



Foreword by Riane Eisler

Many of us recognize that fundamental change in education is urgently needed. We recognize that most present educational systems are not preparing children to meet the unprecedented challenges of the 21st century. We recognize that real educational reform is essential if today's and tomorrow's children are to live in a more peaceful, just, and sustainable world.

In this book, Marshall Rosenberg describes key elements of what he calls life-enriching education: an education that prepares children to learn throughout their lives, relate well to others and themselves, be creative, flexible, and venturesome, and have empathy not only for their immediate kin but for all of humankind.

Enriching life—expanding our minds, hearts, and spirits—should be the goal of education. Unfortunately, traditional education has often constricted rather than expanded the human mind, heart, and spirit. It has interfered with our natural curiosity and joy in learning, suppressed inquisitiveness and critical thinking, and modeled uncaring and violent behaviors.

Fortunately, today most Western schools no longer use violence against children, as in the old motto “spare the rod and spoil the child.” But they still use other teaching methods designed to prepare people to unquestioningly obey orders from above—be it from their teachers in school, supervisors at work, or rulers in government.

The curriculum, also, often presents violence and domination as normal, even desirable—as in history classes where children must memorize the dates of battles and wars, and literature classes where they are assigned epics in which violent conquest is idealized as manly and heroic. The structure of schools itself

is also generally still one of top-down rankings in which education is something done to students rather than with students.

This type of educational process, content, and structure is appropriate for what I have called the dominator or domination model of society—where families, workplaces, tribes, and states are organized into rigid rankings of domination ultimately backed up by fear and force. It is not an education appropriate for democratic, equitable, and peaceful societies—societies orienting to what I call the partnership model, and Rosenberg calls a life-enriching structure.

Obviously there has already been considerable movement away from the domination model, at least in some world regions. Had there not been, we could not be talking of fundamental educational change without risking severe consequences, even death—as was the case for any free thought and speech not so long ago during the European Middle Ages, and is still the case in many places today.

But this forward movement has not been linear. It has not only been fiercely resisted every step of the way; it has also been punctuated by regressions to the domination model. We are experiencing such a regression worldwide today—a regression to more, rather than less, inequality, violence, and human and environmental exploitation and domination. This is why the application of Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication methods to education is so important, so urgent, and so timely.

Marshall Rosenberg is known worldwide as a pioneer in nonviolent conflict resolution. He has dedicated the last forty years of his life to developing and applying Nonviolent Communication as a tool for relations in which each person is treated with empathy and caring. In this book, he shows us how to use this method in schools. He also shows its effectiveness in preparing young people to work together, resolve conflicts nonviolently, and contribute to both their own and others' well-being in empathic and caring ways.

One of the most notable characteristics of Rosenberg's work is this focus on caring, empathy, and nonviolence—characteristics that in domination-oriented cultures are relegated to those who are excluded from social governance: women and “effeminate” men. Marshall recognizes that these are precisely the characteristics we have to nurture in both boys and girls, and shows how we can do this through tested and effective educational methods that allow young people to experience partnership in action.

This experience is important for all children. When children experience the life-enriching partnership relations Marshall describes in this book, they flourish. Experiencing these relations is particularly important for children who have in their homes, neighborhoods, and/or nations learned only two alternatives: you either dominate or you are dominated. It shows them that there is another alternative that feels and works much better for everyone.

Schools in which students and teachers relate as partners—where Marshall's nonviolent life-expanding education is part of every interaction—are communities of learning rather than top-down, impersonal factories. Young people begin to see school as a place of exploration, a place to share feelings and ideas, a safe and exciting place where each child is recognized and valued and the human spirit is nurtured and grows.

And there is more. When we give young people the opportunity to experience relations based on mutual respect and caring, we not only promote their well-being, learning, and personal growth. We also support the shift to a less violent, more equitable, caring, and truly democratic society.

In our age of nuclear and biological weapons, humanity stands at an evolutionary crossroads. At our level of technological development, the chronic violence and lack of caring and empathy required by relations conforming to the domination model threaten our very survival.

On one side lies the road of regression to even more rigid domination—familial, educational, religious, economic, and political.

On the other side lies the road to a more equitable, less violent, more caring partnership future. The movement toward partnership has been escalating for several centuries, partly due to the destabilization of habits and institutions by the technological changes entailed in shifting from a primarily agrarian to industrial world. Today, the rapid shift from industrial to postindustrial technologies is still further destabilizing entrenched beliefs and institutions—opening up further opportunities for positive change. But rather than fostering this movement, education is still often hindering it.

The most basic question for our future is what kind of culture is education transmitting. Is it education for a life-enriching culture of partnership and peace? Or is it education for a culture of domination and violence?

As a mother and grandmother, I feel a passionate urgency to help accelerate the global shift toward partnership. I know from both my life and my research that making fundamental changes is not easy. But I also know it can be done. Indeed, it has been done, or we would all still be living in a world where all women and most men knew “their place” in rigid hierarchies of domination. Working together we can create cultures that support rather than inhibit the realization of our highest human potentials: our great capacities for caring, empathy, and creativity. This book—drawing from Marshall Rosenberg’s many years of pioneering work in non-violent, life-enriching, communications—can help us transform education in ways that advance this urgent task.

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