who are our HEROES

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Sincere thanks to Gordon Neighborhood House for their participation in this study. Many thanks also to Emily Carr University’s faculty Jonathan Aitken, Deborah Shackleton.
Do children today have heroes? Have the attributes of their heroes changed? Do these heroes come from their immediate social environment? These questions guided my research and were asked as part of a wider question of whether children today are replacing traditional models of heroes with celebrities. I addressed these questions through primary research and secondary research.

My primary research included conducting a pilot study through interviews of 16 children aged between 4-10 currently in an out of school care program in Vancouver. Children were asked about their notions of a hero and types of attributes that they would look for in a hero. The findings from the interviews provide support that the celebrity status are important characteristics of a hero, especially common in females. 85% of the female children find heroic qualities in a person with celebrity status.

Overall, there lies a disconnect with the most of the children’s description and qualities of the hero and those who they consider to be heroes.

My secondary research was conducted in two phases. Phase 1 included researching the phenomenon of heroes and the historical evolution of the attributes of the hero in society.

Phase 02 included researching aids through which children best learn in an after-school environment. Interactivity is key in the learning process. 1. Engaging and fun 2. Fostering Creativity 3. Process and Product 4. Accessibility and Inclusion 5. A right to different Media of expression
The more modern our culture has become, the further it has moved away from the archetypal hero image. Traditional heroes are men and women who “deliberately and courageously overcome obstacles for the benefit of others without regard to personal consequence” (modelingfutureheroes.com). In today’s world, due to the high influence of media, the celebrity and the traditional hero are synonymous: many of those who are most famous and idolized are not necessarily those who have demonstrated moral courage or heroism (Loftus, 1995) and thus celebrities can become pseudo-heroes by taking the role of traditional heroes in the lives of media consumers. Our youth need inspirational heroes as role models in their lives to guide their behaviors, attitudes and values. However, today’s children are lightly exposed to the true definition of heroes. Words like bravery, fortitude, gallantry, and valor, which once stirred their emotions, do not carry the same weight for them. They perceive celebrities as heroes and keep from confronting the older; more demanding forms of this ideals. As our society weakens the term heroism, it fails to foster heroic imagination in children.

Multimedia tools such as video and audio recording, digital photography, interactive maps, messaging, online forums, and games provide a wealth of new ways to engage young people, explore issues, record views and creatively communicate about the changes young people need to see. There is a huge untapped potential in the arts and creative multimedia that will help reintroduce the concept of traditional heroes. An afterschool environment will offer a more casual and ideal setting for the implementation of this project.
03 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- “Do children attending an after school program view heroes differently from celebrities?”
- “Does a traditional hero have more influence on youth’s attitudes, behaviour, values than a celebrity?”
- “Is interactive mixed media a more effective communicating tool than classroom teaching to empower young individuals about true heroes?”
- “What are current tools being employed at after-school programs?”
- “Can social-media play a role in this shift?”
Do children today have heroes? Have the attributes of their heroes changed? Do these heroes come from their immediate social environment? These questions were asked as part of a wider question of whether children today are replacing traditional models of heroes with celebrities. I addressed these questions by conducting a pilot study through interviews of 16 children aged between 4-10 currently in an out of school care Program in Vancouver.

These questions were asked:

- Who is a hero?
- What are some qualities of a hero?
- Who is your hero?
- What qualities of the person you chose make him/her a hero?
- Do you try to be like your hero?
- Do you think it is important to have heroes?

The findings were further examined according to gender. There were 7 males and 9 females in the sample, aged between 6 and 10 years old.

**KEY FINDINGS**

- 75% of children think it is important to have heroes
- The celebrity status are more important characteristics of a hero for females. 85% of the female children find heroic qualities in a person with celebrity status
- 25% of the children found heroic qualities within their immediate family
- For most children, being a hero meant to save another human-being’s life.
- Only 25% of children choose their role model because of their internal qualities such as courage, sacrifice.
- There lies a disconnect with the most of the children’s description and qualities of the hero and those who they consider to be heroes.
- 25% of the kids could not name their hero.
Table 1.1: Age of Sample Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>18.75%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>18.75%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.2:
Question 1: Who is a hero?

- Someone who saves lives: 7
- Someone who has super powers: 4
- Someone who does good things: 2
- Someone who helps you: 2
- Someone who can fly: 2
- Someone who lets me play with lego: 1
- Someone who sacrifices their life: 1

Table 1.3: When asked to name their hero, the children spontaneously mentioned the following.

- Superman: 9
- Terry Fox: 7
- Miley Cyrus: 4
- Parents (Mom or Dad): 4
- Vampires: 4
- Brother: 1
- Selena Gomez: 1
- Kesha: 1
- Emily Osment: 1
- Friends: 1
- Policeman: 1
- Barack Obama: 1
- Stephen Harper: 1
Table 1.4: Question: Who is your hero?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hero Type</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superhero</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry Fox</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrity</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Member</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t have a hero</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.5: Question: What qualities of the person you chose make him/her a hero?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Type</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Great Singer</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does good deeds</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brave</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saves my life in video games</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not afraid</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lends me her I-phone</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.6: Is it important for you to have a hero?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
GENDER DIFFERENCES
This section provides information about the differences between boys and girls in terms of their hero choices and attributes of their heroes. These comparisons are based on 7 boys and 9 girls.

