

Speaking Peace In Chicago's Multicultural Communities: Peace Education In Inner City Elementary Schools



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Introduction

Equipping children with the skills and tools to peacefully avoid and resolve conflicts with siblings, friends, and classmates is a task shouldered by many: parents and grandparents, aunts and uncles, teachers and community leaders. The need for peacemaking skills increases with age, as do the potential severity and consequences of actions taken in response to an offense.

Speaking Peace, a school-based peace education program, was launched in early 2017 by the Peace Exchange, a program of Holy Family Ministries. A response to requests from Chicago educators for a deeper dive into peacemaking, *Speaking Peace* teaches tolerance, peacemaking and nonviolent communication (NVC) through peace circles, discussions, storytelling, role-playing, art and documentary films. Provided at no charge to schools, *Speaking Peace* has been taught to over 5,000 students in grades 4th through 8th at 38 Chicago schools.

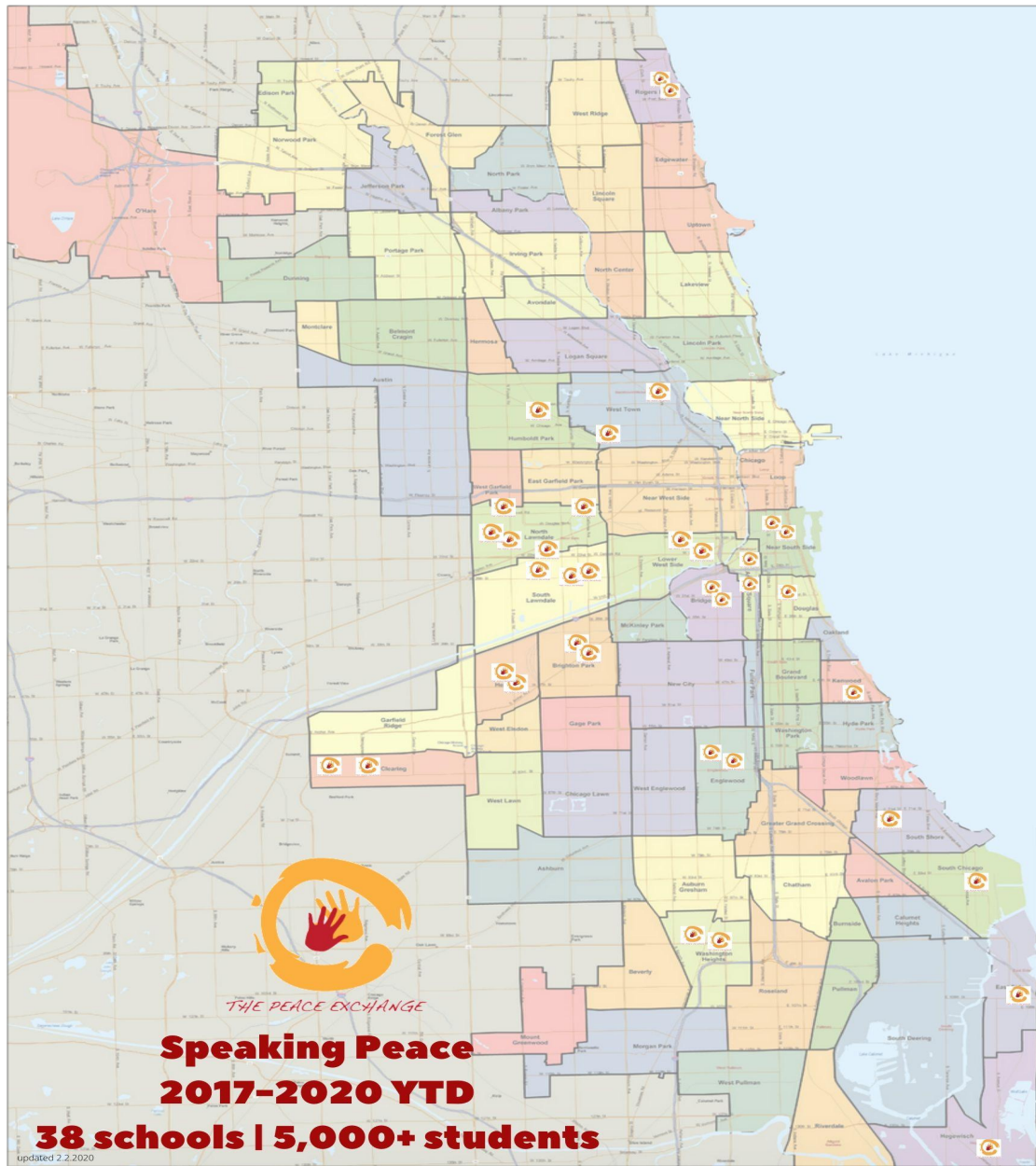
This paper, ***Speaking Peace To Chicago's Multicultural Communities***, is an opportunity for our instructional team to share the evolution of *Speaking Peace*, including the following:

- The need for peace education programs
- *Speaking Peace* program model
- Nonviolent Communication (NVC) methodology
- How our model meets recommendations found in relevant research
- Our assessment and evaluation methods

About the author:

Henry Cervantes serves as Program Manager for The Peace Exchange, Holy Family Ministries. Cervantes has worked for Marquette University Center for Peacemaking developing curriculum as well as serving as adjunct faculty for North Park Theological Seminary School of Restorative Arts, teaching incarcerated individuals. Additionally, he has worked for Illinois State University training student teachers at inner city schools in peace education. Cervantes is one of 40 Human Rights Champions featured in the permanent exhibition Take A Stand Center at the Illinois Holocaust Museum.

Speaking Peace 2017-2020 At-a-Glance



Total number of schools served: **38**

Total number of communities reached: **30**

Total number of students reached: **5,063**

The Problem. The Need.

In the city of Chicago, violence often dominates the news, particularly violence within low-income neighborhoods. What the media generally fails to acknowledge is that Chicago's high rate of violence is concentrated in specific segregated neighborhoods that historically have been the most under resourced. A recent study showed that five Black neighborhoods representing nine percent of the city's overall population, accounted for almost half of the homicides in the city.ⁱ Sadly, what is also underreported is the immediate and long lasting impact of violence on children in these communities.

According to a recent analysis of crime data by the [Chicago Tribune](#), "About 60% of Chicago's youngest children lived in community areas where 91% of homicides took place".ⁱⁱ There is considerable research into the impact of violence on young children's development. Psychiatrist Dr. Carl Bell, a national leader and scholar in treating childhood trauma resulting from violence, shared this insight, "The research shows that maybe 20% of children exposed will not be able to recover and be resilient. It depends on how many protective factors they have around them, how much social fabric is in their community, how much connectedness they have, how much self-esteem they have, how many social emotional skills they have, how skilled they are turning bad things into good things".ⁱⁱⁱ The question becomes- How are we helping children and communities develop protective factors they need to overcome violence and thrive in their communities?

In Chicago, there are many promising programs that aim to prevent youth violence. Like every social issue, it takes communities working together to help make a difference. I work for The Peace Exchange, a program of Holy Family Ministries in the North Lawndale community on Chicago's Westside, an area with some of the highest rates of violence in the city.^{iv} Our approach to violence prevention at the Peace Exchange is to help young people build the social emotional skills necessary to peacefully resolve conflicts. As we visit Chicago schools, we've come face-to-face with a growing demand from teachers, counselors and administrators to help children build conflict management skills. Nationwide research suggests this growing need is not unique to Chicago but prevalent in schools across the country.^v

Through our partnership with [Communities in Schools of Chicago](#) and relationships with other organizations, we've met some of the demands from schools seeking peace education programs that help children peacefully resolve everyday conflicts before they escalate. The demand is so high that our *Speaking Peace* program often has a waiting list. When referrals for the program are received from schools in communities with high levels of violence, teachers and counselors report that their interest is in helping children learn peaceful behaviors and ways to decrease aggressive behaviors. They understand that the exposure to violence in the students' neighborhoods has made an impact on them.^{vi} Our program is aimed at providing peace education to schools with the highest needs and, in part, we base the assessment of need on the rate of violence in that geographic location.

