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It May Be Science Blasphemy, But Magic Can Boost Children's Self Esteem

By News Account

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Adults like to watch Chris Angel or David Blaine because we know the stunts are controlled, but there is always the chance they might off themselves. We get some fun out of figuring out the impossible and it's more challenging than figuring out how to cheat at Wii Fit.

Impossible tricks have a different effect on kids: a new experiment announced today at the BA Festival of Science in Liverpool says learning magical feats can boost children's confidence and social skills.

The study, conducted by Rebecca Godfrey, Dr Sarah Woods, and Professor Richard Wiseman from the University of Hertfordshire, involved assessing the effect of teaching secondary school children some seemingly impossible illusions, including how to magically restore a rope that has been cut in half, and read another person's mind.

The project involved 50 pupils aged between 10 and 12 at two schools in Hertfordshire. Assessments, taken both before and after just a single lesson at 'magic school', revealed dramatic psychological effects, with the results suggesting a significant increase in both sociability and confidence. The researchers also monitored the pupils during a standard lesson commonly used to increase self-esteem, and discovered that performing magic proved more effective at promoting both social skills and confidence.

"Learning magic requires self-discipline, an understanding of how other people think, and an ability to entertain," noted psychologist Professor Wiseman. "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."

Initial findings suggest that some children with low self-esteem may also benefit from learning and performing the tricks. Commenting on this part of the project, Rebecca Godfrey noted, "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."

Marvin Berglas from Marvin's Magic, noted: "These results confirm the many letters and emails that we receive from children saying how their new found talents have elevated their playground status. Also, magic encourages children to interact with their friends and family, and is also both fun and cool."

The BA Festival of Science was held in Liverpool from 6-11 September and brought over 350 of the UK's

top scientists and engineers to discuss the latest developments in science with the public.

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