Table 1.7:
Question: When asked to name their hero, the children spontaneously mentioned the following.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superman</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry Fox</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miley Cyrus</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents(Mom or Dad)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vampires</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selena Gomez</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kesha</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily Osment</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policeman</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barack Obama</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen Harper</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.8:
Question Who is your hero?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superhero</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terry Fox</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celebrity</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Member</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t have a hero</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1.9: Attributes of their particular hero

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Great Singer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does good deeds</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brave</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saves my life in video games</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not afraid</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lends me her I-phone</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I directed my initial research about heroes through specific criteria. What intrigues me is the way that we entertain a host of different character types in our minds and can be transformed by those we truly wish to emulate, from mythical heroes like Hercules to 21st century Shaquile O’ Neil. Through the gradual progression of criteria, I see also a progression of ourselves, as heroes are ‘the avenues to the selves we entertain in our imagination’ (Meyer 11). My choice of heroes made for each section are derived from multiple interviews and other sources.

Hero as...

1. THE DIVINE MYTH
The stories of heroes, traditionally thought of as myths, date back to the distant period of the Ancient World. The Divine Hero, offers us a glimpse of an existence touched beyond the limitations of life.

[These figures] hold the promise that the more we learn to grow towards that which is beyond us, the more likely we are learn how we, too can overcome our limitations. The Divine Hero is a target rather than an expression (Meyer 8).

In this section, I have focused my research on Rama, an avatar of Lord Vishnu in Hinduism and a legendary king of Ayodhya in ancient Indian texts and Hercules, a figure of godly veneration and the archetypal overachieving human.

Their adventures give ample opportunity to point in the direction, which portrays them as quintessential heroes. This is achieved by presenting [them] as spectacularly qualified to display [their] prowess across a variety of situations requiring heroic succor (Kumar). These characteristics casting Rama and Hercules in the complexion of the ‘archetypal hero’ can be classified as follows:

1) Facing the Unknown
2) Love and Sublimation
3) Heroic Nobility
4) The Path of the Karma yogi i.e. the act of achieving perfection in action

“Language, image and the ability to organize them into stories are the means by which we come both to see ourselves and to see beyond ourselves”. –Meyer 253.

2. THE EPIC HERO
The hyperbolized epic hero, lives large and seeks a reality that is even larger, yet he is still grappling with the most basic human concerns: love, home, identity and justice. (Meyer 12) Although he is someone who is touched by divinity, he still holds essential human outlooks and capabilities. Since the epic is structured precisely to elicit our admiration for the hero, the great man of the society out of which is comes, it should be an excellent place in which to discover concretely what a nations, or cultures concept of human greatness was (McNammee, bookjacket). Mythology is filled with accounts of heroes, for example, the Epic of Gilgamesh, a long narrative poem that predates the Hebrew Bible
and Beowulf, the oldest epic poem in the English language.

“The Epic of Gilgamesh appears to have been encouraging the notion of heroism by creating a grand structure of praise around his protagonist, for either poetic or political reasons” Meyer 189. He was truly a hero showing skill, intelligence, valor, reverence, and a respect for death. He goes fearlessly into battle to rid the world of harmful beasts and travels to distant lands to find answers that will help the people of his city.

3. THE COMMON HERO
Here has emerged a modern concept, a new code for the ‘hero’ in the simple figures of ourselves, the problem solver. This stately yet diminutive figure rises through knowledge, courage and perseverance, to face the challenges of a world that is still worth communion with. The modern reinvention of the conventional hero in all its forms, suggests that heroes are now ubiquitous.

“At the conclusion of ‘Song of Myself’, Walt Whitman implied the idea that the hero was not so much disappearing as it was dissipating over a very broad spectrum” (Meyer, 73)

4. THE SUPERHERO
The “superhero” has been a staple of North American mass media since the emergence of Superman in 1938. The popular figure known as the superhero has exerted such a strong and mushrooming influence upon society, morality, and politics that a mythology now pervades our culture.

“The transmedial explosion of the superhero myth has created a profusion of adventures, timelines, settings, characters, and so on, and the public has been developing a strong awareness of the temporality of the myth, which has proven strong enough to resist its confrontation with time and temporality” (Ndalianis). Taking Superman as an example- the first costumed superhero ever created, and the prototype for so many others. The parallels between the so-called ‘man of steel’ and mythical heroes are remarkable. From having amazing abilities and powers beyond that of mere mortals; being raised from humble origins; standing up for truth and justice; and battling with humanity’s archenemies.