Perceptions of and experiences with violence differ from neighborhood to neighborhood. At the beginning of the program, students respond to a short survey that includes questions about 1) their level of concern with violence, and 2) whether or not the student, a friend or a family member has experienced violence. From 2018-2020 schools citywide, 67% of students expressed moderate to high levels of concern with violence with 58% answering “Yes” to the second question. In the North Lawndale and Englewood communities, two neighborhoods with high rates of violence, 75% of students expressed moderate to high levels of concern with violence. Moreover, 78% have experienced violence or have a personal relationship with someone who has. When offering our program in communities with high rates of violence, students sometimes mention how common violence is in their neighborhoods.

Ylonda Ware, school counselor at an elementary school in Englewood, an African-American neighborhood on Chicago’s South Side, invited us to provide peace education to her students. Englewood ranks in the top three neighborhoods for incidence of gun violence in Chicago, and, in fact, violence around this particular school is commonplace. Many young people have been killed in the vicinity of the school.^{vii} Teaching peace in schools like Henderson Elementary reminds us of the needs that school communities face on a daily basis. Students can be disruptive and have behavioral issues that can interrupt instruction. That happens in every school to that extent or another, but I’ve learned that when children are disruptive in these schools, it is a reflection of something else.

I remember one class in which a student was disruptive and couldn’t sit still during one of our workshops. Initially my observation was of a student not paying attention; however, I later learned that that student was a survivor of gun violence. Ms Ware reported to us, “Providing peace education helps them [the students] to have an understanding of how to reduce the effect of the violence...and that there is an alternative way and that there's a different way to handle the problems, such as the issues and the concerns that they see in their community every day...and that peace really is possible, it is really possible to exist in the world”.^{viii} After completing our program at the school, we came back to help organize their annual student peace march against gun violence through the community. Students made signs using the nonviolence communication tools they used in the program. They listed the strategies they learned in our program on their protest signs and even used our logo on their t-shirts. I am often amazed at how students apply what they learn in our program to their surroundings.

The Speaking Peace Model

Speaking Peace is an outgrowth of The Peace Exchange's signature program, the [Peace Builder](#) leadership development program. The yearlong Peace Builder program is designed for young adults, ages 17-21, who are dedicated to nurturing peace and nonviolence. The program is community-based and focused on education. Participants receive a minimum of 80 hours of training, travel internationally to continue their peace studies, then return to Chicago to share their experiences with at least 1,000 children from their neighborhoods. In post-trip 45-minute outreach sessions, our youth Peace Builders speak with students a few years younger than themselves about all that they have learned and experienced in the program. Teachers and counselors, impressed with the young leaders hailing from the same neighborhoods as their students, asked us to develop a more intensive program with the focus of peacemaking for students.

Speaking Peace equips children with tools to peacefully resolve conflicts. The four-session program teaches tolerance, peacemaking, and nonviolent communication (NVC) through discussions, role playing, and documentaries. Research suggests that effective conflict-resolution programs reach all children in a community and not just those who exhibit violent behavior. Furthermore, such programs should include experiential activities to provide students with opportunity to practice what they are learning in order to gain confidence in mastering peace skills.^{ix} Our instructors, each a Peace Builder committed to nonviolence, teach these skills to children. Our instructors hail from Chicago's Westside and Southside communities, giving students a greater sense of connection through cultural competencies and relatability, thus increasing program effectiveness.^x

In schools where we teach *Speaking Peace*, students are always asked the following questions: Have you ever been mad at someone? Has anyone ever been mad at you? Have you ever said something to someone that has hurt them? Have you had that done to you? Have you ever had a conflict with another student? This invites students to understand the complexities of conflicts, how conflict occurs all around us and gives us the opportunity to explore ways to approach conflict. At one school on Chicago's Southwest side, I remember a young student who told us, "But that is how we do things in my family or my community. We don't talk things out. We are not nice to each other when we are angry. We don't listen to each other, so I don't think what you are teaching can help us because that is not how we are". She was being very intentional in communicating what she saw around her on a daily basis. This particular student's skepticism kept her interested in figuring out a new way to communicate conflict.

