

Dávid Dziak

University of Prešov, Faculty of Education, Prešov, Slovak Republic

<https://orcid.org/my-orcid?orcid=0000-0001-9188-9033>

david.dziak@unipo.sk

Reception of Prosocial Literary Role Models by Children of Younger School Age

Izvorni znanstveni rad / original research paper

Priljmeno / received 15. 12. 2020. Prihvaćeno / accepted 6. 6. 2022.

DOI: 10.21066/carcl.libri.11.2.3



The aim of the study is to clarify how a younger school-aged child perceives literary heroes who represent prosocial literary role models, and thus provide evidence for the positive trace of prosocial literary role models in the (prosocial) development of the child reader. The research was conducted on a sample of 24 participants (average age 9.04 years) using research methods such as product content analysis, projective interview and writing techniques. Empirical research gave a positive clue, which the specific literary text with the prosocial literary role model “printed” into the notion of prosociality in the child. The prosocial literary role model may perhaps therefore be used in education as an effective tool in the (prosocial) upbringing of the child of younger school age.

Keywords: child of younger school age, child reader, literature for children, prosocial education, prosocial literary role model, reception of literary text

In the broadest sense of the word according to John F. Dovidio et al. (2006), we can consider prosocial behaviour as any action that benefits another. A child in the twenty-first century needs a role model¹ – a prosocial one. This need is based on the current state of upbringing in the family and school environment. The upbringing component is suppressed in the present-day family, where parents lack time for children, while they transfer responsibility for upbringing to school institutions. However, the current educational system places great emphasis on knowledge, as a result of the penetration of economic values into education. Thus, upbringing disappears from the school environment (Kosová 2013, Liessmann 2008). The need for prosocial education is

¹ A role model is an individual who is perceived as exemplary, or worthy of imitation (Yancey 1998:3).

also based on the state of today's society.² Branislav Pupala (2004) refers to modern man using the term narcissus, a person who lives in a so-called individualised society characterised by indifference, a cult of the body, or a scientific attitude to the world. Similarly, Beáta Kosova (2013) states that today's man is experiencing a crisis: he is lost in a world of consumerism, while his spiritual component is suppressed. All this, in our opinion, has a negative effect on the child's development, and therefore a prosocial role model is needed. According to Bruno Bettelheim (2017: 12) and Zuzana Stanislavova (2013: 10), a child now needs moral education, which gently and between the lines shows the benefits of moral conduct. This is possible through fairy tales in which the child finds the meaning of life and the world.

One of the means of promoting prosocial behaviour in a child may be a suitably selected literary text in which the protagonist represents a prosocial role model. This thesis is partially confirmed by authors from various disciplines who emphasise the positive aspects of reading fiction, including psychological development (Bettelheim 2017), moral development (Alexander et al. 2001, Vitz 1990), moral character (Azizah et al. 2017, Nussbaum 1990), socialisation (Djikic et al. 2012), personal identity (Mathis 2015), development of empathy (Buganza 2012, Gal Drzewiecka 2019, Keen 2007), and sharing (Trepanier and Romatowski 1990) or eliminating prejudice (Johnson 2013). According to Paul C. Vitz (1990), narratives are a major factor in human moral development. The basic premise is that the more the child observes or reads about characters who show prosocial behaviour, the more likely it is for the child to behave in a prosocial way (Johnson 2012, similarly Bandura 1986).

Literature as verbal art fulfils many functions, and these are not achieved independently, but in mutual cooperation. In relation to our topic, the prosocial function of a literary text, the essence of which is the ability to influence the actions, attitudes, or value system of an individual, is especially important. The text has the ability to shape the reader's individuality and to guide the process of socialisation and relationships to the objective and spiritual world. This function is especially relevant for children who are in the process of personal development, and who are therefore very flexible from the point of view of formation (Liptakova et al. 2015: 315).

The prosocial formation of a child reader is realised mainly through the identification of the recipient with the literary hero who represents a prosocial role model. Based mainly on Roberto Roche Olivar's concept of prosocial behaviour (1992), we define prosocial literary role models as characters who assertively overcome problems during the story, while being human, friendly and empathetic to other characters, as characters who help and care for others, share and cooperate with others, and have respect not only for themselves but also for those around them. Such characters may also have certain imperfections, but ultimately, according to Radoslav Rusnak (2017: 55),

² The topic of prosociality came to the fore especially in the 1960s and 1970s, when several researchers began to study positive behaviour seriously. It was also related to the social situation at the time, when there was increasing talk about human rights, with growing interest in helping the weaker, the poor, the sick (Eisenberg 1982).

the positive features should predominate in the literary character. Therefore, in this study, we consider it important to identify prosocial literary role models and then discover their reception by children.

Methodology

Research problem and research questions

The work explores a research descriptive problem on the interdisciplinary boundary between the literary and prosocial development of the child of younger school age. Following the current state of education and upbringing in the family and school environment, in which the upbringing component is suppressed (see Kosová 2013, Liessmann 2008), we considered it particularly topical and important to respond to this state by finding effective and appropriate strategies for raising the child. In addition to its main aesthetic function, the literary text also has a prosocial function, and therefore it has the potential to support the prosocial behaviour of the reader. This aspect has so far only been scantily researched (Aram et al. 2017: 157–158).

We believe that a literary text with a prosocial role model may potentially also be one of the means for the (prosocial) upbringing of the child.³ Based on this, we formulated our research descriptive problem as follows: How do young learners perceive the prosocial literary role model? We attempted to investigate this research problem by answering the following questions: To what extent do child readers identify with the prosocial literary role model? What are the motives for the identification of child readers with the prosocial literary role model? How do child readers want to resemble the prosocial literary role model? What are the imperfections of the prosocial literary role model according to child readers? To what extent would child readers act in a prosocial way if they were in the place of the prosocial literary role model? Who do child readers consider to be ideal heroes and to what extent will reading a text with a prosocial literary role model help them to identify other ideal heroes? To what extent is the concept of an ideal hero among child readers prosocial and to what extent will reading a text with a prosocial literary role model help them extend their concept of an ideal hero to include prosocial aspects?

Research sample

The research sample consisted of animate and inanimate entities. The inanimate entities comprised a set of literary texts, namely four fairy tales, addressed to children from 8 to 10 years of age. The criteria for data collection were those literary texts in which the aesthetic function dominates. As an aesthetic experience was important for the identification process, we chose texts with high artistic value. The units of analysis

³ The thinking of younger school-age children, i.e. the thinking of participants in our research (mean age 9.04 years), is characterised by a decline in egocentrism and an increase in realism, logic and criticism, while gaining the ability to exercise decentralisation, conservation, reversibility, grouping and serialisation (Piaget and Inhelder 1997, Piaget 1999).

were various forms of literary protagonist in order to identify the prosocial literary role model and its various modifications (according to Peter Gavora 2015).

