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# Interdisciplinary Insights on Interpersonal Relationships

*Edited by Xiaoming Jiang*





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Edited by Xiaoming Jiang

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Gomathi Jatin Shah, Clodie Tal, Hind Meyma, Chenkai Lin, Xiaoming Jiang, Pham Thi My Ha

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# Meet the editor



Dr. Xiaoming Jiang is a professor at the Institute of Linguistics, Shanghai International Studies University, China. He obtained a BS in Psychology from East China Normal University and a Ph.D. in Cognitive Neuroscience from Peking University. He served as a research fellow and a visiting professor at the School of Communication Sciences and Disorders, McGill University, Canada. His research utilizes experimental methodologies to uncover social and interpersonal aspects of human communicative behaviors in multilingual and multicultural contexts. While serving as a guest associate editor for *Frontiers in Psychology* and *Frontiers in Communication*, Dr. Jiang published more than forty peer-reviewed articles as lead author in high-impact journals such as *NeuroImage*, *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance*, and *Speech Communication*.





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# Preface

Maintaining interpersonal relationships is essential for individuals to achieve successful human social interactions and healthy lifespan development. In the future, interpersonal relationships will become more challenging as humans will live in a world where artificial and human intelligence work together and individuals with more diverse values, beliefs, and cultures will co-exist and pursue collaborations.

This book examines how to wisely and strategically develop interpersonal relationships among individuals of different roles involved in dyadic relationships, such as educators and students, parents and children, policymakers and citizens, health counselors and patients, business partners, and so on. In these relationships, some roles may possess a higher status, be more empowered, or be expected to provide mentoring, while in other relationships some roles may have inferior status, have more restricted social resources, or lack cognitive maturation. As such, this book reflects on novel developments and relevant challenges regarding the consequences that *synchrony* and *divergence* in dyads may have on developing interpersonal relationships.

The introductory chapter reveals a converging trend in recent studies on interpersonal relationships through a bibliometric analysis of repeatedly used keywords and cited bibliographies. The bibliometric data come from works conducted with the dyadic approach on interpersonal synchrony and interpersonal divergence.

Chapter 2 showcases a teacher's use of repeated narrative writing to cope with emotionally loaded incidents associated with social rejection and behavioral problems of a student during teacher–student interaction. The narrative recordings written by both the teacher and the student reveal how such technique has helped the teacher regulate negative affective responses towards the student and form an emergent plan for coping with the student's difficulties by enhancing the teacher's relationship with the student and the student's social relationship within the school.

Chapter 3 addresses the components of non-violent communication (NVC) and explores the strategies of applying NVC for teachers to develop healthy positive interpersonal relationships with students and make the classroom environment conducive to effective teaching and learning.

Chapter 4 reports an empirical study using the dyadic approach to reveal the association between personality traits and perceived friendship quality, as well as between the values shared between friends and the synchrony of perceived friendship quality. The analysis of the dyadic data shows a significant positive effect of agreeableness on the level of friendship quality and a significant positive effect of agreeableness on the synchrony of friendship quality.

Finally, Chapter 5 introduces a strategy to educate children in village primary schools to adopt mindfulness practices to achieve interpersonal and academic achievements.

With a solid foundation developed from Buddhist psychology, the chapter addresses important interpersonal consequences of practicing meditation activities related to the interoception and cultivation of mental balance.

This book is unique in that it presents an interdisciplinary perspective of current research in the field of interpersonal relationships, featuring empirical reports, case studies, systematic reviews, and perspectives from scholars with a variety of expertise in psychology, educational sciences, communication sciences, linguistics, health science, sociology, religion, and philosophy.

We would like to thank the staff at IntechOpen, especially Ms. Zrinka Tomicic, for their excellent assistance throughout the process of preparing and publishing this book. I am grateful to Mr. Filip Lovricevic for contacting me about the opportunity to serve as this book's editor.

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# Introductory Chapter: Synchrony or Divergence in Social Interaction – The Application of Dyadic Approach in Interpersonal Relationship Studies

*Xiaoming Jiang and Chenkai Lin*

## 1. Introduction

Developing and maintaining interpersonal and inter-group relationships are essential to successful human social interactions and healthy human developments. The knowledge about how to wisely maintain and strategically develop interpersonal relationships has to be revealed in individuals of different roles in dyadic relationships, such as between educators and students, parents and children, policymakers and citizens, business partners, health counselors and patients, and so on.

Decades of research on interpersonal relationships have witnessed findings accumulated regarding the cognitive, behavioral, and psychological underpinnings of building interpersonal relationships in dyads in different social settings. In the clinical setting, the dyadic relationship has been a crucial factor to indicate success after suffering health status problem, for example, heart failure. Dyads were reported to hold a positive perspective toward the quality of life after HF when the strength of the interpersonal relationship was the motivator for care. The dyadic relationship between family caregivers and the patient was affected by the caregiver's health conditions [1]. Semi-structured interview was conducted in family dyads. Strong emphasis was given to understanding the relationship challenges in dyads between stroke survivors and family caregivers in order for the social workers to assist dyads with disrupting negative communication [2]. Moreover, nonverbal communication in dyads can be an effective marker for interpersonal relationship. Individuals with a longer hearing impairment reported more nonverbal leading from their significant others than those with a shorter hearing impairment [3]. If they felt more closeness, fewer leading behaviors were shown by the significant others. Coping outcomes in patients with heart failure were investigated in patient-family dyads to show the factors leading to positive contributions to dyadic heart failure management. The management of HF was reported to be successful when the strength of interpersonal relationships and love were the main motive for care [4]. The type of interpersonal relationship men and women have with an observer could affect how they respond to pain. In particular, the presence of another person resulted in an increase in pain

threshold and such effect was largest when that person was a male friend of a man [5]. Nonverbal cues in interpersonal relationships are the relevant predictors of one's physical and mental health.

In the family setting, the dyadic approach was taken to reveal the role of interdependence between individuals within married couples, including a partner's perceptions and interactions on one's health. The actor-partner models were also tested to establish the link between a partner's level of perceived social support and the inflammation in their spouse [6]. In another study, couples were recruited to report the interpersonal electronic surveillance (IES) each member had conducted on the partner and their trust, jealousy, and relationship behaviors. The actor-partner interdependence model was calculated to show which partner of the couple had a significant impact on the relationship perception following the IES perpetration [7]. The interpersonal relationship between a child and their caregivers in their early life can also be a predictor of their later success in developing a certain religious belief. The attachment style demonstrated during early childhood can become the motivating factor for an individual to commit to practice to develop a collaborative and trusting relationship with their god [8].

In the organizational and management setting, the quality of interpersonal relationships also contributes to organizational citizenship behaviors. The quality of the supervisor-nurse relationship in hospitals is positively associated with the nurse's organizational citizen behavior practice [9]. The similarity in the mental representation between dyads contributes to the perceived relationship quality. For example, the dyadic similarity in work-domain construal level is positively associated with leader-follower exchange quality, suggesting a relation between cognitive similarity and the leadership process [10].

Besides these recent observations, novel methodologies have also been developed to quantify interpersonal synchrony at the behavior and neurocognitive levels and have been associated with performances in dyadic activities. Interpersonal brain synchronization was a novel index adopted to show the possible temporal-spatial mechanisms underlying team performance. The synchrony in brain responses was measured between dyads with equal or unbalanced experiences. The performance in a dyad task of joint drawing was correlated with the participants' interbrain synchrony [11]. Rhythmic patterns in interpersonal behaviors are traced to reflect one's engagement in a cooperative vs. competitive joint task. Cooperative behaviors between dyads showed enhanced theta-band phase coherence than competitive conditions. The synchronous fluctuation of cooperative behaviors of dyads provided a behavioral counterpart of theta-band interbrain synchrony in cooperative behaviors [12]. Observational coding methods are developed to enable the continuous tracking of the personal traits of the dyads during interpersonal interaction. The continuous assessment of interpersonal dynamics (CAID) has been demonstrated as effective to show the variations and underlying sources of moment-to-moment behavior between dyads and has proven to be sensitive in clinical practice [13].

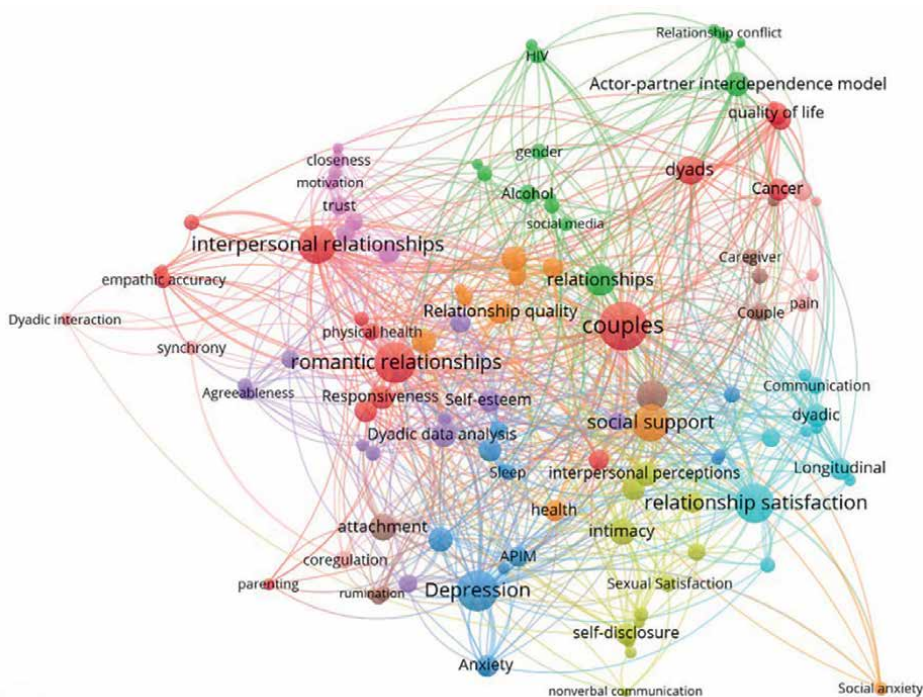
The rapid-growing empirical evidence has led to intriguing issues that reflect the novel developments and relevant challenges in the field of interpersonal relationships, especially *via* works conducted with the dyadic approach to interpersonal synchrony and interpersonal divergence. This chapter aims to make an endeavor to analyze the converging trends in interpersonal relationships through repeatedly used keywords and bibliographies that were cited repeatedly.

## 2. Trends of interpersonal research using dyadic approach

A growing trend of research interests has been witnessed by researchers that apply dyadic approaches to examining the cognitive, behavioral, psychological, and neural mechanisms underlying the formation and maintenance of interpersonal relationships in different social domains and settings. The practice of measuring the level of synchrony and the level of divergence in multifaceted aspects in the qualities, performances, and behaviors of individuals in a dyad, and that of associating these variations in interpersonal synchrony with social, psychological, and clinical outcomes in interpersonal relationships, have increasingly become attended to by researchers in the related fields.

Based on research articles from the Web of Science database from 2012 to 2022, the bibliometric co-occurrence analysis based on keywords (see **Figure 1**) shows trending patterns which the readers rely on for searching the desired articles on interpersonal relationships with dyadic approaches [14].

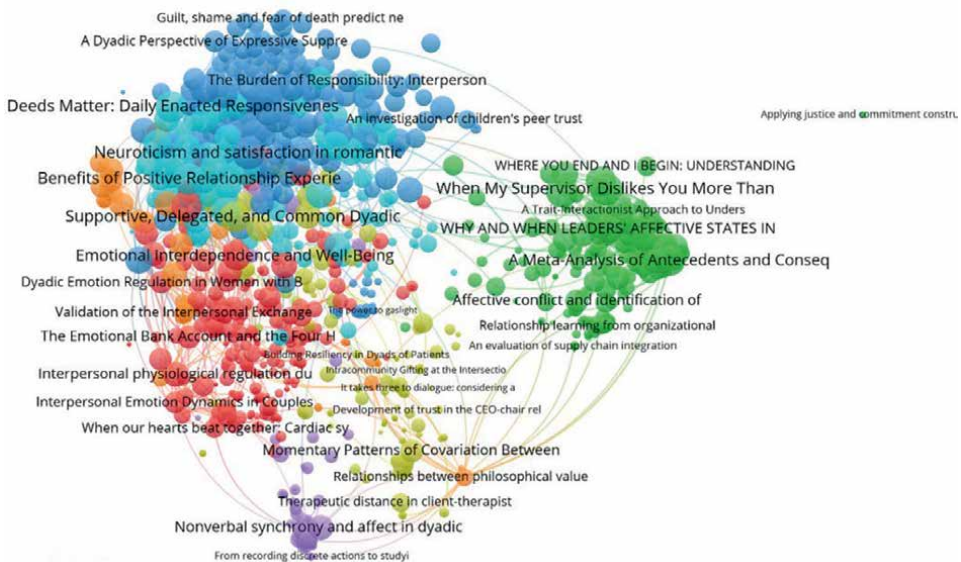
The first cluster reveals the focus on interpersonal interactions between dyads in romantic relationships. The second cluster shows the trend of applying actor-partner interdependence model to various issues related to coping behaviors in dyads (e.g., alcohol and HIV). The third cluster highlights the mental problems (e.g., depression and anxiety) that reside in interpersonal relationships and their impact on individuals



**Figure 1.** Co-occurrence map of keywords ( $n = 128$ ) over publications relevant to interpersonal studies using dyadic approaches. Nodes reflect keywords, and the size of the nodes represents their frequencies. Links reflect the relationships between keywords, and the thicknesses represent the total link strength between nodes. Clusters of keywords are color coded.

and dyads. The fourth cluster mainly reflects how individuals' personalities and how interpersonal perceptions can affect the intimate ties between dyads. The fifth cluster focuses on the use of dyadic data analysis in crucial factors of personal well-being (e.g., self-esteem and depressive symptoms) that are shaped by interpersonal relationships. The sixth cluster reflects the trend on longitudinal analysis of satisfaction in dyadic communications. The seventh cluster concerns how social supports, especially those in close relationships, can affect individuals' health. The eighth cluster mainly reflects the focus on dyadic coping and the attachment patterns within. The ninth cluster reveals the focus on how trust and commitment in interpersonal perceptions can lead to interpersonal closeness and relationship satisfaction. The tenth cluster shows a focus on the synchrony in dyadic relationships and its influence on couple therapy targeting various symptoms (e.g., pain).

Based on citations that shared references, research topics of interest discussed in articles seem to be divided into seven groups (see **Figure 2**). The first cluster of research articles focuses on key indicators (e.g., personality, attachment styles, and supporting behaviors) in dyadic interactions between close partners and their impact on various indicators of life quality (e.g., well-being and satisfaction). The second cluster of research articles is mainly about building and maintaining interpersonal relationships in workplaces (e.g., leader-member exchange, and coworkers). The third cluster of research articles mainly discusses the personal traits (e.g., personality, self-esteem) that affect relationship forming in actor-partner dyads. The fourth cluster of research articles concerns the application of various approaches (e.g., dyadic coping and attachment theory) on diversified interpersonal relationships (e.g., couples, coach-athlete, and patient-caregiver) that could engage relationship challenges. The fifth cluster of research articles highlights the synchrony between



**Figure 2.** Bibliographic coupling network map for articles with shared citations ( $n = 937$ ) relevant to the interpersonal relationship studies using dyadic approaches. Nodes represent the title of the articles, and the size of the nodes represents the number of citations in that article that co-occur in another article. Links reflect the relationships between keywords, and the thicknesses represent the total link strength between nodes. Clusters of articles are color coded.



interpersonal dyads. The sixth cluster of research articles mainly discusses different patterns in interpersonal interactions (e.g., attachment styles and responsiveness) and the impacts on dyads and individuals. The seventh cluster highlights interpersonal topics mainly related to sex (e.g., sexual satisfaction and sexual behavior).

