

A Thomas Jefferson Education in our Home

by
Rachel P. DeMille

with an introduction
by Oliver DeMille,

“The 7 Keys of
Great Teaching”

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To my father,
Glen Jolley Pinegar,
1926 – 2007

Who taught me to *Trust the Process*.

Introduction

As the principles of Thomas Jefferson Education spread, I am often asked how this system fits with other educational models including Charlotte Mason, Montessori, Unschooling, Commonwealth Schools, College Prep Academies, etc. The truth is that Thomas Jefferson Education is not really a system *per se*; it is rather a set of principles that, if applied, will help virtually any educational method be more successful.

Indeed, there are Charlotte Mason practitioners who succeed and those who do not; it is my observation that the successful ones apply many or all of the Seven Keys. The same is true of successful Montessori practitioners, Unschoolers, and private and public school teachers.

As we have consulted with and taught for seminars and conventions, as we have completed additional books for publication, developed audio presentations for download and launched websites and social media to teach, support and promote TJEd, we have continued to refine and improve the presentation of the Leadership Education ideology and methodology, and I wanted to pass on the updated and better outline of the 7 Keys.

This article serves all these purposes. I am particularly excited that readers will get to hear and learn from Rachel. I wanted her to entitle this supplement “A few key things I forgot to teach Oliver about education,” and it would have been true.

Our purpose is not to write a scholarly article in the sense of meticulous citations, presentation of statistics or politically correct language. However, I believe that the information that follows will be very helpful for those trying to mentor the classics and come face-to-face with greatness in their education.

Oliver DeMille
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Cedar City, Utah

The 7 Keys of Great Teaching

Oliver DeMille

There are Seven Keys of Great Teaching. When they are applied, optimal learning occurs. When they are ignored or rejected, the quantity and quality of education decreases. Whatever the student's individual interests or learning styles, these principles can be applied. And whatever your role in education—home, public, private, higher education or corporate training—the application of any and ultimately all of the 7 Keys will significantly improve your effectiveness and success.

In a Nutshell

1. Classics, not Textbooks

No one can deny the value of a great idea well-communicated. The inspiration, innovation and ingenuity inherent in great ideas elevate those who study them. Great ideas are most effectively learned directly from the greatest thinkers, historians, artists, philosophers and prophets, and their original works. Great works inspire greatness, just as mediocre or poor works usually inspire mediocre and poor achievement. The great accomplishments of humanity are the key to quality education.

This first key means that in pursuit of a transformational education, in preference to second- or third-generation interpretations we emphasize original sources—the intellectual and creative works of the world's great thinkers, artists, scientists, etc., as they were produced.

2. Mentors, not Professors

The professor/expert *tells* the students, urges them to conform to certain ideas and standards, and grades or otherwise rewards/punishes them for their various levels of conformity. In contrast, the mentor finds out the student's goals, interests, talents, weaknesses, strengths and purpose, and then helps him develop and carry out a plan to prepare for his unique mission. Of course, there are educators with the title of "professor" who are brilliant mentors (and even some who call themselves "mentors" who don't merit the honor).

Various types of mentors are present at different levels of a person's progress and in different stages of life. In education, the value of a liberal arts mentor cannot be overstated. Parents and teachers who apply the 7 Keys can be an effective part of the mentoring of a student in the early phases of learning, and help prepare the individual to fully take advantage of the influence of later mentors that will be formative for continued development and achievement.

3. *Inspire, not Require*

I would venture that none of the keys is as highly celebrated and as inconsistently applied as this one. This is perhaps the least understood and least practiced of the 7 Keys; yet it is the key to all great teaching. There are really only two ways to teach—you can inspire the student to voluntarily and enthusiastically choose to do the hard work necessary to get a great education, or you can attempt to require it of them.

Most teachers and schools use the require method; great teachers and schools pay the price to inspire. Instead of asking, “what can I do to make these students perform?” the great teacher says, “I haven’t yet become truly inspirational. What do I need to do so that these students will *want* to do the hard work to get a superb education?”

4. *Structure Time, not Content*

Great mentors help their students establish and follow a consistent schedule, but they don’t micromanage the content. Indeed, micro-management has become one of the real poisons of modern education. Great teachers and schools encourage students to pursue their interests and passions during their study time.

Of course, this principle is applied differently at different levels of student development. There are 4 phases of learning:

- Core Phase, roughly ages 0-8
- Love of Learning Phase, roughly 8-12
- Scholar Phase, roughly 12-16
- Depth Phase, roughly 16-24

Beyond this come the Applicational Phases of Mission and Impact, where we each set out to accomplish our unique missions in life, and fulfill our role as societal elder and mentor to the rising generation (For more on these phases, including examples and helps on how to successfully support each phase from infancy to grandparenting, see our book *Leadership Education: The Phases of Learning*.)

During Core Phase, work times and play times are allotted, with children allowed to choose their own subjects of play during playtime. As they get older, play includes reading, math and other subjects that students choose to engage for fun.

At the beginning of the Love of Learning Phase a student might choose a structure of 1 or 2 or 3 hours a day of set study time; it is important that the student choose it, and that the mentor help the student learn accountability for his choice. If the student won’t choose it, you haven’t inspired him yet—get to work. Don’t fall back into requiring. Pay the price to inspire! (Our book *A Thomas Jefferson Education Home Companion* has great suggestions on this point as well.

By the early Scholar Phase a student will likely be studying 6-8 hours a day on topics of their deepest interest. During the Scholar the breadth of learning is expanded and skills are refined, and in Depth Phase, the student increases the structured time and goes into more depth. A more detailed treatment of this process and the ideal cooperation between mentor and student is found in the book *Leadership Education: The Phases of Learning*.

5. Quality, not Conformity

With the student feeling inspired and working hard to get a great education, the mentor should give appropriate feedback and help. But the feedback does not usually take the form of common “grading”, but rather personalized feedback, commenting on the particular strengths of a work, including clarity of expression, original thought, technical precision, correlation of principles and ideas, effectiveness of argumentation or other reader appeal, etc. These are clearly directed toward the evaluation of a written work, but similar concepts can be adapted for feedback on other products of a student’s scholarly efforts, be they organizational, artistic, personal, interpersonal, innovative, etc. Great teachers and schools reward *quality*--quality work and quality performance.

In the early phases emphasis is placed almost exclusively on positive feedback; as the student matures (especially after puberty), more technical critiques become valuable and usually preferred by students as they strive for excellence.

In late Scholar Phase and Depth Phase, anything less than highest quality is not approved by the mentor as a completed work; instead, the student is coached on how to improve it and sent back to work on it—over and over again until excellence is achieved. For example, for years George Wythe College utilized a two-grade system: “A” and “DA”, which mean “Acceptable” and “Do it Again.” Great teachers inspire quality, demand quality—and they coach the student on how to achieve it.

6. Simplicity, not Complexity

The more complex the curriculum, the more reliant the student becomes on experts, and the more likely the student is to get caught up in the Requirement/Conformity trap. This leads to effective follower training, and is more a *socialization* technique than an educational method. Education means the ability to think, independently and creatively, and the skill of applying one’s knowledge in dealing with people and situations in the real world. Complex systems and/or curricula usually lead to student frustration and teacher burnout as personalization is at a minimum and performance requirements are pre-determined.

Great teachers train great thinkers, and great leaders, by keeping it simple: students study the greatest minds and characters in history in every field, write about and discuss what is learned in numerous settings, and apply what is learned in various ways under the tutelage of a mentor.

7. *YOU, not Them*

If you think these principles are about improving your child's or student's education, you will never have the power to inspire them to do the hard work of self-education. Focus on *your* education, and invite them along for the ride. Read the classics in all fields, find mentors who inspire and demand quality, structure your days to include study time for yourself, and become a person who inspires great education. A parent or teacher doesn't have to be an "expert" to inspire great education (the classics provide the expertise), but he does need to be setting the example.

Conclusion

The question I'm asked the most is "How do you actually do this system?" The people who ask haven't become avid students of the classics. The only complex part about mentoring the classics is knowing which books to recommend and then having something to say about them in discussions with students. So that is how to really do this—get reading. For a step-by-step guide to getting started, and suggested reading lists for various ages, see *A Thomas Jefferson Education: Teaching a Generation of Leaders for the Twenty-first Century*. This book gives a more detailed overview of the philosophy and concepts of Leadership Education, and the Appendices offer practical helps for how to get off the conveyor belt.

Once you've read five classics in math, five in science, five in history, and five in literature, you won't be asking that question anymore. Instead, you'll be asking different questions. Better questions. Lots of them.

Introduction to the Phases of Learning

by Rachel P. DeMille

My husband and I have spent several years now promoting a traditional approach to education – “A Thomas Jefferson Education”. The response has been wonderful! It has often been voiced in a two-part reaction:

“This is just what we’ve been looking for! It feels so natural! It’s so obvious!”

...and:

*“But—how do you **really** do it?”*

It seems strange that something so “natural” and “obvious” can leave us feeling so unsure of how to go about it.

I believe it has to do with something Oliver has said (and I’ll paraphrase): it is difficult to put something into practice that we haven’t internalized; it is virtually *impossible* to communicate with conviction something we have not experienced.

The answer to this is also natural and obvious, and Oliver has said this too—it has to start with the teacher or parent. I believe that with few exceptions, those who struggle most to find success with their children in Thomas Jefferson Education are those who are still putting their major emphasis and focus and most intense efforts into *educating their children*.

