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Lisa Lee has a B.S. in Physical Education with many post-graduate hours focusing on Early Childhood Education. Barb and Lisa have written articles describing projects done at the Child Care that have been published in the online journal, *Early Childhood Research and Practice*. They both have conducted a variety of workshops and training sessions related to the Project Approach, as well as other topics including Eliminating and Managing Transitions.



## Eliminating transitions

by Barb Gallick and Lisa Lee

Imagine a day when you planned to spend some time organizing photos and scrapbooking. You have just spread out all the photos and supplies when your husband asks you to help him plant the garden. You clean up and head outside. After the tomatoes are planted and you are digging holes for pepper plants, your daughter reminds you that her soccer practice starts in ten minutes. Again, you clean up, switch gears, and grab that new book you've been meaning to read. You've just settled in to your lawn chair when the cell phone rings. It's your son saying he really needs you to take him to the store to get supplies for his science fair project. Off you go once again and think to yourself, "Has it only been two hours since I pulled out those scrapbooking supplies?"

Many of us can relate to this hectic lifestyle, but how many of us would prefer to have taken those two hours to focus on just one project? As adults, we often find ourselves transitioning from one activity to another in a short time span. Most of the time, we don't feel we have a lot of control over our schedules, but wish that we could carve out extended time to relax and focus on one project.

If we relate this scenario to the way a daily schedule unfolds in an early childhood setting, we might begin to see how young children feel each time we ask them to transition from one activity to another. Picture a group of children in the block area who have spent 15 or 20 minutes building an elaborate car wash. They have just gotten to the point where they will be using cars to develop a story and act it out when the teacher says it's time to clean up for snack. Of course, after snack there's group time and then the class will be heading outside. Are these children also wishing that they could have had an extended time to relax and focus on enjoying their car wash and the dramatic play possibilities? Do

they also feel like they have no control over their schedule?

Having a daily schedule that creates routines for young children is an essential part of an early childhood classroom. Evaluating the daily schedule on a regular basis is an integral part of creating a quality program that meets the needs of both the children and adults who 'live' in the classroom each day. We would suggest that you look (with a critical eye) at your daily schedule once a year to determine whether it works for the group of children currently enrolled in your classroom. One of the most important things to consider when reviewing your schedule is the number of transitions that occur throughout the day.

Transitions tend to be some of the most difficult and stressful moments in an early childhood classroom. At these times teachers often find themselves dealing with more challenging behaviors and feeling more like police officers than nurturing caregivers. If you are feeling uncomfortable or frustrated during transition times, that is a sign that your current schedule may need to be revised to better meet the needs and developmental levels of the children in your care.

As you begin to evaluate your daily schedule, the following questions may guide your thinking.

How much time do children spend in transition?

- Count the number of transitions that occur throughout the day
  - Optimally, a half-day setting would have 6 or fewer transitions
  - In a full-day setting, aim for 8 or fewer transitions



Will eliminating some transitions help?

In our program, we spent a couple of years revising our daily schedule to decrease the number of transitions that occurred. We worked through three schedule revisions (see Figure 1 on page 51) before we settled on a schedule that we felt was more child- and adult-friendly. Our goals were to open up the day to reduce the number of transitions and to provide for longer blocks of uninterrupted play. Henniger (2009) comments, “Quality play experiences can seldom be completed in 10 or 15 minutes. A minimum of 30 minutes (more is better) is needed for creative indoor and outdoor play.” We have found many advantages to eliminating transitions and providing extended periods of play in a daily schedule:

- Longer blocks of time provide teachers the opportunity to engage with individual children. Teachers can plan to offer activities, have conversations or engage in one-to-one play with children in order to extend growth and development, promote deeper relationships, foster language development, or to encourage more appropriate social and play skills.

- A more open schedule allows for small group interactions. Children gather in groups based on their play interests rather than engaging in whole group activities led by the teacher.

- Children become more involved in projects and spend more time planning and implementing ideas. With more time available, children develop more elaborate play themes. Social skills are fine tuned as children share thoughts, negotiate differences, and brainstorm solutions.

- The day begins to develop a smooth rhythm with less stress for both children and teachers. When the daily schedule is less segmented, everyone seems to be engaged in more meaningful activities and interactions.

- Determine how many minutes it takes for each transition (Hemmeter, et al., 2008)
  - What percentage of your day is actually spent in transition?

Are there certain transitions that tend to be more difficult than others?

