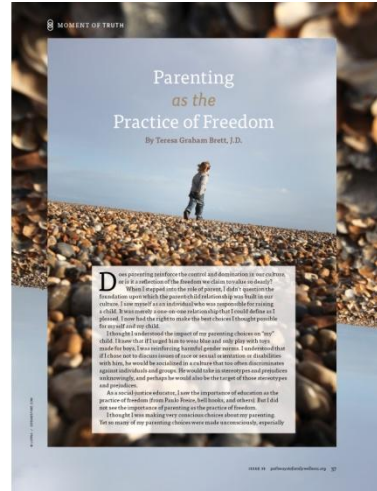


**MOMENT OF TRUTH**

**Parenting as the Practice of Freedom**

By Teresa Graham Brett, J.D.

Pathways #39, page 37



**Talking Points**

- ❖ Teresa Graham Brett starts this article with a challenging and compelling question: “Does parenting reinforce the control and domination in our culture, or is it a reflection of the freedom we claim to value so dearly?”
- ❖ Graham Brett’s personal anecdote addressing her evolving parenting philosophy will probably sound familiar to some parents, but surprising to others – “As a teacher and educator, I was fully committed to empowering students. I wanted them to question what I brought into the classroom. I also wanted them to question what they brought into the classroom. I wanted them to bust open the particular worldview they were holding on to as a way to create broader understanding of difference, power and privilege. As a parent, ironically, I had already made my decisions about the kinds of things my children should believe and learn.” (38)
- ❖ Graham Brett challenges the premise that the child-adult relationship should be based in a power structure in which parents have authority over children. She tells us how, for the first few years of her children’s lives, she had unconsciously engaged in this authoritative paradigm. “I had substituted “progressive” values for “traditional” values, but my parenting still reinforced the dominant paradigm of control.” (38) She attributes this strategy to arrogance in the belief that she had it all together.
- ❖ Challenging that paradigm of domination, Graham Brett encourages us to consider something that some (if not many) parents will find thought-provoking, if not difficult – “In our use of power over children, we reinforce domination and control. If our values include freedom, empowerment, trust and respect, controlling and using power over children is a violation of those values. Our parenting reinforces domination, rather than parenting as the practice of freedom.” (39)

- ❖ Graham Brett recognizes that the realization of this philosophy flies in the face of much of our cultural assumptions about children. The “allowance” of the practice of personal choice makes parents appear irresponsible in our culture.
- ❖ Her advice for parenting as a practice of freedom? Become equally committed to our own wholeness as we are to the wholeness of our children. Our children’s rebellious behavior, or a question of our right to control them, triggers unresolved feelings of loss or our own denied right to express our thoughts and feelings as children. These unresolved feelings may show up as fear, anger, or frustration.
- ❖ Graham Brett explains that we can use these triggers to bring these feelings to consciousness. She explains that “Our work is to begin to understand how our childhood experiences impact our lives now as parents.” (39)

### Resources

Theresa Graham Brett’s website - <http://www.parentingforsocialchange.com/>

Graham Brett referenced additional educators and cultural critics. You can learn more about them here:

[Curious about Paulo Freire?](#)

[Curious about bell hooks?](#)