



An Introduction to N.J. Akbar: Director of Diversity Outreach & Development

In November 2012, **N.J. Akbar** joined EHHS as the Director of Diversity Outreach and Development focusing on the retention of current students of color, outreach efforts to area high schools, and other diversity efforts college-wide. His philosophy for diversity is centered on his beliefs in unity and understanding. He thinks that the goal should be less about numbers of people from different races and more about creating an environment that stimulates unity between individuals. "True beauty exists when we all come together for the growth of one another. Not in competition or in opposition of one another." **Akbar** sees this as a goal of his office's outreach for the college.

He began his career in higher education at Eastern Michigan University working with students experiencing academic difficulty. He later worked in student conduct and career advising at the University of Michigan. In July 2009, he joined Kent State University as Assistant Director of Student Success Programs in Undergraduate Studies. Additionally, **Akbar** served as Interim Director for the LGBTQ Student Center for four months in 2011-2012.

Prior to pursuing his Bachelor's Degree, he recalls being potentially a first generation college student and how scary the college search process was for him. "My parents always put the idea of college in our heads, but neither of them are college graduates themselves. They left the college applications to us; it was our future and our responsibility. They would always ask though. **Akbar** feels he was lucky to have parents who challenged him to take charge of his own future but did not back off with the questions. "I knew I had to have my facts straight for my father. He would not let me answer with 'I do not know' or 'it does not matter'. He taught me something valuable that I use in my adult life, which is to always anticipate the questions before you enter the room. By far my father is a major part of my mindset, temperament, and thirst for answers."

Unfortunately, not all students will come to EHHS with that same type of parental coaching. Many students come to college having been a child of a single parent who worked multiple jobs; some students will come to Kent State from schools where the classes were overcrowded or too many students were mainstreamed. **Akbar** says, "Our job is to try to make EHHS a comfortable place for the best of the best students, but also for those who have faced great life challenges without the support they may have needed. Our office will strive to help create that environment and provide support for our students who may need that reinforcement".

Kent State Faculty Abroad: Istanbul, Turkey

By Jen Fisette & Theresa Walton



On February 22nd, 2013, we began our voyage to Istanbul, Turkey, to work with the sport/physical education teachers, coaches, and administrators at Kent

State Koleji and Avrupa Koleji on both the European and Asian sides. We were excited and uncertain of what to expect, since this was our first time visiting Istanbul. Over the course of our 8 days there, we embarked on a personal and professional cultural journey, providing experiences we never imagined.

Throughout the week, we presented workshops that focused on: curriculum development and curriculum models, assessment in physical education, power of positive coaching, accessing student voice and sociocultural perspectives in physical education, and media literacy. In addition to the presentations, we taught model physical education lessons in numerous gymnasium settings, co-taught with the teachers, and provided professional development to the teachers. It seems too easy to capture our professional endeavors in Istanbul in two pact sentences; however, the professional development we provided does not shed light on the cultural experiences we had while working with the teachers, coaches, and administrators.

For example, neither of us had worked with interpreters prior to this visit and were unaware of what was being conveyed, how our messages and information were being given, and all that we were not informed during the translations. Early on, we interpreted the passionate and intense verbal and non-verbal communication of the Turks as if they were not pleased with our offerings, but as the week went on, we learned that the way in which they communicate is more about their culture than about what we were sharing with them. We were amazed by the lighthearted and free spirited nature of the school culture. The students had 5 to 10 minute breaks after most lessons during which the students would run and skip down the hallways or gather balls and other equipment to play recreationally outside. Not once did a teacher or administrator instruct them to stop running, to be quiet, or to control their behavior and excitement.

