

Heroes in Historical, Social, and Cultural Aspects

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Mankind's common instinct for reality has always held the world to be essentially a theatre for heroism. In heroism, we feel, life's supreme mystery is hidden. We tolerate no one who has capacity whatever for it in any direction. On the other hand, no matter what a man's frailties otherwise may be, if he be willing to risk death, and still more if he suffer it heroically, in the service he has chosen, the fact consecrates him forever.

-William James

INTRODUCTION

What person can be called a hero? What is the distinguishing feature of heroism? What do Hercules, Abraham Lincoln, Galileo, and Mother Teresa have in common? Expecting no easy way to find the answers, I first looked up the etymology of the word "hero."

Hero comes from the Greek word *heros* which meant just "hero." But there mentioned one curious detail, which connected "hero" with "Hera," the sister and wife of Zeus, the king of the Gods in Greek mythology. She was the queen of both the gods and men. But what unites her with the meaning of the modern word "hero?" Hera was famous for serving as a protector of women and children. Developing the idea of protecting someone who is weaker and often helpless inevitably led me to construct my own description of the modern hero's virtues. Heroism is a moral concept, a phenomenon with thousands of dimensions. Many dimensions operate at a high level of abstraction. Any attempt to give a universal definition of heroism is condemned not to be exact and true. Heroes are determined according to one's individual taste and that's why they are very subjective. Andrea Dworkin once said:

A man can be a hero if he is a scientist, or a soldier, or a drug addict, or a disc jockey, or a crummy mediocre politician. A man can be a hero because he suffers and despairs; or because he thinks logically and analytically; or because he is "sensitive"; or because he is cruel. Wealth establishes a man as a hero, and so does poverty. Virtually any circumstance in a man's life will make him a hero to some group of people and has a mythic rendering in the culture—in literature, art, theatre, or the daily newspapers. (*Heroes Quotes*)

When my students were asked to think about their heroes, their answers varied from "a friend who doesn't do drugs when everybody else does" to Abraham Lincoln "who saved the whole nation." Their choice itself, as well as the description of heroic features, is very personal. It mirrors their values and characterizes them as people. Our criteria to define heroes seem to depend on what we like and admire in people and in ourselves as well. In spite of numerous interpretations of hero with all the individualized

differences there is a thread that connects them all together. The central feature is greatness.

The distinguished English philosopher Thomas Hobbes wrote that greatness was merely a reflection of what is valued by a society at any given time. “Greatness is in the eyes of the beholder. And as in other things, so in men, not the seller but the buyer determines the price” (Hobbes 117). A hero, to my understanding, is a person who gave his life either physically or by devotedness to serving other people. The title “hero” is the determination of the “high price” or value that is given to a person by people as an attempt to show their thankfulness and admiration for their great generosity. My definition may turn out to be limiting. Perhaps my students will be more successful in articulating a better definition of a hero. So I am going to invite them to the exciting journey of great people, legendary times and unforgettable events.

Theoretical Foundation and Goals

The aim of education is not to produce a man with a certain range of technical skills, but rather to cultivate the single noble virtue of manliness. A truly manly man would show himself proficient in warfare, scholarship, government, letters and even love. -Cicero

“Please raise your hand – who wants to be a hero?” It was the beginning of my first class devoted to heroism. The opening words took my students unawares. The commotion reigned in my classroom and I was silently observing their hesitation to become a hero until one student interrupted muddled muttering by saying “I don’t want to be a hero. It is silly to die for someone.” Nobody raised a hand after these words, and I thought, “We have a long way to go.”

Thousands of years ago the ancient Chinese, and later the Greek philosophers, examined life from three aspects: physical, mental, and spiritual. They did not interpret them exactly the same way, but they all admitted their existence and agreed that each was as important as the other. They also believed that if we learn to balance these sides of our nature, we are moving towards harmony, agreement with ourselves and with the world.

The problem in many schools today is that too many educators teach students to live one or two-dimensional lives in a three-dimensional world. As everything in nature always tends to be complete, the gap in any dimension may destroy the other two. I explained to my eighth graders the idea of having three bodies in them and the importance to feed them all just as often as we give food to our physical body. I drew three circles on the board symbolizing the bodies and showed their interrelation. I was surprised how easily my students understood the essence of this theory. I continued in my class, “What will grow in your mental and spiritual bodies if you do not take care of them?” One of my students replied within two seconds, “Trash.” “Dirt,” supported another one. I was satisfied with their answers.

