

## Three Key Beliefs about Instruction (And Two Essential Moves to Put those Beliefs into Practice)

*An Excerpt from the Match Teacher Residency’s Handbook on Instructional Methods*

### Background for our MOOC Students

This week’s lecture focuses on the “student-facing” framework that we use for coaching novice teachers in our residency program. We lovingly call it the “Kraken.” It represents a vision for what we believe that students should be doing and thinking in an optimally run classroom.

Why the Kraken? Because our teacher-residents thought our framework needed a different name than “The MTR Rubric for Evaluating if Students are Doing and Thinking the Right Things.” There was a naming contest. And the Kraken won.

Our vision can be summed up as follows: The teacher has designed rigorous, goal-aligned thinking tasks. The students’ attention is focused on those tasks; if they become disengaged, it’s not for very long. Everyone’s getting lots of opportunities to practice, not just a few kids who raise their hands to answer the difficult questions. The teacher is constantly evaluating that practice and giving feedback that helps advance students towards mastering the goal of the lesson.

Or, if you want the really short hand version, it’s this: practice and feedback.

The Kraken is organized into six domains:

	Vision	Observation Focus Questions
<b>Time on Task</b>	<p>Approximately 90% (or higher) of the students are consistently on task throughout the lesson.</p> <p>The students maintain their focus and effort irrespective of the task (e.g. listening to the teacher vs. taking notes vs. working in small groups, etc).</p>	<p>To what degree are students doing what the teacher wants them to be doing?</p> <p>What happens to their engagement when the tasks change?</p>
<b>Teacher Radar and Student Response to Corrections</b>	<p>Teachers address most misbehavior quickly and efficiently.</p> <p>Students bounce back quickly after when their behavior is corrected. There’s very minimal to no “pushback” after a correction.</p> <p>The rest of the class maintains their effort/focus in these situations.</p>	<p>Do students feel like the teacher notices their behavior?</p> <p>Do students bounce back quickly when their behavior is corrected?</p>

	<b>Vision</b>	<b>Observation Focus Questions</b>
<b>Rigor of Target Task(s)</b>	The Target Task is well-calibrated in terms of rigor for the time allotted.	Are students working towards completing a task that's too easy, too hard, or just right (for the time allotted in the class and their skill level)?
<b>Thinking Tasks</b>	Thinking Tasks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Are clear to students, and</li> <li>- Are aligned with the Target Task in terms of rigor and content, and</li> <li>- Will help students master the Target Task.</li> </ul>	Are students asked to do tasks throughout the entire class that are preparing them for the challenge of the target task?
<b>Student Practice</b>	Students are given sufficient opportunities to practice in order to master the Target Task.	Are students getting sufficient opportunities to practice throughout each part of the lesson?
<b>Teacher Feedback to Students</b>	Teacher consistently gives feedback to students, both whole-group and individually, on the quality of their work.  When feedback is given, it is very useful in helping students make progress towards mastering the Target Task.	Are students getting feedback on their practice that helps them make progress towards achieving the Aim of the lesson?  Do students know what "good work" looks and sounds like in this lesson?

So that's a quick recap of what you already learned from the Week 3 lectures. Now we'd like to zoom out a bit... before zooming back in again...

The first part of this reading describes three key beliefs that underlie our vision. We've found it to be very important for coaches and teachers to read and dissect these beliefs right at the beginning of their coaching relationship. It is part of the work of "getting on the same page" by not just discussing *what* excellent instruction looks like, but *why* you have that vision in the first place. The three beliefs that you'll read below are the why.

Part two of this reading gets real specific about a few things (though of course not everything) a teacher can do to advance that vision. We describe two high impact practices that can be used in a variety of teaching contexts. As a coach, we imagine at some point you'll want to draw on either or both of these practices to help a teacher improve in one of the relevant domains of the Kraken.

We should also note that these excerpts come from the manuals that we've written for training *rookie* teachers. But we believe the ideas and techniques are broadly applicable.

### **Part I: The Three Beliefs**

Without further ado:

- 1. My job is to increase student learning in the most efficient way possible.**
- 2. My job is no longer to say smart things. It is to get my students to say smart things.**
- 3. My job is to create a classroom environment that maximizes opportunities for students to get practice and feedback.**

These may seem self-evident, and we hope they are, but they run contrary to many popular images of teaching, in which the teacher is the center of attention with lessons so extravagant that they're more performance art than they are teaching, with the students cast in the roles of VIP ticket-holders to a sold-out show.

But the thing is, you're not the star of the show. Your students are. The bottom line in teaching is outputs, not inputs. The most important measure of whether you did a good job is what your kids can do as a result of having been in your class.

Teaching is directing. It's about being as invisible as possible as you cede the stage to your well-coached students. If you're in it for the slow-clap, you've chosen the wrong profession.

This is not to say that ALL teacher-centered lectures or presentations are inherently bad. Of course there's a time and a place for the "teacher monologue" (to continue our theatre metaphor), and of course there are best practices for planning and delivering this aspect of a lesson. It's even helpful for students – particularly high school kids – to practice how to be an active, engaged learner when the teacher is not asking them to do much more than just listen. But we want to push back on the idea of the "sage on the stage" as *the* paramount image of effective teaching.

**Belief 1: My job is to increase student learning in the most efficient way possible.**

It's 11:00pm on a school night – do you know where the first year teachers are?

Well, too many of them are probably 16 clicks into a lesson plan site that popped up on a Google search page. They're downloading worksheets with stuff to cut out for a kinesthetic activity. They're composing original beats and lyrics for a “factoring polynomials” rap. They're killing yet another ink cartridge printing color images that perfectly capture the mood of the poem they're reading in class tomorrow.



**It may look spectacular, but was it worth the time?**

Of course, there's nothing inherently wrong with any of these exercises in lesson planning. In fact, if you didn't have bigger fish to fry, we'd love to see you sweating the details and thinking creatively like this!

But these (only slightly tongue-and-cheek) examples serve to frame what is so commonly problematic for rookie teachers: a looming pressure, often self-imposed, to attempt to make every lesson plan a different five-star meal each day.

Why will the 5 Star Lesson fail so frequently?

First, the “cool factor” tends to erode – it might captivate the students for a minute or two, but it's hard to keep going—especially once there's legit learning that needs to happen. When it's time to put away the bells and whistles and actually learn, the come down can be pretty nasty.

Kids like to learn. And kids love teachers who help them learn. Think back on all of your favorite teachers from high school—chances are they're the ones who pushed your learning the furthest.

Meanwhile, the time cost to the teacher of this lesson planning is big. Have you noticed how stretched for time teachers are? Their time is always zero sum, so every hour of lesson planning comes at the expense of something else. So it's quite likely that when an hour of lesson planning replaces an hour of, say, relationship-building with your students, “total classroom learning” might go down. (Remember our formula?)

Furthermore, students may actually learn less with a more complex lesson setup. If you spend a ton of time building shapes out of marshmallows and toothpicks, students may remember more about best practices for working with marshmallows. Cognitive psychologist, Daniel Willingham, has articulated a principle that can be viewed as a warning against these practices: “Memory is the residue of thought.” In other words, what students are thinking about in your lesson is what they're going to remember. Thus thinking about marshmallows = remembering marshmallows.

