



Heroic
Imagination.
project



Introduction to Our Educational Programs

Our Approach

General Principles

1. Participate directly with students, rather than make a passive generic appeal.
2. Target recursive, cyclical processes involved in academic and social success, which result in long-term positive outcomes.
3. Normalize the behavior or process (avert possible stigma while building empathy).
4. Tell students they (and others) have the ability to grow and improve and then show them how.
5. Help students develop healthy attributions for self-doubt, challenge, and setback.

Types of Evidence Presented

1. Direct evidence and psychological models from research.
2. Evidence from the lives of other individuals.
3. Evidence from the students' own lives.

Student Resources

1. Leave students with tangible connections to the knowledge and information we present to them (videos and texts).
2. Encourage our students to share what they have learned with others.
3. Offer suggestions for short-term projects the students can do on their own or as a class to get started implementing positive change.

Training and Consulting

Our training includes a basic orientation to our topics and approaches, as well as a full demonstration of one of our lessons.

Our training program has been designed to allow teachers and youth workers without a psychology background or extensive experience to effectively deliver our material. As with our lessons, metacognition, in which the presenter is given a model of what they are changing and how, is a key element of our approach and makes teaching our material more than simply following instructions.

Our 8 activity frameworks significantly decreases the amount of time it takes to conduct our lessons after presenters have delivered one of them, as the order and structure of each lesson is the same.

We also offer consulting of teachers, administrators, and other staff. When they are more aware of the social and psychological dynamics present in educational environments, they can become even more powerful forces for positive change within them.

It's as **simple** as providing youth with the **habit of pausing long enough** to actually see what is "hidden in plain view," replacing their blind spots with more **thoughtful reflection** and **specific plans**.

Dr. Philip Zimbardo

Founder of Heroic Imagination Project



We teach young people how to take effective action in challenging social situations to create lasting positive change in their lives and the lives of others.

Most young people, most of the time, want to do the right thing, but often don't know how.

For example, they often lack the skills and the confidence they need to overcome such common social behaviors as indifference and mindless conformity as well as more complex and negative behaviors that can lead to bullying and violence.

We provide young people with a new way of seeing the world and a new set of skills, all derived from science — the “how” of positive social change.

Once we give them access to what has traditionally only been the domain of ivory tower experts, we unlock in them a source of energy that springs out of their innate sense of idealism and passion for justice. The solution lies not in what we think they lack but rather in investing in what they already possess.

Our innovative program.

We differ from other approaches to social change in two major ways.

First, we focus more on the **dynamics of everyday social situations** than on the personalities and character traits of individuals, as important as they are.

Second, we don't stigmatize our biases and automatic reactions to difficult situations. Rather, we see our tendencies to “watch and wait,” to “go along to get along” and to make hasty judgments about others as normal and human.

All of our programs combine **rich academic content** (the bystander effect, social conformity and prejudice) with **engaging hands-on activities** that young people find surprisingly playful and that our clients—schools, colleges and youth organizations—can tailor to fit their unique needs.

A research-based, data-driven approach.

Our approach, built on our extensive experience with youth and deep ties with the research community, is based on the premise that **ordinary people are capable of taking extraordinary action.**

Research offers not only new insights into how social situations work but practical planning strategies for resisting negative social influences and innovative teaching techniques that inspire and empower. In addition, we contribute to the advancement of science through peer review.

We formally assess the effectiveness of our programs through the use of pre- and post-test instruments to measure how young people take ownership of their learning, how they become more internally motivated and how they develop a lasting set of beliefs that they carry with them.

Our Eight Activity Lesson Framework

1

What would you do?

The presenter describes a situation involving the topic of the lesson (e.g. conformity, the bystander effect, situation blindness). Students are encouraged to explore how they think that they and others would typically act if they were in that situation.

2

Explore the psychology of situations.

Students are presented with examples (videos and oral stories), which illustrate and explain the psychological process the lesson is attempting to change, including:

1. A description of the psychological model involved in the process and the research upon which it is based.
2. The reason why this process is a normal part of human psychology.
3. An explanation of how it tends to automatically affect people in a universal (or culturally bound) way.
4. Examples of specific situations in which reacting automatically and engaging in the process can be problematic or dangerous.

3

Think of a time...

Students explore their natural range of automatic tendencies when responding to certain situations, involving the topic of the lesson, by thinking of a time in their lives when they both did and did not act in a way they would have preferred.

4

Decide for yourself.

Students are given the opportunity to decide for themselves if the lesson topic matters to them and if they have a desire make a change in their skills and awareness of that process.

