

MEETINGS WITH REMARKABLE EDUCATORS

PODCAST TRANSCRIPTION OF

Steven Arnold

with host

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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.

Hopefully, many of you have listened to the podcast featuring the esteemed holistic Montessori inspired educator, Phil Gang, from way back in March 2018. Phil spent many years working in New Zealand. Well, Phil wrote to me the other day with a present. His friend and colleague from New Zealand, Steven Arnold, was coming to Portland, and did I want to do a podcast with him.

Steven has created the *Peace Experiment*, one of the most innovative high school opportunities for teenagers in the world. His infectious enthusiasm is commitment to Montessori ideals without being constrained by formula and history, and his love of adolescence created an atmosphere of delight as we talked together. Steven Arnold has received many awards and accolades. You can read all about his many achievements in the show notes on our **website *www.remarkable-educators.com***. For now enjoy and learn from this remarkable educator.

Steven Arnold: I'm interested to hear about your blog, where that blog comes from and when you're talking about the space between the audience and the actors and you've...

Ba Luvmour: Well, if I'm objectifying, for instance, if I'm in a movie theater and I'm looking at some famous actor, and I have transferred my identity to the actor, then I'm not seeing, I'm not participating, I'm seeing my objectification of the actor. We have, unfortunately, an objectifying language.

Steven Arnold: English, particularly.

Ba Luvmour: English, yes, beg your pardon. Of course. So it's subject, object, verb, subject, verb ... you know what I mean.

Steven Arnold: Yes.

Ba Luvmour: So what happens is we objectify things and then we ... That's an imposition.

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- Steven Arnold: Yes.
- Ba Luvmour: Even if you look, if I may, at child developmental now, you look at [Jean] Piaget or people like that and they talk about assimilating to an already existing schema. That is inaccurate. That is a top down adult way of looking at children.
- Steven Arnold: It is, because, we form the child in the way that they are processing the world and in the way that they're playing with the sand, that is the sand castle they make, rather than trying to mold it into a pre...template. It's not a template; it's created in real time.
- Ba Luvmour: Yes. We face those challenges, but you must be facing those challenges tremendously. We have to back up and talk about the *Peach Experiment* because I am blown away-
- Steven Arnold: Oh, really?
- Ba Luvmour: I am. I mean, gosh, I know of Montessori, of course, and I've had so many great interactions with Montessori, and so on. How did all of this come about? You have to give us the background.
- Steven Arnold: Thank you, I will. Yes, so, I am a Montessori educator, and this is the third Montessori secondary program that I've created. I've created the first one in New Zealand, about 15 years ago, *Athena Montessori College*. Then I went to Brisbane in Australia and I added a Montessori high school on top of an existing. I've done my showing off now, I can do it, I've got nothing to prove to anybody anymore.
- The third one, *Peace Experiment* is my current incarnation. It gives me an opportunity to break all the rules because I'm 50 now, I'm allowed to do that when you're 50.
- Ba Luvmour: Well you're just a young man to me, Steven, that's for sure.
- Steven Arnold: The idea is, I'm very careful to obey the big rules, but by obeying the big rules means I can break all the little ones and I'm good, I'm playing within the sandpit, within the rules of the sandpit. But, if you could offer teenagers, let's say that's my interest, 11-18 year olds, an opportunity to be themselves in a very real way without the pressure of trying to conform and without the disaster which is holiday, no structure around them. What would that look like? And this is what *Peace Experiment* is trying to address.

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Why I say a disaster of a holiday, because it's transient. It's usually expensive, it's really boring, because there is no purpose to it. A holiday is only great because it's between a work period and another work period. Otherwise, it's unemployment. It's awful.

For teenagers, they want to find a way they can feel safe in the world. Then I looked at curriculum and I thought, well, there's almost nothing of worth in the curriculum unless it is of worth to the student. So how can I sift through this?

Ba Luvmour: That's what we see, especially in America, I'm sure in other places, the kids, they just can't even relate. They just go, oh, this is so boring and I'm here to be with my friends.

Steven Arnold: So if you take away the whipping stick of the curriculum and you take it away. The curriculum is used as a bribe for behavior. It's learning management. It's just awful. If you don't need to have outcomes, then what does education look like? Educations totally changes and it becomes actually relevant. So in the time I've been on this planet, the population as doubled. Those in their...gracing their 70's...the population has near on tripled. How do we know what's important, how? I'm not anti-curriculum, I love learning, I love finding out new things.

