

A Thomas Jefferson Education

A Thomas Jefferson Education

TEACHING A GENERATION OF LEADERS
FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

2ND EDITION, UPDATED AND REVISED

Oliver Van DeMille



George Wythe College Press
2006

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To Van & Janice DeMille

Jefferson Mentors

*“If a nation expects to be ignorant and free,
in a state of civilization,
it expects what never was and never will be.”*

—Thomas Jefferson

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CHAPTER ONE

Two Towers

*“Lay down true principles, and adhere to them inflexibly.
Do not be frightened into their surrender...”*

— Thomas Jefferson

“**O**liver, turn on the radio, now!”
There was an urgency I’d seldom heard in Dr. Brooks’ voice, and he hung up without saying anything else. So I hurried to the radio and switched it on. Frankly, I am not a morning person and had failed to answer his three earlier phone calls. But on the fourth set of long rings, I finally picked it up. We didn’t have a television in our home—part of a typical summer routine for our family, meant to get us all to study, talk and build relationships instead of waste our family time in front of the set. The radio told of an event that would change the world, and I immediately called Dr. Brooks back and told him to contact the student body and call a campus-wide meeting.

It was the morning of September 11, 2001.

There is a longing that perhaps we all feel in the beginning decades of the Twenty-first Century. Maybe human beings have always felt it, but something unique seems to be growing and spreading in our world today. Mediocrity, which became the norm and in some circles even the goal between 1968 and 2001, seemed to lose its hold on that tragic morning when the whole

world tuned in to watch the Twin Towers fall—over and over and over. Since “9/11,” we now live in a different world.

It remains to be seen what the Twenty-first Century holds in store, but we learned a few things on that morning that are valuable lessons for the future. First, every generation faces its challenges. The modern feeling of invincibility and the view that peace and prosperity are the natural state of things has been brought into question. Most of us are much more painfully aware of just how fragile our enjoyable lifestyle really is. Even the return to normalcy in the years since 9/11 only masks the new sense of vulnerability Americans now feel.

The looks on the faces of my students as I walked into the main classroom told me what a shock this really was. The questions were emotional and basic: “How long will it last?” “What can we expect in the days and even years ahead?” “What will this mean to the future of our nation?” “Are all my plans and dreams for the future gone forever?” and “What should I be doing to help?”

These young people felt something new that day, something you don’t ever forget. Virtually all who experienced those feelings that morning are deeply changed. They know it could happen again, on any day at any given moment—and they live with that. Moreover, somewhere inside many people actually expect it. The youth of 9/11 are no longer living in a world of Comedy, where we all feel an underlying security that everything will turn out well. We lived through one of those junctures in history when a world of Comedy shifts to Tragedy, and with this on our minds, day after day, week after week, through each holiday season and with every new year, our souls steel with each passing month and our subconscious emotions prepare us for what is ahead. I believe we all feel it on some level—even those who deny it.

Preparing for Leadership

“What can I possibly say to these young people?” I wondered, wishing my father were present. He had served in Vietnam, and

seemed to have come home with an ability to face any crisis—evenly and calmly giving brief words of wisdom that soothed and protected. My own experience hadn't prepared me for this. When the Gulf War began in 1991 I watched in technicolor in a university auditorium and discussed the evils of war with my college classmates. By 2001, the ten years since that event felt like an eternity. In fact, it was an irony that most of the George Wythe College students were supposed to discuss the book *Alas Babylon* that morning. This modern classic, set during the Cold War, opens on a morning when a nuclear war changes the face of the land and the people who survive. Clearly, reading the book wasn't anything like the reality of terrorists flying planes into buildings right now—in the real world.

I looked into the faces of the students, and wondered what to say. Fortunately, before I opened my mouth Dr. Einar Erickson stood. He probably saw me in the same light as the students: young, shell-shocked, and scared. If so, he was right.

Dr. Erickson, who had lived through Pearl Harbor, told of that time over fifty years before. By the time he finished, two things had occurred. First, I think everyone in the room was moved to tears. And second, we were calmed and anchored. Things would work out, there were a lot of decisions ahead for our generation, and there was much work to be done. As students and faculty, we could either ignore these events and escape into campus life, or we could take this head on, realize that great things are going to be asked of our generation, and set out to prepare ourselves to help fill the leadership drought around the world. Dr. Erickson said all the right things. He gave us something to do. He led.

When I got the microphone back, I was ready. "At some point in your life," I said, "you will face a situation where you are in a leadership position and dozens—maybe thousands or millions—look to you to lead. When that occurs, you won't feel ready. But you will have to lead anyway. Today, we're going to do something that in all probability isn't being done anywhere else. We're going to simulate the Situation Room at the White House today, and we're going to learn what's happening."

I assigned each student to a team led by a faculty member and told them they had thirty minutes to find out the positions and names of every person who would likely be advising the President today and to appoint a student to fill each position. Then I gave them one hour to research the person they were role-playing, and to meet back with recommendations for the President. I don't know if other groups simulated this event that day, but just like Pearl Harbor or Chamberlain's visit with Hitler, I'm sure it will be simulated by many students at many schools in the years to come. Simulation is a powerful learning tool, and that day was a sobering and life-changing experience for all who lived through it.

A second lesson of the day is that when crisis comes, we naturally turn to God. Before we broke for our research, one student raised his hand and asked if we could please pray. The room unanimously consented, and another student volunteered to say the prayer. We all felt the enormity of the task our world was facing, and more tears were shed during that prayer. People from many faiths and churches prayed that day in the United States, including many who hadn't set foot in a church for a long time. Across America, the level of religious observance increased that day.

A third lesson from 9/11 is that when crisis hits, we automatically look to leadership. As we were preparing to break into groups for research, the door opened and in walked several former students. They were no longer studying at George Wythe College, but when they first heard the news of the terrorist attacks they immediately grabbed a change of clothes, jumped in their vehicles and drove to Cedar City—one student drove five hours and arrived just as we were making plans. Of course, the whole nation looked to President Bush, just as people in other nations looked to their leaders.

