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Grace and Courtesy in Living with Conflict in the Montessori Children's House

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in fulfillment of final requirements for the MAED degree

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Date _____

GRACE AND COURTESY AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Abstract

The purpose of this research was to determine in what ways increased role-play lessons of grace and courtesy affected conflict resolution in an early childhood classroom. This research study was conducted at a private Montessori school in a midwestern metropolitan area. The six-week study was completed in a classroom with 29 children, ranging in age from thirty-three months to six years old. During the study, data was collected on the number of conflicts and grace and courtesy lessons. Data was also collected on levels of cooperation and use of respectful language among children, as observed and reflected on, by the adult. Results showed that increased grace and courtesy lessons correlated to the decrease in number of conflicts during the intervention, and children were noted using grace and courtesy lesson language in their interactions. Further study could include grace and courtesy lessons directed to specific reasons for conflict per classroom.

Keywords: Montessori, early childhood, conflict resolution, grace and courtesy lessons

GRACE AND COURTESY AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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Conflict is part of everyday life. Children experience conflict as well. In the Montessori Children's House, children are learning how to resolve conflicts, work together, and develop independence as they adapt to their environment and the culture. The classroom is mixed age, with children ranging in age from thirty-three months to six years old. The adult's role in helping the child to gain independence is to provide opportunity to practice, and with that the child can build confidence and comfort through this repetition. The lessons of grace and courtesy are role-plays with the children and the adult, and the children participate in conflict resolution, with the goal of a mutually agreeable outcome. Both allow for practice in many situations the child may encounter.

Conflict resolution is part of the child's experience as they learn to navigate relationships and situations with other children. Conflict in the classroom is something that usually exists each day and many times involves an adult stepping in to help with the resolution. Children respond in different ways to certain situations and may need guidance or suggestions in using language to work through or resolve conflicts in a mutually agreeable way. Situations that might become conflicts could be practiced before hand, such as how to get a drink of water one child at a time, or how to offer and receive help from another child. The goal of these lessons is that the child is able to draw on that practice when the situation naturally occurs, and use that experience to be successful in their interactions.

In my observation of conflict in the classroom, I also saw opportunities in which I felt conflict could be averted. There were situations observed such as a child moving too quickly through the classroom or a child pushing another while waiting in line. Through the language in the grace and courtesy lessons, cultural norms can be modeled, such as how to pass through a narrow space, how to stand in line, or how to ask for the attention of another person, but they can

also specifically address self-regulation of the child's behavior. I also observed that if certain behaviors were ignored, such as taking another child's materials, sometimes this resulted in other children then beginning to mimic that behavior.

The behavior of children mimicking others can also apply to positive behavior. Grace and courtesy lessons are a way behavior can be modeled positively in the classroom. These lessons are mini-dramas, given in a neutral moment, that include the guide and assistant, or an experienced child. They role-play a social situation that children may be involved in. Familiar situations are generally what are practiced, like standing in a line, asking to observe, or greeting a visitor. These lessons offer a way to address a situation or potential conflict in a neutral moment, and provide social skills to interact as the child adapts to their classroom and social culture. The lessons involve experiences both with everyday living in the Children's House and in the child's home.

It is critical that these lessons are given with consistent language that includes common courtesies within the culture. In practice, children become comfortable with the language and can apply the general concept they have learned to the social situation as it arises naturally. The child also becomes comfortable hearing the language and can receive the response of their peers, whether it aligns with what they are seeking, or not.

Therefore, with practice in both the grace and courtesy lessons, which allow the child to role-play the social situations in a neutral time, and the conflict resolution, which the child uses in the moment, they are experiencing repetition in both expressing and receiving this language. This practice can be applied in their general experience in the classroom. Children feel empowered and confident in their ability to state and discuss their preferences, as well as the opportunity to hear preferences and feelings of other children. Starting this practice in the

Montessori Children's House allows for the child to be supported in becoming independent as they develop and practice social skills. This allows them to communicate and participate in a mutually respectful and beneficial way within their community from an early age.

Background

This research study was conducted at a private Montessori school in a midwestern metropolitan area during the three-hour morning work cycle each day for six weeks. There were 29 children in the classroom, ranging in age from thirty-three months to six years old. The children are invited to freely choose activities that the guide has shown them how to use, and they also freely choose their workspace in the classroom. Communication among the children is welcomed but they follow the guidelines of not interrupting another child's activity or disrupting the classroom. I am the assistant, and the classroom also has a lead guide and an aide. The lead guide and I both have Montessori training for this age range, which includes the instruction of grace and courtesy lessons. All three adults used the conflict resolution script.

The purpose of this research was to see in what ways the lessons of grace and courtesy affect conflict resolution. This research was intended to look at ways that observed or potential conflicts could possibly be worked through in neutral situations in these lessons. It was also to look at ways children could become more independent in resolving conflicts in a peaceful, consistent manner through the practice and repetition of the conflict resolution. Both allow for the child to practice working through conflict.

Review of Literature

Conflict resolution is part of the social emotional learning experience in the Children's House classroom. Conflict can be resolved with the use of various techniques when working with children age three to six. Specific language can be modeled by the adult or offered to the

child to then use independently. Conflict resolution can also be practiced outside of the conflict itself, in a neutral situation through role-play. A review of literature included information about social development in children, tools that children can use in conflict resolution, ways adults can prepare themselves to guide children to better self-regulate, and how conflict resolution looks in a Montessori classroom.

It is an important part of development that the child is able to be in control of their choice of behavior. One study (Ervin, Wash, & Mecca, 2010) used the term self-regulation, which is the idea of the child working through a challenge indicated by certain traits, such as persistence and self-motivation, along with the ability to control impulses. Dr. Montessori did not use the term self-regulation as it was used in this study, but she did use the term inner discipline, or normalization, to describe children who possessed these traits. “Only ‘normalised’ children, aided by their environment, show in their subsequent development those wonderful powers that we describe: spontaneous discipline, continuous and happy work, social sentiments of help and sympathy for others” (Montessori, 2010, p. 216). With guidance through conflict and practice of the resolution, the child can self-regulate the way they address conflict and respond to their peers.

Social Emotional Learning

Through conflict resolution, children acquire the opportunity to practice the skills to self-regulate. Children develop social emotional skills, regardless of the environment. Social emotional learning in an intentional way has helped the child to have the ability to control their emotions, self-regulate, and to make and develop friendships in a more adequate way. This is the foundation of the Montessori classroom. It is also important to the child’s life experience (Mindess, Chen, & Brenner, 2008). These skills can be built through approaches that include

teachers who have a common set of social values, such as the treatment of all children with respect and the use of language to speak kindly to other adults and children. Language can be offered for modeling cultural norms, such as how to greet a visitor, or how to ask for someone's attention, as well as to specifically address the child's management of their own emotions through language that names their feelings. This practice can come through stories, pictures, role-playing, and discussions with specific instructions and steps to follow (Mindess, Chen, & Brenner, 2008; Smith-Bonahue, Smith-Adcock, & Ehrentraut, 2015).

