

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

Ayers Institute “My Why” Podcast
Episode 9 – July 2019
Title: *Greg O’Loughlin*

SPEAKERS

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INTRODUCTION:

RM: For some it is a decision made after a moment of epiphany. For others, they can't imagine a time when they wanted to be anything else. They are teachers. They are leaders. They are life changers. These are their stories.

GO: My name is Greg O'Loughlin from East Nashville and this is “My Why.”

Invest in creating a culture in your classroom, a community of learners who are not afraid to take risks and be wrong in front of their peers. Take wild guesses and support that. That can be invigorating like no other work I have done can be!

RM: Welcome to My Why: Stories of Inspiration from Educators. This podcast is presented by the Ayers Institute for Teacher Learning & Innovation and brought to you by the College of Education at Lipscomb University, where 21st century educators are prepared to involve, impact, and inspire.

My name is Rachael Milligan.

Today we are joined by Greg O'Loughlin. Now in his tenth year of teaching, Greg has taught 3rd, 4th, and 6th grades and will be teaching high school next year. Previous work experience in service politics and non-profits all inform Greg's instruction and assessment practices and complement his formal schooling in preparation for teaching. He has a B.A. in communications from SUNY empire, an MAT from Belmont, and was a fellow in the summer institute program at Columbia University's Klingenstein Center. In 2018, Greg was awarded the National Public Education Foundation's inspiring innovation award for his work as the founding director of The Educators Co-operative, a non-profit that supports collaboration, growth, and the development of best practices in teaching and learning for educators in all sectors in the Nashville area.

RM: Greg, thank you so much for being here today!

GO: Thanks for having me.

EPISODE BODY:

RM: I'm really excited to get to talk to you about your journey to becoming an educator. It sounds like you've had a lot of different experiences. So, just think back to that– to where it all began.

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GO: I think the first time I got a taste of teaching really was when I was in 5th grade and my dad took some time off and we volunteered to sail on the Clearwater. It's a boat up in New York that sails up and down the Hudson River. That experience, we had to learn about it in great detail the ecosystems of the Hudson River— which is an estuary not actually a river. And then, we'd stop in ports along the Hudson and teach— I would teach other 5th grade kids this knowledge that I gained through the training.

That experience of seeing those "Wow" moments: when you have them and then you share and then you answer their questions. And perhaps you don't know the answer to that but you say, "That's a really good that's a good notion. That's a good question. I want to dig more." Into that process of creating and generating knowledge and sharing and everyone's becoming a part of that learning experience— that was transformative. That was really I think that was the first time it wasn't just that, "Oh, that's mom and dad's job." It's like, "Oh, that's why they're so into this! This is so powerful— that we can build relationships and connections and share knowledge in this way."

That was that was pretty transformative.

RM: Wow! That sounds like an amazing experience as a 5th grader.

GO: Oh, it was.

RM: Talk a little bit more about how you feel like your parents, perhaps, lead you to know that that was the path you needed.

GO: I can't think of a time when I wasn't fully entrenched in the education landscape in as much as both my parents were teachers growing up. They're both retired teachers now. So, our summer break were always together as a family and then truncated a little bit when we go to the classroom usually that helps set up bulletin boards or visit with my folks after school or after class. So, the formative sense of what grown-ups do as a young child they teach. They spend their day teaching kids. So it seemed, at the time, just normal. Just like, "Of course I'll teach."

There were not conversations saying, "We think you need to be a teacher." It was more the loving care about very difficult topics, right. So, they both taught at the time was called Special Ed and my dad was in— they called it E.D. "emotionally disturbed classroom" and my mom taught an L.D. class "learning disabled class" (which are terms no longer used but that's how it was designated). And they would grapple openly and so lovingly about individual students and the need for breakthroughs. And in a way that provided a model that: that's really fulfilling work. They never experienced boredom or frustration or if it was anger it was just rooted in a frustration.

Seeing that, hearing those conversations and seeing that commitment, provided a model of, "Wow, that's powerful work. That's work that you just never figure out. He never you never nail it. You know you can have one really, really good year and feel 10 feet tall the next year be humbled by a whole group of kids for whom you don't have solutions. And that doesn't give you the right to say, "Well this is a bad one." You still gotta dig in. You got to figure out what are solutions. And so, I think that— more than anything— that open grappling, that open process, it was always about the relationships. I mean the number of home visits my dad would do year after year after year, that provided an incredible model for me. For my mom as well, staying late after school with students every single day and staying late to just pour over assessment data to say, "Okay how can I reach these kids a little bit better tomorrow?"

Those weren't lessons like I need you to learn this stuff. That's just what I grew up seeing. That's what I saw at the table. This incredibly human, loving focus on connection and on growth. And that, for me, I

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think really is why I see— I firmly believe that it's the best work. It's the best work you can be doing. It's really, really powerful work.

RM: You've talked a lot about empathy. Do teachers also need to build empathy within their circle?

GO: I think they're hungry for that!

I think that it's a very confusing setting to do your job in which the majority of conversation is based on outcomes and based on products and that process. I think that's why we have found success with The Educators' Cooperative. We're able to value and invest in that part of the work, the art of teaching. And I don't know that they need to do that because we know that there's a deficiency of it. I just don't know that it's clear where that belongs in the space currently.

So, that's what we're trying to create: the space for that. I would think that, in fact, it's probably surplus in empathy for teachers. It just feels weird to walk around with it in a space where it doesn't seem to be a space for it on the shelf.

RM: I wonder if this would lead us to a point for you to sum up your "My Why" story in six words or less.

GO: "My Why" story is, "teaching increases our capacity for empathy." That's my 'why' daily. I think every teacher teaches that. Some of them do it with numbers and math and someone do it with sentence diagrams. But if we're doing it with the long view of creating citizens and neighbors in mind— if we can expose that that grappling process and make sure that that classroom setting is a space in which they see one another as learners. If we do it right, that that can shine a light later onto— if I disagree with somebody, that could just be a result of a process. And the process is the issue and not the product.

GO: And so, let's talk about the reasons why we got here. Let's think about the things that have informed your opinions or ideas or conclusions here. Because if we invest in that part of it— in raising and praising the process over the product— we'll see in one another far more similarities than differences.

GO: So that's my 'why' daily. I tap into that and think, often, about how what we have done today has led to someone in that room just increasing their capacity for empathy. I can't make someone feel more empathy, but just recognizing that that container is bigger and worth investing in is really important.

RM: Thank you so much for being here today.

GO: My pleasure. Thank you.

CONCLUSION:

RM: As we close today's episode we encourage our listeners to consider your own sources of motivation. What inspires you to do what you do? What is your 'why?' Share your ideas on social media using @AyersInstitute and the hashtag #MyWhy. Also, check out the handout including some of Greg O'Loughlin's favorite resources, lessons learned, his six-word memoir, and other helpful information. This handout can be found on <https://eduTOOLBOX.org>.

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Connect with Greg and The Educators Cooperative on Twitter at @ed_cooperative and on Instagram at @educators_cooperative and go to <https://educatorscooperative.com>. We also invite you to connect with the Ayers Institute on Facebook and Twitter at @AyersInstitute.

I'm Rachael Milligan, producer and host for the My Why podcast. This episode was directed by Julia Osteen. Forrest Doddington handles editing and technical production. This podcast is brought to you by Lipscomb University's College of Education.

Thank you for joining us for "My Why: Stories of Inspiration from Educators." Look for other episodes of this podcast and other Ayers Institute professional learning podcasts at <http://podcast.ayersinstitute.org>.