

MEETINGS WITH REMARKABLE EDUCATORS

PODCAST TRANSCRIPTION OF

William Greene, PhD

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.

Today's guest, William Greene, is Professor of Education at Southern Oregon University, which has rapidly become a center for the international holistic education conference. I met William eight or nine years ago, and we shared immediately our great love for holistic education. But most importantly, William is at the center for bringing holistic education to a worldwide audience.

Hey William, welcome to Meetings With Remarkable Educators. We're really happy to have you here today. So, one of the aspects of your work that I've always been kind of in awe of, is your ability to bring an international audience to the holistic education community. Can you talk about that a little bit?

William Greene: Well, yeah, I mean, bringing people together I think, is maybe one contribution I can support and be a part of. And with the team that we have here at SOU, and the facility, and the location, we saw it as an opportunity to be able to provide a hub for people, a place for coming together, for inspiration. And being able to reach out to some of the networks that we've been a part of over our careers, and that others have been a part of, has enabled us to widen that circle as we've looked to hosting conferences here. So I think that's been a big part of our excitement about being able to have a place that brings people together that other people see as one of many models for holistic practices, and holistic work.

And then of course, it also provides a springboard for us to be able... us from our local area, to be able to participate more internationally and globally in work that's happening in networks elsewhere.

Ba Luvmour: Well, when you do that... I mean, at the last conference, there was a strong Asian representation from Thailand and Korea, how do you actually go about it? And also, there must be a considerable expense in bringing all that together. And I ask you this, because there is so much of a need for holistic educators to network, and to understand one another, and like I say I'm a little bit in awe of it. So what are some of the specifics, how do you actually go about it?

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William Greene: Well, we were inspired initially by the conferences that the group at the University of Toronto, and OIC were putting on under Jack's leadership and others in the Toronto area. And the ability to bring people from different places, from different countries, and different states to a place where they could dialogue and learn from each other. We here at SOU, a number of us have been involved for many years with group such as the Pacific Circle Consortium, which is a group that was founded maybe, I want to say, 37 or 38 years ago with a group at the University of Hawaii in Honolulu. And that group began to cast a net around the Pacific, and particularly Pacific island nations, and East and South East Asia, and included largely the countries that border on the Pacific side of the circle as well all the way down to New Zealand and Australia.

And that group has focused over it's long run, on various issues of policy and curriculum. And maybe 15 years ago or so, part of my involvement with that group, was to help maybe turn the spot light a little bit more on teacher education, and teacher education for the future. A few years ago, I got introduced to the Asia Pacific network for holistic education.

Ba Luvmour: Is that with Yoshi?

William Greene: Yes, it's with Yoshi.

Ba Luvmour: Yeah, Yoshi's been a guest on this podcast, excuse me, but as has Jack Miller from Toronto.

William Greene: Good. So yeah, and that group really helped expand my own awareness and network in what was happening in the Asia region. And so, through some of those contacts, we were able to establish a couple of relationships that have blossomed into some beautiful connections. One of them for example, is this school in Thailand that we have now been able to organize a memorandum of understanding between our institutions with. And we've had a couple of exchanges happen where they've brought some of their students and faculty here to SOU, to Ashland Oregon, and been able to involve themselves in local schools, and in our conference, the last conference that you referenced. And then we were able to take a group of our own faculty and some of our student teachers from our elementary education program, to the school in Bangkok about a year and a half ago, and spent some time in their classrooms, and in some of the workshops that they organized for us.

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So, yeah, those were just a few examples of the different networks that made it possible for us to be able to, maybe, be aware of and invite people to our last conference.

Ba Luvmour: That's great. It's interesting, because Josette had a Master's student that she mentored, and actually ended up coming to the conference, and now he's teaching over at the school in Thailand.

William Greene: Oh, is that Jason?

Ba Luvmour: Yes, Jason. Jason was... Josette worked with him for years.

William Greene: Jason and his wife, yeah, they're both there. And I was so thrilled to hear that they made a connection at our conference with Pappa Phat and some of the other folks at [Roumaroun 00:07:02] School. And then, I was over there just in... I was just over in November, and I was able to spend some time with Jason, and we had quite a good talk about what it was like for him and Lindsay to find themselves suddenly at this beautiful holistic, Buddhist, Tai oriented school on the outskirts of Bangkok, and what it was like for them in their early months of teaching there.

