

Chapter 3

Formative Virtual Assessment towards Sustainable Foundation Phase Teacher Education Learning Environments

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Abstract

The Minimum Requirements for the Bachelor of Education Foundation Phase Teaching qualification are pitched at the National Qualification Framework – NQF Level 7. Graduates of this qualification are expected to have a sound knowledge at least of the learners in Grade R to 3. This includes their physical, physiological, psychological and sociocultural growth and development so that they can provide them with adequate support. They also have to know the backgrounds they come from, especially the many vulnerabilities that might be afflicting them. These graduates must be competent with theories and applications of language development, mathematics and literacy acquisition of Grades R to 3 learners. As such, they have to be able to manage the experiences of these learners effectively so that learning can be optimised. Unfortunately, due to the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, all this learning has to take place mostly through remote technologies in observance of the lockdown regulations that include social distancing. Assessment under such circumstances has proven to be a huge challenge, which this chapter attempts to grapple with in order to maintain and even enhance its quality. Therefore, this chapter, based on the conceptualisation of assessment *of, for* and *as*

learning, proposes forms of virtual formative assessment strategies geared towards the creation of sustainable Foundation Phase teacher education learning environments. This focus has become necessary, because limited resources like time, skills and requisite human capital at many universities threaten to lead to surface learning where only the bare essentials are learnt and taught. Thus, the paper argues that formative virtual assessment can still reach its goals by complying with the already available NQF level descriptors, as they provide the principles for good teaching.

Keywords: Formative assessment, formative virtual assessment, sustainable learning environments, foundation phase teacher-education, emergency remote teaching and learning technologies

1 Introduction and Background

The Covid-19 pandemic has forced societies around the world to reconsider how they conduct all their affairs (Leach *et al* 2021). In many instances, variations and gradations of the lockdown, from the hard to the soft levels thereof and back, depending on the number of infected people, were instituted. These were aimed at preventing the spread of Covid-19 (Prodjomoeto & Muhyidin 2020). In compliance with these, instances of civil society, where a significant number of people would congregate, were closed down and had to resort to emergency remote measures of conducting their activities (Cairns 2020). Among these are ways in which pre-service teacher education in South Africa in particular is assessed virtually, continuously and formatively (Mashitoe 2020). Summative virtual assessments are still conducted, but in this chapter our focus is on *continuous and formative virtual assessments* that are widely used at most institutions of higher learning where teacher education takes place. Currently teacher education happens remotely through advanced virtual technological platforms that enable academics to design learning outcomes, and facilitate and assess them through a bouquet of strategies mounted on these platforms. The student-teachers who are assessed at their remote homes and/ or usual places of residences, require that assessment also be virtual (Van Schalkwyk 2021).

When the assessment as described above is summative, it means that

it is about determining the final level of competence at which the student-teacher is (Ahmad 2020). It is a form of ultimate assessment that does not provide for any improvement or change of the grade of the level beyond the respective assessment activities themselves (Edwards 2020). On the other hand, formative assessment is more developmental in its approach (Cañadas 2021). It is more or less diagnostic and checks whether learning as envisaged has taken place, including the extent to which it has taken place. The intention here is to provide supportive guidance and motivation towards the ideal performance (Cañadas 2021). This can be described as assessment *for* learning as well as assessment *as* learning, while the summative assessment is the ultimate assessment *of* learning (Price-Dennis & Sealey-Ruiz 2021). An example of assessment *for* learning is where a student is assessed formatively during the lesson to ensure that s/he has learnt a particular aspect and/or unit well, such that s/he can remember what it was all about (Price-Dennis & Sealey-Ruiz 2021). Here assessment is for ensuring that learning has taken place and that students are not merely ‘cruising’ in the class and lesson without any understanding of what is being taught (Cañadas 2021). Assessment *as* learning is very close to assessment *for* learning, because the emphasis here is on assessment being an integral part of what is learnt (Cañadas 2021). The student is assessed in such a way that s/he is able to raise similar questions when s/he ultimately teaches her/his learners, and able to respond to them (Cañadas 2021). In this chapter the focus is on assessment *for* learning and as an opportunity for student-teachers to learn even more how to assess virtually and formatively (Granberg, Palm & Palmberg 2021). The variation of formative assessment which this chapter investigates is the one that is conducted remotely via virtual technologies, as in the university’s chosen Learning Management System like Moodle or Blackboard. Sometimes student-teachers use WhatsApp and other such platforms to access the assessment tasks and to provide answers.