Why do first year teachers tend to plan overly-elaborate lessons? Four totally understandable reasons:

**1. Teachers are good at certain activities already, from their college days, and they try to rely on them in their first-year of teaching.**

Scouring the Internet? Writing something and revising it? Brainstorming clever activities? Since first-year teachers feel like they're good at these tasks, and are less confident with things like phone calls to parents or fly-by conversations with students, they default to doing more of the tasks that they do best, rather than the tasks that are most likely to drive student learning.

**2. Teachers feel excited about advanced activities because they're intellectually interesting.**

Dr. Willingham articulates another valuable and relevant principle to consider with regard to this reason for planning elaborate lessons: "Cognition is fundamentally different early and late in training." You are very, very late in training compared to your students. You think differently. What may be "boring" for you (like adding fractions) may be very, very difficult for students. So while you might want to do a cool activity involving colored blocks because you think it will be more interesting, your students might need some old-fashioned pencil-and-paper work with fractions...and if you set it up the right way, they're still likely to find it very interesting and rewarding.

**3. New teachers are often told "Don't reinvent the wheel," but they hear, "Find the most perfect wheel ever invented."**

"Don't reinvent the wheel" should not translate into "I need to find the best example of how to teach this topic by skimming scores of published lesson plans."

There are literally hundreds of thousands of resources on lesson planning – from web sites, to teachers' manuals, to the file cabinet in your room that's full of stuff from last year's teacher.

It's easy to get sucked into a downward spiral searching for an optimal plan. That takes time away from other needed teacher tasks. So then your class ends up tanking because you didn't really take the time to actually rehearse your lesson and anticipate student misconceptions or pitfalls in your directions, transitions, etc. Now you want/need an optimal plan even more for the next day, to get things back on track. It's a nasty little cycle.

You simply do not have time to spend an extra hour or two per day searching for the White Whale of lesson plans. Remember that the quality of a lesson comes down to not only *what* you teach, but *how* you teach it. Sticking with basic, no-frills lessons, and using them to push student learning through careful questioning, practice, and feedback, will always be a higher yield plan than working with an incredibly complex lesson that you don't really feel comfortable with.

**4. New teachers are told – incorrectly, we think – that classroom management is exclusively a by-product of lesson planning. They say “if kids are acting up, it must be your lesson plan isn’t good.”**

This leaves the new teacher believing they can lesson plan themselves out of any discipline problems. You can’t. The quality of your lesson certainly has an effect on behavior; students respond to challenging but attainable tasks that are well explained and have plenty of opportunities to be practiced. That’s what this book is about.

But you can’t plan your way out of a management problem; it’s only one factor. Your relationships with students are at least as important.

A 5-star-meal type lesson plan cannot make up for deficiencies in the other areas. In fact, 5-star plans often exacerbate discipline issues because their planning comes at the expense of relationship building and introduce excessive complexity into the classroom that limits your ability to focus on learning and discipline.

### **The Escape from the 5-Star Meal Lesson Plan**

Let’s consider one more analogy: constructing a new school building. Design involves choices and tradeoffs.

That design might include a lot of expensive extras – fancy climate control, two different theaters, an Olympic Pool. But that might leave a lot less resources (money) left over for other key things – like hiring good teachers, coaches, tutors, buying books and equipment. Another approach is just a tried-and-true, “functional” regular school – some classrooms, hallways, bathrooms, a gym, etc.

We think the second approach, when it comes to the first year teacher, leaves resources (teacher time) left over for other things a teacher must do with limited time.

A good architect need not try to make every building a Taj Mahal. Instead, she can focus on two things:

First, be precise with the basics, the things that architects do over and over again, no matter what the building is going to look like: certain assumptions that X amount of ceiling weight requires Y amount of support, zoning rules like B amount of square footage requires C amount of parking, etc.

A good architect takes pleasure in getting all that stuff exactly right. A good teacher takes pleasure in being precise with plans, too.

Second, an architect makes sure all the little things are executed well during construction. The concrete must be poured correctly; the 2-by-4’s must be precisely hammered, etc. Some architects like to leave that entirely up to the contractor and use their time instead dreaming up cool new designs. That’s a bad approach for an architect – and a rookie teacher.

We believe that content should dictate lesson structure. In other words, the lesson structure that best allows for the learning of the day’s objective is always best. And, in general, this means that many lessons are going to look very similar to each other in terms of how they’re structured.

It's dangerous to structure your lesson differently just because you want to "mix it up" or "keep things interesting." You could end up investing a ton of energy in your own presentation of the "new and exciting" lesson structure. Instead, spend your time thinking about what and how students will practice in order to achieve a particular learning outcome.

**Belief 2: My job is no longer to say smart things. It is to get other people to say smart things.**

If you were just in college, pretty much your entire job was to think and show that you had been thinking by saying or writing smart things. But you have to leave that behind. Now you have to get other people (i.e. students) to think and show they are thinking by saying and writing smart things.

The problem is: doing the thinking yourself is fun for you. You probably liked school, or at least your subject. So you'll be tempted to do a lot of the thinking for your students, and kind of take them along for the ride.

What this looks like: you ask students one very simple question, and then do a soliloquy for them on all the hard stuff. Let's take a look at a not-so-strong example from a teacher asking a question about *Animal Farm*:

*Teacher:* Who do you think is changing the 7 Commandments?

*Student:* The pigs.

*Teacher:* The pigs! Yes! They're the only ones who are literate, so they can argue that the Commandments have always been that way. They're using their superior knowledge to control the other animals. Also notice how the 7 Commandments are a powerful tool of propaganda, right? Like we talked about yesterday? They are held sacred by the other animals because Major created them, and everyone is loyal to his memory. So if the pigs claim the 7 Commandments say such-and-such, the other animals don't question it.

Look at how much thinking the teacher did, as opposed to the students. One student gave one answer. And it was an easy answer. Then the teacher, single-handedly, fleshed out the significance of everything else that happened. The kids had to do nothing, and so probably learned nothing.

And it's so much easier to do this. It's easy for you to spout out this stuff and it's easy for students to just sit back and listen; it's boring, but easy, and safe. Because you're not making students do anything too hard, they won't push back on you or get frustrated (at least not initially). But it's literally useless for kids to have a discussion like this.

So you have to be vigilant that you're putting as much thinking as possible, as early as possible, on the students. Here's another *Animal Farm* example of what that might sound like:

*Teacher:* Who do you think is changing the 7 Commandments?

*Student:* The pigs.

*Teacher:* Correct. There are 3 questions on your paper about this. Take 5 minutes and answer those questions silently. Go. **[Notice that all students have to write answers to the questions they're about to discuss.]**

(5 minutes later)

*Teacher:* Why are the pigs changing the 7 Commandments? William. **[cold-calling ensures all students are ready.]**

*William:* They want the other animals to think they're doing the right thing.

*Teacher:* What do you mean? **[The teacher in the last example would have fleshed this out for William. This teacher is making him explain himself.]**

*William:* If the Commandments say that it's ok to drink, then the animals will accept it.

*Teacher:* Interesting. So why do the animals accept things that are on the commandments when they sound so wrong? Zalima?

*Zalima:* Because they've been around a long time.

