

Why magic is an effective teaching strategy

by

Kevin Ogren

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Dr. Robert Anthony (Department of Curriculum and Instruction)

Dr. James Nahacheewsky (Department of Curriculum and Instruction)

Abstract

This paper examines the use of magic as an effective teaching strategy. The goal of the project was to create a Professional Development workshop for teachers to describe the various ways learning and performing magic tricks can be incorporated into a variety of classroom activities. I have been using magic in my classroom for 20 years and magic has been an effective strategy to motivate and inspire students to read, advance their physiotherapy, build confidence and think creatively. Magic also creates a fun and enjoyable classroom environment where students want to be. Being part of the magic community has also made me understand the importance of constant practice, examining current methods and new methods, and having a mentor. Magic is also a process of lifelong learning that I model to my students.

Keywords: magic, magic effect, magic trick, motivation, physiotherapy, effective classroom strategies, mentor

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Table of Contents.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	v
Dedication.....	vi
Chapter 1:.....	1
My Magic Journey begins.....	1
Passions Collide.....	1
“All you do is Magic, when are the students learning in your class?”.....	2
The Magic of Reading.....	3
Magic and Students with Special Needs.....	3
Fate Strikes Again.....	5
Pay it Forward.....	6
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	7
Introduction.....	7
Magic in the Classroom.....	7
The rationale for using magic.....	8
Magic and children with special needs.....	8
a. Psychomotor Functioning:.....	9
b. Developing Self Esteem:.....	10
c. Addressing anxiety:.....	11
d. Children with Autism:.....	11
But that is just good teaching!.....	12
Magic as a teaching strategy to develop the cognitive aspect of the learner.....	13
Magic and the imagination.....	13
Magic and creativity.....	15
Revealing the secret!.....	16
Revealing the secret to teach critical thinking.....	16
“The students think they’re learning Magic - <i>but they’re really learning to read</i> ”.....	17
Magic as a teaching strategy to develop the affective aspect of the learner.....	17

Creating a culture of creativity in schools through magic clubs	18
Grabbing Their Attention!.....	19
That’s Impossible!.....	20
Giving the Child Power.....	20
Magic, like learning, is more powerful with active participation	21
One potential issue with using magic in the classroom	22
Conclusions.....	22
Chapter 3: Using Magic in the Classroom Workshop: Rationale & Description.....	24
Rationale.....	24
Description and Explanation of the Workshop	25
Introduction and Workshop Goals.....	25
My Inspirations (Slides 3, 4 and 5).....	27
Where can you learn magic? (Slides 6, 7 and 8)	29
Magic is my Classroom (Slides 11, 12 and 13).....	30
The use of magic to help students with physical and mental disabilities (Slides 14, 15 and 16).....	32
Using magic to differentiate a lesson	34
How are the principles of learning and magic linked? (Slide 19)	35
Magic and the Big Ideas in Language Arts (Slide 20)	37
Magical Resources (Slides 21-24).....	38
The Magic of an Every Day Object: The Pencil! (Slide 25)	41
Chico The Mindreading Monkey (slide 26)	41
All Done By Kindness (Slide 27).....	43
Chapter 4: A Bag of Tricks!.....	45
The Magic of Teaching vs. Teaching Magic.....	45
The Bag of Tricks.....	49
References.....	50

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate my Master's project to my magic mentor; Tony Eng. Tony was a true master magician, always working to improve the art of magic. He worked extremely hard to educate the future generations of magicians. He was an incredible mentor; he always provided words of encouragement and took the time to help me perfect my magic. He also pushed my comfort zone and forced me to expand and develop from a magic hobbyist into a professional magician. I hope that I can inspire the next generation and help keep Tony's legacy alive.

Miss you Tony!



Tony Eng

1946-2008

Chapter 1:

My Magic Journey begins...

In 1977, I walked into the Disneyland Main Street Magic Shop and a lifelong passion for magic started. The man working the shop walked up to me and made a small red silk vanish into thin air. I purchased the secret and little did I know that a passion for learning magic was sparked.

Magic has been a journey of lifelong learning for me. I am constantly learning new methods, from reading monthly journals and books on the subject, watching DVD's, attending a variety of magic conferences, and most importantly talking to my magic colleagues in person. I also contribute to magic blogs. The magic community welcomes its members to share what they are working on, provide constructive criticism to not only better the individual magician, but the practice of magic in general. I have always wondered why teaching does not follow the same supportive path.

Passions Collide

During my teaching practicum, I taught a science unit on the properties of water. I remembered a couple magic tricks that might help demonstrate the concepts. I never realized the power that magic could have in the classroom until that day when I performed the tricks. Instead of a basic science lesson with me just standing at the front of the classroom demonstrating an experiment, it literally became a magical experience. The students were excited by the trick and really started to wonder how it worked. "That's Impossible!" many yelled, my response "How

can it be impossible if I just did it?" I refused to tell them how it worked, but asked them to make guesses or hypotheses about how it worked. I had never had students so engaged in a science lesson before.

"All you do is Magic, when are the students learning in your class?"

I have heard the above comment more than once from parents; even from one Principal during my 20 year career as an elementary classroom teacher. In the past, I have not had a particularly good answer. I have witnessed how magic demonstrated could motivate and inspire my learners, but where was the 'real' research to support my practice? One of my main goals when I began my Master's project was to complete a literature review that would provide me with researched answers as to why magic works - both as a pedagogy and for enhancing learners' experiences - in the context of the classroom.

Experimentally, I know that magic can provide many benefits for a classroom teacher. It can help a child learn to read. Many of the first books I read were magic books (I still have my first magic book from a Scholastic Book order from elementary school). It can motivate. Students will work very hard to complete their learning activities when they know that I will perform a trick. It can heal. Practicing and performing magic tricks can provide physiotherapy for people with fine and gross motor issues. It can build confidence. Withdrawn and shy students can learn to speak and perform in front of others through magic. This includes me. I was a very shy student in class. My grade two teacher did not even know I was in her class - but that is another story. Magic demonstrations can inspire. Many would be amazed at the wonder and creativity that happens when students witness and perform magic in classroom contexts. How

does this all translate to my present teaching, and my desire to understand researched perspectives to help explain the phenomenon that I see on a day to day basis?

The Magic of Reading

Our school has been focusing on teaching nonfiction reading for the past couple years. My first thought in response to this initiative was - "Magic books are nonfiction!" I had used magic in the past to teach math and science concepts, but never thought of magic as a vehicle to teach Language Arts. As I worked with the students, I would whisper "Your parents think I'm teaching you to read, but I'm really teaching you magic tricks." The students would laugh and our magic infused learning would continue. On Meet the Teacher night, I would whisper to the parents "The students think they're just learning magic tricks, but they're really learning to read."

Magic and Students with Special Needs

A major revelation came to me during my third year of teaching. There was a student in my class, whose left hand was atrophying and he was running the risk of losing total use of it. His parents and the special education worker were trying to get him to do the exercises that the physiotherapist had prescribed. He flat out refused to exercise his left hand and it was getting worse and worse. He was in Grade five at the time and his parents feared that he would soon lose total use of the hand.

I am not sure if it was fate, but that fall, *MAGIC Magazine* had an article on the *Healing of Magic* by Kevin Spencer. Spencer created a program, in conjunction with physiotherapists,

which uses magic tricks to help people with physical and mental challenges. Unfortunately, I could not get the school to agree to purchase the \$200 program, so I bought it myself. The program arrived within a few weeks and I was quickly able to choose a couple simple tricks that required the student to use both hands.

The child was always fascinated by my magic tricks that I was performing for the class. I performed a rope trick from the program for the students, I received the usual “How did you do that?” response from many students, including the boy that needed to exercise his hand. I spoke with him after school and told him I would teach him the trick if he promised two things: never reveal the secret and he had to practice it at least fifty times before performing it for anyone at school. I explained that magicians must perfect the handling to not reveal the secret by accident. He agreed. Never once did I mention that this had anything to do with helping him to overcome physical challenges. Within seconds he grabbed the rope in both hands! He was struggling with the one hand, but as he practiced it did get easier.

