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The Effects of Connecting Rituals on Verbal Conflicts in the Montessori Preschool Classroom

Dave Budish

St. Catherine University

St. Paul, Minnesota

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### Abstract

The purpose of this action research project was to see if a program through Conscious Discipline called Connecting Rituals would decrease the number of verbal conflicts in a Montessori preschool classroom. Conscious Discipline is a non-punitive, non-adversarial behavior program that is backed by current brain science. One aspect of the Conscious Discipline model is Connecting Rituals. Connecting Rituals are short games, nursery rhymes, and finger plays that adults and children do together in large or small groups. The Connecting Rituals would increase self-regulation and social skills in a Montessori preschool classroom. The study was conducted in a Montessori preschool classroom at a small Montessori school in the Midwestern United States with 23 preschool children, 2.5-6 years old children. Data was collected over a 4 week period using tally marks to record the number of conflicts, a large group discussion, a teacher daily journal and a post-connecting ritual form. Every day the researcher did a Connecting Ritual at the large group gathering with all the children before lunch and at least one Connecting Ritual with each child during the morning work time over a two week period. The study found that the Connecting Rituals did decrease the number of verbal conflicts, but the results were not significant. Further study is needed to understand the long term effects of using Connecting Rituals in the classroom.

*Keywords:* Self-regulation, Connecting Rituals, Conscious Discipline, normalization, conflict

I began my Montessori journey as an educator in May 2019, just after graduation. I felt so fortunate that I was able to get a job with a credible private Montessori school in the suburbs of Minneapolis. I jumped in right away with no turning back. Learning my new classroom's culture and strengths and weaknesses was my priority. As the weeks went on, I could not help but notice the number of arguments children had on a daily basis. It was not just two or three children with these verbal conflicts. It was around ten different children arguing about snack time, stepping on work, who was going to use the work next, who was going to play with who at recess, etc. Sometimes the verbal conflicts quickly fizzled out, and other times it ended with hurt feelings on both sides. At night I would wonder how we, as adults, could help children minimize the negative verbal conflicts. Verbal conflicts are a part of life that children need to learn how to deal with in a healthy way.

Our problem of having harmful verbal conflicts was apparent, and now we needed a solution. I had come to learn about a behavior intervention program called Conscious Discipline through a colleague of mine. Conscious Discipline is a non-punitive, non-adversarial behavior program that is backed by current brain science. One aspect of the Conscious Discipline model is Connecting Rituals. Connecting Rituals are short games, nursery rhymes, and finger plays that adults and children do together in large or small groups. Proximity, physical interaction, and teamwork allow children to have a sense of security, belonging, and safety. These elements are the foundation for a child to feel free and safe enough to explore their environment and increase their academic and social potential. These rituals can be done in small groups or large group settings. I wondered if the connection, sense of belonging and relationships fostered by performing these rituals consistently would pave the way to fewer verbal conflicts.

### **Theoretical Framework**

During the early 20th Century, it was commonplace to think that children were compulsive, impatient, loud, naughty, etc. Dr. Montessori believed and observed otherwise. She observed that a truly normal child has self-discipline, sympathy for others, and enjoys work and nature. In the context of human development, normalization is the optimal functioning of the human being, which corresponds to the laws of growth. It is living life the way it was meant to be lived. In the first preschool, or children's house, started by Dr. Montessori in 1907, she initially used the term 'conversion' rather than the standard term normalization used today. When she coined this term 'normalization' it flipped common held beliefs about children's social and emotional abilities on its head. This was especially alarming since her first preschool, or Children's House, using her method was in a slum with orphans and other impoverished children. Dr. Montessori observed children get to this point by having all of their developmental needs met. She called this process, which revealed the child's true nature, "normalization." Normalization occurs in an environment that meets these developmental and psychological needs. Children need freedom of choice, movement, and stimulating work. When this happens, children become engaged in their work. Instead of this work being burdensome and tiring, children become refreshed. Dr. Montessori stated that normalization is the single most important result of her work as a physician and educator of more than 40 years researching and studying the field of education.

The process of normalization is something that each child must go through on their own will power, only passively guided by an adult. Normalization is a process that is both internal and external, both of which are closely connected. It is internal because it is change happening from within each child. However, this internal change happens only when the children interact

externally with stimuli in their environment i.e., activities from within the environment and other children and adults.

It is the adult's job to provide a variety of activities that meet the developmental needs of the children. The adult also provides the children freedom to move within the environment. This means the children may use an activity any appropriate place in the room, as long as they want, as long they are using the material properly. The adult is also responsible for giving children the freedom to interact with their peers. Lastly, the adult provides boundaries and limits for how the children are allowed to behave and use the materials. The adult is a passive observer while the children are working and only steps in when necessary, for the benefit of the children. The adult positively redirects, then steps away and observes.

