



Nat Damon: Welcome to another episode of Reach. Teach. Talk. The theme today is about tribes and the word tribe is actually... It's got an interesting kind of connotation in today's modern society. I mean, we tend to think about tribes in a negative light, at least the media spins tribes as, "What tribe are you from? What's your identity? What's your political affiliation? What's your view on X, Y, Z, religion, whatnot." Something very personal, and people are easily bifurcated into a tribe and in a way that is actually, I would argue very non-constructive.

Nat Damon: It's the idea of you are part of a category and I'm going to view you in this conformist view, this conformist type of tribe, this people, this group, and therefore there's an ingroup and there's an outgroup. And as media makes money on conflict and based on confrontation, then it isn't that convenient to divide people up into your group A or group B, your tribe A, your tribe B.

Nat Damon: However, we're going to flip that on its head because I have an amazing guest today, Dr. Lou Cozolino who is here from Pepperdine. He's a professor of psychology and he works in at the university level and he works with teachers and he works with others. He's also a therapist himself and he wrote a book. Okay, so I'm just going to tell a little story here. I was flying back from London to Boston where I grew up and I was on a plane and I grabbed this book, and I started reading it. And with education books or with psychology books or even self help books, it's rare that I would not put a book down and during the whole six hours of this flight, I read this entire book cover to cover and I would recommend this book to any teacher, to anybody who's, even any parent, anybody who's interested in learning about how the brain and the emotions connect.

Nat Damon: But more than that, not just... You've heard me talk in previous episodes that learning is cognitive and emotional, but it's also social. And with Dr. Cozolino has been able to impart in his book as his main tenet is the social interaction of human beings, and in his case in this book in the classroom, but also in life absolutely connects to the way we open our hearts, open our emotions and open our minds to learning. And Dr. Cozolino, I want to say you coined the term, we'll get to whether you did or not, tribal classroom, which is this idea of being part of a tribe in the classroom and in a positive way like this is a very positive thing because when you're part of a tribe, you're part of a safe, secure, stable environment ethos.

Nat Damon: And I'll let Dr. Cozolino kind of go deep into what this does to the neurology, the neural pathways, the neuroscience of learning. Another reason why I couldn't put this book down in the six-hour flight is because it made me reflect back to

my time being a camp counselor at Camp Becket in Massachusetts in the Berkshires a long time ago now.

Nat Damon: But when I was a camper there, and also when I was a counselor, I didn't have a word, we didn't use the word tribe to define what our cabin group was, to define what our camp ethos was, but we did have that sense of belongingness and a sense of security and a sense of... I can try things and grow in an environment where we have the eight motto's, and we've got the identity that comes with being a member of Camp Becket. And it was that idea that resonated in the back of my head when I was reading Dr. Cozolino his book, The Social Neuroscience of Education.

Nat Damon: This book is available on Amazon. It's available everywhere. It's also an easy read. It's definitely a book that, as I said earlier, so often education science books can get kind of dry and get kind of lost in the weeds. This book does not. It is a beautifully written book and it is a book that is palatable to any reader who's interested in education, in child development, in parenting and teaching. So that intro is all to say, welcome Dr. Cozolino, Lou Cozolino.

Lou Cozolino: Thank you.

Nat Damon: I'm just so thrilled to have you here today, and to do a deep dive into the concept of the tribal classroom and also to hear your thoughts about my opening here too like what are your thoughts about how tribe is looked at today and on a cognitive level, on a developmental level, what does being part of a tribe do to impact learning and to impact growth just in general? So I'll kind of give you that freewheeling question right now just very broad, but just to get to know you better as we begin this conversation.

Lou Cozolino: Sure. Thanks for having me. I think you have to go back. You can't look at the situation of education from the present day. I think what I do, at least is to go back really to the evolutionary context that shaped our brains. So we lived for millions of years, at least hundreds of thousands but probably millions of years in tribes of 75 to 150 people. And in a sense, what happened during that time was that human beings, continued the trajectory of other primates because other primates are very social as well, but we became more and more deeply shaped.

Lou Cozolino: Our brains, our bodies, our minds were shaped into social organs and meter using the analogy of a neuron, say our brain consists of multiple or billions of neurons, but many neurons that can survive alone that stimulate each other and work together to survive. And so nature or evolution did this really interesting thing, took animals, individual organisms and wove them into larger super organisms, which are, you see this in beehives and termite mounds and elephant troops and a million different examples, but wove our minds to not only enhance our own survival, but simultaneously enhance the survival of the group.

Lou Cozolino: So humans are of two minds. We're of the mind, and this is sort of Freud's basic insight. We've got the ego and we've got the superego. So inside of us we have

our own needs and then we have the internalized needs of other people. And that's how we evolve biologically too, and that's what laws and morals and ethics are about is about navigating those two poles of our existence.

