

Freedom in Education

May 2005

The subject of this month's article is teenagers. This is a particularly interesting topic for me, because, until just a few months ago, I was a teenager myself. The typical 'teenager' behaviour which is so often talked about, and so accepted as normal, never seemed to happen to me, which I am glad about as it sounded terrible!

I vividly remember, as do my brother and sister, with what horror we would hear about the doings of the 'big children' on the climbing frame we used to play on in the village. They would drop litter, trash things up, make a lot of noise and chase everyone else off. When we asked why, the answer was generally 'they are teenagers'. This led us to believe that we, too, would behave in this way once we turned thirteen.

The way in which people talk about how their docile child is turned into a rebellious teenager overnight, really does make it seem as if one has no control over the situation, and for a while I was genuinely concerned about it. The three of us were hardly joking when we talked about how Samuel, the youngest, and therefore the last to become a teenager, would have to run about after his teenage sisters picking up the litter we were dropping - and once he had become one too, who would pick up all the litter then?

Link of the Month:

www.sallylever.co.uk

A useful resource website for those interested in combining sustainable living or downshifting with home education. Sally is a long term home educator, life coach, down shifter and sustainable living enthusiast. You can sign up for her complimentary newsletter, "Fruitful", via her website.

As I grew older, it became clear that I wasn't going to undergo a character transformation on my thirteenth birthday, which makes me believe that nobody does, no matter what the parents say. The seeds of dissatisfaction are sown very early on, and it is surely no wonder that someone who is made to do what they don't want to do all their lives is going to rebel once they get old enough. Nobody likes being told what to do, and the total lack of respect with which some parents treat their children naturally results in the child behaving in a similar way to them when they are older.

I would say that the teenage years are a very special and unique time of life; a time when one starts to become independent, and reevaluate what is often taken for granted. Important questions are posed about the meaning of life and death, and I certainly hope I will never stop asking these questions however old I get become.

The Contact List is continuing to grow and you can take a look at it here: [Contact List](#). It is now one of the most extensive such lists in the UK, containing over seventy contacts covering more than 40 UK counties. In addition, the list contains people from Ireland, France, Germany, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States.

The Jamboree's on-line [Home University](#) is also growing. German has been added to the language section and there is a new subject: Art. In it are discussed, methods, mediums, styles and techniques.

I hope you enjoy the updates to the sites this month.

Wishing you all the best for May,

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](#) me.

Teenagers

In recent years it has become acceptable to characterise teenagers as being antisocial and difficult. Why should this be?

When one studies history, or the literature of previous centuries, it is difficult to find any record of what we have come to consider as the stereotypical teenager – someone who is rude, argumentative, inarticulate, who drinks, smokes, is prone to depression and almost beyond the law.

Logically, this ought to make us all stop and consider whether there is perhaps a problem with the way in which we bring up children, rather than just accept that the teenage years are ‘difficult’.

Obviously, the teenage years are very significant: they represent a pivotal point in a person’s life, when they cease to be a child, and start to feel responsible for their own existence; the body starts to change in mysterious ways, and, for the first time, one is as big as the adults to whom one had previously looked up. There is no reason to assume, however, that these changes should be accompanied by trauma.

Unfortunately, people often find it more convenient to invent a pseudo-scientific explanation to justify something that is not working, rather than finding a way of fixing it, and this is what has now been done with all the problems encountered by adolescents. Instead of taking the concerns of young people seriously, people have developed a theory which suggests that young people have to go through a phase of being argumentative in order to establish their own independence.

This idea, conveniently, does not challenge parents and teachers to ask themselves whether the difficulties that young people experience are due to the way that they are being treated.

If human beings are social creatures, then it makes no sense that adolescents should rebel against their elders just at the point when they are most able to learn the skills necessary for survival; if, on the other hand, human beings are not social creatures then it would not be the adolescents who pushed away the adults, but it would be the parents who pushed their offspring out into the world to fend for themselves. Anyone who has tried to do this is able to testify that it does not feel right.

Logically, the natural state of affairs in society should be that there are very tight bonds of affection and respect between teenagers and adults. When this is not the case, it can be taken as a sign that there is something seriously wrong, not with teenagers themselves but with the whole way in which society is organised.

