



What Makes this TEAM Reflection Paper Successful?

Some specific examples/evidence that contributed to the success of this paper are provided below.

Module One: Classroom Environment

Grade: PreK-3

Subject: Transitions

Criteria I: Development of New Learning (How the teacher developed new learning and what was learned)

How the teacher developed new learning:

- Readings- “Terrific Transition for the Preschool Classroom” by Penny Warner, “Singing Smoothes [sic] Classroom Transitions” by Sarah Matthews, “10 Tips for Improving the Early Learning Classroom Environment” by Jeanne Parks

What the teacher learned:

- “Organization of the environment is very important in providing for smooth transitions...designating specific spots for the children so they know where they need to transition to provides clear visual and verbal cues for the students.”
- “Singing can be an effective way to keep young children fully engaged during classroom transition...When the song’s words state what children are expected to do, they can self-assess whether they are conducting themselves properly.”
- “I learned...color-coding and signs ... are simple systems for young children that can help ease transitions. The system must become a consistent and predictable part of each day.”

Criteria II: Impact on Practice (How the teacher’s practice is different.)

- “I taught the students this [*A Helper I Will Be*] chant one morning and said that we would be signing our own clean up song... I told them we would all sing it together while we helped each other clean up.”
- “I took Penny Warner’s advice and designated spots for the children on the carpet. I strategically placed them so that they were not next to peers who were distracting to them.”
- “I divided the children into teams of four or five students...each team was given a color as their name...student’s names were put on their team’s corresponding color paper, which I laminated so each team would have their own sign.”
- “To transition students to line up, I decided to combine singing a song with words that stated what I wanted the children to do with the color team system. I created my own lyrics... *Red team, skip into line...*”

Criteria III: Impact on students (How student performance/learning has improved as a result of changes in the teacher’s practice)

- “During morning clean up, students and teachers would be singing together, keeping the children fully engaged...more students were ready for circle on time and learning time was maximized.”
- “Center time color teams allowed students to work with peers whose traits encouraged learning and smooth transitions. Students were recognizing their name [sic] on their team’s sign, and recognizing the names of all the peers on their team.”
- “...all but two of my students could name all of the color we used after this system was implemented.
- collaboratively undertake a performance task compared to rote memorization of facts for a traditional selected response test.”



Module Two: Classroom Environment

Grade: PreK - 3

Subject: Transitions

Indicator: 5. Teachers promote student engagement, independence and interdependence in learning by facilitating a positive learning community by: Maximizing the amount of time spent on learning by effectively managing routines and transitions.

Goal:

I will learn about and apply strategies for maximizing the amount of time spent on learning by effectively managing routines and transitions, and as a result, students will transition more independently and effectively.

Initial Summary:

My classroom consists of 21 three year-old children in a full-day school setting. Some students were very prepared for this type of environment and have responded very well to managing transitions and routines. For others, it is their first social experience in this type of environment and they were unable to handle transition times well. When it was time to clean up and come to the carpet we used the song "Whistle While You Work" which worked very well until the CD broke and we had to use a different song. The new song did not have lyrics that included cleaning up, so the students began to use this time to dance and run about the room to the music. Though they enjoyed the song, it was not serving its purpose for transition. This caused disruption, wasted time and did not provide a smooth start to the day. Meanwhile, the staff in the room would be scrambling after students and doing most of the clean up.

Transition to center time also proved to be untimely and unorganized as there was no clear system that sent children to different areas of the room. I would let the children choose their areas freely as long as there were only four children per center. I began to notice that the same children were always in the same centers and that other children would get upset if they could not go to the area they wanted to. I needed to implement a system that would allow children to transition to all centers in a timely and organized way.

Finally, lining up to leave the classroom, whether it was for lunch, recess, etc., was often disorganized. I provided a line on the floor for them to stand on and often modeled how to walk and stand in line. This was not enough. I would have to send children back to the carpet for pushing other children or fighting for a front spot in line. We tried lining up boys and then girls, or even by what type of shoe they were wearing, but there were still issues with this transition and we would be late for recess or lunch. We needed a consistent and organized system. It also needed to include positive reinforcement to encourage the behaviors I was looking for from these students during transition times.

Reflection Paper:

Development of New Learning:



After observing the behaviors of my students during transition times I knew that this was not the classroom environment I was looking for. I wanted to develop new learning about strategies for smooth and organized transitions, and decided that working on indicator 5 would be the most effective way to create the classroom environment that was needed to maximize learning.