Adult interactions with children can help them to develop social emotional skills in a positive manner. Fox and Lentini (2006) discussed the foundation that positive family relationships and responsive teachers create for the child. The teachers who provided a learning environment that offered opportunities for the child to become independent, and have successful interactions, allowed for the development of social emotional skills. These were introduced by first identifying the skill itself, such as taking turns. Then, they were demonstrated, and feedback was given, such as, "I noticed how you waited for her response." Opportunities were offered for practice and with this, the repetition helped build fluency of the skill so that it was used and also could then be transferred to new situations.

Conflict Resolution

One important social emotional skill children develop is the way they handle conflict and the resolution of it. There are many methods to approach conflict resolution with children. Heydenberk and Heydenberk (2007) studied kindergarten and first grade students who were part of a bully prevention program, which included teaching social skills and conflict resolution training. The program specifically taught strategies directed on how to be aware of, and handle, daily conflicts. The bully prevention program and conflict resolution training was attended

throughout seven one-hour sessions over several months. Through a non-profit called the Peace Center, three classroom teachers were engaged with the training along with the students. A conflict resolution trainer, who had a degree in education and extensive training, held the sessions. The students practiced resolutions in different ways.

One of the methods students used was called the Check-in, in which they briefly communicated their feelings at the beginning of the school day to their classmates. The students also kept peace journals, which included teacher prompts using an “I”-message, that usually contained a feeling word, such as “I feel scared/sad/happy when...” Younger children were given a chance to draw how they were feeling in general or in relation to a dispute (Heydenberk & Heydenberk, 2007).

The students also used another method where they stated the problem and the adult gave them ways to talk through it. This was called the Conflict Resolution Circle; this included two children who held a ten-inch plastic ring with both hands, while they talked through their conflict. They were taught basic conflict resolution strategies with this, which included one child who stated the problem while the other child paraphrased back without interruption. Then they paraphrased their understanding of what the other tried to say, and finally worked together to come to an acceptable solution for both children. If the conflict involved safety of a child, the adult was to respond immediately (Heydenberk & Heydenberk, 2007). Similarly, Soholt (2015) has suggested a step-by-step intervention process to work through the conflict. First, the physical interaction is stopped and a response is provided to the child who had the interaction directed at them; they are asked if they are all right and tended to. Next, the child who directed the physical interaction is invited to talk about what happened. The other child’s response is listened to and

this can go back again to the other child, with the language and guidance given by the adult, as necessary.

Students applied what they learned in conflict resolution training to other situations. They stated that they were able to apply their knowledge in different aspects of their school life outside the classroom, and at home. The teachers also reported positive changes in behaviors, including an increase in pro-social behaviors and increased use of conflict resolution vocabulary to the experience, as well as a decrease in bullying behavior, cliques, and harassment and mistrust among students. This application of the concept was also specifically seen when children were offered culturally relevant books that included people with backgrounds different than the children themselves. The children could then be exposed to pictures and age appropriate stories to show tolerance and acceptance of other children as they are. With these differences and diversity, social awareness is then incorporated into the preschool classroom (Heydenberk & Heydenberk 2007; Levine & Tamburrino, 2013).

Conflict Resolution in the Montessori Classroom

In the Montessori classroom, conflict resolution is dealt with in a specific way. It is a goal that the children self-regulate and stop negative behavior before it escalates. Ervin, Wash, and Mecca (2010) conducted a three-year study of Montessori and non-Montessori children, grades kindergarten through second. After data was collected in the study, the question of difference in levels of self-regulation between Montessori and non-Montessori children was rated. Specifically in reference to how conflict was resolved, Montessori children were less likely to need adult supervision or assistance. The question was asked, “What do you do when someone is unkind to you, calls you a name, or hurts you?” The response was that 19% of Montessori kindergarteners would, as their first approach, “tell the teacher”, but more than 75% would take other actions,

like talk to the child, walk away, or solve the problem themselves. A large majority of Montessori first grade children would try to solve the conflict or use words to explain. The Montessori second grade children said in 30% of the cases they would tell the teacher, but also said they would try to solve the conflict or use words. Through the Montessori child's development of inner discipline, or self-regulation, which is aided through concrete materials, multi-age groups, freedom of choice, and practice of the lessons of grace and courtesy, the Montessori child is able to resolve conflicts more independently and with language, than non-Montessori children (Ervin, Wash, & Mecca, 2010).

Comparatively, almost 100% of the children in non-Montessori kindergarten would tell the teacher if they had a conflict. 70% of non-Montessori first grade children would tell the teacher, or they would walk away or play with someone else. The non-Montessori second grade children would tell their teacher 64% of the time and 24% would use other approaches; again, walking away or ignoring the other child, and 12% said they would get mad at the other child or retaliate by hitting back (Ervin, Wash, & Mecca, 2010).

Preparation of the Adult

Adults can be trained themselves so that they can help children with their development of self-regulation in conflict resolution. Doppler-Bourassa, Harkins, and Mehta (2008) conducted a study in which the teachers and community members (teacher aides, parents, and administrative staff) were interviewed about children's conflict behavior, beliefs about their adult responses to children's conflict, and areas in which they would like further support. Information from the community was compiled and used to create an intervention that included six parent-teacher workshops, on topics like conflict resolution and communication, and monthly project meetings that were held over eleven weeks. Additionally, nine hours per week was offered by the research

team to work with teachers to integrate this information from the workshops and meetings into the classroom. After the community based intervention, the teachers indicated in their post-intervention interviews that they were more likely to use language that acknowledged the child's feelings, emphasized choice, and included children in problem solving methods. Throughout this study, one of the most noticeable changes was that the teachers asked the children for their ideas to solve the conflict, whereas pre-intervention none of the four teachers had reported so. Another study by Vestal and Jones (2004) looked at four and five-year-old children in a Head Start program, with teachers who trained in a forty-hour college-level course on conflict management and social-emotional development. Additionally, the children of these teachers used more pro-social solutions to solve conflict.

The teachers also seemed to actively engage the children in the conflict resolution post-intervention. Furthermore, the teachers shifted from directives given to alternatives offered for children's consideration, such as when they asked the children what the conflict was about or offered ideas about what they might want to do to resolve the issue. These teachers modeled emotionally proficient behavior and fewer forceful options that they learned in the course, and the children acquired significant problem solving skills through this modeling, including teachers using dialogue to guide healthy conflict resolution (Doppler-Bourassa, Harkins, & Mehta, 2008; Vestal & Jones, 2004).

