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Education and the Law

Something that has struck me since I started this newsletter, and became able to correspond with home-educating families around the world, is the amount of time that everyone spends in worrying about the official reaction to their decision to home educate. People spend months preparing for official tests and visits and are worn down by the constant anxiety of worrying about whether the local education authorities will approve of the education that is being provided in the home. This is time that could be better spent in other ways and caused me to wonder how or why the State could ever have become so involved in the education of our children.

A Sensible Degree of State Involvement

The proper role of government is, firstly, to provide citizens with a safe and secure environment in which to bring up their children and, secondly, to offer a system of justice to which individuals, particularly vulnerable individuals, such as children, can appeal for help when they are suffering ill-treatment. Even the very best governments are only able to fulfil these tasks with difficulty and it is folly on the part of modern, Western governments to take on responsibility for extra things that they have no possibility of doing well – principally the education of young people – and thereby put at risk those things that they may otherwise have been able to achieve.

The Consequences of State Involvement in Education

Children are designed in such a way that their minimum requirement is to receive individual attention from at least one specific adult – usually one or both of their parents – for the whole of their childhood, and, if possible, beyond. When they do not receive this level of care, they are left with complex problems that they have to sort out when they are older. When groups of children are kept together, large numbers of whom are not receiving this level of care, there exists all the ingredients for social disaster. Unfortunately, this is exactly what is happening today and one of the chief causes is that parents expect the State to play a role in the education of their children:

- Parents expect schools to educate their children instead of doing it themselves.
- Parents expect the government to regulate and finance schools, instead of doing it themselves.
- Children are expected to conform to what schools expect of them, instead of schools adapting to meet the needs of each child.
- Children do not like school.
- Children do not like anything associated with school. Thus all of mankind's greatest intellectual and artistic achievements become more despised and misunderstood by each school-going generation.
- Children who will not or cannot conform to the demands of school are made to feel stupid.
- Children who differ *too* greatly from what the school system expects are told that they have medical problems.
- Children who are *too* rebellious are diagnosed as having mental problems.
- Children feel isolated from their families and become involved in anti-social activities such as drug-dealing and crime.

- Children feel unloved and become involved in self-destructive activities such as drug-taking, smoking, drinking, etc.

The fact that all these things are now commonplace, and that many people consider them to be normal, demonstrates that the time is now long overdue for parents to reassert their natural authority and to reassume day to day responsibility for their children's education.

Problems Encountered by Parents Who Decide to Home Educate

The belief that it is normal for government bodies to be involved in the education of people's children has become so universal that when a parent considers the possibility of teaching their own child the first question that they ask themselves is often not about what sort of education they intend to provide but whether or not they are even allowed to educate their children at all. Once they are satisfied on this point, the whole question of the legality and acceptability of home education can so overshadow their lives that it deprives the experience of all its potential for enlightenment and enjoyment.

- The biggest obstacle is one's own belief that there is someone out there who has a better understanding of what is good for your child than you have yourself. Even though this belief is illogical when stated in these bald terms, it leads home-educating parents to allow their children to be subjected to tests and inspections by people who know nothing about them and it causes people to spend time and money following courses and doing exams that are far inferior to the work that they do the rest of the time, on their own.
- A further obstacle is presented by those officials, who are paid by local education authorities supposedly to serve and to assist you in the education of your child, and who, through ignorance and thoughtlessness, try to intimidate you into educating your children in a certain way. Generally, the more experience someone has of child care, or the more experience they have as a teacher, the less inclined they will be to try to tell a parent how they should be with their own child. Unfortunately many education authorities have people on their staff who possess neither wisdom nor experience and who see nothing wrong in imposing upon mothers and fathers, doing nothing worse than trying to educate their own children in their own home. This puts the parent in the position of having to fend off the bully before they can begin the job that they are trying to do.
- For many parents, the situation is made yet more difficult by the very people who ought to be lending them the most support (and sometimes do) – i.e. their family and friends. People often seem to feel threatened when one person steps outside of the system. It doesn't matter that what you are doing is legal, that it is stamped with a seal of official approval, that your children are happier, that they learn more, that they are more polite, more considerate, better socially adjusted, or whatever. Relatives can still feel terribly uncomfortable admitting that there are members of their family not doing the same as everyone else.

