

ASSESSMENT OF THE FEEDBACK PROVIDED BY THE PARTICIPANTS AT THE EALTA KRAKOW CONFERENCE

Sauli Takala

As at the first two EALTA conferences, participants at the Krakow Conference, May 19-21, 2006, were asked to provide feedback with a questionnaire. The questionnaire was included in the conference folder and participants were reminded several times to fill it in. Altogether 72 questionnaires were returned, 30 more than at the second conference in Voss. While even a better rate of return would have been desirable, it is sufficient to get an overall view of the event and of the participants' suggestions for future action.

The EALTA conference had attracted a wide range of participants: of those who filled in the questionnaire, the majority were assessment professionals/university/college teachers/researchers but teachers, teacher educators and educational administrators were also well represented.

The questionnaire was essentially the same as the one provided for assessing the first two conferences. The fixed-choice format was complemented by an opportunity to give reasons for the answer or to elaborate it. Some questions required the respondents to write their answers in the boxes provided for answering. The participants often did elaborate their answers and quite a few wrote at some length in the boxes.

As before, these extremely valuable comments have all been transcribed, and they have been studied and discussed by the Executive Committee in order to see how EALTA can best be responsive to the members' views and needs. They will not, however, be circulated, but will be carefully consulted also for hints during the preparation of the next conference in Sitges.

The fixed-choice answers were tallied and the results are presented in a table in Appendix 1.

Most of the answers are easy to summarise:

1. Unlike in the case of the two earlier conferences there was a fair amount of criticism levelled at the organisation of the Krakow conference.
2. The cost of taking part was, not unexpectedly, a source of some criticism (20 out of 71 were critical of the costs) although the costs were viewed as relatively more reasonable than at the Voss conference.
3. The locality of the conference was considered very good or good by almost everybody.
4. Almost all found the length of the conference to be appropriate.
5. The length of the presentations was also found to be appropriate.
6. Almost all respondents found the number of presentations appropriate.
7. The participants were evenly distributed in assessing the quality of the presentations as good or mixed. This is a challenge. EALTA needs to monitor the quality of its conference presentations to make sure that the standard is high and, preferably, improves. It is worth considering whether it would also be useful for EALTA to produce brief guidelines for good presentations and to arrange conference-related workshops on the same topic. One of the Krakow workshops had this as one of its goals and the feedback was very positive (see pp. 4-6).

8. The ratings concerning the opportunity for participation and discussion, which were low for the first conference but much higher after the second conference, were also now quite positive (60 out of 72).
9. The ratings of the posters ranged from good to poor. Judging by the comments, monitoring the quality of the posters and their presentations would appear to merit more attention (cf. 7 above).
10. One of the main goals of EALTA received good support as the participants generally felt that they had learned quite a lot or very much during the conference (63 out of 69). Only nine respondents said “not so much”.
11. The Annual General Meeting received positive ratings.
12. When asked to single out the best aspect of the conference the participants named most commonly the quality of the presentations, organisation and the opportunity to learn. This is very encouraging feedback to EALTA.
13. When asked to indicate the worst aspect of the conference, cost and opportunity for participation and discussion stood out.

A good indicator of the success of the Krakow conference is the answers to the question whether the participants would attend the next annual conference if money were no problem. No one was resolved to miss the next conference. Forty-nine said “definitely yes”, 17 “probably yes” and 2 “probably not”.

The participants were also asked to give their views of the Guidelines for Good Practice. The comments were very positive. However, monitoring their implementation was considered important.

When asked what participants would you like to suggest for the next annual meeting and conference, they made many suggestions. There appears to be basic satisfaction with the present format. Not surprisingly some topics were both supported and less appreciated. However, more workshops was a recurring theme, both research-oriented and more practical. More interaction in various forms during the conference would also be generally appreciated.

In response to what participants had learned, in particular, during the conference, a variety of points emerged. Topics often mentioned were the value of sharing of information, of learning what research is being done, of co-operation and creating links; of acquiring a better understanding of the CEFR, the Manual and how demanding their use is; of becoming aware of the need to learn new things or getting confirmation of being on the right track; and having a critical mind towards claims of all kinds related to the use of the CEFR.

To summarise: EALTA has now organised three successful conferences and established itself as a forum for a large number of people interested in language testing and assessment. The participants' comments indicate that EALTA conferences are annual events that deserve to be attended for the opportunity that they provide for learning, participation and discussion. This positive response is a good starting point for the organisers of the next conference. There seems to be a very positive feeling about the way EALTA operates. The main challenge concerns improving the quality of contributions.

