

Effective Transition Techniques

Timothy J. Fox

Concordia University Portland



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## Abstract

The purpose of this action research was to investigate the most efficient transition techniques in terms of time, readiness, and safety in the classroom. The researcher collected data using direct observation and a teacher survey. Four transitioning techniques were explored during the action research: use of a timer, playing music, positive discipline, and explicit teaching. The research was conducted in a sixth grade classroom. Results of the case study showed that the use of explicitly teaching students transition expectations, and the use of positive discipline techniques, are the two most effective forms of transitioning.



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Table of Contents

Chapter 1 – Introduction.....4

Chapter 2 – The Issue.....6

Chapter 3 – Outcomes and Evaluation.....18

Chapter 4 – Action Plan.....20

Chapter 5 – Results and Next Steps.....25

References.....37

Appendix A – Survey.....40



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Action Research Proposal

Chapter One – Introduction

When one enters the research site, they are greeted by the school counselor who waits in the lobby to “touch base” with as many students as possible. They are also there to assist with any social/safety issue that may arise. The students are busy in conversations about previous nights events and laughing at each other’s jokes. The energy level in the lobby of the building makes it impossible not to wake up and be ready for a fun day of learning. The bell rings at 7:50, and students begin flowing into their respective classrooms with a smile, wave, or even a hug to say goodbye to their friends.

The action research site is an elementary school in a Portland Suburb. The school district is the fifth largest in the state of Oregon. The school district is located 12 miles from a major city and services 40 square miles. The population of the district is 112,884, which includes 20 elementary schools, 3 middle schools, 3 high schools, 1 professional-technical education school, and 6 public charter schools. There are a total of 17,569 students that attend the school districts schools, and are taught by 1,037 teachers, 50 principals/assistant principals, and 932 classified staff.

The elementary school in which the research will be conducted is a satellite campus that was constructed in partnership with the school district in 1999. The multi-purpose structure is 12,258 square feet, and has five classrooms. The entire building houses the main schools sixth grade class. The main building was constructed in 1993. It sits on ten acres and includes general play fields and soccer fields. The main buildings population is 657, while the satellite campus’ is 127. There are two administrators, 45 licensed, and 20 classified staff members at the two

schools. In the main building there are two kindergarten, four first grade, four second grade, five third grade, five fourth grade, and four fifth grade classes.

The mission of the school is as follows: In partnership with families and the community, the school staff seeks to challenge all students to achieve maximum academic growth by accepting responsibility for learning, working hard, and celebrating success. We will offer a respectful, trusting, learning environment where the uniqueness of each child is honored. A successful educational program is the foundation for developing lifelong learners. Within the school's mission, maximum academic growth is stated as a high priority. Having smooth, effective transitions times will help support this goal by maximizing instruction time.

The researcher has been teaching for three years. His first two years were in second grade, and this year he will be teaching sixth. He earned his Bachelor's degree in Elementary/Early Childhood Education at Concordia University, and is currently working on his Master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction with a Reading Endorsement at the same university. His classroom this year consists of 26 students. Of these 26 students, 15 are boys, and 11 are girls. These students were previously in loop classrooms, so they had the same teacher for both fourth and fifth grade. They come to the researcher's classroom with strong community/problem-solving skills.

The question the researcher is going to answer is: "How do different transition techniques improve the efficiency in terms of time, readiness, and safety of transition times?"

Action Research Proposal

Chapter Two – The Issue

Transition times in the classroom can add up to lost instructional time if they are not managed efficiently. Transition times can vary from one activity to another depending on the type of transition used, mood of the students, and the expectations set forth by the teacher. These are several factors that contribute to the success of smooth, efficient, and safe transitions.

Transition times have been an issue in the researcher's elementary school. Using the researcher's class from last year, there were on average 10 transitions in any given school day. If each transition took on average five minutes, that is 50 minutes of lost instruction time. Other educators have complained that students are having difficulty moving from one activity to another and then being ready for instruction. The time it is taking is impacting instruction times. Another area of concern is moving from recess time back into the classroom. Teachers at the researcher's school feel that this area needs major improvements. There have been situations of running, pushing, and other unsafe behaviors because of the lack of structure during transition times.

The researcher has had many conversations with other educators about what makes for smooth, quick transitions, and the ideas are varied. The researcher has used many different strategies to encourage efficient strategies to encourage efficient transitions between activities during the first two years of his career teaching. The researcher has tried juggling, string activities, music, and countdowns. Some of these strategies have worked, while some have been a distraction for students. The researcher has witnessed some students that do well with one transition, while others struggle with them.

The researcher would like to find the most efficient transition for students. The researcher has chosen to address this issue because at first glance, transition times may seem insignificant, but when examined more closely, they truly do add up to a lot of instructional time lost. In this action research, the researcher will be trying different transition strategies and methods in order to answer the following question.

The question to be researched at the elementary school is: “How do different transition techniques improve the efficiency in terms of time, readiness, and safety of transition times?”