The concept of the ancient theory became so simple and clear to them that they began to like it and play good jokes about it. “Chris, your mental body is very hungry,” Michael commented on an incorrect answer when it became evident that Chris hadn’t done his homework. Noticing that one of my students was off task, I said, “Joe, you are the only one who is not reading now.” A student named Jairo continued, “Joe, trash is growing.” Everybody understood what he was talking about.

“Education is not merely acquiring knowledge, gathering or correlating facts; it is to see the significance of life” (19) observes Jiddu Krishnamurti. According to the opinion of this world-renowned spiritual teacher, any educational system will inevitably become a complete failure if it has over-emphasized technique. The purpose of education should not be judged simply in producing more job-hunters possessing up-graded skills to survive in a high-tech world. Practicing a certain number of techniques with no time for thinking can hardly make a person feel happy or make his life more meaningful.

A misbalance of the three dimensions becomes painfully evident in adolescents. Entering the real world, which is imperfect and often unfair, our unprepared teenagers become “naked” and defenseless. Many of them deal with their problems by using drugs, alcohol, aggressiveness, some in suicide. Psychologist David Elkind explains that today’s social pressures place adult demands on teenagers without giving them adequate tools to respond with, tools such as tested values and examined experience. “Without an ethical framework or the experience necessary for coping with adult stress, more and more teens resort to self-destructive methods of coping”(Elkind 78). According to data from an American Psychiatric Association report, during the last decade, the suicide rate in the fifteen-to-nineteen-year old bracket has gone up over 400 percent. In one year over six hundred thousand American teens attempted to take their lives. These numbers do not simply speak, they cry for themselves. It is immoral to stay indifferent to this tragedy, as we, being teachers of those teenagers, can either save them or become accomplices in their actions. As long as we continue to deny the significance of a spiritual dimension that provides ethical limits and moral values, we are killing a part of our human nature. Our teaching is condemned to fail. Achieving high scores in standard tests does not make our students become happy.

Aristotle considered a happy life to be virtuous which does not consist of amusement. According to him, our virtue of character is bound up with our passions and with our intelligence. Together they make up our human virtues, which we practice in order to obtain happiness in life. “So, happiness is not a state; we must rather class happiness as an activity” (Aristotle Book 10).

I found this statement to be thought provoking. Is it easy to live a virtuous life or does it take effort? Most probably it takes effort, depending on how “virtually trained” a person is. If it takes effort, does it mean that it is more difficult to live a happy life than unhappy? Can unhappy life, which is not virtuous by Aristotle, be more enjoyable? These are puzzling questions, giving good food for discussion, and perhaps not having

correct answers for everybody. But one conclusion is evident: any life, happy or not, can be expected to be difficult. This is one of the most essential truths of reality that our students must admit, remember and get prepared for. Unfortunately, many of the “effective teaching strategies” teach the opposite. “We want fun!” cheer our students. “Learning should be fun,” complained my eighth grader. “It is,” I said. “But you made us read and reading is not fun,” she continued.

The conflict is caused by our different interpretations of the word “fun.” Knowledge is not valuable for most of our students. That is why obtaining it is not enjoyable enough. What is paradoxical for me in this situation is that the school often supports them in this attitude. Many of the implemented teaching methods promote entertainment as a form of learning, which is harmful because of two main reasons: first, the quality of learning cannot be high enough as the purpose of the activity in student understanding is to get fun, not knowledge. Students stay engaged as long as it is entertaining, but when it turns out to require extra effort or more practicing their desire to learn vanishes into thin air.

The second reason is that this type of schooling does not provide students with the real life experience. It is like a fake guide. It creates an illusion that life is fun and easy. And it is not. One cannot live doing only what he wants and never what he must. In their future the real life will demand responsibility, self-sacrifice, determination, commitment and a lot of work. It will hardly grant them with daily amusement, instead they will more likely get tiring routine that only some of them will manage to turn it into pleasure. One of my student’s compositions “My Hero” has this sentence: “My dad is my hero because he can make himself work for 12 hours every day for us, his family, to have what we have.”

