

IMAGINAL EDUCATION

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Imaginal Education is not something new that we have made up. It is primordial consciousness of what it means to educate a human being. It is a method that has always been in history. We are out to bring consciousness to that as a key methodology for our time. Think about some of the Biblical scriptures when Jesus says, "I'm going to make you a fisher of men." You begin to see images of what Jesus is out to do with those persons lives. Those kind of illustrations over and over again help me to say to myself that Imaginal Education is a primordial method.

The collapse of modern education in our times. It is trite to say education is in trouble. We live out of 19th-century images and yet we operate in a 20th Century world. I have two images of education to share with you. The first one: A guy beats a stick against a tree. All of a sudden the ax head starts falling off. Yet he is still beating it with the stick, trying to get the tree to fall down. He just pours his life into continuing that futile activity. The second image: Imagine six men furiously dumping buckets of water, trying to fill a Coke bottle in the middle of the room. These both are pictures in my mind of what is happening in education.

Ask anybody in a public school - the principal, a teacher, even the janitor: "What does it mean to be educated today?" Be prepared to stay all day because nobody has a way of taking seriously 20th century human beings in the area of education. Not only is the system in trouble, but the whole educational methodology is like using a dinosaur to create resurrected life. The methodology is outdated, outmoded, and not relevant to our times.

Another image of schools and universities is that they are fact factories. You go there and get yourself filled up with facts that you regurgitate. There was a time when the curriculum was created with the blood and sweat of many people who taught us the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic; the curriculum was organized into the humanities and sciences. Then when the Russians launched Sputnik, we said we have got to emphasize the sciences, not just the old sciences, but all kinds of space sciences so we tacked on science courses. Then we told ourselves we live in a psychological age so we added psychology courses. As we began to mature, we said we live in a sociological age so we tacked on sociology courses. In the midst of all the social upheavals and the cries for practical education, we added sex education and drivers education. Then we cried, "Oh good lord, we don't have any black heritage. We have two blacks in our school." So we added it, only to realize we needed to add other heritages as well. Now our university and high school education is a mish-mash of courses.

Students see that education is irrelevant; street corner education seems more adequate to prepare a human being for life than the public school. Kids standing on street corners are getting more prepared for life than our kids who are in the public school everyday. Street corner catechisms become the in thing. Educators are saying, "This is irrelevant; the students are rebelling." You can't blame them for rebelling. When the students rebel, the administrators response is to tighten up.

I remember getting my first job to teach speech in a public school. As I walked into a sixth grade classroom, the principal went in with me saying, "Now listen boys and girls. This is your new teacher. You are not to be noisy. If anybody cuts up, she is going to bring you to me; and you know what will happen." He just went on and on telling them how they better sit in their chairs and shut up. Translated, what he was really saying was, "Now hear this you convicts. Here is your new prison guard. If you try and break out in anyway, you are going to get punished severely. Regardless of anything he said, that is the way his words were interpreted. It took me about a month to get them to say something when I asked them a question.

That is how we have responded to the crisis of education - to get a little more authoritarian. Tighten up the belt; get the kids in line. Society has responded by sort of laughing at it. You come out of high school - and maybe out of college, and the first thing you do when you get a job is go through a training program. What we have our hands is something that is irreversible.

The Cultural Revolution is not going to go away regardless of how we try to recover old 19th-century images. Shifting from the sense of static to relational. Everything we experience in life tells us that life is dynamic, life is relational. Yet we encounter old modes of trying to fix education, trying to fix a person's life, trying to fix a job. It is absolutely immoral in the 20th Century to train a person to do one thing that is not the way life is in our time. We still think there is some static fixedness rather than seeing life as dynamic

Shifting from a style of one-to-one to structured care. My husband teases me that I can't sew even though I spent two years in home economics. He asks "Why can't you sew? Did you flunk?" I say, "Well I never learned. Although I got 'A's, the teacher who taught home economics was my mother's good friend. Instead of being a caring structure for my life, she acted out of a one-to-one relationship."

In the arena of symbols our times have shifted the mystery from the edge to the center. We structure out the unknown in education. Whenever the mystery intrudes, we do not know what to do and panic. When I was teaching if somebody intruded when I lectured, it was immediately a fight. I remember telling a child in my room once to either shut up get out. That the only way I had to deal with an intrusion. I had no way to get said to myself that the mystery breaks in at the center of life, always intruding. I sent that child out into the hall. Later a teacher said to me, "Children don't come to school to stand in the hall." A student's response to being treated like this is to believe their life is not being taken seriously "so shove it" is their response. They drop out of school; or they stay in school and rebel because it has no meaning for their lives. That is the kind of thing that we are up against.

The Cultural Revolution raises the question, "What does it mean to be an educated person? What does it mean to be educated in the 20th Century?" We have not said to ourselves that education is about creating human beings to learn how to deal with their lives, to wrestle with life issues like "Who am I? What do I? and "How do I?" Those are life questions that education is beginning to see are just there and are a part of what it means to be a human being. If we are not dealing with that, we are not educating people. Our images and symbols of what it means to be educated are like "How well do you do on a test? What is your reading score? How many facts do you know? What's your SAT score? How many degrees have you collected?" Or how many tricks can you perform. This sounds cruel but because it is the way we treat dogs, saying, "Sit up Rover, roll over Rover." Often the way we measure whether our kids are educated is how many tricks they can do. "Say your ABC's for grandma. Read something. You can do it, go ahead." Your responses determines whether you are getting yourself educated.

There's only one issue in education and that's how you enable a human being to take the journey that is going to lead to one's life questions. That's the only question. How are you going to be able to take that journey - and take it authentically. How you live that journey is the only question in terms of what it means to be educated.

