

# **MEETINGS WITH REMARKABLE EDUCATORS**

## **PODCAST TRANSCRIPTION OF**

**John Creger**

with host

Ba Luvmour

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Ba Luvmour: Welcome to ***Meetings With Remarkable Educators***. This podcast is brought to you in part by you, our friends and supporters at ***patreon.com/remarkableeducators***. Each podcast is a dialogue between me, Ba Luvmour, and an educator who sees the greatness in their students and touches the whole of their being. These educators defy generalizations. So here's a little bit about what they've done and how I know them.

Demetri: Hey, everyone. It's Demetri. I'm the sound engineer and editor of the podcast, and today's just going to be a little different. Firstly, Ba is feeling a little under the weather, so I'm filling in for him just on the introduction.

Secondly, today we have John Creger, a public high school teacher who pioneers the use of holistic teaching methods in what would typically be considered a non-holistic setting. His brainchild, the *Personal Creed Project*, was developed in his second year of teaching to promote self-discovery and knowledge. Years later in 2001, John Creger was given the James Moffett Memorial Award for Teacher Research, in recognition of his work. Having published articles in many prestigious education journals, Creger offers presentations and seminars to universities and education conventions to broaden the impact of his project and change the lives of students across the country. For more information, head over to ***www.personalcreed.com***. For now, let's get into the podcast.

Ba Luvmour: Welcome, John. Good to hear your voice.

John Creger: Thanks. It's good to be heard.

Ba Luvmour: All right, so John, you are a public school teacher, which is a little bit unusual for this podcast, and puts you in a rather special place as far as I'm concerned, because frankly, we don't find a lot of public school work that really matches up to kind of a profound, holistic approach. Give us some background on you in terms of your public school life, and also how you came into the project that is so exciting to all of us.

John Creger: I attended public high school, and graduated with less than a clue about who I was, and what I was about, what I wanted, how I wanted to contribute. Some of it had to do with the chaos of the late sixties, but I look back, and I realize, and these are things I've only recently in the last five to 10 years realized about what it was that kind of prompted me to become the kind of teacher I've become. Six people I grew up with are dead now, and arising from choices they

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made. Some of them back then, when we were young, some of them, the most recent one died as a homeless drug addict, I think five years or so ago. I think I only recently began to connect those deaths of friends to what I've been about. Fast forward many years later, in my thirties, after ... I guess I like to say hitting a lot of speed bumps with my nose through my twenties in life, I had the chance to discover a lot about who I was, and why I was here, at least begin to find some preliminary answers to questions like that in my twenties.

I hit the classroom as a teacher in my thirties. I kind of had what I now think of as a post-traumatic delayed, or maybe post-traumatic intuitive response to my own high school education, and I think what I started doing at a very intuitive, not particularly conscious level is try to teach in a way so that my students would not wind up as clueless as I did. I think I tried, again, not consciously, on a gut level, to teach in a way that would help my students find out something about who they were as part of their learning in school.

Ba Luvmour: That's very moving, John. Thank you. It's interesting to me that so many of my deep educators that come onto this program really didn't hit stride until their thirties, and were really self-reflective about their early life. You've just given us a really great example of that. Let's jump in, then, so what did you come up with?

John Creger: There's one more piece of that, Bob, and ...

Ba Luvmour: Oh, please.

John Creger: That has to do with the time, the period in which I came into teaching. I came into teaching in the late eighties, early nineties, and as you probably know, this was ... Even in public education; this was a period of great experimentation, at least in the circles that I found myself falling into. We had James Moffitt, the great literacy pioneer, and others like him, and others influenced by him in the late eighties, early nineties in the field of English, teaching secondary English, particularly, and college English.

Ba Luvmour: Excuse me a second, John.

John Creger: Yes.

Ba Luvmour: I've been ... I was on conferences with James Moffitt. We were up on the podium together.

John Creger: No kidding.

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Ba Luvmour: We had wonderful conversations offline, so to speak.

John Creger: That's very exciting. I don't know if you know his friend Tom Gage. Tom Gage.

Ba Luvmour: Of Tom Gage. I don't know him personally, no.