### **3. Aim of this book**

This book aims to show several emergent themes which are highly relevant to interpersonal relationship studies but have not received sufficient examinations with the dyadic approach. Despite the majority of research being focused on relationships in families, clinical and business settings, it is intriguing the constituents and structures underlying interpersonal or intergroup relationships across different contexts, such as friendships, romantic relationships, family relationships, religious relationships, and relationships in and across organizations, communities, and groups.

The ability to encode and decode nonverbal communicative cues can lead to differential outcomes in the maintenance of interpersonal relationships in dyads (Jiang, 2021) [15]. It is intriguing how interpersonal relationships are communicated and perceived by others. In particular, what challenges people are facing in interpersonal relationships during the COVID-19 pandemics? How do virtual communication (e.g., Wechat) and social distancing affect interpersonal relationships? How do facial masks affect the effectiveness of communicating meanings?

While conventional relationship studies focused on human-human relationship building, it is rarely investigated how human beings build relationships with nonhuman existing, such as animals and machines. The human-robot relationship building can be the next important challenge to tackle for researchers from interdisciplinary fields on interpersonal relationships.

The cognitive impacts of the quality of interpersonal relationships on the cognitive processes of individuals in a dyad, such as the ability to comprehend languages, coordinate between attentional resources and implement executive functions, are essential to understand the downstream effect of building a healthy interpersonal relationship. The inter-brain coupling has become an effective dyadic approach to dynamically quantify interpersonal synchrony at the neural level. This novel approach is especially suitable to address whether processes related to interpersonal relationships suffer from individual differences and cultural differences. For example, what are the potential (neuro) cognitive factors that could block the group outsiders from building relationships with group members, how is the elderly maintain interpersonal relationships and how does aging affect such a process? What are the pathological relationships and what are their underlying psychological consequences and impacts on the psychiatric status? What are the prerequisites for children and adolescents to develop interpersonal relationships with others? Can such skills be trained?

These new possibilities constitute the outlook of the current book, which is dedicated to making some contributions to revealing research trends on applying novel dyadic paradigms and measuring tools to tapping the mechanisms and processes crucial to interpersonal relationships in under-investigated domains.


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## Chapter 2

# Employment of Repeated Narrative Writing by a Teacher in Coping with Social Rejection and Behavior Problems of One of Her Sixth-Grade Students

*Clodie Tal and Hind Meyma*

### Abstract

This study examined a teacher's use of repeated narrative writing (RNW) based on Pennebaker's expressive writing method to cope with emotionally loaded incidents related to social rejection and behavior problems of a sixth-grade student in Israel. An analysis of 28 narratives written by the homeroom teacher and an extended narrative written by the student herself at the end of the school year revealed that RNW helped the teacher overcome helplessness, regulate negative feelings toward the student, and form an emergent plan for coping with the student's difficulties. The teacher's plan included enhancement of the teacher's relationships with the student, her peers, other teachers, the school principal, and the student's parents. At the end of the school year, the student was better integrated in the class, learned to trust the teacher, and lean on her for support, and showed improved academic performance.

**Keywords:** repeated narrative writing, expressive writing, coping with behavior problems, social rejection, self-regulation, classroom management

### 1. Introduction

In this paper, we present repeated narrative writing (RNW) by preschool and elementary school teachers as a method for coping with difficult behavior problems in the classroom. RNW is based on the expressive writing method proposed by Smyth and Pennebaker [1, 2] for dealing with emotionally loaded events or traumas. It refers to writing that is repeated (at least four or five times) about an emotionally laden event involving a child with a behavior problem. The preschool or primary school teacher is instructed to focus on the emotional event that undermines her, for one reason or another, and to write about it however they choose, linking the narrative to individuals, feelings, or thoughts, as they arise. The teacher is instructed to write about the same event again and again each day over the course of several days,

without regard to accuracy, spelling, or grammar. In the 1980s, Pennebaker and Smyth [1, 2] found that free narrative writing about an emotionally laden event that takes place on four or five occasions, day after day, or at intervals no longer than a week apart, without regard to syntax or spelling, eventually brings a sense of relief, emotional well-being, and sometimes lowers blood pressure and improves daily functioning [1, 3–5]. A more recent meta-analysis aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of expressive writing in patients suffering from advanced disease showed limited improvement in symptoms such as pain relief, anxiety, and distress. Nevertheless, Kupeli et al. [6] conclude that the findings of their review “highlight that the use of expressive writing as a therapeutic intervention in people with advanced disease is feasible but that a more tailored, focused intervention may be required in order to improve outcomes.”

Tal [7] proposed that RNW be employed to help preschool and elementary school teachers cope with difficult behavior problems, a frequent cause of concern for both veteran and novice teachers [8, 9], which often contributes to thoughts of leaving the teaching profession. Indeed, despite the range of interventions available for addressing behavior problems [10], the negative feelings felt by teachers toward children with these problems [11] often seem to undermine success.

The idea of “importing” expressive writing from therapy into the classroom is consistent with the practices of collecting and analyzing critical incidents [12–14] and journal writing [15, 16] as strategies to develop a reflective approach to educational practice. RNW and journal writing, as well as the documentation of critical incidents, are all based on the assumption that expressive writing about significant experiences, even harsh or traumatic ones, enables the writer to better understand their feelings, improve comprehension of the situation, help regulate emotions, and allow for greater understanding of how different perspectives affect educational relationships. As seen in the research of Tal and others [17], all these can lead to the formulation of educational strategies that take into consideration the feelings and thoughts of the teacher as well as a range of factors that affect the learning and emotional well-being of the students.

This self-awareness of feelings, the ability to regulate negative feelings, and the understanding of educational praxis are critical when teachers address behavior problems, particularly regarding children who are experiencing rejection by their peers.

## **2. Behavior problems and social rejection**

Challenging behavior has been defined as “any repeated pattern of behavior, or perception of behavior, that interferes with or is at risk of interfering with optimal learning or engagement in pro-social interactions with peers and adults” [18]. Aggressive behavior is often part of the behavior problem, and aggressiveness by students with behavior problems often leads to rejection by their peers. One should keep in mind, of course, that not all children who show aggressiveness become rejected and not all rejected children are aggressive [19].

Indeed, in the initial encounter of the teacher with the student under discussion here, behavior problems were quite evident: aggressiveness toward her classmates, chronic tardiness, vocal arguments with teachers and other students. In the course of the repeated writing about events that involved this student, it became clear to the teacher that this student was being rejected by her classmates.

Rejection is a social phenomenon in which others do not want an individual to become part of their interpersonal relations or reference groups [20]. Rejected

children are those who are disliked or despised by the other children in the preschool or elementary school. This is manifested by an unwillingness to sit beside them, participate with them in activities, learn with or play with them, or generally include them. They are certainly not invited to their homes [20]. In short, rejected children are those whose peers do not want to affiliate with them.

Social rejection undermines the fundamental human need to belong, defined as the desire to form and maintain close interpersonal attachments [21]. Rejection evokes powerful feelings among those rejected—from the insult at the heart of the experience to anxiety, anger, sadness, depression, and jealousy [22]—and these often elicit powerful reactions by those rejected. There may be aggressive behavior (among the aggressive-rejected) or withdrawal and/or self-generated social isolation (among the withdrawn-rejected) [19]. In all cases, these are nonadaptive reactions that only exacerbate the situation of rejection. A vicious cycle emerges in which the aggressiveness and withdrawal distance the other children from the rejected child, who responds with more intensified aggressiveness, which continuously feeds the cycle. One must also distinguish between sporadic incidents of rejection by the child's peers and "chronic rejection" by the cohort [23].

Furthermore, the status of social rejection seems to remain stable over time, i.e., children identified as socially rejected retained that status even 4 years later [24]. The continuity of the social rejection status can be attributed to a number of factors: the tendency of rejected children to respond vengefully and aggressively to rejection, thereby exacerbating their situation; the tendency of classmates not to allow them to improve their behavior; the tendency of teachers to ignore the rejection itself and its adverse effects on the children and instead focus on the aggressiveness.

Although teachers know that social competence in a child is important [25], many seem to value scholastic achievement more [26]. Furthermore, teachers tend to ascribe to parental influence or genetic factors more influence on the social competence of the child than the teacher's own classroom interventions [26, 27]. Most publications that discuss rejection and interventions to foster social competence include recommendations for strategies that were not evaluated in systematic research [28].

Dealing with social rejection seems to require that the school or preschool adopt a proactive, ecological-systemic approach similar to that proposed by Olweus [29] for dealing with bullying: modifying conditions in the school so that the teachers, the uninvolved students and students involved in the rejection change their perceptions of and behavior toward the aggressive-rejected student. Importantly, one should not expect rejected students to change their behavior on their own without support and direction from the teachers.

Abraham [30] and Bierman [31] highlight the negative behavior of the peer group that contributes to and sustains the social rejection status. Indeed, they propose that the teacher focus first on the group (encouraging empathy and solidarity) and only then on changing the behavior and enhancing social competence of the rejected child. Research seems to confirm the impression that school and preschool teachers tend to ignore social rejection. Studies by Yoon and Kerber [32] suggest that teachers intervene less in cases of social rejection compared with cases of physical or verbal aggression.

The motivations of rejected children in their social interactions with their classmates are often destructive: exacting revenge, causing harm, a desire to defeat them. Clearly, their repertoire of strategies for resolving conflicts with other children is limited, e.g., hitting them or bribing them with games or candy. A rejected child's assessment of their own social competence is not always realistic [31].

### **3. Classroom management and coping with social rejection**

The approach underlying the research described here is that it is not enough for teachers to work with the peer group in order to end the social rejection, but that the starting point has to be examination of the teachers' own attitudes, perceptions, and actions that could perpetuate or even exacerbate the social rejection. This is because teachers are the "classroom managers"—responsible, together with other staff, for creating conditions to ensure the emotional well-being and learning of every single child, whether "good" students or challenging ones [33, 34]. It should be recognized that the classroom is a socially organized system in which the teachers serve as leaders; subject to their management are people (students and adults) as well as the resources of time and place [35]. Tal defined classroom management as a meta-competency, the ability to guide staff and students toward the achievement of learning goals in the classroom—emotional well-being and significant learning for all. The meta-competency of classroom management not only includes traditional leadership that takes responsibility and guides the system toward emotional well-being and good learning conditions for all the children, it also takes a proactive approach toward the system, including routinely thinking about future scenarios and making decisions in consideration of these scenarios (e.g., never dividing the class into voluntary pairs knowing that such a division in a class with rejected children would only deepen their sense of rejection when no child is willing to learn or interact with them). At the heart of the ecological-systemic approach is the understanding of relationships between people and the diverse perspectives in the classroom (e.g., understanding that ignoring the ostracism of one child, or scolding the rejected child in front of the entire class would make matters worse for that child). Thus, it is imperative for teachers to understand the balance of power in their classrooms, including their effect on it. But no matter how deep their understanding of the powers at play, including future scenarios, it is not enough. Therefore, the meta-competency of classroom management as defined by Tal [33] must also include good relations with and among the students as well as self-regulation of the teacher.

Indeed, meta-analysis studies reveal that effective moral management of classrooms in which there is good coping with behavior problems and good interpersonal relations is founded upon trust and caring about and among the students (including those who have serious behavior problems), a positive emotional climate, and a sense of joint responsibility among teachers and students for what is happening rather than external control over behavior through reward and punishment [36, 37].

We present in this study research regarding the use of RNW of emotionally charged events by a homeroom teacher as a means of improving the social status of a student rejected by her classmates.

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1 Type of research**

This research is a case study in the use of RNW by the homeroom teacher as an intervention for a sixth-grade girl with behavior problems who experienced social rejection. A case study enables the observation of human activity at a specific time and place in order to deepen understanding of the phenomenon under examination [38, 39].



## 4.2 Field and study participants

The research was carried out in a public, 6-year, elementary school in the Arab school system of Israel. The school is located in a mixed city (where both Arabs and Jews live) in the center of the country. At the time of this research, 630 students were enrolled in the school distributed among 18 classes. Most of the students' families are in the middle class socioeconomically.

The main participants in the study were a homeroom teacher, who also coauthored this article, and a sixth-grade girl in her class. The research took place in the 2016–2017 school year.

The homeroom teacher also teaches math. At the time of this study, she was a 20 veteran of teaching. She had served as the homeroom teacher of that class for 3 years, from grades 3 to 6. The homeroom teacher initiated the research and wrote the narratives.

The student Nur (a fictitious name) had also attended this school in third grade, but switched to a different school for fourth grade. In fifth grade, she returned to the school and had the same homeroom teacher. The girl lives with her parents and eight brothers and sisters. The father works outside the home and the mother is a housewife.

Other participants: classmates with whom Nur had daily interactions, Nur's mother, the school principal, and other teachers who taught the class that year.

## 4.3 Research tools

The data for this research were the 28 narratives written about five incidents chosen by the teacher that were particularly laden emotionally and an expanded narrative written by the student. The teacher also kept a journal during the school year—the findings are also based on this journal. The narratives were written in accordance with guidelines given by Tal [7] based on the directions of Smyth and Pennebaker [2], as follows:

I would like to ask you to write a personal story concerning *a stressful, difficult, or traumatic incident* in which you were involved that is related to *a child who exhibits behavioral difficulties in your class*. Please write *your thoughts and deepest feelings* about this incident...Feel free to learn about your thoughts and feelings. You can relate this subject to your interpersonal experiences; you can relate it to the present, your past or future.

The student was asked by the homeroom teacher to write a narrative at the end of the school year, a time in which the teacher played no formal role.

## 4.4 Ethics

The student and her mother gave agreement to participating in this research, understanding that the research was part of an intervention program designed to improve the student's social standing in class and ease her transition to middle school. The names of all the students, the school, and the town in which the research took place remain confidential.

## 5. Findings

We begin this section with a description of the problems in the student's behavior from the perspective of the homeroom teacher and the student herself. We then present findings about the multiple negative emotions that come up in the documentation of events and the

use of RNW to help regulate feelings and guide the formulation and improvement of an intervention program that emerged through the course of the writing. We present evidence of the teacher's efforts at self-regulation and the principles of the emergent intervention program. Finally, we offer an interim evaluation of the program based on excerpts from the narrative written by the student herself at the conclusion of sixth grade.

### **5.1 Much time and self-reflection by the teacher are required to realize a child is experiencing rejection**

The homeroom teacher discerned the difficulties Nur was having when she moved back to this school in fifth grade. From the outset, Nur engaged in disruptive activities that were sometimes violent physically, verbally, and socially toward other students and sometimes the teachers and was said to have a negative influence on the atmosphere in the classroom. Her behavior only deepened the rejection of her classmates and the anger of other students and teachers.

