



Gareth Lewis - Home education

- Rob I'm talking with Gareth Lewis who's a published author on home education. Tell me, Gareth, why do you think home education is a good idea?
- Gareth Choice is a good idea, and I think it helps if parents realise that they are not forced to send their children to school. They have the choice to teach them at home, if they wish to, and, that gives them more power in negotiating what's best for their children when they do go to school.
- Rob What do you say to those that think that home education is a bit for middle-class families? Can anybody do it?
- Gareth Are you talking about legally or practically?
- Rob Practically, first of all.
- Gareth Practically, of course, everybody is capable of bringing up their own children. They're the most... best qualified to know what is in the best interest of their own children, and it's the choice on each individual parent how much they want to delegate that responsibility to other people. So, they have to decide whether the school or schools which are available to them can do a better job than they can do themselves, and if not, then they should educate them themselves.
- Rob You don't need to be qualified, for example, to be able to ...
- Gareth Well the law varies from country to country, but the idea that you have to be qualified to raise your own children seems a slight anomaly.
- Rob You, you've actually educated your three children at home.
- Gareth We did, yeah.
- Rob So, they've never been to a state or a private school.
- Gareth Well, each one of them had a slightly different path through the education system, but they spent most of their time at home.

- Rob And, this has happened in, in France. Did you get any response from the French authorities?
- Gareth Oh, we moved to France about twenty years ago and at the time there weren't really very many rules about home education. But I understand now that the people I know who are home educating do get regular contact with the education service and they have to have an assessment from time to time.
- Rob OK, so they're very much more controlling?
- Gareth It depends again on the parents, because as far as I know from the parents that I've spoken to, if you tell the authorities that you're giving your children an English education, which is obviously legitimate in Europe, there's very few controls that the French authorities can impose because they don't know what the parameters are of an English-language education, and if you allow yourself to be bullied, they'll give your children tests in French grammar, which they won't pass, and then you'll find yourself being controlled.
- Rob I see that the books that you've produced, which are available online, I gather, uh, have been produced by the whole family.
- Gareth Yeah, we wrote the books together more or less when the children were reaching the end of their years of education and I think it was in the early years of the 2000s and they're all avail..., both available on Amazon.
- Rob What kinds of subjects do they cover?
- Gareth The idea was to be a practical guide for learning at home, so they cover learning to read, learning to write, simple mathematics, and then also a lot of practical things like cooking, and gardening, and craft projects, and then for older children they're a little bit more philosophical about why you've been educated and what objective thinking and forces we might be in life.
- Rob And what did each member of your family contribute to the books?
- Gareth The children did a lot of the illustrations, and they also did a lot on the craft projects and recipes and things. I tended to do most of the text. My wife did the, um, administration and the proofreading, and getting the books in the shops, which is probably the most important aspect of any book production.
- Rob And in fact I suppose that it was a part of your home education was to produce this book?
- Gareth That was my idea: that education should shift at some point, from the theoretical to the practical.

- Rob Are there any drawbacks, do you think, in home education? I mean, I know that some people raise the issue of kids socialising with other kids, for example.
- Gareth I think there are drawbacks to home education, which are tied in with a lot of the problems that we have in our society in general, and children in school have terrible socialisation problems, like bullying and alienation, and being forced to conform to things they don't feel happy with. And, children who are not at school inevitably socially isolated from children their own age, maybe over relating to adults. So, everybody's got a certain degree of difficulties in their upbringing, which seems unfortunate to me.
- Rob Now you mentioned earlier that you - in fact you warned me - that you have become a bit more radical in your opinions about education in general and home education in particular. What's that about?
- Gareth Well I suppose when I wrote the books, the main emphasis was to make it possible at every stage for children to go from their home into the education system - at whatever stage they wanted to - so at the end of their primary education, they could go into the local secondary school. Halfway through the secondary school, they could go in the last couple of years of secondary school and do the school-leaving exams in whatever country they're in, and so on and so forth. They could study for the O-levels, A-levels or baccalaureate at home - not so easy for the baccalaureate - but in England it's quite simple. In Britain it's easy to get A-levels working from home and then go to university. But it's over the last few years, I think all rational people have started to question what the value of all of those edu.. uh, qualifications are. There's less jobs for young people and we're all questioning the value that those jobs have for society and maybe what we really need is some young people with a bit of genuinely independent thought who aren't thinking about how to fit into the existing system, but who have the courage to stand outside the system and start something new off. I think that's more the way that education should be going. I think we need more courageous individuals. It's not my sole aim for the education of my children is to enable them to join the system. Obviously you have to give children choice. But that's not what they've been given at school. They're not being trained to either join the system or question the system. School seems to be about making people accept the status quo, repeating what they've been told, repeating accepted ideas, getting a qualification that rubber-stamps their ability to repeat ideas that aren't their own and then find a job that they probably don't believe in. Whereas the other side of the story - where can children opt into, if they don't want that, is lacking at the moment, it seems - totally lacking, particularly as the state and, um has just acquired a bigger and bigger influence over education since the last war. 'Education for all' seems to me to have been becoming a one single colour education - there's no spectrum to it which I think that's what

we're all suffering from that. We're all the losers from, from an education system that's not diverse.

Rob Thank you very much, Gareth

Gareth You're welcome, Rob.

