



# A Path with Heart

A Nonviolent Communication & Social Change Telesummit



## Catherine Cadden

### *Peaceable Revolution Through Education*

*This is a transcription of one of the interviews from A Path With Heart, the 2013 telesummit on Nonviolent Communication (NVC) and Social Change, produced by Alan Seid of Cascadia Workshops and the Blackbelt Communication Skills Program. More than 1600 people from over 40 countries registered for this event. Each call had live listeners and a question & answer period.*

Catherine Cadden worked for a decade in U.S. public schools as well as alternative private schools. After seeing the devastating effects of the educational system she created the TEMBA school in 1997, founded on empathy, self-responsibility, and the tenets of nonviolence. She co-founded Play in the Wild!, and has brought trainings in Nonviolent Communication, TEMBA teaching methods, social change organizing, and alternatives to violence to peoples of all ages in Afghanistan, Argentina, Australia, Canada, China, Japan, India, Quebec, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

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~ Catherine Cadden

Alan: Hello everyone and welcome! This is Alan Seid.

We are together here, and this is A Path with Heart, a telesummit on Nonviolent Communication and Social Change.

The reason I created this telesummit is because this is a topic whose time has come.

Our planet's life support systems are going through significant stress. At the same time, human society is in an unprecedented time historically.

Never before have there been so many humans on the planet at one time.

Never before have we humans been so interconnected, and starkly aware of our interrelatedness and our interdependence.

Never before has the human family experienced such promise, such peril and such opportunity.

Marshall Rosenberg's process, Nonviolent Communication, which was named out of a sense of alignment with Gandhi's movement of truth-telling and compassion, is a world-famous, proven, time-tested methodology for:

- creating exceptional personal and professional relationships,
- for offering compassionate understanding to others (and knowing when and how to ask for it ourselves),
- for preventing and resolving misunderstandings and conflicts,
- for speaking our truth in a way that is more likely to lead to harmony than conflict,
- and for creating mutual understanding without coercion.

In this interview series, I'm conversing with NVC trainers for whom I have a great deal of respect and whose work I admire. Please keep in mind that I'm keeping all the lines muted, for now, to preserve the quality of the recording for future listeners.

My guest on this call is Catherine Cadden. Catherine Cadden's work is to advance a consciousness of interdependence among all peoples, for generations to come, through cultivating the physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual

maturity of the Seventh Generation, and those who directly affect the Seventh Generation, seven generations from now. That's her focus between here and there. Since 1987, she worked in U.S. public schools, Montessori, and Waldorf classrooms, witnessing firsthand the devastating effects of the educational system, both mainstream and alternative: racism, materialism, apathy, alienation, and violence. Having studied the power of social change through the philosophies and movements of Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1997, she opened the doors of TEMBA, a K-8 academic school founded on empathy, self-responsibility, and the tenets of nonviolence. In its eleven years of operation as a true multi-age, multi-ethnic, and multi-class classroom, TEMBA became a beacon of hope for the communities that it served, a place where parents, students, and teachers thrived. TEMBA graduates went on to become leaders in their high schools and colleges, initiating outdoor education programs, creating coalitions between youth and police, and resolving peer conflicts, all while making the highest marks in their academic endeavors. Catherine has brought trainings in Nonviolent Communication, TEMBA teaching methods, social change organizing, and alternatives to violence to peoples of all ages in Afghanistan, Argentina, Australia, Canada, China, Japan, India, Quebec, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Catherine continues the work she started with TEMBA through Play in the Wild!, an organization she co-founded that offers international programs to youth and families. Catherine, welcome!

Catherine: Thank you, Alan, it's an honor to be here.

Alan: So happy to have you. I have been following your work from the other side of the continent with awe and so much appreciation and to be totally transparent and honest, with a little bit of envy.

Catherine: I do get to play a lot.

Alan: [Laughs] It looks very, very, very fun.

Catherine: Was it Emma Goldman that said "If we can't dance, I don't want to be part of the revolution?" [Laughs]

Alan: Yeah, exactly. So now I want to ask you a question based on the topic that you wanted to talk about. I'm curious, why do you think education is a way to change society?

Catherine: Yes. Education and our educational models was something that I first begin to study alongside of looking at non violence. There has been this idea of formal education, since the time of Plato really, this idea of formal education came alive as a way to gather folks to share wisdom. But then we started to see something really shift in education when religion began to gather power and begin to influence government or even became the government of nations. So religion began to create educational structures to teach the moralistic values and teach the belief structures of the religion that were going be ruling that group of people or that government. So out of that grew compulsory education.

The interesting thing about that is now the United States, which is the country that I was born in and have done a primary amount of my work in and I live in currently, there has been compulsory education since 1642. It wasn't until 1852 that the state of Massachusetts made compulsory education a law, making children go to school. In fact if you look up any of the laws and any of the wording, if you know Nonviolent Communication which is this idea to bring alive, in our language, the universal human needs and the beauty of choice to really give to each other, you don't hear that even in the language of the law. I mean the laws are very much about every parent / guardian / custodian, having control of a student. They'll cause the student to attend school. So right there in our foundation of what education is, there is this idea that, "We have to school. We should go to school." But we are not asking, "What is it that we are schooling? What is it that we are wanting to develop in these new learners and bring alive there?" And the interesting thing for me around really looking deep into this was asking myself the question, why do we educate?

When I went down that rabbit hole to discover it, I have to say, I am grateful that Marshall Rosenberg brings alive, in social change and Nonviolent Communication, what he calls 'despair work.' Because when I went down that rabbit hole of why do we educate, there was a lot of despair that I hit around the history of how we set up our educational structures. So if you think about it today, we have laws in place that require our children to attend over a hundred and ninety days in a school. We are talking if you went to school everyday for six months straight and then add a couple of weeks, we're talking over half a year of every year of a child's life. That is an immense influence over: who this being is, who they will be coming, how they are going to make choices, how they are going to set up social systems and social structures, how they are going to begin to organize and relate to themselves and to each other, the community they're within and the world around them.

