



The Academy for Peace of Costa Rica Evaluation of Impact from 2004-2007

The Academy for Peace of Costa Rica (APCR) teaches a peace skills practice called *BePeace*, the synergistic combination of HeartMath for “feeling peace” and Nonviolent Communication for “speaking peace.” APCR trainers have been teaching *BePeace* in public schools for over four years and the impact has been a reduction in conflict and violence in the school as documented in annual reports. The summary below includes background on the effectiveness of HeartMath and Nonviolent Communication and the results of teaching *BePeace* in Costa Rican schools.

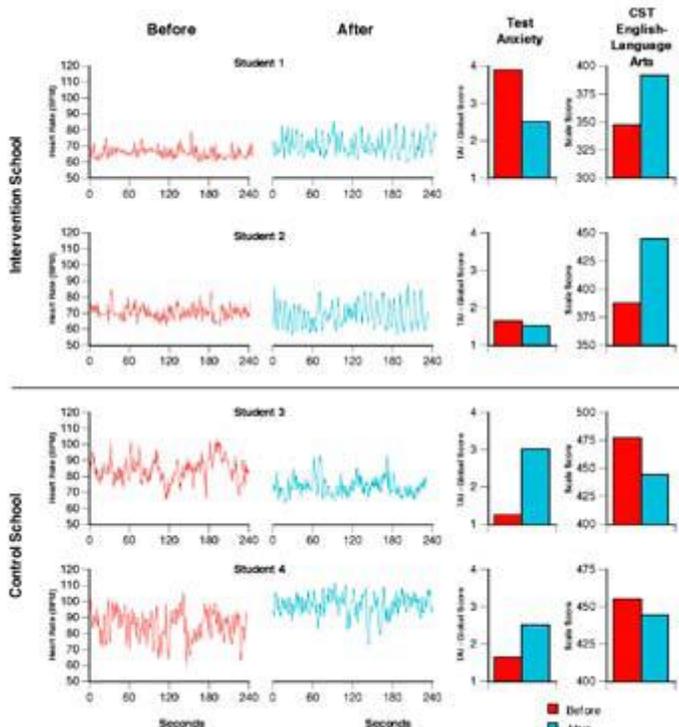
HeartMath for “feeling peace”

The US Congress awarded a million dollar grant to the Institute of HeartMath to prove the impact of its program, TestEdge, on reducing test anxiety and improving test performance in youth. When TestEdge was delivered to students in an experimental school, there was strong, consistent evidence of a positive effect of the intervention on these students when compared to those in the control school:

- There was significant reduction in the mean level of test anxiety; 75% had reduced levels of test anxiety by the end of the study.
- There was a significant increase in test performance in the experimental group over the control group, ranging on average from 10 to 25 points.
- Students in the experimental group acquired the ability to self-activate the coherent state prior to taking an important test
- More positive changes were observed in the classrooms of the experimental school while more negative changes were observed in the control school.
- Students at the experimental school exhibited reduced levels of fear, frustration and impulsivity. They also displayed increased engagement in class activities, emotional bonding, humor, persistence and empathetic listening and understanding.

The findings below are taken from the summary of results from the TestEdge National Demonstration Study which were published in 2007

Heart rate variability (HRV) recordings from the electrophysiological study, showing four students' heart rhythm patterns while they prepared for the Stroop stress test, both before and after the TestEdge intervention. Pre- and post-intervention test anxiety level (TAI-Global Scale score) and the California Standards Test (CST)–English Language Arts test score for each student are also shown. For the two students in the intervention school, the recordings show a shift from an erratic, irregular heart rhythm pattern (left-hand side) before the intervention, to a sustained sine-wave-like pattern (increased heart rhythm coherence), indicative of the coherence state, after the intervention. By contrast, both the pre- and post-HRV recordings for the students in the control school signify an ongoing incoherent psycho-physiological state.



Typical Heart Rate Variability Patterns in Four Students Preparing for a Stressful Test

HeartMath works closely with Stanford University and many other well known universities. Their methods are being incorporated into university curriculum. The success of their methods has been featured on CNN.

Nonviolent Communication for “speaking peace”

Nonviolent Communication (NVC) was developed by Dr. Marshall Rosenberg in 1984. This method, taught in over 50 countries, has been used to resolve conflicts in Rwanda, Colombia, Israel and Palestine among others.