Dr. Montessori breaks the normalization process in four different stages. A child in the first stage of normalization shows typical problem behaviors. Their movements are often impulsive and uncoordinated, and they exhibit negative language and aggressive actions such as yelling, push, kicking, etc. The child will usually need lots of adult guidance in finding an enriching activity to concentrate on. Children in this stage will progress to the next stage of normalization if they are given opportunities to practice making choices like choosing work they are interested in, and choosing where they would like to sit. Children in this first stage also receive many lessons and experiences with adults and other children on how we properly treat, act, and touch others appropriately. The next stage of normalization is characterized by a rare ability to make choices of work. Children will revert to the first stages of normalization at times but less frequently. They still show signs of restlessness and compulsion from time to time. The third stage is defined by a child who will regularly make independent work choices. This child is caring for the environment and those around them while deviating from the typical path of

development infrequently. The fourth stage of normalization displays a child who exhibits independent behavior. This child can choose challenging work for themselves, are self-motivated, and more willing to help others.

According to Montessori's theory of normalization, verbal conflicts and other problem behaviors are caused by children having one or more of their developmental needs not being met. Perhaps a child is hungry, tired, sick, missing their family, or not being academically, socially, or emotionally stimulated in their environment. Lastly, maybe the child doesn't have the right words during an altercation with a friend or classmate. To function optimally, the children in my environment need to be shown love and positive ways to connect with other adults and children. It will be vital for the children in the first and second stage of normalization to experience these positive adult interactions. Part of the learning environment children are in, includes the adult(s). Children need positive adult interactions as their base to begin the process of normalization. First positive adult interactions, then peer interactions, then meaningful individual work. Through the lens of normalization, I plan on doing bonding activities that display love, care, and kindness through activities called Connecting Rituals.

The purpose of this action research study is to examine the effects of Connecting Rituals on verbal conflicts of an affluent private AMI certified Montessori preschool classroom in the Midwest in 2019.

## **Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this action research project is to study the effects of Conscious Discipline's Connecting Rituals on the frequency of harmful verbal conflicts in the Montessori

primary classroom. This section reviews the scholarly work that has been done in the areas self-regulation, normalization, and non-punitive non-adversarial self-regulation methods, such as the Conscious Discipline approach. Conscious Discipline emphasizes positive social development skills through games, finger plays, and songs with adults and peers.

### **Self-Regulation**

Social cognitive psychologist Albert Bandura defines self-regulation as a child's ability to self-educate, self-direct, regulate emotions, and learn to think about what they are learning. Excellent skills in self-regulation have been found to increase academic achievement as well. By the time children reach kindergarten, many teachers have agreed that skills such as paying attention, following directions, and independent work are essential to academic success (Morrison, Ponitz, McClelland, 2010). Better behavioral regulation in the preschool years has shown to produce good results in mathematical function, literacy, and the development of vocabulary in the years following kindergarten (McClelland, Cameron, Connor, et al., 2007). Children who have low self-regulation skills in the early years in life are at a higher risk for failure later on in their schooling. Self-Regulation is a lifelong skill that is crucial to the success of young children in school.

Self-regulation is a crucial skill to hone in life because self-regulation skills affect academic achievement, peer relationships, and overall quality of life. (Casey, et al., 2013).

A Montessori environment is already uniquely suited to teaching children these essential skills. Erwin, Walsh, and Mecca (2010) conducted a three-year study looking at children's self-regulation abilities in Montessori versus non-Montessori classrooms. The study concluded that children in Montessori settings had better skills independently solving conflicts with their peers,

reported feeling more content, and were more enthusiastic and curious learners, among other results. Even within the Montessori classroom, implementing programs designed to develop self-regulation is able to further improve this skill. A study by Chavez (2014) found that after she implemented the Conscious Discipline program, a program emphasizing self-regulation in her Montessori preschool classroom, children's self-regulation abilities increased. The study found that children felt safer, and the teacher in the classroom was able to teach more effectively, and aggressive behaviors decreased. The Conscious Discipline model is one that can aid children in the development of these skills.

