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Understanding the Benefits of Providing Feedback: Improving Letter Writing Ability by Providing Specific Feedback

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Abstract: While substantial evidence has demonstrated the effectiveness of peer assessment, how peer assessment—more specifically, providing feedback—contributes to learning is unclear. To explain why providing feedback improved kindergarten students' letter writing ability, we examined whether teaching students how to provide specific feedback drew their attention to key features of letter formation and thus resulted in fewer errors. Students participated in a 16-week intervention where they were taught to provide specific feedback relating to the place, size, and shape of the letters. Data from 62 students (22 who received whole-class instruction, 22 who received small-group instruction, and 18 control) were coded. The amount and types of errors made on a letter writing task at pretest and posttest were analyzed to determine whether providing feedback decreased the amount of specific errors, and whether improvement in letter writing was positively related to the cognitive processes of problem identification and diagnosis.