There were three specific transition times I observed that needed improvement. The first one was morning clean-up, after which, the children should be sitting on the carpet for our morning meeting circle. The second one was center time, which is a large part of the children's learning and interaction. Lastly, lining the children up to leave the classroom was very difficult, noisy, and untimely.

In order to learn new strategies for transitions, I began to research and read several articles written specifically about early childhood classrooms. The first one that appealed to me was *"Terrific Transitions for the Preschool Classroom"* written by Penny Warner. She spoke about preparing the environment, grabbing the children's attention, and ways to excuse the children. I learned several things from this article. Organization of the environment is very important in providing for smooth transitions. Designating specific spots for the children so they know where they need to transition to, provides clear visual and verbal cues for the students. Penny Warner said, "Simply provide clear directions for the children to follow and present your ideas in a manner that is interesting and meaningful to the children and you will make every day terrific!" (Warner, 2008). I learned that I needed to make my expectations for transitions clear, in an organized environment that my students would be excited about and that would make learning meaningful to them.

The second article that gave me some wonderful ideas was *"Singing Smooths Classroom Transitions"* by Sarah E. Matthews. She said that "singing can be an effective way to help keep young children fully engaged during classroom transitions." (Matthews, 2012). One of the reasons it is often difficult for children to transition is that they are happily engaged in what they are doing and do not want to stop. Though I usually provide ample time for the children to explore, as well as give five and two-minute warnings, they were not cooperating for transitions. I read research which found that chanting, singing, and movement were all natural activities found on the elementary school playground. Why not incorporate these elements during transition times? Younger children often respond positively to music, so it made sense to incorporate these elements into my preschool classroom.

Sarah E. Matthews, just like Penny Warner, also spoke about the importance of setting clear expectations ahead of each transition time. I learned that choosing songs that fit the transition is a strategy that not only provides music, but expectations for the transition as well. "When the song's words state what children are expected to do, they can self-assess whether they are conducting themselves properly" (Matthews, 2012). If we consistently sing the same songs, students will understand what they are singing and it will become a predictable daily routine. This should also promote independence for classroom routines and transitions.

One of the most important things I learned in my research was to provide a system that helps children know what to do and what to expect. *"10 Tips for Improving the Early Learning Classroom Environment"* by Jenne Parks stated that this system could apply to circle time, centers, and small or large groups. Color-coding and signs in the classroom are simple systems for young children that can



help ease transitions. The system must become a consistent and predictable part of each day. Once again, when students acclimate to it, should promote independence and smooth cooperative transitions in the classroom. Based on these readings and observations of what was happening in my classroom, I decided to implement several new ideas and changes.

Impact on Practice:

The first change I made in the classroom was to our morning clean up song. I needed to find a song in which the words stated what I wanted the children to do. Sarah Matthews included a clean up chant in her article that you could sing with the students. It went:

“A helper I will be.
A helper I will be.
There’s work to do
There’s work to do
A helper I will be.”

I taught the students this chant one morning and said that we would be singing our own clean up song. This would avoid the problem of a CD breaking or not working, and we could begin the song spontaneously so no time would be wasted cueing up music. The words were simple and it was easy for the children to learn. I told them that we would all sing it together while we helped each other clean up. We would all be helpers in the classroom. Singing and cleaning up together would help to keep the children fully engaged during this transition. Now the expectation was clearly stated not only verbally to the students, but in the words of the song as well.

To encourage the children to exhibit the behavior I was looking for, I told them that students who were good helpers during clean up time would earn stars on the Star Chart. The Star Chart is a positive behavior incentive system in our classroom. Students can earn stars next to their name for following directions the first time they are given, being a good helper, sharing with their friends, and various other positive behaviors. If a student earns five stars in a day, he or she gets time on the classroom iPad during center time. If a student earns three stars in a day, he or she gets a sticker at the end of the day during closing circle. I wanted to provide more opportunities for my students to earn stars, and being a good helper at clean up time was a great way to earn one. I also gave stars to those children who came directly to the carpet after clean up and sat in the circle “criss-cross applesauce” as we call it. This is when the children sit on their bottoms with their legs crossed, and place their hands in their laps.

I took Penny Warner’s advice and designated spots for the children on the carpet. I strategically placed them so that they were not next to peers who were distracting to them. The goal here was to maximize focus and learning. There was one student who could not sit still on the carpet and kept crawling around. I decided to place him in a chair right beside the carpet so that he had his own space but was still part of our circle. This worked very well. I had to switch a few students around



here and there, but eventually found a spot that worked for each child's specific needs for this time of the day.

