

Co-op practice makes perfect

by
PAUL SANDERSON

While Thursday is officially "Career Day" at MSS, many senior students will be involved in the school's special program of career exploration all year long.

Over the last four years Jim Agnew, a Technical Teacher at MSS with over two decades experience, has served the area as the Simcoe County Board of Education's Co-op Education Co-ordinator. With Agnew's help, interested students spend part of their school year working for local businesses and services while maintaining their academic studies.

The schedule of employment, for which there is no pay, is different for each student and each job. Some work half days

throughout the year, some take three one week work sessions, while others join an entire class for a couple of hours of co-op work experience two or three times a week.

Each student is evaluated by the employer and by an MSS teacher who visits the work place during the co-op session. Each placement must be related to a subject in the curriculum and the evaluations become part of the student's school record. Every 120 hours at work earns one academic credit.

Agnew has arranged work experience for students as auto mechanics, hairdressers, kindergarten teacher's aids, X-Ray technicians, and even one as an assistant to MPP Alan McLean in his Orillia and Queen's Park offices.

MSS Co-op Education has proven its

popularity with both students and employers as the enrollment has swollen from 35 in 1981 to the current figure of 136 work force placements. Agnew projects a further 30 students, participants before the end of the year.

He explains that Co-op education is intended to give students the chance to sample a possible career before they commit themselves to further education or training.

If grade 12 student Khalida Ali, 17, decides to pursue her goal of becoming a pharmacist she must first complete grade 13, be accepted at University for a further five year program, and then complete a year of internship.

Ali is currently serving her second of three co-op work weeks at Jory's IDA Pharmacy on King Street and hopes to combine business

skills with her strong school record in science into a retail pharmacy career. She admits to, "having her eyes opened," more than once while working under close supervision as part of the dispensing team, but she is already declaring with conviction, "Now I know for sure. This is what I want to do."

Pharmacist Alex Kowalski has supervised three Co-op students from MSS over the last three years. Kowalski, who was also interested in teaching and chiropractic, says he wishes co-op education was available when he was in high school because he could have, "explored the options."

"Khalida is going to discover if she could realistically enjoy this type of work in a retail setting." And, he predicts, "It looks to me like she's going into Pharmacy."



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