In crisis, leadership determines direction and our level of success—or failure. Unfortunately, in such times it is too late to prepare leaders. They must be trained, educated, and gain the needed experience before crisis occurs. Yet it is precisely in the years and decades before crisis that peace and prosperity convince the

world that such leadership is not needed—making a living takes hold of society and material goals drive schools, teachers, parents and students alike. Professional training and job skills are all that people seek from “education,” and the concept of leadership education is considered quaint, outdated, frivolous, or absurd. Allan Bloom’s *The Closing of the American Mind* was widely sold, but sparsely read and soundly rejected by a generation of educators. His suggestions, which would have helped prepare a generation of leaders for the Twenty-first Century, were mostly ridiculed or ignored, just as the same suggestions by Jacques Barzun had been disregarded a generation earlier and those of Adler and Hutchins a generation before that.

Perhaps in the wake of 9/11, such prophetic warnings will be more closely considered. Certainly the warning signs had been there for over a decade—terrorists were planning attacks on American soil. And in the broader context, a time is soon coming when a generation of leaders will be needed, when a society trained on the mostly narrow or otherwise deficient educational offerings that are now the norm in our nation will not be enough to overcome the challenges we face. This is the fourth lesson of 9/11, which it seems no society ever wants to learn: that we must learn from our past and heed the cycles, trends, and historical patterns that inevitably (in one form or another) repeat themselves. Santayana was right: if we don’t learn the lessons of history, we are doomed to repeat them.

Is Mediocre Education Enough?

A fifth lesson is that although wisdom is usually thought to be found in the elderly, in times of challenge it is often the young who provide answers. Many of the older generations, who lived and loved and raised families and went to work every day in a world of peace and prosperity, seem fully addicted to a view that crisis is just a passing fad, that everything will quickly return to normal if we just ignore the depth of the problems. As the months after 9/11 turned into years, adult America was only too happy to

go back to “business as usual,” telling itself that maybe this was just a tragic one-time event that has passed and won’t return. The young have no such illusion—they doubt they’ll ever receive a Social Security check, and most of them are sure that serious conflicts are ahead. Naturally, they seek to prepare themselves—often bewildering their parents who wonder why they don’t just focus on credentials and secure jobs. “As if any job will be secure in my world,” the under-thirty crowd quips.

A sixth lesson is that the young are all about one thing: making the world better. They want to do something, not just leave it to others. And with their leadership, a surprising number of the earlier generations join in the cause. A growing cadre of people are aligning their futures with leadership. This is not the “electronic herd” of 1980s yuppie fame or the dot.com millionaire crowd of the 1990s, but a new generation of social entrepreneurs, future societal leaders and statesmen who are convinced that something is happening in the world, that it is time for a new energy, a new direction and new way of doing things. In science, art, health—and just about every other arena—there is a momentum building.

But the idealism still has to face a glaring reality: in history there have been many such movements, and most of them have failed. Pure and simple. Failed.

The ones that succeeded, such as the generation of American Founding, the period of Abraham Lincoln, Gandhi’s successful revolution and Martin Luther King Jr.’s after him, did so in two waves: a wave of great leaders, preceded by a wave of great teachers. These are the two towers of any successful generation.¹ Without both, no generation effectively achieves its potential. Without one, the other never materializes. This is the seventh lesson I learned on that fateful day: if we don’t have the education, we cannot expect to have the leadership. Thankfully, national leaders from all political views joined with international statesmen to condemn the terrorist attacks and re-focus the nation. But what if the crisis had been longer and harder, what if it was just the beginning of a period of world destabilization and challenge,

what if the September morning that opened the Twenty-first Century was just the beginning of a long day with many challenges ahead? What if?

Do we live in a time after the crisis where we can relax, enjoy, and get back to decades of smooth and routine living? Or are we at the beginning of a century or even a decade of turmoil? More to the point, should we be emphasizing the education of accountants, movie directors and secretaries, or using the educational years to train a generation of leaders, entrepreneurs, and statesmen? John Adams is credited with saying that he studied government and law so that his children could study math and science and his grandchildren art and literature. Which generation are we? And more importantly, which are our children? As I looked into the eyes of fifty young people on September 11, 2001, I saw a generation of leaders.

I also saw a haunting drought of schools teaching leadership or training leaders. I had already written the first edition of *A Thomas Jefferson Education* (which carries the subtitle: *Teaching a Generation of Leaders for the Twenty-first Century*), but on that morning it took on new meaning. The question on my mind as I went home exhausted that night was: “Is the education our children are receiving on par with their potential?” It has plagued me ever since. Between that day and this, I have posed this question to tens of thousands of parents, teachers, administrators, legislators and students, and I have seldom received a satisfactory answer. It is time for a change in our educational system.

We Must Do Better

It has been over six years since the first edition of *A Thomas Jefferson Education* was published. Since that time, my wife Rachel and I, as well as a number of dedicated faculty members and scholars at George Wythe College, have spoken in hundreds of venues to tens of thousands of people about the Thomas Jefferson Education (TJEd) model. We have done so on university campuses, private primary and secondary schools, in public elementary and high

schools, and at convention centers, country clubs and town halls to professional educators, homeschooling parents, legislators, corporate executives, and interested community members.

We have met many wonderful people and seen thousands of them apply the Thomas Jefferson Education principles in their homes, schools and organizations. We have made literally thousands of new friends, and we have watched them improve their own education and pass on a higher level of excitement for learning to their colleagues and children. In short, we have witnessed a small revolution as many families, schools and companies have made drastic educational changes and seen the quality of their learning significantly increase.

But it is not enough.

“Is the education our children are receiving on par with their potential?” The answer is still a resounding “no.” The current educational system must change. This book is a call to that change. As such, it is obviously both audacious and insufficient. But it is a start. Our children deserve the very best education possible, not the most “realistic.” They need, and want, the highest quality education that exists, not the most practical. To those who criticize the Thomas Jefferson Education model, I have learned to simply ask, “When you look into the eyes of your children and grandchildren, when you picture their greatness and potential, do you feel that they are getting the education that is up to par with who they were born to become?”

