

4

CHAPTER

In this era of standardization and the Common Core, the practice of elevating student voice might seem countercultural, but given the importance of agency, autonomy and self-regulation in student learning, it is really rather commonsensical.

—ERIC TOSHALIS AND MICHAEL J. NAKKULA

Foundational Activators

This chapter offers three foundational Activators that quickly increase student voice, require little preparation on the teacher's part, and are relatively straightforward to facilitate: **Turn and Talk**, **Popcorn**, and **Wave**. Their elegant simplicity belie their power to increase engagement in learning, and regular practice with **Turn and Talk**, **Popcorn**, and **Wave** prepares students to step into more complex Activators found in later chapters. Consistent use of these Activators puts student voice front and center and creates a High-Performing Community of Learners who are confident and comfortable to share their thoughts and who value multiple perspectives.

How do Foundational Activators support the conditions for engagement?

- Garner good will by acknowledging and welcoming multiple perspectives
- Support participation by creating a platform for everyone's voice
- Capture attention by providing an audience of peers
- Increase interest by injecting relevance
- Foster effort by providing a forum for trying out ideas
- Support investment by making room for students to reflect on Classroom Expectations and Classroom Agreements

Turn and Talk

All students respond to a prompt by turning and sharing their thinking with a partner.

A Turn and Talk—also referred to as Think-Pair-Share (Lyman, 1981)—is an essential tool for constructing a well-paced lesson that gets everyone’s voice in the room quickly. Since each student is expected to think and participate, this Activator ramps up accountability as well as engagement. Because it is a component of several other Activators, there is a big payoff in helping students become skilled at Turn and Talks right from the start. Key to success with this Activator is designing engaging prompts.

TIME: 2–5 MINUTES

TEACHER PREP LIST:

- ☐ Design an engaging prompt aligned with a learning outcome
- ☐ Identify a different prompt for modeling and a student volunteer to help model the Activator
- ☐ Display prompt and student directions
- ☐ Timer

STUDENT DIRECTIONS

1. Do a Quick Jot in response to the prompt.
2. Share your response with your partner.
3. Ask questions or make connections to your partner’s response.

SET UP THE ACTIVATOR

1. Explain the purpose of the Activator. You might say, “*We are going to do a Turn and Talk Activator, which will give you a chance to explore your thinking about _____ with one other classmate. Listening carefully to your partner will help you check in on your own thinking and may even give you some new ideas. Afterwards, I’ll ask some of you to share highlights of your conversation with the rest of the group.*”
2. Review student directions.
3. Tell students they will talk about a prompt with a partner for one minute. Indicate which students are paired together.

MODEL AND TEACH

1. Arrange two desks in the front of the room that are angled towards each other. Ask for a volunteer to model the Turn and Talk with you. Make eye contact with your partner.
2. Show a sample prompt on the board.
3. Emphasize that students do not have to agree on their responses; the goal is to explore their thinking with a partner.
4. Invite your partner to respond first. Listen attentively (make eye contact, nod, smile, etc.) Respond by asking a question or making a connection to what your partner said.
5. Share your response to the prompt.
6. Ask students what they noticed about what you and your partner did during the Turn and Talk (angled your bodies towards each other, made eye contact, took turns talking, asked questions, made connections)
7. Remind students that Classroom Expectations and Classroom Agreements apply to all types of classroom conversations, including Turn and Talks.

PRACTICE AND ASSESS

1. Direct students to the displayed prompt and ask them to jot down a response.
2. Offer words of encouragement and let students know you're excited to hear their thinking. Circulate, monitor, and support students, as needed.
3. Announce when time is halfway up and when there are a few seconds remaining.
4. Use a signal to get the group's attention and ask a few students to share "headlines" from their Turn and Talks.
5. Debrief by asking a few of the following content and process questions:

Content Questions

- What are some ways you're thinking about _____ ?
- Was your response the same or different than your partner's?
- What are some things you learned about _____ ?
- What are some things you're still wondering about _____ ?

