

The Compassionate Classroom



Assessing the impacts of Nonviolent Communication



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Overview

- Project description
- Training content
- Test results
- Interview results
- Conclusion



Compassionate Classroom Project Description

Purpose: Assess Nonviolent Communication as a practical tool for increasing student capacities for engaging both honesty & empathy

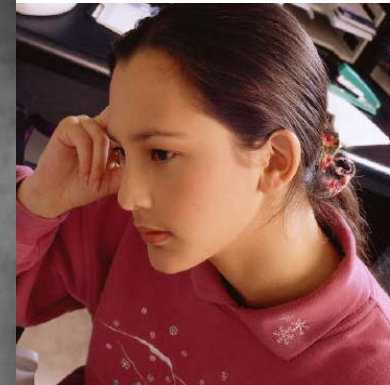
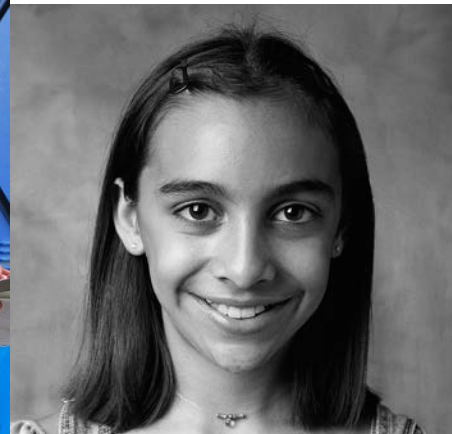
- Based on the Nonviolent Communication model (Rosenberg, 2003) for conflict resolution & empathy development.
- 12-hour interactive curriculum adaptable to participant concerns and circumstances (1.5 hrs/week over 8 weeks).
- 2 different surveys were administered to the participant and control groups 1 week before the training period and again 1 week after the training period. Specifically, a training content comprehension test “Total Honesty/ Total Heart”, and a “School Climate Survey”



Demographics (Grade 7: 13-14 year-old age cohort)

- **Participants:** 29 students, (25 South- & East-Asian Canadian, 3 First Nations Canadian, & 1 Euro-Canadian).
- **Control Group:** 29 students (28 South- & East-Asian Canadian, & 1 Euro-Canadian). No NVC training.

Both elementary schools are located in Vancouver BC





Compassionate Classroom – Content

- **Basic Nonviolent Communication Skill Development**
 1. **HONESTY:** Observations distinct from evaluation;
Feelings distinct from thoughts;
Needs distinct from strategies; and
Requests distinct from demands
 2. **EMPATHY:** for the Feelings and Needs others, and for oneself.
- **Engaging Nonviolent Communication Skills To:**
 - Resolve conflict, diffuse tension, and prevent violence;
 - Take responsibility for one's own thoughts, feelings, needs, & actions;
 - Express appreciation & regret in ways that build mutual-respect.



