



a program showcase

Dubai American Academy

by Michael Kalinowski and Maggie Graham

Located in the Al Barsha area of Dubai, United Arab Emirates, the Dubai American Academy (DAA) serves early childhood through BA and high school graduate levels. The Early Years Program includes three Pre-Kindergarten classes, nine Kinder 1 (four year olds) and Kinder 2 (five year olds) classes, and seven first grade classes. There are approximately 500 students in this culturally diverse school.

The Early Years Program uses a center-based teaching approach. Each classroom has a full-time Educational Assistant as well as English Language Learning for grade one students and English Literacy support for students in Kinder 2 and above. An Early Years coordinator adjusts the curriculum and collaborates with teachers to share ideas and promote best practice.

The curriculum includes units on travel and the world, the family unit and family background, character building, and

holidays. Through these units children begin to understand their role in the world around them. At a young age, they develop a keen sense of understanding not only for other people, but also the ways in which they should treat others. The program takes a proactive approach to fostering acceptance by teaching the children about different colors of skin, languages, and regions of the world. The families of the children in the school are very supportive of the school's philosophy. Most families encourage such beliefs in their own homes, and thus, each child is fully submerged in an all-accepting environment.

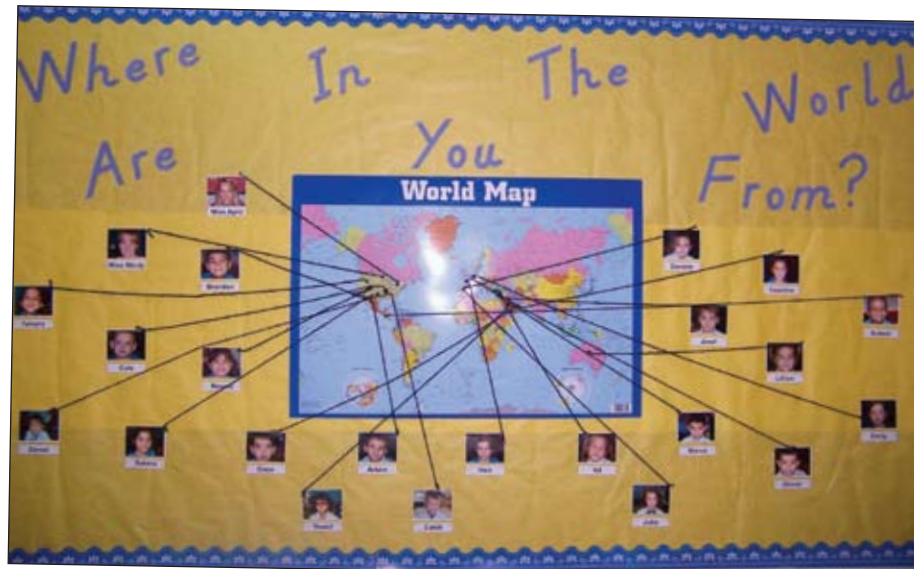
Children at DAA adjust well to new environments because they are exposed to so much diversity. There are approximately 85 nationalities represented by the students in the Early Years Program. It is due to all of these backgrounds that the school has taken the opportunity to celebrate all of the traditions possible. For example, the children learn about,



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discuss, and celebrate Ramadan, Halloween, Eid, United Nations Day, and many more. These celebrations give children the opportunity to talk about their family's culture and what it means to him/her. The open discussion philosophy that each classroom incorporates teaches the children to talk about their differences, accept each other, and appreciate the cultures of others. During Eid ul-Fitr, a Muslim holiday that marks the end of Ramadan which is the Islamic holy month of fasting, one class read a book about Eid, an Arabic word that means 'festivity.' While the book was being read, the American teacher, who was new to Dubai, was mispronouncing some Arabic words. One student raised his hand and kindly offered to help the teacher read the book to the rest of the first grade class along with the teacher. The other students in the class then proceeded to ask this particular student all kinds of questions about the holiday. This five-year-old child



was able to articulate to the class why he celebrates Ramadan and related the religion to other popular religions.

According to Simone Neilsen, former Early Years coordinator, "These children are learning to play, work, live, and grow together despite their cultural or religious differences. These children will most likely grow to continue to foster a culture of kindness among all world citizens and rise above differences."

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The Program Showcases were developed by Michael Kalinowski as a component of the World Forum on Early Care and Education.

They are intended to highlight the work of particularly interesting, unique, and/or exceptional early childhood programs around the world.

Selected programs will appear in future issues of *Exchange*, and are also available on www.ChildCareExchange.com.

