

Harry Potter-style magic lessons 'should be taught in schools'

Harry Potter-style magic lessons should be put on the National Curriculum to boost children's confidence and self-esteem, according to a leading academic.

By Graeme Paton, Education Editor

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Pupils should be taught "mind reading" card tricks and how to rejoin the ends of a magic rope after it has been cut in two, it was claimed.

Richard Wiseman, professor of psychology at Hertfordshire University, introduced the lessons to two groups of 10 to 12-year-olds as part of a study.

He insisted the classes improved pupils' social skills and confidence levels and is now calling on them to be introduced in all schools.

Prof Wiseman, who is also a skilled illusionist and member of the Magic Circle, said they were more effective than standard classes in personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE), which are designed to help children deal responsibly with life issues such as drugs and sex.

Speaking at the British Association Festival of Science at Liverpool University, he said: "Magic School was far more effective than the existing self esteem and confidence lesson. I think there are all sorts of reasons for this. Learning magic requires self-discipline, an understanding of how other people think, and an ability to entertain. Also, unlike playing computer games, it encourages children to interact with their friends and family."

Fifty pupils at two schools were given hour-long "Magic School" sessions as well as their normal PSHE classes. They were then given standard psychological tests.

Confidence and self esteem scores measured before and after the lessons showed that magic had a significantly greater benefit than PSHE, said Prof Wiseman.

He said that learning magic also inflamed children's imagination.

"Magic involves all sorts of principles, primarily misdirection by means of eye contact," he said. "Also, you have to reduce suspicion. Thirdly you have to disrupt the memory. Quite often magicians will say things that are not true, like 'remember the cards were shuffled', when they were not."

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