

Feedback and Assessment in the New Kindergarten Teacher Education in Norway

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Abstract This paper investigates the feedback and assessment routines that are being established in the subject of pedagogy in the new model of Kindergarten Teacher Education (Barnehagelærerutdanning – BLU) in Norway. This scope is chosen due to the particular role of the subject of pedagogy in strengthening the understanding of the practice field, and in ensuring a coherent, professionally oriented perspective. The data comprise group interviews with three pedagogy teachers, two pedagogues from in-service kindergartens and one interview with one student. The gathered data were analysed according to guidelines for qualitative content analysis [1], and interpreted in the light of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). Results show that pedagogues both at BLU and in-service kindergartens experience many challenges connected to formative assessment and feedback practice: (a) a tacit, private and low-priority assessment culture; (b) current practice characterized by summative assessment methods; and (c) minimal collaboration between involved participants. In conclusion, the paper suggests the following improvements in the area of feedback and assessment in the new BLU: (a) establishing a closer and more reciprocal collaboration between all participants; (b) encouraging a shared understanding of central goals and methods in formative assessment, and (c) increasing the status of assessment work and ensuring time resources to involved teachers.

Keywords EEC-teacher Education, Formative Feedback and Assessment, Higher Education

1. Introduction

Feedback and assessment are central elements in developing students' capacity to learn, in becoming aware of their own learning process, and in taking responsibility for their own learning process. As a teacher at the Kindergarten Teacher Education (Barnehagelærerutdanningen – BLU) at Western Norway University of Applied Sciences (HVL), I

have experienced that the routines for feedback and assessment may be dependent on the capacities of the individual teacher. The development of the new BLU gives a unique possibility to investigate the characteristics of BLU teachers' and students' attitudes, ideals and established practice regarding feedback and assessment.

This article investigates the feedback and assessment routines that are being established in the new BLU at HVL. According to the current academic regulations for the new Kindergarten Teacher Education, pedagogy is a subject that ensures continuity between all areas of knowledge, and the subject has a particular responsibility for students' progression and professional orientation [2]. Hence, the main focus of the article is on the role of the subject of pedagogy in feedback and assessment routines. Furthermore, the article suggests improvements that may strengthen students' multidisciplinary learning and professional orientation. The article relies on results from an ongoing *intern research project* regarding established feedback and assessment routines at HVL.

1.1. National Regulations for BLU

The kindergarten teacher education in Norway is a three-year bachelor's degree organized at the national level. It is grounded in international and national legislation [3, 4], which advocates a positive view on children's dignity, rights and status in society. Official statistics show that 91% of all children aged 1–5 years were attending kindergarten in Norway in 2016 [5], which underline the societal significance of kindergartens. The education reform entails that kindergarten teacher education has gone from a study model compounded of nine independent subjects and pedagogy, to a model where the pedagogy subject is integrated into six multidisciplinary areas of knowledge. These areas are; (a) children's development, play and learning, (b) society, religion, beliefs and ethics, (c) language, text and mathematics, (d) art, culture and creativity, (e) nature, health and movement, and (f) leadership, co-operation and development. The regulations for BLU §§ 1 and 3 emphasize the responsibility of the subject of

pedagogy for the progression and professional orientation of kindergarten teacher students. The education should provide students with high levels of academic / professional, social, didactic and ethical competencies in pedagogical work with children, and emphasize pedagogical leadership. Moreover, the education should stimulate critical reflection and professional understanding, as well as place the kindergarten and kindergarten teacher in a societal context, providing a historical, present and forward-looking perspective on the profession [2]. Thus, professional orientation encompasses the development of complex professional competencies, role awareness, sense of social responsibility, and capacity for critical reflection. It is appropriate to relate this to the regulations for assessment, as feedback in class and field practice is essential for the students' progression and professional orientation. The national regulations for BLU emphasize that the assessment shall help students to connect the dots between practice and theoretical knowledge, to see the connection between different areas of knowledge, and to contribute to learning and personal development [6]. Coherence in the kindergarten teacher education requires that subject teachers, pedagogy teachers, in-service teachers, and kindergarten managers alike take responsibility for guidance and assessment of students in field practice [6].

This article sheds light on students', pedagogy teachers', and in-service teachers' perspectives on established feedback and assessment routines. This scope is chosen due to the particular role of the subject of pedagogy in strengthening the understanding of the practice field, and in ensuring a coherent, professionally oriented perspective.

1.2. Existing Knowledge

There is a general agreement that feedback and assessment are essential for students' learning and development [7-17], but authors also point out that much assessment work is still characterized by control rather than focus on learning. Several authors [7-11, 15-17] emphasize the importance of establishing a cooperation and learning oriented assessment culture, known as formative assessment, as an alternative to the traditional summative assessment culture. However, formative assessment represents a paradigm shift in education. Time, resources, view of learning, routines for cooperation, assessment methods and assessment culture are emphasized as core implementation challenges that need to be discussed by teaching staff and management [11, 16, 17]. Lopez-Pastor and Sicilia-Camacho include both English and Spanish articles in their review of studies on formative and shared assessment in higher education. They highlight that although there is an extensive body of research supporting the notion that formative and shared assessment practices enhance students' learning and professional development, their review reveals that the implementation of such feedback and assessment practices have proven difficult [8]. Schneider and Preckel have conducted a meta-analysis on students' achievement in higher education, focusing on both teaching and assessment practices. One of their findings is

that assessment practices are of similar importance as teaching practices for students' achievement in higher education. The assessment practices they point out as crucial, are all associated with formative assessment practices [7]. Evans [10] has conducted an extensive review on feedback in higher education from 2000 – 2012. Researches from the past decade on feedback and assessment have produced a growing body of evidence for good feedback practices. However, the review also renders visible that the art of assessment and feedback is complicated, and that this field of research and practice needs more nuanced empirical evidence. Furthermore, Evans points to a lack of implementation of good strategies in higher education, and that both student and lecturer dissatisfaction with feedback and assessment is well documented. Evans also discusses the issue of “the feedback gap” – although students are presented with high quality feedback, not all will benefit. William [15] has conducted a review on the role of assessment on teachers' professional orientation, which shows that formative forms of assessment appear to have the largest impact on students' learning outcome. William [15] points out that assessment is a crucial bridge between teaching and learning. Formative assessment focuses on encouraging the students' abilities in “learning to learn” by involving them as active participants in the learning process, and by revealing what they have already learned and applying this in further learning. William emphasizes five key strategies in formative assessment: (a) to clarify, share and understand the learning outcome and criteria for success; (b) to develop effective classroom discussions, activities and assignments that evoke evidence of the students' progression; (c) to give feedback that progresses learning; (d) to make the learners become each other's instructors and supervisors; and (e) to help the students gain ownership of their knowledge [15].

