

# Freedom in Education

April 2005

*The subject of the April newsletter is Art and Drawing. Art and drawing has played a large part in my life for as long as I can remember. This was not because my parents were particularly 'arty', I don't think they had done any drawing since they were little before they had me, but because children are so that way inclined. Little children are always keen to do some drawing, it seems as innate as a love of music, or dancing, but because I didn't go to school, there never came a time when I stopped.*

*In my experience, art cannot really be taught. If a child is given a piece of paper and something to draw with, they will start to explore the world of drawing. I am always surprised when I see primary school teachers telling four-year-olds that they mustn't paint on wet paint, and that yellow and blue makes green. These are things which are so easily discovered, and yet would be difficult to remember when taught. Many teachers then proceed to tell some of the children that they are bad at art, and shouldn't attempt it, and others that they have a talent for it. These sorts of comments have damaged people for life, and are totally inexcusable, as well as incorrect. I don't believe anyone is bad at art, even if some people are less inclined than others to do it.*

*During the short time that I did go to school, I had no time for art, and I lost my inclination to draw as well. If one is to create something beautiful one has to be feeling happy, and the boredom of school leaves one in no fit state to draw. I therefore believe that the best way a parent can teach a child art, is to make sure they are happy.*

*These days I do some art most mornings, just as I have always done, and so do my brother and sister. I have found that being able to draw is a very useful skill, more useful than I would have thought. It has meant that I can not only fill our walls with original pictures, but it has given me an artistic eye which is very useful in layout, photography, design, and, of course, illustrating the magazines which me and my family produce. It means I can create and draw logos, diagrams, illustrations, plans, cartoons and put together printed material which looks professional and classy, simply because it has a picture on it.*

*I have never drawn with the intention of becoming good at these things, or even of becoming good at art, they were just the pleasant and unexpected side effects of doing what I enjoyed doing.*

*The [Contact List](#) is still growing well. It is certainly encouraging to read about so many people who are taking responsibility for their child's well being, and enjoying the process of learning themselves. Another thing that I have been working on is an on-line [Home University](#) section for the Jamboree. As you will see if you take a look at it, there is still much work left to be done, but there are two articles which are finished, one about learning languages and one about acting. An on-line Home University is an idea which is still just forming and has only begun - I welcome all suggestions, feedback, comments or articles, about any of the subjects listed, or others.*

*Wishing you a happy April,*

*Wendy*

If you would like to send a comment, link, favourite quote, or news about an upcoming event to be included in next month's newsletter, please [contact](mailto:wendy@freedom-in-education.co.uk) me. ([wendy@freedom-in-education.co.uk](mailto:wendy@freedom-in-education.co.uk))

## **Link of the Month:**

**[www.universalpreschool.com](http://www.universalpreschool.com)**

*Universal Preschool is a site encouraging parents to take care of their children in the early years. There is a large amount of free information, articles, book recommendations and support. Well worth a visit!*

# Art & Drawing

**One does not need to be a great artist to teach children art.**

Even though there are now scientific explanations for almost everything, human beings are still, by and large, a mystery to themselves. One of the many unexplained aspects of human life is the innate desire that we all have to create pictures and works of art. The fact that this drive is nothing new is evidenced by archaeological remains from all over the world, some of which, such as cave paintings, date back tens of thousands of years: it is not restricted to so-called civilised peoples but is common to everyone from nomadic tribes to the builders of the monuments of the Ancient World.

This drive to paint and to draw is also familiar to parents of young children. Just as children have an inherent desire to walk and to talk, they also have a motivation, which comes from within them, to pick up a pencil or crayon and to create works of art on paper, or, indeed, on any other surface that presents itself. This seems to be a more basic urge than the desire to learn to read or write, it manifests itself earlier, is universal, and is more consistent.

One of the mysteries of the current education system is that it largely ignores this fundamental aspect of human life.

## Schools and Drawing

Schools have not totally excluded art from their curriculum, but the teaching techniques that they use tend to suffocate children's creative spirit. For example, painting and drawing is not something that fits into lessons of a set length – children need to be able to start a picture when they are in the mood to do so, to continue working on it until it is finished, and then be allowed to move on to something else. It is also important that they should be able to draw and paint without anyone judging their work and saying that it is good, or bad, or determining how it stands in relation to other children's pictures. Furthermore, from the youngest age children have to be free to decide for themselves what they are going to draw, and they must be given the opportunity to work in an atmosphere which allows them to concentrate upon their work.

