

PUBLICATION BRIEF

COLLEGE of EDUCATION AND PSYCHOLOGY THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT TYLER

A (Super) Heroic Vision of Leader Self

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Summary:

Our desire for heroes in life is evident in the entertainment industry. From *Star Wars* to *Harry Potter*, we crave the adventures of the hero, but where are the heroes for educators? What heroic visions have we created for ourselves? We must look within and beyond ourselves in hope of what we could become. This work explores the heroic visions shared by aspiring educational leaders. Viewing the students' leadership vision of self as hero provides insight to instructors who are guiding them in their personal leadership journey. This teaching strategy is only one way professors can guide future administrators in reflective practice to unveil the often unrecognized mental models that affect how they will one day lead. The heroic metaphor based on pop culture heroes of today becomes a tangible element of belief and commitment that the individual can examine from all sides to come to an understanding of self and others through the lens of "Who am I as leader?"

As an introductory activity, students in an educational leadership course shared a fictional hero with whom they identified. This study is born from the responses of these aspiring administrators as they explored a personal vision of self as hero. Using the process of content analysis, the responses have been analyzed and catalogued into three themes: traditional comic superheroes, uncommon heroes of ordinary people, and nontraditional comic heroes.

Traditional comic superheroes include such characters as Superman and Batman and were chosen by 25% of the participants. The reasons given had much to say about the individual character of the participants. For example, Superman was selected by one male participant because of Superman's strong moral compass. Uncommon heroes of ordinary people included fictional characters like, Clint Eastwood's Dirty Harry, Jessica Fletcher from *Murder She Wrote*, and Maximus from *The Gladiator*. Fifty percent of the students chose these uncommon heroes because they were practical, hardworking problem solvers who never gave up. Nontraditional comic heroes included Jerry Spinelli's Maniac McGee, Bob the Tomato from *Veggie Tales*, and Professor McGonagall and Hermione from *Harry Potter*. These characters exhibited loyalty and courage, and students pointed to the heroes' willingness to take risks while working for a cause greater than self.

The school leader must know self in order to lead others wisely. Imagining and reflecting upon self as leader through heroic metaphor provides a creative framework for envisioning successful school leadership. Envisioning the heroic metaphors of self can be one passageway to school leadership development.

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