The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT) is responsible for documenting and spreading information about the condition of higher education in Norway [18]. NOKUT has since 2013 documented that students in higher education are the least pleased with individual attention from teachers, feedback, guidance and complicity [19]. Studiebarometeret 2015 [20] shows the same tendency among kindergarten teacher education students at HVL. The Research Group for BLU, which investigates the implementation of the new BLU, has demonstrated challenges associated with assessment in multidisciplinary areas of knowledge. They point out that the subject of pedagogy has academic, practical and economic challenges in assessment, since the subject is intertwined in all areas of knowledge [21].

Students' lack of satisfaction with feedback and assessment, as well as their lack of understanding for how assessment plays a role in their own learning and motivation, might be connected to the assessment culture in higher education. Hamberg, Bakken, and Dammen [22] conclude that the institutions need to raise awareness of the educational value of feedback, and strengthen feedback and

assessment work, beginning from the first academic year [22]. These findings suggest that both BLU and university colleges in general have challenges connected with routines for feedback and assessment.

1.3. Research Question, Main Goals and Theoretical Framework

In the light of the mentioned regulations, current situation and existing knowledge, the following research questions emerged: (a) how do students, in-service pedagogues and pedagogy teachers perceive established assessment routines in BLU? (b) what significance do they perceive feedback and assessment to have for students' professional orientation?

The overall goal of the study was to increase the understanding of the feedback and assessment routines that promote BLU students' progression and professional orientation. By identifying participants' perspectives on feedback and assessment, I wish to contribute to the development of feedback and assessment routines adapted to the distinctive features of BLU.

The research questions require a theoretical framework that may contain the complex interplay between assessment routines in class and field practice, and also allow an overall analysis of the perspectives of the three participant groups. The Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) is well suited for analysis of phenomena in their natural context [23], and helps to analyse the relationship between what people think and feel, and what they do. CHAT relies on Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory (first generation), Leontjev's elaboration of the activity concept (second generation), and Engström's extensions (third generation) [23]. CHAT emphasizes mediating artefacts and the role of the linguistic, social, cultural and historical contexts in human activity, development and construction of meaning [23]. Physical and psychological mediating artefacts are central to both human learning and cultural development, and the cultural artefacts that are implemented will form human activities [24, 25]. The cultural-historical theory framework implies a belief in the human ability to reform both artefacts and established cultures [24]. As such, CHAT allows analysing how established feedback and assessment routines (mediating

artefacts) impinge on both pedagogues and students, as well as analysing their views on development of established practice. According to Engström, the third generation of CHAT analysis is developed for studying collective activity and systems development [23].

2. Materials and Methods

The study has a qualitative design, and combines the auto-ethnographic and cultural-historical approach because the intention has been to study, analyse and contribute to further development of the feedback and assessment routines that I myself take part in as a teacher at BLU. The auto-ethnographic approach implies a recognition and appreciation of the researcher's involvement in the cultural phenomena that are investigated [26, 27]. The cultural-historical perspective implies that the attention is directed towards the entirety and complexity of social activity systems [24], and requires that I apply the CHAT analysis model to understand students', in-service pedagogues' and pedagogy teachers' apprehensions of the established and desired practice. In CHAT analysis, the context is viewed as an activity system that integrates object, subject, and physical and psychological artefacts, see Fig 1. In this study, the object is feedback and assessment routines in BLU. The subject is the responsible participants who act. The primary subjects in this study are pedagogy teachers and in-practice pedagogues, since they have formal assessment responsibility at the university college and in field practice. The rules include explicit and implicit rules, regulations, norms, conventions and resources. The mediating artefacts represent feedback and assessment methods and ideas concerning these methods. The community is all the participants who take part in feedback and assessment. The division of labour includes both the horizontal and the vertical division between participants in the community. In Fig. 1, the circles in the middle illustrate the interaction about feedback and assessment between pedagogy teachers and in-service pedagogues in the two activity systems: University College and Practice Kindergarten.

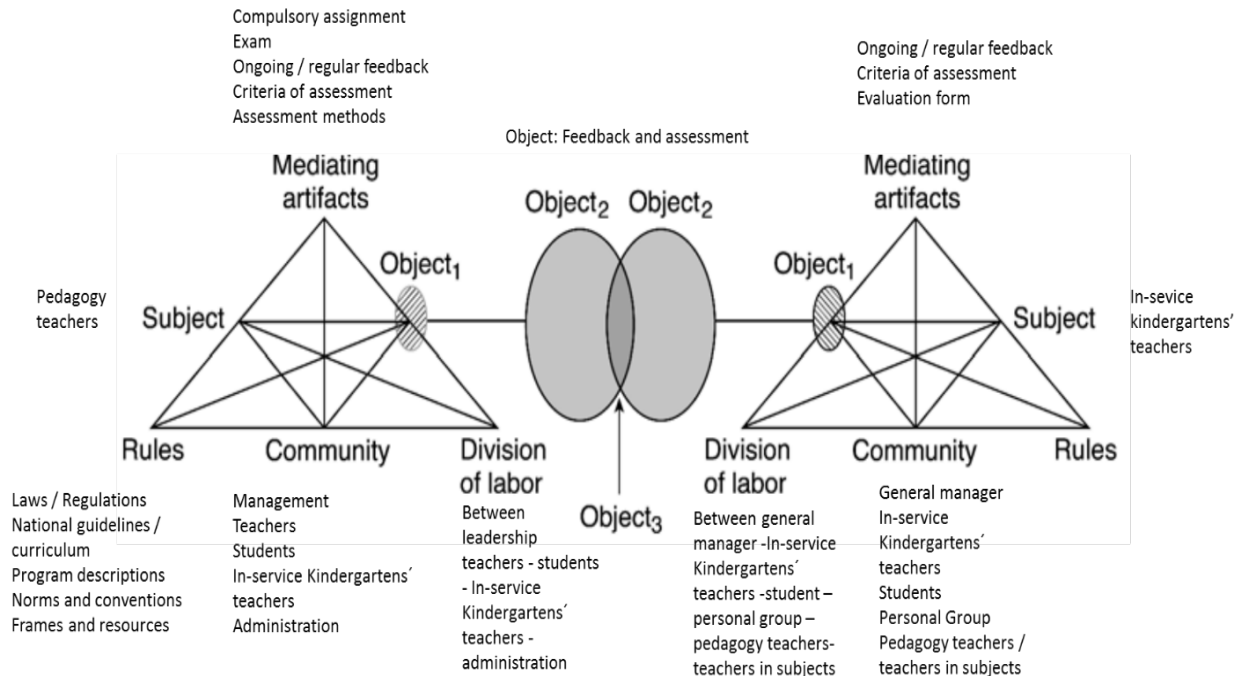


Figure 1. Two interacting activity systems; University College and Kindergarten (18, p. 136).

