

Earliest Days of Imaginal Education in Public Education

as told by Marilyn Oyler, 2018

In the summer of 1965, fifty students came to 5th City for six weeks as a study and work group in the community. We were the audience for the comprehensive curriculum as it was being developed by the Ecumenical Institute; and we were the work force for the beginning of the 5th City Community Development project. We did work days on many properties in the neighborhood as well as recruiting children for the preschool to start in the fall. This gathering was the first experiment in bringing outside people into the community for the summer, and it became the model for many years.

In the summer of 1966, summer participants were in three groups: clergy, teachers and students. The teachers focused on imaginal education as well as methods of working together to create a revolution in the schools. We developed curriculum for our subject areas and mostly fell in love with the idea of having a team to work with, doing important work in the civil rights movement.

Several of us returned in the fall to teach in the neighborhood public schools. For me, it was my first year as a high school math teacher at John Marshall High School. Marshall had 5000 students just as my home town in Pipestone, MN had 5000 residents. It was a time of much learning for all of us. We created a teachers cadre, composed of elementary, middle and high school teachers (maybe 15). We met regularly - often daily - to compare notes and develop new ideas for curriculum. We created "image explosions" to offer alternative personal understandings. They followed the formula of our basic understandings in our religious courses: All of life is good, my life is received, the past is approved, the future is open, and what it means to be the church is to serve the world. This five-part rhythm became the basis for offering transformative images for children at all age levels. The cadre worked with youth in the neighborhood and continued to develop the spiral curriculum, the life triangles and the first imaginal education course for educators.

In 1968, Joe Mathews sister, Alice asked him to develop a course for educators outside the 5th City project. She was a teacher in New York City; and we developed a two-day Imaginal Education course for educators. David McCleskey, Rick Loudermilk and two from the teacher's cadre, Kay Lush and myself, went to New York City to deliver the two-day course for teachers in Alice's school. This course then became available for educators around the United States. It was decided that the teacher's cadre would become the first teachers for this course. We were paired with the highly skilled pedagogues from the EI religious courses to deliver this course.

In addition to teaching the basic principles of Imaginal Education, the theme of the course was to develop a "revolutionary" group within the educational community. The final Imaginal Education lecture was to be willing to stand in the future and forge the new path for needed changes in education.