In answer to the many questions we receive on the particular points of TJEd, I would like to go into a little more detail on the basic phases of learning. While this information might be helpful to anyone interested in education or child development, it does not stand alone. It is intended to be used with an understanding of Thomas Jefferson Education – especially the 7 Keys of Great Teaching, which form the core philosophy.

One last disclaimer before I proceed: Thomas Jefferson Education is more than just a collection of ideas. It is a recounting of a process by which scholars such as Thomas Jefferson, Isaac Newton, Marie Curie and Winston Churchill achieved excellence in scholarship and personal development.

While I whole-heartedly endorse this philosophy because it gives me a vision of how to accomplish our goals for our family, I do not suggest that it is what everyone else wants or *should* want for their family.

I simply say that if you decide to put meringue on your pie, there will be egg whites. You may decide against meringue, it’s true. But as soon as you commit to meringue, you cannot argue on

the point of egg whites.

The education of great historical leaders is a matter of record. Research has revealed what type of early educational experiences developed their Core and Love of Learning, at what point they became more serious scholars, and when they found a mentor to whom they submitted for additional training.

You may decide that you have another vision for your own or your children's education; but if it's a Leadership Education we want, then it's to these examples we must look for the model. We cannot ignore the principles without also modifying the outcome. The principles that we teach and that I enumerate below do not pretend to be everything to everyone, but they are what they are—Leadership Education.

Most all development occurs in stages or phases. This is also true of education. I believe it is important to take advantage of each phase of development to its fullest.

Some things are best taught during a particular phase; it not only goes against Nature to work on a different schedule, but very important opportunities might be missed, and this can impact the development of the individual.

Three important concepts: it's difficult to learn something before its time, perhaps more difficult to gain things missed that should have been mastered previously, and worst of all is to try to *unlearn* what should not have been learned.

Having said all this, let me also say that children are resilient, and all of us benefit from positive changes in our lives no matter what stage we are in. There is no need for someone just now learning of these ideas to feel like a failure, or worry that it is too late to make a difference.

One of the major points of emphasis whenever my husband and I speak is that the parents must lead out and change their own approach to education. Certainly if we "old dogs" can learn new tricks, it is not too late for our children. More on this later.

The first three basic phases of education are:

THE CORE PHASE

During this period we lay the foundation for all learning and service in the child's life. The "curriculum" is simply:

- right and wrong
- good and bad
- true and false
- relationships
- family values

- family routines and responsibilities
- learning accountability
- the value and love of work

Any attempt to over-program this learning phase with lessons on skills acquisition can create conflict in the child's mind (consider John Taylor Gatto's "Seven Lesson School Teacher" from *Dumbing us Down*). Little children are impressionable and eager to please, and will conform (at the very least, on a subconscious level) to the models and rules given them in this phase. This includes the more abstract lessons on "what is success?", "what is maturity?", "how do I resolve conflict?", "what is home?", "what is my relationship with God?", "what is my relationship with others?", "what is my duty?" and so forth.

When we over-emphasize academic achievement during this phase it can:

- serve to teach our children that they dislike academics because everything is hard and boring, and/or
- offer our children an alternative source of self-worth other than intrinsic value, faith, good works and accountability.

The lessons of the Core Phase are best learned through daily experiences in home life, uncomplicated by the secondary goals of academic achievement.

The best efforts of the parents will be in modeling for the child an active spiritual and scholarly life, and in nurturing healthy relationships. Socializing without the rest of the family should be limited and carefully considered. This is an ideal time for reading and discussion of good books, listening to and discussing good music, watching and discussing good media programs, playing at art and building with Legos or erector sets and other similar activities.

Lessons in self-discipline, perseverance and pursuit of excellence are modeled by the parents, and experienced by the young child in mostly tangible ways. These might include household chores, caring for animals and gardens, helping in a family business, and cooperating in a daily routine.

Little children start to internalize the virtues of excellence and perseverance as they do their part with family duties and in service to others. During this Phase children are taught the basics of the family's faith, and how to arrive at and recognize truth. The child should be prepared to make choices, heed his conscience and to know in his heart when he's being inspired.

"Discipline" for children in this phase should consist primarily of instruction, training and patient explanation and re-teaching of principles, rather than punishment, shame or anger.

Suggested Readings on supporting Core Phase:

Better Late than Early, Moore

For the Children's Sake, Macaulay

THE LOVE OF LEARNING PHASE

These are the years when children dabble with learning, getting to know “what’s out there”. If they have emerged from Core Phase in good order they are usually fearless, feeling like almost everything will be interesting and believing that they will be able to do whatever they set their minds to.

During this phase the parent should provide opportunity for children to make and take responsibility for personal decisions. Personal accountability should be emphasized and respected. It is during these years that the child will start to become aware of gifts and interests that will help guide educational paths and begin to hint at the life’s goals and mission. Sometimes these interests are whimsical samplings or stepping stones to other discoveries, sometimes the beginnings of a life-long vocation; none of these is more valid than the others in justifying the pursuit of an interest. Parents do well to encourage the child to orient himself by this inward sense of direction, and to model the same value in their own choices and pursuits.

During these years peer involvement is also carefully filtered and is ideally either an extension of whole-family relationships or, by design, grows into them. In other words, the child’s companions are chosen from that group of families that the parents trust and identify with. If my child discovers a significant friendship from outside our circle of influence, that new friend’s family might become the object of outreach so that a whole-family relationship can be developed and the new family can be invited into the fellowship of the family’s community of friends.

Children in the Love of Learning Phase can benefit from some positive peer influence in making and keeping goals and achieving excellence. During the Love of Learning Phase the skills and tools of learning which will enable later scholarly efforts (reading, writing, math skills, experimentation, library research, and oral persuasion—what kid doesn’t practice that?) are practiced and a fair level of competence gained, with a fair amount of variety of strengths and weaknesses from one child to the next. A certain amount or period of time is set aside on a regular basis for study (daily, every other day, M-Th, whatever schedule suits the needs and style of the parent and child). The content is flexible and often varies from day to day and even changes several times during a study period.

Reading together as a family and the child reading alone and discussing with the parent are two very common activities during this phase. Writing skills might be developed in the keeping of a personal journal, correspondence with friends and loved ones, and creative writing. The parent should be imaginative in offering opportunities to relate everyday life with:

- Books read: re-enact stories from scripture, fairy tales and books read together. Talk about the lessons and invite them to make up their own stories to teach with.
- Historical and current events: learn about how children in another time, place or circumstance interacted with their families, how they played, worked and spent their time, the things they loved and the things they worried about. Invite the children to write,

illustrate or scrapbook about their own life with an eye toward reporting to a future reader on details that might be quaint or interesting years from now.

- The operation of scientific principles: learn to make pancake batter from scratch and discover the function of each ingredient; experiment with more and less, and leaving one out; talk about when it's good to follow rules and when it's good to try new ways of doing things.
- Mathematical principles: learn to pepper your conversation with mathematical vocabulary and ask thinking questions about common experiences; "let's *measure* the time between the lightning and the thunder," "How many pancakes do you *estimate* 2 cups of mix will make?" "I wonder which ice cream our party guests will prefer? Let's *compare*." "This recipe makes enough for 4 people. Will you please *multiply* it and write it out again so it will serve 10?"
- Projects requiring integration of a variety of skills and resources are encouraged. For example, a child might want to build a birdhouse.

Preparation could include:

- research on the nesting preferences of the targeted bird
- drawing up plans
- listing materials needed
- contacting suppliers for price comparisons
- reviewing safety rules for power tools
- consideration of finishing products like paint that would not harm the bird
- planting certain bushes or feeders and other things to attract the particular bird

The use of project learning is an incredible way to encourage the child to venture into new areas of learning. You can start with almost any subject of interest, and with enough ingenuity you can arrive at any other discipline from music to science to math to economics to biology to history to world religions to future trends, and so on. I challenge the reader to analyze the above example for the various skills and disciplines touched on, not to mention the many steps I have left out that could take the child in even more directions.

The need to relate the child's daily experiences and study with the rest of the body of human knowledge and achievement make obvious the need for the parent to put a great deal of energy into his or her *own* education rather than making the child "the project". This is more consistent with natural law that one can only change one's own self and—bottom line—it is much more effective to *lead* than to *steer* such an enterprise as the education of a child. The parent should be diligent in self-education so that the child cannot help but internalize the value of self-improvement and the obligation of the individual to be serviceable to his God and his fellowman.

The increasing intellectual and time demands of the child upon the parent (who is also trying to develop and progress in his or her education) necessitate that the home life and family's time be kept as uncomplicated as possible. Too many outside activities, no matter how valuable or interesting, can be over-stimulating for the child and draw him or her much too soon away from the ties that bind him to the nest.

There will come a time when such activities are the ideal; they should be carefully considered at any stage, and deliberately limited in Core and Love of Learning Phases. Such a “vacuum” is a necessary element of Love of Learning as self-directed project learning often begins when a child sits around for a while wishing for something to do. (Thus we see the problem with filling up his time and space with commitments and diversions.)

This can be difficult to avoid, especially when we as parents are unprepared for the peer pressure (not the children’s peers so much as the parents’) that may be leveled at us. When “every” other boy and girl is in ... [soccer, dance, little league—you fill in the blank] it’s hard to justify a decision to use that time to do comparatively “nothing”. And this is not to say that any of those or other similar activities is inherently wrong for an individual child. But the time spent at home in simple, “homely” activities is irreplaceable, and needs to be held in greater esteem and higher priority against the more stimulating activities that society insists should fill our children’s and family’s lives. It’s okay to stay home! We just need to take responsibility to fill our homes with wholesomeness, warmth and light.