*Teacher:* I don't think that's it. The farmer was around a long time and the animals rejected him...what was it about the commandments that were so special? Ray? **[She contradicts the student to make sure the discussion goes in the right direction, but doesn't give the right answer herself. Instead she asks a follow-up question.]**

*Ray:* The commandments were written right after the revolution when all the animals were, like, really committed. And they still think the commandments are special.

*Teacher:* Right - they don't question the commandments. What's that word we talked about to describe the animal's attitude towards them?

*Annalisa:* Sacred.

*Teacher:* Exactly. So, Tyrone, sum it up – why are the pigs changing the commandments?

*Tyrone:* They're changing the commandments to say it's ok to do what they're doing because the other animals will accept the commandments without asking questions. Because the commandments are sacred. **[Making a student sum up what has been said checks to see if everyone has understood the discussion.]**

This teacher puts a lot more of the thinking work on students. First, she makes *every* student think about the key questions by requiring that they write their responses down first. Then she gives

feedback on their thinking and helps to bridge their answers together to keep the conversation flowing, while still having the students do the “heavy lifting.” And because she’s cold-calling<sup>1</sup>, the students have to stay on top of the conversation because they don’t know if they’re going to get called on next. Finally, she asks a student to summarize what his classmates said, thus demonstrating her expectation that kids listen to and engage with each other’s ideas (not just the teacher’s ideas, like in the first example).

The end result is that the students in this example got a lot more out of the conversation than students in the previous example. They had to do a lot more actual thinking than the first group of students. More thinking = more learning.

You need to want to be the second teacher – the one who helps others say smart things.

**Belief 3: My job is to create a classroom environment that maximizes opportunities for students to get practice and feedback.**

Welcome to our pedagogy. This entire handbook is designed to spell out our approach to teaching and learning, but if we to boil it down to one sentence, that’s it.

Actually, we can boil it down to two words: Practice. Feedback.

Fundamentally, we believe that this is the most efficient way for learning to occur in a classroom setting. The teacher defines a task, gives students opportunities to practice thinking about it, and then tells them how to do it even better.

We believe it’s how everyone gets better at anything—and there’s a lot of emerging research that backs it up.

In the great education debates you often hear about student centered classrooms versus teacher centered classrooms.

Simply put, in student centered classrooms kids drive their own learning, and in teacher centered classrooms, the teacher dictates what will be thought about, when, and how. And, of course, there’s a lot of room in between.

The best way to describe our theory of teaching and learning might be like this: teacher directed, but student centered.

In every lesson, we strive to maximize the amount of time that students are engaged in real thinking tasks. We want them thinking broadly, and we want them thinking deeply. But the difference between us and the folks who might define themselves as purely student-centered is that we think that the questions of what should be learned, and how, are so incredibly complicated that they need the strategic mind of an adult to organize the learning experiences for kids.

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<sup>1</sup> Cold Calling is when you direct a question or another type of thinking task to a student who is not volunteering to participate.

Even when those experiences call on kids to “discover” and “create,” they need guidance and boundaries to make sure they learn the right things.

For example, you could give a student a bag of objects and tell her to “discover” whatever she can. She might discover any number of things – color patterns, basic architectural truths, or even probability.

All of these are worth learning, but we firmly believe that the teacher needs to know exactly *what* will be learned, for each student, before each lesson. It’s how you build units and teach children in groups.

Unbounded, child-centered learning has its place—in play, at home, in after school programs—but teachers’ responsibilities to college readiness, school curriculum, and state standards mean, to us, that it doesn’t belong in the classroom. At least not very often.

Instead, we believe your job is to be highly strategic in how you select, create, and implement loops of practice and feedback.

Sounds simple enough, right? Not so much. There’s a lot that goes into this process.

How do you know what the right task is to teach? How do you break that task down into discreet parts that get their own practice/feedback loops? Speaking of that, what makes for good practice? How do you make sure they’re practicing the right thing? What do you as a teacher need to do to get them ready for their practice? How do you give feedback to 20 kids at the same time? What makes for good feedback? How do you even know what to look for when you’re evaluating student work? How do you know when you’re ready to move on to practice another task? What if some of the kids need more practice and others don’t?

We could have just kept going and going—there are so many decisions that a teacher makes before and during each class that absolutely determine if and what kids learn.

We hope that it goes without saying that teaching is incredibly complex work that requires a very strategic mind. It’s why in our teacher residency program we’re so selective in the admissions process. It’s why we care so much about identifying prospective teachers who have already demonstrated the ability to think critically.

If you love to solve puzzles, you’ve come to the right profession. Lesson planning is the ultimate problem solving challenge: how do I get engage 30 different minds, in 60 minutes, in a series of tasks that will lead to mastery of a learning goal? The short answer: through tons of practice and feedback.

## **Part II: Two Key Practices to Enact the Three Beliefs**

In this next section, we highlight two excerpts from our training manuals that describe teaching techniques that are aligned with our vision of excellent instruction.

1. **Delivering Clear Directions and Expectations.** We believe the clarity of a teacher's directions and expectations is an essential ingredient for mastering the first two domains of the Kraken. When students understand and internalize their teacher's expectations, they're not only more likely to be focused and on-task, they're also more willing to buy-in to the idea that their teacher has the authority to correct their behavior. Below we break down a set of steps and criteria for delivering clear directions and expectations in all kinds of common teaching situations.
2. **Planning and Executing Turn-and-Talks.** This technique involves having pairs of students work cooperatively to engage with a thinking task. When planned and executed properly, a Turn-and-Talk touches all four instructional domains of the Kraken. Our reading excerpt below describes the components of an effective Turn-and-Talk, as well as how they align with each section of the Kraken.

(Note to our "repeat customers": if you took our first MOOC, "Surviving Your Rookie Year of Teaching," the topics of giving clear directions and executing Turn-and-Talks will look very familiar to you. We explore these in greater depth in the lecture videos for this course.)

### **Delivering Clear Directions and Expectations**

*An Excerpt from Match Teacher Residency's Classroom Management Handbook*

Directions are an extension of your vision for how you want your class to look (and how your school/principal expects your class to look). Every teacher needs to sweat directions, regardless of the age of your students. Clear and precise directions communicate high expectations for behavior, preserve instructional time, and help students build habits and you to set routines in the future.

The move: You give directions and expectations that are so clear they're easy to follow. Directions are what you want students to do. Expectations are how you want them to do it.

Examples of directions (WHAT to do):

- "Put your books into your backpacks."
- "Take one handout and pass the rest to the right."
- "Begin your Independent Practice."
- "Write the heading on your paper."

Examples of expectations (HOW to do it):

- "Do this silently."

- “Remain in your seats.”
- “Use soft voices.”
- “Raise your hand if you have a question and continue working until I come over.”

**Why do it:** Students need to know what to do and how to do it. A surprising amount of “misbehavior” happens because students are unclear on what a teacher wants. The result is that they do something in the wrong way and then are corrected and feel persecuted.

For example, 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher Mr. Dalrymple tells his class, “Take a handout and pass on the rest.” What he means is: “Take a handout, then pass the stack on to the person on your right without getting out of your seat.” Sixth grader Darius, however, interprets this direction to mean, “Take a handout for yourself, then get up and pass the pile out to a couple kids in the next section.” When Darius gets up, he’s reprimanded for being out of his seat.

Darius is confused. He was trying to help by passing out papers to other kids. Instead he got in trouble. He is hurt and confused, and starts to explain what he was doing. Mr. Dalrymple promptly gives him another demerit for talking back. Darius is now crushed. He will likely struggle for the rest of the class period.