2.1. Data Collection and Interview Guide

Data was collected by focus group interviews with three pedagogy teachers, two in-service pedagogues, five third-year students, as well as one in-depth interview with one third-year student, in January–April 2016. Focus groups are data collection with group discussions on the subject [28]. The method was chosen because the group dynamics between participants allows exchange of views and new understanding for both research participants and researcher. Bohnsack [29] emphasizes the value of directing the analysis towards the participants' dynamics, interaction, mimic and communication, as tacit knowledge often is shared non-verbally. The focus groups with pedagogy teachers and in-service pedagogues respectively, invited open exchange, discussion and interaction about feedback and assessment routines in their respective environments. The focus group with five students was conducted at HVL by another pedagogy teacher. What the group conveyed concerning feedback and assessment was analysed and used as the basis for the in-depth interview with one student.

Interviews were conducted with an open interview guide containing the following themes: (a) the concept of professional orientation; (b) feedback and assessment of compulsory assignments and exams; (c) feedback and assessment in field practice; (d) hallmarks of good assessment practice (e) other about feedback and assessment. Theme (b) was not discussed with in-service pedagogues, as this lies outside their responsibility. All interviews were recorded and transcribed to ensure a transparent analysis.

2.2. Sample

The NSD Data Protection Official approved the study in

December 2015. A strategic sample was made of students, in-service pedagogues and pedagogy teachers. Inclusion criteria: (a) active third year students from the class of 2013; or (b) active pedagogy teachers and in-service pedagogues with experience from all levels in both new BLU and the old Kindergarten Teacher Education, and (c) the participants were recruited from the same environment and knew each other. Exclusion criterion: No third-year students from my own classes.

All participants gave informed consent. A sample was put together from all groups. Three pedagogy teachers (all women) and two in-service pedagogues (one man and one woman) participated. All had at least 6 years of experience, had education at the bachelor or master level, had wide kindergarten experience, and were in the age range of 39–59 years old. Six students (4 women, 2 men) participated. None were from my own classes. All were from the class of 2013, and in the age range of 22–26 years old.

2.3. Analysis

The transcribed interviews were analysed according to the directions for qualitative content analysis [1]. After the first perusal, a content analysis was made for each interview with the following structure:

- theme in interview guide
- natural units / quotes
- preliminary themes
- categorizing / theorizing.

An open and inductive category development [1] was emphasized. Based on these categories, a comparative analysis of preliminary themes and categories from each

group was performed. At this point, the research problem and CHAT-analysis model were used deductively in the analysis of preliminary themes and categories. A limitation of deductive analyses is that the analysis model may influence the interpretation and emphasis of central findings. Consequently, critical reflection was emphasized in the analysis process. In my view, a limitation of the CHAT analysis model is the danger of creating a static division between main areas and activity systems. In reality, they appear to be overlapping areas, and together they constitute the assessment culture as a whole, with rules, norms, framework, ideals, assessment tools and cooperation routines in field practice and class. For this reason, emphasis was put on the entity and interaction of the feedback and assessment routines that appear across the activity systems.

The categories that emerged turned out to be concurrent in the three samples. The results could be divided into two main categories: the established, and the ideal / suggested. The findings within the two main categories were organized according to the areas of the CHAT analysis model: rules, mediating artefacts, community, and division of labour.

The data contained themes not included in the analysis, as they were outside the scope of the research question.

2.4. Preconceptions and Reflexive Objectivity

I have a dual role as both participant and researcher in the investigated feedback and assessment practice. Thus, it is important to clarify my own preconceptions and connection to the phenomenon. This is referred to as reflexive objectivity [30], which is best attended to by critical reflection concerning own contributions in the production of knowledge. As a lecturer in pedagogy, I have first-hand knowledge of the feedback and assessment practice that are currently under establishment. My preconceptions consist of both experiences of mastery, and opinions concerning challenges in the implementation of new assessment criteria and assessment tools at BLU. The experiences of mastery are

connected to positive feedback from students, such as: “It was instructive to use the assessment criteria in peer assessment” and “I learned a lot from this feedback”. In my opinion, challenges have primarily been due to scarce resources and differing feedback and assessment practice among teaching staff. This closeness represents a limitation if I allow my experiences to guide what to be considered as main findings. First-hand experience may also be a strength because it may help perceive and interpret subtle signals during the interviews [29]. In the current study, my closeness helped me interpret nonverbal signals during interviews, such as laughter when in-service pedagogues discussed assessment forms, mimic when pedagogy teachers discussed the tacit assessment culture, and pauses when students tried to remember feedback from teachers at HVL.

3. Results

3.1. Main Findings in Comparative Analysis

The main findings are first presented in Table 1 for a quick overview. Subsequently, the main findings are described and illustrated with quotes to render visible the informants’ voices. Regarding quotes from students, only quotes from the in-depth interview are included in this article, as these are representative for all students who were interviewed. All names are fictional.

Table 1 gives an overview of the main findings in the comparative analysis of the three groups’ perspectives of feedback and assessment routines at BLU. The main findings are structured within the CHAT model’s four areas (vertical axis) and the two main categories (horizontal axis), which show the groups’ collective views on feedback and assessment routines in BLU. The analysis revealed that the groups have coinciding views of established and ideal / suggested assessment practice.

Table 1. Main findings: Perspectives on feedback and assessment routines at BLU.

	The established (object)	The ideal / suggested (object)
Rules	Tacit, private. Scarce resources, low priority. Progression and professional orientation: Undermined.	Student activation, process and development-oriented norms. Time resources and prioritization. Progression and professional orientation through strengthening the pedagogy subject.
Mediating artefacts	Primarily summative methods. Not stated and described. Ambiguous assessment forms in field practice.	Current, student activating, self-reflexive and process oriented feedback. Resource and development oriented assessment routines.
Community	Students: Satisfied with the in-service pedagogues. All groups: Miss closer community.	Reciprocal action between all participants.
Division of labour	Students: Satisfied with field practice, want closer interaction with teachers at HVL. In-service pedagogues and pedagogue teachers: Miss closer cooperation between all teachers.	All groups: Reciprocal action between all participants in the two activity systems. Exchange information and cooperate.

