

# **MEETINGS WITH REMARKABLE EDUCATORS**

## **PODCAST TRANSCRIPTION OF**

**Richard Lewis**

with host

Ba Luvmour

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**Meetings with Remarkable Educators**

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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.

Ba Luvmour: Today I hope you're brimming with joy because I certainly am. Richard Lewis, for 50 years...let me emphasize that, 50 years keeping alive through in public school systems the experience, the knowledge, the connection, and the meaning of imagination in children. He's published several books. You can find them on our website, ***www.remarkable-educators.com***. And under the show notes, all of his books and all of his many accomplishments are listed. He started Touchstone Center and in Touchstone Center he's brought together all these many artists from all the different disciplines in order to help us understand, connect, and keep imagination alive in children. I'm just so happy Richard has chosen to join us, and here we go.

Well Richard, welcome. Welcome to meetings With Remarkable Educators and thank you so much for joining us, it's so appreciated.

Richard Lewis: Well, thank you Ba.

Ba Luvmour: All right. Well I wanted to start with a little quote from your book, *Living By Wonder: The imaginative life of childhood*. Because I was just so touched by it and I hope that it's a good introduction to what we're going to talk about today. And in this in a chapter called, *the story the child keeps*. There is a paragraph, and you wrote a paragraph and it starts like this.

*In the classroom in New York City not long ago, a child who was frightened by a story I told about a tree that could listen and with its ever-changing leaves, talk to us. At first, Joel did not want to believe what I was saying. I was challenging a reality he had carefully fashioned. Then one day when he realized how the story could allow him the life of his own imagination without asking him to forfeit everything he knew of this world, he wrote, 'It's amazing how the wind moves the trees. It moves my mind also. When I look at a tree, I feel brave and bold. When the wind blows through the trees, the trees whistle in tune for beautiful music. As I listen, I smile.'*

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How ever do you bring this forth in children, this incredible world of imagination that is so evident in your 50 years of work, that inspires you, and what inspires you when you're with the children?

Richard Lewis: Well, let me go back to the poem and Joel the child. I think one of the things though, that is so extraordinarily exciting for me, is the sense that a child comes to this already equipped to be imaginative. And it's only because in some cases, not all, but some cases, children have been told that they don't have an imagination. Or they can't see a tree or listen to a tree, or imagine a tree the way we were speaking about here. So part of my goal to some extent is to help the child really overcome that fear, that he or she can listen to the inward voice that is their imagination and allow it to come to life.

Again going back to my sense and feeling and strong sense of feeling of this, is that every child is born with the capacity to imagine. It's only through again, a variety of situations that they're told again, that they're not imaginative or there's been very little room in their life for this kind of thinking. And so my role or my teaching role on that level is to somehow bring back the confidence the child had initially in its own imaginative thought.

Ba Luvmour: So can you tell us more what you mean by somehow? Is it an in the moment arising with a particular child or a particular class, or are there certain understandings or, I don't know what the right word is? Tricks or techniques that you have? I don't mean to insult you here, I'm just trying to understand deeply what we mean by “somehow”. Because it almost sounds magic from out here.

Richard Lewis: Yes. Well, prior to his writing that particular poem and his particular imagery that he brought to the surface, it just didn't happen obviously. There was a lot of work going on initially in the room where I was conversing about a tree. And becoming the tree myself, and asking the children to imagine what it must feel like to be a tree. And there was a conversation built in and around that duality of communication. So the room, if you can imagine the room with a group of children in it, in a school. It's not anything to do with tricks or anything like that.

It's really the idea where I might come in with a branch as an example, a simple branch. And hold it up and begin to say, "I would like to bring this branch to life. I would like to get a sense that we could bring leaves to it and we could bring roots to it. And somehow, allow ourselves to enter into the life of the tree itself." And through this conversation... And again, we have to imagine for a second that there are other children in the room and they're all

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part of that conversation initially. So there's lots of different inputs going on at the same time. Some children will suddenly say, "Oh Richard, I can see the leaf growing on that branch. I can see the roots growing of the tree." And then I might push it a little bit further and say, "Can you see the colors of the leaf? Can you see how long the roots are?" And we keep going further and further into the imagery that's being suggested by my question.