By analysing and interpreting a set of texts to identify prosocial literary role models, we also simultaneously selected the criteria for their classification: existential type (personal, animal, objective); gender (boys – girls); relation to reality (real – fantastic), and the dominant activity, quality, or ability (e.g. rescuing, helping, cooperating, etc.) of the prosocial literary role model. The individual criteria can be combined and intertwined within the same character.

Combining the above criteria allowed us to identify and then select different types of prosocial literary role models that we used in educational units in the field research. For the research of the reception of the prosocial literary role model by young children, we selected four different types, i.e. four educational units by which we examined the child's reception: in terms of existential type and gender, we chose a boy's (Jaroslava Blažková – *Mačky vo vreci* [Cats in a Bag], 2005) as well as a girl's (Jana Bodnárová – *Dita, 30 mušiek svetlušiek a iné príbehy* [Dita, 30 Firefly Flies and Other Stories], 2014) personal prosocial literary role models. In terms of types, we also opted for the animal prosocial literary role model (Ján Uličiansky – *Kocúr na kolieskových korčuľiach* [Tomcat on Roller Skates], 2006), since animals can be understood with regard to gender as neutral compared to personal characters. As the fourth type, we chose a fantastic prosocial literary role model (Peter Karpinský – *Sedem dní v pivnici* [Seven Days in the Cellar], 2017), which, in terms of its relationship to reality, is fantastic in contrast to the first three realistic prosocial literary role models. From the point of view of dominant prosocial activity, we defined four types, such as liberating (*Cats in a Bag*), caring (*Dita, 30 Firefly Flies and Other Stories*), helping (*Tomcat on Roller Skates*) and rescuing (*Seven Days in the Cellar*) prosocial literary role models.⁴

In the next phase of the research, we worked with living and non-living entities, i.e. with the deliberate selection of third and fourth grade primary school pupils and their products.⁵ The group of research participants consisted of 24 pupils from two third and two fourth grades of a regular primary school in Slovakia, i.e. children from 8 to 10 years of age (mean age 9.04 years). The participants were grouped into four six-member groups, which were formed according to the school grade (two groups from the third grade and two groups from the fourth grade) and according to the literary text with which the group worked (each group had a different literary text). Within the criteria for the selection of the participants, in addition to the representation of pupils in two school grades, we also paid attention to the representation of both sexes (10 boys and 14 girls).

⁴ For an analysis and interpretation of these four prosocial literary role models, see the study by Dávid Dziak (2018).

⁵ Prior to conducting the research, we obtained informed approval from the legal representatives of the participants.

Research methods, research tool and the research process

A content analysis of the products (Elkad-Lehman 2010, Miovský 2006) was performed in the research. We therefore worked with literary texts and with participants' verbal and nonverbal responses. A research tool was created to identify prosocial literary role models based on the content analysis and interpretation of texts. These were four educational units with different types of prosocial literary role models, through which we investigated the reception of their different types. In the second phase, we used a content analysis of the child's personal verbal and non-verbal products which were produced at our request. We created a research tool for the second phase of our research using the method of a projective technique,⁶ as we understand speaking and writing as a means of self-expression. The research tool, or the structure of the educational unit, consisted of several tasks and methods, through which we examined the reception of the prosocial literary role model from several perspectives, in order to address the complexity of the study and ensure the credibility of the research.

At the first meeting, each research participant received a sheet of paper (see Appendix A) containing two writing tasks.⁷ The first task was to cluster the phrase "ideal hero". The main instruction was: "Write in bubbles what comes to mind when you imagine an ideal hero." Helpful prompts were: "What are his qualities? What does he do? What abilities does he have? How does he behave?" Their second task was to write an answer to an open question: "Write down if you know anyone like that." After completing the above-mentioned tasks, the literary text with a prosocial role model was read using the method of shared guided reading with an alternation of loud and quiet reading (Fountas and Pinnell 1998, Fraser 2009). In the second meeting, the literary text was read to the end. The participants' third task was to draw the most popular part of the story, according to which we tried to strengthen the individual reception of the text (Gal Drzewiecka 2013).

At the third meeting, a direct individual semi-structured interview was conducted. Before the interview, the researcher asked the participant to retell the story, which reminded them of the memory traces of the read text. Then the researcher asked the following question: "What characters appeared in the story?" for the participant to keep in mind all the characters in the story whom they could choose in response to the first question of the interview. The interview consisted of the following seven open questions, after each of which we note the purpose of the question: "Which character from the text would you like to be?" – detecting the identification process; "Why did you choose this particular character?" – identification of the motives and reasons for the decision; "What do you like about the character?" – finding out what the recipient appreciates in the literary character and how they would like to resemble this character; "How would you like to resemble the character? Which of their qualities or abilities

⁶ Projective techniques are special methods used to reveal (intentionally and unintentionally) unconscious content of thinking and the depiction of personality structure (Štubňa 2017: 91).

⁷ The tasks had to be written in blue or black pen, because this was important for the penultimate task of the educational unit, in which they returned to these tasks.

would you like to have?” – finding out what the recipient appreciates in the literary character; “What do you dislike about the character?” – finding out the (in)sufficiency of the literary character; “What would you change or add to the character?” – finding out the (in)sufficiency of the literary character; “What would you do if you were in their place?” – determining a degree of identification and prosocial conduct of the child of younger school age.

After answering the above questions, the fourth task was done, in which the participant returned to the first two tasks – the clustering and open question, which they had written before reading the literary text. The task was to complete the cluster and the open question with a green coloured pen. Here, we found out how the child’s notion of an ideal hero had changed after reading the text with a prosocial literary role model. By completing the tasks with the green coloured pen, it was possible to identify the changes made (adaptation, deletion, addition, etc.) (see Appendix B). The last task in working with the text with the prosocial literary role model focused on free writing (based on inspiration from the literary text) on the topic: *The name of the character* (that the participant chose during the interview, e.g. *Celestín*) *as the role model for me*.

Results

In this section, we attempt to gradually answer the seven above-mentioned research questions.

To what extent do child readers identify with the prosocial literary role model?

