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The Effects that Consistent Routines have on Transitions

An Action Research Report
By Sarah Seiberlich

Running head: CONSISTENT ROUTINES AND TRANSITIONS

The Effects that Consistent Routines have on
Transitions

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in fulfillment of final requirements for the MAED degree

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Date _____

Abstract

The purpose of this action research project was to observe the effects of a consistent routine on toddler behaviors and transitions. There were six participants, some of which were new students and others had experience in the environment. The age range was 18 months to 3 years old. About halfway through the summer, the toddlers were presented with a daily routine that they followed everyday. Data was collected by observation during transitions, tally attendance, behavioral scales and teacher journals. The results showed improved behavior during transitions in a shorter amount of time than originally predicted. In conclusion, consistent routines allow toddlers to predict what will come next based on the pattern of their day, which may have impacted the improved behavior during transitions. In order to identify the behavioral benefits outside the classroom more research is recommended. Further research is also recommended to see if the strategies work with larger groups of toddlers.

As a new teacher freshly out of my schooling I began my first job working in a school. I began working in the summer program at a school in Minnesota. When the school year began that fall I had a crash course in working in a toddler environment. The guide (lead teacher) that I was working with told me that I shouldn't be surprised at all by the tears in the beginning; it would take the children about six weeks to adjust to the new environment and routine. My previous experience with children had already prepared me for this as there is an adjustment period when a new routine is introduced. Many of the children struggled moving from task to task and needed to be redirected.

People tend to be creatures of habit, followers of daily routines that provide consistency and order to an often hectic life. They tend to prefer consistent, predictable transitions from home to work, from work to evening, and from a week at work to a weekend at home. Daily routines and transitions that characterize adult lives differ from the daily experiences of young children. Most adults have control over their daily events. They can determine the who, what, when, and how of their lives. Children, however, do not have as many opportunities to be in charge of their daily life experiences; parents make decisions for them. Their families and teachers lead them through established schedules and may not always remember that, for young children, routines and transitions make up much of the day.

In Montessori environments schedules are not implemented because this would take away from the child's freedoms. Dr. Montessori's method does however implement the use of routines. As an assistant who worked with toddlers, I observed that the smallest discrepancy in the children's daily routine could disrupt their entire day. The disruption would affect everything from their mood and emotions to their ability to do purposeful

work. Hemmeter, Ostrosky, Artman, and Kinder (2008) discussed that “challenging behaviors” during transitions could be caused by the structure of the schedule being changed, staff structure, the lack of routine implementation and the length of transitions. It is important for adults who are working with young children to realize the important role of routines and transitions in encouraging development and learning (Hemmeter et al. 2008; Salmon, 2010). This section investigates the structure of routines and transitions that lead to active participants in the classroom, the feeling of security, and the well-being or the health of the child as well as tools used in transitions.

Young children do not yet understand the concept of time so they do not order their lives by hours and minutes, but rather by the events that happen (Montessori, 2010). When events happen in the same order every day, children have a better understanding of their world, and therefore feel more secure. A regular schedule gives children a way to order and organize their lives. Creating safe, caring, participatory and responsive classrooms is important to support the development of socially and emotionally healthy children. Children need to feel safe, the most fundamental level being physical safety followed by social and emotional safety. This can be done through consistent routines (Montessori, 2010). The child feels supported and safe by having a predictable routine and a sense of order to her world (Montessori, 2010). Organizing the day around routines provides children with consistency, confidence, security, trust, and a sense of safety (Hemmeter et al. 2008; Salmon, 2010). Having predictable and structured daily routines will allow for smoother transitions. When young children know what to expect they become more confident in both themselves and the world around them. When the children are provided with an environment that they feel safe in, they learn that they can

trust others to take care of them and meet their needs. This allows the child to become free to relax and explore their environment.