So a piece of writing that comes that you shared with me in this particular situation really came about in a group conversation. And I might also as part of that conversation before we even begin to write, I might ask everybody to really just for a moment, gather themselves and close their eyes and imagine that tree that we're speaking about. And then we might begin to draw the tree. As in all of its possibilities, and through the process of actually making an image of it, a visual image of it, words begin to come to life. And those words of course will be different with every child.

So there is a lot of play I would say, play of the imagining itself that's going on within the room as we're talking. So that the fear that I spoke of initially, the sense that the child might be frightened by its own imagination slowly, slowly, hopefully evaporates. What you read often can be the result.

The conversation that we were having with the children gives an overview of the process that we would go through in order to help the children really begin to feel comfortable at home with their own imaginative visualizing in this case of the physical tree so that they could imagine themselves.

And then from that physical drawing, we might draw some more possibilities. Just for sake of discussion, all the children draw their particular image of a tree. And I might ask a particular child to come up and talk about the drawing, and the child might have a lot of leaves on the tree that he or she had drawn. And I might say, "In the winter time, can you feel how those leaves must feel as the snow falls or if there's a wind, what does the wind feel like as it touches the tree? And what does the tree feel like as the wind is moving through it?"

So we just keep opening, opening, opening up possibilities of how our imagination can literally take a single image and let it grow and grow, until each child feels comfortable to explore basically on its own.

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- Ba Luvmour: Wow. That just sounds fantastic. Is it true across all ages? What's the spectrum of ages that you've worked with in this way?
- Richard Lewis: Everything from the youngest of children to the oldest of oldest, yes. It's always interesting. That's a very interesting question in terms of the age because sometimes I've given teacher workshops and we've done a very similar process. In the same way that the child is afraid, the adult is often afraid.
- Ba Luvmour: I would imagine they had a harder time than the children in many ways.
- Richard Lewis: Yes. And interestingly enough, sometimes they get so excited. Now I'm talking about the adults, that we can't stop them. It's almost as if they've rediscovered their own marvelous sense of childhood and its way of perceiving. And I always comment on that and I say, "Well in a way it's that the link to childhood doesn't end. It's a continuous process." So that even though you were perhaps put in a position where you were being asked a question that I asked of children, that your ability to visualize, to imagine is still there, and it's still as powerful as ever as it was in childhood.
- Ba Luvmour: Let's just get your scope of work clear. I want to talk about the early years, but first I want to ask...so you basically go into schools, right? Into New York City Public Schools. Do you go into private schools or other kinds of schooling or educational options as well, or pretty much exclusively the public schools?
- Richard Lewis: Well, I would say a large part of our work has been in the public schools. Basically because I wanted to get a full spectrum of possibilities in this case within the city of New York. And a way that I could begin to see, working with an enormous diversity of children, how we can do the very thing that we were just speaking about. But I also go into school other kinds of schools that are not public schools. Whenever I'm asked to go, I'll go. A majority of the work over the years in terms of the Touchstone Center has been in the public schools. Yes.
- Ba Luvmour: And when you go in, is it for a class period or are you there for an extended week, or a whole semester? How does it work in terms of time with a particular class or group of children?
- Richard Lewis: It's a very good question. Most of the work that we did in the past, it's changed a little bit now because I've moved into another phase of my life. But most of the work that we've done is usually done collaboratively with other artists. I work with visual artists and

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theater people and dance people. So we work as a team, and we go in often for long-term residencies. And a lot of the explorations that we've done are based on very elemental themes and images. The sea, the sky, the earth, language...the birth of all these qualities of our human sense of perception and imagining. So we have the long-term projects which sometimes go from 10 to 15 weeks, once a week. We work very collaboratively with the teacher so that whatever we do in the classroom that hopefully he or she will then pick up during the week when we're not there and explore it with the children as well.

And prior to our working with the variety of classrooms that we work with, we try to give some workshops for the teachers ahead of time so that they understand that the process that we're going to go through. And then sometimes even workshops after we've actually left that particular classroom to bring it all together. Now, one thing that we've done pretty much through all the residencies that we have completed in the schools is we would publish a little booklet of writings that all the children have done over that particular period of time. And each child gets a little booklet. And then on the very last day, we often share the thoughts and writings that the children to put onto paper. And there's often a lot of visual material as well. Paintings, clay work. In many cases we've done movement and theater things so that it's interdisciplinary in the best sense of the word.