This was a breath of fresh air compared to most U.S. schools where students are instructed to be in lines, told not to run in the hallways, and are restricted from talking or showing any enthusiasm. We were quite surprised when we observed the physical education classes were run the opposite to the school culture – controlled, in lines, limited student interaction and self-expression. We did utilize interpreters; however, many of the students understood English and were able to follow along with our instructions. We taught them lessons that

Kent State Faculty Abroad (continued)

focused on fitness concepts and utilized critical thinking, problem-solving, and student-centered approaches to maximize student participation. The age range for the students we were teaching and working with was 1st through high school students. The teachers and administrators observed our lessons, asked us questions, and often times attempted these approaches in their lessons the following days. When we were at Avrupa Koleji – Cekmekoy the physical education teacher blasted Gangnam Style over the speaker and we performed the dance with all of the students outside at recess. We truly enjoyed working with the teachers, interpreters, and students as well as learning about their school curriculum and culture. (including eating lunch with them!).

Although we did not get much time to explore the area, we certainly maximized the limited time that we had available. We were fortunate that our hotel was located right in the historic district of Istanbul, placing us only a 5-minute walk from the Blue Mosque and the Hagia Sophia. We made sure to venture past these breath-taking architectural and cultural structures at least once every single day. Our day usually began at 5:45am, which was when we heard the first call for prayer of the day.

We frequented the plethora of little shops and the abundance of restaurants that were in the area. On our first evening, after conducting a 3-hour workshop and not having slept in over 36 hours, we went out to dinner around 7pm. The restaurant was barren and thought we might have selected the wrong eatery; however, we were unaware that most Turks in Istanbul eat dinner between 8pm and midnight and that dinnertime, along with all meals, are a special time to connect with family as well as socialize. Our dinners often lasted at least 2 hours. We never felt rushed, we were able to take our time, and had to actually ask for our check. And yes, we definitely enjoyed the Turkish tea and apple tea!

In addition to satisfying our appetites with tasty foods, we visited the Blue Mosque just before Sunday evening prayer; Hagia Sophia; the Basilica Cistern; walked over the Galata Bridge to the Galata Tower; braved ourselves through the Spice Bazaar mid-afternoon on Saturday; and had a late night cultural dinner in Taxsim with our interpreter and a couple of physical education teachers. We even went for a few runs along the Marmara Sea, where people took pictures of us and the hotel staff informed us that Turkish women would never dress like us (cropped running pants and a tech shirt).

We learned much about the Turkish culture and about ourselves on our trip to Istanbul. We are so grateful to have had the experience and hope that we will have another opportunity to visit this amazing city and country in the future.

By Jennifer Fisette and Theresa Walton
Faculty members in EHHS (TLC and FLA)

America The Classroom: Reflecting on the Experience

By ILEP Scholar Jorge Wilson



One ILEP scholar said that Ohio has two things: hard weather and warm people. It really is true. When it comes to understanding American education, we have learned about the school systems and structures. Through our partner-teachers, we have come to understand American educators. The most rewarding experience, however, may have been the opportunity to meet the students. Through observing us, talking with us, and listening to us speak our native countries and what our lives are like back home, they have demonstrated kindness, patience, and respect.

Each ILEP scholar here today came as an ambassador, as a learner, and as a teacher. The work we have accomplished and the relationships we have formed reinforce that idea. As ambassadors, we represent our nations, our culture, and our way of thinking. As students, we have sat side-by-side each other and American graduate students in academic courses; we have tried to take in as much as possible from our visits with the great public schools around Northeast Ohio. As teachers, we provided a little bit of our expertise in our respective subject matter and our culture. If you had asked me not long ago, I would never have imagined that I would teach English in America. One example of this is from our visit to a great organization that takes care of refugees. I went to this place with no idea of what I was expected to do there. So I was asked to help the English teacher. I thought to myself, "What am I going to do, my dear God!" But then, I met such nice Bhutan people when I entered the English class. That experience taught me so much, which has made me think about geography and people in a broader way, but has also made me reflect on my own story.

In short, the United States taught me about American culture by giving me the opportunity to experiencing it. But the ILEP program is not just about learning American culture. I also had the privilege of learning about my fellow participants. We have lived together and worked together. We have shared countless stories about our geography, economy, politics, and social concerns. Some of this learning came through the amazing presentations that they have done; other learning came through friendly conversation. America really is one huge classroom.