

THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-ESTEEM IN LEARNING AND BEHAVIOR IN  
CHILDREN WITH EXCEPTIONALITIES AND THE ROLE MAGIC TRICKS  
MAY PLAY IN IMPROVING SELF-ESTEEM AND IN MOTIVATING  
LEARNING

by

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## **Abstract**

This paper was written using various research based sources to determine the effects of self-esteem on learning and behaviors and whether or not the use of magic tricks can play a role in raising self-esteem and in motivating learning for children with exceptionalities. There have been multiple studies that show self-esteem has a significant effect on a child's ability to learn as well as studies that show self-esteem plays a role in a child's behavior. There are opposing studies showing that self-esteem has no effect on learning and behavior in children with and without exceptionalities. There was no information found that state high self-esteem has a negative effect on learning or motivation in children with exceptionalities or without exceptionalities. Regardless of whether or not one agrees that self-esteem affects learning and behavior in children with exceptionalities, it is important that educators find ways to help all children with exceptionalities, as well as without exceptionalities, improve their self-esteem thereby possibly helping improve learning, behavior, and motivation. One possible way to help raise self-esteem in children with exceptionalities is the use of magic tricks inside and outside the classroom. Incorporating the use of magic tricks in lessons seems to motivate learning. The information on the use of using magic tricks to raise self-esteem is limited to few articles and only one study. While the information on using magic to improve self-esteem in children with exceptionalities is limited, the information collected to date all state positive results using magic tricks to not only raise self-esteem but to also to motivate learning in children with exceptionalities.

## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my two wonderful children Billy and Sara. Without their continued support and patience, I could not have completed the process.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

One way to help students achieve academic success is to have positive self-esteem. Self-esteem seems to affect a child's ability to learn and to behave in class. Self-esteem also seems to affect motivation. Unfortunately, there is evidence that suggests students with exceptional needs have a greater risk of developing low self-esteem (Lyons, 2012). While not all students with low self-esteem will do poorly in school, there is research that shows low self-esteem can lead to less academic success (Daniel & King, 1997). It is important to understand how self-esteem affects learning and behavior for students and especially those with exceptionalities. It is also important to find a way, or ways, to raise self-esteem and to also motivate learning.

Step inside a classroom and observe how students' attitudes and behaviors change as self-esteem begins to decline. Students with exceptionalities often demonstrate this to a greater degree than those students without exceptionalities (Heward, 2005). Instead of being seen as "not as smart" the student would rather be known as the "bad" student or class-clown in the classroom or school. Learning can also be affected by a student's self-esteem. Students with higher self-esteem are more inclined to take an active part in their education than a student with lower self-esteem, although other factors also contribute to lower class participation (Phillips, Smith, Modaff, 2004). Students who participate in class have a higher success rate than those who do not (Turner & Patrick, 2004). Students with a positive view of themselves, along with other factors, have greater motivation to participate more in class than those who have a negative view of themselves (Phillips, et al., 2004).

Self-esteem is how children perceive themselves. According to Dr. Ingrid Schweiger (2008), self-esteem is not a process that comes to maturity and stays in place. It is a process that

is ever-changing unlike a physical trait, such as eye color. Because self-esteem is not a fixed characteristic, it can be constantly in flux. Parents, teachers, and success can help students develop high self-esteem. The flip side is parents, teachers, and failure can cause students to develop low self-esteem. Self-esteem not only plays a role in behavior and learning; it can also play a role in motivation to succeed. According to Marzano (2003), motivation of any type is affected by emotions which are not easily controlled yet very powerful.

Self-esteem can affect students' abilities to make and keep friends which also can have an impact on educational achievement due to behavioral problems. Due to the natural tendencies that children have to compare themselves with others, those with exceptionalities may have low self-esteem from lack of success in school, sports, and friendships (Lyons, 2012).

Self-esteem, or the lack of it, can hinder motivation to learn, or develop friendships in students, especially those students with disabilities. According to Watson (n.d.), motivation to accomplish anything and self-esteem are negatively affected in children with disabilities. Motivation to learn can be intrinsic or extrinsic in nature depending on the student or circumstance. A difficult decision for teachers to make is whether or not to use rewards for classroom behavior management (Witzel and Mercer, 2003). There are arguments for and against the use of extrinsic rewards; however students with exceptionalities appear to need extrinsic rewards more than students without exceptionalities (Witzel and Mercer, 2003). Teachers must decide the best motivational choices for their classrooms and each individual student. Learning magic tricks can be both extrinsic and intrinsic in nature and may be a good strategy to motivate learning.

