

NO.57 SUMMER 2001
BENE LEGERE
 NEWSLETTER OF THE
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LOCAL SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS AND STUDENTS BENEFIT FROM LIBRARY PROJECT

Listening to Lynn Jones talk about her work on the California Heritage Project (<http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/calheritage/>) is like listening to her talk about her young children. Her eyes glow, her hands take on a life of their own in their expressive movements, and her enthusiasm mounts as she explains how local disadvantaged school children are learning to negotiate the Internet at the same time that they are learning about California history.

Though seemingly far removed from traditional library public service, it isn't really. The project is a good example of where libraries are going these days and how they are using technology to help make students' school experiences more productive and relevant.

The project got started almost as an afterthought. Several years ago, the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) agreed to support a program in Cal's Bancroft Library, in which some 30,000 photographs documenting the history of California would be digitized and made available on the Internet. While the project was being developed, Library staff members became interested in making sure that the photos, available to anyone with access to a computer, would be used to full advantage, as examples, really, of living history.

Simultaneously, in response to that part of the University's mission that mandates public service, former Cal Chancellor Tien was creating the Berkeley Pledge, an outreach project whose goal is to use University expertise to help disadvantaged secondary school students prepare more effectively for college entrance, preferably at Cal.



"Corner Mission & 5th. United States Mint behind boys...." Late 1800s image from the Graves collection.

So, these two seemingly unconnected activities came together in the California Heritage Project, whose challenge is to develop a model that will enable teachers and students to use Cal's digital library collections to enhance their understanding of California's history and culture, and, not incidentally, begin to understand their own ethnicity and the contributions of their ethnic groups to California. This fits very nicely with the University's goal of using the

Internet to support K-12 teachers, students, and families in disadvantaged urban communities.

Briefly, the California Heritage Project staff decided that the best route would be to train teachers how to use the Internet to find materials that are relevant to

teaching social studies, such as pictures downloaded from the California Heritage Collection, and how to use computer technology creatively in classrooms to enhance student achievement. For the past three summers, working with both the San Francisco Unified School District and the Oakland Unified School District, project staff have led intensive teacher training institutes with these objectives in mind. In some cases, this training simply brings teachers up to the skill level of their students. In other cases, the training enables teachers to introduce students to the non-commercial side of the Internet for the first time.

And the project has been a stunning success. According to Kathryn Downward, a ninth grade student at Oakland Technical High School, "...did it help me learn? My answer is yes. The teachers, Ms. Yesson and Ms. Jones, layed [sic] the material out, and the information out, in a way I could understand, pictues [sic]. The pictures expressed many things I couldn't get out of the reading like the way Indians acted and how the Europeans came. The pictures really helped....Was it cool? Well, it could have used lazer [sic] lights, but it was very cool. It helped me learn while still being fun and enjoyable. I[t] showed another view point [sic], and another way of learning."

A little explanation is in order as to how studying historic photos can lead to lifelong skills in careful observation and solving problems creatively.

Take a moment to look at the photo by Dorothea Lange of "Manzanar, California evacuees watching a ball game, 7/3/42." This is a "primary historical resource." In other words, it is raw. The photo has not already been "interpreted," as writers do when they include an image in a textbook. No explanations have been given. So the photo can cause the students to generate his or her own questions to answer.

The students are taught to "read the photo," to think about where these people are, who they are, what they are doing there. What is happening? And in doing so, students are being taught to observe, to think on their own, without outside influence, about what they are looking at, and also to be skeptical and question what they may initially take for granted is the truth.



"Manzanar, California evacuees watching a ball game, 7/3/42." Photograph by Dorothea Lange from the War Relocation Authority collection.

Being able to read a photo is part of "information literacy," which enables us to evaluate the barrage of information that we receive daily from multiple sources. Students need to be able to evaluate information for its accuracy, perspective, and usefulness to their lives. These information literacy skills will be particularly important in the future, as we get more of our information from the Internet, which doesn't have an editor or publisher to fact-check and verify the truth of what is published.

Many of the teachers Lynn and her colleague Lisa Yesson have trained work with students for whom English is not a primary language and the students are often not yet reading at grade level.

Oftentimes a visual image communicates far more to students not proficient in English than a textbook with which they have to struggle.

An example is a class discussion that took place at International Studies Academy High School in San Francisco about the Spanish American War of 1898. The class is composed of 22 students from eight countries, most of whom have lived in the United States for less than two years. Several students in the class were lost, not able to comprehend the text, nor able to keep up with the free flow of classroom discussion. The teacher displayed on the computer screen political cartoons from newspapers of the period which are included in the California Heritage Collection. The series of cartoons contained images of the "big guys" and the "little guys" with simple lines, in universal terms. Now, this was something that all the students could pick up on--the power relations between the big and the little.

The reader may think, "Well, this is all fine and interesting, but how does this relate to the University and its students?"

What Lynn and Lisa are doing with public school teachers and students is very similar to what the Teaching Library at Cal is doing to provide students with information literacy. Though Cal students enter the University with varying degrees of expertise in technology, chances are that most will sit down and surf the Internet when they begin their research for a paper or project. (Hopefully all students will supplement Internet resources with paper-based materials that they find on the shelves in the stacks or in scholarly journals. Realistically speaking, however, not all of them will.) Like the high school students, Cal students need to develop critical thinking skills to evaluate and analyze information, wherever they find it.

So what Lisa and Lynn are doing with the California Heritage Project is training teachers to help students get a running start on skills that they will need when they are pursuing additional education or are in the work world.

Along with teacher professional development, the California Heritage Project is helping teachers create lesson plans that can be made into Web pages and shared on the Internet with teachers around the country. Future plans call for the Project to work more closely with school librarians who can serve as technology mentors in an ongoing relationship with teachers in their own schools.

In the California Heritage Project, the University is extending the resources of the campus beyond its walls to benefit school children throughout California.

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