There was another effect in relation to using the *Healing with Magic* program - not only was the student starting to physically move his hand, his confidence started to grow. By possessing the secret of a magic trick one has the ability to achieve something that others cannot. In this case, it was a child who, due to physical challenges, could not always do things his peers could do; sometimes even being ridiculed for these differences. He became able to perform magic that others could not. Magic performance gave him an incredible boost of confidence, especially with his classmates saying “Wow, how did you do that?” to which he would respond “I’m sorry a magician never reveals the secret.” He was no longer a child with a disability having to do monotonous exercises, but rather a magician practicing his next illusion.

Fate Strikes Again

I had been considering doing my Master's degree for some years now. I have always wanted to complete a graduate project on using magic in the classroom. I was just confused with what direction to take the project. Did I want to focus on the use of magic with special needs students, or to develop a unit on using magic in the classroom? Even through my most recent course work I was flip-flopping on the focus that I would pursue. After completing my required course work, I decided to travel to Las Vegas and attend *MAGIC Live*, a convention hosted by *Magic Magazine* - the same magazine that inspired me to purchase the *Healing of Magic* program mentioned above. Interestingly, the list of lectures at this conference is always kept secret until you arrive at the event. On the morning I entered the grand hall to listen to a variety of speakers on the topic of magic I was completely surprised that one of the key speakers was Kevin Spencer, the creator of the *Healing of Magic* program I had used so successfully. His talk moved many in the crowd to tears, including myself. I waited after the session to speak with Kevin. He was extremely friendly and asked for my business card. He has been generous since that meeting, sending me links to various resources that have helped me with my Master's work.

Kevin Spencer also sent me a link to another of his projects called *Hocus Focus*, which is a classroom curriculum designed to help teachers use magic to teach creativity. It looked like a great resource. Again it was \$200, plus shipping to order. I typed up a proposal for my Principal to ask if I could purchase this program, but a family emergency prevented me from submitting the letter of request to my Principal. While I was out of town attending to family in the hospital my wife informed me a package had arrived in the mail. Kevin Spencer had sent me the program as a gift! He also sent me links to the updated version of *Healing of Magic* for free. I am still

totally overwhelmed by his generosity, and the further connections to understanding the importance of magic performance as pedagogy and learning enrichment that this has afforded me during my Master's work.

Pay it Forward

My personal and professional experiences have helped to create the direction that I want to go with my Master's project. Most importantly, I want my project to make a difference for teachers and learners. I do not just want to write a paper that will sit on a shelf in the school or curriculum library. Instead of focusing on one specific topic, my project is to create a Professional Development workshop called "Why you should use magic in your classroom!" I want to encourage teachers to experience and understand the incredible potential that magic performance brings to their pedagogy and students' learning. Within this project/workshop, I will also provide educators with a list of researched resources that can specifically address a targeted need they may encounter in the classroom, or at the very least have some fun with. Magic has provided me some amazing personal and professional experiences, and it is time through this Master's for me to 'Pay it forward!'

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

“All you do is magic, when are the children learning?”

As related earlier in this paper, the above is a question that I have heard in the past from a few parents, and even one administrator. There are many websites and books on the topic of using magic tricks to teach Science and Math. But the main question for my Master’s project remains: “Why is magic a potentially effective teaching strategy?”

Magic can potentially be an effective teaching strategy for all students because it addresses the three domains of the learner – cognitive (content knowledge and critical thinking), affective (social relationships and self-esteem), and psychomotor (physical skills). I started teaching magic to students with special needs to address specific learning needs, mainly psychomotor skills, but over the years my use of magic has expanded.

Magic in the Classroom

Although not a major focus in education, research has been conducted, throughout the past few decades, regarding the use of magic by teachers in the classroom. Frith and Walker (1982) describe how a teacher can effectively integrate magic into the classroom. Their article entitled “Magic as Motivation for Handicapped Students” provides ideas and approaches that can be applied to all students regardless of differing cognitive or physical abilities. They compare magic to music in that they view magic “as a universal language” (p. 109). They argue that as a strategy for demonstration, enrichment or engagement, teachers’ use of magic “offers a creative tool for teaching” (p. 109).

The rationale for using magic

There are two main reasons for teachers to introduce the use of magic in their classrooms. The first is for the **performance of magic**; for their students' engagement, skill attainment and learning. The second is the **teaching of magic** to students; where the students become the magicians and learn to perform magic as applied to outcomes within various subject areas. Both reasons can play a very important role in students' learning. Teachers who use magic often begin by performing a trick for their students, perhaps to have a playful moment and build relationships with their students, or to illustrate a point during a lesson in science or math. As mentioned earlier, both rationales – the use of magic as performance by the teacher, or the teaching of magic to students for their use – is applicable in a diverse range of classrooms, with a diverse range of learners. I began as the performer of the magic in the classroom, and continue to do so to this day to enhance my students' learning. But I have also taught students how to be magicians. My first experience of teaching a student to become the performer was to help a student with special needs work on his gross and fine motor skills. Although the first rule of the Magicians' Code is to never reveal a secret, the next section of this paper explores the literature in relation to the use of magic in classrooms with special needs learners.

Magic and children with special needs

There are multiple studies that inquired into the impact of magic, and how it can be used to help children and adults with special needs (Frith & Walker 1982, Spencer 2012, Walkenhorst 2011, Green et. al. 2013). As found in the literature, there are three benefits for using magic with

individuals with special needs. These are for improvement in their psychomotor functioning, self-esteem and anxiety. As well, magic performance has been proven to be beneficial for children with autism. I will begin with an examination of children's psychomotor functioning.

a. Psychomotor Functioning:

Frith and Walker (1982) suggest a variety of benefits of magic; the first being improvements in the area of children's "psychomotor functioning (including gross and fine motor skills)" (p. 108). In this case, the teacher needs to model and teach the students to become performers. Magic tricks range from the 'easy' and 'self-working' that require little or no physical dexterity, to the 'extremely difficult' which challenge and develop one's manipulation through sleight of hand. This wide range allows the teacher/magician to tailor the trick to the ability level of the child. Spencer and Spencer's (2012) program *Healing with Magic*, provides a range of tricks that the magician/teacher, in conjunction with a physiotherapist, can develop into a meaningful program. Together, the educator and physiotherapist can create a program that fits with the fine or gross motor skill needs of the child. Psychomotor skills include things such as:

"Gross motor skills (Range of motion, Strengthening and Balance): Upper extremities, lower extremities, and body trunk.

Fine motor skills (Object manipulation and dexterity): Speed, accuracy, and eye/hand coordination." (Spencer & Spencer, 1999, p. 20)

The program also allows the student to increase the level of difficulty, and to challenge his/her level of psychomotor development just as the teacher supports and challenges the student's cognitive and social development on a daily basis.

b. Developing Self Esteem:

The most important aspect of magic performance is in 'the secret'. Every magician knows the golden rule of magic 'Never reveal the secret.' In fact, magicians that join organizations like the International Brotherhood of Magicians are required to sign a non-disclosure of secrets contract. The use of 'the secret' can become very important when working with students with special needs. By giving a student a secret while teaching the student to become the performer of a magic trick, it gives them some leverage, or power or control, which may be helpful for them within the social context of the classroom. The performer can potentially do something the audience member(s) – their peers - cannot; therefore, help to “promote self-esteem and self-confidence” (Levin 2006, p. 16). Ezell and Klein-Ezell (2003) state that many students with special needs have experienced challenges, having to adapt to or not engage in the same activities as typical children of their age in the classroom. Through the performance of magic, these same differently abled children gain the ability to do something that their peers cannot achieve. The secret of magic provides cultural capital for the student-performers, creating new relationships for them with peers and building self-esteem for themselves. As Ezell and Klein-Ezell (2003) note in their study: “That knowledge appeared to have empowered the child with disabilities to perform at a perceived higher level than their peers because their non-disabled peers did not know the secret behind the magic tricks” (p. 447).

c. Addressing anxiety:

In their work, Hart and Walton (2010) examined the use of magic with hospitalized children. They looked at magic performed and/or taught to children who were patients. They found there were benefits to boosting self-esteem, as mentioned above, by teaching magic to children who were chronically ill and long term patients. They also found that the performance of magic by others helped to reduce the anxiety levels for children that were about to go into surgery. Often, magicians and clowns would entertain the children and then stay with them just before they went under anesthetic. Such benefits are transferable to educational settings – for students (either typical or with special needs) who may individually or as a group experience anxiety around testing, or at other times throughout the school year and its curricular cycle.

d. Children with Autism:

Spencer (2013) presented to 1300 magicians at *MAGIC Live*, a magic convention in Las Vegas. During this presentation he described some of the success stories around utilizing magic with autistic children. In one anecdote, he described the circumstances of a boy with autism who was trying to learn to perform a rope trick. The child would watch Spencer do the trick and try to copy his moves. The boy asked him to repeat and explain the moves. All the time, the boy's father was filming the magic lesson over Spencer's shoulder. Afterwards the father hugged Spencer and began to cry, explaining that was the first time he had ever heard his son speak.