We help our students in life if we are able to teach them to treat work as a pleasure, as it leads to self-expression, satisfaction, success and happiness. But if we turned what was supposed to be work into fun, if we made them be users not creators, we deceived them, and sooner or later the revealing of it will bring a bitter disappointment. David Bly once said “Striving for success without hard work is like trying to harvest where you haven’t planted.”

I have a student who has now become a big part of my teaching life. He was a polite, respectful, intelligent drug addict – an innocent victim of life’s imperfection. He was one of those who had a dangerous habit of having a careless entertaining life and school was part of it. Facing his first difficulties at the age of 11 and unable to overcome them, he continued to entertain himself doing drugs and became addicted. Three years later he realized that it was no longer fun to be a slave to dope. He asked for help, “Ms. Belik, I wish I was never be born. Life is so hard, I cannot handle it.” His big tired eyes on his pale skinny face mirrored deep pain and sorrow.

Unfortunately, he is not the only one. There are more around us in our classrooms and hallways, walking silently like shadows, unable to handle life. Neither family nor school

ever taught them that it is natural to have problems. All of us have. When you get them, deal with them, try to find the way to solve them, stay strong and patient. You should not get away from them, hide from or ignore them. You cannot lie to yourself either. You should solve your problems or if you fail, change your attitude to them. But don't let your spiritual body grow weeds in it. Take care of it. Conscience can help you to keep your spirit clean, moral values will make it healthy. Acquiring problem-solving skills in real life is a tiring exercise for mind and soul. It is work. Sometimes it is a very hard work. And if teachers, at least sometimes, could sacrifice one lesson on punctuation rules or fractions and teach students how to live a virtuous life, in fact they will begin teaching them how to be happy. A happy person can master punctuation or fractions much faster and easier and maybe your class will become fun for your students.

Last year I got a 7th grade class of twenty-one students. Sixteen of them were problem children coming from at risk environments. At my first class I realized that their purpose for attending school was very far from academic. They hated school and learning and now I became a part of it to them. My regular lesson plans did not work. I knew if I didn't modify my class completely, I would be teaching walls not minds. So, for almost 2 months the objective of my class was establishing civilized behavior through moral reasoning, developing good character, promoting positive attitude to education. Every class was begun with my problem-question that I thought would be directly connected to what they needed or lacked most of all in life. My questions touched the students, and as they could not stay indifferent, almost all of them were actively involved in our discussions. Frankly speaking, sometimes it was a challenge to lead discussion to the desired outcome, to prove and persuade that moral decisions in life, even though being hard to make, are the correct ones. Very gradually we were building our relationship, which finally became a mutual understanding and deep respect. Some of the students began to call me "mama" and it sounded like a reward for my work. I am happy they discovered conscience. It became a great pleasure to work with them. I was enjoying looking at their inspired, thoughtful, and in some cases tearful, eyes when they were writing about people they love or reflecting emotions and feeling provoked by a piece of music. Teaching Project Clear objectives began to be no problem in that class for me. I introduced them to poetry and some of them were shocked to reveal a talent in poetry writing either in themselves or in a classmate. All my students' mothers received a card with their child-composed poem to Mother's Day. This one-year experience with the group of students made my firm belief in the importance of character education even stronger.

Scholarly debate on moral development and character formation extends at least as far back as Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and Socrates' *Meno* and continues through modern times. In the last several hundred years, character education has been a primary function of educational institutions. 17th century English philosopher John Locke saw the main purpose of education in character development. American influential philosopher and educator of the early 20th century, John Dewey, considered moral education to be the central mission of school. In his book *Democracy and Education* he wrote that the most

important problem of moral education in school concerns the relationship of knowledge and conduct.

For unless the learning which accrues in the regular course of study affects character, it is futile to conceive the moral end as the unifying and culminating end of education. When there is no intimate organic connection between the methods and materials of knowledge and moral growth, particular lessons and models of discipline have to be resorted to: knowledge is not integrated into usual springs of action and outlook of life, while morals become moralistic – a scheme of separate virtues...Discipline, natural development, culture, social efficiency, are moral traits – marks of a person who is worthy member of that society which it is the business of education to further. (Dewey 181)

However, since the 1930s American education has increasingly turned away from character education as a primary goal. Ranking three goals of public schools according to their importance made developing good character to be the last one, while developing skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening to become of the first priority. The notion of a good teacher began to be aligned with the idea of a good technician – a skilled craftsman – who has acquired necessary for the “effective teacher” skills and strategies, which research claims are related to achievement.