3.2. The Established

The pedagogy teachers describe the current rules or assessment culture as tacit and private. *Mm, it's way too much tacit* (Nora, pedagogy teacher). *I think we who teach pedagogy give written feedback?* (Emma, pedagogy teacher). *I think that we cannot talk about a common, we might have some criteria but (goes silent)* (Nora, pedagogy teacher). *Yes (whispers and nods)* (Anne, pedagogy teacher). *(...) so there exist as many practices as individuals* (Nora, pedagogy teacher).

Furthermore, they express that prioritizing of assessment is dependent on the teacher's consciousness towards students. *But I can't live with being careless with those who will become the kindergarten teachers for the next generation* (Nora, pedagogy teacher). *I'm thinking that it is important to give that feedback because they (the students) are in a learning process, and it is that feedback that hopefully brings them further* (Anne, pedagogy teacher). *We (pedagogy teachers) have a kind of ethical way of thinking that we shall support the student, so therefore we do it proper* (Emma, pedagogy teacher).

Both groups of teachers express that the current rules and frames are characterized by scarce resources for feedback, assessment and guidance, which limit their assessment practice. *Ok, yes, we have three supervisions during the three weeks that they are here. (...) Well they are here too little.* (Liv, in-service pedagogue). *We probably put more work down than we have resources for* (Anne, pedagogy teacher). *It is a very time consuming process, this is, when you have 32 or 34 or 38 students in one class and everybody shall receive good feedback on everything* (Emma, pedagogy teacher). *(...) it's the resources that hinder a more process-oriented way of working with them (the students)* (Anne, pedagogy teacher).

The two groups of teachers emphasize that the purpose of progression and professional orientation is undermined in the education and in assessment routines. *(...) we are an attachment to all the credits here and there.* (Anne, pedagogy teacher). *It is sort of some conflicts connected to how one can follow the students in a kind of professional development* (Emma, pedagogy teacher). *In the assessment form I would have emphasized the kindergarten teacher role more (...) Yes, it was a bit more concentrated when they had the specialization model (...) the students were better at seeing the whole picture back then* (Tor, in-service pedagogue).

They state that the subject of pedagogy has become fragmented after integration in the multidisciplinary areas of knowledge. *And then it is the fact that pedagogy shall be integrated in all the areas of knowledge, and that we have made exams that works more or less according to that* (Anne, pedagogy teacher). *I really agree that there is a fragmentation too, and when it comes to practice, it is a consequence of speaking different languages* (Nora, pedagogy teacher). *I feel that the students can't see the red line that goes through the way to act, and the way to work, and the view of children, and the cooperation with*

colleagues, and the whole package (Liv, in-service pedagogue).

Students and pedagogy teachers express that the most used mediating artefacts for assessment of compulsory assignments and exams are characterized by summative forms of assessment, and that they doubt the educational value. Both groups give few descriptions of use/experience with a range of assessment routines. *It was passed / not passed. (...) Yes, hmm, I really need to think back* (pauses). *(...) And ideally, it might not be the most useful* (Eli, student). *Because the students only get passed / not passed, and that is something to discuss according to assessment* (Anne, pedagogy teacher). *For all the written work, I think I use its learning (digital learning platform) and written feedback. On oral tests, I give oral feedback, I think* (Emma, pedagogy teacher).

The pedagogy teachers report that they give thorough written feedback on compulsory assignments, but emphasize that they feel alone in it. *I access the students' essays on its learning (digital learning platform), put it in. We give assessments both in the document and we have a general assessment because the students actually ask for this* (Emma, pedagogy teacher). *(...) I write the comments directly in the essay (...) I bring out what is good, and what they should have done more of* (Anne, pedagogy teacher). *(...) and it is a bit alarming, when they get the feedback, and then they say, "we haven't gotten this before!" (...) They've only gotten passed / not passed without the feedback* (Anne, pedagogy teacher).

Both groups of teachers express displeasure with the assessment forms for field practice. *When we presented the assessment criteria the first time (...) then they said that if they were to follow the criteria, all the students would in fact fail their field practice* (Anne, pedagogy teacher). The criteria are experienced as not very specific and hard to use. *Because the questions are so vague, and it is so hard for us to say to the students that you need to work more on this* (Liv, in-service pedagogue). *There were items it was very hard knowing anything about, and then you almost need to interview them* (Tor, in-service pedagogue). *I have not really managed to understand which assessment criteria that underlie the new education* (Emma, pedagogy teacher).

All groups express that they lack a sense of community and cooperation regarding feedback and assessment. *I have the impression that the students think that the teachers "Yes, they don't know what we do there, and they don't know what we do there"* (Liv, in-service pedagogue). *(...) in my view, in-service pedagogues could participate in these forms of assessment* (Nora, pedagogy teacher). *It is something about that dialogue that might contribute* (Anne, pedagogy teacher). The student express a lack of cooperation at campus: *Because now we have lectures, and then we write essays that we get passed/not passed on. And then we show up at some kind of exam that we get a grade on* (Eli, student).

The in-service pedagogues want cooperation to change assessment forms for field practice. *And then I'm thinking*

about changing those forms (Liv, in-service pedagogue). Yes, that would be exiting to take part in (Tor, in-service pedagogue).

The pedagogy teachers intimate that they feel alone in formative assessment of compulsory assignments and that they want closer cooperation with all teachers at BLU in order to strengthen assessment practice in class and field practice. *Then you need communication to create the education as a whole. We can't create it alone* (Anne, pedagogy teacher). *We are talking about the tacit knowledge that needs to get up on the table. We are not good enough* (Nora, pedagogy teacher).

The student praises the community and interaction between themselves and the in-service pedagogues, but wants closer attention from teachers at HVL. *In-service pedagogues have been good at giving feedback. And then it is like reciprocal action. (...) I think it would have been an advantage to get more from the teachers at HVL.* (Eli, student).

3.3. The Ideal and Suggested

All informants express a wish for rules or norms that value process and development-oriented feedback and assessment routines, in which students can actively participate. (...) *I wish we could take more part in the students' processes* (Emma, pedagogy teacher). (...) *to support the student in growing and becoming an autonomous professional, becoming confident in themselves, their knowledge, can contemplate. (...) support them in the connection between theory and field practice in the education* (Anne, pedagogy teacher). (...) *and then you try for a bit, go back to guidance, and it becomes kind of an interplay* (Eli, student). (...) *you wait to see how the students are (...) It is a process that we work on continuously* (Tor, in-service pedagogue). (...) *In the old days, the students from the first academic year were here for seven weeks. You really got to know this person, right, and you could see where you needed to go in and support them* (Liv, in-service pedagogue).

