

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

Ayers Institute “My Why” Podcast

Episode 7 – November 2018

Title: *Roger Wiemers*

SPEAKERS

RM	Rachael Milligan	Managing Director, Ayers Institute for Teacher Learning & Innovation
RW	Roger Wiemers	Professor of Education Lipscomb University College of Education (Nashville, Tennessee)

FULL TRANSCRIPT

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.

RW: My name is Roger Wiemers from Nashville, Tennessee, and this is “My Why.”

I wasn't trained to be a research statistics professor. I became that through struggle. And I said messiness in my life. And I just realized that these were things I was failing at, and I needed to be better at them. We have to keep discovering who we are. If we don't keep discovering who we are, then we're not going to be able to be who we are in the classroom. And so, I keep discovering each year.

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 Rachel Milligan.

Today we are joined by Dr. Roger Wiemers professor of the Doctor of Education Program at Lipscomb University. Dr. Wiemers is originally from San Antonio, Texas and has lived all over the world focusing on missions and education. He worked at Tennessee State University for 15 years as a professor with the last three years being in charge of the doctoral programs in education. Roger and his wife Paula have four children and eight grandchildren with another one on the way. He enjoys teaching not administration. And he has a love for the philosophical and reflective approaches to teaching and learning.

EPISODE BODY:

RM: Roger, I'm really excited to get to talk to you about your story in education and the things that you've experienced. And I wonder if we could start with: what do you remember from your earliest educational experience?

RM: I'd say my grandmother was my greatest influence, because she was a storyteller. She was half Comanche and being around my grandmother— who was the matriarch of our family— was the greatest education. Because— it was her storytelling, her teaching you practical things in life, her taking you out into the garden, or among the chickens, or across the field, or anything like that.

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

She taught me how to plant a garden and how to hoe the garden and to take care of it. And so, you know, the first time I chopped up some vegetables, she was strict in the sense that she taught me not to do that but she wasn't harsh in the sense that she berated me for doing that. So, it was a way of learning what was right to do, but without being ridiculed for doing it incorrectly.

RM: What was your journey to becoming an educator yourself?

RW: I think it began before I went to formal school, because when I was 4 years old I had a speech problem. And so, my mom and dad were not rich in any form, but they discovered about an hour away in a university town that there was one of the first speech therapy programs in the United States at Southwest Texas State University. So, they took me there and I went through a speech therapy program for about six months. I went once a week, and my dad would actually ask off for that day. I don't know what day it was, like a Thursday or something, I can't remember that as a 4-year-old. But I do remember my dad driving me every week.

One of the things I learned from that was the value of education. That my dad would take me, would be off those days, and my mom was very interested in it and they put a focus on me. And so, the value of education was where I learned that first.

RM: Some of the resources that you have shared with us focused on the idea of inquiry based education. So, talk about what the impact of inquiry based education has meant for you, and how you have used that in your work.

RW: Wow! It's a big question. I think to just give a little aside that might lead to that: when it was in junior high and high school, I didn't give my best effort because I became focused on other things. I loved football, and so I got sidetracked by football. And so, when I learned that I wasn't going to be the best football player, it was just one of those things that we have to learn things like that. That's okay, I want to be the best at something else. Okay. So, then the inquiry started there.

Can I be perfectly honest? In high school, I got sidetracked with drinking and things like that and football. And so, the drinking got worse and worse into college. And then I had laid out of college for a while. And so, when I went back to college, I just happened to come into contact with some people who love Jesus and that changed my whole focus then as well. And so, then inquiry into who He was and seeing Him as the master teacher made me want to see how do you teach? What is teaching all about? And what is learning all about? Those kinds of things came into play at that time.

And so, inquiry was there on my own part. And I started realizing that people really learn best when they discover for themselves, not when they're told something. (Now that's kind of hard in what I teach today, as you well know Rachel, sometimes you just have to tell people this is the way it is.) But, they actually learn best when they discover it.

And so, inquiry based education became part of who I was after that.

RM: You are really involved in missions and have been for a long time. I wonder what led you to get into missions in the first place?

RW: Oh, wow. It goes back to before I ever knew Jesus.

I went to junior high in San Antonio and there were gangs, and there was fighting. And I was very peace-loving kid, and I got in so many fights— not because I wanted to, but because of the gangs. And I always

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

lost. Anyway, I was becoming fearful of people who were different from me. And I would have said, to be honest, I was becoming a racist, because I was in San Antonio and there were gangs of a different group of people without saying any name.

And so, I went off to a high school, focused on football like I said, and during the summer practice for my first year in high school– summer practice in football. The coach for the first day lined us up said you're going to be mentored by one of the upperclassmen. So, he said, "Okay, upperclassmen here you're going to get to pick."

And we all had to say our names. And here was Wiemers. That stood out; the name Wiemers. (They called me Oscar Mayer all the way through high school.) And so, the middle linebacker, as I would have called him at that time in my mentality, was the biggest blackest guy that I'd ever seen. He was strong. He was powerful. I loved watching him play football, but he selected me! Little Wiemers? He selected me, and so I thought, "Oh my goodness." And with that beginning racial and racist mentality I thought, "Oh my goodness, what's going to happen to me?"

I'll say his name, because I'm so proud of him. It was Julius Whittier. He chose me and he was a gentleman. And I learned from him that people who are different from me are not only equal to me– that, many times, they can be better than me. Because he was better. He had a better mentality than I did. And so, he taught me to be a better football player, but he taught me to just be a better person. To realize that people who are different from me are so, so good. And look at him that way.

And so, when I did become a Christian many, many years later, I started saying, you know: that's got to drive me. That's got to drive me. That I have to see everybody as being equal.

RM: I would love for you at this point to sum up your “My Why” story in six words or less.

RW: Well, I struggled with this, Rachel. I really struggled with this. So, I literally wrote, “our messy lives teach us grace.” Maybe, I should have said “my messy life teaches me grace.” Because, you know, I wasn't the best student in high school. I struggled with finding a career; I struggled with my life of who I was and drinking and focusing on object things like football and stuff like that. All kinds of things like that.

But I've learned that there's grace involved in this that grace that people give you, grace that the Father above gives us. That those things are really the things that teaches me that being an educator is so powerful. That we can teach other people that grace, too. And that everybody has messy lives. Some people more than others and I might claim that mine might be messier than others. But then I look at other people's lives and say, “wow yeah that's pretty messy, too.”

So, I like that word messy. Because mine is. Even though I teach linear thoughts in statistics, our lives are not linear. They're just not linear. And if we learn to realize that our lives are not linear, and that we can learn from everything in our lives, and put those into something that still has grace and purpose and power in it— Hey that's good. That's good.

RM: Absolutely.

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 Roger's

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

favorite resources, lessons learned, his six-word memoir, and other helpful information. This handout can be found on <http://eduTOOLBOX.org>.

We also invite you to connect with the Ayers Institute on Facebook and Twitter @AyersInstitute.

I'm Rachel Milligan producer and host for the My Why podcast. This episode was directed by Julia Osteen. Forest 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>.