Lou Cozolino: And so when you, think about how we learned and who we learned from for hundreds of thousands of years at least, we learned from people who we're related to, who loved us, who we loved and whose survival we depended on and who's... And the teacher survival depended on the student because the student would grow and the teachers would grow old, and it would be the students that would have to take care of them.

Lou Cozolino: So it was this ongoing sort of flow of energy and information and life, biological life force. So when I think about education now, I think about when you sort of have institutional education, which has kind of from my perspective as sort of oxymoron because we didn't really evolve to learn in institutions. Institutions are based more on Henry Ford's model of mass production. So they assume, similar material, raw materials, similar output. None of those things work when it comes to people. You can try to make it work, but as you see it, it works less and less depending on the resources and the and the security and the wellbeing of the students in the system. And so the system works well for privileged people.

Lou Cozolino: Sometimes. Not all the time. Still it only works for a certain percentage of people, but the educational system works less and less for people who have less of a vested interest in the rewards of the culture and have less access to them and have less resources at home.

Nat Damon: Right. So I'm getting the sense here that what you're leading to is a definition of tribe as not necessarily being this conformist. When I started to talking about this, I was thinking about conformity and thinking about kind of that and similarities. But what you just said, it's a shared sense of reward. Almost like goal-oriented mindset, a shared goal.

Lou Cozolino: Well the foundation of it has been survival. And so that really is what's driving it. I think we know people... If you look at tribes for recorded history, how long? It's like back to the Sumerians, maybe 6,000 BC. What we see is that our history is just a series of tribal warfare. It's tribal wars, genocides, and it's still going on. So we're still in the middle of that level of evolution. So a tribe is really a level of organization of biological survival. Or biological complexity, maybe is a better way to put it. And so that's how I look at it. I'm not looking at, you're in a different tribe than I am.

Lou Cozolino: You and I like say we work together, we're starting a company, we could create a tribal mentality, which is what I'm talking about. It's leveraging the biochemistry of plasticity and learning and wellbeing, and asserting those principles into any group. Also think about animals and humans and dogs. They develop a synergy. They can form tribes together. So it isn't necessarily in... It's a principle. It's kind of like thinking of an alpha, if the alpha male or the alpha female, whatever it is. In our culture, we think about that as the gorilla in the

room or someone who beats everyone up. But an alpha is an organizing principle of a group, right?

Nat Damon: Yes. And let's talk about who organizes these groups? Who's a leader of a tribe? What defines a tribal leader?

Lou Cozolino: Well, it's different. It depends on where you are in history. Like if you're looking at tribes over the last few thousand years, at least in human tribes, which you have the biggest, baddest, meanest, most dishonest male usually. Hint, we don't have to look far to find it these days. But I think that if you go back into subsistence cultures and agricultural cultures where survival wasn't based so much, maybe there weren't any natural enemies in the environment, they were much more collaborative. I mean, actually the principles of... When you read feminist philosophy and feminist leadership principles, it's more that it's more of a flat structure where everyone is valuable because people aren't disposable.

Lou Cozolino: You don't have a huge workforce to choose from. You have everyone around you who you're related to and you got to find something for everyone to do. So their strengths are amplified, their weaknesses are worked around. So workaround is a big part of this. You create an environment where everyone feels invested, like they're benefiting from it and a respected member of the tribe.

Nat Damon: So an ideal tribal group would have... You need a tribal leader. You need a leader, but it's otherwise non-hierarchical, and those who assumed leadership roles are not lauding their power. It's not about power, it's about bringing out, in a sense, I'm sensing a lot of positivity in what you're saying here Lou, because it's focused on the positive. Coming together, we can bring out, utilize our strongest assets as individuals toward the collective with this shared goal. Is that right?

Lou Cozolino: Right. I mean, the leader in... Jared Diamond, he's a professor at UCLA he won the Pulitzer for Guns, Germs, and Steel, but he wrote a wonderful book called The World Until Yesterday, which really describes his experience with the tribes in Papa New Guinea, and he just talked about how gaining authority and gaining power over what you have to offer, it's kind of... Maybe it goes back to Greek philosophy. Maybe like Plato, this notion of the servant leader, that sort of thing. And it's existed at different stages of culture. But in a subsistence tribe you can't tolerate... There isn't a lot of extra to tolerate someone who is flamboyant and megalomaniacal or all of that stuff. Someone just takes care of them because they know it's damaging to the tribe. So leadership is an organizing principle and it organizes based on the resources and the needs of the community.