It is obviously necessary to know how to read and write, and to learn some profession hoping thus to get a secure economic position. But does the cultivation of a technique enable a person to understand himself? If technique is the only thing we are striving for, then we are denying what is far more essential part of life. Life is not only a certain time frame given to a person just to become skilled in some area, where practicing those skills can provide his living. Life is much more significant, many-sided, multi-layered, diverse and when we understand it as a whole, at every level of it, then, that understanding creates its own technique. So technique comes through understanding, but not visa versa.

Technological progress does solve certain kinds of problems for some people at one level, but it introduces wider and deeper issues too. If we disregard the total process of life at a certain point we will meet misery and destruction. Possessing technical skills and knowledge, however necessary, will in no way resolve our inner, psychological pressures and conflicts; and they, being acquired without understanding, can be extremely destructive. The growing numbers of at risk students, juvenile crime statistics, student dropout rates signal the necessity to re-prioritize education tasks. It is fair to mention that at-risk students are not created by schools only. Many schools just continue to ignore their problems with malfeasance, being too busy in implementing “effective teaching strategies,” the only purpose of which seems to improve statistical data on standard test scores. At-risk students come from at-risk families, which are units of at-risk society creating an at-risk future for itself. And education in this chain seems more likely to be a weak link, as it is not workable in reducing that risk.

Before we ask ourselves, “What to do?” we need to find the answer to “Why did it happen?” Schools are inevitably responsible for the present day crisis and if educators understand the reasons for it they will find the proper ways to improve. When they make their functioning more human oriented, they will awake intelligence in students, thus helping the generation not to bring about further conflict and deepen the problems of the society. Creation of the right environment with clear moral framework will strengthen students’ character, which enables them to develop academic competence.

It is difficult to overestimate the role of a teacher. Teaching success, to my mind, is determined mostly by the personality of the teacher. Moral educator has much more chances to find the right key to unlock students’ potential than a teacher-technician equipped with any of the most progressive teaching strategies or methods.

I liked the way the Principal of my school answered the question of a candidate applying for a teaching position in our school. “What is your understanding of a good teacher?” the candidate wondered. The response was, “He must love children . . . We can bring him to trainings, equip him with techniques and methods, we can even make him implement them, but we are unable to make him love children.”

I firmly believe that heart is one of the most important professional teaching tools. “We are looking for a teacher who will be able to teach moral values and virtues through Literature. We need a strong Character Educator,” I said to another applicant for a Language Arts position in our team. “Oh, yes. I can do it. I have a binder on Character Education,” was the reply. Nobody needs your binder, we need your heart.

When one follows a method, even if it has been worked out by a thoughtful and intelligent person, the method becomes very important only if children fit into it. Somebody measures, classifies or labels the child, and then proceeds to educate him according to some chart. This process of education may be convenient for the teacher, but neither the practice of a system nor the pressure of opinion and learning can bring about an integrated human being. In our relationship with students, we are not dealing with mechanical devices that can be quickly repaired. Rather, we work with human beings who possess all the complexity of their feelings, emotions and diversity of backgrounds. If an educator lacks the understanding of it or does not have the strength of patience, love and care, then they look for quick and easy remedies hoping for miraculous results. If there is no success again, they begin to label students with all kinds of “disabilities,” which is in fact often an indicator or an excuse for “disabled” teaching.

Real education cannot be separated from moral and spiritual aspects. Teaching by its nature is almost a religious learning, because it must give a child answers to basic questions: “What am I?” “What is life all about?” “What is my purpose here?” One of the characters of Dostoyevsky in *The Brothers Karamazov* says: “Without God, everything is permissible.” That “everything” often begins in school corridors and classrooms, and continues in the lives of troubled adults.