Within the Montessori method, one specific way adults can teach children to promote self-regulation is through the lessons of grace and courtesy. The lessons of grace and courtesy involve experiences with the child's everyday living in the Children's House and in their homes. The adult looks at situations the child may have encountered, like how to introduce a friend to another friend or how to greet an observer; expressions of their social life. These lessons can be

drawn from interest of the child, but also spontaneously presented. They are given in a neutral moment as to not focus on an individual child. They also offer language that the child could use should a conflict arise, and with this, they can be empowered to resolve it. It is critical that these lessons are given every day with the best language because the child is in a sensitive period for language. The child can also be helped to feel more comfortable in their daily interactions with each other and with adults through these lessons. These lessons are what have helped the social aspects of the Montessori classroom run well (O'Shaughnessy, 2015; Standing, 1998). They help the children adapt to their culture:

The developing child not only acquires the faculties of man; strength, intelligence, language; but at the same time, he adapts the being he is constructing to the conditions of the world about him... The things he sees are not just remembered; they form part of his soul. (Montessori, 2010, p. 63-64)

The child absorbs cultural experiences and surroundings during the first plane of development, from birth to about age six, everything is taken in indiscriminately.

Conclusion

Based on the research reviewed, prevention of escalation and guidance of conflict among children in classroom settings can be supported by the adult in offering various methods to practice conflict resolution. These various methods included offering grace and courtesy lessons, use of dialogue, such as "I-messages", stating the conflict, and applying knowledge to new situations. These approaches assist the child as they become independent, develop self-regulation, and find mutually agreeable conflict resolution outcomes. In my own research, I attempted to intentionally apply these methods on a daily basis within the structure of Dr. Montessori's grace and courtesy lessons, and with consistent conflict resolution language.

Methodology

I collected data for my action research process during the morning work cycle in the classroom, which is 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. each day. Throughout the action research process, there were 29 children in the classroom and three adults: the lead guide, the aide, and myself, the assistant. This process included one week of baseline data collection, a four-week intervention, and one week of reflection. The data collection started in January following the return from winter break.

Before I began the four-week intervention, I collected baseline data with no changes to the environment. The same data tools were used to collect data throughout the action research process. During this baseline week, grace and courtesy lessons were given as usual, but not intentionally on a daily basis. Both the guide and I gave these lessons throughout. I used the data collection from this week to brainstorm possible grace and courtesy lesson ideas, to see what seemed to cause conflicts, and what conflict looked like in our classroom.

I used a system throughout the action research process for both classroom adults, which included placing all necessary paperwork in a folder labeled with their name. This was delivered at the beginning of each hour that they were to collect data. The adults were given the conflict resolution script (Appendix A), which was printed and available in their folder. It included language that had generally been used with conflict resolution in the past in our classroom, but the script allowed for the adult to review the language and use a detailed guide.

The Conflict Form (Appendix B) was used throughout the research process to collect the detail of conflicts between children. It was explained to the classroom adults prior to the research beginning. This was the only data collection tool that was used by the other classroom adults. A calendar with a rotating one-hour designation per morning was placed in the data collection

folder for both classroom staff. This more detailed information on conflicts was limited to one hour per morning, so that it was manageable to collect. In order to collect a varied, but comprehensive sample, the form was used on a rotating basis from 8:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. on the first day, 9:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. the next day, and 10:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. the day following, and then started again with 8:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m., throughout the research process. The adults collected for the same hour each day, and were asked to use this form to record specific information about the conflict that they observed. This included the children involved, the time of incident, a brief description of what the conflict was, whether an adult stepped in or not, the grace and courtesy lesson language used, the outcome of the resolution, as well as other notes.

The intervention began with the intention of offering increased lessons of grace and courtesy. The guide and I discussed the intervention beforehand, and were both to offer a lesson at least once daily in our classroom during the four-week intervention. Throughout the morning, I observed when she gave a lesson and made a note. We also checked in throughout the morning regarding lessons given, and conflicts observed. Children were invited to the lessons, but were also free decline the invitation.

The grace and courtesy lessons were generally given to a small group of two to five children. On some occasions, the lessons were given to the whole group in a morning gathering, as well as to a group larger than five children. One example of a grace and courtesy lesson given was how to observe, or watch another child work. This was given to address a situation with a certain child, but a small group participated. The child had been interrupting other children by touching their work, or taking it away from their workspace. Generally lessons were given in a similar manner to this observation example. The children were first invited to the lesson, and we had a conversation about what it meant to observe. It was noted that in observing, the child does

not interrupt, does not touch the materials that another child is using, and they need to gain permission to observe. The adult used language such as, "I am going to show you how to ask another child to observe." The adult took out their materials. The child asked the adult, "May I observe?" and the adult responded, "Yes, you may." The child demonstrated how to observe, and this could be reversed as well. The other children sat and watched. The lesson can also be practiced with the response, "No thank you, not today, maybe another day." Each child has an opportunity to participate following the initial lesson. These lessons were given to address observed situations of the classroom, as well as to practice potential situations. The lessons were practiced with attention to analysis of movement and gracious, careful, and consistent language.

In addition to these lessons, grace and courtesy picture cards were placed in an open box on the shelf. They included a picture of children and adults interacting in a role-play similar to the lesson, and the name of the lesson listed below the picture (Appendix C). Originally, 18 of the 36 cards were placed out, so that they could later be rotated. After the guide gave a lesson with the cards on the first day, she asked for all the cards to be placed in the box the next day, which then meant all 36 cards were available in the box. She was looking for a lesson that was not available in the initial set, so she wanted them all placed in the box.

The guide and I discussed beforehand that we would both present the cards throughout the action research process. Generally, the presentation of cards was to a small group of two to five children who could then use the cards independently following the presentation, or share them with other children. In using the cards, the children and adult set out a few cards and talked about them. The adult typically asked one child to choose a card and the adult and children conversed about what they saw in the picture, what they thought it meant, and their general experience with the situation. The role-play of the lesson involved the adult and children acting

out what was on the card. For example, one child would ask another child for help. The adult or one child was the person asking for help. The other child could respond to give help, and the lesson could also be practiced where the child declines giving help. Suggested language can be given by the adult beforehand, such as, “Yes, I can help you” or “No, I cannot help you right now”. After the lesson on the card was practiced, roles can change and it can be practiced again, or a new card can be selected. After I had observed the guide give presentations and I had given presentations myself, I noted that the cards were practiced within the presentation of the cards, but generally were not repeated or taken off the shelf without an adult as part of the lesson.

Throughout the research process, I recorded the total number of grace and courtesy lessons, picture card presentations and their additional use, on the Tally Record (Appendix D), per child. On this form, I noted any changes to the classroom, including weather, drills, substitutes, and attendance record. I also used this form to tally total conflicts throughout the morning per child. This form was kept in my folder with the other data collection tools.

I completed the Attitude Scale (Appendix E) twice each morning at 9:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. This was a quick look at how the children were working together, how they resolved conflict together, if they used respectful language, and if they participated with the grace and courtesy lessons. I based my response to the overall feel and observation of the room at that time, and for the hour-and-a-half prior. This form was kept in my folder with the data collection tools.

I used a Reflective Journal (Appendix F) at the end of each morning to look at how I saw conflict resolved and how I saw grace and courtesy lessons and language used each day. My lunch break time was generally following the morning work cycle. During this time, I wrote in my journal and reflected on the grace and courtesy lessons given, the language used in our classroom, and the response of the children to their conflict.