### *Literature Review*

“If only there were more time in a school day...” is a familiar comment from educators who struggle to fulfill all the academic demands that characterize today’s public schooling. These demands have increased in recent years due to the passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. Many schools and districts are feeling the pressure to meet the high expectations of NCLB. As the pressure is being felt, so are the many decisions around instruction time allocation. Time seems to always be in short supply in schools and educators have to be thoughtful and creative about how they allocate their instructional time. Along with instruction time, teachers have to be thoughtful and disciplined with their classroom management. Strong routines and efficient strategies are needed to maximize instruction time while minimizing off-task behaviors. The researcher will be discussing some of the impacts NCLB has had on instruction/content time, classroom management issues and strategies, the effects student engagement and motivation have on transition issues, and routines and strategies of transitions that help maximize instruction time.

*Instructional Time Impacts*

Scores on state tests are rising, but still teachers appear to be stressed as they feel pressure to prove their high quality status and feel they must teach to the test. On top of this, about 71% of districts report that they must reduce instructional time in other subjects to spend more time on reading and math because these subjects are tested under NCLB (Pascopella, 2006). Pascopella goes on to state that about a third of all districts report they reduce time somewhat to a great extent for social studies to make more time for reading and math. Similarly, time was reduced in science by 29% and 22% for art and music (Pascopella). Bufamo (2004) also noted in her observations of a high-poverty, urban elementary school that time spent on writing, and speaking and listening was limited, while social studies, science, physical education and the arts were significantly restricted or even omitted. In a report on the impact of NCLB on school districts across the country, McMurrer (2007) noted that more than half of the districts surveyed have increased time in reading so that it has become the largest amount of time given to a subject. The second most amount of time given to a subject was mathematics. Richard Allington (2005) stresses this concern by saying that the emphasis on reading instruction is pushing other subjects out of the school day; especially in schools where reading achievement is problematic.

In their research on how students spend their time in school, Roth, Brooks-Gunn, and Linver (2003) found that elementary schools spent 68% of their school day, just over four hours, studying academic subjects. Activities that are a necessary part of the school day, but not times of learning, such as unpacking backpacks, lining up, cleaning up, travel/transition between

activities, or getting ready to go home took up nearly one hour of the school day. Younger students spent over 14 more minutes per day on transition activities. With transition times taking up such a large amount of the school day, teachers should be planning with activities to move the day along with optimum living and learning experiences (Baker, 1992). Zimmerman (1998) suggests that merely extending the school day would not equate in more time spent learning. In 1980, 37 states considered extending the school year, but then backed down.

Zimmerman differentiates allocated time, engaged time, and learning time. Allocated time is the total number of hours students spend in school. Engaged time is the time students spend participating in learning activities, or instructional time. Instructional time, however, was often interrupted by disciplinary problems and other things disassociated with instruction. Academic learning time is when learning occurs. Zimmerman indicates that student achievement is not obtained from allocated or engaged time. Academic learning time alone yielded student achievement. Furthermore, inefficient classroom management skills among teachers needed to be improved to increase academic learning time.

It appears, then, that there are many different, and important, curriculum content and skill areas vying for the same quality instructional time.



### *Classroom Management*

The following quote from Baker (1992) speaks to the importance of appropriate planning of transitions.

Transition time should provide children with an opportunity for continued imaginative and creative thinking. Activities should be motivating, relaxing, and reinforcing.

Transition should prepare children for the experience to follow. With the appropriate

selection and planning of activities to meet the needs of children transition times can be an effective part of the day (, p. 17).

Allington (2005) references a study done by Cameron in 2005 that found anywhere from 15 minutes to two hours of each school day were devoted to non-academic activities including transitions, with the average being around one hour and 45 minutes. Allington goes on to point out that the first 30 minutes of many school mornings are devoted to getting students into their classrooms, taking attendance, collecting lunch money, completing announcements, and getting students settled. He also notes that many teachers often have a similar pattern at the end of the school day devoting 15 to 20 minutes packing up and cleaning to go home (Allington).

According to Paul Pedota (2007,)

Everyone concedes that there is a severe shortage of qualified teachers in the United States and that one of the most frequent reasons cited in the literature regarding the problem of staffing and retaining qualified individuals is the lack of student discipline (p. 163).

Often times asking children to move from one activity to another presents opportunities for disturbance, if not chaos, when not planned carefully. This is something that even the most experienced of teachers may be challenged with (Sainato, 1990). For many young students, transitions between activities and lessons are problematic. Students are challenge by several factors. These factors include [Use a bulleted list rather than numbers or letters]

- the need to put closure to the current activity,
- the need to focus upon and comprehend the teacher's directions,
- the distractions created by the movements and behaviors of peers, and

- the coordination of materials during transition periods by having to engage simultaneously in a number of activities (Buck, 1999).

According to Buck, two mistakes that teachers sometimes make are not allotting enough time for transitions and not establishing routines. Sandra Feldman (2003) agrees with Buck when she writes that maximizing learning opportunities comes down to setting, and keeping effective rules and routines. Feldman looks at three different types of time: allocated, time on task, and academic learning. She stresses that how time is used is equally, if not more critical, than how much, or little time educators have. Feldman adds that “having set procedures for entering and leaving the room, turning in and handing out assignments, etc., reduces the amount of time needed for transitions” (2003, p. 1). According to Buck (1999), it is important for teachers to have a precisely defined set of behavioral expectations for transition periods. For instance, a teacher may expect that when students are told it is time to switch activities, they will

- comply within a short period of time by changing to another activity or location quietly,
- put materials away in their correct locations and get out materials for the next activity, and
- move quickly without stopping to talk to others.

