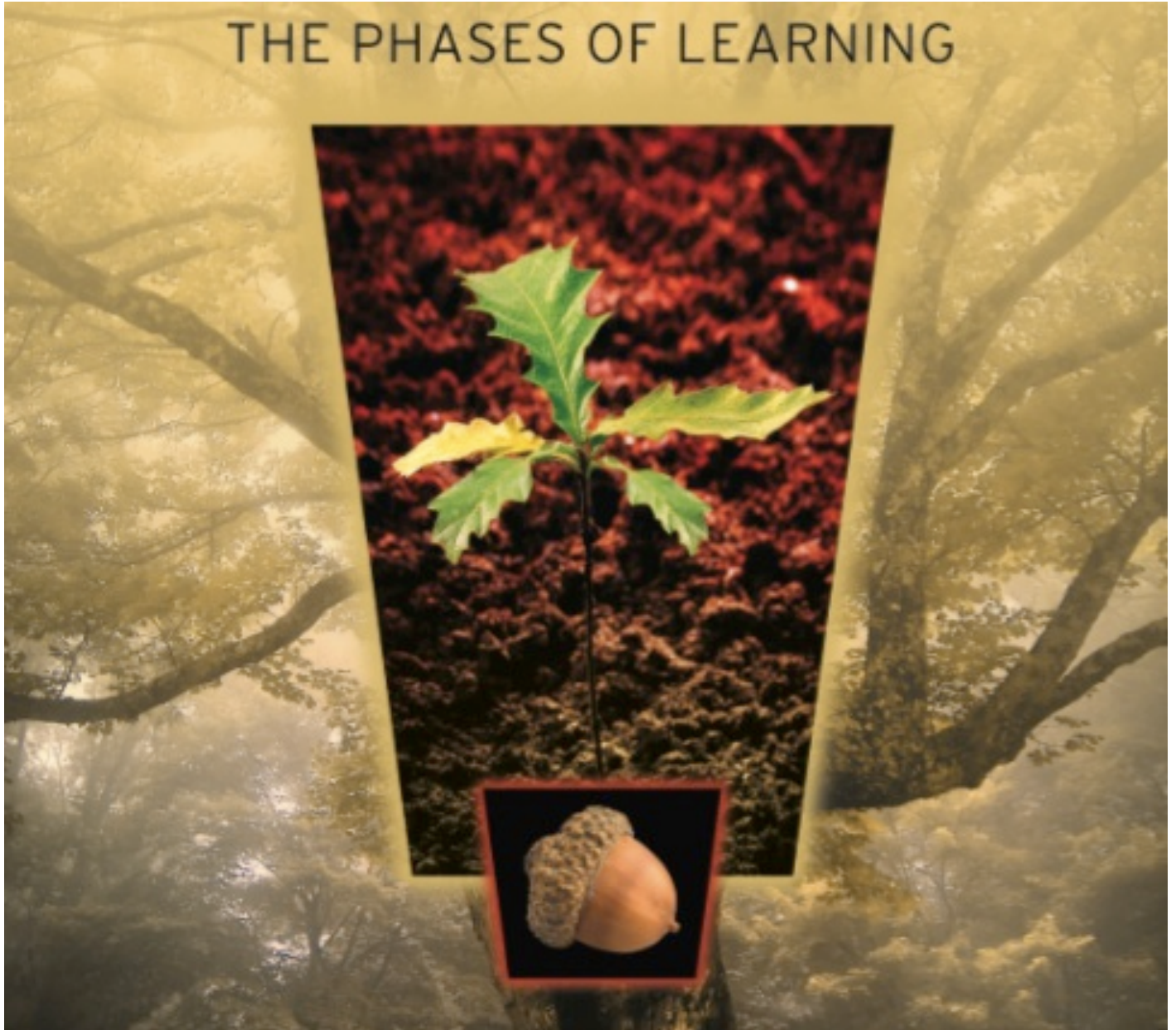




# A THOMAS JEFFERSON EDUCATION

AN EDUCATION TO MATCH YOUR MISSION

## THE PHASES OF LEARNING



By Oliver & Rachel DeMille

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## Introducing 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

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in education or child development, it does not stand alone. It is intended to be used with a familiarity with and understanding of [Thomas Jefferson Education](#).



