

FEAPDA Congress 2022

Alison Weaver, FEAPDA President describes the Innovation, opportunities and challenges in the 21st century deaf education: Technology in and outside the classroom themed event

The beautiful city of Tallinn, Estonia, provided the backdrop for the 26th European Federation of Associations of Teachers of the Deaf (FEAPDA) Congress from 29th September to 1st October.

Faced with the tremendous challenges of the pandemic and the uncertain geopolitical situation, our Estonian colleagues worked incredibly hard to ensure the successful running of the congress – only a year later than originally planned!

Delegates from across Europe were delighted to come together, finally meeting face to face in a great setting, and enjoying a wide range of workshops and presentations on the theme of technology.

When selecting a theme for the congress, the council always aims for a broad overall topic that will be of interest to all members. The theme of technology is one that is often requested in feedback from conference delegates and one that has proved to be even more pertinent given the changes in practice and learning over the last couple of years. This theme also enabled the programme committee to accept a wide range of abstracts so that



FEAPDA President, Alison Weaver, opening remarks

there were presentations and workshops relevant to delegates, whatever their working context.

Presenters were able to share research and practice from their country/region – many of them reflecting on the learning from the pandemic and new ways of working. Topics presented included many elements of the education of deaf children and young people across Europe, encompassing all ages from birth to transition to adulthood and a range of communication approaches. The diverse contributions showcased the range of practice across Europe but also highlighted the many similarities in the challenges we face and solutions we find.

The first sessions of the congress set the tone for the meeting. Keynote speaker Leo De Raeve reflected on the significant changes in the education of deaf children and young people due to developments in technology. Basing his comments on his research and practice in Belgium, Leo spoke particularly of the introduction of neonatal screening and of cochlear implantation, which have led to a change in educational placements, expectations for



FEAPDA Tallinn 1st day



Railii, an Estonian committee member, opening the congress



Leo de Raeve (Belgium), in-coming president of FEAPDA, delivering the opening keynote presentation



Dr Peep Kungas (Estonia), keynote presentation on digital learning

children and young people and increasing opportunities for higher education and employment. While celebrating the positives, Leo also reflected on what this means to us as professionals – suggesting that the role of the Teacher of Deaf Children and Young People has never been so complex, with the additional variables introduced with increasingly complex technology.

A second keynote speaker built on this theme of technology changing the face of education – this time from a mainstream perspective. Peep Kungas from Estonia reported on work he and his colleagues are doing, investigating how digital learning materials can support personalisation. Although still in the early stages, this work challenges much that we as teachers may take for granted, looking at how investment in the infrastructure, equipment and digital learning materials may transform current practice. Thankfully, at the heart of it all, it was recognised that the teacher is still a key component in the digital ecosystem and the central focus remains on improving outcomes for all!

A number of presentations and workshops reflected on current research and practice in the presenters' own countries. Estonian delegates talked proudly of the effective early identification work that is now in place and increasing effective fitting of cochlear implants, leading to more inclusive educational options. They were very honest, however, that there is a significant



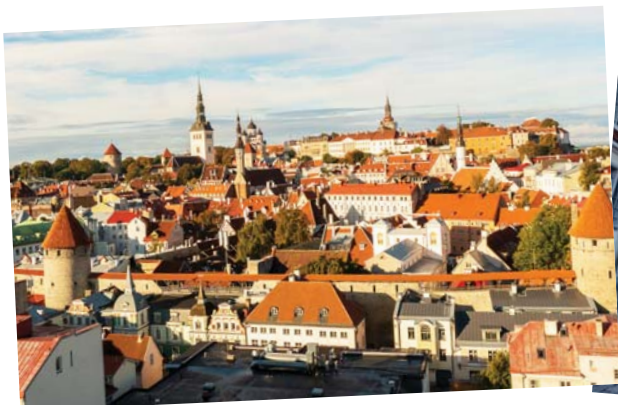
A Slovenian speech and language therapist talking about remote working with EY families through pandemic



Slovenian head teacher talking about the digital resources they had developed in the absence of their own language materials

lack of specialist teachers to work with the deaf children and young people, or to support their school placements as the country moves towards a more inclusive approach. It is not clear how this situation will change in the short term.

Teachers from Luxembourg led an interactive session sharing practice around diagnostics and how in the Centre de Logopédie, diagnostic sessions result in personalisation



Views of Tallinn

of the curriculum for students. Their presentation led to an interesting discussion describing practices in other countries across Europe.

Colleagues from Slovenia described how they had continued to provide support to early years children and to learners in schools, describing many practices that we would recognise. A significant issue for educators in Slovenia is the lack of ready-made materials available in their language. One school addressed this problem by securing Erasmus funding to develop specialist materials, which are now available online and have been translated into a number of languages including, of course, English!

Further web-based materials, which are available in English and British Sign Language (BSL), were described by subsequent speakers.