### **Conscious Discipline**

Conscious Discipline is an emotional intelligence program designed to help children and adults respond to negative situations in positive and thoughtful ways rather than reactive ways (Bailey, 2015). It is a shift from a compliance based form of discipline, to a model that is relationship based. Conscious Discipline is not about making children or adults change their behavior, but rather, it is about changing behavior from within the individual. In Conscious Discipline, positive relationships guide desired behavior rather than following strict rules and being reprimanded when behavioral expectations are not met. Conscious Discipline also doesn't seek to avoid conflict. Traditionally the word conflict is fraught with hurtful words, yelling, and the silent treatment. Conscious Discipline helps individuals understand that conflict can be an opportunity for growth. It is an internal rewards based discipline model. Internal rewards mean that motivation to change behavior comes from the individual's true desire to change.

## Connecting Rituals

One aspect of Conscious Discipline is Connecting Rituals. Connecting Rituals are games, finger plays, and nursery rhymes led by adults to encourage cooperation and care of others. They are designed for children from infancy to eight years old. The games and activities often involve physical touch and positive language which expose children to social interactions and provide a base for other social and communication skills. The rituals involve practicing eye contact and noticing the facial expressions of others. The Connecting Rituals also increase learning potential and effectiveness through touch. Bailey (2010 ) states, “Touch is the only sense we can’t live without.”

Take the activity *Mary, Mary, Extraordinary* as an example. The rhyme goes like this: Mary, Mary, extraordinary, how do your fingers grow? With fingernails and no tails, and a high five to go. The adult and child face each other. The adult and child both make fists that are touching each other’s. Start by saying together, “Mary, Mary, extraordinary, how do your fingers grow?” When you say ‘grow’ you and the child open the palms of the hands so your palms are touching each other’s. On “With fingers,” you both wiggle your fingers together, “and no tails” you both wiggle your behinds. Lastly, when you say, “And a high five to go,” you give an enthusiastic high five.

A major study done by Rain and Brehem Consulting Group (2018) looked at the effects of the program implemented in 24 preschool/elementary schools across three states. The control groups were the schools that did not use the Conscious Discipline model. Rain and Brehem studied aspects such as behavior management, the impact of structures and rituals and routines, impact on social-emotional personal development, etc. The report found that the learning

environments which used the Conscious Discipline model had a significant positive difference in social-emotional development, social-emotional school readiness, and a substantial decrease in physical aggression over seven months. Likewise, Sorrell (2013) found similar results when nine teachers from urban school districts used Conscious Discipline in their kindergarten through third grade classrooms. All nine of the teachers found that there were positive behavior changes in their room, and consequently found that they had more instruction time.

### **Intrinsic Motivation**

It is easy to contrast Conscious Discipline to traditional models of classroom behavioral management. Often these environments are punishment and reward-based. Put simply, the teacher will offer rewards like candy or verbal praise for good behavior (Harrop & Williams 2007). If there is negative behavior, the teacher takes privileges or rewards away. Even in 1949, Dr. Maria Montessori wrote in her book, *The Absorbent Mind*, that rewards and punishment are not necessary because oftentimes adults assume that children cannot guide themselves. She states that rewards and punishments and verbal abuse and does not change their behavior (Montessori, 2018). Children need meaningful work and positive relationships with their peers and teachers (Montessori, 2018). Rubin (2012) claimed it is common for children to be forced to passively comply with the education system in place. Intrinsic motivation however, has been shown to have longer-lasting effects in general behavior and motivation outside of the classroom walls (Dweck, 2007; Kohn, 2006). If school is meant to prepare children for life outside of the classroom walls, helping children gain intrinsic motivation should be at the forefront of an educator's mind.

## **Normalization**

Dr. Montessori's (2018) process of normalization emphasizes intrinsic motivation and positive relationship building with children and adults, like the Connecting Ritual games and activities. Children who display challenging behaviors have what she called “deviations,” or negative behaviors associated with one or more developmental or emotional needs not being met. Montessori believed the best way to help children get back on a healthy developmental path is to give children work that is meaningful and challenging them. Practical life activities are an essential part of the physical and psychological aspects of an authentic Montessori environment. Practical life activities include grace and courtesy lessons, or relationship-building activities similar to the Connecting Rituals. In a study done by Linebarger (2016), she studied the effects practical life activities had on normalization. She found that when practical life activities were an active part of her environment, children were more engaged in their work, worked more independently, and felt safer in the classroom. This sounds similar to the results of a child who can self-regulate.

Dr. Montessori's first Montessori preschool was in a slum in San Lorenzo, Italy. Crime and unemployment were high and illiteracy rates were at 75% (Bosworth, 1983). She started with practical life activities as a cornerstone to other works in writing, reading and math. Through practical life activities, purposeful work, and positive relationship building exercises, the children's social and emotional needs were met. As a result, the children from these underprivileged backgrounds were then able to excel at reading and writing as well because these basic needs were met through practical life activities.