The prosocial literary role model is an attractive hero for a child reader, since up to 13 participants (54.2%) identified with the role model, which is the majority of the research sample. Then 10 participants (41.7%) identified with a secondary positive character, and only one participant (4.2%) chose a negative character.⁸ Almost all participants, i.e. 23 participants (95.8%) out of 24 (100%), identified with a positive character, which testifies to the prosocial orientation of the child of younger school age.⁹ The choice of the prosocial literary role model by the child recipient is an indicator of the positive influence of the prosocial hero on the prosocial development of the child.

What are the motives for the identification of child readers with the prosocial literary role model?

The most important motive for the identification of child readers with the prosocial literary role model was courage, which was indicated by 8 participants (61.5%) out of 13 (100%): “even though he was small, he was not afraid and went for it”. The second most common motive was the hero’s basic prosocial activity, namely helping and

⁸ A participant, who was the only one to choose a negative wolf character, chose that character because “he was evil, he slacks, he sleeps, he kills, he behaved badly”. He also highlighted the wolf’s humour.

⁹ Girls identified much more with prosocial literary role models than boys (in the ratio of 10 to 3). However, the quantitative superiority of female participants over male participants must be taken into account.

rescuing, which occurred six times (46.2%). It tells us about the attribution of significant importance to this prosocial expression by children. Obedience, which we identified four times (30.8%), was the third most appreciated aspect of the prosocial literary role model. It is related to the moral development of the child of younger school age, i.e. with his focus on obedience, compliance with and non-violation of prohibitions. The prosocial qualities of friendliness and kindness, the ability not to give up, as well as the character's appearance, were given as motives for identification three times (23.1%). An important factor was also the gender of the hero; boys tended to identify with male characters (only one participant (7.7%) chose a cat character), girls identified with heroines or animal characters. The similarity between the child recipient's life and the hero's life was observed twice (15.4%) as a motive for identification with the character: "Why did you choose the character of Martin?" "Because he reads a lot of books." "Why is that?" "Because I read a lot of books, too" (cf. Lešková 2020: 22–23).

How do child readers want to resemble the prosocial literary role model?

Participants would like to resemble the prosocial literary role model especially in their main prosocial activity – in rescuing, which we identified four times (30.8%). We also identified the quality of courage three times (23.1%): "I wouldn't be afraid when the pump in the grandmother's cellar turns on. I'm always scared", and the skill to be quick in doing something. The basic prosocial expression of helping and the qualities of being good and kind were mentioned twice (15.4%). Prosocial literary role models thus represent a set of such characteristics, which, from the point of view of prosocial development, are suitable for imitation by child readers. Seven (53.8%) of the thirteen participants (100%) indicated some prosocial activity or trait of the hero that they would like to match. Therefore, the prosocial literary role model may help the child reader realize what they would like to change or improve in themselves in terms of prosocial behaviour. While reading, the child reader may compare their life with the life of the hero: "What did you like about Dita?" "That her parents didn't yell at her." "Why is that?" "Because I don't like it when they shout at me." Therefore, the prosocial literary role model may also help the recipient gain self-knowledge and become aware of their positive character traits as well as deficiencies: "How would you like to resemble the character of Celestine?" "In courage." "Why?" "I don't know if I have that." This was identified three times (23.1%).

What are the imperfections of the prosocial literary role model according to child readers?

As many as 11 (84.6%) participants out of 13 (100%) did not mention a single imperfection of the prosocial literary role model, which indicates its sufficiency. Only two participants (15.4%) reported a lack related to the role model's appearance. If they could add something to the prosocial hero, they would strengthen or supplement some ability, especially the ability to be fast in something. This was identified three times (23.1%). In contrast, participants who did not identify with the prosocial literary role model reported twice as many imperfections. Prosocial literary role models thus fulfil the reader's idea of ideal heroes, which is why most readers identify with them.

To what extent would child readers act in a prosocial way if they were in the place of the prosocial literary role model?

As many as 11 (84.6%) of the 13 participants (100%) would act in the same prosocial way in place of the prosocial literary role model, with the majority using the word rescue or help. The prosocial literary role model may therefore also leave a trace on the conative component of prosocial behaviour in the child reader. The other two participants (15.4%) mentioned some kind of fun or relaxation. All participants who did not identify with the prosocial literary role model (45.8%) would also act in a prosocial way, two (18.2%) of whom would even be more obedient than their chosen character, and even the participant who identified with a negative character would also act in a prosocial way. This indicates prosocial behaviour in the conative component of the child of younger school age.

Who do child readers consider to be ideal heroes and to what extent will reading a text with a prosocial literary role model help them to identify other ideal heroes?

Twenty-two participants (91.7%) wrote down at least one ideal hero, the other two (8.3%) did not indicate anyone. Among the ideal heroes depicted, fictional characters from movies and books clearly dominated (almost three-quarters). Only a quarter of them were real people, which indicates the possible influence of the literary character on the child readers. We can classify all the ideal heroes mentioned by the participants as neutral or positive with regard to prosocial beings. There was no negative person or character among them, which proves the prosocial orientation of the child of younger school age. Seven participants (29.2%) mentioned someone from the family (whole family – three times (12.5%); father – three times (12.5%); mother and cousin once (4.2%)), five participants (20.8%) wrote down a comic strip hero (Batman, Spiderman, Superman, Captain America, Thor – see the conclusions of Anne Haas Dyson 1997, which shows how effectively comic book heroes can be used in education). Four female participants (16.7%) chose the superhero Miraculous, and three male participants (12.5%) wrote down Captain Underpants.¹⁰

Nearly three-quarters of the ideal heroes were familiar to children from television and the Internet (e.g. Scooby Doo, the football player Neymar Jr.), that is, they had only an indirect, impersonal relationship with them, mediated through a digital medium, which proves the enormous effect of technology on the concept of an ideal hero in the child of younger school age. Almost one-third were book characters. Very popular were book series (e.g. Harry Potter, Captain Underpants), which indicates the potential influence of the prosocial literary role model on child recipients, that is, on their concept of the ideal hero. The ideal heroes of the participants were clearly dominated by persons and characters of the male gender, followed by gender-neutral animal characters and, finally, persons or characters of the female gender. The ratio of fantastic and real heroes

¹⁰ In the study by Justin F. Martin (2007: 245), Captain Underpants often appeared among the superheroes of children, so research into his reception by child readers is required.

was the same for boys and girls, but the boys chose only male heroes, whereas the girls presented both male and female heroes and gender-neutral animal characters and animals.