Anstead's article on Kevin Spencer from *Inside Autism* (2013) points out that autism includes three main features:

... difficulties in relating to or understanding other people and social situations; difficulties in acquiring forms of communication; and a lack of imaginative ability indicated by rigidity and inflexibility of thought processes, resistance to change, and obsessive or ritualistic behaviours accompanied by narrow interest. People with autism typically exhibit a lack of coordination, fine motor dexterity and problems with sensory integration. (p. 25)

Teaching with magic can provide opportunities for autistic children to see potential improvements in all of these areas. "If magic tricks help a young person with autism improve language, play skills, social interaction or responsiveness to multiple environmental cues, then it's likely to transfer to other areas of their lives" (Anstead, 2013, p. 25).

Kuhn, Kourkoulou & Leekam (2010) studied how autistic children responded to magic. They started with the assumption that autistic adults were not able to follow social cues; therefore, they would not be "fooled" by a simple magic trick. Magicians use social cues to misdirect the audience, the example the authors used was of the vanishing ball illusion. The magician misdirects the audience by moving his hand as if he is throwing a ball in the air, but there is no ball and the magician follows the arcing path of the "invisible" ball with his/her eyes and head movements. Their study determined that the illusion, which was dependent on social cues, did fool the adults with autism because the autistic participants in fact did react to the social cues. "Our findings therefore show that magic can change expectations about autism, and autism can also change expectations about magic" (p. 1492).

But that is just good teaching!

As mentioned earlier in this paper and literature review, I started out performing magic in my classroom, and then began teaching how to do magic as a way to help a particular student with special needs. But, I began to realize the potential of magic in my pedagogy, across the curriculum and with a variety of learners. These modifications and adaptations are just rooted in good teaching and could benefit every student.

Magic as a teaching strategy to develop the cognitive aspect of the learner

In terms of my whole classroom, I primarily use magic to help develop the cognitive (content knowledge and critical thinking) aspect of the learner. Magic can potentially be a great strategy to tap into the students' imaginations and develop their creativity.

Magic and the imagination

Albert Einstein (1929) stated "Imagination is more important than knowledge." This statement is more important than ever with knowledge so readily available through the Internet. "Engaging the imagination is not a sugar-coated adjunct to learning; it is the very heart of learning" (Egan, 2005, p. 36). In Egan's (2005) book, *An Imaginative Approach to Teaching*, he states that the key to all learning is the need to connect the students' imagination to the lesson. For younger students, he has created nine different cognitive tools. Egan points out that it is important for the teacher to have these tools in mind when planning lessons. Lessons will soon become more engaging and students will remember and understand the concepts. Magic helps

the teacher use at least five of these tools; story, jokes and humour, mental imagery, play and mystery.

Egan (2005) believes that **story** is “one of the most powerful cognitive tools students have available for imaginatively engaging with knowledge” (p. 2). Magicians know that magic is so much more than a group of tricks, that when you add a story or patter¹ that emotionally connects with the audience the trick becomes so much more powerful. I performed the Linking Rings for many years, with good audience reaction. One day, I decided to add a piece of beautiful music and tell the story of my magic mentor, Tony Eng. He taught me his routine and unfortunately passed away of cancer, so I dedicate the trick to him at every show. The change in the audience reaction has been incredible – they become dead silent at the song and I suddenly have their full attention. The story and music took it from a good trick to a memorable piece of beautiful magic. Having the students write their own patter or story for a trick is another powerful way to spark their creativity. Mitchell (2010) believes that magicians should throw away the written patter that comes with a trick. This will force the magician to tap into their creativity and create a routine that is unique and different from other magicians. Maybe this idea can spark creativity in students.

Egan (2005) also talks about the loss of mystery and magic as we grow older. He states that by having a sense of mystery allows us to feel excited and enticed by the fact that much of what we know is only a “tiny fragment of what is to be known” (p. 32). “By opening our minds to this wider, stranger, and less easily accessible world, we create the first tool for its exploration” (p. 33). The magician’s job is to create a mystery that leaves the audience

¹ Patter: the script or words that a magician uses when performing a magic trick or routine.

questioning “How is that possible?” When you can accomplish the same sense of mystery in the classroom, you get the students’ sense of inquiry initiated. This can then be transferred to a wide variety of learning contexts.

As children grow older, Egan (2005) describes another set of tools that teachers need to access to reach and develop their imaginations. Two tools that magic can tap into are “the extremes of experience and the limits of reality” (p. 78) and “the sense of wonder” (p. 79). Egan reminds teachers that students start to become bored with their typical surroundings or environment and that can stifle imagination. Magic can be a vehicle to stretch or totally fly in the face of that reality. This is also enhanced by sparking the students’ sense of wonder. “Wonder can be an engine of intellectual inquiry” (Egan, 2005, p. 91). When a student witnesses a magic trick that creates a sense of wonder, they will usually ask how it is done, but again, the most important rule of magic is to never reveal the secret. This does not mean that the child cannot be encouraged or pointed in a direction that allows them to search for the answer. “Stimulating wonder energizes the literate mind” (p. 92). By not divulging the secret, the children’s imaginations can create more fantastic solutions, rather than the usually simple trick.

Magic and creativity

Educator and theorist Sir Ken Robinson (2009) famously discusses the importance of imagination in teaching and learning. But he points out that we must help students take the next step to creativity. “Creativity is the step beyond imagination because it requires that you actually do something rather than lie around thinking about it” (p. 71). He speaks to the importance of

creativity and finding your passion. He describes that when people feel they are in their ‘element’ they can perform at their peak potential and are at their happiest. Robinson points out that to be an effective teacher, you need to be in your element and demonstrate your passions to your students. He also points out that an over focus on standardized high-stakes testing “discourage(s) innovation and creativity in education, the very things that make schools and students thrive” (p. 236). It also can be discouraging when “good teachers find their own creativity suppressed” (p. 236) – including when others question why one would use magic in one’s classroom.

Revealing the secret!

At times a magician does choose to reveal a secret. The main debate among magicians is when should secrets be revealed? There are a couple acceptable times; the first is when we teach magic to children. It is vitally important to explain the importance of keeping a secret. Spencer (2012) in his *Hocus Focus* program includes contracts that students sign. This creates a bond with the student that what you are sharing is very important. It is especially crucial that if that student is a special needs student, they need to maintain that secret or the magic loses its power.

Revealing the secret to teach critical thinking

Goodin (2010) also looked at using magic and more specifically mentalism (the art of mind reading) to help teach skepticism. Goodin was trying to find a way to introduce skepticism into an advanced writing course. He would “spin a tale of how, as a child, it was discovered that [he] had a special ‘gift’ later tested at the Rhine Institute” (p. 38). This gift was the ability to read minds and other psychic abilities, such as bending spoons. He did not reveal the true secrets for a

few weeks and allowed the students to write about what they saw. He found that about a third of the students truly believed he had psychic powers. When he did finally reveal the tricks he had to remind students that he was teaching about skepticism. Goodin reveals the magic secrets to demonstrate to students that they need to think critically about what they see, this may be even more important with the ubiquitous nature of information on the Internet. Students tend to believe something just because it was posted to the Net.

“The students think they’re learning Magic - *but they’re really learning to read*”

Subbottsky, Hysted and Jones (2010) looked at the use of magical content as a facilitator for creativity with students. They discovered that watching the *Harry Potter* films can have a positive influence on students’ imaginations. Their results “suggested that books and videos about magic might serve to expand children’s imagination and help them to think more creatively” (p. 275). As Egan (2005) explains, magical themes can push the students’ sense of reality and open their imagination to more fantastic ideas and thoughts.