John Creger: He and Moffitt were best friends, and Tom's been a mentor of mine. I never knew Moffitt, but I've been very much ... I think he's mentored me, even after he died, because I started reading his books. Actually I was in my ... I was probably eight or 10 years into my career when I started reading his last book, which was, it was called *The Universal Schoolhouse*.

Ba Luvmour: Yes. The Universal Schoolhouse.

John Creger: Yes.

Ba Luvmour: A groundbreaking book.

John Creger: Absolutely.

Ba Luvmour: I would hope all of our listeners, if they can, pick it up. He was just a wonderful man. No question about it. Thank you for bringing him up. It's really great to have his energy on this podcast.

John Creger: Oh, man. No. You know something? I just, I got to tell you this. I just ... Let's fast forward to today. I'm not sure if you've heard of Jung Jiao?

Ba Luvmour: No, I haven't.

John Creger: Jung Jiao is a professor of education and now he's at University of Kansas. He was at University of Oregon, actually. Born in China, educated in China, and came here, and worked his way in to become a professor. He's a very fine speaker, very ... I'll send you a link. He's funny. He's a standup comedian, and he says he was a failed Chinese farmer who had no alternative but to become a professor in America. He really, in this five minute video that I actually had my students watch and do their first writing on Friday, he really is channeling Moffitt in a big way, about the school, the community should be the school, and we should be developing the whole child. He doesn't quite use that language, but it is very, very Moffitt, that he's coming through. He's quite close with Diane Ravitch. I don't know if you know Diane Ravitch.

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Ba Luvmour: I know of her. I have mixed feelings about Diane Ravitch, but we don't need to go into that right now.

John Creger: I'd love to hear more about that sometime, but anyway, Moffitt and Jung Jiao are on the same page, and I'm having my students now be exposed to Jung Jiao, and I want them exposed to the danger that public schools are facing in the privatization movement. I want them to learn to think, but I would like them to use this content as something to wrestle with.

Ba Luvmour: Great, well, let's jump into your work, because I am fascinated by it, and I ... its just wonderful that you do that in public high school, so go ahead and give us a pretty good detailed conversation about your work, and *the Creed Project*, and just kind of its history as well.

John Creger: All right. One thing that was true in the late eighties, early nineties is that reflection was actually a mode of writing, one of the modes of writing that was not only just encouraged, but you were expected in California, largely because of James Moffitt, actually, we were expected to give our students some exposure to reflective writing, along with argumentative writing, and persuasive writing. Those were categories back then. Reflective writing was something we were encouraged to do. Unfortunately, that went by the wayside after the nineties, and the high stakes testing, and the politicization of school, and accountability, and all those things. Reflection, I was delighted in my early years of teaching in the credential program, to discover that reflection was something that I could actually encourage my students to do. I got my credential through the Bay Area Writing Project, which again, Moffitt was very instrumental in setting up the National Writing Project and the affiliate, state affiliates of the National Writing Project.

The one at UC Berkeley was the Bay Area Writing Project, and I did my student teaching in Oakland, and then moved to Fremont, where I've been teaching ever since. They were people who came to our credential program who were very much involved in reflective writing, and the example of that that I think probably didn't consciously sink in as a model, but unconsciously it was part of the environment that I found myself in when I became a teacher was called the *I Search*, the I Search. In other words, the idea was to search yourself, and to discover what you could in doing a research project about yourself. I think it was a little bit more research-oriented in terms of what am I going to do with my life, more than who I am, but it was Lowry Fisher who was with the Bay Area Writing Project, and is still teaching at a community college in the area here. I never got to know him, but he was just an example of

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the kind of reflective project that I think gave me a green light somehow.

Again, I don't know how conscious I was of this, but I had this urge my second year of teaching, which was '88, '89, I went to my principal with a draft of this thing, and I already had called it *the Personal Creed Project*. I said, "Hey, is this ... Can I run this?" He just said, "Yeah, but let's stay in touch about it." It was a way ... My urge was to find a way for them to discover what they valued as part of their learning, as part of their course, and there was also a thing at the time called values clarification. It was kind of a movement. There were some books about it, and I think I might've been somewhat ... again, another green light came from that, although it somehow didn't strike me as what I was wanting to create with them.