## Teaching Art

One of the biggest problems in the field of art is the widely-held belief that it involves a mystical skill which some people have and others do not. It is true that different people are drawn to different activities – some people seem to be more gifted at talking than others, some people seem to be naturally physically stronger than others, and some people take to activities such as cooking more readily than others, but this does not mean that people who are not particularly good at talking never talk; that people who are not exceptionally strong never walk anywhere or lift anything; or that people who are not naturally brilliant at cooking never cook anything. If art is acknowledged to be a natural activity to which everyone is instinctively drawn, then it follows that no one should stop painting or drawing simply because they fall short of Leonardo Da Vinci in skill and expertise.

To be a good art teacher, one does not have to be 'good' at art, you simply have to give a child a chance to develop their own skills.

Initially, with very young children, this principally involves leading by example, which means sitting down with a child and either drawing pictures for them while they watch, or drawing pictures at the same time as them. You will notice the lack of critical judgement in a young child; to your eyes your picture might reflect a lamentable lack of skill, but to them it is something wonderful that you have created for them.

This sort of activity has always been a natural part of parenting, and for most people is part of their daily lives in the years before their children start going to school. It is a great shame if it stops when a child is four or five year old (many adults will admit that their own artistic development stopped when they started going to school). From the point of view of an individual child, their potential to continue to develop their

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artistic skills is the same when they are two years old, five years old, ten years old, fifteen years, or twenty years old – they simply need the opportunity to do so. All that is required is some space in which to work, the right sort of materials, and enough time to do some drawing every day, without feeling pressurised to be doing something else ‘more important’. Ideally, a parent should be able to make time to do some drawing alongside their children, several days a week. This sets the example and establishes the idea that art is a valued activity, to which other things have to take second place.

## Artistic Materials

Artistic materials are important, but not as important as one might think. One of the features of modern life is that materials such as paper and pencils are plentiful and in cheap supply. A child can start drawing with the materials that exist in the home: crayons, pencils, felt-tips, children’s paints, etc.; the important thing is that they have a chance to draw and paint whenever they want. As with any other activity that is practised regularly, as time goes on they will come to work out for themselves what sort of materials they want, where to get them from, how to look after them, etc.

**New to the Jamboree**  
**website:**  
**Paper Dolls**

New to the Jamboree Craft Corner are Patsy and Chris - two paper dolls with colour-in-clothes!



Over the years, a young person may build up a collection of materials that includes graphite pencils, charcoal pencils, coloured crayons, wax crayons, water colour paints, oil paints, acrylic paints, brushes, various different sorts of paper, different sort of pens, and inks, etc. If all this was bought at the same time it would cost a lot of money, but when acquired bit by bit over many years it represents a much smaller outlay than other pastimes that young people are encouraged to pursue. Furthermore, good quality art materials last for years.

It is true that specialist art shops often like to create a sense of mystery about their stock, and that assistants might not be very helpful to customers, especially children, who are not versed in all the mysteries of what all the different items are called or what they are used for; but one should not allow oneself to be discouraged by such attitudes, as they are themselves derived from the misconception that art is the exclusive preserve of a select few.

## Art and Education

With small children, art begins as a form of play: they draw a picture because they want to, often only taking a few seconds over it, and they have no wider goal in mind than just doing what they are doing. If they are distracted and do not finish the picture, it rarely occurs to them to return to it later, and once the picture is finished, it is forgotten.

Like other sorts of play, however, this sort of activity is, really, serious preparation for later life.

The expression ‘a picture speaks a thousand words’ is often quoted and its truth is well understood by people in the media who use pictures very effectively to sell products or to present news stories ; its significance does, however, seem to have largely escaped those in the education profession.

Pictures represent a very powerful means both of learning about a subject and of expressing something about it.

Over the years that we have home-educated our children, we have always said that we do ‘lessons’ in the mornings, even though we know that for most people this conjures up an image of a family sitting around a table with an adult standing up at one end, explaining something on a blackboard, or of children sitting round toiling through work books.