While the research related to the impact of being able to perform magic tricks on self-esteem is limited, there is some evidence that it may improve self-esteem. Being able to perform

magic tricks has the potential to not only help improve self-esteem, but magic tricks themselves can be used to motivate learning, interest in a lesson, organization, and cooperation with others (Broome, 1989). Magic dates back as far as 1700 B.C. and possibly even earlier (Christopher & Christopher, 2006). Magic has not always been seen in the most favorable light and was even forbidden in the British colonies (Christopher & Christopher, 2006). Magic, or the performing of magic tricks, is now seen in a far more positive light, and according to Dennis Regling (2008) can be used to teach Bible verses in Sunday school. Magic tricks are simply sleight of hand and optical illusions. According to Christopher and Christopher (2006), “The more sophisticated people, the more naively they react to the ageless appeal of magic” (p. 7). Magic tricks can be used to motivate learning and positive behaviors which can improve both success in school and also success in building friendships (Staff, 2008). Magic tricks may be used to motivate learning and interest in a lesson for the whole class or in individual students. Learning to perform magic tricks can be both an intrinsic and an extrinsic motivator and may appeal to both intrinsic and extrinsic learners. Kirk (2012) claims there are numerous ways to motivate students to learn, build friendships, and establish a sense of belonging. This sense of belonging can help improve self-esteem. The use of magic tricks may be the key to improving self-esteem by motivating learning and building friendships. In addition, incorporating magic tricks into classroom lessons can appeal to a wide variety of learners as magic can be visual, aural and kinesthetic and can be used in all content areas. McCormack (1985) claims children are very creative but need help to find that creativity. Using magic tricks may be able to help with finding that creativity thereby helping kids learn. McCormack (1985) also states that performing magic tricks is better at getting kids in front of classmates better than oral book reports and is far more interesting.



The use of magic tricks in the classroom makes learning fun and can motivate an interest in the lesson being taught by gaining students' attention (Booth, 1989; Wilson, 2002). Edward Hootstein (2002) notes that teachers can gain students' attention and motivate learning by designing activities that stimulate learning. In his four action steps, Marzano (2003) recommends including engaging activities to boost motivation. While neither Hootstein nor Marzano suggest the use of magic tricks, perhaps the addition of magic tricks to the classroom is one way teachers may create more stimulating activities to motivate learning. According to David Derbyshire (2008), "A study found that an hour lesson at 'magic school' did more good for a group of 10 to 12 year olds than their normal 'life skills' classes." Derbyshire (2008) lists improved self confidence and sociability, as well as self-discipline and concentration, as benefits of the 'magic school'. The children who were positively affected to the greatest degree were those that were shy and/or had low self-esteem (Derbyshire, 2008).

The purpose of this study is to show the importance of helping a child to have higher self-esteem and ways to achieve that. The specific thesis questions are: 1.) Can higher self-esteem help students achieve academic success in school? 2.) How does self-esteem affect behaviors in the classroom? 3.) Can performing magic tricks play a role in raising self-esteem in children with exceptionalities? 4.) Can the use of magic tricks in the classroom motivate learning? Definition of the terms used in this paper can be found in Appendix A.

## **CHAPTER TWO: METHODS**

### **Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

The purpose of this thesis is to summarize the research supporting the effects of self-esteem on learning and behavior. It is also to examine whether or not the use of magic tricks can raise self-esteem and motivate learning. In this chapter I will include the criteria used and how the information was obtained. Chapter three will deal with the question of how self-esteem affects learning and behavior. Chapter four will deal with the question on whether or not the use of magic tricks can raise self-esteem in children with exceptionalities and motivate learning.

Due to the large volume of research and articles available on self-esteem and behavior, as well as self-esteem and learning, the literature to be reviewed was limited to, studies, peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and book chapters. The criteria were expanded slightly to also include Web articles. The criteria on magic and the effects of magic on self-esteem and motivation were more liberal allowing the use of journal articles, books, Web articles, news articles, conference papers, and newsletter reports. For quality purposes, any sources that sold commercial products were eliminated as were sources that either excluded references, were not peer reviewed or presented at conferences, were not well known in their field or that used information that could not be safely replicated in a classroom setting.

