

Checking for Understanding

Over the past quarter of a century, I have had the pleasure of sitting in lessons watching, critiquing and learning from a wealth of teachers' experiences and expertise. During these times I have experienced laughter, tears, engagement, defiance, innovation, coping strategies, rigidity, following the latest teaching fads, ... and so on. However, every lesson has been a learning opportunity – some ideas and approaches have now become part of my repertoire and others are distinct warnings of what not to do. So thank you to all those teachers who have opened their doors and given me an insight into their sphere of influence/ learning environment/ classroom or whatever else it may be referred to as.

One aspect of good teaching, learning and assessment that stands out for me is where teachers explicitly plan to check for understanding. For some, this may mean marking work after the lesson, tracking students' weekly test scores or even seeing how students have responded to the 'next steps' or 'now try this' activity. However, what I am referring to here is establishing a routine of checking for understanding **during** the lesson, so that the lesson can be adapted (if necessary) to maximise the progress made by all students. By doing this, teachers not only know and target those that are making slower progress, but gain an insight into what may be the underlying misconception or missing knowledge/skill. This type of in-class intervention (Wave 1) is effective as it takes place at the point of need and hence students, more often than not, leave the classroom having experienced success.

Professor John Hattie's research on what has the greatest influence on student learning (referred to as 'effect size') suggests that 'Remediation/feedback' and 'questioning' have an impact of about one GCSE grade. Questioning in the lesson is not simply posing a question, then waiting for sample of hands to go up and picking one of them. For this to be significant formative assessment, Professor Dylan Wiliam suggests that 'ideally **all** students should respond within one minute and teachers be able to view and interpret responses within fifteen seconds'. One way of planning, asking and assessing such effective questions is to use **hinge questions** (to find out more see the AfL section on the improvingteaching.co.uk website). These are generally asked midway through a lesson, so that the formative assessment information can be used by the teacher to adapt the learning.

A hinge question is not the only approach to engage all students in responding to question and answer sessions. Use of mini-white boards, RAG cards, number fans, thumbs up-sideways-down, ... etc. can all be utilised to quickly assess the learning of all students and most importantly provide immediate and effective intervention.

Surinder Panesar

Lead Practitioner – Maths (The Frances Bardsley Academy)