Twenty-Five Terrific Checks for Understanding

Checks for understanding are typically gauges of student understanding and are ungraded and quick. Each of the following strategies can be adjusted to be used as a formative assessment, as well. This will be determined by the grade level, reading level or content complexity, and the intensity of the question prompt. Teachers should first model each CFU or formative assessment for students and release students to complete the tasks on their own when they are familiar with the structure.

1. **Author Sound Off:** Students respond by describing what they think the author's perspective is on a certain topic, citing evidence for their conclusion. This can be adapted for a mathematics or science text as well by having students respond to strategies, habits of mind, or reasoning that the author demonstrates.
2. **What? So What? Now What? Response:** Teachers give students a template to record their thinking on a topic. The What includes only facts. The So What includes the implications of the facts (cause and effect). The Now What is a prediction of future action or a solution to a problem. This is similar to and can be adapted from the template in figure 6.14 (page 127) that we provide for professional collaborative teams.
3. **Weighing In:** Use a two-column notes chart (see figure 3.8, page 48) to list opinions about the content in the left column and a justification for student thinking in the right column. The left column can also be used to record notes, definitions, or any other lesson content, and the right side can be used to record student interpretation, musings, and questions regarding the content.
4. **Mighty Mind Map:** With the use of web tools that create flow charts or diagrams, students create a mind map connected to a teacher prompt or content of their choice. The tool provides students and teachers with a link to access students' thinking processes. Mind map sites could include http://bubbl.us and http://popplet.com.
5. **Dynamite Dialogue:** The teacher or students extract a power-packed passage and express what it means to them. This same strategy can be used for unpacking multistep, open-ended mathematics and science problems as well.
6. **Rationale Race:** This CFU can be done individually or in pairs, triads, or teams. Have students identify at least five of the most interesting, challenging, or controversial ideas found in the content and include a short (one hundred words or fewer) rationale for their thinking. To heighten participation and interest, students, pairs, or groups race to justify their thinking. A judge is assigned to each group to determine which rationale is most convincing, and a point is awarded to the winner. Student engagement is high with this activity.
7. **Extra, Extra! Read All About It!:** Students create an advertisement, editorial, or short news story supported with visuals and powerful text related to the content. For a shorter version, have students create headlines or bumper stickers to summarize the main points of any lesson.
8. **Sensing With Six:** Have students choose six words related to the senses to describe a character, a story, or selected content and justify their choices.
9. **Amazing Analogy:** Students explain their thinking by using a personal analogy.
10. **Poetic Justice:** Students select eight to ten words from a text and create a poem highlighting the chosen words. Students summarize their understanding of the highlighted words. The poem could be adapted to a process or problem-solving strategy in other content areas.
11. **Teacher Tune-Up:** The teacher provides a checklist of criteria for students to make tune-up improvements to their written response and make their thinking tighter. Written responses in mathematics would include explanations and justifications of strategies, procedures, and answers.
12. **Polar Opposites:** Students choose an idea or theory that the author has proposed, and then take opposition to it.

13. **Give It Definition:** Students select a word, phrase, or passage and attach a personal meaning and example to it.

14. **Clear or Muddy Mind:** Students rate their understanding of the assigned content from clear to muddy and identify why there is clarity or confusion.

15. **Sentence Stems:** Students fill in the following sentence stem regarding the lesson. I am frustrated (or *confused*, *excited*, *perplexed*, *intrigued*) by _____ because _____.

16. **Gonna Take You Higher:** Students write seven higher-order thinking questions related to the assigned reading or problem-solving task and exchange their questions with a classmate. They then choose two of the questions they receive to respond to. This requires modeling by the teacher first, but the student investment factor is critical here.

17. **Traffic-Light Response:** The teacher gives the students a prompt, and they respond by holding up a green card when they understand, a yellow card when they are uncertain, or a red card when they do not understand the concept or skill.

18. **Bold Bullets:** Students represent understanding by outlining the major points of an assigned reading by bulleting words or phrases that resonate. Bullets can also be used to have students design or elicit a step-by-step process or as reasoning prompts for a specific mathematics or science topic.

19. **Sticky Points:** Students use sticky notes to annotate a text by identifying notable words, phrases, or passages that they find interesting or confusing in any subject area.

20. **Top 10:** Using humor, students make a list of ten of the most important takeaways from an assignment.

21. **Conference Corner:** Students are paired and select a spot of their choice in the classroom to confer with one another about a teacher-created or student-created question.

22. **Sketch It!:** Have students illustrate new knowledge through visual representation.

23. **Drama:** Choose a complex narrative and have students act out a critical scene from it. This can be adapted to playing charades to have the class guess key vocabulary in any content area, as well.

24. **Masterful Minute:** Students describe the most meaningful component of the lesson in one minute or less.

25. **TED Talks:** Introduce students to a number of TED Talk experiences to provide a model for a successful classroom TED Talk.