



Rae Pica

Transition **Movement** into the Curriculum

A lead teacher in a classroom of 4-year-olds says in frustration, “Transitions can be a nightmare! The children get so overactive that I spend the entire time trying to get them to focus on what to do and where to go. It’s such a waste of time.”

TEACHERS USUALLY do not give as much thought to transitions as they do to other facets of the early childhood curriculum. As a result, transitions often lead to chaos and wasted time. But this doesn’t have to be the case. If we *plan* transitions, as we do other daily components of the curriculum, we can avoid chaos and ensure that transitions are yet another opportunity for learning.

Successful transition teaching teaches children to move easily into and out of group situations. The process naturally includes lessons in cooperation and consideration; bringing satisfactory closure to activities; and following directions. And when transitions are linked to curriculum content, they can add continuity and more opportunities for learning.

For example, to promote shape recognition—and make cleanup fun—ask the children to pick up everything round (or square, straight, pointed, and so on) and to place these items where they belong. Then ask which

shapes are still to be picked up. Or, if you’ve been studying grains as part of explorations in nutrition, you might talk about the differences between uncooked and cooked spaghetti. Ask the children to demonstrate each with their bodies and move to lunch or snack time as one or the other.

Transitions also offer endless opportunities for problem solving, creativity, and self-expression, all of which contribute to creative- and critical-thinking skills—“must-haves” for life in the 21st century. When there are many possible responses to a challenge, children learn to imagine solutions to problems and understand that there is often more than one way to meet a challenge. They can imagine what it’s like to be someone or something else. They can imagine answers to “What if . . . ?” questions.

For these reasons, many of the transitions we facilitate should give children a chance to use their imagination. Try inviting children to transition from one area to another using only one hand and one foot, with a crooked shape, or like a whisper, all of which have more than one possible response. Point out the various responses so the children understand that there are many different ways to meet each challenge and it’s OK to find their own method.

Since many transitions require getting from one place to another, movement is the perfect tool. Most children enjoy movement, so transitions are pleasurable experiences—even something to look forward to. Movement activities provide a focus during transitions and hold the attention of waiting children. Moreover, transitions present opportunities for experience with movement itself, a content area teachers often have trouble finding ample time for.

TO DO MORE

Typical daily transitions in the early childhood setting include arrival, snacks and lunch, cleanup, nap time, going outdoors and returning to the classroom, and departure. If you create a repertoire of activities for these times, you’ll never be at a loss for things to do. Simply choose one activity from your repertoire for each daily transition. Plan in advance to minimize waiting time. If the transition activity involves a prop, or maybe a finger play, have it ready beforehand. By the same token, if children are transitioning to lunch, they should not have to sit at the table waiting; the meal should be ready as children conclude the previous activity.

Because young children love and need repetition, use the same activi-

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ties for a period of time—one week, two weeks, or as long as the children continue to enjoy them and/or they are still effective. You can begin with a small collection of activities and “grow” it over time.

When possible, tie a transition activity to the next scheduled routine or activity to reinforce its focus. Moving to lunch or snack time as cooked or uncooked spaghetti, as suggested earlier, is one example. If children are transitioning to nap time, use imagery that helps them relax. You might ask them to move to their mats or cots as balloons deflating and drifting down from the sky, wind-up toys (or the Energizer Bunny) winding down, feathers floating to the ground, turtles moving, snails crawling, or bears lumbering to their dens for hibernation (perfect if you’ve been doing a unit on hibernation or winter).

Similarly, if you’ve been exploring a particular theme, like seasons, you can incorporate it into many different transitions. Upon arrival, after greeting a child at the door, invite him to

move toward the rest of the children as though he were something related to that particular season—for example, as a snowflake or snowman, a springtime breeze or wind, a falling autumn leaf, or the summertime sun. Use similar images when leaving the classroom or when dismissing the children at the end of the day.

To offer additional practice with motor skills and movement concepts, challenge the children to use any locomotor movement except walking or running—to move lightly, heavily, slowly, in straight, curving, or zigzagging ways.

The possibilities are limitless, so transitions never have to result in chaos or wasted time again! Rather, they can contribute many and varied learning experiences to the children’s day.

TO LEARN MORE

The ideas and activities presented here are adapted from my book, *Teachable Transitions: 190 Activities to Move from Morning Circle to the End of the*

Day (Gryphon House, 2002). But there are many other transition activity books available, including

Transition Time: Let’s Do Something Different, by Jean Feldman (Gryphon House, 1995);

Transition Tips and Tricks: For Teachers, by Jean Feldman (Gryphon House, 2000);

Transition Magician, by Nola Larson, Mary Henthorne, and Barbara Plum (Redleaf, 2002);

Transition Magician 2, by Mary Henthorne, Nola Larson, and Ruth Chvojicek (Redleaf, 2002);

The Giant Encyclopedia of Transition Activities for Children 3 to 6, edited by Kathy Charner, Maureen Murphy, and Jennifer Ford (Gryphon House, 2005); and

101 Learning and Transition Activities, by Bradley Smith and Adam Smith (Thomson Delmar Learning, 2006).

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