In reality, what we did for many years was to make sure that we could get together in the mornings and spend time drawing pictures, each on our chosen subject. When our children were young, the pictures that they drew were usually related to stories that we told them; as they got older the pictures were related to subjects that interested them – usually on an historical theme. (We still do much the same sort of thing today, but now the pictures are often related to an activity such as this magazine.)

I have taught in many different situations, ranging from classroom teaching to one-to-one tuition and, to me, simply working side by side with children, drawing and talking, is by far the most effective situation for learning and teaching.

**“Ideally, a parent should be able to make time to do some drawing alongside their children, several days a week.”**

By trying to copy a picture related to a particular subject, one is forced to study it in detail: if it is a picture of a building one is forced to take note of the style of the windows, its size in relation to other things in the picture, the materials that it is made of, etc.; if it is a picture of a person one cannot help but take note of the expression on their face, whether it is a kind face, or a cruel face, a happy face, or a sad face, and one takes note of the clothes that they are wearing, their jewellery, their hairstyle, the way that they are standing, etc.; it is the same with landscapes, with pictures of boats, agricultural pictures, pictures of factories, in fact, whatever one chooses to draw one learns about in much greater depth than one would by simply reading about it or being lectured about it by someone else.

In addition, when one is drawing or painting, even though one is involved in what one is doing, one is still free to talk and to relate to other people in the room. This means that one can discuss the subject that one is working on. Discussion is a far more effective means of exchanging information

than standing up in front of a group of children and giving a lecture, no matter what the value of what you are saying.

In the rush and bustle of modern life, parents and children have surprisingly few opportunities to sit and simply discuss things with each other, and this is a serious problem, because as children grow older they have a greater need to be able to talk things over with their parents, not less. Many, or most, of the problems that exist in modern family life can be traced to parents and children losing the ability to talk to each other.

Another important reason for studying through the medium of art and drawing brings us back to the initial point made in this article – that art is a much more fundamental activity for human beings than writing, and therefore, as a means of self-expression it is much more meaningful. Education does not simply involve learning what other people have said about a subject – it involves being able to say something about it oneself. For most children for most of the time, especially while they are still of school age, this is simply too daunting a challenge if it means having to write something that really reflects their own feelings about a subject, but, when it comes to drawing or painting, a picture cannot help but be an expression of their own understanding and their own feelings.

It is in the nature of things that the more one pursues an activity, the better one becomes at it. Children who have a chance to spend time painting and drawing every day have a chance to escape from the idea that art is something that one has to be ‘good’ at, and it simply becomes something that they enjoy.

### **What’s The Point of It**

Art, as people have come to see it, is an activity that has little relevance to life in general. In the common view, people who are ‘good’ at art are ‘artists’. Artists paint pictures, which people put on the wall, they are nearly always poor, and no one wants their child to be one. From this perspective, there is no point in art, and that, presumably, is why it has been sidelined in the school curriculum.

This way of looking at things is, however, incorrect. There is a reason why every child has an innate desire to draw and to paint, and it is the people who have not been allowed to develop these skills who find themselves disadvantaged in later life. Art is a creative activity and human societies always have need of people who are creative and innovative. When one sits down to paint a picture, one has to take a blank piece of paper and to create something new upon it.

This is analogous to those situations in life where there is no set formula for what a person should do, but which require that they look within themselves and create a solution from their own resources. This sort of creativity is required every day when one is caring for children, and if one’s work is to have any lasting value, it should also be used in one’s employment.

### **New to the Jamboree**

**website:**

### **French Rolls**

These chewy, dimpled rolls are perfect with soup. They are cooked with water in the oven which gives them a characteristically chewy texture.



Schools are built on the premise that children simply have to be trained to do what they are told, but in the real world it is the people who have some creative spirit who drive society forward, who create the best jobs for themselves and who have the most fun. People who lack creativity are, at best, condemned to follow in the train of those who have.

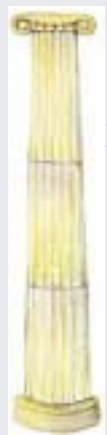
If a child is not taught that art is a subject separate from everything else, but actually learns through art and drawing, then, when they grow up, they will automatically use their artistic skills in whatever they do.