Suggested Readings on Supporting Love of Learning:

Childhood Dying by Paul H. Price

Lolipop Learning by Amy Edwards

THE SCHOLAR PHASE

While the family will ideally have been exposed to great literature in personal and family reading time in the early years, after the onset of puberty the student engages an increasingly rigorous, disciplined survey of classic works and real-life application. At first the new scholar may study only a couple of hours at a time, but as the student matures and his studies gain breadth and momentum, his thirst for knowledge, self-mastery and sense of purpose keep his nose “in the books” for several hours at a stretch.

Peer involvement and interaction are not only desired by the student, but certain types of peer interactions are actually ideal for his progress as the Scholar years progress. Some important lessons can be had in virtually no other way.

Group discussion of classic works and review of original works of the students are invaluable in expanding the young scholar’s horizons. He learns to articulate his thoughts and is brought face to face with the present limitations of his accomplishments, thus inviting him to challenge himself to greater excellence and motivating him to more disciplined study. While all of this sounds very grown-up, it should be remembered that the Scholar is still a work in progress and frequent interaction with and accountability to the parent and/or mentor are imperative.

During this phase it may be appropriate for the student to be involved in a more formal arrangement such as a private school or multi-family Momschool that is in harmony with the principles of Leadership Education. The need for mentors in addition to the parents will probably

arise as the student progresses toward his personal goals and, in the later scholar years, shows leanings toward the areas in which he will pursue a more in-depth education.

The additional phases of Depth, Mission and Impact follow, but I will limit my discussion here to the first three phases which are most influenced by parent, teacher and family involvement. For more on the Depth and Application Phases, see Leadership Education.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q. *What do you think is the most common problem of homeschoolers?*

A. First and foremost, even among "dyed in the wool" homeschoolers, there is widespread neglect of the Core Phase. I believe this is because of our tendency to identify so strongly with our label of "homeschoolers" that our family culture can easily become defined by academic achievement. I remember when I had three teeny little ones under three (and knowing that I wanted to homeschool) how anxious I was to "get on with it".

I had learned to read before I even remember trying; I had an older sister who loved to play "school", and by the time I was four I was an independent reader. So I just assumed that my bright and precocious little kids would also find it easy, and I considered that the measure of my success for a time. I was impatient and self-conscious and worried that I would fail.

Thankfully, our first child was one who would not be rushed. I hadn't realized until the writing of this article how critical that was for the culture of our family and the application of the principles that we promote. Because Little Oliver was more like his father (who did not read fluently and well until he was almost 12 years old), I felt that it would be best for our family not to emphasize reading as a skill by which they should measure their worth, intelligence, knowledge or ability to succeed in new endeavors. I purposely steered our "school" time toward things that fortified the children as individuals and established our family culture, waiting for the cues that Oliver was ready (both developmentally and emotionally) to master reading. The happy result was that we discovered for ourselves—and quite by accident—the purpose of the Core Phase.

Because we have tried to feed the spirit and the intellect on content rather than skills mastery, because we have modeled a love of learning and provided a rich environment, and because we have waited until **they** are anxious to apply themselves to the task, the children not only have that fearlessness that I referred to, but they have the innate sense that their education is their own responsibility. My husband and I are examples, mentors, guides, facilitators, instructors, but they cannot expect us to *educate* them. They intuitively know that it is their job to supply the desire and the effort necessary in order for them to achieve their personal, spiritual and educational goals. In a word, they will have to educate themselves.

I have witnessed many well-intentioned mothers and (particularly) fathers – ourselves not excluded – who pressure their children into structured time and activities that model public school settings and timetable. They cite the need for self-discipline and excellence as the reason for their strivings.

I would suggest that self-discipline and excellence are internal values, and are not developed in an environment of compulsion. I also believe that it is difficult to teach these values without a physical medium that allows the student to see the workings of choice and consequence. By this I mean that learning excellence is easier and teaching self-discipline is more effective when the child sees the natural consequences of his or her choices, as in:

“If I say that I weeded my rows of the garden, when I really didn’t, everyone will know it isn’t true, and I’ll have to do it later anyway and it will be more difficult if I put it off.”

Caring for animals and gardens provide a routine, repetition, and reward that the child’s mind can grasp. These are our methods of choice, but I know of another family that I look up to that has used the father’s dental practice as their medium. The oldest child is a certified dental assistant who, at fifteen, is working on her college degree with George Wythe College Distance Learning, having paid for the entire under-graduate program in advance with her own earnings (she is successfully in Scholar Phase).

The children go early each morning with their parents to do the janitorial and other preparatory work before the office opens for the day. It isn’t too difficult for a medium-sized young person to understand that they can’t cut corners when sterilizing dental equipment without serious repercussions. They learn to take pride in their cleaning when the professional appearance of the office directly affects the family’s wellbeing, reputation and prosperity. And as employees of the business, if their performance is sub-standard they are subject to being reassigned or fired.

In the examples I have given (and there are probably as many ways to teach these principles as there are parents reading this article) consequences are nearly immediate and the necessity of consistency and exactness become obvious as they experience the consequences of their choices.

In this way the child learns self-discipline and excellence in a very personal and internal way. Then when he is older and is having a hard time mastering some math skill or wants to develop an article to submit to a magazine, no one needs preach to him what self-discipline or high standards of excellence will get him. He learned those lessons getting dirt under his fingernails when he was only seven.

While neglect of the Core Phase is a great problem, there is—as you would expect—an equal and opposite problem: those who **do** discover and capitalize on the Core Phase can tend to take it and use it for their whole philosophy, as if that’s all there is. It is the foundation, but virtue isn’t the single attribute we’re to acquire. We need to proceed onward and incorporate others.

From the very first, the role of the parent is to model scholarship; that’s the parent’s job. It’s *not* the parent’s job to educate the children, but rather to model self-education. The healthy child will

naturally move from Core to Love of Learning and then on to the Scholar Phase. In fact, they will often want to follow you into Scholar Phase before they're totally ready. They'll go back and forth; they will model scholar behavior for a few hours—then give it up for six months. Many of the factors that govern these transitions are rooted in biology, and not just environment, so nature is actually working in your favor on this point! Know the principles of success and then trust the process. Every day, every year has its purpose, and getting ahead of the schedule is not an advantage; in fact it may entail doing some backtracking to really set things right.

We tend to press kids when they're just tiny. Everyone around them seems frantic about their learning. They live in a state of tension. We give them tasks just ahead of their developmental stage and force them to reach for things that are uncomfortable. We rob them of their sense of mastery over what they *do* know and personal power over what they *can* do. They can tend to feel stupid, disrespected and impotent. By the time they should be moving into the Love of Learning they either don't have the will to try anymore, or they're so adept at playing the pleasing game that it can hardly be called an educational process.

Most children in today's schools will have received a significant portion of their homework assignments by the time they are twelve. Then in their teens they're told, "These are the best years of your life. Go to assemblies. Play sports." It's 100% backwards. It is our hope that to get people to take the pressure off when the children are young and get them to put the pressure on when they are older. The Leadership-model Scholar Phase is as rigorous as the Core Phase is carefree—and the process of applying the principles runs uniformly counter-intuitive to the Conveyor-belt model at both ends of the spectrum.

Q. What is a normal day like in your family? *[The answer to this question changes yearly, or even several times per year, depending on the season and the phases of our children. The response given here was accurate as of about 2001, and I let it stand as such because it reflects the experience of a young family with most of the kids in Core and Love of Learning, which is demonstrably the most common demographic for people asking the question.]*

A. I get up at 5:30-6:00 a.m. with my baby. The kids get up at 6:30 to get ready for the day. They build a fire in the wood stove, get their rooms ready for the day and (hopefully—maybe 40% of the time) dress and groom themselves. Then we have scripture study. Then Daddy reads to them—somewhere between twenty minutes and an hour and a half.

One day I had to go to a Cub Scout training. When I got back 5 1/2 hours later they were still reading and didn't want to quit. In less than a month they have read at least ten books including: *Pollyanna*; *A Cricket in Times Square*; *The Great Brain*; *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*; and *The Boxcar Children*. [I would note that this during the months of January and February, huddled by the woodstove was what we all wanted to be doing. Again, seasons and phases impact the ideal application of the principles. See *Leadership Education: The Phases of Learning*, Part II.]

When Oliver leaves for work the rest of us take care of the animal chores, eat breakfast, and put

the house in order, as we also do before bed. Then we “do school”. Our two oldest are in the Love of Learning Phase. We structure the time, not the content. They may work on whatever is of interest. They might draw, or read, or build something, or plan endless lists of guests and refreshments for a wished-for party, or try a recipe in the kitchen.... The list is infinite.

I suppose that a certain kind of observer might not realize at a casual glance that we’re actually doing “school” because it doesn’t look like any school I ever went to. This is Love of Learning for younger children. The thing that distinguishes it from utter chaos or free play is that I am present and involved, and I facilitate and discuss with them their learning and accomplishments. I do want them to be interested in, learn and try many things, so the key is for me to model for them that I have varied interests.

