What's Your Position on Transitions?

Moving Students to the Carpet More Efficiently

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Teacher Inquiry – May 2010

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Description of Teaching Context

As a Professional Development intern through The Pennsylvania State University, I have taught in a self-contained, first grade classroom at Gray’s Woods Elementary, located in the State College Area School District. In my first grade classroom, there are 20 students; 12 are girls, and eight are boys. 17 students are Caucasian, one is Indian, and one is Asian. In regard to academic levels, there is a wide range of abilities. Each child contributes significantly to the classroom on a daily basis. Four students are in learning enrichment for math, and six students are in learning enrichment for reading. One student has a learning disability and receives services for math and reading. Six students are part of the Title 1/Response to Intervention/Jumpstart program, which means they receive an extra hour of reading support per day. In regard to reading and writing, two students are currently above grade level, seven are below, and 10 students are at grade level.

Our classroom is equally diverse when considering the apparent behavioral patterns and social relationships among students. There is one boy who is a high achiever and a social leader in the classroom; he has the tendency to easily influence others. Of the 19 students, two boys are easy to get along with but have trouble finishing their work. One girl is quiet and anxious to conform. There are two boys who are nonconformists and sometimes a challenge in terms of behavior. In regard to academics and art, another boy is gifted and talented. One boy requires emotional support because he is easily frustrated. When he feels he cannot successfully
complete the task at hand, his frustration interferes with his ability to work. In addition, five students receive support from the Instructional Support Team for academic and/or behavioral support. In April, one boy joined our classroom, after spending the year in the HEARTS program. “The HEARTS acronym stands for Helping Elementary At-Risk To Succeed. This program is a collaborative effort between the State College Area School District and the Home Nursing Agency (HNA). This collaboration provides students the opportunity to receive their academics & therapeutic needs in one location during the school day,” according to the district’s website (State College Area School District). Most of the students in the class, however, are well behaved and eager to participate and learn (Full Version of Inquiry Brief: Appendix A).

Main Wonderings and Questions

Main Wondering

What transition strategy works best with my first grade classroom?

Over the course of my inquiry, my wondering remained consistent. In the beginning, I wanted to learn more about all transitions within the classroom, but I decided to focus solely on transitions to the carpet. This transition was something that we did approximately six times a day and sets the tone for the subsequent activity.

Sub Wonderings

- Which strategies do my first graders enjoy the most?
- Do boys respond differently to various transitions than girls do?
- Is there a link between the effectiveness and the popularity of a transition?
- Do the students respond more effectively to verbal cues or nonverbal cues?
- What impact does music have on a first grader’s motivation to transition?

Data Collection

In order to explore which type of transition worked best with my first grade class, I
collected data in several forms: formal research, observational notes, student surveys, class meetings, teacher surveys, and student interviews.

**Formal Research**

*Data Collection*

In order to prepare for my inquiry, I researched literature to develop a solid foundation for my wondering. I read books about classroom management, transitions, and child development. I also read many articles and websites that contained a multitude of transition ideas and attention getters. Details about these resources can be found in the annotated bibliography (Appendix B). Aside from formal research, I also talked with my mentor and Professional Development Associate (PDA) about possible transition strategies. The purpose of my research was to develop a list of possible strategies to use with my students (Appendix C).

*Analysis*

After reading books, articles and websites, as well as talking to my mentor and PDA, I created a list of strategies that I was interested in trying with my first graders. I then analyzed each strategy and labeled it with a category. The categories I made were: singing, listening to music, counting, nonverbal, kinesthetic, and clapping. With this data, I analyzed the various categories and created a student survey that was aligned with the categories I created (Appendix D). The purpose of this was to show me which transitions my students would possibly enjoy and which ones they might not enjoy as much.

**Observational Notes**

*Data Collection*

Throughout my inquiry experience, I took observational notes about each transition to the carpet. I recorded the length of the transition, the activity that the students transitioned from,
what activity they transitioned to, any interesting behavior or conversation that occurred during the transition, as well as the date (Appendix E). During the first two weeks of my inquiry, I used observational notes as a way to collect baseline data, and I continued to collect data this way throughout my inquiry. As I began implementing weekly strategies, I also recorded the strategy used, in my observational notes.

The first strategy I implemented with my students involved using a “secret” word. I told the students that there was a secret word that only room 17 knew, and that whenever they heard their teachers say the secret word, they were to come to the carpet as quickly as possible. I changed the secret word every day, to attempt to keep the transition exciting.

The second strategy I tried in the classroom involved counting with the students, until everyone was seated on the carpet. After the transition, I would write the time it took the class to move to the carpet and sit down, on the chalkboard. During Monday’s morning meeting that week, I informed the students of the new transition and told them that their job was to try to beat the time on the chalkboard, thus moving to the carpet faster.

During the third week of implementing strategies, the students only had school for two days because of student-parent-teacher conferences. I decided to time the transitions to the carpet without using any strategy. My mentor and I simply asked the students to join us on the carpet when it was time. The purpose was to see if the students had become more efficient at transitioning.

The third strategy I tried, involved singing a song when it was time to transition to the carpet. I picked a new song for every day of the week, in an attempt to keep the transition from being too repetitive. During morning meeting each day, I showed the students the song on a piece of chart paper and taught them the lyrics and the tune. Four out of the five days, the tune
was from a familiar song. I told the students that whenever they heard their teachers start singing, to join in and meet them on the carpet.

For the fourth and final strategy, I decided to focus on nonverbal transition strategies. I chose a different one to use everyday, but I normally said “Okay” before using the strategy, in order to get their attention. On Tuesday (I attended the career fair on Monday, so no strategy was implemented on that day), I told the students to move to the carpet whenever they saw their teachers do the “moose antler” hand symbol. Wednesday’s strategy involved telling the students that whenever they saw their teacher writing, “Please come to the carpet” on the chalkboard, to quickly transition. On Thursday, my mentor and I would begin clapping/patting a pattern with our hands, on our thighs, shoulders, heads, etc. That was the students’ signal to come to the carpet. Finally, Friday’s strategy involved my mentor or I putting on a funny hat whenever we wanted the students to transition.

