



## Reaching Peace One Child at a Time

by Jackie O'Hara

"If we are to reach real peace in the world, we shall have to begin with the children."

-- Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869 -1948)

As an early childhood teacher and director, I get the chance every day to reach for peace, at Wellfleet Montessori Preschool.

Over 100 years ago in Italy, a brave and somewhat radical woman named Maria Montessori challenged the current system of education through her observations of children.

She became the first female licensed medical doctor in Italy in 1896, and went on to develop a philosophy of education that exists to this day all over the world. She was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1952.

Her philosophy is based on the belief that we need to allow children to reach for their potential in classrooms where they can flourish academically, but also develop a sense of community and see the greater good. One way that Montessori schools do this is by teaching peace; we even have a Peace Curriculum.

At this time in our culture, we are surrounded by news of war and movies that portray violence as entertainment. This is also a time of rapid technological change in which companies market to us constantly through our screens and print media.

Although most adults are aware of this on some level, the change is happening so quickly that we often forget we're consumers of these images. Our children also absorb them, and it's difficult to find ways to actively block it.

How can we be conscious consumers when everything is happening so fast? How can we be a voice for change? As adults, how can we make daily choices that make us role models for our children and the children in our communities?

One of the things that attracted me to Montessori education was the chance to teach global awareness and conflict resolution to children at a very young age. We have geography curriculum where children learn about the seven continents and the languages, arts and food from various cultures.

At Wellfleet Montessori Preschool, we have a "Peace Corner" where children can go to "be peaceful." In that corner is a soft chair, peace pillows and many small objects of peace such as a heart shaped stone, a small bell and a beautiful kaleidoscope. This is not a "time out," it's "time in."

Children choose to go there when they are upset so they can follow their feelings through to resolution in their own processing time, rather than having adults impose the process.

Another tool we have is the "Peace Rose." The red silk rose always sits in its vase on a shelf at child height. If two children have a "Big Problem," one can get the rose and carry it to speak with the other child. The one holding the rose speaks, then passes it to the other and listens. Speak, listen, speak, listen.

With guidance the children soon do this by themselves. We start to hear them working out their own conflicts as the year progresses, by themselves.

At holiday times, we study multicultural holidays and use world maps, art and music to teach that there are different ways for communities to celebrate. We put up a "Peace Tree" and the children decorate it with hearts or doves to emphasize the peace of all celebrations.

When I was in my twenties and thirties, obtaining my education and developing my career, I had visions of being able to make a difference in the world. I've always been an idealist and am passionate about human injustice, pollution and war. Although it may be politically unfashionable, I believe in peace.

As I've gotten older, I have begun to see that "making a difference" is not going to mean I will affect large groups of people from a wide platform. I am not going to write an award-winning play or life-changing song; I am not a spiritual leader or politician.

I am a preschool teacher. Every day at work I have a chance to work with very young children. I show children there are other ways of being in the world besides computer games, movies and internet shopping.

I offer guidance in conflict and give opportunities to practice peacemaking. I encourage children to make eye contact and "use their words" to speak up when they need to. I offer in-depth lessons on global cultures so children can glimpse beyond their local horizons.

In this small way, we hope all of our children can make a difference someday too.

**WELLFLEET  
MONTESSORI  
PRESCHOOL**

**OPEN HOUSE**

**January 26, 2013**

**2-4pm**

**100 Lawrence Road Wellfleet**

**[www.wellfleetmontessori.com](http://www.wellfleetmontessori.com)**

**508-349-6252**

**Ages 2.9-5**



Jackie O'Hara is a Teacher and Director of Wellfleet Montessori Preschool. She has a background as a Child and Family Therapist and is a certified Children's Yoga Teacher.

In addition to working with children for years, Jackie has worked as a naturalist and loves the outdoors. She lives in Brewster with her husband, two teenaged sons and Black Lab.

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