

Teachers Held In Manhattan And Brooklyn

Separate Arrests Involve Handgun and Drugs

By JESUS RANGEL

Two New York City schoolteachers were arrested yesterday, one for illegally possessing a handgun that the police said had been found by a student and that the teacher had offered to buy, and the other on drug charges.

The first teacher, Donald Johnson, 38, was arrested at Thomas Jefferson High School in the East New York section of Brooklyn, where he taught English, and charged with illegally possessing a handgun.

The charge, a third degree felony, ordinarily carries a minimum sentence of at least one year in jail.

The police said that Mr. Johnson took the gun from a 14-year-old student at the school Dec. 15 after the student said she found it in a school bathroom.

Student Complained to Police

Sgt. Raymond O'Donnell, a police spokesman, said that Mr. Johnson told the student he would give her \$40 for the gun the next day. When the student did not receive the gun or the money, she complained to the police at the 75th Precinct station house, he said.

He added that detectives went to Mr. Johnson's home at 60 Clarkson Avenue in Brooklyn early yesterday, where the teacher voluntarily surrendered the weapon, a .25-caliber automatic handgun.

He was arrested shortly after 1 P.M.

The arrest was delayed, Sergeant O'Donnell said, until detectives located witnesses to corroborate the student's charges.

Mr. Johnson had been teaching in the school system since 1974.

Marijuana and Cocaine Found

Another teacher whose students said had warned them about drugs was arrested and charged with possession of marijuana and cocaine after an investigation begun by a tip to a school official, the police said.

The teacher, Shirley Smith, 48 years old, of 3 Washington Square Village, was suspended from teaching and transferred to a job in the local district office.

Ms. Smith, who taught fifth grade at Public School 34 at 730 East 12th Street, bought two small bags of marijuana from a man in front of 244 East 7th Street at 8:35 P.M. Wednesday, said Sgt. John Clifford, a police spokesman. During a subsequent search three envelopes containing cocaine were found on her.

Ms. Smith was charged with criminal possession of a controlled substance and unlawful possession of marijuana.

'A Victim of Drugs'

Sergeant Clifford said Ms. Smith "was seen at several narcotics-prone locations and was observed buying marijuana. After a search she was found to be in possession of cocaine."

She was arrested on the marijuana charge instead of being given a desk summons because she was seen in a public place, purchasing the drug, the police said.

"The children and staff of Public School 34 are saddened that one of their teachers has become a victim of drugs," said Bernard Mecklowitz, superintendent of Community School District 1, in a prepared statement. "I have sent a crisis intervention

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The New York Times/Jim Estrin

Shirley Smith, a fifth-grade teacher at Public School 34 in Manhattan, being arraigned in Manhattan Criminal Court on a drug charge. With her was her lawyer, Manuel Cofresi.

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team to the school today to offer support to the children and staff to help them comprehend and adjust to this problem. We cannot permit the drug culture to invade District 1 schools."

Mr. Mecklowitz said that he was told by a "reliable community source" on Nov. 14 that Ms. Smith might be buying drugs. With the approval of the Schools Chancellor, he said, school officials called the school system's Inspector General, who began an investigation with the Manhattan South Narcotics Squad.

"We will continue to cooperate with the police and district attorneys," Mr. Mecklowitz said. "In the meantime I am removing Miss Smith from the classroom and will recommend appropriate disciplinary action."

'She Wanted the Best'

Ms. Smith began her career at P.S. 201 in 1970 and taught at Junior High 60 from 1973 to September 1976, when she was laid off. She had been at P.S. 34 since September 1977.

"She was a very good teacher," said Evelyn Marti, the school's Parent-Teacher Association president. Her daughter, Marisol Olivera, is Miss Smith's student. "I love her like anything. It hurts me like anything. She's a beautiful person. She wanted the best from the children."

Ms. Smith's students said she was planning a classroom Christmas party.

They said she was the kind of teacher who bought them little presents, lent lunch money, and borrowed library books for them. She also warned them away from drugs, they said.

"She said not to use drugs because you'll end up in the streets, a bum," said Yesenia Rivera, 12.

"I don't believe she did it," said Andre Cruz, 11. "I feel broken up. She used to treat us like a mother."

New York City Board of Education president Robert Wagner said yesterday he has received positive comments

The police say a student found the pistol.

about the handling of the incident. He said Miss Smith's arrest, the second of an elementary school teacher in two weeks, would probably hasten implementation of a systemwide drug-testing program.

The Schools Chancellor, Richard R. Green, said in a prepared statement yesterday that Ms. Smith's arrest "reinforces our determination to implement an appropriate drug testing program and to expand our drug information and counseling program for

staff as well as for students."

Board of Education officials have said that in the past few years more than a dozen teachers have been arrested in connection with illegal drugs.

On December 13, Ramon Diaz, who taught fourth grade classes at P.S. 51 in the Bronx, was arrested for buying drugs in the Bronx.

The issue of drug use by teachers and principals was highlighted when Matthew Barnwell, a 55-year-old principal at a Bronx elementary school was arrested for after police saw him buy two vials of crack near his Harlem apartment.

Because some of Mr. Barnwell's problems were known in the district he served, his arrest triggered a grand jury investigation by Bronx District Attorney Paul Gentile on whether members of community school boards had used drugs, stolen school equipment and extorted money from teachers, principals or other school employees.

Mr. Barnwell's arrest also led to a review of the decentralization system under which the central board of education is responsible for the city's high schools and the 32 locally elected school boards run the elementary and middle schools.

Yesterday, Mayor Koch named a five-member commission with subpoena power to investigate corruption and improprieties in the New York City public schools.