APPENDIX 1. Tally of participants' fixed-choice answers

Organisation	Very good	Good	Not so good	Poor	Missing data
	23	29	16	3	1
Cost	Very reasonable	Reasonable	Expensive	Too expensive	
	24	27	14	6	1
Locality	Very good	Good	Not so good		
	50	21	1	0	0
Length of conference	Too long	Quite long	Appropriate	Quite/too short	
	1	0	65	3	3
Length of presentations	Too long	Quite long	Appropriate	Quite/too short	
	0	1	65	3	3
Number of presentations	Much too many	Too many	Appropriate	Too few	
	0	3	65	3	1
Quality of presentations	Good	Mostly good	Mixed	Mostly poor/poor	
	10	30	32	0	0
Opportunity for participation and discussion	Too much	Much	Appropriate	Little/too little	
	0	3	57	12	0
Posters	Good	Mostly good	Mixed	Mostly poor/poor	
	11	27	23	1	10
Opportunity to learn	Very much	Quite a lot	Not so much	Very little	
	13	50	9	0	0
Annual General Meeting	Very effective	Effective	Ineffective	Very ineffective	
	14	32	3	0	23
Which was the best aspect of the conference?	Opportunity to learn	Quality of presentations	Locality	Organisation	
	18	14	10	10	20
Which was the worst aspect of the conference?	Organisation	Cost	Opportunity for participation	Quality of presentations	
	14	8	6	5	39
Role (several roles could be indicated)	Language teacher	Teacher educator	Assessment professional	University/college teacher/researcher	Educational administrator/other
	16	16	23	36	14

FEEDBACK SUMMARY — Pre-conference Workshop 1:

Designing and Reporting Research

11 participants

Tutors: Felianka Kaftandjieva, Sauli Takala

<p>1. <i>Did you find the training room and facilities satisfactory?</i></p>	<p>YES: 7 PARTIALLY: 4 NO: 0</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● It was nice and convenient to have our workshop in the city centre. However, it was a pity that time was limited to 15.00 hrs. ● What else could we wish for? ● The room could have been somewhat bigger for the group, there were also some disturbing noises from outside...Otherwise ok! ● The sitting order temporarily prevented someone to see properly to the screen. Maybe a round table or an auditorium setting would be a better arrangement. ● The place should be one simulating the real conference situation in which the presenter must stand and handle both the slide show and the notes simultaneously. ● The room was ideal from various points of view. However, having the venue of the Voss conference in mind, we had expected the workshop to take place at the Sheraton as well and therefore decided to stay there (which was quite an expensive thing to do!). ● Excellent ● Everything was fine, except that we could stay there only until 3 o'clock. I'd like to have had more discussions in the afternoon. 	
<p>2. <i>Did you like the format of the workshop (20 min. presentation followed by 25 min. discussion)?</i></p>	<p>YES: 9 PARTIALLY: 2 NO: 0</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I think the presentations could have been slightly shorter (10 min) to have some more time for comments. If the workshop could have lasted until 17.00 hrs (as was planned), it had allowed for a more relaxed pace of discussing the presentations. Now I felt it was a sort of overload of information. And although the information was very interesting, people have an attention span of no longer than 20 minutes. ● I found the discussions particularly helpful, though ideally I would have appreciated even more time for discussions. ● This was a very constructive way to work ● There is never enough time for discussion – the more, the better. As everyone has specific questions related to one's specific interests and contexts... ● An even more clear structuring of the time into sequences devoted to certain activity would ascertain that all the important stuff will be dealt with. The presentations as such went in schedule, but once people got enthusiastic to discuss, there was hardly any time left for comments from the mentors before the next contribution. Even more time per theme or stricter discipline (-: Comments from the listeners on the qualities of the presentation could also be invited. ● After the discussion and the feedback it would have been great to have time for individual work (modifications, changes, adding,) and after that the opportunity for a second presentation. So: let's spend a week together, next time ☺ ● For me it was the best part of the conference although I could not attend the last day as I had to give a conference in Warsaw; I appreciated the discussions and the kind advice the organisers gave to the participants. ● I think the format was excellent, the comments really useful. 	
<p>3. <i>Do you find the time limits for the presentations appropriate?</i></p>	<p>YES: 9 PARTIALLY: 1 NO: 1</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 20 min is appropriate as it gives the presenters enough time to display their work, but it is short enough to bear all in mind for the following discussion ● That's usually what's expected at a conference. ● Yes, because it is very challenging and one usually is given the time limit! ● It offered the same opportunity to everyone to present and discuss his/her project – very fair. ● 20-min presentations are very common at conferences; therefore, it's really useful to have presentations of the same length. 	

