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The Impact of Nonviolent Communication in an Early Childhood Montessori Environment

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Abstract

The researcher examined how Nonviolent Communication (NVC) incorporated into a Montessori primary classroom would impact student's social-emotional learning. The students participating in this research came from multiple ethnic groups and nine were non-English speakers. Some showed evidence of trauma that resulted from living in home environments that experienced instability. The researcher modeled NVC communication in her interactions with students whenever possible and then observed and documented their reactions and behaviors during lessons on social skills in 15-minute intervals over 3 weeks. She observed students engaged in describing their feelings and concluded that NVC can be effective with consistency and guidance from the educator in a culturally competent classroom. Further research is needed to determine if NVC can be useful in enriching SEL competencies in early childhood classrooms with ELL students and students with varying degrees of trauma. This research aimed to fill the gap.

Keywords: communication, nonviolent, conflict resolution, Montessori, grace and courtesy lessons

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Human relationships are essential to the healthy development of individuals. “When adults have the awareness, empathy, and cultural competence to appreciate and understand children’s experiences, needs, and communication, they can promote the development of positive attitudes and behaviors and build confidence to support learning” (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). A stable, consistent adult-child relationship may off-set adverse experiences, present or future. An essential component for creating stability is by developing necessary trust in the environment with adults and peers in the classroom. Providing equitable opportunities to practice problem-solving independently, to communicate feelings, to adjust to new situations, to build relationships and maintain relationships, to express needs and to listen respectfully to others' needs supports conflict resolution in a positive, healthy manner. Compassionate communication may provide richness in the education of children. Life-enriching education where educators value student autonomy and interdependence aids in student experiences in the classroom community and beyond (Rosenberg). Quality human interaction and peaceful conflict resolution forges discovery of mutual understanding with others. Aiding children in managing their behaviors, feelings, and thoughts through interpreting their emotions and controlling their output/input of information supports their self-construction and self-regulation skills as independent humans.

As a first-year Montessori guide and Co-Director of a Primary program, I desired to explore avenues to strengthen my skills in communication in such a way that I could enhance my classroom management strategies. My micro-Montessori classroom serves students 3-6 years of age from a range of cultural backgrounds and socio-economic classes. As an educator, I focused

on ways to cultivate relationships with students, assist students in building their language in support of their feelings and needs as individuals, and nourish connections within the classroom. Nonviolent Communication (NVC) appears to align with social-emotional wellness and educating the whole child (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). By guiding students in compassionate connections through NVC techniques, there is potential to impact Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) positively. SEL is developing the ability to recognize and manage emotions, develop care and concern for others, make responsible decisions, establish healthy relationships, and effectively handle challenging situations (Dacey et al., 2016).

Empowered, confident students may need empowered, confident educators who guide, respond, and offer opportunities for connecting in a compassionate, peaceful manner with peers and within interpersonal relationships. Following is a framework and literature review that will address NVC and the impact of SEL and development of primary age children, particularly with English Language Learner (ELL) students and students who are experiencing differing traumas. The Montessori method, founded by Dr. Maria Montessori, is an educational approach based on a child-centered active learning environment. A holistic support structure, in a multi-age setting classroom environment, consists of the child freely choosing work that is of interest, that is purposeful and that progresses according to the child's natural developmental processes. By guiding children in courteous, polite, and respectful ways of communication in accordance to the customs of the local cultural community, children may learn alternative ways to interact appropriately with one another through dialogue with adults and supportive conversations with peers in the environment. By providing a respectful social environment, children may, in turn, spontaneously respond to the needs of another, value a non-competitive nature, exhibit self-control, and act purposefully, augmenting the child's self-confidence and inward strength and

character. The underlining intention in this research was to transform communication and build upon trust, safety, love, and respect within the classroom environment. Children learn to be members of a community, to make independent choices in purposeful activity, to help others, and to offer respectful space for peers to concentrate on independent work. Children show sympathy and understanding for others and work in cohesive social groups when given opportunities to do so. The research measured student participation in NVC and educator participation, revealing data on the impacts of compassionate, nonviolent communication techniques in the classroom.

Theoretical Framework

For the purpose of this study, Nonviolent Communication (NVC) was the theoretical framework that guided this research. NVC is seen as a powerful tool for peacefully resolving differences at personal, professional, and political levels. In the early 1960s, as a civil rights activist and clinical psychologist, Dr. Marshall B. Rosenberg explored ways to deliver and spread peacemaking strategies with intentions of reducing violence in local, regional, and national communities (The Center for Nonviolent Communication [CNVC], 2019). The Center for Nonviolent Communication (CNVC) was birthed by Dr. Marshall B. Rosenberg and others in 1984 in order to meet the need to inform a broader base of individuals in their communities around the globe (Rosenberg, 2003). CNVC is dedicated to building a foundation of compassionate responsiveness by honoring our shared needs for self-governance, interdependence, integrity, conviviality, physical movement, spiritual practice(s), and joyfulness (Rosenberg, 2003).

According to Rosenberg (2003), when we are living a life communicating our feelings and needs, we can become fully exposed in our humanness to others. When we mirror NVC, all

we can see are the feelings and needs of those communicating with us: “We see what’s in their heart” (Rosenberg, 2005, p. 6).

Nonviolent Communication, by definition, strengthens people's ability to compassionately connect with themselves and one another, share resources, and resolve conflicts peacefully. NVC techniques have two parts, Empathetically Listening and Honestly Expressing. Each part has four identical components, Observations, Feelings, Needs, and Requests. In the work of NVC, it is important to observe without inserting an evaluation. Also important are expressing what one is feeling, stating what one needs, and asking for the listener to meet the need.

NVC strategies aid in conflict prevention and peaceful resolution, rather than thinking or speaking to others in ways that may be dehumanizing or that come from ingrained patterns of communication (Rosenberg, 2003). These ingrained patterns of communication unfortunately have taught us to not only judge our own actions but the actions of others when it comes to moral attributes such as “good vs. bad”, “right vs. wrong”, “correct vs. incorrect”, “appropriate vs. inappropriate”, “normal vs. abnormal” (Rosenberg, 2003, p. 11). NVC provides a backdrop and set of skills to address human issues, from the most personal relationships to global disputes (Rosenberg, 2003).

NVC in the classroom may assist the students and the educators to think, speak, and act in a creative manner. By fully embracing compassionate solutions in a collaborative manner, individuals can focus their attention on the feelings and needs of each person and state what actions might best fit their needs, at no one else’s expense (Rosenberg, 2003). A classroom environment modeling quality human interaction and connection, teaching peaceful conflict resolution, and valuing human feelings and needs may just be the radical change Dr. Marshall B.

Rosenberg envisioned as Life-Enriching Education. The same could be said for Dr. Maria Montessori's vision of a new world for the child and adolescent. Constructing a social environment in which individual consciousness can develop eliciting, educational reform and social reform (Montessori, 1992).

In early childhood, research has shown that children positively thrive in supportive, healthy environments, achieving significant growth in their overall well-being. Around the age of three, the child seeks the company of other children, eager to expand their knowledge of social life—adapting and fulfilling their fundamental purpose of becoming and belonging. They learn to love their community, their people, and their way of life, becoming masters in the nuances of verbal and nonverbal communication. Utilizing NVC techniques will support children's SEL. Each child will become familiar with social expectations and behaviors for which they are engaged, thus influencing compassionate interaction with others.

Literature Review

This literature review examines social-emotional learning (SEL) through the lens of Nonviolent Communication (NVC), a model for compassionate, empathetic communication developed by Dr. Marshall B. Rosenberg. Research supports the thesis that elements of Montessori pedagogy may contribute to positive SEL and that SEL aligns with NVC. Dr. Montessori believed the child to be a carrier of knowledge with an innate power to steer his or her learning in the direction of self-interest (Montessori, 1995). Dr. Montessori created the term “auto-education” to describe this process. In a Montessori environment, children are active contributors in their development. Positive school communities that incorporate peace and reconciliation integrate SEL in tandem with the educational standards of the curriculum. As a

result, these communities support students in becoming self-assured and self-confident into adulthood (Dacey et al., 2016; Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018; Pickett, 2018).

Education is not limited to academic learning alone; rather, it is the totality of human life experiences that provides opportunities for life-long learning (Montessori, 2007). Children will take into consideration all beings within the community. As children consider the wellbeing of others, characteristic traits of socialization occur, which is formative in the social development of the young child (Montessori, 2009). An environment with clear, consistent, age-appropriate guidelines and expectations contributes to the physical, mental, emotional, and social development of the child (Montessori, 2009). The child's experience in the environment works in tandem with the inherent personality each child possesses (Montessori, 2009). Ladson-Billings (1995) asserted that for students to conceptualize learning and knowledge, they needed to understand themselves and others within the classroom culture (as cited by Bennet et al., 2018).

Intimate classroom discussions can transpire when teachers collectively share and compassionately communicate with students through a multicultural lens. Through this lens, a culturally responsive environment must be one that incorporates respectful, communicative dialogue role-modeled by adults, supports early peer-peer interactions, and aids in the foundational structure of SEL (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018; Day & Allvin, 2016; Siegel, 2012; Sojourner, n.d.; Lake & Pappamihiel, 2003; Yew & O'Kearney, 2014). These discussions aid in the formation of interpersonal relationships which may considerably enhance the manner in which students communicate and understand one another (Bennet et al., 2018; Darling-Hammond & Cook-Hall, 2018; Lake & Pappamihiel, 2003).

