

IMAGINAL THEORY AND GOALS

Carol Pierce/Mary Ann Wainwright

One fairly accurate way to talk about the role of the staff at Training, Incorporated is to say they provide image explosions. They present to the students images so vivid, clear and understandable that no one can miss the point. Their clarity means it's possible for the students to remember them. The closest thing to all image explosions I can think of is the way the television program "Sesame Street" presents new letters of the alphabet. New images like these are not always, nor easily appropriated, but they are often retained and can be appropriated later. Through means such as this, the staff offers new images to the students.

But we do not change people's images. Images are changed only where people choose to do so in their own self image. Because change in the self image is painful, and everyone resists it, the forcible manipulation of self image has been called brainwashing. The best example of brainwashing of the public was Hitler. He had a fantastic education program, and was successful in persuading a large population that there was a super race; those not of that race were exterminated. History proved him wrong, but up to a point he was extraordinarily successful.

Anyone working with self image needs to be careful, to exercise responsibility. That is the reason we as a staff meet to weigh up the serious issues of the lives of the students we are dealing with. We offer the students images of work as a marvelous experience; on their first job the supervisor is a tyrant, no one in the office is friendly, and their only concern becomes how to get out of the job. The work is repetitive, the whole situation unbearable. If you don't give them tools for dealing with a situation like this they have no way to survive on the job. So, one thing it means for the staff to participate in creating adequate images is to realize your job isn't over when the student finds a job. You find yourself always working on adequate images for the situations which students/ graduates encounter.

The creation of adequate images is one of the functions of imaginal education. Another function is to offer the possibility of reordering of life experience. An illustration of this is the way Training, Inc. replaces the chaos of the student's life with order when they enter the ordered atmosphere of the simulated business environment. Students who come early in the morning to study are acting out their desire for an ordered situation in which to deal with the curriculum. We're

giving them a way to see differently, and then work with their own situation. Problem solving addresses that, too. The third function is to call for some kind of decision. Most students encounter this when they must decide what type of job they will seek and where they want to work. They do work toward their own vocational goals, but along the way there are many decisions that influence their self image. Its often unclear where these will lead, and how long they will last. But great energy goes into what seems to be relatively small decisions. First jobs are often mistakes, and we like to say that it's good to know that early. Other decisions are called for as images the students hold are challenged, where they take on new images or make new decisions about old images. I never learned to type with speed until I had to do so, and recall the imaginal shift I experienced when I found that happening. These students are given an opportunity to think through, to be clear on ways to refurbish their imagination. Imaginal education offers the opportunity to see where those decisions are being made.

The fourth function of imaginal education is to release maturity. We assume that everyone has motivation; its a quality found in varying degrees in everyone. But the motivity that is within any person is looking for ways to get out. Until you offer a person a path that allows them to see what they know to be true about themselves and what the future holds for them come together, there's no way for their motivity to be released. When a person with a family to support sees the promise of better pay if new skills are learned, and then a way to learn the skills is offered, with pay, it's no wonder that motivity comes. It's helpful to have some highly motivated people at the beginning of the course, because some students admittedly don't become greatly motivated. Many do, some are slow, and some never do. Imaginal Education releases what's there in every person. It doesn't have a special motivity it offers to any student. Training, Inc. only offers the motivity that any person engaged in what they have decided they need to do will exhibit. Of course that is striking motivity.

Now we want to look at the goals of imaginal education. People who observe Training, Inc. often talk about the kind of participation they see in the classes. In this setting the first goal of imaginal education is to motivate participation. We try to give students tools that will allow them to see beyond their individual likes and dislikes, beyond the difficulties of daily life. We want to give them a way to hope and dream again -- its a natural propensity, like motivity, but most of our students have lost it. Their everyday experience

doesn't allow them to see life as something to be hopeful about. When people feel this way they can see no reason to participate. So we look for ways to allow them to remain open, to be able to see the day they've got as a great one. They all have a capacity for collegiability and maybe having the common goal in the course helps too. In any event, we find this approach makes participation almost a certainty.

The second goal is to release people from the excuses that tell them life is a dead end street -- that make them a victim to their circumstances. It's easy to elicit the list of reasons they feel life is unfair. Probably everything they could mention has happened to them, but if they spend the thirteen weeks of the program dwelling on that, they won't have the time or attitude that allows learning something new. We find we must constantly give the students affirmation, not depreciation. They need to experience being in charge of their lives, not always being overwhelmed. You need to find a way to release the courage that has brought them this far, when they've only heard that they were "tough." You try to give them a means of embracing the past, not being the victim of it. Early in every class we ask the students to write autobiographies. And every time we find that they reveal the courage and willpower that characterize human existence. And its a great event for the students, too; they learn about one another at a new level of understanding.

The third goal of imaginal education is to share a life method. Problem solving is a basic component in that the art form method is also useful here. Someone has called Training, Inc., a really good life management course. This is true because we start where any rational person does in their own thinking. In problem solving they look at limits (what the situation actually is), look at their alternatives (all of them, not just the most obvious or pleasing ones), and then make a decision about their action. And they find they can use this for deciding what their family eats, or what career path they themselves will choose.

The last goal is to demonstrate that it's possible to get things done. You demonstrate, over and over, that when they find themselves in a situation where something needs to be changed, it can be done. Imaginal education operates out of possibility, not problems. And it reaps results. Getting results does require time, and the energy and imagination of the staff. A favorite illustration with the staff is how students in every class, when given the assignment of planning and seeing a celebration through to the cleanup, say it can't be done -- at least not by them. But every time they create a

fantastic event that is just what the group needed at the time.

There are also three assumptions about imaginal education that are quite helpful.

- (1) Imaginal education is true. It starts where people are. It assumes the images they operate out of are their images. As teachers we assume it is critical to know where our students start, or we will not be able to teach them. We start where they are, with their real situation, not with what we'd like it to be.
- (2) Imaginal education is repetitive. New images require reinforcement. We repeat things and emphasize being consistent in our repetition. We figure out how to do things in challenging, innovative and creative ways so the students won't be bored. In accounting for instance, where the work itself is repetitive, helping students find their way back to a solution for their inaccurate figures requires allowing them to see that they do belong in that world. One of the ways an instructor has kept that before the students is to write on the board everyday "Welcome to the Wonderful World of Accounting."
- (3) Imaginal education is simple. It isn't complex because we are giving people a chance to reflect on what they already know. Self-conscious reflection on what is happening is what makes the learning or whatever has happened, theirs. With the capacity to reflect, they become different people. It's not a matter of giving people new data; it's a matter of providing a structure that allows reflection to become ordered and, therefore, conscious. In each class we hold a birthday party and ask people to say how this last year was significant for them. Time and time again they comment on the experience of looking over the year; it's a simple thing to do, but it gives fresh perspective.