Nat Damon: Wow. I mean, we're living in a time of where you are witnessing the opposite of what you're talking about, of what you're describing here, authoritarian leadership, top-down power, whether in a private sector and political, and obviously in global politics. And what you're talking about is so hope filled in a sense too. It's we can survive together without that, without that oppression. And it's also eliminating fear, right?

Lou Cozolino: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Nat Damon: In any sort of society that's based on authoritarian rule, fear is the guiding principle, wouldn't you say?

Lou Cozolino: It's a mechanism of control. Yeah.

Nat Damon: Which doesn't exist in an optimal tribal community?

Lou Cozolino: No. The tribal community, it's based on expectations, responsibility and fulfilling your agreements because everyone depends on you to do what it is you're supposed to do. You can't hide it in any kind of corporation where you can steal billions of dollars and then declare bankruptcy. There are no shields between you and accountability. Think about someone like a heroic teacher from my perspective, like Jaime Escalante who taught in Los Angeles years ago and he made everyone aware that everyone was counting on them to be part of a group. And if they didn't show up, he went to their house, he found them and brought them in. And so there's this sense of being... There's a lot of responsibility, but there's also a lot of... There's responsibility, accountability, but also commitment by the group to you. And I think that's really what most people, what I see suffer from now. Most people just feel alone in the world.

Nat Damon: You're tapping into a theme, a constant theme I think in these podcasts, which is this loneliness epidemic. And I was thinking about the word social contract when you were talking, when you were speaking a moment ago, and this idea of a tribe of belongingness and a tribe as agreeing to a social contract is leaning into a social contract. And by that I'm talking about just we are broader than our own individual needs and so much loneliness actually. You can be super successful and affluent and have made tons of money and living at the top of the Hill, but lonely is all hell because you're not part of anything relationally. You don't have relationships and connection with others. And maybe you can speak a little to that distinction between living a life of connection with a common purpose versus living a life on your own as an individual?

Lou Cozolino: Along with the evolution of us as social animals, we've evolved into really... We're very similar to neurons in the sense that if neurons aren't stimulated, they die. They can't live alone. There's no such thing as an individual neuron in nature. And I think that we've evolved to be sustained and thrive by being energized by other people and being connected and all of that. And of course there's a huge variability. Some people, like I would say that I'm relatively introverted because that's just disposition, who knows, biochemistry. But I know that I feel my best and my smartest when I'm giving to others and getting from others and being connected and all.

Lou Cozolino: And I remember, one of the foundational stories from this book in my mind was I realized when I was in my 40s or 50s that when I was in school, I only learned from the teachers that I loved and who I felt cared for me. And the rest of the time I was checked out from stress and other things that were going on in my life. But love turned my brain on. And so you look back into... You look at the neuroscience and you see brains have evolved to get activated through positive

regard, attention, focus of other people and being regarded as important and being given responsibilities. That's how we've evolved.

Lou Cozolino: And I think our brains may have almost like a safety element or a safety catch in it where we don't learn from people we don't like, and that could have been also possibly an evolution where people who we didn't know and we didn't love, we were skeptical of and didn't pay attention to. It was almost like a filtration device or a gate that kept us from learning.

Lou Cozolino: So you take a traumatized minority inner city child who has to fight to get back and forth to school. How open do you think that gate is when you're sitting across from a teacher representing a system that has basically neglected him and his family and his people. So again, I don't want to wave too big a flag, but you just look at it. It's like what we see make sense, and you can't throw money at these problems.

Lou Cozolino: You can't give iPods to everybody or I don't know. Do they have them anymore? iPads, I meant. Anything with an I in front of you, you can't just spread thousands of them and drop them from helicopters. Human problems need human solutions.

Nat Damon: Absolutely.

Lou Cozolino: And I think the internet is doing so much to separate us from one another and isolate people and isolate, especially kids, and I fear the results of the technology because people are hungry for tribes, so they get it online via these social platforms. But that doesn't give them any of the natural biological activation that you get in face to face and analog interactions.

Nat Damon: Brain studies show that, right? The two of us talking in a shared space is different than the two of us even if we had a Skype interview screen to screen, right?

Lou Cozolino: I'm not familiar if there's... I mean I would certainly bet that if they did research on this, and if it was good research, they would find that there'd be different processes. There's a lot of overlap, but some things are missing and a lot of things we can't measure because a lot of stuff gets communicated across the social synapse that is ephemeral, that's unconscious, that has to do with things that scientists don't even realize exist yet. Things that in our minds manifest as care or chemistry intuition. We have all kinds of names for it. Paranormal. Sometimes people call it clairvoyance. But there's all this information that's getting communicated that has yet to be... The channels of that communication have yet to be explored.