If Mr. Dalrymple had only made his directions and expectations more clear, this problem could have been avoided.

### **Differentiating Directions: Context Matters**

Giving effective directions and expectations does not necessarily mean including every-last-detail-so-there-is-no-way-a-student-could-ever-be-confused. Too many directions can be just as ineffective as not enough directions. Too many directions can take up too much time, be condescending, over-complicate a simple task and create too much confusion. Clearly communicating the right amount of directions and expectations requires decision-making. This decision-making depends on several factors:

- Grade level of the students
- Number of students in the class
- The complexity of the task (number of steps)
- The importance of the process vs. the product (of the direction)

Clear directions and expectations are important no matter what grade you teach. However, being “clear” looks much different in elementary school than it does in high school. As kids get older, you can assume much more about their knowledge and competency.

Let’s say you’re teaching 10<sup>th</sup> graders. On the first day of school, you say: “Put the packet in the classwork section of your Math binder, newest stuff on top.” 95% of your 10<sup>th</sup> grade students will do this correctly.

Now let’s say you’re teaching 6<sup>th</sup> graders. You give the same direction: “Put the packet in the classwork section of your Math binder, newest stuff on top.” In this case, 75% of students do it correctly. The other 25% are confused about what you mean by “classwork section.” Are they

supposed to clip the paper into the rings? Should the paper go on top of or underneath the tab? You'll probably have to stop everyone and clarify. Time will be wasted.

Now let's say you're teaching 2<sup>nd</sup> graders. You say, "Put the packet in the classwork section of your Math binder, newest stuff on top. Go." Some 2<sup>nd</sup> graders don't even understand the words "packet," "classwork," and "binder." An earthquake of confusion is unleashed, followed by a tsunami of chaos.

So a good direction for 10<sup>th</sup> graders is a bad direction for 6<sup>th</sup> graders and a disastrous direction for 2<sup>nd</sup> graders. Figuring out what kinds of directions will work for your students will take some time. Any time a direction goes wrong, and students do the wrong thing or get confused, use it as a learning experience! Analyze what you said, and figure out how you would say it differently next time.

There are several components you'll need to consider when giving effective directions. Not all directions need all of these.

**Attention!** – Make sure kids are listening to you.

**Magic Word** – Let students know when to get started.

**Address likely misbehavior** – Anticipate what kids are likely to do wrong and address it before it happens.

**Narrate the positive** – Describe what you see kids doing well.

**Steps** – Break down complex tasks into smaller ones.

**Check For Understanding** – Ask questions to make sure they know what to do.

**Observable** – Directions have to be actions.

**Visuals** – Use pictures, signs, and demos instead of just words

**Economic** – Use as few words as possible.

Or the catchy "AMANS COVE" for short.

Are your directions "good tide"? Read on to discover how to give "good tide" directions using *A Man's Cove*.

### **A in A MANS COVE: Attention**

Before giving any directions or expectations to students, you must have their attention. Attention means: 100% of their eyes are on you. If you let kids attend to other things while you're giving directions (i.e. finishing up some work, digging in backpack, looking at friend), some of them will miss what you say. Then they won't be able to do it correctly, there will be confusion and misbehavior, you'll have to address the misbehavior and restate the directions, and time is wasted. Getting attention before directions and expectations is KEY. Similarly, *you* should not be multi-tasking while you give directions. All of your attention needs to be focused on getting their attention (and making sure that you have it). Don't try to pass out papers, write on the board, etc, while giving directions. Concentrate entirely on getting 100% compliance.

### **M in A MANS COVE: Use a Magic word when appropriate.**

To ensure that students don't start following a direction before you're done giving it, you can use a "magic word" that lets them know "it's time to start!" No matter what grade you teach, if your directions have several parts that students need to remember, you need some kind of cue to start the transition. At the beginning of the year, especially, you'll need to narrate those steps before you give the cue.

These are words like "go" or "begin."

**Elementary example:** "When I clap my hands twice, please stand up, ready to walk to the carpet with lips-zipped, feet facing forward, and hands by your side. <Claps twice.>"

*Label it:* Some elementary teachers alert their students to a direction by actually saying the word "direction" before her what to do. For example, you might say, "Direction: Take out your purple writing folder and put it on your desk." This label alerts students that they should listen for a specific action they're supposed to perform.

**MS Example:** "When I say go, tear off the Ticket to Leave, put your classwork in your binder's classwork section, and begin your Exit Ticket<sup>2</sup>. Go."

**HS Example:** "In a moment, you're going to do three things: take Handout #37 out of your binder, put your novel on your desk, put your binder back inside your desk. Go ahead."

If you allow students to start directions before you're done giving them, they will miss parts of the directions.

Note: You don't always need to use a magic word. If the direction is simple, for example, you can just say it: "Turn the page," rather than, "When I say go, turn to page 42. Go." *The point of good directions is to save time, not waste it.* If your directions take longer than the actual activity, you're probably including too many of the components.

### **A in A MANS COVE: Address potential misbehavior.**

If a set of directions/expectations is something students have never done before, or that requires more independence than they usually have, you need to anticipate and address likely misbehaviors within your directions.

For example, let's say you're doing a gallery walk. This is when you put student work up on the walls and students get to walk around the room and examine it. You're having students walk in groups of 3. You'll control the time intervals. They have work to complete as they're doing this exercise.

If students haven't done this before, think about things they will likely be tempted to do: Go to a new set of work before you ring the transition bell, have off task conversations with their groups, talk to other groups across the room, horseplay, touch materials on other students' desks.

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<sup>2</sup>"Exit Ticket" (or "Ticket to Leave") is a commonly used phrase to describe a written assignment that teacher assign at the end of a class period to assess how much progress their students made with a new lesson.

Within your directions, you address these temptations and redirect students to the right behavior. Here's how it might sound:

**Middle school long example:**

Teacher: Now you're going to have a chance to see other people's projects and write your own thoughts on them. You'll travel with your table group. I'll tell you where to start. You'll have five minutes to complete the reflection at each station. Level 1 voices. I'll give you a 1-minute warning by saying "1 minute warning!" When it's time to rotate, I'll ring the small bell. You and your group will move clockwise [shows direction] to the next project. You'll start the next reflection right away.

Let's review – You'll start at one project. How many minutes will you have with that project? As you're working, can you talk? How will you know when to move to the next project? If you start at this project, what's the next one you'll go to? If you start at this project, what's the next one you'll go to? 3 last reminders before we start:

1. Only talk to your group-mates – not across the room or to the group next to you.
2. Focus your conversation on the work. If your group starts to get off-task, say, "Back to work!"
3. As you're transitioning between projects, make sure to keep your body under control. We're walking calmly. Also, make sure not to touch other students' stuff on the desks. We all like to return to our desks the way we left them.

**Elementary school short example:**

Teacher: When we have something to say, we raise our hand and keep our lips zipped until the teacher calls on us. It can be realllllly hard to be silent when we have a great idea! We're so excited to share it! But we have to raise our hand and keep our lips zipped so that everybody has a fair chance to share. If you are tempted to shout out an answer, keep your lips locked by doing this ["locks" lips with finger]. That's a great way to show self-control.

