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EFFECTS OF CONNECTING RITUALS ON TANTRUMS AND CONFLICTS

The effects of connecting rituals on tantrums and physical conflicts

Submitted on May 12, 2018

in fulfillment of final requirements for the MAED degree

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Abstract

This study was conducted to determine if creating strong student-teacher relationships through a program called Conscious Discipline decreased the number of physical conflicts and tantrums, therefore increasing self-regulation, in an early childhood classroom. This study took place in an early childhood Montessori classroom. There were 25 participants, mixed genders, ages 2.5 to 6 years old. The researcher taught and practiced connecting rituals from the Conscious Discipline program every day during the normal large group time. The researcher collected data by using tally marks to record every time a physical conflict, individual tantrum, or connecting ritual without adult encouragement took place, for a week before and a week after the intervention. The researcher also conducted interviews with each of the children before and after the intervention to determine if the connecting rituals created stronger relationships and feelings of safety in the classroom. The study determined that the results were not statistically significant, but the number of conflicts and tantrums decreased, and the relationship between the researcher and the students developed more fully and the feelings of safety increased. The data showed that further research is needed to examine if the length of conflicts and tantrums decrease with stronger student-teacher relationships.

Keywords: Conscious Discipline, self-regulation, tantrums, physical conflicts, student-teacher relationships

Self-regulation is the ability to control one's emotions and actions. Self-regulation comes from the capacity and the desire to inhibit impulses. A person employs self-regulation because of societal expectations, situational context, or a need to constrain behavior, feelings, or actions. Children are working on developing self-regulation at a young age. Self-regulation first comes in the form of emotions and actions, as young children begin to regulate getting their needs met, including their emotional responses. Emotional responses could be crying to signify hunger, saying whatever comes to mind, or even hitting when angry. Self-regulation comes to fruition when the child is on the normal path of development, although the child does not thoroughly learn to self-regulate until early adulthood. Self-regulation comes easier and sooner when the child is allowed to practice his or her skills in a safe environment. The child, then, must feel safe to exercise inhibiting impulses. If the child sees his or her peers hitting other children or adults when angry, the child does not feel safe and also comes to learn that hitting is okay. For any society to function gracefully and with peace, all members must be able to regulate themselves. To feel safe and secure in an environment, the child must trust the adult caretakers to set clear boundaries and limits and show love toward the child. Thus, the adult and the child must build a trusting, loving relationship so the child may learn to self-regulate.

In the society of the Children's House Montessori environment (a classroom for ages 2.5 to 6 years old), children are learning self-regulation skills. As young children come into the environment for the first time, they become a part of a community with more members than they have seen before. There are around 30 children in the Children's House where this study took place. The more substantial number of children provides more opportunities for them to develop self-regulatory skills, such as deep breathing techniques, walking away or ignoring tough situations, or merely using kind words with peers. On the other hand, these opportunities also

allow for conditions that may exacerbate a child's feeling of insecurity. For example, if a child gets into a verbal conflict with a peer, either child may not be able to inhibit a desire to hit or push the other child. That situation, in turn, would disturb both children's sense of security and safety in the classroom. Children at this age are learning what words to use in social situations, and how to navigate society in general. Explicit teaching of self-regulation skills is necessary for this kind of environment. The adults must give exact wording for children to use when upset, teach and practice deep breathing, and create a healthy relationship with each child. Strong student-teacher relationships come when the adult proves to the children that he or she loves and cares for them and can maintain safety in the classroom. The Conscious Discipline program provides a framework for teachers to create strong relationships with their students, and also to develop a sense of security in the classroom. Conscious Discipline encourages teachers to have fun with students to support relationship-building.

For this research project, the hypothesis is that the number of tantrums children in the environment have (difficulty self-calming in times of upset or conflict) will decrease when self-regulation skills and connecting rituals are taught through Conscious Discipline. Tantrums and physical conflicts disturb the classroom environment—decreasing focus, the feeling of safety, and the security of social interactions. An essential need for children in the classroom is to feel secure and safe. Behavior problems, conflicts, and tantrums will decrease when the children are feeling safe. This feeling of safety comes from a sense of security, with both clear boundaries and a sense of love from the adults.

This study took place in an urban charter Montessori school. There were 25 children included in the study, ages 2.5 to 6 years old. After a year of much adult turnover in the classroom, I started in the fall as a co-teacher. Many children were quickly jumping to hit or

push another child instead of trying to solve a problem using words. Many were also having long and loud tantrums and fits when being redirected by adults. The number of physical conflicts and individual tantrums was at an alarming number every day, especially at the beginning of the school year. I found it necessary to investigate a way to bring calmness and regulation to the classroom.