In *Speaking Peace*, our instructors focus on teaching these main practices: 1) Restorative justice peace circles, 2) Forgiveness and reconciliation, 3) An adapted model for nonviolent communication (NVC) and 4) Use of the NVC model to explore empathy. The following describes how each session explores the above points:

Session 1: Instructors describe their commitment to peace and nonviolence by sharing their personal stories. We then introduce students to the idea of peace circles. Peace circles are a Native American indigenous traditional practice to build peace across communities.^{xi} Sitting in a peace circle, students and teachers are given pipe cleaners, which they are asked to shape into symbols that represent them. This activity provides participants with an opportunity to enter another's world and to understand something about how they perceive themselves and each other. Students and teachers share, one by one, what they've created, then discuss what they've learned about one another.



Having worked with multicultural communities, we've learned that some symbols are common across race, age and culture. Some popular shapes include hearts, family members or a favorite pastime. Students and teachers are surprised at how the classroom opens up, with 95% of students participating and sharing meaningful insights. Observations are recorded in order to measure participation across all classrooms, and the observations attest to the high levels of participation in the peace circles.

Session 2: Peace Builders screen the documentary of their most recent international trip- two weeks in Rwanda in Summer 2019- and share experiences and lessons learned regarding the 25th anniversary of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi. Stories about forgiveness and reconciliation are explored. Students have an in-depth discussion on whether forgiveness and reconciliation are possible in society today. Students are active participants in the Q & A, which is always lively and inspiring. Before the session concludes, students receive a brief introduction to NVC as a way to think about reconciliation and forgiveness. This lays the groundwork for the next session.

Session 3: Instructors share tips on peace practices, empathy and forgiveness. Students draw and label a figure representing the four steps of NVC, then use it to brainstorm solutions to conflicts. Student volunteers demonstrate the use of NVC in resolving conflicts typical to an elementary school setting. This session is structured to allow plenty of time to practice and role-play NVC. The enthusiasm of students volunteering to play either the protagonist or antagonist never fails to surprise us. We often learn how students already practice empathy.

At a North Lawndale elementary school, we received a very kind lesson in empathy and gratitude from students. Through the years, we have been humbled by the notes we receive from schools. At this school, a 5th grade student organized her classmates to make us a thank you binder with letters of appreciation to our program. The counselor mentioned that a particular student had recently lost a brother to gun violence in the community. This student was notably very engaged in our classes, asking questions regarding peacemaking and forgiveness. She mentioned she wanted to get rid of gang violence in Chicago. She presented the

thank you binder to our team. This type of thank you from a young person who has experienced significant traumatic violence is not the average thank you card one receives, let alone a binder full of them. From my experience, young people are definitely grateful for knowledge and skills that can help them in their everyday struggles with conflict.

Session 4: Students view the documentary, Three Boats, about Syrian refugees arriving in Lesbos, Greece via rubber rafts. ^{xii} The film is coupled with a facilitated discussion on compassion, inclusiveness, and empathy. Students use their hand-drawn NVC diagrams to guide them to understand the refugees' situation and refugees' feelings, needs, and actions. This allows students to further practice NVC, but in a larger context. The discussions allow us to answer questions like: Is it important to understand what someone else is going through? Is it important to understand what is happening in the world? What are things you would change if you had the power to do so? Students always share their visions for a better world without racism, violence, war, poverty, hunger, and weapons.

In Chicago's Chinatown neighborhood, we were invited to help 5th-8th grade students learn conflict resolution. In this particular school, we visited classrooms where the majority of students spoke either Cantonese or Mandarin. There were classrooms in which students needed complete translation. Peace Circles, lessons and discussions were translated with help of aides, teachers and students. In one 6th grade class, the teacher was moved to tears from hearing her students empathize with one another as well as with the Syrian refugee crisis. The teacher and her family were once refugees, and the students realized just how close world events are to themselves.

Research supports that methods of peacefully avoiding and resolving conflicts are life skills that can be taught to and mastered by young children. ^{xiii}

At every school, we collect data, record observations, and solicit feedback helpful to understanding the school's students and assessing the effectiveness of our program and its impact. We collect the following: school overview statistics, community crime statistics, pre- and post-instruction results, measures of student participation, and teacher and staff feedback. These school snapshots help us track the quality of our program, and its progress across schools in Chicago.