A longitudinal study from an impoverished community in Hartford, Connecticut yielded positive results similar to Montessori's first preschool in 1907. The study lasted 3 years and consisted of 140 children, 70 children from two Montessori preschools, and 70 from a traditional preschool. The children were tested four times over three years on various social, emotional, and academic measures. The study found that the children at the Montessori schools had higher academic achievement and better social skills than the children from the traditional preschool. Lillard, et al (2017) also found that the academic achievement gap was smaller when compared to traditional preschool classrooms consisting of children from higher income families.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, results from multiple studies have shown that children who can regulate their emotions have greater academic success; they can concentrate on work, and execute tasks when directed. Conscious Discipline is one such method that can aid in this process. Learning environments that incorporated these activities had decreased physical aggression and social, emotional development and academic readiness, to name a few. Normalization is what Dr. Montessori gave the name to the process of aiding children's social and emotional development. Linebarger (2016) concluded that practical life activities supported social-emotional development as well. This highlights some of the research that has been done. But where do we go from here? Is this field exhausted from research? I have found that there is a gap in the field of self-regulation and social development in the field of early childhood education. What if there was a study done using the Connecting Rituals effects on verbal conflicts in the classroom? Previously it has been stated that the Conscious Discipline method had produced positive social and emotional and educational results. This is broad. I want to narrow the search. What about

Conscious Discipline's Connecting Rituals in the context of a Montessori environment with verbal conflicts?

## **Methodology**

### **Introduction**

The study collects data regarding negative verbal conflicts in a private Montessori preschool room, located in an upper middle class community of suburban Minneapolis, Minnesota in the year 2020. The school has three preschool rooms, two toddler rooms, and one infant room. The study took place in a classroom of 23 children with ages ranging from 33 months old to six years old. The 23 children in my room were the participants in the study. By adding Connecting Rituals into the morning work time and our large group gathering time, I hoped to reduce the number of negative verbal conflicts and increase the number of positive verbal conflicts between the children. The Connecting Rituals was the vehicle to help children increase their self-regulation skills and aid children in developing positive social interactions with myself and other children in the classroom. By incorporating the Connecting Rituals, I hoped to help children feel safe and secure in the classroom and help children on a healthy path of social development.

The study conducted lasted four total weeks. During the first week I recorded the number of verbal conflicts using tally marks. The second and third week I performed the Connecting Rituals during the morning work time and the large group gathering before lunch. The last week I again tallied the number of verbal conflicts. I used both qualitative and quantitative data tools to record the number of verbal conflicts that happened during the morning work time from 9 am

to 11:30 am. I used a set of four data collection tools consisting of a tally mark sheet, a guided conversation form, post connecting ritual form and a teacher daily journal.

### **Large Group Activity (Appendix A)**

On the first day of data collection I had a conversation with the children at our large group gathering before lunch about feeling safe in the room, children in the room being nice and helpful, positive words we use, etc. I first asked, “Do you like being at school?” There were a variety of different answers and asked the children why they liked being at school. Then I asked, “Do you feel safe being at school?” There was again a variety of answers and I asked for some of the older children to provide specific examples of how they feel safe at schools. I then prompted the questions, “Are other children in the room nice? Are they mean?” Again I had some children provide examples of what it looked like when someone in the room was nice. Lastly, I had the children form into groups of three or four, with at least one older child in each group. I then asked the groups to think about some positive words we can use with our classmates when we are upset. After a minute or two we talked about those words and what they mean.

During the conversation I kept mental notes on the main points that children pointed out. I had the assistant at the gathering do the same. I filled out the questions based on what I gathered. I had the assistant do the same for more specific record keeping. At the end of the day we compared our notes. I found this conversation was best as an organic conversation. The conversation may go in slightly different directions based on the needs of the specific classroom. The point of this conversation was to get children thinking about how they felt in the room when children were safe and nice, versus unsafe and mean.

**Tally Marks (Appendix B)**

During the first week of data collection nothing in the environment changed. I kept everything the same because this was the baseline data before any kind of intervention was done. Data was collected only during the morning work time because this was when all of the children were in the classroom working. I was the only adult collecting data during this first week and beyond. The Tally Marks sheet was used for pre and post-intervention data collection, which was week 1 and week 4 of my study.

Data collection started at 9 am and went until 11:30, the end of the work time. At my school our work time officially starts at 8:45. Since we have so many children that arrive late, I adjusted the time to start data collection at 9:00 am. When I did my study I kept this sheet with all the other teacher notes on a little desk to keep all aspects of the morning work time the same from the children's perspective.