One of the most significant differences between Thomas Jefferson Education and other classical styles of education has to do with the belief that people, especially children, learn differently at different ages. Thus, there are different phases for learning certain lessons.

When the **The 7 Keys of Great Teaching** are applied with the Phases in mind, it's like hitting the sweet spot—less muscle, greater outcomes!

Some of the greatest researchers in educational philosophy and human development (Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson, and Dr. Raymond and Dorothy Moore) agree that children pushed academically at an early age tend to burn out early in adulthood, or long before.

Young children do soak up learning like a sponge, but at what cost are children pushed into academic work too soon?

A hate of learning is developed when children are forced to perform at a young age and blooms precisely at the time when non-pressured young minds have the potential to be the most curious and inquisitive!

And if children of a very young age soak up knowledge so easily, shouldn't they be learning the most important lessons of love, work, and faith during their most formative years, rather than cramming their heads with random facts and figures their minds are unable to yet comprehend?



By contrast, when a young person enters youth with a passion for learning and an increased level of emotional and neurological maturity, they can study long, hard and effectively with a deep sense of purpose. They are able to make and keep commitments with an inner drive to excel.

How sad it is when we push little ones to the point of emotional exhaustion, and then expect not nearly enough from our teens. It's absolutely backwards!

*Children normally are not mature enough for formal school programs until their senses, coordination, neurological development, and cognition are ready. Piagetian experiments have shown repeatedly that cognitive maturity may not come until close to age twelve. Interestingly, the ancient Orthodox Jews, known over the world for their brilliance, provided little or no formal schooling until after age twelve for girls and thirteen for boys when children were considered able to accept full responsibility for their actions.*

Dr. Raymond and Dorothy Moore,  
*The Successful Homeschool Family Handbook*, page 44

## CORE PHASE

Ages: Birth to around 8-ish.

Core Phase is that magical time of nurture and growth, almost like a cocoon.

The environment is perfect for defining what the individual will become. Later, in other phases, exposure to the challenging circumstances and ideas help the individual grow strong; in Core Phase, such influences can distort and hinder the optimal development of the individual.



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The lessons of Core Phase are taught through work and play as a family. They are:

- Right and wrong
- Good and bad
- True and false
- Relationships
- Family values
- Family routines and responsibilities
- Learning accountability
- The value and love of work



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

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 Lego's 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 physical 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. Children in this phase should be instructed and trained rather than disciplined.

"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.

For more on Core Phase:

- [\*Leadership Education: The Phases of Learning\*, Part I & II](#)
- [\*Seminar Highlights: Core and Love of Learning – A Recipe for Success\*](#)



- [Blog Post: TJEd Q&A – What’s the biggest problem with homeschoolers?](#)
- [Blog Post: Core Phase Crochet](#)
- [Blog Post: Homeschooling in Core Phase](#)
- [Blog Post: TJEd Q&A – Core Phase Play Groups](#)
- [Blog Post: Nurturing the Foundation](#)
- [Blog Post: Through the Peek Hole – One Mother’s View on TJEd](#)
- [Blog Post: Leaving the Kids’ Calendar Blank](#)
- [Blog Post: When I’m Big As...](#)
- [Blog Post: Simplicity. Elegance. All most as good as a nap...](#)
- [Blog Post: How do you organize homeschool for a large family?](#)
- [Blog Post: Homeschooling a Large Family, 2](#)
- [Blog Post: Teaching Language through the Phases, Part 2](#)

## LOVE OF LEARNING PHASE

Age: (commonly) 7, 8 or 9ish to 12-13ish—boys often just a little later on both ends.



The emphasis here is on **Love** above **Learning**. This distinction is only necessary because so many of us have a conveyor belt hangover, and we tend toward duplicating our own experiences with conveyor belt systems.

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



Children learn accountability through their family obligations, chores, personal grooming, attitude, etc. School time is simply “fun,” with no sense of obligation to be responsible or committed to a particular path.

In any endeavor: let them get what they came for (fun, curiosity, exposure, ???) and then move on when they want, however short or long that time might be.

You are the parent with the right and obligation to set healthy limits during “School Time” (like: no friends over, no video games, no [certain type of other diversion]), but be sure you aren’t limiting something for the wrong reasons; and be aware that what might be inappropriate for one child might be right for another, or what might be right this week might no longer be okay next month.