As our program has evolved, so has the rigor of our assessments. Methods we use to measure ourselves and our students include:

- At the beginning of Session 1, all students complete a four question survey designed to give our instructors a sense of the students' exposure to and experience with violence.


The 4 Steps of Nonviolent Communication

THE PEACE EXCHANGE

Step 1 OBSERVE

 Pay close attention to your observations. Speak about what you see in the conflict.

Step 2 FEELINGS

 Recognize your feelings and emotions. Speak about what you feel in the conflict.

Step 3 NEEDS

 Focus on what you need in the conflict. Speak about what you need in the conflict.

Step 4 REQUEST

 Do not demand or say mean things. Kindly ask for what you need in the conflict.

Adapted from Nonviolent Communication: A Language for Life, Marshall Rosenberg

The Peace Exchange
www.peacex.org

- For all four sessions, a “back of the classroom” observer completes a rubric unique to each module. For example, as a way of evaluating the extent to which our instructors keep students engaged, we track student participation rates in activities ranging from the pipe cleaner ice breaker to role playing to discussions about the documentaries we screen. Given the critical role that teachers play in sustaining *Speaking Peace*’s lessons, we pay close attention to their engagement and feedback.
- At the conclusion of the final session, students complete a ten question survey that measures skills such as their ability to recreate the NVC diagram as well as their willingness to use their new skills to peacefully resolve conflicts.

Observations about session 3 nonviolent communication (NVC) drawing exercise:		
	5th grade 2.18.20	6th grade 2.18.20
% students participating and completing the NVC diagram	everyone except 1 student drew the NVC diagram	everyone except 1 student drew the NVC diagram.
% students participating directly/indirectly in NVC skits	Class 1 - 8 students participated in skits out of 21 Class 2 - 7 students participated in skits out of 23	Class 3 - 8 students out of 25 participated in the skits Class 4 - 6 students out of 30 participated in the skits.
Teacher participation		
Are students in a circle?		
Do students have pencils?	yes	yes
Did teachers participate in the NVC drawing exercise?	yes	no
Were teachers attentive to the roleplaying and discussions on NVC?	yes	class 3 yes class 4 no
On a scale of 1 (low) to 3 (high), teacher engagement level?	3	2

- Teachers and counselors complete a questionnaire that provides feedback on effectiveness, impact, and areas for improvement.

All the feedback we collect is rolled up into individual “School Snapshots” useful for describing and understanding our efforts at dozens of Chicago elementary schools. Research suggests that effective peace education programs require rigorous ongoing assessment and meticulous observations that include validated student and teacher feedback to help measure qualitative and quantitative data.^{xiv}

Through my personal experiences, teaching students and student teachers as well as training former gang members and incarcerated individuals, I’ve learned that communities want a practical way to deal with their issues. The saying goes, “Communication is the key”, to which I’d add, “Nonviolent communication is the key in resolving conflicts.”

Teaching Nonviolent Communication (NVC) to Children

Speaking Peace incorporates key Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) social/emotional learning (SEL) standards, and aims to inspire students to be peace builders. The key to this goal is our model of equipping children with an innovative, practical four-step process of nonviolent communication (NVC). This easily understood model helps students develop their self-awareness and an awareness of others.

We were first introduced to NVC during our program's 2017 trip to India. In a late morning session on the rooftop of the AhimsaGram group home, organization founder Shammi Nanda, explained the principles of NVC and sketched the diagram we now use.