Literature Review

Starting at birth, emotions arise from a human need that is not being met. For example, an infant crying is often the expression of being hungry or cold. The infant's needs are met, then, when a caregiver responds by giving food or warmth. The infant then begins to understand that her needs are met through the expression of emotion. Thompson (2011) discussed the normal emotional development of a child after this understanding has been reached: "Later in the first year, new emotional capacities emerge with the growth of new forms of cognitive appraisal (e.g., fear in response to a visual cliff or a stranger) and means-ends understanding (e.g., anger in response to a blocked goal)" (Thompson, 2011, p. 55). As the child grows older and develops further, she begins to create a self-awareness of the connection between how her emotions arise, and what role they play in obtaining both her desires and her needs. Thompson further discussed the role that cultural and societal context plays in the development of emotions and emotion regulation: "Emotions are influenced by inferences of others' intentions and motives, social rules for emotional behavior in specific and general social situations, moral obligations, concerns with social standing and status, and the balancing of immediate with long-term social objectives" (2011, p. 55-6).

Raver's definition of self-regulation is: "the primarily volitional regulation of attention, emotion, and executive functions for the purposes of goal-directed actions" (2012, p. 682).

Ayoub, Malleton, and Mastergeorge (2011) wrote about the development of self-regulatory skills in at-risk children. Their research found that parental stress and socioeconomic status affect the way children are able to develop self-regulatory skills. They discussed the definition of socioeconomic status: “While there is no single definition of SES, there is wide agreement that income, parental education, and occupation are each associated with cognitive, language, and social skill performance and best represent SES” (Ayoub et al., 2011, p. 585). Raver discussed the consequences that the widening income gap is having in not only the academic achievement in children, but also the lack of self-regulation skills and thus behavior challenges (2012). Raver recognized the importance of helping low-income children develop these self-regulatory skills to create both higher academic achievement and fewer behavior challenges in an educational setting (2012).

A Montessori classroom environment may in and of itself be a significant intervention to help children develop self-regulation skills. Ervin, Wash, and Mecca (2010) found in a 3-year study comparing Montessori and non-Montessori classroom environments that the children who were enrolled in a Montessori classroom developed their self-regulation skills more than their counterparts in the non-Montessori classrooms throughout that 3-year time period. The authors also found that the children in Montessori classrooms were more able to solve conflict without the help of an adult and were more likely to show happiness or similar emotions.

A Montessori classroom environment may not, however, be the only intervention needed in the development of self-regulation skills in low-income and at-risk children. Sorell (2013) wrote about the need for effective classroom management skills. With effective classroom management skills, teachers increase both the time spent learning and academic achievement, and they decrease the time spent managing behavioral challenges (Sorell, 2013). It is necessary,

then, to supplement a Montessori classroom environment consisting of at-risk children who generally have lower rates of academic achievement and higher rates of behavior challenges with a classroom management structure. Sorell's dissertation explored a program called Conscious Discipline to support teachers in non-Montessori classrooms with increasing classroom management skills. She discussed some aspects of classroom management that are inherently incorporated into the Montessori philosophy. These include a positive classroom environment, the understanding of student behavior, meeting the needs of each individual student, and order/organization (Sorell, 2013). These aspects are all included in the Conscious Discipline program. The Conscious Discipline model is defined as: "A research-based comprehensive self-regulation program that combines social and emotional learning with discipline and guidance" (Conscious Discipline, 2014).

Montessori (1995) wrote about the extreme significance of helping children develop self-regulation skills at an early age. This is because children from the ages of birth to six are in a period of tremendous growth, when the child is working on adapting to her surroundings. By providing children with a prepared environment structured around the child's natural path of development, Dr. Montessori argued that children would develop according to the laws of nature, something she called "normalization" (1995, p. 204). Dr. Montessori wrote that it is the cohesion of the social unit that will contribute to the child developing her personality, as well as the ability to live harmoniously in society.

Dr. Montessori also wrote about how each child develops differently and has different barriers to normal development. She emphasized the importance of individualizing the presentations (individual or small group lessons). This is so that the child will return to the path of normal development (normalization) and will then exhibit such positive character traits as

joyful working, concentration, a developed will, a passion for social justice, and inner discipline (1995). All of these traits positively affect the way humans interact with each other, and thus affect the way the children live in community with each other in a Montessori classroom environment.

The Montessori philosophy helps children live in community with their peers and the adults in the classroom environment. Children are taught appropriate language to use in social situations, including in times of conflict. These lessons are called Grace and Courtesy lessons. Andrews conducted a study in 2017 in a Montessori early childhood environment about implementing Grace and Courtesy lessons specifically for introducing conflict resolution language. The goal was to have children use more appropriate language in working through conflicts, decrease the number of conflicts, and to have adults intervene less (2017).

D'Apolito (2016) established a connection between a Montessori early childhood classroom environment and the Conscious Discipline model in a research project. She looked at the effects that implementing Conscious Discipline caused on self-regulation and conflict resolution skills, particularly with eight four- or five-year-old boys. D'Apolito found that the implementation of Conscious Discipline positively impacted the boys' self-regulation and conflict resolution skills, so that they were able to be less disruptive to others, use classroom materials appropriately, express themselves with words instead of violence, and self-reflect after times of conflict.