As I am new to the USA, coming from Russia two years ago I wondered and I am still wondering why teaching values is often ignored by school curriculum and school functioning. Several American teachers gave me explanations which all agreed to one main reason: that teaching values is connected to promoting religious principles and in the USA with the diversity of backgrounds, it might be interpreted as an abuse of somebody's freedom of religion. For me, being brought up by Russian-Soviet system of education where name of God was never mentioned in school, though virtues were still being taught, this reason seems to be rather strange. It becomes even more confusing when every morning every student is supposed to stand up to say the pledge to the flag of "the nation under God," facing American flag with his hand on the heart. I didn't notice either that somebody was hurt when he received his salary in banknotes that say "In God We Trust" and I personally do not know any atheist who refused to use the money.

It is extremely important that the society is taking into account the presence of all types of diversities: religious, ethnic, cultural or lifestyle. We must be aware of it. Always fashionable skepticism has an argument to say, "Whose values are to be taught?" My response is *common human*. From my own life experience I know that even my very secularized school was successful in teaching values not through religion but through common human moral values.

I remember how my teachers inspired us, teenagers at that time, to go from house to house in our neighbourhood and offer help in housekeeping to elderly people, of course, free. We cleaned their houses, did shopping or sometimes just talked to them as many of them were lonely and were happy to have someone to talk to. We were glad to know that we did something important and their thankful tears were the reward to us. The veterans of World War II, which is the Great Patriotic War for Russians, received flowers and Thank You cards from us every Victory Day. They were welcome guests at our school events. They were known, they were honored and they were thanked for what they did for our country. They took our breath by life stories about their battles. From their words we heard exploding bombs, whistling bullets, roaring tanks, we felt the pain of bleeding wounds and indescribable grief of friends lost – we pictured the horror of the war. Through them we learned that it might become the biggest happiness in the world just to have a peaceful blue sky. Their life example and exploits taught us courage, loyalty and devotion, selflessness, fairness, purposefulness, love to motherland and our people. In fact these were unforgettable lessons on heroism taught by heroes.

A school with a clear ethical framework is a lot more powerful. It doesn't struggle to find the proper behavior plan. It educates and disciplines students using a much wider range of methods. It is not only Code of Conduct and its consequences that prevent students from misbehavior. It is code of conscience as well. One of the common phrases that describe a problem student in Russia is "morally unstable." It might seem strange but indication of moral stability was almost a requirement in all kinds of references or characteristics whether one applies for a job or wants to be promoted.

Sometimes my students ask me, “Ms. Belik, when you were a student, didn’t you do your homework every day?” “Yes, I did,” I answer them, not because I want to look good in their eyes but because it is true.

“Didn’t you ever feel tired?”

“Yes, I often did”

“But what made you do it?”

“It was a shame for us to come to school without it. That weird feeling of shame whipped us harder than any punishment. Fear of shame is an excellent self-disciplinarian.” This is just one of numerous examples of teaching virtues in a secularized school. I think for a person to be moral does not necessarily require being religious. It is an unfair opinion to think that Russians didn’t have spiritual life because church was prohibited during Soviet time.

Despite all diversities, certain beliefs are definitely common as they are evidently true. Non-violence and mutual respect are on the list, but beliefs about gender roles or what constitutes a family are not. Socrates in his famous *Meno* says that virtues, however many and different they may be, all have a common nature which makes them virtues... Virtue is the desire of things honorable and the power of attaining them (Plato).

Unfortunately, the majority of our students have a moral vacuum: evil and good are not defined for them, values are confused, judgment and thinking skills are not developed enough, conscience does not work. Some of my students do not know that conscience exists. There is no such word, thus, no such notion for them. To my question “What is conscience?” I always receive their attempt to give a definition of the word “conscious.” Our children are disoriented by families, schools and often by greatly harmful media.

Preservation of moral virtues is a safety issue and enforcement of laws is actually based on natural human moral law. The general consensus regarding moral boundaries and about what is right or wrong exists in any society, otherwise “everything is permissible” and safety is at risk.

Numerous studies and life experience prove that laws themselves do not prevent crime. Laws work when most individuals choose to respect the law and exercise self-restraint. “Traditional” punitive measures have failed to curb crime in countries all over the world. According to data of the Crime Prevention Report, “to increase police numbers and to impose longer and harsher sentences, although popular, has proven both ineffective and very expensive” (Walker 21). On the contrary, programs containing elements of moral education have demonstrated that positive results are long lasting and significant. They are supported by international experimental studies and in crime prevention terms can be classified as “criminally preventive.”