Keep your eye on the prize! The most important thing to learn during this phase is Love of Learning. Just remember: by supporting their love of learning they will truly excel in some areas that will later be a spring board for learning in other areas that they might not yet be interested in. And if they enter their youth with a profound excitement for and love of learning, there is absolutely nothing that they can’t master.

We can’t reasonably cover everything in these years. We can’t reasonably cover **“everything”** in 90 years!

Of all the lessons they master in these pre-adolescent years, the most important value, the one that will enable the child to really learn what they do study and successfully cover later than all the rest, is the Love of Learning. That value governs the whole concept of **“Inspire, not Require”**.



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 should be 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 could 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 should be set aside on a regular basis (daily, every other day, M-Th, whatever schedule suits the needs and style of the parent and child) for study.

The content is flexible and most likely 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 are 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, historical and current events and the operation of scientific and mathematical principles. Projects requiring integration of a variety of skills and resources should be encouraged.

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.

## Your Role is to Inspire

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) require 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 them. 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 relatively “nothing”.

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.

## How to Do It

1. Avoid committing to a curriculum or lesson structure that has external demands (financial commitments, practice schedules) you are not willing to modify or compromise. In most cases, you can find a way to gain the value of that experience without the Scholar-level requirements. In the few cases you cannot, strongly

consider letting it wait until [Scholar Phase](#).

2. Be patient! The time for such demands and structure is coming soon during Scholar Phase! Love of Learning should feel like a treasure hunt. Parents, especially those who thrive on structure and follow-through, need to be on track in their own progression in the Phases as a means of gaining confidence in this time of high-energy/low-demand. The more you want to push and manipulate the kids, direct it at yourself! Remember: Inspire, not Require!



### For more on Love of Learning:

- [Core and Love of Learning Seminar Highlights](#)
- [Leadership Education: The Phases of Learning](#), Part I & II
- [A Thomas Jefferson Education Home Companion](#)
- Audio Download: [The 7 Keys of Great Teaching](#)
- Blog Post: [Nurturing the Foundation](#)
- Blog Post: [The Key of Keys in Leadership Education](#)
- Newsletter Article: [Does Force Equal Rigor?](#)
- Newsletter Article: [Love Changes Everything](#)
- Blog Post: [What Homeschoolers Want Most](#)
- Blog Post: [Leaving the Kids' Calendar Blank](#)
- Blog Post: [The Chemistry of Genius?](#)
- Blog Post: [How do you organize homeschool for a large family?](#)
- Kidschool Resource: [This Week in History](#)
- Kidschool Resource: [Math Classics for Kids](#)
- Blog Post: [The Master Within](#)
- Blog Post: [With our Aprons On](#)
- Newsletter Article: [Them, not You – A Problem We Can Solve](#)
- Newsletter Article: [Are you \*just\* reading to them? GIGO.](#)
- Article: [Classics for Young Children and Family Reading](#)
- Blog Post: [Leader in Progress – Please Do Not Disturb](#)
- Blog Post: [Homeschooling a Large Family, 2](#)
- Article: [Living Math](#)
- Article: [Biblical Highlights for Young Children](#)
- Article: [Classics for Young Readers](#)



- Blog Post: [Poetry and Kidschool](#)
- Blog Post: [Language through the Phases, Part 1](#)
- Blog Post: [Language through the Phases, Part 2](#)
- Article: [Caldecott Award Winners](#)
- Blog Post: [The Family Library](#)
- Blog Post: [Homeschooling for Excellence – A Thomas Jefferson Cultivation](#)
- Blog Post: [Flawless](#)
- Blog Post: [Raising Acorns](#)
- Downloadable Resources: [A Thomas Jefferson Education in our Home, Lists of Classics, Let's Learn Times Tables, and more](#)
- Blog Post: [Kindling, Carrot Sticks and Kidschool](#)

## THE TRANSITION TO SCHOLAR

*Transition to Scholar is a sub-phase of Love of Learning that deserves special treatment. Pre-adolescents kind of have their foot in both Love and Learning and Scholar worlds, and need to be free to be either/both/neither as the day may be.*

Age: Transition to Scholar occurs in most girls between ages eleven and thirteen and in most boys between twelve and fourteen.