But kids don't come to school to learn. They're not really interested in learning. They, it's quite a bonus if they do, they're not opposed to it. But they don't wake up in the morning, and say, oh, I wonder what I'll learn today. It just isn't part of their psyche. It's, how will I get through today, or, who will I meet, or, what can I do? In fact, they're just informs a little bit more about what learning is. Our brain seeks novelty, yes. But actually, in terms of self-creation and understanding the universe, our brain seeks affirmation of self.

So, you don't listen to someone you disagree with. You like people who say the same things that you already think. So they're not really discovering, there's not really new learning. It's just like, oh, I think that too, I'm safe. This is a much more powerful way at looking at human development, in my view, than rushing around trying to collect all the sparkly shiny things which lose their value as soon as you've reached them.

Learning, traditionally, in education context is often seen as an economic muddle. If you work hard, you get a good job...

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- Ba Luvmour: Oh, in America, it's right out front. Our goal in public education is to create citizens who could compete in the global economy. It's named that way. It's appalling.
- Steven Arnold: So this is why learn, L-E-A-R-N, is really hiding an E-A-R-N, in there. I just think the L EARN idea is a very sad connection. I wonder what happens when we change the L to a Y, Y-E-A-R-N, and offer something that is just beyond the reach. This is what yearning is about. It's there, it's visible, but it's beyond the immediate ability of the person.
- Ba Luvmour: Excuse me a second, but I just have to ... it's just too bad all you listeners that you can't see the grinning between Steven and myself and his wonderful reaching for yearning. It's just, the energy is just beautiful.
- Steven Arnold: So then the third word that we have to look at, once we've looked at learning and yearning, is to really look at teach. And teachers are a silly verb, and I think it's spelled wrong, I think it needs to be T'-E-A-C-H. To each. This makes much more sense. I give to each what they need rather than, I have a stack of nuts or I have a whole lot of information which I can some, through medical process, transmit knowledge. I don't believe in that process at all.
- To go back to *Peace Experiment*, there is not curriculum. There is no set of ideas that I am going to impart to them except everything and anything they want to learn. So I can teach 14 different subjects at school based levels, so if they ask me an economics question, a math question, a chemistry question, a Shakespeare question, whichever. I'm able to respond. If I can't, I'll get something in that can.
- There's no timetable. We don't start at any particular time in the morning and we don't end it at the end of the day. Technically I open the door at eight and I lock it at five. But sometimes even that's a bit fluid. There allowed to come whenever they want to. For some kids, 9 o'clock is not a sensible time, and lessons don't do early...
- Ba Luvmour: Yes, they don't do well at all, do they.
- Steven Arnold: No. So why would you want kids to arrive at their place of safety already worried and harrowed? So just by taking out the time table and throwing it away, we've given kids back an ability to listen to their bodies. When are you ready to come? You'd think that would

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be a disaster if they never ever came, but they all are desperate to come. And actually, when you have an affirming space, you'd understand that, yeah, this is ... I want to be here.

Ba Luvmour: Sure, absolutely. And if I may just for a moment, I love that you're speaking directly to the insecurity of the age. There is so much insecurity in the age. You have to create safety, you have to create respect, you have to create this recognition of self...

Steven Arnold: Yes.

Ba Luvmour: In order for that student to say, oh, wow, this is great, I want to be here.

Steven Arnold: Some are a bit fuddy-duddy in that I insist on manners, and they always shake my hand as they walk in the door, and eye contact, that they don't eat hot chips out of a paper bag, they always put them on a plate. That we acknowledge each other formally, and I acknowledge you and we use a lot of affirming sort of language.

So, I think that the structures of a society are really, really important. The glue of social, at Montessori we call it the *grace and courtesy*. We see it as a ... *Grace and courtesy* as a lubrication...ummm...*grace* is a lubrication of physically moving through a space with nobility, and *courtesy* is moving through a social space with nobility. So grace and courtesy is very key to us. Because, in order to feel safe, I need to know that I can't use poor language or I can't speak badly of people, but also that they can't speak poorly of me. And that means now I am safe.

Ba Luvmour: Give us some of the ... How many students are there in the Peace Experiment?

