


5-2016

# The Effects of Purposeful Work, Structured Play, and Leadership Meetings on Aggressive and Destructive Behaviors

Hannah R. Cohen  
hrcohen@stkate.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://sophia.stkate.edu/maed>

 Part of the [Educational Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Commons](#), [Educational Leadership Commons](#), [Educational Methods Commons](#), and the [Educational Psychology Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Cohen, Hannah R., "The Effects of Purposeful Work, Structured Play, and Leadership Meetings on Aggressive and Destructive Behaviors" (2016). *Masters of Arts in Education Action Research Papers*. Paper 161.

The Effects of Purposeful Work, Structured Play, and Leadership Meetings  
on Aggressive and Destructive Behaviors

An Action Research Report

By Hannah Cohen

The Effects of Purposeful Work, Structured Play, and Leadership Meetings  
on Aggressive and Destructive Behaviors

Submitted on \_\_\_\_\_

in fulfillment of final requirements for the MAED degree

Hannah Cohen

Saint Catherine University

St. Paul, Minnesota

Advisor: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this research was to examine whether purposeful work, structured play, and student led leadership meetings would decrease aggressive and destructive behaviors occurring in a school's outdoor spaces. This study incorporated student leadership meetings, structured games, and outdoor purposeful works. This seven-week study involved 30 children between the ages of 2.5 and six years in a private Montessori school in a suburban area. An analysis of results revealed that when new purposeful works were introduced aggressive behaviors would temporarily increase, then decrease for a two to three week period of time, and eventually return to the starting level.

*Keywords: aggressive behavior, destructive behavior, purposeful work, structured play, student led leadership meetings*

Essential to the Montessori Method are the beliefs that freedom of movement and freedom of choice are vital for allowing a child's optimum development. Children have a vital need to be able to move, discover and explore their environment. It is through the child's ability to move through and master her or his world that allows this burst of growth and development; through this freedom of movement, Dr. Montessori explains, "he expanded his intelligence and became ever more conscious of his environment, and of himself." (Montessori, *The Discovery of the Child*, pg. 339) With Freedom of Choice, a young child's choices are, of necessity, limited at first. This is because choice must be based on knowledge. A Montessori Guide expands a child's choices by giving presentations until she may choose anything in the classroom. At this point, the child is free to explore fully. Montessori explained that, "Following some inner guide, they occupied themselves in work different for each that gave them joy and peace, and then something else appeared that had never before been known among children, a spontaneous discipline" (Montessori, 1946, pg. 84-85).

Having recently completed my Montessori Training, I embraced these core concepts wholeheartedly. Soon after beginning a first job as an Assistant in a Children's House class room and as an Extended Day Coordinator, I confronted firsthand some of the challenges that accompany granting these vital freedoms to young children. Reality and theory were not meshing during transitions and during time spent outdoors. There are clear expectations for behavior inside the classroom environment; these may not always be followed, but they are in place. However, during the children's time spent outdoors, particularly in an extended day situation, expectations were less acknowledged, set, or clear. A critical limitation to Montessori's freedom of movement is that the child must

move in a safe, respectful manner that is not destructive or harmful to self or others.

Likewise, one limitation to freedom of choice is that there must be respect for the materials; a child can't be destructive to himself, to others, and to the environment.

This lack of clarity was not a fault of the children; rather, it was a problem with clear parameters. Perhaps, the children were not certain: Was this free time? After all, the regular school day was over. And if it indeed was free time, should the child not be allowed to do whatever he or she wanted? However, giving children the freedom to choose on the playground often resulted in choosing harming each other as well as the property itself. The freedom of movement, likewise, often looked somewhat chaotic, aggressive, and dangerous. Examples of this aggressive behavior included hitting, slapping, punching, shoving, kicking, and name-calling; examples of destructive behavior included throwing toys over the fence, willfully damaging equipment and property, kicking out the boards of the fence, and using shovels to destroy climbing logs.

Lengthy discussion about this issue with the school's owners led to an agreement that a clear plan of action was needed in order to decrease both the frequency and severity of the aggressive behaviors and destruction of property. Understandably, a child cannot fully have the freedom in which the Montessori method is so deeply rooted, without first understanding the parameters in which that freedom must function. The first of these guidelines must be safety, after which follows respect for others, for themselves and for the materials. It is essential for the child and the functioning of the environment that the guidelines are clear, limited, and consistent.

With respect for the child's need for freedom of movement and choice as essential Montessori tenets in mind, I set out to find and then implement activities and structures

that, hopefully, would lessen some of these unwanted behaviors occurring during the time spent outdoors. The Montessori preschool classroom where I conducted my research contains 30 children between the ages of two and a half and six years.

### **Literature Review**

Many researchers have tried to address the issues of inappropriate, aggressive, and destructive behaviors in small children (such as hitting, shoving, punching, and biting). In a variety of ways over time, place, and educational systems the topic has been studied and debated both within and outside of the Montessori educational perspective. This literature review focuses on multiple ways researchers have defined, viewed, and approached this issue over the past few decades.

A first way the literature addresses this issue of aggressive and destructive behavior in young children is best understood in the way the problem itself is framed. In this view, educators should not worry excessively about suppressing negative behaviors at school; instead, they should focus on eliciting appropriate responses in young children. This may be viewed as the quintessential Montessori approach. Sackett (2015) suggested that normalized or acceptable behaviors come from within; in this view, these cannot be taught in the same manner one learns how to count or read. Acceptable behaviors should develop when the child is developmentally ready and able -- and not beforehand. The child absorbs or ingests civility simply by way of her presence in the Montessori environment. Rather than any actual lessons or presentations, normalized behaviors come about gradually and naturally. An example of normalized behavior might include a child caring about her environment and treating it respectfully. Another example might be the ability to curb an impulse to hit another child in anger. For Sackett, modeling this

normalized behavior "becomes a constant work of every child every day, and also the constant work of every adult every day in the school community" (pg. 3). The major way this is done is through the modeling of acceptable behaviors by older, already normalized children, as well as by adults. This understanding and internalizing is learned, or acquired, in a thousand and one small ways throughout the day; it is an all day, every day affair, and this will happen for children regardless of whether they are indoors or outdoors.