Research shows that weaving SEL into the curriculum is an approach for educating the whole child, not solely educating the child's cognitive abilities (Dacey et al., 2016; Darling-

Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018; Kidron, 2018). Students acquire the ability to accomplish goals, solve problems, refine character, and become civically engaged through an active process of SEL (Dacey et al., 2016; Kidron, 2018; Simmons, 2019). The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) states that SEL “enhances students’ capacity to integrate skills, attitudes, and behaviors to deal effectively and ethically with daily tasks and challenges” (CASEL, 2017). CASEL identifies and defines five SEL competencies to be self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision making, and relationship skills (Dacey et al., 2016; Kidron, 2018; Simmons, 2019).

The Five Competencies of Social-Emotional Learning

Self-Awareness. Self-awareness is the ability to perceive one’s own thoughts, tenets, and emotions and understand how they interact to influence behavior. These skills allow one to confidently identify strengths and limitations, and do so with an embedded sense of optimism in one’s ability to succeed in certain situations. Self-awareness skills are necessary for health and happiness (Kidron, 2018). Young children (ages 0-5) are learning to recognize and discover words to express their own emotions. Simple words such as happy, sad, and angry are necessary before moving onto more complex words such as worry, frustration, and anticipation (Dacey et al., 2016). While absorbing language, children are developing vocabulary tools for self-expression to navigate their emotions, their reactions, and their responses (Kidron, 2018; Dacey et al., 2016; Simmons, 2019; Darling-Churchill & Lippman, 2016). Self-awareness is also a critical skill for understanding others within the context of community and around the world (Simmons, 2019).

Self-Management. Self-management is the ability to regulate emotions, behaviors, and thoughts in a variety of situations. Self-management skills are essential for effective regulation in

controlling impulses and assessing intense emotions. They are associated with higher cognitive abilities, such as working memory, setting and accomplishing personal goals, and engaging with academic material, all of which increase academic competence (Blair, McKinnon & Daneri, 2018; Dacey et al., 2016; Simmons, 2019; Darling-Churchill & Lippman, 2016; Kidron, 2018). Equipping young children with vocabulary to articulate thoughts and feelings strengthens their ability to handle challenging social situations (Blair, McKinnon & Daneri, 2018; Dacey et al., 2016; Darling-Churchill & Lippman, 2016; Hutchison, 2016). The use of imagery as it relates to an emotion provides palpable opportunities for describing thoughts and feelings for young children (Blair et al., 2018; Dacey et al., 2016; Darling-Churchill & Lippman, 2016; Hutchison, 2016). Guiding children in the management and interpretations of their behaviors, thoughts, and feelings aids them in mastering the input and output of their self-expression. When strong self-regulation skills are present, children can handle more challenging situations with hope, resiliency, and courage (Blair et al., 2018; Dacey et al., 2016; Darling-Churchill & Lippman, 2016; Hutchison, 2016; McGrath, 2016).

Social Awareness. Social awareness is the ability to empathize with and see the life situations of others from their perspective. Social-awareness skills are essential for constructing the ability to accurately perceive the thoughts, feelings, and needs of others (Darling-Churchill & Lippman, 2016; Kidron, 2018). Research has shown when teachers model respect for students and one another, rather than attempting to control behavior, students develop prosocial skills (Dacey et al., 2016; Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018; Pickett, 2018; Rosenberg, 2003; Simmons, 2019). Students develop social awareness when their educational experience promotes learning over individual and mutual beliefs, traditions, culture.

Research suggests that behaviors and attitudes toward peers who appear the same or different are constructed views that are socially derived (Day & Allvin, 2016; Kidron, 2019; Pickett, 2018; Simmons, 2019). These behaviors and attitudes are attached to feelings and values formed at an early age. Researchers suggest that the attached feelings and values about race are direct reflections of what young children see and hear within their environment (Day & Allvin, 2016; Kidron, 2019; Pickett, 2018). In culturally responsive classrooms, students learn to understand and value differences, appreciate diversity, and respect others (Pickett, 2018; Simmons, 2019; Dacey et al., 2016; Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018; Rosenberg, 2003). They feel safe and supported in navigating peer relationships and address conflict in constructive ways, thus gaining the self-confidence that leads to a healthier wellbeing (Darling-Churchill & Lippman; Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018; Kidron, 2018; Pickett, 2018; Siegel, 2012; Simmons, 2019).

Responsible Decision-Making. Responsible decision-making is the process of making constructive choices through deliberation, taking into account the needs of oneself and others. Constructive choices happen when all aspects of a decision and potential consequences are taken into consideration (Dacey et al., 2016; Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018; Pickett, 2018; Simmons, 2019). Responsible decision-making in the classroom environment is key to mutual respect and ethical actions that focus on the safety of oneself and others. Children make independent choices in a purposeful activity, offer assistance to a friend or group of friends and honors the personal space peers need to concentrate on their task (Chopra, 1997; Han & Thomas, 2010; Montessori, 2010; Pickett, 2018). Children begin to empathize with others and offer up an emotional response and material item solely for the pure pleasure they feel when they share and

contribute to the happiness of another (Chopra, 1997; Darling-Churchill & Lippman, 2016; Montessori, 2010; Siegel, 2012).

A challenge can arise between educators and parents when children are not offered time, space, and trust in making decisions. Children may not feel supported in their self-expression if they are rushed in their communication efforts and are viewed by the adult to not be capable of communicating their individual feeling in a given situation. As a result, children may feel unable to respond in a positive, responsible manner leading to some children feeling isolated, alone, angry and hurt. This contributes to a chaotic classroom environment. (Chopra, 1997; Darling-Churchill & Lippman, 2016; Rosenberg, 2003; Siegel, 2012).

Relationship skills. Relationship skills are the abilities necessary for one to initiate and sustain positive and fulfilling relationships with “diverse individuals and groups” (CASEL, 2017). Consistent relationships are established when children trust their caregivers and feel loved and nurtured by them (Campbell, Roberts, Synder, Papp, Strambler, & Crusto, 2016; Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018; Siegel, 2012;). Physical and emotional development flourishes in an environment that maintains healthy connections between caring adults and children (Dacey et al., 2016; Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018; Siegel, 2012). Research in educational literature has shown that positive, consistent adult-child connections in high-quality, early childhood programs builds a foundation for long term success in the social emotional development of the child (Callaghan, 2015; Darling-Churchill & Lippman, 2016; McGrath, 2016).

Through stable, healthy relationships, children learn to control aggressive impulses and resolve conflicts by way of nonviolent resolutions (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2019; Day & Allvin, 2016; Rosenberg, 2003). Yates et al. (2008) explained that

young children from ages 0-5 "form close and secure relationships; experience, regulate, and express emotions in socially and culturally appropriate ways; and explore the environment to learn – all in the context of family, community, and culture" (as cited in Darling-Churchill & Lippman, 2016). Collaborative, inclusive, and cooperative connections with classmates and others aid in the developmental skills needed to effectively build relationships (Dacey et al., 2016; Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018; Pickett, 2008).

Interruptions in SEL Competencies

When the active process in which children develop SEL competencies is interrupted, they may lack the skills needed to respond and react with integrity and responsibility. A path of normal development corresponds to the laws of nature (Montessori, 2009). However, deviations can occur when the optimal environment is not provided to the child. Deviations are psychological energies that have taken a different path rather than the natural path of child development (Montessori, 2009). According to Cambridge Dictionary, the definition of deviation is “the action of doing something that is different from the usual or common way of behaving” (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). In *The Formation of Man* (2007), Dr. Montessori prefers to use the word health to describe normality. The health that Dr. Montessori is observing is that of “psychical health” (Montessori, 2007, p.32) or in modern terms mental health. Mental health is defined “as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community” (WHO, 2014). If adults lack SEL skills themselves or suffer from physical and/or mental health challenges, their ability to support SEL in children could be severely impacted.

Impacts of Trauma on SEL

The ability to cope with stressful events is dependent on many factors, not all of which are clearly defined or well understood (Campbell et al., 2016). Research literature includes a wide range of childhood experiences, some of which are traumatic, that impact the body's response to toxic stress (Campbell et al., 2016; Liming & Grube, 2018; Minnesota Department of Health (MDH), 2019; Perry, 2019). Briere and Scott (2006) explain that "trauma is an event or experience that is emotionally disturbing and distressing and impedes on an individual's ability to cope" (as cited by Campbell et al., 2016, p. 309). If trauma becomes cumulative, individuals may not always be capable of effectively coping with the stress of multiple traumatic experiences without intervention. Cumulative trauma experienced early in childhood is most often linked to interpersonal relationships, because the vast majority of a young person's time is spent within their home environment and their family (Campbell et al., 2016). To assist children in building up self-regulatory skills, adults must focus on specific strategies and interventions that support SEL while also proactively understanding the frequency and the varying types of trauma they have experienced (Campbell et al., 2016).

Physical and psychological health can be affected by intergenerational trauma, also known as historical trauma. Confirmable research has shown that historical trauma has an impact at the cellular level. Oppressive turmoil experienced by particular people traverses across generations, and often adds to cultural identity difficulties. Victims of historical trauma, for example, may have experienced slavery, forced migration, violent colonization, segregation, South African Apartheid, or the Holocaust (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2016). Experiences such as those described can become woven into the cellular fabric of their being and become entangled in secure memory recall and safe emotional self-regulation (Figley, 2012).

