

Nonviolent communication at Laborschule Bielefeld

“It’s nice that you can celebrate my successes. Can you show me how to feel my own successes in the same way you do?”

We happened upon nonviolent communication while looking for a smart answer to this touching question of an autistic boy. While searching for an answer, we eventually came across Marshall Rosenberg and his ideas on nonviolent communication. Subsequently, three colleagues participated in several trainings on the topic, which finally led to the implementation of the principles of nonviolent communication in everyday school life at Laborschule Bielefeld. At the beginning, we had the pleasant feeling that we were already familiar with many of the ideas and that we were already including many of them at our school – however, not all of them yet. Over the following months more and more of these ideas made its way into our groups because we all considered them valuable. It was a like doing a puzzle in which some parts had been missing until now.

Since then, all adults at the primary level have been introduced to the principles by us and all groups have a poster with support measures to solve problems in a mindful way (The four steps of nonviolent communication). This helps the children (and the adults) to develop an attitude that is about communicating what is going on inside oneself instead of blaming, threatening or accusing others. In addition to this, there are feelings and needs cards (see fig. 1) which illustrate the terms presented on the poster. This helps children to develop a shared vocabulary for solving conflicts.

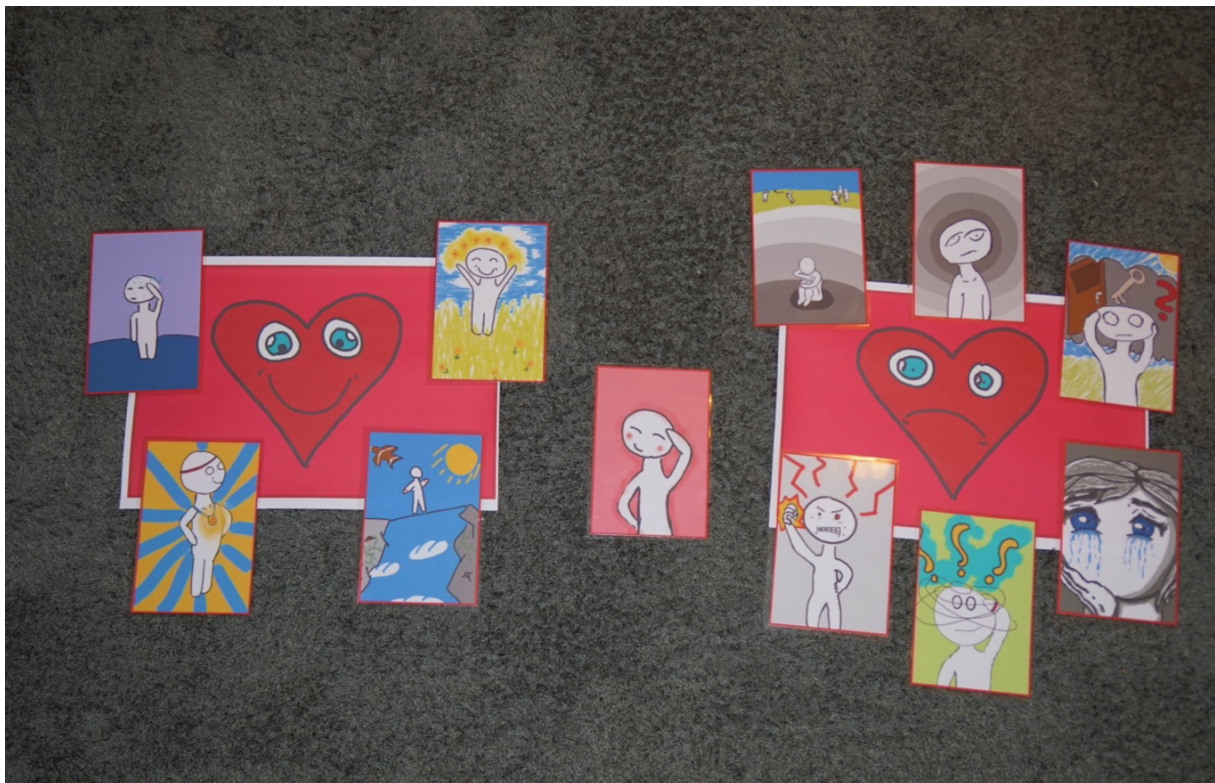


Figure 1: Feelings cards.

“Somehow you always succeed in really solving the problem! Maybe that is because you never ask who is to blame!”

“I think it helps that we all know and understand the four steps and the words for feelings and needs!”

“Somehow everything inside me feels warmer and nicer now!”

As adults at Laborschule Bielefeld, we have heard similar statements many times since we have started to work with nonviolent communication. Here, almost all students learn about nonviolent communication. We start with the youngest children at age 5 by teaching them “giraffe language”. It is always touching to hear students’ positive feedback, especially if before these children had struggled with anger and desperation or had completely withdrawn into themselves.

We hope that with the help of mindful communication, we can contribute to making our students strong, responsible, mindful and peaceful people.

“For the last three years, we have practiced Marshall B. Rosenberg’s nonviolent communication with the children of the mixed-age group 3, 4, 5. Now, problems can be solved quite quickly most of the time and at the end, all participants are pleased with the solution – the problem seems to be solved completely. The children now deal with conflict situations more calmly than before. They often say, “This surely is a misunderstanding.”, when there is a problem to be solved. The children also got used to the process quickly. According to several parents, their children also practise nonviolent communication outside the school context. Other people are oftentimes positively surprised about the way the children interact with each other. The children increasingly voice their feelings, needs and requests instead of complaining or blaming each other. At the same time, it is obvious that focusing on themselves and feeling what is going on inside them has helped the children of this group. They also learn that they can change something whenever there is a conflict situation and that all feelings are allowed and valuable – in other words, they are allowed to feel all feelings, including anger and rage.”

Comment from a teacher of classes 3,4 and 5

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