In her Action Research Study, *Creating A Normalized Montessori Classroom*, Somerton-Burkhardt (2015) would agree broadly with Sackett's (2015) perspective. According to Somerton-Burkhardt, acceptable behaviors will come about if and when the environment is carefully prepared. Then, the children will naturally respond with the behaviors that are modeled and desired. In *Monkey See, Monkey Do: Modeling Positive Behavior*, Espe (2013) further develops this line of thinking. For Espe, her students were unruly because she was not modeling the peaceful, calm behavior she hoped to elicit; when Espe changed her actions, the children followed suit. Finally, in Crawford's (2005) article *Primary Peaceful: Nurturing Peace In The Primary Grades* also agrees with this approach to instilling civility, whether indoors or outdoors. According to Crawford, it is all up to the adult, because "actions speak louder than words" (p. 323).

In a second perspective found in the literature reviewed, normalized behaviors can be taught in much the same way one teaches math and reading. Clear, intentional, detailed lessons on acceptable and unacceptable actions are the solutions. In this outlook, it is not enough for adults or already normalized children to model how to behave. According to Pickering (2003) in *Discipline: Developing Self Control*, adults must "give



the child the vocabulary, actions, and steps required for him to build his awareness and responsiveness of those around him" (p. 2). Pickering offers six clear and direct steps to take to teach a young child civility. These six include Structure, Imitation, Direct Teaching, Work, Independence, and Specific Correction. In this view, adults must provide clear structures and boundaries; at the same time educators give children opportunities for meaningful work. Both of these strategies are necessary to foster the children's exhibiting positive behaviors. Other authors agree with this approach including Lillard (2008) in her study *How Important Are the Montessori Materials?* The researcher concludes that even the outdoor spaces must be created and designed very carefully. The materials cannot just be introduced or placed without a justifiable reason; each material must have a clear and dedicated purpose. For example, the watering cans used to care for the school garden should be placed near the plants that need watering. Van Fleet (2015) also finds that desired behavior and respect for each other and the materials will take thoughtful planning and specific strategies on the part of the educators. This intentionality that includes direct instruction, for example, Grace and Courtesy lessons, is necessary to guiding the children to the desired, normalized behaviors.

A third approach was not taken by any of the Montessori researchers analyzed in the literature reviewed. In this body of literature, the Montessori guide's traditional demeanor does not provide enough of a dominant authority figure as far as children's behavior at recess or on the playground. In *He Did It First*, Warren and Andersonbutcher (2008) postulate that aggressive behavior can and most likely may happen if young students are left unattended during recess. Of course, with very young children, an adult always would be present to supervise. For these researchers, "peer contagion" is a very

real danger, and aggressive behaviors "can occur quite rapidly" (p. 30). As a result, this approach suggests that educators need to "curtail aggressive behaviors before they have the opportunity to spread" (p.31). An example of such a step, according to Trussell (2008), is to lay out a series of increasingly severe penalties with each time an undesired behavior is repeated. A similar view is expressed in a New York Times article by Paul (2010). In *The Playground Gets Even Tougher* Paul claims that bullying is on the rise, and it is being done by and to younger and younger children. The journalist describes a quiet little kindergartener being repeatedly bullied by a group of her peers. The author writes about these children "[...]sneering at her, excluding her, and calling her names. They even threatened her and set her up to embarrass herself in front of other children". For Paul (2010) to combat instances like this, activities on the playground should be every bit as structured as traditional classroom activities. Bencivenga (2007) is another educator who addressed this issue. In his article, *Recess Struggles: Students Help Teachers Maintain a Peaceful Playground*, he advocates the implementation of student leaders -- rather than adults -- as a viable tactic to consider. Bencivegna examined the work of Open Circle, a program developed at Wellesley College that gives the children the necessary language, concepts, and tactics in solving conflict resolution on the playground.

In this, the literature's third approach, unruly behavior during time spent outdoors at school may not always or even often be dangerous or malicious, but it is ever-present and must be dealt with before it gets out of control, or it becomes routine. This behavior could be decreased over time through modeling and purposeful work. However,

that does not mean that supervising and stepping in to intervene and stop dangerous and harmful actions is not warranted.

Current research on what offers the most successful path to instilling appropriate self-control and physical boundaries in young children in an educational setting indicates that there is no single, unified interpretation on how to curb aggressive behaviors in the literature. Based on this review, the authors' works can be summarized in this manner:

The researchers who tend to agree with the first perspective believe that a well functioning, normalized educational environment centers on an overarching philosophy. Briefly, this approach reflects the Montessori Method's belief that a carefully prepared environment usually leads a child to exhibit acceptable or normalized behavior.

According to the Montessori Method, this is true on the playground as well as in the classroom. Another group of researchers claims that a well-functioning, calm, productive educational environment involves both an overarching philosophy and a deliberate, clearly defined, step-by-step method to implement desired social behaviors. Some Montessori and non-Montessori educators alike have addressed this problem by preparing and presenting carefully planned, deliberate instruction; taking these steps might be in lieu of, or in addition to, a carefully prepared environment. Lastly, the authors who represent the third perspective are less focused on a, or on any, particular educational philosophy. Instead, these researchers approach the problem through the lens of external discipline. This literature centers on which concrete behavioral strategies should be in place before these unwanted behaviors happen; it also addresses what specific consequences should be enforced once these behaviors have occurred.

After an analysis of the research, particularly that of Sackett (2015), a few possible actions that might address this issue include: providing purposeful work during outside time, providing structured activities, and implementing student leadership meetings and discussions. These strategies are supported by the first and second group of researchers. By introducing these interventions, both the importance of a philosophical underpinning and direct instruction are being put to active use.