The last week of my data collection was only two days due to a holiday break, but I used this time to reflect. I continued to use the same forms, and observed the application of the grace and courtesy lessons by the children to new situations. The use of the conflict resolution script was also continued. Additionally, grace and courtesy lessons continued with daily intention, and the cards stayed out for the children to continue to use.

Data Analysis

I used the Tally Record (Appendix D) to record the number of conflicts, number of grace and courtesy lessons, and number of times the grace and courtesy lesson picture cards were used. In the days of baseline data collection, there were more conflicts than during the intervention weeks (see Figure 1). There were also fewer grace and courtesy lessons given during this week, and grace and courtesy picture cards were not yet placed on the shelf.

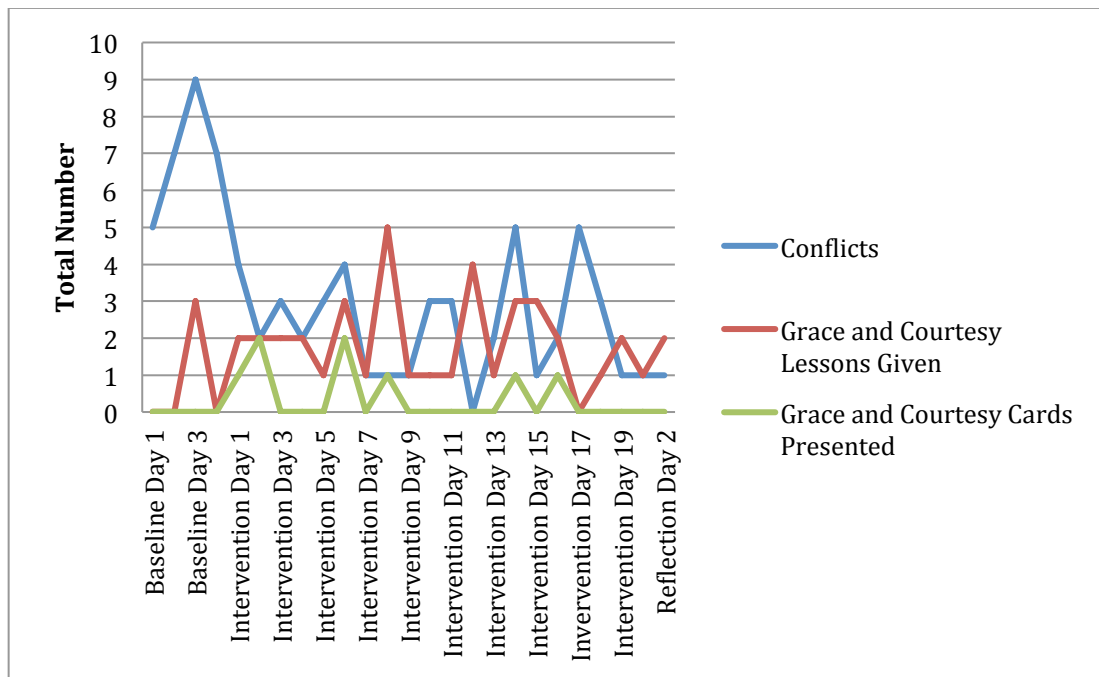


Figure 1. Total number of Conflicts, Grace and Courtesy Lessons Given, and Grace and Courtesy Cards Presented throughout the morning work cycle, per day as recorded on the Tally Form

In the graph above (Figure 1), beginning with intervention day one, conflicts decreased and generally ranged from at least one per morning up to five per morning. Throughout the baseline week and over the course of the intervention, 89% of the total conflicts involved two children, while 7% of conflicts involved three children, on average. During the baseline week, the remaining 4% of conflicts involved a group of five children. On average, during the intervention weeks, 2% each of the conflicts involved four- and five- children group conflicts.

The data showed that an increase in grace and courtesy lessons correlated to a decrease in the number of conflicts observed throughout the morning (see Figure 1). The more lessons that were given in a morning, the fewer conflicts were recorded, with the exception of five days out of nineteen when there were equal numbers of conflicts and grace and courtesy lessons. When fewer grace and courtesy lessons were given, conflicts increased. Grace and courtesy picture card presentations and use was minimal, not more than twice in a single morning, throughout the intervention.

The classroom staff used the Conflict Form (Appendix B) to collect detailed information about each conflict during one hour each morning. The use of the conflict resolution script (Appendix A) allowed for the children to become familiar with using this language to solve conflicts. During the baseline week, there were ten conflicts recorded in detail. The first and second weeks of the intervention had seven conflicts each, with details recorded. The third week had six conflicts recorded. During the fourth week, we celebrated a holiday, and had a group gathering in the time frame that conflict detail was to be recorded. I was also absent one day that week. So, in the three days of the fourth week, we collected detail on four conflicts. The use of this form allowed for the detail of conflict resolution to be noted, whereas the Tally Record only recorded who was involved in each conflict.

The figures below (see Figure 2 and 3) detail reasons for conflicts that were recorded on the Conflict Form. The reasons for conflict were similar during the baseline week and throughout the intervention. These reasons were both observed by the adults, and noted in the language the children used to discuss their conflicts with each other. The child might use language such as, “I don’t like it when you take my oil cloth.” This was then noted as the reason for conflict. In a situation where it was observed that a child took a material from another child, and returned it after they spoke independently, that was also then noted as the reason. The reasons for conflicts fit into the following categories: children taking or touching another child’s materials, ignoring another child’s request, moving unsafely, hitting or pushing, and not leaving another child’s workspace or a conflict over observation.

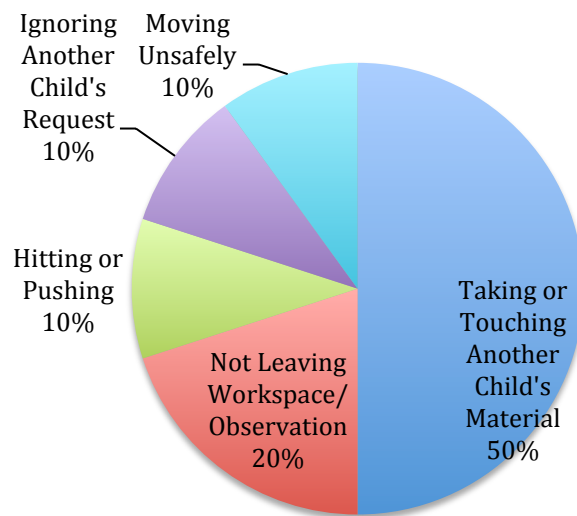


Figure 2. Reasons for conflict during baseline week as recorded on the Conflict Form

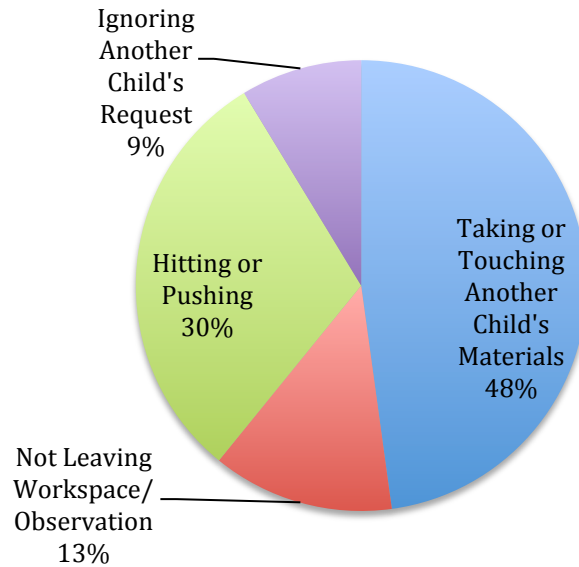


Figure 3. Reasons for conflict during four-week intervention as recorded on the Conflict Form

Children taking or touching another child's material accounted for 50% of conflicts during the baseline week, and there was a 2% decrease during the intervention weeks, on average. This involved children removing materials from another child's workspace, as well as from another child's work drawer, which is where they store personal papers and projects.