Children thrive in a well-ordered and predictable environment, where daily routines, such as arrivals and departures, mealtimes, nap times and toileting, are dealt with consistently by all caregivers. Daily routines provide opportunities for children to learn more about themselves, the world and other people. Daily routines also offer children a sense of stability, and a feeling of warmth and caring from their teachers. The challenge is to develop appropriate daily routines for all children that offer them a sense of consistency and security, yet remain flexible and responsive to the individual needs of each child (Romano, 2011). In order to establish daily routines, most preschool classrooms follow a basic daily schedule. According to Romano, “With consistent routines come stability, order and a natural flow” (2011, p. 14). A schedule can help to ensure the consistency that young children need and also help teachers encourage all areas of development by planning a wide range of activities. It's helpful to think of a daily schedule as a guide that is responsive to children and teachers.

Flexible schedules let teachers capitalize on those moments that arise when children discover something that interests them. They allow teachers to extend a play period so the children may gain maximum satisfaction from what they have done (Romano, 2011; Fuligni et al. 2012). Fuligni et al. (2012) stated “we found that daily classroom routines predict children’s opportunities for engagement in activities of various academic content and different kinds of instructional interactions with teachers” (p. 207). McNamara and Humphry’s (2008) study looked at how children learn routine activities that they need or want to do to participate in the classroom. Their study included three

infants (7.5 to 12.5 months old), five toddlers (17 to 19 months old), and their teachers from two child-care classrooms. They observed the participants longitudinally for 4 to 6 months and recorded the actions, interactions, reactions, and comments of participants during this time. Written descriptions of the toddlers' participation in mealtime and circle time were examined first as five case studies. Then, comparing across toddlers, the authors generated interpretive descriptions of what happens. "Teachers also modeled the sequence of action within an activity. For example, they would wash their hands while children watched and then participated" (McNamara & Humphry, 2008 p. 147). The study suggested that the children had acquired the routines as their own. It also suggested that the predictable nature of routines drew the children into engagement into the routines of the classroom occupations. Roche and Ghazarian (2012) study examined the associations between mother reports of family routines and adolescent academic success. Its participants were of low-income urban youth and mothers. The majority of the youth was African American or Latino and averaged 12 years old. Academic success was assessed by the youth's self-reported grades, educational expectations, and standardized achievement scores. The study found as a child matures having had a consistent routine in school and in family can be "associated with higher academic achievement" (Roche & Ghazarian, 2012, p.847). The purpose of consistent routines is to allow for a better flow into the next activity, but this cannot be done without a transition.

There have been many tools and tactics used in research to create a smoother transition between activities. The following are some tools and tactics that may be considered successful in their use. During difficult transitions, communication skills could be targeted, asking the child to please state what it is they want or in what order

they want the transition to go, as Woods and Goldstein did in their 2003 study. They described how challenging routines can be “converted into opportunities to teach communication skills and increase participation in family activities” (Woods & Goldstein, 2003, p.176). This approach offers flexibility in applying a variety of effective intervention strategies within a family-guided process. The use of materials such as books has been shown to be successful. The book would follow along with the morning time routine, used a separate page for each activity, and included pieces to manipulate and promote engagement. Simpson and Oh (2013) defined two categories for assistive technology, low-tech and high-tech used in the classroom to create a better flow through the day therefore creating smoother transitions. Low-tech tools include pencil grips, raised line paper, picture of symbol communication books, and single message communication devices. A high-tech tool includes electronic speech generators, motorized wheelchairs, and touchscreen computers. These technologies were introduced when challenging behaviors arose.

