

IMAGINAL STYLE

1 I'm sure that you've heard a lot about Imaginal Education in the last few days. It's been a buzz word around here. It's education in the classroom. But by and large what you've heard has been from the theoretical perspective. As Carol mentioned, when you get real flesh and blood students that's when putting into practice all of these nice ideas gets tested. I think this morning what I would primarily like to do is to share with you some of the operating images that I have found most helpful in terms of Imaginal Education.

2 I have been an imaginal educator self-consciously now going into my tenth year. I suspect, however, that when I first began tutoring at St. Gaul's in Milwaukee as a freshman in high school, that somehow I touched bases with some of the same principles of Imaginal Education. This would mean then that I have been an unself-conscious imaginal educator since I was fourteen. And those are a lot of years of involvement with how a teacher impacts a set of images that allows a new life change for these people. This afternoon I am interested in sharing my experience concerning Imaginal Education and style. Later on our workshop will concern methods of Imaginal Education.

3 There are four images that I want to speak about. One, the "On-Behalf-Of" style. Two, the Yin-Yang principle. Three, the four life phases, and four, the belief that life is possibility.

4 In terms of the first category: On-Behalf-Of--I'm clear without knowing most of you that you are profoundly attached to who you are as individuals. You've worked many years at developing your particular personalities and your particular styles and you've refined who you are to the point that you believe earnestly that you're a successful package. Obviously you are because you've gotten hired, so all of that has not been a waste. And yet, I think it is that aspect of who we are which can tend to be the most dangerous relative to being an effective imaginal educator. The reason I say that is because I believe that no matter who you are, in the first instance, it does not matter when you decide to be an imaginal educator. That's kind of a nervy comment on my part. Here I've just told you that it doesn't matter who you are and you've spent all of this time developing who you are. Of course our culture, and particularly the last ten years, has been really preoccupied with telling people that they have it in their power to recreate who they are. My basic stance to that is that that is nonsense. And why I say that is because I believe that it is often who we are, who we think we are, or who we've invested in being that gets in the way of engaging our students to struggle with who they are.

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For example, I can remember a few quarters ago that we had a group of students which was probably the most difficult group that we have ever had. They basically dumped on everything. We did some of the best creative kinds of things and their response was to find fault endlessly. They never responded positively to any of our attempts to share with them.

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I was getting ready to teach a course in Office Procedures called Human Relations. The first day of that course I was going to do a lecture called "Developing a Philosophy of Life". I had left that previous Friday just really dumping on them in our staff meeting. I had said that as far as I was concerned the whole class was not going to do anything. Carol came up to me that Monday right before I was going into the Human Relations class and she said, "You're going to teach this new course. I really know that you're angry. You know that you have the power to stand up in front of them and do the same kinds of negative, unhelpful things that they have done with us. You have that power. You need to make a new decision about how you're going to relate to those students. This is a new course and this is a new moment." Of course I was a bit offended that she would think that I didn't have in me the ability to objectify my personal hatred and do what I had to do. The point is that this is what I mean by in the first instance it doesn't matter who we really are. Our Personal investment in who we are is often called into question over against what the students need. And an imaginal educator must be able to play whatever role is necessary for the training to come off and not for that particular staff member to come off. I think that if we or if you don't believe that; that is if you choose to operate believing it is the staff that is the key to the success to Training, Inc. then you will find in thirteen weeks that you have been unable to train the students. At the end of thirteen weeks the learning process will not have happened because the focus has been inward rather than outward.

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The On-Behalf-Of style is very, very painful because it's counter to our training as teachers. It means that we are not doing our individual thing. What we say and what we do at any given moment has a direct implication on every staff person. Though you may be teaching a particular isolated course--typing--how you choose to teach that course directly ties into the accounting instructor's ability to teach his/her course. Therefore, we are held accountable to the corporate thrust. That's really hard in our society because we are so brainwashed to believe that the "I" is the most important element and not the "we". But imaginal educators understand that it is the "we" that enables images to be changed. It is not one thing that one particular person does that changes a student's life. It is a combination of many things that comes from all the staff that has the possibility of changing a person's life. Without the kind of decision to be corporate, to take pride in what the corporate impact is, we can not be a total service to the student.

8 Because you have not gone through the thirteen week journey and you don't know some of the things that you can begin to trust; things that happen because you trust the method and you trust the structure. There is a journey that continually happens to people and as they go through that journey some things are going to happen. If one has not gone through that journey with them that means trusting things that you don't even know should be trusted. All I can say is trust them. They really work and it's amazing. It gets to the point that you can begin to project where people are going to struggle, where the tensions are going to be and where you need to come in with a renewed style. You know that structure so well and you know what that structure is designed to do with people. That may seem ridiculous but it's not.