Children ignoring another child's request accounted for 10% of the reason for conflict in the baseline week and 1% less during the four-week intervention average. This included situations like a child not moving when blocking another's view, or a child not responding to a request for help from another child.

Children moving unsafely in the classroom and hallway accounted for 10% of the conflicts during the baseline week, and none during the intervention weeks. This included children running in the classroom, stepping on other children's work, and closing lockers quickly without attention to other children sharing that space.

Children hitting and pushing increased on average, from 10% during the baseline week, up to 30% during the four-week intervention. This included pushing in line, and hitting and

pushing for various reasons, such as a child wanting another's work materials or chair. From ages thirty-three months to six years old, a child is continuing to develop their impulse control, so conflicts involving physical interaction transpire. The hope is that the child will gain and practice language that they can use to solve conflicts rather than to physically interact to achieve the response they are looking for.

Children not leaving another child's workspace after they have been asked accounted for 20% of conflict in the baseline week detail, with a decrease of 7% during the four-week intervention, on average. This involved children not responding when a child asked for no observers, or not walking away when a child asked them to. In the Montessori classroom, children are given the freedom to invite an observer, who may not interrupt them, but they are also given the opportunity to work independently. In our classroom, the phrase "No observers, please" was heard often. Children also commonly asked others to "walk away from their work".

Sometimes support is needed to work through a conflict. If the conflict involved physical interaction, the adult stepped in immediately. Nine times out of ten during the baseline week, as recorded on the Conflict Form, adults stepped in to resolve conflicts. During the baseline week and each of the four intervention weeks, children resolved one conflict independently per each week. Adults stepped in for the remaining conflicts recorded in detail during the intervention weeks.

Throughout the research project, language similar to what was heard during the grace and courtesy lessons was used throughout conflict resolutions. This was noted on the Conflict Form. Of the ten conflicts recorded during the baseline data collection week, four of the resolutions involved language that is part of these lessons. A child was noted saying, "No, thank you, maybe another day" in reference to a child wanting to observe. Another child was noted saying, "Please

keep your hands off of my work” to another child who was pulling on their material. Throughout the first and second weeks, children used grace and courtesy language during three of the seven conflicts, per week. During the third week, four of the six conflicts recorded in detail involved use of this language. In the fourth week, there were four conflicts recorded in detail, and in three of those, the children used grace and courtesy language. Some examples of language used were, “I don’t need help. I can do it on my own”, “Look at this big mess. I can help clean up”, and “I’m sorry” without adult prompting or a child requesting that response.

Throughout the intervention, the grace and courtesy language was also noted in general, which included situations such as a child inviting another to observe an activity they were about to begin, and that child also offered to bring a chair for their observer. I also noticed a shift from children saying, “no” or “walk away” to using more positive, respectful language such as, “not today, but maybe another day you can observe” or “would you please walk away from my work?”

Children in our Montessori classroom commonly work individually, in parallel, but rely on each other for support. This is one benefit of the mixed-age classroom. I might give a suggestion of a child who could help another child who is asking for assistance; other times a child steps in when they see a need. Some activities involve small groups of two to three children working together. In the graph below is my scale of agreement regarding how I felt the children worked together cooperatively, on average per week, recorded at 9:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m.

(Figure 4).

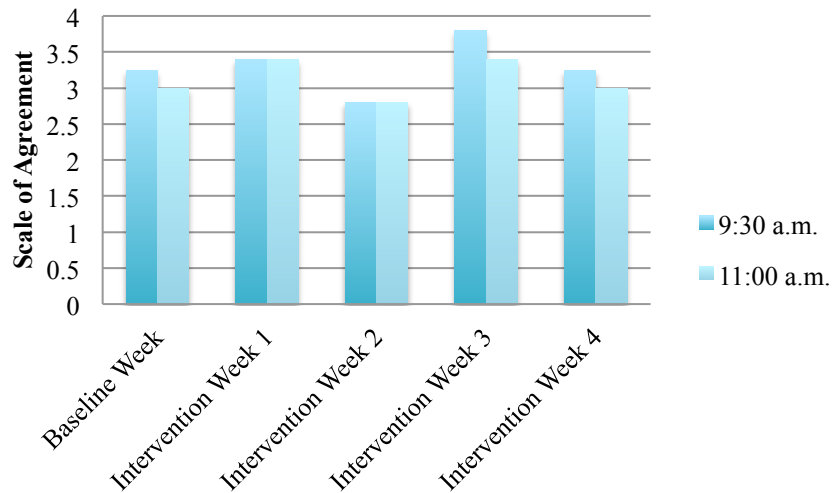


Figure 4. Children Worked Together Cooperatively; Researcher's Weekly Attitude Scale Average, rated from 0 (not applicable) to 4 (strongly agree)

This rating allowed me to use a scale of agreement that went from not applicable (0), strong disagreement (1), disagreement (2), agreement (3), and strong agreement (4) regarding my observation of the overall feel of the room. As I rated my agreement to the question above and those following, Intervention week two was continuously rated at a lower level of agreement during the intervention. The significant change during this week was that the lead guide was absent.

Between the two collection times during the baseline week, there is a small difference of 6% in my agreement. 9:30 a.m. was higher than the 11:00 a.m. collection time. Intervention weeks one and two stayed the same at both collection times, on average. During intervention weeks three and four, I had a higher level of agreement at the 9:30 a.m. time. Throughout the intervention weeks in my Reflective Journal, I noted occasions when children invited other children to observe them working, as well as a small group of children who worked with an adult to address an issue of friendship inclusion. On one occasion, a child noticed another child having difficulty opening their locker, but asked first if they would like help. They offered help once the response was yes. I also noticed times of less cooperation, like when two children shouted "No!"

as a child approached their workspace. That child moved away from the space without saying anything, and the children who shouted continued their work. There was also an occasion when two children took another child's food work from their workspace after that child had spent a long time preparing it. There was a conflict resolution and that child also was able to express their disappointment to the other children. The children agreed not to take that child's food again and were also able to see how upset this child was. As I used this scale, I was able to note how I felt in that moment, regarding the previous hour-and-a-half before recording my level of agreement.

