

# Life-Enriching Education

Nonviolent Communication Helps Schools  
Improve Performance, Reduce Conflict,  
and Enhance Relationships.



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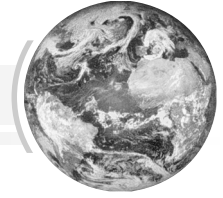
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# CHAPTER 1



## *Toward Life-Enriching Education*

### *Introduction*

I'd like to offer you a vision for the future of education in this country. In this book I will be describing a process of education that can serve, not arbitrary order and authority, but life itself. In this larger dream, we will live in a world in which obedience to authority is no longer a major objective. Before we begin we need to know what our dream is—our ultimate goal. Here is mine—and, I suggest, every human being's dream and goal, at heart: a world nurtured and sustained by Life-Enriching organizations.

I would like to educate this and future generations of children to create new organizations whose goal is to meet human needs—to make life more wonderful for themselves and others. I call the process of education that can achieve this, *Life-Enriching Education*. I call its opposite *Domination Education*.

### *Life-Enriching Organizations*

Life-Enriching organizations are characterized by fairness and equity in how resources and privileges are distributed. People in positions of leadership *serve* their constituencies rather than desiring

to control them. The nature of laws, rules, and regulations are consensually defined, understood, and willingly followed.

Life-Enriching organizations, whether families, schools, businesses, or governments, value the well-being of each person in the community or organization and support Life-Enriching connections between the members of the group.

**Life-Enriching human connections have three characteristics:**

- 1) The people are empathically connected to what each is feeling and needing—they do not blame themselves or let judgments implying wrongness obscure this connection to one another.
- 2) The people are aware of the interdependent nature of their relationships and value the others’ needs being fulfilled equally to their own needs being fulfilled—they know that their needs cannot be met at someone else’s expense.
- 3) The people take care of themselves and one another with the sole intention of enriching their lives—they are not motivated by, nor do they use coercion in the form of guilt, shame, duty, obligation, fear of punishment, or hope for extrinsic rewards.

**Comparing the Dream to the Nightmare**

Perhaps the best way to describe my dream of Life-Enriching organizations is to contrast it with the nightmare of Domination organizations.

<b>DOMINATION ORGANIZATIONS</b>	<b>LIFE-ENRICHING ORGANIZATIONS</b>
<b>Goal:</b> Prove who's right, who's wrong Get what you want Obey authority	<b>Goal:</b> Make life more wonderful Get everyone's needs met Connect with self and others

**Motivation:**

Punishment, reward, guilt, shame, obligation, duty

**Motivation:**

Contributing to the well-being of others;  
Receiving freely from others

**Evaluation:**

Labels, judgments

**Evaluation:**

What is fulfilling human needs and what isn't?

What would make life more wonderful for you and me?

In a Life-Enriching organization, we get what we want but never at someone else's expense—getting what we want at someone else's expense cannot fulfill all our needs. Our goal in a Life-Enriching organization is far more beautiful—to express our needs without blaming others and to listen respectfully to others' needs, without anyone giving up or giving in—and thus create a quality of connection through which everyone's needs can be met.

### *Life-Enriching Education*

The students coming out of an educational program that I envision would learn to value their autonomy and interdependence, and would have learned the organizational skills necessary to create Life-Enriching systems in which to live their lives.

#### What you would observe in such schools:

- teachers and students working together as partners, setting objectives mutually and consensually.
- teachers and students speaking a process language. The one I teach is called *Nonviolent Communication*, which focuses attention on: 1) the feelings and needs motivating each person, and 2) what actions might best meet their needs—at no one else's expense.
- students motivated by their eagerness to learn and not by fear of punishment or promise of reward.

- tests given at the beginning of the course of study to determine need, not at the end to determine reward or punishment. Grades replaced with evaluations of student learning that describe what they had learned—what skills and knowledge they had mastered.
- an interdependent learning community designed to encourage students to care about one another and help one another learn, rather than competing for a limited number of rewards—a community where the common goal is to support all students in reaching their objectives.
- all rules and regulations being created consensually by the people who are affected by the rules—students, teachers, parents, and administrators. Force only being used to protect needs such as health and safety, but never with the intent to punish.

## *Changing the System*

So what I am advocating is not just a new curriculum, a different daily schedule, an adjustment in classroom arrangement, or some innovative teaching techniques. Many individuals among you have tried the ideas I will suggest in this book, and collectively we have tried all of them. What I am urging is a shift in values, a change in the entire underlying system, something as radical as that.

The people I meet are hungry for such a change, ravenous for it. They realize, along with Morrie Schwartz in Mitch Albom's bestselling *Tuesdays With Morrie*, that "the culture we have does not make people feel good about themselves. We're teaching the wrong things. And you have to be strong enough to say, if the culture doesn't work, don't buy it. Create your own. Most people can't do it."