The Montessori philosophy, emphasizing individualization and appropriate and positive character traits, is very similar to the Conscious Discipline model. The Montessori philosophy, however, focuses on many aspects of the whole child. Conscious Discipline, on the other hand, focuses very specifically on creating a positive school family and culture, conflict resolution, and

especially self-regulation. There is a lack of research on how Conscious Discipline and Montessori interact, focusing on both males and females of varying ages (3-6-year-olds).

Methodology

This study consisted of 25 participants, ages two and a half- to six-years-old. Each child's family received an assent form that would give them the opportunity to opt out of the study. No one chose to opt out. The assent form also gave the families information about the study and detailed the potential risks.

I began data collection before I started the intervention, allowing me to collect one week's worth of baseline data. I put five small pieces of tape on my shirt sleeves, each piece with a half hour written on it (9-9:30, 9:30-10, etc.), from 9:00 to 11:30. Each piece of tape had a space for conflicts, tantrums, and connecting rituals. I wrote down tally marks on these pieces of tape every time I noticed a physical conflict between students or a student and an adult, an individual tantrum, or a child practicing a connecting ritual without the encouragement of an adult. At the end of the morning work cycle every day during the baseline data collection week, I transferred the tally marks to a piece of paper where I could see each day's tally marks (See Appendix A). During the baseline data collection week, I also invited each child to an informal interview about the relationship between the children and myself, their feelings of safety in the classroom, and if they believe that I keep them safe (See Appendix B). I used pseudonyms for these interviews and throughout this paper to protect confidentiality. Some of the children, especially the younger ones, were not able to comprehend the questions completely, and so sometimes gave answers that did not make sense.

After the week of baseline data collection, I began my intervention. I did not collect tally mark data during the intervention period. My intervention involved introducing one connecting

ritual from the Conscious Discipline program every week for six weeks. At the end of the morning work cycle on the first day of the week, I had the children sit in a circle. This is normal practice for our classroom. I had arranged with my co-teacher prior to starting my action research project that I would be the one sitting with the children during this circle (collective) time every day during the intervention period. The children sit in assigned spots in the circle. After everyone was sitting, I explained that we would be practicing connecting rituals every day during the morning collective. I gave examples of connecting rituals from Conscious Discipline that I and the other adults have used before with some of the children, like “Little Mouse,” and “Twinkle Twinkle.” I then asked one child to help me practice in the middle of the circle.

The connecting ritual I chose for the first week is called “On Your Face.” It is as follows:

On your face you have a nose, and way down here you have ten toes. Two eyes that blink, a head to think. You have a chin, and very near you have two ears to help you hear. Arms go high and arms go low, a great big hug to say hello (Bailey, 2000, pp. 107-8).

There are motions that go with each of the body parts mentioned. For example, the person who is saying the words will gently touch the other person’s nose, then feet, then next to the eyes, then the forehead, then chin, then gently tug on the earlobes. After “to help you hear,” the person may choose to whisper a greeting or a kind phrase in the other’s ear, like “It’s so nice to see you today.” They move the other’s arms up, then down, then give a hug.

After the child helped me practice in front of the whole group two times, I invited another child to come up and practice with the first child. I kept saying the words while the children took turns practicing the motions with each other. I then had the two children sit back in their spots in collective, and we continued with the normal routine of the day. At the end of each day during the intervention period with the exception of cancelled school days or no-school days, I filled out a daily journal. The daily journal consisted of answering questions related to differences in the environment that day, notes about conflicts and tantrums, notes about self-regulation, and

anything else I might have to say about the day (ex: I didn't get a lot of sleep, we had a snow day the day before, etc.) (See Appendix C).

The next day I invited a different pair of children to practice the connecting ritual in front of the whole group. The third day, I had three pairs of children practice in front of the whole group. The fourth day we did not have time to practice because we celebrated a birthday at collective time instead, and the next day was a no-school day.

The next week, I introduced the next connecting ritual. I chose a shorter ritual, because I had written in my daily journal that the children were getting a little antsy and had a lot of energy. This one was called "Round and Round." It goes as follows: "Round and round the garden goes the teddy bear, one step, two step, tickle under there" (Bailey, 2000, p. 111). There are also motions that go with this ritual. One person holds the other's hand, palm up. The first person traces a circle on their partner's palm, then walks their fingers up their partner's arm, and finally tickles under their arms. The first day I introduced this ritual, I asked one child to help me show the others. I then had a few pairs of children practice in front of the whole group. The next day, I paired up each child with a person sitting next to them, and had the whole group practice a few times all at once. The same happened on the third day and the fourth day. On the fifth day, I proceeded as the second through fourth days, but also had the children practice "On Your Face" a few times with their neighbor.