In the table below (Figure 5) is the Attitude Scale regarding my level of agreement with how the children worked through and resolved conflict cooperatively. Conflicts arise and are part of the children's experience. This was useful in noting how they worked through these situations not only with cooperation, but also with respect and willingness to listen.

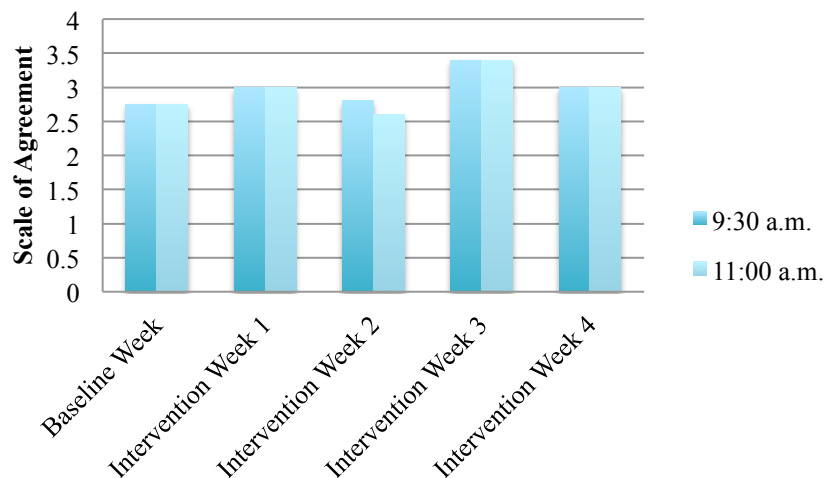


Figure 5. Children Worked Together and Resolved Conflict Cooperatively; Researcher's Weekly Attitude Scale Average, rated from 0 (not applicable) to 4 (strongly agree)

In the baseline week, and intervention weeks one, three, and four, the Attitude Scale rating stayed the same between both collection times. During week two, there was a slight decrease of 5% in my level of agreement between the 9:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. collection times. The

averages per week varied, with week three being rated at the highest. That was also the week that we had one day with zero conflicts recorded for the morning. I observed in the Reflective Journal, a child helping another child in asking an observer to move away. They gave the language for that child to use, “just ask them, please walk away from my work” and stayed with them until the child moved away. I also observed one day during the third week where there were many children shouting at each other, but when it was time to resolve the conflict, they were able to listen to each other and speak without shouting.

I also rated my agreement to how children used positive, respectful language with each other in the classroom (Figure 6).

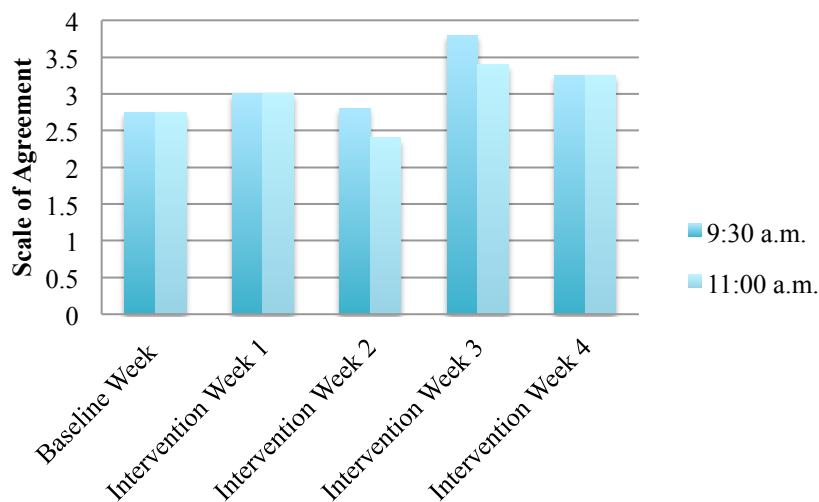


Figure 6. Children Used Positive, Respectful Language; Researcher’s Weekly Attitude Scale Average, rated from 0 (not applicable) to 4 (strongly agree)

The use of positive, respectful language and my agreement to the use of it improved over the intervention, with the exception of intervention week two. In intervention weeks three and four the agreement on the Attitude Scale increased. I also noted this in my Reflective Journal with both prompts. Specifically there was a shift in children speaking to other children who were stopping to observe them. I noted a shift from “no” or “walk away” to more considerate language and tone of voice with, “please walk away”, specifically in the beginning of week three. I also

noted children talking to each other during conflict and using that time to clarify with each other what they wanted. For example, one child thought another wanted help getting their material from another child, who had taken it away. That child actually did not want help, expressed that, and asked the child who took the material to return it, which they did. I also noted two children who conversed about a hug. One child started to hug a friend, and they moved away. That child said, “Oh, you must not have wanted a hug” in a respectful way. The other child replied, “No, I do not want a hug right now.” These interactions that I observed helped me to note the positive grace and courtesy language being used in our classroom.

I rated my agreement to the children participating in the grace and courtesy lessons (Figure 7).

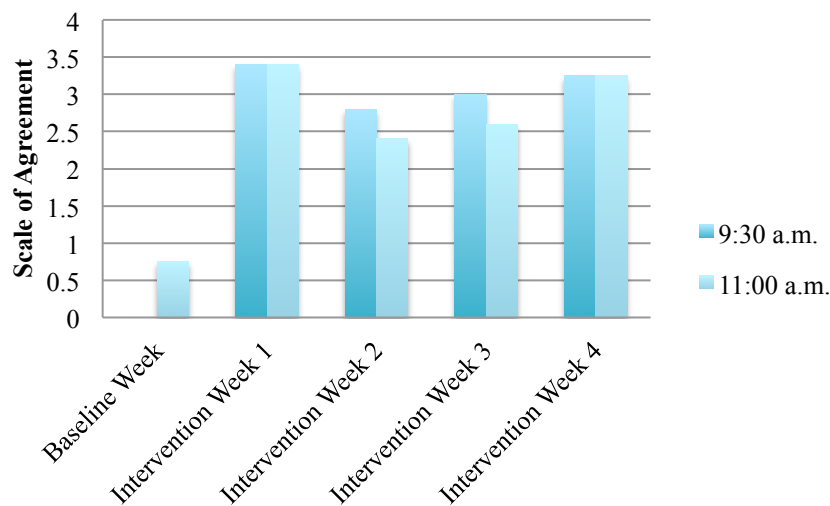


Figure 7. Children Participated in Grace and Courtesy Lessons; Researcher’s Weekly Attitude Scale Average, rated from 0 (not applicable) to 4 (strongly agree)

During the baseline week, no grace and courtesy lessons were given before 9:30 a.m. and only three were given from 9:30 a.m. until 11:00 a.m., all on the same day. Throughout the intervention weeks, grace and courtesy lessons were intentionally given daily. During the second week of the intervention, the substitute gave a lesson at a morning gathering about how to stack two drinking glasses on the tray, rather than three or more per stack, which had resulted in

glass breakage earlier in the week. As with other grace and courtesy lessons, the children were engaged and this was observed by their attention and interest in the lesson. They raised their hands to take a turn, they moved slowly to the tray and used two hands to carry the glass, and they added comments of what they observed after many children took a turn practicing.