Process Questions

- What was it like to share your thinking with a partner?
- Did the amount of time feel too long? Too short? Just right?

Thank students for their active participation, affirm understandings, and address any misconceptions that surfaced.

TROUBLESHOOTING TIPS

1. If there is an uneven number of students, make a trio. While the third person in the trio is sharing, invite pairs to ask each other questions about what they said earlier.
2. If you notice a pair that is not talking, move to these students, clarify expectations, and ask students what they might do to keep the conversation going. If students need some help, you might offer a suggestion, for example, asking each other questions.

VARIATIONS AND EXTENSIONS

1. When introducing Turn and Talk, you might want to support students' capacity to speak and listen effectively by structuring the conversation. Ask each participant to decide if they are "A" or "B." The "A's" speak for 30 seconds while the "B's" listen in engaged silence (eye contact, nodding head, etc.). At the signal, students switch roles and the "B's" respond to the same prompt while the "A's" listen in engaged silence.
2. Have students ask a question or paraphrase what their partners said.

Popcorn

Without raising hands, multiple students respond to a prompt with a brief thought or idea in random order.

A Popcorn Activator generates momentum in a lesson by getting a variety of perspectives in the room in a short amount of time. The informal, random-order sharing keeps students on their toes, creates curiosity, and promotes active listening. And the silence in between the words allows students to reflect, rehearse, and make connections.

TIME: 3-5 MINUTES

TEACHER PREP LIST:

- ☐ Design an engaging prompt linked to a learning outcome
- ☐ Display prompt and student directions
- ☐ Timer

STUDENT DIRECTIONS

1. Do a Quick Jot in response to the prompt.
2. When the signal is given, share out your response without raising your hand.
3. If two or more people speak at once, pause, make eye contact and decide who will go first, then share in that order.
4. When there is a pause, reflect on the previous speaker's words, make connections to your response or rehearse your thinking.
5. Listen attentively to others.

SET UP THE ACTIVATOR

1. Explain the purpose of the Activator. You might say, *"We're going to do a Popcorn Activator so we can hear what different classmates think about _____ . Thank you for staying on your toes and listening carefully since we're going to respond without raising hands for _____ minutes."*
2. Review student directions. Explain that students will respond to the prompt in random order without raising hands. Make a connection to the Activator's name – just as popcorn kernels pop in random order, so will students' responses pop up around the room. Emphasize that the silence in between responses is equally important, since it allows everyone to process what has been said and to build on previous ideas. Explain that each student will have the opportunity to respond once before anyone responds a second time.

MODEL AND TEACH

1. Model with a sample prompt for a shorter amount of time. For example, *"Let's try it with this easy question: What is your favorite kind of pizza? Let me hear three responses. 'Cheese.' 'Pepperoni.' 'Giardano's because they have the best crust.' Good. That is how Popcorn works."*
2. Emphasize that repeated responses are okay and can even highlight important ideas for the group.
3. Remind students of relevant Classroom Expectations or Classroom Agreements.
4. Emphasize that when students "popcorn" responses, they chime in, build off of each other's comments, and set the pace rather than raising their hands or having the teacher call on individuals.

PRACTICE AND ASSESS

1. Direct students to the prompt on the board, and give them time to jot down a response.
2. Tell students they will "popcorn" responses as a whole group for three minutes.

3. Express your confidence that you will hear a variety of thoughtful responses.
4. Invite responses by saying, “Begin” or “The floor is open.”
5. Let students know when there is one minute remaining.
6. Use a signal to get the group’s attention, and debrief by asking some of the following content and process questions:

Content Questions

- What are some things you heard that stood out to you?
- What patterns did you notice in the responses?
- What are some things you realized or are wondering about _____ ?

Process Questions

- What was it like to participate in this Activator?
- What did you find yourself thinking or doing during this Activator?

Thank students for their participation, affirm understandings, and address any misconceptions that may have surfaced.