Maybe alone we can't do it, but the first step in creating a Life-Enriching culture is to be willing to imagine it, and then maybe together, we can.



# *NVC in Education*

## *Sharing the Field*

*A Nonviolent Communication (NVC) trainer was teaching NVC to teachers and students at an elementary school. One day while she was there, a conflict occurred on the playground between two groups of boys. It provided an opportunity to demonstrate how NVC skills can be used to mediate conflicts by helping people hear one another's feelings and needs.*

*It was toward the end of the lunch break and a small group of teachers were on the playground talking with the NVC trainer. Two boys between the ages of ten and twelve ran to the NVC trainer. The bigger boy was red in the face and holding tightly on to a ball. The other, smaller, boy was crying.*

*NVC Trainer (turning, first, to the boy with the ball, and guessing his feelings): You look very excited and upset right now!*

*Boy 1: Yes. I wanted to play, and because of him (pointing to the other boy), I couldn't.*

*NVC Trainer (hearing his needs and reflecting them): So, you wanted to play and have time with your friends, and this didn't happen?*

*Boy 1: Yeah, he came and he broke into our game and he wanted to take the ball and we told him many, many times to go away. It's not their time to play now.*

*NVC Trainer (turning to Boy 2 to see if he heard Boy 1's needs): Can you tell me what you hear him say his needs are?*

*Boy 2:* Yeah, they don't want to play with us.

*NVC Trainer (again asking Boy 2):* I hear you're frustrated, too, and I would still like to hear from you in your words what do you hear him saying?

*Boy 2:* That they don't want to be disturbed while they're playing.

*NVC Trainer:* That's what I hear, as well. And now, I'd like to know how that is for you?

*Boy 2:* We want to play. Just because they're bigger than us, they never give us the field.

*NVC Trainer (turning to Boy 1):* So, what do you hear him say?

*Boy 1:* Yeah, they want to play, too, but it's not their time.

*NVC Trainer:* Hold on. Can you just hear him right now?

*Boy 1:* Yeah, he wants to play, too.

*NVC Trainer:* So what I'm hearing is that you both want to play. And you'd both like some say in where and how you can use the field.

*Boy 2:* But it's not fair. Just because they're bigger, they always get their way.

*NVC Trainer (hearing his needs):* So you would like respect? And you'd like fairness?

*Boy 2:* Yeah.

*NVC Trainer:* I'm guessing you might like to have equal time to play on the field? Would this meet your needs for fairness and for respect?

*Boy 2: Yeah.*

*NVC Trainer (turning to Boy 1): I guess you'd like fairness, as well?*

*Boy 1: Yeah.*

*NVC Trainer: I'm wondering if you're ready to consider some ways this could happen, or do either of you need more understanding first?*

*Boy 2: I think he'll just take the field anyway.*

*Boy 1: How do I know he won't keep butting in?*

*NVC Trainer: So it sounds to me like you both have a need to trust that the other person will keep whatever agreement you make about dividing the field?*

*Boys 1 & 2: Yeah.*

*NVC Trainer: It seems important, then, that whatever agreement you come up with is one that you both feel comfortable with, and can genuinely say you will try out for a period of time, to see how it works. Would you agree?*

*Boys 1 & 2 (nodding their heads): Yeah.*

*NVC Trainer: My guess is that you both have some ideas for how this could get worked out. Would you like to talk by yourselves and then let me or one of your teachers know what ideas you come up with? Or do you want an adult to be with you while you discuss this?*

*Both boys said they wanted to talk together on their own. After a short while, they came up with a plan to*



*divide the field on some days and take turns using the whole field on other days. They said they would be willing to try this for two weeks and then meet to discuss how it's working.*

*While the boys were working this out, the NVC trainer turned to the group of teachers who had been watching the mediation.*

*NVC Trainer:* So I'm curious what you observed in this interaction?

*Teacher 1:* I'm amazed that they worked it out so quickly.

*NVC Trainer:* So you're amazed, and, I'm guessing, pleased, to see how these students in conflict came to mutual understanding so quickly?

*Teacher 1:* Yes. And I'm thinking about how I would have handled it and how it probably would have turned out.

*NVC Trainer:* How is that?

*Teacher 1:* I probably would have scolded the older boy and told him he couldn't play on the field for a week, or something like that. I'd have punished him in some way. And he would not be talking with the younger boy.

*Teacher 2:* I was thinking the same thing. Only I probably would have punished the younger boy for breaking into their game. I might have told his whole group to stay off the field for some period of time and think about it until they learn how to get along. But it never works. It just takes the heat off for a while.

*NVC Trainer:* Hearing this, I imagine you will be interested to see how they are able to continue working things out for themselves?

*Teacher 1:* Yes. And I'm interested, too, in how I can learn to help them work things out for themselves, like you just did.