Ba Luvmour: Tell us a little bit about the teamwork among these various artists. Do you get together beforehand? Do you have professional rehearsals as to how you going to approach it? Do you talk about the particular demographic that you're about to engage with the school system? How do you go about it as a team?

Richard Lewis: I would say again on a general sense that we do a lot of work ahead of time. We do a lot of thinking, planning, talking. We constantly, even during the residency process say the 10 weeks that were there and a particular classroom, often after the class has ended, we find a quiet place and we talk and we go over what we've done. So there's a lot of in a sense behind the scenes work that goes on as we go into the classroom and before we go into the classroom. So in the deepest and best sense, we're collaborating with each other and collaborating with the teacher and the children in the classroom. So eventually what begins to happen is that we're all doing this together. The adults and the children working together towards a specific realization of an image or realization of a theme, and so on. So yes, to answer your question simply, there's a lot of work ahead of time and a lot of work post-processing going on as well.

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- Ba Luvmour: I'm just sitting here just so excited in just the wonder of it all. Peel back for me. Let's go back the 50 years when you started all this. What drew you to it and really just run us through it in a brief way the history of Touchstone in your history and your involvement in this. Because I've been around in this field a long time as well and I've just never heard of such a great program, especially in the public school systems.
- Richard Lewis: Yes.
- Ba Luvmour: It may be that Marni Binder [Podcast on 1/23/18], up in Toronto has something similar going, but not like this. So give us a little history here, Richard.
- Richard Lewis: Well let me go back to just some of the essentials which started the whole process. In my twenties, I was floundering around a little bit, thinking about what I wanted to do. I had studied music composition in college. I originally started in philosophy, worked into English literature and then music. And I had all these different avenues of interests. What eventually began to happen after I graduated from college is that I did a number of different things that had nothing to do with education. A lot to do with particular things that I was still pursuing, which was in terms of music composition, in terms of writing and so on. In any case one thing led to another. And I was working at the time for a publisher in New York here, Simon & Schuster.
- I only can say this because I think this is truly what happened. I got a kind of insight one day when I was walking in central park that I should be listening to children. I don't know where that particular intuitive insight came, but I acted upon it and asked a friend if he knew of any place that I could go to begin working with children. And sure enough, he said to me that he knew of an art center in New Jersey. Englewood, New Jersey where they might be interested. So one thing again led to another. I applied to for their position there to teach something dealing with literature. And what happened is that they scheduled a whole series of literature classes with a group of children between, I would say it was between 8 and 11, 8 and 12 on a Saturday morning in the back of an antique store.
- And I came in with a whole curriculum so to speak, of *what are we going to teach about English and about storytelling* and all that, poetry. And I could see within the first five minutes that there was this glazed look.
- Ba Luvmour: There it is, right? Here he comes, another lecture.

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Richard Lewis: I thought, "Oh no, I'm doing the wrong thing."

Ba Luvmour: So sensitive of you. So many people just don't notice the glaze and just blow right through it.

Richard Lewis: So I quickly did a turnaround and I thought to myself, "I think I should begin to ask some questions." And I asked a very simple question. I said, "How did you get here today?" And they began to tell me, well some of them walked here and some of them were driven here and some of them, their parents walked with them or some of them walked by themselves.

In any case I realized as they were talking and as they were answering the questions, their eyes literally lit up as if *oh, you're asking us a question*. And I think that was the beginning of my realizing that my role is to be both a listener and an advocate of the things that the children were seeing and feeling, to help them bring it alive for themselves as they were bringing it alive for me. And in that process, and literally I did a complete turnaround, so all the papers that I had had to work with and read from. I basically put them aside, and we just began to talk about things that they were interested in. Their dreams, the things that they saw, the things that they felt. Went on and on for any number of weeks.

And it was out of that, that I really began to see something in terms of my future, where I could possibly go with the deep interests that children seem to show when you showed an interest in them. And overlaid upon that was my concern for the almost the deeper, poetic, imaginative world that they were bringing out as we were speaking. And I think it took me one step further, which was how do we reach this poetic quality of imagination within each child? And in and around that, my sense that every child has that from birth. And if that's the case, why does it not stay with children? And why does it somehow be looked upon as an entity in education that is not supposedly teachable or even part of the so-called curriculum? So that was the beginning. And I can go on further obviously, into all the other pieces of the puzzle where it finally shaped itself.

