

Reflection Paper

Subject: Classroom Management: Transitions

Grade: 5th Grade

Module 1: Classroom Environment for Active Learning : Teacher implements instruction in order to engage students in rigorous and relevant learning and to promote their curiosity about the world at large by:

Selected Indicator: 5. Maximizing the amount of time spent on learning by effectively managing routines and transitions

Goal:

My goal is to increase the amount of time spent on learning by effectively managing routines and transitions.

Initial Summary:

Currently, I find it difficult and time consuming to transition the students in my room from one activity to the next. At the beginning of the year I posted classroom rules, expectations, consequences, and a schedule hoping to help the students in the class prepare for transitions. Due to the type of special education students I teach I have been structuring my transitions to be more individualized for each student. For example, when lining the students up for a special I call each student individually. My overall goal is to try and limit the amount of unstructured time that the students have during a transition. After taking data, I found that it takes me anywhere from three to seven minutes to transition my class. This is taking away from valuable instruction time that I need with my students.

Reflection:

This classroom is a self-contained special education class for students who are emotionally disturbed and have significant emotional and behavioral problems. Each student has many individual behaviors that need improvement and behavior intervention plans, as well as other strategies, have been implemented to target those behaviors. When thinking of what the classroom needed to improve on all of the students had difficulty with transitions. Due to the type of special education students I teach I began the school year by structuring my transitions to be individualized for each student. For example, when lining the students up for a special, or lunch, I would call each student individually. I noticed from the student's body language, and comments, that they became frustrated with my way of lining them up. I have always tried to limit the amount of unstructured time that the students have during a transition, thus decreasing the opportunity for misbehavior to occur. However, I found that it takes me anywhere from three to seven minutes to transition my class. This is taking away from valuable instruction time that I need with my students. Through this process I wanted to learn how I can shorten transition time in my classroom to provide for more instruction time. I expected the application of my

new learning to have a positive effect on my students. I would not only gain more instructional time, but I would also keep each student engaged in a transition which will limit the frustration that comes when we line up or switch activities.

One way that I developed new learning was by observing and talking to other teachers about strategies they use to successfully transition their students. One teacher I observed gave the students a 'first, then' prompt. Where she would say, "first you are going to take out your science book, then you will line up at the door." When talking to this teacher she said she did this to limit the amount of verbal stimulation and to keep the students focused on two simple directions. This teacher also had the paraprofessional that was going to be with the students waiting at the door. The teacher did this to give the students a visual reminder where they needed to transition to. This teacher stressed the importance of giving a direction or cue, as well as a visual reminder. The second teacher I observed gave the students time warnings before an activity ends so that they know what to expect. She starts with a 5 minute warning and then gives a final minute warning. When the minute is up she gives her students the next direction, whether it is to go back to their desks or line up at the door. When talking to both teachers they emphasized how important it was to practice transitions at the beginning of the year. By observing my colleagues and discussing transition tips, I learned new strategies to try in my room. I also learned that every teacher has their own way of transitioning their students and once they find a way that works for them they stick to it.

Another way I developed new learning was by reviewing sections of books. According to Henry Wong's book *How to be an Effective Teacher: The first days of School*, it is very important to teach procedures in the classroom. Wong stressed the importance of students knowing from the beginning how they are expected to behave and work in their class. Through Henry Wong's section on classroom management, I realized that by developing and practicing classroom procedures the amount of time on task increases and classroom disruptions decrease which was my biggest concern for making the student's transitions individualized. I also read through the section of Robert Marzano's book called *Classroom Management that Works* about transition and interruptions. Marzano discussed how it is inevitable that students will need to move, whether to go to the bathroom, line up for lunch, or sharpen a pencil and how these minor transitions can cause chaos in a classroom without rules and procedures. Marzano suggested having a large chart labeled with procedures for each major transition and having a student review the rules and procedures that are specific to the transition. He also stressed the importance of making sure that each student listened to the procedures.

The final way I developed new learning was by reading through journal articles that related to transitions and the loss of instructional time due to interruptions. According to Maribeth Gettinger and Jill Seibert, who write the article *Best Practices in Increasing Academic Learning Time*, teachers lose instructional time for many reasons, one of which is ineffective transitions. One strategy that was suggested in the article was giving the students a cue phrase where they would recognize that because a certain phrase was stated they would be starting something new. Like Marzano, Gettinger also stressed the importance of making sure that all of the students were paying attention before starting something new. This would limit the time needed to transition. Gettinger also discussed how important it is for teachers to practice "routines that are necessary for smooth classroom operation. This relates to what Henry Wong said about practicing a procedure until it becomes a routine.

