

Confessions of a Teacher

Reg Jensen

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Community members hold strong opinions about public education because they pay tax dollars into a system charged with the challenging task of educating their children. A traditionally conservative bureaucracy, the system tries to promote excellence in its schools but sometimes falls short of that goal.

Confessions of a Teacher chronicles the experiences of a high school science teacher who has faced some of the educational system's shortcomings. Reg Jensen confronted numerous challenges during his long teaching career. Some of these difficulties stemmed from student misconduct related to alcohol, drugs, inappropriate sexual behavior, and aggressive anger. Other incidents occurred because colleagues failed to take the necessary disciplinary action to control student misbehavior and pedagogical misdemeanor. Jensen also tells of his own actions involving scientific experiments or practical jokes that went awry.

The author taught chemistry, physics, and electronics in California public high schools for thirty-two years. In the two years preceding his retirement, he served as lead teacher, developing science curriculum for his school district.

A decline in academic standards is a common complaint about contemporary education, and Jensen cites a personal experience that supports this real concern. During an evaluation session with his principal, Jensen writes, "He then proceeded to tell me that student enrollment in my classes was declining, and if I didn't make my program 'less academic,' he may be left with no choice but to transfer me."

In schools where unruly students predominate, teachers often find themselves in vulnerable situations when they try to quell disruptive behavior. Called to the student cafeteria to stop a fight, Jensen writes, "...so I stepped forward and placed him in a wristlock...the combination of his twist and me cranking up on my wristlock resulted in a loud snap as his arm broke...These days I would probably be sued for this action."

The book's cover warns of explicit language and sexual content. It depicts a woman in a low-cut blouse standing behind a male teacher who holds an open notebook for her to see. This cover and the book's title suggest that readers might expect to find prurient content in its pages. Incidents of sexual indiscretion involving students and teachers are discussed, but they do not constitute the majority of issues presented in the book.

While readers will find some of the author's anecdotes interesting, other less relevant stories serve as distractions. The narrative, written primarily in the passive voice, lacks vitality. More conscientious editing would have corrected misspelled and misplaced words. The author's fondness for exclamation marks to add emphasis fails to achieve that end.

Not all readers will agree with the author's personal opinions about student discipline, gun control, and Christian-based ethics, but most will find comfort in his sincere belief in the methods he advocates for teaching young people to grow into responsible adulthood.

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