Nonviolent Communication Model

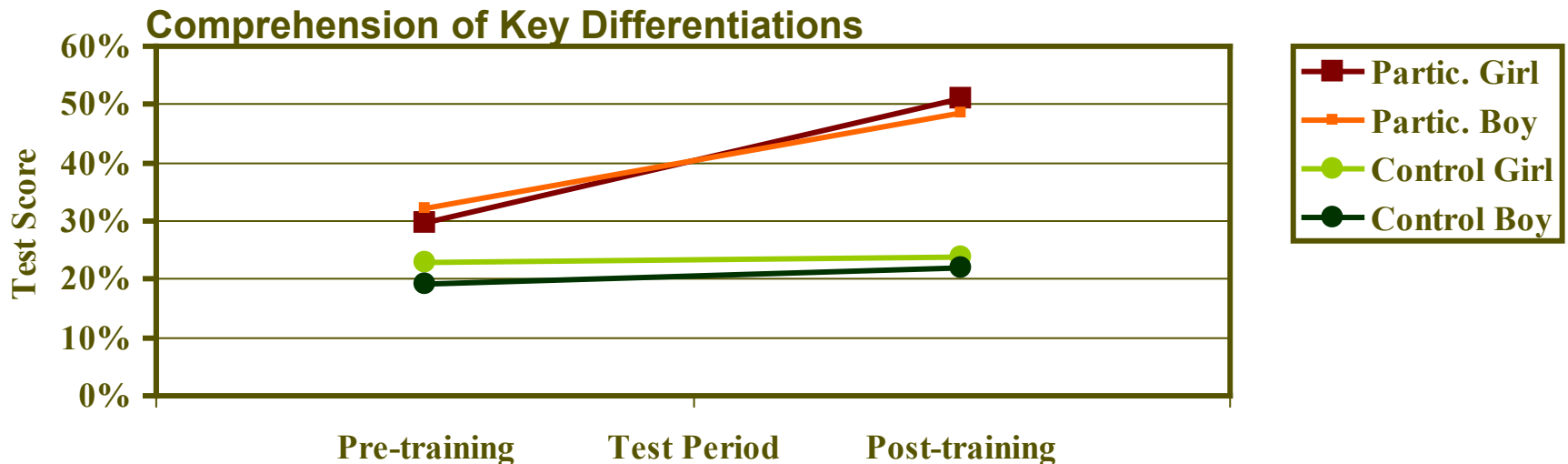
A dynamic interplay between honesty & empathy, as outlined by Rosenberg (2003):





Total Honesty/ Total Heart Skill Comprehension Test – Key Differentiations

- The participant students show increased understanding of the key differentiations identified by the Nonviolent Communication model (ex. Observation vs. evaluation; feeling vs. thought; need vs. strategy; request vs. demand). The control group students show no significant change in comprehension.