Ba Luvmour: Josette and I wrote a games book about that, that turned out to be a bestseller.

John Creger: You wrote a what?

Ba Luvmour: A games book about values clarification that turned out to be a bestseller, and is now just now, we just received the contact to put it in its third edition.

John Creger: It's a games...? You mean games in the classroom kind of thing?

Ba Luvmour: Games in the classroom, games on the playground, games everywhere. Games among family. All kinds of games.

John Creger: That's interesting.

Ba Luvmour: Over 150 of them.

John Creger: Really. I think I ... Is this for something that would work in secondary education?

Ba Luvmour: It works. It works for everything. There's a lot of mixed age games. It works for everyone. Values clarification is an important part of knowing who we are.

John Creger: That's interesting, and from my exposure to the values ... The book that was called Values Clarification, I don't ... That wasn't your book, was it? I don't think so.

Ba Luvmour: No, no. This is just games.

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John Creger: Just games. Okay.

Ba Luvmour: All it was. Just games.

John Creger: Somehow the approach that was taken in the book, I can't tell you how it didn't resonate fully with me, but I just knew what I wanted them to do was, since this is an English class, I wanted them to reflect on their lives, and extensively, and comprehensively, and over a long period of time, and then come up with values that were unquestionably ones their life had been teaching them. I wanted them to become known.

Ba Luvmour: As a developmentalist, this is just ... MoffetThe Univits perfect timing. The person in the, that you're dealing with, the child you're dealing with desperately needs to know themselves. Their desire is tremendously to know themselves, and like you and like me, we didn't get much guidance in that, so to have an opportunity to explore that, it's just so developmentally right on. It's just fantastic.

John Creger: Yeah, and I ... I have to acknowledge that there were certain green lights, as I've mentioned, that made this something that ... Okay, I can do this. It made it ... At the same time, I-

Ba Luvmour: Let's jump into the specifics, though.

John Creger: Sure.

Ba Luvmour: Let's get those specifics down. That's what I know our listeners love to hear. Okay, so what do we do it? I'm a sophomore. I come into your class. What happens.

John Creger: Okay, so this work begins to shift in in the second quarter. The first quarter, I don't think kids are ready to jump into something this personal and this deep right away, and plus I'd rather lay the groundwork, if you don't mind me laying the groundwork a little bit first before you get the specifics?

Ba Luvmour: No, go ahead, please.

John Creger: All right. The first thing they encounter is my second baby, which is *the World Wisdom Project*, and the World Wisdom Project consists of a range of short poems and stories from zen Buddhism, Taoist anecdotes, the Bible, the Quran, various Hindu texts, a lot of Rumi, and we have some ... we have poems from Langston Hughes, Jimmy Santiago Baca, pretty much everyone in my classroom, and their cultures are represented in these short readings, all of which open

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up the idea of wisdom as a study. We'll come back to that, the cultivation of wisdom is one of the design principles that I've now realized is what my courses are about, and I teach teachers this, these design principles. Laying the groundwork for the Personal Creed Project with the World Wisdom Project, introducing the whole idea of wisdom more generally across the board, and helping students connect with wisdom through often times their own cultures, right? We have a lot of Asians. We have African American students, Hispanic students. We have students who have Christian backgrounds, Muslim backgrounds, Hindu, Buddhist backgrounds, and all of their cultures are represented in the World Wisdom Project.

So, we do these short readings. I introduce skills, the skills of inquiry, the skills of extracting quotations, and most of all, inquiry. I actually have been reading, Ba, your principles of *Natural Learning Relationships*, and I'm telling you just this morning, I was realizing, oh, my god. The inquiry is very important in this developmental stage, inquiry and what you call *ideals*, I call *discovery of values*. These are the two, yeah, principles. Now you want me to get more concrete?

Ba Luvmour: That's great. When I saw what your work was about, I realized oh, my gosh, this could be done in a public school, and to be sure, I was skeptical a little bit about that, and yet here you are, and I love your selection. I love your introduction of the word wisdom. Josette and I use it quite often in our work, and we even talk about wisdom-based relationships with children, and you have just introduced that as a real event in this kid's life and it's just great.