When challenging behaviors arise teachers must first look at how the program staff structure, schedule, and implement the routine during the day (Hemmeter et al. 2008). Some problems that arise could be the transition time is too long or the instructions are not given properly. Hemmeter et al. (2008) suggested that teachers create a plan to minimize transition time and maximize the amount of time the children are engaged in work. The children can be given the expectations of the transition time and also use the time to develop social skills. When needed teachers should implement individualized plans for children who struggle with transitions (Hemmeter et al. 2008). Movement and activities used in novel ways, that engaged the children allowing them to

focus their energies and further express their ideas were used to help with difficult transitions. Vagovic (2008) implemented the use of movement, referred to as “transformers.” The transformers were used through the day to “prepare the children mentally and physically to transition to the next activity” (Vagovic, 2008, p. 27). The movement of the body activates certain areas of the brain and this had an impact of more than one domain of learning. Vagovic (2008) suggested that the transformers are done many times a day to transition from activity to activity allowing the child to refocus and to prepare for the next activity.

Transition times are important because they can make the day seem smooth and well-organized, or rushed and unpleasant. Allowing enough time and not rushing a transition, so children can make the transition gradually is the best way to avoid stressful situations. In addition to allowing a realistic amount of time for transitions to take place, it always helps to give one warning in advance before a change in activities. This gives children a chance to finish what they are doing and their cooperation is more likely. It might also help move the process along if teachers comment favorably about the next activity and avoid situations where all the children are expected to do the same thing at the same time. It appears that there is a common understanding that in order to have successful routines and transitions that the children need to know the sequence of events and the expectations of what is to happen. Teacher should consider giving a choice in how the child would like to carry out the transition and not force their own will on the child; this is when challenging behaviors become more prevalent (Simpson & Oh 2013). The purpose of this research is to examine the effects consistent routines have on the

efficiency of transitions in a Montessori toddler environment. What effect will a consistent routine in a toddler environment have on the efficiency of transitions?

Methodology

My data collection process included teacher observation, behavioral scales of the time during transitions, tally sheets to make note of when the children arrived, and journals to reflect on the day. For the first half of the summer prior to week one of my action research project, I chose to have the same routine that was used during the school year. There wasn't an official schedule that was followed, but rather a flow to the day. When I first started working in the toddler environment I was told that it usually takes six weeks for the children to transition into the classroom fully. I wondered if this was actually the case or if the children had a more predictable schedule would it be sooner?

Week one (July 13, 2015) I implemented a schedule that would be followed each day; it resembled the flow of the day that the children were previously used to. The new schedule, however, followed a strict timeline to make the day more predictable for the children (see Appendix A). At the same time as this action research project began we had three new toddlers beginning for the summer. Just as when most toddlers start there were a lot of tears and very little work that was done. Their peers, children who had been in this environment for the last nine months, behaved as if it was their first day as well and also experienced these emotions. As soon as the day started and the routines of the day began the children began to settle down. To lead into a transition we would sing a song that is used during the school year, so most of the children were familiar with what was expected of them. The children who were new were shown what to do and had the modeling of the other children to help them. For each transition the song was sung and

we transitioned into the next activity. During the transition I would observe while my co-teacher modeled what the children should be doing and helped some of the new toddlers. I would begin the transition at the designated time, record the amount of time it took to complete the transition and make note of the behaviors that were undesirable during the transition time such as not putting work away and moving straight to the next task (see Appendix B). I used a behavioral scale to evaluate the how the overall transition went (see Appendix C). At the end of each day I would reflect in a journal (see Appendix D) on what the day's activities were, if they were successful, how I felt the transitions went, what the difficulties in the transitions were, what went well in the transitions and what I could change for the next day.

Each day of the six weeks that I recorded data we maintained the same schedule. The day would begin with children arriving between 8:00 and 9:00 in the morning. Eight o'clock in the morning was designated before-care time; the summer program did not actually begin until nine o'clock. Upon the child's arrival the time frame of arrival was recorded on a tally sheet (see Appendix E) and a highlighter color was assigned so I would be able differentiate the children from one another. At nine o'clock my co-teacher or I would start snack prep; this was a work that the children were able to help with and often choose to do. When the child was in the classroom they were able to choose work and move freely between the indoor and outdoor environment. To begin the transitions I would sing the "Let's Put Our Work Away" song and would observe the children during the transition. Sit down group snack was available at 9:30 following all of the work being put away. Thirty minutes was allotted for snack and snack clean up. During the school year the children were expected to go to the bathroom for toileting following