Further action research is merited to find out if and how to best use the purposeful work, structured play, and the use of leadership meetings to help young children in a Montessori setting establish respect for their peers' personal spaces and boundaries, as well as respect for the outdoor environment and equipment. Action research may show whether or not carefully delineating and then implementing these strategies will decrease the frequency of unwanted actions during their outdoor time, as well as decreasing the breakage and misuse of outdoor spaces and equipment. The question this action research sought to address was *How will implementing purposeful work, structured play, and leadership meetings affect the frequency of physically aggressive and destructive behaviors, as well as the frequency of peer interventions in response to those unwanted behaviors, in an all-day and aftercare primary Montessori environment?*

### **Method**

The first intervention addressed was the lack of purposeful work during outdoors time. I created purposeful work for the children to do when they were outdoors. For the outdoor works, I created window washing, snow shoveling, and rock collecting. (We had just moved to a new school building. The outdoor space was still in the format of a break

Area for the former bank employees. There were stones everywhere.) We also created a semi-permanent target for students to throw snowballs at. Finally, when moving to the school, the new space has a child-sized workbench. We were able to use this outdoors; students were able to hammer nails into 2x4s.

Even on days when weather conditions kept us indoors, I was able to continue this momentum by creating different purposeful works. I created an entire set of work jobs that students have started doing before we go outside every afternoon. Those works include spraying the tables with vinegar water and wiping them, putting the chairs on top of the tables, re-rolling the work mats, organizing the books in the reading corner, washing the chalkboards, washing the mirrors, putting the tops on all of the boxes, organizing the coat hook area, refolding the Practical Life aprons, re-rolling the Practical Life tablecloths, and turning off the lamp. I created a record sheet for recording the use of the purposeful works (see Appendix A). This was in the form of a Tally Sheet that included spaces for observations.

The next part of developing my intervention was creating a list of student-led leadership meeting topics. Some of these topics included: How can we stop ongoing rock throwing, throwing toys over the fence; How can we be safe while engaging in purposeful work with the hammer and the shovel; How can we sit appropriately at Collective; How can we keep behavior appropriate at lunch; How can we keep the coat and shoe area more organized after coming in from outside; How can we choose the activity done during Collective while doing lunch clean up. Though I had made an extensive list, often the children came up with ideas for meeting topics on their own. One of these was: How to determine who gets to sit on my lap during reading time. I created a

sheet for recording each of these meetings (see Appendix B). This gave me a space for the children's feedback and it gave me a place to record my observations during and after each of the student led meetings. Finally, I created a list of structured games to teach the children while outside. A few games I facilitated were Ships Across The Ocean, Mr. Fox, Tag, Soccer, and Duck Duck Gray Duck. I created a record sheet that recorded which game was taught along with observations of how the teaching went and if the children repeated the game on their own at a later time (see Appendix C).

The last data form I created and used was a Behavioral Tally Sheet (see Appendix D). The purpose of this sheet was to record the frequency of aggressive and destructive behaviors, along with any peer interventions, and it also included any observations.

We did purposeful work every day. Collectively, we completed various work jobs daily, and the purposeful work was available to do outside (every day that weather permitted). Some examples of these work jobs included cleaning the chalkboard, washing the tables, organizing the books in the reading corner, and re-rolling the work mats. I taught one new game each week. Initially, my plan was to initiate student led meetings every day. These ended up occurring every two to three days instead. I attempted to record the number and frequency of destructive and aggressive behavior incidents each day; I found this to be more challenging than I had imagined when juggling these observations with the other pieces of this action research. In the end, I was able to record these behavior incidents only two or three times a week.

There were some events, or variables, that prevented daily observation notes or delayed the intervention at times. For example, I was sick for two days, and I was not at school. At about this same time, many children also were ill with the flu; for about a

week or so, we did not have a typical or normal classroom schedule because of the many absences. Additionally, there were several days when it was either too cold or too muddy for the children to play outside. On those days we stuck to the indoor work and I provided indoor-friendly games and activities. The student-led meetings were held regardless of whether or not the children played outdoors.