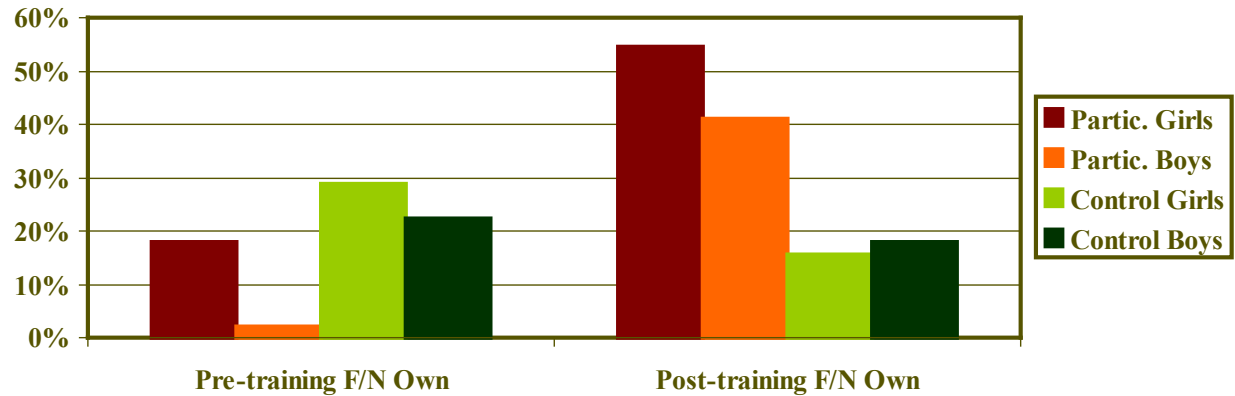


Total Honesty/ Total Heart

Skill Comprehension Test – Identifying Feelings and Needs

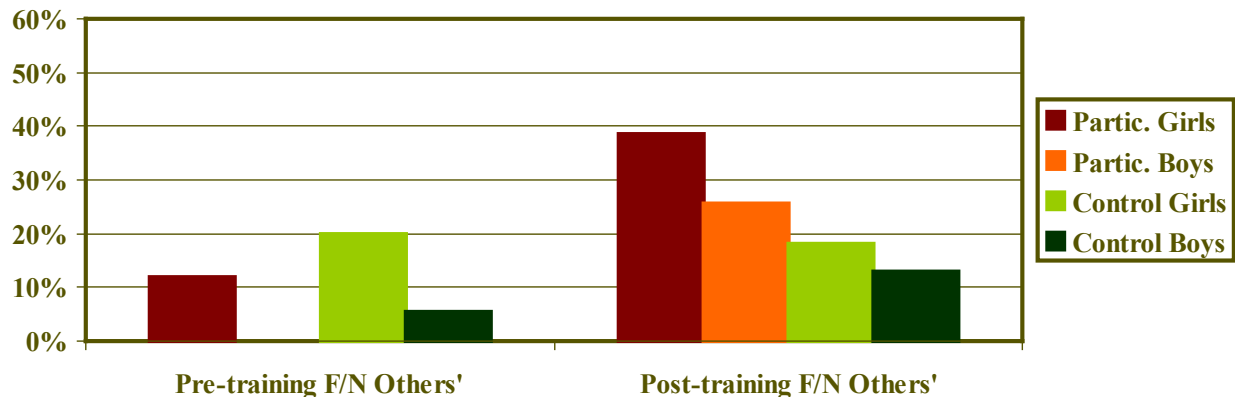
Self-empathy score:

- Only the participant students show an increased ability to identify their own feelings and needs.



Empathy score:

- Only the participant students show an increased ability to guess another's feelings and needs.

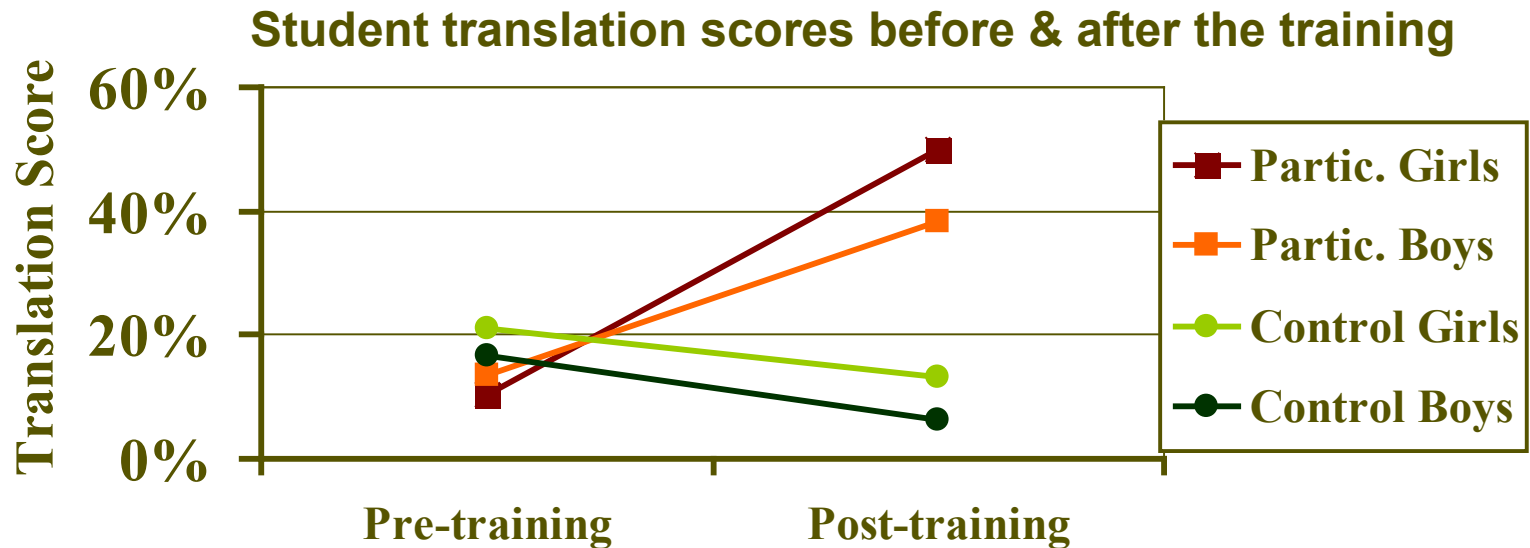




Total Honesty/ Total Heart

Skill Comprehension Test – Translating thoughts to feelings & needs

- Only the participant students show an increased ability to translate thoughts (ex. ignored) into feelings and needs (ex. feel sad/need attention, feel relief/need space).