9 There are situations where you don't have time to run and see what the corporate consensus is about how you need to handle it. There are certain presuppositions as a staff that have been decided upon and those presuppositions are the ones you need to use in making a decision when you can't get immediate feedback from the other staff. That takes training for many of us who have not had the opportunity of operating as a corporate team. It takes getting used to. It gets to be a drag to always try to think of what the group's response would be to the situation and what the need of that student is and not your own personal thing. I have all kinds of great innovative ideas which at all times are not necessarily what the group decides needs to happen. You must be willing to sit back from your own investment in who you are and to say that maybe something else needs to happen. This is part of what I mean by being an imaginal educator.

10 The Yin and Yang principle has to do with embodying a style that says to the trainee that the "Yes" and "No" of life are where life is lived. It is in the midst of the tension that life is lived. And what that means practically is that we are not out to reduce life down to simple common denominators for our students. We are out to enable the students to deal with life's complexities. One of the things that often happens is that we often forget where our students are coming from. We lay out a whole list of expectations. For many of our students these expectations make as much sense as teaching Chinese in terms of where their basic operating images are. We require a lot of our students. We require a lot in terms of style. We require a lot in terms of their stance, in terms of their motivation. We require that they are already self-motivated adults. In fact many of them are not. What we are out to do is to give them a method so that within that thirteen week period they can become self-motivated decision makers. That can only come about if that is grounded in the way life really is and not something else.

11 For example, we had a young woman who will begin a job on Monday and we tried to get her into Training, Inc. this week. We wanted to celebrate her new job as a whole group. She called yesterday and said that she could not be in before she started her job. The reason that

she could not be in was because her husband who she is separated from had beat her up and she was too bruised and puffy to come to class. Now it is well and fine to say some abstraction like, "You have all that you need to make a new decision about that situation." That is not what that young woman needed to hear. She some how has to be able to grapple with the kinds of choices that she has to make in terms of her kind of situation. The family situation has a direct implication on her job. If she keeps on getting beat up she is not going to be able to go to work unless she wants to go to work black and blue and she obviously doesn't want to be seen in that condition. So the kind of real life situation that she has to deal with concerns the real implications of her relationship with her husband in terms of her job. She may have to decide that she may have to postpone her reconciliation with her husband to get a job. It seems at this point that she cannot do both of those unless her husband makes a radical new decision. My point is in terms of those principles. One must play a role as a mirror to our students and allow them to see their real life situation.

12 The students cannot get caught up in our positivity and our motivation to the extent that they begin to dream dreams that are not real. There is nothing more destructive than to sustain a dreaming process that is not based upon reality. That is what the great liberalism of the Sixties did to millions of people. It allowed them to dream dreams which they had no way of making into a reality. If we get caught up in our own romanticism and our own idealism about what is possible and don't constantly mirror or channel that through real life then we are in trouble. What the students will experience once they leave Training, Inc. is a world that is not made of imaginal educators.

13 The next principle has to do with the four life phases. As an imaginal educator we are out to embody an authentic joy at being alive at each moment. You can train people in clerical skills, but if you have not trained their spirit, they will still not be able to do their job effectively because they will have a difficult time in managing their own motivation. There are many, many training programs out there. There are enough CETA training programs to train people in mediocrity. We are out to train people in excellence. I think the difference between Training, Inc. and many other training programs concerns the one thing that the others have not dealt with...the spirit or the dimension of the deeps of the students' lives. One way to allow that has to do with enabling people to love their lives. I don't mean some kind of romantic really nice and rosy kind of love. What I mean by love being realized is by being so clear that the particular life that they have is what has brought them to this point. If any one thing from their past had been different they would be different today. They would not be at this point taking advantage of this training. That's all really abstract and I don't know except that there are many of the structural things that we do that constantly reaffirms who they are and constantly says that that is who makes up who they are and that particular set of experiences is who they are.

14 One of the ways of saying "Yes" to the life that they have is the whole concept of the four lifetimes. That concept is kind of an exciting relationship to life. It is the knowledge that we have four opportunities to live a profoundly creative life. Those phases are: Years 1-19 - Phase I. I call this the phase of the Adventurer. Years 20-39 - Phase II. I call this the phase of the Emerging Adult. Years 40-59 - Phase III. I call this the phase of the Established Adult. Years 60+ - Phase IV. I call this the phase of the Elder. We will probably have the first three phases represented and possibly the fourth. There will be students who will embody the Elder role even if they are not that age. Recognizing the student's phase allows for honoring the students that you have. You will have students of all ages. From what I understand you will primarily have minority students. So honoring the particular ethnic group will also allow them to globalize their images of the world's makeup and of possible office situations which they will encounter.