Buck adds that it is also important for teachers to periodically assess the extent to which students' behaviors match their expectations. Even in an otherwise well-functioning classroom, transitions pose a challenge to teachers and students alike, as student misbehavior is more likely to occur and educational time can be wasted (McIntosh, Herman, Sanford, McGraw, & Florence, 2004).

Adding to the confusion, many classrooms are full of implicit transition expectations – routines that teachers expect students to follow with no instruction. Fortunately, the strategies

needed to teach behavioral expectations are the same as those that effective teachers already use to teach academic skills. These strategies include careful preparation, planning, effective delivery, opportunities to practice, ongoing assessment, and performance feedback (McIntosh, Herman, Sanford, McGraw, & Florence, 2004). Buck (1999) supports this idea when he writes that the importance of well-planned and thoughtfully implemented transition periods is relevant for all students. Without the structure of clear routines and behavioral expectations, students with poor attention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity suffer in terms of reduced academic performance, self-esteem, and self-confidence. With these students especially, it is necessary for teachers to plan transition periods in advance by assessing the context in which transitions occur and by developing specific strategies that improve students' behaviors. Effective instruction about when and how to perform transitions is essential and may mitigate many problems associated with transitions (McIntosh, Herman, Sanford, McGraw, & Florence). McIntosh and his colleagues give an example of an effective instruction method. It is a five-step process useful in teaching any behavior:

- provide a rationale,
- explain the expected behavior,
- model the expected behavior,
- practice the expected behavior, and
- monitor and provide feedback.

Once students have learned transition behaviors, some will benefit from additional support and structure. Pre-corrections are quick reminders of how to perform skills given directly before the opportunity to use them. Researchers have shown that pre-corrections reduce problem behavior during transitions in classrooms and in settings like the cafeteria, playground, and hallway

(McIntosh, Herman, Sanford, McGraw, & Florence). Another specific method for monitoring students in classroom transitions is active supervision. This method is defined by its three behaviors – scanning, moving, and interacting. Scanning involves examining the environment frequently. Moving consists of walking around the setting, visiting problem areas often, and making one’s presence known. Finally, interacting includes teaching behaviors, providing pre-corrections, and even conversing with students informally (McIntosh, Herman, Sanford, McGraw, & Florence). Teaching transitions saves considerable teaching time and frustration, especially given how many transitions students experience throughout the school day. Another consideration for the teacher in order to maximize instruction time is the classroom arrangement. Desks and other furniture should be arranged in such a way that students are able to move about the room without interfering other students such as needing chairs pushed in or bumping desks (Pedota, 2007). He also emphasizes the importance of having procedures for where things go in the classroom, how supplies are retrieved and put away, and expectations for use of supplies.

### *Student Motivation*

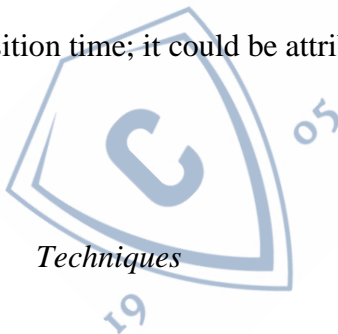
For many years the underlying purpose of classroom discipline has been punishment in order to make a child feel bad so that he or she would behave. Parents and teachers wanted children who misbehaved to feel guilt about their actions; however, a child who felt good would not misbehave. Using punishment to make a child feel bad was a counteractive approach to encouraging positive behavior (Kariuki & Davis, 2000).

While punishment is of course still used, times have changed. Teachers and students work toward the same goal if they formulate those goals together. If classrooms act as a social unit, then the teacher and students have a common value system. Panico (1997) found that

connecting students to the efforts of classroom management caused a shift in the behavior paradigm so that everyone in the class was working together. Teachers were not looking for someone to blame, but the class was active in finding solutions. Students were not forced to behave in a particular manner; they chose to behave that way. Students tended to act responsibly when asked to make important decisions. In the positive discipline environment, students exercised control as opposed to being controlled. In the classroom community, students established the goals and the consequences. As a result, they accepted the outcomes, either positive or negative. Class meetings initiated student decision-making, problem-solving, and shared responsibility. During these discussions students created rewards, evaluated class progress, planned activities, discussed ways to support the community, discussed ways that the teacher could improve, and brainstormed ways the community could work together to improve.