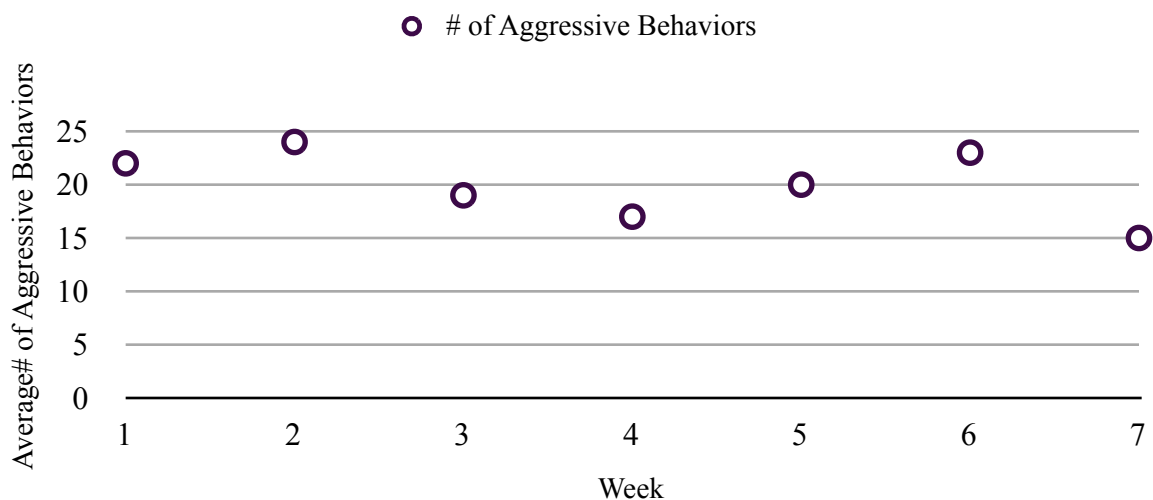
### **Data Analysis**

In preface to all of the following data, it is critical to note that a major unforeseen event occurred that might have impacted my action research. Halfway through this academic year, right before the implementation of my action research, the school where this research was taking place moved buildings and expanded significantly. The school had been, at the time of planning my research, a single Children' House classroom. In the end of December, the school moved into a larger building in the same town. The new school building now held five classrooms; this meant that the children had to get acclimated to an entirely new, much larger environment with many more new children and adults. This new environment took a good deal of getting used to for all of the children. Unlike the old school, the new school had trees; also unlike the old school, this new one did not include a play structure. Further, the landscape consisted primarily of rocks. The students observed in this action research were the only children who had made the move; all of the other students were new to the school. The children's afternoon schedule was changed in order to accommodate all of the other new classrooms and students. There was no longer a post-lunch recess. The post-lunch recess activities originally had been an integral part of the action research plan. Similarly, the group being researched often was outside during the extended day program with students from the

other Children's House classroom; perhaps importantly, this other new class was comprised of children who were either new to Montessori, new to any kind of schooling, or from a different Montessori environment. Additionally, new children were regularly being added; the group was not consistent in terms of numbers or of specific individual children.

As will be shown in the following data, not much is discussed with regards to destructive behaviors. In all of my observational notes, right from the beginning, there were far fewer destructive behaviors noted than had been observed at the original school building. As a result, one of the pieces of this research planned had been to address the prevalence and intensity of the destructive behaviors being done to the outdoors environment by the children. Though it's difficult to point to one clear explanation for this decrease in destructive behaviors, this might have been, in part, because the new school had a great deal more space to play outdoors. It also might be that the destructive behaviors to the property were not as easily observed in the much larger new outdoors space.

### **Aggressive Behavior**





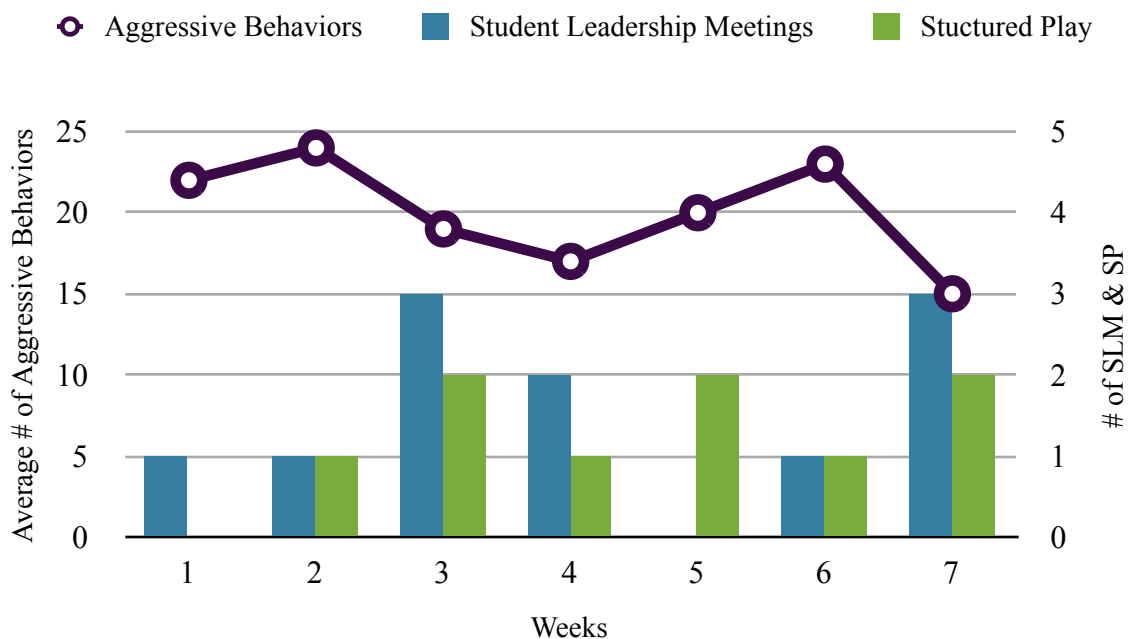
*Figure 1.* Aggressive behaviors quantified. Each dot represents that average number of aggressive behaviors each week.

Figure 1 charts the average number of aggressive behaviors that occurred and were recorded during each week of the action research. Here it can be seen that the aggressive behaviors increase to 24 observed aggressive behaviors on Week Two; this is followed by a relatively steady downward trend for the next two weeks. Starting at Week Five, however, the average number of observed aggressive behaviors begins to increase again, and the number then drops down to 15 observed aggressive behaviors at Week Seven.

There are several factors that might have contributed to the fluctuating pattern shown in Figure 1. To start, on many days throughout the research time frame, the weather was not conducive to the children playing and working outside; in particular, the children were only able to go out one time during Week Three, and two times during Week Five. It is worth noting here that when the children were unable to play outdoors I did not record aggressive behaviors. Similarly, there were weeks when data was collected fewer than three times, such as in Week One. (This was due to a widespread outbreak of flu that week.)

When the data points seen in Figure 1, however, are compared with the Purposeful Work record sheets, an interesting correlation seems to appear. A trend that deserves comment is the one that I noted between some new work being introduced and the peaks in aggression observed soon afterwards. After reviewing my observation notes, it shows that I regularly noted that the children would fight and become aggressive over wanting the opportunity to be the ones to use the new works. I believe that if this part of

the research were continued for an extended period, we likely would see this pattern repeating. Similarly, the pattern that appeared when comparing the Tally Sheet to the observation notes is that aggression initially increased when a new work was presented (particularly an individual work); these aggressive acts then decreased over time as the material became readily available. Finally, then yet another increase was observed as the children appeared to get bored with the available works. My observation notes show that this boredom seemed to occur about two weeks after the materials became available to the children.



