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IWU Education Students Offer "The Write Partnership"

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. -- A group of Illinois Wesleyan University students have worked each Tuesday this fall at Bloomington's Sheridan Elementary School in a project known as "The Write Partnership," a project designed to improve and enhance their literacy.

Phyllis Pederson's first grade class and John Muirhead's fifth grade class at Sheridan have been the recipients of individual assistance from IWU juniors majoring in elementary education.

Now, in a reversal of roles, Sheridan students will have the opportunity to pay a return call on their college mentors. Beginning at 9:30 a.m. Tuesday, Dec. 10, the grade-schoolers will take a tour of Buck Memorial Library, the University's computer center, along with classrooms, Sheean Library, and campus IWU residences. The personalized tours of given by the Wesleyan students will culminate with a reception honoring the young authors at 10:30 a.m. in the Memorial Student Center, where they will be greeted by IWU President Minor Myers, jr.

In "The Write Partnership" project, the Sheridan pupils have been involved in writing, revising, editing, along with in-house publication of poetry, science projects, and autobiographical works.

Included in the program has been shared reading of quality literature, weekly journal writing, library research, and the production of improvisational plays. The project is an outgrowth of the whole language movement, an effort to make literacy instruction more like the reading and writing required in real life.

"We want children to know that printed words belong to them," said project coordinator Dianne Mancus, head of the education department at IWU. "And we want them to start at this early age to picture themselves on a college campus."

Jennifer Dohren, a junior elementary education major from Downers Grove, said, "One of my children asked if I had to take the bus to school. When I told him that I lived at school, he thought I lived in the classroom. All of the university students are excited about bringing their children to campus."

Pederson and Muirhead note that their children look forward to the college students' visits each week. "Many parents have commented on how important the Tuesday sessions are to the children," said Pederson. Muirhead reported he has observed "greater interest and fluency in writing for the fifth graders involved in the 'Write Partnership.'"

"Wesleyan students have learned a great deal about the writing process and about teaching children in their work this semester at Sheridan," Mancus said. "They have also been introduced to economic and cultural differences which must be understood and addressed in today's schools."

Children and tutors in the project were recently visited by internationally-known author Jan Carew, an adjunct professor of political science at IWU and professor emeritus at Northwestern University. Carew told the children that as a boy growing up in Guyana, he spent many hours in a treehouse reading adult books.

"It was reading that led me to writing," said Carew, the author of several books for children. He told the students he doesn't write books for children or for adults, he just writes stories. When Carew asked the group of 24 fifth graders how many thought they might want to be writers when they grow up, nearly one-third of the children quickly raised their hands.