

Introduction

Writing *The Compassionate Classroom: Relationship Based Teaching and Learning* has been a collaborative process that has enriched our lives in many ways. We have brought our collective 45 years of teaching experience to the task of sharing how compassion and learning can blossom in the classroom. We have unpacked the foundational premises of Nonviolent CommunicationSM (NVCSM) and framed the process in terms that teachers can readily share with young people. In making this book available, we hope to introduce teachers and parents to a process that powerfully integrates the intelligence of the mind with the intelligence of the heart. Our greatest desire is to provide teachers with practical tools to help them bring more lively learning and compassion into their classrooms.

Nonviolent Communication is both a consciousness of our compassionate nature and a process for interacting. As we wrote about NVC, we tried to clearly express the nature of this process and the nuances of the language without being formulaic or implying that there's a right way to communicate. As a result, our understanding of NVC has deepened greatly. The challenge of describing an open-ended, creative, improvisational process of interacting still stretches our imaginations and capabilities. We are deeply grateful to Marshall Rosenberg for developing Nonviolent Communication and stretching the hearts of people all around the world towards a more enlivened, compassionate way of living.

Marshall Rosenberg developed Nonviolent Communication because he wanted to see more compassion in human relations. In his early training and practice in clinical psychology, he became acutely aware of the negative effects of diagnostic labeling and realized the power of language to shape thinking and consciousness. He studied the major spiritual traditions, paying attention to the language used by people whose lives emanated the love and compassion at the heart of these teachings. From his

study Dr. Rosenberg concluded that creating a peaceful world entails eliminating language that blames, shames, criticizes, and demands—language based on habitual thinking that inhibits compassion and contributes to violence. He developed a way of using language that connects us to the heart of human experience—values, dreams, desires, and needs. This clarity helps people meet their own needs and joyfully contribute to meeting the needs of others.

Marshall Rosenberg first used NVC in federally funded projects in the U.S. to provide mediation and communication skills training for racial integration in schools. Since then he has spread this powerful peace-making process worldwide. He has offered mediation and training in war-torn countries including Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Croatia, Serbia, Colombia, Sierra Leone, and Burundi. In 1985 he started the Center for Nonviolent Communication (CNVC), an international organization with trainers throughout the world who teach in schools, prisons, health care facilities, and government agencies.

In 1999, CNVC launched an Education Project to develop materials for schools and trainings for educators. This project has been generously supported by grants from the New Earth Foundation and the Threshold Foundation, as well as by donations from many individuals. *The Compassionate Classroom* is an outcome of the CNVC Education Project.



We wrote this book for educators, particularly for elementary school teachers. We hope that the insights, tools, activities, and resources in it will support teachers who are, or would like to be, nurturing the seeds of compassion in their classrooms. We have been listening to teachers for many years. While writing this book, however, we found ourselves listening more closely than ever to their dreams, their concerns, and their frustrations. Their voices have guided us from cover to cover, and we begin this book with *Appreciation: Listening to Teachers*.

Section I explains how relationships impact teaching and learning and focuses on four vital relationships in the classroom: teacher to self, teacher to student, student to student, and student to learning. When we tend these relationships and infuse them with mutual respect, we nurture seeds of compassion.

Section II offers practical tools for creating a Compassionate Classroom. Five premises help develop a consciousness of our compassionate nature, which is at the heart of Nonviolent Communication. The distinct components of the NVC process offer guidelines for learning a language of compassion. Four dialogues convey the power of this language in classroom interactions. A variety of activities and games created by teachers provide skill development and practice. A Guide to Lesson Planning gives suggestions for how to quickly combine exercises and activities in this book to create lesson plans.

We hope that readers of *The Compassionate Classroom* are inspired to learn and practice Nonviolent Communication and to discover for themselves how their lives and relationships are enriched.