

Meeting Inspiring Role Models



School subjects
STE(A)M
Age of students
12 -18
Aim of the activity
By meeting and hearing an inspiring female professional talk about her career choices and her work can open the minds of the students so that they can envision a future as engineers and hopefully inspire them to become what they want. It is however not certain that the participants still know what they want to become, but this encounter opens up the room for additional choices and makes the females more present and approachable in the STEM world.
Activity
The female scientists were asked to tell their success story, illustrated with examples, answering the questions: what made them choose a science-related career? What subjects, interests, skills, personal qualities are important in choosing a career as a scientist? What was the start of your career? Have you encountered stereotypes in the profession? What are the difficulties and joys of the professional path? And other questions.



An example for a session:

SAAB female engineer visiting a Swedish summer school. At the company SAAB, the students were told, there's a huge number of different tasks that require specific training and many people from different disciplines are working together on different challenges. This was envisioned in a very inspirational way by the engineer, and she gave many concrete examples that working together can lead to the achievement of high and qualified results. This means that the students were given an example of an interesting future where STEM knowledge was used in collaborative ways.

According to research, and from our experience, on what influences and inspires girls' interest in STEM, the role models should be at a higher level, but not too distant from the female students they should inspire. It's important not giving the expression of being superhumans, because then it will risk having the opposite and deterrent effect. So, the choice of the female engineer here was well thought out to inspire and not discourage.

She talked a lot about what competencies she used, talked a lot about different ways of thinking, how she experienced different situations and also a lot about what drove her forward in her work (the feeling of benefiting people around her and also of how to make the world a safe place).

An example for a series of sessions where role models spend a lot of time with the girls in the working phases:

Female mentors are involved as mentors of small groups, accompany them throughout the sessions and give support in the working phases of developing a kind of a product. This way, the connection is even more close and the role models become even more approachable to the girls.

Time necessary

60 minutes or more

Learning outcomes

The success stories of women scientists spark girls' curiosity, a genuine interest in a career as a woman scientist, and inspired confidence in their abilities.

Some of the conclusions that girls made after spending time with STEM female professionals:

- it is one of the ways in which people can experience self-fulfilment in a profession;
- you can satisfy your curiosity as a researcher, you can do what you like and still get rewarded, you can be respected by others, you can add value, you can help or even save people;
- it is very important to be able to handle modern technologies now, as this can determine your career choice, your professional success and your happiness in life;
- becoming a scientist means exploring, questioning and not being afraid to make mistakes now.
- even if it was surprising to meet a female engineer (girls were expecting to meet a man) the participants were satisfied with the meeting according to the evaluation we did afterwards. They were inspired and enlightened about what it was like to work as an engineer, but also that you could be an ordinary teenager who wanted to get an education and then get a fun job - designing a cockpit in new aircraft.

Materials and costs

There are companies who are interested in getting more young people interested in science and technology, so they might send a role model free of charge and increase the chances of promoting students' interest in them as a possible future employer.

In our experience, it is beneficial to develop a close cooperation with a company and also involve them in teaching, offering to bring students to an excursion to the company and invite them several times to be a role model or even give a class together.