The next week, I introduced another short ritual. However, my co-teacher started a leave of absence due to a concussion that week. She was out for the duration of the intervention period. During this time, there were various substitute teachers, but I remained the sole lead guide. The first day of this third week, I did not introduce a connecting ritual. Instead, we talked about the safety and cleanliness of the classroom. Safety in this instance meant we talked about what to do

when upset to calm down, instead of hitting others or throwing materials. The next day I introduced a connecting ritual called “Peter Peter, Pumpkin Eater.” It goes as follows: “Peter Peter pumpkin eater, had a friend he loved to greet. Treated her (him) with kind respect, and in the morning hugged her (his) neck” (Bailey, 2000, p. 62). The motions start out with a handshake during “had a friend he loved to greet,” then a gentle touch on the shoulder, and ends with a hug. The first day we did this ritual, I asked a child to practice with me to show the whole group, then had that child practice with another child. I then paired everyone up with a neighbor to practice “Round and Round.” The next day, I paired everyone up and we practiced “Peter Peter, Pumpkin Eater” a few times. We did the same the next two days. On the last day of the week, we added a few practices of “Round and Round.”

The next week, I chose another short ritual. It is called “Georgie Porgie.” It goes as follows: “Georgie Porgie, pudding and pie, gave a friend a big high five. With a friend he loved to play, a gift of a smile he gave each day” (Bailey, 2000, pp. 69-70). The motions start with the shoulders going up and down, using both hands to give a high five, wiggling the fingers of both hands in front of the face, and then pointing to a smile. The first day I paired everyone up and we practiced this ritual all at once. We also practiced “Peter Peter, Pumpkin Eater.” The next day was the same, except we practiced “On Your Face,” instead of “Peter Peter, Pumpkin Eater.” The next day we did not practice any rituals at collective because we talked about safety in the classroom and our classroom expectations. The first day of the week was a snow day, and the last was a conference day.

The first day of the fifth week, I introduced a ritual called “There Was a Little Mouse.” It goes as follows: “There was a little mouse, who had a little house, and she lived, up here” (Bailey, 2000, pp. 112-3). One person takes the other’s hand, palm up, and tickles their palm like

a little mouse during “There was a little mouse.” The first person closes the other’s palm, then walks the fingers up their arm, and then gently touches their nose. I introduced this by modeling it with one child two times. We also practiced “Georgie Porgie” with everyone this day. The next day, I paired everyone up and we practiced “There Was a Little Mouse,” and “Georgie Porgie.” We did the same on the third day. The fourth day, we practiced “There Was a Little Mouse.” We did the same on the fifth day.

The first day of the sixth and final week of the intervention, I introduced “You’ve Been Gone.” It goes as follows: “You’ve been gone, and you’ve been missed, here’s an angel for a hello kiss” (Bailey, 2000, pp. 136-137). This ritual is used when children have been gone from school. I did not introduce motions with this ritual, because the Conscious Discipline ritual used a stuffed animal, and we do not encourage stuffed animals and toys in the classroom. We said this ritual all together the first day. The second day, we did the same, then practiced “There Was a Little Mouse,” and “On Your Face,” in pairs. The third day, we did the same without “On Your Face.” The fourth day, we just practiced “You’ve Been Gone.” The fifth day, we practiced “You’ve Been Gone,” and then “Peter Peter, Pumpkin Eater.”

After six weeks of introducing and practicing connecting rituals almost every school day, and completing a daily journal, I again began to collect data for one week. I did not practice the connecting rituals at collective during this week. I again put pieces of tape on my arm with each half hour written on it. I tallied each time I saw physical conflicts between a child and another child or an adult, an individual tantrum, and a child practicing a connecting ritual without the encouragement of an adult. After the morning work cycle every day, I transferred the tally marks to a piece of paper (See Appendix D). I also asked each child to complete another interview with me. The interview questions were the same as during the baseline data collection week.

Data Analysis

This project set out to see if creating strong student-teacher relationships through Conscious Discipline connecting rituals helped to decrease the amount of conflicts and tantrums in the classroom, thus increasing self-regulation in the children. There were in fact changes in the number of conflicts and tantrums recorded in the classroom and self-regulation did increase. It was also noted that outside factors not previously considered contributed to these changes; there were some times when both children and adults were on edge, and thus conflicts and tantrums increased. Other factors included high periods of stress for both adults and children, one teacher being absent for a long period of time, and an inconsistent substitute teacher roster.

During the weeks before and after the intervention, I conducted interviews with all of the children (Appendix B). The interview questions related to their relationship with me, as well as safety in the classroom. I was only able to interview twenty-four out of the twenty-five children after the intervention, because one child left the school. In general, I received many more positive responses after the intervention than in the interviews before the intervention.

The first question was: “How does Ms. Julia feel about you?” During the week before the intervention, fifteen said they thought I felt positively about them, two responded negatively (this means that they thought I felt negatively towards them), five said they did not know how I felt, and three children’s answers did not make sense (this generally meant the child said something unrelated). After the intervention, sixteen children responded positively, one child responded negatively, two said they did not know how I felt, and five answers did not make sense. The responses to this question were very similar before and after the intervention. A high number of children said they thought I felt positively about them.

