After taking this course, you will be able to:

* Design an assessment that is constructively aligned (content, level, methods) with the course objectives and activities
* Apply the quality criteria with respect to validity, reliability and transparency for construction of assessments and assessment items
* Analyze the assessment output and results, assess the quality of the assessment and make decisions about students’ grades accordingly
* Formulate future improvements for an assessment

By participating in the course, you will find answers to the following questions:

* What is the role of assessment?
* How can you select the right methods of assessment for your course?
* What is constructive alignment?
* How can an assessment plan and matrix help you in the construction of assessments?
* Is it possible to make an absolute reliable and valid assessment?
* How can the formulation of good assessment questions have an impact on that?
* What is the role of feedback?
* How can rubrics help with providing feedback?
* What are the things to consider when performing an exam or item analysis? What aspects should you look out for?
* How do you draw conclusions from an exam analysis and make plans for future improvements?
* If good students fail on certain questions, what does this say about the question… or about your teaching?

**Syllabus**

The role of assessment in higher education  
Why do we assess in higher education? What are possible positive and negative effects of assessment? And in what way can we make an effort in choosing the most appropriate assessment method(s).   
The Assessment Cycle  
  
**The Assessment Plan**  
-As research shows, assessment plays an important role in steering the learning process. There is, however, not one best method of assessment. So, how can you select the right methods of assessments for your course? Making an assessment plan can help you select the right testing methods and decide on the relative weight of each assessment for the final result of a course. An assessment plan also helps to ensure that the assessment addresses the intended learning outcomes.

Feedback & grading design  
You will learn why feedback is so important and how to provide feedback using rubrics. Did you know there are different types of rubrics? Depending on the function of the rubric each type has both its advantages and disadvantages. This module will help you deciding what type of rubric suits your needs. In the stage of grading, methods of setting a cut-off score are important. You will learn about different methods of setting a cut-off score and the advantages and disadvantages of these methods.  
  
Assessment construction  
-The results of student assessments often have far-reaching consequences for their educational or even professional careers. When we allow our assessments to have such impacts on people’s careers, it is of the utmost importance that we are very sure that our measurement is reliable and accurate and a valid representation of students’ actual abilities…. Unfortunately, that is not always the case. The goal for this module is to help you to apply quality criteria for the construction of assessments and assessment items. Because, if we improve the quality of our assessments, we improve the quality of our education, and we will have a huge impact on the future education and careers of our students.   
  
Assessment Analysis and Evaluation  
-When an assessment has been conducted, there is often a lot of time pressure on grading and publishing the results. However, an important step to take before communicating grades to students is to analyze students’ performance on the different tasks or questions. This will provide you, as an examiner, with invaluable information. Not only about your students’ performance, but also about the quality of your assessment as well as your own teaching. On which aspects did students perform well, and where did they fail? If good students fail on certain questions, what does this say about the question… or about your teaching? You may need to decide on how to fix certain errors or unexpected situations and think about how this affects students’ grades. What are the things to consider when performing an exam or item analysis? What do you look for? How do you draw conclusions and make plans for future improvements?

**Module 1**

ASSESSMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION – SYSTEM AND  
PRINCIPLES  
The term assessment refers to general processes connected with monitoring of the student’s learning progress. Classroom assessment plays a very important role in education and there are mainly four reasons why to assess students:  
1. to compare students with each other  
2. to see if students meet a particular standard  
3. to help the student’s learning  
4. to check if the teaching programme is doing its job  
(Baxter, 1997, p.7)  
Classroom assessment has several functions and all of them influence the learner’s development to a considerable extent. As Slavík (1999, p.17) points out it is first of all **motivational function**, which is connected to the learner’s emotions - accepting or rejecting some assessment. Both negative and positive experience will have an impact on the learner’s motivation and attitude towards learning the language. This is why it is very important to handle difficult situations with care. Teachers need to realize that assessment has (unfortunately) crucial importance for students from the early days of schooling. Marks are usually the only information that the two most important authorities for a child (teachers and parents) exchange. This is how children learn from early on days that a mark is what matters.  
However, assessment should also have a **cognitive function** through which students should learn why something is or is not accepted and should become able to search for and understand the substance of things. This understanding should afterwards guide them to some kind of action leading towards improvement. This is called **activating function** and it is connected to the students´ will to carry out changes in order to proceed  
in the learning process.  
Joughin (2009, p.2) on the other hand states that *“the concepts of assessment, learning and judgement draw together the three core functions of assessment. While assessment can fulfil many functions, three predominate: supporting the process of learning; judging students’ achievement in relation to course requirements; and maintaining the standards of the profession or discipline for which students are being prepared. Each of these is important, with each having particular imperatives and each giving rise to particular issues of conceptualization and implementation.”*Things that are the most frequently being assessed in school are usually those parts of the subject matter that are easy to be tested, measured and marked and these are very frequently going in hand with the impression of a student as a language user or a learner in general. However, when we talk about language learning and the aim of learning is reaching communicative competence, it is sometimes difficult to provide assessment in all possible areas that contribute to this competence. For instance, Baxter (1997, p.17) points out several such areas (e.g. language competencies: sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic, the use of the language rather than the usage, learning skills, general behavioural and social skills...) in which it is difficult to provide some assessment although these areas seem to be crucial for the student.  
This is why some teachers have certain reservations towards traditional assessment tools (such as paper-and-pencil testing) and prefer the so-called **authentic assessment**.  
It is based mainly on the ideas of social constructivism (e.g. Williams & Burden, 1997) and points to the fact that school assessment is far from reality and that what we test at  
school has nothing to do what the students need and do in their real life.