But the thing that it actually did for me after that particular experience is that I decided I wanted to go around the world and see if my sense of childhood was correct in terms that no matter where I would go around the world, that children everywhere had this innate quality of the imagination, and in particular a poetic sense of their imagination. And out of that grew a number of books. One was called *Miracles*, which was a collection of poems written by children from English speaking countries, which was published by the very place that I was working at when I had my momentary insight in

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central park, Simon & Schuster. And that was followed by another book called Journeys, which is prose by children from all over the English speaking world and so on.

So that was the beginning process of I guess focusing on the nature of the imaginative process. But in the deeper sense, the nature of childhood and its capacity to imagine, and the need for the imagination in the deepest sense.

**Ba Luvmour:** Richard. When you say something came alive in you, I wonder if you could tell us how you've grown in your sense of self as a person? We might even reach deeply and say into your being qualities, into your consciousness. Has this way of living and working and being in the world, how has this affected you?

**Richard Lewis:** I would say probably in the deepest sense, it's become the central part of my life. And it's affected me in a way that I really perceive the world around me. I would say to answer the question in an arc of being if I could put it that way, that I've begun to see or I began to see a sense that the imagination in childhood is not something we give up within childhood as we move through various parts of our lives. That in fact, it's an entity of growth that no matter what age you are, it's continually there. And if you know that it's there, then the question is how do you preserve it? How do you keep it alive? How do you allow it to be something that becomes central to your sense of perception?

So it's absolutely been not only central, but it's been a way in which I'm able to encompass a sense of human growth and a sense of what it means, I guess on some other level, the sense of what it means to be a human being in the best sense of that.

**Ba Luvmour:** I've also, as you know, been involved deeply in working in working, I don't want to say working, just being with children and learning in the relationship with them. And I have found it changed everything, including my relationship with my wife, with nature, with the mystery and wonder of the world. Really, right down to my toes. And I don't mean this simply intellectually at all. It has a whole way of being in the world. It's just so powerful, isn't it?

**Richard Lewis:** Oh, it's absolutely. Absolutely. And in a way, what it's done is that it's reconfigured my sense of childhood learning, and the idea that perhaps we're doing it backwards. So much of the time we're bringing children perhaps too quickly to a sense of factuality where they lose too quickly their sense of play, their sense of imagining, their sense of the poetic relationship they have with the world. And

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again in a deeper sense, the biological source and root of the imagination being something that is not simply a piece of human thought that is added on for good measure. But is central to how we think and how we perceive the world around us.

Ba Luvmour:

**It's teaching story time.**

Briefly, teaching stories invite us to see the world with a new perspective, often featuring a 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, with great effect; not only for the listener, but also for me as I have learned so much about myself for recounting these stories.

**"The Smuggler"**

Time and again, the wise fool passed from Persia to Greece on donkey back. Every time he had two panniers of straw, and trudged back without them. Every time the guards searched him for contraband. They never found any. "What are you carrying?" they asked. "I am a smuggler."

Years later, more and more prosperous in appearance, the wise fool moved to Egypt. One of the customs men met him there. "Tell me now that you're out of the jurisdiction of Greece and Persia living here in such luxury, what was it that you were smuggling when we could never catch you?" "Donkeys."

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I'd like to return. You know a little bit about my work and Josette's work in holistic human development and how we try to connect with the being qualities, the essential nature of children. And how we see it unfolding throughout childhood really up till age 23. And I'm wondering, can you tell me more about some experiences with different age groups and just do you notice a different way of connecting to imagination or different opportunities or different, you might say, depth exploration by a given age group or anything like that?

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Richard Lewis: Definitely. Well certainly when I work with three and four and five year olds, it doesn't take much to start an imaginative conversation. I could come in with a simple marble, hold it up, and I can say. In all earnestness, I can say I sense that inside this marble, there are some stars that are alive. And all the children lean forward and listening in a way that they're not just only listening, but they can see the stars inside the marble.