	Positive response	Negative response	Did not know	Answers did not make sense
Pre-intervention	15	2	5	3
Post-intervention	16	1	2	5

Table 1: Interview question 1 answers

The second question was: “Does Ms. Julia care about you? How do you know?” For this question before the intervention, twenty-one children responded that I cared about them. Of those twenty-one, eleven children’s following answers were positive, six said they did not know how they knew, and four answers did not make sense. An example of a positive statement is “Yes, because every time there’s a smile on your face I know” (Janiyah). Before the intervention, four students responded that I did not care about them. Of those four, one child’s following answer was positive: “No, because you help us” (Gloria). The other three children’s following answers did not make sense. After the intervention, all of the children responded positively. The number of positive responses was high before the intervention as well, but it is important to understand that all of the children felt I cared about them after the intervention.

	Positive answer			Negative answer	
	+ Positive statement	+ Did not know	+ Response did not make sense	+ Positive response	+ Response did not make sense
Pre-intervention	11	6	4	1	3
Post-intervention	14	3	7	0	0

Table 2: Interview question 2 answers

The third question was: “Do you care about Ms. Julia? How do you know?” Before the intervention, twenty-three children responded that they cared about me. Of those twenty-three, five responded with a positive statement, twelve children said they did not know how they knew,

and six children's answers did not make sense. Two students responded that they did not care about me. After the intervention, again, all of the children responded positively. Twelve children followed up with a positive statement. It is important that all of the children responded positively to this and the last question, because it suggests that I had a stronger relationship with the children after the intervention.

	Positive answer			Negative answer	
	+ Positive statement	+ Did not know	+ Response did not make sense	+ Response was positive	+ Did not know
Pre-intervention	5	12	6	1	1
Post-intervention	12	7	7	0	0

Table 3: Interview question 3 answers

The fourth question was: "Does Ms. Julia keep you safe? How do you know?" Before the intervention, all twenty-five children responded that I did keep them safe. After the intervention, again, all of the children responded positively. This suggests that the children already had been feeling safe with me.

	Positive answer			Negative answer	
	+ Positive statement	+ Did not know	+ Response did not make sense		
Pre-intervention	16	4	5	0	0
Post-intervention	17	6	1	0	0

Table 4: Interview question 4 answers

The fifth question was: "Do you keep yourself safe in the classroom? How?" Before the intervention, twenty-one children responded positively. An example of a positive statement is: "Yes, because I don't want to get hurt" (George). Three children responded negatively, and one child did not respond to the question. After the intervention, all of the children responded

positively. One child followed up with: “Because I take a deep breath and I don’t hurt kids” (Destiny), which is important to note, because of the focus of the large-group conversations I had with the children. We talked a lot about safety (not hurting anyone), and how to calm down appropriately when upset.

	Positive answer			Negative answer		No response
	+ Positive statement	+ Did not know	+ Response did not make sense	+ Positive statement	+ Response did not make sense	
Pre-intervention	14	3	4	2	1	1
Post-intervention	20	2	2	0	0	0

Table 5: Interview question 5 answers

The sixth question was: “Do you keep other children and the materials safe in the classroom? How?” Twenty-three children responded positively before the intervention. An example of a positive statement is: “So for the materials, I don’t let kids drop them or throw them or hit them, and for the kids I don’t let other kids hit other kids or kick or punch” (Faith). Again, after the intervention, twenty-three children responded positively.

	Positive answer			Negative answer	No response
	+ Positive statement	+ Did not know	+ Response did not make sense		
Pre-intervention	17	2	4	1	1
Post-intervention	18	4	1	1	0

Table 6: Interview question 6 answers

During my observations the week before the intervention, I recorded a total of 38 individual tantrums, 23 physical conflicts with other children, and 0 connecting rituals without adult encouragement. There was an average of 7.6 individual tantrums per day, and an average of 4.6 physical conflicts with other children per day. The most individual tantrums in a single

morning occurred on Thursday, with a total of 11. The most physical conflicts with other children in a single morning occurred on Tuesday. The most individual tantrums in a single half hour throughout the week occurred between 11:00 am and 11:30 am. The most physical conflicts with other children in a single half hour throughout the week occurred between 10:00 am and 10:30 am, with the same number occurring between 10:30 am and 11:00 am.