John Creger: Thank you.

Ba Luvmour: Yes.

John Creger: It's almost a subversive word in our culture. You hear that word very little, and you almost have to ... it's like *reflection*. It takes the kids, literally when we finally ... anyway, so we build a lot of skills, whether you call it the laundry list of No Child Left Behind skills, or the more focused lists of Common Core state standards in this Wisdom Project, they not only learn about wisdom, but they're learning about developing ideas, supporting ideas, developing arguments. They're learning to read critically, all the things that the various luminaries want, we're loading them up with that stuff. AND, there's another leg of curriculum which I like to call ... I like to identify the personal leg, but we can get into that later, because you're still wanting to hear about the Personal Creed Project.

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Okay, so after this groundwork has been laid in the World Wisdom Project, then at the beginning of second quarter, they get this very thick packet, the scariest-looking project they've ever seen because it's ... I think it's about 24 pages, and it's systematically, these were weekly reflections that weave into any English course, and they can be ... the project can be tailored to any English course. In the full-blown version, in high school we can run a full-blown version because we have an entire year with our students. The first week of reflections is what I call background circumstances, or maybe your desktop, the desktop of your life. You know when you open up your computer? These are the icons that are on your desktop, right, and it has to do with your ... you choose.

The basic method of creed reflections is *listing, selecting, and reflecting*, so they first list with the ... they have a bunch of options listed at the top of the instruction page. Maybe the neighborhood you've grown up in, your gender, your ethnic background, the culture that you come from, your generation you're from. These are background circumstances that you didn't choose. They're just there when you wake, when you open your eyes and start growing up. You choose three to five of these background circumstances that have been most influential on you, and you write a paragraph about how each one has impacted you.

Again, it's the idea of casting a wide net. I cast a wide net with ... I gave them maybe 20, 30 possibilities. They choose three to five, and ... Actually, they choose five to 10, make a list, and then they narrow it down further by selecting from that list three to five most significant influences in this particular category. First week is background circumstances. And they do that, and that doesn't take them more than an hour, and we're doing everything else in the normal public school academic curriculum.

Second week, it's specific activities, more things that maybe turning points, maybe health, maybe involvement in athletics, or even spiritual life, your background, your family, religious or your personal spiritual experience could be in there. Traveling that you've done, mistakes that were made by you or others that have affected your life, but these are more actions, and there's a whole long laundry list of possibilities. Again, 20, 25 of those, you pick five to 10, then narrow it down further, three to five. For each one of those, you write a paragraph. How has, let's say, my parents divorce affected me, and how has the traveling that we've done affected me? How has my involvement in baseball affected me? They zero in on that ... it's taken them two weeks to kind of get over the strangeness of being asked to reflect on their lives in school, in public school. This is not something we do.

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Since the nineties, it hasn't really been done in any wide scale, and they're just a little bit spooked by this, and we talk about it, because I know they're going to be spooked by it. After two, three weeks they're starting to feel more comfortable with it, and so that's when we introduce people, which is a category that most of us are influenced by significantly. They have a big, long list of family, parents, siblings, friends, celebrities, neighbors, strangers, and they again make a, cast a wide net, bring a few fish out of the net, and reflect on those, most significant, three to five most significant people in their lives.

Then the project, next week, goes a little deeper, and I didn't consciously design it this way, consciously, but students have told me ... Most of what I've learned about this whole thing has come from students' reactions to what they've experienced in my class, but then the following week it's questions.

What questions are actually, whether you know it or not, are driving you? We reflect on how questions might be influencing us. The third, the fourth week, then, or fifth week, I'm sorry, is qualities. Now we're going deeper. You develop an inventory of your own personal qualities, and I give some examples. Positive and negative. One of the instructions that keeps repeating week by week is, *make sure to put in some less than positive influences in your lists for sure, and in your reflections, if possible, because it's good.* I told them it's going to be important later to have some less than positive influences for you to think about. Don't just make everything too rosy, and some kids have no problem. A lot of kids have no problem whatever with that. Some of them are a little shy about writing about difficult things, and I'm encouraging them to do that.