People have asked me how I get my children to eat sticks of cucumber. I eat cucumbers often and leave plates of cucumbers available on the counter to snack on. The first few times one of my toddlers gives it a try they invariably look at me in astonishment and disgust as they spit it on the floor, but by the time they’re four they’ve acquired a taste for it. At first they couldn’t help wondering why I found it appealing, but as they persisted they learned to enjoy it too. And it didn’t hurt any that the older children obviously shared in my opinion of cucumbers; this is one of the elegant details in the Leadership Education model. There is a perpetuity in the motion that carries the momentum from the parent/mentor to the oldest child and on down the line, each with the appropriate expression of the phase he or she is in.

And as it is with cucumbers, so it is with self-education. If they see **me** practicing the piano, crocheting a doll dress, reading a Star Trek novel, The Bible, *The Five Thousand Year Leap*, *Pride and Prejudice*, mathematical theory, and Hebrew apocryphal philosophy, I don’t need to worry about **them** getting pigeonholed. Now, this doesn’t mean you have to be an expert in any particular thing (anyone who knows me knows that I’m not an expert in any of the above with the possible exception of Star Trek) to model for your kids a desire to expand your horizons.

But returning to the routine: we do school again after lunch, and sometimes again after dinner . . . or not. I do try to keep the kids around me a lot during the day as I’m doing things around the house, such as making granola or apple butter or crocheting a gift. (These are all winter activities. In the spring and summer we will do more outside work with the animals and garden, or play basketball or baseball on our lot or just read under the trees on the front lawn.).

We find it easy to stay in compliance the state guidelines for hours of schooling and subject matter, because our schooling time not only includes early morning and evening reading and projects with Dad, but will sometimes go into the weekends, and even on vacations. It also runs year-round.

Of course, keep in mind that my oldest children are in the Love of Learning Phase. As stated before, a couple of years from now as they enter the Scholar Phase, our routine will be changed appropriately. [See below.]

I try to do things that are industrious, thrifty, future-minded — I sort of take Caroline Ingalls *Little*

House on the Prairie) as a mentor. These are *my* values. Another mom might be always involved in art projects or community service or genealogy or researching and writing articles to submit for publication or landscaping the yard or building things or sewing or making wedding cakes or.... I'm guessing that probably doesn't matter the vocation or medium, as long as it enriches the individual, strengthens the home environment and it models godly virtues for the children.

The afternoon is usually unscheduled. It is then that I might leave to do errands or visit and let the children play with friends for a couple of hours. We usually try to keep that to one day a week at the most. In the late afternoon we have more structure: evening animal chores, getting ready for dinner. From 5:00 until 8:00 is family time again, which is practically untouchable until you have a scholar or two in the home. This has taken a lot of commitment on our part because there are so many things that compete for our attention during these hours. First we have our meal, then the evening reading or games. We go in waves: reading for days or weeks at a time, switching abruptly to playing games for a time, with a rare visit to another home taking place once in a while. The time is structured, not the content. The kids go to bed at 8:00pm and we're down by 10pm.

Q. *How can a mother of a large family find time to study?*

A. I believe that simplification is the answer to this concern. And that simplification can occur on four fronts:

- Exterior Time
- Exterior Space
- Interior Time
- Interior Space

Exterior Time & Space

We have already discussed the importance of keeping time commitments away from the home as simple as possible. This is what is meant by simplifying our Exterior Time. Our industrious and progressivist society (and especially the idealist and non-conformist values that tend to be found among those who lean toward alternative education) can also serve to urge us toward busy-ness. It takes a deliberate effort and clarity of purpose to resist the urge to fill the vacuum.

To simplify our Exterior Space is, wherever possible, to live in a place where the available diversions and relationships are as supportive as possible to the family's goals, education and otherwise. This may entail a sort of "vision quest" as parents to come to a unified view of the ideal for development of the family culture. It may require sacrifice or compromise. Even if financial constraints or the realities of a life's mission do not allow for major adjustments to where you live, the process of defining your ideal can be a valuable exercise; having done so, you will be empowered to clearly acknowledge what you choose and why, and what you sacrifice and why. This, in and of itself, will inform your choices and your family's core values.

Interior Time & Space

Simplification of Interior Time refers to the removal of stimulating or cluttering distractions that fill the family's time within the home, such as: video games, TV, too frequent and/or lengthy visits of playmates, etc. I know of many families with a variety of standards that work for them in governing these influences in their lives, from complete abstinence, to structured time, to strategic incorporation of them toward educational progress, etc. In any case, these are such powerful influences that it is imperative that we make a considered decision regarding our family's policy regarding them.

Interior Space is the one place that in our case doesn't stay "fixed". We moved to the country and acquired farm animals to give the children responsibilities (Exterior Space), we have a habitual commitment to regular family time (Exterior Time), and we got rid of the TV that we were spending too much time on (Interior Time). But one of the biggest drains on my time and energy that otherwise would go to educating myself and mentoring my children is caring for the family's possessions.

In order to simplify our interior space we have begun a systematic "purge" which is a monthly clearing of non-essential accumulations. This includes anything from outgrown or unusable clothing, "junk" toys that just show up, and any other possession that just hasn't got a good place to stay out of my way and that is difficult for the children to care for. It is amazing what this one thing has done for the peace of the family and the quality of our time together.

I have a friend who simply made a list of "keepers" off the top of her head from memory and left it written for her husband's reference. She asked him to carry everything else away while she and the children were gone, so that neither she nor they could change their minds about anything. The kids now each have a large shoebox full of toys. They have little difficulty caring for their things. Their imaginative play has not suffered with the lack of the things they used to have. And lap-time has improved in quality now that she doesn't feel guilty about the pickup she's not doing. The house doesn't need it any more.

Big Families

But addressing more specifically the question of big families: many homeschooling moms feel overwhelmed by the demands of seeing to the progress of their many children. TjEd methodology has the virtue of relieving a lot of that pressure as it gives the mom permission to leave off pushing the kids and focus on accomplishing things herself. In the instance of a mother that has many children—maybe five or more—the children can become the project, and I know of no remedy for that. It may be unavoidable that to oversee several kids in each phase of learning simply consumes the mom's interest and energy *for a time*.

But just as the best education I will ever get is as I am preparing to teach a class or trying to keep up with the interests of a teenager, our children can have enriching educational opportunities as they learn how to mentor their siblings and guide the progress of those interested in things they have already made some progress in. In this way, even the mother of many children can make time to model self-education for the children, even if it's only for just a few hours a week.

And if the mother doesn't feel the pressure and rush of a timetable, she will recognize that to let her children develop reading and math skills at a comfortable pace requires much less supervision than the "fifteen pages in the workbook for each child per day" system. And more importantly, an investment in the mother's education is *not* a withdrawal from the children's education—just the opposite! While getting off the conveyor belt, to let the children take it easy for a few months while mom gets a head start is really an investment in their future.

Q. It feels strange to not sit down and drill phonics and reading and math with my young child. I'm worried that if I neglect this I'm cheating him.

A. I know from my experience in teaching beginning Hebrew (which is a totally different alphabet and unfamiliar sounds) that an interested individual can master the alphabet and learn to read and write in less than twelve total hours of class time. (There were only two exceptions—one was a teenager who didn't want to be there. The other was a mature lady who never engaged the process while she insisted that she couldn't do it.) This may sound outrageous, but I have experienced it over and over, literally hundreds of times. Now, imagine if the vocabulary and grammar were familiar. We would have technical language facility in one day. Speed and fluency would follow in a short time with any reasonable effort and exposure. "But those were not young children," you may say. Which begs the question—why do we push these skills on them so young when they are easily acquired in plenty of time once they have a little maturity?

I do make myself available to my children to answer questions and help with projects. Somewhere during the Core Phase and the Love of Learning Phase, between the stories we read, the games we play, my questions and their answers, their questions and my answers, and their questions and answers between each other, they have learned to read and write and figure.

During the Core and early Love of Learning I do not go out of my way to correct their misspelled words. I do not make a huge issue of numbers written backwards. I will, from time to time, compliment their choice of words in a poem they've written and offer to spell-check it before they send it to "Grama." Or I will quiz them on a telephone message they've taken down to ensure that I don't mistake a 6 for a 0. In this way they become conscious that there is a "right" way that they will understand when they are big like me—but there's no negative value assigned to their imperfect efforts. It's not long before they are coming to me with questions to be sure they're getting it right, but in the mean time they are unthreatened and uninhibited in their exploration with the new medium of expression.

There truly is sufficient time over several years to master these skills at a leisurely pace; and the child who does so has virtually no negative associations with the skill, and uses it to achieve his own purposes (in contrast with the child who has technical proficiency, but no desire or inclination to do anything but the bare minimum with it).

The advantage of learning early language and math concepts in this very natural way is that it really becomes a part of the child. Consider your fluency with the names of familiar objects and

animals you have accumulated over the years for which no one gave you a list to memorize. Now compare that with something you were assigned to memorize. Most likely you will see a real difference in your comfort level and fluency with the first type of learning.

The most obvious example of this is, again, in foreign language study. How many people have taken two years in junior high and four years in high school of Spanish or French or whatever and passed with flying colors? Then they find that the way they processed and stored all that information renders it almost useless to them when they are in a situation to speak the language.

The process of language acquisition (and make no mistake, math is also a language) is not a rote learning, drilling process. It is, to use a fad expression, a “right brain” activity, which is by nature holistic and experiential. This is the method I am advocating by making letters and numbers as much a part of their every-day environment as (with no greater emphasis or importance than) a can opener or a pillowcase. *[For more on learning language, and other things, in a Phase-oriented way, [Teaching Language Through the Phases here.](#)]*

Q. *How do you teach things like math and writing?*

A. I would start by rephrasing the question: *why* do you teach math and writing? We are so accustomed (and for many reasons, rightly so) to thinking of these as indispensable skills that we sometimes think of them as an end unto themselves. The skills of math and writing are methods of communicating ideas. There was a book published in the late 1800’s, a math primer, which started by describing counting on fingers and toes, then within 60 pages or so it moved the student into elementary algebra. It was written for a child of about twelve beginning the formal study of math. The book is like a foreign language text.