Analysis

I began analyzing the observational notes by looking at the baseline data. I searched for any patterns that existed in regard to the length of the transition and the activity the students transitioned to and from. Then, I found the average transition time for each day and looked to see if the transitions decreased, increased, or randomly fluctuated throughout the week. Likewise, I determined the average transition time for each week. I then repeated this process when analyzing the post-intervention data. This time, I also looked for patterns that existed in regard to the type of transition used and the length that the transition took. I then determined how long the average transition time for each strategy was. In addition, I compared the results of the three verbal transitions to the results of the nonverbal transitions to help determine the answer to my sub question regarding the effectiveness of verbal versus nonverbal transitions.
Finally, I determined the average transition time for each day of the week to see if there were any patterns.

**Student Surveys**

*Data Collection*

The first survey I developed and administered to the students was a survey that asked them about their interests (Appendix D). They used smiley faces to rate how much they enjoyed various activities. The reason for this survey was to help me implement strategies based on their interests. The second survey I gave the students, served as a way to collect baseline data on the students’ beliefs about their own behaviors during transitions (Appendix F). Every Friday, after implementing a particular strategy throughout the week, I surveyed the students to see if they enjoyed the strategy (Appendix G). The surveys also asked the students to think about whether or not the strategy made them move to the carpet faster. After trying a new strategy each week for a month, I gave the students a post-intervention survey because I wanted to see if the students thought any of their transition-related behavior had changed (Appendix H). This was the same survey that the students filled out before my inquiry began. The purpose of this was to see if the students noticed any changes in their behavior. This also allowed me to discover how the students felt about their transitions after four weeks of using various strategies.

*Analysis*

Before I began implementing strategies, I analyzed the student-interest survey that I administered. I used this survey, along with my initial research, to develop a plan for my inquiry. In order to find out which activities my class enjoyed, I added up all the students who circled the smiley face, the students who circled the straight face, and the students who circled the sad face. Since the questions aligned with the transition categories I compiled, this provided
me with valuable information as to the types of transitions the students would possibly enjoy and the types that they might not enjoy as much. I decided to choose four completely different transition strategies, in order to find out which type worked best with my students.

When I began analyzing the weekly student-reflection surveys, I searched for patterns among the students. I considered how much each student enjoyed the particular strategy and whether or not he or she thought it made him or her move to the carpet faster. The purpose of this was to explore a possible link between a transition’s level of effectiveness and the popularity of that particular type.

Lastly, I looked at the post-intervention survey to analyze the students as individuals, as well as the whole class. I compared each student’s pre-intervention and post-intervention to determine how many people thought their behavior during transitions had improved, had remained the same, or had worsened.

**Class Meetings**

*Data Collection*

After I collected baseline data for two weeks, I held a class meeting to introduce my inquiry to the students. I began by telling the students that I had been timing them every time they were told to move to the carpet. We discussed what a transition was and what should happen during transitions. The students were told that they should quickly clean up and move to the carpet right away, instead of talking with friends, getting up to get a drink, or sharpening a pencil. I took observational notes during this class meeting. After the meeting, I typed the observational notes and recorded more notes about the experience (Appendix I).

At the end of my inquiry, I held a twenty-minute class meeting with the first graders, regarding their transitions. This conversation was recorded on Garage Band (Appendix I). The
purpose of the meeting was to determine how well the students thought the class was transitioning and their feelings about each type. We discussed which strategies they enjoyed and which they disliked. To develop a better sense of understanding, we also discussed the reasons why some were more enjoyable than others and why some seemed to be more effective. In addition, the students shared suggestions for ways to improve the various strategies.

**Analysis**

The first class meeting allowed me to teach the students what transitions were, as well as motivate them to move faster when going to the carpet. The students were completely unaware of transitions and the time they had been wasting. They did not realize that they had not been following directions. This was an opportunity to educate the students about what a transition should look like. I analyzed this first class meeting by reflecting on the notes I took during and after the meeting and noticing the patterns among students’ comments.

To analyze the second class meeting, I listened to the recording on Garage Band and typed a transcript. This helped me find patterns among the intervention data I collected and the students’ reflections and ideas on the various transitions. I analyzed the conversation and determined how many students demonstrated an awareness of transitions, as well as an understanding of their importance.

**Teacher Survey**

**Data Collection**

Aside from collecting data on my students’ transitions and their survey responses, I developed and administered a teacher survey to the Gray’s Woods staff, regarding transitions and attention getters (Appendix J). I asked the teachers to include their name, the grade level they taught, which transitions/attention-getters they used, how often they used each one, and other
questions regarding the patterns in their classrooms.

**Analysis**

In regard to the teacher surveys, I analyzed the data with several thoughts in mind. I was trying to decide which strategy to try for my final week of intervention. To address my sub question about nonverbal strategies, I made a list of the various nonverbal strategies that the teachers mentioned in their surveys. I wanted to see if other teachers had noticed patterns in their classrooms that I may have been missing in my own classroom. Lastly, I looked at each survey and searched for patterns among the answers.

**Follow-up Interviews**

**Data Collection**

Finally, I conducted short interviews with each student about his or her favorite and least favorite strategy and the reasons why. I brought each student into the hallway, individually, and explained that I wanted him or her to give me honest opinions because I was interested in what each one of them thought (Appendix K).

**Analysis**

When analyzing the follow-up interviews, I looked at the four different strategies in terms of each student’s favorite and least favorite strategy. I looked at the four different transitions: secret word, counting, singing, and nonverbal. Then I found the total number of students who voted for each one. Next, to address my wondering about gender differences, I compiled a list of how many boys chose each one as his or her favorite/least favorite and how many girls chose each one as his or her favorite/least favorite.

**Explanation of Findings**

*Claim #1 Students are more likely to transition effectively and follow directions when they are*
aware of time.

