

## ICED (International Congress on the Education of the Deaf) held in Athens July 2015

### Overview Report –

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**She was sponsored by SPECIALKIDZ ( [www.specialkidz.org](http://www.specialkidz.org) )**

The Congress was intensive and none stop!!! Over four days, there were 700 speakers with 145 being deaf; and in addition to this, there were other participants attending this International event.

It was an overwhelming experience although examining the principles and theories on how to educate deaf and hard of hearing children in special needs is not anything new. Speakers shared their papers exploring how they struggle to provide support due to lack of government support in Greece. There is very little finance available; for example, a deaf student would get an interpreter in their class for one hour a day out of a six hour day in their school. They are placed in mainstream schools - they lack the confidence to integrate into a hearing environment. Children with additional disabilities also have very little access to improve their educational abilities.

They are looking for support and it would be good for SpecialKidz which kindly sponsored me to have some involvement but with the current crisis ongoing in Greece perhaps it is not the right time just yet.

A number of papers focused on Cochlea Implants (CI) and hearing aids users - raising the question 'has CI improved the abilities of communication for deaf children'? Almost 99% of research presented appeared to say ' yes' but there still remained other underlying issues with literacy. In most of the research presented, it was stated that the reading ages among deaf pupils has not changed since the Conrad report 1979 and it still stands at an average of 8.11 years. This was shocking news! Reading ages have not made a significant improvement if you are a hearing aid user or a CI; and more alarming is that those without any aids fare even worse and are very much behind in their educational attainments. Not many shared research relating to those with additional disabilities and how they are progressing in education.

Bilingualism, it appears, is favoured as a good approach and it works in some areas but this does not ensure that the children improve academically or that their reading age improves. No one at the congress mentioned any academic data with examination results and none presented that they were looking into this. Many wanted to share a collaboration approach to learning by using a teacher and an interpreter working together at all times. If the teacher is deaf, it has been proven to work well in Hong Kong and Sweden. Teachers are aware that

upon leaving school it is a huge problem for children as they lack skills or access to incidental knowledge or life experiences and therefore do not know how to resolve issues they may face as they develop into adulthood. Should we be teaching children to develop skills to cope with the challenges that life presents perhaps through incidental learning to encourage them to acquire skills to learn about the world to develop a language of knowledge.

In Israel, they stated that Arabic parents of deaf children are less engaging in some areas. The mothers are doing most of the roles and are involved in the child's developmental needs and the fathers are working and less engaging. A speaker from Canada had done research exploring how the various ethnic groups feel about their disabled children - and found that many struggle with accepting the child's deafness but find it easier to compare to those with physical disabilities as it is not visible. They shared how families are more accepting and allow children to learn but it did talk about how disability has affected these children as they become adults.

One workshop focussed on Early Intervention and how working not only with the child and their parents but also the wider family. This can have a huge effect on siblings, maternal grandparents and the child's integration with the wider family as they grow and develop. Research from Cyprus mentioned about the awareness of families of Early Intervention and advice from professionals on the best ways to communicate with their child or access to technical aids is very sporadic. This is due to families being spread out in various neighbourhoods and information is not disseminated once children are diagnosed.

Language was discussed in many lectures and it was shared how different methods were used but I did not feel many talked about the progress of children achieving a high level as these it seems can only be achieved through early intervention. It was shared that the children need to be able to read - the earlier they do this the easier their lives would be in transition into secondary schools.

Research showed progress with the development of speech and language using CI by the Ear Foundation CEO who is a Teacher of the Deaf (TOD). She shared the life of CI children and saw evidence of how it improved language for deaf children better than hearing aids users. But she did not share, that those who attend secondary education, start to become more complex and that learning decreases due to lack of confidence and peer pressures.

Incidental learning was discussed in that if children can have access to this then their language would much improve. If they learn about the world, gain more knowledge on general issues then the language vocabulary would be enhanced. In this research, it stated there is no evidence that deaf people learn better with visual learning. It has to be through incidental learning.

They emphatically apologised for the 1880 congress and shared how times have changed in the education for deaf and those with additional learning. In my view, teachers shared research based on education approaches, communications methods, technological aids/FM system, parenting issues but I did not hear much about the academic achievements - so I wonder if we are getting there? There were debates on using Sign Language as oppose to Oral verses Bilingual approaches. However, the final research stated it would not make any difference on how you teach as the outcomes will still be the same as each child's learning needs are very different.

I do think we need to look at the development of PHSE and emotional language development to enable DHH children to learn a method to express their desires and their feelings.

On day one, we had problems as the interpretation was not provided in all the rooms and a lot of deaf people got very upset. Meetings were set up and they put out the request for interpreters who would be willing to cover some of the workshops as volunteers. Deaf people with the president of WFD created a petition and asked people to sign it to request for a deaf person to be on the committee as they felt the deaf voice is underrepresented. I was fortunate in that there were three BSL interpreters and when they were in the same rooms they were able to share/co-work. The workshops all had six speakers each presenting 10-12 minutes and Q and A sessions so it would have been a lot for one interpreter in each.

In America the Hard of Hearing generally do not mix with the ASL(American Sign Language) users and very separated ;and there is a sense of rejection from these groups. This is what I observed through my networking conversations.

I had a very positive feedback regarding my presentation and many people approached me and wanted to know more about my research. However, we were given a set time and I finished one minute early as I had gone through my presentation and had to reduce the number of slides. They were very strict with time and would tell you 'Time's up! And you would have to end very abruptly. People were very interested in how Art Therapy has been used to enable children to develop an emotional language. Many had not thought about it in the way I had presented it. They wanted copies that I could email to them. The awareness of the cultural dynamics with working on different kind of groups has given professionals food for thought.

Speakers were given 10-12 mins and so many speakers had too many slides and were told to stop due to strict timing. I think a few people complained and after day two 13 mins were given. However, I saw a lot of poor presenters, either talking too fast, or their slides were too wordy and sometimes there was no clear understanding of what their aims were from their talks and I became frustrated but I am sure I was not the only person who felt this way.

I met a Scottish head teacher from Hamilton Deaf School but we saw each other on the last day of the conference so didn't get a chance to talk.

I do feel we need more exposure in the SEN sector and BATOD need to explore further why we are failing the education of deaf and disabled children. We need to educate them and give them the skills to learn how to understand the world and gain knowledge; and in turn act upon this information to give them a brighter and aspirational future.

The next International BATOD (British Association for Teachers of the Deaf) Conference will be in October 2016 and the next ICED is in 2020 in Australia.

Please see the following links-

[http://www.iced2015.com/uploads/140502\\_1st%20Announcement.pdf](http://www.iced2015.com/uploads/140502_1st%20Announcement.pdf).

<http://www.iced2015.com/en/content.php>