

Magic with a message

BY CHRIS MILLER

COLD LAKE SUN

COLD LAKE — Don't be a bully. Dare to be different. Play fair.

These were some of the messages reinforced to students at Cold Lake Elementary School (CLES), St. Dominic School and Mackenzie River School in Cold Lake and three schools in Bonnyville last week.

Professional educator and entertainer Steve Harmer offers encouragement and hope with his Motivational Magic. This is a character education and violence prevention presentation based on the Safe and Caring Schools Project.

Harmer, a former school principal from Calgary, taught students about courage, character and caring through a fun magic program. He has been with the Calgary Board of Education for 21 years, and a professional magician for 25 years, performing over 2,000 magic shows, including 790 with an educational purpose.

CLES principal Kathy McKale said that his program tied in with the public school's Moral Intelligence education, which teaches children to do what's right.

Magic captures the imagination of both young and old. Colourful props, juggling, rabbits, music and laughter engage us at both the heart and head level.

The first concept he introduced was "dare to be decent", a word he said that is almost lost to the world today. He told students about a summer day when he was at the beach with his family and he overheard some teenagers swearing. When he approached them and politely asked them to stop using such foul language, they ran at him and shouted every bad word they could think of. He said that those teens did not have decency.

"If you hear bad language on television, do you know what you should do? I encourage you to turn it off and do something else," Harmer told the students, suggesting students to build a fort, write a letter to their grandma or play a board game rather than watch indecent TV shows. "Do not continue watching something that isn't decent."

Harmer spoke of the ABC's of liking

yourself better. The letter A stands for accepting yourself, B stands for believing in yourself, and C stands for challenging yourself.

Twenty years ago Harmer tried learning how to ride a unicycle. He said that he fell off the unicycle 100 times, skinning his elbows and scraping his knees in the process. Now he is an adept unicyclist.

"I like myself a little better because I learned something new," he said, encouraging students to play a musical instrument, try a new sport or learn how to bake cookies.

Other principles that Harmer highlighted included: daring to believe in yourself, respecting diversity, preventing prejudice, managing anger, preventing bullying, and daring to be a friend.

The excitement and mystery of illusions, tricks and puzzles when applied to teaching concepts make the content memorable.

Magic helps make an abstract concept concrete and therefore easier to understand.

Harmer asked a student to choose which she would prefer as a prize: a red sparkly can or a plain paper lunch bag. As most people would, the student chose the can. From out of the can he pulled a rubber chicken and a handkerchief with a picture of a skunk on it. Inside the bag,

however, were exquisite-looking flowers. His message: What looks bright and beautiful on the outside might be foul and stinky on the inside; what looks plain and boring on the outside might be beautiful inside.

Concluded Harmer, "Don't judge people by their appearance. Get to know the person inside and you may discover a brand new friend."

Harmer also offers motivational and inspirational magic programs for adults. For more information, he can be contacted at (403) 247-6622. His web site is www.motivationalmagic.ca.



Magician Steve Harmer performed some tricks that were not only entertaining, but educational as well.