**Evidence A:** When I collected baseline data prior to implementing new transition strategies, the average transition time to the carpet was approximately 1 minute and 10 seconds, with our longest transition lasting more than 3 minutes. Their actions before the first class meeting proved that they were unaware of the time being wasted during transitions. During our discussion, one student said, “Well, I think that we can try better because we know what transitions are now” (Appendix I). This, along with the rest of the conversation, proved to me that the students had been unaware of transitions and their importance.

**Evidence B:** During the second week of intervention, I chose a transition strategy that involved the students counting with me from the time I called them to come to the carpet, until everyone was seated. The students quickly became aware of the time that it took them to transition. After the first transition of the day, I wrote, on the chalkboard, how many seconds our transition took. I then encouraged the students to beat that time next time. During the second transition of the day, the students were seated by 12 seconds, except for one student who did not put her book away when she was supposed to. While this student was moving around the room, one student said, “Hurry (student’s name)!” For the third transition of the day, everyone was seated by 16 seconds, and someone raised his or her hand and said, “We beat our last [transition] time by 14 seconds!” The students’ comments during the counting transitions showed me that they were aware of time.

**Evidence C:** During the final class meeting, after the students had used 4 transition strategies for one week each and self-reflected every Friday, the students proved that they had become aware of transitions. Our average transition time to the carpet had decreased from 1 minute and 10 seconds to 25 seconds. Below is an excerpt from our second class meeting, in which we were
discussing transitions (Appendix I).

Miss DiSanti- Raise your hands if you think the counting strategy went well. Why did that one go well?

Student- Because I think we all went quicker.

Miss DiSanti- Why do you think it made you move faster?

Student- It made us move faster because we got to count and try to beat it next time and get a lower number.

The sample above, from the final class meeting, illustrates how students transition effectively when they are aware of time. The student explained that she thought they tried to beat their previous time, which showed she was aware of time.

Evidence D: After collecting baseline data and implementing four different transition strategies, I determined the average transition time for each strategy and compared them. I then created a graph with my data, to show the average transition time for each strategy (Appendix E). The graph I created clearly shows that the counting strategy resulted in the shortest average transition time of 17.36 seconds. Since the students were aware of time, they transitioned faster.

Claim #2: Gender differences and student interest should be considered when planning transitions.

Evidence A: During the third week of implementing a new transition strategy, I had a different song for every day of the week. Four of the five songs went to the tune of songs that were familiar to first graders, so I assumed this would be exciting for the students. However, when I performed follow-up interviews with all the students in my classes, I found that these songs were more enjoyable for some than others. According to my data, 12 of the 13 girls in my class said that the singing transitions were their favorite, whereas
only one of the seven boys picked singing as his favorite. On the contrary, five of the seven boys picked nonverbal transitions to be their favorite, when only one of the 12 girls chose that transition. I then created a graph that clearly shows how over 90% of the girls in my classroom picked singing as their favorite strategy, and less than 15% of the boys picked this as their favorite (Appendix E). Similarly, over 70% of boys chose nonverbal strategies as their favorite, and less than 10% of girls chose this type. The data that I collected suggests that the first grade girls enjoy singing more than first grade boys. It also suggests that the boys enjoy nonverbal transitions more than the girls. It would be important as their teacher, to use transitions that both the girls and boys like, so it is an enjoyable time for all. The graph further illustrates the idea that gender differences and differences in student interest exist in my classroom and must be taken into consideration when planning and implementing transitions.

Evidence B: My belief about gender differences and student interest became even stronger when I analyzed my observational notes (Appendix E). I noticed that when I implemented singing transitions, one student said, “Singing is for girls,” and two other boys agreed. This showed me that they either disliked singing or felt uncomfortable with this type of transition. In addition, I noticed that in my notes from the follow-up interviews, one student said that singing makes her feel “shy.” From this, I concluded that gender differences exist and must be taken into consideration.

Claim #3- The first grade students developed an understanding of the importance and meaning of transitions.
Evidence A: By analyzing the transcript I created from the Garage Band recording of our second class meeting, I realized that the students had truly realized why it was important to transition effectively (Appendix I). In the beginning of my inquiry, students did not know what a transition was, and by our final class meeting, one student defined transitions as, “When you move from one activity to something else.” When asked why transitions were important, the students made comments such as, “So we can get to our activity,” “So we have more time for the activity,” and “So that we can come to the carpet faster, so we can start our day right away!” During my first class meeting, the students were unaware of the importance of transitions. As students realized the meaning of transitions, the first graders began encouraging each other to move faster to the carpet and making comments when people were not transitioning fast enough. My observational notes depict this communication (Appendix E).

Wednesday, April 14, 2010

Nonverbal

Transitioning from science (desks) to sharing on the carpet

Some students came right to the carpet, while others remained at their desks. Many students were unaware that I wrote on the board [meaning they should come to the carpet]. One student said, “Guys come! She’s writing on the board!”

Transition: 33 seconds

Above, is an example from my observational notes regarding a particular transition that occurred while I was implementing nonverbal strategies. This sample from my observational notes shows how students encouraged and motivated each other to transition to the carpet faster, as they realized the importance of transitions. The students’ behavior throughout my inquiry, their completed surveys, other notes I took about the transitions, and their comments during the
class meetings clearly show that the students developed an understanding of the importance of transitions.

Claim #4: The length of a transition is not the only factor that must be considered when evaluating its effectiveness.

Evidence A: When I started my inquiry, I had the notion that one transition strategy was going to be significantly better or worse than the others. I wanted to answer my main wondering: What transition strategy works best with my first grade classroom? I was searching for some sort of “groundbreaking” evidence that proved that one strategy lead to the shortest transition time, making it the most effective. After completing the inquiry, I realized that the shortest average transition time occurred when using the counting strategy. The longest average transition time occurred when using the nonverbal strategy. By analyzing the data, I found that the counting strategy was 41% more effective than the nonverbal strategy. While the counting strategy appeared to the most effective, I realized, during the final class meeting, that the students did not agree that it was the best. The students made me aware of something that I had not noticed, during our final class meeting. All 20 students thought their peers were “running” and “pushing and shoving” during the counting transitions. While this was a sign that the students were focused on moving to the carpet faster, this was certainly a safety issue. The excerpt below, from the final class-meeting transcript, illustrates this idea (Appendix I).

