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*Troublesome transitions made effective through
the perspectives of teachers and students*

PDS Inquiry 2007

by

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Abstract:

Transitions are a huge part of every school day and tend to be a time when many off task behaviors can occur. During the transitional time, we both saw large amounts of instructional time being wasted throughout the day due to unproductive behavior in between activities. This led us to wonder how we could create a classroom where transitions are effective and off task behaviors are limited. Furthermore, we wondered if the time used in transitioning was actually being wasted and how teachers and students view the transitional time? With this, our inquiry explores how we can use the perspectives of both teachers and students to create transitions that are used in the most effective ways to increase the amount of instructional time and decrease the amount of unproductive behavior.

Lindsay's Fifth Classroom Background:

This particular fifth grade class, consisting of twenty-one students, is very diverse with different interests and academic abilities. There are eleven males and ten females. Of these twenty-one students, three are in the E.S.L. program, two of which are females and one male. One female student is Title I, while one of my male students tested out of the Title I program this year. Another male student goes to the Resource Room and receives speech and autistic support. Furthermore, another student was recently referred for speech help. A written IEP has recently been created for a male student in this class. While those students leave the room for academic needs, another male student receives emotional support outside of the classroom with the school psychologist

There are six students in my class who excel in all academic areas. Eleven students are considered average in their academic ability, and three students struggle in all academic areas. The students who excel go above and beyond the required tasks asked of them, while the struggling students fail to meet the requirements. Some of the struggling students fail to meet the requirements as a result of little effort, while others have a learning disability. Not only is this class very academically diverse, but also very culturally diverse. Four students are from outside of the United States.

This particular group of students is very talkative, especially during transitions. They tend to use the time in the morning, during activities, and at the end of the day to talk with peers. Without explicit instruction as to what they need to be doing or where they need to be, they are off task and unproductive. Therefore, this downtime takes away from productive instructional time.

Julie's Third Grade Classroom Background:

In Julie's third grade classroom, there are a total of twenty-four students. Fourteen of these students are male and ten of these students are female. There is a wide range of academic ability levels in the classroom, with four students who are in the learning support program and five students who are in enrichment programs. There are eight students in the class who excel in all academic areas and six students who struggle to complete their work. One student who goes to learning support for only reading and writing has an auditory processing problem. Of the students who are in enrichment programs, two of these students are in fourth grade math. Also, there is one child who is in the E.S.L. program and another child with autism. Both of these students do very well in the classroom, socially and academically.

There are no major behavior problems in this classroom. There are four male students who call out frequently and get off task very easily. One female student, who is the youngest in the classroom, tends to have a few social and emotional problems. She often cries, gets frustrated very easily, and argues with peers. Overall, this class does quite well when transitioning from one activity to another. There are a few students who are constantly being redirected to stay on task during the transitional time.

The class is very diverse, academically and socially, as well as culturally. One student is from Korea, one is from Russia, and another student is from China. There are many different ethnicities and cultures celebrated in this classroom. Every child in the class works very well together and each brings something different to the class to help form our diverse community classroom.

Julie's Fourth Grade Classroom Background:

In Julie's fourth grade classroom there are a total of twenty-three students. Eleven of these students are male and twelve of these students are female. There is a wide range of academic ability level in this classroom. One student is in learning support and is currently reading at a beginning second grade level, three students are in Title I, and there are six students who are in enrichment programs. All six of these students excel in all academic areas. There are two students in the E.S.L. program. Both of these students do well socially and are improving immensely with their academics.

There are no serious behavior problems in this classroom; however, this group of students is very talkative specifically during the transitional time. (Many of Julie's observations were taken from her 4th grade class, as opposed to her 3rd grade class, because transitions are more of a problem with this group of students.) There are three students who tend to call out often. One student, who has ADHD, tends to get off task very easily and needs to be constantly redirected. There are two sets of girl cliques that can often cause excessive socializing or hurt feelings among the groups.

Not only is this classroom academically diverse, but culturally diverse as well. There are two students who came to the United States last year from Korea. They were in the E.S.L. program and now do extremely well in the classroom. One student is from Japan, and another student is from Russia.

Overall, this is a very diverse and high achieving classroom. There are many different backgrounds, cultures, races, and academic levels in this classroom. Each child brings their own uniqueness to help create a positive and diverse classroom community.

Rationale for Inquiry:

According to Freiberg and Driscoll (2000), transitions can be defined as “a time of change – a change from one place to another, from one activity to another” (p. 148). Taking over transitions was one of our first responsibilities within the classroom. From the moment we took on this responsibility, we wondered what made transitions so difficult, not only for some of our students, but also for ourselves. We wondered why it felt like we did not have a good grasp on how to transition students from one activity to another, as well as why we could not seem to transition students as well as our mentor teachers. These initial wonderings on what made transitions so difficult led us to further wonderings about transitions.

We began to notice that in both our classrooms students seemed to view transitions as a time to socialize with one another. That is, when they were asked to switch from one activity to another, they would walk over to a friend and start chatting, which was not what the teacher asked of them. Often, this increased the amount of time required to transition from one activity to another, resulting in a significant loss of instructional time. “Although transitions are a necessary part of the school day, the amount of time devoted to these activities should be kept to a minimum. Transitions that are not carefully planned can be very time-consuming and set the occasion for disruptive behaviors” (Carta, 1998, p. 14). We recognized this in our own classrooms and decided that we wanted to investigate what exactly was occurring during transitions in our classrooms.

