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The Social Aspect

Letters

Euclid

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The Social Aspect

The first question that home-taught children are always asked by adults is “Do you have any friends?” and the first question that home-educating parents are always asked is “What about the social aspect?”. Most home-educating families find these questions intensely annoying as there is no easy answer to them and, no matter what they say, it simply confirms what the person asking the question already knows: home-educated children do not have ‘school’ friends.

School Friends

There are two assumptions that underlie people’s worries about friends, the first is that, if something happened to them during their own childhood it must be normal, and the second is that their own children will experience more or less the same things at school that they experienced themselves.

Both of these assumptions could be wrong and deserve to be questioned. It does not take much reflection to recognise that schools *have* changed: children now have to deal with things such as computer games, videos and the internet that did not even exist a few years ago; many more children come from ‘broken homes’ and can be struggling to deal with intense personal problems which inevitably has its effect upon school life; the level of materialism also seems to be on the increase in schools and children are obliged to have an array of merchandising, designer labels and new technology if they are not to be mocked by their classmates. In addition to this, drugs and crime are more prevalent in schools than in any other area of society (outside of the prison system) and this must affect every child who attends school, at least to some extent. Thus it is not reasonable to assume that your child’s experience of school will be similar to your own.

Even more significant is the question of whether or not your own experience of school was really as acceptable as you remember it to have been. Whatever anyone might tell you to the contrary, young children do not like going to school: they do not enjoy leaving their home, their family, their toys and everything that is familiar to them in order to spend time with a room full of strangers, away from everyone who cares for them. The fact that children manage to survive and even to remain positive under this treatment is a testament to their unquenchable enthusiasm for life but it does not mean that they are benefiting from being treated in this way.

The friendships that they make under these conditions – although they may remember them as being the best thing about the time that they spent at school – cannot make up for the damage that is being done to relationships with parents, brothers and sisters, grandparents and people in the wider community.

Family Relationships

A child is not born to an institution, they are born to living people – a mother and a father – and it seems logical that it is this mother and father who are best suited to care for them. There is a certain length of time during which a child does not need to leave their family for any reason whatsoever – least of all for social reasons. Perhaps this length of time varies from one person to another but if we are honest most of us would have to admit that children do not need to leave home and make friends when they are two months old, or two years old, or four years old, or six years old. In fact most of us

would have been happy to have had our lives revolving around our homes and families until we were ten, or eleven, or maybe even fifteen, or sixteen, or even much older.

Given the need that a child has to be with their family, the consequences of denying that need can be serious: a child is bound to feel betrayed by parents who allow them to be taken from their homes and forced to spend time at school and they are bound to feel jealous of younger siblings who are allowed to stay at home. Perhaps there was a time, many years ago, when the school really was part of the local community and perhaps, in those days, children did not feel that they were leaving the umbrella of their extended family when they left home and went to school, but this is not the case today, even in small village schools.

It is not until you opt out of the school system that you are able to appreciate just how much damage compulsory school attendance does to family relationships. People now consider it to be normal for there to be conflict between parents and children and for brothers and sisters to fight with each other, but in most cases these problems disappear when children stop going to school.

Family relationships – especially family relationships during childhood – are by the far the most important relationships that people have in life, and it does not make sense to jeopardise them simply so that a child can make ‘friends’ at school.

Home Education’s Best Kept Secret

When home educators are asked about the ‘social aspect’ they usually give a standard answer along the lines : “Our children have many other home-educated friends”, “Our children are in lots of clubs”, “Our children mix with all sorts of people of different ages”, or “Our children have lots of friends who go to school”. Whilst these answers may be factually correct, they obscure the real truth, which home educators barely dare admit to themselves and which other people are certainly not prepared to hear: children are happy to be at home with their families. They do not particularly want to go to clubs, to schools, or to meetings, and they are not consumed with a desire to make friends with people of their own age. Surprisingly enough, when home-educated children get together with children who go to school, the school children never ask the home-educated children about friends, they simply say how wonderful it must be to not have to go to school and to be able to be at home with your mum and dad.

Rather than being defensive about the social issue, home-educating families ought to be telling the wider world that it is in the social sphere that home education has the most to offer. The important thing for children is that they feel secure in their home and in their family. Modern schools do not treat this issue sufficiently seriously: they dictate to parents and interfere with family life. Until schools change, the best place for children could well be at home with their parents. When set against the overwhelming sense of relief that being at home gives to a child, the question of whether or not they have friends of their own age is really of no significance at all.

Modern ideas about school friends differ from the sentiments expressed by the Earl of Chesterfield in his famous letters to his son in the 1700s:

“The friendship which you may contract with people of your own age, may be sincere, may be warm; but must be for some time reciprocally unprofitable, as there can be no experience on either side.

The young leading the young, is like the blind leading the blind; “they will both fall into the ditch.” The only sure guide is he who has often gone the road which you want to go. Let *me* be that guide, who have gone all roads, and who can consequently point out to you the best.”

Gareth Lewis

Letters

Apologies to people who wrote to me last month, I have been a little slow in answering my post, but am now up to date.

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

Questions and comments that you want to be treated in confidence please send to:
garethlewis@freedom-in-education.co.uk

Euclid

A new instalment in a series of articles that aims to demystify the subject of mathematics:
<http://www.freedom-in-education.co.uk/euclid2.htm>

The Jamboree – the online e-magazine for children who do not go to school

Episode 12: Beauty and the Beast
New Episode Bip and Bop
Last instalment of Mr Superstitious
Gardening tip: Parsnips
Editors Letter

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

Freedom in Education Printed Newsletter

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