Miss DiSanti- What didn’t you like about counting?
Student- I didn’t like it because people were shoving and pushing.
Miss DiSanti- Does anyone else think friends were shoving and pushing during the counting? (All 19 students raised their hands)
Miss DiSanti- Why do you think people were pushing and shoving?
Student- Because they wanted to get to the carpet faster.
Miss DiSanti- So it made you want to move faster?
Students- Yes
Miss DiSanti- Why were people running for that one and not the other ones?
Student- To beat the time
Miss DiSanti- Is there something we can change to make it safer and better for us next time?
Student- We could count more slowly so we won’t have to push and shove.

I learned that the students had negative feelings about this particular strategy. However, it was not because of their interest in counting but because of the safety issues that ensued. I then realized that the fastest transition was not necessarily the most effective. If I were to use this strategy again, I would take the students’ advice and count more slowly, so they would not feel as rushed.

**Evidence B:** In addition to the final class meeting, I interviewed students individually. The interview results confirmed my beliefs that the fastest transition was not necessary the most effective. When I asked the students which strategy was their favorite, 0 of the 20 students interviewed chose the counting strategy (Appendix K). When I analyzed my data, I found that three of the 20 students interviewed, said that counting was their least favorite because people were running, pushing, and shoving. Even though the counting strategy caused transition times to be shorter, it was ineffective because of safety issues.

**Reflections and Implications for Future Practice**

After completing my first inquiry as an educator, I realized that I have gained valuable knowledge about transitions and getting students’ attention. I also became much
more aware of time in general. By collecting baseline data of transitions for two weeks, implementing four different transition strategies for one week each, and comparing the data I collected, I was able to see which strategies were more effective, which ones the students seemed to enjoy the most, and how students responded to various strategies.

I learned that students responded differently to various transitions because of gender differences and student interest. I also found that students were more successful transitioning when they were aware of time, like during the counting strategy. First graders typically do not have a sound concept of time, so using a counting strategy made them more aware. It also motivated students to come to the carpet because they could work together as a class to try to beat their previous transition time. In addition, I found that the students developed an understanding of the importance and meaning of transitions. Lastly, I found that the length of a transition is not the only factor that must be considered when evaluating its effectiveness. While I learned a great deal throughout this inquiry, I still have unanswered questions.

- How effective would these strategies be when transitioning to places other than the carpet?
- What effect would starting the inquiry in the beginning of the year, instead of halfway through, have on the students’ transitions?
- What impact does letting students choose transitions have on their effectiveness?
- How often should you change transition strategies?
- How could I help those students who continue to struggle with transitions?
- How would students from another class or grade level respond to the transitions I implemented?

As a teacher, I will naturally use transitions and attention-getters throughout my career. In the future, however, I would introduce the idea of transitions in the beginning of the year to make students aware of their behavior. Instead of introducing the idea halfway through the school year, I would set students up for success by discussing it in the very beginning. Researching various strategies and developing my list of recommended strategies, will allow me to change my strategies often, in order to keep the students motivated and engaged. While my formal inquiry is complete for now, I will continue to use the transition strategies from my inquiry, throughout the school year. I will also continue to try new strategies and experiment with which ones the students seem to enjoy and which ones seem to shorten transition time.

Appendix

Appendix A: Inquiry Brief

Context

As a Professional Development intern through Penn State University, I have taught in a self-contained, first grade classroom at Gray’s Woods Elementary, which is located in the State College Area School District. In my first grade classroom, there are nineteen students; twelve are girls, and seven are boys. Seventeen students are Caucasian, one is Indian, and one is Asian. In regard to academic levels, there is a wide range of abilities. While a wide range exists, each child contributes significantly to the classroom on a daily basis. Four students are in learning enrichment for math, and six students are in learning enrichment for reading. One student has a learning disability and receives services for math and reading. Six students are part of the Jump
Start/Response to Intervention program. In regard to reading and writing, two students are currently above grade level, seven are below, and ten students are at grade level.

Our classroom is equally diverse when considering the apparent behavioral patterns and social relationships among students. There is one boy who is a high achiever and a social leader in the classroom; he has the tendency to easily influence others. Of the nineteen students, two boys are easy to get along with but have trouble finishing their work. One girl is quiet and anxious to conform. There is one boy who is a nonconformist and is sometimes a challenge in terms of behavior. In terms of academics and art, one boy is gifted and talented. One boy requires emotional support because he is easily frustrated. In addition, four students receive support from the Instructional Support Team. Most of the students, however, are well behaved and eager to participate and learn.

Rationale

As elementary school students, transitions are a common part of the day. While they represent a small percent of the school day, transitions are extremely important. A successful transition can lead to a successful lesson or activity while a poor transition can hinder a lesson or create a negative environment. In my classroom, my mentor has always used a wide variety of creative transitions. Some examples include fun and educational songs, counting, and rhymes, all of which have been developmentally appropriate.

As an intern in a first grade classroom, I have observed and practiced various transition strategies, and I have become interested in which strategies allow children to transition more efficiently. I would love to see less time wasted, and more time spent learning, so motivating students to follow directions and move to the next activity efficiently, is an important topic to
me. While having efficient transitions is important, another aspect is whether or not the students enjoy the transitions. I am interested in finding which transitions are the most efficient; I am also curious as to whether or not the transitions that are effective are also considered fun.

Although I have only begun collecting baseline data in the classroom, I believe verbal transitions, such as songs or rhymes, will be more efficient than nonverbal transitions, such as sign language. I also expect to find that the students will enjoy transitions that involve singing or moving their bodies (i.e. stretching). The results of my survey showed that many students enjoy using their bodies and singing, so I am predicting that these students will also enjoy transitions that involve these types of behavior.