Kariuki and Davis (2000) refer to a study by Mendler and Curwin in which it was suggested that in order to motivate students to engage in appropriate behavior they needed to know that their efforts and actions have value. Also, students needed to feel that they were special and loved. Similarly, students needed to feel that they could influence the people and events around them. Using a positive discipline model, Kariuki and Davis (2000) found that students were able to transition, on average, in only 41 seconds, compared to 5.6 minutes before the intervention. Students were more willing to decrease their transitions because they were empowered to make choices to improve their classroom environment. [This is a pretty big deal for your study] A study by Dawson-Rodrigues, Lavay, Butt, and Lacourse (1997) looked at how positive reinforcement affected transition times in physical education courses. Their findings showed a significant reduction in transition time. First, the behavior management program was desirable to the students because it was based on positive reinforcement. The students enjoyed

having their names displayed publicly on the board and often discussed the rewards among themselves at the beginning of class. They also enjoyed participating in the physical activity reinforcement sessions. By selecting the reinforcers, the students had a vested interest in the program. Second, because of expedient transitioning, the students experienced additional physical education activity time. When they were asked to share what they could do with the additional time, many students said they could spend more time on the activity for the day or possibly have some additional time at the end of the class to participate in games that further developed their skills. Overall, the reduction of transition time increased student awareness of the unnecessarily wasted class time. Third, the behavior management plan helped the students become aware of the allotted transition time. Students were told early in the school year that they would be allowed five minutes for class preparation (e.g., dressing in proper physical activity attire and being in their roll call squad line). However, because there was no visible clock, students were often unaware of the actual time. Throughout the behavior management program, the teacher announced the remaining time to the students, which may have helped reduce transition time. It is unlikely that any single factor accounted for such a dramatic reduction in transition time; it could be attributed to all of the above factors working in combination.



With expectations, routines, and student motivation carefully considered, the next step for teachers is to consider specific strategies for effective transitions in the classroom. Students often have difficulty managing their time during a lesson, typically finishing too early or too late. In the latter case, the student may be enjoying the activity and may desire for it to continue, or the

student may feel an inherent need to put closure on any activity at hand. Whatever the reason, teachers are sometimes faced with noncompliance when students are asked to end their activities. In order to reduce these behaviors, teachers can use many different ideas and strategies (Buck, 1999). Time cues are one strategy for eliminating inappropriate behaviors. This involves the teacher walking around the room quietly telling students that they have a few minutes before they need to finish their activity. Using physical cues, such as the teacher raising his or her arm in the air and dropping it slowly, while saying “class starts now” is one way to get the attention of the class after a transition (Buck). A strategy that Campbell and Skinner (2004) introduce is the Timely Transitions Game (TTG), a procedure that has been shown to alter student behavior including explicit timing procedures and an interdependent, group-oriented reward program with randomly selected criteria. Explicit timing procedures involved the teacher giving a verbal prompt that it was time to line up. The teacher started a stopwatch and recorded the amount of time it took the students to be properly lined up. Anytime during the transition that those expectations were not being met, the stopwatch was restarted. The group-oriented reward program involved a chart used for recording transition times and activities. At the end of each day, a paper was drawn that had one of the day’s transition activities and another that had a time. If the time for that transition was actually lower, the students earned a reward, such as extra recess time. Using this strategy, teachers were able to save approximately 1.5 hours per week of allocated school time by implementing the TTG. Training students to respond to teacher prompts while reinforcing appropriate responding proved to be effective to decrease the amount of time spent transitioning from one activity to another. Taking the initial time to train the response to a prompt will allow for teachers to spend more time engaging students in active learning rather than losing time in classroom management struggles (Ferguson, Ashbaugh, O’Reilly, &

McLaughlin, 2004). Teachers may use positive reinforcement procedures to encourage students to transition appropriately. A student may obtain verbal praise, good grades, or extra recess for certain kinds of appropriate behaviors. When providing incentives, keep in mind that certain incentives may be aversive to some students. For example, many older students (such as middle and high school students) may not respond favorably to extra teacher attention or public recognition. In cases such as this, the teacher should provide other incentives, such as homework reduction or a choice of rewards. Providing specific praise can be more effective in increasing correct behaviors. Specific praise serves two purposes: first, it tells students exactly what they are doing well, and second, it provides a cue for other students on how to earn teacher's attention (McIntosh, Herman, Sanford, McGraw, & Florence, 2004).

Through this literature and research, one can see the impact that transition times have on instruction time. NCLB has added more pressure for teachers in regard to reading and math. Time allocated for these subjects has been on the rise since its implementation and teachers are feeling the effects. Classroom management has a large impact on how smoothly students are able to transition in the classroom. Teachers need to have very clear expectations as well as consistent feedback on the progress of students. When students take ownership over their goals and classroom expectations, the results have shown positive results. One can see that there are many strategies for transitions including intrinsic motivation, reward programs, and verbal/physical cues. A teacher needs to decide which strategy works best for their teaching style as well as the population of their classroom. While considering which strategy to use, the teacher needs to take into account the age of their student, special needs, or any motivating factor that may impact the strategies effectiveness. The researcher will explore all of these components of transition time in the classroom in order to find transition techniques that improve the efficiency in terms time,

readiness, and safety.



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Action Research Proposal

Chapter Three – Outcomes and Evaluation

The goal of this action research project is to find the most effective transition techniques between classroom activities and subject areas in the elementary classroom. In this study, the researcher wants to find transition techniques that are most effective in terms of time, readiness, and safety. The literature review clearly shows that there are many factors that contribute to effective transitions including classroom management, student motivation, and techniques used. The researcher will take into account each of these factors as he conducts his study.