**High School short example:**

Teacher: When you're correcting someone else's paper, be respectful about it. No one wants to get their paper back and have their partner say something sarcastic, even if it's just a joke. They might not take it that way. Only write the number correct on the top and silently hand it back. No additional comments.

**N in A MANS COVE: Narrate the positive.**

**The move:** You publicly describe students following directions.

We think Doug Lemov was the first educator to write about this technique, but we know that effective teachers have been using this one forever.

Here's what it sounds like:

Teacher: Pencils down and eyes on me. (Pause). Jasmine had her pencil down fast. Nathan's eyes are on me – he's ready.

**Why do it:** This move is SHOCKINGLY effective. It can single-handedly transform the atmosphere in your class. We’ve seen kids go from eye-rolling and feet-dragging to eager-to-please in seconds.

Narrating the positive lets students know that you notice what they do, and creates momentum for the whole class to do the right thing. People naturally want to follow the crowd, so giving evidence that the crowd is following directions will encourage those few stragglers to straighten up. This creates momentum and “normalcy” around following your directions.

Narration should be:

*Neutral* – Narration is used when students are meeting expectations. Therefore, they should be recognized, not praised. Praise is for above-and-beyond effort or actions. Therefore, words like “excellent,” “great,” “good,” “wonderful” are not used during narration. You’re simply stating the behavior, not judging it.

*Behavior-centered* – It’s tempting to use narration as praise. “I like” and “I love” spill out of our mouths before we’re even aware of it. But we should not use these words during narration. They put the focus on the teacher’s feelings rather than on the behavior. Even saying, “I see” or “I notice” puts the focus on the teacher rather than the desired behavior. So eliminate any mention of yourself when you’re narrating. Instead, put the focus on the behavior and the student.

No	Yes
“I like how Laura has her pencil out.”	“Laura has her pencil out.”
“I love how Javier is SLANTing and ready.”	“Javier is SLANTing and ready.”
“I see Julde’s hand is up.”	“Julde’s hand is up.”
“I notice that Row 3 is ready.”	“Row 3 is ready.”
“Rahma you need to STAR, Mario you need to STAR, Daniel put that away.”	“David’s in STAR with hands free, Charlotte’s ready in STAR.”

*Quick* – You don’t need to narrate every kid every time they’re doing the right thing. It wastes time and gets super boring.

*Positive* – Don’t “narrate the negative:” “I am missing 3 pairs of eyes.”

*Authentic & Age-appropriate* – With younger kids, repeating the direction in your narration is totally appropriate to the age-group and in fact, helps to reiterate the directions. For older students, repeating the exact direction in your narration can come across as condescending and robotic.

For example, if the direction is to put your book away, pencil down and eyes on the teacher, narration at different levels might sound like:

Age Range	Authentic & Age-Appropriate
Ages 4-8 (K1 – 3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade)	“Shiobhan put her book neatly in her desk; Gary’s pencil is in the groove. I have Reuben and Laura’s eyes.”
Ages 9-12	“Shiobhan is ready to go with her book away and pencil down. I

(3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade – 7 <sup>th</sup> Grade)	know Reuben is ready, he’s looking right at me.”
Ages 13 – 17 (7 <sup>th</sup> Grade – 12 <sup>th</sup> Grade)	“Shiobhan’s good to go. Thank you, Reuben. <Makes eye contact with 3 other students and smiles> Thanks.

A full example of good narration at the 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> grade level:

Teacher: “When I say go, put your classwork in your binder and your homework in your folder. Then sit silently with your eyes up here so I know you’re ready. Go. (Pause). Richard’s classwork is away. Donovan’s eyes are up; he’s ready. So is Marlene with that beautiful smile. 5 seconds left. Need everyone there in 5-4-3-2-1. Got it. Thank you.”

Again, we can’t emphasize enough how SHOCKINGLY EFFECTIVE this move is.

One wrinkle with narrating the positive is that it changes over the course of the year. When students are first learning your classroom’s procedures and expectations, you’ll narrate a lot. As the year goes on and procedures turn into routines, you’ll narrate less. You expect more and more of students as they grow over the course of the year, so meeting the basic expectations doesn’t get as much recognition. Towards the end of the year, you may only narrate when you introduce a new activity or procedure, or when students start to struggle with a particular routine and you want to go back and reinforce the right ways of doing things.

**Differentiation:**

*Elementary and lower middle:* Narrating is a key move for younger students. They are still eager to please and want to do the right thing. They often need the extra reminder on what to do and the encouragement to move quickly. Therefore, they respond very strongly to narration. Third-grade teacher Jes Weren says she uses narration “constantly. It’s one of my best strategies. Just the other day we had a parent night at my school. It was a little boring for kids, since it was designed to be informative for parents. But whenever I would say, ‘It’s great how student so-and-so is tracking the speaker,’ alllll kids’ heads would turn. It’s really powerful.”

*Upper Middle and High School:* In upper middle school and high school, kids need fewer reminders on what to do and want more independence. So you’ll still narrate the positive – just not as much and with a slightly different tone.

**S in A MANS COVE: Break directions into Steps.**

Complicated directions sometimes need to be broken down into small tasks, especially for younger students. Examples:

<i>Situation</i>	<i>No steps:</i>	<i>Steps:</i>
<i>Elementary:</i> Math tiles are in a bag. They need to be taken out and put on the desk.	“Put your tiles in a line on your desk.”	“My turn (teacher is demonstrating each step): Hold the baggie with one hand, and pull out the tiles one by one and make a line on your desk like this. You won’t need all the tiles, so don’t dump your bag. Your turn!”
	“Write about our Essential	“Take out your Reader’s

<p><i>MS/HS:</i> You want students to write in their Reader's Notebook.</p>	<p>Question in your notebook.”  (might be ok if students have done it a bunch of times; if not, need steps)</p>	<p>Notebook and open to the Essential Questions section...Record today's date on the first line, right hand corner...Skip a line and start your response.”</p>
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**C in A MANS COVE: Check for understanding (CFU) when appropriate.**

If your directions are complicated, unusual, or have given your students problems in the past, check that they understand what you're asking them to do before letting them begin.

MS Example:

Teacher: When I say go, take out a piece of loose-leaf paper from your binder. Then put your binder back in your desk and then silently track me so I know that you're ready.  
(Pause) Jamie, when you've finished, where will your binder be?

Jaimie: Back in my desk.

Teacher: Correct. Go.

Now let's look at how that exchange could go differently:

Teacher: When I say go, take out a piece of loose-leaf paper from your binder. Then put your binder back in your desk and then silently track me so I know that you're ready.  
(Pause) Jamie, when you've finished, where will your binder be?

Jaimie: Um, on my desk.

Teacher: Nope, inside your desk.

Teacher: Loose-leaf paper, go.

In the first exchange, the teacher confirmed that students understood the directions, so she allowed them to begin. In the second exchange, she found that at least one student did not understand the directions, so she clarified, and then let them begin.

Note: When directions are simple or typical, there's no need to check for understanding. For example, "Take out a pencil," is not a direction that needs to be checked in most situations.

## **O in A MANS COVE: Observable directions and expectations.**

To be observable, your directions and expectations have to contain an action.