So, when I take a look at what we have in place and what I would like to see as far as the world I'd like to live in because social change simply means we want to change the social structures. Then that gets really personal, I ask myself what are the social structures I would like to see? Well, I know for me I didn't enjoy to see a world where everyone needs to be being met, where there is peace and there's harmony and excitement to turn towards the suffering and the pain that's out there so that we can release and attend to each other in a giving and receiving mode. So in asking myself that question, "Why do we educate," I really began to answer it differently as I came out of that rabbit hole, I said, "Wow, I would like to create education so that it's effective at creating a peaceful world, at really creating a world where everyone thrives." So, if I want to create a world where everyone thrives, then I scale it back. Okay, I want to create the community that thrives. Then I scale it back again. Okay I want to create the school and the classroom that thrive where these kids begin practicing and putting into habit where their social skills will be. Here's to saying that much. How's that landing.

Alan: Well, it sounds like an fascinating exploration and I'm glad that you made it out of the rabbit hole with the despair work that you did. Just part of what it stimulates for me is the wonder that I survived my schooling as relatively unscathed. And yeah, it just sounds like a fascinating exploration and I'm curious who your influences were, your greatest influences in relation to peaceable social change and what you learned from them? How did that get implemented into the school that you created?

Catherine: Well, I mean your experiences are uncommon and that was part of what made just looking at this. It was amazing to know how many people my age and older really talked about surviving school and I have actually compared it now that I have worked with so many people around the world who have obviously gone to school because the United States often becomes the model for many of these other countries and so I have heard that many times, survived school and I found that people would tell stories about their school experience not unlike people who survived the war of that level of fatigue. And now in the states we are actually experiencing another level of that with the amount of weaponry that enters into the physical space of a school. And so when I was studying Dr. King, well I'll back up. I'm really fortunate that my first inkling into the idea of nonviolence or social change was when I was handed Civil Disobedience to read when I was 22 years old. Henry David Thoreau, being from the northeast of the United States, wrote Civil Disobedience, which was an amazing idea, this idea that we could have peaceable revolution - he coined the phrase. He said

that we could have a revolution of ideas, a revolution of something happening in our society and we could do it peaceably, simply by not following a law that's unjust. Years later, when I was learning the language of Nonviolent Communication and this vocabulary of universal human need, I went back to that Civil Disobedience that Thoreau wrote, and I learned that he was speaking to when a law doesn't meet the needs of the people and if we decide and go, "Look, we're not going to follow this law anymore. It can't be a law." That was the piece that really grabbed Mohandas Gandhi. When he was in his struggle, when the English were occupying India that he grabbed on to that idea - wow! So, you know Henry David Thoreau talking about that if a hundred thousand people don't follow a law well then we can't have a law. Gandhi was looking at few million people. He's got that, "Wow - we've got a few million people to say we're not happy with this law and we aren't following it. Hence his movement of bringing that idea of civil disobedience; we are going to do something different; we are going to march to the ocean and harvest our own salt instead of buying the British salt. All these acts were saying, "I'm going to gather the people. We are going to have enough people not follow the laws so that we can state our case that these are unjust. What's in place is not meeting the needs of the people.

Alan: And have it changed...

Catherine: And have it changed. And so, with three of those protests, Gandhi was able to gather up his people and really make a statement. That was the piece that really inspired Dr. King and there is something in here too that I found quite beautiful. Gandhi and King both spent a great deal of time wondering about education. If you ever have a chance to see the volumes Gandhi wrote, it can cover a book case of an entire wall of a room, I mean it's immense. He wrote a great deal on education and that was actually where I really honed in on him and studied what he wrote about education. And something that he said really sparked my interest. It was the idea of, "Why do we send children to a school to learn the government's chosen language for them when they already have a hundred ways to express themselves. They are straight from God and they are ready to express. Why do we take all that away to have them speak the one language the government has chosen for us?"

I found that very profound and it made me question. Wow - so this idea about language and what's the language were teaching when we bring our kids together in a school classroom setting. What is it that we're teaching them? And that was one of the things that, I am jumping ahead now a little bit from your question, that is quite important. It was so fascinating to me that I spent six years



writing my philosophies in education, doing all my experiments in all these different structures of school, then deciding to start a school and I already had a group of families to start my school. And I still felt that there was one piece missing for me and it was very much about this idea of language. Lo and behold, the year before I opened my school, I found it with Marshall Rosenberg and having this vocabulary of universal human need, having this, I call it a simple structure to be able to speak in a language of giving and receiving, a language of human understanding. Aha! That was it! That was the piece of this whole structure of creating a school based on nonviolence that I was looking for. And so, that became one of the first languages all my students played with. Their first vocabulary was the list of needs. And so, yes, I would say Gandhi was a huge influence on the level of wondering, "What do I want to do with these kids, once I gathered them? How do I want to structure it so that I can go with my dream idea that if we create school in a particular way, that if we begin to offer communities or learning in the structures that will actually have impact and influence in the society." I want to pause there and see if anything more came up from me or you or even take a moment to hear from anyone in the group. Right now, I would love to hear from two or three voices, just I'm curious what has been touched in you so far or if a question has risen in you.

Alan: Absolutely, we already have one hand up and if you'd like to raise your hand in the call, all you need to do is press one on your phone and we'll see your hand come up. And we have Teresa on the line.

Teresa: Hi. The word despair just brought up a lot to me. I was informed a lot by John Holt's *Growing Without Schooling* in the 80's and was met with a lot of resistance, to the point where my attempts to educate my children was not allowed because of all of the rules and the structure that said we had to do this first before that. It has to be all these books and all these tests. It was a complete denial of my choice and I felt dramatic despair, like "Oh my gosh!" It just brought back all of these memories. Catherine, the way you were talking about the wording of the language, compulsory education certainly does not allow us any say so, at least in my region in Ohio in the 80's. It was like, "You can't do that." Now there is a lot more leeway with the home education but it's still not changed so much when you look that language of the law. So, thanks for bringing back that memory and awareness in me, thank you.