But over the course of about a year and a quarter—until the end of the first third of sixth grade—the teacher focused on “the problems caused by Nur” and the impudent way she approached both adults and other children. As noted by the teacher in the summary and evaluation of the intervention program:

*(Unfortunately), it never occurred to me even once that she was [also] a victim and not [just] an aggressor...I prayed to myself that she would change classes or schools...I never once looked at her face except when I was angry and scolded her. For every problem in the classroom or school yard, I always thought that she was guilty, without even thinking for a fraction of a second that perhaps someone was trying to make her look bad or cast blame on her for something she did not do.*

At the beginning of sixth grade, Nur's multiple behavior problems were plainly evident. There were documented incidents of physical and verbal aggressiveness toward other students: She hit children, flouted boundaries and rules, disrespected the teachers, hassled other students.

All this behavior seems to have led to Nur's rejection by her peers. None of the other students wanted to play with her or sit beside her. Most of the students rejected her, made fun of her, and taunted her, apparently to get her to lose self-control. Despite the warning signs, it took time for the teacher to realize that the blatant behavior problems were masking a deeper and more serious issue—social rejection. Thus wrote the teacher in her journal:

*As a result of my conversations with her [Nur], and after giving this thought night and day, I realized that she was indeed rejected, and this was substantiated by the narrative that Nur herself wrote at the end of the 2016–2017 school year in summing up the intervention process that I developed for her, as she presented a troubled picture of social rejection that undermined her sense of self. The narrative that Nur wrote shocked me; I felt terrible because I had not seen it for so long. Feelings of guilt and sorrow enveloped me, I rebuked myself. It was an irresolvable dilemma: I had asked Nur to write about herself and her years in the school, but, on the other hand, I regretted that request. The narrative seemed to be a mirror through which I now saw my real self. I saw how I had treated her with contempt and ignored her (naturally not on purpose). But through this same mirror, I also saw my success in integrating her into the class after years of rejection and lack of acceptance.*

Corroboration of this teacher's impressions regarding what Nur experienced can be found in the narrative Nur herself wrote upon conclusion of sixth grade:

*[The other students] stayed away from me and did not want to sit beside me or talk to me and of course not play with me. I felt terrible. And when I complained about one of them, the teacher replied, "I'm sure you were bothering him, so he got back at you." I think this answer was very cruel. I'm not that way and I do not want to be that way, but I have no choice. I have to disrupt and annoy so that they will yell at me or punish me, at least that way I'll be part of things and they'll have to deal with me, it does not matter how.*

Excerpts from the teacher's journal and the student's narrative reveal the distress of the rejected student. They suggest that the student was aware that her behavior was disruptive and grating, and that she saw this problematic behavior as signaling her state and need for care and attention. One can also see, however, that time and an emotional effort by the teacher are required to rise above the behavioral issues and discern the underlying distress. This takes adoption of an introspective-reflective stance in order to understand that social rejection is not just due to being a problematic student, but also a consequence of the teacher's own attitudes and the attitudes of the other teachers toward the student and her behavior. One can glean from the two narratives that angry and alienating responses by teachers exacerbate negative behavior in rejected children. It seems in retrospect, based on the words of the student and teacher, that construction of the image of a rejected student as a "troublemaker" leads to the student being blamed for sins they did not commit, which only deepens the anger and vengeful feelings of the rejected child and the subsequent avoidance of them by other students. The narratives depict a dead end from which only an adult can find a way out. In the case of the teacher, the writing of a journal, documentation, and RNW about these incidents led to her realization that she bore responsibility for maintaining and even escalating Nur's social rejection. This insight, as noted, led to the teacher's profound sense of guilt, which, although difficult to bear, is an important step toward initiating an intervention to engender change.

We now present the gradual process that led to change in the teacher's attitudes toward the student.

## **5.2 Multiple negative feelings as part of daily coping with a rejected student**

Analysis of the narratives written about five emotionally loaded incidents reveals an outpouring of words that convey negative emotions. Behavior that is aggressive and flaunts authority always evokes strong negative feelings. Anger and a sense of powerlessness in the face of this behavior were the most salient and frequently cited negative emotions. The anger was also often accompanied by sadness and guilt. The teacher notes that incidents caused a storm of emotions that accompanied her even after working hours. She writes regarding the first incident, for example: "I went to see my mother to consult with her about this. I started talking and felt so emotional that tears fell from my eyes" (first incident, fourth narrative).

Some examples of the teacher's anger, which appeared prominently in the narrative writing:

"I was very angry at whoever had done this despicable deed" (first incident, first narrative). "I became even more exasperated and yelled" (third incident, first narrative).

"At that moment, I saw red and wanted to shout to the heavens" (third incident, second narrative).

“I left the classroom boiling mad” (fifth incident, second narrative).

Unlike the feelings of anger that were prevalent primarily in the first and second writing of each incident, the teacher’s sense of helplessness appeared in all the narratives:

“I was very surprised and felt helpless,” (third incident, fifth narrative).

“Again, I felt powerless and broken,” (fifth incident, third narrative).

The arousal of guilt feelings played an important role; to a large extent, the sense of guilt led to the teacher’s acceptance of responsibility and the determination to act on behalf of Nur. Indeed, toward the end of the process of narrative writing, the teacher wrote in a kind of summation, “The guilt feelings together with a kind of sadness ultimately led me to want to take responsibility for what was happening in the classroom with regard to Nur, and then to think about a course of action” (fifth incident, seventh narrative).

Some expressions of the teacher’s guilt feelings that came up in the narratives:

“I felt as if I were giving her [Nur] short shrift,” (third incident, first narrative).

“And I almost blamed myself for causing her to be rejected by the class” (fifth incident, seventh narrative).

A piling on of negative emotions is oppressive. However, in the context of RNW, these unpleasant feelings can lead to soul-searching, in-depth thinking, and a taking of action, as the teacher herself wrote: “These words hurt me deeply and led to soul-searching” (third incident, first narrative).

### **5.3 RNW helped enhance self-regulation of the teacher, allowing for formulation of an intervention program**

RNW helped, first of all, in self-regulation—controlling the influence of negative emotions over the teacher’s thoughts and actions and bringing out thoughts and decisions about courses of action. In the words of the teacher, “My main goal became how to help the student – how to help improve her social standing, and how to improve her functioning prior to the expected transition to middle school.”

An example of enhanced self-regulation of the teacher can be seen in the first incident in which she discovered that Nur had distributed notes in the class on which she had written derogatory names. This evoked the teacher’s anger, and repeated writing about the incident brought about an effort at self-regulation: “I decided to slow down and become as calm as possible” (first incident, second narrative).

And in the third incident, which required the involvement of the teacher to separate Nur from another girl, the teacher wrote, “I collected myself and asked her [Nur] to come with me” (third incident, first narrative). In the second narrative of this incident, she wrote, “I restrained myself and replied, no problem at all.”

Indeed, the number of negative emotions expressed declined significantly from the first to the fifth incident ( $t = 7.28, p < .05$ )—from a mean of 2.2 negative emotions expressed after the first incident across five narratives ( $SD = 0.8$ ) to a mean of 0.71 negative emotions after the fifth incident across seven narratives ( $SD = 0.88$ ). The statistical analysis is based on counting and comparing the total number of words reflecting negative emotional expressions in each narrative—inclusive of all negative feelings.

### **5.4 RNW contributed to insight formation and emergence of a course of action**

RNW led to an intervention program that was dynamic—growing, crystallizing, and improving during the course of the writing. The emergent intervention program focused on the following elements:

- Improved communication with Nur
- Efforts to change Nur's image in the eyes of her classmates
- Involvement of the principal and teaching staff in the intervention program
- Involvement of Nur's mother

#### 5.4.1 *Improved communication with Nur*

From the teacher's journal:

*Through the course of the narrative writing, I understood that one way to cope with the irregular incidents was to connect with the student emotionally, to love her more, to understand her, and to relate to her as a human being so I could prove to her that I am not against her and do not hate her, but rather the opposite.*

The following is an excerpt showing how the idea took root of becoming someone the student could turn to:

*I suddenly had the idea of proposing to Nur that she tell me about every problem or incident that happens to her in the school, on the way home, in the street, or even at home, and that I would take care of the matter, together with her, of course. Once this idea came to me, I felt my body and head relax, I promised myself that from now on, I would not disappoint Nur and I hoped that I could change something in her feelings (second incident, fifth narrative).*

The day after she had the idea of getting closer to the student, the teacher described what she did to implement it. In the sixth narrative of this second incident, she writes that she waited for Nur at the school entrance and invited her to walk together in the school yard so she could talk to her. This was in place of the usual scolding about Nur's lateness. The teacher wrote that she had decided "to temporarily ignore her [Nur's] negative actions" in order to deepen her connection with the student. First the teacher asked Nur what she thought of the buildings in the surrounding area and whether she would change anything. Nur got caught up in the conversation and volunteered good ideas for improving the look of the surroundings. Then the teacher asked Nur to talk a little about herself—good things about herself, what she likes in herself.

The strength of interpersonal relations is tested at a time of crisis, and one soon followed. The third incident tells of a scuffle with another girl in her class. The teacher entered the room after hearing shouts, and Nur immediately stopped her aggressive behavior. As soon as Nur stopped pulling the hair of the other student, she broke out in tears, saying, "You're always against me, you're all against me, nobody understands me or believes me, now for sure you'll tell my mother to come and take me to the principal." After some reflection, the teacher decided to invite Nur for a conversation. In this talk, Nur asserted that she had pulled the girl's hair because that student had made fun of her in the morning about her repeated lateness and her arrival at school with her hair unkempt. Nur decided to pull the hair of that student, she said, "so that her hair would also be messy." In light of this conversation, the teacher had the idea of empowering Nur by asking her to suggest ways to overcome her behavior

problems—particularly her aggressiveness toward other students and her ongoing tardiness. Nur showed up early in the morning for the conversation with the teacher, but she had no real suggestions, only accusations against the girls in her class who seek to undermine her. After that conversation, the teacher thought about suggesting that Nur take on a role with responsibility, such as submitting the class attendance record, maintaining the cleanliness of the closet and blackboard, or arranging the tables in the hallway.

Despite the obstacles, the teacher remained resolved to stand by Nur and hear her out. Through the course of her ongoing work, the teacher began to understand the complex dynamics between the student and her classmates and other teachers. Based on the connection slowly forming between them, the teacher began to add more elements to the intervention program.

Of interest in the teacher's conduct was that in her awareness of her own feelings and by giving thought to Nur's behavior in the relationship, she avoided impulsive reactions, adopting a reflective approach that allowed for gradual formulation of a program based on proactive and ecological-systemic thinking. The teacher took into consideration the effect of her actions on Nur and the other students as well as the influence on Nur of the other students, teachers, and her parents.

#### *5.4.2 Efforts to change Nur's image in the eyes of her classmates*

Social rejection of a student is characteristic of interactions within a peer group, among the students themselves. The rejection—expressed as unwillingness of the students to engage in activities with or be in the company of the rejected student—is sometimes the outcome of the rejected student's behavior (aggression, irritating actions, failure to be attentive to the other), and the rejection itself feeds the insult, anger, and jealousy of the rejected student, escalating their aggressiveness. Hence, it is critical to understand that without intervention, the rejection will only increase and deepen the emotional damage to the rejected child (see [31], for example). One of the narratives written by the teacher notes that Nur explains her aggressive behavior as a reaction to feeling rejected or to act of rejection by the other students. Aware of Nur's feelings, the teacher chose actions to moderate the rejection and a proactive strategy to rehabilitate her image with her classmates.

While writing the narrative about the first incident in which she discovers that Nur is the one spreading notes to classmates using derogatory names, the teacher decides, "...not to tell the students in the class that it was she [Nur] who spread the notes, hoping that she will stop her improper activity."

Later, while writing the narrative about the third incident—the hair-pulling of the other student—the teacher resolved to change Nur's image in the eyes of her classmates by assigning her a job. To that end, she asked the class for a volunteer to bring the class attendance record to the secretariat at the end of every school day. All the students volunteered except Nur. The teacher turned to Nur in front of the class and asked her why she was not volunteering. "Anyway, you won't give me the job," responded Nur, "so why should I raise my hand, I saved you the trouble." The teacher was surprised by Nur's response, yet informed her that she wants to assign her responsibility for the class attendance record. In her narrative, the teacher wrote that Nur's face lit up, manifestly happy with the teacher's offer, and accepted the job.

But changing the image of a rejected child in the eyes of one's classmates is a long and arduous process. Indeed, the next day the teacher again hastened to a noisy row between Nur and a group of other students. When asked for an explanation, Nur told

her that one of the students took the attendance record to the secretariat even though the whole class should have known that this was Nur's job.

In response, the teacher decided to clarify the matter to the entire class the next day, to give full public backing to Nur. The teacher went to school that day even though it was her day off and asked the full forum of the class who did Nur's job of taking the record to the secretariat the previous day. One student raised his hand and said that he had done it. The teacher asked him whether he was aware that this was Nur's job. "Nur is not responsible at all and should not take any job upon herself," replied the student. "She doesn't even manage to get to school early, she's late every day." The teacher understood that the student's reply was an opportunity to clarify to him and the entire class in the presence of Nur that "everyone in the world has his own job, and one is not allowed to take the job of another, and also one must never judge people any way one feels like it." The teacher wrote that Nur suddenly looked happy. Nur herself felt that how the teacher handled this issue, the public defense of her, strengthened her. Later, the teacher wrote that from that day forward, Nur stopped being late for school.

#### *5.4.3 Involvement of the principal and teaching staff in the intervention program*

As part of the ecological-systemic insights gained by the teacher during the narrative writing, she realized that an intervention program that attempts to improve the social behavior of one of the students requires the cooperation of the other teachers of that class, keeping the school principal informed, and receiving support from the principal as well.

In the course of writing the fourth narrative of the second incident, the homeroom teacher concluded that she should convene a meeting of the other teachers concerning Nur's intervention program. At that meeting, she presented to the other teachers the incidents in which Nur was involved—most recently, planting a pencil case of one student into the bookbag of one of the high-achieving students. In parallel, the homeroom teacher shared the insight she had formed in light of the narrative writing and her conversations with Nur—that the student was in need of support and acceptance by the teachers, evidence that they see her as a valued person, so that Nur can forego the manipulations she uses as a way of coping with feeling rejected.

Afterward, while writing a narrative about the second incident, which primarily concerned Nur's ongoing late arrival to school, the teacher decided to meet with the principal. At that meeting, she presented her difficulties in coping with the challenges posed by Nur. A decision was reached to involve Nur's parents, primarily because of her chronic late arrival to school. The intent was to understand what takes place at home and the parents' attitude, and not just, as in the past, a call to complain about their daughter's behavior. And indeed, the teacher held a phone conversation with Nur's mother. Later, while writing about the fifth incident, the teacher came to believe that Nur's difficulties required in-depth thinking. She understood that the context of the problem may be more complex than she originally thought. She again consulted with the school principal. In the first meeting with the principal, she had spoken of her difficulties and need for support, and the principal provided it. Subsequently, the teacher and principal met again to explore more deeply the context of Nur's difficulties. Here the teacher shared everything she knew about the student, and they decided to invite the mother to a face-to-face meeting with the teacher and principal to formulate an intervention program together.