For example, the direction, “Pay attention!” is not observable – there’s no action. What exactly does one DO to show they’re “paying attention”? Similarly, the oft-used “Listen carefully!” is difficult to assess through observation alone. Instead, say, “Eyes on me.” It’s a specific action. You can observe a student doing or not doing it. Either they have their eyes on you or they don’t.

In addition, observable means phrasing in the positive: “Eyes on me,” rather than, “Don’t stare into space.”

Examples of Observable Directions & Expectations:

<i>Situation</i>	<i>Not observable</i>	<i>Observable</i>
Student is staring into space instead of writing.	“Focus.” <i>(What does that look like?)</i>	“Pencil to paper.”
Brian is writing instead of tracking his classmate.	“Be respectful.” <i>(What does that look like?)</i>	“Track Alex.”
<i>Elementary:</i> Leo is waving his arms in large circles.	“Don’t wave your arms around.” <i>(What should I do with my arms?)</i>	“Arms at your sides.”

## **V in A MANS COVE: Use Visuals.**

Some students find it much, much easier to follow directions when they have a visual to consult. This is so crucial for elementary. Even more crucial for students who are English Language Learners, or for students who have difficulty processing information that’s delivered verbally. There are **4 useful types of visuals**:

- 1) Written directions on the board or overhead.

**Elementary/Middle School (Grades 2-6) Example:** *You want to make sure students know exactly which problems to do and what to do when they’re finished. You write on the board:*

1. Complete #1-5, 8-9
2. Read your “Just-Right” Book
3. Reading Log!

For 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, two or three steps, written in phrases, is appropriate. For 4<sup>th</sup> grade and up, students can be expected to follow three to five steps, again, written in phrases.

**MS/HS Example:** *The Independent Practice for a given lesson has 3 different parts.*

You want to make sure kids know what to do when they finish a part, and what to do when they finish all 3. So you write up all the directions as steps, put them on the projector. You talk

through the directions, check for understanding, and then leave them up so kids can refer to them if and when they get confused.

Overly-complicated written directions will not be read or used, and will likely result in more questions. (Can a 7<sup>th</sup> grader reasonably follow more than 5 written steps? Yes. Of course. But if you're writing down that many steps, you're likely not checking in with the whole class enough to give feedback on their tasks. Also, more than 5 steps of independent tasks means a lot of opportunity to skip steps, or become off-task).

- 2) A demonstration with a material or school supply.

**Elementary Example:** You're telling kids how to put away manipulatives. You take a student's manipulatives, place them back in the baggie, double check that you didn't miss any, seal the baggie and pass them to the table leader.

**MS Example:** You're telling kids where in their binders to put their classwork on the first couple days of 6<sup>th</sup> grade. You take a student's binder and open it towards the class. You show them how to pull the "classwork" tab over, how to open the rings, how to put the paper on top of yesterday's handouts, how to close the rings, and how to close the binder. You also say, "Notice that there are NO papers in the pockets of this binder."

- 3) A demonstration of an action or procedure.

**Elementary Example #1:** You're teaching table leaders how to clean up the table's manipulatives. You now take on the role of the table leader, collect all the baggies into the colored bin, and silently and calmly walk over to the Math Center. You place the bin on the shelf, matching the color of the bin to the color on the shelf. When it's securely on the shelf, you walk calmly back to your seat and sit in STARS.

**Elementary Example #2:** You're teaching students the right entry procedure for your class. You narrate your actions while you demonstrate shaking the (imaginary) teacher's hand at the door and making eye contact, walking in calmly, taking a classwork from the table by the door, walking to your seat, putting your backpack on the back of your chair, getting your pencil out, sitting down, pulling your chair in, and starting your Do Now.

**MS Example:** On the first day of school, you're helping students understand your expectations for their posture in class. First, you sit down at a desk yourself and show them what "professional posture" looks like – sitting up straight, a writing utensil in hand, desk free of clutter, etc.. And then you also show them the different unacceptable ways to sit in the chair – slouched over the desk, rocking back on two legs, etc. Make sure your demonstration includes both examples and non-examples. Finally, you point out a few students who are meeting your expectation, which serves as yet another visual reminder of what to do.

## E in A MANS COVE: Economic

Don't babble or add filler words.

<i>Situation</i>	<i>Babbling</i>	<i>Economic</i>
<i>Elementary:</i> Students are coloring science projects. It's time to pack up.	"So, when we start, in just a moment, we're going to put away your four crayons inside the box, and then you'll be ready to sit quietly at your desk."	Teacher: "1-2-3-Eyes on me" Students: "1-2-Eyes on You" "When I say 'cupcake,' please put all your crayons inside your toolbox. Move your toolbox to the center then go to STAR <sup>3</sup> ...Cupcake"
<i>MS:</i> Students need books for this part of lesson.	"Like we did yesterday, let's get our books out. We're going to start with Chapter 4 today – so open to page 43. You can put a finger, pencil or something on that page, or turn your book over, and then put your eyes up here on me to show me that you're ready to get rolling."	Please silently take your book out, opened to page 43. Eyes on me when you're there."
<i>HS:</i> You want students to take notes.	"Write down the notes from this page that I have up here so you'll be able to read them later and use them to consult in case you have a problem. This stuff will be on your homework."	Write this down.

As said above, we want your directions to be "good tide" – not too high (aka more elements than is necessary given the age and/or task); not too low. We're going to run the risk of a messy mixed metaphor and include a picture of goldilocks just to hammer home the importance of "just right."



This porridge is  
*GOOD TIDE*...I  
mean ... JUST  
RIGHT.

<sup>3</sup> STAR is an acronym that's used by many elementary teachers for giving economical directions about how students should look during certain components in a class. It means, "Silently Tracking And Ready."

## When Directions Become Routine: The Ultimate Time-Saving Move

Clear directions and expectations exist to save you and your students valuable learning time. Directions that you frequently give to your students – like what to do with their classwork before you start the Exit Ticket; where to put their homework at the beginning of class; how to clean up your station when the warning bell rings – these are directions that you’ll give with the intention of turning them into a routine.

In order for a direction to become a routine, give it the same way every time. Point out to students that you do give the exact same direction every day. You do this so that they can learn your expectation and eventually complete this task without the longer direction. Some teachers even say things like, “In 3 weeks, I’m going to say “Get ready for your Exit Ticket” and you will know that this means: Put the classwork in behind the tab in the classwork section of your binder (with the newest stuff on top), put your binder and other materials under your chair, and silently track the front of the room to show you’re ready.”

Carolyn, a teacher at our elementary school, says: “I try to make everything a routine. My kids know that first, we do this. Then, we do this. Then, we do this. I try to give very few new directions. I simply remind students of what they already know how to do.” Through repetition, students internalize the directions and expectations for different parts of the day. **As the year goes on, teachers don’t have to give the students as many directions.** Teacher Jes told us that at the end of the year, she gives about  $\frac{1}{4}$  the number of directions compared to the beginning of the year. Her students have internalized the class’s routines and procedures.

### Special Section: Mega-Directions and Expectations

**The move:** When there is a new or unusual situation for students, explicitly teach them appropriate behaviors for that situation.

**Why do it:** What to do in any given situation in school may seem obvious to you. But you need to remember you’re a highly successful adult, not a child or young adult. Your students may not know how to handle a new situation – they need you to model and teach it.

Elementary Example:

Situation: You and your students are going to attend a musical. Many haven’t been to a theatre before and may not know the norms.