eating, we continued this practice during the summer. Following toileting, the children were sent outside where we would spend the rest of our morning. At 10:30 we would again sing our transition song and move to a walk, which would end at the playground. We remained at the playground until 11:15 and then we would walk back to the toddler yard to prepare for lunch. Toileting followed lunch in preparation for naptime. Most of the children would eat right up to twelve o'clock and take until about 12:25 to clean up, thus moving directly from toileting to story time. I began reading the story at 12:30 every day and the children were in their beds by 12:40. In the first half I moved nap around, in a thirty-minute window, to see when would be the best time to start nap for these children. I found that most of the children in this environment needed to be in their bed by 12:45 if we wanted a successful naptime and to avoid undesirable behaviors. Due to nap lasting up to almost the end of our day I ended my project each day at one o'clock. While the children were napping I would reflect on my day in the journal I kept to be able to look back on the day and make suggestions of what I needed to do better the next day.

For the next six weeks we continued with the same schedule, the only change in the day being what activities or works that were available for the children. I had noticed before I began my action research project that there was usually only one toddler that was present on Fridays so I chose not to record data on that day to avoid skewing my results. If I had anything that I wanted to change during the transition time, I would implement it on Mondays due to the natural break in the week.

Analysis of Data

Prior to the beginning of my project I informally gathered observations for a baseline to compare my data to. Starting in July I implemented a consistent routine and began recording the time each child arrived on each day of the week.

Tally Sheets

The data group that I worked with was six children through the week (see figure 1).

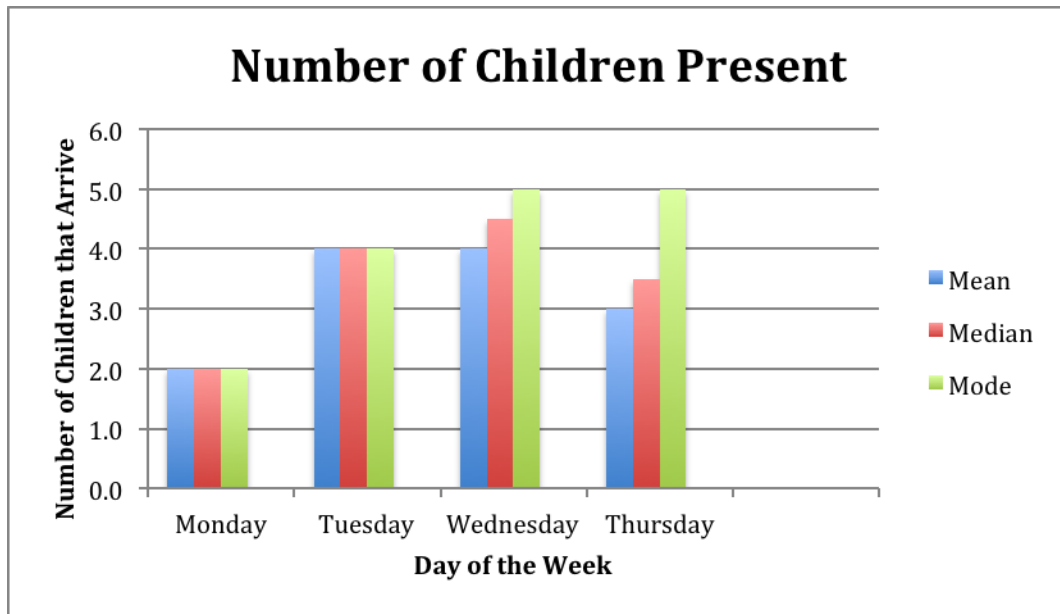


Figure 1. Average number of children present each day through the summer.