Steven Arnold: Currently there are 20 students at Peace Experiment. As I say, this is the third time I've set up a high school. We'll get to about 100 and the last few have got to around 100. That seems to be a good community. Actually for the last 40,000 years, humans have hung in group of about 70 to 100. Most people have about 70 to 100 on their phone speed dial, so they would call friends. So that's about the size of a community.

Ba Luvmour: Where's the funding come from?

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Steven Arnold: My wife and I have put this up. This is a trust if you like. To think about funding, it exists because we know it has to, and then all else comes from there. There is no external funding.

Ba Luvmour: Well as a person who's put his own money any number of times to bring this forward, I deeply appreciate that.

Steven Arnold: The school itself cost 8,000 New Zealand dollars, which is about \$4,000 American, somewhere around there, maybe \$5,000. So it's not an expensive model at all.

Ba Luvmour: No not at all.

Steven Arnold: That's per annum. Schools near us might be four or five times that. So we're deliberately as accessible as possible, and even that being said, if kids say I want to come but I can't afford it, I just say, walk through the door. It's okay.

The funding model is there. All schools in New Zealand, there's a New Zealand school in Auckland, all schools get a little bit of money from the government once you've become registered. We are registered and we're accepted by the government.

Ba Luvmour: Do you have to meet any qualifications from the government?

Steven Arnold: Three things, you need a suitable premises. Our premises is suitable, we have enough toilets. There's enough air and fire exits and so on. Suitable staffing. I've actually been a teacher educator at universities, I sort of tick all of those boxes and my other staff, who are coming on, are registered teachers, which is a requirement in New Zealand. And you need a suitable curriculum. A curriculum is just a set of ideas. So I've just used the New Zealand curriculum.

People get muddled a little bit between five concepts, we're just thinking about those. Curriculum is what we teach. A syllabus is when we teach it. Pedagogy is *why* we teach it. A delivery is how we teach it. And assessment is how we take photos. So all that we're doing, we have a Montessori Pedagogy, but the set of ideas, we can use any curriculum we want to. It doesn't really matter. It's just easier to use the New Zealand curriculum...so, a state curriculum.

I'm not worried about when a child wants to learn anything. They can enter a formal qualification process at any point if they chose to. But really interesting, if you give students the opportunity, would you want to do this or not? They chose not, mostly. They see

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right through the whole qualifications blackmail process. But, if somebody asks, “oh, what about jobs?” In New Zealand we also have another way of approaching it if you want to get to a university after high school. You can get in when you're 20 anyway. You don't have to have any qualifications. You just go straight in.

Ba Luvmour: That's nice. That's part of the New Zealand system of education?

Steven Arnold: Yeah. That's standard for everybody. Also, if you left school and you suddenly decided to be a sound engineer but didn't have the required bits and pieces, there are so many bridging courses that all just, you pay to get, whichever core classes you need to get you there. I'm a little bit opposed to creating a 15 year institution called school that pummels out people in case they want to go to university, which, in New Zealand, only a quarter of them do, and even then, they only go because, they're sort of socially trained that that's what happens after school, rather than I'm passionate and desperate to learn. Many people, even after a three or four year degree still have no clue who they are.

Ba Luvmour: The Pedagogy is *about* subjects. You're not integrated as a whole-person with your learning. It's the learning rather than yearning, it's not the yearning. When the yearning is actualized, then it becomes part of who I am. Then it's, I can either go or not go, if it's gonna fulfill more of my yearning.

Steven Arnold: It's interesting to use the word integrative. We kind of use it as a short hand. There's a fallacy in the word integrated in that you must disintegrate first, in order to integrate. You have to take the whole world experience and cut it up into math, into science, into grade three, into grade eight, in order to put it into little bits. Then, people think they're marvelously insightful, and they say, oh, we're integrated, we put it back together. It is a bit of a buss word, and obviously I work for TIES, TIES *The Institute of Education Studies*, talks about integrative learning. But really, holistic is a much safer word, but it just gives a few spiritual kicks that some people find a little bit tricky. There's a few barbs in there.

Math is just looking at the world through one set of glasses. The same world can be looked through art glasses, or sound engineering glasses, or human development glasses. It's the same world. A concept I have is an idea of a...I graph $1 \text{ over } X$ graph, so this is a *hyperbole*, and you can't see this, but I'm sort of drawing a one over X , the more that we go into ourselves, the more that we go out into the world and the more we go out into the word, the more we

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understand ourselves. These are the basic constructs of setting up an education system.