Explicit teaching of desired behavior: You create a “Social Story” about going to a musical and read it with the kids. The text is several pages long and includes pictures. It says the following: “I am going to a musical. I will sit in my seat. Before it starts, I will talk quietly. When it’s dark, I will watch and listen. I will keep my lips zipped so my friends can hear the music. I will raise my hand if I have to use the restroom. I might be worried that I’ll have to use the bathroom. But it’s ok because a teacher will help me. When the lights go up, I will clap. I am so excited to see the costumes and hear the singing!” When you’re done reading, you talk to the kids about what they’re going to do at the musical.

MS Example:

Situation: The short story you're reading has a couple of swear words in it, and you're afraid that kids will laugh or handle the words inappropriately.

Explicit teaching of desired behavior: Before starting the reading, you say, "The reading today has 2 swear words in it. They are important to understanding the character and the situation he's in, so we need to handle it professionally. Here's how. If you are reading and you get to one of the words, you may choose to either read it as it's written OR skip it if you're not comfortable saying it. As a listener when you hear the word, I expect you to remain silent and track the text. If you start to giggle because the word makes you uncomfortable, you need to do your best to stop. Cover your mouth. If you need to, put your head down. Lastly, you may not use the swear word as we're talking about the book, only when we're reading the text."

HS Example:

Situation: You have a guest speaker in your classroom.

Explicit teaching of desired behavior: Before the speaker comes, you tell the students: "Tomorrow we have a guest speaker. His name is Miles Armstrong and he's from the Museum of Fine Arts. He's going to be showing us slides of ancient Chinese art during the Ming dynasty. Our goal is going to be to describe the unique aspects of the art and how it reflected what was going on in China during that time. I want him to feel welcome and valued in our class."

What will happen is you'll come in and do your Do Now as usual. You'll see him at the back of the room. Please smile at him to let him know he's welcome. After the Do Now, I'll introduce Dr. Armstrong. When I say, "Please welcome Dr. Armstrong," that's a signal for you to clap. When he starts talking and showing the slides, track him and the slideshow. Take notes on things he says that aren't in the slides to show respect and interest. If a question pops into your head, raise your hand. He loves questions and asking them shows you're listening. Make sure you avoid side conversations – it's distracting to the speaker and disrespectful. Once he's done, I'll say, "Thank you Dr. Armstrong." That's your second cue to clap. Please smile as you clap as well so he knows you're appreciative of his efforts for us."

In each of these situations, the students now know exactly how you expect them to act. If they don't meet the expectations, you can then either do a Group Reset or give an individual consequence (see reactive moves).

Other examples of new situations in which you would explicitly teach desirable behavior: Playing a new game in class, doing a gallery walk, visiting the class across the hall, traveling on the MBTA as a class, having an assembly, listening to other students' speeches, reading about a controversial topic, working in groups.

## A Final – but Important! – Note on Using Positive Language

You'll notice that throughout all of our examples of directions and examples in this section, we've attempted to use positive language. That is, we tell kids what they should do rather than what they shouldn't. The difference looks something like this:

<b>Positive Language</b>	<b>Negative Language</b>
“Eyes on me when you're finished.”	“Don't stare out the window when you're finished.”
“Silently take out last night's homework and put it flat on your desk.”	“No talking while you take out your homework, and make sure it's not all crumpled up on your desk.”
“Remember to raise your hand and wait to be called on if you want to get in on this discussion. We want to hear one voice at a time.”	“Don't call out. I need to see your hand raised, otherwise no one will be able to follow the discussion.”

These are subtle differences, and there's surely no long-term harm in dropping the occasional What Not To Do in class. But over time, the subtleties of these differences can really add up and have a profound impact on how students feel about being in your class.

Simply put:

Do you want students to perceive your class as a place where people generally do what they're asked to do? Or do you want to draw their attention to all of the possible ways in which your expectations might not be met?

By no means will you create that perception simply by using positive language for your expectations and directions. There's no amount of “spin” that will convince kids to think that your class is under control if it really isn't. But rocky classroom management, combined with lots of “No” this and “Stop doing” that, is likely to leave students questioning whether you truly believe if they are capable of meeting higher expectations.

## Planning and Executing Turn-and-Talks

### *An Excerpt from MTR's Handbook on Instructional Methods*

A Turn-and-Talk is exactly what it sounds like: the teacher asks a question, and then prompts students to “turn and talk” to their neighbor about their answer. Another variation might involve students giving and receiving feedback to a peer, or working collaboratively to solve a problem.

Well-planned and executed Turn-and-Talks can have a profound effect on the “Ratio” in your classroom. Ratio, a term coined by Uncommon Schools’ Doug Lemov, is the degree of intellectual work that students are doing in any given moment of a lesson relative to their teacher. A “High Ratio” class is one in which students are engaged and accountable for doing rigorous thinking work over a sustained period of time. The “Student Practice” domain of the Kraken is essentially a measure of Ratio across an entire lesson.

A Turn-and-Talk is a technique that necessitates the teacher getting off stage and turning over more of the intellectual heavy-lifting to the students. You Talk Less + They Talk More = Ratio Win. That’s a good way to move the needle on Student Practice. But Student Practice is only one of four aspects of our vision for effective instruction. Let’s consider the other three:

- Rigor of Target Tasks – How challenging is the task that you assigned students to work on with their peer?
- Thinking Tasks – How does the task of the Turn-and-Talk align with the ultimate goal of your lesson?
- Feedback – How does the teacher assess and respond to the thinking that students generate in a Turn-and-Talk?

Below, we outline the components of Turn-and-Talks that can have a positive effect on *each* domain of the Kraken.

#### **1. Plan Rigorous Thinking Tasks for your Turn-and-Talks**

This is the “give me something to talk about” rule. The technique is NOT called, “Turn and Say One Word.” You need to ensure that the task associated with a Turn-and-Talk demands that students participate in some type of give-and-take conversation.

Some examples of rigorous Turn and Talk tasks include:

- Expressing and defending an opinion. “I believe that \_\_\_ is true, and here’s why.”
- Brainstorming a list of ideas or characteristics. “What are all the possible ways we could solve \_\_\_\_?”
- Making observations and drawing a conclusion. “What do we notice in this \_\_\_\_, and what does that tell us about \_\_\_\_?”

- Evaluating and improving a piece of work. “I think that \_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_ is done effectively, but we can still improve \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.”
- Generating a definition or principles from a set of examples. “I think that the definition of \_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_ based on what I see in \_\_\_\_\_ examples.”

In all of these examples, there’s enough cognitive work to go around that two students could legitimately share the load and both would still get a rigorous mental workout. The thinking tasks are also open-ended enough where two different students might offer two very unique points-of-view on how to tackle the work. Hearing a different perspective causes students to evaluate their own ideas, and also potentially synthesize their response with their partners – both of which result in high levels of thought and engagement.

A Big Kraken Caveat: You will only enjoy the benefits of a rigorous Turn-and-Talk if the work that you’re asking students to do is indeed aligned with the Target Task of your lesson. Perhaps your Target Task calls for students to write a summary of the causes of the French Revolution. Well, they might have a stimulating, challenging Turn-and-Talk exchange with their peers about the causes of the American Revolution...but if that conversation doesn’t somehow help students get around to relating these ideas back to the French...then we don’t have an example of an effective Turn-and-Talk.

