EALTA-funded conference and workshops:

‘Testing and Language Progress Assessment: traditions and innovations’

Surgut State University, Surgut, Russian Federation

21-22 March 2016

Report by Carolyn Westbrook
Introduction

In 2009, the Unified State Examination (ЕГЭ) was introduced as the school leaving and university entrance examination. This is a national exam, which was introduced, on the one hand, to counter corruption in university admissions and, on the other, to promote mobility (Denisova-Schmidt and Leontyeva, 2014).

However, the introduction of the national examination system brought with it a number of challenges, not least the lack of assessment literacy among teachers and teacher trainers but also the risk of teaching to the test to help students get the best possible results.

While it is understandable that teachers want their students to achieve the best results, the danger of teaching to the test is that it restricts the content of the curriculum and can produce over-inflated results regarding students’ abilities.

To address this lack of assessment literacy, a transnational EU project was developed to develop a training programme for in-service and pre-service teachers in Russia. ProSET (Promoting Sustainable Excellence in Testing and Assessment), comprised 4 EU partners (University of Bedfordshire and Southampton Solent University in the UK, Technische Universität Dresden, Germany, and the University of South Bohemia, in the Czech Republic), 11 Russian universities from all over Russia, the National Association of Teachers of English in Russia and Cambridge University Press in Moscow. As part of the project, 8000 pre- and in-service teachers received some form of training in assessment literacy and a course handbook for a two-module course in language testing was produced. The project finished in 2015; however, as the name suggests, the project team were interested in this being sustainable and a number of language testing events have continued since the project ended.

This is where the EALTA-funded workshops came in.

The EALTA-funded conference and workshops

Thanks to the generous funding from EALTA and generous financial and administrative support from Surgut State University, the Center for International Testing: ‘Intex’, and Surgut-ELTA (English Language Teachers’ Association), it was possible to arrange a two-day conference and workshops to promote assessment literacy in the Ugra region of Siberia. The event was organised by Olga Simonova from Surgut State University and had two keynote speakers, Carolyn Westbrook, from Southampton Solent University and Anzhelika Vladyko from Cambridge English Language Assessment.

The conference comprised keynote speeches, plenaries and workshops. It had also been planned to include Special Interest Group meetings; however, due to severe weather conditions and the need for people to travel home before they were no longer able to get home, this last session was dropped. Nonetheless, the participants had the opportunity to submit their papers for inclusion in the conference proceedings to be published further to the event.
Over the two days, the conference and workshops, which were on the topic of ‘Testing and Language Progress Assessment: traditions and innovations’, were attended by around 150 participants comprising pre-service teachers, in-service teachers and university faculty from Surgut and the Surgut Region, Nefteyugansk and the Nefteyugansk Region, Langepas and other Ugra settlements.

Conference Programme

Day 1   March 21, 2016

Venue : Energetikov Str., 8, Conference Hall

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>9:00 - 10:00</td>
<td>Registration Book kiosk /exhibition</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:00 - 10:30</td>
<td><strong>Opening ceremony</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Sergey Kosenok</strong>, Rector, SurSU</td>
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<td><strong>Tatiana Osmankina</strong>, Director of Surgut Department of Education</td>
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<td><strong>Vitaly Apokin</strong>, Director of Institute of the Humanities and Sport</td>
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<td><strong>Olga Simonova</strong>, President, Surgut-ELTA</td>
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<td><strong>Inna Chmykh</strong>, International Examination Centre INTEX</td>
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<td>10:30 - 11:00</td>
<td>Carolyn Westbrook, Senior Lecturer, Southampton Solent University,</td>
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<td>*Assessment of Learning, Assessment for Learning and Assessment as</td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Learning</em></td>
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<td>11:05 - 11:20</td>
<td>Anzhelika Vladyko, Senior Specialist, Cambridge Assessment,</td>
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<td>Yekaterinburg, ‘<em>Cambridge Exams for schools</em>”</td>
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<td>11:25 - 11:40</td>
<td>Larisa Sychugova, Senior Regional Expert in EGE, Surgut</td>
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<td><em>News on Russian State English Examination in 2016</em></td>
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<td>11:40 -</td>
<td><strong>Coffee break</strong></td>
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11:50 - 12:30  Anzhelika Vladyko, Senior Specialist, Cambridge Assessment, (Yekaterinburg) *How to Succeed in Preparing Students for National and International Exams*

