

The Think Tank: cognitive scientist builds lab-on-wheels

A cognitive scientist called Tyler Alterman is raising money to build a lab on wheels called "The Think Tank" that will educate people in New York about the brain.

The lab will be built out of box truck renovated by Alterman and a team of artists headed up by Christine Alaimo, a neuroscientist with a cupcake business that raises money for autism research. The aim is to get psychologists and neuroscientists to deliver talks about the science of the brain, invite citizens aboard to participate in studies and to educate classrooms. The project is currently seeking \$10,900 (£7,200) funding on Indiegogo.

The Think Tank is Alterman's senior thesis project for CUNY Macaulay Honors College. He is collaborating with neuroscientist Daniel Casasanto for the initiative.

Alterman is keen to become part of a movement to help members of the public engage with and understand cognitive science. In the past he has tried to communicate the subject to audiences at Occupy Wall Street, but the box truck -- complete with a large brain sculpture on the top -- was inspired by an art project called "Trailer Park", which featured a miniature park (complete with plants and benches) inside a trailer.

"If an artist can get away with putting a park on wheels, I thought, then why can't I get away with putting cognitive science on wheels? Not having a good answer, I summoned my design background to draft a proposal for a cognitive science education station," Alterman told Wired.co.uk. He went on to explain that having initially wanted to call the trailer the "Brainmobile", his mother suggested the eventual name.

He believes that The Think Tank will supplement schooling by sharing scientific knowledge and the process by which that knowledge was discovered. In addition it will create a platform for citizen science, whereby interested people will get the chance to become scientists, through experiments aboard the vehicle.

Once the funding is raised, Alterman is keen to unveil the pink and green vehicle at a public benefit, which will be headlined by the Amygdaloids, a rock band made up entirely of neuroscientists.

"The biggest challenge is the fact that most Americans, including myself, were never taught science in secondary school," argues Alterman. "American secondary school students spend hours climbing the foothills of facts and figures without ever learning how to figure.

"The essence of science is not the figures, but in the figuring: the chaotic brainstorming of new ideas during a lab meeting; the creative design of new experiments; speaking with a teammate about how to make meaning from data over coffee and pancakes. Science is first and foremost a series of methods for thoughtfully exploring the world -- a way of knowing. This we never learn."

If you'd like to support the project, head on over the Indiegogo page.

URL: <http://www.wired.co.uk/news/archive/2013-02/25/the-think-tank>