Total Honesty/ Total Heart Skill Comprehension – Average Overall Test Scores

Control Group

	Pre-training	Post-training
Control Girls	22.81%	18.25%
Control Boys	16.67%	14.98%

Participant Group

	Pre-training	Post-training
Participant Girls	19.03%	48.33%
Participant Boys	16.45%	40.89%

- The average comprehension score increase for participant girls is **29%**
- The average comprehension score increase for participant boys is **25%**

The changes measured by the Total Honesty/ Total Heart Skill Comprehension Test have been identified as statistically significant by the University of Victoria Statistical Consulting Centre.



Summary of Total Honesty/ Total Heart Test

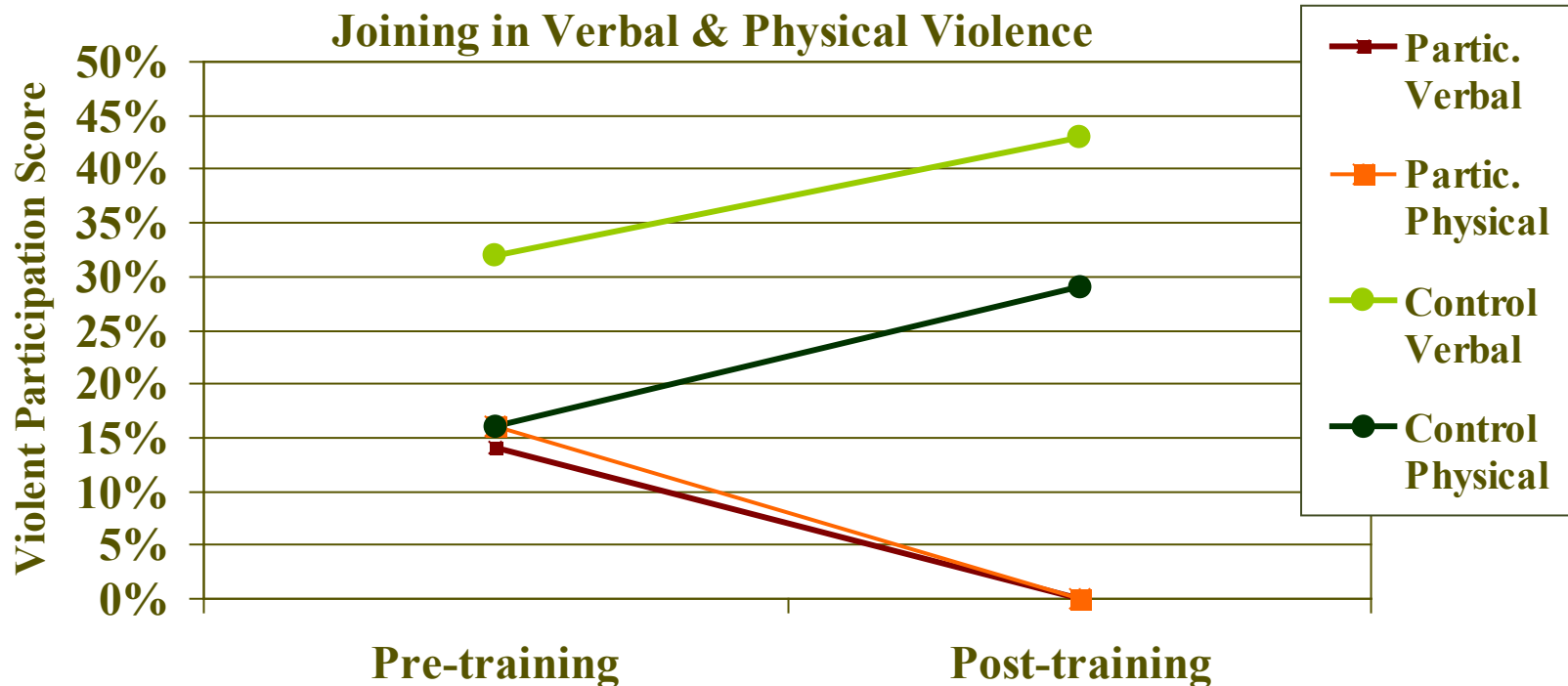
- Participant boys and girls showed statistically significant increases in their knowledge of key concepts and their capacities to engage both self-empathy and other empathy. They also showed a significant increase in their ability to translate thoughts into feelings and needs.
- The skills comprehension survey demonstrates an average comprehension score increase of 29% for girl participants and 25% for boy participants. The Permutation non-parametric testing undertaken by the University of Victoria Statistical Consulting Centre indicates that these results are statistically significant.