Above all, the teacher left with a feeling of unconditional support from the principal, which reassured her.

In sensitive cases such as social rejection in which the students, parents, and teachers are involved and when various parties may resist or have complaints against the intervention, the school principal must provide unconditional support. Such support gives strength to the teacher to implement the intervention program.

#### *5.4.4 Involvement of Nur's mother*

Through the course of the writing, the homeroom teacher gradually realized that it was necessary to involve the parents of the rejected student in information and the intervention efforts. Through her writing and conversations with Nur and her mother, the teacher surmised that the student was not receiving enough attention and direction at home, which raised her level of concern. In this context, a decision was made together with the school principal to invite the mother to a conversation at school.

This conversation revealed that the mother was aware of some of the difficulties with Nur, and she herself took responsibility for some of Nur's tardiness. The mother shared with the teacher that some of Nur's tardiness was caused by the mother's request that Nur help with chores around the house. Despite the embarrassment and unpleasantness felt by the mother during the conversation with the principal and teacher, she expressed deep satisfaction that the teacher was creating an intervention program for Nur.

### **5.5 Evaluation of the intervention program at the end of the school year: the student's perspective**

The program evaluation presented here is based on the words of the student—the teacher's evaluation appears in other sections of the findings. The student described the changes she felt in herself in sixth grade, the year the intervention program was implemented by the homeroom teacher to address the social rejection Nur was experiencing. The teacher gave Nur paper and a pencil and requested, "Please write about yourself and your integration into the school from the first day you arrived." The text was written by the student in Arabic and translated by the homeroom teacher into Hebrew and thence to English. (The division of the text and their subtitles were given by the authors.)

#### *5.5.1 The student's evaluation of her scholastic performance*

*I started learning in sixth grade. I felt that I matured a little, and I felt within myself that I wanted to make progress and improve my achievements, but I forgot to say that my grades in third grade were good, but in fourth and fifth grades, they were terrible, very low. I never got more than a 50, which really bothered me, but I had no choice. The teachers and students took the desire out of me to study and improve...I have to add that my grades also went up, I started to get 75 or more. This made me really happy and pushed me to be okay with everyone...*

#### *5.5.2 Positive change in the homeroom teacher's attitude toward her*

*Suddenly out of the clear blue sky, I felt that the homeroom teacher began to treat me differently. She began to make sure that no one bothered me. She gave me jobs, classroom chores, I found myself coming out of the place of humiliation I was in.*



### 5.5.3 *The changed attitude of the homeroom teacher affected her relationship with other students*

*I started to see that the homeroom teacher smiled right at me, was concerned about me, listened to me when I complained about one of the students. The students in the class began to make friends with me, started to play with me...*

### 5.5.4 *Changes in herself*

*Truthfully, I also began to calm down, I stopped disrupting and annoying the students for no good reason, which wasn't what happened before.*

### 5.5.5 *Summing up*

*I was really happy when the teacher told me she wanted to write things about me and talk with me as part of her college graduate studies, I felt very important. I really love the homeroom teacher, and it's too bad this did not happen a long time ago. That could have saved me lots of worry and suffering. Because then I did not love her at all, and I did not even like going to school. I would come to school late and be absent lots of days only because I did not like the homeroom teacher and the students, but after things changed for the better, I started to come early and wasn't absent. These days we are organizing a farewell party for the sixth grade. The teacher put me into the choir and a few other things.*

The narrative freely written by the student enables an understanding of how she perceived her own behavior and of those around her in sixth grade in school and in general. Her words suggest that she attributed her poor scholastic record in fourth and fifth grades to the fact that “the teacher and students took the desire out of me to study and improve.” Her words also suggest that good grades were important to her, but that she was in need of support from her classmates and teachers for her to want to make an effort. Of interest, Nur indicates in her writing that she takes responsibility for her behavior. She “admits” that she herself stopped disrupting and annoying her classmates “for no good reason.” Strikingly, she attributes the overall change in her functioning and the class atmosphere to the homeroom teacher’s changed attitude toward her. In her perception, the teacher rather suddenly changed her attitude toward her from one extreme to another. Suddenly the teacher expressed affection for her, listened to her, and defended her from baseless complaints of other students. Moreover, Nur expressed her sorrow that the change in the teacher had not occurred earlier, which would have saved her “lots of worry and suffering.” She explains her tardiness and frequent absences from school as a result of feeling unwanted in school itself. After the changed atmosphere in the class, she declares that she made an effort to arrive on time to school and her classes. Nur also views the fact that the teacher includes the intervention program in her graduate school studies as an expression of her importance in the eyes of the teacher.

In cases of social rejection, there is always concern that without sufficient support, the student will return to behavior that could again undermine her relations with classmates and teachers. Therefore, the homeroom teacher continued to maintain telephone contact with Nur and take an interest in her for several months after she completed sixth grade. The teacher reports that, according to Nur, her social and scholastic functioning in middle school was strong.

## **6. Discussion and conclusion**

This paper presents a case study of coping with the social rejection of a sixth-grade student through the RNW of the homeroom teacher.

Despite prolonged familiarity of the school with the child and to some extent with the family, until fifth grade, the school had not invested any serious thought into what this student was experiencing or the root of the problem that led her to change schools. At the beginning of fifth grade, attempts were made to cope with Nur's behavior problems primarily because they were disruptive to classroom management. These included chronic tardiness to school, frequent absences from school, involvement in fights, aggressive behavior toward other students, and failure to respect the teacher's authority. Nur's poor scholastic performance was not initially of interest to the school system.

It took time for her homeroom teacher, and then the other class teachers, to see Nur's problematic behavior as rooted in social rejection that disturbed and hurt the student herself. Changing the definition from a behavioral issue and classroom management disruption to social rejection that harms the student herself took place during the course of the RNW about emotionally loaded events in which Nur was involved. The definition was changed from the student being "the problem" to an understanding that a large part of the problem was the learning environment, not just the student's behavior. In the course of the writing, awareness grew that how the classroom was managed at the beginning of the school year did not afford a real opportunity for the student to improve.

Bierman [31] reminds us that social rejection is a group process, not the characteristic of an individual. Nevertheless, the focus becomes both a description of the phenomenon and of how interactions between the child and their peer group are handled. Bierman [31] and Abraham [30] emphasize the need to invest efforts in changing attitudes toward the rejected student by the peer group prior to addressing the issue of the rejected students themselves. In this paper, the teachers are perceived not just as external factors who intervene in order to change the perceptions and behaviors of the students, but as factors whose perceptions, emotions, and behavior have an effect on the social dynamic in the classroom [11].

And, indeed, in the research presented here, the key to changing the social status of the student was improved relations with the homeroom teacher. Relations with the teacher and, through her mediation, with other teachers and students, were perceived as a necessary though insufficient condition for improving the social status and scholastic performance of the student. In the words of the homeroom teacher:

*Analysis of the narratives indicates that the writing led to one of the main components of the emergent program – an emotional connection with Nur, one that expresses my growing emotional commitment to her that allows her to trust me, to see me as someone she can turn to when she feels bad.*

The case study presented here shows an emergent intervention program for the student that gradually evolved for the homeroom teacher from one narrative writing to another—the intervention program was informed by the insights that arose during the writing and analysis of her thoughts and feelings. The writing and subsequent reflection helped the teacher better understand the contexts—classroom, school, and family—and develop ideas that would allow for the social integration of the rejected student.

The intervention program that emerged included, above all, establishing a good relationship between the homeroom teacher and the student, fewer negative emotions of the teacher toward the student and the situation, recruitment of the teaching staff and principal to change the atmosphere in the classroom and school to one that supports the student, changed perceptions of the other students toward the rejected student, changes in the perceptions and behavior of the student herself, and parental support of the intervention program. Although she gave empathy and unconditional support to the student, the teacher did not refrain from addressing her tardiness and integration difficulties. What stands out in the narratives is the teacher's sincere attempt to understand what was taking place in the classroom and home without judging the student. Even when she viewed sternly the student's behavior, the teacher was more disturbed by the harm the student was causing to herself, not the disruption caused by her behavior. This is how the teacher explained the essence of the intervention program to the school staff: "We have to find a way to get Nur to stop this conduct and this, of course, will not happen if she does not feel that we love her and believe her."

The attempt to use RNW to create an intervention program for a student whose behavior undermines the preschool or elementary school teacher is based on previous research [17] describing two case studies in which the preschool teachers used expressive writing [2, 3] manifested in RNW to deal with multiple behavior problems in their preschools. Research by Tal et al. [17] shows evidence of improved self-regulation of the preschool teachers that brought about a significant reduction in negative feelings cited in the narratives and improvement of their classroom management competencies evident in greater initiative, self-determination, and leadership instead of helplessness—intervention programs based on proactive and ecological-systemic thinking—and all these were founded upon improved interpersonal relations between the children, the staff, and the teachers.

In the current research, RNW for emotionally loaded events to deal with students' behavioral problems was expanded to grapple with social rejection in the school, not just the preschool. More importantly, in addition to the narratives written over long months by the homeroom teachers, narratives written by the rejected student were added. The writing of the student herself makes a significant contribution to corroborating the findings derived from the teacher's narrative writing, providing critical evidence that there was marked improvement in her situation and functioning. Based on the testimonies of both the student and homeroom teacher, the student changed her attitude to herself and to others, leading her to believe in herself as a person of value, and no longer believing that everyone was against her. All this came in the wake of the changed mindset of the homeroom teacher. As a result, asserted the student, she invested more in her studies, improved her grades, and was able to fit in with the other students and school activities (such as the choir). The vicious cycle in which the student's aggressive and grating behavior brought about her rejection by the other students and the indifference of the teaching staff, which exacerbated the student's behavior, were replaced by an educational process founded upon the encouragement and support of the homeroom teacher and other teachers, allowing the student to express her abilities and realize her ambition of learning and progressing.

In summary, this research finds that RNW by one teacher can be an effective tool for coping with social rejection and behavior problems of an elementary school student. The same homeroom teacher reported that she adopted RNW in another case of a third-grade student with serious behavioral problems and particularly low scholastic performance. That child would not enter the classroom and was not capable

of third-grade-level reading or writing. In the first stage, the homeroom teacher responded with anger, but she soon embarked upon RNW. As a result of RNW over the course of several months, she created for this child an emergent intervention program, leading to behavior improvement and scholastic achievements for this student as well.

Although this is a study of one student with one teacher in one school blessed with a supportive and understanding principal, this case is one of several [7, 17] showing the effectiveness of RNW in coping with difficult behavioral problems and social rejection in preschool and elementary school. This is an “inexpensive” coping mechanism accessible to every teacher, and therefore, one can recommend that preschool and elementary school teachers try using RNW over several months to cope with challenging behavior. In all the cases reviewed, between five and seven cycles of RNW were required for creating and implementing an effective intervention program to cope with behavioral problems.

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## Chapter 3

# Use of Nonviolent Communication: Deepening Teacher–Student Interpersonal Relationships

*Gomathi Jatin Shah*

### Abstract

Human beings are social animals and communication between humans is an inevitable component of human life. In a formal school setup, the routine interpersonal interactions in classrooms form the building block of the teacher-student relationships. Strong healthy interpersonal relationships between students and teachers necessitate skills that revolve around the ability of both to create a positive educational setting encompassing conditions of empathy, warmth, mutual respect, amongst others. Teachers in the capacity of being far more experienced than students will need to exercise their agency with an exclusive set of behavioral actions and act as professionals with a different set of responsibilities in the best interest of their students. Daily talk and actions may reflect a kind of violence that can disrupt relationships creating unhealthy environment. Violence can be manifested in different forms of communication that inhibits autonomy, fails to recognize one's and others' needs, among others. Rosenberg emphasizes the importance of nonviolence in everyday life and brings out the essence of a good interpersonal relationship through non-violent communication (NVC). Within this context, the present chapter will explore ways of non-violent communication that can enable teachers to develop and nurture healthy positive interpersonal relationships with students.

**Keywords:** nonviolent communication, interpersonal relationships, teacher–student relationships, classroom context

### 1. Introduction

*We have a vocabulary of words (verbal and non-verbal) to talk to each other, convey what we wish to, get our things done, and live a life full that we are blessed with. Then why do we always find it difficult to connect, why is there always some kind of conflict going on with others and more so with oneself? Ironically, we experience this not only with random people in our life, but with people whom we feel close to, with whom we are always together, with whom we don't wish to hold grudges, i.e. Our Own People!! Are we falling short of vocabulary? Are we showing our true self to them? Are we afraid of something? Are we being insensitive? Our interpersonal relationships are far too perplexing.*

Human beings are social animals and communication between humans is an inevitable component of human life. Without connecting to people or communicating with others,

people feel lonely. Every individual is unique in his/her own ways of thinking, perceiving, talking, acting, communicating, etc. It demands a whole lot of patience and understanding to manage differences and conflicts that arise during exchange of communication with others and maintain and nurture healthy relationships. One can compare interpersonal relationships to a garden that is full of different flowers, plants, fruits, vegetables, all growing simultaneously side by side and needing maintenance to help them grow.

Every relationship goes hand in hand with certain extent of expectations. Within social psychology, social exchange theorists documented decades ago how interpersonal relationships are governed by reciprocity concerns [1, 2]. This asserts the 'give and take' principle of relationships with varying intensities. Interpersonal relationships as the name suggests cannot be one sided. Interpersonal relationships need to be essentially built through skills like being empathetic, actively listening to others, cooperating, helping others, making the right decision, finding the common ground by negotiation, etc.

## **2. Violence: an element of communication**

Individuals' social and emotional needs include needs of praise, respect, love, affection, achievement and so on. Strong caring relationships result in healthy and better life, whereas poor relationships may promote depression, drug abuse, and other mental health problems. Daily talk and actions may intentionally or unintentionally reflect a kind of violence that can disrupt relationships and ruin the healthy environment. Violence can be manifested in different forms of communication that inhibits autonomy, fails to recognize one's and others' needs, devalues others or be ruthless to both self and others. Other than forms of violence like physical abuse; murder; rape amongst other actions, violence in interpersonal relationships can be manifested in being rude; labelling' hurting others' feelings; bullying; not listening; neglecting; criticizing; passive-aggressiveness; violating confidentiality; causing embarrassment, etc. Similar kind of aversive interpersonal behaviors can have negative effects on the emotional, social and psychological well-being of the individual who is at the receiving end [3].

## **3. Non-violent communication: the key to positive interpersonal relationships**

Rosenberg emphasizes the importance of nonviolence in everyday life and brings out the essence of a good interpersonal relationship through non-violent communication (NVC) which includes four components: observation, feelings, needs and appeal/request. Rosenberg conveys that nonviolent communication leads to the transformation of the way we express ourselves and hear others, directs us to honest and clear expression and at the same leads to paying attention to each other with respect and empathy [4].

Do read the poem 'Words are Windows or They're Walls' by Ruth Bebermeyer.