### **Literature Search**

The primary search resource used was the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), although the following sources were also used: Questia, JSTOR, Google, and researching sources from related articles. The ERIC database alone produced 3104 results when using the keywords *Self Esteem* and *Behavior*, 3577 results when using *Self Esteem* and *Learning*, 26

results when using *Self Esteem* and *Magic*, 3 results when using *Self-esteem* and *Magic Tricks* and 8 when using *Motivation* and *Magic Tricks*. The results were similar when using the other sources with the exception of back checking which produced fewer results in some areas and more in other areas. The search was narrowed by omitting the words *or* and *and* between the terms. The bulk of the research was found through back-checking sources. Information that did not match the information being researched, such as the use of the word “magic” to mean anything other than magic tricks was excluded. The final list included 58 sources that matched the information being researched, the bulk of them being research studies and literature reviews. The research turned up only a single study on the use of magic tricks to raise self-esteem.

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESULTS**

### **Effects of Self-Esteem on Learning**

Low self-esteem can affect achievement in the classroom (Watson, n.d. (a)). Self-esteem is not a constant and changes depending on the messages received from others (Schweiger, 2008) as well as self perceptions of oneself (Roman, Cuestas, & Fenollar, 2008). Roman et al. (2008) maintain that self-esteem is perception and is based on a person's feelings about themselves and not necessarily what others think of them. David Copperfield's Project Magic Handbook states, "Most people with disabilities have come to believe that they are less capable than a non-disabled person" (as cited in Levin, 2006. p.15). This does not mean that they are less capable but merely perceive themselves as so.

Romon, Cuestas, and Fenollar (2008) began analyzing factors, such as self-esteem, that influence academics. They found that while family, others' expectations, and learning approaches do affect academics, self-esteem has the strongest impact on learning and that improving self-esteem is important. Daniel and King (1997) studied the effects of self-esteem on inclusion placement vs. non-placement. Among their findings is that lower self-esteem does affect academic achievement. Not only were the students' affected, but parent's attitudes were also affected by their children being in inclusion classrooms (Daniel and King, 1997). They found that behavior is negatively impacted in inclusion classrooms. In addition, they found that self-esteem is affected negatively when students are placed in inclusion classrooms. Perhaps this can be attributed to the fact that self-esteem is how one feels about oneself and can be affected by others, including parents and teachers (Romon et al., 2008). Franks and Marolla (1976) studied self-esteem and found that self-esteem has two dimensions- an outer (how others feel

about oneself) and an inner (how oneself feels about themselves) dimension. They found that both dimensions were important to scholastic performance with the inner dimension being the most important. Perhaps a student with exceptionalities when placed in a classroom with nondisabled peers, especially peers without learning disabilities, compare their abilities to those children without disabilities. This may lower their self-esteem as they may not be able to perform as well on classroom assignments. Renick and Harter (1989) explain that students with exceptionalities not only deal with special education, but also classes that do not include students with learning problems. Renick and Harter (1989) note that while it is true that not all students with exceptionalities compare themselves to nondisabled peers, resource students that were learning disabled wanted to be more like students that were not students with learning disabilities. Those that do compare themselves may also feel that other students think less of them due to their learning disabilities which can also lead to a decrease in self-esteem.

Reinjntjes, Thomaes, Boelen, van der Schoot, Castro & Telch (2010) found that some students felt lower self-esteem when others disapproved of them. It seems to be a circular effect: lower self-esteem affects learning and failure in academics or the perception of how others feel about one can lower self-esteem. Franks and Marolla (1976) note that a source of higher self-esteem is feeling that one has the ability to succeed. If one feels one has the ability to learn, that positive feeling may enable that student to learn. This feeling of competence comes from having a higher self-esteem. Romain et al. (2008) found a strong link between self-esteem and deep processing as well as effort and came to the conclusion that higher self-esteem is important in learning.

Heyman (2001) suggests that there is a link between self-esteem and academic self-concept. He

also suggests self-perception of their learning disability and that self-esteem, academic self-concept and self perception of a learning disability may affect achievement.

