

Dean Educates

NOT ONLY COLLEGE STUDENTS ON IMPORTANT LIFE LESSONS, BUT ALSO NEARBY PRE-SCHOOL STUDENTS

Dean College instructor Paula Waite '78 has successfully taught others how to resolve conflict: First, remain calm; second, make sure everyone is heard; third, choose a solution together; and finally, be prepared for follow-up and support.

Does Waite instruct diplomats or business leaders? No, she works with preschoolers at the Dean College Children's Center.

The 25-year teaching veteran is assistant director of the school and is a graduate of Dean and Framingham State College. Her three children, now grown, also attended the Children's Center.

"What I see is that what works to solve problems and resolve conflicts with preschoolers, works for all age groups, including adults," she explains. "We get testimonials from parents that this approach works for them in family situations, and that children who know the technique are well prepared for elementary school."

Kate Barba, a registered nurse at Massachusetts General Hospital and a Franklin resident, sent her two children to the Center.

"We found this curriculum very helpful to both of my children," she says. "It really focused on their social skills as they entered school."

All of the educators at the Children's Center are educators in the High Scope curriculum. "All of the children and teachers use the same approach over and over again, and it works," she explains. "What I especially like is that the Center is a laboratory school connected with the College. The Dean students bring so much energy and enthusiasm to the classrooms, and Dean's international students who work at the Center bring some additional diversity to this program."

Barba also notes that all of the preschool teachers are always up-to-date on the latest literature and research, and the school's director shares that with parents.



In the photo above Faith Nickolas works with children in the Center.

On the left is Paula Waite '78 teaching two young children how to resolve conflict.



"What frequently happens with children in different settings, is that the adult supervising them thinks it will be easier to just solve the problem, rather than letting this be a learning opportunity for children to learn how to negotiate the problem," says Waite. "We encourage the children to bring up issues, to state what is happening, and to work together to hear everyone's suggestions for a solution."

The school staff works to develop empathy through this technique. "We want the children to look at how others feel and identify their own feelings. Children are very capable and eager to use the technique," says Waite. "Once they are familiar with the process, and they've seen how well it works, they use it themselves. We guide and facilitate the problem-solving at the Children's Center, including asking the children to come up with the solutions."

One goal at the Center is that when the children leave and go to elementary school, they are able to solve problems without an adult.

"Of course not everything is an open discussion," says Waite. "Respect and safety are key, and unkind words or destruction of materials is not allowed nor tolerated. You get to know the children's physical and intellectual capabilities, and you create the expectation for them to come up with a solution. Even very young children can be taught this method." ¶