

First of all, I would like to wish everyone a Happy New Year. 2005 is really here, and with it all the endless possibilities that a new year brings. This Freedom-in-Education Newsletter is now beginning its third year, and there is certainly an exciting new feature to celebrate it. Readers may have noticed that since the last month a Contact List has gone on-line on this website. You can read an excerpt from the article about it by my father, Gareth Lewis, beneath the main article, or simply [click here](#) to add your details.

The subject of this month's newsletter is 'A Father's Role'. I personally believe that a father has a very important role to play in the life of his children, no less important than the role of the mother. These days this is sadly underestimated.

Fortunately, everyone can remember from their own childhood, that nothing is so special as spending time with one's parent when they are prepared to give you their full attention; nothing more exciting than being with one's father when it is just you and him. Everything you do together becomes the biggest treat, and the most mundane things can become so special that you are unlikely to forget them for the rest of your life. I think fathers can often forget how happy they can make a child simply by being with them, and how important it really is for a child to have that father there, as well as, hopefully, the mother, to give them that special help, support and unconditional love which only a parent can give.

Wishing you, again, all the best for the new year,
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, Wendy.

Quote of the Month:

"We must not believe the many who say that only free people should be educated, but we should rather believe the philosophers who say that only the educated are free."

-Epictetus, Ancient Greek philosopher-

A Father's Role

Is there more to being a father than simply ensuring that your children go to school?

There is a commonly held belief that the role of being a mother is more significant than that of being a father. This has led to the assumption that while it is understandable that women should agonise over how to divide their time between the home and their work, it is all right for men to be away from their children for as long and for as often as they wish.

While it is obviously true that a child needs its mother more than its father during the first few months of its life, there is no reason to suppose that this remains true over the course of someone's whole childhood. In fact, if one talks to any adult about their feelings towards, and their relationship with, their respective parents, it becomes obvious that people hold both their mother and their father in more or less equal regard, and that everyone expects at least as much from their father as they do from their mother.

It therefore seems strange that boys are brought up to believe that the only real responsibility that a man has towards his family is to bring home enough money to ensure its financial survival.

Training to be a Father

When they stop to think about it, everyone knows that when someone has a child, the role of being a parent automatically becomes more important than almost anything else in their life – and this applies equally to men and to women. It does not matter how important, celebrated, or well paid a person's employment might be, compared to the responsibility of being a parent, it is relatively insignificant.

To put it bluntly, towards the end of a man's life, people cease to be interested in where he worked, or how much money he earned, the most significant fact about his former life is usually whether he had any children, and how well he raised them: and the greatest solace that he is likely to have is not from money that he has accumulated in the bank, but from the care that he receives from his family.

"Every child expects as much from their father as from their mother."

This is so obvious that it should not need to be stated, and yet boys and young men are now brought up in such a way that these simple facts of life remain hidden from them. Even from the age of two or three years old, little boys are constantly asked what they are going to be when they grow up.

They soon learn that the correct answer to this question is to name a profession – 'a doctor', 'a lorry driver', etc. – and the process intensifies once they start school. All the tests and all the exams that they sit are not to ensure that they will one day make good fathers, it is all part of the process of ensuring that they acquire the skills that will allow them to go out to work and earn money. Given the pressure that boys are placed under in school, it is not surprising that when they leave, they believe that their only real responsibility in life is to get a job.

Presumably, when schools were started it was assumed that something as significant as how to be a father would be learnt by boys at home, from their own fathers – but as children have come to spend more and more time at school, and fathers have spent more time at work, this vital instruction has somehow managed to slip through the net.

Looking Back in History

History might be able to provide a clue to the sort of relationship that a father might have had with his children in earlier times.

One feature of old books, often not understood today, is the habit of listing people's ancestry – Abraham begat Isaac, Isaac begat Jacob, Jacob begat Joseph, etc.: presumably to the writers of these books this was significant information, and it does not seem unreasonable to assume that in those days men passed on to their children the knowledge and understanding that they had gained in their lifetime; so that Abraham's son would be expected to have learnt everything that Abraham knew and that *his* son would have acquired the knowledge both of his father and his grandfather. A similar tradition seems to have existed in many societies and it was common for men to be known by the names of their fathers – Fitzwilliam means son of William; Ericsson, means son of Eric, etc.