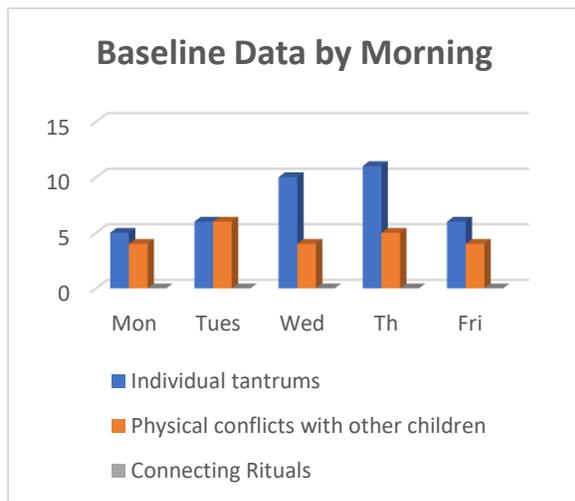


Figure 1: Baseline Data by Morning

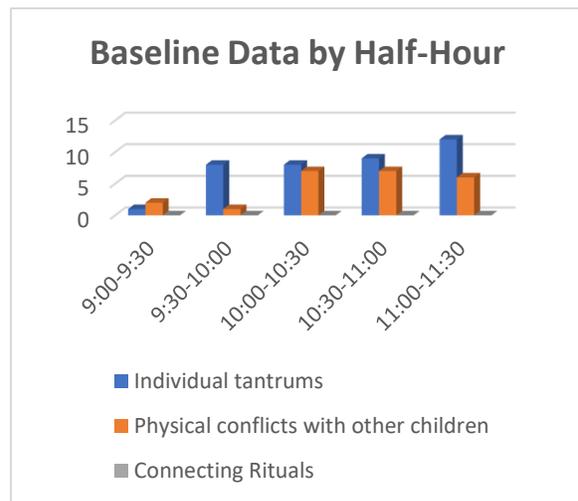


Figure 2: Baseline Data by Half-Hour

The week after the intervention period, I again collected data on the number of conflicts, tantrums, and connecting rituals without adult encouragement. The first day of this week I was in a car accident on the way to school, and so did not collect data that day. I recorded a total of 26 individual tantrums, 13 physical conflicts with other children, and 1 connecting ritual independent of adult encouragement. The number of tantrums and conflicts decreased from 38 and 23, respectively. There was an average of 6.5 tantrums per day, and 3.2 physical conflicts each day. This decreased from the data I recorded before the intervention: 7.6 average tantrums and 4.6 average conflicts. The highest number of tantrums in a single morning occurred on Wednesday, which was 10. The highest number of physical conflicts in a single morning

occurred on both Tuesday and Thursday, at 5. The highest number of individual tantrums in a single half hour throughout the week occurred between 9:30 and 10:30. The highest number of physical conflicts with other children in a single half hour throughout the week also occurred between 9:30 and 10:30. The one connecting ritual without adult encouragement that I recorded occurred on Friday. The number of individual tantrums and physical conflicts decreased after the intervention period. This suggests that the connecting rituals helped to build stronger relationships between me and the children, and that this helped to increase self-regulation skills in the classroom.

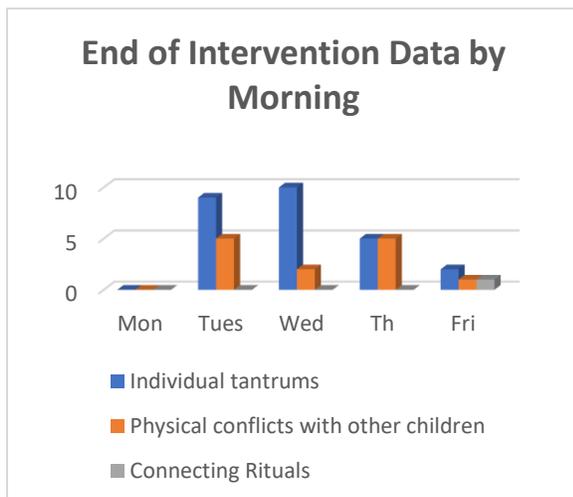


Figure 3: End of Intervention Data by Morning

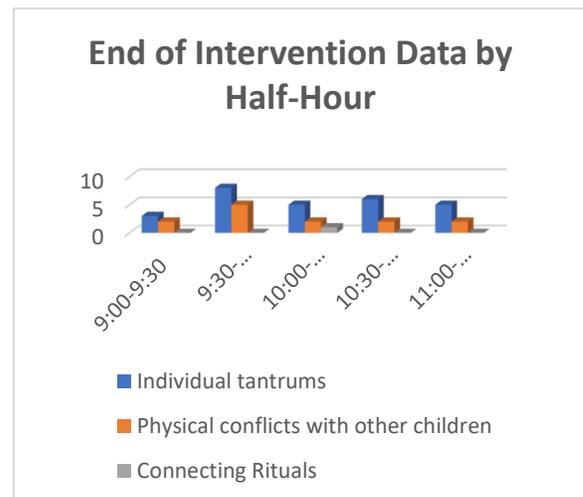


Figure 4: End of Intervention Data by Half-Hour

The daily journals showed that the children displayed less self-regulation on days when the adults (mostly me) were feeling stressed or tired, or an adult was absent and thus a different, less familiar, adult was in the room. In the beginning of the intervention period, there were a few days when it was too cold to play outside. This, too, affected the number of tantrums and conflicts in the classroom, suggesting that large motor play is also important for a normalized classroom. On the very first day of the connecting rituals, the children were very eager to practice with each other and with me. The children were able to go outside for recess on the

second and third days of the intervention, and the journal for that day said that there were less tantrums and conflicts those days. On the fourth day, we did not practice connecting rituals at collective, but celebrated a birthday instead. I saw two children practice the connecting ritual I taught that week (“On Your Face”) with each other.

