

Music For Every Classroom: Transitions

by Elizabeth M. Peterson

Copyright © 2006 by Elizabeth M. Peterson

Transitions - they are those difficult times during the day when you are changing from one activity to another: transitioning from eating dinner to cleaning up afterwards, from walking the dog to cleaning the bathroom. Sometimes we adults have difficulty with transitions. I never enjoy the transition on a Saturday morning from sleeping in a little to starting the laundry. Our children and students often have difficulty with these times too. Music can help!

It wasn't until I became a mother, that I realized just how useful music can be for transition times. I began to use them innately for all kinds of events throughout the day to ease any frustration, anxiety or uncertainty my baby had about the things that were changing.

For example, when my baby wakes up in the morning and I scoop him out of his crib, I sing him my own version of a "Good Morning" song adapted from the familiar tune from the movie, *Singing in the Rain*. When it's time for baby to be on the move and into the car seat, I sing him his own "Zachy Song" that I made up for him. Without fail, it brings a smile to his face. And as I give him his last kiss goodnight, I stroke his little head and sing a shortened version of "Goodnight, My Love." All these songs have become something familiar to both of us and it helps smooth out some of the otherwise rough parts of the daily routine.

Classroom transitions occur many times throughout the day: when students enter the room; when we change from one subject to the next; before and after snack, lunch and recess and at the end of the day. Using music to help with the transitions in your classroom can be easy to do. There are three ways music can be used to do this: by singing, by playing and by listening.

SINGING

Children love to sing and you can easily make up a transition song to sing using a familiar tune. Here are a couple of examples:

To the tune of Row, Row, Row Your Boat

Clean, clean, clean the room,
Clean the room with me.
When we're done cleaning the room
Lunch time it will be.

To the tune of Frere Jacques

We are sitting, we are ready

Please begin, please begin.
Computer time is over, we have out our folder.
Let's begin, let's begin.

PLAYING

Playing music doesn't mean you have to unload a pile of instruments, you can use the two instruments you already have – your hands!

To signal that you want your students' attention, clap a simple 4-beat rhythm to your students and have them clap it back to you, but don't make the mistake of stopping there. Often times there are a few students who didn't clap with the rest of the class. Clap another rhythm right away and have students repeat that too. I like to clap out rhythms until the whole class is clapping them back to me. That way, I know they are all ready.

You can use this idea as more of an activity too. For example, after lunch, to get students centered back on the classroom, start clapping some rhythms for students to repeat. Then expand on the concept by adding in a slap on the lap, some snaps, a tap on the desk or a clap on the shoulders. When you mix things up like this, the students' interest is not only kept for longer, but their focus gets more and more intense.

Here is an example. Count "1, 2, 3, 4" in a steady beat. For each count do the movement that is noted below. Play each count of 4 for your class and have them repeat it before you move onto the next one.

Key: C=clap, L=slap your lap, S=snap your fingers

1	2	3	4
C	C	C	C
C	C	C	C
C	C	C	C
C	C	C	C

1	2	3	4
C	C	L	L
C	L	S	S
C	C	L	S
S	S	L	C

Using music for transitions doesn't have to be confined to the classroom. If you walk your class through the halls to another room, say for P.E. or art, use rhythm to help you along. Just as the military has been using chants to keep the ranks in order and motivated to keep moving, you can use rhythm to keep your class together. Before exiting your room, whisper or tap out a steady beat to your class and have them start stepping in place to your beat; quietly, of course. Once they're ready, challenge them to keep this quiet steady pulse going the whole way to the next room. If they can't make it this time, let them know they will have another chance when they make their way back or the next

time they have to travel from one room to the next. When walking the beat is no longer a challenge, add something different like a sway of an arm or a snap with the right foot.

An exercise like this helps promote focus and team work through music making. You may find that students want to help one another so that the class, as a whole is successful. Students who have not been able to use their musical talent before may have found their opportunity to shine!

LISTENING

You can also use recorded music in transitions. My favorite way to do this is during clean up time whether it is after snack time, recess or some sort of a project. The piece should be something upbeat and relatively short. You can pick anything that's catchy: a pop song, children's song, your favorite song, classical piece, etc. I have used a piece of piano music by Chopin, *Prelude No.16 in b flat minor*. It is 1 minute of fast paced..... quick notes and . I've also used a longer song by the Beatles: *Help!*. When the students were done cleaning, they used the rest of the time to do a little dancing. This helped get a little extra energy out and they knew that once the music was over, it was time to get back down to business.

Music is also a nice thing for students to walk into at the beginning of the day or at the beginning of a class. When it's time for one of my chorus classes to enter my room, I have some type of vocal music playing on the stereo while my students gather their folders, make sure they have a pencil and take their seats. I play anything I can from a variety of genres: Christmas Carols, Ella Fitzgerald, choral music, Mozart's Requiem, Brittany Spears ... anything to peak their interest and maybe even get them singing along as they prepare for class. I also make sure I repeat some music every so often so that, for example, they begin to know the lyrics and melody of *Fly Me to the Moon*, a song they may not have ever had the chance to know otherwise.

Using music with various transitions throughout the day isn't only helpful but can be a great way to share experiences with your students. Singing, playing and listening together are great activities that build community. They help students stay focused and motivated to work too! And most importantly using music helps smooth out those otherwise rough patches in our day.