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Home » 'Living Library'

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Students studying world language and culture at Park High School were given a unique opportunity to explore different cultures and learn about other students from different parts of the world Tuesday afternoon.

Park High student Alex Estes listens to Julio Cesar, of Brazil, left, talk about his culture and things he likes to do.

This may not seem too unusual for world history classes. However, the Park High students didn't have to open a book, listen to their teacher lecture or watch a short film to gain their knowledge.

Instead, the group met a group of exchange students from Montana State University face to face, up close and in person just down the hall in

the school's multipurpose room.

The new experience, called the Living Library, is an idea brought to the school by local architect Larry Raffety, who experienced this concept firsthand in the Peace Corps a few years ago in the Ukraine.

"It's a conversation between three Park High School students and a foreign exchange student attending MSU just talking to each other, meeting each other and discovering each other," Raffety said.

The program is a first for Park High, but not for Raffety.

"I worked on these projects in the Peace Corp in the Ukraine. We did the same thing in a city of about a million people that had all kinds of foreign students that were not connected to the

POLL

The Legislature is considering a measure that would allow police to pull over cars and ticket people just for not wearing seat belts. Do you agree with this proposal?

Yes

No

Ukrainian students," he said.

On Tuesday afternoon, up to 100 Park students split up into teams of three and were given a few minutes to interview three of the 14 exchange students who were from all over the world, including El Salvador, Brazil, Haiti, Saudi Arabia, China, Cambodia, Morocco and Ecuador.

Randy Pierre-Louis, of Haiti, talks with Park High students about the fact that her family owns land and grows rice.

"It's a great idea. It's good for getting rid of stereotypes," Park High School Principal Lynne Scalia said Tuesday. "I thought our kids might be a little bit shy, but they weren't at all. At lunch

before the event today, (Park students) came right up to the exchange students and wanted to know what was going on and why everybody didn't get a chance to talk to them."

Scalia said that the Park High kids were very enthusiastic, curious and interested in the whole idea.

Randy Pierre-Louis, of Haiti, told one group at her table that she didn't like Montana's cold climate. Pierre-Louis said her family owns rice fields and that she's learning crop management at MSU with hopes of eventually managing the fields herself.

She was also asked what kind of languages are spoken in Haiti. She explained that Haitians speak Creole and French, and that the French they speak is a different dialect than what's spoken in France.

"We asked them why they chose to come all the way to MSU, and what their culture was like and their geography," said Mary Davis, a junior at Park High.

Alex Estes, a sophomore at Park, said students asked Julio Cesar, of Brazil, if he was excited to have the World Cup come to his country.

They asked other exchange students what they did for fun with their friends and what different holidays they celebrated and what the drinking age was in their country.

Luis Sandobao, of El Salvador, brought a traditional game called a capirucho — a wooden cup with a handle, and a small ball attached to the cup by a string. The object is to flip the ball up and into the cup.

The questions were flying fast, since the groups knew they were on the clock, with a lot of laughing taking place as well.

"So when we were talking to the guy from Saudi Arabia, I asked him how he felt about the new change to allow women driving last week in his country, one if not the only country in the world where women are not allowed to drive. He joked and said that they made up a song sampling from the ol' Bob Marley tune, 'No Women no Cry,' and changed the words to, 'No Women no Drive.' We thought that was funny," Estes laughed.

There were some connections made, and maybe some friendships started, as some of the Park High students invited exchange students to return to Livingston later this month to celebrate Thanksgiving with their families.

Shawn Raecke may be reached at photo@livent.net.

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