Through my development of new learning I discovered many different ways that I could transition the students. So I decided to try a strategy that I thought would be efficient and quick to introduce. The last thing I wanted to do was to create further behavioral problems with implementing many

new strategies all at once. The first method I did to improve my transitions was to create a line order that would change weekly. Every Monday the student at the front of the line would go to the back. The remainder of the line would still be next to the same person, except for the student in the front and back of the line. The line order lessened the confusion when I asked all of the students to line up in order. The students knew exactly who to line up behind. As well as implementing the line order, I would ask all of the students to line up at once instead of calling them up one by one. By trying this strategy I decreased my transition time depending on the activity we were ending, but not to a point where I thought I had found a successful strategy. Although this was working better than I had anticipated I was still having difficulty with the students lining up quickly. There were a few students who would continue to work on an assignment or others who would wait until the second time I asked. So I decided to try a cue for lining up. I decided that my cue would be "time to line-up." This did not work at all. I found that the students regressed and took longer to line up. I stuck this strategy out for a week and then I decided I needed to try something else. I thought the strategy I observed from one of my colleagues, where she had a paraprofessional line up at the door, was an excellent way to redirect the student's attention. So I decided that I was going to stand at the door and line the students up from there. This worked, but again it didn't solve my problem of lining the students up quickly. After talking with my mentor she suggested the idea of counting down from 5 or 10. I was willing to give anything a try to transition the students quickly and thus spend more time on instruction. The first time I tried this method I asked the students to line up in line order. I said that we should all be standing quietly, facing forward, by the time I get to zero. I started to count down from 10 and was surprised that 4 out of the six students got out of their chairs immediately and lined up. The other students eventually realized that we were lining up and managed to make it to the line by the time I got to 2. I was blown away that this had worked so quickly. I decided that if this counting down strategy can work so well with lining the students up quickly what else would it work with. So I decided to try the counting down strategy when I transitioned from earned free time to academics. The transitions after earned free time are often the worst. The students do not want to stop doing their activity to go back to their seats and learn. Since the beginning of the year I set a timer for the students as a visual cue. I incorporated the idea from the teacher I observed about giving the students warnings. I would give them a 5 minutes warning, then a two minute warning, but the students were still struggling with stopping their activity when the timer went off and returning to their desks in a timely fashion. So I decided to implement the counting down technique. I would cue that students that free time was over and they needed to be in their seat by the time I got to zero. I started at 10 and counted backwards. The first time I did this transition three out of the six students went back to their seats immediately. The others waited until the last few seconds and managed to make it to their seats by the time I got to zero. Although I believe I have become more successful with shortening transition times there were still days where the students did not make it to their chairs in time. I did not want this counting backwards technique to lose its effectiveness so I decided to implement a consequence if they did not follow my direction in time. If they did not make it back to their desk in time they would lose a following directions point from their point sheet and we would follow the classroom consequence steps.

Through this process I wanted to learn how I can shorten transition time in my classroom to provide more for academic instruction time. Due to observing other teachers and reading various resources the students' performance has improved drastically. Originally, it took the students in my room anywhere from three to seven minutes to transition, depending on the activity we were stopping or going to. The transitions from a choice activity to an academic were the longest and most difficult. These long transitions were taking away from valuable instruction time that I needed with the students. Currently, it takes my students anywhere from 15 seconds to a minute, or two, to transition. Another way that the student's performance has improved as a result of the changes I made is that we are spending more time on instruction. At the beginning of the year I had a thirty minute block of academics that I was lucky if I got a solid twenty minutes of instruction before the kids had to yet again transition to a special.

Currently, with the faster transitions I am able to get a solid twenty eight minutes out of that academic block because the students are becoming ready to learn faster. Through this module I realized that I was the main problem of transitioning my students. I was the one who was directing the show and waiting for each kid. I was the one individualizing the transitions for each kid which didn't work well. I used to line each student up individually and realized that if they weren't listening then they didn't know what to expect. This took longer to transition the students because often times a few students didn't pay attention and missed the direction. By implementing the counting down technique the students who were ready to transition did so and the other students who were not ready quickly picked up what they should be doing and transitioned with the others.