NVC is the “method of choice” for conflict resolution for many schools around the world:

- In a research study in Gothenburg, Sweden where four schools were presented with three models of conflict resolution to choose from, they all chose Nonviolent Communication.
- The European Commission sponsored NVC trainings in Israel from 1997-1999 which are now carried on by an international non-profit organization, Education for Life.
- Other countries with major NVC school projects include Italy, Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia and the United States of America.

Evaluations of an Italian NVC school project showed:

- Compared to the control group, there was a significant reduction in the number of unpleasant situations between student and teacher, a reduction of the number of violent conflicts and an increase in the number of nonviolent resolution processes.
- The number of conflicts solved with mediations doubled over one year.

The Skarpnacks School in Stockholm had the following results using NVC:

- The number of conflicts between students decreased dramatically.
- Most conflicts that occur are handled by the children so teachers spend little time dealing with conflicts.
- Students increasingly talk directly to each other when they don't like what the other is doing with confidence that they will be heard and that there will be a satisfying outcome.
- Teachers rarely experience resistance from the children because the children trust that their needs will be considered
- Standardized testing showed that all students were performing at or beyond the expectations for their age.

At the conclusion of a two-year NVC public school project in Sweden:

- A clear majority reported that they listen more empathically to students
- A clear majority reported that they feel safer in difficult conversations.
- A clear majority reported that the climate in their classrooms had improved
- A clear majority reported that NVC has given them a tool to develop further as pedagogues.

Evaluation of *BePeace*, the combination of HeartMath and Nonviolent Communication, taught by the APCR in Costa Rican schools:

From 2004 through 2007, 304 teachers were trained in *BePeace*, which impacted approximately 9170 students. In addition, from 2006 through 2007, 259 students were trained in *BePeace* mediation practices and 50 parents received *BePeace* classes.

Each year the APCR trainers became more masterful in *BePeace*, which improved the quality of the trainings that were offered. In 2007, *BePeace* mediation was added as the primary focus of teacher and student training. This emphasis encouraged both teachers and students to practice *BePeace* more frequently in the classroom.

Evaluation has constituted an important part of the APCR's work. It has been a creative process of design and trial of measuring instruments. Each year as the training improved, so did the evaluation process. Highlights of the evaluations of the last four years are shared below.

2004: Highlights of the evaluation report by Shanti Vidya, Academic Director, Latin American Center, Long Island University

Pilot Project: Elias Jimenez Castro School

- 94% of the teachers reported an improvement in the quality of their communication with the students
- 66% reported an improvement in their ability to prevent conflict
- 55% reported an improvement in their ability to resolve conflict.

Examples of teacher's personal changes as a result of NVC training:

Before: I was irrational; I blamed others and felt guilty; I punished myself or others physically or emotionally; I got angry and depressed; I hurt a lot of people, especially my husband and children.

After: I manage to have better control of my feelings; I am able to express my feelings and needs because now I can identify them; I have fewer situations that turn into conflicts; I find more peace in myself; Now I take into account the feelings and needs of others.