As we started our inquiry, we both had a strong interest in studying transitions with slightly different approaches. Julie was interested in looking at teacher views of

transition times compared to student views on transition times. With this, she wondered if students see transitions as a break from their daily instruction throughout the day verses teacher views of maximizing instructional time through out the day. On the other hand, Lindsay was more interested in how transitions can be used in the most effective way to eliminate unproductive behavior and increase the amount of instructional time. When discussing our data collection, we came to a realization that our inquiry could be strengthened by combining our two topics to form a new driving question. Through collaboration, we recognized that we both were already incorporating one another's inquiry within our own. Julie was collecting data in her classroom of the students transitioning from one activity to another in order to analyze the unproductive behavior of certain students and explore how this could change. Meanwhile, Lindsay was giving the students surveys in order to collect data and observe student views on transitions.

By combining our two inquiry topics, we were able to create a new driving question: Using the perspective of both teachers and students, how can transitions be used in the most effective way to eliminate unproductive behavior and increase the amount of instructional time? With this question we can look at the different responses and views that teachers and students have of transitions, and then incorporate different interventions that may help make transitions in our classroom more effective based on student and teacher perspectives.

By studying transitions now within our first year of teaching, we hope to learn of different techniques that will help manage the overall classroom setting better. We can take what we learn from this inquiry to benefit the classroom environment in future years. In turn, we hope to find ways to increase the amount of instructional time and decrease

the off task and unnecessary time spent waiting for students to start the next designated assignment or activity. In addition, we can learn different strategies that can be used with different age level students and with various types of children. We realize that transitions are a huge part of every school day, and therefore, want students to be provided with all they need in order to be successful. Knowing how to handle transitions, so that both the students and the teacher benefit and are successful, is something that we will take with us for the rest of our teaching career.

Driving Question:

Using the perspective of both teachers and students, how can transitions be used in the most effective way to eliminate unproductive behavior and increase the amount of instructional time?

Sub-Questions:

- How much time in the day is spent on transitions? To what extent is this time ineffective or is it essential for student learning?
- To what extent do teachers find transition time to be problematic in their classroom?
- To what extent do students think they waste time during the day in transitions?
- Which transitions can be implemented that are effective and age appropriate?
- Are there any other side effects to unproductive transitions other than losing important instructional time?

Inquiry Vs. Improvement Project:

There are many aspects of our project that make it a true inquiry project and not simply an improvement project. As with all inquiry projects, we started with a wondering. This wondering, on transitions in the classroom, led to further wonderings about why transitions seemed to be a social time for students in our classrooms. Now that we are observing and conducting transitions more and more, we realize that we have many wonderings about transitions. Along with our wonderings, we are collecting data, researching, and further analyzing this area of classroom management, which is an essential part of inquiry. We want to know how to make transitions as effective as possible in order to eliminate unproductive behavior and increase instructional time by using and understanding teacher and student views of transitions.

With this specific question, we will collect data to gain a sense of our classrooms' behavior, analyze the time it takes to transition from one activity to another, and survey and interview the students and teachers to see their perspective on transition time. We will then analyze the data to find useful patterns that can help in the process of implementing different intervention strategies. We know that at the end of this inquiry study, we may have one question answered, but many will remain and others will form from the results we have collected. With an improvement project one does not analyze and make sense of the information, but is just trying to make something better.

Inquiry Plan Description:

In January we determined that we wanted to focus our inquiry on transitions, and then began this project by making formal observations of transitions within our classroom and researching on this topic. We both felt that transitions were a problem in our classrooms and, therefore, wanted to gather data on transitions from the start of the day to the end of the day. According to Freiberg and Driscoll (2000), “The times when students first arrive, before and after lunch, and at the end of the day are often characterized as ragged, nonproductive, and unpleasant by teachers and students” (p. 149). For this reason, we wanted to make sure we observed and gathered information on transitions in our classrooms for the entire school day.

Over a three-month period of time, starting in February, we began collecting data, not only from formal observations taken in the classroom, but through student and teacher surveys. We distributed the surveys in mid February. The teacher survey would provide insight into strategies already in use in different classrooms, as well as what transitions look like other classrooms. We hoped to gain teacher perspectives on transitions and have a means with which to compare the students’ views. The student surveys would give us insight into how students felt they used the transitional time in their classroom. After all teacher and student surveys were distributed and collected, we reviewed and analyzed the information they provided in order to further pursue our inquiry in late February.

Along with administering student surveys, in the beginning of March, we took the time to interview students individually, in order to ask their opinions on different

strategies that would motivate them to move at a faster pace in the classroom and between different activities. Based on the students' input, we planned to use this data to implement interventions for use within our classroom. Additionally, we also asked the students if they felt they needed to talk between activities, and if so, why? We believed that this was a necessary step in order to determine whether the time spent socializing during transitions was actually beneficial.

In early March, we developed interventions, which we felt would be most effective in our classrooms. We implemented the different interventions by mid-March. Our interventions included, creating a competition between tables, counting down from a specified number, clapping to a pattern and having the students respond with the repeated pattern, and calling specific tables/groups to the designated area as opposed to everyone all at once. While we implemented the different interventions, we recorded data and observations as to what the students were doing and how they responded to the interventions. (See Appendix I for table competition data chart.) Thus, our data collection and observations continued throughout the process of implementing different interventions.

After we implemented the different interventions based on students' ideas, we took the time to analyze our observations of the different strategies in order to gauge their effectiveness. When analyzing our data, we compared pre and post intervention observations. Additionally, we assessed the level of motivation the students possessed during the implementation of new strategies. This information informed the ways in which these strategies can be effectively used in future classrooms in order to motivate

students to move at a faster pace between activities, as well as in the beginning and end of the day procedures.