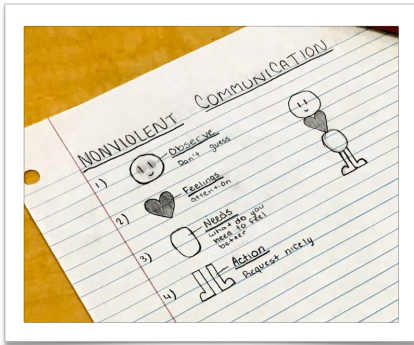
Speaking Peace teaches nonviolence through the strategy of the late clinical psychologist, Dr. Marshall Rosenberg, who developed an international model widely recognized as Nonviolent Communication. Dr. Rosenberg's vision was to explore the causes of violence and what could be done to reduce violence and to disseminate effective strategies for peacemaking skills. His master work, Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life, also known as Compassionate Communication, has been used in different settings to address interpersonal conflicts. Furthermore, "NVC's foundation is based on language and communication skills that strengthen our ability to remain human, even under trying conditions. NVC guides us in reframing how we express ourselves and hear others. Instead of habitual, automatic reactions, our words become conscious responses based firmly on awareness of what we are perceiving, feeling, and wanting." ^{xv}

To teach NVC, instructors and students sketch a very simple body made up of a head, heart, stomach, and legs. Each body part corresponds to a step in the NVC process.

- 1) **Observations** - The head and eyes represent our viewpoints. It is important to pinpoint the cause of a conflict and the ability to do so relies on our observational skills. We guide students to be mindful of what actually occurs in conflict and have them speak from their own viewpoint. The way we view the world is what our world is. Rosenberg writes, "Observations are an important element in NVC, where we wish to clearly and honestly express how we are to another person. NVC does not mandate that we remain completely objective and refrain from evaluating. It only requires that we maintain a separation between our observations and evaluations." ^{xvi}

One way I try to demonstrate this point is by telling a story to students. I share an experience I had in a store parking lot where another adult takes my parking spot. Students usually respond by saying how they would respond or how they have seen other adults

in their lives respond. Usually, it is hardly peaceful. I try to tell students that it is important to remove our judgments from our observations, that sometimes our judgments about others can distract us from our observations about a situation. Yes, sometimes our observations might be disappointing, but does that give us permission to treat other people in a mean way?



2) Feelings - A heart is used to depict feelings. There is a clear distinction between expressing our feelings and our thoughts. Helping students build a vocabulary of feelings is extremely important if they are to regulate their feelings and express those feelings in a healthy way. Rosenberg writes, "A common confusion, generated by the English language, is our use of the word 'feel' without actually expressing a feeling....NVC distinguishes the expression of actual feelings from words and statements that describe thoughts, assessments and interpretations."^{xvii}

At an elementary in Chicago's North Lawndale community, during a NVC role-play, a young student had difficulty expressing her feelings during a conflict scenario. She then shared, "You are making me feel some-type-of-way," during Step Two of the process. This automatically got the students to respond in good humor. The phrase is used in inner city popular culture to describe when someone is having a difficult and strong emotion, like hatred and anger toward someone else. When introduced properly, students will find creative ways to make this peace process their own. I am amazed that students can express themselves, even if their words and ideas are influenced by popular culture. Now, when I am upset, I sometimes reference that line to help ease a situation.

- 3) **Needs** - A stomach in the shape of a simple circle represents needs. I tell students if we are struggling with someone, odds are that we need something. Because we don't have what we need, we create problems. Teaching students to differentiate their needs from their wants is important especially in a conflict resolution. Rosenberg reasons, "When we express our needs indirectly through the use of evaluations, interpretations and images, others are likely to hear criticism. When people hear anything that sounds like criticism, they tend to invest their energy in self-defense or counterattack."^{xviii}

Our *Speaking Peace* instructors teach children how to identify a need in a particular scenario of conflict and focus on solving the need. Continuing with the parking lot example shared above in "Observations", I ask the students, "what was my immediate need during the conflict?" Students raise their hands and always point to the fact that it was finding a parking spot that needed to be fulfilled. In these situations, students recommend finding another spot to solve the problem. This addresses the immediate need and does not make matters worse with another person. Separating the needs and the wants in conflict is important in learning how to resolve them.

- 4) **Request** - A pair of legs symbolizes a request for action. There is a clear distinction between demanding and requesting something from someone. We help students change their demand into a request. Rosenberg states, "Expressing genuine requests also requires an awareness of our objective. If our objective is only to change people and their behavior or to get our way, then NVC is not an appropriate tool. The process is designed for those of us who would like others to change and respond, but only if they choose to do so willingly and compassionately."^{xix} The four-step process is a method to speak, listen and respond with the steps as guides for resolving an issue.