There are five rows of data. Each day of data collection uses one row on the Tally Mark sheet. For each day of data collection I wrote down the date, attendance and external factors that may have impacted the number of verbal conflicts in the box furthest to the left on the worksheet. External factors are things like inclement weather, fire/tornado drills, or anything out of the ordinary that may skew results. The rest of the row for each day consists of five different boxes representing 30 minute time slots during the morning work time. The first time is 9:00-9:30, then 9:30-10:00, 10:00-10:30, 10:30-11:00, then 11:00-11:30. In each of the five boxes there is a VC and #CI. These acronyms mean Verbal Conflict and Children Involved. Whenever there is a verbal conflict, I put a tally mark next to VC in the appropriate box relative to the time of day. I then wrote a number next to #CI of how many children were involved in the particular

conflict. The Tally Mark sheet was also used for the post-intervention data collection (week 4). Week 1 and week 4 results were then compared to see if there was any difference in the number of verbal conflicts.

### **Post Connecting Ritual Form (Appendix C)**

After a week of collecting the baseline data I incorporated the Connecting Rituals in my classroom for two weeks. Each time I did a Connecting Ritual with an individual, small or large group I filled out a Post Connecting Ritual Form. I filled this form out after completing each ritual. I wrote down the name of the Connecting Ritual I completed with the initial of the child(ren) that performed the ritual with me. I then reflected on what went well during the ritual and what could have been changed in order to do it better next time in a few bullet points. Lastly, I observed the child(ren) to see if they exhibited any different behavior since completing the ritual. I reviewed these forms every couple of days to see if there was a pattern in my answers. It was important to observe children's behavior after a Connecting Ritual was performed to see if the child's behavior has changed.

### **Teacher Daily Journal (Appendix D)**

At the end of each day I filled out a Teacher Daily Journal at my house. The journal consisted of four prompts. I used my best judgment when it came to answering the prompts. The first prompt was just writing down general notes from the day. I did a few short bullet point answers. I then reflected on a scale of 1-10 how the class did at handling verbal conflicts. 1 was bad and 10 was excellent. 5 was just an ok day and 7 was a pretty good day and everything in between. I then had to write down how many positive verbal conflicts took place. Lastly, I reflected on noticeable changes in behavior after the Connecting Rituals were completed. This is

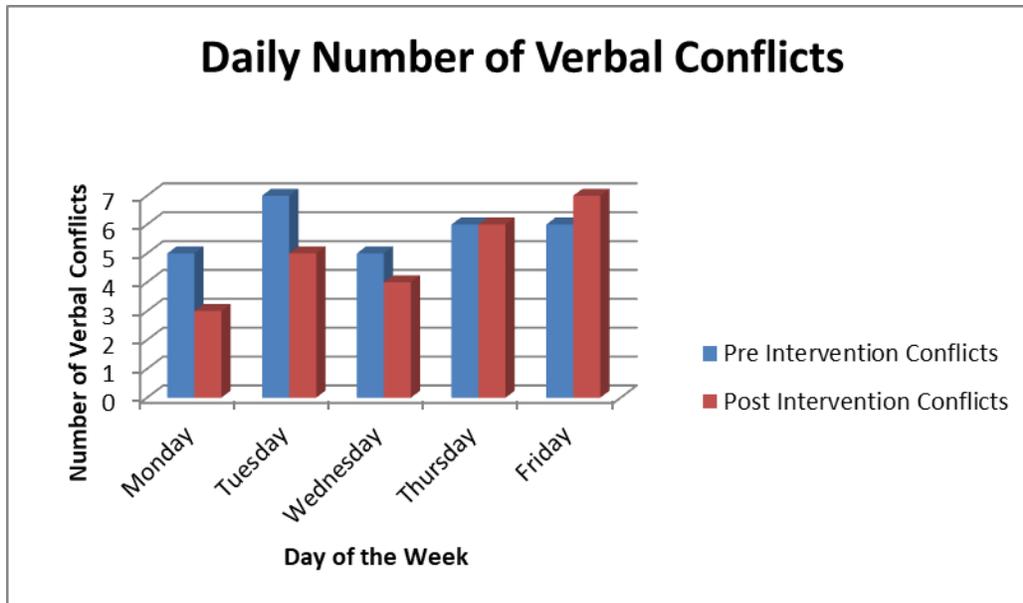
similar to the last question on the Post Connecting Ritual Form but this time I wrote down how many changes in behavior took place. I had the option to circle 0, 1-2, 3-4, 5-6, or 7-8.