Then we, actually, the next week's reflections were spurred by Rianne Eisler, who I think you've interviewed as well, and I had a delightful experience. I've written about this. I'm not sure if you've seen the recent article I wrote for her newsletter, but I had the opportunity to chauffeur Rianne to an event where she was speaking, and I was also running a small workshop. I told her about the project. She was very interested and encouraging, but she said, "John, this is wonderful, but you have nothing on gender roles in this project." I kind of fell to right away, and almost saluted her, and said, "Yes, ma'am." Now we have a week reflection on gender roles, which is very appropriate now. Five years ago, six years ago, at the beginning, when she first had inspired me to put this in there, it was a little awkward for them. Gender roles? Is that really relevant for us? Now with gender fluidity, and the kinds of issues that are normal today, it's really right in the pocket today.

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That's the casting of the wide net part of the project. Now we try ... Now it's time to see what's in the net, and focus it a little bit, so now they create a shortlist across all these, I believe it's six categories, and they pick the three to five most significant influences across all these categories. That could be background circumstances, specific activities, people, questions, qualities, gender roles. Any of ... they pick the three to five most powerful influences in their lives, and now they've got a shortlist, and then we go deeper with that shortlist. Why does that influence deserve to be on the shortlist? What about it? Is that significant in your life, and then I ask them to think metaphorically about each of these influences on their shortlist. They create a metaphor that resonates with them about this, so they're getting deeper with their shortlist, and then we ... after they've kind of claimed their shortlist to some degree, through various activities, and it sounds like some of your games would be appropriate here.

I'm interested in poaching some of your ideas, I think. Then we start going into a series of three weeks, in which they turn a corner from influences to values. Which is ... of your shortlist influences, which one do you value the most? I'm not saying which has had the greatest impact on you, but which do you value the most? Which do you value the least? This gives them a chance to start thinking about their values, their ideals, I think, in the language that I've seen ... a little bit that I've seen of your writing. I ask them, "Okay, so if you most value your Uncle Harry and you least value your parents' divorce, what does that suggest about what you value?" Most of them begin to come up with some preliminary sense of what they might value, and then we go into two final weeks of that section of the project in which they really do identify what they value.

Ba Luvmour: Can you give us just kind of quickly here some examples of what they value, what values they've come up with?

John Creger: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Many of them will identify compassion as a value that they've been taught, or honesty. If they've gone through, if their family's gone through a divorce because parents weren't honest with one another, sometimes that's a great lesson in honesty. Yeah, that's ...

Ba Luvmour: This is just great stuff. To our listeners for a second, I'm sure you know, usually I'm jumping in, and much more interactive, but I just think that this is so very important, and especially because, as I said in the beginning, we don't have a public school expression that actually works in this day and age to allow teens and young teens to come to their own through self-inquiry. These are words that are

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just so, so important through self-inquiry, through reflection on their own life, through participation in those events in their life, and to be able to distill it as to what's important to them. I'm just so impressed with it.

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Today's teaching story is entitled, "Hidden Deaths."

One day the wise fool was in the market, and saw birds for sale at \$500 each. My bird, he thought, which is larger than any of these, is worth far more. The next day he took his pet hen to market. Nobody would offer him more than \$50 for it. Then the wise fool began to shout, "Oh, people. This is a disgrace. Yesterday you were selling only half this size at 10 times the price."

Someone interrupted him. You fool. Those were parrots, talking birds. They are worth more because they talk. "Fool," said the wise fool. "Those birds you value only because you can talk. This one, which has wonderful thoughts and yet does not annoy with chatter, you reject."

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See you there.

I have to tell you, John, usually I do not let people go on for quite so long, but I myself am I just thrilled and enthralled by this project. It's just great.

John Creger: Thank you. I-

Ba Luvmour: Thank you so much for putting it together.

