

Child Development Research Project With Dubai

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Chris Coughlin, a child development assistant professor at Chico State, always wanted to do a research project exploring children's perceptions of war and peace throughout the world. "I realized that we didn't know much about children's attitudes toward peace," Coughlin said.

Coughlin worked for four years at Zayed University in United Arab Emirates. Coughlin designed the project to encompass three facets: children's experiences, a cultural exchange, and research by undergraduates. The director was excited about the idea and the catalyst to brand it as an honors project, Coughlin said.



Allison Schultz and Emma Nie were invited to participate in the research project because of their placement in honors classes. "It was an opportunity to apply the concepts we've learned on how a research project was done outside of just learning theory," Schultz said.

Coughlin chose Zayed University because of the current relationship between the U.S. and the Middle East. Supported by the Child Development Department Director Dr. Judy Bordin, Coughlin began contacting Zayed University professors. The project explored children's perceptions of war and peace in Chico and in Dubai. Both Chico and Dubai students worked on the project for six months. Zayed University students interviewed family members. Schultz and Nie interviewed children at Little Chico Creek Elementary School.

Both student research groups started co-developing the questionnaire the previous semester. The student researchers then collected and analyzed the data. Schultz and Nie were excited but a little nervous since they had never done anything like the research project before, but their professors had faith in them. Study provided new information for the professional community as well as a chance to meet and share cultures.

Research revealed that children here and in Dubai had similar concepts of war and peace. However, the children in Dubai were more aware of the conflict in Iraq than the children at Little Chico Creek. "Children living in the U.A.E. appear to have a more global sense of the world," Coughlin said.

The women knew a trip to Dubai was a possibility but didn't expect it. Given the success of the project, the women were invited to present their findings at the Women as Global Leaders Conference an international conference that takes place at in the United Arab

Emirates every two years. "It was amazing connecting with women and student groups," Nie said. "They are the nicest people you could possibly imagine."

The women were the only group discussing cross cultural issues and one of a few student group presenting at the conference. The attendees were from 80 countries, with various interests and backgrounds. "Many of them came up to us during the conference and said they appreciated how a western country and a Middle Eastern country came together and created a study that dealt with our future, our youth," Schultz said.

Schultz and Nie took a cultural tour of Dubai and were fascinated by the freshness of the city. "Everything has to be new," Nie said. They are constantly building. The food, the hotel, and the conference were over the top. The women saw multiple cranes grazing the sky from their hotel window highlighting Dubai's growth and expansion. However, it still is deeply rooted in its rich history. "Dubai is a city of contrast," Nie said. Some areas are new, modern, and extravagant, others older and traditional. It has places like innovative Palm Island and the traditional spice market.

Coughlin is hoping to add age groups and incorporating other areas of the world. Coughlin is interested in working with Afghanistan, Kenya, and South Korea. The research will explore the perspectives of children experiencing war, had life changes as result of war, and are threatened by war. The ultimate goal is to use the research to help children cope with war and peace experiences and for students from universities around the world to work together.

Schultz and Nie met with the Emirati women for the first time a few days before the conference. Together they refined a professional presentation and a cross-cultural bond. Schultz and Nie even went to the mall with the women from Zayed University. "The girls are just like us, giggly, happy," Schultz said. "They are the same 22, 23 year old girls we are."