We began our inquiry with a driving question and limited sub-questions. Throughout the entire inquiry process we learned, from giving surveys, conducting interviews, and implementing interventions, various strategies to use in our classroom. However, throughout the whole process we also formed many new wonderings.

Data Collection:

We collected data in four different ways, which included: classroom observations, surveys, interviews, and journals.

Observations

Although we had slightly different wonderings at the beginning of our inquiry, we had similar ideas about methods of data collection in order to address these wonderings. After researching about transitions, we began by making daily observations during transitions in our classrooms. Although, we observe transitions everyday and, for the most part run them, actually sitting back and watching transitions throughout the day allowed us to put data on paper and even notice things that we may have not noticed before. We could focus in on what the students and teacher were doing during this time, including student conversations. The majority of these observations was in note form and included various types of transitions throughout the day. These were fairly simple notes, specifically stating teacher instruction and student responses. That is, what all of the students in the classroom were doing during the transitional time, exactly how long transitions were taking, and what the teacher was saying and doing. Not only did these

observations help us to gain insight into what was going on in the classroom during transitions, but they also helped us to see some patterns that were occurring during this time. These observations were the first step in discovering what was really going on during the transitional time.

Surveys

As we were making observations in our classrooms, it occurred to us that it would also be necessary to survey and interview teachers and students. In doing this, we gained the perspectives that teachers and students have regarding transitions- a vital piece of our inquiry. We felt that it was very important to see what other teachers believe about transitions in order to make transitions the most effective and increase the amount of instructional time in our own classrooms. We distributed surveys to all regular education teachers at Radio Park Elementary School and two other teachers outside of the district. A total of sixteen teacher surveys were collected. An example teacher survey is shown in Appendix A. These surveys include questions designed to elicit information about the length of transitions in the classroom, the extent to which students talk during transitions, the teacher's expectations for students during transitions, as well as strategies used to help students transition from one activity to another. The survey also addressed whether teachers were comfortable with having students socialize during transitions. One of the main reasons for this was to see whether different teachers were more tolerant of what the students do in-between activities and whether this affected the amount of time it took to transition in their classroom. The data provided by the teacher survey enabled us to consider the perspectives of many teachers in order to make this time valuable and effective for both the teacher and students in a classroom. In addition, we learned of

different transition strategies that were implemented by other classroom teachers.

In addition to surveying the teachers, we also surveyed the students in our classrooms. (See appendix B for a sample student survey.) Julie gave a survey to each of the students in her third and fourth grade classrooms (a total of 46 student surveys). Included in the student survey were six questions dealing with students' perceptions regarding their behavior during transitions. The student survey questions included information about all transitions that occur throughout the day and also addressed whether or not students believe they talk or socialize with classmates in-between activities. We also inquired about the students' ability to follow directions when talking with a classmate. The students had to answer whether they always, mostly, sometimes, or never follow the routine and instructions during transitions. Lindsay gave a similar survey dealing with the same aspects of transitions to her fifth grade classroom. A total of eighteen were collected. However, after Lindsay collected the surveys and reviewed the answers of some students, she found that the class results did not accurately reflect her observations and the students true actions during transitions. With this, Lindsay created a PowerPoint presentation to help break each question down for the students in order to ensure that each student had a solid understanding of the questions being asked. In addition to creating a PowerPoint, Lindsay asked them to complete the poll questions on Studywiz, which consisted of questions identical to those of the first survey.

Interviews

In addition to student surveys, Julie conducted interviews with sixteen students in her fourth grade class to get a more personal feel for what students think about

transitions, as well as any strategies that they think might help them move in-between activities at a faster pace. She focused on two particular questions during the interviews: Do students feel the need to talk to classmates between activities, if so, does that actually help to prepare them for the next activity; and what might motivate them to move from one activity to another at a faster pace? These interviews were recorded on Garage Band for later use throughout our inquiry study.

Journals

Data was also collected in the form of a reflective journal. The journals enabled us to put into writing our thought process about our study of transitions.

Data Analysis

After we collected our data, we systematically analyzed each type. All of the data was organized into piles based on the method of data collection.

Observations

We first read through all of our written observations and compared this information with one another. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, we recorded exactly how many observations we took in-between activities. We found that a total of thirty-three observations were taken during transitions in our classrooms prior to implementing our interventions. After finding this total, we then coded all transitions that took more than three minutes in yellow in order to see how many times throughout the day a

transition lasted longer than this specific amount of time. An example of a transition lasting more than three minutes occurred when the teacher instructed all the students in the classroom to obtain their materials from their cubbies at the same time and return to the carpet, which resulted in disorganization. We then coded in pink any transitions that took less than one minute which exemplify the students' ability to move from one activity to another. An example of such a transition was when a teacher counted down from thirty and all students were in their designated spots when she reached zero. Additionally, we recorded any techniques and strategies that were implemented by the teacher, in which we found to be successful. We considered an extremely successful transition to be one that lasted under one minute. However, we also considered any transition that lasted under three minutes to be effective and elicit productive behavior.

Surveys

Student Surveys: We both started out by reading through all the student surveys and recording the results in a chart that displayed each question and the students' responses to each particular question. Two separate charts were created, one for Lindsay's fifth grade classroom and one for Julie's fourth grade classroom. Another chart was created in the same manner for the two additional questions that Julie had included on her survey. (See appendix C for data charts.) After creating these charts we looked to see if there were any common patterns in students' responses. We also analyzed these to gain a greater sense of how the students felt they handled transitions. For each question we looked to see how the majority of students in the class responded and to see if they viewed transitions as much of a problem as we did. By looking at the charts, we found that most of the students felt they usually did what was asked of them, with limited amount of

talking.

