



U.S. Department of Education
Grant Performance Report (ED 524B)
Executive Summary

OMB No. 1890-0004
Exp. 10-31-2007

PR/ Number #U215X100025

The *Biographies of the Nation* (BON) TAH project offered a total of 105 hours of professional development during its second year to its 3-year cohort of 35 participants and 34 completers. Thirty of the thirty-four completers (88%) participated in 75% or more of the professional development hours offered.

Project partners have remained unchanged since the grant was awarded. They include the three consortia districts—the **Great Falls Public Schools (LEA), Helena Public Schools, and Bozeman Public Schools**, and its partners—the Montana Council for History and Civics Education (MCHCE), Montana State University’s Departments of History and Native American Studies, and the American Computer Museum. Education Northwest is the external evaluator for the project. **Teachers were primarily social studies and American history teachers from grades 3-12.** The content areas covered during the second year were Expansion, the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Gilded Age and Progressive Eras, which included the **NAEP Periods of Expansion and reform (1801-1861); Crisis of the Union: Civil War and Reconstruction (1850-1877), and the first part of The Development of Modern America (1865-1920).**

Professional development activities included a 17-hour, **two-day fall colloquium**, a 25-hour, **three-day spring colloquium**, a 34-hour, **four-day summer institute**, six, ninety-minute **book study sessions** offered throughout the year and led by mentor teacher leaders, and 20 hours to complete a required **instructional plan**. Finally, we made available through MSU’s Department of History and Philosophy, a graduate credit in history (for teachers who specifically registered and paid for the course). All materials for the project, including teacher instructional plans are located on the MCHCE website (www.mchce.net) or on the BON Wiki (<http://biographiesofthenation.pbworks.com/w/page/30953232/FrontPage>).

During the fall colloquium (October 21, 2011), teachers took a pre-test of their content and pedagogical knowledge in the eras of focus for the second year. For the content and pedagogy pre-test, **50% of the items were from a nationally validated assessment (NAEP released)** and the other 50% from items developed by historians, project participants, and external evaluators and pilot tested and scored by independent raters during our previous *West as U.S.* TAH project (as per its objectives). On the final day of the summer institute (June 21, 2012), teachers took a post-test to evaluate their growth over the second year of the project. *Biographies of the Nation* and Education Northwest are developing a blueprint for a U.S. history assessment for in-service teachers of U.S. History. One unique aspect of the assessment is that it connects content knowledge to pedagogy—making it a more authentic assessment for the intended population. In Year 2 (addressing the era of the Civil War and Reconstruction) relevant items were selected to demonstrate key understandings essential to the era, matched to project objectives for the year, and aligned with the National History Standards.

The assessment was comprised of six items and required about an hour for teachers to complete. Each of the six questions was worth 5 points summing to a perfect score of 30 points. Before scoring the teacher assessments, the evaluation team at Education Northwest trained raters. Two raters scored each question. During the scoring process, evaluators monitored the raters’ scores to prevent an excessive number of discrepancies in their ratings. A discrepancy occurs when ratings differ by two or more points. (When there was a discrepancy, a third scorer resolved the discrepancy by assigning the final rating.) Findings include an 8% gain (as compared to a 6% gain in Y1) in teachers’ content understanding and pedagogy between the pre- and post-test, with a **pre-test mean score of 17.8/30 and a post-test mean score of 20.1/30**. Matched pre- and post-test data for participants showed 88% posted pre- post-test gains in content knowledge and 85% posted pre- post-test gains in pedagogical knowledge.

Additionally, teachers provided feedback to our evaluator at each of the professional development sessions. The results of the feedback gathered during the summer institute suggest: Project components (e.g., reading materials, presentations, book study groups) are effectively reinforcing each other to increase teachers’ content knowledge of American history. The project is seen as a good example of how to work within Common Core Standards. Through project involvement, teachers are using more primary documents. The development of teachers’ Instructional Plans went more smoothly during Y2, with teachers using their units developed under the project and refining them over time. Teachers expressed interest in each other’s instructional plans, and some shared (and strengthened) their plans through peer review during local (district) book study sessions. Teachers also observed changes in student achievement and attitudes since their involvement with BON. They saw greater success for Special Education students and those “not typically top” students, as well as increased skill among students in using primary sources—by allowing students to struggle with the material, they promoted deeper understanding and interpretation.

During the second year, participants submitted significantly higher quality Instructional Plans. Several teachers submitted very high quality instructional plans that can be used as models in the future. During the first year, 59% of IP’s were an average rating of “3.” In the second year of the project, 63% of IP’s received that rating or above. Most significantly, 44% contained student work in Y2 as compared to 15% in Y1.

Professional development sessions were well received by teachers who appreciated the balance of content and pedagogy interwoven in presentations. 92% (24/26) participants agreed that the sessions were above average or excellent in providing relevant content to the Civil War and Reconstruction. 96% (25/26) participants agreed that the sessions were above average or excellent in providing classroom activities and examples for teacher about the Civil War and Reconstruction. 92% (24/26) participants agreed that the sessions were above average or excellent in integrating biography and biography-related themes into the Colloquium. 92% (24/26) agreed that the sessions were above average or excellent in addressing the Essential Question: “To what extent did the Civil War fundamentally change the United States?”