The student is as complex an individual as ever she will be! Usually she will advance unevenly in the various aspects of personality and physical, emotional and intellectual maturity.

This strange situation leaves not only the budding youth feeling out of sorts, but all her relationships become subject to forces beyond her control. Is she able to articulate her needs? Does she know what's bothering her? No, and no. Is she a child needing a hug or even lap time? Is she a youth wanting to be given her own space? Yes, and yes.



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The key words for this Transitional period are ***independence*** and ***protection***. The Transitioner benefits greatly from a parent that is secure about the changes that are beginning to manifest in her.

Parents and teachers can help the child/youth by listening without fixing, and reassuring her that much of the turmoil or confusion that seem to have come from nowhere, or alternatively, which are being blamed upon coincidental things (like: a recent move, the death of a loved one, a change in the social circle, etc.) are really just the natural process of the body gearing up for rapid growth and hormonal activity.

Putting other issues in their place and addressing them separately is important; identifying that the transition to adolescence is challenging (with or without the extra complications) is *vital*.

Parents who treat ten-year-olds like they are still children (which they are!) in the *physical* relationship, such as sitting them on your lap and giving them a big hug, while simultaneously *talking* to them and treating them with dignity and respect as an adult, will see the best results. (And it may be that this formula does not expire even as the child grows older.)



Perhaps the most important thing to know about the Transition to Scholar is that it is a sub-phase of Love of Learning. And, as such, that it is all about ***Love***—not just Love of *Learning*.

The Transitional child is in such a constant state of *becoming* that she can never quite get her bearings on who she is right now.

Having an environment that is abundant in the physical affection that she took for granted when she was small is comforting and signifies that the relationships around her are *not* changing—even though she is.

This anchoring influence will reassure her that the changes that are fast coming upon her are not to be feared, and do not mark the abandonment of all they valued before; rather, this is a welcome and anticipated development that brings opportunities and rewards along with the challenges.



See Chapter 6 (pp. 153–189) of [Leadership Education: The Phases of Learning](#) for more on the Transition to Learning, including:

- Traits and Behaviors
- Discoveries
- The 35 Parenting Skills for Transition to Scholar
- Separate and specific recommendations for mothers and for fathers
- An extensive Q & A section

### **Additional Resources:**

- [Sample Chapter from Leadership Education: The Phases of Learning on Transition to Scholar](#) (pdf download)
- Boys Club: [Knights of Freedom](#)
- Girls Club: [Young American Stateswoman Association](#)
- Youth Club: [Statesmanship Club](#)
- Blog Post- [“Leader in Progress: Please do not Disturb”](#)
- Newsletter Article- [“Love Changes Everything”](#)
- Newsletter Article- [“Does Force Equal Rigor?”](#)
- Blog Post- [“A Thomas Jefferson Cultivation”](#)

- Blog Post- "[How do you organize a large family for homeschool?](#)"
- Online Resource- "[Classics for Young Readers](#)" (also available as a [free pdf download here](#))
- Book- [Leadership Education: The Phases of Learning](#) (Note: the chapter on "Transition to Scholar" is included in the free sample download of this title. [Click here to download that pdf.](#))
- Book- [A Thomas Jefferson Education Home Companion](#) (This title has some excellent suggestions for how to help your child in the transition to Scholar Phase through goal setting, skills acquisition and parent mentoring)

## SCHOLAR PHASE

Age Range: commonly 12-14ish through 17-18ish, often later for boys than for girls

Scholar Phase naturally follows for a healthy youth who has an active [Core Phase](#) and rich [Love of Learning](#). This transformational time coincides with puberty, and the young person can now think abstractly.

This is important because during this time a healthy youth is able to comprehend fully that requirements are not reprimands, achievements are not affirmations, and acquisitions/deficits are not **her**.



Peer involvement that supports her best self (including educational philosophy and goals) is important during Scholar Phase. It is well for a parent to look ahead to this time and do some concerted community building in order to facilitate the Scholar Projects that are so ideal to meet the needs of youth in Scholar Phase.

