

THE STATESMAN

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The TJEd Conveyor Belt



By
Oliver &
Rachel DeMille

As Leadership Education grows and TJEd spreads, we have gotten more and more of a certain type of question that we think deserves a more public response. It seems that a number of people who read the TJEd books and articles or attend the seminars resonate with the idea of getting off the conveyor belt, but unwittingly find themselves drawn to a new TJEd-style conveyor belt. This can be a difficult transition, and staying off any conveyor belt is very important.

One mother wrote in response to the new book *The TJEd Home Companion*: “Mrs. Jeppson describes how she dealt with her four-year-old’s ballet class, and later describes teaching girls between the ages of 6 and 9 about public speaking within a formal club setting. This appears to contradict what the DeMilles have previously discussed about Core Phase children participating in groups. I agree with the DeMille’s original assessment that children under 8 should have very limited, if any, participation in these types of groups. I am wondering how to reconcile the DeMille’s information with Mrs. Jeppson’s descriptions.”

This may seem confusing, but back up for a minute and think about the conveyor belt vs. the leadership model. On the conveyor belt, these two items would be contradictory—you either don't put children under 8 in such clubs or you do. That's how the conveyor belt thinks. In the leadership model, in contrast, you decide what is best for each child and you do it. In the TJEd model, parents personalize each guideline to fit the needs of each individual child. One of the reasons we were so thrilled to collaborate with Diann was because her approach differs so much from our own. And yet her commitment to the principles of leadership education is evident in her own life and in the lives of her children; we hope the same can be said of our family.

Most people in our modern society naturally assume that all children should do such clubs, while the leadership model assumes that most clubs are not ideal for young children. It's important to understand these general guidelines, and it is vital to follow them or break them when it is best for each individual child. The key is having our own expertise so that we can with confidence adhere to or ignore the guidelines, and know when to do which.

There is a difference between engaging a mentor for our personal development and seeking an expert to tell us how to run our family or home. Making and keeping commitments even when it is demanding or when we don't understand or value what the mentor is asking of us is critical in late Scholar and into Depth Phase and even beyond. It is another thing entirely to abdicate our role as decision maker for our family. No mentor worth your time would allow himself to be put in that role.

A young mother told Rachel, "I keep feeling like I should sit down on the floor with my five-year-old and read him books a lot more, but that would ruin my scholar phase."

By all means, ruin your scholar phase. If that's the right thing to do. If not, then don't. Or read to your five-year-old a lot more and just slow down your scholar phase studies. One of the hardest things about getting off the conveyor belt is becoming your own expert on matters of family concern. The most basic assumption of Leadership Education is that you are the expert on

your own home and the education of your children. If the right thing is to sit down and read with the toddler, do it. If you should slow down your scholar phase, do it. If you should speed up your scholar phase, do it. In short, getting off the conveyor belt means that you study the guidelines of Leadership Education and then personalize them to you and your children.

One day a professional teacher called and asked, "How can I apply the 7 Keys when my district won't let me use classics in class?" Oliver responded, "Can you copy a page from Plato or Euclid and hand it out to the class and discuss it?"

"Well, yes, I can do that," he said, "but they won't let me get rid of the textbooks."

"Great, then supplement the textbooks with classics," he suggested. He later told us that it works wonderfully. He includes something from a classic in every class, and the students have started reading even the textbooks differently—with more interest and much more closely. General guidelines combined with specific personalization. That's TJEd.

A mother cornered Rachel after a convention and asked if it was possible for her to do her own brand of TJEd, or if she had to use the method and books taught by the Commonwealth School in her area. When we told Tiffany Earl and Aneladee Milne, the founders of the Commonwealth School approach, they laughed. "Of course she can," they quickly replied. Tiffany added, "She needs to do what's best for her children." That's TJEd.

Another group announced that they weren't using TJEd anymore because they disagreed with something they read in an article we wrote. We asked if they were abandoning classics. The answer was "no." Mentors? "No." In short, they were using all the 7 Keys. They can even call it something else! That's TJEd.

Another woman told Oliver she loved most of TJEd but couldn't keep coming to seminars because she just didn't believe in Inspire, not Require. Further dialogue revealed that she has two autistic sons and without requirements they didn't function well. Oliver recommended that she require, structure content as well as time, and also that she emphasize quantity

along with quality. General guidelines combined with specific personalization. That's TJEd.

One woman visiting George Wythe College said the following about the *TJEd Home Companion*: "I didn't like that in some places it just tells the reader what to do." When she came back the next day she had changed her mind. She said, "It shows me clearly how *one mother does it*. That's very helpful. It helps me do it better, though of course I'll do lots of things differently in my home." That's TJEd!

Right on! At first, she felt worried because she was still using conveyor-belt thinking. By the next day, she was using a leadership mindset and personalizing the general guidelines. She uses parts of it, and not others. She's glad she learned how Diann does it and how Rachel does it, because it gave her ideas and breadth of understanding, and more clarity on the underlying principles. Leadership Education means parents personalizing the curriculum and educational methods to meet the needs of their specific children. That is the whole point of getting off the conveyor belt.

A charter school administrator came to Oliver concerned that the parents really hated the idea of classics and that she was losing valuable recruits. "Can you just train your teachers deeply in the classics and apply the other 6 Keys?" Oliver asked. She implemented it, and it worked! Over time the parents even got excited about the classics.

One parent couldn't believe we'd recommend Saxon math, another questioned why we would suggest the E.D. Hirsch series, and another wondered why we liked Montessori. We recommend that parents and teachers consider any book, program, seminar or curriculum that interests them and learn from them, and then apply what will work with their students or in their home. That's what it means to really get off the conveyor belt: to become the expert on your home or classroom.

TJEd means general guidelines and principles (the 7 Keys, 4 Phases, scholar contracts, etc.) combined with specific personalization for each student. If it becomes just another conveyor belt, the key element in the whole process is lost. That element, put simply,

is this: Leadership education must have a leader at the helm. There is a double entendre here—the facilitator (be that parent or teacher) must be a leader pursuing self-education so that the student or child will be a leader pursuing self-education

So, Leadership Education means personalizing for yourself or your student, to help that student get the best education possible. Since most of us are used to conveyor belt thinking, this shift in mindset can be hard to get used to. But it's essential to getting off the conveyor belt. The general guidelines are incredibly important and one strays far from them with some risk involved; but they are still just guidelines. Leadership Education requires us to pay the price to receive inspiration in order to personalize whatever is needed to help each student get the ideal education for them. That's TJEd!

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