It has as a base assumption that a young person in practical living has discovered and used mathematical principles on a regular basis. Such a youth approaching adolescence understands math in his life; the book says, “You know math; you use it all the time. Let’s introduce you to a language that *scholars* use to communicate mathematical ideas.” The approach respects both the material to be learned and the learner.

When considering the acquisition of language skills (whether the language be French or Geometry), what we hope to do is focus first on the *ideas* to be communicated and the way they affect us and change the world (Core). Then we engage in discovery and play with the tools of the language (Love of Learning).

Once the student is fully engaged in the meaning and purpose of the ideas, or at least the desire to grow in the ability to participate in the Great Conversation, the Scholar-level dedication to technical proficiency is natural, and does not discourage the deeper understanding, application and innovation that are too often lacking in students and teachers who approach skills acquisition as the primary goal. *[I again direct the reader here to consider the application of Phase-appropriate objectives and methods when undertaking such subjects as math and writing.]*

We begin by studying the lives of great mathematicians. This is not only fascinating, but extremely entertaining. For example, consider the book *Mathematicians Are People, Too* by Luetta and Wilbert Reimer.

A friend of mine read this book with her children and reported that after doing so her 10-year-old asked if it were all right if he used part of his school time to do some calculations. He had previously thought of himself as “math-stupid” and was resistant to any suggestion to study math. Of course, she nonchalantly said that it would be fine, but inside she was doing back-flips of glee. My son Oliver had nearly the same experience; he will never forget the stories of Thales and Archimedes. Mathematicians are cool! In fact, he incorporates math learning and principles in his everyday vocabulary.

The same is true of writing. We discuss poetry and prose in terms of the ideas, and then as a side note may comment on how effective the author was in getting his point across through the way he used language. This is where we start.

And incidentally, if you missed this in your study of math and writing, I recommend that you and your children go back and cover these things. This is the Love of Learning Phase. Then I would move to play and experimentation with the ideas, from doubling recipes and making 3-D puzzles out of sliced fruit to writing haiku and limericks. From there I would move on to classics written by mathematicians and reading from and about the great classics in literature.

As students progress in interest and facility, they will become fluent in the language of great writers, philosophers, artists, scientists and mathematicians. They will be able to understand the language and reproduce or disprove the results. In other words, no education of numbers or letters is complete if you can't do the actual calculations yourself, and if you aren't contributing to the body of knowledge in your own way through discussion, experimentation and innovation.

This level of discourse will, in many people, be reserved to a particular subject area, at least at first. But usually a person who achieves such a Depth-level in one subject will, over the course of his or her life, continue to add to his or her areas of expertise to become a true Renaissance man. Thomas Jefferson was such a man. And it goes without saying that this is a completely different vision than mere *literacy*, and entails a lifetime commitment to learning and contributing.

So we return to the original question: not how to become literate, but why engage the process at all? If literacy is really the goal in mind, a much less ambitious vision will do the job. But if the goal is to be a thinker, a leader, a statesman, a participant in the Great Conversation, nothing less than the gradual and long-term approach will do.

But to return to the nuts-and-bolts of the original question: the mastery of the skill of writing ought not to be undertaken as a means of learning discipline, as I said before. The key is to write about something you care about, something that matters to you how it's received, if the reader agrees or disagrees with your ideas or likes or dislikes your choice of words.

Until writing is simply a medium for expression, a tool of communication, it cannot be appreciated

and will not be approached with any serious intent to achieve excellence. If we encourage our children to write about what they're passionate about, be it Jane Austen or Harley Davidson, their writing will take a quantum leap forward. When they're trying to express something they feel deeply about, they care that it comes out well because they yearn to be understood. Then writing is not so much a discipline to be mastered as a tool to be wielded effectively to say what they need to say.

And of course, I must return to the mantra that the parents must lead out. Most children will not seriously value the study of math or the mastery of language unless their parents model effort toward the same. As long as parents focus on the stress of, "What should I be telling the kids to do?" no one will get a great education. Parents may be acting with the best intentions, but as long as their focus is solely or primarily on what the *kids* are supposed to accomplish, that greatest likelihood is that no one – not the kids, nor their parents – will achieve excellence.

But when parents set, work toward and achieve personal goals, education becomes a family culture. If parents are doing it the kids will most likely come along. Parents model: "This is the kind of person I am, the kind of family we are. *This is what we do.*" Then excellence becomes a standard. It is not about education or school; it is about the way a statesman* strives to live. If they don't accept that family culture of their own free will, you couldn't have forced them into it anyway. There really is no substitute for trusting the process.

Q. It seems to me that it shouldn't be that difficult to inspire a child to read before the age of twelve. How do you know you aren't just justifying laziness or making excuses for a system that doesn't work?

A. It would depend on what the child is doing instead of reading, I suppose. If we set a table with a variety of greasy appetizers, highly-spiced entrees and rich desserts on a daily basis, with a small centerpiece of fresh fruits and vegetables, the chances are that even if the freshies get sampled from time to time, the majority of the diet will come from the less nutritious options. No matter how artfully prepared the centerpiece, or how much we rave about its goodness and our preference for it, the more stimulating, addictive foods will rarely be passed up by the children we prepare the table for. By virtue of human nature and the inevitability that they will prefer the addictive foods, we have practically made that choice for them and communicated to them that it is an acceptable one.

If we keep our bookshelf of classics in the back room and arrange our furniture (and family time) around the video game console, it's not hard to catch the subliminal message. The more wholesome options of developing talents, nurturing relationships, serving the needy, refining tastes and perfecting skills simply cannot compete with the more addictive options laid before our families.

With regard to inspiring a child to read before the age of 12, I must say that six years ago I felt exactly as the questioner did. And in many, if not most, cases, I think her instinct is correct. But the exceptions are not only notable, but numerous. In the case of my husband, I believe that the "inspiration" one would usually need for earlier results was there. His parents have always

modeled self-education. Both are well read, hold college degrees and had careers in education. My husband was read to at home by both parents on a regular basis; television was not readily available; classics were discussed; high standards were communicated, modeled and expected; parental authority was appropriately exercised and respected; love and positive reinforcement were the rule and mother was at home with the kids when they were home.

I do not mean to make excuses for his "delayed development". In fact, I am quite comfortable (at long last) with the idea that it was not in the least *delayed*. He reads more effectively and indeed MORE than anyone I know. Thank the Lord that he wasn't so disgusted with the process that he gave up before he was ready to begin!

[Oliver's comment on this: I will admit that a child's not reading until twelve seems extreme to me. But it is not nearly as extreme as thinking that there is a set age when every child should learn to read, as if every child is the same, or that such a standard age should be set somewhere between 4 and 7. Nor is it nearly as extreme as believing that society, through the Educational Bureaucracy, knows better when each child should read than his parents do. The least extreme notion I can conceive on this matter, is that a parent in tune with his child and founded on sound principles is the most likely person to help the youth learn to read at the appropriate time—two or six or twelve or sixteen.]

Now, as I watch my three oldest master reading, it has been a lab in reading acquisition. They were born inside of two and a half years, and their reading level is similar, with certain differences in their strengths and weaknesses. Emma loves the challenge, and is excited to read certain books. She uses the reading as a bridge to social activities like character dress-up parties or clubs. Sara is a self-educator who has taught herself everything from walking at nine months to tying her shoes to riding a bike. Her mind works in a deep, imperceptible way as she assimilates things in patterns of her own making. The way they have each learned to read, and their motivations to work at it, are very different—as is their physical readiness.

Oliver often lost his place and had a more difficult time with mid-sentence distractions. But he also was slower to master the coordination of catching a ball. I am quite sure, in retrospect, that in his case these skills are related in his development—certainly in his style, or comfort level, in learning new things. At ten years old, Oliver's vocabulary (not just comprehension, but working vocabulary) is more like that of well-read young adult.

His understanding of symbolism and metaphor is amazing. He is not language-deficient or language-challenged. He understands the mechanics of the process, and I believe he would very successfully teach another child to read. (In fact, that is part of the plan when it is time for Eliza, who is four, to begin.) He simply has a developmental style that makes people like me and the questioner and the majority of professional educators feel insecure—perhaps because we realize that there are things that we are powerless to change without the passage of time.

But now, at the beginning of his eleventh year, I find that all my good intentions to improve on his father's timetable had nothing to do with me, except to the extent that I do my part as a model and

mentor so that he is empowered and facilitated and in no way undermined by my insecurities, power anxiety, pride or impatience.

I almost wonder if the Good Lord gave us this situation so that people couldn't point their fingers and say "well, it's easier for you because..." as if we had no situations that required prayer, patience, trust in the process, diligence, restraint. We have in fact had these things as will every parent who undertakes to own their responsibility as their children's first and primary teacher. And these things are different for each child, it seems.