The next week, I practiced “On Your Face” with several children during the morning work cycle. There was a line of children waiting to practice with me at one point. One day during the second week showed that the adults were tired. There were a lot of tantrums and conflicts that day. On another day during the second week, my co-teacher was out in the afternoon, as well as a support staff member. The children were in a lot of conflicts with each other during recess that day, suggesting that staffing changes also increase the number of conflicts.

The first day of the third week, my co-teacher was out, and there were many conflicts and tantrums. I wrote that it was a hard day for our classroom. My co-teacher was out for the rest of the intervention period. The second day of this week, there were many screaming tantrums and physical conflicts. On the third day, we had a large group conversation about what to do if someone hurts you. I noticed that a lot of children would hit or push another child if that child accidentally hurt them. The fifth day showed that there was a lot of fighting at recess, but self-regulation was higher overall. This suggests that talking with the children about safety and what to do in different situations will help the children navigate difficult times.

The fourth week started with a snow day. The day after that, there were not that many conflicts, but a few big tantrums. There were a lot of children absent that day. The next day followed the same pattern—not too many conflicts and tantrums. I believe that the children started to adapt to my co-teacher being gone for an extended period of time.

The fifth week started after Daylight Saving's Time and a long weekend after a professional development day (no school for the children) the Friday before. The children were calm, and I wrote that I was calm as well. The second day of the week was the same. The third day of the week was National Walk-Out Day, and we went to the park after a short work cycle in the morning. The children had a hard time with the switch in the schedule, and there were many conflicts and tantrums before we left. One child was not following directions on the walk to the park and had to stay behind with her para. The next day had fewer conflicts and tantrums. The last day of the week was louder, with more conflicts and bigger tantrums. One of the support staff was out this day.

The sixth and final week of the intervention started with an average level of self-regulation. There were not a lot of tantrums and conflicts this day. The second day of this week was calmer, with less conflicts and tantrums. However, the third day of the week was louder and I wrote that there was more hitting this day. The conflicts and tantrums increased each day this week. This was the week before spring break, and the week of my car accident, both providing sources of stress for both adults and children.

The daily journals helped me to understand some patterns of the increasing and decreasing number of conflicts and tantrums in the classroom. For the most part, conflicts and tantrums decreased when we had a large-group conversation about safety and how to navigate difficult situations. When the adults were tired, or there was a staffing change, I wrote down that there were more conflicts and tantrums in the classroom. This suggests that the adults play a large role in how the children self-regulate.

The data suggests that implementing the Conscious Discipline connecting rituals decreased the number of conflicts and tantrums in the classroom. The children also seemed to

like practicing the rituals with adults and with each other. In times of high stress, such as right after a conflict or tantrum, one child in particular regularly asked for a connecting ritual from adults. Some of the older children, wanting to help other children calm themselves down, initiated connecting rituals with others.

The interview data also suggests that the connecting rituals helped build a stronger relationship with me, and a better understanding of each child's role in the safety of the classroom. There were more positive responses to the questions about my relationship with them at the end of the intervention. The children were also able to better articulate how they felt about me. The older children definitely understood more about what I was asking them than the younger children. This is a normal factor of asking the same questions of different aged children. The younger children for the most part could answer positively to the questions but could not generally articulate how or why they felt that way, as the older children could. This does not necessarily mean that the younger children felt differently about their relationship with me, or about the safety in the classroom. Their responses could be attributed to a lack of vocabulary to explain why they felt that way. Again, this is normal.

The children generally articulated stronger feelings about safety in the classroom at the end of the intervention period. I believe this had to do with the fact that I conducted many large group discussions about safety in the classroom during this period. Again, I believe this contributed to the decreased number of conflicts and tantrums in the classroom.

Action Plan

This study set out to determine if using connecting rituals from Conscious Discipline created strong student-teacher relationships and if those relationships helped create stronger levels of self-regulation in the classroom. Higher levels of self-regulation mean that there are less

conflicts and tantrums in the classroom. The connecting rituals consisted of short, playful songs or word plays that involved eye contact, physical touch (like hand-clapping), being present in the moment, and fun. The children generally did not practice the connecting rituals without adult encouragement during the data collection periods, but my daily journals recorded some of the children asking either another child or an adult to go through a ritual with them. This suggests that the children enjoyed the connecting rituals, and some understood when to use them in order to self-regulate.