5. THE CELEBRITY
Somewhere along the road to civilization our values took a different turn and we decided that elite athletes are gods, that movie stars deserve deities. There lies a part of us that yearns to ogle and gawp at the splendour of our celebrity heroes lives. It is here, in the peculiar ambivalence of our attitude towards these so-called heroes that the true focus of my interest lies. A lot of people are fascinated by fame and the famous, to the point of obsession. People put their trust in what famous people say and do. Famous journalists, pundits and talk show hosts are especially powerful, as they can directly sway public opinion on an issue or topic simply by the virtue of their jobs.

A 2003 study was done on the celebrity worship phenomenon. Psychologists Lynn McCutcheon and James Houran took 600 subjects and gauged their celebrity fascination levels. They found that twenty percent of
the group, or 120 subjects, followed the celebrity scene purely for entertainment value. Another ten percent, or 60 individuals, took the celeb watching to another level; believing that they had what McCutcheon and Houran described as a “special bond” with the celebrity. An even smaller group-less than one percent-were termed “borderline-pathological.

6. THE BUSINESS/ PRODUCT
If media output is any measure, the ‘hero industry’ is engaged in massive overproduction. Promoting products as a hero—one that stands for more than itself—gives the public something to watch, to believe in, and to cheer for. Beyond acquiring customers, they create a broader audience that is anxious to see what comes next. Metaphorically speaking, they want their products to grow in status from local champion to recognized hero.

While this may be a new initiative for Dell, it’s certainly not new to Lexus, JetBlue, Starbucks, or Ritz-Carlton.

“Adding “people” to “product” represents brand experience enhancement and business results that can last. After all, people can be every bit as heroic as products.”

- William J. McEwen, Ph.D.
My secondary research shifted direction towards current tools through which individuals and groups of young generation can be empowered to make informed decisions about their heroes. There are current not-for-profit programs outside of BC that have initiated a drive towards inspiring heroes in our youth, but they mostly involve lesson plans and visually dry materials that do not encourage creativity and collaboration amongst them.

According to previous research, three point-of-service features—strong youth engagement, well-conceived and well-delivered content, and a conducive learning environment—lead to positive impacts in after-school settings, the ultimate gauge of quality (Grossman 01).

**WHY INTERACTIVITY WITHIN VARIOUS MEDIA IS KEY?**

1. Engaging and Fun
2. Fostering Creativity
3. Process and Product
4. Accessibility and Inclusion
5. A right to different Media of expression
6. Authenticity
7. Self directed

**SELF ASSESSMENT AS A TOOL**

The purpose of having children engage in self-assessment is to help them determine what they think is their most gratifying and well-done work and what goals they set for themselves and for evaluation purposes. When self-assessing, children use criteria and standards to evaluate themselves. Research has shown that by encouraging a child to critically analyze her or his learning process, the child is afforded the opportunity to take control of his or her learning and creates an arena for independence and ownership of the learning process.

The importance of student self-assessment are working towards real, powerful and enduring levels of student engagement. This is drawn on current research in the Fair Go Project. This research in a Priority Schools Funding Program (PSFP) school is investigating ways that teachers can support students in processes of reflection and evaluation of their own learning. This support is concentrating on self-assessment probes that bring together affective and cognitive reflections in a process of increasing intellectual challenges. The suggestion here is that student engagement is most likely to be found when there are high levels of both feeling and thinking. Student self-assessment is recognised world wide as an interesting and vital way for children to learn. Through self-assessment they can more fully understand both the content and processes of their learning. While it is well documented that self-assessment is beneficial to both the students and the educator (Bryant & Timmins, Hart, Black & William).
USING THE SUPERHERO METAPHOR

Why is the metaphor so compelling?

The metaphor of the superhero is compelling because metaphors work by gestalt. They create an entire sense, simply by conveying that one thing is the same as something else. Powerful metaphors show us the deep similarities between things that we had assumed were very different from one another.

Playing with the metaphor feels like trying on variations of identities of who I am and who I want to be in my work. This playfulness enhances the learning process. By adopting the metaphor of superhero, children can use what they know about their best self and their strengths playfully until they find a way to express their strengths that fits perfectly.

In the book *Writing Superheroes: Contemporary Childhood, Popular Culture, and Classroom Literacy*, Anne Haas Dyson reports results of an ethnographic study of an urban classroom of 7- to 9-year olds, examining how the children use superhero stories in their play worlds. Dyson shows how the stories of superheroes offer children ways to adopt powerful identities who can do battle against evil and win. When you are feeling beaten down or demoralized in your work, you may need ways to tell yourself and others stories in which you can adopt a powerful identity who is capable of battling against the organizational forces arrayed against you and coming out on top.
09 BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Bibliography is categorized into Theoretical Frameworks, Supporting Writings and Projects and Practices. Theoretical Frameworks

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS


SUPPORTING WRITINGS

The Worlds Most Influential People. The 2010 TIME 100. <http://www.time.com/time/specials/packages/0,28757,1984685,00.html>


Dyson, Anne H. Writing Superheroes: Contemporary Childhood, Popular Culture, and Classroom Literacy.

PROJECTS AND PRACTICES


Lost Heroes. Ian Stevenson. <http://www.ianstevenson.co.uk/>