Ba Luvmour: That's great. I love the connections, and of course, that's what this podcast is so much about, and people like yourself making that real. But for our listeners, SOU, is Southern Oregon University, and as William just said... you just said William, is in Ashland Oregon. So I've been there of course many times, and it's kind of a small university. How do you have the resources, and the ability to bring that international audience together?

William Greene: Well, it's not through the benevolence of a large bank account anywhere. We knew from the beginning that it was going to need to be a self-support run conference, and that in order to sustain itself, we would need to stay in the black each year in our financial records, and to not put our school of education in debt. And as long as we could manage to do that, we would be able to offer it again. So with the generosity and help of some of our invited speakers, or keynotes that have accepted probably far less of a stipend or honorary than they might have gotten at a larger conference, we were able to build something that was able to pay for itself and give us a little bit of seed money for the next time that we host the conference here.

Ba Luvmour: That's great. Well, you're a Professor of Education, is that a right way to talk about your title there at SOU?

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William Greene: That's my title, I guess, yeah.

Ba Luvmour: So how do you have time as... I mean, you have class loads, research, and all that you do there, how do you have time to be at the center of this conference and this international community?

William Greene: Well, I guess it just goes to that idea of finding the things that put us into flow, and to some state of exhilaration and self-actualization. And being able to work on something that I feel so committed to really at this point of my career, I think that's part of where you just find the energy, and you find the desire. But really, I'll tell you where it lies, is with my colleagues who are part of the planning and part of that whole encouragement and motivation for each other, but also from the students and our local teachers, who become part of the conference too. And I really... I mean, I see that as kind of an extension of my own teaching and scholarship, in the sense that, if we're not able to give our students the opportunity to network with us, and to see some of the things that we value in our classrooms and in our teaching in real life, and in real examples of people who are doing the work, then I think we're doing them a big disservice.

We're not following our own... perhaps our own vision for what it's like to go beyond just words, and beyond talk, and beyond even classroom experiences, but to be able to take them out of that and put them into a larger circle, a larger community of holistic visionaries.

Ba Luvmour: So you talked about this as an aspect of self-actualization, and being in a flow, and just actually enlivening, and enriching, and energizing, rather than depleting. Can you tell us a little bit about how you came to holistic education, or to the way you envision it or live it in a personal sense?

William Greene: I would be happy to give you a little quick sketch of that. Let me first back track just a little bit to talk about my use of that term self-actualization, and the use of flow. So both of those can be seen as a very sort of, having been germinated in western perspective of perhaps psychology and maybe human development. And a colleague of mine whose been a big part of my work here, and a big part of our conferences, recently shared with me a really intriguing idea from a first nation's perspective, from an indigenous perspective about that idea of self-actualization, and how on Mazlo's hierarchy, that's kind the goal I suppose to be a self-actualized individual. And it's also from a western perspective, a very individual orientation.

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But my understanding of a more first nation's perspective and perhaps indigenous perspective, might be that it's just the beginning where we move from that to more of a community actualization. And then from community actualization to cultural perpetuation. And that idea has really been... has really stuck in me these last few weeks as I've thought about how I live that, and where that... why that's resonating with me as it is.

I mean, we understand that the idea of seven generations, and how planning in many indigenous cultures and indigenous educational perspectives involve that longer range. And it really made me think about the work that I do with my students in regard to self and self development, which is really important. That's a big part of... For me and teacher education, self development is the umbrella as the container for content, theory, skills, practice. To me it's all in the circle of self development.

So when I think, "Well, where does that come from for me, and my holistic view and practice?" So, since I've become an older at belt, I suppose, and learned more, acquired more knowledge in the world, and my vocabulary has widened, and I've been able to think about looking back at my own teaching history in my practice, I wouldn't have called my early practice holistic education. I didn't know that word in the early 1980s. But I look back and I see that actually, it was holistic in a large sense, and I had a lot to learn, and I still do. But when I think about how I started, and the degree to which I felt the spiritual nature of a classroom, and of connecting with students, again, I wouldn't have used the word spirituality in those days. But I can see that those early seeds were there.