During this action research project, the researcher will be using a variety of data collection tools. These tools include teacher/student surveys, individual student interviews, and data collection of transition times. The researcher's expectations are that transitions will take anywhere from under one minute to five minutes depending on the complexity of the transition. The researcher will be investigating different strategies as variables in making transitions more effective. The researcher will be making observations of students around four behaviors during transitions. These behaviors include:

- starting promptly,
- putting materials away,
- moving safely and directly to the next activity or location, and
- starting the next activity in a timely fashion.

Students will be observed by table/learning groups and will be observed at least two times for each transition strategy used over the course of the research.

## EFFECTIVE TRANSITION TECHNIQUES

Before conducting strategies in the classroom, the researcher will conduct a survey of the teaching staff at the research site (Appendix A). This survey will include questions about teachers' feelings toward transition time's impact on teaching, as well as preferences for transition strategies. After the implementation in the classroom, the researcher will conduct a survey of the students as to their preference of transition strategy and effectiveness (Appendix B). To gather any additional information as to the students' feelings toward transition times, the researcher will also conduct individual student interviews. Finally, data will be gathered through the use of a stopwatch timer to determine actual transition times. The researcher will look at two variables when organizing data collected using the stopwatch timer. The first will be to note the amount of time it takes for students to transition from one activity to another activity in the classroom. These activities include transitioning from one academic activity to another academic activity (e.g. mathematics to reading) as well as traveling from the carpet back to desks. The second set of data will be transition times from one activity to another that is outside the classroom. These types include: lunch, recess, specials (music, P.E. and so on.), and going home. This data will be collected using the stopwatch timer. The timer will be started once the teacher has given the signal for the start of the transition, and stopped when students are prepared for the next activity.

The researcher believes investigating transition times will not only benefit his classroom, but also those of other educators. The more efficient students are at transitions, the more education time there is for teachers.

Action Research Proposal

Chapter Four – Action Plan

The issue to be examined in this action research project is transition times. The researcher is analyzing different strategies that will make transition times smoother and faster so that impact on instruction time is at a minimum. Concerns by fellow educators, as well as the literature have warranted a study on transition times in the researcher's school. With today's added pressure on academic instruction, transition times need to be kept to a minimum to support teachers and their goals. The researcher will describe possible solutions from the literature and outline an action plan to achieve the goals of the research.

*Possible Solutions*

Kariuki and Davis (2000) studied the relationship between positive discipline techniques and classroom transition times. Positive discipline techniques included class meetings in which students were allowed to discuss their behavior, set goals for improvement, choose positive reinforcement rewards, and to make suggestions for improvement. During the first class meeting the students decided that rewards would be the best motivator to decrease transition times. A "menu" of rewards was created that were meaningful to the students. The results were that transition times decreased. Kariuki and Davis believe that students were more willing to improve their transition times because they were given the power to make choices about their classroom. The students in the class realized that there was a problem, and they found ways to solve it democratically.

The researcher feels that this approach has many benefits for students. First, empowering students to make decisions about their education helps promote ownership. Secondly, moving the teacher's role from a more authoritative figure to a facilitator will create a true sense of community in the classroom. The researcher feels that a positive discipline technique is a good approach in decreasing transition times. The author accepts this strategy and will implement it as part of his research.

Another possible solution to the issue of transition time is the use of a timer. Starr (2007) suggests placing a timer in the classroom for all students to see during transition times. Use of a timer may help students that need a visual reinforce to be successful. The researcher has a Time-Timer ([www.timetimer.com](http://www.timetimer.com)) that he has used in his classroom. The timer is a great visual cue for students. Given the fact that the researcher already has this tool, he accepts this strategy as a possible solution.

Dawson-Rodriques, Lavay, Butt, and Lacourse (1997) researched the use of positive reinforcement to decrease transition times. A management plan was developed that included two positive reinforcement methods-public posting and physical activity reinforcement. Public posting refers to the display of names of students who demonstrate appropriate behavior. Physical activity reinforcement involves rewarding students who demonstrate appropriate behavior with participation in physical activities they enjoy.

The researcher has seen a similar public posting method used before with mixed results. The strategy worked well for students that liked the attention of having their names posted, but not as well for shy students that were embarrassed to have their names on the wall. For some students, not having their name on the board was embarrassing because their peers saw them as

not being able to accomplish the goal. For this reason, the researcher rejects this as a possible solution.

Buck (1999) conducted a survey of teachers that used background music in their classrooms. Of the 360 teachers surveyed, Buck found that 81 used music during transition times. Some teachers used the music as an indicator to students that a transition was approaching. Others played the music during the entire transition. At the research site, music has been used in other classrooms to start and end transitions.

Because this strategy has been used successfully at the research site, and the resources needed (CD player, CD's) are readily available, the researcher accepts this strategy as a possible solution.

A final strategy suggested by McIntosh, Herman, Sanford, McGraw, and Florence (2004) involves the use of explicit teaching of expected behaviors. They discuss the need to teach the behaviors for transitions just as a teacher would teach academic content. They suggest showing students the proper way to transition as well as the wrong way of doing it. They also stress the importance of having many opportunities for the students to practice the correct way to transition, re-teaching as necessary.