Scholar Phase has four main Sub-Phases, as described by Aneladee Milne:

- Practice Scholar

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- Apprentice Scholar
- Self-Directed Scholar
- Mentored Scholar

## Practice Scholar

Practice Scholar is the Scholar Phase version of the [Transition to Scholar](#) in Love of Learning. There is something of a chronological overlay.

During Practice Phase, we allow them to move in and out of Scholar Phase with its adult-level responsibilities/privileges and [Love of Learning](#) liberties/restrictions. Both have their advantages, and the Practice Scholar is managing a biological turmoil that makes it difficult to feel completely at home in either world on a consistent basis.



Your comprehension of and steadiness during this transition will allow the Practice Scholar to trust the process without undue stress and be prepared for the more rigorous commitments of Scholar Phase.

Youth participation in Practice Scholar or Transition to Scholar can depend greatly on their birth order, number of years between them and the next oldest sibling, years between them and the next younger sibling, gender, etc. In short, a parent/mentor should be prepared to adjust expectations and approach based on a clear assessment of which side of the fence they should approach from: Transition to Scholar or Practice Scholar.

## Resources:

- Critical Reading on Scholar Phase: [Leadership Education: The Phases of Learning](#), ch 7
- [LEMI](#) has an excellent program for helping youth progress in Practice and Apprentice Scholar.

- [Williamsburg Academy](#) has some excellent online classes that support TJEd-style Scholar Phase.

## Apprentice Scholar

Apprentice Scholar is the youth who has left behind the liberties of childhood in preference of the responsibilities of being a young adult with commitments to keep, including academic ones. The Scholar Contract and Scholar Projects are important elements of this time of focused study seasoned by peer interactions.

## Self-Directed Scholar

Self-Directed Scholar is a youth who owns the responsibility for her studies as if it were a professional commitment, like an office job.



Indeed, a contract between the mentor and the scholar is one of the defining features of this Sub-Phase, and will enable the Self-Directed Scholar to enjoy the rights and responsibilities of adulthood while yet in the stable nurture of a home with (a) parent(s) to oversee the necessities of life. It's a simulation for responsibility in the real world.

## 3 Obstacles to Self-Directed Scholar

**1. The youth is not really prepared by success in the preceding phases. If this is the case, go back to the beginning.**

No achievement or timeline will compensate for missing the important lessons of Core and Love of Learning. And the process of recapturing them isn't wasted time. Indeed, it avoids the roadblocks and dysfunction that inevitably await when the recapture is not achieved.

Don't avoid this!! It doesn't take nearly as long to renegotiate lost lessons as it did to mess them up, for whatever reason—undiagnosed trauma, poor health, abuse, neglect, family crisis, unknown factors; the results of these impediments to the Core and Love of Learning Phases can be rescripted in a fraction of the time of a normal development.

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Trust the Process. For more on renegotiating lost lessons, see Leadership Education.

## **2. The parent(s) do not respect/follow the Scholar Contract.**

It is amazing to me the lengths to which we will go to try to get our little ones to apply themselves to their studies with adult-like commitment and zeal, and the contrasting opposition we raise to a youth acting like a scholar. We want them to put down their book and come help with this or that, or go get some fresh air, for heaven's sake, etc. The Scholar Contract is literally less to obligate the student than it is to restrain the parent. We must discipline ourselves as parents/mentors in order facilitate the Scholar Phase.

## **3. The youth's hard-wired need for peer involvement short-circuits the process.**

Without careful attention to the youth's social needs, the forces of nature can be too distracting. Even the most committed Scholar youth can find themselves having to choose between the crucial social development and the critical intellectual preparation of these years.



As parents and mentors, we must see to it that they need never choose between these. Indeed, there is nothing that so powerfully ensures a successful Scholar Phase as appropriate peer support and inspiration.

## **Mentored Scholar**

During the Transition to Depth, the Scholar who has had wide exposure to subjects about which he is passionate now feels the personal desire to effectively address the inevitable deficits in his skills and learning.

He is highly motivated, and readily submissive to the guidance and demands of a caring mentor as he contemplates his imminent release into “the real world”.

His new level of maturity affords him a more objective view of himself, and he suddenly sees that he is shortly to be a small fish in a very large pond; he is anxious to be taught by someone who is his superior; this is a drastic and fortuitous change.