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New to the Jamboree website:

Clothes for the Paper Dolls

Download two new outfits for Patsy and Chris: Fancy dress, and evening clothes!



Most people send their children to school when they are only five years old, or, nowadays, when they are even younger. They do this not because they themselves consider it to be in the best interests of their own child, but because it is the most convenient arrangement for themselves and because other people expect them to do it, and because everyone else that they know is doing the same thing.

None of these arguments carry any weight with the children themselves. From their perspective, something is happening to them that they don’t understand – they are taken from their homes, where they are happy, and put in school or nursery where they are not happy. They tell their parents that they are not happy and sometimes even go so far as to say that they don’t want to go, but instead of responding in the way they expect, their parents force them to continue going to school.

From then on, a divide exists between parents and children. Parents are keen to explain to everyone how happy their children are at school, that there were difficulties at first, but that these have been overcome, etc.: the children do not contradict these assertions because they are still children and they still want to believe what their parents say, and they try to believe that they really do like school, and that they really are having a great social life, and that they really are learning lots of interesting things.

However, when they get a little older and start to acquire the faculty of questioning things for themselves, serious confusion is bound to result.

Adolescence is not simply about physical changes, and about relationships (as it is conveniently portrayed to be), but these changes are accompanied by a desire to make sense of the world, by the development of a sense of personal

identity, and by a desire to understand what life is all about. It is normal for teenagers to ask themselves serious questions such as what life is all about, how they are going to support themselves, what sort of job they might want and why, whether there is any higher purpose to life, whether they might ever want to commit themselves to a permanent relationship with another person, whether they might want to have children, about death, about illness, about old age, about war and about the way in which the world is run.

These issues are quite a burden for someone to bear on their own, and, in the normal course of events, young people would be able to share them and discuss them with their elders, but in this day and age they are accompanied by another set of darker and more problematic questions such as ‘Why do my parents send me to a school which I hate?’, ‘Why have I never been able to talk to my parents about how much I dislike school?’, ‘Why do my teachers teach me things that they do not even believe themselves?’ ‘Why are my teachers so lacking in integrity?’ ‘Why is everyone stressing the importance of examinations, when I can see that the whole idea of exams is unjust?’, ‘Why do people make me do homework?’, and ‘Why don’t people understand me and listen to me?’

In short, when their children reach adolescence, parents reap the results of the way in which they treated them when they were small.

When a child is young, their faith in their parents is absolute, they have no secrets and they have no fears. In these circumstances, being a parent ought to be easy: a baby cries, you pick it up, you feed it, you change its nappy, you hold it, you comfort it, and you keep trying new things until the child is happy.

There is no reason why parents should deviate from this approach when their children get older. If a child comes back from nursery school in anything but their normal state, then the natural response of a parent should be to accompany them to the school, to stay with them, to identify what is causing the problem, and to solve it. The same applies to school. If a child is having difficulty sleeping, is not enjoying their homework, complains about having to go to school, or if their behaviour changes, or if their attitude to other members of the family changes, then parents should take this as a sign that they are not happy, and they should take steps to remedy the situation – you don’t have to wait until a child is able to articulate their problems in words.

If parents fail to stand up for their children, then they cannot be surprised if their children become secretive and do not share their difficulties with them. From a young age, children are now trying to find ways to live with things that make them unhappy, and have lost faith in their parents’ ability, or desire, to help them.

“It is remarkable that in this present time, when there is so much talk about education, the art of reasoning no longer features in the school curriculum.”

In such circumstances, when adolescence hits them, the last people that they will turn to for help or assistance will be their parents.

In fact, the one thing about which most teenagers are fairly sure is that adults are hypocrites who have been lying to them consistently for many years – after all, they ensure that they do not have to go to school themselves, no matter how hard they try to convince children of its benefits – and therefore, rather than looking to adults for advice, it seems reasonable to do more or less the opposite of what adults may suggest. Thus, if adults say that you shouldn’t smoke, it suddenly makes sense to smoke, if adults say you shouldn’t drink alcohol (even though they do it themselves) then drinking becomes a good idea, if adults say that you shouldn’t take drugs, then drug taking becomes an attractive option, and so on and so on.