Mondays were the lowest attendance days as I had two children, Wednesday and Thursday were the days with the most amount of children in attendance at five. The children who were present from day to day varied based on their family’s needs. There was only one child present on most Fridays so I chose not to record data on that day. Each day the time the child arrived was recorded on a tally sheet (see figure 2).

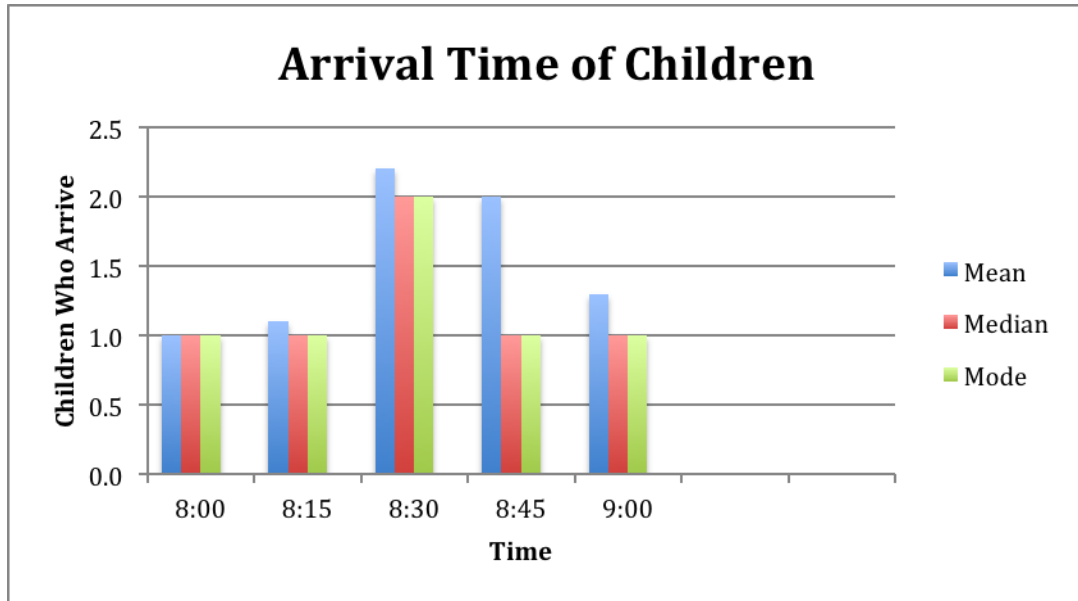


Figure 2. Average arrival times of the children through the project time period.

I assigned each child a color so I would know who arrived at what time. The majority of the children arrived between the times of 8:30 am and 8:45 am. The child who arrived outside of the 8:00 am to 9:00 am timeframe is not shown in figure 2. This child’s arrival was sporadic and caused disruptions to the day and routine. These days were only in the first week of camp and then the child left the program for the summer.

Behavioral Scale

During each transition the children’s behaviors were observed and recorded on a behavioral scale (see figure 3).