**Main Wondering**

*What attention-getting and transition strategies work best with my first grade classroom?*

**Sub-questions**

*Which strategies do first graders enjoy the most?*

- In order to begin answering this question, I have distributed a survey to my students, in which they rated their level of interest in regard to certain activities that could potentially be used to transition, such as clapping, singing, and counting. As my inquiry progresses and I begin implementing a new strategy every week, I will survey the students about how much they enjoyed the strategy and how well it worked for them. This will help me understand which transitions they enjoy the most. Furthermore, observational notes of their body language and facial expressions during transitions will provide valuable insight into the effectiveness and popularity of the various strategies.

*Do students transition more efficiently during certain times of the day?*

- I will time various transitions throughout the next few months and record them through observational notes. In addition to the length of the transition, I am also including the time of
day it took place. I will use the data to compare how effective the various transitions were at
different times of the day. Observational notes will also be taken during/after the transition, and
reflective notes will be taken after the transitions, to record interesting observations. The
observational notes will include the length of the transition, the activity that the students are
transitioning from, what activity they are transitioning to, any interesting behavior or
conversation that occurs during the transition, as well as the date

*Do first graders respond more effectively to nonverbal or verbal cues?*

- Over the course of this inquiry, I will be implementing both nonverbal and verbal cues. I will
split my data into these two groups and compare the information collected. Looking at which
group had a shorter average transition time will help me understand which type the first graders
responded better to.

*What impact does music have on a first grader’s motivation to transition?*

- I will be implementing various musical transitions, such as listening to music or singing.
Similar to the data collection strategy mentioned above, I will analyze the transition times and
observational notes associated with this type and compare them to the results of non-musical
transitions. This will help me understand if music had a positive impact on my first graders’
transitioning.

**Timeline**

*February*

- February 22nd-26th
  - Record baseline transition times and take observational notes on interesting
    behavior or comments during and after the various transitions

- March 1st-5th:
  - Continue to time baseline transitions and take observational notes about interesting
    behaviors after the various transitions.
  - Research different transition strategies
  - Implement a new strategy and use it, along with my mentor, all week.
  - Develop and administer survey to students about their interests
March

• March 8th-12th (Spring Break):
  - Continue to research and plan for different transition strategies
  - Organize data that has been collected so far, by looking for themes or patterns

• March 15th-19th:
  - During a morning meeting, talk with students about what a transition is. I will give them examples, and ask them how they feel how our class behaves during these times.
  - Develop and administer pre-intervention survey to students
  - Implement the “Secret Word” strategy and use it, along with my mentor, all week
  - Continue to time transitions and take observational notes
  - Develop and administer survey in which the students will evaluate the “Secret Word” strategy

• March 22nd-26th:
  - Implement a counting transition and use it, along with my mentor, all week.
  - Continue to time transitions and take observational notes
  - Begin to analyze collected data and develop claims
  - Develop and administer survey in which the students will evaluate the counting strategy

• March 29th-April 2nd:
  - Since the students are only in school for two days because of goal-setting conferences, time transitions and take observational notes without using a strategy
  - Continue to time transitions and take observational notes

April

• April 5th-9th:
  - Implement song transitions use them, along with my mentor, all week.
  - Continue to time transitions and take observational notes
  - Email teachers about my inquiry and distribute survey to teachers at Grays Woods on Monday and request that they be returned by the following Monday, either in email form or hard copy. (Before sending the survey, ask Mrs. Colangelo, our principal for approval)
- Develop and administer survey in which the students will evaluate the song strategy
- Begin analyzing data and writing paper

• April 12th-16th:
  - Implement nonverbal transitions and use them, along with my mentor, all week.
  - Continue to time transitions and take observational notes
  - Develop and administer survey in which the students will evaluate the counting strategy
  - Develop and administer pre-implementation survey to students
  - Draft of paper due April 16th

• April 19th-23th:
  - Begin preparing for presentation

• April 26th-30th:
  - Revise paper
  - Prepare for presentation

• May 3rd-7th:
  - Final copy of paper due May 2nd
  - Revise paper
  - Prepare for presentation
  - Inquiry Conference May 8th

Data Collection Ideas

For this inquiry, I plan on collecting data in various forms. The data collection will consist of baseline data, intervention data, and follow up/conclusion data. I will do so using several different strategies or methods. The sources of my data collection will also be varied, as I plan on interviewing and observing teachers and students. A detailed outline of my plan for data collection follows:

• As a reference point, I will collect data regarding how long the transitions took before the inquiry began. I will time how long it takes students to move from their desks to a seated
position on the carpet. The timer will begin when the teacher (either myself or my mentor) asks the students to clean up and meet her on the carpet, and it will end when all students are sitting in their appropriate spots on the carpet.

• I will survey students about their interests, in order to learn which transitions they might consider fun. Later, following a class meeting, I will survey them about how they think the class is doing during transitions, as well as how well the students think the transitions worked for them and how much they enjoyed each one.

• My mentor and I will take observational notes on classroom activities and the outcomes of the various strategies. The notes will contain information about the type of transition, the length of time the transition took, the time and day it took place, and any other variables, as well as any interesting student or teacher behavior.

• I will administer surveys to other teachers in Gray’s Woods, in order to determine what transitions they use and which ones they find to be successful or less successful. The surveys will provide me with valuable insight, as I learn about new strategies. I will also learn what time of day teachers think their students have a difficult time transitioning, how long a typical transition in their classroom takes, as well as other pertinent information.

• Reflective journals will also allow me to think about the past week, regarding whether or not the chosen transition was successful and what made it successful or less successful.

Appendix B: Annotated Bibliography


A previous PDS intern wrote this report. The report has many transition ideas and attention getters, which I could consider using with my first graders. It also has great examples of teacher and student surveys, which I could use as a guide when creating my own surveys. The author’s main wondering, “How can I learn to use efficient transitions to maximize students’ attention and motivation, to maintain a positive classroom environment, and reduce time off-task?” is quite similar to my current wondering, so I can use this report to generate ideas and to learn about valuable resources regarding transitions and classroom management.