So it immediately makes me, I would say, understand in the best sense that the early childhood has this ability, flexible ability to encompass the world where they are both the object of what we're talking about, but can grow from that object. So the stars and the marbles, let's use that as an example. That conversation, I can almost guarantee would go from where I could maybe ask one child to come up and give the child the marble and say to her, "Can you take that star out of the marble and hold it up, and let it shine within the room itself?"

And without hesitation, the child will pick up that marble and with two fingers, take the star out and let it shine. Then I might ask another child to take some more stars out, until we have all these little stars that are focused and put within the tips of our fingers. And the story can go on and on and on, obviously. I can also say, "I think the stars might need some time to sleep." And then we put the stars down on the ground, on the floor. And as the star sleeps, it dreams. And as it dreams, we can actually go into the dream of the star. So going back to the question a little bit, I think what becomes apparent or what has become apparent is that the richness of the early childhood's mind is almost incalculable. It's something that I never actually, even when I began this work, realized the depth that the child can go in extending itself way beyond the pure fact of something. Way beyond what we assume the child might be capable of doing.

I think it's that gift of play and that gift of allowing itself, the child allowing itself, to be merge into the very thing that we're speaking about. It's the best of the imaginative process in that level.

Ba Luvmour: Well, what happens then as the child gets older? Let's say if you're with the fourth graders, around 10 or so.

Richard Lewis: Yes.

Ba Luvmour: What do you notice there?

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Richard Lewis: Well, when they're 10 of course, they've been told somewhere along the way as we said earlier as we spoke, you can't really become the tree because the tree is out there and you're here, and that's the difference. And I think also it's where the scientific mind sometimes intercepts the poetic mind, and where the scientific mind says, "There's reality and then there's what's not reality." So that boundary line so to speak, begins to make itself apparent.

Ba Luvmour: Well Richard, let me interject here for a second because we've noticed in holistic education and also in holistic development. And when I say in holistic education, we noticed it from the Steiner's and the Montessori's and the John Holt's, and the many, many great educators who have also come from them or succeeded them, I guess. Is that that imagination is really alive in a very powerful way between nine and 12. But it's generally speaking, the curriculum or what the great psychologist Alice Miller called the poisonous pedagogy. That beats it down. But that when we've noticed that when we actually honor that there's even if you will richness and a depth that comes forward in the nine to 12 years. Have you seen anything like that at all?

Richard Lewis: Oh, absolutely. Just to extend what I was saying, what ultimately appears is that it doesn't take too long to reach beyond what children have been told they should be thinking and not thinking, what to imagine and not imagine. To open up exactly what you're saying is that the richness is there. In fact, I worked a lot with junior high school students. And I would say the richness continues even in a greater velocity at times than nine and 10 year olds might be doing. Because it's going back to what I think I mentioned earlier is that that quality of thought doesn't really disappear. It's going back to what you just said earlier, which is I think is the curriculum basically dictates another form of thinking.

And that curriculum on many cases, overrides the child's innate ability to think the way we're speaking. So I agree with you 100 percent. It's there, it's totally there-

Ba Luvmour: I'd like to extrapolate on this just a little bit because it's a basic understanding of mine and again in holistic thought if you will, is that actually wellbeing, the whole movement and the whole energy towards wellbeing is an inexorable energy moving through us. Imagination is really seen as a critical field in allowing wellbeing to manifest. And when I say wellbeing, I'm talking about in the whole of the child. Emotionally, intelligence, socially, in every single way. So the imagination in this way is seen like I say, as a field in the whole quality of wellbeing that lives in each of us.

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Richard Lewis: Yes. And I think going back to that quality of wellbeing that you're speaking about, I think if it's really opened up the way we're referring to it. It allows what we call the natural world to merge with the human world. And that merging allows, I think, the child to feel that I'm not separate from something that's out there. I'm part of that phenomenon called nature. I am the very nature that is the nature out there. And I-

Ba Luvmour: I love it. I am the very nature that's out there. That is just the heart of the whole matter. So beautiful.

