

Media Relations

Wednesday, June 30, 2010

'Through the Lens of Indiana' -- partnership promotes innovative teaching of American History

Thirty teachers from the Monroe County Community School Corporation spent a week of their summers immersed in new ideas for teaching American history as part of the History Education Project, a partnership between Indiana University and Bloomington schools and agencies.

Representing Bloomington, Ind., elementary schools, middle schools and high schools, the educators took part in seminars with IU historians, education professors and librarians and spent hours working on methods for using primary sources and original documents in their classrooms.

Participants also learned first-hand about the rich resources available at IU and in Bloomington for teaching history, including rare documents at the Lilly Library, historic maps at the IU Geography and Map Library, and exhibits at the Monroe County History Center.

'Big-league research'

"I think this is part of our core mission of teaching and research," said Jim Madison, the Thomas and Kathryn Miller Professor of History at IU Bloomington and one of the directors of the initiative. "We are getting some of that primary, big-league research into the classrooms of Monroe County."

The institute kicked off the second year of a three-year project titled "Teaching American History through the Lens of Indiana" that is funded by \$497,917 from the U.S. Department of Education. It is one of 123 projects in the current round of Teaching American History grants, and the only one in Indiana.

The Monroe County History Center and the Agency for Institutional Technology are partnering with IU and MCCSC schools to carry out the project, which includes weekend retreats, field trips, planning consultations, book discussions and a culminating spring conference.

Project directors along with Madison are Lynne Boyle-Baise, a professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction in the IU School of Education, and Patricia Wilson, a history teacher at Bloomington High School North. Glenda Murray, past board president of the Monroe County History Center, also helps coordinate the initiative.

The June 14-18 summer institute featured workshops by IU historians Eric Sandweiss and Ed Linenthal on using local places and physical objects to teach history; a presentation by Lou Malcomb, head of the IU Geography and Map Library, on using maps to do in the classroom; and a talk by Barbara Truesdell of the IU Center for the Study of History and Memory on using oral history. It also included lessons by Boyle-Baise and education professor

Jesse Goodman, time for research and reflection and opportunities for teachers to develop, create and share resources, ideas and best practices.

'A backstage pass to history'

Cameron York, a fourth-grade teacher at Highland Park Elementary School, said the project had opened his eyes to conveying multiple perspectives in the teaching of history. It also introduced him to resources such as the Wylie House Museum in Bloomington, home to IU's first president, Andrew Wylie, and the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indian and Western Art in Indianapolis.

"It's kind of like having a backstage pass to history," he said.

Mary Wiggins, a fifth-grade teacher at University Elementary School, said she experienced a sense of discovery that she would transmit to her students.

"It has so many layers," Wiggins said. "When you get excited as an educator and want to know more, you bring that excitement back with you to the classroom."

The teachers spent a full morning at the Lilly Library, IU Bloomington's library for rare books, manuscripts and special collections. Public services librarian Erika Dowell created a display of objects chosen to inspire ideas for classroom activities that included an extraordinarily valuable original printing of the Declaration of Independence, letters written by and about Abraham Lincoln, political posters and cartoons from the 1800s, a journal of an Indiana pioneer midwife, early sheet music, a satirical article about the California Gold Rush and paper dolls and a patriotic book for children by well-known author Munro Leaf from World War II.

Madison said the project is helping teachers understand that they and their students can "do history" and produce knowledge, not merely memorize facts and figures from the past.

"If you can start by having students look at a primary source from 100-200 years ago, to my mind, that is the core of social studies education," he said. "To appreciate a document, to understand it, to really become your own historian -- that's active learning, rather than sitting and listening to someone lecture."

Boyle-Baise said it was exciting to watch and listen as teachers worked together on ways to implement new insights into their work when they return to school.

"I sense that people are really changing their thinking about history teaching," she said. "They're just starting to think about ways they can create new lessons for the classroom."

She added that it's rewarding to see teachers excited about history at a time when an emphasis on standardized testing in language arts and mathematics threatens to push other subjects to the corners of the curriculum.

"This is a real statement from the Monroe County Community School Corp. that history is not going to decline and disappear," she said.

Web Version

<http://newsinfo.iu.edu/web/page/normal/14835.html>

IU News Room

530 E. Kirkwood Ave., Suite 201

Bloomington, IN 47408-4003

Email: iuinfo@indiana.edu

Web: <http://newsinfo.iu.edu>

Copyright 2010 The Trustees of Indiana University Copyright Complaints