Teacher Surveys: We started analyzing the teacher surveys by reading thoroughly through each one and then highlighting with yellow all of the surveys in which teachers felt that transitions in their classroom took more than three minutes. We separated these from the others and found that six out of sixteen teachers believed that transitions took more than three minutes in their classroom. After splitting them into two piles, we then looked at the highlighted surveys to compare how talkative their students typically were during transitions to those surveys that were not highlighted. We marked on paper any patterns that we noticed between the two piles. Such patterns that we looked for were the different percentages of students in which transitions are a problem, how talkative students are during transitions, general strategies used in between activities, and the teacher's expectations. We recorded any similarities and differences on paper to help gain a better perspective of teachers' views of transitions in the classroom.

Interviews:

We began analyzing the student interviews by listening through all of the recorded student interviews on Garage Band. After listening through the interviews one time, we then listened to it a second time taking notes on any student responses that would help with our inquiry, as well as any specific strategies that students suggested would motivate them in-between activities.

Journals:

When looking at our journals, we read through each one reflecting upon our

experiences throughout our inquiry investigation. We looked for patterns that we may have written in our journals and any similarities between them. (See appendix D for a sample journal)

Claims:

Claim 1:

When students socialize with one another in between activities, it will result in a longer transition time.

Evidence: At the beginning of this inquiry project, one of the main aspects that we both noticed in our classrooms was the fact that many of the students seemed to view transitions as a time to socialize with one another. Although, at first we did not take any formal observations, we felt that a lot of instructional time was lost due to the extended transitional time. We felt that one of the main reasons for this was, because students would often talk with classmates in-between activities. After taking formal observations of transitions in our classroom and analyzing the data, we found that in every transition that took longer than three minutes, we recorded multiple students talking and socializing with one another. A total of thirty-three observations were taken in our classrooms during transitions. Of the thirty-three observations taken during transitions, nineteen lasted three minutes or longer prior to implementing our interventions. This is approximately fifty-eight percent of the total transitions lasting three or more minutes. In all of these transitions lasting three minutes or longer, we recorded multiple students socializing with one another and off-task behavior. In appendix E there are observations of transitions taken by Julie in both her third and fourth grade class on February 12, 2007. In these observations, Julie recorded multiple students talking to one another in all

of the transitions that took longer than three minutes. In those transitions that were less than three minutes, she recorded, for the most part, that the students cleaned up their materials and followed instructions quickly and quietly.

Along with our observations of our classrooms during transitions, we analyzed the sixteen teacher surveys and found that all six of the teachers whom recorded transitions taking more than three minutes in their classroom also recorded their classroom as being extremely talkative. That is, one hundred percent of the teachers who stated that it took longer than three minutes to transition felt that their students were extremely talkative during the transitional time. In comparison, of the eleven teachers that stated it took only one to three minutes to transition, only two teachers recorded their class as being extremely talkative, five said their class was somewhat talkative, and three said their class was not very talkative. That is, only about eighteen percent of the teachers who stated it took only one to three minutes to transition felt that their class was extremely talkative during transitions. From our observations and the teacher surveys, it is evident that when students socialize with one another in-between activities it will result in a longer transitional time.

Claim 2:

Students are more motivated and act in a positive manner when they have a vital role in decision-making.

Evidence: We have found throughout our inquiry exploration that students tend to be more accepting to their own ideas, which is why it is important to invite the students to

contribute their own ideas to make an activity or idea more effective. For our inquiry, we wanted our students to have a vital part in deciding how to make transition time more effective in the classroom.

We conducted student interviews to gain a better perspective on what specific students felt would motivate them to move from activity to another at a faster pace. Out of the sixteen interviews, four students suggested counting down from a specific number and six students suggested playing some kind of game to motivate them to move from one activity to another (see Appendix F for exact student quotes).

Due to the student input, we were then able to implement their strategies that they had suggested in our classroom and observe the students within the transitions. When comparing the observations we collected prior to the intervention and after, we found that there was a large reduction in the time it took the students to move in-between activities. Prior to implementing the interventions, we found that approximately fifty eight percent of the transitions we observed lasted three minutes or longer. After implementing the interventions, we then found that approximately twenty five percent of the transitions now only lasted three minutes or longer. Therefore, the transitions lasting three minutes or longer was reduced by thirty-three percent. Out of the sixteen observations of transitions developed from student ideas, twelve resulted in transitions, which lasted less than two minutes. This proves that the students were more motivated when implementing their own transitional strategies, since the time it took them to move from one activity to another was greatly reduced.

Not only did the student interviews allow students the opportunity to share their opinions and thoughts on the idea of transitions, but students had another opportunity to

voice their opinions by conducting a class meeting. Lindsay held a class meeting in which the students discussed and shared ideas about an intervention that we conducted. Prior to holding the class meeting, several students complained the game was unfair and therefore lost interest and motivation to participate. However, the observations taken after the class meeting show that all twenty students in the classroom at this time agreed that the game was now fair. This was proven through a class vote. Also, all of the students were now interested in participating in the game and demonstrated a higher level of motivation to move from one activity to another in order to win the game. After holding the class meeting and hearing the students' opinions, not one student complained that the game was unfair, nor did anyone seem to lose interest compared to before the class meeting. (See Appendix G for further explanation on implementing the competition between tables).

