



## **Square Peg: My Story and What It Means for Raising Innovators, Visionaries, and Out-of-the-Box Thinkers**

*Todd Rose , Katherine Ellison*

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In the seventh grade, Todd Rose was suspended—not for the first time—for throwing six stink bombs at the blackboard, where his art teacher stood with his back to the class. At eighteen, he was a high school dropout, stocking shelves at a department store for \$4.25 an hour. Today, Rose is a faculty member at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

*Square Peg* illuminates the struggles of millions of bright young children—and their frustrated parents and teachers—who are stuck in a one-size-fits-all school system that fails to approach the student as an individual. Rose shares his own incredible journey from troubled childhood to Harvard, seamlessly integrating cutting-edge research in neuroscience and psychology along with advances in the field of education, to ultimately provide a roadmap for parents and teachers of kids who are the casualties of America's antiquated school system.

With a distinguished blend of humor, humility, and practical advice for nurturing children who are a poor fit in conventional schools, *Square Peg* is a game-changing manifesto that provides groundbreaking insight into how we can get the most out of all the students in our classrooms, and why today's dropouts could be tomorrow's innovators.

## **Square Peg: My Story and What It Means for Raising Innovators, Visionaries, and Out-of-the-Box Thinkers Details**

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# **From Reader Review Square Peg: My Story and What It Means for Raising Innovators, Visionaries, and Out-of-the-Box Thinkers for online ebook**

## **Lori L (She Treads Softly) says**

Albert Camus said, "We are all special cases." Square Peg: My Story and What It Means for Raising Innovators, Visionaries, and Out-of-the-Box Thinkers by Todd Rose, with Katherine Ellison, certainly proves that we are all special and unique, especially in the way we approach learning. Square Peg is both a memoir and a personal manifesto. Todd Rose was a bright child who could not seem to avoid trouble and was quickly labeled a delinquent. Part of his problem was the way the educational system reacted to him in a misguided attempt to change or alter his behavior. Rose ended up a high school drop out, but he later went on to become a professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Rose elaborates on four ideas derived from the study of complex systems and recent neuroscience findings: variability is the rule (our perceptions and reactions are much more dynamic and diverse than previously thought); emotions are serious stuff (children's emotional states do influence their ability to learn); context is key (the circumstances can effect the behavior - this includes labeling children with a disorder); feedback loops determine long-term success or failure (chaos theory and small changes making a difference). At the end of each chapter Rose offers a summary of the "Big Ideas" from that chapter and "Action Items" for parents.

It was enlightening to see what Rose's mother and grandmother did right as Rose makes a case for student centered education. He makes it clear that we can't fix a child's behavior. Behavior is an extremely complex system that originates from the interaction of a person's biology, past experiences, and immediate context. If we can understand this complex systems, we could learn to do a better job as teachers and parents in supporting and educating kids, rather than setting them up for failure. Once a child is caught up in a negative feedback loop, it is hard to escape.

Medicating ADHD children so they can fit into the environment of school, while beneficial for many, may not completely address the root cause of a child's learning difficulties. The stress children can feel while at school does not help their ability to learn. Finding a way to use current technology to help all children individualize their education could potentially transform education and help many overcome their special needs or limitations. For example, Rose himself had problems with his short term memory, so the ability to record a multi-step series of instructions with built in reminders would have benefited him enormously.

Square Peg is entertaining as well as informative. I appreciate the "Big Ideas" and "Action Items" at the end of each chapter. It is a nice way to summarize what points Rose believes are the most important from all the information and personal anecdotes he provides. Square Peg includes an epilogue with Rose's current research findings, chapter notes, and a bibliography.

Very Highly Recommended - I truly enjoyed this book!

<http://shetreadsoftly.blogspot.com/>

Disclosure: I received an advanced reading copy of this book from the publisher and TLC for review purposes.

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### **Kyle Schutter says**

clearly something is wrong with education. one size fits most leaves too many kids behind.

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### **Kristine says**

If you have a child who learns differently, no matter what their challenge is you need to read this book. Presented in a relate-able way from someone who has lived the experience of "being different". Each chapter is short and manageable as far as information and he provides a recap of the most important parts for you to take away.

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### **Natalie says**

I was reading this as a child, not as a parent, but this book was incredible. I can relate so much to this man's story. My mother read it, and she said that it was like reading my story - I want to thank Todd Rose for this, and I would recommend this book to anyone is a kid who "thinks outside the box" and parents raising said kids. This was brilliantly written, and was something I could relate to personally.