15 Phase I has to do with the adventurer, the youth, the constant questioner. You will get students who will play that role...who question everything that you give to them. I mean they will ask why things are that way and who says things have to be that way. That can be really frustrating. You'll want to ask them why they have come to training and to remind them that you're not the final authority. But what you realize is that they are coming from their life phase which is to question absolutely everything. And when you know that about a student that gives you the kind of objectivity to not necessarily dump on them in terms of their questioning because they are living out the kind of role that they have been assigned due to their age. One of the things that we are out to do with them is to equip them to begin to make the transition as an emerging adult.

16 The second phase of life is the time where the individual is beginning to establish his/her roots. I suspect your largest group will be in this age bracket. They are making new choices. Many of them are taking training for the first time. They are looking at the business world for the first time as a place where they can begin a career path. That is an exciting time because the experimentation is focused towards putting some roots down, establishing themselves in a new kind of way. It isn't that the questioning stops, but it is a questioning out of the new kind of perspective. It is a questioning that is out to give them the methods and skills to help them plant themselves in a particular direction.

17 The third phase, and this is the one particularly that you hope you have present is the phase of the Established Adult. We have a forty-five year old woman in training and she is the backbone of the class. The students go to her. She plays the mothering role, but not a smothering style. She is the person who pushes them into the unknown in a way that the staff cannot necessarily do. We have to play other kinds of roles. Audrey plays a phenomenal role. They look at her seriousness. They look at her motivation and see that this woman is starting all over again. She happens to have been a social worker for fifteen years and she had been faced with a whole new career choice. She had to take a whole new relationship with this training. She has been an incredible example. I thought to myself that she could be one of the staff. Everyone knows that her abilities far surpass the kind of abilities that an entry level job requires.

18 The last phase is the Elder. This phase represents the great story-tellers. That is the person of wisdom who has just lived life. Audrey has also played this role. She has the kind of life experience. It is one thing to hear the great kinds of stories that come out of the mouths of babes; of people who are eighteen years old. It is another thing to hear it come out of the mouth of someone who has lived so many years. The honoring of these dynamics is the decision of the staff. It is important that as a staff these dynamics are played. It is important to have a staff person who plays the role of the questioner in terms of the staff and also in terms of the students so that they can see what it means to be successful and means to be on top of a particular skill or a particular style and to see that it doesn't mean you stop asking questions about life situations. So you and your staff want to make sure that these dynamics are happening in terms of your own corporate internal life and in the life of the students.

19 We are at every given moment the embodiment of possibility. This is particularly true when we don't feel it or even when we don't believe it. We are the "yes" in the midst of the "no's" that our students constantly experience from the structures of society. I think I've mentioned before that one of the things that we can do after the glamour of the new class has worn off is to read the students' autobiographies. The students write about where they come from.

20 When people come to visit the class they sometimes comment that the students are obviously not the disenfranchised. That they are obviously not the people who need this training program. What they see is a group of people who look professional. Well obviously those visitor's images of what the poor and disenfranchised look like is from another century. But it also points to the fact that we do an incredible kind of job in terms of shaping the students' imagination of what kind of style is successful in the business world. What I often want to do with those visitors is to let them read the autobiographies because these reveal who these students really are. These are students who live life in situations in which their life is in danger constantly just in terms of walking outside of their homes--in project situations. We have students like Barbara who couldn't come to training because her husband beat her up. We have students who have family members that have been shot or raped. The daily experience of their life is a constant, "No. No. No." Therefore it is imperative for this experience to be an emphatic, "Yes."

21 Let's not forget that even the fact that some of our students show up every day is an incredible new decision for them. That is probably a "yes" that they are making. In other words they need an environment that says life is possible. They are not guaranteed that kind of a relationship once they leave Training, Inc. and they certainly don't often come into training from affirmative situations. We have to remember that our style is out to allow those students to believe that it is possible for them to make choices.

22 For example we push very hard--dress style in terms of the business world. We push very hard the use of standard English. All of the kinds of things which are needed to be effective in the business world. Personally I believe that you should be able to wear blue jeans and tee-shirts to work. Now that is my personal belief. I also know what they have to confront in the business world. And what we are saying to our students is that there is a set of values about dressing which are operational in the business world. You have to decide about your relationship to those values. You either decide to get on top of those values or you ignore them. We don't necessarily say that they have to be incorporated into the student's value system. The way you dress is going to effect your success, though. Without support and honoring from the staff, making these choices are very, very hard. If we embody any other style but the "yes", if we dare to let our personal dislikes, angers, fears and even lack of faith to take over, if we dare to become suddenly elitist, if we become moralistic and give-up then we have failed our commissioning and have done harm. I believe strongly that imaginal education and being an imaginal educator is a particular calling. I really believe that when you deal with peoples' images that you are dealing with their fundamental humanness and is, therefore, a serious responsibility. At every moment we have the potential to help create and affirm human life. This is the power of Imaginal Education.

--Lynnette Shanklin
(3/81)