So, when you live a life and then you suddenly become touched by something, you're touched for a reason I think. There's something that's already a truth, or an embodied sense that what you're learning or what you're hearing, what this new thing is, is right, and it's true. And I guess it was kind of that way for me when I started this latest journey with holistic education in, say, the last 10 or 12 years, has really been a rediscovery of that probably earlier truth that was felt, but not necessarily understood.

Ba Luvmour: And that is... Thank you so much for that. I mean, I think many of us as holistic educators can both resonate with it, and just accept our own version of that as accurate within ourselves. And I know for me, the learning in relationship has just entirely changed my understanding of self, and universe, and relation, and community, and just all the way through.

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It's teaching story time. Briefly, teaching stories invite us to see the world with a new perspective. Often featuring a wise fool or trickster animal, they can be humorous with many shades of meaning shining through the story. I have told teaching stories for the past 40 years, with great effect, not only for the listener, but for me as I have learned so much about myself through recounting these stories.

Today's teaching story is called, how foolish can a man be? The wise fool was found pouring wheat from the jar of his neighbors into his own at the communal wheat store. He was taken before the judge. "I am a fool," the wise man said. "I don't know their wheat from mine." "Then why did you not pour any wheat from your own jars into theirs," demanded the judge. "Ah, but I know my wheat from theirs, I am not such a fool as that."

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How is it that SOU is okay with this, because it's obviously not in the traditional university systems, and you're part of the Oregon University system. So do you ever get any blow back, or feed back that what you're doing doesn't work in your professional community at SOU?

William Greene: Well, I came to Souther Oregon University from Honolulu, that was our last stop before coming to Oregon and the University of Hawaii there. And University of Hawaii, is a research one institution, SOU is not. We're a regional comprehensive university, and we serve a fairly high number of first generation college students, of a demographic that I've just been grateful ever since I started here, to be able to have the opportunity to touch lives that, for first generation in a family that are sending their children off to school, to college. And I think that the uniqueness of the location here, Ashland is known as kind of a cultural... I guess you could say, a cultural pocket, and one of many in Oregon. But it's a lively town. There are a wide variety of cultural opportunities in the arts, and literature, and writing, and outdoors orientation.

So the values that have sort of steeped here in the hearts of people who live here, and in the campus community, the SOU community,

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reflect that to some extent. They reflect a certain way of thinking, way of knowing that I like to think is, more than just a very stoic kind of traditional academic campus. And I feel like because of its size, we're about 5000 students roughly, it varies from year to year, and the fact that people here have really chosen to be here, many people are faculty and students too, have had other choices to teach elsewhere, to study elsewhere. And those who remain or choose to come here, are those who sort of find that affinity with a kind of openness, a kind of open heart, open mind, to new ways of thinking about.

So that's part of why I think there isn't the kind of blow back that might occur in a different kind of place. I have felt really fortunate to be able to be in a place that values teaching to a great degree, and values service to a great degree, and values scholarship to a great degree, but not to the obsessive degree that occurs in many other places. So it allows faculty who are finding their niche, and finding their connection to things that they're excited about and interested in learning about, it gives us a lot of flexibility, I think, to do that.

And so, my own teaching has been along that path of being able... feeling free enough to be able to explore while still teaching classes that meet teacher standards and practices commission standards for licensure. And to still be able to produce course outcomes that satisfy the accreditation bureaus. But to be able to begin each class for instance, in a sacred circle with a dollar store candle in the middle, and lights out, and opportunity to come together in a way that allows us to see each other in new ways.

So even though we begin with that piece, we begin with really an opportunity to show up, and to be present, and to be aware of each other and of ourselves, then gradually that circle expands and dissolves into content, but in a way that is never very far from those precious moments in class where the Vaha, that space between people is just pulsing with a kind of love.

Ba Luvmour: My heart's just beating with you as you speak William. It's beautifully said, and rendered. I wonder have you followed any of your students after they've graduated and seen any kind of outcomes or choices that they've made?

