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## And after maths, we have magic tricks! Harry Potter-style lessons 'boost children's confidence'

By David Derbyshire

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'Magic school': Learning tricks like Harry Potter also 'helps discipline'

Children should be taught magic tricks in schools to boost their confidence and self-discipline, researchers say.

A study found that an hour lesson at a 'magic school' did more good for a group of 10 to 12-year-olds than their normal 'life skills' classes.

Prof Richard Wiseman, a psychologist at Hertfordshire University who carried out the study, called for magic to be included on the national curriculum.

'Learning magic requires self-discipline, an understanding of how other people think and an ability to entertain,' he said.

'Also, unlike playing computer games, it encourages children to interact with their friends and family.

'Because of this, we thought it might be a unique and effective way of developing an important set of psychological skills.'

Most schoolchildren are given weekly lessons in Personal Health and Social Education classes.

The classes include sessions designed to boost children's self-esteem and confidence, improve their relationships and have respect for others.

Prof Wiseman, a member of the Magic Circle and former professional magician, tested the effects of a magic lessons on 60 pupils aged 10 and 12 from two schools in Hertfordshire.

Half the pupils spent an hour in a 'magic school', learning how to do two simple tricks – restoring a rope that has been cut in half and reading someone's mind by correctly naming a card chosen from a pack at random.

They were told to practise the tricks repeatedly and given tips on how to present them.

The rest attended a normal PHSE class where teachers tried to boost their self-confidence and respect levels with stories, role plays and discussions.

Using a questionnaire, the psychologists assessed the children before the lessons, immediately afterwards and two weeks later.

Although both lessons boosted the children's confidence and sociability, the magic lessons were far more effective, Prof Wiseman told the British Association science festival in Liverpool.

Shy children with the lowest self-esteem got the most benefit, he found.

The effects lasted for at least two weeks after the lesson – and if lessons are repeated could last for much longer.

In carry out the tricks successfully, the children had to practice repeatedly – which developed their self-discipline and concentration.

They had to learn how to present the tricks to a class, boosting their confidence.

And they also had to think carefully about how their audience would see their performance – and avoid giving the tricks away. That encouraged empathy and social skills.

Prof Wiseman stressed that magic lessons should not replace conventional lessons in reading, writing, maths and science.

But he believes children could occasionally be taught magic in PHSE using interactive DVDs.

'There's no suggesting that schools should devote huge resources and time to magic tricks, but it is one avenue that's worth exploring.'

Parents can also help develop children's confidence and self-discipline by encouraging magic in the home, he said.

Co-researcher Rebecca Godfrey said: 'It is early days yet, but these results are very encouraging and we hope that this approach can be used to develop new and exciting ways of reaching out to these children.'

### **A mind-reading trick that boosts children's confidence**

- 1) Lay a 20p, 10p, 5p, 2p and 1p coin on a table.
- 2) Turn your back, and ask your friend to choose any coin.
- 3) Ask them to pick up the coin and hold it tightly in their hand for a few moments whilst concentrating on it.
- 4) Next, have them put the coin back on the table and move all of the coins around.
- 5) To find out which coin they chose, pick up each coin and hold it against your forehead. The coin they chose will feel warmer than the others.

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