Reading a fairy tale with a prosocial literary role model helped 21 participants (87.5%) out of 24 (100%) identify other ideal heroes, while three participants (12.5%) did not list anyone. While before reading the text they selected mainly fictional characters as ideal heroes (almost three-quarters), after reading the fairy tale with a prosocial literary role model, they mostly wrote about real people (almost two-thirds, while with all these people they had a personal relationship, not a mediated one). This is to say that reading the fairy tale with a prosocial literary role model significantly led to identifying real role models from their nearest social group. Five times (23.8%) this was a friend or a classmate, and up to seven times (33.3%) it was someone from the close family (see MacCallum and Beltman 2002: 34–37). Up to five times (23.8%) it was the mother who dominated the family that was given as the ideal hero, but before reading the text the ideal hero was their father.

The mother was identified three times as an ideal hero (14.3%) after the reading of the text with the girl's personal prosocial literary role model. Although we realize that for the child of younger school age both parents are mostly role models, the research shows that a literary text may activate or recall one of the parents as a role model. Again (more than) one-third were book characters, so six participants (28.6%) chose the prosocial literary role model from the read fairy tale, three of them (14.3%) wrote down the name, even though they did not identify with the character), twice Harry Potter (9.5%) and a comic strip hero (9.5%) were mentioned.

To what extent is the concept of an ideal hero among child readers prosocial and to what extent will reading a text with a prosocial literary role model help them extend their concept of an ideal hero to prosocial aspects?

Almost half of the participants (11, i.e. 45.8%) had a more abstract and therefore more prosocial concept of an ideal hero, whereas the other 13 participants (54.2%) had a more specific and therefore less prosocial concept. From these 11 participants who had a more prosocial concept, as many as 9 were girls (37.5%), which was partly reflected in the reception, as they identified more with prosocial literary role models than the boys. Participants who identified with a prosocial literary role model had a slightly more abstract and more prosocial concept of an ideal hero than participants who did not identify with the prosocial literary role model.

The most common association of participants regarding the ideal hero was rescuing (nine times 37.5%), which again speaks of the prosocial orientation of the child of younger school age. The second most frequent association was the general moral category of goodness (seven times 29.2%), followed by strength (six times 25%) and the fantastic ability to fly (four times 16.7%) (see Appendix B). They listed another basic prosocial expression of helping, the qualities of being brave, kind and wise, and the skill to be quick three times (12.5%).

Reading the fairy tale with the prosocial literary role model also helped to expand the child's concept of an ideal hero, since up to 22 participants (91.7%) stated an association, 19 of whom (86.4%) added some prosocial activity, trait or ability. Three (13.6%) added a non-prosocial aspect and two (9.1%) wrote nothing. Eight participants (61.5%) of those 13 (54.2%), who previously had a less prosocial concept of an ideal hero, after reading the fairy tale with a prosocial literary role model, expanded their concept of an ideal hero to prosocial aspects (see Dooiee Kim and Sang-Hoon Kim 2017). The concept of an ideal hero was enriched the most (eight times 61.5%) by the quality of courage, a characteristic of individual prosocial heroes. Four participants (30.8%) added the main prosocial activity of rescuing. We also identified four times (30.8%) the prosocial quality of being nice or kind-hearted, and the participants also indicated the ability to fly (see Appendix B) three times (23.1%) and helping twice (15.4%).

The positive trace of the text with a prosocial literary role model in the child recipient was also explored in an interview, during which one girl stated: "I would also like to help people", and another girl said similarly: "I would also like to set someone free" (as the given prosocial literary role model did). We also identified this positive clue in the focused free writing, in which one girl, after naming some positive qualities of the prosocial hero, expressed her desire to be like him: "I would like to have all his skills"; and another participant realised what she would like to be: "I should be as brave as he is. I should be heroic. I should protect people".

Discussion

We see the benefit of our research mainly in the presentation of the possibilities of using a literary character as a means for the prosocial development of the child of younger school age. At the same time, we are aware of the time and capacity limits of our research and the need for further empirical research and deeper interpretation of findings. Aram et al. (2017) state that a literary text has the potential to support a child's prosocial behaviour, and this aspect has not yet been further explored. This study sought to respond to this research challenge, and empirical research gave a positive clue, which the specific literary text with a prosocial literary role model "printed" into the notion of prosociality in the child. At the same time, we outlined the use of a literary character as a means for prosocial education, which may be used (not only) in lessons of literary and ethical education.

The outcomes of our research indicate the following tendencies in the process and in the result of children's reception of a literary text with a prosocial literary role model:

The prosocial literary role model may leave a positive and valid clue in the prosocial development of the child of younger school age because: (1) it directs the conative component in the sense of acting in a prosocial way; (2) it encourages the identification of real positive role models from the closest social group; (3) it works to extend the concept of an ideal hero into prosocial aspects; (4) it fulfils the reader's idea of an ideal hero; (5) it represents an attractive hero for the child reader to identify with; (6) it represents a set of such prosocial characteristics that are suitable for imitation and

at the same time attractive for the child recipient; (7) it helps the child reader realise what they would like to change or improve in themselves in terms of prosociality; (8) it helps the child recipient realise their positive qualities as well as their imperfections.

Our conclusions support the results of the research by David Carr (2019), Adam M. Willows (2017), K. Maja Krakowiak and Mina Tsay-Vogel (2013) and Haesung Jung et al. (2020). Carr (2017) posits that literature contains many models and icons of virtue and vice and that such paradigms turn out to be essential for the ethical-moral upbringing of an individual. Willows (2017) similarly states that stories increase the information conveyed in terms of virtue, and aid the growth of prudence. Stories can provide virtuous exemplars, inform learners of the nature of virtues, and offer practice in developing situational judgement. As such, they are a significant resource for virtue ethics and moral education. Krakowiak and Tsay-Vogel (2013) similarly found that the altruistic motivations and positive outcomes of characters led to more favourable perceptions of character attributes, greater character liking, and more justification of the character's actions. The latest meta-analysis by Jung et al. (2020) summarising the effects of 88 studies with 25,354 participants found a moderate effect of prosocial modelling in eliciting subsequent helping behaviour.

We discovered that a child reader: (1) (almost always) identifies with the positive character; (2) would in most cases act in as prosocial a way as the literary hero; (3) mostly appreciates the hero's quality of courage and prosocial activity, which are the aspects in which they would like to resemble the hero; (4) identifies with the character with whom they have something in common (similarly, Padilla-Walker et al. 2013: 396); (5) puts an emphasis on the gender of the hero in identification (cf. Mlčák 2013: 71), with boys (mostly) tending towards male characters, girls towards heroines or animal characters; (6) is strongly influenced by television (see the summary by Tobias Greitemeyer 2022: 136–137), which is also reflected in the child reader's concept of an ideal hero; (7) is oriented towards obedience, fulfilment of duties and non-violation of prohibitions (cf. Kohlberg 1984, Piaget 1997); (8) has a strong prosocial orientation (similarly, Eisenberg 1982).