William Greene: Yeah, we have. Not real systematically. I think that's not just our thing here that we have neglected, I think it happens a lot of places. But I think we've been aware of the importance of that. We have done some things that really allow us to I guess, follow up and

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track, and get feed back from students who have been through our program... our programs, I should say. One of them was, about 10 years ago, we introduced the idea of core reflection into our elementary ed and our secondary master's program. And we had a group of students that we thought connected to through that work in core reflection.

And we decided when they got jobs the following year, and were suddenly out of our nest and out into the world, we thought about how heartbroken we would be if we were to find out that suddenly they had kind of forgotten the ideals that they were connected with, and the program, and forgot about what they found out about themselves and instead began to be socialized into maybe some ways, in education, that are more towing the line sort of ilk status quo. And we thought, well, this is an opportunity to sort of keep those chords connected a little bit longer.

So, we began to meet with them, invite them back once a month to come into our houses, we'd trade professors houses and provide snacks for them when they come, and a hot beverage or something, and we'd just turn a tape recorder on and put it out in the middle of our group. We started out with different numbers, 10, 12 sometimes up to 15 people, and maybe three or four faculty members, and we just let them talk. We just let them talk. And we didn't have an agenda, we were very intentional about that. We didn't have an interest in teaching anything, we just were interested in allowing them an opportunity to connect.

And then, we were curious if the process of being able to reconnect to ourselves through the work of core reflection, and through other approaches that we used, whether it would make a difference for them. So we did that for the first year, and then the second year, and then the third year, and then we found out that some of the teachers that started with us, kept wanting to come back each year. And so the group would continue to change, and evolve each year as new students were added to it, but then some, for different reasons stop coming. But we had a core group of about six that stayed with us for, I think seven years. And we ended up writing a chapter about them, and about what it was like in this journey of being a beginning teacher, but being able to have this connection.

So, through that work, we were able to... And now, many of those teachers that have been part of that group are cooperating teachers, or are supervising teachers, or student teachers in the field. So that has been a real... That was a real gratifying project to be a part of.

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And in other ways we continue to see students come back if they've gotten undergraduate degrees, they come back for master's work. And we're now putting together a special endorsement in holistic education. Well, it's not called an endorsement, a specialization in holistic education for MED students, and a minor in holistic education for those who might be in our elementary ad or licensure program for undergraduates.

Let me add one more thing Ba, I'm sorry I keep tacking on here.

Ba Luvmour: No, go, rock and roll. I mean, it's just fantastic stuff, so please.

William Greene: The other way that we were able to find out some about our students, is through the work of our conference. And I think that, as I mentioned earlier, was really... we started that in 2014, so I think that venue, being able to bring local teachers and even our current students who have been a part of some aspect of our holistic journey, and courses, and to be able to bring them into a larger community, gives us a chance to see they get re-energized, they get excited, the inspiration comes. And they have words too, to be able to share things with that holistic community that tie them into it, and I think bring a lot of validity to the work that they're already doing.

Ba Luvmour: It's just great stuff William, and unfortunately podcast time is what it is. And I'd like to offer to our guests, the opportunity to give a parting comment, and especially keeping in mind that there's lots of people, lots of listeners, who are, we might say, on the fence. They're students and they still have that aliveness in them, and they really want to know a different way but they're a little bit nervous, and can they get a job. And parents too. Parents are very concerned with, "I know the public schools don't necessarily do a great job, I know a holistic approach is really useful." So what words would you bring to the people who are just about to move over to what we might call a more holistic perspective?

William Greene: Well, my words would be this I think, that there are many ways to think about what a holistic approach looks like. It's not... There isn't one holistic approach. I teach a philosophy of ed class, and we talk about philosophies from essentialism to existentialism, right? And you can be a very holistic essentialism, you can be a holistic existentialist.

I remember at our last conference, Jack Miller's words in our opening reception, and you might have been there Ba, when he said

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very simply, "The role of a holistic educator is to be a loving presence." And I guess, if I was going to make a quick comment to those going into the field, or to parents, or to policy makers, that when we think about educating, educate, the root of education to draw out that which is within, and to think about our role if our role is to be a loving presence, how can you go wrong with that. We can still meet standards, we can still teach content, we can still practice new skills, and we can do it with love, and compassion, and... Yeah, I guess that's what I would say.

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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.