Ba Luvmour: You mentioned your wife. Is she part of this whole education process?

Steven Arnold: We met at teachers college, actually, we met on the stage at teachers college, so she's a dancer and she's a community worker. She works with palliative care, so this is people in their last stages of life. She works with rape crisis victims; she works with people who have had some challenges. She's just able to walk beside these people at this time. She is totally, totally sportive of what we're doing. You know, there's some financial challenges, the idea of going to work every day and just pumping love out is very, very important.

My Master's Thesis is called *Loving School* and the double entendre there is an institution that provides love, but also the individuals who also love attending. So loving school has got a really important aspect for us. Mallika is, yes, on the board. In fact, she and I are the board, and that means that we're free to do whatever.

Ba Luvmour: That's great.

Ba Luvmour: It's teaching story time.
Briefly, teaching stories invite us to see the world with a new perspective, often featuring a wise person, a wise fool, or a trickster animal. It can be humorous, and often have many shades of meaning shining throughout the story. I have told teaching stories for the past 40 years, and I love them, and I have to tell you, each time I tell one, I learn much more in myself.

Today's teaching story is entitled, "The Robe."

John, an old friend of the wise fool, called one day. The wise fool said, "I am delighted to see you after such a long time. I am just about to start a new round of visits, however. Come! Walk with me, and we can talk."

"Lend me a decent robe," said John, "Because as you see I am not dressed for visiting." The wise fool lent him a very fine robe.

At the first house, the wise fool presented his friend, "This is my old companion, John. But the robe he's wearing, that is mine." On their

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way to the next village, John said, "What a stupid thing to say, the robe is mine indeed. Don't do it again." The wise fool promised.

When they were comfortably seated at the next house, the wise fool said, "This is John, an old friend whose come to visit me. But this robe, the robe is his." As they left, John was just as annoyed as before. "Why did you say that, are you crazy? I only wanted to make amends, now we are quits. If you don't mind," said John, slowly and carefully, "We shall not say any more about the robe." The wise fool promised.

At the third and final place of coal, the wise fool said, "May I present my friend John. And the robe, the robe he's wearing, but we mustn't say anything about the robe, must we."

Let's have some fun interpreting this teaching story. Become a Patreon supporter at patreon.com/remarkableeducators, and you have access to our detailed comments on how this story applies to education and parenting. Of course, that's just our perspective. The fun comes with community dialogue as the many shades of the teaching story come alive. See you there.

Steven Arnold: I think a big part about *Peace Experiment* is that we totally encourage failure. We encourage parents to accept failure, and we really promote it. For example, on Friday afternoons we have a big meeting and everybody gets tougher and we have a big plastic spoon. Whoever won the spoon last time, last week, gets the host a conversation and people tell spoon stories. "Oh, I was an idiot, I went to, I bought the wrong thing, I spilled ink on my computer, or, I flushed my phone down the toilet, or, or, or, or, or, or." Then at the end, we're laughing, we're almost competing for the spoon award. Embedding this culture of being friendly with error, celebrating failure, laughing at yourself, teenagers can get very serious about their own inadequacies and imperfections sometimes.

This becomes bedrock of our community. When things are going wrong, we say, "You're gonna get the spoon award this week," or "Wow, I can see that you're really gearing up for a spoon award, here." Gives us a language that we are accepting of the perfection of humanity which means that we're accepting *fallor ergo sum*, which means, to err is to be human.

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Ba Luvmour: Err is to human, sure.

Steven Arnold: So this idea that we are meant to fall off the edge every now and then. And trying to stop somebody falling off the edge is counter to the development of a human mind.

Ba Luvmour: Well, I know that you're traveling the world, and you've told me that you just came back from Bulgaria. I'm interested, so, do you talk about, is that what you're doing? Talking about the *integrative* in your travel?

Steven Arnold: I used that as an example, but my specific idea there was to look at adolescence as a group of people who are navigating the world so beautifully. Their individual adolescents see the world as changing, as dynamic, as challenging, as threatening, as difficult. Navigating a new body, navigating new social relationships, independencies, looking out and trying to find out where they fit in. Part one.

Part two is the human species is going through a time where we are unable to identify where authorities have come from. Our ability to make decisions is so different, we can't say, hey dad what did you do in this situation, what is that received wisdom. Our world is changing and dynamic.