This gives them an enormous advantage in whatever field they choose to work: artistic skills are of specific use in a huge range of different professions, but, more importantly, almost everything benefits from being done with an artistic eye, and, if things are done better, business will prosper.

A simple walk round a modern city, or indeed round a country landscape shaped by modern farming, is sufficient to demonstrate the consequences of ignoring the importance of art in the education of the young, and of perpetuating the myth that art is something separate from everyday life.

Schools are always trying to identify skills shortages and to train people to fill them. One of the greatest shortages that we have is people who know how to combine a feeling for art with those every-day activities that shape the world in which we live. Anyone who does possess those skills is bound to be in great demand in the years to come.

*Gareth Lewis*



# HOME UNIVERSITY

Many home educated young people find that the problems with school, which they left the system to avoid, are just as deeply rooted in University. Creativity, originality, and character are suppressed as the aim of learning becomes to pass exams.

[www.jamboree.freedom-in-education.co.uk](http://www.jamboree.freedom-in-education.co.uk)



# ACTING

"Acting is very enjoyable and hugely educational, and at home brothers and sisters, or the whole of the family, can have immense fun putting on a play..."

This article covers everything about doing a family performance, from learning the lines through to the final dress rehearsal.



# LANGUAGES

"I have found language learning one of the most enjoyable, fascinating, satisfying and liberating things I have ever done..."

Bethan writes from great experience about some of the best and easiest methods of learning a language.



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# Letters

Hello,

Just want to say thank you for the lovely newsletters, I find your articles very interesting and the Jamboree website charming.

Micky Hargil

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## Designing a Garden

Last year was our first attempt to grow a vegetable patch with the children. We had little success as the rabbits ate everything except the potatoes, but the children loved doing it.

We recently did a project on what to do with the garden, thinking that as everyone uses it everyone should have a say in what it looks like. We went to the nearby garden centres and looked at the plants (there weren't many as it was still winter!) and also looked in gardening books. I gave the children the task of drawing the existing garden and how they would like it to be.

Amazingly, they all kept the vegetable patch, so I think that we can definitely say that this year the rabbits are not going to be running all over the garden, but are going to be in the rabbit run.

They all added areas for the different animals that we have, and a pond.

Thank you for your article, it keeps us inspired.

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## Helping in the Charity Shop

Mum and I have been helping down at the local charity shop over the past month, but we have just left because some of the women down there were being real pains! One of them kept giving me third degree interrogations about what I'm going to do with my life when I haven't got any exams and why I left school.

Mum bought a skirt for me and the same lady asked why I didn't have a job and my own money.

I don't mind people enquiring about home education but it does get annoying feeling that you have to constantly validate yourself! To be honest, I'm past caring now what other people think, I am happy in what I do, while, for the most part, people's own children or grandchildren are drinking themselves senseless and are knee-deep in debt at University, so I'd rather take my option anytime!!

People like the lady in the charity shop are the ones who isolate home educators: so many times people have said to us, "Aren't your children isolated?" and it takes a great effort of will not to reply, "They wouldn't be if people like you did not keep avoiding us as though we had a disease!"

I think that the main reason why people behave like this is because we hold a mirror up to them; they don't like to think that maybe they didn't do the right thing for their own kids, and therefore pretend that people who home educate do not exist, and that everything is absolutely fine. The fact that so many young people are loaded up on alcohol and prozac, is simply not acknowledged. Just before Christmas, a young man in Sidmouth drove himself off the cliff. What is happening that could make a young person feel that there is no way out? I have felt that feeling of emptiness and pain myself, but luckily I have a family that loves me. I have met so many young kids who aren't really loved at all, they are seen just as an annoyance that their parents want to be rid of as soon as possible.

Nonny

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## One-to-One

Please accept our thanks for your magnificent book One-to-One which we bought in W H Smith, London. You show so clearly how children (and adults) can find learning endless fun despite the National Curriculum. Thank you so much for helping people far more than perhaps you realise.

C & M Travers

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Please send contributions to: [wendy@freedom-in-education.co.uk](mailto:wendy@freedom-in-education.co.uk)

Or you can write to Gareth Lewis at [gareth.lewis@freedom-in-education.co.uk](mailto:gareth.lewis@freedom-in-education.co.uk)

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