Character Education nowadays is becoming the most needed area of teaching.

Fortunately more and more teachers begin to admit it. Character education is based on the idea of establishing behavior models that are developed from the ideals and examples we learn from others and practicing them in real life. The “others” can be people whom we admire, our heroes.

The French philosopher Henri Bergson has shown in his book, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, that mankind cannot do without what he calls the appeal of the hero:

the attraction exercised by the great figures who act on us by their example, having led, in love and dedication, a love superior to our ordinary lives. The need to have a moral ideal embodied in a concrete human being who shows us the way is one of the needs of the moral growth. It is normal for a young person to feel enthusiasm for a hero a saint of his or her choice, and to cling to him, and to dream of him and try to imitate him. This hero, whom we love and who draws us above ourselves, is for us a real master in moral life (Bergson 34).

The goal of my curriculum unit is to provide my students with behavior models that come through understanding of the importance of human life, possibilities of human mind and strength of eternal moral values. Heroism will serve as a foundation to teach ethical ideals. I share the opinion of prominent educators who think that teaching values should be at the core of school curriculum for the purpose of systematically developing the character of students. They emphasize the importance and necessity of “cognitive development and character development through perspective-taking, moral reasoning, thoughtful decision-making, and moral knowledge” (Lickona 9).

It is important to provide our students with a chance to learn the greatness of heroism, which is, I think, one of the best ways to reinforce moral education at school. Personal models – heroes – in history, fiction, and current events can be utilized:

to exemplify and encourage emulation of particular virtues or desirable traits of character, such as honesty, civility, courage, perseverance, loyalty, self-restraint, compassion, tolerance, fairness, respect for the worth and dignity of the individual, responsibility of the common good. And so forth (Leming 24).

Dramatic stories about heroism in the literature of history and fiction are likely to attract attention of students, provoke them to raise questions that will lead to discussion and reflection about virtues and values. Stories about heroes can inspire students by examples of their life and perhaps help them find a hero within each of us. “Whether in print, on the stage, or on film, the hearts and minds of children and youth can be engaged by heroes and heroines. There are lessons to be learned, hearts to be moved, and imagination to be stimulated” (DeRoche and Williams 96).

In selecting the material for teaching the curriculum unit I am going to provide my students with an honest examination of heroes’ lives without perfecting them. It’s important for students to realize that they are real people, that human imperfection is a part of the human condition. I want to see my students studying and thinking about lives of the heroes of mankind. I anticipate their discussions about people who have been heroically dedicated to a great intellectual or human mission in all times and in all countries of the world. I want them to know the names of those who were led by love to

other people and self-sacrifice. And I will feel happy if I see their raised hands to the question: "Who wants to be a hero?" Then I will know that my time, energy and efforts are not spent in vain.

IMPLEMENTATION: HEROISM IN INTEGRATED CURRICULUM

The curriculum unit will be implemented in three grade levels and three content areas of World Studies Academy in Fonville Middle School: Language Arts, Social Studies and our Thematic Course – World Studies. It is important for students' learning efficiency to have interrelated experiences in more than one class. This approach complements, reinforces and enhances their learning. It provides a more solid foundation for their knowledge.

As students progress through the unit which begins with the implementation of their prior knowledge and experience and develops skills of making connections, comparison, and analyses it will proceed with the new content. As heroism is a multi-level and complicated notion, my curriculum unit begins with the basic and personal related lessons in the first year of middle school.

6th Grade

Myself

Students will participate in activities related to themselves and their families. Heroes at the family level will be identified: parents, relatives, friends.

All activities are designed to find answers to the key-questions.

Language Arts

1. What do I think and know about myself?
2. What do others think and know about me?
3. What do I value in my family members and other people? Why?
4. What person can be called a hero?
5. Are there heroes among my family members and friends?

Social Studies

1. What is the history of my family?
2. Who are my family's heroes who changed the history of my family?
3. Is there a connection between my family's history with the history of my country?
4. Who are the heroes from my native ethnic/cultural origin? (in my school we will focus on heroes of Hispanic and African-American origin)

World Studies

1. What does it mean to be a teenager in different countries?
2. Are there heroes-teenagers around the world?

My Community

This sub-unit brings students into thinking and learning about heroes of their immediate surroundings – school, neighborhood, city, state. Students will identify heroes at their community level: teachers, policemen, firefighters, doctors, businessmen etc.

