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The magic of dealing with bullies

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Behind the unicycle, materializing dove and rabbit pulled out of a hat, Steve Harmer delivers a serious message of courage in dealing with bullies.

The 46-year-old magician has taken his motivational magic to more than 120 Alberta schools since September. That's when the Calgary elementary school principal, a magic aficionado for 22 years, took a year off work to follow his lifelong dream — entertaining and inspiring children through a one-man show.

"I'm hitting a hot button in schools and our community these days," he said.

Harmer, who has been an educator for 21 years, thinks bullying is on the rise and wants student to realize the strength they have together. Statistically, only one in 10 children is a bully, he said. Victims and bystanders outnumber them 10 to one.

"You have powers in numbers," he said. "You have the power to influence the behaviour of the bully. We need to get the caring majority of kids to speak up and report incidents so the bullies learn they are not going to get away with it."

But don't forget bullies also need help, Harmer said, calling them the neediest children.

Harmer models his presentation after "brain research," which asserts that we catch on more quickly when learning is associated with a graphic form.

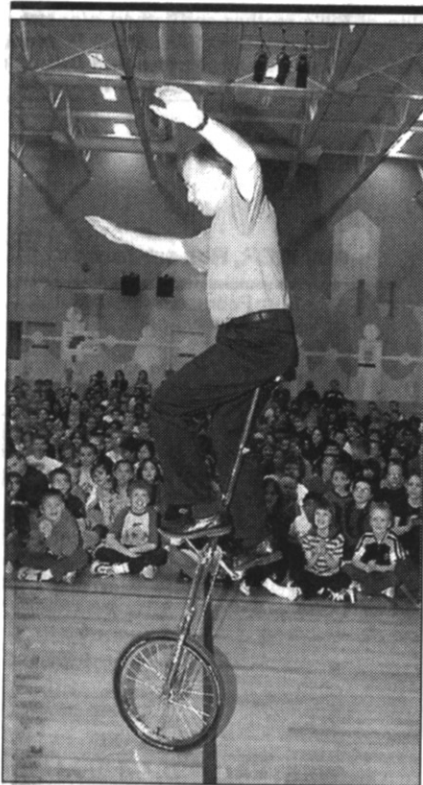
"When I do magic, I use three-dimensional objects to deliver the message so it's a concrete illustration," he said, giving the example of the building blocks he uses to explain self-esteem.

While the animals were a big hit, many of the students at Crawford Plains School in Mill Woods were especially touched by Harmer's closing story. Over soft instrumental music, he talked about an athlete in the Special Olympics who fell during a race.

Instead of hurrying to the finish line, the other competitors heard her cry and ran back to where she had fallen. They helped her off the ground, then all linked arms to cross the finish line together. His point: sometimes it's better to care, than to win.

"I almost started to cry," said Grade 5 student Kryssa Kennedy, who thought the Special Olympics story was the best part of Harmer's presentation.

"The story had a lot of meaning for me," said Jacquie Merriman, Grade 6. "A lot of people in our school are really mean. I just hope they'll change."



RICK MACWILLIAM, THE JOURNAL

Steve Harmer works his magic with students at Crawford Plains school in Mill Woods on Tuesday.