Genius in Our Homes

Greatness isn't the work of a few geniuses, it is the purpose of each of us. It is why we were born. Every person you have ever met is a genius. Every one. Some of us have chosen not to develop it, but it is there. It is in us. All of us. It is in your spouse. It is in each of your children. You live in a world of geniuses. How can we settle for anything less than the best education? How can we tell our children that mediocre education will do, when greatness is available? Like on the morning of 9/11, other calls will come to

our generation in the years ahead, announcing new challenges and introducing new opportunities. Our generation, and that of our children, will face its share of crises, just like every generation in the past. When those calls come, will we be ready?

The answer depends on how we educate the next generation.

CHAPTER TWO

Education Today

“All men who have turned out worth anything have had the chief hand in their own education.”

—Sir Walter Scott

Almost everyone agrees that modern American education needs to be improved, but almost nobody agrees on what the “fixes” should be or how they should be implemented. The problems are many and diverse: low test scores, illiteracy in the inner city, violence and crime within the school buildings and grounds, racial tension, moral ambiguity, sexual promiscuity, children raising children, parental non-involvement and neglect, oppressive regulation of teachers, competing agendas from administration and even state and federal programs, the large divide between schools in affluent areas and those in poverty, students who lag behind all other industrial nations in math and science, art and music programs cut due to lack of funding, teaching at the bottom of the professional pay scale, the huge cost of building enough schools to serve the rising generation, and the list could go on. Indeed the so-called debate on education is in its fifth decade, with few solutions, if any, in sight.

The truth is that this debate will continue until we realize that it is a fruitless discussion. Education will never be fixed, and in fact it doesn't need to be fixed. Any effort to “fix education” will fail for

two reasons. First, education is so many things to so many people: for some, education means job training, for others it means fixing social problems, still others see education as job security or a source of political clout.² Americans love education, believe in education and pay big money for education, but few agree on what it is, what it should accomplish, or what methods should be used to achieve it.

Second, the problems of education seem varied and complex; but the complexity is a myth, rooted in a modern misconception about education and educators. Education can't be fixed as long as we believe this basic myth.

The myth is that it is possible for one human being to educate another.

The fact is that the only person who can fix education is the student. The more popular options—increased funding, bigger schools, vouchers, the proliferation of private or charter schools, more homeschooling, a new initiative by a U.S. President, tougher mandates by Congress—will not and cannot fix education. They may improve it, perhaps even significantly, but only to the extent that individual students determine to educate themselves and then follow through.

Teaching, not education, should be our focus,³ because great teaching inspires students to educate *themselves*. Jacques Barzun made the case for this in the 1960s, but the educational industry moved on without listening.

Great teaching will solve our educational problems—in public, private and home schools, and at the pre-school, primary, secondary, university and even corporate training and professional mentoring levels. Find a great teacher, in any of these settings, and you will find a group of students diligently, enthusiastically and effectively educating themselves.

Teachers teach and students educate. Students are the only true educators. Historically, every other method of education has failed. Education occurs when students get excited about learning and apply themselves; students do this when they experience great teachers.

Two Types of Teachers

There are two types of great teachers which consistently motivate student-driven education: Mentors and Classics. Mentors meet face-to-face with the student, inspiring through the transfer of knowledge, the force of personality, and individual attention. Classics were created by other great teachers to be experienced in books, art, music and other media.

Any system of education which attempts to separate the student from these teachers, classics and mentors, will be less inspiring and therefore less effective—fewer students will choose to seek an education; and those who do will be less likely to follow through.

As the old saying goes, the best education is a student on one end of a log and Johns Hopkins on the other. Students who spend their afternoons across the log from Plato, Jefferson, Milton, Gandhi, Shakespeare and a caring and nurturing parent or other mentor are almost guaranteed a superb education because they will do the necessary hard work. Too often, however, it seems that so-called educators obscure rather than enlighten the views of these great minds, ignore rather than compare, ridicule rather than read.

A generation of students have, like Shakespeare's Ophelia, turned education over to others: "I do not know, my lord, what I should think," and a generation of so-called educators have responded like Polonius: "I'll teach you: think yourself a baby ..."⁴ In this environment, "teach me" has come to mean "entertain me," "tell me what to think and I'll parrot it back to you," or "hand it to me on a silver platter." But none of these are teaching—or learning.

My Children Deserve Better Than This, But This Is All I Know!

Without great teaching, through mentors and classics, the most that schools can offer is socialization, which they often defend as

though it were the primary objective of learning. Some private schools offer a better learning environment than most public schools—but they only help students educate themselves more effectively in direct proportion to their higher rate of great teaching, mentoring and use of the classics. And while some home-schools, charter schools, and voucher-supported schools boast better curricula and higher test scores, again the superiorities are rooted in personalized mentoring. Alternative schools and homes which lack effective teaching, either by a mentor or the classics (or both), tend toward mediocrity or fail altogether. And public, private or college-level teachers who adopt the classics/mentors approach, often against great odds, are likely to inspire students to quality education.

Schools were historically created by parents to allow great teachers—mentors and classics—to inspire students to seek learning and then guide students on their path to a quality education. Then schools were attacked by political agendas from both sides: Conservatives felt that the expense of education should be justified by training students for the job market, and Liberals saw schools as a perfect place to gain support for social agendas ranging from civil rights to environmentalism.

By the mid-2000s, parents must search in vain for schools that *educate*. Few parents realize that the problem is rooted in the very foundation of the system. People cannot be educated unless they *choose to seek education*, and they seek it when they are *inspired by great teachers*, past and present. Parents and students who base their curriculum on job training or social change may end up highly trained or passionately engaged in reform, but they will likely leave school *undereducated*.

Most modern teachers, including those parents who deal with the problem by teaching their children at home, often find that their own educational experience is a real hindrance. How does a generation that grew up uninitiated in the classics now pass on mentoring in classic works to the next generation? We know our children deserve better than what we can offer at home or school, but what can we do?

Finding a Mentor

Years ago, I asked the same question. Having studied with nearly straight “As” in both high school and a respected private university, I faced a dilemma. I had scholarships, career opportunities, and “great expectations” (though I didn’t know what that meant at the time), but I knew something that none of my professors or academic counselors seemed to appreciate: I didn’t have an education. I had impressive grades and was on track for a respected diploma and some skills and talents, but I really didn’t have an education—and I knew it.