Nat Damon: So the teacher as a tribal teacher, a tribal leader in the classroom, the tribal classroom would be focusing on that. We'd be focusing on... Or at least valuing in some way defined or not defined in their own minds. A great relational teacher with a tribal classroom would be aware of the connectivity of all members of her class. And so you would have not just the... You brought the hypothetical student coming from disadvantaged background in the classroom

and needing to find that connection with the teacher, that teacher believes in me, therefore I will work for her. Yet there's also this broader look or responsibility of the teacher to create a classroom where that kid, the student also feels like I'm safe in this classroom and that teacher is responsible for creating a sense of tribe in the classroom.

Nat Damon: What would a flourishing tribal classroom look like? Or at least maybe you can share what you've seen in terms of when there's a classroom that's going really well and that really feels cohesive and it has a shared goal and has a tribal focus, what's the feeling of this classroom and how do you gauge it? How do you know that this is an effective classroom or not?

Lou Cozolino: Well, I think that everyone feels that they may not be able to articulate it. They may just say, it feels good here. It feels like a family. That's something that a lot of people say. People don't really use the word tribe. I think they tend to think of natives and loin cloths and stuff. I mean, I just use that term because in reading the anthropology literature, that's just the term that's used and it fits really. I think that's really the thing. I don't know if your listeners are even that familiar with Carl Rogers?

Nat Damon: Absolutely.

Lou Cozolino: Years ago he was visiting Cambridge when I was a student there. I got to spend a week with him, and it was, I think in the mid '70s so I was very much into the fire and brimstone, potential movement and all of these weekends where you beat people up and didn't let them pee and put them through all of these trials and tribulations. And then I met Carl and I was like aghast that like, "How could he be so famous?" He's so calm. He's so soft. He's so accepting. And by the end of the first day I spent with him, I wanted him to adopt me.

Lou Cozolino: He was able, he embodied the presence, all of his principles of positive regard and support and empathy and focus. He made you feel seen and felt. And so I think that it's that basic principle that he stumbled on to. I don't know. I never heard him talk about neuroscience and I don't think the data really existed back then. He created an orientation towards therapy at least. That is an optimal condition for neuroplastic activation, and the biochemistry of learning.

Lou Cozolino: And so of course in a classroom you're not having a one-on-one relationship. You've got a dilemma of it. You can't spend eight hours a day with each kid. You've got to figure out some way to change the social dynamic in the classroom so that each of the kids in the classroom, each of the students can benefit from the existence of the other students. And so the way teachers... But you asked me like five or six questions in one paragraph, so I'm trying to...

Nat Damon: Break it down. Take your time.

Lou Cozolino: So I was thinking what would be on a teacher's mind? Because of course the pressures are getting through the content. Their tests are coming, they've got to, go on. One thing you've got to ask yourself the question is how well is that working for you? And it might be that in some neighborhoods and some classes

and some schools that works fine. And in other classes you've got dropout rates of 50% or 60... You know what I'm saying?

Nat Damon: Yeah.

Lou Cozolino: So is it working? You might have a principle that you like to believe in. But based on results, does it seem to have any validity?

Nat Damon: Right.

Lou Cozolino: Right? And I think when you look at the heroic teachers that I've studied, they've always taken... Marva Collins in Chicago. She got tired of teaching in the public schools so she cleared out the top floor of our tenement building in Chicago. Her husband went to Goodwill, bought a bunch of tables and desks and started her own school. Teaching in modern society, it's almost like a subversive activity when you're doing it with people that the system designed to be marginalized. Right?

Nat Damon: Yes.

Lou Cozolino: Why does it take so long to help these people? Why are there so many potholes in Compton and not in Beverly Hills?

Nat Damon: Right.

Lou Cozolino: Right? Why did it take so long to do research into the AIDS vaccines? Right?

Nat Damon: Right.

Lou Cozolino: All of that stuff. I mean, it's not... I don't know. To some people, it's a mystery, but if you follow the money, you always find the answer, at least in my experience. Right?

Nat Damon: Yes.

Lou Cozolino: And so you've got these schools that aren't funded enough that they don't have enough resources. And of course the teachers get the crap beat out of them, pardon of my English, and so they get burnt out. And then they end up, like most of my teachers in high school. They had the little hip flask or the bottle in their desk drawer.

Nat Damon: Right.

Lou Cozolino: Right? And they just needed-

Nat Damon: A carton of cigarettes.

Lou Cozolino: Yeah. And they just needed to stay a little bit drunk all day to tolerate what was going on. But not the teachers that really cared and the ones that I connected with.

Nat Damon: Or maybe it was the teachers that they cared so much too who are burning out because they care so much.

Lou Cozolino: It could be, yeah. They just leave the profession usually after those years.

Nat Damon: Right. They walk away.