TROUBLESHOOTING TIPS

1. If students are reluctant to share, precede this Activator with a Turn and Talk so students have an opportunity to rehearse their ideas.
2. If students are challenged by speaking in random order without raising hands, ask them to raise hands. Call on the first person and then put the students in charge. After the first speaker responds, s/he calls on the next student whose hand is raised. Continue until all students who have raised their hands have had an opportunity to speak. Students will have to know each other’s names in order to do this with ease and efficiency.
3. If you do this Activator in the middle or end of a class in which participation has been uneven, consider asking students who haven’t participated in the last 10 minutes, to be sure to share.
4. If students are racing through the Activator without appreciating the silence in between responses, ask them to consider the benefits of allowing some silence in between responses.

VARIATIONS AND EXTENSIONS

1. Ask students to do a Quick Jot before or after the Popcorn Activator.
2. If done at the end of class, you might couple it with an Exit Ticket[™].

Wave

All students respond to a prompt in rapid order
with a single word or phrase.

This Activator is a very quick way of collecting a response from everyone in the room. A Wave injects a jolt of energy into a lesson's pacing, since students respond to a prompt in rapid succession with just a word or phrase. The speed of responding coupled with the challenge of distilling ideas down to just a few essential words captures students' attention and packs this Activator with intellectual rigor.

TIME: 1-3 MINUTES

TEACHER PREP LIST

- ☐ Design an engaging prompt aligned with a learning outcome that can be answered succinctly with a word or phrase.
- ☐ Display prompt and student directions.
- ☐ Timer

STUDENT DIRECTIONS

1. Take a few moments to think about your response.
2. Be mindful of the speaking order and listen attentively to each response.
3. Share your word/phrase when it is your turn.

SET UP THE ACTIVATOR

1. Explain the purpose of the Activator. You might say, *"We're going to do a Wave Activator so we can hear everyone's smart ideas about _____ really quickly. I'm going to challenge you to respond in just a few words and stay on your toes, so we can move around the room to hear all your responses in two minutes."*
2. Review student directions.
3. Emphasize that responses are limited to a word or phrase.
4. Remind students of any relevant Classroom Expectations or Classroom Agreements.

MODEL AND TEACH

1. Ask for a volunteer to start the Wave and be explicit about the order in which students will respond, for example, *"Chris will start us off and then it will be Jessica, Xavier, Danielle, etc."*
2. Show a sample prompt and model how students might respond in the designated order: *"My favorite ice cream flavor is vanilla (point to Chris) chocolate fudge (point to Jessica), mint chocolate chip (point to Xavier), vanilla (point to Danielle), etc."*

3. Explain that students can say “pass” if they are not ready to go. Tell them you will give them another opportunity at the end.
4. Emphasize that completing the prompt the same way someone else did is okay; in fact, it might mean that this is an important idea worth paying attention to.

PRACTICE AND ASSESS

1. Display the prompt, and give everyone a few moments of think time to consider their responses.
2. Say, “*Begin*”, and point to students to indicate the speaking order, as needed.
3. At the end, go back and invite any student who might have passed earlier to respond by asking, “*Is there anything you might want to add?*”
4. Debrief by asking some of the following content and process questions:

Content Questions

- What are some things that stood out to you?
- What patterns did you notice in the responses?
- What did you realize or what are you wondering about _____?

Process Questions

- What was it like to participate in this Activator?
- In what ways was it easy or challenging?

Thank students for their participation, affirm understandings, and address any misconceptions that may have surfaced.

TROUBLESHOOTING TIPS

1. If the Wave gets stalled because students are confused about the order, stop and review the sequence and start again.
2. If students are struggling to drill their response down to a word or phrase, ask them to do a Quick Jot first. Then tell them to go back and circle a word or phrase that gets at the heart of what they’re saying.

VARIATIONS AND EXTENSIONS

1. Chart patterns of responses as well as any surprises or wonderings. Explore these further through a Turn and Talk and/or a whole-group discussion.
2. If you do the Wave Activator at the end of class, you might ask students to write their response on sticky notes and to put these up on a designated wall space on their way out. Use these in your next class to build a bridge from the previous to the current lesson.
3. Have students write a paragraph explaining the word/phrase they selected. When appropriate, ask them to use textual evidence to support their thinking.
4. Take notes during the Wave and type up some of the responses. Project them the next day and ask students to explore some of these further using another Activator format like the Mix and Mingle Activator (Chapter 17).