The children used more grace and courtesy lesson language as we continued through the four-week intervention. This included saying to each other phrases like, “no, thank you, maybe later”, “would you please give me my oil cloth back?”, “please walk away from my work”, or “I would like some space right now”, which I noted in the Reflective Journal (Appendix F), as well as on the Conflict Form. With repetition of the lessons, the children were observed as being comfortable with the use of this language with each other independent of adult direction, both in situations of conflict and in their daily interactions.

When an issue was addressed with a specific child, other children were brought into the grace and courtesy lesson as well. One example of this was a child who was having difficulty keeping their nose clean, which is part of their development of functional independence. This child was invited to the lesson, along with two other children who have experience with blowing their nose independently. All three children willingly participated in the lesson, and the steps, which included blowing the nose, use of a mirror to check the nose, putting the tissue in the compost, washing hands with soap and water, and drying them.

The grace and courtesy lesson picture cards were not used very often over the course of the intervention. The cards were used with small groups of children, and the adult sat with the children at the beginning of each lesson. In one case, during intervention week two, I noted in my Reflective Journal that the cards were used appropriately with a small group, which means children took turns choosing cards, and practiced the lessons on the card. After a fourth child

joined the group, the children began to move quickly, without attention to these movements, during the lessons. An adult stepped in and redirected the use of the cards, and stayed with the children as they continued to use them.

Throughout the intervention, I noted in the Reflective Journal that with this practice, the adults lead most conflict resolution and grace and courtesy lessons. I appreciated the time I took to observe and notice details of conflict resolution, as well as the grace and courtesy lesson language used within the classroom. I also noted in the Reflective Journal that children modeled conflict resolution and language that was respectful to each other. In a Montessori mixed-age classroom, there is opportunity for children who have more experience to help those who do not have the same. This can be true even when an adult assists in this interaction.

At the beginning of this intervention, I found the practice of intentional grace and courtesy lessons a bit overwhelming. As I continued with the intervention, the lessons became more of a habit. I began to notice the children using language more often and recorded that in the Reflective Journal. As I listened to the children resolve conflicts with the grace and courtesy language, I thought about the children developing inner discipline and adapting to the classroom culture through this practice.

The adults in the classroom were both aware of my research and what it involved because they helped to complete data on the Conflict Form. This awareness of grace and courtesy lesson language, as well as the use of the conflict resolution script by the adults may have altered the way we interacted and responded, and what language we used. The guide and I gave grace and courtesy lessons, and I observed that the more I practiced, the more comfortable I became with them. In the Reflective Journal, I noted the grace and courtesy lessons being applied to new situations. I saw examples like a child who offered help to another child who could not open a

container, and a child who showed another child how to carry a book with two hands. I noticed the graciousness of these language and actions, even in regard to conflict resolution.

There was no consistent day of the week or outside influence when there were increased conflicts. For example, there was one day when there were no conflicts; otherwise they were part of the classroom experience. On this day with no conflicts, there were four grace and courtesy lessons given, two observers, and five children absent. Another example during the intervention weeks was when there were two days with five conflicts each. One was the day a holiday was celebrated, and the other was a day when there were six children absent, but there were no other changes, such as change of weather, drills, observers, or substitutes.

Conclusion

The data showed that an increase in grace and courtesy lessons impacted conflict in many ways. The Tally Record tool showed that grace and courtesy lessons did affect the number of conflicts. The number of conflicts did not significantly decrease over time; there were varied numbers of conflict from day to day. With this, the other data tools allowed me to see what was happening within the conflicts, and what language was used. As the research went on, more grace and courtesy lesson language was used in the conflict resolutions. I also saw this in the Reflective Journal, not only with regard to language, but also with the children independently supporting other children in times of potential conflict situations, such as unwanted observer or needing to ask for help. My attitude was rated on a scale of agreement and differed from my response in the Reflective Journal in that it was an in-the-moment response to the overall feel of the room. The parallel of these two data collection tools, along with the other two allowed me to reflect on the ways the lessons offer not only the language but also the experience of practicing so that they can be applied to other situations, and be used independently.

Action Plan

The data from my action research demonstrates that intentional, regular grace and courtesy lessons had a strong effect in reducing the number of conflicts. The data also showed that the children participated in the grace and courtesy lesson role-plays more often than they used the grace and courtesy lesson picture cards. They seemed to enjoy the lessons in the way they willingly volunteered to participate, engaged with each other, and applied what they learned in the lessons to new situations.

As an adult in the Montessori Children's House, I support independence by helping the children to help themselves. Within these lessons, and with the conflict resolution language, the adult allowed the child the freedom to repeat the lesson, to choose if they wanted to be involved in the lesson, to communicate freely, and to move throughout the space in a safe manner. We established guidelines of expectations with both the grace and courtesy lessons, and that the child needed to take part in the conflict resolution. Self-regulation and development of independence comes from within the child:

Children construct their own characters, building up in themselves the qualities we admire. These do not spring from our example or admonishments, but they result solely from a long and slow sequence of activities carried out by the child himself between the ages of three and six. At this time no one can "teach" the qualities of which character is composed. The only thing we can do is to put education on scientific footing, so that children can work effectively without being disturbed or impeded. (Montessori, 2010, p.217)

The lessons of grace and courtesy allowed the children to experience social graces in a neutral way and allowed them to practice social skills, in turn, helping to build their social

independence. This is an aid to their life, as the child truly begins to understand their impact on the classroom and the responsibility that comes with that. As I look to these results, I see through the data that the regular, intentional lessons of grace and courtesy can affect the ways in which conflict is resolved, including the total number of conflicts.

In order for the child to be independent in their conflict resolution, the language and skill itself needs to be modeled by adults and other children. With this opportunity to repeat using the language in the conflict resolution script, the children practiced resolving their conflict in a consistent way. This general language used in resolving conflicts before the intervention was similar to what was in the script, but with this tool, the language could be more consistent. Additionally, the child knew what to expect from the other child, and also knew that they would have a turn to interact and explain how they felt. With this, there is the hope that through repetition the children become more comfortable, and more independent in the use of this language, as well as with conflict and resolution of it.

There were many variables that limited, and impacted the data collection and intervention. Other observation of the classroom was required, and there were situations that took my attention away from this collection. Another dynamic was the timing and way in which I became involved in conflicts. During this collection period, I felt that I responded very quickly to conflict as to not let it escalate. When a conflict is physical, immediate intervention is necessary, but otherwise longer observation can happen before intervention. There was also my bias in the response to each child's conflict, as it was observed that certain children became more likely to interact physically in their conflicts.

Grace and courtesy lessons were given to children of mixed-ages and mixed social interactions. Lessons were given to children who were available at a certain time, as well as to

children with whom an issue could be addressed. These lessons have the limitation of being the idea of the adult, based on observation. I did not experience a child requesting to practice a specific grace and courtesy lesson in my intervention.