The research of Miroslav Bocan et al. (2011) found that up to half of the participants from six to nine years of age have no role model, or did not provide any answer. However, such findings are not consistent with the results of the present study, where up to 22 participants out of 24 wrote down at least one ideal hero. Only 3.3% of Bocan's research participants identified fictional characters as role models, with Hannah Montana, Spiderman and Batman being the most common answers, which is a different result from our work, where we found that up to one third of the role models of a child of younger school age are fictional characters.¹¹ Nevertheless, we agreed that comic strip heroes are strongly represented among the fictional characters, so research into the reception of (various types of) comic strip heroes by child readers is required. For example, Judy H. McCrary (1999) found through the drawings of pre-schoolers that they learned moral values from the superheroes they watched on television (especially

¹¹ However, the age range of Bocan's research participants, which was between six and fifteen years, should be taken into account.

Batman, Superman, and Wonder Woman). Based on our findings, it is possible to discuss the statement of Miriam Uhrinová (2009: 125–126), according to which even older school-age children try to find a different model among their friends or in the media, as parents and teachers have lost the “aura of perfection”. According to our results, children of younger school age are already dominated by role models such as depicted persons and fictional characters, which is probably influenced by rapidly evolving technology, especially television that also affects the supply of role models for children.

Since the results of this study apply only to our research sample, we would like to continue this work to deepen, supplement and strengthen the existing outcomes in terms of credibility. For this reason, it is necessary to examine the reception of other types of prosocial literary role models by children of younger school age (for example, the heroes from the book *The Brothers Lionheart*), as well as the effectiveness of other educational procedures (for example, dramatic improvisation, role-playing) in working with the prosocial literary role model. We will examine the reception of (non-prosocial) literary anti-role models (for example *Horrid Henry*) in the research to follow (cf. Schleihauf and Hoehl 2021).

Recommendations for practice

Based on the results of our research, we formulate the following recommendations for the theory and practice of teaching (not only) literature in primary education:

(1) ***In terms of teaching content***, we propose to include the topic of depicted, fictional role models.

(2) ***In terms of teaching goals***, we propose to develop comprehensively the concept of the ideal hero.

(3) ***From the point of view of the textbook***, we propose to expand the set of literary texts with artistically valuable books, in which there are various types of prosocial literary role models (the elaborated table: *Mapping Text Potential* by Wayne Tennent et al. (2016: 32) can help select a text).

(4) ***From the point of view of the teaching process***, we propose to deal with prosocial literary role models systematically. After the establishment of a moral dilemma in the literary text, we propose to stop reading and give pupils some space to express their approach to the established conflict and then suggest a solution to the problem, or ask how they would act in place of the character – the prosocial literary role model. According to Nell K. Duke and P. David Pearson (2002), story prediction supports the reader’s comprehension of the text.

(5) ***In terms of teaching methods***, we propose to support the identification of pupils with a prosocial literary role model through various methods such as the method of shared reading, as it has proven its effectiveness in reading texts with a prosocial literary role model. Certain similarities can be seen with an effective teaching method called “guided reading”, based on Myrtle Simpson (1966) and Don Holdaway (1979).

We suggest using a number of different experiential methods when reading, such as dramatic improvisation, role-playing (in doing so, one can be inspired by Dyson's ethnographic work on "Author's Theater" 1997), drawing, comic strip creation, in order to strengthen the pupil's emotional side of identification with the prosocial literary role model.

(6) *In terms of developmental preconditions and experiences of the pupils*, we propose to respect the cognitive, reading, moral or prosocial development of pupils in developing the concept of an ideal hero, to connect a literary text with the pupils' experiences, and to look for common and different qualities between the pupil and the prosocial literary role model (for this, we recommend the method *Double Bubble Map*, Tennent et al. 2016: 173). Similarly, Ellin Oliver Keene and Susan Zimmermann (1997) suggest three different kinds of connections: text to self, text to text, and text to world. We propose to provide some space for pupils after reading a literary text to express their opinion, their feelings and impressions of the prosocial literary role model, and then to bring conflicting opinions together among pupils. Tennent (2015) also believes that what the teacher thinks is irrelevant, because the teacher's role is primarily to find out what the pupil thinks.

(7) *In terms of text comprehension*, we propose focusing on understanding the motives and consequences of the behaviour and actions of the prosocial literary role model, because the findings of the research by Krakowiak and Tsay-Vogel (2013) reveal that both motivation and outcome affect perceptions of the character's positive and negative attributes, the appeal of the character, and moral disengagement. We suggest developing various levels of comprehension of the text in pupils, i.e. using cognitive techniques such as analysis, synthesis, comparison, evaluation, application, abstraction, etc., in reading, thus leading to a better understanding of the prosocial literary role model. Certain parallels can be identified with the proven strategies to support text comprehension presented by Tennent et al. (2016).

(8) *In terms of interdisciplinary relationships*, we propose using books with a prosocial literary role model as a means of teaching other subjects, for example, in ethical education, where one of the topics is real and depicted prosocial models, or in history, where there are many prosocial heroes.

Acknowledgment

This work was supported by the grant *Artistic Value, Triviality, Trash and Kitsch in Literary, Fine Art and Musical Production for Children and Youth* (VEGA 1/0095/18; 2018–2021) and the grant *Golden Fund of Literature for Children and Youth (100 plus 1 best books for children – 100 plus 1 books for teenagers)* (KEGA 005PU-4/2021; 2021–2023).

References

Primary Sources

- Blažková, Jaroslava. 2005. *Mačky vo vreci* [Cats in a Bag]. Bratislava: Q111.
- Bodnárová, Jana. 2014. *Dita, 30 mušiek svetlušiek a iné príbehy* [Dita, 30 Firefly Flies and Other Stories]. Bratislava: Perfekt.
- Karpinský, Peter. 2017. *Sedem dní v pivnici* [Seven Days in the Cellar], 2nd ed. Bratislava: Perfekt.
- Uličiansky, Ján. 2006. *Kocúr na kolieskových korčuliach* [Tomcat on Roller Skates]. Bratislava: Perfekt.