However, concerns have been raised regarding the quality of assessments in these virtual and remote preservice teacher-education interactions (Demir, Bruce-Kotey & Alenezi 2021). These concerns, among others, include the fact that many student-teachers do not have the requisite devices like smartphones and/ or laptops that will enable them to participate in virtual and remote learning and assessments effectively and efficiently. Again, due to unfavourable socio-economic backgrounds at some of their homes, student-teachers sometime struggle to secure the data bundles that are necessary for

their Wi-Fi and internet connectivity (Phillips 2021). Another vexing problems affecting the virtual and remote teaching, learning and assessment is the provision of internet connectivity as well as the availability of electricity, especially to student-teachers learning from their homes located within the contexts described above (Leuthold 2021). Many students – even those who have the necessary devices – sometimes struggle with accessing Learning Management Systems [LMS] used by their universities. Just like their lecturers they require training in the use of these programmes (Price-Dennis & Sealey-Ruiz 2021). They require conducive and quiet spaces where they can learn virtually undisturbed. In some instances, their homes are crowded and/or noisy (Hawkins 2020). They also cannot study, nor be assessed meaningfully virtually because of the household chores they have to perform on a daily basis. In many instances, their parents do not have the skills and knowledge to provide them with support and tutoring while they are at home (Hawkins 2020).

On the other hand, they are totally dependent on their remote lecturers, who are only accessible virtually, and this invariably leads to fears and anxieties, resulting in them resorting to rote memorisation with very limited understanding of what is being learnt (Lancaster & Cotarlan 2021). At times, student-teachers themselves lack the necessary motivation and ‘staying power’ to read and study by themselves. Some are not sufficiently self-regulated, as they easily get distracted (Lancaster & Cotarlan 2021). On top of this, they may also lack the requisite *information literacy skills* to enable them to read, store, retrieve and write with ease in response to their assessment tasks. They may also struggle to manage their time effectively (Lancaster & Cotarlan 2021). Their lecturers further require extensive and intensive training in strategies to teach and assess remotely by means of virtual technologies. This is over and above being able to upload the learning content meaningfully onto the university’s website and/or the LMS. Lecturers require specialised skills to collate and sequence content as well as to facilitate it meaningfully, such that student-teachers can learn ubiquitously without their in-person presence. This content requires that it be uploaded in such a way that it is interesting, accessible and challenging to the students and enables them to achieve the learning envisaged at their level of study (Saleem, Saleem & Batool 2021). Among others, learning content has to be sufficiently interactive and geared to the learning styles of student-teachers in those remote contexts. Lecturers thus have to be competent in terms of virtual and remote learning content, facilitation strategies and assessment thereof. They have to know how to package

the curriculum and its units for virtual and remote delivery and understanding (Nilson & Goodson 2021).

Assessments – whether in person or remote and virtual, summative or formative – in pre-service teacher education programmes are of a varied kind. These depend on the respective programmes' graduate attributes, relevant level descriptors, critical cross-field outcomes, programme and learning outcomes, as well as the theory of teaching and learning adopted therein (Țălu 2019). Furthermore, in the Foundation Phase Teacher Education programmes at the two universities constituting the focus of this study, teaching and learning are organised that the highest levels of learning as captured in Bloom's Taxonomy are achieved. These are operationalised through the Minimum Requirements for the Bachelor of Education Foundation Phase Teaching qualification (Hackmack 2019). These imply that graduates from these programmes are able to know the content and pedagogies of the subject. They are also expected to know the kind of learners they will be teaching, and how they learn. This includes knowing their backgrounds and all relevant contextual factors for their learning. They must know effective classroom management strategies well (Hendricks & Harrison 2020). However, above all, they should be able to analyse, synthesise and evaluate the information and data generated in the areas mentioned above for informed decision-making. Assessment thus involves determining the extent to which student-teachers have advanced towards achieving all these (Hendricks & Harrison 2020).