Although the number of conflicts and tantrums did not significantly decrease after the intervention, there were many outside factors contributing to an unsettled classroom. These factors include having my co-teacher out of the classroom for an extended period of time for medical leave, having multiple substitute teachers during that time, and data collection the week before spring break, which was also a period of high stress for me. The interviews I conducted with the children before and after the intervention gave me a sense of how they interpreted my relationship with them, as well as how they perceived safety in the classroom. Although it was not a part of my intervention, I talked a lot about safety in the classroom with all of the children during the intervention period as a normal educational practice. This means we talked about how to calm down when upset instead of hurting others, throwing materials, or running out of the classroom. Their answers to my interview questions reflected the increased amount of safety conversations as the children generally spoke more clearly about what it means to be safe in the classroom, and how they, as individuals, could help increase safety. Their answers to the interview questions will help me as a teacher to understand how to talk to the children about safety, and how to help them understand that the classroom is a community to which each child contributes greatly.

The study revealed just how important adult stability is in the classroom. Even though the instability in the classroom (a teacher being gone for a long period of time) could not be helped, it definitely created higher levels of stress among the adults and the children. I believe that this is why creating strong relationships with multiple adults at school is so important. During periods of stress, the children can rely on the relationships that have already been built and are able to trust adults to keep them safe and secure. This will help the children navigate periods of high stress. I will definitely continue to think about how to create strong relationships with the children in my classroom. I will continue to *bring the children in*, meaning I will keep using the connecting rituals to build on the relationships I already have with each of the children. This will help the children develop higher levels of self-regulation and decrease the number of conflicts and tantrums.

Although a classroom completely devoid of conflicts and tantrums is not plausible, I would like to have looked at how long individual conflicts and tantrums last. As mentioned above, the number of conflicts and tantrums did not significantly decrease over the intervention period, but my daily journals reported that both the conflicts and tantrums did not seem to take up as much time as they had in the beginning of the intervention. This tells me that the children were in the process of developing self-regulation skills, and the connecting rituals helped them do that. However, I did not record data on how long each conflict and tantrum lasted. Further research is needed, then, on the time it takes for each conflict and tantrum to play out.

I will continue in my practice as a teacher to conduct these conversations, as it seems to help the children perceive how they can better impact safety in the classroom. I believe further research is needed on how these conversations impact the children's feelings of safety, as well as the number of conflicts and tantrums in the classroom.

I will also continue to practice the connecting rituals with the children on a daily basis. Now that the children in my classroom have a breadth of knowledge of connecting rituals, it will be easier to spontaneously practice the rituals individually with the students during the school day.

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EFFECTS OF CONNECTING RITUALS ON TANTRUMS AND CONFLICTS

Appendix A

Tally Marks

Baseline Data Collection

From tape on arm

I=individual tantrums OC=physical conflicts with other children CR=connecting rituals

	9:00-9:30	9:30-10:00	10:00-10:30	10:30-11:00	11:00-11:30
2/5	I OC CR	I OC CR	I OC CR	I OC CR	I OC CR
2/6	I OC CR	I OC CR	I OC CR	I OC CR	I OC CR
2/7	I OC CR	I OC CR	I OC CR	I OC CR	I OC CR
2/8	I OC CR	I OC CR	I OC CR	I OC CR	I OC CR
2/9	I OC CR	I OC CR	I OC CR	I OC CR	I OC CR

EFFECT OF CONNECTING RITUALS ON TANTRUMS AND CONFLICTS

Appendix B

Interviews

Pre- or post-? (Circle one)

Informative script: "I'm going to ask you some questions about how we get along and stay safe in the classroom. I want you to tell me how we feel about each other, and if you help keep our classroom safe."

1. How does Ms. Julia feel about you?
2. Does Ms. Julia care about you? How do you know?
3. Do you care about Ms. Julia? How do you know?
4. Does Ms. Julia keep you safe? How do you know?
5. Do you keep yourself safe in the classroom? How?
6. Do you keep other children and the materials safe in the classroom? How?

EFFECT OF CONNECTING RITUALS ON TANTRUMS AND CONFLICTS

Appendix C

Daily Journal

Date:

Differences in environment:

How was the teaching of connecting rituals during collective?

Notes about conflicts/tantrums:

Notes about self-regulation:

Other thoughts about today:

EFFECT OF CONNECTING RITUALS ON TANTRUMS AND CONFLICTS

Appendix D

Tally Marks

End of Research Data Collection

I=individual tantrums OC=physical conflicts with other children CR=connecting rituals

	9:00-9:30	9:30-10:00	10:00-10:30	10:30-11:00	11:00-11:30
3/12	I	I	I	I	I
	OC	OC	OC	OC	OC
	CR	CR	CR	CR	CR
3/13	I	I	I	I	I
	OC	OC	OC	OC	OC
	CR	CR	CR	CR	CR
3/14	I	I	I	I	I
	OC	OC	OC	OC	OC
	CR	CR	CR	CR	CR
3/15	I	I	I	I	I
	OC	OC	OC	OC	OC
	CR	CR	CR	CR	CR
3/16	I	I	I	I	I
	OC	OC	OC	OC	OC
	CR	CR	CR	CR	CR