### **Data Analysis**

The goal of this action research project was to decrease the number of negative verbal conflicts by giving the adults and children in the room opportunities to have calm and positive physical and social interactions during the morning gathering time before lunch and in small groups and one on one time throughout the morning work time. A decrease in negative verbal conflicts would show an increase in self-regulation and positive social interactions with peers. An increase in self-regulation and positive social interactions is consistent with higher academic achievement.

The children who participated in the study were part of one preschool classroom at a Montessori school in the Midwest. The classroom had ages ranging from 2.5-6 year olds. The classroom had a total of 23 child participants during the four week study.

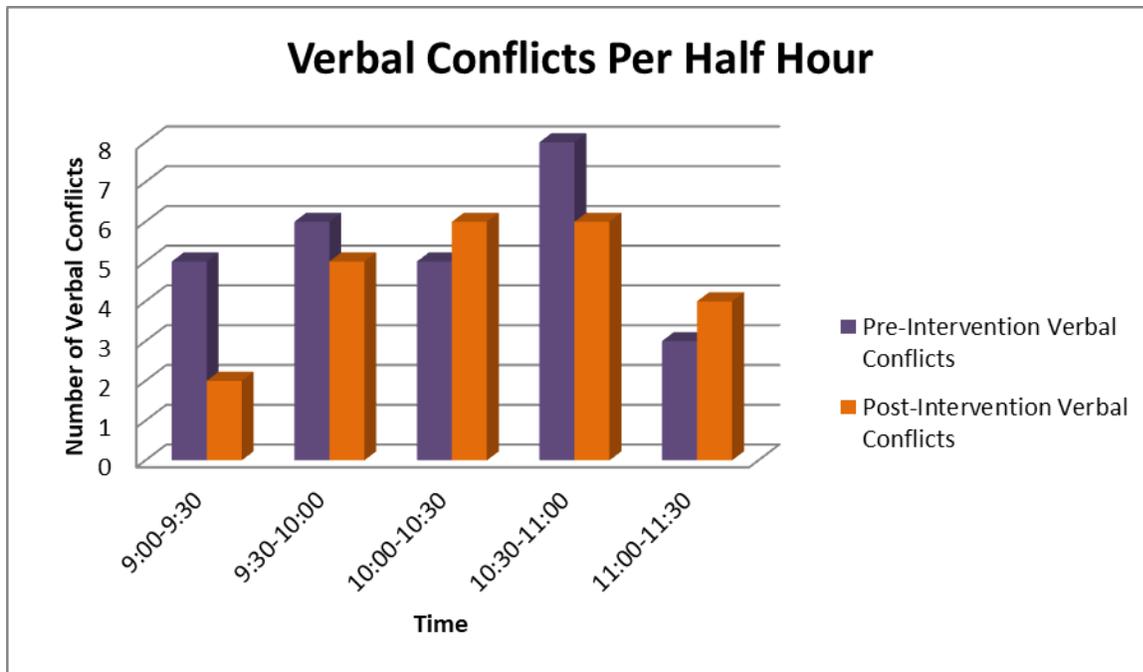
During the first two weeks of data collection the room had three different substitutes sporadically due to staffing changes, which may have skewed the number of verbal conflicts. During the third week of the study, the last week of doing the Connecting Rituals, the new full time assistant started in the room. The post-intervention week also experienced some potentially skewed results. One child in particular who is working hard on their self-regulation and social interaction skills was absent on Monday and Tuesday.



