

EALTA 2009 Panel Discussion

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Two themes emerged from the conference:

1. **Synergies and tensions in testing and assessment** (official theme of the conference) as exemplified by, among others:
 - David Newbold who painted a picture of a ‘tug of war’ and ‘Trinity ladies’ vs. University of Venice as Trinity College London and the University of Venice work towards co-certification of graduating students.
 - Carole Thomas: From tension to synergy – the Bilkent experience;
Anders Fikke Johannesen & Hildegun Lahlum Helnes: Synergies and tensions in computerized language testing
2. **Testing and assessment in the real world** (theme that emerged from many papers presented) as in:
 - Justifying the Use of Language Assessments (Lyle Bachman): need to be able to hold our head up high and justify the results of language assessment and the decisions we take on the basis of these results.
 - Other papers reporting on what actually happens in the real world of development of assessments and their administration (e.g. Barbara Blair & Bente Barsnes).

A number of recurring issues were discussed:

- Need for ‘assessment literacy’ among school teachers presented during Pavlos Pavlou & Dina Tzagari’s paper was echoed from other parts of Europe, including Italy.
- Matura exam: synergies and tensions that exist in developing and implementing these high stakes tests and the ‘rocky road’ being experienced in different countries including Macedonia (Slobodanka Dimova), Poland (Jo Lewkowicz & Elzbieta Zawadowska-Kittel) and Austria (Rita Green & Carol Spoettl).
- Test and item development: how setters go about developing tests of reading comprehension (Tony Green) – a relatively unexplored area. Item difficulty and ways in which this is/should be estimated both from a theoretical and practical perspective (e.g. Falianka Kaftandjieva; Glyn Jones) and yet again, the question of item/task authenticity reared its ugly head.

- Setting standards and cut-off scores and relating test taker performance to the CEFR scales (discussed by, among others, Evelina Galaczi; Nivja de Jong & Jan Hulstijn): issues of scale interpretation seem to create numerous tensions and we saw not only the need for constantly working on our rating scales, but also some of the issues and tensions involved in disseminating information about our scales to all stakeholders. How much information is / can be divulged?
- Synergies that arise through collaboration as presented by Ulle Turk on the work in progress on the military test where a number of countries are working together to standardize the military test so that a common understanding of what a given level means can be reached.

Conclusion

- Although we are working in different countries under varying socio-political and economic realities, what the conference brought home (at least to me) was how many of us are experiencing similar problems/tensions and how working together may help address these and bring about greater synergy.
- Being able to hear from such specialists as Lyle Bachman and John de Jong as well as teachers in the field made this a conference more of synergies than tensions and a really valuable, real-world experience.