Catherine: Thank you Teresa. You know the despair work in social change is I found it to be so incredibly vital. At the Temba School, Temba was the name of the school that I ran for 11 years, the teachers would do despair work. On a

couple of different level, I was really fortunate to have one of my mentors, Gloria Cooper, who I got to apprentice with for a few years before started my school. She named it really clearly. She said, "Every child you meet will likely bring up the unresolved pain that you have from that age. Be ready to deal with it and not with that child because it's not for them to have to hold space for your pain." So as an educator, that's a powerful thing for us to be aware of, that we had our own personal journeys as educators. And because celebration and mourning are so close together, of course when we get to see kids thrive and get what we didn't get, that stimulated pain. So, we had a despair circle around that. And then running a school that is doing something quite different than what you know, what we've been told education is suppose to do or how were supposed to do it has levels of despairs. So, we would give room to that and have an opportunity to really contact the needs within ourselves and give space for that empathy. And that kept us rejoiced to keep coming back each day and showing up for ourselves and showing up for the kids in the community.

Alan: Do you feel complete Teresa? We have a couple other hands up.

Teresa: Yes. Yes, yes, thank you.

Alan: Thank you for your input. Okay, so the next hand I saw go up is Linda. Hi Linda.

Linda: Hello. Yes, I have a daughter, she adopted a child and she started sending him to a charter school which is very good. But she then ended up home schooling and she is a mental help specialist for children. She actually wrote a book about instead of medicating and punishing, dealing with causes of our children acting up behavior by parenting with an education - educating the way nature intended it. So, she very much agrees with what you are doing. But I am wondering how would I help another grandchild of mine. My daughter sends him to a public school. At this point, he totally believes he is a no good person and then there is absolutely nothing I can tell him that, makes him believe anything else.

Catherine: I am really hearing your heart there, Linda, around really wanting him to have a place to thrive and be seen and to be understood. And so, our places, as family and friends and community members who care, have these different levels where we get to decide how we want to step in and contribute so that things might move differently. You know, we don't have control and we don't know what the result is. We do have a choice in any moment, in what we want to offer



and do we want to make a connection. And so, usually when there's a child and a parent and I have a sense or my mind is telling me, "I think they're struggling," until I really check it out and connect with them, that is me telling myself that they are struggling. You know that when we get the choice in this practice of NVC, to share our honesty, we might say to the parent, "I am wondering, are you enjoying what your child receiving with the education they are getting?" So we can begin the dialogue that way and you know that's the interpersonal level of the dialogue, to begin to create the subtle and small shifts see and then giving our presence to the children and offering them our full awareness.

The students of my school had full clarity that when they entered another school, because my school only went to 8th grade, they knew they would be going into a different structure. We discussed the clarity of what that discernment looks like and that we have a choice in every minute and every moment. How we want to engage with this different kinds of structures and we don't have to make that our own internal structure. And so that is a gift, that we can connect to kids that are still in what I call domination system structures or in NVC, we might call it a jackal structure. That is still a judgment on the structure. So if students are in a structure that isn't fully connecting to them and fully giving to their needs, then we can connect to the child and offer them empathy. We can offer them our clarity of connection and we can offer them the value of what it is to learn about the discernment, that the structure around them doesn't have to become their internal structure. And that's something that is quite important, as we are still in what I'm hoping is still a transitional phase, out of the type of school that we are doing in most countries. But we are still in this phase and we have many students still in the structures that aren't quite fully meeting all their needs. And offering them skills to really thrive and live who they really are in their passions. We do have the ability if we've begun our practices with Nonviolent Communication to offer authentic connection and empathy and clarity to them. I am just curious, how that was to hear that?

Linda: I totally agree with you, it's just that, he would like to come live with me in the home school or go to a charter school and in this past year, when they moved to a new school, he is absolutely miserable there. It's just a horrible experience everyday and just unbearable for him. I've just seen him, he just changed, you know he is suffering more and more and there is nothing I can do because I'm not his mother.

Catherine: I'm really hearing that you wanting to find your way to contribute and my guess is offering him a real quality of connection and seeing if he is needing

help with how he like to voice the change that he'd like to have. That's how we get to be a child's advocate. That is not deciding for the child what their voice is, but giving them the empathy and connection so that they can find their voice and be able to speak it.

Linda: I know it wouldn't do any good if he voiced it because it doesn't matter what he says at home but I don't seem to be able to pick the right words to say when he's in pain to make him realize he's not this terrible person that he's been told he is. He is totally bought into it now and..

Catherine: Yeah, I am hearing that really painful to witness.

Alan: May I add something Linda and Catherine?

Catherine: Go ahead.

Linda: I was just going to say from the time he was born I'd never seen a happier or more loving child in my life and he is the most despairing unhappy child now at his age. He is twelve, but I've never seen a child gets destroyed so badly.

Catherine: Yeah. I'm hearing you name how we all come in to this world and really wanting that nurtured and really wanting him to be received. And I'm guessing you really wanting all of us to be received. And that was something that I really wanted in our internal structure of schools and one of the things I created with Temba. I really loved it when Marshall Rosenberg pointed out that we're born with the language of NVC. It's innate in us and to communicate from the need you know and it's innate in us to empathize and try to connect. In the most natural of moments, a baby cries and someone responds, "Are you feeling hungry and needing food? Are you feeling lonely and needing comfort?" We offer an empathic guess and we make connection. So that's one of the pieces in social change with education is we can begin to structure our educational systems so that we can begin to really nurture the natural language authority within us and that's the ability to speak from the needs and to connect and give from the needs.

Linda: But what can I say to him when he just believes he is a terrible person? What words could I use or words to try to change how he feels about himself?

