

Non-Violent Communication (NVC) in Schools

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Introduction:

A 'Teacher' is one who moulds the child predominantly and has always been a confidant-support. In the process of developing and mentoring children, a teacher performs variety of roles and tends to face work-conflict due to incompatible role pressures from various role senders: co-teacher, head-teacher, community, parent, and child. The teacher should develop a platform for self and others with an opportunity to exchange honestly. Communication plays the key role as the binder.

Purpose of communication:

The purpose of communication between a teacher and student is normally to

1. Express one's emotions
2. Get things done
3. Pass on or obtain information
4. Make decisions.

The goal is to develop relationships, and have a joint understanding between the sender and receiver. The crux is speaking

and listening to drive the messages.

A teacher in pursuance of role responsibilities encounters various situations leading to conflict and non-violent communication (NVC) can come handy.

Non-violent communication:

NVC is an approach of communicating from the heart, to prosper, with an ultimate goal to generate beautiful connections with people around one, and have compassionate exchanges. The approach helps one to discover by heart whether one has the willingness to enhance the wellbeing of all around him. There are four components of NVC: observation, feelings, needs and request for action.

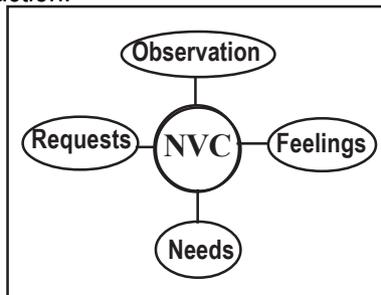


Fig 1. Components of NVC

NVC aims at attaining a peaceful state of being, where there is a natural sense of serving without any fear of punishment, with a hope for reward, and out of duty or guilt supported by the existing literature in the internet, literature of national and international conferences.

How a teacher can build NVC:

Field-based illustrations are presented below to highlight how the teaching community can build a wall of NVC. The four different Illustrations given below enable a teacher to visualize multiple work-role relationships with colleagues, superiors, students and their parents for understanding NVC.

1. Observation

Observation is the first step in communication, where one happens to see, hear and notice something. In the process, it is but common that one tends to make *judgements*, and starts to *evaluate*. While doing so, thus, one begins to “get disconnected” and/or “starts to *label*” someone as “good or bad”. A strong belief that bad ones “must be *punished*” grows within oneself. Because we want to condition the behaviour as we do not want to face them. The second factor disconnecting a teacher from student is *denial of responsibility*. When

someone misbehaves, one tends to confront with the inappropriate behaviour and develop negative feelings affecting one’s own self-esteem.

Illustrative transaction-1: In a boarding school a 10th grade boy and a 9th grade girl are seen together often. One day the boy comes closer to the girls’ hostel and opens the gate to enter. The warden (class-teacher of the boy and subject teacher of the girl) stops the boy at the compound and asks him to go back to his hostel. The boy argues and leaves red-faced. In the process of exit, he bangs the door, rushes out, pushes a two-wheeler parked in front of the gate and shouts at the teacher. The girl just keeps herself engaged with others in playing and ignores what has happened. The teacher asks the girl the reason for her closeness with the boy. The girl replies that he is from the village and the families are related.

Analysis:

In a conflicting situation, the teacher or student should be able to communicate if their action is life supportive or not. The success lies in how far one is able to stay without mixing one’s words with evaluation.

When Illustration-1 was given for a role-play to discuss how one observes, the following phrases of expressions were elicited. A few spontaneous phrases, which depict one’s judgement and evaluative quality are (shown in brackets) presented here:

- *“The boy is poor in studies” – (judgemental)
- *“He will be fined if he is not apologizing” (punishment comes in)
- *“What if my superior finds fault in me?” (Investigation)
- *“I warned the boy because I had to” – (impersonal forces)
- *“I scolded him because he violated the norms of the hostel” – (action of others)
- *“Does the other hostel also have such problems” (comparison)
- *“He thinks he is a hero” (labelling)
- *“I did it because I am also a parent” – (social roles)
- *“They will elope one day” – (exaggeration)

Teacher’s empathy:

Here both the teacher and student are responsible for their own thoughts, feelings and actions. Language matters here for expressing. It is an assumption that

NVC comes handy for the teacher. Imagine, instead of above phrases, how it would have been if the teacher has expressed -“I opted to talk with the students and watched them the entire week just because I wanted to help the children”. Here a teacher is expressing empathy, and this is one of the pillars of NVC too.