Richard Lewis: Absolutely. And I think once we can get to that point in working with children where they make that realization, then they make the next realization, which is the imagination is a natural act of being. It's not a segment of thought, but it might be the very nature of thought itself. And if that's the case, then it opens up a whole level of thinking by the child to see that they have a sense of control, a sense of empathy with their imaginative life. And I should just mention here too which I think is certainly relevant to what's going on now within our own country, that they begin to see that there's the capacity of the imagination to create, and the capacity of imagination to destroy. And that duality, that unfortunate problem in which so much of what can be called the imagination can actually move into a very negative, destructive capacity.

So if children are aware of that, I think it becomes something that they allow themselves to see well, how do I integrate the creative capacity of the imagination so that it becomes a very, very substantial part of who I am, and what I'm doing, and where I'm going so to speak.

Ba Luvmour: So do you have conversations of this depth with your whole team? Does the whole team as you go in have the same commitment to the quality of the student and understanding that what you're awakening in the students is this profound humanity and this profound naturalness? Does the whole team know about that?

Richard Lewis: I would say one of the things that I've been graced with is the people I've been working with, I've worked with for many, many years. Often we stay in one school or we stay in one school for over eight or nine, 10 years.

So not only do we get to know each other as a collaborative team so to speak, but we get to know the children and the parents, and the faculty teachers in a way that it becomes a community of people working together. This is not to say that we don't have some uphill

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battles. Obviously within any educational system, there's always gonna be some problems. But to your initial question here that the people again, the artists that I've worked with have all been persons who are totally inspiring to me, and totally part of this process that we all do together. So it's been a blessing on that level for me to have that kind of community of people that I work with.

Ba Luvmour: Well, I'm sure many of my listeners as educational professionals and often in schools which have alternative means of funding are wondering how do you fund this? How has this been funded? Because with all the school budget cuts and just the general disrespect to school needs, where did the money come from?

Richard Lewis: Well, from many different foundations. New York State Council on the Arts, the city gave us money. School board of education gives us money. A variety of non-profit funding sources, which in itself was and is definitely another mountain to climb, as funding at different points of time has either dried up or we have to find new sources of funding.

So we've been fortunate. The Touchstone Center was started in 1969 and arts education or the *Artists in the School's Program*, I'll put it that way, was just in its infancy. It was not something that was a part of the public school situation.

I was fortunate to be one of the first persons to go into public school as an artist, a poet in residence in a public school downtown, Lower East Side. And nobody had ever heard of this idea of a writer, a poet going to a classroom. But it was at that infancy point that there was a lot of interest in figuring out a way of bringing the artist who could work as a teacher inside or into the school itself.

So funding began to creep up and began to be a part of the process that we had to go through. In order to survive, we had to obviously...

Ba Luvmour: Are there other groups similar to yours? I know I worked a long time ago with a group called *Stages of Learning*, which was off Broadway actors and actresses bringing Shakespeare into the public schools. A man named Floyd Rumohr was working out of the *Brooklyn Academy of Music*, and I had a lovely association with him and their group. So are there other groups like yours around?

Richard Lewis: I would say there are definitely many others. But I think in terms of the way we worked, we were unique for a certainly a long time in terms of working both collaboratively and working very much

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towards the realization of these elemental images and themes. So that there was always at the center of what we did was the nature of nature itself. How do we probe that? How do we open that sense of the world?

Ba Luvmour: What about in other states? Again, one of the aims of this podcast is to get this great workout to more, and more, and more people.

Richard Lewis: Yes.

Ba Luvmour: And I just wonder about people in other states because frankly, I just don't hear a it in the public school system. Like I said, I hear about it in Canada Public School system sometimes, but not in the Indonesian and the Japan, and other places where I've had contacts. Certainly not often in America. So do you hear about, is there a network of great programs like yours that you're aware of?

Richard Lewis: Well, there's one organization called the *Association for Teaching Artists*, which is up in Rochester, New York. It was one of the first organizations to organize in and around that question, to bring together the all the groups of individual artists as well as organizations like Touchstone under one roof. I believe they have a website and a Facebook and so on. You can go to that Facebook and to the website, and you'll see there's an enormous amount of information about the diverse groups that exist certainly in the United States. But there's also been a lot of international interest in this too. I know certainly in England and in Australia, New Zealand, all those places do have different modulations and theme and variations of what we're talking about.