Catherine: Here is the tricky bit, Linda. We can't change other people, we can't change what is going on for them. We can offer our connection, we can offer our presence and we can offer who we are to that other person. And then hearing the

despair in you, my guess is that in order to really connect to what is alive in you I'm guessing there's some practice with Nonviolent Communication you'd like to engage in order to then begin having sweet empathic dialogues and connections with your grandson today so that you can give to him what it is that you really like for him to have.

Linda: Yeah.

Alan: Linda, this is Alan and we've interacted on some previous calls in this telesummit. I do really hear how much you want to contribute to your grandson and I just have some guesses about some of what's going on in you. Catherine named despair and maybe hopelessness and there is some of that work for you to engage with but there is one piece that I'd love to share with you and I'm wondering if that would be okay with you.

Linda: Yes.

Alan: And that's this, that I'm a parent, I'm not yet a grandparent but I have 3 children; 9, 5 and 2 and one of the things that has come to me is that sometimes we don't know when the seeds we're planting are going to bear fruits. All we can do is do our best and so I would love it if you can acknowledge yourself for how much love you have for your grandchild and how beautiful that is that desire to contribute and to trust that your showing up doing your best, day after day. And we don't know the seeds that you are planting. Sometimes they may be falling on fertile soil, sometimes not, but we don't know when those will bear fruit and I want you to just, I'd loved it if you would sit with that. And I'm also seeing some other hands up. And so I'm wondering if you would be okay if Catherine engages with some other callers

Linda: Yes.

Alan: So I'm curious what's stimulated for you hearing all these?

Linda: Well, this is just the type of work one of my daughter's is trying to do, trying to make changes in the world and also that feeling the pain of my grandson and his brother and sister because they are not getting that kind of empathy. But you were talking last night about feeling desperation, like that you only have this amount of time left and you've got to stop it now and make a difference because you know it's so bad and you feel desperate that you can't let it go on anymore and yet you can't really change it. And so, It's just living and suffering all the time,

suffering for what that person is going through. It's worst than if I was suffering it myself.

Catherine: Linda, you bringing for the couple of things that I'd like to bring now to the table and I appreciate what you got, so thank you. One of the things that you're bringing forward is a koan. In Japanese Zen tradition, a koan is an unanswerable question, and for me there is a koan in education. My first meditation teacher, Jack Cornfield, offered this story to us. He said there's a man, walking by a river and he sees a baby floating down the river. He runs into the river and picks up the baby and gets him on safety on shore and then sees another baby floating down the river and then runs to grab that baby, get to shore, gets to safety. He turns and there is another baby floating in the river. He runs to grab that baby gets him to safety and there were two more babies floating down the river and runs to grab them. The unanswerable question, the koan of this is, "When do you stop running to the river to save the baby and walk upstream to stop whoever is throwing them in?"

For me, that's what it is to be engaged in social change in education because it is like we are running to the river right now and saving the babies that are, kind of, drowning in the systems and structures that are not fully functioning the way that we want them to function. And then there is the idea that says, "I can't quite leave the babies but we really need to get upstream and do something about this." That's one of the reasons why I was excited that Alan invited me to come do this interview. One of the things about starting my school was it felt like I could do both almost simultaneously. I was still running to the river but starting the school and creating a different paradigm to practice in, to engage and to explore, gave us the opportunity to walk up to the river and start to do something different. I'd like to call in Sandra Shaun.

Alan: Okay, Sandra

Sandra: Hi, Catherine.

Catherine: Hi, Sandra, how are you?

Sandra: I'm good, so glad to hear from you again. Recently I was consulting in a school in my state and a young man was so despaired because he had to take Spanish. He hated Spanish. He didn't want to take Spanish, but his parent made him with the explanation: "I'm older than you, I know what's going to serve you in the future and I believe having a foreign language, especially this one, will really

serve you well. So, you just have to do it because we are your parents and we know what's best." And during my session with this student, he drew about his anguish and he said, "I don't know why I hate Spanish but I just hate Spanish." And it turns out that he is now acting out in that class now. I did get talk to the teacher and say, "He is acting now because he doesn't want to be there and I'm hoping he can have his choice." She said, "It is a joint decision between parents and him." Well, it doesn't look like that for me, but when you get this response that the parent has wisdom, knows better and they want the kids to turn out as a certain way - they want them to be functional and able to compete in society and then they tell the kids what they have to take in school. That's a big one to come up against - a big argument.

Catherine: Yeah. One of the sort of subtle shiftings we can do with that or engage with that is really entering in knowing, within ourselves, that can shift. This idea of shifting from the "should" paradigm or the "have-to" paradigm, to the paradigm that says, "There really is choice." I could probably spend the entire rest of my life and do nothing but give empathy to parents and teachers who have been on the planet so far and I still be wouldn't be able to give enough empathy to the mountain of pain that parents and teachers are walking with.

I really agree with Marshall, I heard him one time say, "You know I think what really motivates us, and gets us out of bed, is our need to contribute." That is a need inside that really activates us and moves us forward. I have never met a teacher or parent that wasn't really moving from that need. Did the strategy, the word that came out their mouth, the decision that they made - did that fully contribute to the person they were wanting to contribute to? If we assess it, the answer is probably sometimes yes and sometimes no. But there is a place in us that really wants to contribute and that's the place where I love to sit down with parents and teachers and students because then we can get in to the game of how can we make learning more fun and how can we engage this. Whenever I hear a parent or teacher say, "We have to do it," I am hearing in that the deep desire to contribute and maybe not fully knowing how to make the shift or give something different than what they habitually have been giving.

I was reminded a little earlier in the call about something that someone else was saying. I learned a long time ago that I can't give away anything I don't have. So, if I don't have the ability to self-empathize and connect with my needs, when I will be effective in empathizing with others or connecting to the needs of others? I consider this skill as one of the first primary skills, really learning how to self-

empathize and get in touch with the needs inside of us. Because then we are going to be more likely to be able to offer that to others.