- How many and what types of challenging behaviors are occurring?
- Are children spending time waiting for others?
- Are the children engaged while waiting?
- What are the adults doing during the transition? (Hemmeter et. al., 2008)

How often does the entire group transition at the same time?

Can you redesign the transition to involve small groups of children at staggered intervals?

Transitions tend to be some of the most difficult and stressful moments in an early childhood classroom.

## Beginnings Workshop

As you consider your own classroom schedule, we would encourage you to spend time observing and reflecting before you begin to make changes.

- Teachers feel less rushed. There is more time for the teachers to observe and deepen their understanding of the developmental levels and needs of each individual child in their care. Armed with this knowledge, the teacher has the chance to take on the roles of facilitator, co-investigator, and supporter of learning.
- Extended periods of uninterrupted play empower children with more choices about what happens to them and when. Children begin to develop a sense of ownership and become more invested in the group experience. When teachers give up some control, they convey respectful confidence in children's abilities to make important decisions. As children gain a feeling of value they begin to demonstrate responsibility and respect for the classroom environment. Inappropriate and challenging behaviors are seen less often.

Even now, as we write this article, we have been discussing ways to further modify our current schedule.

Reviewing the advantages to eliminating transitions has made us pause and consider whether there are places that could be 'tweaked' to make our day run more smoothly. As you consider your own classroom schedule, we would encourage you to spend time observing and reflecting before you begin to make changes. You will find that eliminating as many transitions as possible to create a schedule that allows for extended periods of play and work will prove both beneficial and rewarding for all members of your classroom community.

### References

Hemmeter, M. L., Ostrosky, M. M., Artman, K. M., & Kinder, K. A. (2008). Planning transitions to prevent challenging behavior. *Young Children*, 63(3) 18-25.

Henniger, M. L. (2009). *Teaching young children: An introduction*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.



PHOTOGRAPH BY THE AUTHORS

**Figure 1: Examples of Daily Schedules**

Note how we have eliminated transitions by grouping activities together. Children flow in and out of areas at their own pace rather than as a large group. Morning Meeting is a time to discuss what is happening in the current project and what activities are being offered that day. Children have a say in what happens and they make suggestions or requests at this time.

Many Years Prior to 1995	Spring 1995 to Fall 1996	Summer 1998
7:30 – 9:30 AM Arrival, breakfast, self-chosen play	7:30 – 9:25 AM Self-chosen play	7:30 – 9:30 AM Arrival, self-chosen play
9:30 – 10:00 AM Choice time	9:25 – 9:30 AM Clean-up and handwashing	9:30 – 9:50 AM Morning meeting
10 – 10:30 AM Snack time	9:30 – 9:50 AM Snack	9:50 – 11:40 AM Project work, activity time, outdoor play (open snack is available until 10:35 AM)
10:30 – 11:00 AM Small group time	9:50 – 10:20 AM Story, songs, discussion	11:40 AM – 12:00 PM Music, handwashing, lunch prep
11:00 – 11:45 AM Outdoor play	10:20 – 11:40 AM Choice time, project work, outdoor play	12:00 – 12:40 PM Lunch
11:45 AM – 12:00 PM Music	11:40 AM – 12:00 PM Music	12:40 – 1:00 PM Toileting, handwashing, toothbrushing, story, self-chosen play
12:00 – 12:30 PM Lunch	12:00 – 12:30 Lunch	1:00 – 2:30 PM Rest time and nap
12:30 – 12:45 PM Toileting, toothbrushing	12:30 – 12:45 PM Toileting, toothbrushing	2:30 – 5:00 PM Gradual wake up, toileting, hand washing, self-chosen play in indoor and outdoor play areas (open snack is available 2:45 to 3:30 PM)
12:45 – 1:00 PM Story	12:45 – 1:00 PM Story, self-chosen play, or movie before rest	
1:00 – 2:30 PM Rest time	1:00 – 2:30 PM Rest time	
2:30 – 3:00 PM Gradual wake up	2:30 – 3:00 PM Gradual wake up, self-chosen play	
3:00 – 3:30 PM Snack	3:00 – 3:20 PM Snack	
3:30 – 4:15 PM Songs, finger plays, and choice time	3:20 – 3:40 PM Language time	
4:15 – 4:30 PM Job board and clean-up	3:40 – 5:00 PM Self-chosen play	
4:30 – 5:00 PM Self-chosen play		

You will find that eliminating as many transitions as possible to create a schedule that allows for extended periods of play and work will prove both beneficial and rewarding for all members of your classroom community.