He wants to measure up in the workplace, or in the college environment, and imagines that he is unprepared because of this or that. In reality, he is quite well educated and has command of some important information and qualities, not the least of which are his concept of self, mission and accountability.

He is now prepared to take on the things that either casually or vehemently he neglected up until this time and that he and his mentor consider to be vital in anticipation of Depth Phase. [See [Leadership Education: The Phases of Learning](#) for more on Depth Phase and beyond.]

At some point, the student has a good, broad, quality education with some depth in a few areas of interest.

The student eventually reaches a point where he wants or needs to move out from under the wings of parents and take on the world. The increased maturity of youth who have been engaged in a Leadership Education to this point puts them in an interesting position.



Some may be ready for the educational intensity that a mentored scholar experience such as college provides but are too young to live away from home on their own. Finding a good mentor, creating a special class, or enrolling in online or community courses can help during this transitional time before Depth Phase.

### For more on Scholar Phase:

- The Top 8 Mistakes Parents Make with Scholar Phase Youth- [\*Leadership Education: The Phases of Learning\*](#), pp. 212 – 224
- How to Create a Scholar Contract- [\*Leadership Education: The Phases of Learning\*](#), pp. 204 – 206
- Blog Post- [“Leader in Progress: Please Do Not Disturb”](#)
- Newsletter Article- [“Love Changes Everything”](#)
- Resource: [\*Thomas Jefferson Education for Teens\*](#)
- For Adult Scholars- [“With our Aprons On”](#)
- Blog Post- [“Youth vs. Teenager”](#)
- Blog Post- [“How do you organize a large family for kidschool?”](#)
- Blog Post- [“Homeschooling a Large Family, 2”](#)
- Mentor Meetings between Parent and Child- [\*A Thomas Jefferson Education Home Companion\*](#), Chapter 4
- Successful Group Learning- [\*A Thomas Jefferson Education Home Companion\*](#), Chapter 10
- Newsletter Article- [“Does Force Equal Rigor?”](#)
- Blog Post- [“Taming the Technology Beast”](#)
- Blog Post- [“Homeschooling for Excellence: A Thomas Jefferson Cultivation”](#)
- Blog Post- [“What is the biggest problem with homeschooling?”](#)
- Resource- [Classics for Young Readers](#) (also available as a pdf download [here](#))
- Blog Post- [“Language through the Phases, Part I”](#)
- Blog Post- [“Language through the Phases, Part II”](#)

Afterward  
By Oliver DeMille

## A Return to Simplicity

*I wouldn't give a fig for simplicity this side of complexity...  
but I'd give my right arm for simplicity on the other side of complexity.*  
~Oliver Wendell Holmes



### I. A New Era

When TJEd is new to a person, [The 7 Keys of Great Teaching](#) are the focus. Then, over time, most of us emphasize other things that help us re-arrange our thinking and get off the conveyor belt. These include:

- [The 4 Phases of Learning](#)
- [The 3 types of education](#)
- [The genius in everyone](#)
- [The 5 environments of mentoring](#)
- [The 55 ingredients of Core and Love of Learning](#)
- [Building community](#)
- [Transition to Scholar](#)
- [Student whispering, etc.](#)

All of these can be very helpful in applying Leadership Education.

At a certain stage, once you have been applying The [7 Keys](#) and also many of these other principles and methods, you reach a vital point where a re-emphasis on The 7 Keys is essential.

We are seeing a lot of people at this point right now. This is a very exciting development! This means that thousands of people are ready to take the next step in great Leadership Education. What does this step look like?

## II. The Hidden Secret of TJEd

When you make The 7 Keys the focus, but with all the background of study and experience gained from years of doing TJEd, The 7 Keys are a whole new level of breadth and depth. And this focus shines new light on everything else.

For example, consider the Phases. Many people unwittingly put the Phases above The 7 Keys. The Phases follow a chronological pattern like the conveyor belt, and they are thus an easier fit for most people in a society where schooling and learning are chronologically determined.



The phases are also vitally important in their own right, since children and youth at different stages of spiritual, social, intellectual and physical development need different educational processes to most effectively progress.

But sometimes emphasis on the phases leads some of us to try to fit the children/students into one of the phases—based on their age—rather than making the phases fit the individual needs of the student.