Traumatic events occurring before the age of 18 have been categorized as adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) (Liming & Grube, 2018; MDH, 2019; Perry, 2019). Regarding exposure to ACEs in the realm of early childhood, there seems to be a consensus that further research is needed, across multiple professions, to establish an understanding of the short- and long-term effects of ACEs for young children between birth and 5 years of age (Campbell et al., 2016; Liming & Grube, 2018; Perry, 2019). Substantial brain research has correlated physiological effects of trauma and neglect and that cognitive, physical, emotional, and behavioral developments alter the biology of the brain, which in turn affects the health of the child (Perry, 2019; Siegel, 2012). Insecure or disorganized attachment may lead to internal stress and exhibit external difficulties that create emotional dysregulation (Perry, 2019; Siegel, 2012). Campbell et al. (2016) determined that how caregivers respond to young children's negative behavior is critical to the outcome and long-term effects of ACEs. The repercussions of the biological effects of physical and psychological trauma can have identifying measures of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Strahl, 2012).

A combination of individual, relational, community, and societal factors contribute to the risk of child abuse and neglect (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2020). According to the CDC (2020), there are certain risk factors that may or may not increase the likelihood of abuse and neglect. Liming and Grube (2018) examined a previous study by Jimenez et al. (2016) where they utilized ACE exposure scores (e.g., 0 ACE exposures, 1 ACE, 2 ACEs, and 3+ ACEs) to examine a correlation between teacher-reported behavior challenges and academic skills against early childhood ACE exposure of 1,007 kindergarten students. Results suggested that students with exposure to three or more ACEs significantly increased the likelihood of social delays and were nearly two and a half times more likely to have aggressive

tendencies (Liming & Grube, 2018). ACEs in this research example negatively impact the child's need to develop healthy social awareness skills. Participation in early learning programs can assist in early detection and interventions for children experiencing trauma (Liming & Grube, 2018). Early identification of inevitable developmental, speech, and language delays increases the child's potential to outgrow such obstacles (Campbell et al., 2016; Liming & Grube, 2018). Without such interventions, children can be hindered by their ACEs, leading to decreased competencies socially and academically well into adulthood (Campbell et al., 2016; Liming & Grube, 2018).

Extensive global research has revealed that ACEs are positively related to a range of high-risk behaviors and negative health outcomes (Liming & Grube, 2018; Seguin, 2009; WHO, 2020). Liming & Grube (2018) reported that "The impact of exposure to ACEs intersects with multiple developmental domains, including social, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive development." Personal behavior is directly linked to responsible decision-making as one evaluates the consequences of various actions while taking into consideration the wellbeing of oneself and others (CASEL, 2017). Indications of developmental health challenges may arise during the preschool years. These indicators might exhibit high levels of aggression or hyperactivity, which share similar risk factors as adolescent disruptive or violent behaviors (Seguin, 2009). Shonkoff and Phillips (2000) acknowledged that "research in neuroscience has informed our understanding of the physiological effects of stress that negatively impact learning and behavior, providing an additional basis for promoting safe and nurturing learning environments" (as cited in Pickett, 2008). Several physical aggressions were measured, such as hitting, biting, and kicking, fighting, and bullying others. Hyperactivities such as restless, cannot sit still, fidgeting, acting without thinking, impulsive, difficulty waiting for a turn, and lack of

concentration were also measured (Seguin, 2009). Several studies identified connections between physical aggression and hyperactivity in early childhood to adolescence, which can account for differing cognitive functions into adulthood (Seguin, Parent, Tremblay, & Zelazo, 2009).

Seguin et al. (2009) researched the relation between early visuospatial abilities and the nonverbal aspects of social behavior and the effect on self-regulation, as tied to disruptive behaviors. One aim of Seguin et al.'s (2009) study was to measure if there is an association between language function and histories of physical aggression and hyperactivity. They examined whether these behaviors were equal to the sum of their parts or stronger together (Seguin, 2009). A second aim was to determine if there was a relation between non-linguistic measures of visuospatial organization and short-term memory. Visuospatial is the visual perception of one's spatial relationships of objects. Visuospatial organizational skills are needed for perception, movement, and depth (Seguin, 2009). Short-term memory is a branch of executive function with verbal intellectual function as a component, affecting one's ability to self-regulate (Seguin, 2009; Siegel, 2012). Memory is linked together through internal neuro processing functions that are individually unique to each person (Siegel, 2012). Seguin et al. proposed that impaired early spatial abilities cultivated a higher risk factor for persistent antisocial behavior concerns than verbal abilities (2009). However, a previous study cited did not seek out the reason behind the disruptive behavior, and its association was not addressed and did not specify cognitive ability (Seguin, 2009).

The perceived negative behavior is simply a signal or byproduct of not knowing how to communicate (Greene, 2017). Communication is an essential component of SEL. Adults serve children best by focusing on safe, healthy forms of communication rather than focusing on the communication behind the unacceptable misbehavior (Baily, 2015; Greene, 2017; Rosenberg,

2005). Children lacking skills in communication exhibit challenging behavior. Challenging behavior communicates that the child does not have the skills to meet certain demands and expectations and express feelings.

Articulating feelings is critical to SEL. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) suggests that an initial step in thriving socially is to develop the conscious recognition and management of emotions (Dacey et al., 2016). When children do not have language to communicate their emotions, this can result in physical aggression.

Neurocognitive tests evaluating receptive language were administered to 355 three-and-a-half-year-old children utilizing the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised (PPVT-R). Measured results of PPVT-R, after research, indicates that language abilities and receptive vocabulary were explicitly related to physical aggression (Seguin, 2009). Learning is social, emotional, and academic. Learning takes hold on both paths of intrapersonal awareness and interpersonal skills. According to Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey (2018), "These skills can be taught" (p. 4). Likewise communicating compassionately without judgment, with empathy, and with expression of one's feelings and needs in a neutral context may also be taught.

Classroom Culture

In this multicultural society, classrooms often include students from a variety of different ethnicities, cultures, and languages. Many ELL and immigrant students are abruptly placed into a new culture and are expected to know and understand new rules and norms as well as a new language. While at the same time, students may be experiencing trauma of leaving a war-torn country or being separated from family (Dunham, 2019). These factors may contribute to stress, anxiety, and the inability to form meaningful relationships with peers or educators (Bennet et al., 2018; Day & Allvin, 2016; Dunham, 2019). Students of the global majority are particularly

vulnerable to mistreatment by others who lack cultural competence. This can take the form of teasing, name calling, bullying, and misunderstanding of traditional ways.

In the midst of difference, educators and school leaders can create culturally responsive classrooms through inclusion, acceptance, appreciation, compassion and respect. Reflecting the diverse cultures and ethnicities of the student population is an essential practice for early childhood educators (Bennet et al., 2018; Han & Thomas, 2010; Michel; n.d.). A culturally responsive classroom takes into consideration the home languages of its students by, for example, displaying a welcome sign in various languages (Bennet et al., 2018; Day & Allvin, 2016; Dunham, 2019). Bennet et al. (2018) expressed an imperative need for early childhood classrooms to absorb the rich diversity of the students, families, and communities they serve. Through the five SEL competencies, educators can speak to socio political conversations, from an emotionally intelligent platform around equity and culturally responsive practices (Bennett, Gunn, Gayle-Evans, Barrera IV & Leung, 2017; Han & Thomas, 2010; Simmons, 2019).

SEL is effective in supporting ELL students to integrate within the school community by building strong relationships with educators and peers. SEL also encourages cooperation, supports clear communication, addresses conflict resolution, and nurtures a sense of belonging. As Dunham (2019) noted, “additional benefits include stress management, motivation, self-efficacy, and confidence to seek and offer assistance when it’s needed”. As ELL students develop their SEL competencies, they become more engaged, motivated, and integrated into classroom culture (Dunham, 2019). Additionally, research shows when all students receive SEL instruction within an integrated school community, there is a reduction in bullying, leading to higher rates of acceptance (Dunham, 2019; Pickett, 2008). In order to navigate injustice, students need to develop their allyship to ethically and compassionately communicate with others, and

students need the skills to inspire others to be allies for all people (Day & Allvin, 2016; Kidron, 2018; Pickett, 2008; Simmons, 2019). All students, through experiencing integrated education, can develop character virtues that promote moral and ethical behaviors (Kidron, 2018; Day & Allvin, 2016; Bennet et al., 2018; Dacey et al., 2016). Day and Allvin (2016) highlighted that anti-bias education incorporates an awareness of the many ways in which people identify themselves and others. Identification might include but is not limited to gender identity, family structure, economic class, ethnic identity, culture, language, and differing exceptionalities. Anti-bias education offers transformative opportunities to relate and communicate with others with respect and integrity (Day & Allvin, 2016; Kidron, 2018; Pickett, 2008; Simmons, 2019).

Communication Strategies

Communication is a common area in which children are continuously learning and where educators can help most. Communication is the foundation for building interpersonal relationships. Key factors in building this foundation include the ability to know when and how to express oneself, recognize nonverbal cues, and begin to distinguish what is important when someone else speaks (CASEL, 2017). When we communicate effectively, we are able to tell others how we feel about a situation, issue, or experience in a productive manner. One of the main pillars that effective communication is built on is respect; respect for oneself as well as respect for others one is communicating with. When we are respectful to others we are communicating with, through making eye contact and actively listening, we have the ability to create positive relationships where all sides are heard. According to Merrow (2018), “being respectful while communicating can lead to being more open-minded, empathetic, and compassionate towards others as well as towards ourselves” (para 2). A thriving school

community consistently communicates with meaningful intention (Day & Allvin, 2016; Kidron, 2018; Pickett, 2008; Simmons, 2019).