“*Authentic assessment is designed to evaluate how the student uses new learning rather than how much he or she remembers. It allows the learner to demonstrate problem solving skills, application of knowledge, and communication of the new information. Although paper pencil tests may be used, the emphasis is on performance tasks like portfolios, demonstrations, and presentations.*” (Hoffman, 1996-2008)  
The table below compares the differences between traditional assessment and authentic assessment:

Table 7.1 Comparison of traditional testing and authentic testing

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Traditional Testing** | **Multiple authentic assessments** |
| 1. Specific test questions | 1. Assessment can include paper-and-pencil testing but may also include other procedures including portfolios, group work, projects. |
| 2. Tangible and structured | 2 Open-ended activities demonstrating student abilities to grapple with the challenges of a discipline in real-life contexts. Feedback is intended to be formative (helping students learn as they are assessed) |
| 3. Can be administered within a limited time period | 3. Performances become an integral part of the instructional cycle rather than limited to an examination time. Feedback provided by the teacher and peers is meant to be formative; that is, it is intended to help the student assess his or her strengths and weaknesses, identifying areas of needed growth and mobilizing current capacity. |

Hoffman, B., 1996-2008  
It is probably useful to explain what is meant by the term **portfolio** since it represents a tool for authentic assessment of a student. Portfolio can be defined as a collection of student’s work, which should demonstrate his or her progress in a given period of time.  
The criteria for the selection of what will go into the portfolio can be specified by the teacher or by the students themselves. It should be clear to the students whether they are to include every piece of work they produce or only a selection of it.  
  
As Hedge (2000, p.390) points out portfolios should help students within the following areas:  
• *Make a collection of meaningful work*• *Reflect on their strengths and needs*• *Set personal goals*• *See their progress over time*• *Think about ideas presented in their work*• *Look at a variety of work*• *See effort put forth*• *Have a clear understanding of their versatility as a reader and a writer*• *Feel ownership for their work*• *Feel that their work has personal reference*The assessment of such portfolios is a very demanding task because the teacher must be clear in what s/he is looking for and must acknowledge the process rather than the product in the portfolio content. A portfolio offers a complex assessment of what the student has managed to achieve in the course and the items that are being assessed were produced in similar conditions to those in which the students might function in the  
future.  
**Assessment in higher education** is usually conducted through exams or continuous assessment. This kind of assessment is mainly focused on the assessment of knowledge or skills gained by the student within a specific field.

**Module 2**

**The Assessment Cycle & Assessment Plan**

**The Assessment Cycle**

**Observing and collecting facts** is the first of the four steps in the cycle. A educator’s daily  
job involves continual observations of children. “There is always something new to learn  
about a child—even a child you think you know well. When a educator observes a child’s  
knowledge, skills, and behaviours and records these observations systematically, she discovers what is unique and special about that child; this forms the basis for building a positive relationship in which educators can plan experiences that allow the child to flourish.  
**Analyzing and responding**, the second step in the assessment cycle, involves using the  
information gained during the first step to respond to each child and scaffold his/her learning appropriately. Knowing what each child can do in relation to the objectives for development and learning helps a educator decide how much support an individual child needs, as well as whether the classroom routines and rules are working for the group as a whole. Educators use this knowledge to help decide when, what, and how to teach.

**Evaluating**, the third step, means deciding which indicator of an objective best describes  
the child’s knowledge, skills and behaviours. By consistently analysing and evaluating their  
observation notes and portfolio samples, educators can determine each child’s level of development in relation to each objective.  
**Summarizing, planning, and communicating** comprise the final step of the assessment  
cycle. Educators summarize what they know about each child, develop plans for individual children and the group, and then communicate their findings to families and administrators.

**The Assessment Plan**

A critical component of effective assessment is the planning process. Planning is important because when it takes place, proper attention is given to all aspects of the assessment process:

* Appropriate methodology considering the goal or outcome being assessed
* Data analysis needs and the resources available
* Options for sampling
* Use and review of results
* How results will be shared
* How the information will be used for improving teaching and learning or institutional effectiveness

Assessment planning is an activity that a program or department should undertake at the beginning of their assessment cycle timeframe, which is usually the academic year. As such, the planning process should be started by late summer and an assessment plan finalized by early in the fall semester in order to allow for adequate time to implement the plan.

**What is an assessment plan?**  
At the most basic level, an assessment plan is a document (e.g., in Word or Excel) that outlines:

* Student learning outcomes or department goals to be assessed during that academic year
* Direct and indirect assessment methods used to demonstrate the attainment of each outcome or goal
* Brief explanation of the assessment methods, including the source(s) of data
* Indication of which outcome(s) or goal(s) is/are addressed by each method
* Intervals/timelines at which data is collected and reviewed
* Individual(s) responsible for the collection/review of data

Additional components of an assessment plan may include the mission of the department or program, curriculum maps aligning outcomes with courses, and a detailed implementation plan for each method or outcome/goal. There is often an assessment plan template that is utilized by all departments within a college or division to ensure that all aspects of the planning process are addressed and submitted in a consistent format to leadership for review.

**Module 3**

**Feedback & grading design**