It comes and goes to be honest with you. Depending on the political arena and what kind of pressures are being placed upon schools. Certainly now in the I would say last 10 years with the accountability being so high in terms of schooling, the role of the artist is sometimes put pretty much on the sideline. So one has to figure out different strategies of you get around that sideline. And I've been fortunate to work with schools and individual artists and principals to be able to integrate whatever we've been doing into the schools themselves.

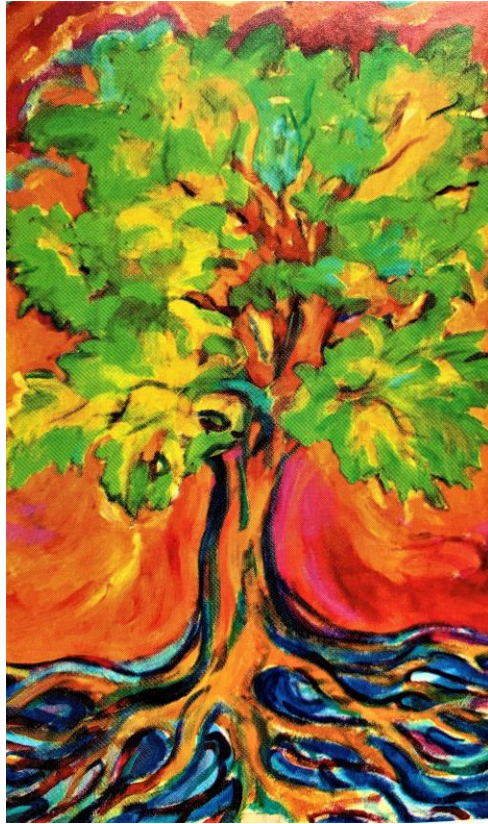
Ba Luvmour: That's what I hear time and again, that if you get a principal on your side or the superintendent, that that's the way to make it work. That it can happen at that level.

Richard Lewis: 100 percent. Yes.

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- Ba Luvmour: Well Richard, we've been talking while. So I'm wondering what have I not asked? What would you like to bring forward here that I haven't inquired about?
- Richard Lewis: Well, I thought we began with that beautiful poem about the tree, right, In the wind?
- Ba Luvmour: Yes.
- Richard Lewis: I wanted to go back to a project we did called *the Tree of Knowing Project*, was a project we did at the East Village Community School in the Lower East Side. And the concept of the project was to do exactly what I said earlier, was how do we interface with the life of a tree? And so the life of a tree becomes part of us and vice versa. And much of what I do as part of the projects that we've done over the years is to, I create a poem or write a poem that becomes a center piece out of which we work. So I wrote a poem which was then made into a small presentation in which visual artist, Noah Baen, built a little stage and we presented to a number of classrooms in the school.
- So let me just read you the poem itself, and some of the things that grew out of the poem in terms of children's reaction. And unfortunately there's a lot of visual art that went with this, but since you and I are just talking on the basis of person to person voice mail so to speak, let me just do the reading aspect of it.
- Ba Luvmour: If you have any pictures of it, you can send it along and then I can correlate it when we do the podcast so people could see some pictures when they go click on it.
- Richard Lewis: Now, I did send you the book actually. A Tree Lives.
- Ba Luvmour: Oh, right. Sure you did. Oh, I love that book.
- Richard Lewis: Good. All right. So I think those are pulled together some of the strands of thinking that you and I have been thinking through here. It goes back to that question you asked earlier. How do you get the qualities of thought moving so that children can begin to ask the questions that you and I have been working with as well? So here's the preface to the little stage performance we did, and it goes like this.