*Figure 1: Morning Baseline Data*

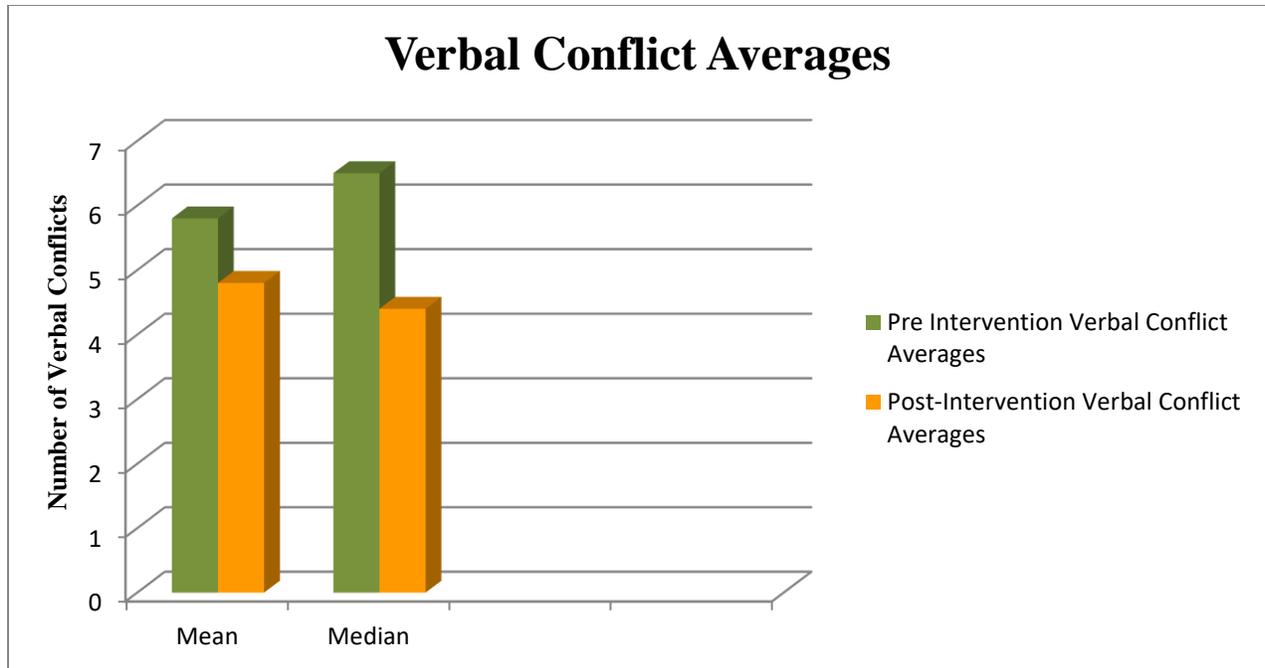
Figure one shows the number of verbal conflicts for pre-intervention (week 1) and post-intervention (week 4). On Tuesday during week 1 we only had twenty minutes of outside time due to cold weather. This reflected in the number of verbal conflicts in the morning work time even before outside time. There were a total number of seven verbal conflicts. On Thursday during week 1 there were four children gone because of the flu. I recorded 29 negative verbal conflicts over the first week and 24 during the fourth week. There was an average of 5.8 verbal conflicts per day before the two week intervention and an average of 4.8 number of verbal conflicts during the final week after the intervention.

The data shows more conflicts on certain days of the week in both the pre and post intervention results. The number of conflicts on Monday are lower for both the pre-and post-intervention then shoots up on Tuesday, goes slightly lower on Wednesday, and the number of verbal conflicts go up on Thursday then up yet again on Friday or stays the same.



*Figure 2: Morning Baseline Data Per Half Hour*

Figure two compares the number of verbal conflicts per half hour of the morning work time over the first week and the last week of data collection. Each thirty minute time span was tallied up daily over the span of the first week. The data concluded that there were the most number of verbal conflicts from 10:30-11:00 each day and the least number of verbal conflicts from 11:00-11:30 each day during the pre-intervention week. The biggest change in the number of verbal conflicts from pre to post-intervention was from 9:00-9:30. During the pre-intervention data the number of verbal conflicts during this thirty minute time slot was five, and the post-intervention data only yielded two verbal conflicts over the whole week.



*Figure 3: Mean and Median of the Number of Verbal Conflicts*

Figure three shows the averages for the verbal conflicts during the morning work time. The mean number of verbal conflicts was 5.8 for the pre-intervention and 4.8 for the post-intervention. The median number of verbal conflicts was 6.5 then 5 for the post-intervention. The mode, or the most common number of verbal conflicts in the morning was tied between 5 and 6. The middle of 5 and 6 is 5.5. The post-intervention results were not applicable for the mode as there were no days with the same number of conflicts.

### **Action Plan**

This study set out to see if the Connecting Rituals from Conscious Discipline would decrease the number of verbal conflicts in a Montessori preschool classroom in the Midwest in 2019. The question I have been trying to answer all along in the study was this: What are the effects of Connecting Rituals on verbal conflicts in the Montessori environment? A decrease in

verbal conflicts would show that children have increased their problem solving skills during times of conflict, and increase self-regulation. Children who are more self-regulated have been shown to be more successful academically and socially. The Connecting Rituals are nursery rhymes, finger plays and games done one on one, or in small groups. The rituals emphasize positive touch, like hugging, high fives, and holding hands, eye contact and teamwork. Lastly, the rituals give children an opportunity to love and show love to others. The findings concluded that the Connecting Rituals do decrease the number of verbal conflicts. The pre-intervention data showed 29 verbal conflicts during the first week and 25 during the post-intervention week. The decrease in verbal conflicts was not significant. The post-intervention week also may have skewed results. One child who is working on self-regulation and social emotional skills was gone Monday and Tuesday.

