Role Model Project

School: Humann Elementary  
Grade Level: 3  
Teacher: Linda Splichal  
Scientist: Tim Perrin  
Date: Spring 2004

Goals

According to the data provided by the Project Fulcrum Survey, many female students at Humann did not see themselves as potential scientists at least as much as males. Since Humann does not have much diversity it was difficult to assess how minorities felt about scientists. However it appeared that minorities had a positive image of scientists. With this in mind, the main goal of our role model project was to encourage the female students to think about science as a potential career path by bringing in a female scientist.

Constraints

The elementary school model posed several challenges for bringing in a role model. These included:

1. a tight curriculum schedule,
2. a four-week science unit, and
3. all students had to be addressed at once.

With this in mind we needed to find a female scientist who could visit the students and contribute toward the goals of the curriculum.

Scientists as Role Models

Cory Ross was chosen as the best scientist to visit the school because of her background as a biologist. During her visit she talked about both her research in animal behavior and helped fulfill one of the curriculum goals by talking about different animals that lay eggs (in detail). She also caught the attention of students by bringing in many models of animals and eggs and her son’s pet hedgehog (which is similar to an echidna, a mammal that lays eggs). She did a good job of getting students interested in science and acting as a role model. Many female students asked her questions about her research and talked to her after her presentation.

An additional role model was paleontologist Neale Monks from England. Dr. Monks visited Humann School and gave a formal presentation about dinosaurs. He also attended our field trip to Morrill Hall and interacted informally with students. Students were instantly drawn to him. His British accent and knowledge of dinosaurs and bones fascinated students. They asked him question incessantly, to which he often replied with a question. This illustrated to the students a scientist’s nature to ask questions.
The resident scientist, Tim Perrin, has also acted as a male role model and scientist. Throughout the year many activities have been done that touched on what Tim does as a scientist at the university.

Assessment

To assess this activity we had both verbal and written feedback from the students.

Conclusions

We have seen a few things that indicated students had a change in their view of a scientist. In particular, one of the female students was surprised to find out the visiting biologist was a ‘her’ but was also happy that was the case. Another student said she wanted to be a marine biologist. One male student said that he wanted to be in a band and be a computer scientist because he thought it would be cool to “do research and have a laptop” (Tim regularly brings his laptop to the school and occasionally uses it for presentations).

As to be expected, not all students desired to become scientists. Strangely, most that said they were not interested in some career involving science wanted to be professional athletes. It is difficult to assess exactly how many students actually had a change in their view of a scientist since we did not do any pre-assessment of this form. However, we think that Project Fulcrum has had a positive impact at Humann Elementary.