5

Develop effective change-making strategies.

Students explore common psychological obstacles to taking effective action, connect them to the stories from the previous activities, and reflect on research-based solutions to them.

6

Plan for the next challenge.

Armed with change-making strategies from the previous activity, students' start visualizing a more productive way to deal with a specific upcoming situation that matters to them and involves the process the lesson is attempting to change. They do so by developing a concrete plan, setting personal goals, and incorporating research-based strategies for overcoming likely obstacles.

7

Reflect on your personal take-aways.

Students reflect on their personal 'take away' from the lesson; the ideas they found the most interesting, useful, or surprising.

8

Spread the word.

Once students develop effective change-making strategies, they are now prepared to share them with others.

Research Findings



Over the 2010-2012 academic calendar years, four pilot intervention programs were conducted by the Heroic Imagination Project in three different schools, ARISE High School, Foothill College, and UC Berkeley.

These pilots centered on creating lasting positive change in students in two domains: situational awareness and mindset. The goal of these interventions was to help students identify and initiate positive change within key psychological processes critical to their long-term success in school, work, and interpersonal relationships and to encourage a pattern of wise and effective acts of everyday heroism.

In all pilots, positive gains were observed in our students across a number of constructs in both domains, compared to students who had not received our materials.

We have conducted numerous other programs across a diverse range of educational settings, but in these pilots we were able to collect full psychometric and evaluative data from our students as well as their teachers.

From this data, we've found that our students became more aware of the power of negative social influences and how vulnerable we all are to them, particularly the bystander effect and the influences of authority and conformity. They also became more aware of the power of negative social influences and how vulnerable we all are to them, particularly the bystander effect and the influences of authority and conformity.

Also of interest:

- Learning about social conformity and how to not to conform was the most common theme and was identified many times.
- Most students reported that they were more able to celebrate and learn from mistakes, challenges, and setbacks and to be more forgiving of themselves when things go wrong.
- At Foothill, most students also reported an increased understanding of group dynamics and development in their ability to engage in and navigate a collaborative group effort on a project, which included primarily dominant personality styles.
- Many students showed increases in empathy and situational awareness, and made more effort to initiate mindful self-reflection in order to better see the whole picture of social interactions.
- Several Foothill students emphasized an increase in empathy for sixth and seventh grade students and teachers as their group project required them to teach what they had learned to this low-income through the Citizen Schools program. One student reported being surprised at the degree to which she had underestimated the 6th graders' ability to be articulate and nuanced about the material they were learning.
- Students reported that what they had learned that they wanted to share with others was the power of a situation, social influence, and critical thinking in challenging situations.

Summary of Our Six Lessons

Mindset



Mindset refers to one's self-concept about one's own intelligence, talent, and ability to overcome challenges.

By cultivating a growth mindset ("I know I can improve") over a fixed mindset ("You either got it or you don't"), students can bounce back from setbacks and perform better academically and socially.

Situation Blindness



It's easy to make snap judgments about people or situations without having a clear picture of what's really going on.

By understanding the power that a person's situation or environment may have on their actions, we can avoid making mistakes of misinterpretation or miscommunication.

Bystander Effect



The Bystander Effect refers to the counter-intuitive phenomenon where in an emergency, the more people there are on the scene, the less likely it is for anyone to help.

This effect has resulted in many puzzling (and unnecessary) tragedies. Equipped with the right knowledge, however, students can learn to take effective action without putting themselves in harm's way.

Conformity/Peer Pressure



We all have a desire to be accepted by the people around us. We also tend to trust group opinions over those of individuals, including our own.

The subtle, yet powerful pressure of groups can lead us to bend our preferred choices in favor of the group's, but it's important to be able to resist following the group into bad decisions.

Adaptive Attributions & Stereotype Threat



Individuals who are members of groups that are stereotyped negatively around a certain task tend to underperform when called upon to perform that task.

The knowledge and strategies in this lesson can help students prevent their anxiety about stereotypes from hindering their performance.

Prejudice and Intergroup Conflict



It doesn't take much for people to form groups, and it's just as easy for people to form and act on biases that are based solely on their group membership. Even arbitrarily divided groups can escalate into bitter rivalries.

Understanding our natural tendency to favor our in-group and reject outsiders is the first step in treating everyone more fairly.



Contact Us

If you would like to know more about HIP Education, or would like to discuss how to implement a program in your school or youth group, please contact us at:

admin@heroicimagination.org.

We look forward to hearing from you!