All this combines to put today's parent into a position similar to that of a hero in an old story: they see their child going off to school each day, miserable, learning nothing, being ground down and oppressed by overbearing authority and looking to them to be their knight in shining armour, hoping that they will rescue them from this terrible situation. Opposed to this are the voices of all the people who failed the test, urging them to believe that nothing will be gained by doing the right thing, and that it is hopeless to believe that, in this day and age, a good parent can help their own child to have a happy childhood. Perhaps this is a little overdramatic, but sometimes a little drama helps to cast things in a clearer light.

In any event, I would say that no parent should allow their decisions about their children's education to be influenced by their perceptions of what is or is not allowed or by what other people will think of their decision. The government should be there to help us to do the right thing for our children, and my experience has been that it fails to do this, not because it is staffed by malignant people bent on doing harm, but because parents have ceased to demand what is best for their children and have allowed themselves to be led, when common sense says that they should be leading.

Gareth Lewis

School Reform

It is easy to criticise schools, and even to identify them as being responsible for a decline in educational standards, and implicated in the growth of social problems such as crime and drug abuse. It is also fairly clear that the qualifications awarded by schools are not of any real value and, therefore, that even children who do well get little real benefit from the years that they spend in them.

It is more difficult, however, to see how schools could be reformed so that they are able to do the job that they are meant to do.

At present, the only option available to parents who have acknowledged the problems associated with school is to educate their children at home, but this does not seem to be something that everyone is going to be able to do in the near future – and in the meantime millions and millions of children are having to undergo all the indignities and injustices associated with going to school. Is there anything that can be done?

A Suggestion

It seems to me that all the problems associated with school are linked to the fact that children do not like going there – children don't like school, so they don't cooperate with what happens at school, and consequently they don't learn anything while they are there.

If schools are to succeed then they must create conditions in which children *are* happy. Children are happy when they are with people who care for them. The solution is therefore to invite parents and grandparents to attend school with their children – parents would not be responsible for the education of their children, but would be there to ensure their welfare, and of course could learn at the same time, and make sure that the teacher was doing a good job.

Home-educating families have successfully demonstrated that parents and children working together are capable of achieving both high academic standards and good social skills. The way forward for the school system is to take this on board and to have as many parents and grandparents in every classroom as possible.

Education Tips 1:

Nowadays, people associate teaching with standing up in front of a group of children and giving them a lecture.

Good teaching, however, relies on a much more sensitive and imaginative approach.

Walking

Parents of young children are well aware of the advantages of taking them out for a walk every day. These advantages do not diminish, but increase, as children get older.

Many home-educating families make a point of going out for a long walk almost every day and far from being an escape from their responsibilities, this is one of the activities from which they learn the most:

- Walking provides the ideal situation for allowing parents and children to talk to each other.
- Even in urban areas it is possible to find walks through woods and parks and beside rivers. Walking allows you to experience the changes of the seasons and to see Nature in action.
- Walking allows you to become familiar with the plants and the birds in the area in which you live.
- Walking is the best form of exercise: it uses every part of the body without causing any undue strain.
- Walking helps children to become familiar with the local geography – where the shops are, where people live etc., and this is very important in an age in which children are usually ferried around in cars.
- Walking helps children to re-engage with their local communities. Instead of being cooped up indoors, they have a chance to meet people who live in their area.

Walking and Children Who are Withdrawn from School

When children are withdrawn from school, for whatever reason, no one is likely to be aware of how alienated they have become from anything to do with conventional school work. Trying to make such children read books or work on paper can cause explosive arguments, but failing to give them any direction can result in them spending all day watching television and playing computer games and wishing that they were back at school.

Walking provides the solution. It gives the children a practical experience of the fact that they are free from the restrictions of school – they can fill their lungs with fresh air, they can shout, they can sing and they can see the blue sky above their heads – and it gives them a chance to talk and to make sense of what they have been through. There is no reason why a long walk, starting after breakfast and finishing at lunchtime, for example, should not constitute the whole ‘school day’ when you first embark upon home education.

Letters

Why send them off to school anyway? I forgot the reasons.