By conducting the interviews and holding a class meeting the students were able to play a vital role in helping to make transitions more effective within the classroom. The interventions that we implemented were based on student ideas and therefore, we observed the students to be highly motivated to make improvements and move at a faster pace during transitions.

Claim 3:

Without clear organization, transitions can result in potentially dangerous situations, as well as off task behaviors within the classroom.

Evidence:

According to Glenn Buck (1999),

“Teachers are challenged at transition periods by having to engage simultaneously in a number of activities, such as presenting a series of directions, coordinating the storage of students’ materials, managing the students’ social behaviors, and supervising the students’ physical movements to new locations (e.g., lining up the students to walk to another classroom)” (p. 224).

With all of these things that teachers are required to accomplish during transitions, it makes it extremely important for teachers to have a well thought out and clearly organized plan when transitioning students from one activity to another. From our observations of transitions it is clear of the importance for a teacher to have a specific way of organizing the students when transitioning in order to eliminate potentially dangerous situations and behavior problems.

Of the thirty-three transitions we observed, prior to implementing our interventions, seven were without clear organization. That is, the teacher did not provide specific directions in an orderly manner. All of the students in the class were simply told to get their belongings and return to their designated areas. Out of the seven disorganized transitions, five resulted in potentially dangerous situations. Such observations of the potentially dangerous situations include students pushing each other out of the way and tripping over objects and peers. Also, all seven of the disorganized transitions resulted in over half of the students in the class engaged in off task behaviors. The off task behaviors we observed during this time include, students talking and socializing with one another, students wondering around the classroom, and students playing with materials not needed for the lesson or next activity. All of these observations were taken when all of the students were asked to either get necessary supplies out of their cubbies for the following activities or line up for lunch, specials or recess (See Appendix H for more details).

According to Freiberg and Driscoll (2000), “when a teacher directs students to line up at the door to go to the cafeteria, she is herding students” (p. 149). Creating alternatives to this situation is important in a classroom setting. From our observations it is quite evident that disorganized transitions can result in undesired behaviors and even potentially dangerous situations.

Conclusions:

Through this inquiry project we have learned many things, not only about transitions, but also about students and teaching in general. Our driving question throughout this entire process focused on using the perspectives of both teachers and students to allow transitions to be used in the most effective way to eliminate unproductive behavior and increase the amount of instructional time. With this, we researched, observed, interviewed, investigated, and analyzed what we could do to help answer our initial wonderings. However, despite the fact that we have learned so many things, as with many inquiries, our driving question has still left us with further wonderings.

Through the student and teacher surveys, we were able to use their perspectives to incorporate various interventions that we felt might eliminate unproductive behavior and increase the amount of instructional time. Each intervention that we implemented did indeed improve the transitions in our classroom. The students were more motivated to move quickly in-between activities, therefore, eliminating a great amount of unproductive behavior that we observed prior to our inquiry investigation. However, we feel that because we have only done the interventions for two weeks in our classrooms that we do

not have enough substantial evidence to truthfully declare that we know exactly how transitions can be used in the most effective way to eliminate unproductive behavior and increase the amount of instructional time in a classroom.

We implemented four different interventions after analyzing the teacher and student interviews and surveys. From this data, we realized that the students needed to be motivated somehow to transition from one activity to another quietly and quickly. By interviewing and surveying the students we allowed them to play a crucial role in our inquiry. We chose four main interventions to implement. These include creating a competition between tables, counting down from a specified number, clapping to a pattern and having the students respond with the repeated pattern, and calling specific tables/groups to the designated area as opposed to everyone all at once. By implementing these different interventions we could definitely see an improvement in the amount of time it took to transition from one activity to another based on our observations before and after introducing the inventions.

Through the entire process we learned that no matter what intervention implemented to help make transitions effective, it had to be something that would work for both the teacher and the students in the classroom. The students need to be motivated to make the most of their time, and the teachers had to incorporate something that he or she could conduct in an organized manner and also, feel comfortable when incorporating it into the classroom. We found through the teacher surveys, that some of the interventions we tried in our classroom are also used with younger elementary students.

Along with our driving question, we had several other wonderings in which we wanted to look into further. One main sub-wondering that we wanted to research was

how much time in a day is actually spent transitioning. Jones and Jones (2004) stated in *Comprehensive Classroom Management*, that “A surprisingly large amount of classroom time is spent in transition from one activity to another. The approximately thirty major transitions each day in elementary classrooms account for nearly 15 percent of classroom time” (p. 291). We found that depending on the classroom, the amount of time spent on transitions throughout the school day varied. On average, we found that 45-50 minutes a day were spent on transitions in our own classrooms. Much of this time we observed was spent talking with peers in between the different activities and could have been decreased to enable more instructional time. We also found that the teachers whose students were very talkative said that transitions were in fact a problem due to the amount of time they spent transitioning from one activity to another in their classroom. However, the students did not necessarily have this same view as the teachers. When surveyed and interviewed, the students in our classrooms felt that they did not socialize as much in between activities as compared to what our observations showed. Not all of the students found this time socializing being wasteful, but rather a few declared that it actually helped them prepare for the next activity.

In addition, we learned that there are other side effects to unproductive transitions, other than losing instructional time. We found that unorganized transitions can result in behavior problems and dangerous situations for the students. It is extremely important for a teacher to organize transitions in such a way to promote a positive classroom environment.