Now we needed a clear system that would help the children know what to do during center time. I decided to divide the children into teams of four or five students each. I carefully placed students that were more active with calmer students, or students that were very verbal with quieter students. The goal here was to put students in a group where their traits complemented learning and smooth transitions, and not have students who distracted each other together. I also took social skills into consideration and placed students with high social skills with those whose skills needed more development, so as to encourage peer modeling as well.

Each team was given a color as their name. We had the Blue Team, Red Team, Yellow Team, Green Team, and Orange Team. The students' names were put on their team's corresponding color paper, which I laminated so each team would have their own sign. This would provide the opportunity for students to not only recognize their own name, but the names of the peers on their team. Since the teams were named after colors, it gave students who needed help with color naming another opportunity to be exposed to and learn colors every day.

To transition to centers, I would begin by sending each team to a different center. One student from each team would be in charge of their team's sign for that day, and take the sign with them to their center. Every ten or fifteen minutes, each team would rotate to the next center together, taking their sign with them each time. They traveled as a team to each center around the room, until every team had gone to each center in the classroom. If a student arrived late or was pulled from the classroom for any reason, it was easy for them to find their team when they arrived by looking for their color sign. They would then join their team at the center they were at during that time, and continue the rotation. This system would also ensure that every student in the classroom had the opportunity to explore and spend time at *all* the learning centers I provided. Traveling in teams made the students' movement around the room more organized, and we could easily direct a student as to where they should be in the classroom at the time.

To clean up centers we used the same song "A Helper I Will Be." Once again the expectations are clearly stated in the words, and it was consistent with what we used in the morning. This would become a predictable part of our daily routine. Another opportunity for students to earn stars was also provided at this time for children who were good clean up helpers, and who sat on the carpet in their designated spots when they were done.

To transition the students to line up, I decided to combine singing a song with words that stated what I wanted the children to do, with the color team system. I created my own lyrics and chant specifically for this transition. The song asked the children to do a specific movement, such as skip or hop, into line with their team. I would hold up one of the team's signs and would sing:

"Red team, skip into line.

Red team, skip into line.

Red team, skip into line,

Quiet as you can."



We repeated this chant for each color team. Now the children had an organized system for lining up with only four or five of them at a time. Adding the movement to this transition also helped keep the children fully engaged while they lined up. In addition to that, it gave the students a chance to practice and develop gross motor skills by hopping, jumping and skipping, which are important pieces of development for this age group of children.

Impact on students:

By implementing these new strategies and systems, my students responded positively in several ways. During morning clean up, students and teachers would be singing together, keeping the children fully engaged. The students were excited to earn stars next to their name, and if they saw their peers earning a star, they would quickly begin to exhibit the desired behaviors. Since this incentive also applied to coming to the carpet and sitting quietly, more students were ready for circle on time and learning time was maximized.

We began a little ceremony at closing circle for those students who earned five or more stars by the end of the day. We would put their names up on the board, then let the classroom “Super Stars” come to the front of the room and take a bow. The other children on the carpet would be cheering for their peers, which encouraged positive relationships and appreciation among the students. Meanwhile, this also provided further incentive for all students to want to earn five stars the next day.

Center time color teams allowed students to work with peers whose traits encouraged learning and smooth transitions. Students were recognizing their name on their team’s sign, and recognizing the names of the peers on their team. In addition to that, all but two of my students could name all of the colors we used after this system was implemented. This maximized learning at several levels. Because students were now spending time and exploring all the learning centers in the classroom, they were gaining cognitive and social skills in more ways than they were before. Parents were recognizing that their child was learning more at a faster pace, and students made large improvements in assessments.

The organization of children lining up to leave the room improved immensely. Students sat quietly on the carpet until their team was called, while the others were concentrating hard on their movements as they made their way to line. Students who were waiting would chant and sing with me until it was their turn. All students were kept fully engaged during this transition. I was able to watch the students as they moved to assess their gross motor skills for the various movements. Students who needed more gross motor development now had an opportunity every day to practice their movements. This resulted in improved motor function for my students.

Transitions throughout our day are now more manageable and organized. The expectations are clear and consistent, and students have positive incentives for good behavior. They are demonstrating the desired behaviors for transitions and throughout center time, which in turn has optimized learning in motor function, social skills, and cognitive development for all students. Teachers and students are comfortable in their classroom environment, and students are experiencing increased success in academic areas and social skills. Through learning and implementing new strategies and systems, the students transition more independently and the amount of time spent on learning has been maximized.