The teacher groups claim that more resources need to be allocated to assessment, guidance and cooperation, and that there needs to be a collaboration among teaching staff on feedback and assessment. (...) *but we need resources to do so!* (Emma, pedagogy teacher). *There should have been more resources set aside to make this collaboration a joint concern* (Nora, pedagogy teacher). *And then we need more resources for guidance, well, 1.5 hours per week is not enough* (Eli, in-service pedagogue). (...) *and criteria that HVL and the field practice kindergarten have developed together (...) Then I would sort of be spared of saying that they are my criteria* (Liv, in-service pedagogue).

Both teacher groups emphasize that the purpose of progression and professional orientation must be reinforced by strengthening the subject of pedagogy. *I think we have to do something with the education and subtract the pedagogy in order to have progression there* (Anne, pedagogy teacher).

(...) *that they rather should have that more overall pedagogy, not the way it is split up now* (Liv, in-service pedagogue).

All participants agree that mediating artefacts that include current, student-activating, self-reflexive and process-oriented feedback are the key to encouraging students' learning. *That you receive guidance where you get to address the things you're uncertain about. You sort of become (...) yes, she gets to know me very well and in a way what I am thinking about and what I need more of* (Eli, student). (...) *then it is those important conversations, that process is alpha and omega to create assessment* (Nora, pedagogy teacher). (...) *there should be a form that I and the student could sit down with* (Tor, in-service pedagogue).

The teacher groups are especially preoccupied with using assessment methods that strengthen students' abilities for self-assessment and metacognition. (...) *it is sort of getting a grasp of that self-reflection* (Tor, in-service pedagogue). (...) *so, it is crucial that the students go through it, work on it* (Anne, pedagogy teacher).

All groups think that feedback and assessment should emphasize both resources and potential for development. *A good assessment is when the person get those stars in their eyes, that ooooh, I learned something, I got over the hump, I feel I can proceed* (Nora, pedagogy teacher). *There is no use in saying – you did good! You need to tell them how they are good, and what you expect, so they know what they need to work on* (Tor, in-service pedagogue). *As far as I'm concerned, it's very important to sort of feel that I'm good for something. (...) and then of course you need feedback on what needs to be better* (Eli, student).

All the groups of informants emphasize the importance of community and a division of labour that has reciprocal action between all participants in the two activity systems. *If we could get the same kind of guidance (field practice guidance) on the academics for instance* (Eli, student). (...) *a form that the school and field practice kindergarten have developed together* (Tor, in-service pedagogue). (...) *to make this cooperation a joint concern. Then we can make sure that we understand each other* (Nora, pedagogy teacher). *And then I'm thinking it is crucial that we communicate with the practice field* (Anne, pedagogy teacher).

They express a need for a division of labour in which students, in-service pedagogues, pedagogy teachers and other subject teachers exchange information and cooperate on the design of methods and assessment routines that will enhance students' learning. *That the entirety between students, teachers and us is too... Everybody does things their own way, and has their own subject and their thoughts about things. There should have been more information flow* (Liv, in-service pedagogue). (...) *we need a revolutionary change. And the assessment criteria, I think that is a collaborative matter* (Nora, pedagogy teacher). *Well, I think it is a win-win situation to have practice team where the in-service pedagogues, the kindergarten administrator, we as professional supervisors and the students attend (...) it is*

a very good way to meet (Emma, pedagogy teacher).

4. Discussion

Four primary results are discussed in this section, regarding established and ideal assessment routines in BLU, based on the theoretical framework, personal experiences, and current knowledge. Some of this content will overlap, since it reflects the informants' holistic approaches to assessment routines, both within and between the two activity systems.

4.1. Tacit, Private and Low-priority Assessment Cultures

A key finding in this study is that the feedback and assessment culture of BLU is perceived as tacit, private and of low priority. Based on CHAT, this is interpreted as a sign that goals, framework, tools and cooperative routines involved in the assessment activities (rules, mediating artefacts, division of labour) have been the subject of very few collective discussions in the implementation of BLU. In this discussion, I will examine ways in which this might be understood, with an emphasis on the need for a shared discussion forum, and the signals conveyed by the allocation of resources, as well as the latitude for private assessment practices.

CHAT emphasizes the importance of the language, social and cultural context of human activity and meaning structures [23, 24]. Based on this perspective, it would be essential to establish formal discussion forums for the teaching staff. My findings indicate that the assessment culture in BLU has most likely not been a primary topic of discussion. A lack of collective discussions and shared use of language may have allowed for the development of tacit assessment routines and ideals among both the teaching staff and the student community. This may also have created an opportunity for the development of differing and private assessment practices in BLU. This interpretation is underpinned by students' difficulties in describing assessment routines, and by pedagogy teachers' description of assessments as tacit and depending on the teacher's conscience. The finding of a tacit practice corresponds with research findings revealing that the implementation of new feedback and assessment practices have proven challenging [8, 10, 11, 16].

It appears that both pedagogy and in-service pedagogues feel that limited resources pose a significant constraint on assessment and collaboration. Pedagogy teachers have expressed that they use more resources than they actually have at their disposal. They show an interest in stretching themselves. However, the limited availability of resources may be viewed as an indication that assessment is not an area of priority. In other words, it may be a sign that it is fine to lend it less importance. Based on CHAT, resources and frameworks are viewed as rules [23], which would be

important to discuss in the light of teachers' ideals for assessment practices. A lack of proper discussions may therefore have led to discrepancies between allocated resources and teachers' assessment practices. This may have caused some teachers to strive towards higher ideals than allowed by the assessment resources. Other teachers may feel the need to *give low priority* to assessment efforts, in favour of other tasks which may have a higher status in the organization. In a 2015 Nordic Institute for Studies of Innovation, Research and Education report, researchers found that 81 % of academic staff members in Norway reported a greater interest in research than in teaching [12]. Tendencies that indicate low prioritization of assessment activities are also supported by students' expressed interests in increased attention from teachers at HVL. Altogether this suggests a tendency towards a private assessment culture, where assessment is given lower priority, and characterized by few discussions on assessment goals, norms and framework. The tendency that teaching and assessment have low priority is also highlighted by Yorke [17], who concludes that implementing formative assessment in higher education is a considerable undertaking. He points to, among other factors, that academic staff have pressing tasks in research and publication which complicates the implementation of more learning oriented assessment practices. Thus on one hand, a lack of resources might hinder the implementation of formative assessment practices. However, lack of knowledge and skills regarding the advantages of formative assessment might also prevent effective implementation. Evans [10] emphasize that successful implementation of formative assessment practices requires both enhancement of competence such as training, and direct involvement of both students and teaching staff. Furthermore, Schneider and Preckel have recently shown that assessment may be as important as other teaching practices in improving students' achievement [7]. Updated knowledge on the importance of assessment methods other than summative assessment might not be well known among academic teaching staff, and academic teaching staff might not have sufficient resources allocated to updating their assessment practice.