Factors that may affect self-esteem in students with exceptionalities include but are not limited to understanding of their learning disability (Rothman, 1995), other's expectations, learning approaches, academic achievement (Coleman, 1984; Romain et al., 2008), friends and peer networks (Schunk and Meece, 2005), and school performance in middle school girls (Kutob, Senf, Crago, & Shisslak, 2010). In addition to self-esteem, Marzano (2003) states that how students perceive themselves also influences motivation to learn. Self-acceptance is important as it is how a person feels about themselves (Marzano, 2003). If one feels successful, that person may be more willing to accept himself/herself and feel that others are willing to accept him/her too, thereby raising self-esteem.

While more researchers agree that self-esteem impacts academic achievement, there are researchers who state self-esteem does not affect learning or academic success and that effort is the determining factor in whether or not a child succeeds (Colvin, 2000). Some even feel that the self-esteem rhetoric is dangerous as schools are instilling a false sense of self-esteem (Tobin & Hwang, 1997). There are also researchers who found no difference between academic self-concept and actual academic performance (Kloomok & Cosden, 1994). This study used 72 elementary students with learning disabilities. Kloomok and Cosden (1994) found those with low academic self-concept and those with high self-concept performed the basically the same on achievement tests.

## **Effects of Self-Esteem on Behavior**

Lower self-esteem can lead to behavior problems (Guerra, Williams, & Sadek, 2011) and to increased aggression in some children (Donnellan, Trzesniewski, Robins, Moffitt, & Caspi, 2005). In contrast, being bullied can lead to lower self-esteem (Guerra et al., 2011). Not all children will experience a lowered self-esteem during adolescence, due to multiple factors; others will, especially as they enter into adolescence (Kort-Butler & Hageman, 2010). Keeping students from experiencing the destabilization of self-esteem during adolescence should be a goal of all educators as it may diminish the incidents of bullying.

A look inside any classroom will yield various levels of self-esteem among the students. It usually is not difficult to pick out the ones that have lower self-esteem vs. those with higher self-esteem. The ones that have the lower self-esteem tend to be quiet, withdrawn, sit in the back of the class, and do not readily participate in class activities as those with higher self-esteem (Phillips, Smith, & Modaff, 2001). Students with exceptionalities are more likely to be among the lower self-esteem set (Lyons, 2012). Ironically, the school setting seems to contribute to the decline of a child's self-confidence due to bullying (Cho, Hendrickson & Mock, 2009), the attitude of their teachers or other school personnel (Scott, Murray, Mertens & Dustin, 1996), and rejection by their peers (Reijntjes et al., 2010). Younger children are usually very confident, if not overly confident, in themselves and their abilities (Plumert, 1995). A child's self confidence seems to decline as the child approaches adolescence (Schunk & Meece, 2005).

While aggression seems to rise during adolescence as indicated by incidents in violence in schools such as the Westside Middle School massacre and the Columbine High School massacre, it is not always due to lowered self-esteem. According to Colvin, neither Harris nor

Klebold, the Columbine shooters, had low self-esteem (2000). While Donnellan et al. (2005) did link low self-esteem to aggression dependent upon age, they also linked aggression to narcissism. Due to this link, it appears low self-esteem is not the sole indicator of aggression and may in fact not be a factor in aggression in some school incidents. Guerra et al. (2011) studied the predictors of bullying, as well as victimization, and found that some bullies do have high self-esteem. They also linked lower self-esteem to both bullying and being the victim of bullying (Guerra et al., 2011). Low self-esteem seems to affect behavior, but how a person behaves towards a person may also play a role in aggression. According to Cho et al. (2009) a large percentage of students with a Behavioral Disorder (BD) are labeled as bullies. They also reported that students with BD are not readily accepted by their classmates which may influence how they are treated as well as how they behave. Guerra et al. (2009) report aggressive students that have low self-esteem bully as a means of spreading low self-esteem although not all bullies have low self-esteem. Bullying can be seen as acceptable behavior by many students (Guerra et al., 2011). Guerra et al. (2011) also noted that not all students who are bullied go on to become bullies themselves. Donnellan et al. (2005) found a correlation between self-esteem and behaviors. While there is much information linking low self-esteem to behaviors, there is a limited number of studies or amount of research that link lowered self-esteem to bullying.