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### **Zalina says**

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### **Erin says**

Excellent reading for those who don't follow a conventional path through school and life. The author dropped out of high school mid-way through his senior year and is now a professor of education at Harvard. This book provides very helpful points for parents and unconventional students. He describes four primary concepts to keep in mind: (1) **variability** among people means that conventional systems aren't appropriate for everyone; (2) **emotion** plays a big part in how students (and authority figures) react to any given situation; (3) **context** is important for enabling success...he quotes Einstein saying you can't judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree; (4) **feedback loops** can send an individual into a spiral of self-destruction OR in a positive direction...pay attention to how events and responses play out.

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### **Jeffcamp says**

This is a short, compelling book that education leaders should read. The author was a hyperactive, disruptive,

mostly unlikable child. He flunked out of school. But he went on to be accepted to Harvard. How does that happen, and what can we learn from his experience?

The author has some practical advice that will interest parents and should also interest policy makers. Given its brevity, it merits a wide audience.

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### **Tess says**

This is more a memoir than an education book. The author has some wonderful insights on the struggles of ADHD and other assorted issues. There is also some interesting research. However I found myself noticing that he never took full responsibility or showed remorse for the terrible things he did while growing up. I know he struggled growing up but the excuses became tiring.

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### **Jenny GB says**

Todd Rose's book claims to be a how-to guide to raise out of the box kids as well as a "game changing manifesto" that provides "groundbreaking insight into how we can get the most out of all the students in our classrooms". Wow, boast much? Not surprisingly, this doesn't live up to that hype. This book is primarily an autobiography of Rose's life, particularly as it relates to his misbehavior and trouble in school. Even now and then Rose discusses some research on topics such as emotions powerfully affect behavior or that failing is a good thing. None of this is earth shattering and these ideas have been around for a long time. Also, he seems incapable of giving advice to teachers or parents except in vague terms or being snarky about it. For example, he advises parents to hug your kids and then later tells you to knock it off because you're probably bothering them now. His idea of summing up his chapters is to throw in irrelevant information, such as there are two ways to make the word syllabus plural (I bet he couldn't wait to put his "revenge" for one Harvard student's comment in print) where as I'm wondering who cares about that? We all have petty issues with other people, but forcing all your readers to read about it is pointless. He also seems rather too gleeful about his misbehavior, especially flaming bags of poop (which again merits a "big idea" mention) and scoring detention so that he has somewhere to go during lunch (which I have mixed feelings about and find very sad). He also for some reasons keeps mentioning that parents have to play the long game and keep steps ahead of their kids which he refers to as chess and definitely NOT checkers. Actually, I think both games require strategy and thinking ahead if you're playing them properly. Checkers doesn't have as many options for moves, but is also a dynamic game where the move you make will affect your opponent's decisions and thinking ahead can predict those outcomes. I would also caution anyone reading this book that Rose is a little too enthusiastic about the future in technology. As a teacher, I've seen firsthand that most e-books are the exact same quality as certain textbooks because, surprise, they're being developed by the same companies and these companies can't think creatively to develop something brand new. Khan academy is also mostly a false hope. Khan has done a good thing, but he's done it poorly and sometimes done it mathematically incorrect. I love the ideas of video learning, but why not make it interactive? Why not push students to think about why you're doing what you're doing? Anyway, that's a whole different rant.

It might sound like at this point I hate this book, and I don't. Rose really relates his story in a moving way. I'm finding it hard to empathize with him because my life has been so vastly different, but some of my

students must feel this way. His description of the hard time he had being bullied is of course quite moving and definitely wrong. The reason why I'm so frustrated with this book is because it promises some ideas, but doesn't really deliver any accept having to buy all your students some expensive new technology or questionable value. I'm sure all kids love goofing around on computers, but the idea that it instantly makes learning awesome is a false one. To Rose's credit he does point that out and talk about the need for good teachers and not just paid babysitters to watch over the students as they play on computers. However, he then fails to offer any alternative idea to teachers. He's a bit better about providing parental advice, but it's still stated in vague terms and contains ideas that I hope everyone has heard of, for example praise the effort and not the outcome on a task. The most interesting and intriguing thing Rose discusses was a few innovative schools he visited. I'd love to hear more about how they work! My overall impression of this book is that I'm not impressed. As a story of a man's struggles to overcome his adversities it's a good story, but as advice book to parents and teachers or as groundbreaking science about learning revealed it's just doesn't work.

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### **Chris says**

The story of the Square Peg is a book every parent who has a troubled child should read. There are so many parents out there who have forgotten what it means to be a kid, especially being a kid in today's times. I'm not sure when it happens, but it seems that as soon as adults turn into parents, they lose all sense of reality and common sense. They like to believe that what they are doing is best for their kids, when sometimes it is not. This book explains the trouble the author had growing up because of all the trouble he got himself into. His impulsivity always made him look like a kid with no future and no chance of doing anything good with his life. Boy, did he prove them wrong.