The lack of collective discussion is also reflected in teachers' statements regarding challenges related to the goal (rule) of a professional and comprehensive approach to assessment, and to the entire BLU program. Pedagogy teachers view the subject of pedagogy as somewhat fragmented and divided into multidisciplinary academic areas of knowledge. In-service pedagogues have stated that the BLU students appear to be less professionally oriented than students in the old Kindergarten Teacher Education. This may indicate that there has been little discussion on profession and low prioritization of national regulations for progression and professional orientation in the various areas of knowledge. The informant groups do not express an explicit need for a multidisciplinary assessment culture in BLU. However, the teaching staff's focus on challenges

associated with both professional orientation and the lack of collaboration among the teachers may be interpreted as a sign that such a need does exist.

The above-mentioned tendencies correspond with formative dialogue research on findings related to the professional, practical and economic challenges of assessment activities in BLU [21]. Findings that suggest a tacit, private and low-priority assessment culture also correspond with results from current assessment research, which has uncovered challenges associated with efforts to establish new contexts and cultural expectations for assessment [8, 10, 11, 15-17]. These researchers emphasize that if the goal is to implement new and improved assessment routines, there is a need for greater discussion between management and the teaching staff with respect to objectives, resources, learning perspectives and assessment tools. My findings indicate a need for discussions that could help to make the tacit assessment culture more explicit.

4.2. Summative, Implicit and Ambiguous Assessment Tools

The second research finding indicates that students and pedagogy teachers view the most common assessment routines of compulsory assignments and exams as summative, and that both students and pedagogy teachers give little credence to learning outcomes. Pedagogy teachers have stated that though they provide thorough written assessments of compulsory assignments, they also feel that they are the only ones performing this assessment practice. In general, students and pedagogy teachers offer few descriptions of various assessment tools when describing established practice. Both groups of teachers have expressed dissatisfaction with ambiguous assessment forms in field practice. Based on CHAT, these descriptions and the implicit nature of these practices are interpreted as signs that current mediating artefacts are characterized by summative ideas and assessment tools. This can also be interpreted as criticism of imposed artefacts for assessment in field practice.

In total, my findings indicate that the informant groups are dissatisfied with the current assessment practice and established artefacts. It is crucial, in my opinion, to view this in conjunction with the tacit assessment culture. CHAT emphasizes that the implemented physical and psychological cultural tools will have a formative function for human activities [24, 25]. In this case, it appears that the informant groups have been affected and formed by the assessment routines of which they are critical. Students and in-service pedagogues appear to be "at the mercy" of established assessment methods, and this suggests that they have less latitude for participation than the pedagogy teachers. Moreover, this indicates a need to establish additional collective discussion forums across the activity systems, to further develop both established artefacts and assessment ideals. From a cultural-historical theory perspective, such a

collective discussion on both rules and mediating artefacts would be a determining factor for further development, based on the idea that human learning creates meaning through active participation, the use of artefacts, and communication in social communities [24, 25]. This highlights the need to include students in these discussions, something which is supported by Hamberg, Bakken & Dammen [22], who point out the importance of increasing students' understanding of the significance of assessments in terms of motivation and learning. International empirical reviews and meta-analysis also underscores these factors, which emphasize that a shift from summative to formative assessment forms requires changes in both the teacher and student roles [7, 8, 10, 15-17]. The changed student role might pose an added challenge to the implementation of formative assessment, as it requires that the teachers and management accepts a greater responsibility for teaching students formative assessment skills, such as self-assessment, peer assessment, and the use of feedback groups.

The extensive use of summative assessment methods should be viewed in light of traditions inherent in higher education. My findings correspond with surveys indicating that students in this sector are among those least satisfied with teacher feedback and supervision [22], and this has been a stable pattern in student surveys [31], suggesting that the pattern should be viewed in light of the traditions of higher education. Lauvås [13] noted that formative assessment represents a departure from both teaching methods and summative assessment traditions in higher education. This means, among other things, that the sector has a longstanding tradition with assessment tools that have been designed based on learning theories that focus on the individual, as well as on ideas regarding measurement of knowledge [15]. The introduction of formative assessment in Norway has also been subjected to central control from the Bologna Process and the Quality Reform in Norwegian Higher Education [32]. Central control may, in other words, have been met with some opposition from the sector. In the focus groups with pedagogy teachers and in-service pedagogues, opposition has primarily been directed towards limited resources. My findings also indicate that pedagogy teachers have challenged the current assessment practice by using formative assessment tools. This suggests that they wish to reform established artefacts and culture. From a CHAT perspective, this emphasizes humans' active behaviours or interventions which are key to the further development of practice [24]. However, the pedagogy teachers' departure from summative assessment appears to be more of a private assessment practice which requires the use of their own free time: "(...) *it actually gives me energy to sit with this on the weekends and really go into depth on these assignments.*" (Nora, pedagogy teacher). This accentuates the strong inner motivation to promote student learning, but also the challenges of bringing the entire teaching staff together in collaborative agreement on frameworks, ideas and tools. This is consistent with findings from assessment research

which emphasize the challenges of introducing formative assessment routines, because it represents a paradigm shift in the perspectives on both learning and assessment [8, 10, 11, 15-17]. Permanent changes also demand collective change and development processes. Based on the existing body of research, one might argue that the passage from summative to formative assessment practices in higher education is an extensive and complex process. Although the informant groups in my study is displeased with the current practice, this dissatisfaction alone is not enough to fuel the transformation from a summative to formative assessment culture. In my view, this indicates that the process depends on a change in attitudes, knowledge and skills for management, teaching staff and students alike.