Approaches in Communication Supporting SEL

SEL competencies can become challenged when children are under stress. Conscious Discipline (CD) is a process developed by Dr. Becky Baily to help adults effectively communicate. Utilizing a CD communicative approach is acknowledging the behavior/communication by stating the interpreted root of the conflict or emotion and choosing to respond with the best possible option to meet the situation (Baily, 2015). It is a commitment to transformational change in the mindset of the educator in order to create classrooms that model ethical behaviors, pro-social skills, and high-level values. Healthy socialization can occur with consciously set intentions to alter perceptions and responses to classroom conflict (Bailey, 2015). A CD approach can assist the teachers in understanding the why and how behind the internal state of the mind, brain, and body response to specific behaviors (Baily, 2015). This approach regulates the adult's internal state and teaches children to do the same (Andrews, 2017; Bailey, 2015).

There are three brain states that serve as the framework for Dr. Baily's CD approach, Survival State, Emotional State, and Executive State (Baily, 2015). Each brain state includes the integration of the mind, body, and brain. The Survival State ("Am I safe?") is activated under threat and can ignite the fight, flight, or freeze response. When consequences are delivered in the form of anger, the brain goes into survival mode rather than learning mode (Fay, 2006). The Emotional State ("Am I loved?") is related to past conditions and the reactions to them. Our conditioned response emerges when an individual perceives the world as not progressing as expected. The Executive State ("What can I learn?") serves as an integrated learning state with

regulatory functions. Regulated functions help to manage emotions, solve problems, and see from another's perspective or point of view. When adults respond to a child's negative behavior from a place of empathy, the reasoning brain turns on and the child learns how to respond in a healthy manner (Fay, 2006).

Love and Logic, developed by Jim Fay and Foster Cline (2006), is another technique in empathic communication. To be effective in this communication technique, one must focus on stating the expectation, making the request, and following it with what the other person is asking rather than choosing an ineffective phrasing of language to achieve the desired result (Cline & Fay, 2006). There are two guidelines to follow when delivering communication through the techniques of Love and Logic. In a loving manner, the adult delivers enforceable statements with the child without lecturing and without anger (Fay & Fay, 2010). In this loving way, the adult is offering choices for the child in a nonthreatening manner. Perry (2019) discussed the concept of "first-then" statements to voice what the adult wants to happen and considering the child's need when doing so; for example, "First wash your hands, then have lunch." The Love and Logic technique makes requests or statements that are logical, respectful, and direct while also being compassionate towards the other person or people groups, in a mutually respectful manner (Cline & Fay, 2006). When children make a choice to behave unexpectedly, the adult can communicate in such a way that the child is held accountable to solve the problem in order to get the personal needs met (Cline & Fay, 2006; Perry, 2019).

Positive affirmations can be used to redirect negative thoughts and initiate inner calm. An affirmation is a statement, phrase or thought repeated to oneself in a practice of non-judgement, acceptance, love, and spiritual nurturing (Chopra, 1997; Keely, 2020). Mindfulness exercises such as affirmations assists with calming the body's response to stress and anxiety (Keely, 2020).

When the body is calm muscles are relaxed, breathing is normal, and the heart rate is steady.

Taking it a step further, deep breathing helps more oxygen get into the bloodstream allowing for the physical response within the body to calm the mind and reduce stress.

Nonviolent Communication

Nonviolent Communication (NVC) as developed by Marshall B. Rosenberg, is a communication technique to help people resolve conflicts. Rosenberg stated his intention for NVC was “to create the quality connection that allows everyone’s needs to be met and make life more wonderful for everyone” (2005). The purpose of NVC helps to give language to the emotion a person is experiencing and directly supports the social-emotional learning and well-being of children in community with others.

The five competencies of SEL are incorporated throughout NVC. Self-awareness in NVC begins with an awareness of what one is observing that is meeting their needs and then moves onto the awareness of what is not fulfilling their needs. Through self-awareness one identifies their emotions, what one is presently feeling and needing in the given moment. Self-management is present in NVC as one regulates their emotions and acts with control in their request to fulfill the need. Self-management and relationship skills are at work when an individual can express their opinions and beliefs as opinions and beliefs and not as facts. This is accomplished when an individual can regulate their thoughts and behaviors in a variety of situations while clearly communicating and resisting inappropriate social pressure. Social awareness is an important aspect of NVC. The ability to take the perspective of and empathetically hear what others are observing that is or is not fulfilling their needs gives way to appreciation and respect for one another.

In positive established relationships one can constructively negotiate conflict and offer help when needed. This is essential in NVC when understanding what others want in order to fulfill their needs. The SEL competency responsible decision-making is crucial in making clear observations without mixing evaluations. Observing is an essential characteristic of NVC. When an individual makes an evaluation rather than an observation it may come across as criticism and may provoke defensive arguments. Criticism is counterproductive to cooperative problem solving. Power-*with* is a concept that Rosenberg refers to when laying out the differences between observation and evaluation. The power-*with* is “the ability to motivate people from within. In contrast, power over gets people to do things because of their fear of what we’re going to do to them if they don’t meet our demands, or how we will reward them if they do” (Rosenberg, 2005, p. 12)

During a Keynote Address given at the 1999 National Conference of Montessori Educators, Marshall Rosenberg described the principles of Nonviolent Communication (NVC): observation, feeling, need, and request (2015). Individuals who use NVC frame all of their communication with these principles in mind. Rosenberg offered the illustration and visualization of two particular animals as descriptors for NVC. He utilizes the Giraffe because it is the land animal with the largest heart to which he expands on, by describing the Giraffe’s language as one that encourages joyful relationships and inspires compassion (2005). Rosenberg uses the description of the Jackal as this animal represents an individual's disconnection and awareness of the manner in which one thinks and interacts with one's feelings and needs, as well as the feelings and needs of another (Rosenberg, 2005). When individuals communicate with Jackal language it is challenging to make the connections with others in the way they want or intend to. Rosenberg makes a brief reference to his time in school and states, “Unfortunately,

giraffe language is not the language I was educated to speak. I did not go to Montessori schools. I went to ‘jackal’ schools.” (2005)

Through his work in NVC, Rosenberg saw a need to approach education differently. He brought forth the concept of Life-Enriching Education with characteristics and roots in SEL. Life-Enriching schools value the well-being of each individual within the community and support Life-Enriching connections between one another (Rosenberg, 2003). Life-Enriching human connections have three characteristics. First, individuals empathetically connect to the feeling and the need they each feel, free of judgements, or blame in wrongness (Rosenberg, 2003, p. 2). Secondly, individuals are attuned to the interdependent nature of their relationships and equally value the others’ needs and their own and seek to fulfill without the expense of the other (Rosenberg, 2003, p. 2). Thirdly, people take care of themselves and others for the sole purpose of enhancing their lives (Rosenberg, 2003, p. 2). NVC is interwoven throughout culturally responsive classrooms when adults encourage students to express their feelings and opinions and develop skills to take appropriate action when it comes to fairness (Day & Allvin, 2016; Rosenberg, 2003; Simmons, 2019). When practicing NVC one begins to retrain the pattern of thoughts and habits from a place free of moral judgment and live a life that is rich with compassion (Rosenberg, 2005).

NVC is an equity-based approach that assists in structuring a path to self-efficacy and self-regulation at all stages of life. In a 2007 report, the World Health Organization reported evidence that “The more stimulating the early environment (social interaction), the more positive connections are formed in the brain and the better the child thrives in all aspects of his or her life, in terms of physical development, emotional and social development, and the ability to express themselves and acquire knowledge.” (Irwin, Siddiqi, Hertzman, 2007, p. 7). Although there is

research supporting NVC in a multitude of educational settings, there is very little data about incorporating NVC in early childhood settings, specifically with mixed-age Montessori primary environments. This research aimed to fill the gap to determine if NVC can be useful for enriching SEL competencies with ELL students and students with varying degrees of trauma in Montessori early childhood classrooms.

Methodology

The Montessori school involved in this project served children who have experienced historical trauma and are currently experiencing instability with a lack of resources to adequately address their needs. This researcher was especially interested in serving children and families in ways designed to counter trauma in supportive ways. The research question was: To what extent will Nonviolent Communication (NVC) influence social-emotional development and socialization within a combined preschool-kindergarten Montessori environment, particularly with students experiencing trauma and students who are English Language Learners? The research was conducted over the course of five weeks and used four data collection sources. Qualitative and quantitative data on the effects of NVC on student behavior, in a Montessori early childhood classroom was collected over the five weeks of the study.

Data collected was analyzed to determine the effects of NVC on individuals and the classroom dynamics. NVC dialogue is a way of consciously expressing oneself with honesty and clarity of thought while also offering empathy and respectful attention to another. It is a method of compassionate communication without violence and aggression. In this research, violence refers to words or emotions that lead to hurt, pain, or discomfort, either from others or from within.

The language of NVC is meant to enhance communication skills and strengthen human interactions by inward reflection and relations with others even through challenging interactions. The NVC model is built on four components: observation, feeling, need, and request.

1. Observations are the concrete actions we observe that affect our well-being.
2. Feelings are how we feel in relation to what we observe internally and externally.
3. Needs are the universal the needs, values, desires, etc. that create our feelings.
4. Requests are the concrete actions we request in order to enrich our lives.