Lou Cozolino: Those are the people we need.

Nat Damon: Exactly. They're the ones who care, the 50% who leave after the first three to five years.

Lou Cozolino: But if I could just... I'm sorry. What you asked me before, it's like what should a teacher be thinking about in a sense, how do you build a classroom? What you're being told is that the curriculum is important and I think you have to do like a 360 or figure ground switch and you have to say no establishing the classroom as a tribe is what's important, and the curriculum will get sucked into the vacuum of the enthusiasm and the interest that you create by creating that social biological state in the students and in the teacher.

Lou Cozolino: So that would be the first principle that I would say that you need to think about. And I think that what happens is that teachers get frightened maybe or the administrators get frightened. We don't have time for this alternative agenda, but it's the alternative agenda that really makes certain classrooms able to function.

Nat Damon: It's incredible that building connection, building trust, communication, collaboration, all of that is looked at as an... What do you call it? Alternative...

Lou Cozolino: Alternative agenda.

Nat Damon: An alternative agenda. You're absolutely right. That is what excellent teachers do and relational teachers do and that's why I focus here on this podcast is to talk to very interesting people about how they build foster relationships in their classrooms, in their organizations, and this is absolutely essential. And combining what you just defined as an optimal tribal classroom with what we were just talking about with the burnout rate in teaching, how about a tribal class teacher?

Nat Damon: Teachers need to belong to a tribe as well, and you definitely talk about this in your book. If you could talk about that a little bit too because I think that there are quite a few listeners to this podcast who are teachers and who are... Especially if they're listening to this podcast between January and March, really questioning, "Do I want to continue with this? I am feeling sense of burnout and fatigue?" But is a burnout like career burnout or is it just, it's winter and it's cold and it's dark? I don't want to get in the car and another cup of coffee. But what can you say, because you do write about this and you do talk about this in your book about the tribal teacher environment, and being part of a tribe as a group of colleagues, and how important that is?

Lou Cozolino: Well, it's interesting because a student of mine named Megan Marcus who helped me work on this book, started a company called FuelEd. And her organization is dedicated to giving teachers what they need and then helping teachers have ways to connect with each other and support them kind of toe as a way to work against burnout. And in a sense, treating the teachers the way these principals in this book would say they should treat their students because it's hard to ask someone to do something that no one's doing for them.

Lou Cozolino: Generally, when I meet with principals they're more concerned with budgets and details of this, that and the other thing. But very few... Especially in public schools, you get a little... The private schools have a little more. They've got the luxury to do that. But in public schools, which I think, by far the majority of the students are in, the context doesn't really work, but there are sort of steeped in this... They're suits, they're managers, they're looking at the bottom line and at numbers and their job performance is based on test scores. And so they're afraid to invest in anything that doesn't, at least logically to them, seem to connect to their metrics.

Nat Damon: Right. They're trying to do their job, which as you said is so much more quantitative based and so much more deliverable based.

Lou Cozolino: Right.

Nat Damon: Analytical versus what a teacher's doing. Yet, I was thinking while you're talking about the fact that just like a teacher to a student, a student is not going to thrive in a classroom unless... Like you, you're saying that teacher that really worked well with you was you knew, you sensed that teacher believed in you. And I would imagine it's the same situation when you're a teacher and if you're a principal, your direct report does not know you or does not believe in you or convey belief in you. Maybe they're speaking a different language and they don't know how to convey belief in you or what to even look for when it comes to belief in your teaching skills, then how can you really function optimally in communicating belief to your own students?

Lou Cozolino: Right? Yeah. And then sort of the headmasters of private schools that I've met seem primarily concerned with fundraising, and the principals in public schools that I've met in primarily...

Nat Damon: Tribal schools.

Lou Cozolino: They've got bosses they're trying to please.

Nat Damon: Exactly.

Lou Cozolino: And so the teachers are kind of left and they're stuck in a sense between administration, between what administration expects from them and what the students really need from them.

Nat Damon: Right.

Lou Cozolino: And so they're in a real dilemma. So I think a lot of the burnout. I don't think it's getting up in the morning and working. I think it has to do with the demands fill at the level of demand and the level of unfulfilled need that they face every day at work.

Nat Damon: Yeah. And you mentioned the word time as well. And just this feeling of there's not enough time to be able to... From the administrator's point of view, to be able to really connect and get to know my teachers and their teaching style and to be able to really honor what they do, and also the same thing the teacher is feeling, "Oh my gosh, I've got all these different responsibilities, plus I've got a plan and execute my classes and give feedback and work with the kids." So it is that it feeling all the time in schools. Another word you brought up though is love. And I'd love for you to speak to that word as it pertains to teaching in the tribal classroom.

