

The Future of NVC Mediation

Where We Have Been, Where We Are, Where We Might Go

By Ike Lasater

With Julie Stiles

© 2009 Words That Work

WordsThatWork.us

The Future of NVC Mediation

Where We Have Been, Where We Are, Where We Might Go

By Ike Lasater

With Julie Stiles

When I was on the board of CNVC, a position I held for 6 years, I noticed that people wanted to contribute to the growth and expansion of NVC in the world, and no one articulated a clear road map of what that growth might look like and how people could contribute. This is not necessarily a problem; when people are motivated and spend enough time in the community it becomes obvious what their role is and what they can do. However, for many people there is a certain stage when it can be a real support to have someone, like myself, write down one vision for how NVC and NVC mediation can grow and change and affect the world, and the possible roles people can take on to help that vision become a reality. This article is my first attempt at floating a mental model of how I see the expansion of NVC mediation occurring and the different roles I envision people taking on to support that expansion. I welcome comments and additions to this vision; I see it not as my vision, but a vision that I invite others to help shape and clarify and hold, as it will take all of us to bring it into being.

Vision

I would like to start with my vision of NVC mediation, how I would like to see it develop and the role I would like to see it play in the world.

I envision NVC and NVC mediation as household words; the general public knows about their potential and how to access the knowledge when needed through a broad base of grassroots stakeholders. Communities have people available with NVC skills ready to respond to local issues, whether through restorative justice, group decision making to resolve community dilemmas, or mediating conflicts between individuals. NVC is utilized in schools to resolve conflicts in a way that children grow up with knowledge of the distinctions and how to communicate with others.

NVC mediation is a known, accepted, and highly valued profession within the larger profession of mediation and conflict resolution. This means all the trappings of a profession are

in place: a community of NVC mediators sustaining themselves doing the work full time and furthering the collective knowledge; professional support opportunities for those in the community in the form of conferences, regional and international networks; and a wealth of support materials such as a periodical journal, books, and newsletters. The profession is worldwide, with mediators practicing in all languages.

NVC and NVC mediation are well known and valued in the halls of leadership on a global scale, and are the first choice for those in power. NVC mediators or people versed in NVC hold key positions in both government and the private sector around the world, ready to respond to the many challenges I see befalling us in the future, such as conflicts over population growth, climate change, and resources.

NVC provides the first choice for resolution of issues, whether those issues are individual, local, national, or international in scope. Due to the prevalence of NVC in culture at large, people in conflict with others see the possibilities of connection and resolution and are willing to work towards that outcome instead of resorting to more automatic and destructive responses. As a result, communities and nations are more peaceful and enormous energy is released that we direct to continuing to improve the quality of life.

If this is one version of a vision of NVC mediation, where are we now and how do we work towards turning this vision into a reality? I'd like to start with taking note of where I see that we currently are in the evolution of NVC mediation and how we came to be here, then look more at what we are currently doing and the many roles I see that others might play to help further the possibility of NVC making a difference in the world on a large scale.

Where are we?

Marshall Rosenberg developed NVC over the last four decades, and began both applying it and offering NVC training. In these trainings, he often demonstrated the application of NVC for people who are in conflict. Many people who witnessed these demonstrations began seeing a new hope and possibility for resolving conflicts in a way that restored the community through each person getting connected with their deepest motivations.

The general pattern with any new system or idea is that after the innovator comes up with the model (and sometimes begins applying it), others get enrolled in its possibility and begin to apply the innovation in diverse situations. NVC, of course, has a wide application; Marshall's

coverage of mediation is a small percentage of the topics he covers in workshops. NVC mediation is not an area that he has invested the central part of his career in, nor has he focused his efforts in teaching people how to mediate or train others in mediation. Some of us who have witnessed his demonstration of resolving conflicts and are interested have begun the task of applying NVC to mediation.

We are still in the first and second generations of people attempting to take what they've seen Marshall do on the stage in a workshop and apply that to the day-to-day mediation world. The current practitioners of NVC mediation are in fact still developing what NVC mediation is. In addition, a few of us are developing ways to train others to mediate using NVC.

To put this in some context, I'd like to share my own history of learning to mediate using NVC. I've been practicing NVC mediation since 2002, but the way I learned to mediate using NVC is certainly not an effective or efficient pedagogical method. When I first began to learn NVC, I was coming from 20 years as a trial lawyer, during which time I had been in hundreds of settlement conferences and mediations. When I saw Marshall demonstrate resolving a conflict on the stage, I had never witnessed anything like it in my many years as a lawyer. I wanted to be a part of what I saw happen. I began to see a possibility, dim though it was at first, that what I saw happen to people when they worked with Marshall was something I could be a part of daily as a professional mediator. It touched my heart in a way that no settlement conference ever had; it was incredibly satisfying to see the transformation that happened with people, and I could imagine nothing more nurturing and fulfilling than to be able to contribute to creating that for others.