When the above do not take place, then we are not able to talk about quality in formative virtual assessments. The latter, among many outcomes, also aims at creating sustainable Foundation Phase Teacher Education learning environments (Rus-Casas *et al* 2021). These are attached to, and underline quality maintenance and enhancement, as envisaged in the relevant documents referred to earlier. Sustainable learning environments in this paper are defined as those remote and virtual interactions among lecturers and student-teachers geared towards enhanced learning through formative assessment contexts (Rus-Casas *et al* 2021). Getting closer to the focus of the chapter then, such learning environments are those contexts where, among others, the above take place (Ben-Eliyahu 2021). This chapter, therefore, based on the understanding of assessment *for and as* learning, proposes forms of virtual formative assessment strategies, ensuring and advancing the above in keeping with the Minimum Requirements for the Bachelor of Education Foundation Phase Teaching qualification pitched at NQF Level 7.

Literature Review

In response to the challenges of devices, data and connectivity, the Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET] as the relevant literature demonstrates, has tried almost everything within its power to address some of these through the provision of laptops to all students, especially those coming from remote, rural and/or impoverished backgrounds (Sosibo 2021). Negotiations among the DHET and Eskom, traditional leaders and municipalities in order to provide reliable electricity, is an ongoing concern (Jantjies 2020). Even the data were provided to the student-teachers in terms of the agreements between the DHET, the various universities and the mobile phone companies. Data used for learning and assessment were zero-rated so that the student-teachers would not incur huge costs (Prinsloo & Singh 2021). Students in areas outside the reach of internet connectivity received their study materials on USBs and sometimes in hardcopies delivered to their nearest post offices, churches and police stations in instances where working addresses were not available in rural areas (Jantjies 2020). Over and above these measures, students who could not be accommodated through any of the measures described above were allowed and actually invited to stay in university residences where connectivity was assured (Landa, Zhou & Marongwe 2021). In turn, they were to observe very strict Covid-19 protocols. The students in those rural areas with unreliable connectivity could do their assignments and tests in hardcopy, capture these on their mobile phones using their cameras and then forward them to their respective lecturers. Furthermore, the notion of community classrooms is still just muted, but should the pandemic persist, this could be explored further and formalised (Jantjies 2020). This is an approach whereby the university negotiates with various communities where its student-teachers reside to identify centres or homes in the neighbourhood with reliable internet connectivity where student-teachers could come together during specified periods to access learning materials and be assessed remotely (Tamrat & Teferra 2020).

Participatory and Appreciative Action and Reflection – PAAR as the Theoretical Framework

In order to make sense of the formative virtual assessment strategies gleaned from the literature and the empirical data generated for this paper, we decided