12:35 - 13:15  Natalia Nikolaeva, Macmillan Regional Manager, Yekaterinburg *Systematic Preparation for State Final Language Exam on the base of Modern Teaching Technologies*

13:15 - 14:00  Lunch break

Concurrent workshops

| 14:00 - 15:00 | Carolyn Westbrook  
Receptive Skills - What are Test Tasks Testing? | Angelika Vladyko  
Developing and Testing Communicative Skills Effectively. |
|--------------|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| 15:00 - 16:00 | Carolyn Westbrook  
Productive Skills - Marking Criteria and Reliability in Oral and Written Test Tasks | Natalia Nikolaeva  
MELTS as a Tool for Independent Monitoring of Students’ Learning Progress in English. |

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**Day 2  22 March**

**Venue:** Lenin Av. 1, Rooms 201, 408, 409, 413, 317

**Plenary session  Room 201**

| 10:00 - 11:00 | Carolyn Westbrook  
*Bridging the Gap Between the EGE and Classroom-Based Assessment* |

**Concurrent workshops  Room 201  Room 413**

| 11:10 - 12:30 | Carolyn Westbrook  
*Designing Learning-Oriented Assessment tasks* | Inna Chmykh  
*Principles of Listening Skills Assessment* |
|--------------|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| 12:40 - 13:30 | Carolyn Westbrook  
‘Developing Academic English Skills - Reading-into-Writing’ | Olga Simonova  
*Self-Assessment and Peer Assessment: Challenge or Profit?* |

13:30 - 14:00  Lunch break

14:00 - 16:00  *Special Interests Groups*

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**I. Preparing Students for the EGE through Innovative Classroom Assessment Tasks**

II. Language Competence Assessment in ESP

1. Sannikova Svetlana Vladimorovna, ChelSPU, Chelyabinsk, Challenges in Learners’ Progress Assessment in Language Teaching within Professional Context «Проблемы оценки результатов по иностранному языку в профессиональном контексте».  
2. Sitnikova Anastasia Yurievna, SurSU, Using Graphic Organizers in Language Skills Assessment while teaching ESP course

III. Using Information, Computer and Mobile Technologies in Language Testing and Assessment


IV. Teacher’s and Student’s Assessment Literacy

1. Danilyuk Lyudmila Georgievna, School #46, Surgut, Project-Research Activity as the Tool for the Assessment of Learners’ Metasubjective Results Проектно-исследовательская деятельность как инструмент оценки метапредметных результатов обучающихся  
2. Simonova Olga Alexeevna, SurSU, Methods of Forming Students’ Assessment Competence in English Language Teaching

V. Translation Quality Assessment Issues

1. Salo Victoria Eduardovna, SurSU, Postgraduate Course, Assessment of Pragmalinguistic Aspects of Translation in Fiction Discourse (on the example of A.I. Solzhenitsyn’s work “The Archipelago ‘GULAG’”) Оценка pragmalinguистических аспектов перевода в художественном дискурсе (на примере произведения А.И. Солженицына «Архипелаг ГУЛАГ» и его перевода на английский язык)  
2. Rubtsova Kristina Romanovna, European Centre of Foreign Languages, Surgut
Carolyn Westbrook focused on assessment of, for and as learning, introducing these concepts and how they can be incorporated into the language classroom in the first keynote speech. Carolyn’s workshops on day one focussed on encouraging teachers to consider the constructs being tested when testing receptive skills and also to consider the importance of marking criteria and rater reliability for productive tasks.

Anzhelika Vladyko provided an overview of the examinations offered by Cambridge Assessment for schoolchildren and focussed on how to develop students’ skills for these and the Unified State Exam.

Larisa Sychugova gave an update relating to the Unified State Exam for 2016

Natalia Nikolaeva explained how teachers could use modern teaching technologies to prepare students for the Unified State Exam and then gave a workshop on using a tool for monitoring students’ independent learning.

On the second day, Carolyn’s keynote speech reviewed the concepts of assessment of, for and as learning for those who had not been able to attend on the first day and considered how these concepts could be used to prepare students for the Unified State Exam.