I believe that the skill of reading is not the hallmark of education, but simply an *almost* indispensable skill to be acquired in the process of *gaining* an education. With this slightly different emphasis, the process of education begins in some respects much earlier than the popular five or six years old, and in other ways irrespective of timetables whatsoever. If I had a child who didn't master reading until he was 18, I would not halt all other aspects of his training in pursuit of that Holy Grail. I would continue to school him in every needful and wholesome way. The years remaining to him after he turned 18 would certainly still offer him a richness of reading unfettered by smothered desire, feelings of failure and inadequacy, or hatred toward that process that had always made him feel slow, stupid, or backward.

I know a young man who, when I met him at age fifteen, could not read at better than a 1st or 2nd grade level. He was a unique young man, who didn't "fit in" with his peers. He was clearly intelligent in physical things, as a mechanic, an inventor, a trainer of animals, and a gardener. But he felt stupid and backward based on the feedback he had gotten in school.

Some well-placed words from an elderly gentleman whom he respected gave him a new attitude. Within a year and a half he had become the first person ever to graduate a year early from his high school. He was still not a very fluent reader, but now he took a long view. He now believed that he *would* be a good reader *eventually*; and he desired an education.

Now he is almost thirty years old, and about a month ago he called my husband to recommend a couple of books he had recently enjoyed. He wanted to discuss them. It took this young statesman more than ten years to put his "disability" behind him once he had a vision of what he wanted to be. But indications are that he will end his life better educated than most of his peers who were "successful" in school.

Again, this is a unique example; but I believe that to illustrate it is helpful because our society has come to place emphasis on artificial measures of intelligence and "education". What of the blind person who may never "read" a book? Or the person with a brain injury that makes impossible the use and comprehension of numbers? Clearly in these cases it would be important to create an altruistic definition of education that could include these people. I believe that the altruistic measure is the best one for all of us, "handicapped" or not.

My definition includes being all that I can, and using every tool at my disposal to acquire knowledge and serve, and this presupposes that I will try to become excellent in reading, writing and arithmetic. Not because these skills define my education, but because I can use them to

become educated. Another individual who cannot use one of these tools for some reason is not necessarily disqualified from becoming educated. They will simply emphasize and/or utilize other tools.

Now, with all that said, the truth is that most kids will move on a quicker timetable. In fact, if they are pushed less and inspired more when they are young, and inspired even more and even pushed when they are young adults, they will often have a great advantage over their peers in terms of passion, interest and desire, as the literally thousands of people who are applying this method have proven. The difference is amazing, and you see it in the Scholar Phase. It is a real tragedy of our time that a philosophy of mandatory education has produced such a low level of literacy and a dismal percentage of the population who get to the Scholar Phase. The measure of our educational system, and any education system, is not how the average seven-year-old or thirteen-year old is doing, but rather the quality of education of the adult population.

And just to be clear: My point is not that students should go slower, but that each should go at his own optimal pace and keep going as he gets a superb education.

Q. What about the young child who sincerely enjoys reading, arithmetic, whatever. Doesn't this mean that they are ready to move on to the Love of Learning or even the Scholar Phase?

A. First of all, let me just stress that the “danger” is obviously not that a child may find pleasure in or be predisposed to early acquisition of skills or knowledge. In fact, many of those we look to as icons of the Leadership Education model were also precocious in their skills and understanding.

The danger is in the current popular culture that does not inform the Core even as it subjects the infant to conformity training; the danger is in the parent who, responding to his own training and experience, either unwittingly or knowingly ties approval, self-worth and/or affection to academic achievement; it is in the child whose childhood has been usurped by the urgencies of non-intrinsic goals, leaving the child to progress with a hollow soul, and producing an individual who is as rudderless and irrelevant as he is useful to the state as a worker.

I do not suggest that some grand conspiracy has done this to us; the incremental loss of our values and culture made sense at the time each small compromise was made. But the cumulative impact of these assaults on our culture, our families and our children can no longer be ignored, and no amount of money, technology or legislation will retrieve what was lost. And the loss is on such a grand scale, that to begin to approach our ideal again – indeed to even hope for some small progress toward *balance* against the opposing forces – our generation must take a stand for Core Phase at any cost, free from the competing goals that have complicated the equation for so many years.

The good news is: it is a very natural, almost organic, process that leads our children to progress through the Phases. There is little cause for worry that a lack of manipulative machinations on our part will result in a child who stalls out. I write here on the principles of cultivation as relating to gardening and education. As with gardening, there are some things that are ours to do, and some

things that are not. The fact is, when we have done our part to know and fulfill our role as parents/mentors/facilitators, when our children are truly ready to move to the next phase, nothing we can do will really stop them.

Let me give an example from farming: we have gotten great joy and fascination from watching little eggs hatch. It's almost excruciating to hear the peeping from inside the shell and have to wait, wait, wait until it starts to crack. Then, little by little, pieces fall away. Once it's almost finished, I inevitably have to restrain one of the kids from pulling away the pieces of shell that are still attached. This can actually injure the chick!

But too often parents rush the process from Core to Love of Learning thinking they're getting ahead somehow (ironically, in our culture parents these same parents often interfere with the natural progression again to try to slow the student down rather than allow him to move into Scholar and Depth Phases when it's time).

My inclination is to strongly avoid moving into the Love of Learning and Scholar phases "as quickly as the child can", and here's why: the child may truly get a great deal of enjoyment from academics. But he may also very much enjoy dating and holding hands. Either one given *undue* emphasis (which is not to say: give them absolutely no attention at all) at inappropriate times will rob the child of experiences and lessons that the Core Phase (or whatever the phase in question) has to offer. Any life experience out of synch may not be fully appreciated or understood, and may leave the child with a "been there, done that" sophistication that renders them unteachable later.

Holding hands with and kissing my husband is wonderful. But I don't think anyone reading this article would disagree that, wonderful as it is, it is not a great achievement to push our children or even encourage their inclination toward these behaviors earlier than the "right" time. I don't think this is an unfair analogy.

I truly do believe that rushing academics in our current cultural climate can be as stunting to the moral and emotional development of the child as precocious physical intimacy. I don't mean that a child who just "picks up" reading should be forbidden to read. Rather, he should be directed to use that gift in certain types of Core-building activities; and the self-worth of the child should not be reinforced based on the skill, but on the good choices he makes and the correct understanding that he has of Core principles.

That having been said, when the time is right, there's hardly enough time in the day for all the reading and handholding that a person ought to do.

Q. How do I know if my child is ready for the Scholar Phase? or: How do I encourage my child's progress into the Scholar Phase?

A. What is usually meant by this is "How do I make my child study, now that he's a young adult?" This question reveals the basic insecurity of the parent or teacher—"Am I doing enough?" "Is my child measuring up?" The remedy for this insecurity is twofold—understanding and action.

The understanding must be of the natural and almost unavoidable passage of the student from one phase to the other. The parent must ensure that the phases of development have been properly seen to and have achieved their design. When a child reaches adolescence and has bypassed the Core Phase or had a disastrous “Love” of Learning Phase, the chances that he or she will feel inclined toward scholarship are slim to none.

Frankly, I would worry about the direction a motivated scholar would take that had not followed the phases to some reasonable extent. What would be the motivation of the serious and effective scholar who had no Core? And what sort of self-destruction or societal malice would motivate the scholar who had no Love of Learning? Now, these are hypothetical and even philosophical questions, but they serve to emphasize the point that simply “turning of age” does not fit the student for scholarship.

Much has been written about “unschooling” and “detoxing”. In my opinion, detoxing at its best is an excellent technique for reclaiming the Core Phase, which has been lost to many students. The “unschooling” process well-executed is an apt way to describe the awakening of the Love of Learning. The parent must be both patient and diligent: patient in trusting that the process will work, and diligent in modeling for the student healthy and desirable behaviors and the rewards that come from scholarly efforts. The family must work together to renegotiate the lost core phase through core-building activities: working and playing *together*.

This is a risky prospect in some people’s minds, but honestly, what is the alternative? It comes to this: if the child will not respond to the principled, non-coercive methods employed to invite him or her to get back on track, no amount of compulsion would achieve the desired results anyway. The best compulsion can accomplish is conformity—*superficial* conformity—which is quickly shed when the young adult is away from the controlling person or circumstances. And relationships are either strengthened or destroyed, and the future either ensured or lost based on these choices.

It is a fact that a child who reaches adulthood without making the choice to become a scholar still has that option available to him throughout the remainder of his life. But the child who misses the Core Phase, or who doesn’t fall in love with learning, is much less likely to pick these up later. Whether such a student did poorly in school or very “well” in school, his education is dangerously lacking.

We should make the point that under normal circumstances the passage from Love of Learning to Scholar phase is as normal, natural and comfortable as learning to walk. It is not without its bumps and setbacks, but we may trust that over time the one phase follows the other. If the child is reared through the phases in a natural and healthy fashion, he most likely will, from the earliest years, look to his maturation as steps toward doing as his parents do.

Many well-adjusted children will even try their hand at Scholar Phase behaviors before it is time. The types and symbols of the past illustrate this well: as the little tike may pretend to shave and put on his hat to go to work, or as the young girl dons her pearls to hostess friends to tea or care for the

dolly like a baby, so will the youth “play” at the adult behaviors of study and scholarship that he has seen modeled by the adults he trusts and admires.

The thing that marks the transition from Love of Learning to Scholar Phase is the awakening of the student to a sense of personal mission that motivates him or her to do the hard work of scholarly education. If there is anything that the parent can do to help inspire the student to a successful Scholar Phase it is this: model for the child a sense of personal mission and help foster in the child a commitment to fulfill *his* mission.