In the same way, when it comes to trying to make sense of life itself, or of dealing with the consequences of inappropriate behaviour, teenagers cannot be expected to trust their fears and doubts to their parents. They are far more likely to confide in the peer group upon which they have been encouraged to rely since they were

barely bigger than toddlers.

Thus young people, none of whom, by definition, have any experience of such matters, have to help each other to come to conclusions about how to conduct themselves in their relationships, what the real significance is of the feelings that they have for other people, and what goals they should set themselves in life.

When they see this happening, many parents start to regret the mistakes that they made in the past and to wish that they could turn the clock back to when their children started school, and begin all over again – which, of course you cannot do, and which, fortunately is not necessary. The whole process of child-rearing is much more forgiving than people acknowledge. If, on the one hand, it is true that no matter how hard one tries, one is almost bound to make mistakes as a parent, on the other hand, it is also true that one only has to admit that one has made mistakes and one’s children will always be prepared to give you another chance.

Thus, rather than regretting things that are beyond change, parents of adolescent children could, in most cases, still rescue the situation by starting to treat them with respect: listening to their concerns; not criticising their decisions; supporting them in what they want to do; and allowing them to make mistakes without making them feel stupid when things go wrong.

Parents that do this are always pleasantly surprised; instead of finding themselves having to share their home with the teenage monster commonly portrayed in modern literature, they find instead that they have a new friend, a young adult who understands them but is prepared to forgive their foibles, someone who can help them to engage with a changing world and, ultimately, someone who will allow them to fulfil the role of an older person with some knowledge of life to pass on to the next generation.

Gareth Lewis

Teenagers and the Art of Reasoning

Traditionally, the art of reasoning was the foundation upon which education was built: different people had different skills ranging from growing crops to simple crafts, art, engineering, and building, but the term 'education' was reserved for the process where people were taught how to apply logic and reason to the experiences of every-day life.

It is remarkable that in this present time, when there is so much talk about education, the art of reasoning no longer features in the school curriculum.

Geometry was always considered to be the subject that gave the most direct and most simple introduction to the art of logic, because, although it could be related to the world around and about us, it is not itself complicated by issues relating to beliefs and morality that cause people so much confusion.

An educated person is thus able, through studying the propositions of subjects such as geometry, to cultivate an understanding of the process of reasoning, and then, later, to apply these tools of logic to the propositions that are made to them about life itself.

Readers who have followed the series of articles in this magazine about Euclid's geometry will have seen that the path that has led from basic principles – such as accepting that things that are equal to the same thing are also equal to each other – to propositions such as that the angles of a triangle make two right angles, is not always straightforward. Some of the steps that one is required to take require careful consideration before they can be accepted. Some things that may appear not to be true have to be accepted because they are shown to be logical, and some things that may appear to be true have to be rejected, because on closer examination, they turn out not to be logical.

Furthermore, it turns out that even those propositions that have been accepted cannot be done so wholeheartedly, because it is never possible to prove the basic assumptions from which the process of logic began, and because the process of logic itself seems to run into difficulty when it encounters the idea of infinity. Thus, as well as learning to apply logic, a student is also able to develop an understanding of its limitations.

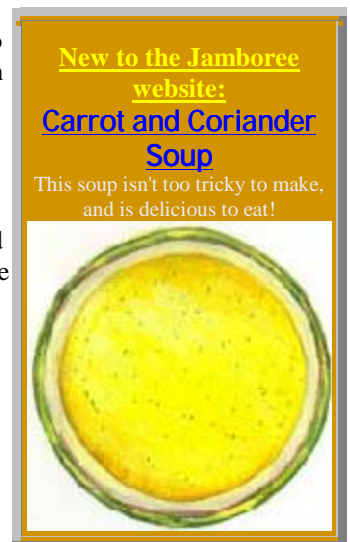
It could be argued that young people growing up in a stable and well-regulated society should not need to trouble themselves with such abstruse material, and this is probably true. If adults were offering the younger generation a programme of training and instruction that guaranteed them a secure future, then it could be left to the individual whether or not they wanted to study logic.

But the younger generation is not being offered such a programme. They are made to go to school which does virtually nothing to prepare them for later life. When they reach an age where they are able to question what they are doing, they have no tools with which to make sense of their experiences.

