

JOB SHADOWING: AN EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVE TO ADVANCE WOMEN IN SCIENCE

Molly Ferguson

Pour réaliser le plein potentiel des femmes sur le marché du travail, les programmes d'action positive obligatoires ne seront pas, d'eux mêmes, suffisants. Nous devons aussi initier des projets éducatifs informant les jeunes étudiantes de leurs nouvelles options professionnelles, surtout dans les domaines

traditionnellement décourageants tels que la science et les mathématiques – et aussi, nous devons leur inspirer la confiance nécessaire.

Molly Ferguson nous fait un rapport du projet pour filer les emplois, qu'elle a développé comme stratégie pour faire avancer les femmes en science. Elle s'est servi de son expérience comme consultante en éducation à l'Université York et à l'Université de Toronto pour le développer.

Who would disagree that the better way for students to learn about the work world they will inherit is to talk directly to the carpenter, the chemist, the computer programmer, rather than to be told about it by Mom, Dad or the guidance counsellor?

Who would disagree that an even better way would be to move these talks from the classroom to the workplace, where the



*Two Humberside Collegiate students, Mary Psitiopedas (left) and Wendy Chun, with Gulf Canada's Eleanor Barker
Credit: Courtesy of Molly Ferguson*

students' observation of women at work can stimulate an exploration of new experiences, new possibilities?

Might we not then expect that if we "show her the mirror, the student sees not the mirror, but herself?"

Twelve young women in grades 11, 12 and 13 at Toronto's Humber College recently visited Gulf Canada's Toronto office. There they spent a morning talking to ten women whose science and math background has catapulted them into related careers as process and chemical engineers, and as analysts in the financial, purchasing, planning, marketing and forecasting departments. These professionals painted honest pictures of their own uncertain beginnings. "We learned," reports student Nina Sosnowsky, "that life has unpredictable twists and turns and some of these women found themselves in places in life they never expected to be. Who could ever predict that a geologist would end up working in an office as a corporate planner, or a pharmacy graduate would become the senior analyst in finance at Gulf?"

Another student, Natalie Horlatsch, revised her picture of a straight path to a specific job: "Choices are not always made in high school or university; life can force you onto a totally different path even after your studies have ended. A career is not permanent or carved in stone." Hers is another way of saying that education is a continuing process, and that adaptability and flexibility are essential skills.

Spurred on by the morning discussions, the students paired up to job-shadow six Gulf women. They attended meetings, listened in on phone calls, met staff, explored pipelines, talked to computers, saw communicators and negotiators in action – and, by chance two students met the President of Gulf. In a wrap-up session Gulf's Gail Ogden outlined employment requirements; Maggie Cox spoke candidly about the responsibilities of her dual commitment to her job and her young child.

The students' responses to their job-shadowing experience was encouraging:

- "I actually realized that what I want to do is perhaps not what I want to do! An open mind is necessary. I should be free to diversify if need be."
- "I must aim high, never feel that I can't reach a specific goal because I'm female."

- "I now know that I have the chance to become whatever I want to be and that I have power and control of my own life. Definitely, I'm not going to drop sciences no matter how hard."

These remarkably mature responses typify the rich learning experience that can come from a brief but well-planned field trip.

Viewing this mutually rewarding day with a critical eye, I was aware that the middle executive Gulf women were not representative of the majority of working women, just as the students themselves were not representative of those who are likely to drop math and science. However, neither were the students at all certain about *any* career (let alone science); nor were they certain that they would attend university. While this pilot project can be faulted, then, for not including employees in apprenticeships and graduates from secondary school and community colleges, it can be commended for raising the students' awareness of job marketplace realities. Some appear to have set themselves higher career goals.

Jointly organized by Maggie Cox, Co-ordinator of Employee Relations at Gulf, Carol Overholt, Humber College's Guidance Counsellor, and myself, this program – together with Visits to Science in the University and a Mentor Program – comprise the pilot project I co-ordinated from January to June 1985 on behalf of the Astronomy, Chemistry, Mathematics and Physics Departments at the University of Toronto. Professor Jim Prentice of the University's Physics Department initiated the program and brought together members of four natural science Departments to get it underway.

Penny Moss, Chair of the Toronto Board of Education, asserts the value of educational initiatives such as job shadowing:

Telling or counselling within our school can never be as effective as the opportunity for young women to meet women already working in science . . . and I believe it would be a mistake not to recognize that such positive experiences are later shared with many other students. My own decision to enter science as a young woman was largely attributable to my participation in a university laboratory program for high school students. The barriers to the entry of women to post-secondary education in mathematics and pure and applied sciences begin long before university. The Toronto Board has begun to address and seek

remedies to the problems. I believe the university can and indeed should assist in the removal of barriers.

Molly Ferguson is a consultant with New Initiatives in Education. She has co-ordinated two university-based programs intended to advance women in science – WISH (Women in Science, Hopefully) at York University and Women in Science at the University of Toronto.

WAKING UP

Waking up with a stranger,
the early morning light
so bright with summer
it adds a sheen to your shoes
so properly aligned with the
closet door
even the folds of the clothes
over the soft back of the
rocking chair
seem comfortable
while my neck is cramped,
half off the pillow

in such unaccustomed clarity
the desk calendar gleams
with figures
a motel room or travel
brochure photo?
yet the uneven breathing in my ear
is just short of a snore
exhaling a mixture of musk
deodorant
and last night's garlic and
wine pasta

then the curve of a tanned
shoulder
is glimpsed from the corner
of my eye
as I fight the impulse to jump up
that panicky message to leave
quickly before the other
awakes

just last night it seemed such
a good idea
all that excitement and
heat together:
being one against the darkness
children in awe

but this simple sunrise shows
I don't know who you are
after twenty years of sunlight,
moonlight,
stormy days without light
I wake up to find/you a stranger

Bernice Lever
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