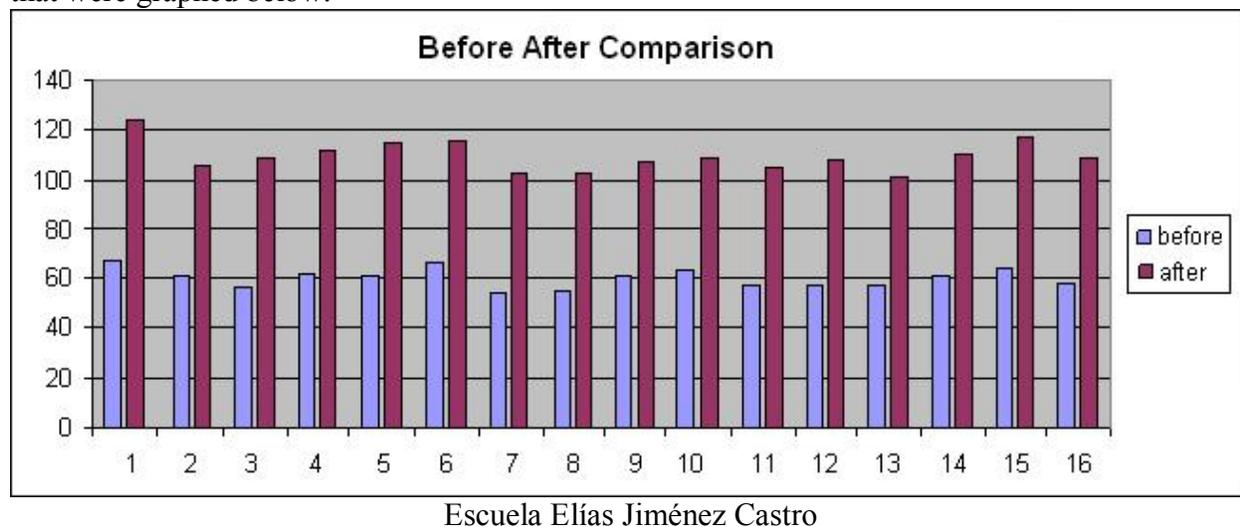
2005: Highlights of the evaluation report

This evaluation report was conducted by:

- Cynthia Henson and Sabrina Sideris, two graduate students at the UN University for Peace,
- Madeline Cocco, Lic. Social Anthropology from the University of Costa Rica and DEA Social Anthropology from the University of Barcelona, Spain
- Priscila Siu, Associate of Arts from Panama Canal College

Pilot Project: Second year at Elias Jimenez Castro School

The table below compares the results from teacher surveys issued at the beginning and the end of the year. Each choice was given a value: “Never” was worth 1, “Rarely” was worth 2, “Sometimes” was worth 3, “Frequently” was worth 4 and “Always” was worth 5. All values for each of the 16 questions were added to give each question a total worth. These were the numbers that were graphed below.



These are the questions that teachers were asked to respond to:

1. I feel peaceful
2. I manage my anger internally rather than acting it out
3. I resolve conflicts creatively
4. I identify my feelings during conflicts
5. I express my feelings during conflicts
6. I can identify my own needs
7. I identify my needs during conflicts
8. I express my needs during conflicts
9. I make requests to get my needs met
10. I can identify the feelings of others
11. I help others identify their feelings

12. I can identify the needs of others
13. I help others identify their needs
14. I help others to make requests to meet their needs
15. I use NVC methods in my classroom
16. I use NVC methods at home

It is clear that the teachers improved significantly in every area that was measured above, indicating the strong impact of *BePeace* in their personal lives and as teachers.

The pilot project at this school was not continued in 2006 as a pilot project in a school that was more troubled was taken on that year. However, a follow up evaluation was conducted in November 2006 to evaluate whether, in the absence of the APCR, the training received in the previous two years was still having an impact. The results of interviews indicated that the teachers were still enjoying these benefits in their lives:

In the school, the lasting benefits they experienced in their personal lives were as follows:

- improvement in their self-esteem
- better communication with others
- greater empathy for self and others
- identification of form of violence that they couldn't identify before

The lasting benefits they experienced in the school were as follows:

- The level of aggression and violence decreased.
- Intolerance and conflicts decreased.
- *BePeace* activities impacted the whole school, not just the participants in the program.
- Children learned to resolve conflict by themselves.

2006: Highlights of the evaluation report by Sabrina Sideris and Madeline Cocco (credentials noted in 2005 section)

Pilot Project: Honduras School in a troubled neighborhood

Teachers indicated

- they consider the trainings very valuable and utilize the skills in the classroom and in their lives
- improvements in their work environment, particularly in the relationship to the school director, are the result of the trainings
- they have improved their interpersonal relationships
- student violence has been reduced
- they have increased their self knowledge

However, the observers at this school indicated that the teachers were not effectively transmitting *BePeace* to the students. Consequently, training both teachers and students in *BePeace* mediation was added as the major emphasis in 2007.