Magic as a teaching strategy to develop the affective aspect of the learner

Jokes and humour “can also assist in the struggle against sclerosis of the imagination as students go through their schooling - helping to fight against rigid conventional uses of rules and showing students rich dimensions of knowledge and encouraging flexibility of mind” (Egan, 2005, p. 4). Most magicians that write or lecture about performing for children stress the importance of making the children laugh. One very important lesson that I learned from Aldo Colombini, a very funny Italian magician, is that the magician should never make the child the

butt of the joke. I believe that if even one child leaves my show feeling embarrassed, I have failed as a magician. The same should apply to every classroom. I also feel one of the best times to get the students laughing is first thing in the morning as they enter the classroom. Many children enter the classroom with emotional baggage that interferes with their learning. But, if you ‘pull off your thumb’ at the door and you get them to smile or giggle – you relieve their anxiety and begin their day of learning well.

Creating a culture of creativity in schools through magic clubs

Many of Robinson’s ideas are manifested through magic societies. Magic clubs create a sense of domain and fields of expertise. Magic clubs hold meetings and conventions, Robinson (2009) points out that these “tribes” or groups of like-minded people can “gather in the same place, the opportunities for mutual inspiration can become intense” (p. 121). This is the same in classrooms and schools when a group of students work together with a common goal. I have witnessed this positive collaboration with students in my magic club at school. Peers work very hard to help each other perfect their magic. Here, learners become teachers.

Another important aspect of finding your creative element is in having a mentor. Robinson (2009) describes that a mentor plays an extremely important role by teaching the basic skills, encouraging, facilitating and stretching our limits. Within the magic fraternity, mentoring is a crucial method used to develop the art of magic. Within the classroom or school magic club the teacher can be a mentor, but so can older students or other children that have skill that they can help another student.

Robinson (2009) points out that creativity is a skill that can be developed and taught. He also states that it is crucial for the teacher to discover their passions because when they model or mentor these passions, it will transfer to the students. I will attend a magic lecture or read a magic book and rejuvenate my passion for using magic in my teaching. I then try to share that new learning with my students. The more excited I am, the more excited they become. It is amazing to see how infectious a passion for magic can be.

Grabbing Their Attention!

“The art of magic has the potential to capture and hold the attention of people of all ages. Children are especially intrigued by the seeming impossibility of a magic trick” (Spencer, 2012, p. 3). Egan (2005) explains that “the sense of wonder” is one of those cognitive tools that a teacher can use to grab and spark the attention or imagination of students. Egan also points out that as we grow older that sense of wonder and belief in magic disappears. As people move into adulthood, we gain knowledge that stops this belief in magic. Egan declares that losing this belief can impede our imagination.

There are many successful magicians that have been able to make others, including adults, believe that magic might actually exist. For example, can David Copperfield really fly? During one of his performances, he ‘flew’ over my head and I could not see any wires. Siegfried and Roy were called the *Masters of the Impossible*; their entire life and career was spent creating an incredible sense of wonder. Kaye (2005) is a world class children’s magician who teaches other magicians the importance of performing good magic, because even though you are

performing for children, good magic will quickly grab the attention of the adults that are usually talking at the back of the room. As a teacher, you can be standing at the front of the class conducting your typical lesson and you notice members of the class are not paying attention. If you perform a moment of magic and it is amazing how all of the sudden every child is re-focused on you, or the task at hand.

That's Impossible!

Robinson (2009) describes in great detail about schools and other education institutions placing “tremendous significance on standardized testing, we cut funding for what we consider ‘non-essential’ programs, and then we wonder why our children see unimaginative and uninspired” (p. 16). Magic continues to spark a sense of wonder and imagination. When a trick is performed and that child has those “That’s impossible!” and “How did you do that?” moments, the child’s mind starts to create theories how the trick is done. Often, students’ imaginations invent more fantastic methods than the usual simple trick. Teachers should recall though, at appropriate times, “Revealing how a seemingly impossible feat was accomplished defeats the primary purpose of classroom magic; and the students lose fascination with the mysterious proceedings” (Frith & Walker, 1982, p. 108).

Giving the Child Power

Kaye (2005), aka Silly Billy, writes about the psychology of performing magic shows for children. When performing for children it is crucial to provide ways to empower the children. Kaye points out that there are two ways to accomplish, the first is to make the children feel they

are responsible for creating the magic. Kaye dedicates a whole chapter to “Mommy, I Did Magic!” This can be as simple as having the children say the magic words. Kaye also points out that children usually feel overpowered by the adults and the magician can create a sense of power for the children by using magic called “Look, Don’t See” where the child sees the magic and the magician does not. “It empowers the children with knowledge that the adult magician does not have” (p. 157).

Magic, like learning, is more powerful with active participation

As a magician, you need to make sure the audience feels a part of the show. Active participation of volunteers is crucial for that special connection with the show. Teachers can learn from this as well. Aoki (1983) feels “[this connection] as [his] personal world of [his] lived experiences, a world in which [he] participated with others in its very construction” (p. 335). When your students or audience feel connected and active with the lesson or trick it becomes more memorable. This connection is even made deeper when the magic happens right in the spectators hands. One can watch magic on TV or live on stage, but when a playing card changes right between their fingers or three little sponge balls become twenty, right in their hands, the trick is so much more powerful. Aoki (2003) refers to this as the “curriculum-as-lived” (p. 2). Students need to experience learning right in their hands.

It is also amazing how different audience members will come up after a show and their interpretation of trick will be so different. As a magician, it is so important to not rush through a trick and allow time for that ‘WOW’ to sink in and give people that opportunity to process what

happened. This helps create another level of connection. “People are continuously interpreting the events they experience, and these interpretations differ from person to person” (Aoki, 1978, p. 14). It is also amazing how the mind will also even exaggerate the illusion and make it even more incredible.

One potential issue with using magic in the classroom

One roadblock to using magic in the classroom is the religious beliefs of some families. In the past I have had parents ask that their children do not participate in novel studies of books, such as the Harry Potter series because they believed that they promote witchcraft. With these parents, I explained that my magic is just “tricks” and that I do not possess real magical powers. By framing magic tricks as a puzzle, this helped eliminate the fears of some of these parents (it does take the fun out of magic though.)

Conclusions

When considering why one would use magic in the classroom as a performer, or in the teaching of students to become performers, several key points have emerged from the literature. Each of these addresses the three domains of learners – cognitive, affective, and psychomotor. As a teacher who practices magic in his teaching, and as a magician who teaches his students how to perform magic I have found that I am:

- helping a child with his/her physiotherapy;

- helping a student build confidence;
- helping a student overcome anxiety;
- motivating my students to learn;
- sparking the imaginations of my students;
- helping children to think creatively and critically.

In using magic in the classroom, I am helping to make the classroom an exciting and engaging learning space along with my students. Although one does not share one's secrets as a magician, as a teacher I can tell other educators that it is no secret that magic can play a vital role in teaching and learning.

Chapter 3: Using Magic in the Classroom Workshop: Rationale & Description

In this chapter, I will provide a rationale for the professional development workshop on magic as an effective teaching strategy, based on my understanding from the literature review in Chapter 2. I describe the workshop, explaining some of the content and intentions of the PowerPoint slides and handouts presented to teachers.

Rationale

When I first started to reflect on my teaching, I examined how I learn and improve my magic. I realize that with magic, I read the current magazines, try new techniques, attend many conferences and lectures, belong to magic clubs where we share and critique our magic, maintain a journal, where I reflect on ideas and record my thoughts, and finally I am constantly editing my professional show, adding new material and reflecting on how I could improve by watching video recordings. I began to wonder why I do not do this with my teaching. I also thought, does magic improve my teaching or does teaching improve my magic.

The goal of my Master's project was to create a workshop for teachers to describe how magic has helped my teaching and provide some resources and strategies that they can use in their classrooms. The intent of the workshop was to show teachers how I use magic to inspire and entertain the students. I also wanted to have them experience the magic in the same way that I present it to students so they can get an idea of the sense of wonder and fun students can have while they are learning.

Description and Explanation of the Workshop

The District Professional Development Day Booklet read:

Kevin Ogren is a grade 3/4 teacher at Sunset Elementary. This is his 20th year teaching on the north island. He has also been a semi-professional magician for more than 20 years. Kevin is currently completing a Master's of Education, with a focus on the use of magic as an effective teaching tool.