So, for me, it seems that we have a group of experts in dealing in this space. I think it will be really useful for us as the wise adults to actually stop and listen to say, *adolescents, I don't know how to do this space very well. I'm sort of stuck in rhythms and patterns that I've established over decades. You're really good at this. You know how to navigate this space.*

I wanted to say, in Bulgaria, that we are, it's the right thing to listen to adolescents. But not only out a polite, sort of, oh, aren't we lovely people sort of way, we're desperate to hear how the guardians of the planet are forming. So that we can assist them.

I've found all of that, and I think it's a lovely concept, and I think it's just worth sharing just quickly. In the Pacific Islands, they have two ideas of time. A common wisdom idea of time is that when we look in front of us, we indicate the future. This is five years, this is 10 years, and indicate forward. We indicate behind our back as the past, as in, a year ago, or when I was a child. As if we're walking through time forwards, but, we can't see the future, so our eyes are closed, and we're not looking at the past. So it's a very insular sort of time.

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The Pacific Island concept of *te-wha* is that we walk backwards through time. That we can see in front of us, yesterday, and there is 5 years ago, and there was when I was born, and this is my origins. These are my origins and in fact when you stand up and speak in Maoridom, which is the native language of New Zealand, native culture to New Zealand, you introduce yourself and say, "This is my mountain, this is my river, these are my people and these are the influences on me."

Tomorrow, when I go, is behind me. So we walk backwards through time, we can see the patterns that have been established in our life relationships and we can use that as a wisdom to predict what might happen next. We're engaged with the history. So I used this in Bulgaria as a vehicle to say, actually let's look back to our own selves as adolescents, our own inner wisdom, and Montessori uses the phrase *follow the child*. Often interpreted as *follow the child* in front of you (i.e., the little being that you are to take care of.) But actually for me, there's a sense of *follow the child*, the inner being that formed you, that created you.

Ba Luvmour: This is all very exciting for me; I can't tell you how many times I've said to educators, parents, go backwards. Go backwards. Everybody wants to go forward, results, consequences, what might happen. Go backwards. Who are you now, how did you come to what you see, how are you organizing yourself in relationship to this moment. Go back, go back.

I also wanted to say, I wanted to check it out with you, because, we get a lot of putting teens down, naive, and so on. The way I have always talked about them, myself Josette is that they're taking enormous responsibility for their life because they're saying, wait a minute, I'm insecure, I don't know what's going on, but I have to develop this sense of self. I have an inner yearning, an inner, not compulsion, but an inner yearning, is a good term, to go ahead and see how this *self* works in this world. To me, that is such a touching statement of I'm gonna take responsibility and I don't quite know how to do it.

So we talk about their ideals as ways for them to use and organize and develop their sense of self.

Steven Arnold: Yes.

Ba Luvmour: What do you think of that?

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Steven Arnold: Well I think that they are developing and that that sense of self is changing. There are some essences that come through, probably not in our lifetime, but through generations of DNA or cultural expectations or social expectations that come through to shape us as well. The individual is trying to make sense of the world. The child is in a much better position to do that because they're not blurred.

Even if we look at a physics model and we lift an object into the air, at that point, the object has a lot of potential energy, even if no actual movement. It could do anything. As it falls, and I imagine the object falling as our progression through life, it actually loses potential. It has less and less pathways that it could fall to. As adults, we could be doctors and we could be scuba divers and we could be astronauts, but actually, we make life choices, and we become less and less able to see ourselves through different lights. We actually lose potential.

I think that what you're saying, in my interpretation, could be that we need to listen to the youth who have that multi potential. Not that they have a set path to follow, there is a sense of that, but that their range of acceptability is so much more.

Ba Luvmour: It's open and it's beautiful. We've also noticed that this age also is interested in what we might call the shadow. For instance, most of the tickets to horror shows or the purchases of those types of books. Also a lot of their reaction to their culture of their parents or their situation is to look for, I don't really want to call it the dark side, but look for what's not being acknowledged and bringing it forward. I feel their really put down for that. I feel that's part of what you're saying, is their open to this wide sense of who we are.