Last, but not least, it is important to understand these results in light of the comprehensive implementation of BLU. The Research Group for BLU states that most of the institutions have viewed the new education as a comprehensive reform in terms of content, structure and culture [33]. Implementation has demanded a full revision of study models, syllabuses and curriculum literature, compulsory assignments, assessment methods, collaborative routines and organization in multidisciplinary areas of knowledge. The interpretation therefore needs to consider how the extensive efforts involved in bringing about change have left the teaching staff with very little time and resources to change established processes before they have been tested out over a certain period of time. This may explain why the *assessment forms in field practice* have not been changed, despite dissatisfaction among both pedagogy and in-service pedagogues. An alternative interpretation is that this dissatisfaction is not representative for the pedagogy teachers and in-service teaching staff. Based on my proximity to this phenomenon, I know that the field practice administration has the primary responsibility for preparing assessment forms. This has given pedagogy teachers and in-service pedagogues limited influence on the design and revision of these forms, since the division of labour has given the field practice administration the formal authority for these activities. In sum, this shows that the extensive implementation process has established implicit guidelines for mediating artefacts, the community and the division of labour. It is therefore not surprising that the established artefacts appear to be summative, tacit and incomplete. It also suggests that these themes have not been given high priority in terms of implementation.

4.3. Limited Sense of Community and Little Collaboration

The third finding indicates that all three groups believe there is a limited sense of community and little collaboration on assessment. Students would prefer more interaction with teachers at HVL, and in-service pedagogues have called for collaboration on the assessment forms and greater flow of information between all teachers involved. The pedagogy

teachers would like more collaboration to strengthen the assessment routines at HVL and in field practice. From the perspective of CHAT, this is interpreted as a sign that the current assessment practice is characterized by a limited sense of community and poor division of labour among the involved participants. The wish for a greater sense of community and better division of labour was discussed in the first section. In this section, therefore, the discussion will address the implementation process with limited resources and traditions in higher education.

Limited sense of community and poor division of labour suggest a discrepancy between the ideals presented in the national guidelines and the established assessment practice, since these guidelines encourage greater collaboration with respect to assessment and supervision of students in training practice [6]. As noted, it is important to view these findings in light of the extensive implementation of BLU. The Research Group for BLU points out that work is suffering due to tight deadlines and limited resources for implementation [33]. Efforts to bring about comprehensive changes are time-consuming and require collaboration, because efforts must be made in several areas at the same time. This implies that certain areas may be given lower priority, and my findings suggest that this is the case with assessment practices. A limited sense of community and poor division of labour for both feedback and assessment routines should also be understood as an expression of the continuation of established traditions regarding the division of labour and assessment practices. This is supported by the fact that reports, both prior to and following implementation, have emphasized students' wishes for increased supervision and better feedback from their teachers [22, 31, 34]. Evans summarises that "student and lecturer dissatisfaction with feedback is well reported" [10, p. 73], and presents several actions directed at implementing formative assessment, including increasing student – teacher dialogue and interaction. In the NOKUT report No. 3 from 2016, it is also noted that in higher education, the quality of instruction appears to be a "private matter" for each individual teacher [34]. Traditions and limited time for collective discussions have most likely resulted in the continuation of private assessment practices among both pedagogy teachers and the in-service pedagogues. However, informants have called for greater community and better division of labour, which indicates the motivation for change. Further development of these assessment practices, from a CHAT perspective, would demand sufficient time and the proper forums for dialogue regarding assessment, between the entire teaching staff and the students and management in the BLU program.

4.4. Establish Frameworks, Artefacts and Division of Labour for Student Participation in Assessment

The fourth finding deals with the informants' collective perspectives on ideal and suggested feedback and assessment routines in BLU. All three groups emphasize the importance

of greater collaboration on feedback and assessment routines. They all state that they would like to have norms, methods and a division of labour that open for process- and development-oriented assessment routines. The teacher groups also emphasize the need for greater resources for process-oriented assessment and supervision, as well as the need to strengthen the subject of pedagogy to ensure the goal (the rule) of progression and professional orientation. From the perspective of CHAT, this is interpreted as a wish for a closer and more reciprocal sense of community and better division of labour across the activity systems. This is further understood as a wish for norms and frameworks (rules) that provide status and latitude for the use of dialogue-based and development-oriented mediating artefacts, with increased student participation.

The groups express the need for a *greater and more reciprocal collaboration* between all involved participants, and they wish to have a discussion of rules, mediating artefacts and division of labour. It is possible to view these replies as based on a perspective of change and development within the cultural-historical theoretical framework. CHAT emphasizes change and system development through activity, dialogue and the creation of meaning in a social community, and accentuates the opportunity for people to change their mediating tools and cultures [23-25]. The fact that all three groups wish to make assessments an issue of collaboration signifies a belief in change through collective discussions in an expanded community. It also indicates that these groups *acknowledge one another as important contributors*. This is made clear by, among other things, statements from pedagogy teachers who state that they cannot create a good kindergarten teacher education on their own, and statements from in-service pedagogues who say they would like a better flow of information and more dialogue between all the teachers. This is also apparent in the students' call for more interaction with their teachers, and in the teaching groups' emphasis on collaboration processes with the students. Wittek & Brandmo [35] underline the importance of strengthening collaboration between the university college and the practice-training field in applied sciences education programs. They point out that this is key in helping students to connect the various forms of knowledge gained through both theoretical studies and practice training, since learning and professional orientation occurs in the area between theory and practice [35]. Despite explicit wishes for greater and more reciprocal collaboration, it is also apparent that pedagogy teachers and in-service pedagogues also wish to strengthen the subject of pedagogy to ensure that the overall objectives of progression and professional orientation in BLU are achieved. This can be understood as they would like a division of labour where pedagogy teachers have most authority. However, I interpret these findings to mean that the participating teachers believe the objectives of progression and professional orientation need to be emphasized both in assessment routines and in the education as a whole. This interpretation builds on information that was

presented during the discussion of goals regarding assessment, and from other statements indicating clear interests in closer and more reciprocal collaboration between all the teachers.

With respect to the reformation of culture and tools, both teacher groups emphasize that change towards more process-oriented assessment routines would demand both *more well-defined norms and greater resources*. In other words, they call for a strengthening of overall objectives and structural framework conditions (rules). The fact that the teacher groups are calling for a more tight-knit community, clearer goals and additional resources indicates a belief that change will require both cultural and structural revisions. From a CHAT perspective, these change processes would demand collective discussion processes to clarify the overarching rules, resources/frameworks and prioritizations involved in assessments. Such discussions should be carried out by the communities, both within and between each activity system, to ensure unity and coherence between assessments for field practice and assessments at HVL. This would require participation by management, students, university college teachers, in-service pedagogues and administration staff, since they all have different, but complementary roles with respect to assessment routines. Thorough discussions in the community would enable the establishment of ownership and a shared understanding of goals, norms and frameworks, which would provide the foundation for assessments carried out at both the university college and in field practice. This would also contribute towards the development of a collective insight on the significance of priority, status and the allocation of resources for assessment activities. With this in place, teachers would be able to develop and implement more process- and development-oriented mediating artefacts for assessment, with increased student participation. The teacher groups have called for a greater collaboration, more explicit goals and better frameworks. This is consistent with findings from previous research on assessment, which emphasizes the need for fundamental discussions on learning perspectives, resources and the assessment culture [8, 10, 11, 15, 17].

