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Teaching abroad has benefits

Kentucky students learn from overseas program

BY HOWARD MCEWEN | ENQUIRER CONTRIBUTOR

This spring, seven Northern Kentucky University education majors traveled to Australia, Denmark and South Africa to do their student teaching.

"It just gives them a broader experience and exposure to different cultures and ways of life to bring different points of view into the classroom and have more real-life experience to draw upon for their students," said Kevin Besnoy, assistant professor in the department of teacher education and school leadership.

Melissa Schanding, who teaches at Holmes High School, taught Danish students seventh- to ninth-grade English.

"One of the major things that I learned from doing my student teaching overseas - which I am eternally grateful for - is learning how to teach English as a second language (ESL)," Schanding said. "I had had a class and a few discussions regarding teaching ESL students, but I really didn't feel fully prepared. Now, I have first-hand experience to draw from, which is comforting as a new teacher."

For Kara Patterson, who also taught in Denmark, the lessons learned were the same she learned student-teaching in Kentucky.

"Teaching isn't having a set of standards and a closet full of supplies. It's getting to know students on a personal level, being a positive influence and guiding children so they can learn to think and solve problems on their own," she said.

Besnoy said one of the things his returning student teachers learn is how teaching is the same anywhere.

"They recognize how similar education is globally," he said. "Teachers and students all over the world face the same questions."

Isaac Willis Larison, assistant professor in the College of Education and Human Services, said the experiences will benefit Kentucky's students.

"Whenever we learn more about children and teachers and the process of learning in other countries, we learn ways of improving instruction for our students," he said.

While the student teachers were learning, their own students wanted to learn about the United States.

"One of the most amusing questions was regarding the obesity of American people," Holmes High School teacher Schanding said. "Many Danish students seemed to have the notion that all Americans were overweight and ate fast food five to seven times a week."

Kara Patterson had similar questions from her students.

"The students were fascinated with Hollywood and wanted to know if the images they saw in movies were realistic," she said. "Many were all very curious about gangs, fast food and obesity, and the military."

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