Clearly, in such a situation, a father was not seen as an optional extra in family life, he was the educator and role model for both his sons and his daughters.

This only appears to have changed when men's work started to take them away from the home every day. The more time that men spent away from home, the less time they were able to spend with their children; the less time that they spent with their children, the less able they were to really fulfil the role of being a father; and, over the course of time, people have almost come to forget that men have as much to offer their children as do their wives.

Men's Liberation

Over the past twenty or thirty years the women's liberation movement has tried to improve women's position in society, mainly through trying to win equal rights with men at work. This effort, however, failed to take into account the fact that in many fields of employment the men themselves had very few rights and very little freedom.

"Literature and tradition combine to present young men with the idea that something special is required of them in life."

Economists and political scientists have always recognised that there is no automatic distinction between paid work and slavery. The amount of freedom that a person has is not defined by the amount of money that they earn, or even by the nominal status that they have within an organisation, it is, rather, a function of how much choice they are able to exercise over what they do in their daily lives.

Thus, someone who has to be at work for a certain number of hours every week and who cannot be with their children when their children need them, cannot be considered to be enjoying much freedom.

Unfortunately, this is just the situation in which many men now find themselves: it is the demands of their work which determine their daily routine, often leaving them powerless to do what they themselves believe to be best for themselves and their family.

Being a Real Man

Literature and tradition combine to present young men with the idea that there is something special required of them in life. From a young age they are told stories of heroes and warriors – men who conquered the world or who overcame great difficulties to accomplish difficult tasks – but at the same time they are subtly led to believe that no such opportunities for greatness will ever be presented to them: the world is presented to them as being a place which has already been civilised and in which all the great challenges have already been accomplished.

Clearly, however, this is not the case; young men today are confronted by a challenge as daunting as any faced by heroes of the past. They are growing up in a system which appears to give them no choice but to go to school, pass their exams, find a job, and then spend their lives working and working, simply in order to earn enough money to pay the bills and keep themselves and their family fed and housed. At the same time, their conscience tells them that there is more to life than simply going to work and that they have other responsibilities, such as those towards their children, which require them to be able to decide for themselves what they are going to do from one day to the next.

Resolving this dilemma requires all the fortitude and all the attributes ascribed to the heroes of ancient stories. In order to succeed, it is not sufficient to either simply do what one is told and get a job, or to turn one's back upon work and to become dependent on other people's charity.

Being a Father

The nature of this challenge often only becomes clear to a young man when he becomes a father: prior to that time, he may imagine that he is in control of his own destiny while in reality he is not.

Children bring a very simple clarity to the situation because they come with a clear and forthright need for their parent's company. The degree to which a man is able to respond to this need tells him how free he really is.

This is not something that applies simply to the time immediately after a child is born (as proponents of paternity leave may imagine) but remains true throughout a child's life.

It is common for people to formulate ideas about what the role of a father might involve, and then to decide how it might be made compatible with a forty-hour-per-week job. For example, a father is often cast in the role of someone who provides a sense of authority within a family, to whom all a child's transgressions are reported when he comes in from work; or a father might be type cast as someone who provides a sense of fun or adventure at the weekends and during the holidays; or a father might be someone who takes a few days off work and assumes control at times of crisis.

Clearly, a father has the potential to be much more than any of these things, but no one can tell in advance what precise role he may be able to play in the lives of each of his children – each child is different and will have different needs. One thing is certain, however, and that is that if time

New to the Jamboree website:
[Pickled Onions](#)

This is a simple recipe for the nicest pickled onions you are ever likely to taste!



constraints are placed on the relationship then a father will never be able to fulfil his role, whatever it might be.

This applies particularly in the realm of education. People often think that education is about learning things from books and, especially if they themselves did badly at school, they often imagine that they have no role to play in the education of their own children; but education involves much more than book learning – it should be about helping a child to negotiate every aspect of growing up to become an adult and, by definition, parents are the people best equipped to help them in this process.