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- John Creger: I really appreciate ... the feedback.
- Ba Luvmour: I do speak to public school teachers. I speak to all kinds of teachers. I'll be in North Carolina at the Rainbow School. Josette and I are the keynotes there in the beginning of October.
- John Creger: Nice.
- Ba Luvmour: I'm pretty sure I'm going to mention you and this there. That's a more holistic gathering, but I just can't see where any school, any teacher wouldn't value this and try to bring it forward.
- John Creger: Thank you. I'm interested in getting on the road as much as possible with this. It's taken me a long time, Ba, to be honest, to be comfortable promoting what I do. I've been really someone who's worked in the classroom developing this stuff. It's so excited for me. It's so exciting for-
- Ba Luvmour: Maybe you need to do a Personal Creed project about your own values, as to why it's taken you so long to make this public.
- John Creger: Oh, okay. I think I beat you to that. Can I tell you the story of how I started doing that?
- Ba Luvmour: Okay.
- John Creger: Okay. This was ... I took a leave of absence in the mid-nineties to go to graduate school, when I had a chance to do some thinking about all this, and realized ...
- Ba Luvmour: I have to interrupt for just a second. Again and again, that's what I hear of the teachers and the educators who have been on this podcast. I took a break, and I went back to graduate school to do further reflection. I think it's almost everyone I've spoken to.
- John Creger: That's interesting.
- Ba Luvmour: It is.
- John Creger: It is interesting, and when I came back, I was hoping that my district would let me go back to the same school, because when I was in graduate school, as exciting intellectually and even spiritually as graduate school was for me, I kept thinking about this place, American high school in Fremont, California, where I'd spent eight years, the first eight years of my career, and it was so exciting to think about going back there, and being in this classroom

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situation when I could experiment, and they could tell me how things were working. I just wanted to get back there. Just being around them was so exciting to me. I eventually did get back to American, and I got back, and I'm getting to my story now. I got back because a colleague was retiring, and so I was going to take over for her mid-year. I was coming back from grad school, and so I subbed for her a couple of times. First day I went in to sub for her, this kid walks into the classroom late, and he has kind of a swagger about him, an attitude about him.

I had an out of body experience. Sometimes I don't really know why I do what I do, and I just, sometimes just follow my gut without really knowing. I took him in the corner. He didn't know me, I didn't know him, and I said, "Listen, you and I are going to become good friends, but until then, I don't want any attitude out of you." I couldn't believe I was saying it to this kid. He was, probably could have beat the hell out of me if he wanted to. He was kind of big, but sure enough, my wife and I danced at his wedding a few years later. This was the kid ... we got a really good relationship going because it was, I don't know, I guess I started us off on a real clear foot. I don't think he'd had a whole lot of father influence in his life, and I just kind of stepped up and said, "This is the way it's gonna be," and he liked it. Anyway, it was Michael Feebo who, here I am introducing the project, getting that fired up again after two and a half years of being in grad school, and I'm having the kids doing all this reflecting.

I'm sitting on my teacher's desk, and Michael raises his hand and says, "Mr. Creger, you're making us do all this creed stuff, creed reflections. Mr. Creger, what's your creed?" I'm on the spot. I'm sitting there.

Ba Luvmour: That's great. That's exactly how it should be, and it shows your openness to your own students. It just comes through so clearly.

John Creger: I wrap my fingers around my knee, and I lean back, sitting on my teacher's desk, and I kind of try to play it cool. I say, "Well, my creed, huh? Let me tell you about that." I improvised it. I just fell flat on my face. I just made a complete knucklehead out of myself, and that night, I went home, and I started writing, and I said, "That's never going to happen again. In fact, I'm going to present ... I'm going to be the first presenter every year," and I've been the first presenter, and I got to tell you something I read in your writings that really inspired me and resonated this morning. I'm reaching for my printout here. You have a thing when you talk about adult and child developing together. You say ...

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Ba Luvmour: Yes.

John Creger: By providing for the stage-specific needs of the child, adults come to greater health and contact with their own well-being. You say, "Properly responding to the expressions of the organizing principle in young people can often precipitate a simultaneous development in adults." We had our childhood limitations. You go on to say, so what Michael Feebo did for me was give me permission, kind of like James Moffitt did, to develop as part of my students' experience. I present my creed every spring, and I update it every spring because I don't want to give them some cookie cutter thing. I actually reconsider my creed, and I have a slideshow for them. I'm a musician, so I include some of my music in the show, and I'm the first one to present, and it's huge in my own development, in my own, my life. This is an opportunity for me to develop, and I want to start pitching that when I present to teachers. I think I really ... You're reminding me that this is part of the experience and opportunity for me to grow myself, as part of helping them grow.