It may be true that the Scholar Phase is the most difficult one to carry out successfully in this day and age. We have seen many young people enter the Scholar Phase “on schedule” and press themselves in serious study when most of their peers are more interested in other, less demanding, more entertaining diversions. The natural inclination to fall in with their peers often takes its toll on the scholars’ commitment. By the time they should have been ready to enter the Depth Phase and take on a serious mentor to prepare them for the Mission Phase, they have left their studies to “fit in” and have fun.

Sadly, we often see parents apply pressure to the young scholar to lighten up, study less, help out more around the house, be “normal”—thus dousing their fire for learning. Now, it is not my intention to say that we know better than the parents do. But supporting the young scholar’s success requires commitment on the part of the whole family and an understanding of the demands that are placed on the scholar.

Young James Madison and young Thomas Jefferson had looked toward this period of time all their young lives, knowing that by the time they were 12 or 13 they would be adults, and would be expected to take the next several years to prepare for the rest of their life. Young George Washington was ready to enter his apprenticeship that marked his transition into adult responsibility.

But our society militates against the young person either being given much responsibility or being respected for the choices he makes. TJEd is, as I said before, a specific process with a vision of a specific end in mind: each person using his education to effectively and powerfully prepare for his or her mission.

The assumption is that when a young person begins to mature into an adult body, and has the in-born inclination to be given responsibility and respect, he ought to be ready for it (with some continued guidance and support, of course) and expected to follow that path.

Q. The Phases sound wonderful when you start from birth. But what about a teenager just taken out of public school who wants nothing to do with studying, or anything at all?

A. There is a young lady I have known for many years (I will call her Missy) who, by the time she was perhaps nine years old, decided that she was stupid and that she was not going to try anymore in public school. At one point in her youth she came home one day and announced that

she wasn't going back. She was so shut down that she was practically catatonic. Missy sat on the couch or lay on her bed, rarely speaking for almost a year and a half before she was finally persuaded to go back to public school. It wasn't very long before she was again convinced that she was stupid and she went home to stay. The whole family was concerned and made various attempts to reach her, but everything seemed to aggravate her withdrawal.

Missy had an older sister whom I'll call Carrie who had married and moved out. Carrie was a great lover of history, and one day while visiting in her parents home while her husband was out of town, she was overcome with the need to tell someone about a documentary she had watched on television the night before.

I quote from a letter she wrote to me:

"We were just sitting, when something someone said or did reminded me of Napoleon. I had learned so much about this man, and I just had to share it with someone. I just started to talk, and talk, and talk about the facts, about the things he had done in his life, about the romance he had with his first wife Josephine, things that intrigued me, things that outraged me. I wasn't trying to teach anyone; I wasn't even trying to really have anyone listen to what I was saying. I personally had been so inspired, I just had to speak.

"While I was talking, I began to watch my sister. She was at the edge of her seat, her elbows on her knees and her face in her hands, looking straight into my eyes. Her gaze didn't leave mine the entire time. I talked for over an hour about Napoleon. When I was done, she started to ask me questions, and wanted me to continue. I went on for another half an hour or so and then I told her to come with me. We went to the computer and pulled up the famous paintings of this man, his personal letters and writings and just began to dive into the history of the whole thing. We talked until I had to go, and continued to talk about him and Josephine for days to come.

"After this occurred something sparked in Missy that had never been there before. She realized that she, too, could have a love for learning. All other attempts to teach her had failed because she felt like she was being forced. This time was different, because I didn't have the intent to "teach Missy" or even manipulate her into learning something. I was simply sharing something that made me excited and happy."

The next twist of fate took place as Carrie took a part-time job teaching at a newly opened private school (called, not coincidentally, Thomas Jefferson Academy) and asked Missy to come along to just be there. The sisters' parents were in support of Carrie using her discretion in Missy's education. They were aware of the particular bond that had recently developed between the daughters and felt that Missy was most open to progress under the influence of this relationship. They had, in effect, given Carrie full mentorship authority. Missy attended Thomas Jefferson Academy some days, and on some days would spend the day at Carrie's apartment.

At first, things went well; they spent one day a week in the library researching great men from history. Carrie let Missy drive the research and sort of went along for the ride. It seemed that

Missy's troubles were over. Then, an unexplained setback sent Missy back into her depressed behavior. She would show up at Carrie's house unprepared for the day, take long naps, ignore any invitations to research or discuss.

Again, in Carrie's own words:

"I started to feel like a complete failure. Here I had been with her almost every other day trying to inspire her, help her, teach her, and love her. We had been through so much together. We both had felt the breakthroughs together. So when she went back to her old ways of not caring or wanting to learn, I took it as a personal rejection."

Meanwhile, Carrie was attending the Five Pillars Certification teacher training (a requirement of her employment). She heard a lecture by Oliver DeMille and was particularly impressed by the discussion of "teaching through freedom". After asking several pointed questions referring to Missy's situation, she realized that she had little to lose and decided to give it a try.

"My instinct was that I needed to just continue my life in a way that would help her see what a mother and housewife does on the average day. At first this was not easy. I felt that if I didn't have her read something or write something or have her do something productive, that I was not being a very good mentor. I felt at times that it would be so much easier to just tell her what to do and make her do it, but I knew that was not teaching her through freedom. I felt a lot of pressure from others, like, 'what is Missy learning today—or is she even learning anything at all?'

*"The only thing that kept me going was the thought that I needed to just do it myself; then I would be better able to inspire her. I needed to better my **own** life.*

"I would turn on good music, read to my son, clean my house, make different dinners, bake new things, do laundry, play on the floor with my son, read good books, work on our finances. I basically just went about my day, and invited her to join in with me. There were days she would cook with me and days she would sit on the couch watching. It was hard not to feel like I was failing on the days she would just come over and sleep on my couch. On Wednesdays I tried to continue helping her study about different things.

"On one particular day she had a school assignment to study about George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. I was sitting on the couch with her and we had gotten three or four books on them. I began to read with her, when my son needed a nap. I went upstairs to put him down, telling her to just start without me. When I got back, she was frustrated; when I started to read with her she shut down. She told me she didn't care, didn't understand a thing she had just read, she hated history and that she never wanted to study again. She finally said, 'There is no use. I give up!'

"I sat there for a moment unsure of what I was going to do. My first thought was, 'Well, if she gives up, so do I; there is no reason I should continue when she has no desire or will to do any of it.' I then remembered Oliver's lecture, and how I needed to pick up the book

myself if I ever wanted her to do it. So I did. I just started to read. She sat there for about an hour watching me read. I read to myself. I lost track of time and just kept reading. After a while, Missy closed her eyes and fell asleep. She woke up a while later and I was still reading. I finally closed the book; Missy was in a mood where she didn't even want to talk. My mom came for her and as she left my heart just sank. I felt that whatever we had gained, our special bond, was gone.

"The next day, Missy was sitting around home being bored [Remember? You've got to be pretty bored sometimes to pick a project you know you should!] when she decided that she would write her paper on Thomas Jefferson and George Washington after all. Her first attempt at this paper a week earlier was a two-line summary about each person. This time she sat down and just started reading about them, studied some of their great achievements and then began to write an incredible paper. She called me three or four times to tell me how excited she was about her paper, would read it to me, then change it and call me back and read it again. I went over to her house the next day where we sat discussing the Founding Documents, James Madison, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson and George Washington. She was the one that came to me and said she wanted to study. She turned on the computer and began to type. She worked on it all day, until it was finished. As I sat and watched her, I kept asking myself if this was the same person who had raised the white flag at my house and had given up on history and everything else.

"When she turned her paper in to her teacher, Mr. Jordan, he did a remarkable thing that made all the difference. Rather than simply writing "good job" on the top and handing it back, he made the long-distance phone call to Missy at home and told her how impressed he was with what she had written, and how proud he was of what she had accomplished. She just about died from his expression of approval. She called me nearly crying, she was so happy. The neat thing is, she had done a great job and she knew it.

"The school year ended a complete success. Missy was excited about going to school, she passed all her classes. For the first time, she didn't give up. She even presented herself for Oral Examinations and passed with honors!

"I know we are far from the end with Missy. We still have so much to learn. This year was simply the start of a new way of life for her. She has learned a few things that are now inside of her forever."

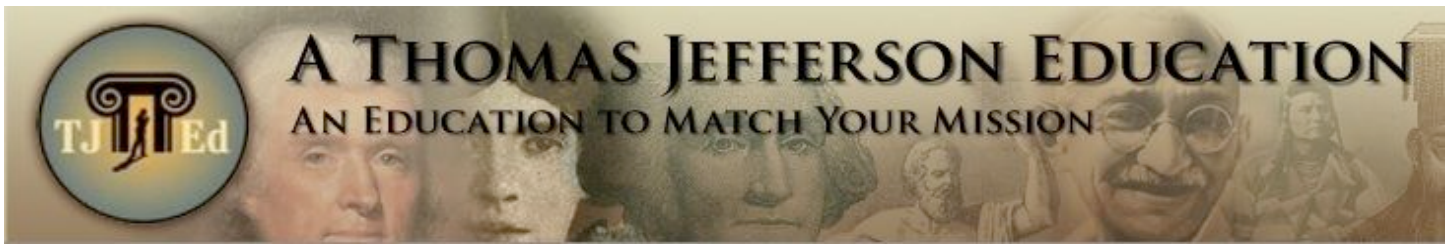
I shared this rather lengthy account because for those with this type of concern, I believe nothing less than recounting the whole process would suffice. I know of other similar stories and truly believe that the pattern can be duplicated in almost every case, if the principles are applied.