The lessons that a father teaches his children, therefore, do not require any particular programme of instruction but can simply evolve out of spending time with his children. Over a period of years children should be able to absorb from their mothers and fathers the accumulated knowledge and understanding that they have gained from their experience of life, and this can then form the basis upon which they themselves make decisions as they get older.

The worrying truth is that many children, are growing up without this input from their fathers, simply because their fathers are not spending enough time at home for any real understanding to develop between them and their children.

Honours and Rewards

Perhaps part of the problem is due to the value system that prevails in certain sections of our society: if we are able to do what we are told at school we are awarded qualifications; if we are successful at work we receive money; and if we achieve a position of status we are granted a certain celebrity.

New to the Jamboree website:

Hair Scrunchie

It is great fun to make your own hair scrunchie, in a material to suit your taste, preferences and clothes!



No such honours and rewards seem to be available to young men who simply set themselves the goal of being a good father.

Perhaps this is one of those areas in which appearances are deceptive: whilst the wealth and status offered by society often comes at an unacceptably high price, the simple joy shared between parent and child is something that can never be overestimated.

Too many older people are full of regrets about the time that they did not spend with their children, and this is a condition that particularly afflicts men who thought that they were doing the right thing by going out to work every day when their children were growing up.

If they wish, today's fathers can learn from the experience of these men and can take up the challenge of looking for new ways of fulfilling the role of being a father. There may be obstacles in the path, such as house prices, career structures, people's expectations, bills to be paid, etc., but, in a sense, these simply make the challenge more worthwhile. If enough men did manage to find a way to make a living which did not involve compromising the needs of their families, then society as a whole would benefit: the way in which we live would become more child-friendly, and a little sanity would be restored to our daily lives.

Gareth Lewis



www.jamboree.freedom-in-education.co.uk

New to the Jamboree website is a touching story from the life of Helen Keller, and a cartoon fable from Aesop: The Baby Crab and his Mother

Contact List

Information & Guidelines

The idea of starting a contact list for people interested in home-education, flexi-schooling, part-time schools, community schools, small schools, and any humane alternative to the current education system, has been something that I have been considering for some time.

It has long been my belief that it is not the government or local education authorities that stand in the way of more parents becoming involved in new educational initiatives: the problem, rather, lies with the very organisations which are supposed to be promoting a new approach to education.

In the nineteen sixties and nineteen seventies many people were moved to explore new, and more idealistic approaches to educating children, and they set up organisations to support these ideals. Unfortunately, they did not take into account the degree to which they had themselves been affected by their own schooling, and, consequently, these organisations were set up in such a way that they lent themselves to being controlled by small groups of people who then inadvertently use them to maintain a monopoly on the areas in which they were operating.

There is also often a fear of allowing younger people to play a full role in these organisations and to move them in a direction that would be appropriate to the present time. Experience would suggest that organisations whose origins date back thirty or so years are difficult to reform.

It ought to be possible to devise something which allows people to work together without creating hierarchies and which prevents one person from being in a position where they can exercise control over another person.

The idea of this list is that it allows anyone to make themselves available to be contacted, on an equal footing to anyone else. It also allows interested people to contact a range of people in their area and to thereby quickly develop a feeling for what is happening and what they want to be involved in.

I don't know if it will work - its success will probably depend on how many people make themselves available.

To join the contact list: www.freedom-in-education.co.uk

Letters

I know it's the Right Thing

Thank you for producing such an interesting and informative magazine. I have just embarked upon home education as my son is 4½ and "should" have started school. I am viewed by many as a crank at worst, or as an over-protective older mother at best. Your magazine is a voice of reason that I welcome each month as I reach yet another trough of self-doubt – Am I doing the right thing? Am I mad? Will he blame me, thank me???

Of course, I know it's the right thing for me and for him, but it helps to know there are others doing the same thing.

Many thanks, R. D.