Lou Cozolino: I think for mammals like we all are, the origin of relationship is mother child bonding, which then got extrapolated to males and got extrapolated to tribes and got extrapolated to soccer teams and in nations and all the things that we feel a part of that are more abstract. But that core feeling, that core biochemistry of oxytocin, dopamine, serotonin activation and a few other things. The activation of those things is what makes us feel like we want to do something we might love oil painting, we might love this.

Lou Cozolino: You see your child and you don't have to ask yourself whether you love them or not. You know it because your body... We've been shaped to have those feelings. And fortunately it's been extrapolated to other things, so we don't spend too much time chasing our children to love them so they can grow up and do things on their own without us.

Nat Damon: Right.

Lou Cozolino: But I think, that's the core of it, and I would guess that for every teacher it's hard for me to imagine the teacher taking the job for the money, or whatever. It seems to me at least the teachers I know, they love kids, they love teaching, and they love the feeling of a student's eyes opening up to some new information or to the connection or the appreciation they receive. Whatever it is. Or even the altruistic sort of taking care of or giving someone something without return. So I think that's why most teachers are attracted to the field.

Lou Cozolino: I'm sure there's always exceptions, but I would say that's probably the vast majority. But what they run into is a system that doesn't appreciate their love. And I think that... So the system, the industrial system treats them like they're an irreplaceable part on an assembly line.

Nat Damon: Getting back to your Ford analogy from the beginning of [crosstalk 00:33:43].

Lou Cozolino: Yeah. I mean you can put... Now, it's almost like... It's like you... It used to be, we can just... If you don't show up, we just get somebody else. Now, it's if you don't show up, we just show them a video or we put a robot in front of the class. So

feeling disposable and expendable, I think as part of it. Your love not being appreciated as part of it.

Nat Damon: Which is a very primal feeling. It's like the parents not... A love toward a parent being rejected. Right?

Lou Cozolino: Yeah. When I think back to the teachers that I connected with, a lot of them were... They were all characters. None of them were sort of like the party line teachers. Right?

Nat Damon: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Lou Cozolino: One of my teachers in high school was my algebra teacher. He's just this little guy who smoke cigars constantly. He drove a Cadillac. He had a Cadillac and the trunk of the Cadillac was full of nylons. And he would sell them in the parking lot of the temple down the street to make some extra money.

Nat Damon: What?

Lou Cozolino: And he was just like... I don't know if you know the term garmento, but there were these guys in Manhattan when I was a kid and they always carried around giant scissors that you'd use to cut fabric, and if you mess with them, they come after you with these scissor. So they were just sort of... It was sort of like just a real interesting car. Excuse me. He was the gruffness person and I just loved him and he loved math. I saw his eyes would light up. Because I knew how much he loved math and I didn't particularly love math before, but he loved it so much.

Lou Cozolino: I said, maybe there's something here. And I worked my ass off and I remember I got a perfect score on the New York state test or regions exam for this stuff. And I saw him in the lobby and he looked at me and he put his arms out. I'll never forget that.

Nat Damon: Yes.

Lou Cozolino: And so things like that. And there were other teachers as well, but things like that. And I think they're usually teachers that know that the system, there's just like... All of the system is BS. I'm here because I want to connect with you or you, whoever is available to learn and I'm going to give you everything I got.

Nat Damon: And that's a subversion of it. You mentioned teaching being a subversive vocation for those who do it right, right?

Lou Cozolino: Yeah.

Nat Damon: Because it is. It's like because the system as structured is not oriented toward that kind of connection, and the opening of the heart in order to connect and certainly it's not predicated on love, and the definitions that you share about what a teacher's love really is. And I had a guy... Not a guy. I had a sixth grade teacher, Mr. Bradley who was just majorly into history and he was amazing as a

history teacher, but he was also a very gruff... He also coached me in ice hockey and he would throw erasers.

Lou Cozolino: They'd hit you and explode, right?

Nat Damon: Yeah, totally. And usually I'd be spacing out, he'd hit me with an eraser. But he got away with that because I knew that he honored me. His first report card comment to me, I remember this so well. It was a horrible report card. It was a C, C, C. B plus, B plus. I don't know what the subjects were, but it was C, C, C.

Lou Cozolino: You're a hockey player. You're not supposed to be smart.

Nat Damon: I know, yeah.

Lou Cozolino: And you got so many shots to the head.

Nat Damon: That's really good [inaudible 00:37:00]. We did wear a helmet, but we didn't wear masks. This is back in the early '80s. No masks. But C, C, C, B plus, B plus and his one comment was one sentence, "Don't rest on your laurels." And 11 year old me was like, "What is a laurel?" So of course I looked it up and I got home. I didn't even ask my dad.