These four components involve expressing oneself honestly and empathetically receiving what the other person shares. NVC aligns with social-emotional wellness of all people. By guiding students in compassionate connections through NVC techniques, there is potential to positively impact Social-Emotional Learning (SEL). SEL is developing the ability to recognize and manage emotions, develop care and concern for others, make responsible decisions, establish healthy relationships, and effectively handle challenging situations (Dacey et al., 2016). In this study, the researcher will determine if empowering students by offering compassionate peaceful communication through NVC will build self-confidence and healthy communication interactions with peers and with adults in a Montessori Primary classroom.

The population of this action research was a mixed-age class of 20 enrolled students consisting of 10 three-year olds, 8 four-year olds, and 2 five-year olds. The children were enrolled in a public charter Montessori school in an urban neighborhood of a northern central state in the United States of America. Although 20 children were enrolled in the program, attendance for three children was inconsistent throughout the research time frame, mid-way through the research two children left the school, and at the tail end of the research two new

children were enrolled in the class. There are two lead teachers in the class that also serve as co-directors of the Montessori program. Only one teacher was conducting this research. Qualitative data was gathered through observation notation while quantitative data was compiled through researcher self-evaluation, delivery of specific lessons geared towards NVC dialogue, and student participation throughout the research.

During the five-week research period, data points were collected based on the social and emotional interactions between students as well as interactions between a student or a group of students and the researcher. The research was conducted over the course of five weeks and drew from four data collection sources constructed by the researcher: 1) Grace and Courtesy Presentation Tally (Appendix A); 2) Student Interaction Tally and Checklist (Appendix B); 3) Researcher Rating on the Delivery of NVC (Appendix C); 4) Observation of Students and Field Notes.

Grace and Courtesy (GC) lessons are short dramatic lessons demonstrating healthy prosocial behavior and are staples in Montessori early childhood classrooms. These lessons equip young students with practical information that aid students to be socially responsible in and out of the classroom community. NVC GC lessons focused on emotional recognition of self and others. GC presentations centered on NVC resolution by identifying feelings and describing the feeling in conversational ways.

The researcher tallied student participation during each GC lesson, whether the student was engaged or distracted and if student(s) needed NVC prompts to complete the engaged interaction (Appendix A). The researcher introduced three GC lessons per week that focused on NVC language and dialogue.

The lessons addressed the expression of the researcher's emotion by specifically describing the researcher's feeling and her need in situational scenarios during GC lessons. An example of NVC utilized by the researcher was "I feel frustrated when I see the cylinder blocks rolling on the floor, because I have a need for the materials in our classroom to be put back when they are not in use." Another example was "I feel scared when I see you hitting your friend, because I have a need for students in our classroom to be safe." A third example used was when the researcher observed a student growling at another and appearing angry, the dialogue was "So it sounds like you are really feeling angry, because you wanted to put your name card away by yourself." A fourth example of applying NVC in a GC lesson was "When you heard your name called and came to the line, I felt happy because you came the first time I called your name." At times the researcher addressed a similar situation with, "I felt concerned when you did not come to the line when I called your name because I have a need for all students to line up when their name is called for safety."

The Student Interaction Tally and Checklist documented independent attempts at NVC during the morning work cycle and the recess timeframe, while also noting if the student interactions were natural with results of positive interactions between students, negative interactions between students, or elicited a partial result with one student communicating in a positive manner while the other student was reacting negatively (Appendix B). Data was collected four times per week during 15-minute observation time frames. Tallied data noted if students attempted to use NVC, if feelings were communicated effectively by students, if the attempt at NVC occurred during a neutral moment, and if the student requested the guidance of the researcher to complete communication efforts. Information was gathered by a checkmark if

the interaction was natural, positive, negative, or partially communicated; if it was attempted but the other student was observed to appear not to be empathetically listening.

The Researcher Rating on the Delivery of NVC provided feedback on researcher self-perceived ability to communicate compassionately using NVC. Perceived NVC use was measured on a scale of 1-5 that included the options: came easily, natural, neutral in feeling, somewhat unnatural, and unnatural (Appendix C). Collection of data was gathered at the end of the morning work cycle three mornings per week. One measured rating was on the researcher's ability to use cue cards in order to describe feelings with ELL students. Another measured rating was on her ability to retrieve these cue cards when addressing emotions that supported NVC dialogue with all students. The rating system provided insight on her ability to effectively communicate with students while also navigating and role modeling NVC with fellow co-workers.

Observation and Field Notes took place over the five weeks of the research by randomly selecting three students per day for two 10-minute observation sessions, 10 minutes in the morning and 10 minutes in the afternoon (Appendix D). These observations assisted in gathering data detailing actions and interventions with students based on instructions given, observation noted, and support provided by the researcher to encourage more effective communication. Data also included field notes on the weather, morning arrival of selected children to be observed, irregular schedule including substitute teachers and observers, information about the presence and health of the researcher, and common concerns when addressing conflicts with students.

The researcher noted conflicts that arose during the morning work cycle including how the conflict was brought to her attention, what the conflict seemed to be about, the language the

students used to describe their concern, and observations about the students behavior. This data was tallied (Appendix B) to record if each student involved in the conflict was able to state the problem, identify or describe their emotions, empathetically listen to each other, and how they were guided to a nonviolent resolution. Throughout the project, the researcher tracked how many times students requested help to resolve conflicts. On occasion the researcher observed the need to intervene during conflicts and at times offered support by demonstrating NVC strategies (Appendix B). This data was tallied to show whether the number of conflicts increased, decreased, or remained the same.

To determine whether NVC was effective on social-emotional learning (SEL) and the socialization of the environment, all data was compiled, examined, and analyzed to check for commonalities across instruments. The data was categorized to interpret conclusions on students' ability to communicate with peers and the researcher. All data on students was triangulated to determine findings of students' ability to attempt NVC, to compassionately communicate and empathetically listen.

The researcher was comfortable and knowledgeable with NVC prior to the research. However, she had yet to implement these communication strategies in an early childhood classroom environment. Data collected on the Rating of the Researcher's Delivery of NVC aided the researcher in managing her communication efforts with English Language Learner (ELL) students during the research period. They will also be instrumental later as she enhances her cultural competency within the classroom environment.

Analysis of Data

The purpose of this study was to determine if the use of NVC influenced compassionate dialogue among early childhood students in a Montessori classroom. NVC is viewed as a

philosophical approach as well as a communication tool to foster positive human interaction and even transform violence in the world. The Montessori school where this research took place served children who have experienced historical trauma and were currently experiencing instability and a lack of resources to adequately address their needs.

This researcher was especially interested in serving children and families in supportive, transformative ways designed to counter the effects of trauma. The mixed age group provided daily opportunities to practice patience, tolerance, and assistance to others. Older students expressed compassion, acceptance, and love while the younger students demonstrated how important giving unconditionally was to another person. Students progressed through different levels of social understanding and learned how to relate to others in a new way.

Table 1
Demographics of Study Group

	Three-Year-Olds	Four-Year-Olds	Five-Year-Olds	Total
Female	4	5	2	11
Male	6	3	0	9
ELL*	9	5	1	15
FRL**	10	8	2	20

*English Language Learner

**Free and Reduced Lunch (Households meet low income eligibility criteria)

Grace and Courtesy Data Collection

The researcher introduced a new method of conflict resolution using the language of NVC. She was particularly interested in whether children were able to identify their feelings, and if communicating those feelings clearly to the other children involved in the conflict would aid both children to find resolution. Fifteen GC lessons were developed and presented, three days per week, to each of the two research groups over the course of the five-week research period. GC

lessons provided opportunities for students and the researcher to discuss feelings and needs in a small group setting. Students were introduced to and participated in voicing their feelings and need in a variety of situational scenarios. Lessons addressed how to listen for the classroom bell, how to respond to a fellow classmate's request, and how to form a line when preparing for recess or other transitional times. These are just three examples of GCs that were presented utilizing NVC.

The researcher demonstrated NVC through the use of phrases such as, "When you heard your name called and came to the line, I felt happy because you came the first time I called your name." and "I felt concerned when you did not come to the line when I called your name because I have a need for all students to line up when their name is called for safety." Student participation tally data was totaled and calculated over the five-week period to analyze if student engagement increased throughout the research period (see Figure 1). Naturally as student engagement increased throughout the research period, engagement of students that were distracted decreased.

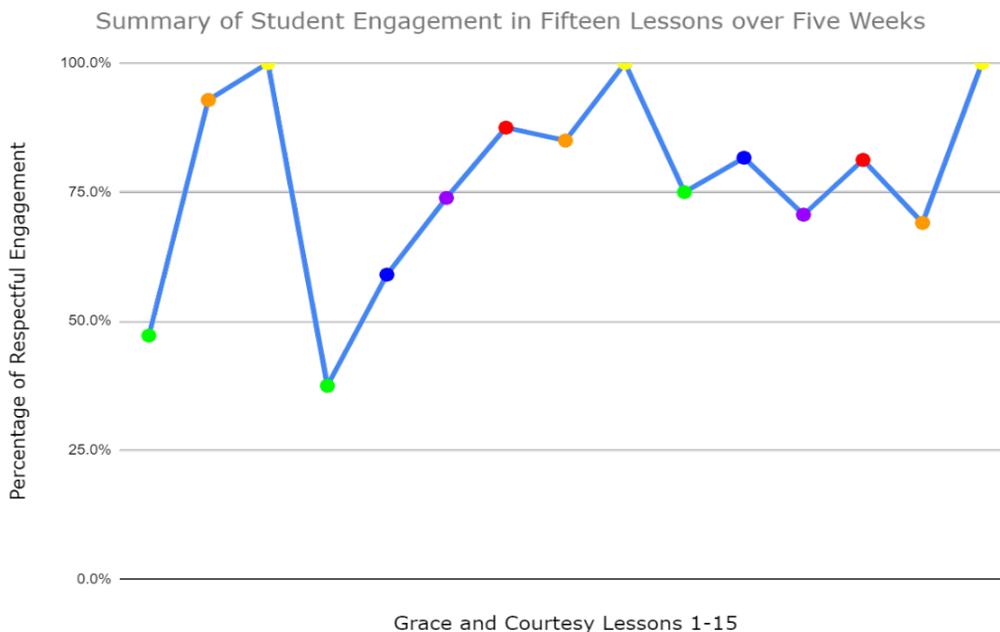


Figure 1. Researcher-observed students engaged in a respectful, attentive manner.