Before I go on about this review, I would like to point out what some of the other people have said about this book in the reviews. It surprises me how people view and understand books once they are finished with them. It's almost like they expect to be entertained the whole time, while at the same time, if it doesn't come loaded down with dates of research titles and articles, then it must not be good enough to read. People have gotten to the point that, in order for them to agree or believe with what the author is saying, they need a list of facts from tons of research articles first. That should never be the case and the reason why is because as soon as a person reads one article, they start pulling it apart because of what some other research paper said before that refutes a new one. If books were as judgmental as we are about them, a lot of people would probably never get to read the books they want because they would get turned away so often.

This author, a Harvard professor now, came in and basically said, look, you don't need all this filler in order to understand your child. He didn't load down this book with tons of research titles, although a few show up now and then, but instead provided pointers as to what parents should be doing. One of them, don't always think medicating is the solution, because it is not. He mentions this, even though he takes them. Another thing about his solutions, which probably goes against the grain for many parents struggling with this, is that he doesn't provide medicating options, but a more humane approach. He focused on getting the reader to understand how a child's environment affects their behavior and how it can help or harm them. A lot of the reviews showed disappointing remarks because some felt that all he did was talk about himself, which shows you that they were only looking for facts and figures. Why read this book at all if that is what you want? There are plenty of journals to read that provide just facts and figures then. Go be irritating somewhere else.

So what makes this book different from all the others? The author shows his thought process about how he viewed the world and how the world viewed him. He made this a personal journey about all his troubles and what he did to fix them and arrive on top. He combined the idea of his personal struggles with how the world

views trouble makers like him and what they try to do about it. He wanted to show the world that kids like him can come out on top, if they get the support they need.

Parents who struggle with children who are trouble makers often believe that their children have no future because of their constant misbehaving. This is not true, because of how the public education system is set up, most children who are not able to adapt, instead of the school adapting to their learning style, end up dropping out or getting kicked out. Mr. Rose explained that if he had the kind of educational opportunities that digital technology has brought to schools today, his grades probably would have been better and his classroom performance on par with everyone else, but because teachers are not trained to deal with kids like him, he was often sent to the principal's office for discipline.

The other issue he mention in the book was using medication. His mom was concerned about it and he provided his thoughts on it as well. Of course, medication should never be used on a child, just because the parents don't have the patience for handling their child's unlimited flow of energy, doesn't make it ok to sedate them just because. There are plenty of books on how to cope with children who are hyperactive. I choose not to say ADHD because it is a label that is often abused and used on a child who shows the slightest sign of being hyper. Can you imagine if some of the greatest minds of our history were medicated as children, where we would be today? Exactly.....think about that for a minute.

If you want to find out why your child is misbehaving all the time, read this book.

If you want to understand why your child is struggling in school, read this book.

If you want your child to end up just like the author did, read this book and pray, but don't rely on the first option.

If you want to know what you should be doing as a parent to help your child, read this book.

If you want a miracle cure, look elsewhere, but still pray, and if your not religious, think hard.

If all you want is facts and research results so you can find their flaws, read research journals, and leave this one alone.

If all you want is entertainment while reading this book, read some comics instead.

In order to solve your child's misbehavior you first need to understand where it is coming from. Most of the time, your child doesn't know. So the best thing you can do is be there for them, even when everyone else isn't.

Give them hugs, talk to them, tell them you love them, and provide positive feedback, even when you think they don't deserve it. Sometimes a random trip for ice cream can make their day.

They need to know that you are always there for them, even in very hard times, otherwise they lose hope in themselves.

One last thing, don't read this book hoping to copy everything the author did, read this book so you can understand what to look for in your child's environment that is hurting them and helping them so you know what you need to do.

I really enjoyed this book because it shows that you have to look at everything in a child's life that is helping/hurting them. Sometimes it is even the parents style of parenting that might be hurting the child. You should also consider that but never rule it out. If you are a helicopter parent, STOP IT, and let them live a normal live. If you are too free-spirited as a parent, then maybe providing some rules and boundaries will help them. Kids need structure but never at the level of what helicopter parents have.

Never rule out the smallest thing because the sad part about all this is that their developing brains don't know how to express themselves about what they are feeling or experiencing until they are adults, and by then, it is too late to know what to do to fix it. They won't be able to tell you that the medication you forced them to take was actually hurting them when they were a kid. So take your time about introducing that because medicine should only be used as a last resort, not a quick fix for the parents.

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If you want to know why I didn't give it five stars, it was because it was a very short read. I was hoping for more, just to learn more about the work he is doing now to help kids.

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### **Jaime says**

So glad I read this. Changed the way I view Claire's behavior.

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### **Helen Moses says**

Good to read in connection with Normal...