I also knew enough to realize that those who really make a difference in society have a quality education. I also had a new baby son whom I wanted to see get the best out of life. But where to go for an education? About this time, I remembered a speech I had heard at a weekend retreat. I was so inspired that I asked the speaker for some recommended readings, which he supplied. Several years later, when I faced my dilemma (I needed an education and hadn’t found it in the schools), I called this speaker and asked for his help. He sent me on a search of the classics. As part of this change, I left a large, respected university to study with a small, unaccredited Bible school. Although I was concerned about the impact on my life, including future credibility and job security, I knew that I had to choose whether to focus on the *quality* and *excellence* my new mentorial education offered or the more typical career training I was getting at the big university. I liked the university, and still consider it a very good school. But I had experienced both types of learning, and I knew in my heart that I had to choose the highest quality education I could find.

Teachers Teach, Students Educate

After several years of mentors and classics, and over a decade of teaching at George Wythe College as a mentor and later mentor of mentors, I have learned that all education boils down to two things: the student putting in the work to educate himself, and

the teacher getting the student's attention long enough and deeply enough to get him started and help him keep going.

It is amazing to me how often these basics are missing. At George Wythe College, we actively recruit public, private and homeschoolers, and few freshmen from any of the three have a solid education. Many applicants have good grades, impressive transcripts and high test scores, but when closely scrutinized they are poor writers, poor calculators, and poor readers; consequently, they are poor thinkers. In short, they have learned to play the academic game well, but they are uneducated.

My research and association with other college administrators and teachers assures me that my experience is far from isolated. "Jeffery Hart, an English Professor at Dartmouth, discovered this sad state of affairs for himself while teaching a freshman composition course in 1988. He assigned the class to read Allan Bloom's book *The Closing of the American Mind*. When he asked them what they thought of it, they replied that they hated it. 'Oh yes, they understood perfectly well what Bloom was saying: that they were ignorant, that they believed in cliches, that their education so far had been dangerous piffle and that what they were about to receive was not likely to be any better. No wonder they hated it. After all, they were the best and brightest, Ivy Leaguers with stratospheric SAT scores, the Masters of the Universe.'

"Then Professor Hart launched into an impromptu quiz. 'Could anyone (in the class of 25 students) say anything about the Mayflower Compact? Complete silence. John Locke? Nope. James Madison? Silencia. Magna Carta? The Spanish Armada? The Battle of Yorktown? The Bull Moose party? Don Giovanni? William James? The Tenth Amendment? Zero. Zilch. Forget it. The embarrassment was acute.'"⁵

And from the student perspective: "Karen E. King, a junior International Relations major at American University, expresses well the difficulties that are encountered: 'I came to college to study International Relations within the framework of a well-rounded liberal arts education. I want to understand Western Civilization and how it developed, and be able to speak intelli-

gently on the basic subjects that people have been learning for hundreds of years, things like great literature and history. This, I always assumed, was the definition of being 'educated.' So can someone explain to me why some of America's leading colleges and universities are no longer requiring students to study...history, philosophy, math or science? There has been a purging from the curriculum of many of the required basic survey courses that used to familiarize students with the historical, cultural, political, and scientific foundations of their society...Excuse me, but...I think American colleges and universities are becoming so 'flexible' students can graduate without learning a whole lot."⁶

Problems versus Difficulties

What nobody seems willing to say openly anymore, perhaps for fear of turning students away, is that getting an education is *their* job, and that it is a supremely difficult job. Mortimer Adler got it right when he titled an article, "An Invitation to the Pain of Learning." For anyone to get an education, in our modern times or in any times, teachers and students must squarely face what Jacques Barzun called, "the difficulties of schooling, which do not change. Please note: the difficulties, not the problems. Problems are solved or disappear with the revolving times. Difficulties remain. It will always be difficult to teach well, to learn accurately; to read, to write, and count readily and competently; to acquire a sense of history and develop a taste for literature and the arts—in short, to instruct and start one's education or another's."⁷ Or as Adler put it: "The kindergarten spirit of playing at education pervades our colleges. Most college students get their first taste of studying as really hard work, requiring mental strain and continual labor, only when they enter law or medical school. Those who do not enter the professions find out what working at anything really means only when they start to earn a living.... But even those who...gradually come to realize the connection between work, pain, and earning...seldom if ever make a similar connection of pain and work with learning. 'Learning' is what

they did in college, and they know that that had very little to do with pain and work.”⁸

Education for the Twenty-first Century

The solution to the American Education Question is to focus on great teaching rather than education. Each semester at George Wythe College I am moved by a new class of young people who literally come alive during four months of coming face-to-face with greatness in mentors and classics. Suddenly learning is magic, like falling in love; the passion returns and doors and eyes open and students become thinkers, creators, and leaders. The same thing happens wherever the classics/mentors model is applied.

If our schools—public, private and home—return to great teaching, mentors and classics, students will begin doing the hard work of educating themselves and the myriad so-called education problems will be solved.

Parents must lead the charge. Most public and private school teachers—and there are many good ones—are not in a position to change the current environment. Nor are many legislatures or school boards likely to adopt the classics/mentors model. Parents must do it in their own learning, and take their resources to schools and teachers that do it effectively for their children. Homeschool can be an ideal place to do it for parents who will take real leadership, but all types of education will change if parents lead the charge. In fact, if even a significant few do it effectively, public and private schools will have real incentive (spurred by competition) to follow suit. The resultant educational renaissance will empower and reward great teachers, and their children and students will be the only true educators that exist—self-educators

But how should parents proceed?

CHAPTER THREE

Three Systems of Schooling

“Teaching, like farming and healing, is a cooperative art.

Understanding this, Comenius in The Great Didactic again and again compares the cultivation of the mind with the cultivation of the field; so, too, Plato compares the teacher’s art with the physician’s.”

“...only when teachers realize that the principal cause of learning that occurs in a student is the activity of the student’s own mind do they assume the role of cooperative artists.

While the activity of the learner’s mind is the principal cause of all learning, it is not the sole cause. Here the teacher steps in as a secondary and cooperative cause.”

“Like the farmer and the physician, the teacher must be sensitive to the natural process that his art should help bring to its fullest fruition—the natural process of learning. It is the nature of human learning that determines the strategy and tactics of teaching.”