And so, in what you just shared, Sandra, again I am hearing the despair that is going to rise up whenever we stick education into a conversation. I'm sure we each have a story. I would imagine every caller on this call has a moment where they've seen a child not getting fully what they were hoping for them to get or they themselves didn't respond in the way they were really hoping that they could have responded to really fully give to that child. And I'm sure that every caller, cause I'm going to guess, let's make a guess about the ages on this call, but I'm going to guess majority of us have our own pain we are walking with where we weren't seen and heard as fully as we would have liked, particularly around our learning. And so that's the other piece - that's where bringing in Nonviolent Communication into the education structure that will create such a huge social shift. It's because we are listening differently now when we bring that in. That's what I'm hearing in what you are sharing, Sandra, is you are seeing something, you are going, "Oh, there are these behaviors in the classroom. I'm hearing these needs that haven't been heard in that child." The expression of needs, all behavior, all the words that come out of her mouth are an expression of needs.

Sandra: Right. I was there just one day. He wasn't acting out in my session, he was receiving a lot of empathy from me and the students around him because were doing an NVC process. But from the Spanish teacher, she told me, "He's acting out and being inappropriate." And I said that these are all because that energy is leaking out and I understand he's feeling forced. I was able to do empathy with him but not with her. So... [Laughs]

Catherine: So, you've already heard from me before Sandra, you already know what I am going to say. [Laughs]

Sandra: Yes.

Catherine: Yes, that is where we get to take our breath and do our work. You've heard me before, I'd hang out in a classroom for a very long time before I got the courage to work with people over the age of 18. That where my judgement, you know and that's really...whew! If we want to really want to work on social change, and if we really want to work on making the shift, we go to where we have the most judgement, we turn towards where we are holding and harboring the most judgement and begin to empathize with ourselves and empathize with those spots around those judgements because then we will begin to take apart what



Walter Wink calls the domination structure that we have internalized, the blame and criticize game. Thank you Sandra, I'm glad you had time...

Sandra: One more...just one little bit. My grandson tells me that his Math teacher apologizes about how the powers-that-be have dictated for the math curriculum there, and she has to give that much homework and he felt sad for her that she was apologizing. She said, "I'm sorry but I have to assign this, I am being told to do this."

Catherine: Yeah, that's the pain in this kind of structure. The have-to's are kind of like that F word, they travelled downhill. Have-to's come in in a power-over structure or power-under structure and travel from one person to the next. A lot of people don't feel that sense of choice. It really denies that choice. And that is where we can begin to make inroads.

A teacher that I had a chance to work with made an inroad on that very thing that you mentioned about the curriculum that they have-to do. This was a teacher in a high school that throughout the course of any one day had 175 students for 45 minute periods. He taught American history and African-American history. And so in the first week of school, he said, "We're doing an experiment. I would like this classroom to be something different." So in that first week of school, he just taught Nonviolent Communication. He just said, "This is going to be the language of our classroom." Then in the next week, he brought in their books and he brought in the state curriculum. He put that down in the center of the kids and he said, "This is what the state has said is important for you to learn. This is what we've been requested to do for the entire year. How do you want to do it? Should we make a map to get through all this materials?" And so the kids made a map together and set the curricula for the year and they were able to add in extra topics. So they were able to get through all the course work and extra topics.

And so what that showed me was how that was a great experiment in truth, that when all learners, when all people in the room get to participate in creating the structure, then it shifts very quickly from, "I have to," to, "I choose to". And that is the kind of shifts that we are making within these systems and within our selves. Alan, did you have something?

Alan: Whenever you and Sandra are complete, I do.

Sandra: I am complete.

Alan: Sandra, I just want to say, before I say what I was going to ask Catherine, was just to acknowledge that I am glad you are on the call.

Sandra: Thank you

Alan: So Catherine, I think what's coming up for me is a little bit of a slight change of track and I am wondering if you're okay with that?

Catherine: Yeah - that's fine.

Alan: What's most alive for me, what I am really excited to hear you talk about is your current work with Play In The Wild.

Catherine: What part would you like to hear? (Laughs)

Alan: Tell us about it. Tell us what you do - what the impact is for the kids? How can people find out about it? Turn us on to it. Let's say we are brand new. I want to hear from you what's alive for you in your current work.

Catherine: Well, Play In The Wild really grew out of the Temba school. I had been running summer programs alongside my school for a very long time. I decided to go ahead and release my school. For those who are curious, with the school, the parent body actually took it on. Two groups were formed and a charter school was formed, which is still alive and well in Northern California. The other group started a home school collective and those students have now gone off to high school and college.

And so when I made the decision to step out of the school and out of the classroom and respond to all the requests that were saying, "Come do trainings over here. Come show us what you are doing." When I took that on full time, one of my things was that I still wanted to play with the kids.

So Play In The Wild became the new classroom for me to always play in with people who are 18 and under. At the Temba school, we used to have what we call "Wild Days." A Wild Day could happen spontaneously or we usually made sure it happened at least every Thursday and sometimes we added an extra Wild Day. A Wild Day was getting outside. We would do the entire day outside, rain or shine. However it was, we were going to be outside of the idea that classrooms and learning always happens inside a building. We engaged with what it is to be a life-long learner.

So Play In The Wild continued on that experiment of really getting kids outside of buildings and outside of the idea that learning is always done at a computer or at a desk. Learning can happen by engaging the community. It can happen by engaging with the natural world. There's something much bigger here about becoming a learner and being who we are.

So Play In The Wild has really honed in on building our skills about nonviolence and Nonviolent Communication and being in the wild. And it's really grown. It started out because I had been doing backpack treks for years and then doing canoe quests with Melanie Witham in Canada. We had done several of those where we had taken kids way out in the backcountry and really lived as a community, meaning that we took care of the food together, we took care of how we solved problems together, and basically having that ability to choose. Like how I shared about that young man in that classroom who gave his students a choice about the state curricula. We were looking at what we wanted to be learning and moving like that together as a group.

