

EALTA Guidelines for Good Practice in Language Testing and Assessment

LARGE SCALE DISSEMINATION DAYS

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The EALTA Guidelines for Good Practice in Language Testing and Assessment (the GGP) were developed collaboratively within a working group and in continuous interaction with the membership. The text was adopted at the third annual conference in Krakow in May 2006. Since then three additional products have been developed, based on the original GGP text: A poster, a standardized Powerpoint presentation and a leaflet comprising the full text. Translations, following strict principles and procedures, have been generously provided by national teams and are currently available in 35 different languages, with another two underway. All products can be downloaded from the EALTA website (www.ealta.eu.org) free of charge.

Following discussions in the Executive Committee and at the Annual General Meetings, different local, regional and national dissemination activities have been carried out. The aim of this report is to briefly describe two large-scale events in the autumn of 2009, both following the same basic pattern.

National GGP day in Sweden, 4 September 2009

The national GGP dissemination day in Sweden was a collaborative venture between the Swedish National Agency for Education (NAE), generously funding the day, and the University of Gothenburg. Plans were made together, taking into account content related and pedagogical aspects, as well as concerns connected to policy and practicality. A decision was taken to approach, and also

allocate, a certain number of places to the three categories addressed in the Guidelines: teacher educators, teachers and test developers.

It was decided that the event was to be held in Stockholm, at a conference venue in the city centre, and that the conference, including lunch and coffees, was to be free of charge. Consequently, the only costs for participants were those related to travelling. Furthermore, it was decided to hold the conference on a Friday, thereby making it possible for participants to combine it with a weekend in the capital.

The invitation to the GGP day, signed by both organizers, was published on the National Agency website mid May 2009 and approached the three categories addressed in the Guidelines. The information on the flyer was short, stating background and purpose, the outline of the day and the maximum number of participants (200). There was also information that early registrations would be prioritized. In addition to this public announcement, special invitations were sent to universities and university colleges engaged in language teacher education and/or large-scale test development, and to regional representatives of the Swedish language teachers' unions (foreign languages and Swedish as a second language).

The response to the invitation was instant and overwhelmingly positive; within a few days there were 200 registrations as well as an extensive waiting list, and the invitation had to be taken off the website. In addition, a number of approaches were made by individual teachers and head teachers asking about possible plans for similar conferences in other parts of the country.

The programme, briefly commented below, consisted of a short welcome address, three presentations before lunch, categorized group discussions and a

concluding panel in the afternoon. The three plenary presentations focussed on the following:

I. A national perspective: Swedish language policy, national curricula and syllabuses in relation to different European projects and undertakings, with special emphasis on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), recently translated into Swedish.

Tommy Lagergren (Swedish National Agency for Education)

II. A theoretical and educational perspective: Basic concepts concerning (language) testing and assessment, i.a. validity and reliability, issues related to purpose, construct, rubric and agent, aspects of formative and summative assessment; the Swedish national testing and assessment system in relation to the above.

Gudrun Erickson (University of Gothenburg – EALTA)

III. A European and EALTA perspective: Issues related to the CEFR, its background, content, aims and implementation in Europe; the Manual for relating exams to the CEFR; background, aims and activities of EALTA; The Guidelines for Good Practice: aims, structure and uses.

Neus Figueras (Departament d'Educació,; Generalitat de Catalunya, Barcelona – EALTA)

IV. After lunch, offered in a nearby restaurant, participants split up in ten groups, based on their professional activities in relation to the three membership categories. The discussion was allotted two hours, including coffee.

The groups were outlined in advance by the organizers, but participants were told that they could change if they wanted. Only very few actually decided to do this. The discussions were based on the GGP, which had been distributed to all in its leaflet format. Wishing to avoid the risk of having too much of an influence on the discussions, the presenters only very briefly visited the different groups but did not take part in the interaction between participants.

V. The last hour of the day was devoted to a discussion between the participants and a panel consisting of an NAE representative and two of the presenters (Gudrun Erickson and Neus Figueras). In this, a number of important theoretical and pedagogical issues were discussed, as were national implications and practicalities in relation both to formative and summative assessment and testing.

The feedback given to the conference was exceedingly positive and accompanied by pleas for similar events and national follow-up seminars. After the conference several reports indicated that participants had set up local networks, in which EALTA's Guidelines for Good Practice formed the basis for analyses and discussion. Furthermore, it could be noted that there was an instant and significant rise in the number of individual members of EALTA in Sweden during the weeks that followed the conference.

