



*The noblest pleasure is
the joy of understanding.*
Leonardo Da Vinci

*My mother said I must
always be intolerant
of ignorance but
understanding of illiteracy.
That some people, unable
to go to school, were
more educated and more
intelligent than college
professors.*
Maya Angelou

CFU Thinking

Checking for Understanding is a fundamental aspect of teaching and learning. Here are a few simple techniques:

How It Works

Defining 'understanding' is tricky; deeply philosophical. Keep it simple in class: Understanding = being able to describe, explain, use and connect ideas, concepts or objects. To know whether your pupils really understand something, collect reliable and relevant evidence from them. Do this through a series of pre-set questions and routine observations. This is CFU Thinking. See below for 6 (of many) CFU techniques.

Knowledge, Skills & Attitudes

In order to understand a new piece of knowledge, an idea, a skill, a concept or a technique pupils need three things: information, feedback and metacognition. They need the facts necessary for understanding; they need to be told that they've understood; and they need to believe/realise for themselves that they understand. Make these three aspects of learning explicit to your pupils as they tackle new material.

Prove It

ASK:

'How can you best prove that you really understand it?'

4 Checks

ASK:

'What is it?'
'What does it relate to?'
'How does it fit in?'
'Why is it important?'

1-10 Scale

ASK:

'On a line from 1 to 10, how well do you understand it?'
(answer n)

THEN ASK:

'Why not n+1?'
'Why not n-1?'

Applications

- New and difficult facts
- New and difficult skills
- New and difficult concepts
- As a set of formative assessment techniques
- As a set of techniques for pupils to use with each other in genuine collaborative activities

Understanding will need repeated revision if it is to embed.

Review key points after 1 hour, 1 day, 1 week, 1 month.

Extensions, Adaptations, Variations

- Develop the idea of a positive error culture so that pupils are comfortable admitting that they don't yet understand.
- Create scripts for pupils to use in order to scaffold their expression of their understanding:
 - I know I understand this because...
 - I know I don't yet understand this because...
 - To understand this better I need to...
 - Because I understand this I can...

Evidencing the understanding younger pupils may require more detailed observation over time if they are less able to express what they know.

Test It Out

Include just one of the six techniques below in your next lesson.

What happened:

Planned Scan

Once pupils are working independently, carry out a predefined scan of 5 areas in the classroom. Include: lowest ability pupil; highest ability pupil, 3 from the mid-range. What does this tell you?

1-10 Line

Pupils draw a line in their books and mark 1 & 10. At set points in the lesson they pause and mark on the line how confident they are in their understanding. Moderate their responses using targeted questions.

Meta-Stand

ASK:

'How do YOU know that you understand this?'

'How would you know if SOMEONE ELSE understands it?'