So after a lot of years of success, we had our students getting older and asking us, "Okay, now that we have been learning these skills and taking them to our families, we really want to know how do we change the world that we live in on a much bigger scale?"

So then we created the Revolutions Retreat, where we aren't out backpacking or canoeing for all of the 9 days, we are more in a retreat-style setting. We are still camping to a degree, but we can focus in on these ideas of social change and taking the skills of NVC and the practices of nonviolence into whatever it is we are wanting to change. We have seen students begin to change their school structures. We have seen kids introduce new programs into the schools. We have seen kids become incredible peer mediators. We have also seen the Wild students become more of a community, in and of themselves around the globe. We get to thank Facebook™ for helping keep the connection alive after our program ends.

I got to witness our most recent October Wild event, which was a Revolutions Retreat, I got to see kids from Canada and Mexico and the U.S. giving empathy to the students they had gotten to know that were in Palestine during the most recent bombings that occurred earlier this year. So getting to witness these students that globally are growing up and know that there are people around the

globe that have an interest and a caring for change in the world. We are seeing it really empower them.

I have a student from Western Australia who just called in another team member and myself to be his mentor, but he has asked that he have support to do his final senior presentation on nonviolence and the impact that it has on the world.

Alan: May I ask you another question?

Catherine: Please

Alan: How can people who are listening to this call or to the recording support or get involved with Play in The Wild?

Catherine: One of the easiest things is to go to [PlayInTheWild.org](http://PlayInTheWild.org) where we have a very full and engaging website. You can go to our celebrations page and see numerous videos about our many different programs. If you know any youth, turn them onto the website and then they can see if it is something that would excite them. Then they can access contacting us about getting into a program, getting into a quest or taking a retreat. We also now have Community Camps that are for people of all ages. If you go to the website, you'll see our current list of programs.

If you are interested in seeing that a certain youth or family has access to these programs that might otherwise not be able to because they can't afford the flights or can't afford to contribute to keep the sustainability of the program going, then we have ways that you can contribute resources or you can contribute financially so you can support other families and youth.

We have a very full program coming up this year. We are really excited about something called the Animator Training. We call it Animator, which is what we call ourselves, the staff, at Play in The Wild. We consider ourselves animators and I really like that word because that is actually the word for trainer in Quebecois French. We feel that our job is to animate connections, to animate learning, to animate the environment and bring alive the connections. So the Animator Training is going to be a very full program for people who want to work with youth. They will get the experience of a Revolutions Retreat. They'll get the experience of an outdoor wilderness question and they'll get online learning for a number of months with private consultations so that they can really develop their passions and integrate them with Nonviolent Communication and the principles

of nonviolence - so they can really work with youth in the way that they want to do it.

Alan: Fantastic. I have to say that I have seen your videos, or some of them, and I love them. They are so inspiring and so moving. I highly recommend them for anyone. And they're short - a few minutes.

Catherine: I am almost getting tears. I want to say, for anyone whose read my book, *Peaceable Revolution Through Education*, I talk about the story of Cody who is in my book. I have full permission to talk about him in this way because he has been on teleconference calls. I actually invited him to join us today. I love it when Cody speaks from the place of what it was like to grow up in this structure. He was one of those kids that came from a structure that labeled him as a bully, angry, "learning-delayed." His file and his labels were so thick. It was really fun one time, he and I were speaking about the topic of his file and labels and he looked at me and said, "You have never told me that!" I said, "Of course I wouldn't have told you that. Why would I want you to know what other people thought of you in that way? How was that going to be useful?" He smiled and there was this sweetness because he had an opportunity to engage his learning. He is a fun one to talk to. If any of you ever go to the Play in The Wild site, feel free to email him and ask him questions because he has such an amazing perspective on having been in the system that labeled him so profoundly, it could have been devastating.

Cody was at Temba for 4 years, being in a completely different paradigm, and then walked back into the system that utilizes labeling and punishment and rewards. He walked back in empowered, so much so that he went back in in 8th grade and he had made the decision that he wanted to get to know some of his peers and people he would be going into high school. I will remind you that this is a 12-year old. So he now has the ability to say, "You know, I am going to have a need for safety and community and connection when I get to high school. So I am going to go back to public school in 8th grade so I can meet some of these people and start connecting then.

One of the things he did with his home room teacher, which is a thing in the United States, where you have someone called your home room teacher who is your lead teacher on several subjects and then you have other teachers for other subjects. He was back in the public schools for a couple weeks and he asked that teacher, "The last time I was in a school like this, I had a really hard time taking tests. In fact, often times I was told I was stupid. And in my last school, we

didn't have to take tests. So I am actually nervous about taking tests again. So I have this idea that maybe until I am used to taking tests again, would you be willing to give me the test 3 times and then take an average score from those three tests. The teacher was so amazed with his strategy that he had come forward with, that he had this proposal and he was really connected to it. He was really connected to these needs for learning and ease and safety that she almost didn't know what to do so she just said, "Yes!" So he only did that for about 3/4's of the way through the first quarter back in school. Then he came to her and said, "I figured out the testing thing. I am okay with it now. I can now take tests like the rest of the kids. The teacher said, "Great!" So he became one of the kids that maintained the highest marks you can get in American schools. I asked him later and what he had really figured out is that the tasks weren't a reflection of who he really was. That is profound to get that level of discernment, to be able to engage with an educational structure that does test you quite regularly. It is really something to be able to stand there and say, "This doesn't reflect who I am, it is just giving me some information about the stuff that we are working on." That is profound, particularly here in the United States because of the way our social structures and society and how education can have an impact.

This is what I was talking about before - if you look at what is happening today with compulsory education and how No Child Left Behind has left a price on every student's head which relates directly to their attendance and their test scores. Schools are penalized if their test scores aren't high enough or if their attendance isn't a certain number, they don't get funding. And this applies down to each child. That kind of level of punishment that is holding the educational structure for our children has me wondering, "What kind of a society are these kids going to create if they are living in this much fear and 'have-to.'"