## **2. Define the Student Relationship in a Turn-and-Talk**

Planning a quality Turn-and-Talks also means thinking through how pairs of students will engage with one another. The teacher must define that relationship to ensure that students have a clear sense of why they are working together. Their work together is, in and of itself, a particular type of Thinking Task (per the second instructional domain of the Kraken).

Three types of student relationships come to mind, each of which is a different type of Thinking Task (though this is hardly an exhaustive list):

- a) A Teaching Relationship – In this type of Turn-and-Talk relationship, students are responsible for teaching something to their partner. You might use this format when you want students to solidify their understanding of a new concept or definition by having to explain it to someone else. For example, Partner A is assigned to explain a definition or process in her own words while Partner B takes notes, and then they exchange roles with Partner B explaining a different definition or process while Partner A takes notes. The act of teaching in this case helps students internalize the material.
- b) A Collaborative Relationship – In this type of Turn-and-Talk, students are working together to come up with a more complete answer than what they might have formulated on their own. Each is responsible for contributing ideas to the conversation or making their own observations.

- c) A Feedback Relationship – In this type of Turn-and-Talk, students are essentially coaching each other by providing their partner with feedback on a piece of work or an idea. Often a Feedback Turn-and-Talk is preceded by a task that students complete independently so they have something to present to their partner. The teacher also has to take time to make his/her “criteria for success” clear to the students – that is, the specific qualities of excellent work that students should use as the benchmark for giving critical feedback to their classmates. A good Feedback Turn-and-Talk usually includes some type of rubric or checklist that students can use to assess their partner’s work.

### 3. Turn-and-Talk Accountability: Assessment and Feedback

Ok, so now you’ve planned out a brilliantly rigorous and collaborative Turn-and-Talk. But how do you make sure that that conversation doesn’t just evaporate into thin air? What will students do with the content that they generated in their Turn-and-Talk? And how will you assess and respond to their thinking?

The answers to these questions are not only important for extending or deepening what students learn from a Turn-and-Talk. They’re also going to dictate the degree to which your students are invested in future Turn-and-Talk activities. Students need to know that “something will happen” with the ideas they generate in these conversations in order to feel motivated to exert genuine effort during a Turn-and-Talk.

Here are four strategies for boosting student accountability during Turn-and-Talks:

- a) Move and Listen – We’ve seen far too many teachers just sort of hanging out in the front of the room during their Turn-and-Talks - maybe erasing the board or getting the next set of handouts ready. But if you’re not actively circulating among your students and listening to their discussions, you’re missing an opportunity to assess their ideas, give feedback, or ask questions to keep the partner conversation moving. Your physical presence and attentiveness sends an important message about how much you value the activity.
- b) Partner Spotlights – When transitioning from a Turn and Talk to a whole group discussion, you can boost accountability by asking students to spotlight something that they heard or learned from their partner. “Tell us what your partner had to say about \_\_\_\_” is a great go-to move for debriefing a Turn-and-Talk. The more you use that move, the more that your students will internalize the message that they need to listen carefully to their partner’s ideas. You’ll get an even bigger accountability boost if you cold-call students to comment on their partner’s ideas after a Turn-and-Talk. “Tell us what your partner had to say about \_\_\_\_, (insert name of student).”

- c) Write it Down – You can also require students to write down something that their partner shares with them during a Turn-and-Talk. Even the simple act of summarizing their partner’s comments in a single sentence or through a few bullet-pointed notes will help students feel more accountable for actively engaging during a Turn-and-Talk. You can also check that written record later to assess the quality of student engagement and provide targeted feedback.
- d) Synthesis – Possibly the highest leverage accountability move you can make is to ask students to synthesize what they discussed in a Turn-and-Talk in their response to a higher level thinking task. In this case, the ideas generated in a Turn-and-Talk become one component of a more complete thought that students are asked to produce later in the lesson or for homework. Ideally, the synthesis exercise is something that you also collect and assess. Students will then see Turn-and-Talks as an essential building block for higher-level learning.

#### 4. Turn-and-Talk Structure

We just laid out some criteria for **planning** an effective Turn-and-Talk. But even if you get that right, there’s a whole lot that go wrong in the **execution** of this technique.

Here are three things that you must consider about how you structure your Turn-and-Talks:

- a) Who’s Talking – Students need to be clear who they are talking to, how long they should talk, and when/how to transition between speakers. First, you need to think about who’s talking to who when you call for a Turn-and-Talk. Will students just turn to the person right next to them? What about if they’re sitting at tables or in “pods?” What happens if their partner is absent? You can’t waste time sorting out all of these questions whenever you run a Turn-and-Talk. Second, you need to give students clear time parameters for their partner conversations. Are they discussing a question for one minute? Two minutes? Ten minutes? That decision will impact the urgency of their partner work. We also strongly suggest using a timer to help you stick to these time parameters. Third, you may want to assign students to two distinct roles in a Turn-and-Talk (e.g. a Teaching Relationship), so you need a way of communicating that. Lots of teachers designate students as “Partner A” and “Partner B” in order to quickly assign these roles. We’ve heard some creative variations on that as well – e.g. “Door Partners” and “Window Partners” – the former for students who are sitting closest to the door in a classroom, and the latter for students who are sitting near the windows.
- b) Discussion Starters – What can you do to avoid a Turn-and-Talk that looks more like a Turn-and-Stare-Awkwardly-at-Your-Partner? A tight, efficient Turn-and-Talk will get students conversing with one another as quickly as possible, and sustain that conversation until the end of the activity. Oftentimes students need to have on hand a

few stock phrases, sentence starters or question stems that can help move their dialogue forward when they get stuck. Examples include:

- “I agree/disagree with \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.”
- “I’d like to build on that idea by....”
- “So basically, you’re saying....” Or, “The gist of what you’re saying is...”(For summarizing.)
- “Can I clarify what you mean by...”
- “What haven’t we thought of? Are we missing anything?”
- “What is this question/problem asking us to do?”
- “What’s the next step?”

These discussion starters don’t just help maximize your student’s time on task. They also help teach kids how to have high-level academic discourse, which is a worthy goal in and of itself.

c) Transition Position – A tight Turn-and-Talk minimizes the amount of time that’s lost during the transitions in and out of this activity. First, you need to think about your desk or table arrangements. If you plan on having lots of Turn-and-Talks – and we think you should – you need to set-up your classroom so that students have easy access to their partners. Your appetite for this activity will quickly decrease if kids have to drag desks and chairs across the room every time you want them to work with a partner.

Second, depending on the age of your students, you might put a procedure in place for how they physically position themselves for a Turn-and-Talk. For example, an elementary teacher might clap once to signal to her students that they should silently turn and face each other. The students would then pause so the teacher can check to see that everyone completed that step successfully. Next, the teacher would clap two times to signal that it’s time to start the conversation. A procedure like this ensures that everyone is in the right position – sitting up, alert, making eye contact – to jump directly into their conversation.

Third, teachers need some type of cue to signal when partner work has ended. Typically teachers want to transition from a Turn-and-Talk to some type of whole group discussion or independent writing activity. That requires students to move seamlessly from talking to listening or silently writing. You can introduce students to cues like hand-claps, bells, or flicking the lights on and off in order to tightly execute those transitions.