I have had extensive experience in exploring peace education and conflict resolution with children, youth, and adults of color in communities most impacted by all forms of violence. Teaching NVC to thousands has changed my perspective and has informed the way I teach peace to vulnerable communities. For many of my students, it is usually the first time they've heard words like "nonviolent", "peace building" or "conflict transformation". By listening to those most impacted by violence, we can learn a great deal from their experiences. Using their examples, context and experiences, we can find a way to connect each student to the material and make it relevant to their lives and the lives of those around them.

For children, youth and adults alike, in order for nonviolence education to be effective, it must be grounded and relatable to their own situations, whether it be a classroom, the cafeteria, or the playground. Schools are our best way to reach the most young people.

In December 2018, I spoke with Cook County Sheriff Tom Dart and inmate Devonta about when and where to teach children nonviolence. Sheriff Dart has this to say, "A lot of that, I believe, needs to be done at the school level because there's no other touch point for these young boys and girls. Outside of [schools], it would be naive to say there should be some other type of intervention. In the school setting, I think, it's clearly something that's very, very relevant to teach them conflict resolution, to teach other ways to address anger; things along those lines will apply all throughout their lives." When asked when the skills of de-escalation and conflict resolution should be taught, 25-year-old Devonta responded, "6th, 7th, 8th grade, like middle school."

The majority of students in the program do a great job working through the NVC steps and actually have a lot of fun doing so. This is when students are engaged the most, at an average session 3 class we get at least 8-10 student volunteers to come up and demonstrate using their skills to teach the entire class. A remarkable observation is how students often want to play the bully. They want to rehearse talking down to others. It's apparent to our instructors that students are calling on their own experiences of being bullied. Our approach is to remind students that this is peace training, not "bully training."

When students talk through their issues with someone else, they feel empowered to confront situations differently. For example, at a school in Chicago's Humboldt Park neighborhood, there was a student who initially said he would never approach conflict in a peaceful way, that if someone messed with him, he would simply, "Let them have it." I told him that "it" had no place in school and asked if he would be interested in trying a different method to speak up for himself. He would have a way of letting the other person know exactly how he feels without having to harm the person or getting hurt himself. The student agreed and his classmates cheered him on to try. The student started by confronting the other student in the scenario, saying "Hey, I'm going to tell you how I feel about something you did. I will be kind about it and ask you for something nicely so please listen." To my surprise, this student set up and used the NVC model in his own creative way.

In Pilsen, a primarily Latino neighborhood on Chicago's Lower-West Side, School counselor Kristy Brooks invited us to conduct *Speaking Peace* with her 5th and 6th grade students. She expressed specific interest in conflict prevention and resolution. After the program, she reported, "Over 50% of student self-referrals for counselor help were from our 5th-6th grade classes for 'problems with another student'." She added, "[After *Speaking Peace*] My 5th-6th student self-referrals for 'problems with another student' were cut in half! From Sept-Jan, I averaged 1.1 per week. For February, I averaged .5 per week. Thank You!". This direct data point is not something we had asked for in reporting, but it has gotten us to consider if our program is making an impact on student and counselor referrals for behavioral issues.

A 2010 academic study, "Peace Education in the Classroom: Creating Effective Peace Education Programs", published by the University of Minnesota outlines four key components necessary to make the peace education program successful. Using the *Speaking Peace* model and the NVC framework, we will outline each component of this study and offer how we meet these recommendations using our approach. Authors David W. Johnson and Roger T. Johnson are quoted in the bold font:

Peace education includes teaching students how to:

(a) Face the difficult issues that must be discussed in order for peace to be established and maintained.

Speaking Peace explores different scenarios of everyday conflicts with students. The team begins by offering examples of behavior young people are familiar with: verbal or physical bullying, taking things without permission, name calling, and gossip. Then, we teach students that nonviolence is one approach to dealing with everyday conflicts we all encounter in life. We explore difficult scenarios like the ones mentioned above to recognize the importance of peace in school communities and explain that by using NVC, we can establish and maintain peaceful communities. We also use case studies from our Peace Exchange documentary films to look at other

social contexts. Also, the documentaries help us learn strategies that are utilized by other cultures to establish peace.