Create a High-Performing Community of Learners

Trust is critical to creating a High-Performing Community of Learners since many young people need to know that teachers care for them as individuals before they will learn from us. We understand it can be challenging to find time and opportunities for this when there are many students in a class. That's where Foundational Activators come in—their formats provide teachers with quick ways to check in with each student. For example, acknowledging young peoples' feelings about your subject with a quick Popcorn or Wave prompt like, "A word to describe how I feel about _____" (content area) communicates that you care about students' feelings and past experiences with your subject. Investing in building Trust and Belonging through these quick Activators brings a big payoff. Students get the message that your classroom is a safe place to learn, which is essential to creating a High-Performing Community of Learners.

For more information on the issue of respect among and between students and teachers, please see Carol Miller Lieber's *Getting Classroom Management Right: Guided Discipline and Personalized Support in Secondary Schools*, page 104 (Educators for Social Responsibility, 2009).

Foundational Activators offer vehicles for establishing Classroom Expectations and Classroom Agreements that anchor a High-Performing Community of Learners. When designing these Classroom Agreements, students will often use the word "respect." Because this is a word that is abstract and often means different things to different people, it is essential that students name very concrete behaviors that show (through words and actions) how to treat someone with respect. Asking students to engage in a Turn and Talk or Popcorn Activator in response to the following prompt can unpack this word: "If I had a movie camera here in the classroom, what behaviors would I film that would show you treating each other with respect?" Afterwards, the group can use their responses to formulate Classroom Agreements that will help them take ownership and exercise accountability around respectful behaviors they commit to using.

Foundational Activators are also tools for reinforcing Habits of Learning. Prior to filling out a self-assessment at the end of the week or unit, students might engage in a Turn and Talk to reflect on one Habit of Learning they have made the most progress with. This provides students an opportunity to process their ideas before filling out the self-reflection form, holds them accountable to a classmate, and creates a High-Performing Community of Learners that honors effort and encourages metacognition.

Using Foundational Activators for Creating a High-Performing Community of Learners

- Turn and Talk: Which agreement is hardest for the group to keep? What are some things we can do to help everyone get better at keeping this agreement?
- Turn and Talk: Who is an adult you consider successful? What are some things that make this adult successful?
- Turn and Talk: What Habit of Learning have you made big improvements in? What are some things that have helped you make improvements?

- Popcorn/Wave: One thing I still need to complete, revise or redo is _____ .
- Popcorn/Wave: If I had a movie camera here in the classroom, what behaviors would I film that would show you treating each other with respect?
- Popcorn/Wave: A word or phrase I might hear indicating that we're living up to our Classroom Agreements is _____ .
- Popcorn/Wave: A word to describe how I feel about (subject area) is _____ .

Using Foundational Activators to Support Learning in the Content Areas

Generate Connections to Prior Knowledge: Foundational Activators can enlist adolescents' interest and activate prior knowledge prior to reading in any course. In a ninth grade biology unit on the food chain, students might make predictions about the provocatively entitled article, "Sea Otter Fights Global Warming." This type of prompt ramps up students' curiosity about what they'll encounter in the text while inviting them to draw on what they've previously learned about the carbon cycle. Making independent predictions and sharing these with a partner prior to reading propels adolescents' movement through a text in order to "test" which predictions will be proven accurate.

Provide Opportunities for Practicing Skills and Deepening Understanding: Foundational Activators are critical for providing all students opportunities for mastering content and strengthening skills, especially in large classes. When there are many students in an algebra class, inserting a Turn and Talk in which students analyze the degree of a polynomial function supports everyone in thinking through a challenge, not just the one student who raises her hand or who is asked to go up to the board. By ritualizing the use of Foundational Activators around unit learning outcomes, an algebra teacher can offer the repeated practice necessary for all learners to hone skills and achieve learning outcomes.