This strategy is one that the researcher has used and seen used in many of the classrooms at the research site. The strategy alone does not seem to be enough to fully help students with transitions. Therefore, the researcher partially accepts this possible solution. The researcher acknowledges the importance of teaching expected behaviors, and will incorporate this idea into the action research plan.

*Action Plan*

This action research project will begin in August and continue until February. The following explains the timeline in detail:

- September – The researcher will gain consent from the principal and district office to follow through with this action research proposal. The researcher will create the teacher and student surveys.
- October – The researcher will ask teachers to complete a survey asking for input about their feelings toward transitions, and preferred transition strategies.
- October – During the first two weeks of October, the researcher will be conducting baseline research on transition times without any of the proposed strategies being incorporated.
- October – At the beginning of the third week of October, the researcher will give the students a survey to determine their feelings toward transitions.
- November – March – The researcher will be using a stopwatch to record data collected from transition times.
- November 3<sup>rd</sup> – November 28<sup>th</sup> – The researcher will implement the strategy of using a timer to indicate transition times..
- December 1<sup>st</sup> – December 19<sup>th</sup> – The researcher will implement the second strategy of playing music during transition times.
- January 5<sup>th</sup> – January 30<sup>th</sup> – The third strategy, a positive discipline technique in which students are responsible for their behavior will be used.

## EFFECTIVE TRANSITION TECHNIQUES

- February 2<sup>nd</sup> – February 27<sup>th</sup> – The final strategy will be implemented. The researcher will implement the strategy of explicit teaching of transition times.
- March – A follow-up survey will be given to students, as well as individual interviews with each member of the class.
- March – The researcher will analyze and interpret the data collected for this action research project. A final write-up will be completed by April.



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## Action Research Project

## Chapter Five - Results and Next Steps

The purpose of this Action Research was for the researcher to find the most efficient transition techniques in terms of time, readiness, and safety in the classroom. The following is the data collected from teacher transition surveys, and the results of the four implemented transition strategies in the researcher's sixth grade class.

*Survey Results*

The researcher sent out a survey (Appendix A) to other fifth and sixth grade teachers to find out what transition techniques were currently being used. The researcher has compiled all the responses below (repeated/similar responses are not included). The survey asked the following questions:

1. What techniques do you use to ensure safe transitions?

- Community agreements (classroom behavior rules)
- "Safety Monitors" (Classroom job)
- Clear cleanup procedures
- Dismiss one table group at a time
- Review expectations before dismissal
- Numbered line order

2. What techniques do you use to ensure timely transitions?

- Use of a timer (make it a competition)

- Play music (When music stops, students need to be ready)
- Bells/Chimes
- Countdown
- Rainstick
- Singing songs (cleanup, going home)
- Team points

3. What techniques do you use to ensure student readiness during transitions?

- Directions written on board
- Students repeat directions to teacher, or a partner
- Targets posted for next lesson
- Have students wait for signal before moving
- Ensure attention of all students before giving directions
- Compliment students that are ready (Positive reinforcement)
- Team points
- Clear attention-getting signal
  - “123, eyes on me”
  - Clap, students copy
  - Chimes
  - Rainstick
  - “Give me five”
  - Hand in the air
  - “If you can hear my voice, touch your \_\_\_\_\_”



4. What types of transitions do you use going to the following activities?

a. Academic to academic

- Put all supplies away
- Brief instructions
- Students wait for signal before moving
- Students wait quietly next to clean desk
- Targets for next lesson reviewed
- Attention of all students before giving directions
- Brain break before next lesson

b. Academic to P.E./Music/Specials

- Students call quiet individuals to line up
- Students wait to be excused by teacher
- Competition between table groups
- Number line order (each student has an assigned spot in line)

c. Academic to recess/lunch

- Room/desks cleaned (expectations posted in room)
- Debrief of lesson
- Afternoon lessons reviewed
- Exit cards (answer question before leaving)

5. What types of transitions do you use coming from the following activities?

a. P.E./Music/Specials to academic

- Directions written on the whiteboard
- Assignments on desk

- Procedure to return quietly to desk and wait for instructions
- Silent read a book at desk

b. Recess/lunch to academic

- Same as P.E./Music/Specials to academic
- Review of afternoon lessons

Based on the survey, the researcher has determined that clear expectations, attention signaling strategies, and routines are widely used in other classrooms. Teacher's signals varied slightly, but all teachers used them. Classroom procedures and expectations were very detailed and practiced often throughout the year. Teacher responses to question number five were the same as question number four.

### *Observation Results*

The researcher conducted a ten-week observation using four different transition techniques:

- Use of a timer to indicate transition times
- Playing music during transition times
- Positive discipline technique in which students are responsible for their behavior
- Explicit teaching of transitions

During the first two weeks of the action research project, the researcher collected baseline data of transitions based on time, readiness, and safety. Time was determined using a timer. Students who were not ready for the next assignment, or did not put materials away from previous lesson determined readiness. Number of unsafe students was kept (too noisy,

bumping/pushing). The researcher chose one transition time/activity each day of the week for data collection:

- Monday: Morning academic to academic
- Tuesday: Academic to lunch/recess
- Wednesday: Lunch/recess to academic
- Thursday: Going to/coming from music
- Friday: Going to/coming from P.E.