(b) Establish a procedure that all parties agree to use to discuss these difficult issues (i.e., constructive controversy).

Speaking Peace instructors guide students in NVC to establish a nonviolent procedure to confront an issue. In the third session, instructors draw the NVC picture diagram on the board and have students copy it. Instructors explain each step in the procedure by defining important terms and providing examples of each. The procedure is reaffirmed by having students brainstorm how they would use NVC in a conflict situation. Then, students are given opportunity to role play those situations. Students agree to experiment with the process to discuss a difficult conflict or issue.

(c) Train students how to use the procedure skillfully.

In Session 3, before students use the NVC procedure, instructors model how to use it using a common scenario. One that everyone can relate to is a basketball game where a student refuses to pass the ball to another student. . Instructors model how to appropriately confront this particular situation by using the NVC steps. With coaching from instructors, students then write their own way to approach the situation using the four steps.. The program dedicates a significant amount of time to role play where students act out how to appropriately use the NVC steps. We engage students in providing constructive feedback to each other on how to better use the four steps. Students also brainstorm their own examples of everyday conflicts and role-play, furthering practice of the NVC process in situations they have chosen.

(d) Incorporate the use of the procedure into students' personal identity and value system so that the procedure will be habitually used. When left unresolved, the difficult issues may result in a renewal of war or violence.

Once students have role-played using the NVC procedure, there is a discussion in which students explore their own personal identity and value system with regards to the process. Students are asked "Would this process work in real scenarios? Yes? No? Maybe? Why?" The discussions always conclude with the understanding that in order for peace to grow, it first has to be attempted, practiced and habitually utilized and that those who commit to it demonstrate leadership. A bookmark outlining the four NVC steps is given to each student and teacher as a reminder.

To clarify, the peace process must be relevant to students' experiences and include exploration and discussion of the ways students can use the model in their everyday lives. The NVC method is a problem-solving step-by-step guide to help young peace-keepers work through problems in a peaceful way.

Speaking Peace and our way of teaching NVC incorporates and meets the aforementioned academic recommendations. Additionally, our approach to teaching NVC to children is threefold: 1) students identify the steps, 2) articulate the steps 3) and learn to empathize with others by using the steps. This threefold approach enhances and reinforces the NVC process with learning activities which include: drawings, role-play skits, bookmark handouts and class discussions.

Peace education is as cross-curricular as it can be cross-cultural. In Chicago's different neighborhoods, you will find classroom communities that are largely Black, White, Brown or Asian. Whether we are teaching in all African American classrooms in the heart of the Black community or Latino classrooms in the Barrios, our experience had shown us that peace education is valued across all communities. Yes, peace is different in each cultural context, but the tools can be used to create a desired outcome.

Author's Reflections^{xx}

In the course of writing this paper, I spent some time reflecting on the need for—and impact of—our *Speaking Peace* program on children in these communities. During my review of the surveys we conduct at the outset and conclusion of instruction, several things caught my attention:

- Students in these two communities have been impacted by violence at higher rates than students citywide. 78% told us that violence has directly impacted them, a family member, or a friend. Citywide, 58% of students answered “yes” to the same question. As an aside, we posed the question to 53 freshmen at Hinsdale Central High School in Hinsdale, IL. 7.5% responded with a “yes.”
- When asked to draw and label the four steps of nonviolent communication, 54% of Englewood and North Lawndale students were able to recreate the diagram. Citywide, 75% of students were able to correctly draw the diagram.
- I was pleased with the responses from Englewood and North Lawndale students to the question; “I plan to use nonviolent communication skills with my classmates and friend.” 60% of students in Englewood and North Lawndale responded “sometimes” and “a lot” while 52% of students from other schools responded with the same answers.

Dear Peace Exchange,

My name is Makayla Mitchell. I want to thank you guys for taking the time to come in our classroom and teach us peace. I thank you Mr. John and Mr. Henry for helping us learn more about peace. Without you guys my classmates and I wouldn't know how to use peace in different situations. Thank you so much.

Sincerely,
Makayla Mitchell

Peace



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