A study of logic would help them to work out that if the instruction that they have themselves received at school has been so devoid of value, and that, if their teachers have themselves been trained in a similar system, and if their teachers' teachers also had their ideas formed by a school-based system of education, then it is not logical to assume that their teachers can have anything of value to teach them, even though society has placed them in a position of authority.

When it comes to questions such as the smoking of cigarettes, a young person trained in the art of logic could see the flaws in the idea that smoking is somehow a way of asserting their independence – logically, cigarette companies are multi-national, legalised drug pushers who depend for their income on persuading young people to becoming addicted to nicotine, and no credit accrues to anyone who falls for their products.

Sometimes the consequence of logical analysis can be quite unnerving. For example, the origin of modern science can be traced to the rather illogical idea that, because the people running the Church were charlatans, there could not be any such thing as God.



The area most worthy of being challenged is when advice is given for the future. If people have managed to provide a schooling so devoid of inspiration, then why should their advice be taken when it comes to university or a career?

Such an indiscriminate use of logic may appear to be dangerous, but it can help a young person to sort out where responsibility really lies for the difficulties that they are experiencing. More often than not it turns out not to be with themselves, and this realisation can give them the confidence to do the things that they want to do and to take responsibility for their own lives. *GL*

Letters

Hello

I'm a home educating mummy of a 3-year old daughter.

I've been reading your Jamboree site. I agree with a lot of what you have said about university. The only university thing I would say that I would recommend is the Open University. I still don't have a degree - I'd kind of like one but I fell out with the system. However, the Open University imho in terms of the Level 1 courses has great materials. You don't have to do the assignments but I have found their courses to be extremely interesting, well written and they treat you like the interested human being that you deserve to be treated as. Anyway, basically just saying that the OU imho is one of the best universities, except of course the University of Life.

I have to say that your site is a real inspiration to home educators, I love your artwork!

Kind regards

Liz

Hi,

I have recently taken my son out of state education for various reasons and was rather anxious at the thought of teaching him at home. However, thanks to people like you I have found inspiration to want to take on such a huge task. Some people have commented that they cannot believe how easy it was to do (withdrawing your son/daughter from school), and on the same note complement me on taking on a big commitment. I would like to say a big thank you for giving me the necessary guidance through your informative books and websites when I felt that I might not be up to the task ahead.

Regards

Michael Brace

PS keep up the good work!!

Wendy,

Just wanted to say how very much I have enjoyed your website. So much of it was so inspirational. I hope that my girls (aged 10, 7 and 1) have as happy and fulfilling a childhood. Every so often I think "am I doing the right thing?" and articles such as yours give me the impetus to continue.

Thank you,

Ruby

Otherwise Japan

I would like to let you know about the present situation in Japan. The government education monopoly restricts children who have encountered serious problems at schools and makes them sick or even pushes them to commit suicide. There are very many children facing difficult problems, because we do not have the right to education—other than National Education.

There are many individuals who withdraw from society and seclude themselves at home. The number of such people is thought to be between hundreds of thousands to a million.

Families are ashamed if a child stops going to school. Such children are discriminated against in our society as 'school refusers'.

There are many problems in schools, including teachers using physical violence and student bullying is common. To understand the cause of such problems, please keep in mind that we don't have any other ways of education in Japan except schools.

Otherwise Japan is campaigning for Japanese law to be altered in accordance with international treaties to make education outside of school a legal alternative.

Kyoko Aizawa
Otherwise Japan

HOME UNIVERSITY

http://www.jamboree.freedom-in-education.co.uk/home_university/home_university.htm

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.

[Read about Home University on the Jamboree's new section.](#)

NEW! ART

"Art is a subject particularly well-suited to home university. Plenty of time is a key ingredient to becoming skilled at drawing, as is beautiful and varied surroundings, both things which are plentiful at home..."

This article covers my experience of drawing, plus tips about mediums, methods, techniques, style, etc.



New: German Reading German, Heidi, Brothers Grimm

http://www.jamboree.freedom-in-education.co.uk/home_university/home_university/German.htm

Please send contributions to: wendy@freedom-in-education.co.uk

Or you can write to Gareth Lewis at gareth.lewis@freedom-in-education.co.uk

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