Ba Luvmour: I thank you, and I do want to remind everyone that Josette did a podcast in which she went so deeply into that relationship between how we mutually develop, how development is bi-directional, and the opportunities that we have, and it's just a great example of it. You're a natch, man. You are a natch. That's a natural teacher moment, let me tell you.

John Creger: I'll tell you what. I work, and you're reminding me, and I'm a big proponent of public schools, but in a way, the public schools are the belly of the beast, in that all of the misguided ideas, and practices of education, education corporations and politicians, all of these are brought to bear on us, and they really have done a number in the last 20 years on the level of consciousness in public education. So, the idea that this is a revolutionary idea for me to share with public education teachers, that we ourselves naturally can grow alongside our students if we provide the right kind of environment. You're giving me some fire here. I feel like I ...

Ba Luvmour: I'm on fire about it too, John, but this is what it's about, and what you've done here. I have taught at the Portland State graduate school here for education, and I ran a short seminar on burnout. Everyone thought burnout was about, go home and rub your cat, or have a drink, or see your wife, or whatever, but when we got into it, and we really looked, and self-reflected, and did inquiry, burnout every single time was about, I don't have time to have a real relationship with my students. I came into this because I realized that the interpersonal interaction was meaningful for me, and because of the large class size, and what you're calling corporate

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influences, and so on, I just can't seem to get a place where I have a genuine relationship. I feel like here, what you're describing, there's at least an opportunity for that relationship to unfold, and for the teacher to be nurtured in the moment of our profession. I just think that's so important because there's so many great ...

John Creger: There's huge resistance to it. Just the other day in our first department meeting of the year ... I try not to be a blowhard in our department meetings. I try to keep quiet most of the time, but when the senior team and our English team is creating a senior project finally after all these years, and it has no personal element in it, it's only about your analysis of literature and all, I do speak up, and sometimes we have dustups. We had a dustup the other day after one of my colleagues who teaches seniors says, "I can see this personal stuff in the ninth and tenth grade, but in 11th and 12th grade it's just not about them anymore." She said that, and a ...

Ba Luvmour: Wow.

John Creger: That's what we're dealing with.

Ba Luvmour: That's one of the reasons I can't do the public school world, because I don't think I'd have the patience to sit through that meeting.

John Creger: I did.

Ba Luvmour: That's a rough moment for where I live.

John Creger: My buttons were pushed, and they know it. The thing is that I have allies, though, and one of them is the department chair who runs the Creed Project, and another one is a newer teacher who also runs ... we've had years, Ba, when 85% of our sophomores went through the project.

Ba Luvmour: Whoa. Gee. I am conscious of the time, and the length our listeners do listen, and you said you had ... there was another project. Was that *the Personal History Project*, and if you could speak about that super quickly, I'm sorry to be rushing you, but I am, have to be sensitive to what our listeners ... They're time-sense as well.

John Creger: Sure. Absolutely.

Ba Luvmour: Then it all comes together in the Global Citizen Project, so run us through this really pretty quickly, John.

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John Creger: Sure. To try to get out the kind of learning that's possible with projects like the Personal Creed Project, I've done some thinking about how to talk about it with colleagues, and I've come up with the idea of two legged curriculum, the idea of having an academic leg and a personal leg. That's a nice, simple idea that resonates, so I collaborate with the history teacher, and he teaches world history, I teach tenth grade English, and we have the same kids. I have a fifth period, we each have a fifth period, and then sixth period, we swap, so that's two groups of kids. He came up with the Personal History Project, which is his version of the Personal Creed Project, except they examine four significant events in their own lives, and they reflect on that, and make a presentation. At the same time in the year when my students, after the same students are reflecting on what they value, so that's the Personal History Project. This happens in a different class for the same students, concurrent to the Personal Creed presentations.

Presentations are really when the students experience the project in the most dramatic way. I'd like to invite you, Ba, and anyone listening to come and observe Personal Creed presentations in my classroom or any classroom around the country where they're happening, because that's really when it's most obvious that something profound and transformational is going on. The last thing...