With respect to mediating artefacts, it was clearly stated that all informants wanted *continuous process and development-oriented assessment routines with greater student participation*. The pedagogy teachers also made specific suggestions for the reallocation of teaching resources to more process-oriented supervisory and assessment activities in smaller groups:

"(...) more study groups where we could have become acquainted with the students in different ways (...) Classroom teaching, the way it is today, means that you can't be there and follow your students in their processes." (Emma, pedagogy teacher).

This signifies a belief in the value of closer processes between students and teachers, and of greater student participation in feedback and assessment methods, in the

form of continuous feedback, dialogue and supervision in small groups. The in-service pedagogues and students also want this type of mutual interaction and dynamic in assessment activities, which is expressed by the students' call for "increased interaction with the teachers", and in the in-service pedagogues' focus on "assessment in cooperation with the students". This is interpreted as a belief in mediating artefacts which build on a cultural-historical theoretical perspective, involving an emphasis on activities with student participation, where language and interaction are key to learning processes [35]. This perspective on learning is also fundamental to ideals and methods emphasized in literature on formative assessment [14, 15]. This highlights self-reflective assessment methods with student participation, which are essential for learning, because they involve students as active participants in the process between teaching and learning [15]. William [15] emphasizes the importance of further developing the students' capacity for self-regulated learning and metacognitive awareness (the awareness of one's own learning and knowledge), and that this requires active student participation. This perspective is reflected in the pedagogy teachers' focus on the importance of getting students to talk about what they have learned, and in the in-service pedagogues' statements regarding the importance of promoting the student's capacity for self-assessment and self-reflection. They are, in other words, concerned with the principle, referred to by William [15] as "activating students as owners of their own learning". All three groups also emphasize that the feedback should mention both mastery and the potential for development. This corresponds with the two principles of clarifying criteria for success and providing feedback that moves learners forward [15]. What was not as clear was the use of peer feedback, response groups and other forms of feedback among students. This represents the principle William [15] describes as activating students as instructional and supervisory resources for one another. All three groups spoke about feedback and supervision as something that takes place between students and teachers. This can be viewed as a learning perspective that emphasizes the delivery or transfer of knowledge from teacher to student [35]. Based on my own experiences, I know that many pedagogy teachers actively utilize peer assessments for oral assignments, and that many in-service pedagogues provide group supervision to activate students as peer supervisors. The lack of focus on these issues is most likely due to weaknesses in the interview guides, since much of the focus was directed at feedback and assessment routines for compulsory assignments, exams and field practice. This may have directed the participants' attention towards more formal assessment routines, and away from more informal feedback routines practiced in teaching and supervision situations.

4.5. Strengths and Limitations

An important quality assurance in qualitative studies is to

participate in a research group, and to ask other researchers to provide their thoughts and ideas after reviewing the empirical data. This type of intersubjective dialogue between researchers can, according to Kvale & Brinkmann [30], contribute towards increased communicative validation. An attempt was made to ensure this by transcribing interviews and having these and some of the analyses read and commented on by both the leader and fellow researchers in the research group. Their insights have revealed several nuances and ensured a more thorough analysis, which strengthens the credibility of the results.

This study suggests that there may be multidisciplinary challenges involved in assessment routines, and that these have not been sufficiently discussed or elaborated on by the three informant groups. One weakness of this study is that subject teachers were not included. They were initially excluded because one of the goals was to direct the spotlight on the special responsibility of the subject of pedagogy for the progression and professional orientation. Further studies should therefore include subject teachers from all areas of knowledge in the final stage of the program, and direct attention to multidisciplinary assessments in the six areas of knowledge in BLU.

The limited sample of the study could imply that the results are primarily representative for the informants who participated. However, key findings are consistent with findings from other studies regarding the implementation of BLU, assessment processes in higher education and formative assessment. Examples of this are findings indicating that current practice is characterized by summative assessment methods; that students would like better feedback; and that the groups would like increased collaboration on goals, frameworks and methods in assessment processes [11, 15, 16, 22, 33]. In sum, this strengthens the credibility of the results, which mean that they might be generalized to similar informant groups and educational institutions.

5. Conclusions

The focus of this article has been to highlight the perspectives of students, in-service pedagogues and pedagogy teachers with respect to feedback and assessment routines in BLU at the HVL. A central objective has been to develop an increased understanding of feedback and assessment routines which promote better professional orientation among BLU students. In doing this, the intention was to contribute knowledge that could provide the basis for further development. The results indicate that the three groups have congruent views on the challenges and potential for improvement in established assessment practice. Currently, the established feedback and assessment routines are not considered ideal, but all three involved groups have offered several constructive suggestions for how these established routines can be strengthened and further

developed.

The limited number of people who agreed to participate in the study warrants caution in drawing conclusions on behalf of all students, pedagogy teachers and in-service teachers. There might be other perspectives than those reconstructed in the current article. Nevertheless, the reconstructed qualities are reliable, and reveal three key challenges associated with established assessment practice at HVL: (a) a tacit, private and low-priority assessment culture; (b) current practice characterized by summative assessment methods, and (c) minimal collaboration between involved participants. The study also shows that all three groups have a clear interest in developing assessment routines that involve a greater utilization of formative assessment, and they also note the following areas for improvement: (a) establish a closer and more reciprocal collaboration between all participants; (b) encourage a shared understanding of central goals and methods in formative assessment, and (c) increase the status of assessment work and ensure time resources to involved teachers. The two teacher groups also emphasize the importance of strengthening the subject of pedagogy to ensure a more comprehensive focus on student progression and professional orientation, in both assessment routines and in the BLU as a whole. The suggested areas of improvement could be used as a starting point for further development of the established feedback and assessment routines. The results render visible the need for additional studies with a greater number of participants that direct attention to the multidisciplinary aspect of feedback and assessment routines in BLU. My study may form the basis for future action research on feedback and assessment routines in BLU at the HVL. More precisely, I recommend the following paths of action at HVL. (a) Conduct a local implementation study of formative assessment routines at BLU. (b) Anchoring formative assessment in the management. These two measures can ensure a successful implementation of a formative assessment culture, in which well-known implementation challenges such as structural, economic and cultural limitations are attended to. Management support will be invaluable in the implementation of an assessment culture that challenges the established traditions and culture for summative assessment in higher education.

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