The decrease in the number of verbal conflicts was not significant, and there were a few outside factors that I had to consider as well. The month leading up to the intervention my classroom had one major staff change. The former assistant quit and the room had a different sub every day for a month. During the first week of data collection there was a day when four children were out with the flu. Another day the children were not able to go outside for recess because of inclement weather. During the two week intervention period we also had our Valentine's Day party in the morning.

On the first day of the study we spent time at the gathering before lunch talking about what it means to be a friend, and are children in the room safe and nice. Overall the conversation was about ten minutes long. While the conversation was fruitful and positive it was easy for children to veer the conversation in a different direction. If I were to do it again, I would have this conversation in small groups over the course of a few days during the morning work time.

The study was conducted for a four weeks. Initially, the study was going to be five weeks. However, I had to do a week less based on factors outside of my control. Looking back I suggest this study be six total weeks. The results may have been more conclusive had there been one pre-intervention week only collecting data on the number of verbal conflicts, four weeks of the intervention and one post-intervention week again, tallying the number of verbal conflicts. I still wonder if I were to do four weeks of Connecting if the third and fourth weeks produced a lower number of verbal conflicts or if the results would have plateaued. Since I was only able to do a two week long intervention I wasn't able to do as many one on one and small group Connecting Rituals. I aimed to do at least a one-on-one or small group Connecting Ritual with every child over the two week period. This worked out well for children who often did not have work out, but some children had work out for most of the morning work time.

Most of the Connecting Rituals happened at the large group gathering right before lunch. I yielded positive results when I conducted the rituals daily. Over the ten days of the intervention we did six different rituals. Children showed more interest when we changed rituals every two or three days. This is the best course of action because it takes time to teach the children how to do the ritual with a partner that first day. On the second day you only need to practice once and children can do it again much more fluently and enjoy it much more. If you do a Connecting Ritual too many times in a row the group loses interest. If the children enjoy one of the rituals from a few days prior you can circle back and do that one again. When you introduce a new ritual it is best to read the nursery rhyme to the group. Then have the group repeat the nursery rhyme with you. Then have them watch you do it with a partner. Then everyone practices together, then the second and third time they can do it together easily.

It is unrealistic to have a preschool classroom void of conflict because any group of people is going to have conflicts. The goal is not to avoid conflicts, but to teach children how to have verbal conflicts in a civil manner with respect for the other person. Further areas for study could investigate the length of time each of the verbal conflicts last, and what behaviors the children exhibited during the conflict. Did the child(ren) cry, yell, use hurtful words? Did the conflict become so much that an adult needed to intervene? Adding this to the study could give more specific results in social/emotional development and self-regulation. If there is a similar number of verbal conflicts but there is less crying, yelling or use of hurtful words it could give insight into progress into social skills and self-regulation.

While the study did not show clear results, I plan to continue doing the Connecting Rituals in my classroom. The Connecting Rituals provided the children an opportunity to love others and be loved through simple nursery rhymes, finger plays and gentle touch. The children in my room now have a background in doing the Connecting Rituals and can do them with or without an adult present. They can spontaneously do the rituals during the morning or afternoon work time or outside. I hope the Connecting Rituals become part of your classroom whether you teach toddlers, preschool, elementary, middle school, or high school. These rituals give children one more opportunity during the day to have positive interactions with their teachers and peers.

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Appendix A

Large Group Activity

1. Do you like being at school?
2. Do you feel safe at school?
3. Are other children in the room nice? Are they mean? Helpful? Do they solve problems peacefully?
4. What are some positive words we can use with our classmates when we are upset?

## Appendix B

**Tally Marks**

Baseline Data Collection/ Post Intervention

VC= Verbal Conflict

#CI= Number of Children Involved

Time	9:00-9:30	9:30-10:00	10:00-10:30	10:30-11:00	11:00-11:30
Date:	VC	VC	VC	VC	VC
Attendance:					
External:	#CI	#CI	#CI	#CI	#CI
Factors:					
Date:	VC	VC	VC	VC	VC
Attendance:					
External:	#CI	#CI	#CI	#CI	#CI
Factors:					
Date:	VC	VC	VC	VC	VC
Attendance:					
External:	#CI	#CI	#CI	#CI	#CI
Factors:					
Date:	VC	VC	VC	VC	VC
Attendance:					
External:	#CI	#CI	#CI	#CI	#CI
Factors:					

Appendix C

Post Connecting Ritual Form

1. Name of Connecting Ritual Completed/ Child Initials:
  
2. Individual, small group, large group (circle one)
  
3. What went well? What could have been different?
  
4. Has the child(ren) exhibited differences in behavior since completing the Connecting Ritual? Explain