Steven Arnold: Maybe another example of that would be, I think that we're living in an anesthetized time. Instead, we don't have access to feeling. After being in a very loud room, I remember driving home one time and reached to turn on the radio and the radio was already on, i.e., I was seeking to up my stimulus because I had been used to a very, very high level of stimulus. I think that a teenager seeking a horror or seeking an extreme experience is trying to feel again. Trying to get that idea of aesthetics. Feel wonder, feel joy, feel sadness. In fact, we know when people are down and sometimes they cut themselves, they just need an intense rush of emotion, any emotion, because it's the flux of emotion changing from one state to the other that we like. It isn't necessarily better to be happy or sad, but moving from one to the other gives us the currency to feel ourselves.

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We do this in group because we can't see ourselves until we see our impact on others. So, wow I act, I have no idea who I am, but I can see that you respond to me in this way. Now I can see who I am. So we learn, we develop outside of our beings.

Ba Luvmour: In our work we've noticed that the years between eight and 12 are virtually ignored. There's terrible phrases, like *tweens*, as if these aren't whole people going through their own developmental growth and to us, I feel pretty strongly in this, that there is a lack of understanding how this huge emotional development that kicks in by about eight or nine, and it's just ignored.

Steven Arnold: Yes, and the stupidity of educators is highlighted by the most fundamental change that will ever occur in a human being is moving from a pre-reproductive state to a post-reproductive state. This is big. This is the idea of puberty if you like. It's the idea of becoming a contributing member to society. But the physical characteristics are largely ignored. They are not addressed at a public level when we don't embrace it or have cultures of all rituals in modern society that see it as a positive thing. It is a whole lot of negatives and even relationships themselves become a twisted sense of a disempowering process rather than this, wow, I'm a man. I'm not a part of homo sapiens. I'm a woman. I have developed an ability to reproduce.

The ages eight to 12 are exactly the time where all of this ability to reproduce has come through. Now, you ask, you give any body that potential, if you ask the chair to reproduce, it wouldn't. Then imagine if you said, "You do have now the ability to reproduce," what a tremendous shift in understanding self and other that that would be. There's so much to learn from. These people who, because we're scared of them, and they are teen-toddlers, they have the same brains of a toddler, but the bodies of an adult, and they are just wondering around the planet, they create fear in others and so we ignore. And I agree with you. And I think it's enormously damaging.

Ba Luvmour: Enormously. So much about relationship community. If in the earlier years and then in the teen years that sense of place and safety and security, those years are about relationship and who we are together and how that works together.

Steven Arnold: From an individual point of view, they would just see it in quite basic terms as my body is different and no one is acknowledging this, or, yes, sex is of interest or not of interest but its thrust upon us. There's different understanding of how my body works and what

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my body is. It is so profound; no one has graced puberty at the right time or with the right amount of this, or the wrong amount of that, or at the right rate, or accepted in the right way. At a time where I think they are emotionally fragile, because of these big significant changes, their behavior is sometimes erratic. As adults, but that is actually ignored. I don't know why.

Adolescence is seen as a time where we can't trust them. I think that what they do need is a really high level of trust. At *Peace Experiment* I say the answer is yes, now what's the question? That's the trust level we have.

Ba Luvmour: I have spent many years bring *Rites of Passage* back into our culture, to the best of my ability and I've had the great fortune, good fortune of facilitating many, many Rites of Passage. We've had a lot of success. Recently, we've created a Rite of Passage for kids between the ages of nine and 12 with boys and girls together. In my pretty extensive study, it's the first coed intensive Rite of Passage that I know of in history, frankly. And I speak to friends from the Native American communities and so on about this.

Certainly the *Coming of Age* or the Rites of Passage in the 14ish year is probably the most known and celebrated throughout history. Do you have any sense of that?

Steven Arnold: I'm a fan of ritual as well, in fact I'm a marriage celebrant, so that's a way of people creating a new life together. I do enjoy ritual. I think that we have to be careful that the ritual retains its meaning. It's almost like the ritual can't be just on traditions because the traditions would be empty without the meaning. For a group to create themselves a meaningful Rites of Passage that has dignity and is recognized by the adult community...

Ba Luvmour: Well that's part of a Rites of Passage. A Rites of Passage isn't only a ritual. A Rite of Passage has distinct parts, one of which is a profound recognition by the community.