Language Arts

1. Do I know heroes in my community: school, neighborhood? What made them become heroes, where and when?
2. What are the heroic professions that are important for everyday life of people in my neighborhood? What do I know about these people?

Social Studies

1. What heroes' names do we pronounce every day: name of school, streets, towns, cities, stores, companies? What do I know about the owners of these names?
2. Who are those people who most influenced the history and the life of my neighborhood, city, state? What events are connected with them?

World Studies

1. Based on life examples of heroes in different countries, what role do family, school and community play in the lives of heroes?

7th Grade

The Country I Live In

Students will be provided with the opportunity to learn about well-known and common people who have been shaping the history of the country for it to become as it is. National level heroes will include outstanding leaders, people of Art, sport, business.

Language Arts

Social Studies Curriculum determines Language Arts content.

Social Studies

Students will study history of the USA. Social Studies teacher and Language Arts teacher plan together for Social Studies to teach events and Language Arts to teach about heroes of those events. For example, Topic of Social studies – “Discovery of America” relates to Language Arts Topic – “Christopher Columbus,” or “Heroism of the first settlers.”

World Studies

Students will learn about world known American heroes. The teaching will be connected with the content events of Social Studies but reveal mostly American heroes in culture: scientists, writers/poets, musicians, and architects. The national origin of the heroes will

be determined for students to appreciate efforts of people from various ethnicities to improve human life.

8th Grade

Students will reveal heroes of the world scale in the “Our World” sub-unit. They will learn about people who changed the world and contribute into the evolution of civilization: great leaders, scientists, musicians, writers/poets, architects, artists and others. Integrated into the curriculum will be stories about great people of different nationalities. These will develop positive attitudes, important cross-cultural skills and appreciation of various racial and ethnic groups. Teachers of the different content areas will plan together to ensure the students’ experience is holistic.

Our World

Language Arts

Social Studies Curriculum determines class content.

Language arts class will enrich students’ knowledge of World History with biographies of outstanding leaders, description of heroism of common people.

Specific feature of the class will be heroism of women. Students will identify heroines among women-rulers and common people.

Social Studies

Students will learn about main events of World History beginning from Ancient Times till present. The topic of heroism will be integrated throughout the whole course. Heroism of the whole nation or group heroism should be recognized. Students will identify what role heroic individuals and heroic groups play in history making.

World Studies

Students will learn about world heroes in Science, Art, and Literature. Students will get to know people from different backgrounds whose achievements and life examples greatly contributed to the “Common Cause,” which is the evolution of civilization and making the world the better place to live. I want students to come to the conclusion that great heroes do not belong to one country; they are citizens of the world.

As my Curriculum Unit contains a lot of discussion, I would like to mention two ways it can be led. The first one requires a teacher to lead a discussion to a predictable outcome. It involves a conscious effort to teach specific character traits and virtues. Teaching certain concepts such as courage, honesty, responsibility does not need a lot of arguing. These virtues should be introduced, explained and illustrated by various examples of heroes’ actions and lives. The teacher expresses a firm belief in the importance of having and implementing these virtues. These discussions can become successful only with the ability of the teacher to lead students to understanding of and agreement with the teacher’s statements. This kind of discussion can be implemented with students who lack a solid ethical framework.

The second approach encourages students to develop their own values and value systems. This way to lead discussion requires a teacher to present students with provocative ethical dilemmas and encourage open discussion and exchange of opinions. The teacher and students must realize that the most important rule of this kind of discussion is that there are no right or wrong answers. Each student must decide for himself what is right or wrong. It is also a good exercise for students to learn how to be nonjudgmental about values that are different from their own. It will teach them tolerance and respect of other people's opinions. These discussions can give a lot of ideas for topics practicing persuasive writing.

LESSON PLANS

The lesson plans I have developed are for the topic *My Community* for Language Arts, Social Studies and World Studies. Suggested ideas of lesson plans can be implemented through several classes, depending on teaching styles and the pace of students' learning. Content of World Studies class can have modifications due to the ethnical peculiarities of students. In my case we will begin with Hispanic heroes.