Ba Luvmour: We didn't say that earlier, so the culmination is they present this to the other students.

John Creger: That's right. We didn't say that. That's really where it all comes down, because then you have the *social* experience, which is much more dramatic and impactful on many students than the written experience.

Ba Luvmour: That's just fantastic, so let me just get this straight. You said around the country, so there's how many places around the country are doing the Personal Creed Project?

John Creger: In my dreams, a lot more than probably in reality.

Ba Luvmour: Fair enough! Fair enough!

John Creger: I am making attempts now with a website I have up, and I'd definitely like to share that at some point with your listeners. You asked me about *the Global Citizens Project*. I'll just say a couple words about that if I could.

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Ba Luvmour: Please.

John Creger: It's a joint project. We just started that. Wali Noori my colleague in the history department, and I started that project last year. The idea is for them to identify a global issue, and zero in on a problem that is part of that global issue, and research, and present solutions, so that ... doing so with a mind to their personal creeds. That's the Global Citizens Project. Did you want me to say more about the presentations?

Ba Luvmour: No. I think we have it. I think you've named it exactly right, that the social aspect of saying that in front of people has another level of power that just reinforces all the good work that you've done with that. Let me ask you just the kind of a last question here about your future. What do you envision for yourself, and how are we going to get this out more into the world?

John Creger: Thank you. I'm now in my third year, fourth year of teaching 80%. Instead of teaching five classes a day, I teach four, and I'm devoting myself to building an outreach of seminars. I think the best thing, what I want to do, and this is at my students' urging, I want more students around the country in high school and college to have the opportunity to experience this project. The best way for me to do that, I'm now convinced, is to get speaking engagements so I can speak to rooms of teachers, principals, superintendents, and tell them about the project, so I can do seminars, for districts, for schools, so that I think that's the quickest way for me to get this project into the lives of more students. I'm building a signature talk. I'm learning how to approach, to find more stages to speak on, even though this ... It was not my idea, of fun, to promote my work. I'm learning to do it, and I guess I'm going to learn how to enjoy that part of it, too.

I want to give seminars, and I think ... I also probably have another book in me, and I wrote about the Personal Creed Project in a book after winning the James Moffitt Award, awarded by *the National Council of Teachers of English*. In the new book, I think I'd like to include some of this developmental awareness that is just not part of our public school consciousness at this point. Maybe at least an article, at least an article, but I think a book that would incorporate some of this in my last few years in the classroom. I think I might get three to five left. I'd like to start being more consciously working with developmental stages, and I think I'm already there intuitively, but it would be great for me to write about it, too.

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- Ba Luvmour: Let me say, John, that it is a privilege to talk to an educator with so much courage, and foresight, and willingness to do things that really bring forward the real important part of education, and I'm just very grateful. Do you have any last words you'd like to say to our listeners?
- John Creger: The last words I'd like to say to my students, I like to say them two things. I say, **be inspired**. Find something that inspires you. For me, often times Bob Dylan's work inspires me, and whatever it is for you.
- Ba Luvmour: Me, too. Me, too.
- John Creger: Oh, man. Especially his last 20 years. Most people don't know about his last 20 years, most recent 20 years.
- Ba Luvmour: How modern times, you like that album?
- John Creger: Oh, shit. Sorry, this is ... We're on the air.
- Ba Luvmour: That's okay, man. This is our podcast. That album is killer, isn't it?
- John Creger: You know what song, Ba, you know what they ... The first song they hear is "Beyond the Horizon."
- Ba Luvmour: Unbelievable.
- John Creger: That song's about the afterlife. It's about the frick'in afterlife, and they love it, but anyway, I say to them, "Be inspired."
- Ba Luvmour: That's great. Whatever-
- John Creger: That's part of the World Wisdom Project. Whatever inspires you, be ... don't let time go by without being inspired. Stay inspired. That's the first thing, and the second thing is, **be bold**. Take what's inspired you, take what you stand for, another way of saying your creed, take what you stand for, take what inspires you, and be bold.
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This is Ba Luvmour reminding you that holistic relationships with children leads to joy and self-knowledge with the adults in their lives, with respect for you and for children everywhere.  
See you next time.