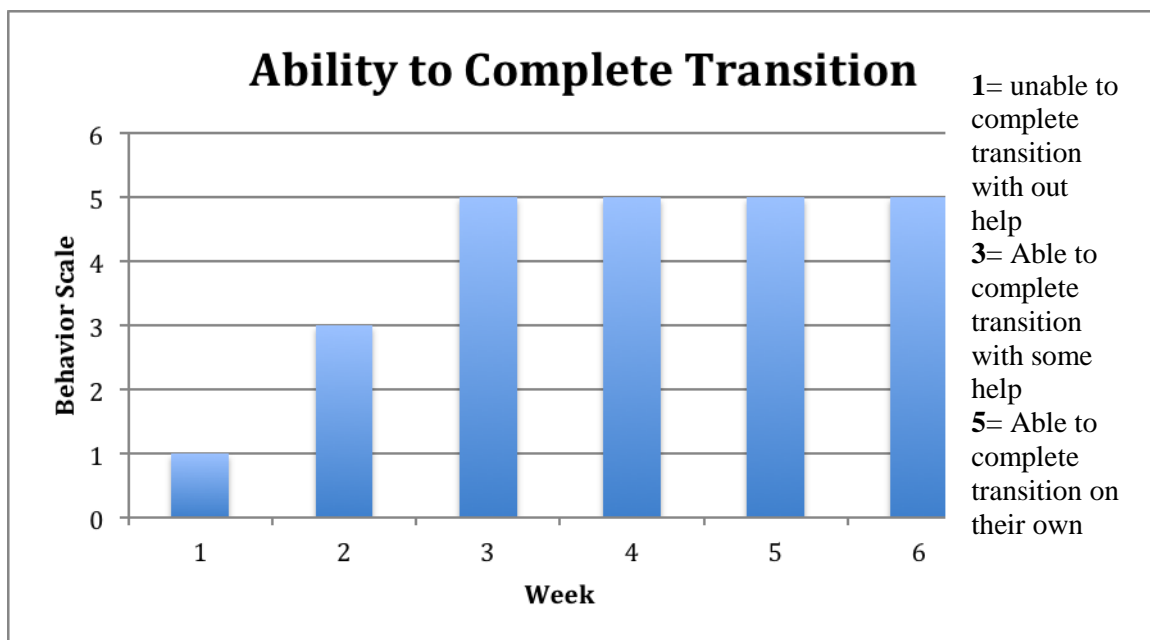


Figure 3. Average ability to complete transitions based on the behavioral scale for each week of the action research project.

The behavioral scale was used to track behaviors during the transitions in the environment. The data shows that during the first week of the new routine being implemented, the children were unable to complete the transition without adult direction. The second week of the routine the children were able to complete some of the routine without direction but needed some help. At week three of the action research project the children were doing the transitions primarily on their own, aside from skills that needed adult help, such as zipping zippers and tying shoes. This was sooner than I had expected.

The lead guide in the toddler environment told me when I began that it usually takes about six weeks for toddlers to fully adjust to the new schedule when they join the environment; this was based on her toddler Montessori training. I did not set out to prove her wrong I had experienced the six week adjustment period working in the environment my first year. My goal was to see if there was a way to make transitions between activities smoother. The behavioral scale showed that by implementing a strict routine,

where each day's activities are done at the same time, the children were able to adapt to their routine sooner than expected.

Observation Notes

To support the behavioral scales I also took observation notes; this was done for each transition. The observation notes were also taken to track the time it took the children to complete a transition. When I began the project transitions took just over ten minutes to complete. There were a lot of directions given as well as physically helping the children to put the work away. During the first week we had a child who was dropped off sporadically. The first two days he was dropped off on time and picked up at lunch, however, on the third day he wasn't dropped off until ten o'clock. For the rest of the children this was disruptive, especially the youngest of the group because he saw a parent which prompted him to look for his own parents. This was very upsetting to him and his mood affected the rest of the children in the group. The child who was dropped off late was also very upset because he was used to coming in and helping with snack preparations and this was no longer available. This child was only here for the first week so there were no disruptions of this kind for the rest of the summer.

The second week of the project was better than week one, however, the transitions were not as efficient as the transitions could have been. Unexpectedly in week three the children were able to complete transitions in about five minutes, give or take 2 minutes, depending on the amount of children present on the day. The older children in the environment began to take some responsibility, helping the younger put their work away. They would show the younger children where the work belonged or lead them by the hand to the place it belonged. When the project concluded the children were putting their

work away on their own with out any instruction. The oldest children in the group had begun to put their work away after they were finished working with it. The children moved from activity without direction; they knew what was next and began to expect it.