This is a subtle difference, perhaps, but it has huge impact. Too many people want their kids to race ahead of the regular age ranges. For example: “But my son was ready for deeper math and science at age 8, so TJEd didn’t really work for him.” “But I really wanted more structure for my 6 year old,” or, proudly, “My daughter was ready for Scholar Phase at age 9!”

The result of such thinking is an unconscious return to the conveyor belt, however well meaning the parent may be.

Such primacy of the phases isn't really the intent of TJEd at all.

***TJEd is centered on The 7 Keys of Great Teaching.***

TJEd affirms that individual learners progress through the Phases in order, and that there are some general age guidelines, but that every individual progresses at his or her own pace. Always! Thus there are some 6- or 8-year-olds ready for Transition to Scholar and some 40-year-olds who need Core Phase.

A lot of adults hold themselves in core phase when they are actually ready for Love of Learning, or in Love of Learning when they're ready for scholar phase. Others push themselves into Scholar Phase even though their Love of Learning is weak. Some parents do this to themselves—but even more do it with their children.

***Putting The 7 Keys first naturally fixes such mistakes.***

If you have the Phases without The 7 Keys, you don't have Leadership Education—no classics, mentors, focus on inspiring, etc. But if you have The 7 Keys *without* the Phases, you'll still end up using Phases even without knowing them.

For example, if you are trying to apply “Structure Time, not Content” to a 5-year-old, an 11-year-old, and a 16-year-old in your home, you will naturally learn to structure different amounts of time and types of study for each student in order to help each individual fully succeed.

Likewise, “Inspire, not Require” will take very different approaches as you work with each of these students. The classics you use will be different, or at the very least the discussions about them will vary widely for students of such different ages. The Phases are an outgrowth—an application, even—of The 7 Keys.



It is important for parent-mentors to always keep this in mind.

***The 7 Keys are the focus; the Phases flow naturally out of applying The 7 Keys.***

Of course, the Phases are an extremely important part of Leadership Education. But let's be clear: the Phases are only effective when parent mentors put The 7 Keys first.

Most educational models require the student to fit into the system, but TJEd builds the education (curriculum, methods, structure, hours, assignments, activities, details, etc.) to the needs of each individual student. If a child needs more structure during Core or Love of Learning, TJEd mentors provide it because they are focused on "Mentor(ing), not Profess(ing)."

If a youth needs more traditional styles of math and science, a TJEd mentor provides it because she is focused on "Quality, not Conformity." But if a student needs less structure, more freedom and room for creativity, TJEd mentors provide this while many (most!) other systems resort to structure, force or textbooks—often for the benefit of the parents or teachers, rather than the child. A focus on The 7 Keys naturally overcomes these problems.

There are many other examples, and the main point is that by emphasizing The 7 Keys any mentor will learn to apply the 4 phases, the 5 environments, the 55 ingredients, and other tools and techniques as needed by individual students.

### III. Simplicity on the Far Side of Complexity

Re-learning The 7 Keys after one has experience in Leadership Education is incredibly powerful. When Rachel and I find ourselves struggling with the education of one of our own children, we pull out [A Thomas Jefferson Education](#) and [Leadership Education](#) and re-read the sections on The 7 Keys—with the specific child in mind.

We have done this many times, and it always works. As parents we struggle as everyone does to know how to optimize and individualize our approach to the progress and education of each of our eight children, and even though we wrote these words, somehow re-reading them is extremely helpful. Somewhere in the basic overviews of The 7 Keys we find the perfect solution to whatever difficulty our child faces.

In fact, we have created a document called **“The 7 Keys Re-Boot”** that puts the major commentary on The 7 Keys all in one place for easy reading and re-reading.

According to former Columbia University provost Jacques Barzun, education is a long series of difficulties. Businessmen and businesswomen often struggle to understand education because business thrives on solving a problem and then implementing systems that eradicate the problem for the future.

Not so in education. Each new student faces his or her own set of difficulties today, and when he overcomes these difficulties he’ll move on to a new set of difficulties next month and then next year.

For example, “I don’t know much about history” is a difficulty ripe with potential learning. And once it is no longer a difficulty, because the student has learned a lot about history, two new difficulties automatically present themselves:

- 1) “I don’t know much about 15<sup>th</sup> Century German history,” or something akin to this,  
*and*
- 2) “I don’t know much about science,” or some other topic.