Jaz Mann, from the UK, described the work he has been doing in the area of safeguarding. As a Deaf parent of a Deaf child, Jaz is only too aware of the increased safeguarding risks to deaf children and young people. Jaz described the work he is doing, with the support of Deafkidz International, to develop games to raise awareness and understanding of safeguarding risks and provide children and young people with strategies to recognise and deal with unwanted behaviours. Evaluation of the project to date has been very positive.

For more information, see: www.end-violence.org/grants/deafkidz-international

The theme of online abuse was the subject of a presentation from Germany, which also cited the increased risk for deaf children and young people. Their research had identified that key risk factors for deaf children and young people include high media usage, communication barriers, and a lack of appropriate intervention programmes. Future phases of the project will consider recommendations for education and the development of resources.

Claudia Becker, also from Germany, spoke of further resources that have been developed with the support of Erasmus funding. The focus of Claudia's work is theory of mind. Her project, the Mind Reader, provides a wide range of information, interventions, and a toolbox of resources, all of which are freely available online – in English and in BSL! For further information see: www.protom-education.com



Jaz Mann delivering his safeguarding presentation with the DeafKidz resource that educated deaf children about covid19



Thomas Lydell (Sweden) Digital Teaching Materials for the Deaf

Thomas Lydell from Sweden presented SpreadtheSign, an online, visual, multi-lingual, and free-access dictionary of sign and spoken languages, covering more than half of Europe. SpreadtheSign is another project with Erasmus funding, and the current aim is to increase the number of sign language videos available in the dictionary. Among other aims, mobile apps will also be developed to promote sign language learning.





FEAPDA President, Alison Weaver, thanking Paul Simpson for his decades of service to FEAPDA

Further information can be found at: www.spreadthesign.com

Further workshops focused on promoting learning and sign language through technology with presentations from Germany and Sweden feeding back on their work with educational apps and online education.

Access to education through speech-to-text support was the topic of another interesting discussion, which again highlighted the diversity of practice and funding available across Europe. In addition to the usual Speech-to-Text Reporter (STTR) processes that we are accustomed to in the UK, a number of software applications such as Text on Top (text-on-top.com/en/), Text on Tap (text-on-tap.live/) and Ava (www.ava.me/) were recommended for use either in the classroom or in conference/training situations.

Although the formal elements of the congress are, of course, important, the event is not only about presentations and workshops. The comfortable surroundings promoted many informal discussions, and the medieval banquet on Friday evening brought the day



Leo de Raeve (Belgium), in-coming President of FEAPDA, leading a workshop on Increasing demand for STTR interpreters in secondary education, high school and university level



Maggy presenting Paul Simpson with a gift to an entertaining close!

This congress also saw a significant change in council membership. At the start of the congress, we had the opportunity to thank Paul Simpson for his many years – decades! – of support for FEAPDA. Paul was not able to attend in person, but he was able to join us by Zoom and participate in the morning session.

Paul has been a stalwart of FEAPDA since the 1980s. Originally supporting conferences as an interpreter, Paul moved on to become a member of the council, representing BATOD, and subsequently served as President for 10–15 years before handing the reins to me about five years ago. Since then, he has been Vice President – I could only take on the role of President secure in the knowledge that Paul was there with me – keeping me on the right path!

As BATOD representative, Paul's passion for promoting good outcomes for deaf children and young people underpinned his work for FEAPDA, as it has his work in the UK. With his encyclopaedic knowledge and vast



A german presentation re safeguarding



The city square and venue for banquet

experience, Paul has provided invaluable support to FEAPDA throughout the decades. In addition to ensuring the smooth running of the federation, chairing meetings and supporting the planning of many congresses, Paul has also given a great deal of time supporting various research projects that FEAPDA have been involved in – such as the iCare Project and the Leonardo Project.

But it is not only his professional contribution that colleagues in FEAPDA will miss. Paul has become a good friend to many in FEAPDA and we will miss his cheerful and encouraging presence at the heart of discussions and decision-making. I have been representing BATOD on FEAPDA for about 20 years now – and it just wasn't the same without him there too!

At the congress, I also stepped down from my role as President. I will remain as Vice President, to support the



Guided tour in the Old Town



Gala dinner - a medieval banquet in Tallinn

incoming President Leo de Raeye from Belgium, until the next congress.

As the time has come for Paul to step down and as I gradually relinquish my responsibilities, we are very pleased to welcome two new BATOD representatives to the council. Anne Marie Hall and Teresa Quail each have a wealth of experience and will both have much to offer FEAPDA in the future.

You can learn more about the congress and the wider work of FEAPDA on the website www.feapda.eu We are already in discussion about the next congress, planned for 2024 – so watch this space for more details!



German presentation APPsolutely! How to use apps (and other digital programs) to enhance – hybrid presenters – Swedish interpreter in shot – Estonian captions



Alison Weaver is the current FEAPDA President.

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