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An exploration of formative assessment strategies that can provide constructive feedback on essays written in English as a first additional language

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ABSTRACT

This research explored the formative assessment strategies of giving constructive feedback on essays written in English as an additional language in a South African township school.

Following an action research format, eight lessons were carefully planned and conducted in two Grade 11 English First Additional Language classes. I taught learners in both classes the qualities of a good essay, discussed the assessment criteria and showed them how to plan a reflective essay. The learners wrote two drafts, received individual (written) and whole class (oral) feedback from the teacher and oral feedback from peers after each draft, and then submitted a final essay for marks. The data consisted of learners' essays, my lesson plans and notes, my comments on learners' drafts, evaluation forms and one lesson recording.

Learners' first, second and third essays, my comments and evaluation sheets were analysed. My supervisor and a critical colleague also read and analysed some learners' essays and my comments. The analysis showed that learners' quality of improvement corresponded with the quality of comments I had given.

In conclusion, formative assessment strategies and constructive feedback used in the current study enabled learners to improve the quality of their work as well as promote deep learning. However, giving constructive and dialogical feedback are skills that teachers can only master with time.