

Reaching out to all ages: CO₂ Week in Longyearbyen

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Having worked as a substitute teacher I know full well what to expect when you head into a class-room full of unknown students. The answer to that is: anything. I've met angelic classes, straight-backed with eager hands in the air. I have also spent the odd hours wrestling children down from book-cases, tearing scissors from their eager hands and wishing for ear-plugs. So when invited to come help teach global warming to 5 year olds, 9 year olds, 13 year olds and 15 year olds, I will admit to some hesitation.

The youngest children out at the Store Norske core-storage site, gather to hear more about how coal is formed

Cathy Braathen, who is in charge of the UNIS CO₂ Labs outreach program, coordinated with the local schools to create CO₂ week between the 29th of April and the 3rd of May. The classes incorporated

global warming into their curriculum and several people from UNIS and Store Norsk mining company were involved in various lectures, exercises and excursions during the week. While the idea behind teaching each group was ultimately the same, the approach and the amount of information varied greatly depending on the age of the children/adolescents. Most of the learning was interactive using simple tools. Among other things the children made CO₂ which expanded balloons over the concoction of vinegar and baking soda, they had the chance to watch how CO₂ behaves in water and even get an understanding of porosity as they experimented with rocks and water in a container.

The youngest children blew bubbles, heated a plastic box with a mini earth inside, drew pictures and of course, watched 'the arctic adventures of Dioxy' (the movie). Several groups also had excursions to the CO₂ site and to Store Norsk core storage lab.



Ready to face the five-year olds - a striking resemblance between the original Dioxy mascot and the costume design?

As a PostDoc with the CO₂ Lab, my activities vary greatly. I give conference talks and host biology seminars, scootering trips with industry and government representatives and TV interviews. I think, however, I can safely say that the oddest moment in my career at UNIS came towards the end of the outreach week when UNIS was invaded by the children from the daycare centers for a whole day filled with activities. My part to play involved pulling on a large grey velour ball, over-sized four-finger gloves and my giant head-phones in an attempt to look like Dioxy, the mascot of the CO₂ project!

At five it is perhaps hard to understand how CO₂ can cause the planet to heat and to understand why global warming is a problem. However, those of us who helped out during CO₂ Week were impressed with the interest and enthusiasm we met, both from students and teachers. There were certainly

many eager hands in the air and no children climbing book-cases. The questions and ideas that they had, all through the ages, pointed to insight and thoughtfulness. It showed us all how young minds can absorb information and how the various building-blocks of knowledge come together over the years.



A group of nine-year olds at the Longyearbyen CO2 site have located the last well and raise their arms in triumph