

Interfaith Projects at Woodheys Primary School



In February this year Laura Daniels, Headteacher of Woodheys Primary School in Sale, Cheshire, presented Archbishop Desmond Tutu with a beautiful photograph of children's hands all on top of each other all wearing Peace Mala (see below for the picture and a description of the Peace Mala) bracelets with Desmond Tutu's rainbow quote underneath. He absolutely loved the concept and said this was almost a concrete image of his rainbow vision:

Laura Daniels with Archbishop Desmond Tutu and South African charity workers

'At home in South Africa I have sometimes said in big meetings where you have black and white together.... 'Look at your hands – different colours representing different people.

You are the rainbow people of God. '

***And you remember the rainbow in the Bible is the sign of Peace. The rainbow is the sign of prosperity. We want Peace, prosperity and justice and we can have it when all the people of God, the rainbow people of God, work together.'* Desmond Tutu 1991**

During a four hour stop over in Cape Town, Laura, who has always had an interest in labyrinths, was able to walk the labyrinth at St Georges Cathedral with the new dean, Rowan Smith. After this Laura and Rowan Smith set up an email correspondence during which Laura asked him if he thought Desmond Tutu would be interested in the Peace Mala project. Rowan responded enthusiastically that he was sure Desmond Tutu would be interested. This resulted in the presentation of the Peace Mala photograph on February 6th 2009.

The Promotion of Interfaith at Woodheys Primary School

Woodheys Primary School strongly promotes and Interfaith approach and has an Interfaith section with six major faiths represented. There is also some beautiful Interfaith art work in school. As a result of this emphasis on Interfaith the school is attracting more families from different cultures. 35% of the families in the school now come from multi-cultural backgrounds, compared with an average of 5% in other nearby schools. Laura makes a point of going to places of worship with families from her school and visits them in their homes. She has been collecting information from the different places of worship, interacting with their faith leaders and obtaining pictures of each leader wearing a Peace Mala.



Woodheys has been part of a British Council funded 3 year project with two schools in Durban, South Africa. Gordon Road Independent Girls School and Vumokuhle, a large primary school with over 900 pupils in the Township of Umlawzi. These contrasting schools form a very strong 'triangle' of mutual support – to the extent that, three years on into the project, all three schools have adopted the U.K's motto TEAM 'Together Everyone Achieves More'.

In 2007 the school was awarded 1st in the U.K for Energy Conservation. The £15,000 prize money was presented at the Ashden Awards in London to the Headteacher Laura Daniels by her environmental 'hero'

Al Gore. In her acceptance speech, Laura thanked Al Gore and people like him for activating 'Positive Energy' around the globe, in order to help preserve Mother Earth for future generations. She also highlighted the crucial importance of education; as the words of the song go:

***'The children are our future,
Teach them well and let them lead the way!'***

In 1982, Al Gore, in his book 'Earth in the Balance', recognised that the root of the problems mankind is now facing stems from a lack of engagement with 'spirituality and nature.'

In March, Laura Daniels presented to the British Council International Climate Change Champions about the important work that the youth of today face regarding sustainable issues. Laura Daniels and Freda Eyden (Environmental Co-ordinator) shared these concerns and have drawn these strands together in ways which have brought the school and its successful teaching methods to national and international prominence.

Through a three year teaching exchange with the British Council this union is now shared with the two schools in Durban and good practice shared. The Environmental link has now shifted towards multi-faith collaboration due to the installation of a J.P. Joule Positive Energy Labyrinth' which was opened on the 23rd May with a ceremony which reflected the gathering which the Pope held in Assisi, Italy in 1986. All the faith leaders from the world's major religions gathered to say their own prayer for Global Peace. As Laura Daniels noted at the Woodheys ceremony, if you remove words such as 'God' and 'Allah', the thoughts and words are almost identical. There are far more similarities than differences between faiths.

The Peace Mala Bracelet

The Peace Mala comprises of 14 rainbow coloured beads with a central white bead. The beads represent the major faiths and spiritual paths and their peace messages for the world – again all very similar. 'Treat other as you would like them to treat you'. The central white bead represents the uniqueness of you the wearer.



Finally all the beads are pulled together with a clear bead, which represents unity and harmony. The rainbow is an important symbolic link between heaven and earth in many cultures. The Peace Mala represents friendship, respect and peace between the faiths and all people in our world.

In July 2008, the Woodheys school were delighted to hear that they had jointly won the Peace Mala Junior Youth Awards and would attend the award ceremony in Cardiff at the Temple of Peace on 17th September.

Two staff from the Durban school were invited to work with Woodheys pupils on Peace projects and on setting up a 'Peace Council' with badges representing the Peace Mala Dove. Gordon Road School already had a 'Peace Council' and their staff trained the Woodheys pupils in mediating skills and

This is the picture presented to Desmond Tutu.

conflict resolution. The children also, through Skype, had an opportunity to speak 'face to face' about common issues.

Laura is a passionate advocate of the spiritual power made available to users of the Labyrinth which she distinguishes from a maze - 'a Labyrinth is designed to find yourself'. In 2008 Gordon Road School raised the money to build their own Labyrinth and Laura was able to give them more information about how Labyrinths release the right hand creative side of the brain, which links with the work which the Headteacher of Gordon Road, Mrs. Yvonne Johnstone, does in the area of emotional intelligence.

For further information about Woodheys Primary School and the Peace Mala project please visit the websites below:

contemplation

www.woodheysprimaryschool.co.uk / www.peacemala.org.uk