The tally of participation data was analyzed to discover if students using NVC needed guidance from the researcher to complete the thread of their communication efforts. Respectful student engagement did not show *steady* growth; it was somewhat erratic but did show an overall increase. By the end of the research 100% of students were respectfully engaged during GC lessons. Thus, confirming the lessons were engaging and there was student interest over the course of the study. Further analysis was noted through Observation and Field Notes whether the number of conflicts increased, decreased, or remained the same over the research period. Qualitative data responses gleaned from the notes, suggest that students involved in conflict dialogue utilizing NVC and with accompanied guidance from the researcher, were able to state their concern and identify how they were feeling.

There was a slight shift in the delivery of two GC lessons. These lesson alterations were based on the researcher's observation of students' understanding, describing, and voicing their individual feelings. One lesson included affirmations stated individually while attending a group lesson. The affirmations said aloud were "I am loved. I am kind. I am safe.". Each affirmation provided much needed dialogue around individual self-care and understanding of internal feelings and needs as well as feelings and needs that are universal. A second lesson addition was the introduction and use of the breathing ball. The breathing ball was an expanding, interwoven ball that simulated the in-and-out breath. The researcher used this method as a point of focus on listening to the individual breath as well as the breath of the person sitting next to them. This addition provided an opportunity to calm the body and the mind in support of a deeper discussion around feelings. The researcher guided the students through a discussion on feelings by asking questions such as, how do you feel? Why are you feeling that way? What makes one feel i.e. sad, happy, mad, excited, or scared? When you feel _____ how can you feel better, what do you

need or what have you received? Through this open, conversational interaction between the researcher and students, the researcher was able to have a clearer picture on the developmental aspects of each student and as a whole student body. The student body had shifted slightly with five additional children entering the classroom. Two of those students had inconsistent attendance throughout the research while two different students left the school during week 3 of the research period.

Student Interaction - Tally and Checklist Data Collection

Four times per week in 15-minute observation cycles, twice a day, the researcher tallied student interactions with each other and measured variations in how they expressed their emotions and how those emotions were perceived by another student (Appendix B). The first 15-minute observation occurred during the morning work cycle and the second 15-minute observation occurred during recess. Four data points were measured by the researcher's observation of peer-peer interaction in their delivery of NVC to one another. A positive result was calculated if the student was able to communicate respectfully while the other student listened empathetically. A negative result was analyzed if the student was not able to communicate in a mutually respectful manner. A partial result was determined if the student was able to communicate in a respectful manner, but it was observed that the other student did not empathetically listen (Figure 3).

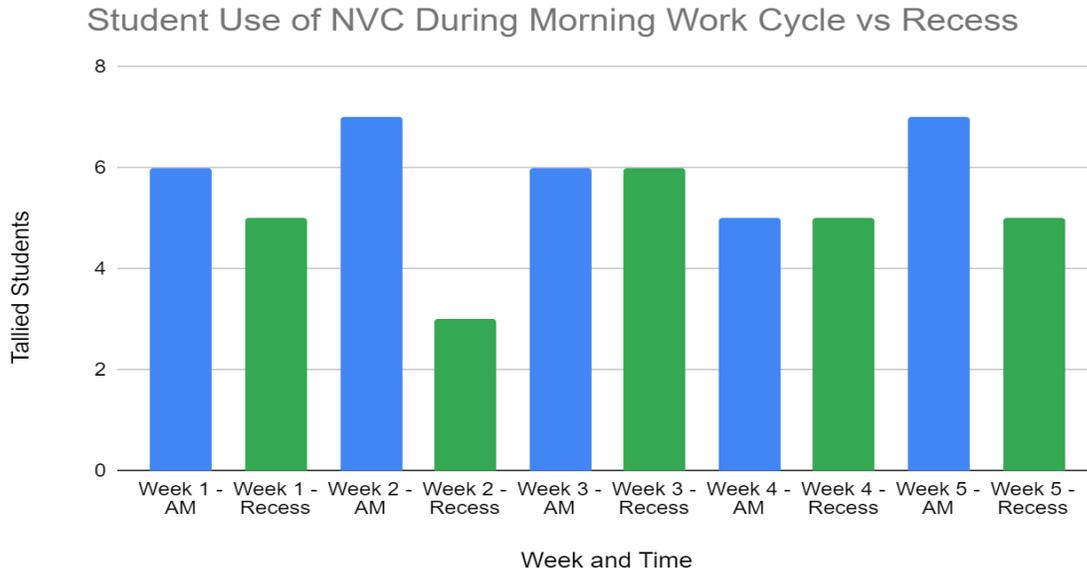


Figure 2. Student attempts at NVC. Each line represents weekly results of student use of NVC during the morning work cycle and recess.

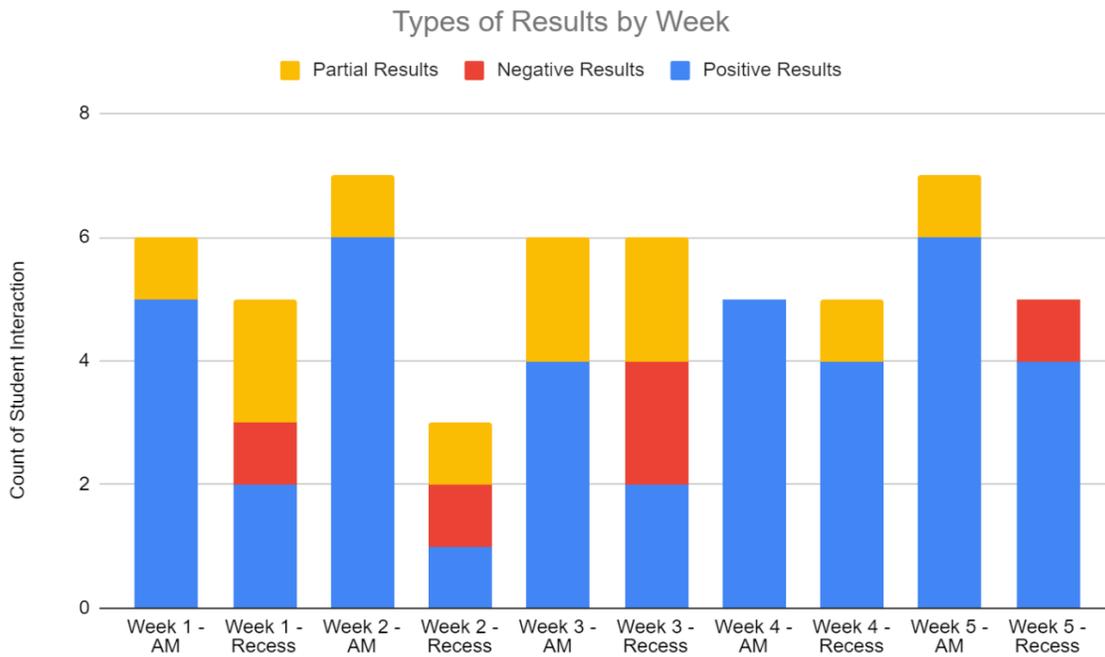


Figure 3. Student NVC results. Each line represents weekly results of student use of NVC during morning work cycle and recess.

The morning work cycle data indicated a greater natural utilization of NVC, and a slight increase in utilization of NVC from week one to week two. During weeks three and four, GC lessons focused on classroom guidelines which did not offer enough variation in the GC lessons that incorporated NVC dialogue. Dynamic changes in the classroom during this time may have impacted the results. Results showed that students addressed each other using NVC in neutral moments more frequently during the morning work cycle (Figure 4) than during outdoor play. The recess data indicated a broader range of results (Figure 5).

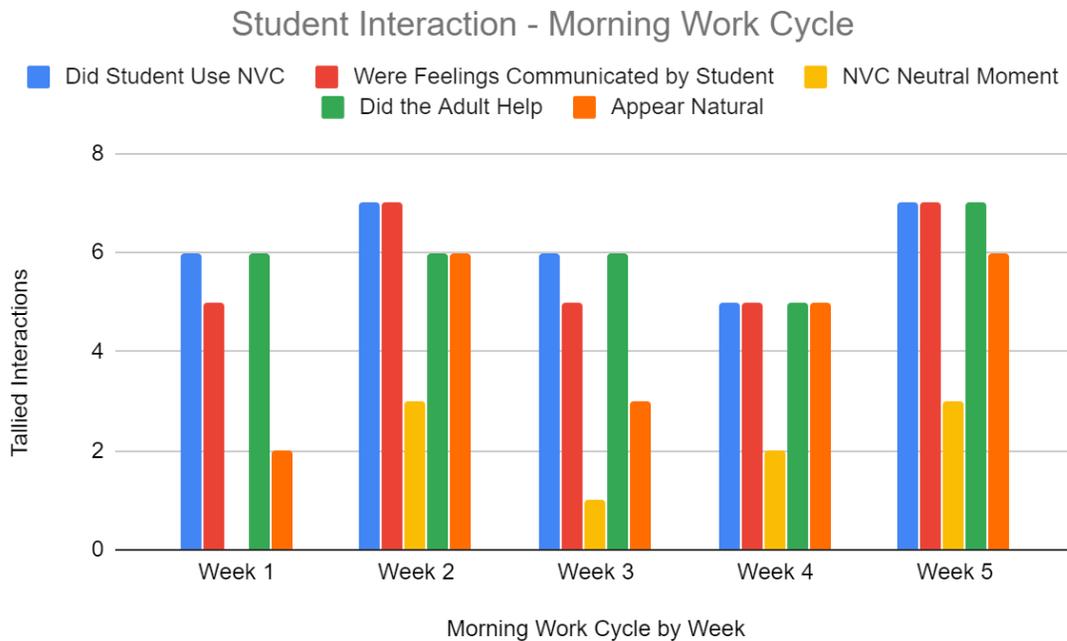


Figure 4. Student communication interaction during morning work cycle, over the five-week research period.