In addition to behavior, low self-esteem has also been linked to school delinquency (Morrison & Cosden 1997; Rosenberg, Schooler, & Schoenbach, 1989). This school delinquency can lead to increased drop out rates (Morrison & Cosden, 1997). Morrison and Cosden (1997) linked individuals with learning disabilities to increased risks in societal outcomes as well as to delinquency and lowered self-esteem. In addition, children with low self-esteem have been



known to act out in class in order to gain attention that may be lacking due to declined academic success (Witzel & Mercer, 2003). A child may act up in an attempt to cover up failure (Broome, 1989). Regardless of the form a behavior issue takes, it is important to find ways to avoid behavior issues and give students a way to improve self-esteem and gain academic achievement in school.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: THE USE OF MAGIC TRICKS**

### **Effects of using Magic Tricks on Self Esteem**

Students with behavioral issues often have lowered cognitive abilities which are characteristics of learning disabilities (Watson, n.d. (b)), and many of these children will have low self-esteem. Due to low cognitive abilities, it is important that children are helped to succeed in other areas outside of academics (Lyons, 2012). Learning to successfully perform magic tricks may help a child feel a sense of success. According to Tobin and Hwang (1997), there are dangers with the self-esteem rhetoric in that students are given a false sense of success. They report that one should not praise when there is no real reason to give praise, and to do so can hinder the confidence to try something new instead of encourage (Tobin & Hwang, 1997). Using magic to improve self-esteem voids the false sense of success in that either the student is successful in performing the magic trick or the student is unsuccessful. Studies have shown that students with learning disabilities claim to have lower academic self-efficacy than most of their peers (Lackaye & Margalit, 2006). Due to the perception of lower academic self-efficacy, teachers must come up with a different approach for student success. Helping students successfully perform magic tricks may be the way to improve self-esteem among students with exceptionalities by giving them something in which to succeed. Children with exceptionalities may experience a decline in self-esteem when they get old enough to realize their capabilities in academics are not as strong when compared to those without exceptionalities (Lyons, 2012). As children get older, they also realize that there are other differences between themselves and students without exceptionalities. Other students may also see them as being different but not in a positive manner and shun them. According to MacMaster, Donovan & MacIntyre (2002), even

family may treat them differently. It is important to find a way to help children, including those with exceptionalities, develop better self-esteem and learning to perform magic tricks may help develop higher self-esteem. While there is support for the teaching of magic tricks to raise self-esteem (Broome, 1989; Derbyshire, 2008; Falcon, 2002), only one research study has been conducted (Ezell & Klein-Ezell, 2003). Teaching students to successfully perform magic tricks is a way to improve self-esteem in a way that lets the child feel success without feeling a false sense of accomplishment. Derbyshire (2008) reports boosted confidence following magic lessons and that the higher confidence lasted two weeks after the lessons. Broome (1989) found the same results from students in her self-contained classroom and their learning to perform magic tricks.

According to Roman, Cuestas, and Fenollar (2008), self-esteem is not a reality, but instead is how one feels about oneself, or a perception. Magic can show that perceptions are selective to the individual (Frasier, 1993). This may show students with exceptionalities that what one perceives as others' feelings towards a person may in fact not be the others' feelings at all. This clarification may help increase self-esteem. Using magic tricks can help clarify this concept by showing a child that things are not always as they appear.

### **Benefits of Using Magic Tricks**

There is support to show that increased self-esteem is one of the benefits of using magic tricks (Broome, 1989; Derbyshire, 2008; and Falcon, 2002), but only one research study has been conducted to prove this (Ezell & Klein-Ezell, 2003). Ezell and Klein-Ezell found that while children with exceptionalities tend to have a lowered self-esteem, that learning to successfully perform magic tricks helps increase self-esteem (2003). The study was conducted with 26 students that volunteered to participate as well as had parental consent (Ezell & Klein-

Ezell, 2003). Ezell and Klein-Ezell (2003) used the Student Self-Concept Scale to measure self-esteem and self-confidence both before and after teaching students magic tricks. Ezell and Klein-Ezell (2003) note that it is important to find magic tricks that the child can successfully perform as failure to perform the trick will not raise self-esteem. College students were taught the magic tricks and they in turn taught the students at the elementary and secondary levels (Ezell & Klein-Ezell, 2003). Over half of the students in the study did develop higher self-esteem by learning magic tricks (Ezell & Klein-Ezell, 2003).