School Climate Survey (descriptive statistics)

Joining in when witnessing Violence

Participant students show decreased likelihood to join in when they witness violence, while control group students show increased likelihood to join in when they witness violence.





Summary of Test & Survey Findings

- The Total Honesty/ Total Heart Skills Comprehension Test demonstrates an average score increase of 29% for girl participants and 25% for boy participants, and these results are shown to be statistically significant.
- The School Climate Survey demonstrates a notably increased capacity and willingness on the part of participants to say “Stop,” to request peaceful peer support, to inquire about peer well-being, and to ask for adult help, whether witnessing/experiencing verbal or physical violence.
- The School Climate Survey demonstrates that participants’ desire to hit decreased by 46% for girls & 48% for boys, while the control group boys experienced a 24% increased desire to hit classmates.
- The School Climate Survey demonstrates that participants’ actual contribution to witnessed verbal violence decreased by 14%, and decreased by 16% for joining in witnessed physical violence. The control group’s actual contribution to witnessed verbal violence increased by 11%; and it increased by 13% for physical violence, over the same period.



Interview Findings

Level of interest after the training period

12/13 Students were more interested after the training because:

- The bullying decreased & there were fewer mean remarks in the class
- There had been new ideas & more learning than expected.
- The idea of feelings and needs was appealing
- The concept of empathy was appealing, especially the way it was presented
- They learned how to solve real-life problems
- They learned to stop and think (when mad) about the other's feelings and needs
- They learned how to express genuine regret

Male participant: “The best thing was: instead of getting mad, stopping and thinking what the other person’s going through. Empathy. Sometimes you just get mad, and now instead of letting it get worse, I go and say sorry & say what I regret (like with my brother when we’re yelling at each other).”

Male participant: “Empathy [is useful], ‘cause you try to think what the other person is going through & then it doesn’t go to violence so much, & you don’t fill up with hate anymore.”



New thoughts about conflicts, arguments, & fights

12/13 Students think differently about conflict/ arguments/ fights because of the training. The students refer to the course material regularly. They use the term “Giraffe” as a code for invoking awareness about language use and behaviour choices, as well as for inviting compassion & peaceful conflict resolution.

The students report the following new thinking as a result of the training:

- Thinking about what others’ feelings and needs are
- Responding with empathy
- To apologize after doing something, even if it takes some time
- Pausing and not saying anything, instead of getting into the old fights and mean comments.
- Stepping in, to stop fights
- Pausing as a group when there’s a conflict
- Listening to the thoughts, feelings, & needs on all sides of a conflict
- Choosing to get along instead of “getting back at people”
- That you can be at peace with people who aren’t your friends
- More choices/options for solving problems
- Self-empathy
- More confidence going to an adult for help



10/13 Students feel differently about conflict, arguments, & fights because of the training.

