



Teaching Threads

Increasing the Odds for Successful Transitions

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During the school day, transition times can often be frustrating for both students and teachers. Transitioning from one activity to another may be difficult for students actively engaged and therefore reluctant to stop. Other students may be unaware of or unable to perform the steps required for successful transition. Problems also arise when students are required to transition from one part of the classroom or building to another and from the school bus or playground to the classroom. Teachers desiring smooth and efficient transitions between activities too frequently end up spending valuable time managing student behavior during transition time. ➤

Teaching Transition Skills

The first step in making transitions easier for both students and teachers is to recognize the need to actively teach transition skills and subskills. Students are required to transition several times every school day with each transition requiring a large number of subskills. Students who do not possess the skills needed to complete each transition will not be successful. Teachers can begin to make transitioning easier for students by reducing the number of transitions. Rather than changing seating arrangements for each activity, students can remain in the same seat for two activities. Giving students a one-minute stand and stretch break is often helpful. Similarly, activities that require the same student materials, such as markers and scissors, can be completed back to back to reduce the transitioning of materials. A third suggestion is that teachers maintain consistency across the skills required during transitions. Developing a consistent routine for handing in all completed work will require students to learn one transition routine rather than different routines for homework, math

workbooks, personal journals, and spelling practice.

- Teach transition skills
- Reduce the number of transitions
- Establish consistent routines + procedures
- Use reminders + reteaching
- Praise, recognize, + appreciate student transition skills

Direct instruction including teacher modeling, presentation of transition rules, student practice with corrective feedback, and recognition of student correct performance, is effective for teaching transitioning skills. Teachers can begin by following this basic instructional sequence (Sprick, 2012).

1. Identify three to five primary transition times that occur daily
2. Develop a set of steps for successful transition that can be applied in all those transitions
3. Utilize a direct instruction approach to teach these steps to all students
4. Provide frequent opportunities for student practice, reminders, and reteaching
5. Provide praise, recognition, and appreciation for student achievement

Students can be taught simple key word strategies to facilitate efficient transitions, such as move quickly and quietly, and put your materials away and get what you need for the next activity.

Quick, Quiet, Away, & Ready

Prior to each transition, teachers can use verbal reminders and/or direct student attention to a posted list of the required steps and/or ask students to state the required steps. Teachers should also ask the class if there is anything that would prevent a student from being able to carry out the transition and then make needed accommodations. For successful transitioning, each student must be able to perform all the required steps. Therefore, teachers must assess individual student skill level and provide individualized instruction and/or accommodations as needed. Expecting students to perform skills they are not able to perform will result in failure and frustration.

Making Transitioning Easier

Students can learn to prepare for transitions when teachers adhere to the daily schedule of activities and alert students with signals, such as “you have 15 minutes” and “in 3 minutes you will need to ____”. Students concerned with completing assignments may be more willing to move on if given options such as, “If you have not finished your work, you will have time to complete it during ____.” Such options provided must not be perceived as punishment by students; use study periods rather than recess time.

Students need sufficient time and space for transitioning. Teachers can observe students to determine what is needed. Since time spent on transitioning is time taken away from instruction, efficient transitions are necessary. Replacing 5- to 7-minute inefficient transitions with 3-minute efficient transitions can add 30 to 60 minutes to instructional time each day. Teachers can challenge students to speed up transition time.

In classrooms with limited space and/or tight traffic areas, teachers can develop a system in which half of the students transition at one time. This will require teachers to plan an activity for students as they wait. For example, as half of the students return the science materials to the shelf, half of the

students are completing their “What did I do today?” journals at their desks.

Many teachers find it helpful to allow students to regroup between activities. Students can be required to put their material away and then sit at their desks or in a circle. The teacher can then lead a short discussion of “What did we do today in math?” “What new information/skill did we learn?” “What are we ready to do now?” and “How will we get ready?” Transition activities, such as two-minute puzzles or singing a transition song, can be helpful during transition times. One teacher helps her elementary students regroup after their lunch and recess break by turning off the lights, putting on some soft music, meeting students at the door, and reminding them of the 5-minute quiet time. Students can sit quietly at their desks, draw, or color during these 5 minutes.

Olive (2004) provides several suggestions for making transitioning easier for younger students.

- Using pictures to post daily schedules and provide transitioning cue
- Performing certain activities consistently in certain areas of the classroom
- Involving students in a song, rhyme, or clapping pattern during transition
- times
- Providing two-minute warnings
- Incorporating peer interaction
- Using high probability requests just prior to transition request

Physical prompts are often helpful with younger students. For example, if a student is reluctant to leave the art area, giving him/her a musical instrument may increase their willingness to move on to the music circle. ➤

Transition Problems

When problems continue during specific transition times or for certain students, observations of and discussions with students can assist teachers in determining why the problem is occurring and recurring. There are several possible reasons for transitioning difficulties such as: students not knowing exactly what to do; students knowing what to

do, but not being able to do it; students having too much fun in the current activity; students unaware of and unprepared for transition (Is it time already?); students attempting to avoid the next activity; students unsure of the next activity; students who have not completed the current task; and students with difficulties attending to task and following directions. Identifying the reason why a problem is occurring and recurring enables teachers to more effectively correct it. Students who do not know what to do or do not know how to do what is required can be taught the skills needed. Three-minute warnings can alert students to transition times. Extra time for fun activities can be used as group rewards for time saved during transitions.

Of particular concern for some teachers are students displaying oppositional behavior during transition times. Assisting such students in recognizing and demonstrating personal control may result in more positive student responses. One strategy is to ask rather than tell (Hewitt, 1999). Teachers should avoid statements such as “In 3 minutes you will need to do...” and instead ask questions such as “What do you need to do in 3 minutes?” This gives the student the opportunity to state what they need to do, rather than having the teacher tell them what they need to do. Teachers faced with students who say “You can’t make me”, might respond with “You are right, I can’t make you. You are the one who controls your behavior. I hope you make a good behavior choice.” This helps the student feel in control rather than being controlled, reducing the student’s need to oppose teacher directives.

Transitioning is a time of change and activity. Teachers and students are shifting from thinking about math to thinking about science, from playing kickball to sitting at a desk; or from being at home with family to being in school with peers. This article provides a few suggestions for making transition time easier for students and teachers. The references listed include several additional suggestions.

References and Resources

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As always, my intent in presenting these activities is to help teachers answer this question -

What can I do to make it easier for my students to learn and behave?



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