to make use of Participatory and Appreciative Action and Reflection [PAAR] as the theoretical framework couching the study (Ghaye *et al* 2008). This framework focuses on developing insights into the ‘root causes of success and sustaining strengths-based discourses’ (Ghaye *et al* 2008:363; Kenyon 2019; M El Ebyary 2019). As reported in the findings, lecturers managed to mount an effective approach of conducting virtual formative assessments by moving away from summative assessment-oriented approaches. Their strategies focused on what the student-teachers were good at and could achieve, in spite of the pandemic (Ghaye *et al* 2008:364). This represented a departure from high stakes in terms of assessment to focusing on real, practical and demonstrable competencies acquired through learning (Kenyon 2019; M El Ebyary 2019). These strategies, as discussed in detail later in this chapter, are similar to the 10 strategies that Rutgers University adopted during the pandemic. These, as informed by the student-teachers themselves, seemed to have been effective in enabling them to demonstrate their competencies (Earl 2013) in handling Foundation Phase learning, because they allowed all to be creative in using and responding to the quizzes, putting together presentations, using open-book strategies and group projects, including self-review as well as peer-review techniques, among others (Ghaye *et al* 2008). As PAAR dictates, these 10 strategies discussed later in the chapter advocate collective learning where student-teachers collaborate in responding to the assessment tasks like working together to craft a presentation, putting together a group project or responding to the open-book tasks (Ghaye *et al* 2008). These ensured introducing multiple perspectives to the handling and performing of tasks at hand (Ghaye *et al* 2008:368). As PAAR would quip, this enabled the framework to mirror the human experiences closely. The human experiences are not unidimensional, but multi-perspectival, dynamic and geared towards the utilitarian intents (Ghaye *et al* 2008:372). PAAR, as our theoretical framework highlights, enabled our study to unearth practical wisdom of the lecturers and the student-teachers as they still achieved quality in virtual formative assessments in spite of the pandemic and the lockdown, and they continued to move on with their learning. This way of seeing enabled us to develop an understanding that went beyond the challenges of the day presented by remote and virtual learning and assessment, to see how industrious and effective the student-teachers were in acquiring new skills presented in the BEd programme.

This framework also enabled us to develop an appreciative insight into how academics try very hard to maintain high academic standards when for-

mative assessments are conducted, in spite of the huge challenges of doing so remotely and virtually (Kenyon 2019; M El Ebyary 2019). In fact, the entire chapter does not come across from a deficit perspective trying to find fault with how academics at their respective institutions attempt to assess in compliance with the NQF Level 7 criteria. The above implies that formative virtual assessments are looked at in terms of their intent and not so much the percentages and/or marks obtained by student-teachers, although these too are not ignored (Chaaban & Sawalhi 2020; Darling-Hammond, Schachner & Edgerton 2020; Ellis-Hill, Pound & Galvin 2021). Functional knowledge is that knowledge that can be applied and thus be put to better use. Assessments have to lift these out by requiring that students show their appreciation of them, and how they would apply them (Blomkamp 2021; Sargent & Casey 2021).

Methodology and Design

The approach to generate and collect data in this chapter is qualitative. As a starting point we used the academic performance on the five first-semester virtual formative assessment tasks of 10 BEd Foundation Phase student-teachers at each of the two universities in this study. One of the two universities is situated in the northern part of the South Africa, while the other is in the central part. The marks used were averages obtained in the five assessments, as mentioned. One of these universities is located in the rural and predominantly poor part of the country, while the other is in an urban setting with relatively better resources like electricity and access to internet cafes, among others. Student-teachers at both institutions were in their third year of study in the BEd Foundation Phase Teaching Programme (Jansen *et al* 2021; Shaik 2021). These students were chosen randomly on an individual basis, but with an understanding that Foundation Phase Teacher Education is the backbone of any nation. If better ways can be found to continue with, and even strengthen learning and assessment at this level, given the context of the pandemic, almost half of the battle for better education would be won. Student-teachers at this level carry the future of the nation and of the entire humanity in their hands; hence the decision to focus on this cohort in this study.

For ethical reasons, their names and those of their respective institutions are kept confidential. Ethical clearance to conduct the study was obtained from the Faculty Research Ethics Committee where we undertook to protect the identity of the lecturers and student-teachers while focusing on the

patterns of the data emerging. We also promised to anonymise, as far as possible, the identities of the institutions in our study as we strive towards respectful research that does not harm anybody, in whatever manner possible. This included being mindful of, and complying with the Protection of Personal Information Act – PoPIA (RSA 2020), which indicates that personal data should only be included in research and its reports when it is absolutely necessary to reveal them (RSA 2020). In this chapter, there seems to be no need to reveal such.

