

EXAM PREPARATION AND TASK DESIGN, THE BRITISH COUNCIL SUMMER SCHOOLS 2005 COURSE REPORT

Acknowledgement

We have two very successful and enjoyable summer schools behind us; professionally designed and conducted with active, intelligent and motivated participants. I would like to thank here for:

- **the trainers: Együd Györgyi team leader, Dr. Csépes Ildikó, Tankó Gyula and Weisz György who were attentive, flexible, funny, and professional in every aspect.**
- **our project manager, Nagy Edit, who makes possible these wonderful events,**
- **the British Council for its financial support**

Introduction

I took part in the British Council summer schools in June and August, where I actively took part in the activities and tasks as an „ordinary course participant” and at the same time I acted as an observer/trainee with the aim to become a trainer at a later stage. I think this mixed role gave me a very good opportunity to experience the tasks, their difficulty and challenges, the problems and the excitement of the different activities, but also to be able to observe teaching techniques and group dynamics and understand better participants’ needs while working with them. The course is the final outcome of years’ of developmental work of the British Councils’ Teacher Support Examination Project. Course content, teaching methods written materials have been lots of time tried out, revised and fine-tuned during the past 6-7 years and it meets high professional standards.

Course Objectives

I think the most important goal of the course is to raise general awareness of testing principles and show good practice, get participants familiar with rating procedures and evaluation. The course also intends to demonstrate the essentials of test design. Although it takes much more training and practice to become an item writer for a high stake exam this course does help participants design better classroom tests or select good tasks for testing purposes, assess their students more objectively and reliably, be more fair to them in general when it comes to their grades or evaluation during or at the end of the terms or language courses. The course provides participants with a general and solid understanding of testing, assessment and evaluation and the knowledge participants acquire during the course can make all teachers (secondary, tertiary or language school teachers) cope easily with the task of preparing their students for ANY examination.

The Trainers

The Trainers have participated in the British Council project for years and years and have taken a leading part in developing the course. They have been teachers and teacher trainers for an average of 15 years. Their professional field is all connected to different aspects of assessment and testing; they are recognized experts in Hungary working for universities, pedagogical institutes and language examination accreditation bodies.

The Participants

We had two groups of 12 participants, which proved to be a very effective group size. It was an international audience with participants from Romania, The Czech Republic and the Ukraine. Course participants represented different areas of the profession, both tertiary and secondary education with different background knowledge of testing issues and slightly different expectations. These differences were very well handled by the trainers and they managed to cater for personal needs as well.

Participants worked in small groups of fours and threes and the groups were rearranged several times so everybody got to know each other. It also enabled participants to learn about other participants' problems and opinions, which proved also to be a very useful experience. Of course, social events and activity nights enhanced participants' relationships and team spirits as well.

The Modules

The course is built up from six modules, Introduction into Testing, Reading, Use of English, Listening, Writing and Speaking. The course includes pre-course tasks presented in training packages, which prepare participants for course content. Home assignments form an integrative part of the modules, which are to be completed after the course. The modules consist of sessions, the number of sessions depends on the particular modules, Writing and Speaking have more sessions as they are subjectively assessed skill and more time is needed for practising marking. The distribution and length of the sessions, two sessions 90 minute each in the morning, two late afternoon were ideal. Participants had some time in the afternoon to relax and socialise. The modules were carefully planned, the stages and tasks of the different modules were logically ordered and followed a similar pattern. Read more about the modules [here](#). The tasks used during the course all come from the volumes of the INTO EUROPE series, which tasks were all piloted in Hungarian schools, analysed and carefully revised and fine-tuned, so they represent very good quality of test design. Please find participants' comments about the various modules [here](#).

Very Strong points

- Excellent, experienced and flexible trainers
- Various teaching techniques, motivating activities
- Very effective course management
- Superb course material, useful pre-course training pack
- Reliable and valid tasks, scales, videos from INTO EUROPE
- Challenging home assignments
- Logically built up sessions, very good timing, nice timetable of sessions
- Active involvement of participants, very little lecture-like presentations
- Permanent evaluation procedures
- Funny social activities
- Professional organisation, five star venue and surroundings

Recommendation

I highly recommend the course (teachers can do the modules separately as well) for all the teachers who

- would like to understand the rationale behind examination systems and test design,
- want to assess their students' performances more reliably,
- prepare their students more effectively for modern English examinations

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