I just wanted to say how much I enjoyed and identified with this newsletter.

Three years ago I took a year off from homeschooling and put my 4 children in a private school where I was hired to teach 2nd grade. I had a very successful year teaching, and my children did very well in school, but quickly realized that there is no better education my children could receive than what I could give them at home. I know I don't have all the answers, but that's why I buy teachers' editions and answer keys. Then my children and I learn together the things we don't know, and it really is fun.

I didn't do very well in algebra when I was a kid. However, I've done very well this time around teaching it. Sometimes my daughter catches on to a concept before I do, and she helps me figure it out. At first I was afraid this would be bad for her to see that she sometimes figured something out before I did, but it actually has been very positive for our relationship that I am willing to let her explain a confusing concept to me. It may even help her to be more willing to listen to me when I explain things to her, and it has certainly helped her to realize that we can all learn from anybody no matter their station in life.

My children all seem to enjoy homeschooling. At first they missed seeing their friends everyday, so I tried to make sure they had plenty of opportunities to invite kids for a sleepover. As time has gone by they seem to need to have their "school friends" over less and less, and seem to be more satisfied with each other's company the majority of the time. Their need for friends hasn't gone away, but their need to see them all the time has. This is not to say that they never disagree, but nothing would eliminate that with any kids (or grown ups).

After being back to homeschooling now for 2 yrs. my children are much more tolerant of each other. They are also light years ahead of their public and private school peers at resolving their own differences.

A friend of mine asked me the other day if I was going to put my 8th grader back "in school" next year (she'll be a high schooler). I told her I couldn't think of any reason to do that. My daughter's attitude towards her family and her schoolwork was good, she was excited about learning and was enjoying some of the more mundane subjects like History and Algebra, and she was finding time to pursue learning about things she chose, such as learning Russian and pursuing her passion for drawing, and she was able to do all of this without being made to feel like a freak for enjoying learning about things the "other kids" weren't interested in. It's never been an issue for me whether or not I like or dislike public or private schooling. It's just that homeschooling is such a good, positive experience. I can't think of any reason to send them off to school.

One more thought before I close. My kids are actually learning. School for them is not getting a grade in a subject on their report card. It's about learning - actually learning something new. It's fun, and wow! there's so much "stuff" to learn.

Happily homeschooling,

Lori

Please send letters, articles, and information intended for inclusion in the newsletter to:
newsletter@freedom-in-education.co.uk

The Jamboree — the online e-magazine for children and Parents:

“Well, being a child myself I have always been so aware of the junk and exploitation that is aimed at us; whatever it is, as long as it's for 'kids' it is almost always something horrible and gross - this is what people think children like. This also applies to teenagers except in their case the things tend to be worse.

I don't know about anybody else, but for me that has never been what I have liked or wanted, but I *have* always thoroughly enjoyed such things as reading cartoons, paper folding, growing vegetables, and more recently things like history and cooking.

And so, this is exactly what we have put on this website, firstly because we enjoy writing and drawing the things on it, and secondly so everyone else can read and enjoy it as well, and perhaps contribute *their* favourite things and so we can build up a website that is both inspiring and fun that anyone will be able to read and enjoy.”

Extract from this months editor's letter

The April issue contains the final episode of Beauty and the Beast, first episode of a new Bip and Bop cartoon, and much, much more:

<http://www.jamboree.freedom-in-education.co.uk/>

Freedom in Education Magazine

The April issue of the Freedom in Education Magazine contains:

- all the articles from the newsletter
- original cartoons to go with the articles
- recipes, gardening information, and history story from the Jamboree
- an original cartoon of the Brother's Grimm story, Allerleirauh
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http://www.freedom-in-education.co.uk/current_newsletter.htm

Contacts and Information

This free newsletter now has over 750 subscribers and the freedom-in-education site has over 12,000 hits per month. If you have any information that would be useful to parents and children interested in a more enlightened approach to education, please send it in to:

newsletter@freedom-in-education.co.uk

This newsletter is edited by Gareth Lewis, author of [One-to-One, A Practical Guide to Learning at Home](#) .

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This newsletter can be viewed, saved, and printed as an Acrobat Reader file:

www.freedom-in-education.co.uk/newsletter/april.pdf

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