Rosenberg in his book 'Nonviolent communication: a language of life' talks about how he identified a specific approach to communicating—both speaking and listening—that leads us to give from the heart, connecting us with ourselves and with each other in a way that allows our natural compassion to flourish. He refers to this approach as Nonviolent Communication, using the term nonviolence as Mahatma Gandhi, the Indian freedom fighter used it—to refer to our natural state of compassion when violence has subsided from the heart. Generally we may not consciously realize that the way we talk may be 'violent', but words may often lead to hurt and pain, both for others or ourselves.

Nonviolent communication is not something new or that we are unfamiliar with; it's a conscious attempt to remind us about how we as humans are meant to relate to one another and assist us in a way of living that manifest this knowledge. This kind of communication assists us in reframing and revisiting our ways of expressions and listening characteristics. It enables individuals to carefully choose words or responses based on awareness of what one is perceiving, feeling, and wanting. Individuals using nonviolent communication tend to express themselves with honesty and clarity, while simultaneously paying others a respectful and empathic attention. Such kind of exchanges drive our awareness towards our own needs and of others. In the course of such exchanges, we are trained to observe carefully, specify the behaviors and conditions that are affecting us and learn to articulate our needs in any given situation. Though this sounds very simple, it is powerfully transformative. NVC fosters respect, attentiveness, and empathy and engenders a mutual desire to give from the heart. It may not be considered as a technique that can complete bring to end arguments or any kind of disagreements in dialog, but rather a method designed to increase empathy and the quality of relationships of individuals who use NVC with people in their environment.

#### **4. The NVC process**

Rosenberg refers to NVC as more than a process or a language. One needs to focus the light of consciousness on four areas—referred to as the four components of the NVC model, observation, feeling, need, and request.

Let us understand the presence of awareness of the first three components when we use NVC to clearly and honestly express how we are.

Initially an individual observes the occurrences or happenings in a situation; this observation of others' words or actions may or may not be as favorable to the individual. The next step is how the individual is able to articulate this observation without judging or evaluating the words and actions by just assuming that whatever is happening is either favorable to the individual or unfavorable to the individual. Further the individual expresses one's feelings like joy, sadness, irritation, frustration, happiness, etc. when s/he observes the actions. Next the individual may voice out one's needs that maybe connected to the feelings that s/he expresses.

The fourth component addresses that which the individual wants/needs from the other person and that which will be favorable for the individual and enrich his/her life.

Thus, part of NVC is to express the pieces of information very clearly, whether verbally or by other means. The other part of this communication consists of receiving the same pieces of information from others. One connects with them by first sensing what one is observing, feeling, and needing; then discover what would enrich one's lives by receiving the final piece—their request.

##### **4.1 NVC process**

- The concrete actions we observe
- How we feel in relation to what we observe
- The needs that create our feelings
- The concrete actions we request to enrich our lives

- The essence of NVC is in one's consciousness of the four components, not in the actual words that are exchanged.

## **5. Interpersonal relationships in educational context**

Virginia Satir once said, "I see communication as a huge umbrella that covers and affects all that goes on between human beings." If this is true, why is there so little attention to the umbrella? [5].

Man educates him/herself to live a life appropriate to self and the surroundings. If we consider a formal education setup like a classroom constituted of students and teachers, different types, modes, or styles of communication are embedded in the teacher–student relationships and the routine interpersonal interactions in classrooms form the building block of these relationships. Positive teacher–student relationships also contribute to student learning. Problematic relationships have been found to be detrimental to the attainment of student outcomes and development. Warm and supportive interactions between teacher–student and student–student lead to productive learning environments. Martin and Dowson, while mentioning the context of a student's life emphasize the need for positive interpersonal attachments to parents, teachers, and peers in fostering healthy social, emotional and intellectual functioning, as well as positive feelings of self-esteem and self-worth [6].

The education system in general is still orchestrated within power dynamics and a culturally appropriated control over the 'so-called' superior knowledge. Students enjoy little or no autonomy and learning takes the form of transmission or transfer of knowledge from the teacher as authority to the student as the receiver of knowledge. Such an educational system places harsh demands on the student community which primarily seeks to succeed for survival based on fear of failure or rebuke, thus hindering the overall growth and enrichment of the individual's life. This strongly demands a need to create a culture of acceptance, support, and mutual respect where true growth can take place for teachers and learners alike.

Strong healthy interpersonal relationships between students and teachers necessitate skills that revolve around the ability of both to create a positive educational setting encompassing conditions of empathy, warmth, mutual respect, amongst others. Teachers in the capacity of being far more educated and experienced than students will need to exercise their agency with an exclusive set of behavioral actions and act as professionals with a different set of responsibilities in the best interest of their students. Given the constraints of time in completing the syllabi prescribed in a loaded curriculum, and the kind of academic and administrative responsibilities that teachers are expected to shoulder, teachers will ideally not have the luxury of time to solely dedicate, to building relationships with students. It is thus essential to focus on how teachers can build positive interpersonal relationships with students into the daily course of their interactions embedded in both routine discourse and pedagogy in the classroom.

## **6. Teacher: student interpersonal skills**

*"Children need far more than basic skills in reading, writing, and math, as important as those might be. Children also need to learn how to think for themselves, how to find meaning in what they learn, and how to work and live together." —Marshall B. Rosenberg, Ph.D. [7]*

First and foremost, a student-centered classroom is a primary ingredient of a safe and sound classroom and the quality and type of teacher–student communication determines this type of classroom. The effective teacher in this kind of classroom is able to facilitate the use of student’s ability to express personal experiences and guide the learning to encompass student needs and interests. Carkhuff et al., believe that, good interpersonal skills enable the teacher to enter the learner’s frame of reference and prepare him/her for learning [7]. This further enables to create a situation wherein students feel related to teachers and feel that their needs are satisfied thus allowing for their optimal function and development. Teacher–student interactions are the main determinants of these type of environments.

## **7. Creating a safe and trustful classroom**

What can teachers do to thrive—to engage in joyful learning and compassionate interactions? And how can they contribute to meeting these needs?

A teacher’s relation to self and with others, especially her students, are vital to create a safe and desirable environment for students’ overall development.

### **7.1 Recognizing students’ needs**

In creating a relation with self and others, one needs to be mindful of needs of students’ needs.

Discipline is a very traditional hallmark of a classroom. Teachers usually expect strict discipline from students—discipline in being quiet in class, completing tasks on time, listen to their instructions, be obedient most of the times, be well-behaved at all times, take responsibility and more. Disciplinary control practices like punishment, rewards, judgments, comparisons, threats, etc. induce fear in children. Disciplinary measures by teachers often tend to have detrimental effects on students’ outcomes. Besides physical violence, bullying, labelling, taunting, amongst others, that are causes of concern for children’s safety, other daily routine occurrences at school induce fear in students and undermine their emotional safety.

In addition to academic subjects, content knowledge and other related tasks, classroom relationships; safety; trust; student needs; teacher needs; and modes of communication are highly important to create a compassionate learning community where engaged learning flourishes.

In order to create a fearless environment for students, their needs should be acknowledged and met with appropriately. William Glasser refers the basic human needs as needs for survival, power, belonging, freedom, and fun. Abraham Maslow refers to the basic human needs like survival, protection/safety, belonging, competence/learning, and autonomy or self-actualization [5]. The vocabulary of needs is quite vast. Categorizing students’ needs in an educational context, students bring to school needs for belonging, fun, freedom, competence, and autonomy besides learning. Unless these needs are fulfilled to their satisfaction, students will not feel safe enough to fully engage in the learning process.

A classroom setting comprises students from diverse backgrounds and possessing differential capabilities. If a teacher is able to support students’ common needs rather than ranking their academic differences, s/he will be able to create a safe space filled with trust in the school context. This emphasizes the need to shift the focus from disciplining students to meeting their needs.

Acknowledging students' needs is not sufficient; there is more to it. How one communicates the needs and listens to others' needs determines the likeliness of fulfillment of the needs. This is all about the language of giving and receiving, which necessitates the practice of the art of empathy. Teachers need to practice a way of language that is not aggressive in nature. Aligned to this, teachers will have to practice skills like guessing students' feelings from verbal and non-verbal cues; identifying values—one's own and of students; translating judgments into statements of feelings and needs or strategies for meeting needs; and taking responsibility for one's own thoughts, feelings, and actions.

## **7.2 Building relations with self**

*The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change.*  
—Carl Rogers [5]

At the outset, a teacher has to build a relationship with self. This entails taking time out to make deliberate attempts to observe oneself and ask questions to self about self. The questions can range from one's intention or goal, interests, talents, qualities that one values and would like to cultivate in students, the kind of relationships one would like to nurture and so on.

- The teacher should be able to question herself about what s/he thinks about self. Since a tendency to criticize and judge oneself usually results in being critical of others whereas compassion for oneself is more likely to result in compassion for others.
- The teacher should be able to recognize one's own contributions and successes and at the same time also be able to notice one's mistakes and learn from these mistakes.
- The teacher has to be able to identify the moments and activities that s/he enjoys doing and how often s/he encounters such instances.
- The teacher should be able to ask for help or support from others without hesitation to be able to cope with one's own challenges and frustrations and also be able to take time to celebrate one's successes with others.

*True compassion requires us to attend to our own humanity, to come to a deep acceptance of our own life as it is. It requires us to come into right relationship with that which is most human in ourselves.* — Rachel Naomi Remen

## **7.3 Building relationships with students**

- To be able to connect with students, teachers should be able to let students know that their thoughts and feelings matter, they are listened to and their view points are given importance. A teacher is likely to experience feelings of excitement and joy only if s/he is able to see students as whole human beings with their own thoughts, feelings, needs, talents, interests, and gifts to share. The way students are perceived by teachers through the classroom contexts often communicates louder than words.

- Teachers should be able to listen carefully to students and value what they say. This contributes to understanding, connection, and trust. Teacher should question themselves as to how many times do they give an attentive ear to their students.
- It is very important to deliberate on the fact that for what is it that you are listening to students. Is it just the academic content, textbook responses, or academic knowledge or something beyond that? The teacher should be able to listen to students' needs, understand their feelings and encourage them to grow themselves from the inside out.
- The teacher should be able to maintain a balance between fulfilling one's own needs and the students' needs. At times, when students end up doing something that is against teacher's expectations or needs, the teacher should be able to let them know that s/he cares about their needs getting met as much as s/he cares about meeting one's own needs by avoiding any kind of force on students to do as per the teacher's needs or using any power strategies. Any kind of verbal or non-verbal punishment for not conforming to the teacher's needs should be avoided. This does not mean that the teacher should sacrifice one's own needs. S/he should find out ways to ensure that needs of both the teacher and students are fulfilled.

## **8. NVC: the language of giving and receiving**

Nonviolent communication is founded on language and communication skills that strengthen our ability to remain human, even under trying conditions. The language of giving and receiving speaks of our common human needs and what would make life more wonderful for us. This way of communicating makes it easy to give to one another and to receive from one another—to enjoy and enrich life.

However, in our routine daily life, one generally tends to speak a language that makes it difficult for people to give and receive in a joyful manner. This language usually meets superficial needs and results in pain including conflicts that arise every day in classrooms.

Unfortunately, this is not the language most of us learned. It is usually referred to as Jackal Language because (metaphorically) the jackal is low to the ground, and its sight is limited to what is right in front of it.

Say for instance a teacher utters the following statements in the classroom:

- “You latecomer, what have you achieved today?” (labelling)
- “You are a dumb student, who always gets low scores in exams. You cannot take part in this competition.” (judging)
- “You have copied in your paper, I can see the exact same responses in ‘X’s’ paper too.” (blaming)
- “You have to complete the assignments by the end of this week, I do not care how you do it.” (demanding)

This language is usually used by teachers who often think about who's good, who's bad, who's right, who's wrong, and who's to blame. It is devoid of feelings and needs

and just conveys thoughts, beliefs, and opinions. Knowing that this is not what one wishes to communicate, yet it has become so automatic that teachers end up communicating in this way before they know what is happening. Teachers need to relearn a language of giving and receiving, where the above statements can be translated into messages that contribute to meeting the needs of students.

The language of giving and receiving has many names, including: Nonviolent communication, Compassionate Communication, and the Language of the Heart. It is also referred to as the Giraffe Language because (metaphorically) the giraffe perspective includes vision and a big heart—the integration of thinking and feeling.

Let us attempt to translate the above classroom statements into a language of giving and receiving.

- “I have been observing that you have been coming late quite often. Is there any way I can help you to keep up with the class sessions?”
- “You may not be performing well in your papers, but I feel that you will be able to do well in this competition, so I think you should try and take part in this competition.”
- “I see that your responses in the answer sheet seem to be same as ‘X’s’ responses. I need to know if you if you are not able to understand what I am teaching in the class. Only then I will be able to ascertain that my objectives are attained.”
- “Can you please complete the assignments by the end of this week, so that the grades can be submitted on time”

As we can see here, the teacher is able to convey via these translated statements, what s/he observes, show concern for both student’s needs and one’s own needs, express his/her feelings and listen to student’s voice. These expressions of the pieces of information given by the teacher enables the teacher to stay motivated solely to give and receive compassionately, and do everything s/he can to let the students know about his/her intention and eventually elicit compassionate responses from students too, thus creating a mutual exchange of compassionate communication resulting in the overall well-being of both the giver and the receiver.

As we glance through these expressions, we can see the four components of ‘Nonviolent Communication’ in the form of giving—observations, feelings, needs, and requests. At the receiving end, students can connect with each component by first sensing what is being observed, felt, and what needs are considered; and then identify what would enrich their lives by receiving the fourth piece of information—the request. Gradually a flow of communication, back and forth, gets internalized until compassion manifests naturally. One needs to be cautious that NVC is not a fixed or agreed upon formula, but it is something that adapts to various situations as well as personal and cultural styles.

As we are familiar, there are a number of different cultures existing on this planet. Each culture comes with a package of its own norms, views, expressions, and beliefs and these elements largely determine the patterns and styles of communication amongst people inhabiting these cultures. Culture also undergoes continuous changes, evolving across time and space, thus adapting to different circumstances and situations. This kind of cultural diversity is strongly influential on ways in which individuals interact with, interpret or understand other individuals. Communication styles are thus subject to discrepancies or conflicts as a result of existing cultural differences.



Say for example we look at two different cultures—the individualist and collectivist cultures. Western culture is generally identified as individualist and the eastern culture as collectivist. The characteristic features of these cultures are independent and interdependent respectively. Individuals from individualist cultures usually follow the norms of exploration, creativity, self-reliance whereas individuals from collectivist cultures follow the norms of conformity and obedience. Thus the principles of tolerance, understanding, conflict management and spirit of mutual co-existence is reflected more in collectivist cultures as compared to individualist cultures. Individuals belonging to individualist societies seem to lack compassion, empathy, mutual respect and expressions of gratitude. These characteristic features of individualist cultures may result in the evolution of unhealthy communication to a large extent [8]. One cannot resort to a fixed strategy of NVC across these cultures. Individuals need to understand the meaning, context and vocabulary of the communication or interaction in that situation to make appropriate use of NVC for the well-being of both the giver and the receiver.