2007: Highlights of the evaluation report by Maribel Munoz, Masters Degree in Peace Education, UN University for Peace, Masters Degree in Education, National University

Pilot Projects: Honduras School and Elias Jimenez Castro School

Results:

- 41 teachers participated in the program that impacted 960 students
- 367 students received 6-hours of mediation training on Saturdays
- Trained 43 student mediators in the two pilot schools
- 16 more students requested and received mediator training who were not in the original program.
- 68 mediations were conducted in the schools by students
- 9 groups of students received 22 SerPaz sessions taught by APCR trainers
- 26 workshops were presented to parents at Elias Jimenez Castro School and 17 at Honduras School
- International Day of Peace was implemented through a lesson plan, activities and a school assembly by students, teacher and APCR trainers
- All of the APCR trainers were certified by the Institute of HeartMath through a course held in Costa Rica.
- Thirteen “practice group” sessions were held for APCR trainers
- Teachers indicated that, at the beginning of the year, they gave an average of 16 “bad behavior” tickets (boletas) to students per month. By the end of the year, they had reduced this number to 9.
- The APCR was unexpectedly requested to intervene in 4 difficult student cases that had been passed from teacher to counselor and then to an APCR trainer
- 163 teachers participated in the SerPaz 40-hour course offered at APCR headquarters. The results of their evaluation of the course were outstandingly positive and are shown below.

Item to be evaluated	1	2	3	4	5
Course content was well organized.	0	0	4	22	155
Concepts were clearly explained.	0	0	3	19	141
The general environment facilitated learning.	0	1	4	18	140
I received clear answers to all my questions.	0	1	1	20	141
I received support from my small-group trainer	0	2	3	11	147
I would like to implement this method in my classroom.	1	1	1	11	149

Testimonies

Each year, the APCR has collected testimony from those who participated in the *BePeace* school program. A few of those testimonies include:

1. Student, Veronica Herra Benavides, sixth grade student, Elias Jimenez Castro School: This experience has taught me that I can resolve any fight without violence. Now I can help

people to know their feelings and the other person can listen to them. I love being a mediator and helping my classmates. I was born to be a mediator.

2. Costa Rican teacher, February 2008, *BePeace* 40-hour course: Thank you for making us a part of your dream.
3. Costa Rican teacher Ivette Lopez: It is a privilege to be part of such an important project that will change a paradigm, and in this way, help all human beings to create a better world. I'm committed from my heart and I'm willing to continue with the program as long as needed.
4. Costa Rican teacher from Honduras School, November 2006: I feel a sense of togetherness that makes me happier about coming to work. This feeling automatically makes me do a better job; I work from my heart now.
5. US teacher Linda Hamilton, January 2008, *BePeace* 40-hour course: I've been offering empathy in my classroom and I am astounded at the results. I even used it to step right in the middle of an about-to-break-into-a-fistfight scenario with two 8th graders this morning. I'm still smiling at the peaceful way it was resolved. It works!!!!
6. APCR trainer Christine Essex: When I first learned about HeartMath and Nonviolent Communication, I felt deeply touched and excited. Somehow I knew these were the tools I'd been yearning for to achieve the harmony and authentic communication I so desired. However, I found that using these tools was not an easy task. Over the next couple of years of practice I experienced a profound upheaval on the internal level as my perspective was turned inside out and upside down. For me it's much, much more than a technique and new vocabulary, it's a new way of looking at and being in the world. It has enriched and improved my relationships with others and myself beyond anything I could have imagined. Now, when strong emotions are triggered, I have choices beyond the usual fight or flight, attack/defend paradigm I was raised with. Now I can choose to stay in peace and still speak my honesty. For some of us, just speaking our truth is the hero's journey and I am eternally grateful to have these very powerful tools in my life.
7. Volunteer Carol Marianne: The most uplifting part of being an Academy for Peace volunteer is seeing the impact on teachers of learning *BePeace*. There is an immediate ripple effect and everybody wins – the teachers reap the rewards of feeling compassionate and the children learn to get their needs met in healthy, nonviolent ways.

In summary, the APCR has had a growing impact on the reduction of violence in these two pilot schools over the last four years. As a result, in 2008, the APCR will work in all thirteen schools of Santa Ana County. The evaluation process has already begun this year, led by Shanti Vidya, Academic Director, Latin American Center, Long Island University who completed the APCR evaluation in 2004. Professor Vidya is refining the evaluation process, which will assist the APCR in further proving the effectiveness of the practice of *BePeace*.