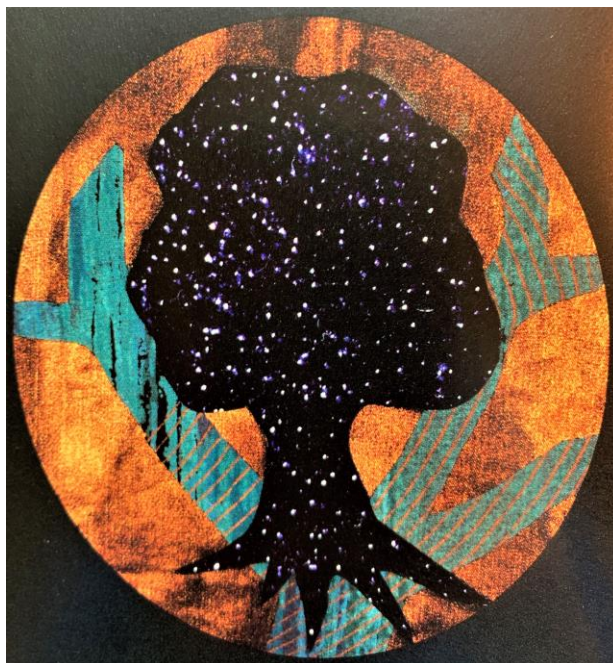




***A tree knows when to let its leaves open. It knows how to  
take water from its roots, how to bend with the wind,  
how to grow tall, and full, and alive.  
A tree even knows when to sleep, letting its leaves fall to  
the ground, its branches waiting for another spring.  
But does a tree know the wetness of rain, the cold of  
winter snow? Does it know how dark the night becomes,  
how long a day can be?  
Can it smell the air?  
Can it hear the birds?  
Can it see the sky?  
Because a tree is, can it ask, can it answer?  
Can it, like us, imagine?***

So that was the first thing that I would read with the children, and then we would do the performance based on the poem which I'm going to read now, which was basically a puppet theater performance in which a tree, imagined tree would come alive within a puppet stage setting. And from there after the poem was read, we asked all the children to create tree of imagining, the tree that they could perceive in their own imagination. So here's the poem.

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*In our backyard, a tree lives.  
In its leaves—spring winds.  
In its branches—hungry birds.  
In its roots—moving waters.  
And inside this tree  
another tree lives.  
In its leaves—distance skies.  
In its branches—shadows of stars.  
In its roots—dreaming darkness.  
And further inside  
another tree lives.  
In its leaves—a moon grows.  
In its branches—the sun returns.  
In its roots—a day begins.  
And further still  
is there another tree—  
another tree  
living inside?*

Ba Luvmour: As you're reading this wonderful poem, I'm looking through the book itself and the wonderful, it looks like watercolors. Were they watercolors that the kids were using to create these great images to go along with that poem?

Richard Lewis: Yeah. They're very large paintings and they were done in acrylics.

Ba Luvmour: Oh, acrylics? Wow. All right. Well I can heartedly recommend this wonderful book. It's called *A Tree Lives*. And it's by Richard with illustrations by Noah...

Richard Lewis: Noah Baen.

Ba Luvmour: All right. And you published it yourself out of Touchstone I see.

Richard Lewis: Yes. *Touchstone Center* Published it. Right. Exactly.

Ba Luvmour: That's great. Thank you so much for that.

Richard Lewis: If I have a moment, I'd love to just read a couple of the ... there are a few thoughts here. The children wrote as they drew their picture after they painted their painting of the tree. All right, this is by Valentine who's seven years old. She said,

***My leaf needs kindness and stars,  
and snow in order to grow.*** ~Valentine, age 7

And this is by Case, age eight.

***I think we know what a tree dreams,  
because at night we sleep next to a tree.  
And it is like two thoughts together.*** ~ Case, age 8

And Donovan, age 11.

***My roots have a heart,  
a heart that's a source of the tree.  
My root's heart is like water  
that makes the tree live.*** ~ Donovan, age 11

I could go on, but anyway. There is some children's reaction to the sense of what we were talking about, of how to bring the interior world of the tree, the interior world of themselves together. And in a sense, from that to realize that at the center of that is the imaginative process, the imaginative act which is both within nature and within ourselves. So going back to your question about wellbeing, hopefully that's a moment of wellbeing.

Ba Luvmour: Hopefully. I think it rings and sings of wellbeing.

Richard Lewis: Thank you.

Ba Luvmour: It must be just so, so rewarding for to have a really from 1969, that's kind of a risk and to go through the ups and downs of what's

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happened in education since then and just to carry this all through. It's just incredible warrior spirit in the best sense of the word. And I'm just touched to my roots.

Richard Lewis: My roots are tingling too.

Ba Luvmour: So Richard, just thank you so, so much. And actually I hope this is the beginning of a lot of conversations between us.

Richard Lewis: That would be wonderful. That would be wonderful. And thank you so much.

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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.

Reference:

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