Magic is a great way to help spark imagination and develop creativity. Magic can also be used to help students with physical and mental disabilities. This workshop will look at the various resources available for using magic in the classroom. Participants will also learn a variety of magic tricks that can be taught to their students.

The two-hour workshop consisted of a PowerPoint presentation, interspersed with performances of magic and the participants actively learning some magic. The main goal of the workshop was to demonstrate to teachers the power that using magic in their classroom can have. The main components of the PowerPoint presentation are: (a) an introduction of my magical inspirations and background (Slides 3-10); (b) a brief overview of how I use magic in my classroom (Slides 11-20); (c) provide a variety of magical resources that teachers can use in classroom (Slides 21-25); and (d) an opportunity for the participants to learn and perform some magic.

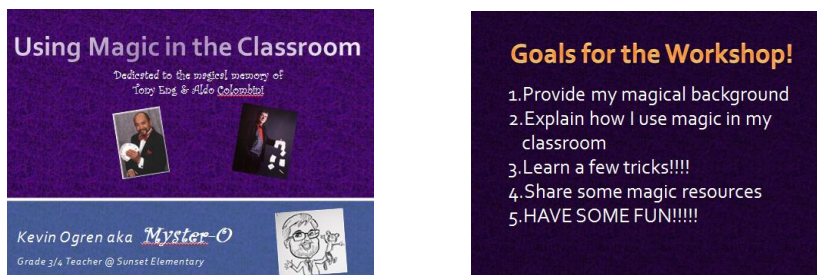


Figure 1.

Introduction and Workshop Goals

The workshop began with a brief personal introduction and I wanted to pay honour to two of my mentors that have passed recently. The passing of two of my mentors had a very profound effect on me; I started to realize that their magic lived on through me. I also came to the belief that I had the responsibility to become that mentor for another young budding magician.

Next, I performed a quick routine called the vanishing silk. In this routine, I start with a basic trick of vanishing a silk handkerchief in my hand, but then progress through a series of improvements to the trick. The first improvement is I vanish the silk in a \$20 bill to prove it does not go up my sleeve, a common explanation of how the trick is done. I then vanish the silk in a ball of fire to add a little flare and finally I transform the silk into an egg. It mirrors my development within magical arts; transitioning from a basic magic trick to the mastery of an amazing illusion. I also wanted teachers to have the experience of seeing something they could not explain and give them same sense of wonder that students feel when I perform magic for my class.

I then reviewed the goals of the workshop (slide 2). The first goal was to provide my magical background and inspirations for why I became a magician. I wanted to demonstrate that not only did I follow and develop a passion, but it also required the help of real and positive role model/mentors that took an interest in helping me become a professional magician. As teachers, we may not have the expertise to be that mentor, but we can help be that positive role and help direct the students' passions in the right directions. The first thing is to actually listen to the students and not dismiss their dreams. The second goal was describe how magic has been an effective strategy for me, from helping to motivate students to read, to learn math and science concepts, provide physiotherapy and to build confidence. The third goal was to actually teach a

few tricks to participants. I want to use this opportunity to demonstrate I how I use a simple magic trick to teach non-fiction reading and also show the participants how much fun learning magic can be. I also wanted to demonstrate that learning magic is a hands-on, active learning experience. The fourth goal was to provide the teachers with a list of magic resources that I have used in my classroom. I have collected magic resources for more than 30 years and I wanted to share some of the best ones I have used with students. I also allowed some time to give the teachers a chance to have a look at the various reading levels and subject areas covered. The final and most important goal was to have some fun. Teaching can be a very stressful profession and sometimes it is nice to sit back and have some fun. Many adults forget what it is like to be a child and I wanted the participants to just let go and have a little fun. Maybe when they see how much fun bringing your passion into the classroom can be, maybe they will try it too.



Figure 2.

My Inspirations (Slides 3, 4 and 5)

The first goal of the workshop was to describe who and what my magical inspirations are. I wanted to point out that no matter what it is we do, we need to find our inspiration. My first magical inspirations were magicians on TV. I still remember watching Mark Wilson and his Magical World of Allakazam and then it was Doug Henning and his brightly coloured jumpsuit.

Later, I became a huge fan of Paul Daniels, a British Magician, who was a master sleight of hand artist, but always performed with a little humour.

You can watch the magicians on TV, but you need to take that next step and attempt to learn magic. My first real interaction with a real magician was at the Disneyland Main Street Magic Shop. I remember having a spending allowance for my trip and spending it all in that shop. The vanishing silk, described earlier, was one of the tricks I purchased at the magic shop. Every magician also remembers their first magic kit; mine was the Mark Wilson magic set advertised on his TV show. I also remember the first magic book I owned, I still have it, I still use a trick that is in the book (see the magic calculator later in the presentation).

The next crucial moment in my magic history was when I met my magical mentor. That person was Tony Eng; he owned Tony's Trick and Joke Shop. I looked forward to every trip to Victoria to visit his shop. He would always greet me with a friendly smile and take the time to talk magic. He became that mentor that helped push my magic to the next level. Tony did not just teach me magic, he discussed my interests to determine where I wanted to take my magic. He incorporated my interests and modelled his teachings around them. This is such a crucial lesson for my teaching. So many times I prepare what I think is a wonderful lesson without knowing what the interests of the students are and the lesson falls flat. As a mentor and teacher, I need to spend more time getting to know the interests of my students.

The brick and mortar magic shops are vanishing and these mentors are not as readily available. I had a revelation after the workshop, one of the participants approached me and explained that he was a new teacher and also loved magic. I convinced him to travel with me a couple weeks later to a magic lecture in Vancouver. As we talked over the many hours in the car I realized that he was where I was 20 years ago. I had the realization that I could be his Tony

Eng. His eyes were filled with wonder and excitement as we arrived at the lecture and I introduced him to many of my magic friends, a whole other world opened for him.



Figure 3.

Where can you learn magic? (Slides 6, 7 and 8)

Students will ask how a trick is done. Many magicians answer that they cannot tell because we are sworn to secrecy or use a gag response, like “very well” (see slide 6). I like to tell children that the secrets of the procedures and magic technique can be found in books. If a child is truly interested in magic he/she will seek out the secret in a book. Another goal of this to get the students to search the school and public libraries for books on magic and read the books they find. I also point out that no matter what they want to learn, the topic can be found in the library. As teachers, our job is not to just provide information to students, but teach them the skills to find that information on their own.

I talk to my students about going to magic lectures and conventions. I want to model my lifelong learning. I want them to see the excitement I feel when I have learned a new trick or routine. I believe that it is important that students see that teachers have passions, whether it is SCUBA diving, painting, hunting, fishing, playing music or magic. They need to learn that if you have a passion that it is important that you explore, learn and develop that passion. It’s just another way to be a positive role model.



Figure 4.

Magic in my Classroom (Slides 11, 12 and 13)

The second goal of the workshop was to describe how I have used magic as an effective teaching strategy in my classroom. As stated Chapter 1, I have faced many criticisms for using magic in classroom; for example, my principal asking “why are you doing so much magic, when are the students learning?” Even as recent as two weeks ago, one administrator questioned the validity of having a professional development workshop on using magic in the classroom. One of my main goals for completing my Master’s project on using magic in the classroom was to research and answer the “Why Magic?” question. Slide 12 gives a brief introduction to seven reasons that I use magic within my classroom.

My first use of magic in the classroom was that of an extrinsic motivator for learning, “if you work quietly and get the assignment completed, I will show you the new trick I am working on.” I am always amazed at how hard a class will work when there is the magical reward. More importantly, I believe magic works as a motivator for students to want to be at school. I worked at a school where attendance was an issue, especially students arriving late. I began to start one or two days a week with a magic effect I was working on. The number of students arriving late

was reduced dramatically. Magic was one of the main factors to students wanting to be in my room, students voiced that they did not want to miss the magic.