Journals

Everyday I would journal about the day. The project structure didn't change form day to day, to keep true consistency in the routine. I recorded thoughts as to what should be changed in future projects, what was going well and what needed some work. Often I found myself making notes regarding questions I had, such as if strict structure to the day was beneficial or harmful to the child? My results were showing me that keeping a consistent routine was beneficial to the children's behaviors in the classroom. What was happening on the weekends when the children's home routines were different? Journaling each day showed me the gaps that were in my project and raised questions as to what could and should be done differently if this project is repeated.

Synopsis/Conclusions

Time	Transition	Activity
8:00 – 9:00	Into the classroom	Begin work
8:00 – 9:30		Free work time
9:30	To snack	Put work away
9:30 – 10:00		Snack
10:00	To bathroom	Toileting
10:00 – 10:30		Free work time
10:30	To walk	Put work away
10:30 – 11:15		Walk followed by playground
11:15	Return toddler yard	Free work time until lunch
11:30	To lunch	Put work away
11:30 – 12:00		Lunch
12:00	To bathroom	Toileting
12:00 – 12:30		Free work time
12:30	To nap	Story time
12:30 – 2:30		Nap

Figure 4. Daily schedule that was followed for the six weeks of the project.

Due to this data group's size (six children), larger groups may have other findings, however, I found over the six weeks of my data collection children provided with a consistent routine have more efficient transitions. My findings may have been affected by the children's personalities due to the small group size, as well as if the time spent in the environment was the cause. Further research should be done with larger groups.

Discussion

The purpose of this action research project was to determine if there would be improved behaviors in the toddlers' transitions if consistent routines were provided. My research indicated that when given a consistent routine to follow day-to-day the toddlers began to expect what would come next, allowing for better behaviors and smoother transitions between activities.

Consistent routines allowed for the children to keep track of their day based on their routine. Over the six weeks the toddlers came to expect what would be happening next to be the same from day to day in our environment. In a way this allowed the children to keep time of their day without knowing the time. At week three there was great improvement of the children's behaviors during transition times. During the transitions the toddlers did what was expected of them on their own rather than relying on an adult to direct them. The newest child, who was also the youngest child, had picked up the routines by the third week and became a part of the toddler community.

The most noticeable change in the first three weeks was when a child was done with their work, rather than leaving it out and walking away from it, the child would put it away. During the school year we would try to catch the child before they began another

work and have them clean up, however, it was often too late to get them back to the work. The first two weeks of the project were much like the school year, then beginning in week three the children slowly began to take responsibility for putting away their own work. This was an unexpected benefit to keeping the routine. This allowed for faster transition times and the children were able to move on to the next activity more smoothly with less involvement and directions from the adult.

Upon completion of the project and looking back, I would suggest to have the project recorded. Then, there is a visual record to go back to during analysis. During the transition there is only one set of eyes and it is very hard to watch the group as a whole. Taping the classroom would allow for the researcher to look back on the day while journaling and possibly catch something they missed during the day. Recording before the project begins would allow for a baseline to compare each week to. The recording would show if the routine is truly affecting the children's transitions. The schedule of the day should also have some flexibility in it. Allowing for flexibility in the day will help the children adapt better when their schedule cannot be followed.

Another improvement that could have been made would be to have the parents more involved. Reaching out to the parents and giving them more information as to what is being done with their children day-to-day would have allowed for more communication between us. With the parents more active, the importance of routine could be impressed upon them. Advising the parent to keep the same routine when it comes to waking up, meal times, nap times and bedtimes through out the week is suggested. Meeting with the parent would have allowed further discussion on the importance that they keep their child's daily routine the same during the project time frame (i.e. dropping their child off

at the same time daily), thus allowing for more accurate data collection. The meeting also would have allowed for the parents of the children to be active in the data collection and relationship to grow among the community. The recording of behaviors and transitions at home would give further insight to the parents into the importance of routines.