Let us look at another example to understand the dynamic nature of NVC. Family structures or systems also influence the way individuals communicate with each other. Children from a joint family structure demonstrate different value system compared to their peers who come from nuclear family structure. There are a few children who may also belong to broken families. A teacher comes across children from different types of families in the classroom. Dealing with different kinds of children with different value systems can make it quite challenging for teachers to maintain a cordial healthy relationship with students through use of a uniform style or strategy of non-violent communication, since the teacher will have to understand the child's background, value and belief system to utilize the right kind of language and also teach the child the appropriate way of behavior and language to ensure the well-being of both the child and the teacher. Teachers will have to make deliberate attempts to change old habits of thinking, listening, and talking, but it is not totally impossible. They need to make conscious efforts to learn NVC, the language of giving and receiving, and practice over time to develop fluency and adapt to different situations.

## **9. Why NVC for teacher: student interpersonal relationships**

Teachers using the components of NVC in their communication with students display understanding and caring for students and hence are able to establish good interpersonal relationships with students. As a result, students feel they are being cared for by their teachers and hence students tend to care about what their teachers think about their behaviour. Students' behaviors start reflecting the behaviour of their teachers (adults).

A positive student–teacher interpersonal relationship is very crucial for the overall development of students. A teacher's ability to interact with students with warmth, empathy, respect, trust and confidence in his/her students determines the quality of the teacher–student interpersonal relationship and the responsibility of this relationship lies largely with the teacher. Research has widely suggested the importance of interpersonal relationships of students and teachers, and its effect on the outcome of the educational process [9]. Moreover, the positive effects of interpersonal skills do not seem to be limited to student achievement alone, but goes beyond to increased student's self-concept and reduction of negative student behaviors.

## 10. Conclusions

The present chapter at the outset introduces us to the nature of interpersonal relationships with a strong emphasis on the 'give and take' principle of relationships. It brings to light the social nature of humans who possibly survive through communication and connections with other humans. Having said that, the chapter makes a mention of both implicit and explicit forms of violence that may be manifested in different forms of communication which can have negative effects on the emotional, social and psychological well-being of individuals. In effect to this, the chapter demonstrates the essence of a good interpersonal relationship through non-violent communication (NVC) as proposed by Rosenberg. It elaborates on the transformative power of NVC which is shown as a method designed to increase empathy and the quality of relationships of individuals. The essence of NVC is expressed as one's consciousness of the four components, namely observation, feelings, needs and appeal/request and not in the actual words that are exchanged. The chapter attempts to use this lens of NVC for interpersonal relationships exclusively in the area of teacher–student relationships in the educational context. It describes NVC as the language of giving and receiving and accentuates the need for teachers to make conscious efforts to learn NVC, the language of giving and receiving and practice over time to develop fluency. It further focusses on how teachers using NVC, can build positive interpersonal relationships with students into the daily course of their interactions embedded in both routine discourse and pedagogy in the classroom. Such an interpersonal relationship can be developed between students and teachers when both of them mutually share needs and feelings of each other and build trust and respect, the two key elements to any relationship.

The chapter further facilitates the reader to explore ways and strategies of non-violent communication that can enable teachers to develop and nurture healthy positive interpersonal relationships with students, to manage student behaviors and make the classroom environment, conducive to effective teaching–learning. The chapter concludes by foregrounding the NVC approach to communication, i.e. a way of communicating that leads one to give from the heart, and underscores the results of NVC in bringing about many positive gains for students and teachers alike, contributing to everyone's well-being.


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# The Role of Personality Traits and Values in Perceived Friendship Quality: The Dyadic Approach

*Chenkai Lin and Xiaoming Jiang*

## Abstract

This study using dyadic approach, focused on the impact of personality traits and basic human values on the synchrony and the average level of perceived friendship quality between dyads. We used the Friendship Quality Questionnaire to measure the perceived friendship quality levels of the involved parties, the 50-item IPIP version of Big Five Questionnaire to quantify the individual personality traits and a Short Swartz Values Survey to characterize different basic human values. Two aggregated measures were defined based on the score of friendship quality of each party of the friends. The level of friendship quality was defined as the sum of perceived quality of two persons involved in the friendship. The synchrony of friendship quality was defined by subtracting the perceived quality of one party from the other in the friendship. The level and the synchrony of each personality traits and each basic human value between dyads were quantified in a similar way. Several linear regressions were conducted in a two-step process to examine the correlation between personality traits and friendship quality and the correlation between basic values and friendship quality both at the dimension of general levels and synchrony. The results showed a significant positive effect of agreeableness on the level of friendship quality and a significant positive effect of agreeableness on the synchrony of friendship quality. Our findings highlight the association between personality and the perceived quality in dyadic relationships.

**Keywords:** big-five personality trait, basic human values, friendship quality, interpersonal relationship, synchrony

## 1. Introduction

Among all important interpersonal relationships in human social interaction, friendship is a predominant one as it stands for self-trust, reliability, and consolation, yet not as exclusive and singular as romantic relationships. However, not all friendships are deep and stable, and building high-quality friendship is desirable for many ones to enhance their psychological health and maintain efficient social communication.

The quality of friendship has drawn much attention in the past, and the possible predictors for friendship quality have been tested in a wide range. This study aimed to further resolve this issue by employing a novel dyadic approach, focusing on two

predictors that are both inborn features of individuals, that is, the personality traits and the basic human values.

Personality traits are the descriptions of people in terms of relatively stable patterns of behavior, thoughts, and emotions [1]. There are various taxonomies or models of personality traits, ranging from MBTI, Big-five model, 9-factor model to several others. Among these the most widely accepted model and researched one is the Five-Factor Model of Personality Traits [2, 3], also called the Big-Five Model. Personality has long been considered a crucial element in predicting various behavioral outcomes. Those varying in personality traits defined with such model demonstrated differential ability to respond to social cues and react in various interpersonal relationships. For interpersonal relationship in particular, personality traits are associated with the quality of relationships with peers, families, and romantic others [4].

Basic human values are generally described as rather stable broad life goals that are important to people in their lives and guide how they perceive things, make judgment, and behave [5, 6]. Basic human values is suggested to have a strong influence on interpersonal relationships, as the synchrony between pairs in the relationship and the strength of a value that a person holds for their life affects the quality of communications, the degree of trust, the synchrony of lifestyle, and the difference in mutual devotion.

Previous studies have already revealed some connections between personality traits, personal values, and friendship quality. Of the five dimensions of personality traits, scores of both extraversion and agreeableness have proven to have positive correlations with the peer acceptance and the number of friends [7]. In that study, the friendship statuses were confirmed by sociometric nomination techniques rather than rating scale measures, so the friendship score in the study only showed how popular a participant was, but the specific quality of each of the friendship he or she was in remained unknown.

Prosocial tendencies, indexed by agreeableness, were proved to be positively related to perceived friendship quality [8]. Children with high agreeableness tended to give more emotional support or instrumental aid to their friends, which resulted in higher friendship quality. This finding may as well be applicable to adults, and this would be examined in this study.

Moreover, there were sufficient proofs of the positive impact of high conscientiousness on friendship quality [9–12]. The high score of conscientious was associated with less conflicts [11, 12] and better peer-acceptance in interpersonal relationship building [9, 10]. A conscientious individual was expected to be a more responsible friend and more trustworthy and have better self-control, and their conflicts with their friends were more likely to be avoided which thus prevented their damage to general friendship quality.

The effect of Neuroticism/Emotional Stability was controversial. One study indicated that those of high neuroticism could enhance the irritation of two friends in the interaction between them, causing the frequency of conflict to rise [11]. On the contrary, another study showed inconsistent results. In this study, higher score in the neuroticism actually predicted a higher friendship score [13]. Whether neuroticism was positively or negatively associated with friendship quality therefore remained uncertain, despite an expected association between these factors.

There was not enough evidence that openness could be associated with friendship quality. However, the positive effect of openness on friendship could be hypothesized for this study on college students because openness was related to the tendency of being constructive and being more open to confronting the conflicts between friends instead

of neglecting or avoiding them [11, 14]. The former tendency was assumed more meaningful for friendship building between two both of whom were in high education.

It was also argued that the similarity of personality traits between friends had positive effects on building a reciprocal friendship. One study examined the effects of the degree of similarity in personality on friendships and found the personality traits between two persons in friend pairs were significantly more similar than random pairs [15]. Given that the personality traits were not specified in that study, it is intriguing whether a certain aspect in one's personality could possibly predict the friendship quality. A more recent study also showed similar results that personality similarity was positively correlated with group success, even after controlling for individual's own personality [16], demonstrating the crucial role of personality similarity in the interaction among group members.

Specifically, one study indicated the exceptional role of the similarity of Extraversion in dyadic interaction as matching levels of Extraversion led to higher periocular muscle activity which represented positive valence emotional expressions [17]. Two extraverted people tend to have a more relaxed interacting pattern and can be expected to build reciprocal interpersonal relationship including friendship.

The basic human values' effects on friendship were not such a hot topic, still there was previous experience. One study showed that friendship dyads shared more values than non-friendship dyads [18]. This study used a dyadic approach, but the finding was based on the observation of a simple study design and the conclusion demanded effortful interpretation. Nevertheless, it can be inferred that friends with similar values were more likely to have the similar patterns of friendship-related behaviors and thus forming a more reciprocal and equal relationship. In this study a linear regression model was made and the regression coefficients would be obtained for a more precise prediction.

The effects of basic human values on friendship quality have scarcely been tapped, but some suggested association can be found from the definition of the two dimensions of basic human values, Conservation vs. Openness to Change and Self-transcendence vs. Self-Enhancement. Schwartz (2006) explained the emphasis of two ends of both dimensions of the basic human value [19]. Openness to Change emphasized independent action, thought and feeling, and readiness for new experiences, whereas Conservation emphasized self-restriction, order, and resistance to change. It could be assumed that a higher score of Openness to Change in a friendship pair would lead to swift adaptations to the change of friendship background, and a greater chance of making various shared memories, whereas a higher score of Conservation would lead to more rigid and fragile friendship and potentially decrease friendship quality. Self-enhancement emphasized pursuit of interests, whereas Self-transcendence emphasized concern for the welfare and interests of others. It could be assumed that a higher score of Self-enhancement in a friendship pair would lead to a selfish pattern of treating friends and thus damage the general quality of the friendship, whereas a higher score of Self-transcendence would lead to a more selfless and caring friendship.

## **1.1 Hypotheses**

To achieve a systematic understanding of the connection of different dimensions in the personality traits and the perceived friendship quality and of basic human values and the perceived friendship quality, a dyadic approach was applied, in which all the above variables were measured on both parties in the friendship. Both the synchrony and the averaged level of friendship quality were quantified based on

measurements on each individual in the dyads and were modeled. The personality traits and the basic human values served as independent predictors and entered in the model in a two-step linear regression process. In the first step, univariate regressions between each of the independent variable and the dependent variable were built. In the second step, multivariate regression models were built between the effective independent variables (the ones proven significant in bivariate regression) and the dependent variable.

Some hypotheses can be made based on the findings of previous studies. The sum of the level of the perceived friendship quality between friends could be positively correlated with the summated score in Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability (Inverse of Neuroticism), Intellect/Imagination (Openness), and Self-transcendence vs. Self-enhancement, but could be negatively associated with the summated score in Conservation vs. Openness to Change. The synchrony between friends in the perceived friendship quality could be positively correlated with the synchrony in Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, Intellect/Imagination (Openness), and Conservation vs. Openness to Change.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1 Participants**

Eighty-two undergraduate students were recruited to participate in the study (among whom 35 were males and 47 were females). They altogether formed 51 pairs of friendship dyads (among all participants, some were used to form multiple dyads). All dyads were of the same sex, among whom 22 were male pairs and 29 were female pairs. All dyads reported to be good friends and knowing each other for at least 3 years as verification for their interpersonal relationship before entering for the study.

### **2.2 Measures**

The perceived friendship quality was measured by the 25-item version of the revised self-reporting Friendship Quality Questionnaire, [20–22]. The 25 items contained questions concerning companion, conflict solving, information sharing, suggestion giving and receiving, emotional distance, and satisfaction about the relationship. These dimensions ensured the measure to target each individual's evaluation about the reciprocal relationship between them in the dyad. Each item was rated on a five-point scale, with 0 meaning the lowest score (not at all true) and 4 meaning the highest score (really true), except for the 3 inversed item. All participants completed the evaluation on their own without confirming with their counterpart.

The personality traits were measured by the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP), which was one of the latest developed inventories inspired by the Five Factor Model of Personality Traits. The Five Factor Model, also called the Big Five, was the most widely accepted and researched taxonomy of personality traits [2, 3]. The model divided the personality trait into five factors. In the IPIP version, the five factors were named Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, and Intellect/Imagination. The questionnaire included 50 items, with 10 items per factor. Each item was rated on a five-point scale, with 1 for very inaccurate and 5 for very accurate.



The basic human values were measured by the Short Schwarz Values Survey (SSVS) [19], which was based on Schwartz Values Theory and has been translated into 47 languages [23]. The SSVS was an adapted version of the Schwartz Values Survey (SVS) invented for more convenient usage. The SSVS was proved to show comparable constructs with the SVS on the two value dimensions of Self-Transcendence versus Self-Enhancement and Conservation versus Openness to Change, and was well applicable across studies [19]. The SSVS contained 10 items, with each item judged on a nine-point scale.

### 2.3 Procedure

Questionnaires were delivered to the participants in written forms, with each form representing each questionnaire: the Revised Friendship Quality Survey, the International Personality Item Pool, and the Short Schwarz Values Survey. Each participant filled in questionnaires independently, and each counterpart within a dyad was naïve to each other's response. One participant can be paired with several others to form pairs under the condition that the two persons within the pair considered each other as good friends. For those who had been paired into more than one dyad, he or she needed to fill out the Friendship Quality Survey for various times depending on their relationship with a specific counterpart, but only needed to fill in the IPIP and SSVS only once.

### 2.4 Data analysis

The questionnaire results were preprocessed with excel formula and then thrown to the SPSS 24 for the statistical analysis.

The friendship quality scores for person 1 and person 2 in a dyad were added together, and the summated value was used to represent the general level of friendship quality in this dyad. The general levels of the five personality factors and two personality dimensions were each processed in the similar way, by adding together the scores of the two friends in a dyad.

The friendship quality score for person 1 minus that for person 2 was used to represent the synchrony of friendship quality in the dyad. The synchrony of the five personality factors and two personality dimensions were each processed in the similar way, by the subtraction of the scores of two friends in a dyad.

## 3. Results

First, the results of all the questionnaires were collected and put into a reliability test, and the descriptive statistics are shown in **Table 1**.

### 3.1 Univariate analysis

In the univariate analysis, linear regression models were built on the general level of friendship quality in the dyads and on the synchrony between counterparts in the dyads, each only including one measure as an independent factor (**Table 2**).