*Figure 2.* The average number of aggressive behaviors compared with the number of student leadership meetings and structured play activities for each week.

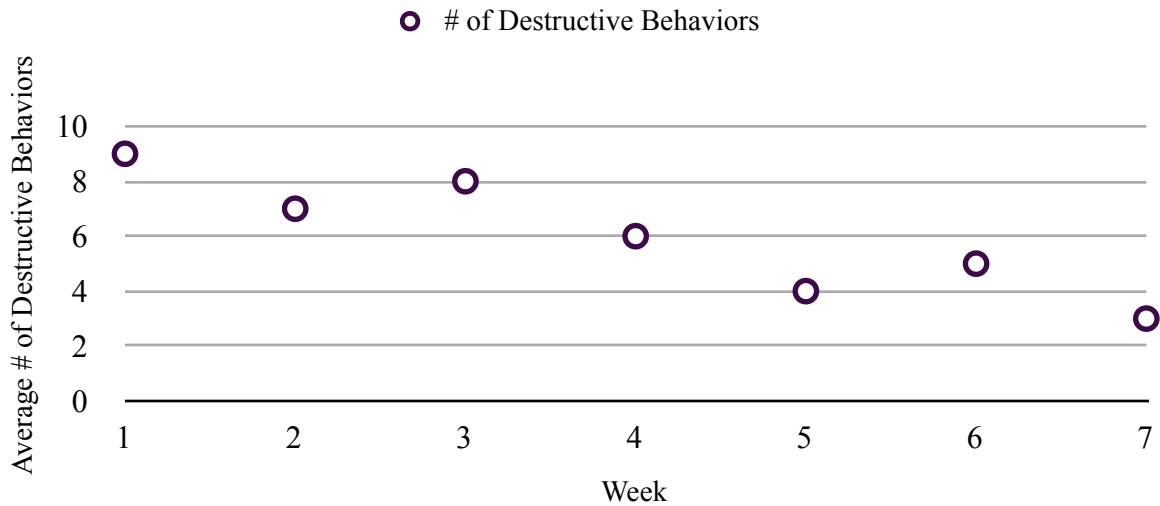
Figure 2 compares the fluctuations of the average aggressive behaviors that occurred each week with the number of Student Leadership Meetings and Structured Play games that were taught. The graph shows that no Structured Play games were taught during Week One and that no Student Leadership Meetings were conducted during Week

Five. Widespread illness caused much of the observed class, as well as myself, to be absent at different times throughout Week One.

There seems to be a correlation between the average number of aggressive behaviors and the number of Student Leadership Meetings. As depicted in Figure 2, the average number of observed aggressive behaviors tended to be higher on weeks where there were fewer Student Leadership Meetings (Weeks Two, Five, and Six), and less aggressive behaviors recorded on weeks where there were more Student Leadership Meetings (Weeks Three, Four and Seven). After reviewing observation notes, there is a clear trend that I intentionally conducted more Student Leadership Meetings after particularly difficult weeks. I do wonder if the following decreases in aggressive behaviors noted were simply part of a natural fluctuation in behaviors, or if there was, perhaps, more of a direct causation between the Student Leadership meetings and the aggressive behaviors. In other words, after weeks where the trend tended to show a lot of negative language observed in my notes, the next week also witnessed an influx of new ideas about proposed topics for the Student Leadership meetings.

As for any relationships between the average number of observed aggressive behaviors that occurred each week, and the number of Structured Play games that were introduced and led by me, there does not seem to be any noticeable correlation. Though there were peaks of aggression on weeks when less Structured Play was presented, such as Weeks Two and Six, the overall connection does not appear to be as strong.

### Destructive Behavior

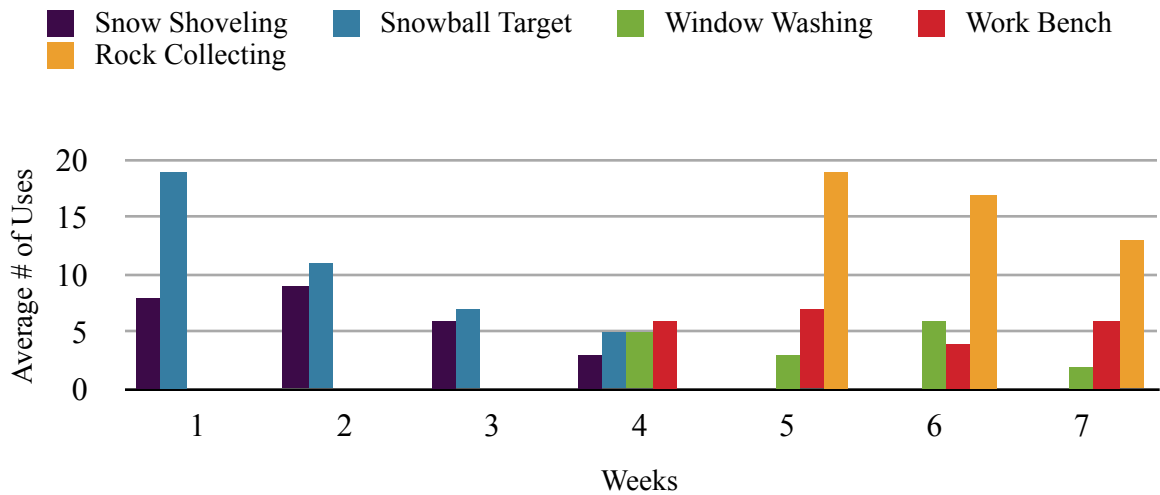


*Figure 3.* Destructive behaviors quantified. Each dot represents that average number of destructive behaviors each week.

