

Solving conflicts together!

Nonviolent Communication and conflict management by children.

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Graduation project for a vocational degree in Applied Psychology, submitted October 2015

Summary

The teachers of school X, a primary school in Germany, have indicated they regularly handle conflicts between the children from the flexible classrooms using hostile, assertive, passive or third-party interventions. These flexible classrooms have children aged six or seven, sometimes eight years old. The teachers of these flexible classrooms wanted to learn concrete ways to practically teach children more pro-social ways of handling conflicts, leading to more equal outcomes in the form of win/win solutions. They think they may have found their solution in Nonviolent Communication (NVC). The purpose of this research is to validate if NVC does effectively stimulate pro-social conflict management skills in children aged six to eight years old when they experience conflicts with their peers in school X, a school for *Gemeinsames Lernen*. If so, the NVC project can also be implemented in other classrooms. The following research sub-questions have been identified:

1. How does Nonviolent Communication stimulate pro-social conflict management?
2. How often were each of the conflict management strategies as described by Chung and Asher used by the children in the flexible classrooms before the project?
3. What were the outcomes of the conflicts between children in the flexible classrooms before the project?
4. In conflict situations, do the children apply more of the pro-social strategies as described in the Chung and Asher model?
5. Are the outcomes of the conflicts handled by the children in the flexible classrooms more often equal (win/win) after the project?

The chosen research design was a quasi-experiment. In two flexible classrooms (intervention group) the NVC project was implemented and in two other flexible classrooms (control group) it was not rolled-out. The intervention group consisted of 42 children and the control group contained 40 children. A pre-test was done where all children were presented with two questionnaires. One with questions about a recent real-life conflict and one with 6 hypothetical incidents. This process has been repeated as a posttest and additionally the four teachers of the four flexible classrooms were asked to record the chosen strategies and the final outcome of the conflicts happening in their classrooms. The results of all three of these measures show a significant rise in the percentage of children that chose pro-social strategies in the intervention group as well as a significant rise in the percentage of incidents that lead to an equal (win/win) outcome. In the control group, no such increases could be found.

The evaluation questionnaires that both the two teachers and the children in the intervention group filled out, also showed that both the two teachers and most of the children were positive about the NVC project.

From the abovementioned we can conclude that Nonviolent Communication does indeed stimulate pro-social conflict management in children between 6 to 8 years old in conflicts with peers at school X, a school for *Gemeinsames Lernen*.

Further research is needed to evaluate if the NVC project remains effective in the long term, as well as further research to establish the validity of the separate measures that were used.

The teachers are recommended to implement Nonviolent Communication in other classrooms with outside support and to keep consistently applying NVC principles to manage conflicts in the intervention group.