This website is a compilation of various classroom management tips, which were submitted by teachers across the world. Most of the ideas are for primary grades, which is relevant to the classroom in which I am currently teaching. Aside from general classroom management tips, there are transition ideas for various times of the day, as well as the school year. This resource provides valuable transition ideas, which I could potentially experiment with in my classroom. I also plan on utilizing the myriad of tips from this website, in order to help me better manage my classroom.


This book discusses ways to decrease disruptive behavior, and increase productive behavior. According to chapter 1 of the book, the goal is to help teachers “create ethical approaches that are right for the sort of teacher you are, help the children you teach, fit with the school’s ethos and leadership, match the values of the children’s families, and fit the educational system that employs you” (Corrie). I could use this resource to find transitions and strategies that match the educational setting, in which I am currently teaching. In addition, this book could help me learn why my students behave the way they do during transitions and provide me with ways to help the students better adjust during these situations.


http://www.educationworld.com/!a_curr/!columnists/!jones/!jones016.shtml

This article discusses the teacher’s role during transitions, as well as the student’s role. It also provides information about how to make students feel responsible for their actions, as well as their education. Included in the article, are ways to transition before and after lessons. One of my goals is to help students become intrinsically motivated to effectively transition from one activity to the next, and this article discusses many ways to do so. This resource contains many ideas that I could utilize with my students, in order to make transitions shorter and to help students understand why effective transitions are important.


This book contains classroom management strategies that were used in three different
classroom settings. It contains much information regarding student motivation, how to meet children’s needs, cognitive and moral development, establishing guidelines, dealing with behavior problems, using nonverbal cues, as well as a myriad of other pertinent topics. I plan on using this book to better understand the students in my first grade classroom, and how I can become a better educator, in terms of classroom management. Furthermore, this book will help me meet the students’ needs, in regard to transitioning and adjusting to various situations. I will use this book to help make transitions more efficient in my classroom, by learning more about children and classroom management.


This article discusses the problems that arise during clean up and ways to reduce these situations. The strategies mentioned are motivational and rewarding for students, which makes clean up a more positive experience. In my classroom, getting students to clean up their area quickly and effectively has been a struggle, and I plan on utilizing this resource to make clean up an easier transition for both the students, as well as the teachers. If I can make it easier and more fun for the students to clean up, they may have more success with transitioning from one activity to the next.


Northeast Foundation for Children, Inc.

This book goes into great detail about the developmental stages associated with children between the ages of 4 and 14. It provides information that explains why children behave the way they do. I could use this book to learn more about the students in my classroom, who range from age six to eight. This book would serve as an invaluable guide, as I employ developmentally appropriate transitions and attention getters. By understanding my students’ developmental needs, the more I will be able to relate to them during transitions.


This website provides many examples of songs that can be used for classroom transitions. It displays songs that are divided into different categories, such as transitioning to the carpet and transitioning to a circle. I plan on exploring the effectiveness of music and songs, so this website will be helpful in planning and implementing various musical transitions.

http://atozteachersonstuff.com/Tips/Sponge_and_Transition_ACTIVITIES/  

*Sponge and Transition Activities* is a page on an atozteacherstuff.com forum, and Cynthia Valdez was a teacher who posted a particular strategy in which interested me. It involves making a “football field” poster with 5 “yard lines” and every time the students transition under 1 minute, or the desired time, the marker on the poster moves to the next “yard line.” If the students get to the other side of the field by the end of the day, I would put a cotton ball in our “Party Container,” which would allow the students to earn a reward when the container was full. I believe this system would be highly motivating to students.

*Transition activities: Finding "treasures" within the classroom.* (n.d.). Retrieved from  
http://198.66.129.179/findingtreasures.htm

This website is similar to the previous one, as it offers different transition ideas for various times of the day. It also provides an explanation as to why transitions are more difficult for children than adults. This can help me understand why children have difficulties with transitioning from activity to activity. Furthermore, it will allow me to better meet my students’ needs.

**Appendix C: List of Strategies**

Literature-Suggested Strategies

- *Secret Word* (Allen)
- *Counting* (Brand)
- *Heigh Ho* (Hummingbird Educational Resources)
- *Hush, Shh, Quiet Please* (Hummingbird Educational Resources)
- *We Are Waiting* (Hummingbird Educational Resources)
- *Time for Carpet* (Hummingbird Educational Resources)
- *1, 2, 3, 4* (Hummingbird Educational Resources)
- *Mystery walker* (Brand)
- *Beat the clock* (Starr)
- *Football poster* (Valdez)
- *Start singing a song* (Transition Activities)
- *Clapping/stomping* (Transition Activities)

Teacher-Suggested Strategies (Nonverbal)

- *Turning off lights*
- *Clapping*
- *Writing on board*
- *Hand signal*
- *Ding a chime/ring a bell*
- *Looking at watch*
- *Patterns to repeat*
- Turning on music
- Set timer

Appendix D: Example of Student Interest Survey
Name: 

1. Do you like to sing?
   ☺ ☻ ☼

2. Do you like to listen to music?
   ☺ ☻ ☼

3. Do you like to count?
   ☺ ☻ ☼

4. By which numbers?
   2 5 10 100

5. Do you like to rhyme?
   ☺ ☻ ☼

6. Do you like using signs, like our bathroom symbol?
   ☺ ☻ ☼

7. Do you like to exercise?
   ☺ ☻ ☼

8. Do you like to clap?
   ☺ ☻ ☼
Which of these activities is your favorite? Please tell me why.

Singing because I sing better.

Which of these activities is your least favorite? Please tell me why.

Clapping because it makes heres my hands a lot.
Appendix E: Example of Observational Notes and Corresponding Graphs
Average Transition Time (Seconds)

- Baseline: 70 seconds
- Secret Word: 20 seconds
- Counting: 30 seconds
- No Intervention: 20 seconds
- Singing: 20 seconds
- Non-verbal: 30 seconds

Boys Favorite (%): Non-verbal (60) > Secret Word (20) > Counting (10)
Girls Favorite (%): Secret Word (90) > Counting (20) > Singing (10) > Non-verbal (70)
What was your favorite transition?
Appendix F: Pre-Intervention Surveys

Name: [Redacted]

Do you clean up and move to the carpet right when the teacher asks you to?