The 20 students were interviewed via a WhatsApp call by the authors over a four-week period. Like we have indicated, they were selected randomly from the lists of the two institutions, respectively. Their performances were almost similar, irrespective of the institution. Even the manner in which they responded to our questions, which mainly focused on how their formative assessments were conducted during the pandemic and what their views were about them, was almost similar. Each interview lasted between 15 to 30 minutes. We used Ineke Buskens' (2011) Free Attitude Interview Technique where we focused on one question, followed by either the clarifying question or reflective summary. The clarifying question was used where the student-teacher was reluctant to talk about certain issues. This was thus used by way of encouraging more sharing while the summary was used to refocus the conversation when the respondent was digressing (Buskens 2011).

Each interview was transcribed verbatim and the data were analysed using Teun Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analytic Technique (Johnson & MacClean 2020) that enabled us to focus on the spoken word as text and then to deepen the analysis further at the discursive practice level until we got to the socio-structural level of analysis (Johnson & MacClean 2020). In the actual practice of the analysis, these levels were not applied separately. We moved from one level to the next and back until the meaning became clearer. This analysis and interpretation are thus also guided by the PAAR, which alerted us to be sensitive to the strong points of the student-teachers, and to valorise those good points away from the negativity of the pandemic and the fears it engendered in terms of remote teaching and assessment.

Findings

When analysing the formative virtual strategies that were used at both universities, they seemed similar to the 10 suggested and actually used at

Rutgers University (2021), which we use in this chapter as basis to organise our discussion and presentation of our findings on. These 10, while not exhaustive, present the most effective and widely used by many academics at these two universities in particular.

Series of Quizzes

The most popular mode of formative virtual assessment was the use of quizzes during synchronous and asynchronous teaching, according to the student-teachers. In order to captivate and sustain the interests and focus of the student-teachers, the lecturer would occasionally present a quiz to test the student-teachers' levels of comprehension, understanding and retention of the subject-content. The quizzes were easy to mark and provided feedback almost immediately. Student-teachers also expressed their likes and preferences for this mode of assessment, as they argued that it kept them on their toes. The quizzes were not made up only of recall questions, although most of them were. What is important is that they were, and had to be pitched at the level that would show the understanding of Foundation Phase learners' levels of cognitive functioning and general emotional development.

Student-developed Quiz Questions

The quizzes referred to above were designed by lecturers. However, the student-teachers were also given the opportunity to design such as they too were aspirant teachers. They were required to collaborate online as they discussed different questions. This looked like play – as some of the student-teachers explained – but they found them challenging and forced them to read far more than they would otherwise have done, because they had to formulate the questions and know the answers that were almost correct and most similar, with only one of them being the most correct. Formulating these quizzes generated a lot of debate as well as 'to-and-fro' reflections when small teams of student-teachers disagreed and sometimes reached consensus on which question(s) to include and which to exclude. This created the golden opportunity for the student-teachers to know more about their subject content from a multiplicity of perspectives. The student-teachers concurred that they had to be creative as they designed new questions, and that they had to find good reasons for choosing one question over others.

Open-book, Take-home Assessments

Formative virtual assessments created more and more opportunities for the use of the open-book and take-home modes. Although some students thought that these would be easy, because they could just refer to some pages and then pick an answer, this proved not to be the case. When open-book and/or take-home assessments were given, the academics had to make sure that most questions would only be those of the highest cognitive order. Such questions would require that more than one source of information is used and that the answer is an integration of multi-layers of data presented in a very sophisticated manner. The open-book and take-home assessments required that student-teachers should think long and hard about the responses they would provide.

Professional Presentations or Demonstrations

Formative virtual assessments gave students the opportunity to really go out of their normal way and become innovative. They were sometimes required to provide interesting and convincing presentations to their peers and the wider audience. The amount of preparation required involved being familiar with a number of media to create particular effects. These were in the form of pictures, videos and songs that would appeal to particular emotions on the part of the Foundation Phase learners in order to make a point. The presentations and demonstrations online refined their skills as teachers, especially of young children in need of excitement through colour, movement and song.