Secondary Sources

- Alexander, Kristin J., Peggy J. Miller & Julie A. Hengst. 2001. Young Children's Emotional Attachments to Stories. *Social Development* 10 (3): 374–398. <<https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9507.00171>>.
- Aram, Dorit, Deborah Bergman Deitcher, Tami Sabag Shoshan & Margalit Ziv. 2017. Shared Book Reading Interactions within Families from Low Socioeconomic Backgrounds and Children's Social Understanding and Prosocial Behavior. *Journal of Cognitive Education and Psychology* 16 (2): 157–177. <<https://doi.org/10.1891/1945-8959.16.2.157>>.
- Azizah, Aida, Joko Nurkamto, Sarwiji Suwandi & Muhammad Rohmadi. 2017. Building Students' Character through Fairy-Tale Textbooks. In *Proceedings of the 4th Asia Pacific Education Conference (AECON 2017)*, 10–12. Paris: Atlantis Press. <<https://doi.org/10.2991/aecon-17.2017.3>>.
- Bandura, Albert. 1986. *Social Foundations of Thought and Action. A Social Cognitive Theory*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Bettelheim, Bruno. 2017. *Za tajemstvím pohádek* [*The Uses of Enchantment*], 2nd ed. Transl. Lucie Lucká. Praha: Portál. (Original work published 1976).
- Bocan, Miroslav et al. 2011. *Hodnotové orientace dětí ve věku 6–15 let* [Value Orientations of Children aged 6–15]. Praha: Národní institut dětí a mládeže Ministerstva školství, mládeže a tělovýchovy. <<http://www.vyzkum-mladez.cz/zprava/1310479648.pdf>> (accessed 20 October 2021).
- Buganza, Jacob. 2012. Ethics, Literature, and Education. *Ethics and Education* 7 (2): 125–135. <<https://doi.org/10.1080/17449642.2012.733595>>.
- Carr, David. 2019. Moral Exemplification in Narrative Literature and Art. *Journal of Moral Education* 48 (3): 358–368. <<https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2018.1463201>>.
- Djicic, Maja, Raymond Mar & Keith Oatley. 2012. The Psychology of Fiction: Present and Future. In *Cognitive Literary Studies: Current Themes and New Directions*, edited by Isabel Jaén & Julien Jacques Simon, 235–249. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Dovidio, John F., Jane Allyn Piliavin, David A. Schroeder & Louis A. Penner. 2006. *The Social Psychology of Prosocial Behavior*. New York: Psychology Press.
- Duke, Nell K. & P. David Pearson. 2002. Effective Practices for Developing Reading Comprehension. In *What Research Has to Say About Reading Instruction*, edited by Alan E. Farstrup & S. Jay Samuels, 3rd ed., 205–242. Newark: International Reading Association.
- Dyson, Anne Haas. 1997. *Writing Superheroes: Contemporary Childhood, Popular Culture, and Classroom Literacy*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Dziak, Dávid. 2018. Ponúknime detskému čitateľovi prosociálne literárne vzory [Let Us Offer Prosocial Literary Role Models to a Children's Reader]. *O dietati, jazyku, literature* 6 (2): 52–66.

- Eisenberg, Nancy. 1982. *The Development of Prosocial Behavior*. New York: Academic Press.
- Elkad-Lehman, Ilana. 2010. Literary Reading as a Methodology in Qualitative Research. In *Text and Discourse Analysis A RASHOMON of Research Methods*, edited by Irit Kupferberg, 81–110. Beer-Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of The Negev Press.
- Fountas, Irene C. & Gay Su Pinnell. 1998. *Guided Reading, Good first Teaching for All Children*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.
- Fraser, Val. 2009. Developing Reading in the English Classroom. In *The Complete Guide to Becoming an English Teacher*, edited by Stephen Clarke, Paul Dickinson & Jo Westbrook, 2nd ed., 147–160. London: SAGE Publications.
- Gal Drzewiecka, Iveta. 2013. *Grafopoetika* [Graphopoetics]. Prešov: Prešovská univerzita.
- Gal Drzewiecka, Iveta. 2019. Rekonštrukcia mentálnej dimenzie príbehu v recepcii textovo-obrazových naratívov (na príklade obrazových kníh O. Lavieho a W. Erlbrucha Medveď, ktorý tam nebol a S. Tana Stratená vec) [Reconstruction of Conceptual Dimensions of Story in Reception of Text-Pictorial Narratives (The Case of *The Bear Who Wasn't There* by O. Lavie and W. Erlbruch; and *The Lost Thing* by S. Tan)]. *O dietati, jazyku, literature* 7 (2): 32–45.
- Gavora, Peter. 2015. Obsahová analýza v pedagogickom výskume: Pohľad na jej súčasné podoby [Content Analysis in Educational Research: A Review of the Current Forms]. *Pedagogická orientace* 25 (3): 345–371. <<https://doi.org/10.5817/PedOr2015-3-345>>.
- Greitemeyer, Tobias. 2022. Prosocial Modeling: Person Role Models and the Media. *Current Opinion in Psychology* 44: 135–139. <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2021.08.024>>.
- Holdaway, Don. 1979. *The Foundations of Literacy*. Gossford: Ashton-Scholastic.
- Johnson, Dan R. 2012. Transportation into a Story Increases Empathy, Prosocial Behavior, and Perceptual Bias toward Fearful Expressions. *Personality and Individual Differences* 52 (2): 150–155. <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2011.10.005>>.
- Johnson, Dan R. 2013. Transportation into Literary Fiction Reduces Prejudice against and Increases Empathy for Arab-Muslims. *Scientific Study of Literature* 3 (1): 77–92. <<https://doi.org/10.1075/ssol.3.1.08joh>>.
- Jung, Haesung, Eunjin Seo, Eunjoo Han, Marlone D. Henderson & Erika A. Patall. 2020. Prosocial Modeling: A Meta-Analytic Review and Synthesis. *Psychol Bull* 146: 635–663. <<https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000235>>.
- Keen, Suzanne. 2007. *Empathy and the Novel*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Keene, Ellin Oliver & Susan Zimmermann. 1997. *Mosaic of Thought: Teaching Comprehension in a Reader's Workshop*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.
- Kim, Dooiee & Sang-Hoon Kim. 2018. Art Beyond Art's Sake: The Influence of Artistic Cues on Prosocial Choice. *Empirical Studies of the Arts* 36 (1): 22–40. <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0276237416689663>>.
- Kohlberg, Lawrence. 1984. *The Psychology of Moral Development. Essays on Moral Development. Volume 2*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Kosová, Beáta. 2013. *Filozofické a globálne súvislosti edukácie* [Philosophical and Global Contexts of Education]. Banská Bystrica: Univerzita Mateja Bela.
- Krakowiak, K. Maja & Mina Tsay-Vogel. 2013. What Makes Characters' Bad Behaviors Acceptable? The Effects of Character Motivation and Outcome on Perceptions, Character Liking, and Moral Disengagement. *Mass Communication and Society* 66 (2): 179–199. <<https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2012.690926>>.
- Lešková, Dana. 2020. *Reflexie o postave so znevýhodnením v literatúre pre deti a mládež IV*. [Reflections on a Disabled Character in Literature for Children and Youth IV]. Prešov: Prešovská univerzita.
- Liessmann, Konrad Paul. 2008. *Teorie nevzdělanosti* [*The Theory of Miseducation*]. Transl. Jana Zoubková. Praha: Academia. (Original work published 2006).