Steven Arnold: Yes. If we give children an opportunity to become adult, then, what does adult mean. I think one of the reasons why we degraded our Rites of Passage is because, maybe I'm out of turn, but the adults are acting like adolescents. It feels like adults are not taking responsibility for the planet, for each other, they're not ... *Peace Experiment* obviously has three frames, peace with self, peace with other, and peace with the environment. It feels to me that adults are very much stuck in an adolescent *me, me, me, me, now, now, now,*

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now, here, here, here. There are only three things on their mind, me, now, and here. While we're stuck in that frame it's hard for teenagers or approaching teens to see themselves as maturing if there isn't a standard to mature to.

I think there's a little abdication of self when you become an adult and that you're no longer out for an individual benefit but perhaps taking a greater care of the community. I think hand in hand with the work with ritual, which is absolutely necessary in terms of marking a...hey, you've got some extra bits and pieces now, but also with that we actually need to put a pressure on, an expectation on people to say, actually, as an adult, these are your contributions and you need to make sure you can move beyond immediate meeting of your own needs. I don't know if it's fair to say, but it does feel to me that we've got a very adolescent society in that respect. A lot of people are about *me, now, and here.*

Ba Luvmour: One of the interests of mine, and I'm wondering how this fits in is, bringing awareness of death into life and bringing it and making the appreciation or the relationship or somehow even a direct experience, not obviously with one's own death, but with *what does death really mean and how do you live it as part of the education process.* Is that something that comes up in the Peace education work?

Steven Arnold: Absolutely, Mallika's work is with the dying, so this is a big part of the world view. We need to help students to appreciate life through understanding what aspects of death are, absolutely. Death itself, they play around with the language of suicide so much more, it is actually trivialized. Now, we're not to hold life as if it's more important than death. Death is a very, very key part about life, and I think is very important for teenagers to understand, for adults to understand. But actually, you throw a few video games at somebody you just click on restart, and you do that long enough, you realize, actually, nah, I'll do this life, and if I stuff up, I'll just start again.

I don't know if that trivializes our relationship to the profound, but I also want to celebrate that we are seasonal as humans. We have a growth time and a dead time and then there will be a regrowth of somebody else. Realigning with nature is fundamental, I think, for us to support the kids to, teenagers, adults, everybody to know that there is a ... death is just the next thing that's going to happen. It's not to be scared of, it's to be respected, but it isn't the end as in a dismal, or glamorous, or high celebrity. It's just a full stop.

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Ba Luvmour: Thank you. What haven't I asked? What would you like to share with our listeners that we haven't covered?

Steven Arnold: I have a 17 year old student who wrote a book, this is a while ago now, and she wrote a parenting book, not as a parent, but from the teenage perspective. I think the voice of the adolescent is the voice to share at this point. She wrote the book, the book is called *You Shut Up [Re-defining teenager]*, by Eva-Maria Salekova. *You Shut Up* is straight to the parents saying, *just chill. We're gonna make it through. Don't worry about us. Yeah we're gonna stuff up, but so did you. In fact, probably we're gonna stuff up less than you did because parents don't always tell their kids what they get up to when they were young.*

The idea of the book is also just to say, *we're going to get it wrong, but actually we're doing a hell of a lot better than you think we are, can you just trust us, please.* I think that that message is a really important one, or trust, and safety. If they get it wrong it's not the end of the world because adults get it wrong and that's actually okay.

So as opposed to think about if ... What is the ideal adolescent going to be, if we're so critical of adolescents all the time, what is the ideal adolescent? The ideal adolescent is the one that is stuffing up, is trying out adult relationships, is trying out different ways of managing a human body. It's the experiments. You can hear that in the title of our school. It doesn't say *school* in the title because *Peace Experiment* sounds to me like an open ended experience. Whereas *Peace Experiment School* sounds like a closed experience.

I want the teenagers to experiment. I want them to feel like this is their world and they can do whatever. I suppose, giving high faith, I trust in the teens—even at 11 years old, but Montessori goes all the way to, my youngest child that I've enrolled is six weeks old at a Montessori school—gives the students independence and knowledge knowing that they're going to get it wrong. Or at least, different to what I would do if I were there.

And I suppose it's useful just to end on that statement where often we run around with a template of the world, there is *right* and on the other side there is *not like me*. I different to self. Wrong is just therefore that which isn't me and I think we want to support teenagers to know that they are right, even if they're not me.

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Ba Luvmour: I'm really delighted that you were able to come all the way from New Zealand and of course you've been traveling and just, may the *Peace Experiment* just grow, and grow, and grow. Thank you so much.

Steven Arnold: Great fun, thank you for having me. Cheers.

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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.