Well, what I saw happen on the stage did not happen the first few times I tried to apply it in the real world! At that point I began to deconstruct what I had seen on stage. While I realized that some of the results that Marshall achieved in demonstrations had to do with his skill and experience, I also saw that there were a lot of preconditions that were embedded in the context. For example, the people participating had sat through his presentation on NVC, had learned his terminology and seen his approach, and perhaps had already seen a demonstration. They also were intensely motivated and in agreement to participate, and were in front of a whole audience, sometimes hundreds of people, with the expectation that something was going to happen. This creates a completely different context from what we deal with in the everyday mediation world. I was prompted to begin thinking about how we could create what happened the workshop context

by using different strategies that would work for the real world mediation context. This, for me, began the process of delineating what NVC mediation could be and how to practice it as a professional mediator.

I then began offering training in NVC mediation, along with my colleague John Kinyon. John and I have been offering trainings for seven years now, finding ways to break down the expertise of using NVC to mediate conflicts into layers so that it can be taught. I only know of a handful of people who are offering NVC trainings around the world. Undoubtedly there are more. I am looking forward to finding out who they are and meeting them.

In general, then, we're at the early stages in the evolution of NVC mediation. We are still developing NVC mediation as a profession, feeling our way forward in terms of how as practitioners to make a living doing this work. We are trying to become better known in the broader community, both the mediation community as well as the general public. Finally, as trainers, we are still learning how to train others to be able to mediate using this method.

Working Toward the Vision

To move toward the vision of what NVC mediation could be, we are doing many things at once:

- Increasing public awareness of NVC mediation so that there will be more clients who want disputes mediated using our methods
- Expanding the number of practitioners of NVC mediation (training practitioners)
- Creating more trainers of NVC mediation (training trainers)
- Creating professional support and continuing learning opportunities for both practitioners and trainers

I'll discuss a little more about the efforts we are undertaking in these areas.

Increasing Public Awareness

At this point, writing is the main focus to increase public awareness of NVC. The hope is to get the word out to the general public so that they become familiar with the terminology of NVC, and see how they can benefit by choosing an NVC mediator. In addition, we are reaching

out to the mediation community through articles to broaden the connections with the larger profession of conflict resolution. Liev Larsson has recently written a book on NVC mediation that is being translated into German, English, and Polish, and John Kinyon and I are in the midst of writing a book that we hope to have published in 2011. I, along with Julie Stiles, have written and continue to write articles that are available on my website (WordsThatWork.us), Mediate.com and CNVC.org.

Training Practitioners and Trainers

My personal goal in terms of training others to mediate is to have practitioners and trainers working in the five most spoken languages in the world within five years. These languages are Mandarin, English, Spanish, Hindi, and Arabic, though of course people speaking any language are welcome. I would like to have more and more NVC mediators in all parts of the world sustaining themselves doing this work, and growing personally and developing their skills with ever more challenging disputes, so they will be ready to respond to the looming challenges coming in the next decade or two. When I think ahead to what is coming, I feel an urgency to have more people practicing NVC mediation and more people training others to practice it.

For me, it has been around an eight-year process of trial and error to begin to have confidence as a practitioner, and toward the end of that time I also began learning how to train others to be practitioners. John Kinyon and I find that in our trainings, depending on the skills and life experience people bring to the training, it takes between 18 months and three years to be highly skilled and confident as a practitioner of NVC mediation. When people begin who are already NVC certified trainers or have other mediation experience, it often is within a year that they are confident and beginning to help train others in the approach that John and I have developed.

The current training model that John Kinyon and I use is based on a year-long training program. People can attend for multiple years in a kind of tiered learning. At first, people in our trainings are really learning how to mediate their lives—how to apply the principles of NVC and NVC mediation to their internal conflicts and their conflicts with other people. When they become somewhat versed in mediating their lives, people then might take on the additional challenge of lending their skills to others who are in conflict—in essence they become mediators

or practitioners. Finally, when they become more confident and skilled at being able to mediate conflicts between others, they might take on the additional role of training others to mediate. I see these as nested roles; the trainer is also a practitioner who is also mediating their own lives.

When someone comes into the training with no experience with NVC or mediation, it might take them three years to fully embody these three roles; the first year they learn the basics of how to mediate their lives, in the second year they enhance their skills as practitioners who lend their skills to others, and if they so choose, in the third year they learn to train others. Of course, depending on their previous experience and skills someone may move through the training much more quickly. The training is designed so that someone can always dial their learning to where they are at their learning edge all the way through the training.

At this time John and I can support four year long programs in different places around the world. Right now we have programs starting in the western and eastern US, Australia, and Poland. I would like to have many more training programs happening than I am able to do. My commitment is to provide training in an area for three consecutive years. During that time, I and the other trainers request for people to self-select to enter the trainer track. In the training we then provide support to those participants who are interested in training others besides mediating their lives and developing their skills as practitioners. After the three years (or at whatever point they are ready), the folks who have self-selected to be in the trainer track will then take over the one year training program in their area and further proliferate the training. What I see myself doing, then, is seeding more of these programs in more areas and languages, personally only staying in one area long enough to establish practitioners and trainers.

