

Barbie® becomes a Computer Engineer

By Alexis Schroeder

Working with the Society of Women Engineers and the National Academy of Engineering, Mattel's Barbie® will become a fashion icon in the high-tech industry as a computer engineer in 2010. The big question is whether this doll will encourage more young girls to explore math and science as they enter middle and high school.

I have a teen-age daughter who played with Barbie dolls for many years. She loved coordinating fashions for each Barbie that she owned. I don't think she realized that Barbie even had a career other than to wonder secretly why she couldn't hold a job. Barbie has had 124 careers to date. The outfits for each career were just more clothes for Barbie's closet.

Barbie's fashions were much more interesting to explore than her current job. As a mother-daughter effort, we even tried to make our own Barbie gowns from doll patterns. Cutting and sewing these tiny pattern pieces proved too much of a challenge for us with our big fingers and bulky sewing machine. But it did make us wonder about the engineering effort required to make the variety of beautiful themed outfits and gowns that did make the fashion ensembles that we bought over the years. There was the clever mechanical engineer who figured out the mass production of tiny dresses. Then the chemical engineer who developed safe plastic shoes and other accessories creating the final touch on an outfit and matching the career theme with plastic equipment.

Even though Barbie is a computer engineer this year, she is still a Barbie with a disproportionate body type and loaded with plastic must-have "career" accessories. In a time where young women need better self images, this Barbie still does not convince me that Mattel is on the leading edge of engineering images other than in their mass production and manufacturing efforts. I'll just have to wait and see what the graduating classes of 2020-2025 look like in terms of engineering graduates.

Author: Alexis Schroeder, a Global Institute for Technology & Engineering (GIFTE) Board member, who was parented by a mother chemical engineer and a father aeronautical engineer grew up going to the library every week where she



read through the complete Nancy Drew ® and Hardy Boys ® mystery series multiple times. She doesn't recall enjoying play time with Barbie dolls. However, she kept an open mind; and her daughter who excels at math and science but is passionate about fashion and textiles, loved her Barbie dolls and all their fashions. Her opinions are her own and might not reflect the position of the GIFTE organization on this multi-generational issue.