Provide Opportunities for Formative Assessment: Popcorn Activators are ideal for quickly getting a read of the room in terms of what students know and can do. English language arts teachers often support understanding of literary elements and summarizing skills by asking students to summarize the reading of fictional texts using a Somebody (character) / Wanted (goal/objective) / But (conflict) / So (resolution) framework. Students who share their summaries using a Popcorn Activator provide important feedback for the teacher. Hearing multiple summaries

also injects creative tension into the classroom as students encounter divergent ideas that encourage them to re-evaluate their own. Afterwards, the teacher might ask students to assess what summaries get at the heart of a chapter's conflict. Alternatively, if the Popcorn Activator revealed students' need for further support in constructing a summary, she might decide to conduct an on-the-spot mini-lesson for this purpose.

Prepare Students for Assessments: Prior to an end-of-course world history final assessment, a Wave Activator might be used to quickly collect a variety of responses to the prompt, "*Name a technological development that changed the world.*" Hearing multiple answers will jog students' memories and provide a jumping off point for students to select and elaborate on two or three of these responses in their study guides.

Inject Relevance Into the Curriculum: Since foundational Activators quickly fill a classroom with student voice, they are a relatively easy way of making content more immediate for adolescents. As students learn basic vocabulary that might be used in an "Introducing Ourselves" unit, a world language teacher might insert a Wave into a lesson where students share their birthdays, favorite colors, or one thing they like to do in their free time. Having the chance to talk about themselves and to find out about their peers captures young people's attention and increases their capacity to remember the new vocabulary.

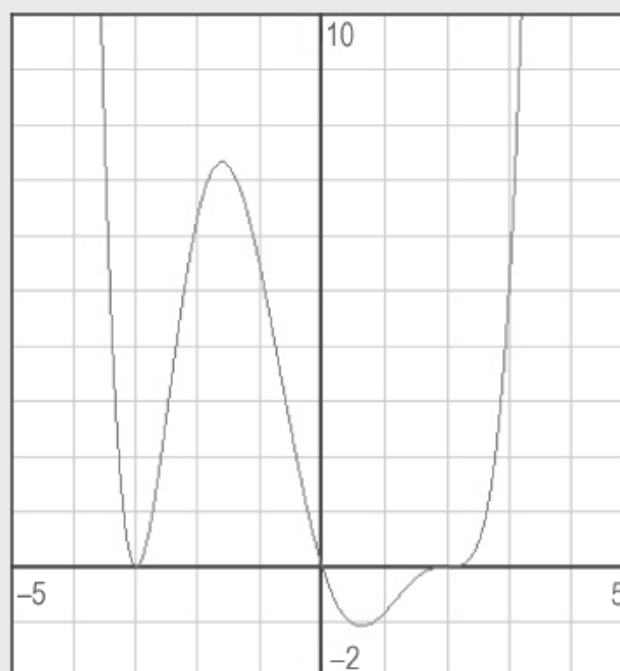
Foundational Activators Content Area Examples

Math



Algebra

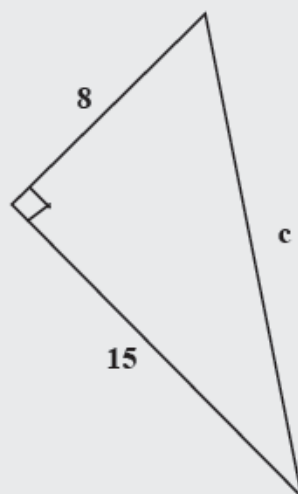
Turn and Talk/Popcorn: What is the degree of this polynomial function? What are some other possibilities?



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Geometry

Turn and Talk/Popcorn: Both Jessie and Tami are given the triangle shown below and are asked to find the length of c . Jessie says that $c = 31$ while Tami says that $c = 25$. Who is correct? Explain completely and identify the error that lead to the incorrect answer.