Figure 3 charts the average number of destructive behaviors that occurred each week over the seven-week research period. In this figure it can be seen that there is an overall downward trend in the destructive behaviors observed. There are two peaks at Week Three and Week Six. There is a matching peak in aggressive behavior seen in Figure 1 during Week Six.

As with Figure 1, there are multiple outside factors that might have affected the results, such as widespread illness, inclement weather, and some inconsistent data recording. However, I observed that over the weeks the overall number of student leadership meetings that were focused on caring for our environment and treating the materials with care increased. I believe these meetings, as well as available purposeful work, have helped the children reach a level of consciousness about caring for their outdoor space, but they also have provided the children with an alternative: a productive, constructive outlet for their energy that had not been readily available before.

## Purposeful Work

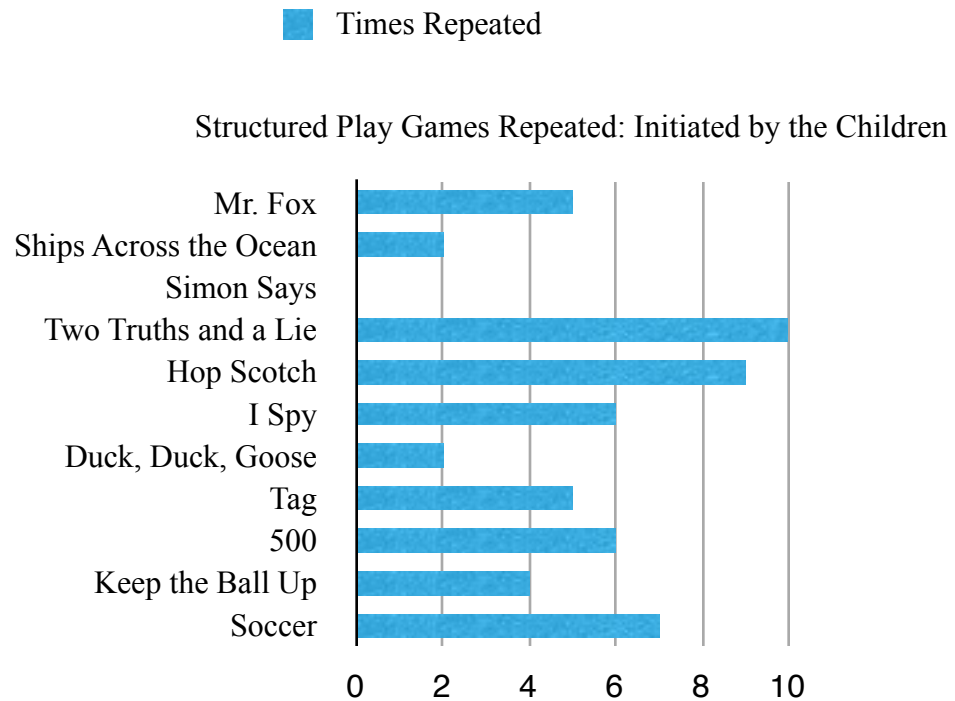


*Figure 4.* Average number of usage for each purposeful work. Each bar represents a different purposeful work done each week.

Figure 4 depicts the different Purposeful Works that were available during the research period and the average number of uses of each per week. It is clear that the group activities (i.e. Snowball Target and Rock Collecting) were used by the children far more than the individual Purposeful Works (Snow Shoveling, Window Washing, and the Work Bench). There are a few potential reasons for this. To start, I believe that simply due to the fact that multiple children could do this work at the same time it allowed for more tallying in the same amount of time as some of the other works. Another potential cause for this higher amount of use may be that the children wanted to work together, and these types of works allowed for that. Also clearly visible is the pattern depicted in the graph that shows a peak of activity with the works when they are first introduced, followed by a relatively steady decline in interest afterwards. This trend could have also been caused to some degree by the number of times the children were actually able to go outside due to the weather, and regularly low number of children due to widespread

illness throughout the research period. However, it would be interesting to see how this trend might also be affected if the works were less weather dependent, or at least if the weather had been more temperate and consistent throughout the research period.

### Structured Play



*Figure 5.* Number of times each structured play game was initiated and repeated by the children.

Figure 5 depicts the different Structured Play activities that were taught over the seven-week research period; it also shows the number of times these activities were initiated and repeated by the children. There is a clear range between the most repeated game (Two Truths and a Lie, repeated ten times) and the least repeated game (Simon Says, repeated zero times). Interestingly, the three most repeated games are all relatively different in nature. Two Truths and a Lie, repeated ten times, is a sedentary, verbal, group game that requires listening relatively intently. The second most repeated game, Hop

Scotch, which was repeated nine times, is an active, individual game, which requires physical control and some concentration. Conversely, Soccer, which was repeated seven times, is an active, group game that requires more teamwork than it requires physical control.

The three least repeated games, however, seem to all be relatively similar. Simon Says (repeated zero times), Ships Across the Ocean (repeated once), and Duck, Duck, Goose (repeated once) are all mildly active group games which require an individual to choose parts of a category. In review of the observation notes, there was a clear trend that the element of one child leading and choosing within a category (i.e. types of movements or types of colors) while the other children needed to follow along seemed to hinder the games to a point where the other children lost interest quickly.

### Student Leadership Meetings



Types of Student Leadership Meeting

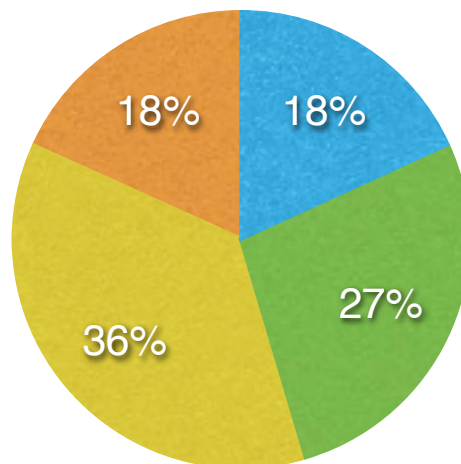


Figure 6. Types of student leadership meetings quantified.

