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## Teachers' travels benefit classroom experience

By Tom O'Neill Post staff reporter

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For many educators, the connection between teaching and learning isn't a straight line - it's a circle.

Teaching heightens the appreciation of learning.

Summer break arrives, you go far, far away, and then bring that new knowledge back where it belongs - to your classrooms.

That's part of what led two Kenton County teachers to spend a part of their summer traveling the world, one to Thailand, the other to Trinidad - 11,200 miles between them.

For Kember Dunn, who teaches eighth-grade math at Woodland Middle School in Taylor Mill, that meant studying Buddhist culture and forest preservation in Thailand.

For Annette Boehm, who teaches sixth-grade science at Turkey Foot Middle School, that meant doing scientific inquiries into community-based wildlife conservation in the rain forest of Trinidad. She studied how the famed blue-and-gold macaws are reintroduced into the wild, and the behavior of newborn leatherback sea turtles.

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Their trips were part of 2006 Earth Expeditions, a program for educators through Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, and the Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden.

A third Kenton teacher, Christine Hallau, will travel to the African nation of Namibia this month. Teachers from Boone County and Rising Sun, Ind., also took part in Earth Expeditions trips.

The teachers paid a part of the costs and earned tuition-free graduate credit from Miami. Teachers met with educators in their host countries, then will connect through Miami's Dragonfly Web platform for learning collaborations.

Chief among the lessons from their field research?

"We all have the same basic needs: food, shelter, the need to be accepted," Dunn, 34, said of her 12 days in Thailand, traipsing from monasteries to hilltop villages, studying the coexistence between Thai villagers and the surrounding environment.

The trip also provided a glimpse into how different our cultures are.

"They seem to have a greater sense of heritage," she said. "I have to say, one of the neat things I learned, an eye-opener, was their belief about telling stories from generation to generation. I think they seem to appreciate learning from each other, and elders."

This fall, she'll lead a mentoring program with the 6th-grade science club at Woodland, and will also plant a garden for the garden club.

She was accompanied by 12 teachers from all over the U.S., including Chicago and Louisiana. In the group was Jessica Showalter, a teacher at Ryle High School in Union.

For Boehm, the only other local person on her trip to Trinidad was Thane Maynard of the Cincinnati Zoo. Boehm, 43, spent nine days with 18 teachers and zoo and aquarium workers. She'd previously made a similar trip to Costa Rica in 2000.

The morning expeditions into the rain forest and coastlines, Boehm said, were breathtaking.

"The beauty of everything, it's quite incredible," she explained. "Bird watching was too easy, some were bright enough to be Christmas ornaments."

Dave Jenike, co-director of the Earth Expeditions and vice president of education and facilities at the Cincinnati Zoo, said Boehm's wonder is the perfect fuel to bring back to her classrooms.

"Reading about the rain forest is one thing," he said. "But it can be transformational for students to hear about the rain forest from their own teacher who's experienced it first-hand."

"It really pumps you up as a teacher," said Boehm.

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