Premise:

Having an unorganized classroom makes students feel out of control and as though they don’t know what is coming next. Students need to mentally prepare to begin learning something new. If classroom teachers are organized in their transitions and allow students to prepare their mindset for the task at hand, we can help them have the best possible head start for learning.

Students at Risk:

- Students with Autism, ADD, ADHD and other behavioral disorders.
- Students who are easily distracted and over-active.
- Students who have problems with detailed or multi-step instructions.
- Students who have difficulty monitoring, managing and directing their own behavior.

Psychological Ramifications:

Within the last decade, the United States has taken a particular interest in brain research and early childhood development. Many studies reveal that the first ten years of a child’s life are critical to intelligence and development. During the elementary years, the brain is making connections that will determine the child’s ability to acquire and absorb all forms of knowledge throughout their lifetime. The primary duty of an educator is to create a safe and successful classroom environment designed to enhance the psychological development of all students within their care. An educator should work to promote development of cognitive competencies and self-concept. In a classroom full of many diverse students with a wide variety of learning styles, it is imperative for educators to reach out and unite all students. Transitions between subjects or recesses in the elementary classroom are often the most challenging situations for teachers. This is often the time when students lose and are unable to regain their interest in school work.
Role of the Teacher:
- **Build Predictability** – set classroom routines for subject transitions as well as entering and exiting the classroom. Decide how you want students to prepare for classroom activities, i.e. gathering into groups, sitting quietly at desks, reading…
- **Establish classroom procedures** – students should know exactly when homework is to be turned in, when bathroom breaks are allowed, and the expectations set for work time.
- **Incorporate structure into classroom transitions** – provide clear boundaries between activities by having some kind of short transition activity that gets kids moving and ready to begin learning about another subject.
- **Plan for classroom transitions** – prepare your students for transitions before they occur. Periodically let them know how much time they have to complete their current task and what they can expect next. Transitions go smoother when students can anticipate the change and know the time constraints they are under.

Role of the Student:
- Have a copy of the daily schedule so you know what to expect and when you can expect it.
- Prepare for each class by getting your textbooks, paper, pencil and other needed materials.
- Take advantage of breaks by walking around, using the bathroom, getting a drink, etc. Get refreshed so that you are ready to begin again.

Role of the Parents:
- Check your child’s homework and help them when questions arise.
- Communicate with your child and ask them if they are having any problems beginning a new subject or coming back from lunch or recess. Talk about what they can do to help them improve their focus.

Suggested Transition Activities:
Activities should reflect a change, either physically or mentally, so that students may transition into a new frame of mind in preparation for learning a new subject. Below are a few suggestions for various subjects:
- **English** – read a short story or poem.
- **Math** – put a math problem on the board for students to solve as they trickle in.
- **Health** – put a health statistic on the board and ask students to write about their feelings on that subject.
- **Writing** – have students free-write in response to a topic.
- **Science** – give marshmallows and toothpicks and have students build the tallest structure they can.
- **Band** – have students write all the instruments in the Woodwinds Section.
• **Social Studies** – give a blank map of the U.S. and have students fill in as many state names as they can.
• **Art** – draw a birds-eye view of your house or nearby playground.

**Other Activities Provided by Colleagues**

- Use the first few minutes, take time to finish homework
- Play music while they clean up and have them sit down when you are finished and sing along
- Recite a poem that we have worked on in class
- Count by 5’s, 10’s, and 2’s as practice
- Sing a song that goes with the theme being studied
- Ask for words that start with a certain letter
- Put a scrambled word on the board and allow students in small groups to come up with as many words as they can
- Trade “thinker” hats. Take off their recess hat and put on their writer hat – remind them what that hat entails
- Each student is a member of a day of the week (M-F), Monday, Monday kids go to the bathroom/drink first, and so forth
- Do some physical exercises. Let students lead or create new ones for everyone to do.
- Use students’ names in a story problem to get the student involved
- Start out with a “problem string” that teaches a new math concept like 7+10, 17+10, 27+10…

**Resources**


Colvin, G., & Lazar, M. 1997. The effective elementary classroom: Management for success, Longmont, CO, Sopris West