It can be difficult to take a young adult and help them to reshape their self-image and rekindle in them the desire to try. I don't think it is at all coincidental that Missy's Love of Learning was awakened by the thing her *mentor* found so fascinating. It was Carrie's authentic, unfeigned passion for the subject that intrigued Missy long enough to capture her attention. It was Carrie's

genuine concern for her that kept Missy coming back. And finally, Carrie's integrity as manifested by her continuing to study for herself, even when Missy dropped out, won Missy's ultimate trust that it must truly be worth it.

Conclusion

The phases of learning can be a great key when understood in conjunction with the Seven Keys of Great Teaching and the Five Environments of Mentoring. It is most effective and least painful to begin with Core and move through the Phases in order. There is no rule as to how long it takes to reestablish the Core, or how long to work with Love of Learning. You have to trust the process, and then trust your feelings. And above all—lead the way.



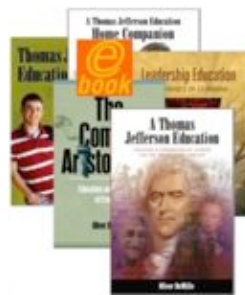
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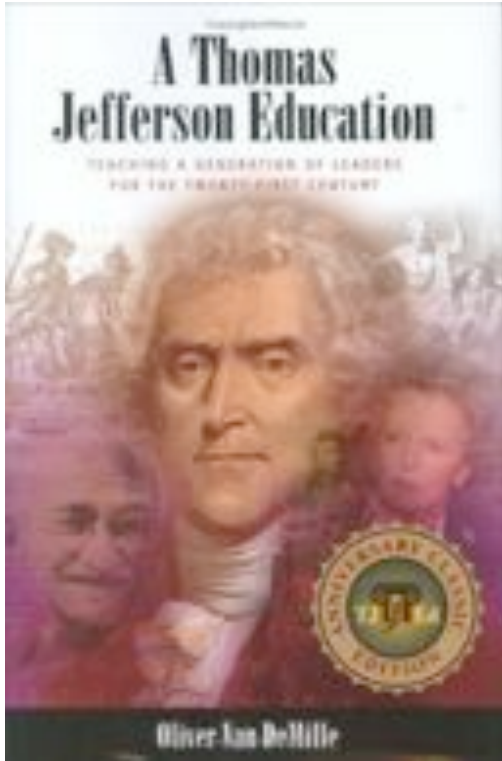


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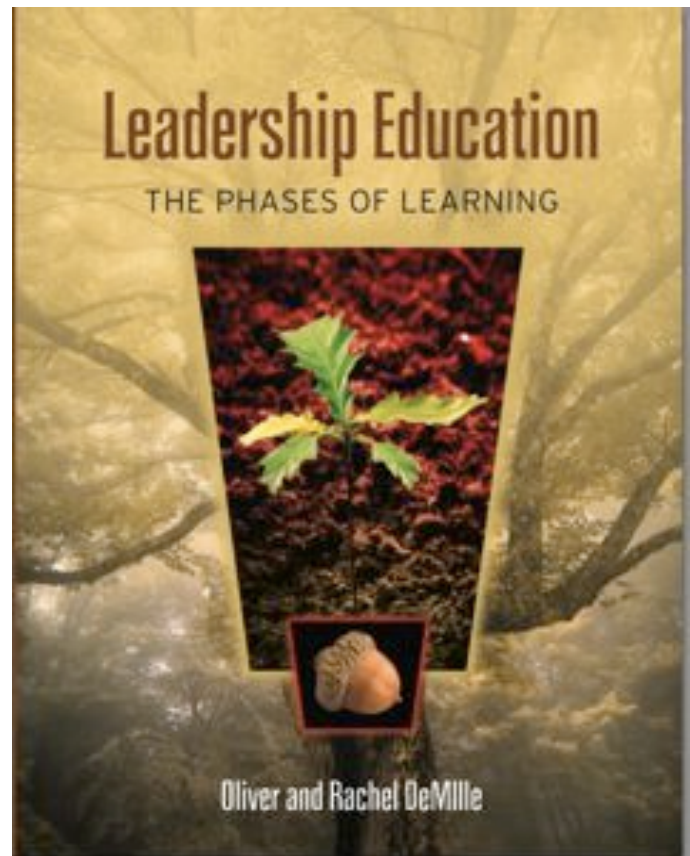
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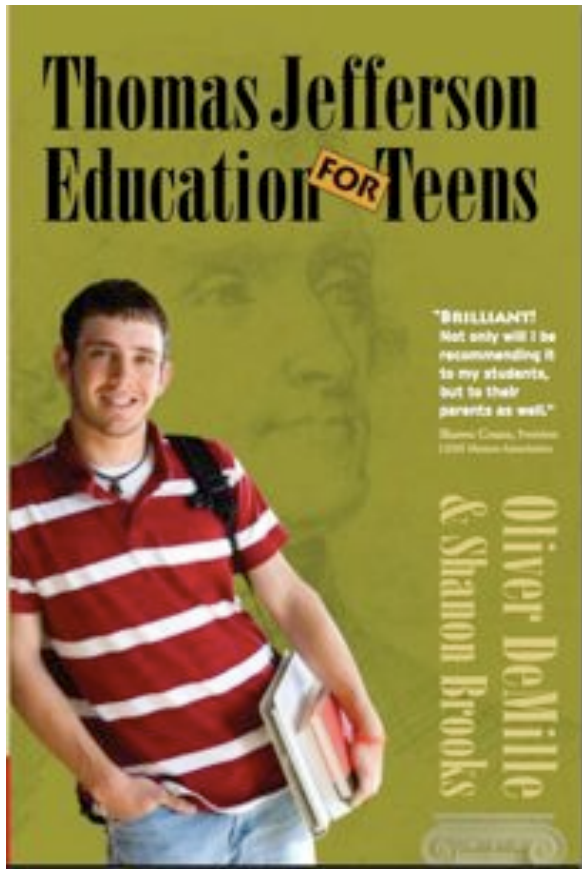
Leadership Education helps explain the stages that everyone needs to go through to fulfill their mission in life (that includes parents, too!). I love that suggestions of activities are included so that those just beginning this TJEd journey can get their feet wet and be mentored along the way. Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!

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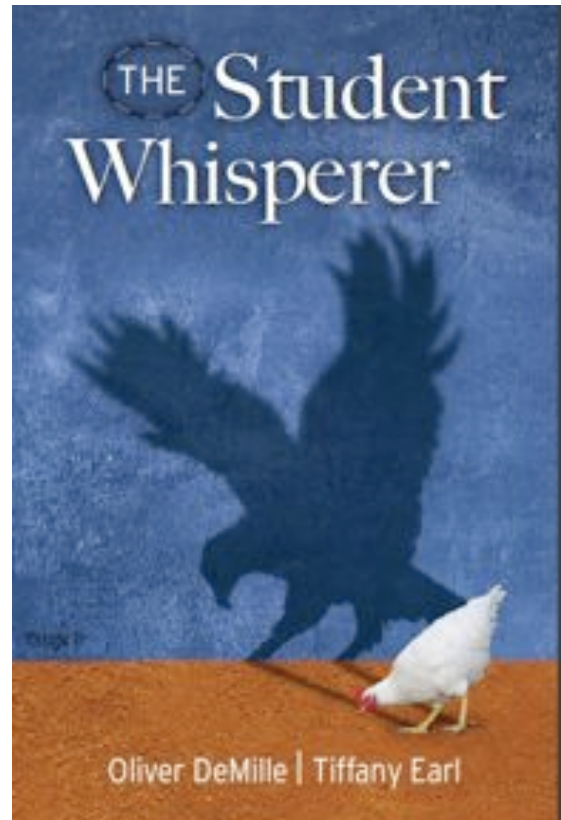
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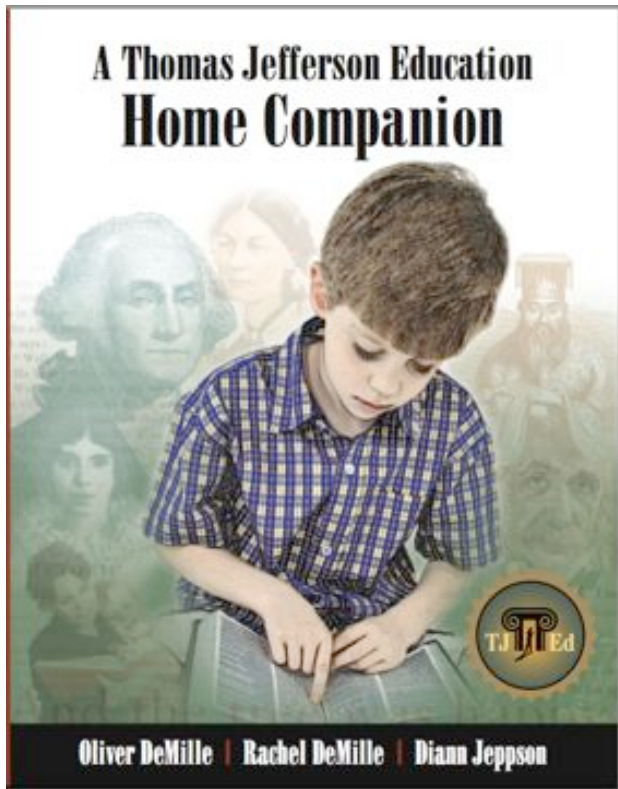
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