When exploring all of our inquiry wonderings, we have learned many things that we have found to be beneficial to use in our future endeavors as a teacher. We now

recognize the importance of including students in the decision-making process in order to gain a better understanding of our students. This is necessary to find out from the very beginning of the school year to see what will motivate students to produce quick and efficient transitions. It is also very important at the beginning of the school year to set clear expectations of what the students should do in-between activities. “It is important that everyone in the classroom (teachers, children, and other staff members) knows what behaviors are expected during transitions” (Carta, 1998, p. 18). Along with this, we have learned the importance of implementing clearly organized transitions so that behavior problems and dangerous situations do not occur. Furthermore, a teacher should not only ensure that transitions are organized, but that he or she implements a variety of strategies so that students remain motivated and engaged. Freiberg and Driscoll (2000) suggest that “During the year, add some variety to make them interesting and adjust them to changes” (p. 148).

New Wonderings:

After completing this inquiry a few of our initial wonderings were answered. However, now that we have studied transitions more closely, many more wonderings come to mind.

1. Would the problem behavior and talking return once the students become “bored” with the game? Would a new intervention need to be put in place?

The table competition intervention was successful for the first few weeks and truly motivated the students to move from one activity to another at a faster, more organized

pace. However, we wonder that once the novelty of this wears off will the students lose motivation and therefore, result in longer transition time?

2. Would this type of intervention, of using a competition between tables to motivate students, work with younger students or should a competition be focused on a class record to beat?

We saw that this type of intervention worked well with the upper elementary level students; however, we wonder would it be beneficial and even work to create a competition between groups of students in a primary grade classroom? In the primary level grades and throughout ones' schooling, a lot of emphasis is placed on team building and the ability to work together to solve different problems. With this, we wonder if it would be better to implement this type of intervention, but encourage it to be a whole class competition to beat the record set by a previous class?

3. When is it okay for students to talk during transitions?

It is quite obvious that not all students are going to move quickly and quietly during transitions all of the time. Therefore, we wonder if there should be a specific transition or time of the day when students are allowed to talk. We realize that this may help a few students to move along to the many activities provided throughout the school day.

However, when do you know, as a teacher, what activity this is appropriate to allow for?

4. Would the interventions be even more effective if they were implemented from the beginning of the academic school year?

We recognize that at the start of each year, the teacher goes over classroom rules with the students to ensure there is a safe and secure classroom environment provided for them.

With this, we wonder if it would be as beneficial to implement the strategies we tried in the beginning of the year along with the rules? Would the transitions have been as effective as they were when we implemented them in the middle of the year after we noticed transitions had become a problem in our classroom?

5. How can you intrinsically motivate students to make effective transitions and eliminate unproductive behavior?

When implementing the competition between tables, the students recognized that there was going to be a reward for the table that earned the most points. This extrinsic reward was a huge motivator for many students. However, we wonder if there is a way we could motivate the students without providing such an external motivator, in this case a prize.

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Appendix A: Transitions in the Classroom

* If you could please take a few minutes to fill out this survey on transitions in the classroom to help with my inquiry project it would be greatly appreciated. You do not need to put your name on this survey. Please return to Julie Jobe's or Jen Scheivert's mailbox after completing. Thank you for your time and help!

~ Julie Harris – Intern in Julie Jobe's and Jen Scheivert's room

1. What grade level or special do you teach? _____

2. On the average, how long does it take for students to transition from one activity to another in your classroom?
 - a. 1-3 minutes
 - b. 4-6 minutes
 - c. 6-8 minutes
 - d. 8-10 minutes
 - e. 11 + minutes

3. For what percentage of your students are transitions a problem:
 - a. All
 - b. More than half
 - c. Less than half
 - d. None

4. Generally, what strategy do you use to help students transitions from one activity to another? (ie. ringing a bell, clapping, turning lights off, etc.)

5. How talkative are your students typically during transitions?
 - a. extremely talkative
 - b. somewhat talkative
 - c. not very talkative

6. Are you comfortable with having students socialize during transitions?

7. Do transitions seem to take longer during certain parts of the day? (ie. morning transitions verses afternoon)

8. What are your expectations for students during transitions? What do you think a smooth transition looks like in a classroom?

Appendix B:

Student Survey

1. When I come into school I read the front board and get started on my morning duties right away.

Always Mostly Sometimes Never

2. Between activities, I go right back to my desk and begin working without talking.

Always Mostly Sometimes Never

3. When it is time to start a new activity, I clear my desk right away and go where I am asked to go.

Always Mostly Sometimes Never

4. When it is time to pack up, I gather my belongings without talking and line up when asked to do so.

Always Mostly Sometimes Never

5. Between activities I talk/socialize with a classmate.

Always Mostly Sometimes Never

*6. Between activities I follow instructions _____ if I am talking to a classmate.

better the same worse

Appendix C:**5th grade survey on transitions**

Question	Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Never
When I come into school I read the front board, put my belongings away and get started on the morning activities.	8	9	1	0
Between activities, I go right back to my desk and begin working without talking.	3	14	2	1
When it is time to start a new activity, I clear my desk right away and go where I am asked to go.	6	9	1	0
When it is time to pack up, I gather my belongings without talking and line up when asked to do so.	1	13	4	0

4th grade survey on transitions

Question	Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Never
When I come into school I read the front board, put my belongings away and get started on the morning activities.	7	13	3	0
Between activities, I go right back to my desk and begin working without talking.	3	13	7	0
When it is time to start a new activity, I clear my desk right away and go where I am asked to go.	6	12	4	1
When it is time to pack up, I gather my belongings without talking and line up when asked to do so.	5	9	7	2

Additional 4th grade questions

Question:	Always	Mostly	Sometimes	Never
Between activities I talk/socialize with a classmate.	4	7	11	1

Question:	better	the same	worse
Between activities I follow instructions _____ if I talking to a classmate.	5	13	5

Appendix D:

Lindsay Driver
March 3, 2007
Journal

Inquiry Survey Results/Learning experience

This week I planned on surveying the students to gain further data for my inquiry study, along with giving me the opportunity to see the different perspectives of the students on transitions throughout the entire school day. My survey consisted of four different questions in regards to transitions in different parts of the day (morning, starting new activities, between activities and end of the day procedures). The flip side contained questions that helped fulfill some of my sub question wonderings.