—Mortimer J. Adler

On the first day of school, the little boy waved to his mother and turned to run down the bright hallway to class. His teacher smiled and pointed out his desk. “This is going to be great,” he thought. “I love to learn new things.” After a few fun stories, the teacher handed out crayons and paper and announced that it was time to draw a picture. The little boy enthusiastically

grabbed the crayons and began to imagine all the things he could draw: mountains, lakes, airplanes, his family, his dog, the ocean, the stars at night...

Hundreds of ideas raced through his creative little mind.

His teacher, seeing that he had started drawing, stopped him and said that today the class would be drawing flowers. The boy's mind again ran wild: daisies, daffodils, roses, carnations, violets, lilacs, pansies, mixed bouquets, green gardens full of rainbows of colors...

The teacher again interrupted, informing the class that today they would be drawing a certain kind of flower.

Taking colored chalk, the teacher went to the board and drew a green stem, with two leaves, and four identical pink petals. The little boy, eager to please, dutifully copied her drawing.

After several attempts, his drawing looked exactly like hers. The teacher congratulated him for doing such good work.

As the school year passed, the little boy became a very good student; he learned to listen, obey instructions and get the right answers on tests. His parents were very proud of him, and his teacher was impressed with his excellent progress.

When the next school year arrived, the boy had done so well in his classes that he was enrolled in an accelerated program. During the first week of class, the teacher handed out crayons and paper and announced that it was time to draw a picture. The little boy, still in love with art, enthusiastically picked up his crayons and waited for instructions.

After several minutes the teacher noticed that the little boy wasn't drawing. "Why haven't you started?" she asked. "Don't you like to draw?"

"I love to draw," responded the little boy, "but I was waiting for you to tell us what the assignment is."

"Just draw whatever you want," the teacher smiled and left the little boy to his creativity.

The little boy sat for a long time, watching the minutes tick off the clock and wondering what he should draw. Nothing came to mind.

Finally, in a burst of creative inspiration, he picked up his crayons and began to draw:

A green stem, with two leaves, and four identical pink petals.⁹

The story is indicative of an entire generation of American education, which has been called “the cloning of the American mind.” Fortunately, the tragedy is not complete because many parents across the nation are reaffirming their role in educating their children.

The Coming Renaissance in Education

A renaissance is coming to American education, and frankly homeschoolers are uniquely positioned to take advantage of it. All parents can do it, regardless of the geography of their children’s learning environment, by emphasizing the highest levels of quality and excellence and settling for nothing less in the education of their children. In history, and today, there are three major types of schooling:

- 1 *Conveyor Belt education*, which tries to prepare everyone for a job, any job, by teaching them *what* to think. This includes rudimentary skills designed to fit them to function in society. Most public schools are conveyor belt schools, though there are many excellent teachers in the public system who use leadership methods.
- 2 *Professional education*—from apprenticeship and trade schools to law, medical and MBA programs—which creates specialists by teaching them *when* to think.
- 3 *Leadership education*, which I call “Thomas Jefferson Education,” teaches students *how* to think and prepares them to be leaders in their homes and communities, entrepreneurs in business, and statesmen in government.

Each of the three major educational systems has its own goals, methods and curricula, and each prepares its students for certain types of careers and lifestyles. Educators and parents at all levels benefit from understanding all three systems.

The Conveyor Belt System

Historically the primary goal of public schools, the reason they were instituted, was to educate the poor so they could get a job and take their place in society. The middle class already had private schools and apprenticeships, and the wealthy were tutored at home.

Successful nations in history have had professional schools and leadership education, which complement each other. In class societies, the middle classes have tended toward the professions while the aristocracy received leadership education.¹⁰ Of course, that left out the lower classes, so many nations established public schools to educate the poor. This always improved the nation—delinquency, poverty and enslavement were replaced with widespread literacy and functionality, with resulting increased prosperity and opportunity.

In addition to these considerable benefits of public schools, they often came with a down side. Consider two of the most successful cases: Eighteenth Century Germany, and Nineteenth Century Britain. Each instituted public schools to educate the poor, and the standard of living increased. But eventually the professional and leadership schools deteriorated because they simply couldn't compete with free, government-subsidized schools.

In each case the educational system and later the governmental system collapsed or at least convulsed. The lesson seems to be that if you have all three systems working together, society benefits. But when nearly everyone is getting an education for the poor and hardly anyone is being trained as a leader, the whole nation suffers. Conveyor belts may have an important place in society, but it is essential that they don't become a monopoly and that professional and leadership training schools are maintained.

The Professional System

The second type of education is the professional system. Private schools arose from the apprenticeship tradition of training youth for specific trades or professions. From kindergarten through the twelfth grade, the purpose of prep schools is to get students into college or technical school; then it is to get them into a trade or law school, CPA or MBA program, medical school, etc.

This is done by teaching them *when* to think. The law student is trained to handle legal issues, the medical student to effectively handle a medical situation, the manager a business concern. Such students are trained to be creative, to pull together information and use it to make decisions and marshal the talents and resources under their stewardship. Their specialized knowledge makes them valuable as experts in their field, and an important part of an interdependent system where *other* experts tell them when their knowledge is to be applied and what to do outside the scope of their expertise.

The professional system does what it's designed to do—create expertise. And if you need a doctor, a lawyer or a manager for your business, you are glad they are well prepared. The professional system has been very effective in achieving its goals, but it is not a substitute for leadership training.

The Leadership System

The third educational system is leadership preparation, which has three primary goals. First, its purpose is to train thinkers, leaders, entrepreneurs and statesmen—individuals with the character, competence and capacity to do the right thing and do it *well* in business, government, church, school, family, entertainment, research and other organizations.

The second goal is to perpetuate freedom, to prepare people who know what freedom is, what is required to maintain it, and who exert the will to do what is required. These two goals are accomplished by the third: teaching students *how* to think. Those

who know how to think are able to lead effectively and are able to help society remain free and prosperous. Those who know only *what* to think or *when*, no matter how valuable their contributions to society, are not capable of maintaining freedom or leading us to real progress without additional leadership skills. The success and perpetuity of our “American way of life” depend upon leadership education.