Finding a Missing Community

I just had to write to tell you how wonderful your magazine and website is. I was introduced to it by a "home-educator" friend a few months ago, and with every issue I have felt more and more like I've "found" my missing community of like-minded people. What prompted me to write was the EXCELLENT article on the "Art of Enjoying Christmas", which I look forward to sharing with my children later this week.

I am going to recommend your publication to my daughter's teacher; she is a kindred spirit and obviously dedicated to her job. I have no choice but to continue to send my children to school at the moment. I feel sure that the ideas and philosophy you present will ring true with her as they do with me, and that she will find the magazine a great resource in preparing her lessons.

With kind regards,

Esther Peacock (Germany)

'From-the-Heart' Resources

I just renewed my subscription to the magazine. I don't know what I'd do without them. My children (age 14, 10 and 6) literally dive for it when it arrives and they are motivated to try the recipes and crafts. They also love the online Jamboree.

This is such a living example of what real education ought to be. Last week my children were folding

origami shapes for the Christmas tree and this week they're making a cone garland and marzipan figures. Thank you for such 'from-the-heart' resources.

Kindest regards,
Lauri Bolland
Pennsylvania USA

Thank You

I haven't had the time to read your newsletter for awhile. Today I read Discipline. It is really needed in the homeschooling community in the US. thank you for putting the issue into words.

Funding for Home Educators

Many thanks for your newsletter, it is always a joy to read positive views on home educating. Even within 'home eding' circles people can become negative, something I'm guilty of myself, perhaps this is due to isolation. Anyway, I appreciate all your efforts.

I wonder if you or anyone has any thoughts or knowledge of funding for home educators either for individual families or groups. As our children grow we are struggling financially to provide them with all the opportunities we would like. Most of these things they would get in school as a matter of course eg: the chance to learn a musical instrument, be coached in various sports. I can't help thinking that if we are prepared to be inspected and can prove that we are offering our children an adequate education and therefore easing the pressure on the struggling state education system, we should be entitled to some financial help. I wonder if anyone has actually attempted to campaign for this sort of thing or is everyone too busy educating their children! Maybe your website could be a good place for generating support.

Kind Regards
Caroline Farquhar

Freedom in Education Magazine

The Freedom-in-Education Newsletter has a non-virtual form: the Freedom in Education Magazine. This January it is celebrating its two year anniversary. The magazine has the main article from this newsletter, plus the recipe, craft project, story from history and gardening from the Jamboree site. It also has puzzles, quizzes and cartoons which don't translate well onto the internet. Here is what Gareth wrote about it in the January issue:

Two Years of Freedom in Education

The Freedom in Education magazine has now completed two full years of publication.

The roots and origins of the magazine probably strike a chord with readers: Lin and I home-educated our three children from when they were aged 9, 5 & 3, and one of the first things that they started doing was creating magazines and journals – just for our own use. Many years later we found ourselves using the same skills to produce the Freedom in Education Magazine. At first the magazine was little more than a printed version of the online newsletter, but it soon started to take on a character of its own as it acquired traditional features of our old, hand-made magazines i.e. cartoons, quizzes, stories, crafts, etc.

In this sense it is Freedom in Education in action.



The Freedom in Education Magazine can be purchased for £12.00 at www.nezertbooks.net

Link of the Month

www.fluentfrench.com

If you are interested in speaking French fluently I believe that you will only need your own dedication and the course sold on this site to do it. David Tolman, from America, is the genius behind this original and unique way of learning the language, and I can safely say that neither I nor my family have seen a better language course for any language.

The basic idea is that he records interviews with French people in France talking about their work, their life, or a particular French custom, and sells these on a CD (with a slow version). To accompany the CDs there is a book that has the complete transcript of the interviews with the literal English translation underneath. If you buy the course (which is reasonably priced) you will receive a new pack of CDs and booklet every two months for a year.

This brilliant idea means no grammar, no exercises, and no rules to memorise - you will learn to speak French in a similar way to how babies learn it, simply by listening to French people speak. The comments on this site from satisfied customers speak for themselves.

If you would like to send a comment, site-suggestion, favourite quote, or news about an upcoming event to be included in next month's newsletter, please [contact](#) me, Wendy.

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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