Variables that could have affected the results include familiarity with the adults and familiarity with the routine before the project began. When the project began all of the children had been familiar with the adults in the classroom. Also the routine was familiar to almost all of the children who were participating in the project. There was only one child who was unfamiliar with the routine. To see if consistency in routines truly has an effect on transitions, the research project should be done with children who are unfamiliar with the adults and the routine in the classroom.

In a Montessori environment, so much structure can be hard to implement. How do you keep a very rigid routine but still allow the child their freedoms? This action research project appeared successful in the toddler environment, however, I feel that it would be difficult to implement in a primary environment without obstructing the child's freedom. I believe more research should be done on how to implement this sort of structure into a primary environment as well as its counterpart in a traditional school setting.

To gain greater understanding of the importance of routines for children a longer period of study would be recommended with a larger number of participants. Collecting data over a longer period of time could determine if consistent routines would continue to have a positive affect on the children's behavior during transitions. It could also provide

more information regarding if these behaviors would continue if the child's routine were to be changed. As the research has shown, consistency in routines is important in a child's life. With a consistent routine the child can measure time based on the routine, allowing for better behaviors when transitioning.

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Appendix A

Daily Schedule

Time	Transition	Activity
8:00 – 9:00	Into the classroom	Begin work
8:00 – 9:30		Free work time
9:30	To snack	Put work away
9:30 – 10:00		Snack
10:00	To bathroom	Toileting
10:00 – 10:30		Free work time
10:30	To walk	Put work away
10:30 – 11:15		Walk followed by playground
11:15	Return toddler yard	Free work time until lunch
11:30	To lunch	Put work away
11:30 – 12:00		Lunch
12:00	To bathroom	Toileting
12:00 – 12:30		Free work time
12:30	To nap	Story time
12:30 – 2:30		Nap

Appendix B
Observations/Notes

Start Time	End Time	Notes
EXAMPLE- 9:30	EXAMPLE- 9:35	EXAMPLE- T: meltdown when redirected to the new task (snack) clamed self down on the sheep skin

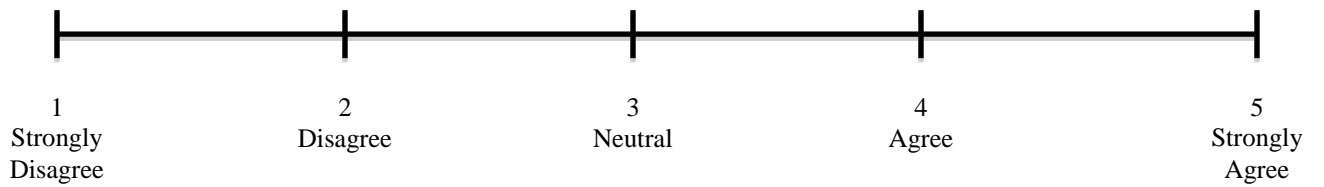
Appendix C

Transition Behavior

Transition:

How was this transition approached?

The Children responded well to this transition



Comments:

Appendix D
Journal

What were today's activities?

Were they successful?

How did the transitions go?

Difficulties in transitions?

What went well in the transition?

What can you change for tomorrow?

Appendix E

Arrival Times of Children

Week of:

# of Children Present	Arrival Time:	8:00	8:15	8:30	8:45	9:00
	Monday					
	Tuesday					
	Wednesday					
	Thursday					
	Friday					

Week of:

# of Children Present	Arrival Time:	8:00	8:15	8:30	8:45	9:00
	Monday					
	Tuesday					
	Wednesday					
	Thursday					
	Friday					

Week of:

# of Children Present	Arrival Time:	8:00	8:15	8:30	8:45	9:00
	Monday					
	Tuesday					
	Wednesday					
	Thursday					
	Friday					

Week of:

# of Children Present	Arrival Time:	8:00	8:15	8:30	8:45	9:00
	Monday					
	Tuesday					
	Wednesday					
	Thursday					
	Friday					