Leadership education can be found in certain public school classrooms, a few private and charter schools, and many homeschools. Of course, there are conveyor belt homeschools just as there are leadership public classrooms. Unfortunately, many homeschools are considered inferior by other schools; and the antipathy and relative contempt seem to be mutual in most cases. In truth, there are high quality public schools, private schools and homeschools, just as there are mediocre and poor ones. The key is for parents to find the best education possible for their children and implement it. Parents should choose the school that offers the best educational opportunity for their child.

Despite current stigmas, homeschool is one legitimate option. Homeschooling has a long and successful tradition. Actually, it has two traditions: first, the very wealthy have always educated their children at home, some through professional tutors and others with the parents as mentors; and second, many of the greatest thinkers, leaders, statesmen, entrepreneurs, scientists and artists of history were self-educated.

Wherever the student sits to study, at public or private school, or at home, leadership education is based on several powerful traditions: student-driven learning, great teachers, mentors, classics, and hard work. Together these form the tradition of leadership education, what I call Thomas Jefferson Education, a tradition which is sorely needed in modern America.

I am firmly convinced that Thomas Jefferson Education is the direction education must, and will, take in the coming decades. Abraham Lincoln is credited with saying, “The philosophy of the schoolroom in one generation will be the philosophy of government in the next.”¹¹ This thought has brought me much hope as I

have seen the future in the faces of thousands of parents and teachers I have spoken with across the nation.

I have been so impressed with the parents, public and private school teachers, college and university professors, and a few excellent private and charter schools that are applying the principles of Thomas Jefferson Education. Wherever the elements of Jefferson Education are present, parents and teachers nearly all have in common courage, energy and dedication. The future is in good hands with their children and students at the helm. But all of us need to understand all three systems of education.

Conveyor Belt Methods

Not only are the goals of each system very different, but also the methods. Most public schools use what I call the “Soviet conveyor belt” method. They are set up like a factory: everyone in the class gets the same education at the same age from the same textbooks, and they are tested the same and graded based upon the same scale regardless of their individual interests, talents or goals.

The goal is to give students the same ideas, and to grade and rank them according to their conformity with these ideas. In this system you go down the factory line, first grade, second grade, third grade, with a factory worker at each station, being assembled with certain parts (the curriculum) at a certain point in a certain way from a common book or manual. Of course, all of the products (students) are fitted with the same parts (called “education”) as everyone else on the conveyor belt. When you finish twelfth grade, you get a stamp (diploma) on your forehead signifying that you are a finished product ready to be sold to the job market.

The “Soviet” part of it is that standards and grade levels are set at a low enough level that virtually everyone can get through and be a finished product. What happens if you try to get ahead? A factory worker moves you back into place. What if you get behind? A “special” worker pulls you up to speed.

Each of us who has gone through this system can name

notable exceptions to this model—usually great teachers. I'll say a lot more about these quality teachers in a later chapter. For all the good these wonderful educators do in individual lives, the system is still a factory which idealizes social and intellectual conformity. If you feel that this system is best for your child, make sure he or she has a great teacher—and stay closely involved with the teacher and even help her understand Thomas Jefferson Education principles.

The Competitive Conveyor Belt

The methodology of the professional system is similar, but it is competitive; the standards are set by the highest 10-15%. In other words, if you want to make it into law school, medical school, the premier MBA programs at the most prestigious Ivy League schools, you have to test in the higher percentiles. But once you're in that percentile, once you make it and say, "I'm at Harvard," you are required to get on the conveyor belt for several years until they stamp another diploma on your forehead. You say, "But I want to think; I want to be a leader." The institutional response is that there is time for that later, after you have graduated; for now you need to focus on your conveyor belt studies.

Of course, this type of focus is mandated in order to really learn the profession. But when and where does the leadership training come? Where are the schools which offer it?

The Leadership Crisis

These same three systems have existed for a long time, and free and prosperous nations have always had a strong leader education system. When I teach this, people often say at this point, "Well, in our society we just go to public school. That's how everybody does it, that's how the system has worked for a long time." In fact, our modern system is a fairly recent development. Only in the last seventy years has it become the predominant system. In the history of education, the current American system is very non-tradi-

tional, very different from what has been done for generations. Almost everybody in America today is getting the kind of education that has historically been reserved for those who simply had no other options. Where this used to include the poor and lower classes, today it has become almost universal.

What happens when a society does not prepare leaders? We get managers and professionals leading in areas they have no training for, such as government, and we get a nation of followers who see no problem with that because they have no experience with anything else. In a nation where the government is supposed to be the servant of the people, it is easy to see that our traditional form of government and its cultural underpinnings will deteriorate beyond repair if the citizen neglects to fit himself for leadership; eventually the result is widespread specialization complemented by arrogance, pride and general ignorance. This was the legacy of Germany in the 1930s—a highly trained but uneducated people easily swayed by Hitler.

In the past, the traditional leadership pool—the wealthy and the aristocracy—have always been educated with mentors and tutors, and then at prep schools which use the classics/mentors approach. There’s a reason for that: the mentor system creates statesmen. Without such a system, you just don’t get the same caliber of leaders. And when a few do emerge, you will almost certainly find that they have a leader education background. Of course, in America we don’t have an aristocracy and don’t want one, so leaders must come from all classes—what Jefferson called the “natural aristocracy.”¹² But if they are to be entrepreneurs and statesmen, they must be trained as entrepreneurs and statesmen by the curriculum and methods used to train leaders throughout history.

“What About Their Social Life?”

The actual curriculum of the public school system is about 75% social and 25% skills. When I present this to public school teachers, many of them raise their hands and say something like, “75%

is low on that. It's at least 85% and probably more." The real goals of public school are social more than academic.¹³ If you doubt it, pull your kids out of school to start homeschooling, and see what your friends and family say. I'll bet you won't be asked, "Hey, what about their academics?" But I guarantee you someone will ask, "What about their *social* life?"

Don't just ignore the question, it is a valid one. We live in society and most of us choose to interact with others. But the real question should be, "What are you socializing them *for*?" Everybody is socialized in one way or another. Children aren't going to grow up and never spend time with other people. What people usually mean is, "Will they seem normal and well-adjusted, or backward and strange?" In most cases that depends on the parents. If parents are so-called "backward and strange," chances are their kids will be also—even if they are in public school. In fact, such children will likely be less "normal" when they reach early adulthood, given the teasing and rejection they are almost sure to feel in school. At least in homeschool, their confidence is supported and they have a strong chance of getting a good education without their love of learning being destroyed by an artificial social and class structure which dominates the hallways, locker rooms and classrooms. Many of those who tend to struggle socially anyway may be better off in a homeschool than on the conveyor belt.