😊 😐 ☹

Do you talk with your friends instead of cleaning up and moving to the carpet?

😊 😐 ☹

Do you quickly sit down on the carpet?

😊 😐 ☹

Do you think you could move to the carpet more quickly?

😊 😐 ☹
Appendix G: Student Follow-Up Surveys About the Strategies

Name: __________________________

1. Did you like this week’s transition (secret word)?
   - [ ] ☺️ ☺️ ☹️

2. Do you think the secret word made you move to the carpet faster?
   - [ ] ☺️ ☺️ ☹️

3. Do you feel you were a better listener this week because you had to listen for the secret word?
   - [ ] ☺️ ☺️ ☹️
Name: __________________________

Did you like this week’s transition (counting)?

😊 😊 😔

Do you think that counting made you move to the carpet faster?

😊 😊 😔

Do you think you tried to beat the time on the chalkboard?

😊 😊 😔
Name: _________________________

1. Did you like this week’s transition (singing)?
   😊😊😊

2. Do you think that singing made you move to the carpet faster?
   😊😊😊

3. Do you feel you were a better listener this week because you had to listen for your teachers and friends to start singing?
   😊😊😊

4. Please circle your favorite song.
   Heigh Ho, Heigh Ho
   Hush, Shh, Quiet Please
   We Are Waiting
   Time For Carpet
   1, 2, 3, 4

5. Why was this song your favorite?

   I love counting!
Name: ________________

Did you like this week’s transition (nonverbal)?
😊 ☺️ ☹️

Do you think the nonverbal transitions made you move to the carpet faster?
😊 ☺️ ☹️
Appendix H: Post-Intervention Student Survey

Name: [Redacted]
Date: 4-15-10

Do you clean up and move to the carpet right when the teacher asks you to?

Circle one: 😊😊😊😊😊

Do you talk with your friends instead of cleaning up and moving to the carpet?

Yes Sometimes No

Do you quickly sit down on the carpet?

Circle one: 😊😊😊😊😊

Do you think you could move to the carpet more quickly?

Circle one: 😊😊😊😊😊
Appendix I: Class Meeting Notes

First Class Meeting

March 15, 2010

- “Who knows what a transition is?” (0 students raised their hands)
- Seemed very surprised when told how much time they had been wasting
- Seemed excited when I told them about my inquiry and trying different ways to move to the carpet
- One student said, “Well, I think we can try better because we know what transitions are now.”
- “Who thinks they can try to move to the carpet faster from now on?” (All students raised their hands)

Second Class Meeting

April 15, 2010

Miss DiSanti- I want you all to think about how we used to move to the carpet. We used to just call you by table number. Miss DiSanti noticed that we were taking a little longer than we should have been to come to the carpet. Some of our friends would stay at their desk and continue working or they’d stay at their desk, or they’d walk around the room instead of coming right to the carpet. So I tried some new fun things with us and I just want to hear your thoughts about those fun things. So let’s just think about it, do you think now we’re moving faster to the carpet then we did before. Raise your hands if you think we’re moving faster now (counts 17 hands). Great! So are we getting faster at moving to the carpet. Why do you think we’re getting faster at it?

Student- Because we’re learning more. We’re learning how to listen when we’re working.

Miss DiSanti- So you’re becoming better listeners... Is there anything else that makes it easy for you?

Student- Because you don’t always have to hear things, you just see things and listen to things.

Miss DiSanti- Listen for the transitions and directions?

Student- Yes

Miss DiSanti- So friends, what exactly are transitions?

Student- When you move.

Student- When you move from one activity to something else.

Miss DiSanti- How do you think the secret word transition went?
Student- Good, but not as good as Please Come now!

Miss DiSanti- So you think that worked better than the secret word?

Student- Yes

Miss DiSanti- Does anyone else have any other ideas about how the secret word went?

Student- Good because we got used to it. We started learning about transitions and it made us go faster because we were listening.”

Miss DiSanti- Oh you were listening. Is there anything we could change about the secret word to make it better for us?

Student- You can probably do a different word.

Miss DiSanti- Maybe do a different word...

Miss DiSanti- What kind of words would you guys like to hear?

Student- Happy

Student- Excited

Miss DiSanti- Now friends, the next one we tried, we counted as a class how long it took us to walk to the carpet and we wrote the time on the board and tried to beat it next time.

Miss DiSanti- Raise your hands if you think the counting strategy went well. Why did that one go well?

Student- Because I think we all went quicker.

Miss DiSanti- Why do you think it made you move faster?

Student- It made us move faster because we got to count and try to beat it next time and get a lower number.

Miss DiSanti- Raise your hand if you liked to beat your last transition time. (8)

Miss DiSanti- What didn't you like about counting?

Student- I didn't like it because people were shoving and pushing.

Miss DiSanti- Does anyone else think friends were shoving and pushing during the counting? (All 19)

Miss DiSanti- Why do you think people were pushing and shoving?

Student- Because they wanted to get to the carpet faster.

Miss DiSanti- So it made you want to move faster? Yes
Miss DiSanti- Why were people running for that one and not the other ones?
Student- To beat the time.

Miss DiSanti- Is there something we can change to make it safer and better for us next time?
Student- We could count more slowly so we won't have to push and shove.

Miss DiSanti- Raise your hand if you'd like to count more slowly next time (15).
Student- I didn't like it because you didn’t count the half numbers like 1, 1 ½.

Miss DiSanti- The next transition we tried was singing when we came to the carpet
Miss DiSanti- Raise your hand if you didn't like singing (3).

Miss DiSanti- What didn't you guys like about singing?
Student- People were still pushing and shoving.
Student- People were rushing.

Miss DiSanti- Why?
Student- Because they wanted to get to the carpet faster.

Miss DiSanti- So it sounds like one problem we're having is running, pushing and shoving when we come to the carpet. Do we think we could use our walking feet and keep our hands by our sides?
Student- Yes

Miss DiSanti- What would you like to try differently next time?
Student- Sing a little slower.
Student- People should just not run because they could make somebody fall down and hurt themselves really bad.