Providing Professional Support

To begin supporting those professionals in the field currently, we are helping to connect people and develop resources. At this stage there are a number of practitioners around the world, and many of them are beginning to aggregate to form a loose community. One of the places people can hook into this community is through the NVC Mediation group on Facebook.¹ We are also working on the first international NVC mediation conference, which is scheduled for October 2009 in Warsaw, Poland.

Developing resources at all levels is another important aspect of professional support. I

¹ <http://www.facebook.com/home.php#/group.php?gid=56377890994>

mentioned earlier the writing that has been done to increase public awareness, but we are also writing articles for practitioners and developing training manuals so that trainer candidates can more quickly and with greater ease and confidence begin training without having to develop materials themselves.

We are using the open source model for these training manuals; rather than trying to copyright or limit their use, we prefer to promote their use with the condition that anything developed from them will also be made available to people under the same open source terms. We want people to be collaborating on these manuals and sharing materials and best practices with others. This, we believe, is the best way to grow the profession. At times, after an innovator creates the model, either when it grows to a certain point or the innovator is no longer around, the model or method splits into a number of factions, sometimes these factions even turn against each other in their belief that theirs is the one true way. Perhaps this is inevitable, but we hope that with the open source model for training materials that we can maintain a sense of collaboration and sharing as the profession of NVC mediation grows.

How You Can Contribute

I've already covered some of the roles that a person might take on if the vision I have outlined speaks to them; let me just summarize the ones I've mentioned and then expand on some other areas where I see that folks could contribute.

First, it's a huge contribution to have people go through our training program who are simply interested in mediating their lives. When people take on this practice, they can affect many people around them as they work internally and lend their skills in informal ways to others. Anyone who has taken an interest in NVC and is mediating their lives might eventually introduce NVC to their community. For a teacher to introduce it to the school they work in, or a manager to introduce it in their workplace is an invaluable service, especially if training is then organized for those interested to learn for themselves. As mentioned, we would also like many more people to become practitioners of NVC mediation, using their skills to formally mediate conflicts and lending their skills in their area of work, as well as some of these people becoming trainers.

Another crucial function is for organizers for the trainings; the unsung heroes of NVC trainings are the people who use their NVC mediation skills to create the training. It's an

opportunity not only to contribute to bringing this training to their area, but also to take on the commitment of utilizing the skills they are learning in the process of communicating with others to put on the training. This role is a crucible for developing and honing NVC mediation skills in a very practical way.

At the same time as trying to train more mediators, we need to find more ways to get the word out so that those mediators have clients who want this form of mediation. We encourage other people to write about their experiences as a way of letting the broader public know about NVC mediation. The more people who write about their experiences mediating their own lives and lending their skills to others in conflict the better, whether in the form of online articles and blogs or through print media. Practitioners and trainers can also be writing about their experiences as a way to share knowledge among others in the community and the wider conflict resolution community, and as enough material is generated to support a professional journal, people will be needed to coordinate the creation of content as well as edit and publish it.

In addition, there are many more kinds of content that could be developed at all levels. Ideally, besides written content such as articles, books, and manuals, it would be great to have multi-media content available, utilizing video and audio as well as the many interactive opportunities provided by the web. Those folks more versed in these areas than I could probably come up with interesting ideas to further the spread of NVC using these tools.

Though we are at the very beginning stages currently, as the professions of NVC mediator and trainer grow, the support community will hopefully also grow. Professional associations and conferences need organization, and we need people willing to take on leadership roles to create and maintain these forms of professional support. Since the community is global, the relatively new medium of social networking may prove to be an important feature of ensuring communication flow among members, and people versed in the effective use of this form are welcome to help out in this area.

Although I have experienced the efficacy of NVC personally and professionally, I recognize the importance of scientific research in providing the necessary rigor to establish the effectiveness of the methods used. We need institutions and researchers willing to take on this type of research and publish their findings.

Last but not least, an important aspect of incorporating anything new into culture is through the arts. Artists can often comment and critique society as well as offer solutions in

creative ways that get past people's defenses; though I know no examples currently, I would welcome seeing NVC principles in some way emerge through novels or visual arts. I would also love to see people finding creative ways to incorporate NVC into the entertainment side of media as well; a powerful way to introduce and insinuate the promise of NVC into the general public would be to incorporate it into TV and radio shows. For example, I've long had an idea for a reality TV show based on conflict resolution using NVC. It is incredibly engrossing to observe real life conflicts being facilitated in a way where connection and resolution result; to have a reality show that enlightens society as it entertains would be a nice change from the usual reality fare.

Conclusion

I'm sure there are many more functions people could play in helping the spread of NVC; I have merely tried to outline a few that I see in the hopes that it stimulates discussion and encourages those of you who are new to the community to see ways that you can contribute. No matter what your background, experience, and interests are, if the vision of a more peaceful world, where everyone has access to the skills that help create connection and satisfying resolution to conflicts, speaks to you, there is a way for you to help make this vision a reality. At whatever level you want to become involved—whether through learning to mediate your life, becoming a professional in the community, taking on a leadership role in creating structures that perpetuate the spread of NVC, or bringing NVC to the halls of governance—please find a way to contribute your knowledge and skills. The more of us that get involved and work together, the quicker we can turn the vision into reality.

What do you want your contribution to be?