If your children are educated at school, you still need to give thought to their socialization. Are they perhaps being socialized in bad ways? Are there opportunities or lessons you can give them that will improve their socialization? All parents should consider socialization an important part of growing up.

But consider the question at a deeper level. The highest level of socialization, the ideal, means the ability to effectively work with people of all backgrounds, stations, and positions, of really caring about them and being able to build and maintain long term, nurturing relationships. The conveyor belt, by its very nature, discourages this. Spending your time with the older sixth graders or the cheerleaders or whatever group is seen as most

popular often earns you the title of snob, unless you are “one of them.” And if you are a member of the “in” group, socializing with those “below” your station is frowned upon and discouraged—except by parents and teachers, who are very impressed with you, earning you a reputation as “teacher’s pet.” Much of this is carried into college and career and even into politics and pettiness in the work place.

It is not a great stretch of the imagination to see how the grouping of children according to birth year can breed envy of those older, contempt for those younger, and alienation from siblings. Spending all day in an institution run by adults (each equally requiring and supposedly deserving of respect and unflinching obedience) can provide competition in a child’s mind and heart for loyalty to and trust in his parents and the family’s own culture and values. The fact that most of our nation’s children are “socialized” in this system defines popular culture on those terms. Parents must be alert and active to combat these pressures, even if the children are schooled at home, and especially if they attend public or private school. The survival of our families and the souls of our children depends upon it.

As one national commentator mused: “Over the past two years, Lorena has become interested in teaching our daughter ourselves, and she’s investigated all the data about reading ability and math scores. But a single fact has brought me around to think she’s right about homeschooling Faith. In the midst of America’s endless argument about charter schools and vouchers, parental choice and teacher’s unions, I hear almost no one asserting that one of the things education should aim at is to produce children who have what Aristotle called a great soul.

“I can’t pretend my wife and I have much idea about how to go about that. But homeschooling still seems worth trying, if only because we haven’t discovered many professional teachers who have much idea either—or many who believe even in the possibility of great souls anymore.”¹⁴

In fairness, there are many examples of struggling youngsters being taken under the wing of a caring teacher, principal or coach

and really excelling—academically and socially. But this can as easily be a parent as a teacher. Public schools also have numerous socializing failures. The fact is, both homeschools and public schools have socializing successes and failures. Most of us know individual examples of both. But you can't legitimately criticize homeschooling for not socializing, when its successes compete favorably with public and private schools. For the most part homeschool avoids the negative social pressures of gangs, drugs, cliques, etc.

As a parent, instead of finding ways to defend against this frustrating question ("What about their social?"), give some real thought to how you can help your students be as highly prepared as possible with social skills as well as scholarship. The royalty and super-rich, and in recent decades the entertainment industry—establishers of social norms—have done academics at home through mentors and socialized their children in non-school events. Homeschool is natural to socializing future leaders who don't feel compelled to follow the crowd or bend to social pressure, but who do feel at ease with others and work well in society.

This takes some planning and work; it probably won't just happen. You must model it for them, even if it means getting out of your comfort zone, and give them opportunities to be where they can experience for themselves. If you get them involved in such settings starting when they are young, they will be socialized like leaders always have been—by interacting with adults and others of all ages from their early years, and being much more comfortable in adult work, social and other settings than their contemporaries.

Social interaction with peers is also a homeschool natural. Brian Ray of the National Home Education Research Institute found the following: The typical homeschooled child is regularly involved in 5.2 on-going social activities outside the home, including dance classes, music lessons, little league sports, scout troops, church groups, and neighborhood play; while average test scores for homeschooled children are 30 to 37 percentile points higher than those of public school students.¹⁵

In summary, don't just ignore the most asked question about homeschooling. Homeschool is uniquely designed to be a wonderful place to socialize children and youth—with their peers and in interaction with adults. With a little planning, the right kind of socialization can be one of the real strengths of homeschool; it certainly has been for the royalty and wealthy through history.

Again, and this bears repeating, if you are using another quality setting to educate your children, say a charter or private school, or even a public school, be sure to pay attention to their socialization. Conveyor belt socialization will likely have negative aspects that you will need to mitigate, and without other considered influences being added to the mix, such socialization will not prepare them for leadership.

The Key to Leadership Education

The fundamental difference between leadership education and the other types of learning, is that the leadership curriculum is *individualized*. Find a great leader in history, and you will find an individualized education. The place to begin individualization is in understanding the developmental process that underpins great education. We call this the Phases of Learning. These Phases were first noted and identified in our research of the education of Thomas Jefferson, and were later seen to be a pattern of many luminaries in history who lived exemplary lives and changed the world for good. These phases have been defined and discussed exhaustively, both from a philosophical and an applicational standpoint, in our book on the Phases of Learning; however, a brief summary as a foundation for further discussion of TJEd is in order here.

Core Phase

At the center of each individual's personality and development is the Core Phase. The establishment of the Core occurs roughly between the years of 0-8; the maintenance and nourishment of

the Core is a life-long process. During Core Phase, critical lessons of life are learned and assumptions are made that define the individual's concept of self, family, and the beginnings of their broader worldview. During this phase attention should be given above all to the nurture of a happy, interactive, confident child through the lessons that occur naturally during work and play in the family setting. Any programming of learning which does not fit this description can imperil the critical lessons to be learned in this phase. Such lessons are often extremely difficult to assimilate as effectively later.

Home is the ideal venue for the Core Phase, and “homeschool” in the Core is a product of the structure and flow of family life. This consists of the lessons of good/bad, right/wrong, true/false, and is accomplished through work/play. The acquisition of “scholarly” skills is not as important as these lessons during this phase. Ample research supports the position that later readers are life-long readers, and that much harm is done to the child who feels pressured to excel, is labeled as “slow,” or in any way is made to feel “unacceptable” during this phase, especially in relation to academic performance. A child who plays at and practices learning throughout the Core Phase will approach skills acquisition at the self-appropriate time and pace with relish and self-confidence as her aptitude increases and the meaning of the tasks gains context through her experiences. The biggest need during this phase—for all children, wherever they are schooled—is the rich learning environment and family culture of self-education that are inherent in the TJEd model home. For children who are schooled away from home, this phase is if anything more important than for homeschoolers.