The use of NVC was more challenging during heightened emotional moments during the recess period. Student interactions appeared less natural, stressed, and NVC rarely occurred in

neutral moments. Interestingly during weeks three and four, NVC interaction increased during the recess period while the interactions dipped during the morning work cycle (Figure 4).

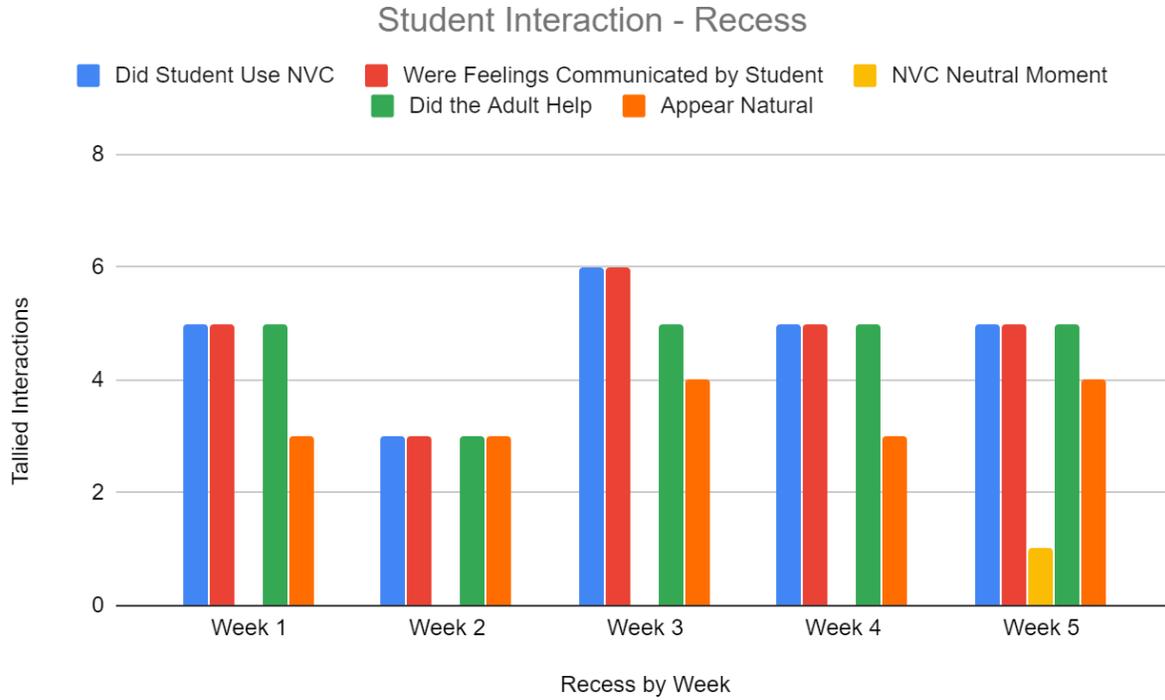


Figure 5. Student communication interaction during recess, over the five-week research period.

Student use or attempts at NVC was analyzed to specifically determine if students would independently choose to communicate using the language of NVC. As shown in Figure 4, students engaged in NVC more often in the morning than during recess. There was a regression in week four in which students attempted to use NVC less than even the first week of the research. It was determined that the researcher’s attention was on revisiting previous classroom guidelines rather than delivering new NVC language during GC lessons which affected the results.

Self-Evaluation of Researcher - Rating Researcher Delivery of NVC

One aspect of this project involved researcher self-evaluation on the delivery of NVC. Data was documented three mornings each week over the course of five weeks by applying a score to rate her communication between students and fellow co-workers. The researcher evaluated herself based on five points of implementation (Appendix C).

Data was analyzed to illuminate trends and patterns in the delivery of NVC by the researcher. Self-assessment data collected by the researcher indicated that the researcher was able to communicate NVC with ease. However, the retrieval of cue cards to support dialogue amongst ELL students, was an unnatural method of delivering language of emotional reaction and communication of the emotion the student was experiencing or expressing. This challenge may have affected the natural flow in the delivery of NVC strategies over the course of the research period.

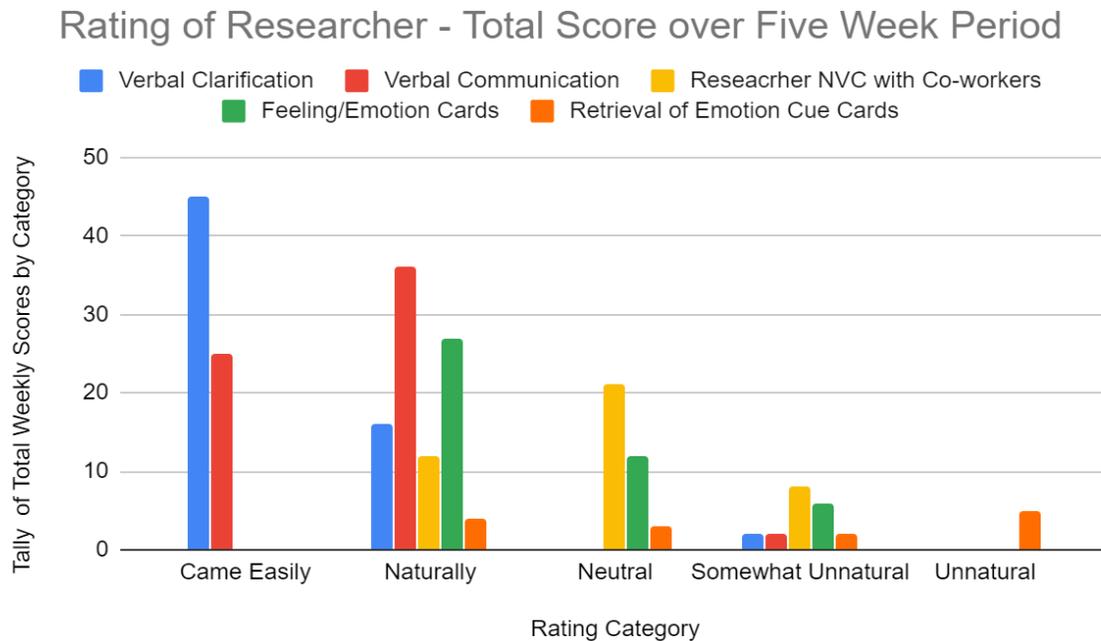


Figure 6. Rating of researcher. Each bar represents frequency of researcher’s ability to communicate with students and fellow co-workers utilizing NVC.

Observation and Field Notes

The original research design proposed that the researcher conduct observations of three randomly selected students, five days per week, for two 10-minute observations (Appendix D). However, as stated in the methodology section, the amount of observations had to be scaled down considerably. The research was impacted by a health diagnosis of the researcher, increased enrollment which added additional work in managing the classroom environment, inconsistent adult presence causing an imbalance in classroom expectations by the student body. Adjustments were made to account for these variables. These variables resulted in the extension of the project by an additional week. This additional week resulted in a modified schedule that allowed the researcher to resume observation and field notation. Data was collected on verbal engagement of NVC between students and students and the researcher.

Based on findings, the study concluded that NVC affected student interactions with one another. When supported by the researcher, students displayed an enhanced positive attitude towards themselves, knowledge of emotions and more self-confidence in resolving conflicts cooperatively while independently speaking and listening to the individual feelings and needs of one another. During the recess period in week three, the researcher was approached by a tearful student. The student explained to the researcher that a classmate had taken a pine bough from their hands. Attempting to uncover the feeling the tearful student was experiencing the researcher asked two open-ended questions. First she asked the student “How did it make you feel when _____ took the pine bough from your hands?” and second, “Would you like some support in speaking to _____ about your feeling and what you need?” The student accepted the supportive guidance and together they approached the other student to peacefully resolve the conflict. Utilizing NVC dialogue to state the feeling, the unmet need, and the request the

researcher coached the tearful student by offering the NVC phrases, one at a time “I feel angry that you took the pine bough from my hands without asking. I need you to ask if you can have a turn without taking it from my hands. Please ask me if you can have a turn with the pine bough.” This interaction happened a few more times between other students over the next two weeks of the research period. The pine boughs were a different material to experience outside and several students were interested in seeing the many ways one could explore with them.