Female Participants:

- “Before, I would not settle fights peacefully. But now I will, and I do settle it peacefully. I feel more satisfied settling fights this way.”
- “Before, there weren’t as many options. I was frustrated. Instead of thinking things through, I’d use the easiest way, like names, arguing, whatever. Afterwards, now I think more before I act. I feel more relaxed and confident.”

Male participants:

- “Before, there was pushing and swearing. They would’ve called them for a big fight after school and called in their friends. Other classes still do that a lot. There are still some in our class, but there’s been a big change. The people in our class who used to bully are stopping and trying to be more understanding. I’m more confident asking what’s going on for the other person too and asking for help.”
- “Before, if someone kept on bugging, you’d say ‘stop’ or tell a teacher, and they still don’t stop. So you’d use violence ‘cause it’s the only way they’d learn. Now, I always stand up for myself first, then tell an adult. I can kind of ask more for what I need & say what’s happening – ask to talk to the bully. I don’t want to judge him by his actions, I want to know what’s going on inside. Maybe get a teacher to help so I can talk to him.”



Feelings participant students report when they think of conflict, arguments, & fights:

Pre-training	Post-training
Scared	Confident
Upset	Satisfied
Angry	Relaxed
Frustrated	Sad
Mad	





New Behaviour

11/13 Students report acting differently as a result of the training.

New behaviour reported by the students includes:

- Asking what's going on & being curious when there's a conflict
- Asking a teacher to help them understand each other
- Thinking happier thoughts & feeling confident
- Stepping in when there's a conflict, saying "Stop," and guessing at the feelings & needs.
- Listening to requests
- Staying calm in the face of insults
- Pausing and then avoiding saying mean things



Participant comments about new behaviour

Female Participants:

- “I settle things nicely, with empathy. I listen to both sides and sometimes if it is too difficult to understand, I go to an adult (like a teacher).”
- “I try to understand more”
- “Instead of just yelling ‘Stop,’ I’ll say why I want them to stop – the feelings and the needs.”

Male Participants:

- “I used to verbally say mean things, but [the instructor] has been talking about what the other person feels, like, maybe there’s been a problem at home. Now saying mean things upsets me, so I don’t want to anymore.”
- “Now people don’t fight and push as much. There are hardly any fights now. For example, if I take someone’s pencil, instead of keeping it and fighting, I just give it back when they make the request to have it back.”
- “If a person says something, I don’t push them or say mean things back. I stop and speak in a calm way.”



Practical applications of NVC:

12/13 Students report actively and effectively engaging the concepts taught during the training.

NEW Post-training concepts engaged	Vs. OLD pre-training responses
Using the code word "Giraffe"	Fighting back
When fighting with a sibling, stopped and connected with each person's feelings and needs	Fight until a parent intervenes
Peacefully solved a conflict with a friend, took responsibility for actions, expressed regret & apology	Fussing, crying and getting mad, then not talking to each other
Dialogue – talking it out with classmates	Arguing verbal fight with name-calling & swearing
Accepting people the way they are	Labeling, shaming, name-calling, & ganging-up
As a 'Peer Helper' focusing mediation on feelings, needs and empathic listening	Peer mediation focused on compromise and who is in the 'right'
Clearly representing own feelings and needs with extended family members and taking the time to connect with theirs.	Bickering & yelling.



Practical applications of training concepts

Female participants:

- “When I was arguing with my friend we talked it out peacefully and solved it. I said things like: ‘Maybe I have something to do with this problem, I want to take the time to think it through. Then I apologized when I figured out my responsibility in the argument. Before, I would fuss about, I might cry or just get really mad at people and ignore them.’”
- “Two kids were fighting and I asked one to tell the other what they wanted. I used feelings and needs with them but in an easier language.”