Figure 6 represents the different types of Student Leadership Meetings that were conducted over the seven-week research period. It can be seen that the eleven Student Leadership Meetings that were conducted can be organized into four general categories. These categories include: Caring for the Classroom and Indoor Materials (two meetings), Caring for the Outdoor Space and Materials (three meetings), Daily Procedures (four meetings), and Social Interactions (two meetings).

The topics discussed under Caring for the Classroom and Indoor Materials were:

*-How can we keep the room cleaner during lunch?*

*-What could you do if you see a material is not ready for the next user?*

The topics discussed under Caring for the Outdoor Space and Materials were:

*-How can we keep toys from getting thrown over the fence?*

*-What activities we can do that don't damage our play space?*

*-How can we keep our outdoor works from getting damaged?*

The topics discussed under Daily Procedures were:

*-How can we keep the shoes and coat hooks more organized when returning from recess?*

*-How can we decide who gets to sit on the Teacher's lap when reading a story?*

*-What are some ways to help ourselves and each other sit appropriately during collectives?*

*-What are some suggestions for helping ourselves and each other to stand appropriately in line?*

The topics discussed under Social interactions were:

*-What are some ways we can express frustration with each other without hitting?*



*-What are some ways we can ask for a turn with a material without grabbing it away from another child?*

As discussed previously with Figures 2 and 3, there appeared to be a clear relationship between the Student Leadership Meetings and the number of observed aggressive and destructive behaviors. When analyzing Figure 2, it was noted that there seemed to be a connection between the increasing amount of Student Leadership Meetings that focused on caring for the outdoor space and the materials and an overall decrease in destructive behaviors. Similarly, the analysis of Figure 3 pointed to a connection between the fluctuations of aggressive behavior occurrences and the number of Student Leadership Meetings that were facilitated each week. The overall conclusion here shows that the more Student Leadership Meetings that occurred within a week, the less aggressive behaviors occurred or were observed.

### **Action Plan**

After seeing the results of this action research and data analysis, I have no doubts that I will alter some of my teaching practices. It is difficult to separate how I will be a different educator as a result of my action research and as a result of having taught in a classroom for almost an entire school year. What I have learned so far as a first year teacher is so vast that it may be next to impossible to determine how much of my growth as an educator came about as a direct result of having undergone and completed this action research project.

I am aware of one clear and critical change in my practice as an educator that has resulted. This is the value of thoughtfully identifying, defining, and then putting an educational problem into words, coming up with possible solutions to this problem,

observing and implementing the possible solutions, and finally, carefully and painstakingly analyzing the results. Additionally, as a result of having done this action research, I have learned the importance of trying to view a classroom issue as impartially and as objectively as possible. What I mean by this is that there is a level of setting realistic expectations. The children hitting each other disturbed me greatly at the start of the year. Either this behavior lessened, or it ceased to shock me as time went on. I believe that both possibilities are true. I will generalize observations about aggressive behaviors and purposeful work to not only my students' outdoor environment but also to their indoor environment by regularly adding and changing the works within this time frame that was observed. I will continue to observe to notice the time between peak interest and boredom; I will regularly circulate the work. Along with this, I will commit myself to being more observant at all times and all places, whenever possible.

I also have found that the value of Student Leadership meetings is dependent upon their frequency and consistency. The length, timing, flow, and order of these meetings need to be as structured as possible. The times that the children seemed to benefit most from these meetings is when they were carefully planned and conducted with intentionality. Along with this, the children must have a voice and a choice about the topics and outcomes of the meetings. This is one of the reasons traditional classrooms use "Morning Meetings" in their daily routines.

It would be interesting to see the result of some future action researcher focusing solely on the fluctuating interest levels of s work over an extended period of time. I also think it would be beneficial to break down this current research project into even smaller, more discrete pieces. For example, I think it would be interesting for someone to have

been able to focus only on the impact of Student Leadership meetings and their effect on destructive behaviors. Or, I would like to have focused on the effect of Student Leadership meetings on aggressive behaviors.

Other, much smaller pieces of my action research that deserve to be studied in their own right: the effects of purposeful work on destructive behavior; the effects of purposeful work on aggressive behavior; the effects of structured play on destructive behavior, and the effects of structured play on aggressive behavior. This research did examine all of these, but I suggest that a future researcher look only at one of these elements at one time, in order to gather much more focused data.

Overall, the action research topic I chose to pursue was very wide in its view- perhaps too wide. It would be interesting to see how the results would have changed had there been a more narrow scope to my research. I see now that I may have tried to take on too much and to try to solve too much. No doubt, this is something that many new researchers attempt.

I am not certain what possible impact this research will have on student learning and behavior yet. It seems logical that the more intentional, focused, and aware that I am as a guide, the more positive educational experience the children will have in the classroom. One change that the children will see as a result of this research is that they will regularly be getting a larger sense of ownership, control, leadership, and empowerment.

Dr. Maria Montessori's belief in the importance of purposeful work does indeed have merit. Structured play and purposeful work all do have observable, beneficial effects. What I learned, in the end, is that empowering the children to express themselves

and to voice their needs-in this instance through Student Leadership meetings-does contribute to a calmer, smoother-flowing, better functioning classroom, just as Dr. Montessori claimed so many years ago. I discovered however, that reading Montessori's words and living them through trial and error each day in the classroom were two very different things. The biggest lesson that I have learned, from daily work with my students as well as from conducting this action research is this: teaching always will require seeking a balance between the theoretical and the ideal, and the everyday realities-both wonderful and discouraging- of working with young children in a Montessori Children's House environment.