Before I gave the survey I talked with my mentor who gave me the advice to support my questions with four different choices as opposed to just three. Therefore, this would hopefully force the children to think more in depth rather than just having them circle the center choice. With this being approved by an inquiry coach and my mentor, I thought this survey was ready to be tested and I was anxious to see the results!

To my surprise, the results did not reflect what I felt or even correlated with the data I had collected in previous weeks. After reflecting back on this survey, I feel that there are definite things I could change and emphasize to have made this more accurate or at least relate closer to the data I had collected.

With this, I gave further thought into my possible choices. My original choices for the first set of questions were always, sometimes and never. Yet, I wanted to add one more so that not all of the students would just circle sometimes. I then added seldom to come after sometimes and before never. Although, now looking back at this, I do not

think that was exactly the right word to go in that place. I feel as if seldom and sometimes are too similar. Even for some fifth graders I found that they did not understand or know what that meant. With this uncertainty, it may have hindered the answers they gave. Therefore, I learned from this that it would be best for me to use a different word choice. I chose words that may be more familiar to 5th grade students. These included, always, mostly, sometimes, and never.

My second mistake in giving this survey was that I did not go over in detail what was required of them. I believe in order to make this a fair and accurate survey; I should have read through each of the questions and explained exactly what each one meant. Along with what each answer meant. For example, if you are circling always, that means every single day you do what the question is asking, or for mostly is that more than 50% of the time you are doing what the question asked, while sometimes means you are only doing the task less than 50% and never demonstrates there is no time at all that you do what the question asks. This way the students have a clear understanding of what they are answering.

With all of this, I have decided to re-give the survey, making those corrections necessary in order for me to at least feel I gave a fair survey and would be collecting accurate information as opposed to just giving a simple survey that some of the students may have been confused with. In addition, I have set up the survey on a new computer program called study wiz. This will allow the students the opportunity to gain more experience on this new program and also enable them to answer the questions through an online poll during their time in the computer lab. This poll will allow me to also see the

different percentages of each of the questions asked and see where the majority of the students feel they struggle in terms of transitioning throughout the day.

With much consideration and thought, I knew that I could not leave the survey alone because at this point it was not serving its purpose or helping me collect the necessary data. Despite the extra time and effort, I can only hope that this will give me more accurate results. But if nothing else, this opportunity in giving a survey was a learning experience and a chance for me to gain a more accurate insight into the perspectives of each of the students on transitions.

Appendix E:

Observations of transitions in Julie's third and fourth grade classroom

2/12/07

4th grade classroom – Morning transition from desks to carpet for morning meeting

Time: 8:55- 8:59

Total transition time: 4 minutes

Teacher- "Go ahead and clear your tables. Table one, two, and three may go to the back."

(Repeated herself 3 times, telling tables one, two, and three to go to the back carpet)

- Group of three boys talking about a birthday party
- Two girls by cubbies whispering to one another
- Two boys and one girl by sink getting a drink from fountain and chatting
- Tables five and six got to carpet right away
- Mrs. X redirected students A & B two different times

Transition from morning meeting to writing at desks

Time: 9:09-9:10

Total transition time: 1 minute

Teacher- "Even tables get piece of paper and go back to desks. Now, odd tables."

- Majority went right back to tables
- Two students talking with one another
- One student had to be redirected to table because talking with another student at the wrong table

- Overall, very quick. Everyone got right back to table quickly and for the most part quietly.

3rd grade- Transition from math to lunch

Transition time: 11:45- 11:53

Total transition time: 8 minutes

Students had to clean up the math station they were working at and then go back to desks.

Once at desk the teacher let quiet tables wash hands for lunch.

- Students cleaned up stations quickly but very loud.
- Many students talking once they were back at desks. Teacher reminded the students to use time wisely. Told two tables they should have a book out be reading. Everyone at the tables was talking.
- Teacher called tables to wash hands. Taking very long for students to wash hands.
- Three girls talking by sink. Needed to be reminded to quickly and quietly wash hands.
- Very chatty throughout whole transition

Transition from recess to science

Transition time: 1:35-1:37

Total transition time: 2 minutes

Students called by tables to get drink and then to come back to the carpet.

- All students reported to carpet very quickly and quietly. However, once at the carpet, the student then began to talk.
- Transitioned smoothly

Appendix F:

Student Interview Quotes: (Names are changed)

Some students who suggested counting down from a particular number to help with motivation.

Steve: “ I think if you count down from ten seconds and we are all in our seat, then we could get two smiles.” (Smiles are a class incentive and when so many smiles are earned, then the class gets to pick a prize.)

Sarah: “If you count down from a number and we are in our seats in five seconds, then we get smiles, but if we are in our seats by ten seconds then we get one smile.”

Billy: “You could count to ten and if we don’t all get to our seats or the next activity by ten, then we get a light out.” (Two lights out in the classroom means that students do not get to choose their seats for lunch.)

Some students who suggested implementing a game

April: “Playing a little game, like timing yourself to see how fast you can do it [transition].”

Kristen: “ Do a game of some kind in-between activities.”