- Liptáková, Ludmila et al. 2015. *Integrovaná didaktika slovenského jazyka a literatúry pre primárne vzdelávanie* [Integrated Didactics of Slovak Language and Literature for Primary Education], 2nd rev. ed. Prešov: Prešovská univerzita.
- MacCallum, Judith & Susan Beltman. 2002. *Role Models for Young People: What Makes an Effective Role Model Program?* Hobart: National Youth Affairs Research Scheme. <<https://researchrepository.murdoch.edu.au/id/eprint/9492/1/rolemodels.pdf>> (accessed 27 October 2021).
- Martin, Justin F. 2007. Children's Attitudes toward Superheroes as a Potential Indicator of their Moral Understanding. *Journal of Moral Education* 36 (2): 239–250. <<https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240701325381>>.
- Mathis, Janelle. 2015. The Significance of the Arts in Culture: Learning through Children's Literature. *Libri & Liberi* 4 (1): 85–102. <[https://doi.org/10.21066/carclibri.2015-04\(01\).0016](https://doi.org/10.21066/carclibri.2015-04(01).0016)>.
- McCrary, Judy H. 1999. *Children's Heroes and Heroines: Developing Values Manifested through Artwork*. Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association. <<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED437390.pdf>> (accessed 20 October 2021).
- Miovský, Michal. 2006. *Kvalitatívny prístup a metódy v psychologickom výskume* [Qualitative Approach and Methods in Psychological Research]. Praha: GRADA Publishing.
- Mlčák, Zdeněk. 2013. Prosociální chování jako fundament dobrovolnictví [Prosocial Behavior as a Foundation of Volunteering]. In *Prosociální charakteristiky osobnosti dobrovolníků* [Prosocial Personality Characteristics of Volunteers], edited by Zdeněk Mlčák & Helena Zášková, 41–72. Ostrava: Ostravská univerzita.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. 1990. *Love's Knowledge. Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Olivar, Roberto Roche. 1992. *Etická výchova* [Ethical Education]. Bratislava: Orbis Pictus Istropolitana.
- Padilla-Walker, Laura M., Sarah M. Coyne, Ashley M. Fraser & Laura A. Stockdale. 2013. Is Disney the Nicest Place on Earth? A Content Analysis of Prosocial Behavior in Animated Disney Films. *Journal of Communication* 63 (2): 393–412. <<https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12022>>.
- Piaget, Jean & Bärbel Inhelder. 1997. *Psychologie dítěte* [The Psychology of the Child]. Transl. Eva Vyskočilová. Praha: Portál.
- Piaget, Jean. 1997. *The Moral Judgement of the Child*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Piaget, Jean. 1999. *Psychologie inteligence* [La psychologie de l'intelligence = The Psychology of Intelligence], 2nd ed. Transl. František Jiránek. Praha: Portál.
- Pupala, Branislav. 2004. *Narcis vo výchove* [Narcissus in Education]. Bratislava: Veda.
- Rusňák, Radoslav. 2017. *(Ne)samozrejmé kapitoly z literatúry pre deti a mládež* [(Un)obvious Chapters from Literature for Children and Youth]. Prešov: Prešovská univerzita.
- Schleihat, Hanna & Stefanie Hoehl. 2021. Evidence for a Dual-Process Account of Over-Imitation: Children Imitate Anti- and Prosocial Models Equally, but Prefer Prosocial Models Once They Become Aware of Multiple Solutions to a Task. *PLoS ONE* 16 (9): e0256614. <<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0256614>>.
- Simpson, Myrtle. 1966. *Suggestions for Teaching Reading in Infant Classes*. London: Methuen Educational.
- Stanislavová, Zuzana. 2013. *Éthos a poésis v umeleckej tvorbe* [Ethos and Poesis in Works of Art]. Prešov: Prešovská univerzita.
- Štubňa, Pavol. 2017. *Psychológia literatúry* [The Psychology of Literature], 2nd rev. ed. Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo Univerzity Komenského.

- Tennent, Wayne, David Reedy, Angela Hobsbaum & Nikki Gamble. 2016. *Guiding Readers – Layers of Meaning: A Handbook for Teaching Reading Comprehension to 7-11-year-olds*. London: UCL Institute of Education Press.
- Tennent, Wayne. 2015. *Understanding Reading Comprehension: Processes and Practices*. London: Sage.
- Trepanier, Mary L. & Jane A. Romatowski. 1990. Classroom Use of Selected Children's Books: Prosocial Development in Young Children. In *Elementary School Counselling in a Changing World*, edited by Edwin R. Gerler, Joseph C. Ciechalski & Larry D. Parker, 391–397. Michigan: ERIC Counselling and Personnel Services Clearinghouse.
- Uhrinová, Miriam. 2009. Reálne a zobrazené vzory [Real and Depicted Role Models]. In *Vybrané pedagogické aspekty rozvoja prosociálnosti u detí* [Selected Pedagogical Aspects of the Development of Prosociality in Children], edited by Zuzana Hollá et al., 119–132. Ružomberok: Katolícka univerzita v Ružomberku.
- Vitz, Paul C. 1990. The Use of Stories in Moral Development: New Psychological Reasons for an Old Education Model. *American Psychologist* 45 (6): 709–720. <<https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.45.6.709>>.
- Willows, Adam M. 2017. Stories and the Development of Virtue. *Ethics and Education* 12 (3): 337–350. <<https://doi.org/10.1080/17449642.2017.1356664>>.
- Yancey, Antronette K. 1998. Building Positive Self-Image in Adolescents in Foster Care: The Use of Role Models in an Interactive Group Approach. *Adolescence* 33 (130) 253–267.

