

"Mission Possible: Peace"---Peace education for primary age children at Princeton Montessori School.

By Kimcha Lim

"Mommy, I had to use the peace rose with Johnny again today!" My 5-year-old son told me with a big sigh. I had to keep myself from laughing in front of him, just because of his dramatic expression.

"Well, what happened?" I ask.

"Um, he was not listening to me."

I begin a train of thought about peace. This little soul has flourished in the beauty of the respectful, peaceful Montessori environment. We all know that Dr. Maria Montessori gave us her vision long ago. The roots that place us in a peaceful learning environment are a tribute to her fundamental work of education. With the tragedy of 9-11 and the wars in many places around the world, peace education is more essential than ever.

How do you as a parent or an educator help to promote peace within the child, between children, at school or home, and extend those ideas to the community? Remember, peace education can be started young. The key is to open the communication. The following are several methods we use at Princeton Montessori School to teach peace.

It is important to have class meetings on a regular basis. Teachers, as well as children can express their concerns and feelings. The teacher provides appropriate language skills to make sure concerns are being addressed and heard. Setting guidelines can help young children to deal with general problems, instead of finger pointing or name calling. Reading books and poems about peace is a wonderful way to begin the class meeting. We read a book "Peace is a circle of love" by Joan Walsh Anglund (Harcourt, 1993).

"Peace is for anger to go away," says a child.

"Peace is being happy and makes people happy," says another child.

These two children are the oldest in the class. They are my great

helpers in the discussions.

A class meeting held as part of a regular routine could be once a week or every other week or even once a month, depending on the needs of the classroom. We also use a peace stone as a tool to help children to solve their disputes.

"Why did you tell on me?" asks Suzy.

"Because you said I was stupid," replies Mary.

"Well, friends don't tell on each other," says Suzy

"Sometimes you have to do that," says Mary.

"I am sorry," says Suzy.

"It is OK. I know you didn't mean to, I forgive you," says Mary.

"I won't do it again," says Suzy.

They hug each other with great big smiles. A stone with "Peace" on it is what we use in our classroom. It is placed in front of our fish tank, which is the quietest spot in the class. The child who holds the peace stone is the speaker, while the other is the listener. This allows younger children to have control over whether they are in the role of the speaker or listener.

Unique and pretty objects often catch children's interest. A few examples are a peace rose in my son's class, a peace dove, a candle, a rock, a vase or a flag. This can be done under the teacher's guidance. But it's best if the children choose the peace object independently.

How does a 3-year-old learn to be silent for two minutes in class?
Silence work---The child places the sign "Silence" on a rug, legs crossed, and eyes on a sand timer. This allows the child to work on peace on his or her own.

Back massage is another great way to teach young children about caring. This is a lesson in which the teacher gives a back massage to a child, and invites him or her to give a massage to the teacher. The intention is for them to learn to take care of others, as well as themselves.

Having a teacher who can model respect, communication, grace and courtesy is the best way for children to learn about peace and cooperation. One of my colleagues has a great way to start her day in the class. All teachers and children are seated in a circle with their legs crossed holding hands. With a song,

"Hello, hello, here we meet again'

Nice to see you, nice to see you,

Join the circle with you friends,

Hold hands."

One by one, they whisper "peace" to pass on to the entire circle. At last, by counting quietly "1, 2, and 3" they all whisper "peace" together. What a beautiful sight to see all the children engaged in a mindful setting.

Nature is always a fabulous way to bring people's minds to the relaxed and spiritual level. I invite older groups of children, 5 and 6 years old, to our Yuki's garden. Yuki's garden is a Japanese garden on the school grounds. It is a place where students, families, and faculty remember loved ones. It is named after one of our former toddlers, Yuki.

The garden has a small pond surrounded by Japanese plants, perennials and rocks and even has a bamboo hut where children can go to be quiet and reflect in a peaceful. It is amazing how quickly children become calm and quiet as they walk into the garden through the gate. Teachers encourage children to write and draw reflections of their experience.

"I see fish swimming. It is a sunny and quiet day."

"I hear wind. I see clouds."

Peace is a possible mission. By talking about conflict, anger and feelings, children learn to solve problems through various peaceful ways. It is our responsibility to cultivate a peaceful environment to nurture these young minds. Our future leaders will hopefully then show people

that it is truly possible to live together in a peaceful world.

"Mommy, did you have a good day?" my 5-year-old asks me the day after he told me about the peace rose.

"Yes, my dear, how about you?" I ask him. I can't wait to hear his response.

"Oh, I had a great day. Johnny and I built a skyscraper with blocks."

I smile. The peace rose had worked again.

About the author

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