Lou Cozolino: Laurel and Hardy.

Nat Damon: It is. I was thinking like Laurel and Hardy. Exactly. He threw erasers. He took my shoe off and rolled down the window, the middle of a snow storm and toss it out because I didn't wear it on my foot and he said, "Go get it." But it wasn't... You hear stories like that today in passing, of course people are like, "Oh my God, he's abusive. You got to report that."

Lou Cozolino: You get your attorneys and he's fired and all of that stuff... But think about how uncles and fathers and people you were related to treat you.

Nat Damon: Right. Same thing.

Lou Cozolino: That's how they treat you.

Nat Damon: That's how they treat you. Right. So I don't know. I mean, I do know, and based on this conversation is you're helping crystallize so much of what these subversive teachers in their tribal classrooms do in order to create, to add to a flourishing learning environment. So you can have a kid coming from any type of background, stable, unstable, whatnot, and enter the classroom. And if that child has a sense of feeling of I'm comfortable, I think you used the word comfort earlier, then that teacher's job is actually more than half done.

Lou Cozolino: Absolutely, because then you don't have to talk them into doing all the things they need to do. Then they do it because you've already created the sort of the social and biological context that makes them want to work.

Nat Damon: Yes, and work for themselves, right?

Lou Cozolino: Yeah.

Nat Damon: But also if truly following the definition of a tribal classroom, it's working for the, in a sense, working hard so that you're pulling your weight. And it's not just to impress the tribal leader. In fact in a really healthy classroom, and I'm thinking about with older kids, middle school or high school, it doesn't have to be stated like my work effort is helping others in the classroom. It just is, and you sense it. It's a sense and that's why I can't be analyzed. I don't think a tribal classroom can be analyzed through kind of quantitative metrics, really.

Lou Cozolino: No, I think it's something you have to measure by. I think the biggest measure of it is the differential or by the delta between what you expect of people and what they end up coming through with or compare them to how they perform in other classes, right?

Nat Damon: Yes.

Lou Cozolino: Because I think that's where you really, you see success where students are deemed unteachable.

Nat Damon: In one section.

Lou Cozolino: In one situation.

Nat Damon: In one discipline.

Lou Cozolino: Right. And so then what's the truth? And that was something that, when I was growing up, I saw that, and in some classes I was just terrible. And the teachers would berate me. And so in those classes I'd say, "Gee, I'm not that bright. I'm really not that smarter person." And then other classes where I do well and the teacher, "You're brilliant, really." So then who am I? And it breaks down that question of sort of a monolithic self like I've got to make a decision about who I am. Now, I'm a lot of things and I'm a social being and a contextual being. So depending on who I'm with and where I am, I feel different and I act different.

Nat Damon: Yes, right. We're all chameleons that way, and that's a survival instinct.

Lou Cozolino: Yeah.

Nat Damon: Right?

Lou Cozolino: Well, but it's also the fact that we're so much more. We have individual identities probably also because of tribal evolution. In other words, we each had to have one name and a responsibility and commitments, and people had to hold us accountable for the tribe to survive. But the truth is like if you ever traveled to some foreign place and you're in an unknown land, you discover all kinds of things about yourself because you're not being held in context, right?

Nat Damon: You're making me think of the... Yes. When you're being viewed by people who've never known you before at this moment that they interacted with you

and by being a foreigner in a place, it makes you more raw. And it makes me think about just the handoff meetings at schools would have like year to year. Most schools, the teachers who are receiving the files or the reports of the students from the teachers who taught them the year before.

Nat Damon: And it gets in discussions about the halo effect and about just what preconceived notions. Like if you're a sibling, if you had an older sibling and this same teacher teaches you and they're like, "Oh, you must be just like Jimmy, your older brother or something." And you're not, you're an individual. So you're getting me to think also about just the importance of allowing for that growth, but I think also just the importance of looking at schools as it's not just in the classroom that a student's identity has shifted or reinforced or the opposite, it's all parts of the school day. There's some many different adult eyes watching students, and in a way, how that that reflects on how a student feels about himself or herself is important to consider too.

Lou Cozolino: Yeah. I think it's all important and that's a thing that probably the big one take home would be the alternative agenda is not an alternative. This developing relationships and building the tribe is not something that... And again, maybe in some schools you can and still get the results you think you want. But in schools where kids are struggling, then I don't think it's an alternative. And it doesn't mean that every teacher who's teaching should be a teacher. Some people aren't cut out for it. It doesn't mean every adolescent should be sitting in a classroom.

Lou Cozolino: Some adolescents aren't there. They need to be doing something else for five or six years. Yeah. And if they need education later on, give it to them later on when they can actually benefit from it. So the whole thing, the industrial... It goes back to the mass production, right?

