

# IN THE CLASSROOM

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## FINDING MAGIC *in literacy*

GRANT QUARRY

SUPER-COOL TV magicians like Cris Angel, Dynamo and David Blaine have breathed new life into the ancient art of illusion and magic, attracting legions of young fans worldwide with creative versions of old tricks and new death-defying feats of their own.

At Gray Primary School just outside of Darwin in the Northern Territory, young teacher Keira Stewart is using the spellbinding attraction of these modern-day masters to motivate her own Grade 6 students, particularly in the area of literacy.

"I had a lack of students completing homework tasks," Stewart says, when asked how she came up with the idea.

"I probably had six students out of 24 completing homework and one of our genre writing focuses for the term was involving procedures.

"I noticed that there was a huge interest within my class around magic and TV shows like *Dynamo* and magicians like Cris Angel, so I planned my procedure writing with magic tricks in focus and within that unit one of the tasks was to come up with a magic trick, or find one, practise it at home and write it in the form of a procedure – and then present it to the class."

The results were staggering.

Otherwise disengaged students revelled in the task with 22 of her students completing their homework in relation to the unit and attendance rates skyrocketed.

"I guess they were engaged and wanting to come to school to perform their magic tricks, so students who'd had low attendance had actually improved ... and also the procedure writing focus being No.1, I was able to get some great results from students actually wanting to write."

For inspiration for their tricks, students used ideas they'd seen on TV, some searched the internet, while others had family members who were happy to teach them tricks of their own.

The students also created plaster wrap masks, which they decorated and have been using when performing their magic.

"There were many card tricks," Stewart says.

"One of the instructions was that they had to be safe, because they had to bring their own materials into school as well, so they were trying to think of ways to make each other disappear, or cut each other in half (laughs).

"One student actually worked out how she could do that without physically hurting anyone or using a member from our class – she cut out a person from a magazine and put the cut-out body inside an envelope and then cut the envelope and magically the body

was still in one piece when she pulled the envelope open."

Stewart, a fifth year-out teacher who trained at The University of Newcastle and who has been at Gray Primary for four years, says the learning outcomes from the exercise were rich and varied.

"It was really interesting, actually, in that students who aren't as confident with the writing part performed really well with the presentation.

"That was a way for them to be able to achieve success with the same outcome, so they were marked according to their presentation, as well as the written piece.

"Some of the students who aren't always as confident actually offered to perform their tricks to younger students in the school, so they went and visited early year classes to do their tricks again, so that was a really big highlight for me," Stewart says.

## INSIDE THE CLASSROOM

### THIS ISSUE

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- Frank Zappa

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