Annotated Anthology or Bibliography

All the above forms of assessments required that student-teachers were able to compile an annotated anthology and/or bibliography. The critical skill that would be cultivated and assessed was information literacy, which involved making pithy, but useful notes so that information could be stored and retrieved with ease. Student-teachers would be required to work out lists of readings on particular relevant topics and themes to show that they do have such important information management skills. It would not be easy to cheat when a student-teacher is required to demonstrate that he/she does have the skills. They had to know what is important and relevant. This could only happen when they could read extensively and intensively to know who the thought leaders are in some area of learning and/or discipline.

Fact Sheet

Sometimes bibliographies are preceded by fact sheets. The latter could be a one-pager summarising an important point or so. Academics would sometimes require of the student-teachers to read on a given topic thoroughly and then summarise the ideas succinctly in a page. The student-teachers confirmed that it was easier to write a long piece and not a one-pager. A one-pager demanded that the student-teachers knew a lot about their subject content, and that they could summarise all neatly without the need for superfluous words.

Peer- and Self-review Activity

Formative virtual assessments shall have achieved their objective when student-teachers individually and collectively could review themselves, such that they could propel themselves and their peers to the next level of performance (Mouza 2021). Self-assessment is one of the hardest aspects of learning because they test one's integrity and demands that one does a thorough introspection and self-reflection. This can be done on almost any activity and every day in order to deepen reflection and understanding without being judged by others (Virarkar *et al* 2021). However, it could also be an indication of the level of the maturity of the student-teacher when he/she can expose him- or herself for review and critique by peers so that she/he can learn from such experiences. As a peer being reviewed by others, one provides support to her/his peers by being 'a guinea-pig' for others to learn to become better versions of themselves. At the same time, the self that is reviewed is pushed to even higher levels of being, such that it can model for the rest what good performance could be about (Virarkar *et al* 2021).

E-Portfolio

All the above-mentioned formative virtual assessments require a clear, logical and long-lasting mode of 'storing' which the e-portfolio provides (Misdi 2020). This could be a deliberate effort on the part of the student-teachers to collect, collate and compile such a portfolio on all artefacts of their work. Such a portfolio requires that it should be informed by a particular self-chosen, but relevant philosophy of teaching, followed by materials produced in pursuance thereof as evidence (Yu 2012). An e-portfolio is normally organised logically so that all aspects thereof are detailed in terms of evidence, which will be

submitted at any given time that such an activity is to be assessed thoroughly. Various aspects of the work are captured in the portfolio in a logical manner that can demonstrate what has been achieved over, say a month, a quarter, a semester or even a year (Das 2021).

Non-Traditional Paper or Group Project

In our view, as informed by the student-teachers, the best form of assessment involves the project and all the artefacts that student-teachers can produce out of that. It is best to see the actual artefact in action. According to the student-teachers, the project must be real and collaborative without minimising the inputs of all. It must be functional and assist them all to respond to a real-life problem from the teaching and learning virtual lessons (Chaaban & Sawalhi 2020). The group project provides all with the opportunity to work together and to showcase best practice. Through the project all members are also given the opportunity to work in a community of peers, to debate and defend a self-chosen position. A rubric is reported to be the most effective as basis for assessment and justification of grading students' work remotely and virtually (Smith-Hawkins 2021).

Discussion

We have already indicated elsewhere in this chapter that the student-teachers and their lecturers need a thorough induction and training in the use of virtual technologies for the above discussed teaching, learning and assessment to be effective (Rahman 2021). Sufficient asynchronous lessons and materials can be posted online or posted via LMS, and these could be followed up by means of live synchronous and interactive teaching activities. Kanjee (2020), using Wiliam and Thompson's ideas (2007), proposes a strategy which served as basis for what we are arguing for in this chapter. In this way, the students can be taken by the hand by the experts through various pre-arranged learning processes. Literature emphasises that lecturers should always take student-teachers in their confidence when it comes to the processes of teaching and learning (Köksal 2019). This means that the lecturer should explain exactly what the learning outcomes of a particular module, unit and lesson are going to be. This should be linked to how the lecturer will take the student-teacher around the learning of each outcome, specifying the minimum required media