Nat Damon: Yes.

Lou Cozolino: We've got a model, we fund the model and we use the model as the gold standard. And if you don't make it in the model, then there's something wrong with you, and you don't see the effects of culture, socioeconomic status, trauma, stress, you name it. Basically the mismatch between human beings and building microwaves.

Nat Damon: Right. Well I think it's fortunate that today we have research, we have science, we have concrete data that is confirming everything that we've instinctually... Good teachers have instinctually sensed for a hundred years since the factories model of education developed more than a hundred years now. And I don't know what are your thoughts. Maybe you can leave us with some final thoughts about this. Do you sense that we are moving toward more recognition of the importance of the alternative primacy of building relationships first and then the education will happen in a sense? That's all. I'm going to leave it.

Lou Cozolino: Yeah. I think I'm seeing it in private schools. Not all of them, but I'm seeing in the private schools that I deal with, and maybe I deal with them because of the

fact that they're open to the types of system on arguments. It could be a selection bias.

Nat Damon: Sure.

Lou Cozolino: But I think there are people that recognize this and they're learning whether or not it's going to exist at a broader level. Like in public education is something I can't tell because forces seem to work in both directions simultaneously. There's financial problems. There's this regression into more authoritarianism, with politics and things that are going on. And on the other hand, there's more data with attachment. There's more recognition of the importance of education and teaching. So that might be positive. A negative thing is that a lot of people are thinking, well what do you need schools for? You've got YouTube now and you can learn everything on YouTube. And I teach at a school where they just put the masters program in psychology online so people-

Nat Damon: The entire program?

Lou Cozolino: Yeah. So people don't even have to come to school and interact with teachers at all. So there's a huge push for that economically, whether it's a good idea or not.

Nat Damon: Right.

Lou Cozolino: And it's been going on for a while now and it's really hard for me to... It's a rare student that graduates from my program where I feel confident that I could refer a client to them because I don't see that they've really gotten enough training in education. The schools now are not schools, they're businesses and the students are now customers. And so we can't really upset them or challenged them too much because they'll go to some other school.

Nat Damon: Right.

Lou Cozolino: So that the standards keep getting lowered, the expectations keep getting lowered. And so the truth is, I don't know. I mean I, I try to remain optimistic and I just effort in the direction of the things that, if I see the opportunity to do something, like one of the things that I've resisted, but I think I'm sort of moving in that direction is almost being a sort of like a motivational speaker and a cheerleader for teachers to try to find those people. Like my student Megan did, to find those people who who are motivated, who aren't just needing the help and just work one by one by one and get enough people out there that who are good teachers because they will contact lots of students over their career, if they don't quit and go into accounting or real estate.

Lou Cozolino: I'm doing whatever little good I can. Certainly, plenty of people seem to have written this book. The problem with something called the social neuroscience of education is that most teachers and administrators are looking for books that have catchy, easy titles that have one principle, like grit for example, or something like that.

Nat Damon: Mindset.

Lou Cozolino: Yeah. And so you sell millions of those books, but the problem is it's just one little narrow piece of a puzzle. It's not in context. And you can't really do much with it except make money if you sell the book.

Nat Damon: Right. I mean I cannot recommend this book enough. I mean the social neuroscience education, you're absolutely right. If it was called something like subversive teaching or something.

Lou Cozolino: Or sex in the afternoon.

Nat Damon: That would sell millions. But actually it'd probably not be good to see that book on a teacher's desk or in a principal's bookshelf, right?

Lou Cozolino: Well, it would be in the drawers.

Nat Damon: Even in the drawers. Along with the vodka, the other shots, the scotch, whiskey. Dr. Cozolino, Lou, thank you very, very much for this.

Lou Cozolino: My pleasure.

Nat Damon: I feel like we covered everything I was hoping to and much more because this broadening conversation, it's really connected to so many things. So many themes of previous podcasts that I've had actually, loneliness, epidemic, the social contract, the need for connection, putting feelings first, belongingness, the individual and the group. And you've been able to sum it all together through this discussion and through your work. And I'm just so grateful for your insights. And you are a cheerleader for teachers.

Lou Cozolino: I'm proud, yeah.

Nat Damon: You are. I'm just so grateful to have gotten to know you and I'm so grateful for the... I can't remember who the teacher was or the school person was who put this book in my hands, but I'm so grateful for that flight and for the six hours, and the easability of the read, and for what this has generated in terms of firing me up as an advocate for teachers in excellent relational teaching.

Lou Cozolino: Good.

Nat Damon: So thank you very much for being here.

Lou Cozolino: My pleasure. Thanks for having me.

Nat Damon: Pleasure.

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