The following chart shows the baseline data collected:

T = Time

R = Readiness

S = Safety



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EFFECTIVE TRANSITION TECHNIQUES

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
T: 5:03 R: 2 S: 0	T: 3:27 R: 6 S: 2 noisy	T: 3:29 R: 3 S: 0	T: 4:17 R: 5 S: 0 Going To	T: 5:13 R: 8 S: 0 Going To
			T: 7:21 R: 3 S: 5 noisy 2 wrestling Coming From	T: 4:21 R: 4 S: 8 noisy Coming From
T: 4:32 R: 4 S: 1 running	T: 3:49 R: 0 S: 5 noisy	T: 3:06 R: 8 S: 0	T: 2:47 R: 6 S: 2 bumping Going To	T: 4:49 R: 3 S: 4 noisy Going To
			T: 6:08 R: 5 S: 7 noisy Coming From	T: 3:21 R: 3 S: 0 Coming From

The baseline data shows that transition times are inconsistent. Students were not given any real directions other than to get ready for the next lesson/activity. Safety issues were minor. Noise level seemed to be the unsafe concern in the classroom. Students who were not ready either left materials out when transitioning, or continued an off-task conversation after the transition. The transition from music to academic on Thursdays had the longest transition times.

## EFFECTIVE TRANSITION TECHNIQUES

Students in sixth grade go to band, orchestra, or choir, and are released at about the same time.

Some students choose to socialize outside the classroom with friends from other classes, adding to the total time it takes for the transition to end.

### *Timer*

The first transition technique to be implemented in the classroom was the use of a timer to indicate transitions. The researcher gave directions and then gave a “go” signal while starting a timer visible for all students to see. The following chart shows the data collected:

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
T: 3:17 R: 0 S: 0	T: 2:40 R: 10 S: 5 noisy	T: 4:01 R: 6 S: 0	T: 4:02 R: 13 S: 2 bumping Going To	T: 3:14 R: 6 S: 0 Going To
			T: 8:21 R: 1 S: 0 Coming From	T: 6:04 R: 0 S: 0 Coming From
T: 3:06 R: 5 S: 3 noisy	T: 4:17 R: 3 S: 0	T: 3:28 R: 6 S: 0	T: 3:56 R: 8 S: 4 noisy Going To	T: 2:39 R: 12 S: 10 noisy Going To
			T: 6:30 R: 1 S: 9 noisy Coming From	T: 3:54 R: 3 S: 0 Coming From

The use of the timer produced quicker transition times, but the number of students not ready, baseline: 60, compared to 74 with the use of the timer suggests that students were more concerned about transitioning quickly, than they were to being ready. The total transition time for the two baseline weeks was 62:43, while the timer weeks were 59:29. Again, safety was of little concern. Students had a tendency of being too loud, but walked and kept hands to themselves.

### *Music*

The second transition technique to be implemented in the classroom was the use of music. The researcher would turn music on during the transition and turn it off at when students were ready. The following chart shows the data collected:



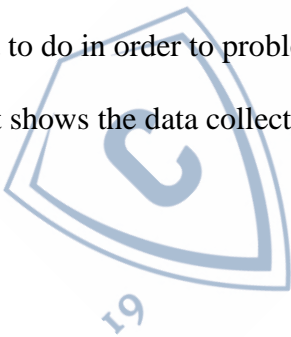
EFFECTIVE TRANSITION TECHNIQUES

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
T: 3:06 R: 3 S: 0	T: 4:17 R: 0 S: 0	T: 3:28 R: 14 S: 0	T: 3:56 R: 5 S: 0 Going To	T: 2:39 R: 7 S: 0 Going To
			T: 6:30 R: 1 S: 0 Coming From	T: 3:54 R: 2 S: 0 Coming From
T: 5:14 R: 0 S: 2 noisy	T: 3:37 R: 2 S: 0	T: 3:05 R: 1 S: 0	T: 3:43 R: 2 S: 0 Going To	T: 3:14 R: 3 S: 0 Going To
			T: 7:02 R: 0 S: 2 noisy Coming From	T: 6:04 R: 0 S: 3 noisy Coming From

The use of music during transition times created a very safe environment. Safety/noise level was at a minimum so students could hear the music. The baseline weeks had 34 safety issues, while the music weeks only had seven. The use of music during transitions definitely creates a safer transition environment. Time was less than both baseline weeks, and timer weeks with only 58:49 used. Another benefit the researcher found from the use of music was that of readiness. Only 42 students were not ready during the two weeks of music compared to 60 (baseline) and 74 (timer).