And so for me, that is where changing our educational structures will start to change our society and shift the level of violence, the level of tension, the level of depression, all the things that we are seeing in our society that are systemic - the symptoms of having these kinds of structures in place. Then we get to be creative when we're the ones coming in to create social change.

A partner and I created an entire program that we were taking into high schools. And because of No Child Left Behind and that law, the way that we played it is that we would go to the high schools and we would say, "We get that if a kid is off-campus, you don't get money for them for that day, because that is what is happening in America right now - it is down to the day. The kid has to be in the seat in the classroom and be counted for the school to get a certain amount of



money. So we would go to the principals and say, “We want the kid that you would like to suspend, but you’re not suspending because you have to keep them on campus in order to get your money. So we’ll take them, but we will do with them what we want. (Laughs) We want to teach them nonviolence. We want to play with them for a few days and give them skills in Nonviolent Communication.” The principals were happy. They got to give us what was, in their minds, their worst kids and they got to keep their money. We got our freedom because we went somewhere else to get grants and get ourselves paid.

So we would get to come into these high schools where some of these kids had strategies where they would carry guns. We would play with these kids for 2 and 3 days sometimes once a month. We had kids who kept wanting to come back. Even that much began to shift what was happening in those high schools because now all of a sudden, they had kids that were able to empathize. There were kids that had the ability to express honestly from a place where they were connected to needs. There were kids who now had the ability to support each other in conflict resolution circles. So rather than running into the river to save the babies, its kind of fun to get creative and work with what’s already here.

Alan: Wow - I’m really enjoying all the stories that you are sharing. I am wondering, just looking at the time and noticing that we have a little bit less than 20 minutes that we scheduled for the call, I do have one question that is really at the top of my mind, and I am wondering how you, Catherine, would like to craft our remaining time here?

Catherine: Hmmm. Why don’t you ask your question and then I would really like to open up and see what’s alive in other folks and see what questions are still out there with the people who have called in.

Alan: Even if we open up to questions now, we probably would run out of time.

Catherine: Yeah, I don’t think we’ll have time to get to everybody. That is the thing, if they want to come check out the work at [PlayInTheWild.org](http://PlayInTheWild.org) or if you just ‘Like’ the Facebook page for Play in The Wild, one of the things that we’ve started doing that has been quite fun and people have been enjoying is that people have been emailing us questions and then we have been answering them on the Facebook page. So that is another way that people can get their questions answered.

Alan: Perfect. Well, the reason this question is sort of “top of mind” for me is that it’s an issue that is very alive in present society, at least in the United States and probably in other places as well and it came up earlier in this call. You said something just now that stimulated it again for me and I am curious to hear your perspective on this: What do you, Catherine, think is the fastest way to stop the gun violence that we see in our schools? Is that even something you want to engage with now?

Catherine: Interestingly enough, I am sitting here smiling and part of that is that a part of me is sitting here going, “Okay, I’m ready to challenge everybody. It goes back to that principle that if 100,000 people, if 2 million people walk out, if every person in the U.S. doesn’t show up for school, the schools can no longer happen. The fastest way to get to that tipping point that says, “We’re done. We’re done watching our children die, literally, at school. We’re done continuing to watch these systems support engagement that produces suffering and death.”

Alan: How do we get to that tipping point?

Catherine: Yes, this is a discussion that I had with Marshall quite a few times. This is that koan again, because we have to each individually get to our willingness to be done and to want something different - to be sick and tired of being sick and tired - and then we engage differently. So one way of getting to that tipping point is, if I am going to talk strategies, is that we have to be really wild and crazy and courageous people, like Alan Seid creating a telesummit so that word can get out and people grab onto that inspiration and that clarity and then begin to engage with each other. That is one of the pieces that Nonviolent Communication really brings us is the ability to then step up to the tipping point. That is my short answer. I am noticing time and want to call on some folks.

Alan: Please do. I know we could unpack that short answer for another hour and a half and it would still be a short answer. Please go ahead.

Catherine: I see Hugo

Hugo: Hello, can you hear me?

Catherine: Hi Hugo

Hugo: Yes, good morning. This is Hugo from Spain. Yesterday during the morning conference, I had an opportunity to ask a question to Kelly Bryson. He

was basically sharing his experience with long-term NVC groups... (recording breaks up) ...wasn't enough to hold those long term groups and he suggested some other complimentary works like say the Forum and various things. I was wondering what your experience was regarding long-term NVC-based groups, working as you are in the education field? I would very much appreciate if you would comment on that, thank you.

Catherine: Thank you very much, Hugo. I appreciate the question and in that I am hearing you wanting some hope and trust that we can get to the tipping point. My experience and my foundation is really in the practices of nonviolence. Nonviolent Communication came in to join with that, which was quite powerful. So for me, my foundation, that has created sustainability in the school and in those groupings have to do with the basic principles of nonviolence which take a look at what our relationships are. That was something that Gandhi looked at, was what happens in our relationships. And there is something for me there about a spiritual foundation that I found in my studies around nonviolence. I am not talking about a religious structure, I am talking about a spiritual foundation that accesses an interdependence and an engagement with all life and examines the question, "What is our relationship to everything?"

For me, as far as some of the practices that really helped me to sustain and stay engaged, I have done work with Stephen and Ondrea Levine around the loving kindness and the forgiveness practices. I really enjoy their work and have integrated that quite deeply. Bringing alive meditation for me helped create that sustainability in a way that I can access spirituality. That is something that Marshall talks about around the spirituality in Nonviolent Communication. I found NVC to be more sustainable if we don't engage it as a process or do or something that we pick up and put down. Instead if we live it as a consciousness, asking, "Can I be in a needs consciousness? Can I be accessing what Marshall Rosenberg calls 'divine energy?'" That is when are in contact with these needs and we are engaging with each other, there is something divine that begins to happen.