The first type of follow-up difficulty is lack of depth, the second is lack of breadth, and both arise as soon as you learn anything.

I repeat: Everything you learn will present these two kinds of further difficulties, which is why learning never ends—and also why the more you know the more you realize how much you don’t know.

Wise mentors learn to treat every learning difficulty as an exciting adventure to be embraced! This is one reason that love of learning is vital to getting an excellent education.

As Leadership Education mentors and parents, our challenge is to deal with these learning difficulties for our own personal education and concurrently with each student we mentor. Sometimes the way to deal with such difficulties is clear, but other times we are unsure how to proceed.

In such struggles, the TJEd mentor has a great secret weapon: ***The 7 Keys***.

#### IV. Advanced TJEd

As a mentor re-reads the basic concepts of The 7 Keys with a specific mentee and her current learning challenges in mind, the magic occurs. This is deep, and profound. This is great student whispering. It is the crux of great mentoring. In fact, the mentoring questions outlined in the appendix of [\*The Student Whisperer\*](#) came from this exact process—re-reading the basic 7 Keys to find answers for specific mentees facing specific learning challenges.

This process is powerful. It is also “Simple, not Complex”:

- Take a notebook and pen
- Write the student’s name at the top of a blank piece of paper
- Re-read the segments on The 7 Keys in [\*A Thomas Jefferson Education\*](#) and [\*Leadership Education\*](#), with the following question in mind: “How can I better help Johnny apply this key right now to succeed in his learning needs?”
- Take the time to repeat this with each of The 7 Keys
- Write your ideas in your notebook

Once this is complete, you’ll have a to-do list for yourself (not your mentee!) that will help your mentee succeed. Apply the things you come up with, and watch the magic happen.

This is a transformational process, and it works. The deepest and most advanced solutions are found in the basics. The 7 Keys work. They are profound and they are effective. Unfortunately, sometimes we give them too little attention, even when we've known them for years.

The 7 Keys are the answer. Advanced mentors in Leadership Education should spend more time than anyone else studying and re-studying the basic 7 Keys. They know that real magic comes from re-reading, pondering and applying The 7 Keys for a given student's specific needs right now. This is "simplicity on the other side of complexity."

It is this repeated process—and *only* this—that makes one an expert. You are the expert on your home and family precisely because you constantly rehash every old and new idea in the world based on how it impacts or could impact you and yours.

Those who are applying TJEd at the highest level spend much of their time re-reading The 7 Keys and searching out how they apply to a given child or student right now. This is the apex of great mentoring, the central 7 principles of the science of teaching, the indispensable action of Leadership Education.

Every successful education is based on The 7 Keys. Rachel and I didn't invent these keys when we wrote TJEd; we simply found that they were the common themes in the education of the greatest leaders of history.

So we put them together on a list.

All great teachers and schools are great to the extent that they apply The 7 Keys—even if they have never heard of TJEd. The 7 Keys work. They are the true principles of great teaching and great learning.

Education without any of The 7 Keys is lessened in depth, vibrancy and quality. We live in world where people want everything to be new, where experienced TJEd'ers hear the words "7 Keys" and are tempted to think, "Been there, done that. What's new?" Hopefully we know better.

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The 7 Keys are classic—you learn more each time you re-read them and even more each time you apply them to a specific student. This is the advanced level of TJEd.



If you want to apply TJEd at the highest levels, re-read the basics of The 7 Keys and apply them to each student's current needs—and repeat this classic process over and over. As veteran TJEd'ers give more and more attention to The 7 Keys, we will see a whole new level of quality in Leadership Education!

In every field of human endeavor, from music and science to sports and education, the great masters become great because they focus on truly mastering the basics. The 7 Keys are the foundation of all great education, and all of us need to give them a lot more attention.

Now is the time for a new era in TJEd, an era where more of us truly, deeply and profoundly master The 7 Keys. As thousands become true masters of The 7 Keys, we will see a whole new level of quality and greatness in education.

**For more information on Thomas Jefferson Education, including available resources, reader/user reviews, sample downloads and purchase options, visit our website at <http://tjed.org>, or click the banner below:**