Carolyn’s workshop on day two focussed on looking at some of the exam tasks and in groups, participants had to discuss how they could make communicative activities to practise the skills required for the construct being tested. The most important aspect here was how students could acquire the skills required for the test but without constantly doing past papers. In other words, how we can help students increase their test score while ‘simultaneously increasing mastery of the content domain tested’ (Popham, 1991: 13, in Green, 2015).

Inna Chmykh gave a workshop on the principles of listening assessment while Olga Simonova built on the concept of assessment as learning by giving a workshop relating to peer and self-assessment.
Feedback

There were a lot of positive verbal comments during and after the conference. However, although participants were asked to complete an online survey, only just over 10% of the participants completed the questionnaire. We had intended to ask participants for feedback before they left; however, as the weather was worsening quite dramatically, we decided it would be sensible to let them get home and then send out the electronic survey. Nonetheless, the feedback from the 16 participants who responded was incredibly positive with 85% stating that they thought the conference was excellent and 100% stating that it was either very good or excellent.

Qualitative feedback comments on the strengths of the conference included:

- ‘Lots of practical tasks’
- ‘Variety of subjects discussed’
- ‘Useful reports’
- ‘Relevant theme’
- ‘Discussions of actual problems’
- ‘Practical advice’
- ‘Informative and useful sections’
- ‘Useful materials’
- ‘New information’
- ‘We are really lack [sic] professional advice and these conferences unite professionals of different levels - it’s great!’

The weaknesses of the conference were given as:

- ‘Lack of time’
- ‘More workshops needed’
‘Technical problems’
‘Lack of foreign guests’

Since two of these ‘negative’ comments relate to the desire to have more time and more workshops, it could be assumed that the participants enjoyed the conference.

However, a lesson for future EALTA-funded events would be to ensure that participants complete the feedback questionnaire on site before leaving.

Outputs

In addition to the materials provided during the conference, the conference proceedings are almost ready to be published and will be made available to participants once they have been published.

‘Added value’

Due to having a considerable number of colleagues in Russia, thanks to the ProSET project, I was able to participate in two other events without incurring any extra costs for EALTA.

The first of these was in Samara. As my flight to Surgut went via Samara, I set off a day earlier and was kindly accommodated by Samara National Research University, who organised a language teaching and testing event as part of my visit. This event attracted approximately 150 pre-and in-service schoolteachers and university faculty and I was able to do a presentation to the participants on Teaching and Testing Academic Listening and one on developing academic English skills.

The second additional event was a conference in Chelyabinsk. When colleagues there found out that I would be in Russia, they arranged a conference for the Chelyabinsk English Language Teachers’ Association and I was fortunate that
Chelyabinsk State Pedagogical University kindly funded my trip from Moscow to Chelyabinsk and back again so I could deliver the same presentations there as I had delivered in Surgut. There were an additional 350 pre- and in-service teachers and teacher trainers at this event.

In sum then, the EALTA-funded workshops and presentations were delivered to a total of approximately 650 participants not only in Siberia, but also in the Urals and the Volga region of Russia.

Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to thank EALTA and the selection committee for putting their faith in me to deliver the event by accepting the event application and funding the conference and workshops.

I would also like to thank Olga Simonova, Inna Chmykh and their team at Surgut State University for the incredible organisation and to thank the Rector of Surgut State University, Sergey Mikhailovich Kosyonok, for the generous financial and administrative support provided in organising and running the event. Thanks for the warm welcome to Surgut State University go to Tatiana Osmankina, Director of Surgut Department of Education and Vitaly Apokin, Director of Institute of the Humanities and Sport.

In terms of the additional events that were organized, I would like to express my thanks to Viktoriya Levchenko, Dean of the Department of Foreign Languages and Ludmila Kozhevnikova, Associate Professor, at Samara National Research University and their team as well as the Samara English Teachers’ Association for the
organisation and warm welcome, as well as the university for funding my stay there.

Finally, I would like to thank Svetlana Sannikova from Chelyabinsk State Pedagogical University for arranging the CHELTA event and to Vladimir Vitalyevich Sadirin, the Rector of the University, for hosting my visit and, as always, for the very warm welcome!