Derek: “Play a short game to help us move fast.”

Joe: “I think we could play a game with the whole class in-between activities so that no one talks.”

Appendix G:

Many of the students, in their interviews, offered the idea of playing a class game in between activities in order to motivate them to move from one activity to another.

With this information, we worked together to come up with an idea that would incorporate their own desire for a “game” between activities and work towards making transitions more effective to increase the amount of instructional time.

The intervention was created as a competition between tables to see who would be able to get ready the fastest in an organized and timely fashion after directions had been given and between activities. The idea was introduced to the students during the morning meeting by simply going over the actual competition, how we would be keeping track of the different points, when we would be recording the points, and what we expected from them. Most importantly we wanted them to see the reason for which we were implementing this new strategy. We wanted the students to see that it is important to move from one activity to the next without wasting time, which in turn would create more instructional time. The first table to have their supplies out or desks cleared (whatever is being asked of them to do), will receive a point. The table with the most points at the end of the week will receive a prize: being either a pencil or piece of candy of their choice.

After doing this competition for one day, I heard many students say this was unfair or for some it was becoming a fierce competition. Therefore, before the students gave up on this idea because I was gaining a sense they felt it was unfair due to the different number of students at each table, I wanted to brainstorm different ideas with the students themselves to find the best way we could make this fair. In other words, I

wanted them to come up with their own solutions to make this strategy the most effective and make it beneficial for them and also to truly increase the amount of instructional time.

We rearranged the schedule for the following day to fit in a 25-minute class meeting, following the steps for a problem-solving meeting in the Teaching Children to Care book by Ruth Charney.

Steps:

1. Introduce the problem and review the meeting rules
2. Gather Information
3. Begin and Focus Discussion
4. Brainstorm solutions
5. Choose a solution
6. Define progress and consequences
7. Close the meeting

We began the meeting by mentioning to the students that we notice this new system was unfair and asked them what they noticed or how they felt about it.

Many of their responses included how they thought it worked by helping them move along faster, but it was unfair for different reasons: some tables have 2 people, some have 4 or 5 (table of 2 is at an advantage), the way the room is set up works to some people's disadvantage because it is further from the carpet area, and even some people are taking it too seriously.

The class voted on the three most popular commented on problems with the new system. With this information, we took a vote for all the students who thought the system was unfair, too competitive, and the fairness of the classroom arrangement.

With the results of these votes, we opened the floor for people to brainstorm different ideas they wanted to help make it fair and effective for everyone.

Such solutions included:

1. Table with 2 people can wait longer to get to their seats (giving the other students a “head start”)
2. Arrange the classroom to make tables even from the carpet
3. Make all the tables even with the same amount of people
4. Forget the competition altogether
5. Each table gets points for being ready by a specified time. Specific number of candy is given for each amount of points (Gold Rush effect)

Given the 5 possible solutions the class came up with the solution to make all the tables even. But the next question was how often should we change tables to make it fair?

The class voted between every week or every 2 weeks. All but one student voted to change seats every 2 weeks. Therefore, we all agreed that it would be fair to finish out this week and next with the seats they were in and starting in 2 weeks, the tables would be even and provide the most effective way of conducting this intervention.

Appendix H:

One of our classrooms is arranged in such a way with six different tables and cubbies along the side where students keep their materials. The cubbies are arranged in rows side by side and on top of another. Therefore, if all the students are asked to get out a specific assignment that can be found in their cubbies, it is a mad rush over to that area. In turn, people are pushing and shoving to get what they need. We realized after several observations of this behavior that it would be beneficial to ask each table to go up one at a time to obtain the necessary supplies for the following lesson to avoid a large number of students in one area at the same time.

In addition, the class lines up for lunch according to the number they ordered. Milk only lines up first followed by lunch ones, twos and threes. However, on specific days when a popular lunch is being served, several students often sign up for the same lunch number. Therefore, when the teacher calls all lunch ones to line up, over half of the class goes running towards the door to be first in line. This in turn, caused a chaotic mess. Therefore, in order to organize this transitioning period better, we now ask how many lunch ones are there before having them line up at the door. If we think there is a large amount of lunch ones, we then ask them to line up one table at a time, choosing which table to go first and each table follows after. Along with this, when a teacher calls for all of his or her students to be at a specific area it is important that he or she implements a strategy that not all students rush to the same area at once. With this method, it is more organized and saves the students from pushing one another and arguing who was in front of who in the line. By avoiding the different arguments, it also in turn saves time and enables the class to get to their designated area on time. The two

examples above clearly demonstrate how chaotic and potentially dangerous a transition can be when the teacher does not have a specific organized way of transitioning the students.

2/26/2007 (example of disorganized transition)

11:13 – List of supplies needed to obtain on board:

1. History Binder: get supply list
2. Reading Log
3. Map
4. Pencil/board

11:15 - Ask students to get supplies and return to the carpet

Everyone surrounding cubbies looking for supplies, people arguing about moving over so they can get to their own cubbies,

Everyone reported back to the carpet after 5 minutes – end observation at 11:20

3/8/2007 (example of organized transition)

1:32 – List of supplies needed to obtain on board:

1. History binder
2. Map
3. Journal
4. Pencil
5. Green board
6. Westward Ho booklets

1:34 – Ask students to stand on the count of 1, go back to their seats when the teacher says 2, and yellow table go to cubbies on 3. Next table goes when yellow table is back to carpet...and continues

The last table was back to the carpet after 3 minutes – end of observation at 1:37

Appendix I:

Table		
Red		
Orange		
Yellow		
Purple		
Blue		
Green		