I then modelled using magic to teach a concept, specifically Math. I started with a magic square technique from the Joshua Jay *Complete Course in Magic*. On a poster paper I drew a 16 square grid, I had a participant name a number between 30 and a 100, then as they counted to 30, I completed filling in every square so that no matter which line, vertically, horizontally, diagonally, four corners, inner square, they all add to the number that person named. It really got the participants asking “how did you do that?” I did not reveal the secret, but stated that it did involve a formula and a lot of mental math. I then moved onto an easier math trick called the Magic Calculator (see Slide 13). I use this trick to give the students a real reason to work on mental math strategies, including using ‘friendly’ numbers (those numbers that add to 10, i.e. $8+2$ & $6+4$). Just recently, I had a student that was struggling with the concept of ‘friendly’ numbers and kept stating that he could not do mental math and always wanted to use a calculator. He was fascinated by this trick, but was frustrated that he could not do mental math. After spending some time after school helping him with the concept, (I explained to him that I wanted to teach him the trick, I did not say I wanted to teach him mental math) he began to quickly get the concept of finding numbers that added to ten. He finally discovered a real purpose, important to him, for learning some strategies to do mental math.



Figure 5.

The use of magic to help students with physical and mental disabilities (Slides 14, 15 and 16)

One of the most powerful uses for magic in school is to help those students with special needs. When I used magic to aid a student with his physiotherapy was the first time that I truly understand a deeper power of using magic. I have used Kevin Spencer's *Healing with Magic* for more than 18 years now. I told the story of the student with the hand that was atrophying; it is a very emotional story for me. It was one of those "Aha!" moments for me in my teaching career. The Floating Wand was the first trick that I taught the student and it was the first real hands-on trick the participants learned. It was the easiest of the tricks that I had prepared, in the hope that all the participants could quickly experience success. The basic trick is the student holds an object, like a pencil or ruler in his/her left fist, while the right hand grasps the left wrist, when the fist is opened, instead of falling to the floor, the object is suspended and floats. This trick required the student, with the atrophying hand, to repeatedly open and close his hand and grasp and release the object. I started with a large ruler, which was easier to grasp and moved to thinner objects, such as, pencils, which required him to use finer hand movement more.

I also used this opportunity to model how I teach a magic trick to students. To start, I always explain the importance of the secret. I make the students take the magicians' pledge (see slide 15). I always make the students that join the Magic Club sign the Magician's Oath. I explain to the students that I am a member of the International Brotherhood of Magicians and I

was required to take a similar oath and that I can be removed as a member for breaking my solemn oath. It lets them know how important the secret is and they are informed that if they breach the oath they will be asked to leave. I explained to the workshop participants that when a student with a disability has the potential to do something that an 'able' bodied student cannot that is the power of magic, therefore, the secret MUST be protected.

For the past couple years, one of the main goals of my school was to improve non-fiction reading. I quickly realized that magic instructions were fun examples of non-fiction reading and were an effective way to get the students motivated to read directions/instructions. I presented the magic trick in the same way that I would to students in my class. The teachers at the workshop quickly started to perform the floating wand from reading the directions and there were lots of laughs and smiles. I did point out that if teachers had students in their class that had difficulty reading the instructions and normally had a reader for assignments, those students could also watch a video and listen to the instructions. I played a video link on how to do the trick to demonstrate a modification for those students with difficulty reading.

After all the participants had a chance to try the trick, I performed a variation that received another "how did you do that?" reaction. The participants all knew the secret that a finger was secretly holding the pencil in place, but I then removed my hand and the pencil still floated. I used this as an example that the learning can continue and the trick can always be improved or a different technique can be learned.

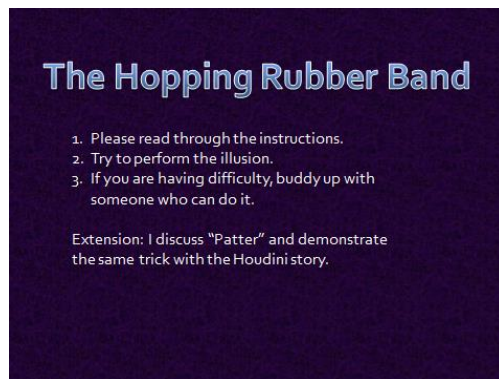


Figure 6.

Using magic to differentiate a lesson

The Hopping Rubber Band is a slightly more difficult trick to learn from reading the instructions. I have used this trick over the years to help to teach students to read and follow instructions. I modelled to the teachers how I use teaching this magic effect to meet an example of a learning outcome, for example, Grade 5 Language Arts comprehension outcome: Students will be expected to locate and interpret details to answer specific questions or to complete tasks. I want to the students to complete the task of performing a magic trick by reading the instructions and following the diagrams. I allow students time to try and figure out the trick by reading the directions on their own. If a few of the students are having difficulty completing the task, I have students that can do the trick raise their hands. I have students that are struggling partner up with someone that can do the trick. This allows the students that can perform the trick another level to master the skill by teaching it to a peer. I will also model reading the instructions by going through the steps one at a time, modelling how I read the trick and break it down to each individual step and demonstrate how the diagrams and photos can aid understanding. In teaching non-fiction reading, I have found that many students will just look at the pictures or just

read the words; the teacher needs to teach them to look at both to help build a better understanding.

Another important aspect of using magic is that you can build or expand the learning from beyond just learning a simple trick. Once the participants have a grasp of the basic trick, I demonstrate an extension activity of writing some creative “patter” for the trick. I demonstrate the Challenge Hopping Rubber Band trick, but add a story about how Houdini was a great escape artist. I use a second rubber band to tie my fingers together and the original rubber band still manages to magically jump from my first two fingers to last two fingers. The Patter or story adds another dimension to the trick, making it more than just a trick. This allows the teacher to add some creative writing to your magic language arts lesson. I described to the participants that I use this example to have the students create their own story, they can pull from another story, maybe a fairy tale, but they need to make it their own.

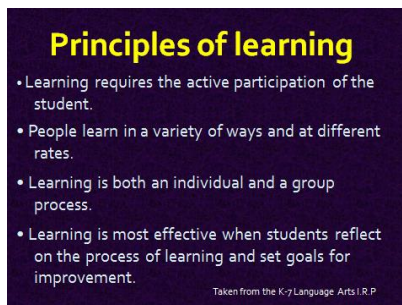


Figure 6.

How are the principles of learning and magic linked? (Slide 19)

At this point, I post the principles of learning as they are presented in the K-7 Language Arts IRP. I asked the teachers to discuss how they saw the tricks that were taught touch on some or all of the principles of learning. By modelling the tricks of the Floating Wand and Hopping Rubber Bands, the teachers described how trying the illusion, they felt they were actively

involved in the learning process. I also saw participants working by themselves and with others. For the fourth principle of learning, having the students perform their magic in front of peers, creates a real audience or goal to present their learning. To help students self-assess how they are meeting their learning goals, I described two ways that I practice and work towards my goal of performing. The first is to practice in front of a mirror. This allows me to see what the audience sees and check my angles before performing live. Most students have some form of digital video camera; this is another way to see what the audience sees. I tell students that I video record my practice sessions and some live shows to assess how the magic looks from the audience. It allows me to see and hear the reactions of the people watching and listen to what I say.

The performance of the magic effect provides the students with a 'real' audience. In most cases, the only audience for students' assignments is the teacher when the students hand their work in. When students realize they need to perform their tricks in front of a group, it provides a real tangible goal for their learning. Like peer editing a piece of writing before it is published in the class newspaper or posted on the bulletin board, I try to start with a safer smaller group, such as, the Magic Club or to a couple peers before performing for the whole class. Another option is to perform for a younger class, for example, I have my students perform for their kindergarten buddy class. This allows the students a chance to perfect and correct errors before performing for the real audience. The first time a student starts to learn magic, the majority will run out a recess, try to perform the trick without any practice, make a mistake and give away the secret. This provides an opportunity to discuss the importance of practicing and making sure that they have perfected the trick before performing. This gives the students an authentic way to self-monitor (watching in a mirror) and revise any problems, possibly with the

help of a peer. The performance of the magic effect will also provide the students with some real time assessment of how they met their goal of mastering the magic effect. Performing for a real audience will provide immediate feedback on the effectiveness of your magic learning. The first time you successfully perform a magic trick that amazes your friends, you want to learn more.



Figure 7.