Dávid Dziak

Sveučilište u Prešovu, Pedagoški fakultet, Prešov, Slovačka

Recepcija prosocijalnih književnih uzora u djece mlađe školske dobi

Cilj je rada razjasniti kako dijete mlađe školske dobi percipira književne junake koje doživljava kao književne uzore i tako upozoriti na pozitivan trag prosocijalnih književnih uzora u (prosocijalnom) razvoju dječjega čitatelja. Istraživanje je provedeno na uzorku od 24 sudionika (prosječne dobi 9,04 godina) porabom istraživačkih metoda kao što su analiza sadržaja proizvoda, projektivni intervju i tehnike pisanja. Empirijsko istraživanje otkrilo je pozitivan trag koji je određeni književni tekst s prosocijalnim književnim uzorom „upisao“ u pojam prosocijalnosti u djeteta. Takav se književni uzor stoga može upotrijebiti u obrazovanju kao učinkovit alat u (prosocijalnom) odgoju djeteta mlađe školske dobi.

Ključne riječi: dijete mlađe školske dobi, dječji čitatelj, književnost za djecu, prosocijalni odgoj, prosocijalni književni uzor, recepcija književnoga teksta

Appendix A

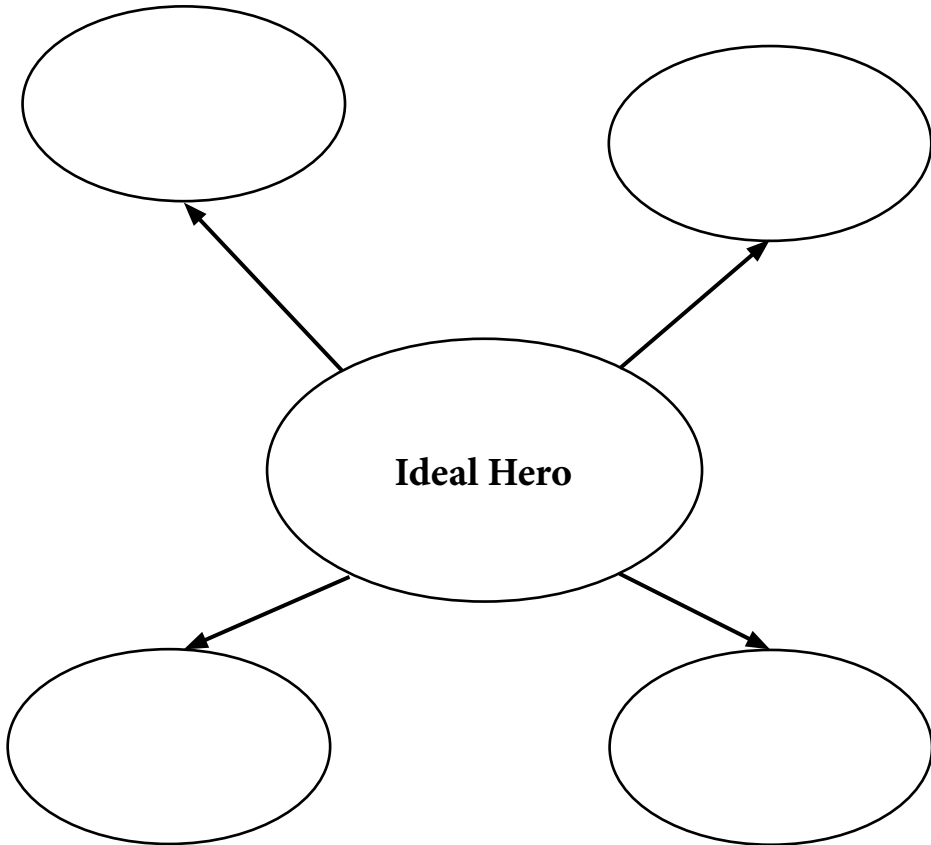
.....

Name

.....

Age

**Write in bubbles what comes to mind when you imagine an ideal hero.
What are his qualities? What does he do? What abilities does he have?
How does he behave?**



Write down if you know anyone like that:

.....

Appendix B

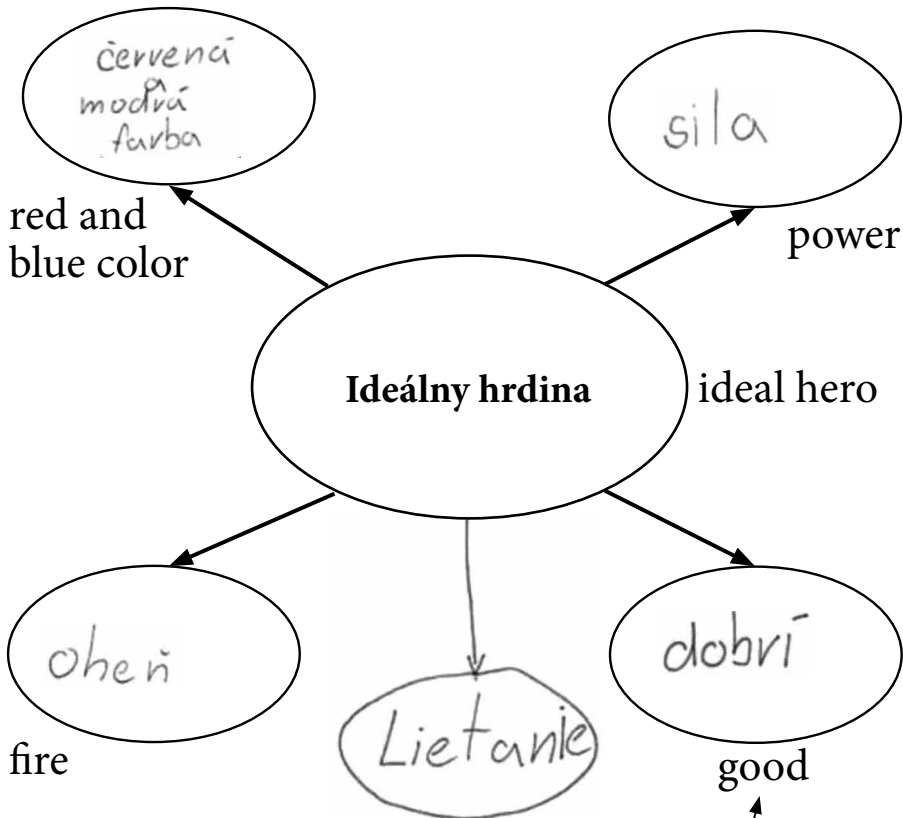
.....

Name

.....

Age

**Write in bubbles what comes to mind when you imagine an ideal hero.
 What are his qualities? What does he do? What abilities does he have?
 How does he behave?**



Write down if you know anyone like that:

capitan america, ocko, ujo, dita

Captain America, father, uncle, Dita

written in green pen, after reading a fairy tale