The classroom adults who recorded data knew the action research was about giving intentional grace and courtesy lessons and collection of information on conflicts. With this way of being in the forefront of our minds, I wonder how much this affected our overall language, reaction, and movements. The data could have also been impacted because there was a script to use in conflict resolution, and to observing, talking through, and resolving conflicts.

In the future, it would be interesting to see how very specific grace and courtesy lessons could be repeated in order to impact common conflicts at a given time in the classroom. If there is an issue that needed to be addressed, such as a child taking away another's materials, or friendship issues, these could be addressed with various targeted grace and courtesy lessons. As I move forward in my work, I hope I will continue to intentionally offer grace and courtesy lessons, as I have observed the impact they have on conflict.

Since the intervention has ended, I have observed the grace and courtesy lesson cards being used only two times. Over time, the cards may be used more as the children become more familiar with them. I could have done more work with the use of the cards and presented them more often. The goal of the picture cards is to allow the child independence in practicing the grace and courtesy lessons, which leads to the development of skills to not only work through many situations that the child may encounter in the classroom, and in their every day experiences, but also in resolving conflict. The use of these skills can help the child as they self-regulate their behavior and choices, again in times of conflict, and in general.

I do not yet know the long-term effects of these grace and courtesy lessons being given, but they have become a more observable part of our classroom culture. I have since observed many children ask others to move away from their work space using grace and courtesy language. I have observed children using this language in conflict resolution and in every day experience. A few weeks after the intervention, we had a classroom gathering time during the transition from the work cycle to lunch, and the children became loud and disruptive. I decided to end the gathering time and invited children one by one to begin lunch set up. The first child I invited stood up silently, put their hands by their sides, and walked slowly and carefully around two children, to get their lunch plate. The next child did the same, as did the following. This shifted the feel of the classroom to a calmer state for the lunchtime and afternoon. Since this happened, I have noticed children moving in this way, purposefully and with courtesy and care of each other and the classroom. This is part of the process to self-regulation, which is referred to as inner discipline within the Montessori method.

The hope is that with continued attention to giving the lessons on a regular basis we can look forward to observing their effects. Conflict happens almost every day, so by supporting the children through giving and practicing language, the hope is that it can be resolved more independently. There is also the goal of a mutually agreeable resolution so that children know they can be heard, and to practice listening to another child's requests. Hopefully, others can use this process and tailor it to the needs of their classroom by choosing role-plays that fit situations affecting their classroom and with a conflict resolution that works for the children in their classroom.

When I reflect on these results, I continue to value the Montessori method that I have been trained to practice, as these lessons are part of the method. Therefore, this brought me to

continue to reflect on the Montessori method and the many techniques of guidance within it. This study proved that these lessons, given to the child at a young age, could help as they develop personal graciousness, and courteous awareness of others, as part of their social relationships. By using the Montessori method in this research project, the results have reinforced to me that through the consistent practice, as well as observation of these lessons, the child gains self-respect, and is aware of the needs of others and their feelings. The grace and courtesy lessons allow the children to practice the culturally appropriate gestures that radiate dignity and love to others, just as the children show this within themselves.

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GRACE AND COURTESY AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Appendix A

A colleague created the conflict negotiation and resolution pattern script.

Conflict Resolution Script

Independence, mentally and socially

We give the child the language so that they can be successful in solving conflict independently. The script gives the child that language, and in this way empowers them.

New children may need some assistance in using this script. The more a child hears this script being used, the more comfortable they will be with it, and thus, they will be successful in independently resolving conflict with other children.

Frequency > Comfort > Success

Adult

1. The adult must be neutral in words, body language, and facial expressions. This encourages children to focus on each other.
2. If there is more than one concern:
 - a. If **Child B** also has a complaint, let them know that they will have a turn next.
 - b. Address one concern at a time.

Child A

1. "I don't like it when you *touch my work*."
Child states **specifically** and **exactly** what they are uncomfortable with.
2. "I want you to *keep your hands to your own body*."
Child states **specifically** and **exactly** in **positive terms** what they want or need from **Child B** to be comfortable. Saying, "stop that" or "don't do that anymore" is not an option.

Adult may pause for a moment to allow **Child B** an opportunity to respond to **Child A's** feelings. Saying "I'm sorry" is the child's choice. The purpose of this script is to give the child the language to communicate their own feelings. If the child chooses to say, "I'm sorry" it is then because they feel it.

Child B

1. "I will *keep my hands to my own body*." By saying these words out loud, **Child B** agrees to make a commitment to change their behavior.

GRACE AND COURTESY AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Appendix B

Conflict Form

Date:

Hour Timeframe (Circle One): 8:30-9:30 9:30-10:30 10:30-11:30

Observed Child(ren):

Age(s):

Time of Incident:

Brief Description of Conflict:

Description of Support Needed (Steps Taken if Adult Support Needed):

Grace and Courtesy Language Used:

Outcome of Resolution:

Notes:

GRACE AND COURTESY AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Appendix C

Cards were compiled with help from a colleague.

Sample of Picture Cards



How to blow your nose



How to participate in a collective



How to ask for help



How to help solve a conflict

GRACE AND COURTESY AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Appendix D

Tally Record Per Day, Per Child

Children by number (assigned at random)

C: Conflict

G: Grace and Courtesy Lesson Given

GC: Grace and Courtesy Cards Used

Date:

Additional Notes (weather changes, drills, substitutes, etc.):

1 C: G: GC:	2 C: G: GC:	3 C: G: GC:	4 C: G: GC:	5 C: G: GC:
6 C: G: GC:	7 C: G: GC:	8 C: G: GC:	9 C: G: GC:	10 C: G: GC:
11 C: G: GC:	12 C: G: GC:	13 C: G: GC:	14 C: G: GC:	15 C: G: GC:
16 C: G: GC:	17 C: G: GC:	18 C: G: GC:	19 C: G: GC:	20 C: G: GC:
21 C: G: GC:	22 C: G: GC:	23 C: G: GC:	24 C: G: GC:	25 C: G: GC:
26 C: G: GC:	27 C: G: GC:	28 C: G: GC:	29 C: G: GC:	

GRACE AND COURTESY AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Appendix E

Attitude Scale

Attitude Scale to be completed by action researcher at **9:30** and **11:00** each morning work cycle.

Date:

1. The children worked in a cooperative manner.
strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree not applicable
2. The children worked through and resolved conflict in a cooperative manner.
strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree not applicable
3. The children used respectful, positive language to work through and resolve conflict.
strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree not applicable
4. The children participated in the grace and courtesy lesson by observing others and practicing the social skill being presented.
strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree not applicable
5. The children who used the grace and courtesy picture cards were engaged with the material.
strongly agree agree disagree strongly disagree not applicable

GRACE AND COURTESY AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Appendix F

Reflective Journal

Reflective Journal with prompts, recorded at the end of each day

Date:

I saw conflict resolved in this way today:

I saw grace and courtesy lessons and language used in this way today: