

SELF ESTEEM:

Sometimes it Takes a Little Magic

In this article, Kent explains the impact that magic and other creative classes can have on kids, especially “problem learners.”

Originally published in *Parenting in the 90s*, May 1994.

by **Kent Cummins**

kent@kentcummins.com

512 288-1596

866 KC MAGIC (526-2442)

Copyright © 2001 by Kent Cummins. All rights reserved. This document may not be redistributed or copied in whole or in part without the express written consent of Kent Cummins.

Have you ever wished there was a MAGIC way to motivate young people? Well...maybe there is!

Let me tell you about a child whom I'll simply call, "Juan." A large-for-his age sixth grader, he was one of the prize pupils in a recent after-school magic course. (Yes, I said a MAGIC course!) Several innovative schools are providing a wide variety of enrichment programs after school, in an attempt to get their "at-risk" students interested...in anything!

Juan never missed a class. In fact, he arrived early and stayed late, very attentive, eager to participate. It was obvious that he studied the subject in between the once-a-week classes, because his questions exposed an increasing knowledge and interest. After the last class, the enrichment program supervisor noticed Juan hanging around. "Has he been to very many classes?" she asked.

I checked my roll sheets. "He hasn't missed one." I replied.

"Is he any trouble in class? Does he pick on the other students? Does he pay attention?" she persisted.

"No, he's no trouble at all. He's really one of my best students. Why do you ask?"

"Well...Juan is a real bully and a troublemaker. He's been suspended from school. He isn't allowed to go to classes. We didn't know he was coming back for the after-school magic class!"

How Magic Motivates

What is there about MAGIC that turns on certain otherwise hard-to-reach kids? There's an intrinsic excitement about "secrets," especially for kids. It makes them want to read, to learn more secrets. Magic also promises respect from the people whom you fool. It makes kids eager to perform, to express themselves in front of others. Performing magic gives them self-confidence and poise. It's different, interesting, unusual. It's FUN!

Magic is not for everyone, of course. If we were all magicians, then magic would lose its charm as a unique form of expression. Many kids will do better at a computer camp, playing soccer, or in a cooking class. After all, we are all individuals, with individual needs, skills, and talents.

But for the right kid, magic can turn them on to a socially acceptable form of "power." Performing magic in front of other kids can empower a shy, introverted child. And performing in front of approving adults can really provide a shot of self-esteem.

Self-esteem is an important issue these days. Parents, teachers, camp directors, and anyone else who works with children seem to be looking for ways to enhance the self-esteem of young people.

Janet Reno, the attorney general of the United States, has indicated that she favors making young people feel better about themselves as a long-term deterrent to crime, gangs, and drugs. It makes sense: people who feel good about themselves, and can project a favorable future, are far less attracted to the dangers of antisocial activities.

I have noticed that many kids who are “problem learners” in a traditional academic setting actually thrive in creative classes such as magic. Students with dyslexia, or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, appear to process information differently from that required by the highly structured, traditional teaching methods. ✨