Love of Learning Phase

Following a successful Core Phase, a child will naturally transition to what we call “Love of Learning.” During this period, a child will commonly play at projects and skills which builds his repertoire of understanding and prowess. During Love of Learning, which

typically runs more or less between the ages of 8-12 (often earlier for girls than for boys), the time in the day devoted to learning will gradually increase over time to a number of hours a day by the time the student transitions to Scholar Phase.

In Love of Learning Phase, the child builds upon the foundation of the Core Phase and continues on to form his assumptions of identity and community. The Love of Learner is ripe for exposure to the many areas of human knowledge, with a focus on that which he can experience on his level. Some children may have particular gifts or aptitude in a more technical area with established norms, and insofar as their involvement is exploratory and interest driven, it is to be encouraged. In contrast, special care should still be given for a time to allow for personal expression without negative feedback.

By this we do not mean that there is no discipline in the home. In the areas of family routine and the individual's obligations to follow house rules and contribute to the running of the home and family, rules and consequences are essential to the child's sense of security and accomplishment. Rather, in the areas of exploration and skills building, the parent/mentor should be wary of establishing premature and unnecessary standards of "correctness" on points that will later be obvious and require no criticism.

For example, the requirement to subject a daily journal to proofreading can stifle a love of self-expression. To make an issue of numbers printed backward during Love of Learning can leave a child feeling defensive toward the very person she should ideally look to for help when she has a desire to "do it right" or wants to make a good impression with others who may view her work.

As noted previously, Thomas Jefferson Education has high standards of quality. These are learned in the early years through family work and routine rather than in perfectionism in academic skills. Later, in Scholar and Depth Phases, the temperament and aptitude of the student not only allow for serious critique and review, they require it.

The TJEd home will facilitate a successful Love of Learning Phase as parents and older siblings model the behaviors of study,

self-discipline, passion for learning, a sense of personal mission and a habit of service in and out of the home.

Scholar Phase

Scholar Phase (often, but not always, from ages 12-16) typically ensues with the onset of puberty and is marked by a change in the student's physical, emotional and social expression. With these changes come a readiness to apply a new level of effort to personal and academic achievement through a process of commitments and accountability. The young Scholar should have additional privileges (exempted from some chores such as “errand running,” diaper changing, dishes, or whatever seems appropriate in the individual situation) as a young adult—rather than a teenager. He should also have defined responsibilities (as opposed to just tasks and jobs). For example, a Scholar Contract may define some certain 25-50 hours per week when the parents facilitate uninterrupted study time, while at the same time the Scholar has a list of agreed upon responsibilities (e.g. all of the laundry, or dinner every night, or all yard maintenance, or some other full-charge situation) which is clearly and simply defined.

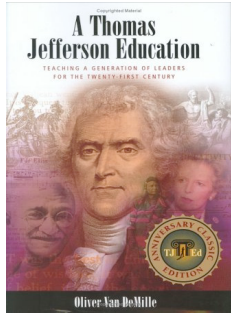
The Scholar should ideally be exposed to a variety of options in materials and classic works, and be encouraged both morally and substantively to gain experience and exposure to great ideas—through book discussions, peer-group classes, or other enticing experiences that feed the need for social as well as intellectual stimulation.

Scholar Phase is a time to study “everything under the sun,” to read, study science and math, practice art and study the great artists, and cover every topic and subject in a spirit of passion and excitement for learning. It is a time to study long hours, to work hard at learning because you love it, and to ponder, think, read, write, listen, discuss, debate, analyze and learn. It is the time to lose your life in study—and if it doesn't happen in youth, it is very difficult to recreate later.

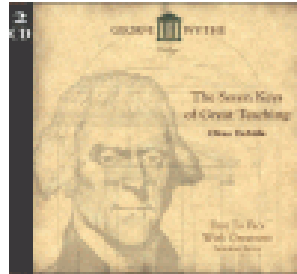
Depth Phase

Depth Phase (ideally between 16-22) is characterized by a profound hunger to prepare for oncoming responsibilities and future contributions in society. This hunger leads a Scholar to acknowledge his or her limitations, and the limitations of the current mentorship arrangement, and to submit to the grueling expectations of a mentor at a new and higher level. For most, this is best accomplished in a college setting.

The moral support of others similarly engaged, the networking with those who are also mission-oriented, the challenge of having your grand ideas revealed to be limited or ineffectual, the opportunity for exposure to peers with new and thought-provoking solutions to age-old problems, and the interaction with mentors with an obsession for excellence and the character and competence to demand it, is the ideal culmination for the years of earlier training in the leadership model. This college experience simply must be individualized. Of course, that means that somebody must do the individualizing. Great education means self-education, but at some point it must also mean having a great mentor. In the history of the world, the combination of classics and mentors has been the method of obtaining all of the necessary knowledge, traits and skills. Classics and mentors are the foundation of leadership education, which is the best preparation for professional training, leadership roles, and for life itself. The success of leadership education ultimately hinges on one thing—the mentor.



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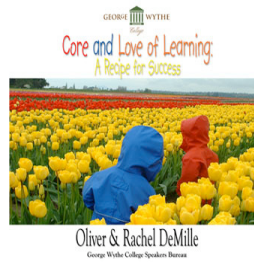
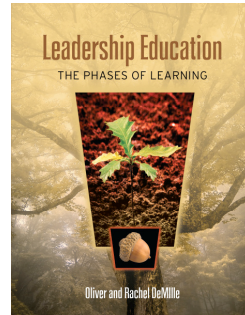


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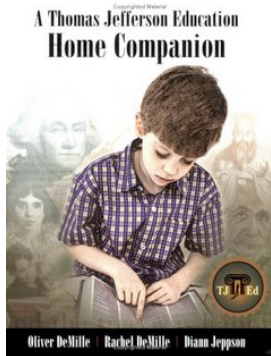
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