In addition to raising self-esteem, magic tricks also motivate learning in the classroom by capturing the student's attention (McCormack, 1985). There is debate as to whether or not extrinsic motivation destroys a child's intrinsic motivation (Witzel & Mercer, 2003). Magic can be both an intrinsic and an extrinsic motivator- intrinsic in that it encourages a child to learn to perform magic tricks for the child's own satisfaction and extrinsic in that successfully performing magic tricks can lead to others praising the child for their ability to do what someone else cannot. Because of magic's ability to intrinsically and extrinsically motivate, it will not destroy motivation. Students are also more concerned with how their peers perceive them than they are about education (Ester, 2010).

Performance of magic tricks has the built-in ability to encourage student participation by motivating them to "figure out" how a magic trick is performed. According to McCormack (1985), students do not want to be fooled and are motivated to try and figure out the magic trick. Another benefit to learning to perform magic tricks is the improvement in social skills. The student learns the magic trick through interaction and through interaction teaches the trick to others (Falcon, 2002). Being able to perform magic tricks has the ability to capture the attention

of a student who has not shown any interest in school lessons (Frasier, 1993). Once that attention has been captured, magic tricks may also have the ability to motivate the student to learn through hands on demonstrations as well as through inquiry. Magic tricks can be linked to many subjects and topics (Frasier, 1993). Because of the vast appeal of magic to students and the breadth of subject, teachers can easily incorporate the use of magic tricks into the lessons. Bowman (1986) states that the use of magic tricks can help teachers develop lessons that can not only get the students attention, but they can also keep the student's attention by encouraging thinking.

### **Ways to Incorporate Magic Tricks into Students' Lives**

One way to incorporate magic tricks into students' lives is in the classroom. According to Frith and Walker (1982), there are two ways to use magic tricks in the classroom of exceptional students: tricks that are used for demonstration purposes to get a student's attention and those that can be taught to the child for the purpose of raising self-esteem by allowing the child with exceptionalities to do something their peers cannot do.

In addition to the classroom, magic tricks can be incorporated into students' lives through extracurricular activities. Each year extracurricular activities are being cut from schools. According to the Department of Education, "The arts are essential to every child's education, which is why the arts are one of the core academic subjects in the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB)" (2004). Mason, Steedly and Thormann (2005) note that for students with exceptionalities, the arts may have an even greater impact on learning. Even with evidence pointing to the importance of the arts in the education of children with special needs, there is a need to strengthen the evidence-base for inclusion of arts in education. Magic in the classroom may be one way to strengthen the evidence-base. Students with exceptionalities benefit from

hands-on activities. Performing magic tricks is a hands-on activity. Also by including magic in the classroom, teachers could track whether students improved academically and socially.

Teaching magic tricks to students is one way of keeping students exposed to the arts while helping them learn. Frith and Walker (1983) claim, “Magic may be compared to music as a universal language.” Success in academics can be linked to extracurricular activities (Cosden, Morrison, Gutierrez & Brown, 2004). Teaching children magic tricks can be done in the classroom by incorporating the magic trick into the lesson being taught or outside the classroom in the form of a magic club for students. A study in a Los Angeles school for young people with behavioral and/or learning problems found that starting the day with an art activity helped the students become ready to start their academic day (Cho, 2000). The article went on to state how relaxed feelings, brought on by doing art projects, helped the students to be better prepared to face the general classes as well as helped to build up the students’ self-esteem. The same benefits may be possible by incorporating magic tricks into the classroom or through extracurricular activities that include magic tricks.

Some benefits to extracurricular activities include lower dropout rates (Cosden et al., 2004; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997), improved academic success (Cosden et al., 2004; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006), and improved parent involvement at school functions as well as better collaboration in schools (Logan, 2008).

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to show the importance of helping a child to have higher self-esteem and ways to achieve that. The questions that were researched are: 1.) Can higher self-esteem help students achieve academic success in school? 2.) How does self-esteem affect behaviors in the classroom? 3.) Can performing magic tricks play a role in raising self-esteem in children with exceptionalities? 4.) Can the use of magic tricks in the classroom motivate learning?

