Most French language teachers have spent considerable amounts of time in France to enrich their teaching about that country, but the French language is used far beyond the borders of Europe. When teaching about Francophone Africa, most teachers have to rely on secondary materials.

That is no longer true for eleven middle school and secondary school teachers in Indiana who participated in a five-week, Fulbright-Hays Group Project Abroad to Cameroon this summer, funded by the U.S. Department of Education.

Virginia DeLancey, associate director of the IUB's African Studies Program, led the teachers to Cameroon, the country she has worked in since 1968. Martha Nyikos, director of foreign language education at the IU School of Education, also traveled with the group to help the teachers write unit plans on Francophone Africa which introduce culture into the curriculum.

The teachers spent the first week in Cameroon listening to lectures each morning given by faculty members of the University of Yaoundé, all of whom were asked to emphasize French influence in Africa. In the afternoons, the group visited related sites, including the French Cultural Center, museums, and palaces, schools, churches and mosques, and local markets. Evenings provided Cameroonian cuisine at the home of the Minister of Higher Education and the Dean of Arts, Letters, and Social Sciences of the University of Yaoundé, or at the local cafeteria and a favorite “chicken house.”

To better understand French influence on Africa, the teachers spent the next week in Anglophone Cameroon receiving parallel lectures from faculty members of the University of Buea, all whom were asked to emphasize British influence in Africa. This provided quite a different perspective.

The group next toured the area, from the beaches and rainy, coastal plantations to the slopes of Mt. Cameroon and the cool grass fields of Bamenda. Cameroon is often referred to as “Africa in miniature,” and the teachers realized what this meant as they continued their travels throughout the country, paying their respects to the Fon of Bafut, the Sultan of Foumban, and the Lamidot of Ngoundéré.

In the hot, dry north region, they met the soothsayer at Rhumski among eroded volcanic cores which soar from the earth. The teachers also stood impressively close to hundreds of elephants at Waza National Park and climbed several kilometers to the village of Oudjilla on top of a small mountain.

By the end of the five weeks, the group had accomplished the main goals of the project. They had a good idea of the influence of France in Africa and of the realities of life in Cameroon.

Since returning home, Cameroon Group Project teachers have been preparing their unit plans on Francophone Africa. On September 21, they met at IU Bloomington with group leader Virginia Delancey and Martha Nyikos to discuss the final phases of their work and future plans for sharing these curricular units with other middle school and secondary school teachers.

At the Indiana Foreign Language Teachers Association Meetings in Indianapolis October 25-26, the teachers spoke about how they would be incorporating their experiences into their classroom teaching. On December 3, they will participate in the Indiana Humanities Council conference, “Internationalizing the Curriculum.” — Virginia Delancy

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