Male participants:

- “I used to lock my sister in the bathroom closet when she bugged me. Now I tell her to ‘Stop’ and say what my needs are, or I just ignore it until she’s tired of bugging me - I realized how scary it was for her.”
- “I went to my cousin’s house and he was yelling at me, so I yelled back. At first I was so angry, and then I started reading about empathy in my journal. I thought about my cousin and called him up and apologized and asked if anything was wrong. It turned out he was having a really hard time at school in one of his courses. Before, I wouldn’t have called. I would’ve stayed mad and not talked to him.”
- “I used to call people names and they’d get someone to back them up – to intimidate me. I’d use disrespectful words when I had a conflict. I’ve stopped using disrespectful words (like ‘retard’), now I don’t use those words.”



What the students liked most about the training:

- Learning to observe vs. evaluation
- Sharing past experiences of being compassionate and of not being compassionate
- Hearing about needs
- Learning about empathy
- Empathizing with self and others
- Linking regrets to unmet needs and making a real apology
- When people really said their own feelings
- The way people changed and became more considerate
- That classmates intervene now when they see bullying
- That there were lots of activities
- The class was taught in detail and with confidence.
- That it works



What the participants have noticed

Female participants:

- “The observation really helps me in conflicts. I learned a lot about how to observe rather than evaluate.”
- “I like how everybody’s changed. There’s less problems in the class and those guys aren’t bugging others as much. Before, some people were meaner and now they’ve changed the way they handle problems. Before, if there was bullying people would just watch, and now more people will say ‘Stop’ and ‘calm down’ and do the feelings and needs – and it works.”

Male participants:

- “I liked the activities because they were fun and at the same time they’re about something really important. It’s fun and it means something.”
- “I liked that it worked. I was surprised that it worked. We’ve had a lot of cops talk to us before and it didn’t work. People still behaved in a violent manner. I liked that what you taught worked.”



Summary of Interview Findings

- The majority of participants interviewed report that they were increasingly interested in the training as it progressed because of: decreased bullying, fewer mean remarks, new ideas (especially feelings, needs, and empathy), learning to solve real-life problems, learning to stop and think (when mad) about what might be going on for others, learning about regret & appreciation.
- The majority interviewed identified the training as engaging, useful, and practically applicable.
- The majority interviewed think differently about conflict because of the training. They, and their classmates, refer to the course material regularly. They use the term “Giraffe” as a code for invoking awareness about language use and behaviour choices, as well as for inviting compassion & peaceful conflict resolution.
- The majority interviewed feel more confident dealing with conflict due to the training.
- The majority interviewed act more compassionately towards themselves and others due to the training.
- The majority interviewed actively and effectively engage the concepts taught during the training.



How the participants describe the training

- It makes it so you don't want to pick on people
- It helps develop good people skills so you can relate in a conflict.
- You'll learn to observe instead of evaluate
- It's fun, educational and calming
- You learn how to be compassionate, appreciative and inclusive
- You learn to speak openly about feelings and needs
- You learn how to get along better
- The empathy part changes the way you think about things.

Male participant "We learned how to be compassionate and how to get along better. There's going to be ups and downs in life so you have to deal with it compassionately and not just get revenge or cause more problems. It's a lifetime experience because you keep learning everywhere you go your whole life: in high school, even as an adult. This isn't only for school, it's for everywhere you go."

Male participant "It's about peace. It stops bullying. It makes a huge difference."



Summary

This pilot study demonstrates that Nonviolent Communication training has had a significant measurable impact on the attitudes and behaviour of participating students. This training clearly supports capacity building in the areas of conflict resolution, communication skills, and particularly empathy development (including self-empathy). The participants began integrating and applying their new skills within the 12 hour training period, and the results were noticeably positive. Further, all but one of the interviewed students identified the training as engaging, meaningful, and practical.

Nonviolent Communication training represents a radical new approach to violence prevention and social wellness in schools through its focus on capacity building in addition to prevention and intervention.



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Vancouver Coastal Health Authority: <http://www.vch.ca/>

The International Center for Nonviolent Communication: www.cnvc.org

The BC Network for Compassionate Communication: www.bcncc.org

University of Victoria Statistical Consulting Centre: www.math.uvic.ca/~scc/