Can higher self-esteem help students achieve academic success in school and how does self-esteem affect behaviors in the classroom? While the majority of the research shows self-esteem does affect learning (Romon, Cuestas, & Fenollar, 2008; Daniel & King, 1997), there are some studies that show self-esteem does not have an effect on learning (Colvin, 2000). Some believe that effort plays the greater role in academic success (Colvin, 2000). Regardless of whether or not one believes lower self-esteem is linked to lower academic success, there was no research found that claimed that higher self-esteem is detrimental to academic success or lowers it in any way. The same can be said for self-esteem and its effects on behavior. Because there is no evidence located to show that higher self-esteem is harmful or causes behavior issues, and there is research that finds that it does help, it seems important to help a child develop a positive self-esteem. Helping children to improve their self-esteem should be important to teachers and parents alike.

Can performing magic tricks play a role in raising self-esteem in children with exceptionalities and also motivate learning? While there has been much research conducted on self-esteem and how it affects learning and behavior of students, including those with

exceptionalities over the years, it has proven difficult to find many that support or denounce the learning of magic tricks as being able to raise, or fail to raise, self-esteem and/or motivate learning. Recently more interest in teaching magic tricks and how being able to perform magic tricks can improve a student's self-esteem has been generated. There also appears to be a greater interest to include magic tricks in lessons in the classroom judging by the availability of curriculum that includes magic tricks. In contrast to the conflicting reports on self-esteem and its effects on learning and behavior, the research in the use of magic tricks to raise self-esteem seems conclusive. Not a single study showed anything other than the use of magic tricks in a positive light. Not only does learning to perform magic tricks improve self-esteem (Ezell & Klein-Ezell, 2003; Broome, 1989; Derbyshire, 2008; Falcon, 2002), learning to perform magic tricks captures the student's attention (McCormack, 1985), which can lead to motivation to learn, and improves social skills through interactions with others (Falcon, 2002) . Magic tricks can be taught to children in classrooms as well as in extracurricular activities.



## **CHAPTER SIX: LIMITATIONS**

The limitations for this thesis are the small amount of published information on the use of magic tricks in the classroom and on how the use of magic tricks improves self-esteem and motivates learning in children with exceptionalities. The research turned up only one study that researched how the use of magic tricks can improve self-esteem. While the research found the published information agreed that the use of magic tricks can improve self-esteem and motivate learning, the amount of information was limited.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: IMPLICATIONS

The information on the use of magic tricks in the classroom is limited, but all agree that it can improve self-esteem in children with exceptionalities and to motivate learning. While the research is in agreement that the use of magic tricks can improve self-esteem and motivate learning, more studies need to be conducted before the use of magic tricks in the classroom will be considered as evidence based practice.

While there are recent studies that indicate self-esteem does not have an effect on learning or behavior, there are many more studies that counter those outcomes. Due to the conflicting information regarding whether or not self-esteem affects learning and behaviors, more studies are needed to determine the effects of self-esteem. It certainly does not appear to harm a child, hinder learning, or cause misbehavior to help a child improve their self-esteem; therefore, improving self-esteem should be implemented both inside and outside the classroom. While learning to perform magic tricks seems to help a child in many different ways, all positive, more research is needed as the research to date is very limited and there is not much recent information to be found. Not only does learning to successfully perform magic tricks have the potential to improve self-esteem, but successfully learning to perform magic tricks also has the potential to generate more interest in the lessons presented in a classroom.

The majority of studies exploring the link between low self-esteem and bullying do claim there is a link, but, there are a few that claim that bullying is often associated with narcissism including the one by Donnellan, Trzesniewski, Robins, Moffitt, and Caspi (2005). Regardless of the link, bullying is such a concern that the government is planning to spend \$3.4 million dollars in an effort to rid schools of bullying (Flynt & Morton, 2004). Anything that helps children

improve their self-esteem and motivates students to succeed in school, especially those with exceptionalities should be explored further.

**APPENDIX A:**  
**Definition of Terms Used**

Self-Esteem	Having confidence in one's ability to be successful (Merriam-Webster, 2011)
Magic Tricks	Tricks performed by sleight of hand, or optical illusions. (Dictionary.com, 2012)
Motivation	The act of encouraging something. (Merriam-Webster, 2011)
Behavior	The way in which a person decides to act (Merriam- Webster, 2011).
Resistance	The act of not wanting or agreeing to do or incorporate something (Merriam-Webster, 2011).
Exceptionalities	Something that makes a person stand out in contrast to another person (Merriam-Webster, 2011).

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