## References

- Bencivenga, A. (2007). Recess Struggles: Students Help Teachers Maintain a Peaceful Playground. Retrieved from <http://www.edutopia.org/recess-struggles>
- Colvin, Geoff, Timothy J. Lewis, and George Sugai. (2000). The Effects of Pre-Correction and Active Supervision on the Recess Behavior of Elementary Students. *Education & Treatment of Children*, 23 (2), 109-121. Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ611299>
- Crawford, P. (2005). Primarily Peaceful: Nurturing Peace in the Primary Grades. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 32 (5), 321-328. Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ732347>
- Espe, S. (2013). Monkey See Monkey Do: Modeling Positive Behavior in the Classroom (Unpublished master's thesis). *St. Catherine's University*. Retrieved from <http://sophia.stkate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1035&context=maed>
- Jones, K. D., Casado, M., & Robinson, E. H. (2003). Structured play therapy: A model for choosing topics and activities. *International Journal of Play Therapy*, 12(1) 31-45. Retrieved from <http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/pla/12/1/31/>
- Lewis, T. J., Powers, L. J., Kely, M. J., & Newcomer, L. L. (2002). Reducing problem behaviors on the playground: An investigation of the application of schoolwide

positive behavior supports. *Psychology in the Schools*, 39 (2) 181-190. doi:  
10.1002/pits.10029

Lillard, A. (2008). How important are the Montessori materials?. *Montessori Life: A Publication of the American Montessori Society*, 20(4), 20-25. Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ819577>

Lloyd, K. M. (2008). An analysis of Maria Montessori's theory of normalization in light of emerging research in self-regulation. *ProQuest Education Journals*. Retrieved from <http://pearl.stkate.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/304503369?accountid=26879>

Ostrov, J., Keating, C. (2004). Gender Differences in Preschool Aggression During Free Play and Structured Interactions: An Observational Study. *Social Development*, 13 (2) 255-277. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9507.2004.000266.x

Paul, P. (2010). The Playground Gets Even Tougher. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/10/fashion/10Cultural.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/10/fashion/10Cultural.html?_r=0)

Pickering, J. S. (2003). Discipline: Developing self-control. *Montessori Life*, 15(3), 18. Retrieved from <http://pearl.stkate.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/219952748?accountid=26879>

Sackett, G. (2015). Grace and Courtesy: Empowering Children, Liberating Adults.

*NAMTA Journal*, 40(1), 113-126. Retrieved from [http://eric.ed.gov/?](http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1077947)

[id=EJ1077947](http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1077947)

Siemers, E. E. (2006). Children's aggression at recess: Examining the relationship

between the playground environment, aggressive behavior, and reports of worry.

*ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global*. Retrieved from [http://pearl.stkate.edu/](http://pearl.stkate.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/305291852?accountid=26879)

[login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/305291852?accountid=26879](http://search.proquest.com/docview/305291852?accountid=26879)

Somerton-Burkhardt, H. L., (2015). Creating A Normalized Montessori Classroom

(Unpublished master's thesis). *St. Catherine's University*. Retrieved from [http://](http://sophia.stkate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1118&context=maed)

[sophia.stkate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1118&context=maed](http://sophia.stkate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1118&context=maed)

Trussell, R. (2008). Classroom Universals to Prevent Problem Behaviors. *Intervention in*

*School and Clinic*, 43 (3), 179-185. Retrieved from [http://](http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/articles/31464819/classroom-universals-prevent-problem-behaviors)

[connection.ebscohost.com/c/articles/31464819/classroom-universals-prevent-problem-behaviors](http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/articles/31464819/classroom-universals-prevent-problem-behaviors)

Van Fleet, Stephanie M. (2015). Instilling Reverence for Montessori Materials Through

Rituals of Grace and Courtesy (Unpublished master's thesis). *St. Catherine's*

*University*. Retrieved from [http://sophia.stkate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?](http://sophia.stkate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1121&context=maed)

[article=1121&context=maed](http://sophia.stkate.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1121&context=maed)

Warren, K., Andersonbutcher, D. (2008). He Did It First! A Path Model of Interactions in the Aggressive Behaviors of Elementary School Boys During Three Successive Recess Periods. *Journal of School Violence*, 4 (1), 29-45. Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ842847>





## Appendix B

# Leadership Meeting Record

Date:  
Time Started:  
Time Ended:  
Number of Students in Meeting:

**Issue being Discussed:**

**Children's Ideas for Solutions:**

**Follow-Up Observations:**

## Appendix C

# Structured Play Observations

Date:  
Time Started:  
Time Ended:  
Number of Students Involved:

**Type of Structured Play Taught** (i.e. Tag, Hop Scotch, 'Mother May I!');

**Observation of Children's Response to Introduction of Game:**

**Observation of Children's Response after Playing of Game:**

**Observations If no Structured Play Implemented:**

**Appendix D**

Daily Observation Record of Aggressive Behavior

<p>Date: Start Time:      End Time:</p> <p># of Aggressive Behaviors:</p> <p># of Destructive Behaviors:</p> <p># of Peer Interventions:</p> <p>Observation Notes:</p>	<p>Date: Start Time:      End Time:</p> <p># of Aggressive Behaviors:</p> <p># of Destructive Behaviors:</p> <p># of Peer Interventions:</p> <p>Observation Notes:</p>	<p>Date: Start Time:      End Time:</p> <p># of Aggressive Behaviors:</p> <p># of Destructive Behaviors:</p> <p># of Peer Interventions:</p> <p>Observation Notes:</p>
<p>Date: Start Time:      End Time:</p> <p># of Aggressive Behaviors:</p> <p># of Destructive Behaviors:</p> <p># of Peer Interventions:</p> <p>Observation Notes:</p>	<p>Date: Start Time:      End Time:</p> <p># of Aggressive Behaviors:</p> <p># of Destructive Behaviors:</p> <p># of Peer Interventions:</p> <p>Observation Notes:</p>	<p>Date: Start Time:      End Time:</p> <p># of Aggressive Behaviors:</p> <p># of Destructive Behaviors:</p> <p># of Peer Interventions:</p> <p>Observation Notes:</p>