and directing and/or providing them to the student-teachers for them to interact with them accordingly (Malm 2020). The lecturer also has to explain what the criteria for assessment of each of the outcomes and learning facilitation strategies are. The lecturer should try all forms of media to reach the diversity of student-teachers learning remotely (Wang, Clarke & Webb 2019). The lecturer must have high up on the agenda the fact that the student-teachers will be on their own, without immediate access to any form of support. This implies that the lecturer will demystify and simplify all learning content so that the student-teacher can gain confidence in a gradual and graded manner as she/he masters subsequent units in the module by himself/herself remotely, with an occasional support (Korucu-Kis & Ozmen 2019). The lecturer should clearly highlight what the student-teacher should do in order to demonstrate mastery. It should not be some hazy idea that cannot be measured and accessed (Kim 2020).

The lecturer should use SMART evidence which is specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and time bound so that everybody would know what will be assessed and how that will be assessed (Ivars-Baidal *et al* 2021). Especially during asynchronous sessions, the lecturers must use accessible language that all student-teachers can understand (Dassa & Nichols 2020). Different media to achieve these could be used, such as pictures, photographs, videos, tables and graphs, icons, etc. These lessons should be recorded for unlimited re-use and/or replay by the student-teacher, who may otherwise miss something. Under these circumstances, lecturers use the techniques and questions that will encourage student-teachers to be involved and to take part and actually engage at his/her highest levels of thinking (Dalinger *et al* 2020). All questions should be based on what the lecturer promised at the start of the lesson. All the time lecturers must ensure that they provide prompt and individualised feedback to enable the student-teachers to learn therefrom as well as from the mistakes that shall have been corrected (Dalinger *et al* 2020). This could be arranged in some kind of a loop that feeds back during the synchronous class sessions as well as asynchronously through assignments and test reports. Assessment feedback should avoid generalised feedback, but it also must be by means of the SMART approach. The lecturers' feedback should focus on content as well as on the effective processes of learning (Ivars-Baidal *et al* 2021).

The student-teachers also have to be empowered to become equally contributing members of the learning community by being given the

opportunities to assess their peers both synchronously during the lectures facilitated virtually and asynchronously on written assessment tasks (Du Plessis 2020). They should be in a position to assign a grade to their peers' work and be able to defend how they arrived at that grade. The opportunity for peers to provide feedback should enable the lectures to be lively with debate remotely, emphasising the diversity of the student-teachers' perspectives and interpretations (Barrable, Touloumakos & Lapere 2020). The aim is to enhance student-teachers' learning through enabling them to assume both their own positions and those of their peers. This strategy has proven to enhance understanding among all student-teachers even more. Student-teachers should also be given the opportunity to assess their own work honestly and critically. This enhances the student-teachers' reflective and reflexive powers, which in turn strengthen their understanding further (Thomas & Molina 2020). They learn to take responsibility for their own learning and their self-chosen positions thereon. They are also enabled to defend their points of view, as well as allow one's voice to come through and be heard (Wheatcroft 2020).

Conclusion

The discussion above has demonstrated that unconventional ways of formative assessment can be adopted to maintain and enhance teaching and learning at any institution, irrespective of its geographical location or band. This virtual assessment can be continuous and formative or even summative in many instances where the grade is afforded for particular levels of performance. Teacher-preparation for the Foundation Phase is a professional training enterprise that requires that graduates should show particular demonstrable skills that the strategies presented above can be assessed effectively without lowering the academic standards. The above strategies managed to deconstruct any notion of cheating, because collaboration and consultation of authoritative sources were strongly encouraged. A higher premium was placed on collaboration, compassion, creativity and critical thinking than on memory and regurgitation.

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