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### **Desiree says**

This made me look at my students differently.

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### **Laura (booksnob) says**

Square Peg is, in part, a memoir about L. Todd Rose's experience growing up a misunderstood, wild and out of control kid with ADHD. He is every teachers nightmare, throwing stink bombs in school. He ends up making a lot of mistakes including, failing high school and is three steps short of being a juvenile delinquent. He had a couple of things going for him though, a mother who loved and accepted him and the will to succeed. He uses this will to succeed to reinvent himself. Square Peg is the story of how he went from being a failure at the very bottom of the educational system to a Harvard graduate student.

Square Peg is also a book for parents and educators who are looking for answers for helping kids survive and thrive in a failing education system. If you have a child with dyslexia or ADD or Asperger's you probably already know that your child doesn't do well in the current educational system. Rose provides specific techniques and ideas on how to be a better parent and how to be a more effective teacher when working with kids that are active learners.

Both of my kids have ADHD and Dyslexia. School has been a major challenge for both of them. I am a high school teacher who wants my students and my own children to succeed and yet I know that what L. Todd Rose states in his book his true, School is failing to educate some kids. We must find a way to teach school so that every learner can succeed. Right now dropout rates for high school students are staggering and many

of these students are "intellectually gifted".

One of the ways to reach struggling students is to use digital technology in the classroom. Currently I am teaching with digital media (Ipads in the classroom) and am rethinking and relearning a new way to teach my curriculum. I am trying to create a paperless classroom (the wave of the future) as well as being creative with lessons on the Ipads. I love it and I believe my students do too. I plan to teach the staff in my building some of the techniques I am trying digitally in my classroom. I love to be an innovator! Did I mention I have ADD?

Square Peg arrived on my doorstep at the right time. My son is struggling in school and one of the reasons why is because he is bored with worksheets. Rose's book has given me a new outlook and strategies to help him and encourage his teachers to think "out of the box" when they teach him.

I LOVE the way the book is set up. Each chapter begins with a relevant quote and the chapters are easy to read, entertaining, informative and positive. At the end of every chapter are listed the Big Ideas as well as Action Items.

Square Peg is a informative book for parents and educators alike. I think it might be my new teaching mantra as I have recommended it to several of my colleagues already. I'm going to end with one of my favorite quotes included in the book.

"If we teach today as we taught yesterday, we rob our children of tomorrow."

John Dewey

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### **Lara says**

Original review here

I participate in a Facebook group where the discussion centers largely around learning differences in students, and ideas for helping those students receive an education that works for them. The group was born when a friend of mine met a lot of resistance from both her child's teacher and the school/school district in trying to get her daughter help. She also met plenty of resistance from the educational system in trying to figure out why she was struggling in the first place.

I've learned a lot about 2E children (2E=Twice Exceptional, meaning simultaneously gifted and learning disabled) from that group and from doing my own research. I have often suspected that my Bria has a minor learning disability, even while being extraordinarily gifted in some areas. We went through an especially difficult period with her in the fourth grade, and, with a lot of work on our part, she has risen above many of the difficulties she encountered then. She's a determined--and very smart--child who now makes As and Bs, and has a goal to go to BYU. She just has to work really hard for those grades in certain subjects (cough cough math cough cough).

Anyway, being in this Facebook group has really opened my eyes to the struggles many of our students face in the classroom today. It's truly amazing how the system can fail so many of our children, and yet still be good-intentioned.

Square Peg - My Story and What It Means for Raising Innovators, Visionaries and Out-of-the-Box Thinkers, by L. Todd Rose is a great book with great ideas for our modern classrooms. Todd Rose was himself a 2E child. And the system failed him. He tells the story of how he was given a poetry assignment, and because he actually enjoyed writing poetry, he did it. His teacher failed him, thinking he had cheated, since Todd didn't try on any assignments, as a general rule. Even when Todd's mother plead his case to the teacher, the teacher held firm to the failed grade.

This story made me so angry! And even though that was probably 20-30 years ago, things like this still happen quite commonly in our educational system.

Rose's book is simultaneously a memoir and a textbook which teaches parents and teachers how to cater to individual learning styles. He has great ideas for using all of the technology available today to help the students that struggle in a traditional learning environment. I liked how he had 'Big Ideas' and 'Action Items' after every chapter. I liked even more that the action items often included things like "give your child a hug!" Rose, who was diagnosed with ADHD as a youth and consequently dropped out of high school with a 0.9 GPA, is now a faculty member of the Harvard School of Education. His story is inspiring, and his ideas for our children even more so.

I highly recommend reading this book if you are looking for ways to help a child who isn't flourishing in a traditional school setting. I would also recommend it to parents of children who have been diagnosed with ADHD, as a big part of the book centers on that particular condition.

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