Magic and the Big Ideas in Language Arts (Slide 20)

Again I allowed the participants to look at how the magic lessons covered addressed the big ideas from the K-7 Language Arts Program. They could see how being able to perform the tricks demonstrated comprehension and that they could articulate their learning, but due to the limited time I was not able to really get them working in pairs and have the time to assist each other to develop and perfect the tricks. This would have allowed the participants a better chance to see how working together on the tricks could touch on more of the Big Ideas. They did not have the chance to reflect and think critically on what they learned. Using magic can address all four of the Big Ideas. Thinking back on the workshop, I also wish I had provided the magic unit I use with students where I expanded the basic lesson of learning a magic trick into a larger unit where the students choose their tricks and worked with two or three other students to create a magic show using the tricks they chose. This unit addresses the first three big ideas, firstly the students need to be able to comprehend and read through the magic materials provided and then

critically examine with their partners what tricks could work together. Finally the students need to think creatively about how they can blend the tricks and write a story or patter that brings the tricks together.

As addressed in the previous section, having the goal of performing the magic allows students opportunities to communicate the information they have learned. Magic also provides a forum for the students develop an understanding of themselves and others, as the teacher or magic mentor, you must teach and model the strategies and language needed for this to occur. For example, with my Magic Club, I teach the students some of the language that magicians use, such as, flashing, which refers to a magician ‘flashing’ or inadvertently exposing something hidden to the audience. By having a fellow magician point out if you flashed, you can adjust and improve your magic. I compared this to an example when we ask students to peer edit. If we do not provide the students with the language and what to look for, they cannot provide their peers with constructive feedback. For example, my students have been working on making sure sentences have capitals and punctuation. When the students peer edit, they will be looking for these aspects of a sentence and will be better equipped to improve each other’s sentences. By giving the students this language, they are able to “use the language of praise and constructive feedback when working with others” (Grade 5 Language Arts IRP Learning Outcome).



Figure 8.

Magical Resources (Slides 21-24)

Another of my goals for the workshop was to provide teachers with some ideas and resources that they can take away and use right away. The Internet resources for the most part were free and like magic DVD's they are helpful for those teachers that would like to bring magic into their class, but feel a little uncomfortable performing magic. They can allow the magician in the video to take on the magic teaching duties. I clicked a couple links to show what some of the websites looked like and how the magic was presented. One website that I use a lot is www.teachbymagic.com. It is specifically set up for teachers that want to add a little magic to their classroom. I explained to the participants that there are a number of free tricks they can access, but to access the entire site there is a fee. The tricks posted on this site are listed by subject and learning outcome, which is helpful if you are looking for a trick to fit a particular lesson or learning outcome. The creators of this website have also created the book *Teach By Magic*, which is even better laid out than the website. The chapters are set up by subject and the tricks are arranged from easiest to hardest within each chapter.

I also described to the participants how I use these resources to model my learning process to students. Many times, I have taken a video or written trick that I do not know and learn it with along with the students. I verbalize my learning process as I go through the instructions provided step-by-step. I also read magic journals and books during silent reading. These activities give the teacher an opportunity to model that learning is a life-long process and there is always something new to learn and that is what makes it so exciting.

I also brought along 30-40 magic books of various reading levels and topics that I use in my classroom. I wanted teachers to see that magic books come in a variety of reading levels and come in a variety of styles from mostly text based instructions to some having many photographs and diagrams. I provided some time at the end of the workshop to allow teachers a chance to

have a quick look to see how the resources may suit the needs of their students. The resources were also arranged into categories, for example, books on math and science magic. If teachers were interested in purchasing any of the magic books they looked at, I also included a list of the books that were still available through books stores, such as, Amazon and Chapters. I pointed out that the Vancouver Island Public Library had a very large number of magic books and that most of the books that I listed were available there as well. I let the participants know that other great sources of cheap magic books are garage sales and used book stores.

I wanted to provide a wide range of magic resources so that teachers can see how magic can meet the needs of different learning styles and abilities. There are so many ways to learn magic, various magic books at various reading levels, DVD's, internet videos and in-person lessons. This variety of resources, in reading level and media, can be of assistance to the teacher that is attempting to differentiate how a student can learn a trick, depending on reading ability and learning style. I did not mention in the workshop, but I have also used this opportunity for students that are not interested in magic to explore other interests. I have modelled how to learn magic through the variety of resources and then spoken to the students about what are some of their interests or hobbies. This further allows the teacher to differentiate the lesson to match the interests of the students. In the past, I have had students use the strategies and resources learned in the magic unit to learn other skills, such as, juggling, ventriloquism, cartooning, etc.



Figure 8.

The Magic of an Every Day Object: The Pencil! (Slide 25)

I explained that magic can be so much more powerful when you use everyday objects. When a magician brings out a box painted in bright colours with ancient Chinese symbols painted on it, the spectator quickly assumes that it must be something tricky about the strange looking box. When the magic is performed with a pencil, something that every student has and knows is not magical; it must be the magician creating the magic. At this point in my workshop I had five different tricks with pencils lined up, starting with the simple optical illusion of the rubber pencil to a more difficult trick of making a pencil vanish. This allowed me to see how the participants were doing, as the majority of the group was able to perform each trick I was able to move on to a more difficult trick. As with my students in class, I wanted to have a variety of tricks that if students are demonstrating understanding, I can provide more challenging activities to keep them interested.

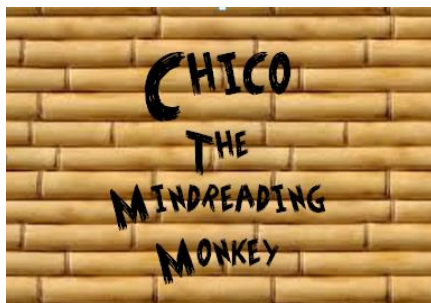


Figure 10.

Chico The Mindreading Monkey (slide 26)

I wanted to finish the workshop with one of my favourite routines that I end my professional magic shows with, Chico the Mindreading Monkey. I learned this routine from fellow Canadian magician Bill Abbott. The reason for finishing with this routine with Chico, a monkey puppet, is twofold; the first is I talked about confidence and how some students may be too shy to speak in front of the class. I had a student in the past that would only talk in front of the class through a puppet, while she hid behind the puppet theatre. Some of the most creative storytelling came from her puppets; the puppets allowed her a voice in the classroom.

The second reason is I am always amazed how even some adults quickly began to think that Chico is alive and they let themselves suspend reality for a moment and allow their imaginations to go. During the routine, a spectator chooses a card and when I turn away and ask the spectator to show the audience the card, Chico tries to peek. The children will always yell “he’s peeking!” It also amazes me that even adults will say “he’s peeking,” although, as in the workshop, adults sometimes need a little prompting “is he peeking?” I believe that adults are usually too polite to say anything, but by giving them the prompt, they relax. The participants started laughing every time he peeked and a few let me know every time he peeked. Even though it is a simple monkey puppet, with a little magic and imagination, it allows even adults to recapture that feeling of wonder.

Having ‘fun’ was the last goal of the workshop and this was a very important goal for me personally. Many of the participants described how much they enjoyed the workshop and they could see how much I loved magic. I mentioned that whatever their passion was, they could incorporate it into their classroom. I also heard comments like “kids must love being in your classroom.” I believe that students should love being in all our classes. When you incorporate

your passions into your teaching, your classroom will be a place that not only you enjoy working in, but so will your students. Our classrooms should always be a fun place to be.

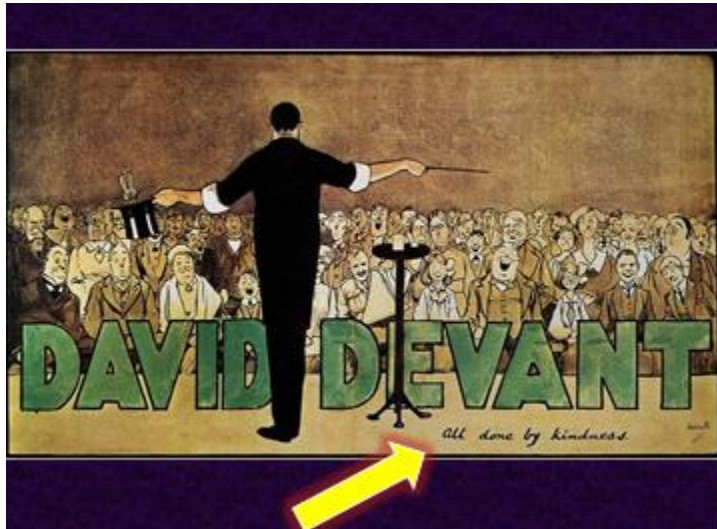


Figure 12.

