



Learning by Accident

Learning by Accident is an ongoing Crucible feature, in which real-life lab accidents or incidents are recounted and explained. The goal is to highlight the consequence of ignoring safety rules so that science educators will be further encouraged to become knowledgeable, and to take appropriate action, in areas of safety that effect their daily activities in the science classroom. Submissions are encouraged. If requested, anonymity will be guaranteed. Please send written descriptions to Ian Mackellar, STAO Safety Committee Chair, Box 191, MAITLAND, ON KOE 1P0

My practice teaching took place in the United Kingdom at a secondary school whose students had more than their fair share of social and behavioural problems. We delivered a laboratory-based science program, with many experiments for the students. My unit on "Heat" allowed the students to use Bunsen burners, glassware, thermometers, and the wonderful, sturdy, indestructible steel retort stands and clamps. Although students had been introduced to general laboratory safety, my unit included reminders and additional specific lessons on equipment handling.

On that memorable day, we had completed the lesson introduction, and equipment was being distributed from stations around the room. There were clear tasks for each group member to control traffic. "Johnny" was to collect the stand and clamps for their storage at the front of the class. Johnny was not the most popular student in class, and was more often than not absent because of one disciplinary action or another. On his way back to his group, someone provoked him with a comment he considered inflammatory. This was rather bad timing considering Johnny was conveniently armed with a metre long rod of steel. Instinct or training kicked in and the weapon was swung with both hands above his head, ready to come crashing down on his antagonist.

Fortunately the student teacher had also responded by instinct. I had reacted at the insult and arrived from behind Johnny in time to slip both arms beneath his and grab the stand. He was effectively pinned between the steel and my body. Whispering

« « « **By Stella Heenan**

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something in his ear like, "Let go, get to your seat or else!" Johnny submitted and no one was hurt. A somewhat nervous teacher went straight to the Principal after class to discuss what had happened. Physically restraining a student was not usually considered acceptable, but I was relieved that my actions were supported.

Why do I think this is a safety issue? How about the arguments for and against delivering a full program to students with special needs, as Johnny

was? We teach the safe use of equipment, but do we fully anticipate and prepare for the possibilities of inappropriate use? What safety- and class-management training is included in the programs for science teachers? Science teachers all say that discipline in the laboratory is fundamental to safe practices, but how easy is it to keep this in our minds whilst getting swept along with our students' enthusiasm of science experimentation? After all, wasn't it spreading the joy of science that led us to be science teachers?



EVENT CALENDAR

FEBRUARY

Weekends until February 25
Timescape: Sundials and Sunsticks Family Workshops at the Ontario Science Centre. More info: 416-429-4100 or www.osc.on.ca.

MARCH

3-11 National Engineering Week
Theme: Space - celebrating engineers as everyday heroes. Special events include Engineering Blast-off Show on March 3, and a forum on smart homes on March 8. See above for information.

3 - June 3, 2001

K'NEXhibition at the Ontario Science Centre. Focussing on engineering and scientific principles using K'NEX. See above for info.

APRIL

19 - 21 26th Annual Science for Educators Seminar, Chalk River Laboratories. For Elementary, secondary and post-secondary teachers. New for 2001: sessions for teachers of grades 4-8. Register online at www.aecf.ca, or call: 1-800-364-6989.

29-May 2

CASI Annual General Meeting. Regal Constellation Hotel, Toronto. Call for Papers. Send abstracts to address given at Website: www.casi.ca

MAY

5-6 OSEE Conference 2001: Reconnecting with Nature. YMCA Environmental Learning Centre, Paradise Lake, Waterloo. Visit the Ontario Society for Environmental Education website at www.osee.org, or call Bill Andrews: 416-429-2786.