



Mr. Barge's Instructional Tip of the Week! – Avoiding the 1-2-3s

Sometimes we often get stuck in a repetitive routine that prevents us from “letting go” in the classroom. I often call them the “1-2-3s.” That could be the result of not putting enough trust in our assessments. For example ... have you ever assigned your students a reading with some guiding questions or given them a task or problem to solve? You then “circulate with a purpose” to assess student learning. That’s “1.” Then, have you ever followed up with, “OK guys, now pair up and share your answers.” Again, “circulating with a purpose,” you listen to student responses, ask them to explain their thinking, or their classmates’ thinking, and provide feedback. That’s “2.” Then you ask the class to share their answers, once again, during a whole class discussion. That’s “3.”

You then find that almost half the band has gone by where the students are sharing the same answers three times. Sometimes, we even follow up with a 4th step by saying, “OK, let’s jot down some important points that we’ve made and please copy them in your notebooks.”

Let me give a more specific example. I assign a reading on the causes of the Civil War and ask students to write some of the causes from the reading (1). While they are reading, I’m seeing what they are underlining, asking students why they are underlining that information, and reading their list of the causes. Then, after a few minutes, I ask the students to “pair up!” and share their answers with one another (2). After giving them a few more minutes to share (and providing feedback), I then say, “OK everyone, let’s review your findings as a class (3) and elicit responses from the students (the same responses that I heard, and observed, while I was “circulating with a purpose” and saw that the students were clearly understanding the concepts. Of course, if I noticed that they didn’t understand, I would give feedback and/or supports. If I noticed a common obstacle, I would simply check-in and review or model something with the class for clarity so that they can continue with confidence. I might even follow that with a step 4 of writing the causes of the Civil War on the board based on the whole class discussion and instruct them to copy them (again).

The point here is to avoid getting stuck in DOK 2 land. Chances are you planned a rigorous activity/task (DOK 3 or 4) that would have asked students to discuss as a group whether the Civil War could have been avoided and provide evidence to support their arguments. However, being stuck in the 1-2-3 step takes time away from students engaging in the more rigorous task since so much time was spent on eliciting basic information and reviewing that information several times. Trust your assessment. If you see that they are “getting it,” then move on to the rigor.

Keep in mind that this is just one method of increasing rigor in the classroom and trusting your assessment! Please continue your efforts to plan rigorous tasks for your students in your instruction.

*... because at Edward R. Murrow High School, we **CARE** about our students!*