All Done By Kindness (Slide 27)

As I mentioned in my workshop, like all of the teachers at the workshop, I do not know who David Devant is, other than he is a magician that died more than 60 years ago, but I do have one of his posters hanging in my magic room. I love this poster for two reasons, the first is that the magician is not the focus, you only see his back. It is the reaction of the audience to his magic that is important. As teachers, we need to remember this, it is not how wonderful our lessons are, even if they are magical, it is how the students react to what we do that is important. The second thing I love about this poster is the phrase “All done by kindness”. To go back to the passing of one of my mentors, Aldo Colombini, he taught me that you must treat every volunteer in a magic show with respect and kindness. You must never embarrass or humiliate a volunteer willing to come up on stage, especially if he/she is a child. If you do you have failed as a

magician. This profoundly changed the way I perform, as well as, teach in my classroom. I wish this was the motto in everything we do in all aspects of life. Kindness should not be a random act; it should be the only act.

Chapter 4: A Bag of Tricks!

In looking back at the workshop that I created for the District Professional Development Day, I feel that the workshop was very well received by the participants. I received a lot of very positive comments on the feedback forms. I have also heard from many teachers, who did not attend the workshop, that they heard it was good and wished they had attended and hoped that I would do it again.

One of the workshop goals was to describe how I use magic in my classroom. Slide 12 included seven fairly general goals. One example was I simply stated magic can help provide physiotherapy, by using magic tricks to encourage a student with fine and gross motor skill issues to exercise his hand. My literature review also included developing self-esteem, addressing anxiety, and helping children with autism. I did speak to helping confidence, but by not including these topics on the slide; some of these ideas were lost in the discussion.

One of my main concerns when I finished the workshop was that I felt that I talked for almost the entire presentation and rushed trying to cover all the material. I did not have enough time to work through all the magic effects with the teachers. I originally planned for two hours, but only had 90 minutes. I did not reduce the amount of material, but instead cut back on the hands-on time. Another concern was the workshop had very broad goals and I tried to cover a huge amount of information. In retrospect, everyone had lots of fun, but I wondered if they walked away with actual information they would use. Magic is my passion, but if it is not their passion, will they use it in their classroom?

The Magic of Teaching vs. Teaching Magic

I have started to really look at the magic community and how it develops and strengthens the art of magic. I have begun to realize that there is so much from the magic community that I can apply to improving my teaching. Maybe magic provides some insight beyond just using the instructions of a magic trick to teach non-fiction reading.

The first goal of the workshop was to provide some background information of where my love of magic came from. I do not believe that the reason for this was clear in my mind at the time. I felt I needed to demonstrate my credibility as a magic expert, but it became apparent that it was more important to share how magicians develop the art of magic and apply that to teaching. Mentoring and supporting each other is integral to the magic community. Unfortunately, I do not see the same level of support within teaching. So much of what teachers do is in isolation and behind closed doors. Asking for help is almost seen as a sign of weakness, that you cannot handle the job. The magic world works hard to mentor and help develop the younger magicians, whereas in teaching we seem to do the opposite. The new teachers usually get the assignments that nobody else wants and are thrown to the wolves.

I have also come to the realization that I work very hard to improve my magic, but I do not do the same things to improve my teaching. I belong to the International Brotherhood of Magicians and I read the monthly journal, attend lectures and conventions. I find it strange that I do not belong to any of the Provincial Specialist Associations (PSA). I do not engage in the same discourse with teachers in my similar areas. This is a trend around the province, as the local Pro-D chair, we are always asked to promote the PSA's as the membership is down. I have been wondering why teachers, myself included, have strayed from the PSA's.

I am constantly refining my magic show. I know that I cannot do the same old tricks over and over again. One of the main rules of magic is never repeat the same trick twice. With

teaching, I know I am guilty of performing the same trick over and over, even if the results are not what I want. As I perform magic shows, I make notes of what routines worked well and which ones did not. If a trick or routine does not work well with the audience, I examine why – is it just a matter of tweaking the patter or practicing the moves so I am a little more comfortable? Or is it just not a very good trick and needs to be deleted from my repertoire? I have wondered why I do not examine my teaching with the same lens. Do I truly look at why a lesson or teaching method is not as effective as I would like? I know I am guilty of using an old lesson to save time, even though I know it bombed in the past.

One way that I analyze my magic is I videotape some practice sessions and full shows. During the show I am so focused on getting the routines right that I am not always that focused on the audience. I change up how I record the shows as well; I will alternate from recording my performance from the audience perspective to recording from the stage to capture the reactions of the audience. I have never done this level of analysis of my teaching. I remember my sponsor teacher 20 years ago recording things, such as; how I moved around the room, did I ask boys and girls to respond equally, did I try to involve every child at some point, etc. I still think about these things as I teach, but many times, like a magic show, I am so concentrated on the lesson that I totally missed if the students were on-task and focused.

The magic community has also had the issue around the old versus the new. There are the old magicians that do not agree with using DVD's and the internet. They believe that all magic should be learned from a book. The older generation of magicians feel that the new magicians only watch DVD's and internet videos and become copy cats of the latest fad. The older magicians believe that magic books are a little harder to work from and force the magician to interrupt the instructions, incorporating their own creativity into the trick. The younger

magicians believe that you can learn faster from the video and internet medias, why waste the time reading the old magic books and struggling through a sleight of hand, when you can YouTube it and learn the moves quicker. There was quite a divide within the magic community for a number of years, but recently thoughts have begun to shift. There has been meeting in the middle, both sides recognize that they can work together and learn from each other to move the art magic forward. The older magicians are well rooted in the traditions and understand the history of magic, whereas the new generation of magician are taking magic in directions that were not thought of before.

Education has had similar debates in areas such as phonics versus whole language. New ideas and methods compete and conflict with old ideas. The magic community has learned that embracing both, the old and new can complement each other, making both stronger. Maybe education needs to stop swinging the pendulum and meet somewhere in the middle, taking the strengths from both.

I maintain multiple journals for magic. There is one in my car, when I hear a song that inspires me on the radio and I think it may be a great addition to a magic routine I write down the title and artist. I maintain a dream journal on my bedside table and have recorded some excellent ideas that I have incorporated into my show. I also journal after shows to record what worked well and what did not. I also jot down notes about tricks or ideas as I read or watch magic. It never occurred to me to journal about my teaching. I do have the odd 'schoolmares,' maybe journaling about them will help reduce the anxiety. At the start of this master's program, our professors encouraged us to journal about our learning. I now keep a journal at my desk. If a lesson or activity did not work well with students, I have started to examine why. I have discussed some of my notes with my students to get their feedback as well. It is also important to

record aspects of a lessons that worked well, I want to make sure that I remember the successful activities as well.

The Bag of Tricks

As a magician, you collect and develop a bag of tricks, well in my case it has become a room full of tricks. When I started in magic I bought every new trick that came along, but as I have aged and matured with my magic I have become a lot more reflective. Instead of just buying every new trick, I think about how it could fit into my show. I spend more time seeking routines or tricks that fill a need in my show. When I see a new effect and I have that temptation to buy it, I always question how will it fit? Does it match my style, not every trick works for every magician? Does it work for my audience? Many great tricks are not for an audience of children, for example, I avoid anything with fire or blood. I am in total control of my show and I am ultimately responsible for the success or failure of my performance. A teacher has that same autonomy in his/her classroom. We cannot control who sits in the audience or classroom, but we can control how we educate the students. The master's process has allowed me to see that I have a bag of teacher tricks, which is the wealth of experience gathered over my 20 years of teaching. I have to use that experience to evaluate my teaching to improve or even eliminate a classroom strategy. Teachers, like magicians, collect and amass a wealth of knowledge, but it becomes how we take all that information and reflect on what works best with our audience or students. We also need to be honest with ourselves and change a routine if it is not working. We need to talk to our colleagues and ask for help. We also need to be willing to take the time to provide help and support to each other to better the art of teaching. When teachers and magicians are true to their passion and reflect on the effectiveness of their routines, they can create some true magic, whether it is in the classroom or on the stage.

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