Conflicts:

Normally while communicating one tends to convey the desires as demands. A demand always breeds supremacy and influence. A teacher will vary by culture due to differences. Always a demand from a teacher will instil fear of punishment, and subordination by a student. If a teacher orders, “You should not enter the girl’s hostel” it sounds like a forceful language with a demand. This probably stimulates the boy to react differently and use improper language. In alternate, if the teacher has an expression of “I would prefer you to sit in my room and discuss because I respect hostel norms” again this is a sample of NVC.

Social sanctions:

Reward and punishment are the most commonly used weapons to govern the society. This is also a symbol of life alienating communication. The scope to breed

sanctions is more in schools. Instead of above judgements and 'evaluating-words' imagine how our school will be if one is trained to say, "I would like to orient children about hostel norms, once again, because I respect child-rights as much as organisation norms".

Dispassionate observation:

Teachers should unwind themselves from the conditioning behaviour. Most of the behaviours and practices acculturated are due to our biased observation, due to lack of reasoning, and avoidance of any type of role conflicts. Most importantly, if teachers could weed out dialogues of "children will never listen", "they can't", "the generation is like this" they will see a lot of goodness in them and in others. To begin with, honing the skill to distinguish observation from evaluation and judgements is the key to find "what is alive in oneself".

2. Feelings

Most of us are in this syndrome of feelings-mismanagement. To manage feelings, one has to be skilful to deal with self, others and situation. Teachers are more affected as high expectations from various stakes are arrowed towards them. A teacher obviously will feel "happy" when a student wins a trophy and be

"depressed" when incidences of abuse prevail. A clear expression of one's own feeling without mixing up with thought and opinion is an important ingredient in NVC.

Illustration-2: A teacher of a reputed boarding school holds multiple tasks including website maintenance. There is a timeline for uploading the announcements of various events of the month. Due to work overload and genuine reasons, the teacher now and then skips the timeline by a few hours to two days at the maximum.

The art of insulation:

Distinguishing the expressions of actual feelings from words, and statements describing thoughts, opinions, evaluations and interpretations, is an art by itself. The impression collected out of our discussion with all levels of staff is given below here. The objective was to make one understand how one tends to share thoughts, opinions, and expressions with words. The expressions with a mixture of feelings and thought (shown in the brackets) are:

- * "I feel he should know it is only my obligatory role" (I think)
- * "I feel hurt and helpless" (feelings)
- * "I think the job is thankless" -

(thought)

* "I feel scared when his eyes turn red" – (feeling)

* "I think he does not like people from this state" – (opinion)

* "I feel he wants to give this task to 'X' teacher," (think)

Analysis:

In the course of discussion, there were interesting insights from all segments emphasizing how it is important to differentiate those words expressing feelings, and those describing what one thinks of self. "I feel I am incompetent to do multiple tasks" (opinion on one's own ability) and "I feel aloof from the process of work" (feelings) were some more points of view of a few more teachers.

A teacher must learn to view one's own feelings and that of others evaluating her. When the teacher says, "I think he/she does not like any of my jobs" she is already getting into the thinking process from the superior's shoes as how the superior is evaluating or estimating him/her.

In the above illustration if a teacher says "I feel subjugated" then she is only expressing her opinion about the superior's attitude. If she mentions, "I feel targeted" again, she is only interpreting the action of her superior. If she quotes, "When you

don't criticise me, I am overwhelmed" then it is a feeling. This will opportune both the superior and the teacher to explore compassionate connections. One has to master vocabularies (one of the strong prescriptions of NVC), and teachers are more blessed to do so by virtue of their profession.

3. Needs

Illustration 3: In a single-teacher village school, the community finds the school noon meal centre and development of the children are not well. Most of the days the perishable commodities of the noon meal centre go waste and thrown into the dustbin. Fifth grade children are unable to read and write basic alphabets. Most of the days parents and teachers were not sure if the school will be opened or not. The parents who are mostly dependent on daily wages, experience difficulties and dilemma to either leave the children alone in the village or go for their daily labour.