<p>4. Do you find the time limits for the discussions appropriate?</p>	<p>YES: 6 PARTIALLY: 4 NO: 1</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● It might have been good to be clearer about the format of the discussion. How much time for clarification questions about the topic/research presented? How much time for feedback on the way of presenting? Which criteria for feedback both on content and on presentation? Etc. ● I do see the time constraints of such a workshop, but as I mentioned above, more discussion time would have been ideal (but that always seems to be the case :-) ● Please, see above! Now we have to harass the workshop leaders afterwards... ● Particularly if someone tends to be very dominating - a besserwisser ● Could have been longer. 	
<p>5. Do you find the time limits of the workshop per day appropriate?</p>	<p>YES: 7 PARTIALLY: 2 NO: 2</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● But, as said under q. 3, it was unplanned to have only time until 15.00 hrs. ● We could not have put more into one day. ● We could have continued for longer! ● Sometimes one might need to continue to gain better understanding... ● There was time to revise the presentations after the inputs given the first day and to discuss in groups after the official part. ● The day could be longer; until 5 p.m. at least. 	
<p>6. Do you find the length of the workshop appropriate?</p>	<p>YES: 5 PARTIALLY: 5 NO: 1</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I think it would have been just as useful to have only one day workshop. It was interesting to hear so much about other research, but too much to take in properly. Since the nature of the workshop was mainly to focus on the way of presenting and on some difficulties in the research design, it would have been okay to attend only one day. (But then until 17.00 hrs, with no more than 6 participants). ● It would have been interesting to try to apply your (Felly's and Sauli's) comments to the presentations and see if we really got the message ☺ ● Two days is better than one... but 3 days at least would be good! ● Could be longer, e.g. 3-5 days. ● As the inputs have been very inspiring, I would have liked to work individually on my own project for another two days in our group and with your presence. This would have offered the possibility to ask questions and compare notes. ● Depends on the number of participants, but a three-day workshop would be actually better as it would give more time for discussions and incorporating the feedback in one's own presentation. ● An extra day of general discussions on reporting validity and reliability or other related issues. 	
<p>7. Would you recommend this workshop to your colleagues / fellow professionals? Why? Why not? What about you, personally, would you like to participate in another workshop like this?</p>	<p>YES: 11 NO: 0</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I would recommend it to other colleagues with little experience in presenting and with a need for feedback on content of their research by experienced professionals. I would certainly attend another workshop like this, but probably not if it lasts two days. ● It was the variety of feedback we all got and gave, and the discussion of so many differing projects and approaches which made the workshop so helpful – therefore I certainly will recommend this workshop to colleagues and I would be very interested to participate in another workshop like this. ● I think this type of awareness & training are needed to improve our professionalism and help us communicate better. ● I'd absolutely recommend this both to researchers, PhD students, anyone who does a study of any kind. It is good to have the opportunity to discuss one's subjects with others with similar but also different interests outside the actual conference context. Plus have the luxury of having international experts to give advice! 	

- I appreciate outspoken, frank, straight forward (si vous voulez) comments, which force the participants to step in front of the mirror, face the truth and LEARN.
- For me it would be great to have the opportunity to attend a similar workshop next year since my personal PhD project is just about to start.
- I would be pleased to participate in a follow-up course next year.
- Perhaps it should be clear that the workshop is not only directed towards novice researchers but also for junior/senior researchers and develop European projects or partnerships ...
- Both. I would definitely recommend it to fellow professionals because for me it was the only occasion where I actually got some real, useful feedback on my presentation, and I think we all need that. And I would definitely like to attend another workshop like that as well.
- Very helpful, with constructive feedback in a relaxing atmosphere.