Science



Earth Science

Turn and Talk/Popcorn: What are some ways you might describe the relationship between rocks and minerals?

Popcorn/Wave: A word/phrase that gets at the heart of plate tectonics is _____.

Biology

Turn and Talk/Popcorn: Based upon what you know about the Food Chain, what predictions might you make about how "Sea Otters Fight Global Warming" as described in the article?

Popcorn/Wave: When you hear Darwin's Theory of Evolution, what comes to mind?

Chemistry

Turn and Talk: What chemical element would you most like to be? Provide two to three reasons to support your answer.

Popcorn/Wave: What is one thing you learned about the quantum mechanical model?

Physics

Turn and Talk: Describe some examples of state change.

Popcorn/Wave: What do you think of when you hear the word "energy?"

Social Studies



U.S. History

Turn and Talk: What are some differences between the way the U.S. Civil War was fought and the ways civil wars are fought today? To what extent are there any similarities?

Popcorn/Wave: Name one of the New Deal programs.

World History

Turn and Talk: What role did the river play in early civilizations?

Popcorn/Wave: Name a technological development that changed the world.

Government

Turn and Talk: What are some reasons you think the Media is often referred to as the fourth branch of government?

Popcorn/Wave: What are some things the U.S. government "regulates?"

English Language Arts



Economics

Turn and Talk: What are some of the economic impacts NAFTA had on the U.S., Mexico, and Canada?

Popcorn/Wave: What is one way your life has been impacted by globalization? What is one way it will continue to be impacted by an increasingly interconnected world?

Writing

Turn and Talk: What are some strengths of the sample essay? What are some things you might suggest the writer focus on in the next draft?

Popcorn/Wave: What is a sensory detail you used in order to create an image for your readers?

Reading – Literature

Turn and Talk: What are some ways that Gogol tries to remake his identity in the novel *The Namesake*?

Popcorn/Wave: Share your sentence summary of Chapter 4 of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* using the Somebody/Wanted/But/So framework.

Reading – Informational Texts

Turn and Talk: What are some ways that the text answers the essential question, " _____ ?"

Popcorn/Wave: A headline of five words or less that captures a key idea in _____ .

Speaking and Listening

Turn and Talk: Identify a type of rhetoric the speaker used and the impact it had on you as a listener.

Popcorn/Wave: What is a question you might offer to jumpstart our conversation about _____ ?

Language

Turn and Talk: What are some ways of changing the following sentence to make it gender neutral? "If a student studies hard, he will succeed."

Popcorn/Wave: What are some examples of subjective writing?

World Languages



Turn and Talk: Partner A, pretend to be a waiter and ask your partner in (the target language) what they would like to eat. Partner B, respond with your order in (the target language). Switch roles and repeat.

Turn and Talk: Turn to your partner and share the vocabulary words that have been challenging for you to remember.

Popcorn/Wave: If you could visit any city in the world where (target language) is spoken, where would you go and why?

Popcorn/Wave: What is your favorite color?

Popcorn/Wave: What is your favorite season?

Popcorn/Wave: When is your birthday?

Popcorn/Wave: What is your favorite thing to do in your free time?

Suggestions for Writing Your Own Turn and Talk and Popcorn Activators:

Think about one of your upcoming lessons and consider where you might insert a Turn and Talk to support pacing of the lesson and help students construct meaning around the learning outcome. Another idea is to bookend your week on Mondays and Fridays with one of these formats to create a High-Performing Community of Learners.

Your Turn

Design Your Own Foundational Activators

A Checklist for Designing Effective Activators:

- ☐ *Does the prompt support a specific learning outcome?*
- ☐ *Is the prompt engaging?* Can students respond without feeling anxious or uncomfortable? Do students have enough prior knowledge to feel competent in their responses? Will the prompt ignite curiosity, make content relevant, and challenge students to think at a high level?
- ☐ *Is the prompt crafted with invitational language that promotes exploration and reduces the need for certainty?* Invitational prompts might begin with "What might...?" "What are some of the...?" or "What is your hunch for why...?"