We experience life comes to us a chaos. How do you enable someone to see relationships and bring order to them? There is no way to talk about the self without talking about a set of questions. If you ask me who I am, and I say that I am a woman - that is pointing toward relationship that is over against man. I cannot describe myself except relationally. I am a teacher, as over against students, that's describing a relationship. Life is a bundle of relationships. The question is how do you enable one to see the chaos of the relationships in

life. Although they are often conflicting relationships, that very chaos is life to create, order, and determine how one participates in it.

The task of education is to provide foundational skills and necessities that are a part of life. It is to provide adequate images of living in the 20th-century. First you trust your intuition, trust your experience of life. There is no one who has experienced life anymore than you have, whether they have lived seven or eighty years. Then trust the corporate wisdom. When it becomes necessary research, research. Build a model and decide a timeline, hold yourself to that model and go. The task of education is to provide techniques and methods that release freedom.

Imaginal Education. There are four presuppositions of Imaginal Education:

1. Everyone lives out of images.
2. Images determine behavior.
3. Images can change.
4. New images can be intentionally beamed in.

The first point is nothing new. You can look around this room and determine who we are by the images we portray. We live out of images. Madison Avenue is very clear about this. It is painful for me to say this, but Madison Avenue has created in my mind an image that to be human is to have white shiny teeth. If I don't have bright shiny teeth, obviously I'm not fully human. So I operate of that image. That image tells me who I am. If my teeth are so bad off that they just don't get white and shiny, obviously I'm not a full human being. So I buy Ultra Brite Toothpaste, because human beings have white and shiny teeth. Human beings wear a size 10 dress if they are a woman; obviously I am not a full human being because I don't wear a size 10. If I want to be fully human, I have to starve myself. That is how Madison Avenue has taught us.

Let's play a little game. If I say 'Charmin bathroom tissue', what image comes to mind? "Charmin is irresistibly soft? What color do you think of when I say 'little girl' or 'little boy'? We think about what our life means with images of family, money, jobs. Images tell us what we can do. It is hard to separate these two. I cannot give a lecture if images I have been bombarded with say 'You can't give a lecture. You can't talk before a large group of people. You can't do it. The only thing you can do is listen.' Images tell us what it means to be male, female, black, white, old, young.

When I was in high school I had pink stationary with pink flowers in the corner. Whenever I mailed a letter I would douse it with perfume. Anyone who got a letter from me knew who I was: sweet, innocent, and smelled good. That was the image that told everyone who I was. How do you use what you know consciously for the sake of educating human beings - knowing that all of them live out of images and images determine behavior?

Life experience is a relationship. I am a relationship of mother, black, daughter - that is the only way I can define myself. The crucial point is the point of relating to those relationships. This is the point of decision. This is where the image of who I am gets created. Images are not abstract ideas, but the image that holds that abstract idea is what determines my behavior. If my image of myself is that I am an old battle ax, then you better look out because every time you bump into me you have got a battle. That image tells me what to do. If that image tells me I am a magnolia blossom, that is a bit more pleasant because magnolia blossoms woo you in, not beat you.

We act out of concrete pictures in our heads, not abstract ideas. I knew a girl who imaged herself as being a good girl, that is what she told herself and other people - I'm a good girl. Every year she said this year I plan to go to school and study. But the image that girl operated out of was sheer spitfire. This is the way she acted out her life. Once in the cafeteria a teacher said something to her about a discipline issue. She lit into him and cursed him out. If you ask

her later why she did that, she would say, "He deserved it; he made me do it." Her image of herself does not record what she tells herself about herself. So the only way she can talk about her behavior that it is always somebody else's fault, never her fault.

Imaginal education says no to that. It is in the negation of that image that new possibility is created. How do you expose the concrete behavior and allow her to get said what her image is of herself. It is in that process that a new story and image gets created. That means that you constantly bombard her with images of possibility and relationships she can take to life so she gets a new image of herself. Images have more power than anything we ever say abstractly about ourselves because images determine behavior, not ideas but images.

Images can be changed. The first way to change self images is to expose the way one acts in life. Call that into question so a new story can be created. The other way is to support the abstract idea about oneself and the behavior to coincide. Both of them are dehumanizing; neither one of them knows how a person can participate in life authentically. Then you begin to change the self story. You change the abstract idea and the image to change the way the person creatively acts out their existence. Not one or the other, but both the idea and image.

When a child falls or is hit, the child has two choices: an excuse not to participate or to say to themselves something like this: "I am always falling down, but I know what I can do. I can pick myself up and say to myself, I'm the greatest too." You want to change an image of a previous pattern of behavior so that child sees new possibilities for how to act.

Viola changed my image of what it means to be a mother. She left her kids to participate in a demonstration and died. My whole image of what it means to be a mother radically shifted. People say she was a bad mother because she left her kids and got herself killed. That is not the way that image bombarded my life. For me it was like creating a future for your child means you risk creating the future so that children can live authentically. That shifted my image of what it means to be a good mother.

Let's talk about beaming in new images. First of all, you do with a comprehensive curriculum that deals with all of life, is transparent to the mystery, is relational and is womb-to-tomb. You have a curriculum about educating people to live in the world whether you are intentional about it or not. That curriculum needs to have the basic, foundational reality that everyone has to have, the basic skills. A curriculum has to be relational, dealing with the structural relationships. It has to be relational to sociology and history, Then an authentic curriculum deals with personal identity, psychology and art. This curriculum has nothing to do with whether you succeed or fail. It deals with the gift that I am. Then the curriculum has an imaginal part that gives self-consciousness to everything else, that enables a person to relate to everything else and be able to use it. The curriculum that creates one as a human being reveals the mystery of life, the unknown. We always show up collapsing one of the polls. A comprehensive curriculum deals with the whole person.