
Third Annual Prague's Play With Science Fair Proves Science Not Only for Boys

On May 31, 2010, the New Town Town Hall hosted the 3rd annual Play With Science event, whose morning programme was designed by the Charles University Faculty of Mathematics and Physics, along with Young Débrouillards of the Czech Republic, an association promoting scientific curiosity in children. The afternoon was reserved for adults, with experts from the faculty and the Academy of Sciences giving public lectures.

The yellow circle path for youngest kids and the red circle for older children led the young visitors literally all the way from the cellar to the tower. In the cellars, light magic was being performed, while the tower was the place for meteorologists and their experiments.



The operations were overseen by Dr. Zdeněk Drozd (on the right), director of the department of Didactics of Physics of the Faculty of Mathematics and Physics, and Petr Zapletal, president of the Association of Young Débrouillards.

What is new about this year's fair?

ZD: This year, we asked the Association of Young Débrouillards to take part. I consider it quite natural, as it is an event aimed at kids and it makes perfect sense when children present to other children.

What is the ratio between Charles University students and débrouillards?

ZD: Out of 90 demonstrators, there are 49 débrouillards, so they have a slight majority.

How did you organize particular demonstrations? Did you design the experiments and then assigned demonstrators, or did the demonstrators themselves come up with experiments?

ZD: We have an established model of how this should work. We have something more playful on the yellow circle and something more scientific on the red circle for older kids. Our meteorology students, for example, usually set

up demonstrations for the older kids. The programme for younger ones is usually run in conjunction with students of the Faculty of Education, who are being trained to teach elementary school. These students, mostly girls, attend our Experiments in Science seminar that they looked up themselves, because they realize that it will be them who will introduce kids to physics in their science classes. To sum it up, yes, students usually know what they'd like to demonstrate.

The young débrouillards that take part in the project must not only have a certain level of knowledge, but also the ability to present it...

PZ: We've been around for 18 years now and we have a system worked out. We do train kids in presenting their skills, so that's not an issue. At this year's Play With Science, kids from three clubs signed up: Frýdek-Místek, Prague Břečťanová Street, and Prague Jakutská Street.

I've seen a lot of girls attend. Does it mean that girls are not afraid of physics, contrary to the popular stereotype?

PZ: Surprisingly enough, it's half boys and half girls this year. Sometimes we get even more girls than boys, which means that science is no way solely a boys' affair.



Martin Kotmel is a second year student of the Faculty of Mathematics and Physics. "At our rather small department, there is a push to make first-years take part in all activities. Therefore I came here last year and I've stuck with it," says Martin. Two out of five kids usually solve the question why it is possible to press down even a glass bottle. "But then we had this group of girls in pink here, and they solved it right away. I was very surprised and it's a proof that no one should be approached with prejudice."

(Lucie Kettnerová)

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