Needs, the third component assumes that there is always a giver and taker with positive and negative connotations. As per the literature on NVC, this is emotional slavery and emotional liberation. Where ever one is dominant there will be

someone to subordinate. The school and the community are good examples where both of them have common needs for fulfilment. Both visualize their needs and have a pleasure of giving in to the other.

Analysis:

In the process of moving away from emotional slavery to emotional liberation, one tends to experience three different stages of relating with others. At first, one may hold oneself accountable for the sad feelings of others where guilt and fear come in and this is emotional slavery. Second stage is an awkward scenario of one detaching from the feelings of others and shy away from shouldering the responsibility. Third is where one attempts to set aside feelings and accept to respond to the needs of others out of compassion.

In the illustration-3, if the teacher fixes self as responsible for the plight of the school and the children, she may express "I feel humiliated when the entire community is waiting to fight with me". Second, it may toss both the teacher and members of the community in an awkward position of shouting, abusing, fault-finding and fighting. One has to identify the root cause of one's own feelings and not hang over with external stimuli and blame one another.

Nevertheless, one should ask oneself if needs of anyone be fulfilled by this act? The same teacher with compassion and in alignment with the community's needs may express "I am happy that you are voicing it out as I am overloaded with my role and I am in need of support". Here lies the beauty of NVC that one can visualize oneself.

Collaborative approach:

The key message here is both the teacher and the members of the community should be clear that both have different needs and were attempting to attain the result at the cost of one another. In addition, both have to realize that only honesty and integrity will enable to fulfil mutual needs.

Both of them have to introspect objectively. Here it is neither the teacher's fault to remain a single-teacher of the school nor the parents' fault of sending their kids to this school.

When both understand the truth of their plight, without mixing hard feelings and abusive languages, they will be able to honour each other's position. When there is an understanding, obviously compassion to work jointly for peace arrives in all situations.

4. Request:

The fourth step of NVC is to explore what will make life wonderful. In this phase, one makes a specific request to the other person as well as is empowered to make one's life more wonderful. Here the onus is on oneself to use positive languages and to place clear-cut request to the other person. One has to train oneself here to spell clearly what one wants from others rather than does not want. By this fourth stage, a person should be conscious of their needs and make genuine requests. A teacher should be able to make a clear request and one must be sure that it is not a demand in the eyes of other. We shall take illustration-4 for discussion.

Illustration-4: As part of our initiatives to promote joyful learning to kindergarten and primary schools, we had series of workshops on joyful learning methods. The method of 'game way' and 'learning by doing' is provided along with supply of lots of teaching materials like charts, papers and other relevant stationery. Not all staff got an opportunity and only a few of them underwent training.

We wanted to find out the perception of the school on the

teaching methodology. Our follow up discussions explored some insights of NVC. For example, a few teachers did mention their views on the joyful method of teaching pedagogy used by fellow-teacher in the following way:

- * "As a teacher, all should follow same pedagogy" (Discrimination)
- * "There is no need to do for the sake of pleasing children" (Spite)
- * "These are new learning phobia" (Suspicion)

Analysis:

Here, an untrained co-teacher will not be able to visualise how this new pedagogy or change of pedagogy will bring some positive changes in children. It is also probable that the teacher who complains do not know about various pedagogies including joyful learning methods. If genuine, she would try to explore how the pedagogy helps children. In private discussion with a few teachers we found that there were some improvements in the response, though vaguely, towards expression of their needs. One mentioned that "good, I want the class room to be a usable room". However, the request could have been more specific. What we expect in NVC form is one to say "after the class with play-way methodology, the cut pieces of

papers are to be thrown in the dustbin, the charts stuck on the blackboards to be removed for her to start classes and classroom be rearranged in routine pattern”.

Conclusion:

The above are some initiatives to make the life of teachers and students pleasant. Joint workshops for children and teachers are needed

to check how one can modify their communication style. This travel will definitely be successful and our future research will enable the teaching and student community to lead a peaceful life. Teachers can begin to research by reading literature, pursuing courses and practising NVC in life to make it more realistic and successful.

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