Language Arts

I will bring several issues of the *Houston Chronicle* to each student. The issues should not necessarily be of the same date. The goal of their work is to find out whether there is a place for heroism nowadays and how heroic actions are described in periodicals. Working with newspaper articles, they will learn who the modern heroes of their city are, what they did, and what the reason to write about them is. Students' activity will include the following steps:

1. Reading newspaper articles for main ideas, facts and details;
2. Analyzing the information. Students will determine what description of certain people and events contain "heroic" component.
3. Language analysis. Students will identify and list those words that helped them to picture the heroes.
4. Identifying cause and effect factors and filling out a Cause-and-Effect Chain chart for every hero.

This assignment will make students think about and understand what leads a hero and what the effect of his actions on others is. I want my students to come to a conclusion that there are people who do good without earning money, that richness does not always have a dollar equivalent. Helping other people is what makes a person more valuable and needed. I want them to picture themselves being in their heroes' shoes and describe how they would feel and what they would do. How easy is it to become a hero?

Their Cause-and-Effect Chain should also reflect what personal features and character traits might have helped their hero and made him act heroically. Is it possible to develop heroic traits of character? If yes, then how? If no, then why? When the gathering of information and its analysis are completed, students will fill out the Cause-and Effect Chain on posters and display on the wall.

5. The final stage of classroom work is to read information of their classmates displayed on posters and determine what the most typical causes and effects of the heroic actions are. They will write the results of their observations and conclusions down.

Assessment of student progress can be done at any stage of their work.

Social Studies

The goal of this series of lessons is to learn about people who most influenced the students' neighborhood, city, and state. Students will enumerate the ways through which the public appreciates their heroes. The teacher will write students' answers on the board. Possible answers are: books, movies, radio and TV information, newspapers, museums, monuments and memorials, songs, heroes names are given, maybe, to your school, streets, cities, stars.

Students will receive a local map and they will make a list of people's names given to various places. For the next several classes, their work will be devoted to these people.

1. Students will fill out KWL chart about these people, which has three columns: 1) What do I know? 2) What do I want to know? 3) What have I learned?
2. Using school and community library, internet, and by interviewing people, students will research to find out information about those people whose names were given to school, streets etc. in their neighborhood.
3. Students will present their information in the graphical organizer format.
4. Teacher initiates discussion with the students the purpose of which is to find answers to the following questions: What makes a person great? What would our life be like without them? How do these people change the life of others and course of history? Can these people be called heroes? Why yes? Why no? Students will work out definition of a hero. While discussion the teacher will write students' answers on the board.
5. Students will work in groups to choose who, in their opinion, most of all matches the description of a hero. A group representative will speak to the class about the person of their choice and justify with the help of his group mates why the chosen person can be called a hero.
6. Students can create a "Wall of Fame" with the names of heroes they have learned about.

Assessment: the teacher will use the same KWL charts that students filled out at the beginning of the unit to write in the third column. Comparison of the first (What do I

know?) with the third (What have I learned?) columns will give the student and the teacher an idea how much new knowledge was gained during the study of the topic.

World Studies

This course will reveal people's appreciation of heroes represented mostly in world culture. Students will know about heroes from fairy tales, poetry, and songs. They will teach what heroes the world's most famous monuments are devoted to, what names and events memorials want people to remember. What holidays and traditions in the world are connected to heroes' names?

In order for students to know about the world around them and to appreciate and value the differences and similarities of other people, it is important for them to find their own identity and value their historical and cultural heritage. So, we will begin our tour of heroes with those memorialized at *Plaza y Paseo de los Heroes*, a quiet tree shaded square, dedicated to the illustrious men of the Mexican republic. The names of heroes students are going to learn about include Emiliano Zapata – outstanding general of Mexican revolution, Miguel Hidalgo – a priest statesman whose activity urged independence, Guadalupe Victoria – first president of Mexico. All three of them are stone-carved statues on pedestals that can be found on that square. The goal of these lessons is to put the people on pedestals of students' memory. True to life stories of heroes can inspire students through the examples of their lives and promote understanding of the possibilities for heroism within each of us. *Building character, developing virtues, identifying values provide students with a foundation for their future success. Raising heroes makes a society stronger.* I hope that with the support of my outstanding team of teachers my Curriculum Unit will become a reality.

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