After the conference, all presentations, including the standardized Guidelines Powerpoint, which can be downloaded from the EALTA website, were made available on the website of the Swedish National Agency for Education.

Regional GGP day in the Basque country, 13 November 2009

This second GGP dissemination day was organised by HABE, the governmental institution in charge of the teaching and assessment of the Basque language in the Basque country, Spain, and an institutional member of EALTA since 2007. The day was advertised as a Symposium and addressed to teachers, teacher trainers and testers of Basque in primary, secondary and adult sectors. The session was particularly meaningful as the Basque country had recently undergone a process of validation and comparability of Basque language

certificates, and both testers and teachers were extremely interested in discussing issues related to good practice in language testing and assessment.

The symposium took place on November 13th, from 9:00 to 17:00, and HABE took full responsibility for its organisation and dissemination: sending out the announcement, being in charge of registration and overall organization issues such as rental of the premises, refreshments and contacting the media. The venue chosen was the Auditorium in the Technological Park of Donostia – San Sebastian, and the response to the announcement was well received, with just under 100 registered participants from different fields in the profession. The languages of the Symposium were Basque, English and Spanish, and the participants and speakers were offered simultaneous translation.

The day was organized in the following way:

I. Welcoming speech by the Director General of HABE, who addressed the relevance of EALTA for an institution like HABE and highlighted the importance of exchange of professional expertise and cooperation amongst European institutions in charge of teaching and certification.

Eugenio Mujika Galparsoro (HABE)

II. A theoretical and educational perspective: Basic concepts concerning (language) testing and assessment, i.a. validity and reliability, issues related to purpose, construct, rubric and agent, aspects of formative and summative assessment; examples from the Swedish national testing and assessment system in relation to the above and the possible links between different education systems in Europe.

Gudrun Erickson (University of Gothenburg - EALTA)

III. A presentation of EALTA as a professional association and its Guidelines for Good Practice in Language Testing and Assessment. How the Guidelines relate to current developments in the field of testing and assessment in Europe,

how they illustrate the approach and philosophy of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and how they can be used to fulfil EALTA's mission to promote understanding and share experiences.

Neus Figueras (Departament d'Educació – Generalitat de Catalunya – EALTA)

IV. The certificate system in HABE and the steps taken to improve it, following EALTA Guidelines as a guideline for improvement. This session provided an overview of the content analysis and statistical analysis procedures that HABE has put in place in order to guarantee the quality of their certificate system.

Justo Egaña, Aintzane Ibarzabal and Josu Perales (HABE)

The pattern in the afternoon was slightly different from the one followed in Sweden. In the first session (one hour) participants split up in two groups, based on their professional activities in relation to the three membership categories, and worked in two separate rooms. The sessions were chaired by the guest speakers to the symposium, Gudrun Erickson (assisted by Aintzane Ibarzabal) and Neus Figueras respectively, and the discussions were based on the GGP which was distributed in its leaflet format in Basque. The last session in the day (one hour) was a question-and-answer time with a panel format, with the speakers for the day and Joanba Bergara, Head of the professional training department at HABE, responding to questions and engaging in lively discussion with participants.

The feedback received to the symposium was very positive, especially in relation to the participation of guest speakers, the only point of criticism actually being that similar sessions should be organized more often so that exchange of opinions on testing and assessment could take place more regularly.

Thanks to the organisers, the symposium was well publicized in the media, with local newspapers and regional school journals publishing accounts of the event. A DVD containing the presentations was produced and sent to the participants and is currently available in the HABE library.

Concluding comments

The aim of the two large-scale events briefly described here was the same, namely to introduce and discuss the EALTA Guidelines for Good Practice, basing this on a short introduction focusing on fundamental principles of [language] testing and assessment and connecting it to local circumstances. The two events, addressing EALTA's three membership categories – teacher educators, teachers and test developers – followed the same basic pattern, with presentations by local and external representatives in the morning and discussions between participants and with the presenters in the afternoon. The outcome of the two conferences was very positive, both concerning feedback given and activities following the events. We therefore feel that these GGP dissemination events can be said to well correspond to EALTA's mission statement, which is *"to promote the understanding of theoretical principles of language testing and assessment, and the improvement and sharing of testing and assessment practices throughout Europe"*.