In a Montessori environment, students are active contributors developing their character, constructing themselves physically, emotionally, cognitively, and socially. A young student may quickly move from a foundation of love into a need for a supportive social environment, gradually acquiring special characteristics that form the construction of self; however, if the essential social emotional skills are not in place, the student may need assistance and guidance to know the classroom is a healthy place for human connections. Throughout this research it was evident that the foundation of love, trust, and security that the classroom environment provided for everyone was pivotal in socialization and social emotional learning.

Action Plan

This study incorporated NVC in an early childhood classroom to explore the effects on compassionate dialogue amongst the student body. The research examined whether there were any changes in which the students communicated independently, with one another, during morning work cycles and recess, after receiving GC lessons. The underlying goal of the research was for students to practice NVC in both neutral moments as well as in times of conflict.

Integrating compassionate guidelines to be safe, be kind, and be responsible, with a focus on communicating verbally and nonverbally through the principle strategies of NVC positively affected student’s prosocial skills. Based on the findings, students displayed confident

characteristics in conflict resolution by navigating social interactions to meet their needs by expressing their emotions, and by asking for assistance in utilizing the techniques of NVC if they were not sure how to proceed. It became imperative that the researcher was available to nurture positive reciprocal relationships between students. Social cohesion was impacted by empathetically and compassionately interacting with one another. Through the cultivated practice of NVC, positive and respectful interactions took place and enhanced peer-peer relationships.

Prior to the study, the researcher envisioned students incorporating the concepts of the daily lessons into their regular social interactions. In addition to recognizing their feelings and acknowledging their needs in each situation, there were times when students were challenged by their emotional expression. The researcher engaged in opportunities to discuss pro-social nonviolent methods of communication with the students but was contradicted by messages the students had previously been taught. Thus, the researcher utilized these moments as exploration into the cultural and ethical practices of each students' family. Given the complex nature of students experiencing trauma, regarding homelessness and refugee resettlement, cultural competence of the researcher as well as fellow educators needs further examination. When teachers collectively share with the students a multi-cultural lens through which to view their intimate surroundings, students can form interpersonal relationships that may hold more considerable significance in the understanding of one another (Bennet et al.; Lake & Pappamihel, 2003; Darling-Hammond & Cook-Hall, 2018). A key factor to enabling educators to be effective when working with students from cultures other than theirs is cultural competence, another area of personal and professional development the researcher intends to expand on in the future.

The researcher leveraged elements of the Love and Logic technique throughout the research period to model observing and making requests, which are important aspects of NVC. Love and Logic is a strategy that allows educator to be effective in the achievement of a stated request, rather than choosing an ineffective phrasing of language to achieve a desired result (Cline & Fay, 2006). In the classroom, for example, the researcher utilized a phrase, such as "I would be happy to show you how to carry your work carefully," rather than "That is not how we carry that work." Another example she applied was, "I will start our collective once everyone is sitting comfortably in their space," instead of demanding that children "Sit down with your legs crossed and your hands in your lap during the collective." These techniques make requests or statements that are logical, respectful, and direct, while also being compassionate towards the other person or people groups in a mutually respectful manner. In this method, no judgement or criticism is implied, which is a key tenet of NVC.

The researcher role modeled communication strategies for expressing feelings and needs for both researcher and students, another important aspect of NVC. First-then statements were incorporated throughout the course of the research. These statements were essential during transitional times aiding in the delivery of NVC by the researcher. First-then statements implied the need of the adult to address the feeling or need of the student. For example, "First wash your hands, then have lunch." For many students experiencing homelessness, they may very well be hungry. In this example, by stating the need of the adult first following it with the need of the student, allowed the student to know a meal was coming. First-then statements such as this assisted the student in meeting the feeling and desire to enjoy a meal (Perry, 2019). These were key interactions with foundational communicative dialogue necessary for purposeful instruction of NVC throughout the research.

Expanding emotional vocabulary was a key strategy throughout this research project because research supports the correlation between emotional regulation and language development. By utilizing various forms of healthy communication, students develop more complex social and emotional skills which fosters interactive dialogue in the expression of feelings and needs. Drawing on the Montessori concept of a sensitive period for language development, students observed and quickly picked up on positive verbal communication and responded well to guidance offered by the researcher that assisted in resolving conflicts or self-expression.

Among the interventions, additional lessons (not in the researcher's original plan) of spoken affirmations contributed to the recognition of emotions and community building. However, upon reflecting on the affirmation exercise, the researcher expanded her knowledge on mindfulness practices as a way to encourage students' self-awareness within an early childhood environment. Supportive lessons in mindfulness included a breathing ball that offered a visual of expanding and contracting one's breath as well as visualizing a flower opening and closing. This allowed time and space for many students to calm their bodies and settle into the work cycle. These exercises were independently chosen by several students and seemed to support the students' ability to self-regulate when faced with disruptive feelings. Further research on mindfulness as it relates to NVC and SEL, could be expanded upon as a foundational approach in guiding students in the internal awareness of feelings and needs in a variety of situations.

Potentially through mindfulness exercises, students may become aware of the interconnectedness of human experiences. Ladson-Billings (1995) asserted that for students to conceptualize learning and knowledge, they needed to understand themselves and others within the classroom culture (as cited by Bennet et al., 2018). Educators must engage with families,

provide multi-cultural literature, and hold critical conversations and literacy practices within a social justice framework. There is fundamental research regarding culturally responsive literature and classroom design in support of all students. Compassionate communication and classroom discussions can transpire when literature is viewed through multi-dimensional, diverse perspectives. Culturally responsive print-rich environments provide opportunities for courageous conversations while listening with kindness and respect (Bennet et al., 2018).

Further research is needed in the utilization of diverse literature as a means to encourage communication and respect in the classroom. A deep dive should be taken into compassionate communication with students of all cultures in an early childhood environment (beyond the materials used in culturally responsive classrooms). The research reviewed speaks to the physical necessity of material goods as well as the need for children's literature, rich with cultural context, available in all classrooms but it doesn't go far enough—the compassionate communication piece is missing. Young children learn to express themselves and listen to others while being respected and understood by those in their environment. They begin to realize that their ideas and contributions in communication hold value and meaning to others, fostering social cohesion within the classroom.

The researcher strove to meet each student at their level of experience and development. She took time to address conflicts through nonviolent, pro-social means by building upon the healthy, stable connections of love, trust, and care. Through these connections she witnessed the growth of several students learning to navigate conflict, with more self-confidence within the classroom environment. The researcher expanded her knowledge and skill set in understanding the cultural needs of the community in which she serves. Another area worth exploring to see the impact of NVC is to teach families compassionate communication strategies. The researcher

intends to facilitate a Parent Education night annually, with a focus on structured, purposeful methods of communicating with children, one method being NVC.

The accumulation of results point to the positive impact on the socialization and SEL on all students in this study. Dr. Montessori (1946) believed that children [construct] their “own behaviour from life and its experiences, and if set on this road of life, all will be well” (p. 83). From the moment of birth, children begin to communicate with those around them. Through these emotional communicative ways, children build trust and security in people within their familial social groups. Children will continue to make connections within supportive environments outside of the home, further developing their character. Early childhood classroom socialization may be the flint against steel needed to ignite a society grounded in social cohesion to create a peaceful world we envision (Montessori, 1992). NVC can be taught to young children, and positively influence SEL within the classroom. Integrating compassionate communication from a place of honest sharing while empathetically listening takes tremendous amounts of practice and patience. This is not an easy process for young children to grasp, especially those who have experienced trauma and/or are ELL. NVC skills can be cultivated in both educators and children, and doing so is worth the effort.

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Appendix A
Grace and Courtesy Presentation Tally

	Early Morning Group A 9:00-9:15	Mid-Morning Group B 11:00-11:15
Students engaged during presentation		
Students respectful of presentation		
Students distracted during presentation		
Students who volunteered to participate and present to another student the Grace and Courtesy presentation		
Students who need prompts in guiding the communication interaction during the lesson		

Appendix B
Student Interaction Tally and Checklist

Tally III/III/III/	Did student(s) use or attempt NVC techniques?	Were feelings and/or needs communicated by student(s)?	NVC took place in a neutral moment	Did the adult intervene to help at the request of the student?
Morning Work Cycle 10:00-10:15				
Recess 11:45-12:00				

Checklist ✓✓	If NVC was utilized, did the interaction appear natural for student(s)?	Positive results – the student was able to communicate respectfully, and the other student listened empathetically	Negative results – the student was not able to communicate in a mutually respectful manner	Partial results – the student was able to communicate in a respectful manner, but the other student did not empathetically listen
Morning Work Cycle 10:00-10:15				
Recess 11:45-12:00				

Appendix C
 Rating of Researcher Delivery of NVC

Rating System	Came Easily (5)	Natural (4)	Neutral (3)	Somewhat unnatural (2)	Unnatural (1)
Verbal clarification and articulation of NVC techniques during G&C lessons					
The researcher communicates verbally with students using NVC techniques during morning work cycle					
The researcher utilizes NVC – to compassionately communicate with fellow employees					
Feeling cards* for ELL students utilized to teach NVC					
Retrieval of cue cards when addressing NVC techniques with ELL students during morning work cycle					

Appendix D
 Observation of Students and Field Notes Collection Tool

Student Initials	Morning	Afternoon

Basic feelings when needs “are” being met

Amazed	Comfortable	Proud	Trustful	Surprised	Energetic
Glad	Eager	Thankful	Hopeful	Joyous	Inspired

Basic feelings when needs “are not” being met

Angry	Irritated	Discouraged	Overwhelmed	Distressed	Sad
Confused	Embarrassed	Uncomfortable	Lonely	Puzzled	Impatient