Miss DiSanti- Why is it so important to come to the carpet quickly?
Student- So we can get to our activity!
Student- So we have more time for the activity!
Student- So we have extra time to do the activity and we don't have to rush!
Student- So we can learn!
Student- Because then we can be done with the activity quicker.
Student- Teachers don’t like people’s [behavior] sticks going up and sometimes that happens if you don’t come to the carpet when you’re supposed to.

Student- So we won’t miss anything!

Student- So that we can come to the carpet faster so we can start our day right away!

Student- So we don’t have to miss anything!

Miss DiSanti- So transitions to the carpet are pretty important aren’t they? It’s important to use our walking feet and it’s important that right when you hear your teaching calling you to the carpet that you come right away. You stop what you’re doing and you come right to your spot.

Miss DiSanti- This past week friends, Mrs. Bryan and I haven’t been using our voices to ask you to come to the carpet. The first day I put on my moose antlers and every time I put on my moose antlers, you had to come to the carpet. So I wasn’t using my voice was I? I was using my body. Yesterday I wrote you a special message on the board and every time you saw me starting to write you had to come to the carpet?

Student- What’s today’ [transition]?

Miss DiSanti- I’ll tell you in a few minutes friend. Now I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but when I asked you to come to the carpet this week, I would say okay first to try to get your attention, but this morning I didn’t say okay and it took a little longer. Yesterday I didn’t say okay for morning meeting and it took longer than usual

Miss DiSanti- Why do you think that might be?

Student- Because you didn’t get our attention because we were working.

Miss DiSanti- So if friends are busy at their desk, they might not see my moose antlers or see my message on the board.

Miss DiSanti- Well today we are going to try a different one with you. I’m still not going to use my voice, but it’ll be one that you’ll hear. I’ll do a special pattern either clapping my hands or stomping my feet. Let’s try it together! (Whole class joins)

Miss DiSanti- Do you think that one will work better for us today?

Student- That’s fun!

Do you think that one will work better than the other 2?

Student- People could start hearing the pattern because it makes noise.

Student- Maybe people will notice faster this time

Miss DiSanti- Any other ideas?

Student- It could get people’s attention so it won’t take as long to get us on the carpet
Student- Because people can hear it so whenever they hear it they can come to the carpet instead of just looking because sometimes people couldn’t see the transition so they don’t know to move, since they’re thinking really hard doing their work.

Miss DiSanti- Keep in mind that one of the problems that we’re still having is running and pushing and shoving. Why is it important to walk?

Student- It’s not safe to run.

Student- People could fall or run into each other.

Student- Maybe this one will work better because this one has sound and we can hear it

Miss DiSanti- Put on your thinking caps for a minute. Is there something else you’d like to try to come to the carpet?

Student- We could use motions that make sounds like the one we’re doing today.

Student- Knock on the chalkboard.

Student- I think you could say names of the wetlands pictures.

Miss DiSanti- We’re definitely moving a lot faster than we used to be but remember to use your walking feet, and keep your hands by your side when you’re walking to the carpet. Let’s see how our new strategy works for us today!

*Appendix J: Teacher Survey*

Name:

Spring 2010

*Transition Survey*

1. What attention getters/translations do you use in your classroom?

Clapping, waiting/looking at watch, patterns for class to repeat, countdown, etc.

2. What type of transitions do you use the most? (i.e. singing, clapping, etc.)

Countdown, timer to beat, clapping

3. Do you use the same ones every day/every week? If so, explain.
No, change them frequently so they don’t become mundane. I like to keep them guessing, but use enough so they are aware of what to do and expectations.

4. Do you think your students respond differently to each one? If so, how?
Yes, we have many who are competitive and beating the clock is always a motivator. It’s important to find what motivates them as a class – class goals can sometimes work, too.

5. Do your students transition more efficiently during certain times of the day? If so, explain.
No, I think it’s more dependent on me. The exception is getting ready for recess; they never seem to take too long for this 😊

6. Do you plan which transitions you’ll use before you use them or are they spontaneous? Please explain.
Spontaneous – it’s difficult for me to plan these.

7. Have you tried the attention getters that you use, with children of a different age group? Please explain.
Yes, some that work with primary do not work with upper grades as they see it as pleasing to the teacher, not something that’s all that important to them.

8. Do you notice that there are certain students who consistently take longer to transition than others? If so, explain.
Yes, those who have attention deficit usually have difficult unless internally motivated.

9. Do you ever reward your students for transitioning well? Please explain. (i.e. extra recess, choice time, etc.) Usually it’s not just transitioning, but transitioning can be a part of it. The only thing I’ve ever used is to make it a part of a class goal and transitions would be one component. For example, the kids may be working on completing work and cleaning up when finished with an assignment (goals set at class meetings – the class usually determines what needs to be worked on with guidance from me) and if they earn so many, they can earn a special reward for class (again this reward is set by them with teacher approval i.e. PJ day, movie day at lunch, game day during math class, etc.)
10. Which transition(s) do your students seem to enjoy the most? Varies depending on class – need to look at their attitudes and likes/dislikes, and then decide what works for them – changes each year. This year, they like beating the clock and the countdown.

Appendix K: Samples of Follow-Up Student Interviews

Student A
Favorite- Nonverbal because you don’t use your mouth.
Least Favorite- Singing because it makes me feel shy.

Student B
Favorite- Nonverbal because they were funny. I’d never see it before.
Least Favorite- Counting because some people were running and shoving trying to beat the record. Maybe counting slower would help because we wouldn’t have to rush.

Student C
Favorite- Nonverbal because it was funny.
Least Favorite- Singing because I don’t like using my voice.

Student D
Favorite- Singing because I like to sing, and I liked the songs.
Least Favorite- Nonverbal because if someone is turned around or putting something away, then they might not know.

Student E
Favorite- Singing because we get to use our voices and that’s the only time, usually, we can sing that loud.
Least Favorite- Secret word because I don’t like it because it was hard to hear.