8. *What aspects of the workshop could be improved if any?*

- I would like to add that I really appreciate the feedback given by Felianka and Sauli. This feedback was not only very valuable and useful, but also given in a nice way: critical, but with humour and respect for the presenter and her/his research.
 - At the moment, I can't think of any!
 - Including a "hands-on" session to apply learning.
 - We could have sent out some texts or abstracts to each other in advance, in order to be better prepared for the discussions. The workshop could be extended with a day at least.
 - Just a few ideas:
 - Video recording of presentations and storing them onto a cd or dvd (by local it-wizards), so that participants could observe themselves afterwards. We do this a lot in teacher education and it has proved to be an utmost popular way towards improved presentation skills. (As for myself, I can tell that it's never without surprises, no matter how experienced a lecturer you thought you were...)
 - Repeating the presentation, probably in shortened version, at the end of the workshop, having taken lessons from the entire course.
 - Audience feedback forms or free-worded feedback from listeners.
 - Information about the workshop along with credit assignments in good time, so that people conducting doctor studies can plan and include it into their grades.
- Thank you, Felly and Sauli for informative sessions and inspiring and warm-hearted atmosphere!
- The place should be one simulating the real conference situation in which the presenter must stand and handle both the slide show and the notes simultaneously.
 - The idea to have lunch at British Council was brilliant: we didn't need to spend a lot of time looking for a restaurant and the food was very nice. Dear Sauli and Felly! Thanks again for all your support and the expert knowledge you shared with the group. I appreciate your commitment very much and will be glad to keep in touch. All the best to both of you!
 - See my last answers: how to train doctorate students, develop collaboration, have a special rubric on the EALTA website ...Could this workshop (with the ppt presentation and text) be on the website?
 - No ideas here. Thank you both very much for an excellent workshop and extremely useful feedback on my research plans. Thank you!



FEEDBACK SUMMARY — Pre-conference Workshop 2: *Assessing Speaking at B1 level: Training interlocutors and assessors*

Tutors: Ildikó Csépes, Györgyi Együd

Background to the course participants

Altogether 15 participants came to the workshop, representing 9 European countries where they work

Out of the 15 only 13 gave us back the feedback sheets. Here are their comments on the organisation of the course, the local facilities and course content.

Question 1: Did you receive all the necessary information about the workshop prior to the event? (pre-course materials, timetable for the course, information about the venue, etc.)

All the 13 respondents said YES, adding that

- the Introductory Training Pack (*a ca. 70 page document giving information about the model speaking exam, guidelines for interlocutors and assessors, pre-course tasks, etc.*) was very useful
- all the materials arrived in time
- the organisation was excellent
- participants came to the workshop primed thanks to the videos they had to watch (*downloadable from the www.examsreform.hu website*)

Question 2: Did you find the training room and facilities satisfactory?

11 participants found the room rather small (“for a group of that size” + “had to move a lot and to shuffle with many papers”). The room was very long and narrow, basically inappropriate for the workshop. One participant (*being a local citizen*) remarked that “had other institutions known about the event, they would have been more than happy to organise the event on their premises providing better facilities and a more suitable venue.” The food and coffee facilities were adequate, though a bit slow.

Question 3: What aspects of the course could be improved if any?

Participants’ comments:

- “I don’t see any ways of doing it better”
- “It was perfect”
- “There was all you can get in a 2-day event. Perfect”
- “I would like to see a bit more background (even though you said that would be a different training)”
- “Everything was OK”
- “It could be lengthened”

- “Maybe there should be a 3-day course so that things could be discussed a bit more detailed”
- “It was an extremely useful course – I would have liked one more day, perhaps to try out some more scoring exercises”

Question 4: Would you recommend this course to your colleagues / fellow professionals?

All the 13 respondents answered YES, saying that

- “I came away feeling more confident on several aspects of oral assessment”
- “This workshop opened other fields I/we should develop, change.”
- “Great for professionals on their way towards assessment structures in their own countries”
- “It really offers a marvellous insight into the way assessing candidates can be made easy (relatively!), fair, and non-stressful for assessors and students alike”
- “The trainers were excellent & kept up a high level of trainee motivation & participation throughout. I highly recommend this course.”
- “Professional in approach & materials, informed, depth of subject knowledge, unique in itself”

In summary, the workshop participants were pleased with the course content and procedures used. The training facilities and the venue itself, however, were clearly inadequate for the training. These need to be checked in the future by a member of the organising committee if this course should run again.

We also recommend that the course registration should remain in the hands of the tutors, but a closer cooperation should be made between the local organisers and the tutors to ensure that all the relevant details could be discussed and taken into account.

Ildikó Csépes & Györgyi Együd
workshop tutors
Hungarian Examinations Reform Teacher
Support Project of the British Council Hungary