### *Positive Discipline*

The third transition technique to be implemented was the positive discipline technique in which students are responsible for their behaviors. During Monday Morning Meeting, the students were given the opportunity to discuss transitions, and what they wanted them to look, sound, and feel like. The students decided that each day a table group would be in charge of monitoring transitions. There are five table groups, so Monday was Table 1, Tuesday was Table 2, and so on. Students met each morning to discuss how they felt transitions were going, and what to do in order to problem solve issues that came up from the previous day. The following chart shows the data collected:



EFFECTIVE TRANSITION TECHNIQUES

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
T: 2:49 R: 1 S: 3 noisy	T: 3:17 R: 0 S: 0	T: 2:58 R: 2 S: 1 noisy	T: 3:34 R: 0 S: 0 Going To	T: 4:13 R: 0 S: 0 Going To
			T: 5:12 R: 3 S: 0 Coming From	T: 4:02 R: 0 S: 0 Coming From
T: 3:26 R: 0 S: 0	T: 2:45 R: 2 S: 3 noisy	T: 3:07 R: 0 S: 0	T: 3:35 R: 2 S: 0 Going To	T: 4:14 R: 1 S: 0 Going To
			T: 4:54 R: 0 S: 0 Coming From	T: 5:31 R: 0 S: 0 Coming From

The use of positive discipline worked well. Transition times went down to a total of 53:37. The students' readiness improved to a total of 11 students not ready at the end of each transition for the two weeks. This was due in large part to the collaboration of the class. Each table group assigned jobs to one another. Some students were safety monitors, while others were desk checkers. Together they were able to ensure readiness and safety. During the first Tuesday morning meeting, the students decided to add music to the transitions to ensure safety/quiet. This strategy proved successful with only seven safety issues compared to the 34 during the baseline weeks. Another interesting outcome to the positive discipline technique was the decreased

## EFFECTIVE TRANSITION TECHNIQUES

transition time from music and P.E. Students from the table groups in charge would “herd” the rest of the class in to ensure a timely transition.

### *Explicit Teaching of Transitions*

The final transition technique to be implemented was explicit teaching of transitions. The researcher gave clear, explicit directions before each transition, and reminded students what the expectations were. There were opportunities to practice successful transitions on Monday morning of the first week, with the students modeling the correct and incorrect way to transition. These expectations were reviewed often over the two-week course. The following chart shows the data collected:

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
T: 2:03 R: 0 S: 0	T: 1:52 R: 3 S: 1 paper thrown	T: 2:47 R: 0 S: 1 noisy	T: 2:42 R: 2 S: 2 noisy Going To	T: 4:03 R: 1 S: 0 Going To
			T: 5:25 R: 0 S: 0 Coming From	T: 4:14 R: 0 S: 0 Coming From
T: 3:33 R: 3 S: 0	T: 2:54 R: 1 S: 2 noisy	T: 3:02 R: 1 S: 0	T: 4:03 R: 2 S: 2 noisy Going To	T: 3:54 R: 0 S: 0 Going To
			T: 5:46 R: 0 S: 2 noisy Coming From	T: 4:57 R: 2 S: 0 Coming From

The use of explicit teaching was very successful. Compared to the baseline weeks, transition time was 11:28 faster. Only 15 students were not ready, compared to 60, and there were only ten safety issues compared to 34. The researcher spent considerable time reviewing the expectations for successful transitions throughout the two weeks.

### *Summary and Conclusion*

Based on the researcher's observations, transition techniques have a huge impact on instruction time throughout the day and school year. It was obvious to the researcher that having no transition techniques in effect caused a considerable loss of instruction time. The use of a timer by itself produced quicker transitions, but student readiness was sacrificed. Students seemed to get into a competition frame of mind, and only focused on how fast they were moving to the next activity. The use of music during transitions produced improved results because students needed to move quieter and not talk with friends in between activities. Using music as a transition technique appears to be a valuable addition to other strategies. The researcher concludes that explicitly teaching students transition expectations, and the use of positive discipline techniques are the two most effective forms of transitioning that were explored in this action research. It is important to note that students chose to combine listening to music along with their table group jobs. Students realized early on that it took a group effort to improve transition efficiency. Assigning jobs within each table groups was something that the researcher had not previously considered, but had tremendous impact on the success of the students. These transition technique combinations had positive effects because students led the decision. They took ownership over transition time from the teacher, and took a personal interest. Keeping transition times to a minimum adds instruction time and gives the students maximum

opportunities for learning. Helping students discover this connection is crucial in a true student owned/run classroom. Spending the time to work with the students early in the year to teach about the benefits of safe, timely, and appropriate transitions can pay off huge by the end of the school year. Students were excited and proud to know that they were having an impact on their education, and that their decisions really do make a difference.

For future study, the researcher would like to know if the internal motivation of students to practice effective transitions carries forward to future years. Will students continue using effective strategies in other teachers' classrooms? Will they teach new students the value of effective transitions? The researcher would hope that the students in his classroom would in fact remember the importance of transitions that are safe, timely, and ready. This action research design could be easily implemented in other classrooms, grades and schools. Other transition techniques could be explored. Considering the value of student participation, choice and group effort in this project it may be possible to apply the results to the broader study of democratic participation in classrooms.



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Appendix A

Transition Survey

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

1. What techniques do you use to ensure **safe** transitions?
  
2. What techniques do you use to ensure **timely** transitions?
  
3. What techniques do you use to ensure **student readiness** during transitions?
  
4. What types of transitions do you use **going to** the following activities?
  - A. Academic to academic:
  
  - B. Academic to P.E./Music/Specials:
  
  - C. Academic to recess/lunch:

5. What types of transitions do you use **coming from** the following activities?

A. Academic to academic:

B. Academic to P.E./Music/Specials:

C. Academic to recess/lunch:



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