The models on the summated score of friendship quality between dyads revealed that among all personality traits, only Agreeableness ( $\alpha = 0.001$ ,  $\beta = 1.545$ ) had a significant positive correlation with the general level of friendship quality. For basic human values, both Self-transcendence vs. Self-enhancement ( $\alpha = 0.017$ ,  $\beta = 7.300$ )

Measures	M	SD	Range	Alphas*
Friendship quality	71.92	14.86	28–100	0.92
Personality traits				
Extraversion	23.49	7.84	7–39	0.87
Agreeableness	33.54	5.16	23–43	0.77
Conscientiousness	28.67	6.53	12–43	0.80
Emotional stability	21.01	8.46	3–39	0.89
Intellect/imagination	33.51	5.78	20–46	0.78
Basic human values				
Conservation vs. Openness to Change	0.31	1.02	–2.03-3.20	/**
Self-Transcendence vs. Self-Enhancement	–0.71	0.76	–2.66-0.89	/**

\*Cronbach-Alpha.  
 /\*\*All values were only each related to one question.

**Table 1.**  
 Descriptive statistics for all measures.

Friendship quality						
Measures	General level			Synchrony		
	$\beta$	constant	p	$\beta$	constant	p
Personality traits						
Extraversion	0.032	143.349	0.933	0.043	10.047	0.825
Agreeableness	1.545	40.204	0.001	0.693	6.488	0.031
Conscientiousness	0.403	120.724	0.306	0.120	9.612	0.630
Emotional stability	0.448	125.003	0.154	–0.007	10.540	0.972
Intellect/ imagination	0.740	94.276	0.077	–0.163	11.403	0.564
Basic human values						
Conservation vs. Openness to Change	–5.162	147.048	0.024	2.060	8.516	0.198
Self-Transcendence vs. Self-Enhancement	7.300	154.199	0.017	–0.994	11.213	0.675

**Table 2.**  
 The univariate linear regression data of all predictors for friendship quality.

and Conservation vs. Openness to Change ( $\alpha = 0.024$ ,  $\beta = -5.162$ ) significantly correlated with the general level of friendship quality in a positive way.

The models on the synchrony of friendship quality between dyads revealed that among all factors of personality traits, only Agreeableness ( $\alpha = 0.031$ ,  $\beta = 0.693$ ) positively correlated with the synchrony of friendship quality. Basic human values did not show statistically significant effects on the synchrony of friendship quality.

### 3.2 Multivariate analysis

In the multivariate analysis, linear regression models were built on the general level of friendship quality in the dyads and on the synchrony between counterparts in the dyads. All independent factors showing a significant contribution in univariate models entered the multivariate models simultaneously.

The model on the general level of friendship quality (**Table 3**) included three predictors, the summated scores of Agreeableness, Self-transcendence vs. Self-enhancement, and Conservation vs. Openness to Change. Only the general level of Agreeableness showed a significantly positive correlation with the general level of friendship quality.

The model on the synchrony of friendship quality (**Table 3**) included the general level of Agreeableness as the only predictor. Therefore, the multivariate analysis produced the same result as in the univariate result.

In sum, the general level of friendship quality in a dyad was positively correlated with only the general level of Agreeableness; the synchrony of friendship quality in a dyad was positively correlated with only the synchrony of Agreeableness.

## 4. Discussion

Our findings showed that the general level of Agreeableness, the general level of Conservation vs. Openness, and the general level of Self-transcendence vs. Self-enhancement contributed significantly to the general level of friendship quality in a dyadic relationship. The synchrony of Agreeableness contributed significantly to the synchrony of perceived friendship quality between those in a dyad.

These findings highlight the contribution of the general level of personality traits and basic human values to the general level of friendship quality. Regarding the effects of personality traits, the lack of contribution of the general level of Extraversion to the general level of friendship quality was unexpected, as the past study showed sufficient

General level of friendship quality		
	$\beta$	p
Personality traits		
Agreeableness	1.168	0.031
Basic human values		
Conservation vs. Openness to Change	-3.794	0.076
Self-Transcendence vs. Self-Enhancement	2.519	0.445
Constant	71.402	/
Synchrony of friendship quality		
	$\beta$	p
Personality traits		
Agreeableness	0.693	0.031
Constant	6.488	/

**Table 3.**  
*The multivariate linear regression data of selected predictors for the general level and synchrony of friendship quality.*

evidence for the existence of such effect [7]. However, the target population of the past was early adolescents, while the target of this study was college students. The strong positive impact of the general level of Agreeableness on the general level of friendship quality was consistent with the prediction. The ability to care for and empathize with others remained a crucial factor of building a high-quality friendship. It was surprising to find that the general level of conscientiousness did not contribute significantly to the general level of friendship quality, as there were sufficient proofs of such contribution given in the past studies [9–12]. Unlike those in the past studies, participants of this study were all born and raised up in the Chinese society. Individuals from the Chinese culture were typically prone to avoid confrontation [24]. Even those ones with low Conscientiousness were influenced by such cultural norms that they would not resort to conflicts as often as the same people from confrontational cultures, when they disagreed with their friends. The general level of Emotional Stability did not prove to contribute significantly to the general level of friendship quality in this study. This was not surprising as the past two studies concerning this topic came up with contradictory results [11, 13]. The general level of Openness did not have any significant association with the general level of friendship quality. Although individuals with higher level of Openness showed preference to confronting rather than neglecting conflicts when they arose [11, 14], the tendency of confronting conflicts may not help to improve the friendship quality.

Regarding the effects of basic human values, the general level of Conservation vs. Openness was shown to contribute significantly and negatively to the general level of friendship quality. Open-minded individuals seemed to form better friendships as they treated friends with sincerity and tolerance. The general level of Self-transcendence vs. Self-enhancement also positively and significantly contributed to the friendship quality as expected. The selfless care for the friend and being selflessly cared by the friend can actually enhance the general level of friendship quality.

As the novel finding demonstrated in the novel dyadic approach in our study, the synchrony of Agreeableness was demonstrated to positively correlate with the synchrony of perceived friendship quality. The extent to which a friendship was emotionally reciprocal was the key factor of maintaining high-quality friendship. Surprisingly, the synchrony of Extraversion did not show a positive correlation with the synchrony of dyadic friendship quality. Previous study only shows that matching level of Extraversion leads to positive emotional expressions [17] and that may not be an essential factor of friendship building. Unlike the past study [16], the Synchrony of both Conservation vs. Openness to Change and Self-transcendence vs. Self-enhancement revealed positive relationship with the synchrony of the friendship quality. In these studies, the values were compared in friendship dyad vs. non-friendship dyad and the friendship quality was not directly tested. Thus, our findings provide a step further to show how the quality friendships can be measured in a more continuous way.

Furthermore, in multivariate models, only Agreeableness was found to have a significant association with friendship quality, outshining Conservation vs. Openness to Change and Self-transcendence vs. Self-enhancement that were both significant in univariate models. After controlling for the human basic values, for models on both general level and synchrony, Agreeableness remained the most crucial predictor for the high-quality friendship.

Finally, the study may suffer from some limitations. The first limitation was the demographic homogeneity of the participants, given that all were East-Asians and were college students. Therefore, the generalizability of the findings based on these subjects may be limited and could benefit from replication studies. Secondly, it is possible that friends engaged in the study may not be that close friends. Although

all participants were all confirmed by the data collectors to be good-friend pairs and knowing each other for at least 3 years, additional measures could be applied in future studies to validate the authenticity of the friendship and to ensure the strength of good friendships. Finally, the Big Five theory may not account for all the valuable aspects of human personality traits, and other taxonomies can help to fill the gap. In the future studies, Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2 (MMPI-2) [25] can be used to offer a rather clinical assessment of personality traits, and the Enneagram Personality [26] can be introduced as a taxonomy that categorizes humans possessing particular type of personality instead of dimensions of personality traits of a particular person. What's more, the traditional western-based personality models may not be perfectly suitable to measure the participants in China. With the cultural adaptation considered, the Seven-factor Chinese Personality scale [27] and Junzi Personality [28] referencing to Confucius ideas can also be introduced as further research materials.

Despite these limitations, this study was well-rounded and informational, providing valuable contributions to the research on the effects of both personality traits and basic human values on friendship qualities. Using a novel dyadic approach, this issue can be addressed in a deeper way from the perspective of both the general level of both friends and the synchrony between friends, by aggregating the data collected from each friend counterpart. In addition, this study filled in the gap of related researches in a Chinese context, supplementing a cross-cultural understanding of the effects of personality traits and basic human values on friendship quality.

## 5. Conclusion

This study was designed to examine the correlation between personality traits and friendship quality and the correlation between personality traits and friendship quality, by testing both the general level of these measures and the synchrony between friends in a Chinese university context.

The initial univariate analyses found that the general level of agreeableness (one of the personality traits) had positive association with the general level of friendship quality, and the general level of Conservation vs. Openness to Change and Self-transcendence vs. Self-enhancement (two of basic human values) had positive associations with and general level of friendship quality. Moreover, the synchrony of Agreeableness was the only independent variable positively associated with the synchrony of friendship quality. In the subsequent multivariate analyses, the general level of Agreeableness was the only independent variable that remained significantly correlated. Finally, both the general level of Agreeableness and the synchrony of Agreeableness between friends showed significant correlations.

This study showed the importance of Agreeableness in building high-quality friendship in a high-context culture, highlighting Agreeableness as a reliable predictor in one's personality for promoting the friendship quality in the practice of healthy social interaction.

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# Perspective Chapter: The Power of Our Mind – How to Educate Children to Adopt Mindfulness Practice and Positive Reflection on Both Academic and Social Change Achievement

*Pham Thi My Ha*

## **Abstract**

Children Education with Buddhist relevance: Life is constantly changing, and world has been facing the most challenging period over the two recent decades due to advancement of technology and its influence leading people and living things to witness unmeasurable values both of materials and of spirituality. Thus, nurturing young generation to develop their kindness and appreciation toward the distinct values constructed by their ancestors might leave educators, parents, authorities, religious leaders great concern how to positively scaffold children to understand that co-existence of humans and nature is becoming the matter of the age. In practice, most of governments and individuals are observing humans materialistically interfering the world around them so much that the nature does response: natural disaster, pandemic. With this consideration, spiritual education, the core plans of the development of a community, as well as a country, have been the major attribute to continuously transform the strategies of governments to develop their countries, and to adapt to the new era, the age of artificial intelligence—the age that human minds need far more nurturing than ever. In individuals' mindsets, perhaps, development of society should be considered first; dramatic changes of community should also be prioritized. Their reasoning toward this concept might be meaningful in case they are living in the commercial areas, or industrial zones. Although we could have learned that the global economy reshapes the world as its own way, people qualities require to be in the course of rounded trainings much more than ever. With the experience as a Buddhist nun, working with more than a thousand children in village schools in Bihar, the application of Buddhist study in implementation of three schools, one is in Vaisali and two others in Kolhua and Bodhgaya, where 2,400 children practicing balancing themselves, appreciating

their mindfulness really benefits children in the primitive conditions without the electricity grid or the Internet connection.

**Keywords:** mind, children, child, practice, village

## **1. Introduction**

Life is constantly changing, and the world has been facing the most challenging period over the two recent decades due to the advancement of technology and its influence leading people and living things to witness unmeasurable values both of materials and spirituality. Thus, nurturing young generation to develop their kindness and appreciation toward the distinct values constructed by their ancestors might leave educators, parents, authorities, and religious leaders with great concern about how to positively scaffold children to understand that coexistence of humans and nature is becoming the matter of the age. In practice, most governments and individuals are observing humans are materialistically interfering with the world around them so much that the nature is responding with natural disasters and pandemics. With this consideration, spiritual education, the core plans of the development of a community, as well as a country, has been the major attribute to continuously transform the strategies of governments to develop their countries, and to adapt to the new era, the age of artificial intelligence— the age that human minds need far more nurturing than ever.

In individuals' mindsets, perhaps, development of society should be considered first; dramatic changes of community should also be prioritized. Their reasoning towards this concept might be meaningful in case they are living in commercial areas, or industrial zones. Although we could have learned that the global economy reshapes the world in its own way, people's qualities require to be in the course of rounded trainings much more than ever. With the experience as a Buddhist nun, working with more than a thousand children in village schools in Bihar, the application of Buddhist study in implementation of three schools, one is in Vaisali and two others in Kolhua and Bodhgaya, where 2,400 children practice balancing themselves, appreciating their mindfulness really benefits children in the primitive conditions without the electricity grid or the Internet connection.

This journal shows the attempts to look for appropriate approaches to facilitate children's study process, also to shape their qualities to be kinder to living and non-living beings. Three leading theories: *Psychosocial theory (Erik Erikson)*, *cognitive theories (Jean Piaget)* and *sociocultural theory (Vygotsky)* are considered in this paper. In reality, this journal has been indicating the implications of many quantitative research findings on changes in children's behaviors, their remarkably positive- changing performance, during school years and their participation in community activities, which are believed marking sustainable changes in the local as well as individual children themselves to be conducted simultaneously with their practice of mindfulness, under the instruction and company of Buddhist scholars and practitioners.

Last but not least, mindfulness practice significantly reforms children in the two village primary schools to perform better in academia as well as creates a better educational environment for both teachers, researchers, practitioners, and young learners locally.

## **1.1 Three theories as solid foundation**

There are many theories about children development and key attributes influencing children's thoughts and behavior. Most of these subjects are village primary school students aged 4 to 12, Psychosocial Theory, Cognitive Theories, and Sociocultural Theory are opted.

### *1.1.1 Psychosocial theory by Erik Erikson*

Erikson believes that dealing with conflicts marks potential changes in stages of people's growth. personal development paralleled with the possibility of challenges or failure exists and gradually becomes the strength of the individual. Eight stages are mentioned in his theory, namely infancy (18 months), early childhood (2–3 years), preschool (3–5 years), school age (6–11 years), adolescence (12–18 years), young adulthood (19–40 years), middle adulthood (40–65 years) and maturity (65+ years). In each psychosocial stage of growth, he shows the detailed elements in three categories: Conflict, Important Events, and Outcome. At the stage of preschool, school year, and adolescence, in terms of conflicts, children have to experience these obstacles like guilt, inferiority role confusion respectively; hence, a person experiences many social events such as exploration, school and social relationships at these ages may see the conflicts as core values constructing their skills, strengths, responsibility prior to further stages of older ages. Children aged 3–11 are the focus of this journal due to the maturity, quality, and wisdom just gained as adults, parents, and teachers understand and provide support in time. Although Erik Erikson's theory is influenced by Sigmund Freud's work on psychosexual development, the stages of children's development are carefully considered in his theory.

### *1.1.2 Cognitive theories by Jean Piaget*

As a psychologist, a theorist, Jean Piaget conducted research on many aspects of humans' cognition. Four theories are known as the achievements of the greatest theorist in the field. They are Cognitive Theory Basics, Social Cognitive Theory, Cognitive Restructuring to Treat Phobia, and Cognitive Biases Treatment. In this paper, the Cognitive Theory Basics is concentrated to emphasize how Jean Piaget's theory of behaviorism impacts the way we understand human behavior, in particular children. This theory also relates to information processing, belonging to the human mind function, and cognitive-behavioral theory [1].

Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development states that as children grow, their intelligence changes. The cognitive development process is related to knowledge acquisition, innate capacities, and environmental influence. Four stages are mentioned Sensorimotor (18–24 months), Preoperational (2–7 years), Concrete operational (7–11 years), and Formal operational stages (12+ years). The major feature of his theory reveals many novel assumptions about children's cognitive intelligence and he is in favor of the view that children have distinct ways of observing the world, as well as interpreting what they experienced of their own perception, and thoughts. With his naturalistic perspectives on qualitative research of his own three children, his findings have contributed to many fields due to their educational implications. Thus, Piaget's theory has substantially

influenced developmental psychology. Newer insights and viewpoints on children's development actually have inspired the world as some concepts related to stages in Piaget's studies like universal stages of cognitive development and biological maturation, child's schemas, and equilibrium in human cognitive structures [2].

### *1.1.3 Sociocultural theory by Vygotsky*

Lev Vygotsky, an almost temporarily respected psychologist, in his sociocultural theory shows that social interaction with the community is the core means by which children's behavior and cognitive processes are acquired; adult or peer intervention plays a crucial role in process of development of a child. His theory has widely applied and significantly changed the approaches adults, parents, and educators use to nurture children.

Vygotsky studies the stages of childhood development to profoundly analyze the interrelatedness between learning and culture.

*“As a baby, you display elementary functions designed for your survival: crying, a sense of your mother's scent, and familiar voices. These displays gradually fade out as a result of external stimuli: initiating, consequence, and conditioning by others. It is replaced with problem-solving skills such as reflection, bargaining, and reasoning. This higher-level thinking is influenced by cultural factors. The values and beliefs of a community, including models of acceptable behavior, create pressure for others to adopt the preferred attitudes and protocol of that society. Etiquette is communicated orally and by example.”*

*(Lev Vygotsky-sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development-By  
Dr. Serhat Kurt- July 11, 2020-[https://educationaltechnology.net/  
lev-vygotsky-sociocultural-theory-of-cognitive-development](https://educationaltechnology.net/lev-vygotsky-sociocultural-theory-of-cognitive-development))*

He also notes that culture consistently affects human behavior and during the process of developing the correlation, and relationships between human-and-cultures are complex. The important concepts mentioned in Vygotsky's studies are language, and individual's role. Hence, the social cultures and cognitive development are interwoven as a unity. It is crucial to note the roles of Vygotsky's findings from many studies in education, language learning in particular. The concept of the zone of proximal development is considered the center of his model of cognitive development [3].

## **2. Buddhist psychology**

Buddhism, the path to enlightenment taught by the Buddha, is distinct from other beliefs. Based on adopting non-conditional love, great compassion, and Abhidhamma as core values, it leads practitioners towards the stages of mindfulness, kindness, and right conduct, which, thus, benefits not solely practitioners themselves but non-living beings existing surrounding them as well. Buddhism had been popularly respected in the past as the noble doctrine of all ages to positively reform humans, both mentally and physically, it has been welcomed worldwide and will be being developed in the

future with its values. No languages are used to express worthiness, invisible advantages once beings understand the essence of life, live as the Buddha Teachings, as well as appreciate values around them as the key ethical consideration of humans in most of the aspects.

According to Dr. W.F. Jayasuriyain his work “The Psychology & Philosophy of Buddhism,” chapter IX [4], he reveals the concept of “Dynamic Psychology”, regarding analytical findings on a wide range of aspects, from *knowing and thinking*, *Kamma*, *death*, and *rebirth*, to the actions of *controlling evil thoughts* in relation to the moral philosophy of Buddhism. In the essence of the pure thoughts and their positivity gained through stages in trances, awareness, and wisdom realistically transform people to be the better, the kinder, and more productive. Also, in these precious studies resulting in Psycho-Physical Analysis, the ethical codes and appreciation of life are constantly reshaped. Due to these perspectives, Buddhism and Social Development become an interwoven pair of many studies.

Buddhist Psychology Theories are based on a wide range of case studies, of concrete contexts, and further than that the causes leading to these contexts are meticulously analyzed and evaluated. The implication of these studies is seen in the works of many contemporary psychologists. The approach using mindfulness is also universally applied in consulting clinical interference to patients diagnosed with mental disorders or problems. The very mindfulness-based cognitive therapy had appeared in many studies by University of Toronto psychologist Zindel V. Segal, PhD. The tendency of human beings, thus, of suffering wrong or evil thoughts shows a variety of perspectives towards psychological pains, and unpleasant feelings, resulting a strong desire to stay away from those experiences.

According to Dr. Jack Kornfield, a Buddhist teacher and psychologist, in his famous book “The Wise Heart: A Guide to the Universal teachings of Buddhist Psychology”, emphasizes that human beings themselves own emotional and behavioral challenges, Greed, Hatred, and Ignorance, the core features of Buddhist psychology. These roots causing many wrong thoughts and then leading to wrongdoings are observed and recorded as well. It is believed that more studies and research should be done in this field though in “The Buddha and His Teachings” by Venerable Narada Mahathera, our teacher (the Buddha) leads us to the middle path, the path of obtaining purification, of reaching a supramundane stage and of finding ourselves [5].

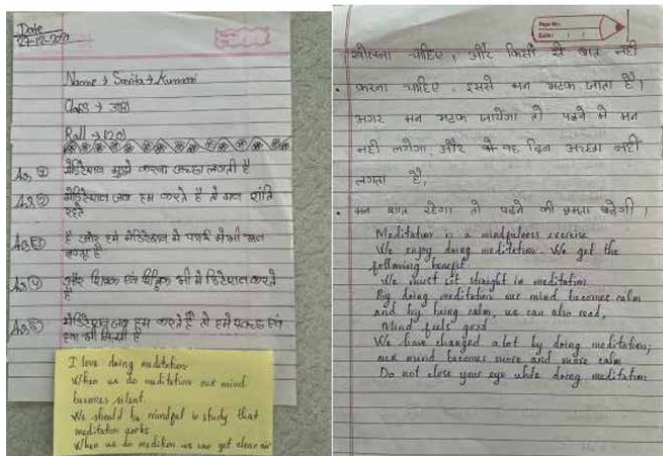
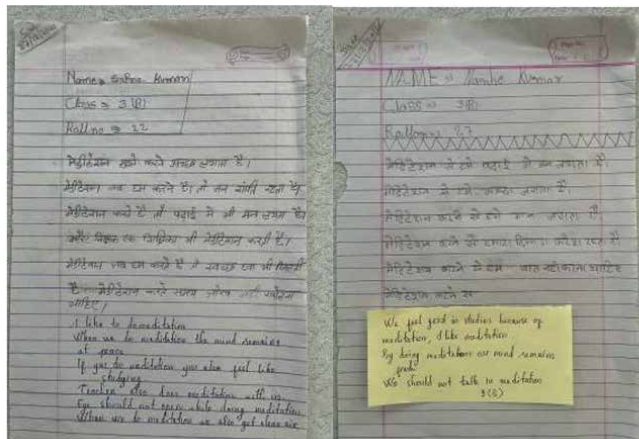
As the Buddhist nun, most of our time in the temple, practice mindfulness and observe our actions in daily life, especially I have good opportunities to stay in Buddha Land and do our practical practicing of Dhamma in remote areas in India which have caused the real view and real thought of what we have been taught about Buddha way of life, every moment is precious the real human realms here in front of our eyes which have forced us to catch fast and make great strides on our practicing.

Our tranquil time in India, especially in Vaishali, Bihar of India this place is our Bikkhuni Partriarch Sangha was set up, succeeded until today. We are practitioners, what we have observed in a routine day and the benefits we get from mindfulness we share with our poor children around Bihar, India since 2013 till now. Buddha is the greatest psychologist and psychotherapist, Buddhism practicing mention analysis of human psychology, emotion, behavior, cognition, and motivation. Terminology, Buddhists called as Buddhist ethical, Buddhist psychology; Buddhist psychology mainly related to healthy and virtuous life for human being, such things are so simple,

easy to adopt in life if we do first and talk later, experience on ourselves then we can adjust our actions.

Applied mindfulness to our children from nursery to 5 standards, for nearly ten years. Bihar of India still maintain caste system, children who belong to poor family they do not want to attend school, only stay home and do labor work or just small but with parents on the field, wander here and there, only think about how to survive a day, how pity they are! We provide them free education we hire teachers, give them uniforms to wear to school, shoes, bags, notebooks, pencils, textbooks whatever we can share. From these circumstances somehow others can understand how hard to train these children from the bottom of the society, only the caring, the compassion we nurture for these children they change, keep changing very fast in our training environment.

Buddhism psychology is just the term for easy use when we mention about this term it seems that we want to mention about the practicing of mindfulness is a way to help our children aware of their self-management and self-control from these aspects which create their self-esteem and confidence in their childhood time. For every three months I collect the hand written note of all children from 2 standards to 5 standards just to know if they are happy with 10 minutes we practice mindfulness or not, and I got a very surprising result that most of the children in our school was very happy with this activity. Such as:



### **3. Changes and finding oneself**

Learning Buddhism is continuously perfecting ourselves on daily basis, respecting the precepts, appreciating Buddhist practitioners, the shanga, and applying the Buddha's Doctrine in practice. Although I have been living and working with the local people in Bihar since 2005 as a Vietnamese Buddhist nun, and a postgraduate, pursuing higher education in Buddhism Studies, I realize my efforts to help the local people are still inadequate. Meeting street children and learning about their difficulties ignites me to devote my life working as a teacher, and a practitioner here to help children. Fortunately, three village primary schools had been built, namely, Mahaprajapati Schools. We have welcomed two thousand and four hundred local children to learn here. In addition, fifty-seven teachers (18 males: 39 females) have been continuously working to help children. In villages, there is not enough facility for students and teachers as well as equipment or basic conditions, such as electric grids or the Internet, though, all members of our schools, teachers, students, and Buddhist nuns in the Mahaprajapati nunnery still work harmoniously in tranquility together.

The pandemic has severely impacted the community; students and teachers in these schools are no exceptions. They, however, have worked far more diligently to help the locals because, through practicing mindfulness, children in these schools are more dynamic to get involved in charitable giving. "To Give is To Learn" as their current middle path to reflect what they have done and valued on daily basis is shining. Hopefully, the pandemic to be dominated, and students and teachers here along with the locals could stand out from the chaos and unmeasurable loss of natural disasters, pandemics, and conflicts striking them presently and upcoming years.

The changes triggering ones to find themselves are significantly seen through the daily activities of students in their schedules. Not only do children appreciate the meditation time of 40 minutes before beginning their study sessions of the day, but teachers at schools are humbly involved in the practice. The better performance of students is considered a great temporary achievement: students and teachers are dynamic in their work, teaching- and- learning.

The most crucial truth in Buddhism is the causes of suffering of existence are solely found within us, they can only be ceased by carefully observing, awareness, or in other word meditation. The starting point of human life is suffering, it manifests in every corner of our life even if we are small or grown up we also face many dissatisfactions in our own life these are the suffering we feel, Buddhist term we call suffering to mention about all unhappy thing we have. For children in our school, they somehow understand the word 'suffering' because most of them are from poor family which is 'suffering' so close to them.

### **4. Cultivating mental balance**

The Buddha with his most valuable teachings is appreciated beyond the boundary of any religion. It is the adaptable and tranquil lifestyle in which human beings, living beings and non-living beings coexist kindly and mutually value others as themselves. From these perspectives, the Enlightenment really changes the world back to its natural orbit. Body-Mind is a unity in an individual, interacting and impacting each other so closely that his or her actions are seen as the results of many sets of thoughts. Without a doubt, thoughts generated in our mind and doings, or actions come from

our physical bodies. We are able to live in happiness just as we can value the right doings. And these achievements are sourced from right thoughts.

With the above consideration, realistically applying the Buddha's teachings in local schools is prioritized by teachers and scholars of the Mahaprajapati Primary Schools in Bihar. The schedules of giving young learners and teachers regular time to refresh their mind, to control their negative thoughts, to enrich positive ones, to construct healthier habits of appreciating their own values, their Selves, then their compassion can be multiplied further in the community, which is believed to benefit nature as well. The mediation practice having been being conducted since the schools were established in September 2013 is becoming the charming beauty of the area, certainly being known beyond the territory, and currently being supported by the governments and organizations as well as individuals. The practice in Mahaprajapati Schools, hence, might be an ideal model of a mentally balanced life in the contemporary age.

Nurturing mental-balance styles of living also requires further studies of forms of thoughts, from stages of sensuous beings to stages of ones experiencing Brahmas with or without forms. Approaches to developing kind thoughts and great compassion in everyone may rely on how individuals value mindfulness featuring from attributes to shaping good individualism in every walk of life: social conduct, academic performance, and creativity, altruism to themselves and to other living and non-living beings [6].





At the basic level we wish the children can adjust themselves to the mindfulness space, most of our children belong to poor family that is the reason they are short of most necessary things for a child, we provide all of them whatever we can but it is not enough and it is very hard to reach the good level of life but the most important thing as the result we have got that is the changing and progress of each of us. Not to mention about religions we only care about how we live together in this human realm what we can do what we can share what we can talk about in this present moment is the most important.

Through the hand note we collect from children we can witness the real benefit of mindfulness in their school time, at home they have to work in the fields, help parents to take care of their small brothers or sisters, cook, and even small around six to ten year old they can handle everything in a small hut, looking at their conditions it touches our heart and urges sensitive one should do something.

Mindfulness gives our children and teachers the awareness to witness what was within their bodies and some changes as acceptance to let go of struggling with things that were not. Temporally I may say that participants noted benefit from doing mindfulness, many of us accepted that positive feeling comes, and there is improvement in anxiety.

## 5. Conclusion



I practice mindfulness since childhood with my father, and my religious family until now, I observe very clearly about the connection between our mind and body, mental states are directly reflected in our biochemistry. Initiation of those mental states, it is our beliefs, the choices of belief govern how we respond to life that means the focusing in our attention in ways which create feeling conflict, tension, worry... can make the real physical effects in our body. Sharing experiences to children we could not explain so deeply just practice ten minutes every morning, how each of us observed and experience the changes in our body, and behavior to others.

It should be my honor to be a Buddhist nun living and working in The Mahaprajapati Nunnery to address the current practice of students and teachers, the locals, and the local government in Bihar; without them, their support and collaboration, our cause of worshipping our Buddhas, our Buddhist Core Values might not have been smoothly and nicely implemented. I would like to borrow the words of Venerable Narada Mahathera in his forewords of the above-mentioned precious work to close my journal, *“Mere learning is of no avail without actual practice. The learned man who does not practice the Dhamma, the Buddha says, is like a colorful flower without scent.”*




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*Edited by Xiaoming Jiang*

Maintaining interpersonal relationships is essential for individuals to achieve successful human social interactions and healthy human development. As such, this book adds to our knowledge about how to develop interpersonal relationships wisely and strategically among individuals of different roles in a variety of dyadic relationships. The book addresses intriguing issues that reflect novel developments and relevant challenges in the field of interpersonal relationships, especially via works conducted with the dyadic approach to interpersonal synchrony and interpersonal divergence. It characterizes how the dyadic relationship is a crucial factor in successful healthcare treatment in clinical settings, gives an overview of how the dyadic approach reveals the role of interdependence between individuals within educational and counseling pairs, and demonstrates how the quality of interpersonal relationships contributes to organizational citizenship behaviors in organizational and management settings.

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