So for me, the way I would answer your question, Hugo, is that I think sustainability happens when there is a spiritual practice of some sort. My partner Jesse and I got to go to Occupy Wall Street and we got to do an incredible despair circle with the original occupiers. One of the things I saw in that movement was, and this is totally my own judgment, my opinion, was a total lack of spiritual base. There was a lack of interdependence to all things. So when I witnessed that movement, I said, "Wow, we are needing a little more Dr. King in

here, not this idea of Dr. King. One of the things that Dr. King brought into his movement was that spiritual foundation that people would find within themselves, even when they fought together as a group, they could empower the group. That is the way I would answer that question. Thank you so much for that question Hugo.

Alan: I think we have time to call on one more.

Catherine: I would love to call on Jeff Joslin, but he doesn't have his hand raised. Or does he? He is just saying hi, giving me a high five. The next person I see is Stephen.

Stephen: Hi there. I'm calling from Hawaii and I have long forgotten what my question was. Thank you for your contributions. I don't want to take up your time if somebody else is waiting.

Alan: Thank you, Stephen. I see someone who has had their hand up for quite a while, Catherine, is that okay?

Catherine: Yes

Alan: Sarah

Sarah: Hi. My question to you is around something that is coming up in my life at the moment around giving a family mediation to family that is in such a lot of pain and it is around a teenage daughter who has made some choices that are really tough for the family, involved in a lot of crime and violence and a lot of behavior that has made it impossible for her to be at home and also to go into a remand center, which is the equivalent of a juvenile detention center. With all of the work that I've seen that you've done with the youth and the pain in not being understood and not really being heard, I am asking if there is anything that comes up for you, across the world, across the cultures in a group of people who are really experiencing a lot of pain and expressing that in ways that are really harmful to others. Is there anything in relation to that teenage age-group that you have seen that consistently comes up for you, any really strong needs in that group.

Catherine: I am appreciating your question, Sarah, and I am curious. Are you calling in from Australia?

Sarah: Yes, I am.

Catherine: Yes, well it's interesting. I had an opportunity to go into the maximum security prison for juvenile girls in Sydney. One of the things that is a personal belief for me, from what I have witnessed, is that the youth are speaking loudly to what might be our generational pain. And what I got to see in that maximum security prison was the deep pain around belonging. Do we have a universal pain across cultures and across ages? Well that is based on perspective and the perspective I have, from my experiences, is that I have consistently seen deep pain around belonging in many cultures and in many ages. As we have moved about the planet and rearranged nations and moved people willingly and unwillingly around the globe, I would say that is one of the pains that I see consistently. With the youth in particular, in there, there is a really deep need to be seen and understood, to really be gotten for who they are - not to be simply engaged with through the labels and societal judgments about teenagers, but really to be seen for who they actually are. I hope that touches your question a little bit. And I am seeing that we have are short on time, but I wanted to check and see if that touched your question?

Sarah: Yeah - thank you so much.

Alan: Thank you. I want to say one more thing to that too, if I may, which is that not just in young people, but in society at large, one of the scarcest resources is meaning and purpose. And I think that is a piece that plays into the hopelessness and despair of young people. I'm curious, Catherine, whether that resonates for you?

Catherine: Yeah - I would say there is connection there for me with what I have seen and I think that ties into what I was talking about before about the sustainability of oneself having a spiritual foundation, having a sense of connection to the interdependence of all things. So yes, you have named a big piece of why students rebel in these domination culture systems. I am guessing why that math teacher keeps apologizing for how much math homework was being assigned, because the teacher doesn't even engage with the meaning and purpose.

Alan: And earlier you mentioned our need for contribution which I think adds so much to meaning and purpose.

Catherine: Oh yeah - I could go on 3 million different tangents at this moment and we are out of time.

Alan: Yes - I am noticing the time too and I want to thank you SO SO so much for being a part of this. I am wondering if you have any closing comments before we really wrap it up?

Catherine: I would like to breathe deeply. One of the things I always shared with my kids is the idea of playing with quotes. Find something that helps remind you. In Nonviolent Communication, we have this idea of 'remembering' something that reminds us of the consciousness, reminds us of the meaning and purpose. I want to share with all of you, in closing, the quote that keeps driving me. Its a quote that I have been walking with since the first moment I read it when I was 24 years old. I am 46 now. I put it in the introduction of my book. It's on my desk and I see it. It's from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s speech on Vietnam that he gave exactly one year before his death. The quote is:

"Pure compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. It is to see that an edifice, a structure that produces beggars needs restructuring."

That is the quote that keeps driving me to feed my meaning and purpose with whatever it is that I am doing in the world because I want to see a restructuring. Every time that I hear the word 'bully', I put that in the place of the word 'beggar' because I want to see the structures change so we're not producing that behavior anymore. I hear about the gun violence in schools and that makes me want a restructuring so we don't see that strategy anymore.

I also have gratitude that I want to share: 1. For taking time out of your day to come share in listening or sharing your question. I am really grateful that everyone took this time because seeing all the people's names in front of me on this call touches me in a deep way, that we are getting closer to the tipping point. That there are even this many people on the planet right now that care deeply and want to see something shift for our children. So I am really grateful for everyone who's been here today.

Alan: Thank you. And in about two-and-a-half hours, we'll have a call with your life partner, Jesse.

Catherine: Yeah! My husband!



Alan: Yeah! And we'll get to hear his perspective. In closing, I would like to unmute everyone so we can all say bye to each other.

Everyone: Bye. Thank you.

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*NOTE: Any inaccuracies in this transcription are solely the responsibility of Alan Seid and Cascadia Workshops. Minor edits have been made for reading clarity. Please consult the original recording as needed.*

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*World View While Doing Time*

**Stephanie Bachmann  
Mattei**

*“If We Want to Change the World, We  
Should Start With the Children” ~ Ghandiji*