

## PSYCHOLOGY FOR EVERY DAY - PROMOTING LIFE SKILLS THROUGH THE TEACHING OF PSYCHOLOGY: A report from the EFPTA 2021 conference

Lenka Sokolová (President of EFPTA)

[info@efpta.org](mailto:info@efpta.org)

[www.efpta.org](http://www.efpta.org)

The European Federation of Psychology Teachers' Associations (EFPTA) was established in 2004 as a federation of national and regional associations of psychology teachers in schools and colleges in European countries, to promote and support the teaching of psychology in pre-university education. Members are mainly involved in the teaching of psychology courses at lower and upper secondary levels to students aged from 13 to 19 years. EFPTA's focus is on pre-university psychology education, and in the spirit of the Bologna Process, it has established a network of pre-tertiary psychology educators across Europe.

Normally, the EFPTA biennial conference takes place every even-numbered year in one European country. However, in 2020 the conference did not take place. After Copenhagen, Berlin, Prague, and Reykjavik, it should have returned to the 2010 venue – Bratislava, Slovakia. The 2010 conference was affected by the eruption of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano in Iceland and while some delegates were unable to reach Bratislava that year, others had difficulties returning home! It is almost unbelievable that a global catastrophe has influenced the EFPTA conference in Bratislava again. Approximately one month before the conference European countries started closures and lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the EFPTA board decided to postpone the conference to 2021 hoping that we would be able to meet in person. However, lockdowns, restrictions, and distance teaching have stayed part of our lives and so we are not meeting in person, enjoying sightseeing, and chatting with a cup of coffee or a glass of wine. “The new normal” moved many events into virtual space.

EFPTA 2021 conference took place online via the Zoom platform in April 2021 with more than eighty registered participants from sixteen different countries. The presenters were academics, researchers and practitioners from twelve European countries, representing ten European universities and eleven associations and organizations that support the teaching of psychology at different levels of education (including European Federation of Psychologists' Associations - EFPA's Board of Educational Affairs, European Society for the Teaching of Psychology - ESPLAT, International Baccalaureate Organization, British Psychological Society – BPS Division of Academics, Researchers and Teachers in Psychology - DARTP, and national psychology teachers' associations from Czechia, Finland, Denmark, Germany, Iceland, Slovakia and the United Kingdom). They prepared three days of interesting presentations, workshops, discussions and informal sessions that brought together psychology teachers and student teachers from sixteen countries.

In the opening session, each board member presented the teaching of psychology at the pre-tertiary level of education in their countries. The first keynote was presented by professor Daniela Ostatníková from Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia. She talked about the role of hormones in shaping human cognition and behaviour. She highlighted that genes and environment shape the architecture of the human brain influencing various aspects of brain functions. Hormones in the internal environment are very effective messengers of genes. The effects of testosterone on human cognition and behaviour remains a very challenging issue for medicine but its neuronal impact might be of interest for educators as well.

The second keynote was related to supporting mental health among upper secondary and vocational school students. Päivi Kohta from Finnish non-profit organization NYYTI RY presented the “Learn about your mind” course which was designed as a generic mental health promotion intervention. It aims to offer general life management skills for students, promote their mental health and increase life satisfaction and decrease depressive symptoms. Preliminary effectiveness studies indicate that the course increases self-efficacy beliefs on one's thought management, optimism, and social skills.

Helen Kitching, Lucinda Powell and Jock McGinty represented the British Psychological Society and Association for the Teaching of Psychology. Their symposium aimed to discuss mental health in schools and colleges in the United Kingdom. The symposium addressed mental health and wellbeing in schools and colleges in the UK as well as issues around support for mental health and wellbeing when students make the transition on to university. The speakers highlighted the challenges as well as presented ideas and case studies that showed best practice and effective ways to support both our students and the teachers.

Short item presentations allowed participants to learn more about the teaching of psychology in different countries and meet representatives of international organizations supporting the teaching of psychology. Åge Diseth from Norway discussed the results of his research on the motivation towards choosing psychology as a subject among Norwegian secondary school students. Sally Wiggins and Suzanne Narciss presented activities of ESPLAT. Ioulia Papageorgi introduced research conducted by EFPA's Board of Educational Affairs focused on the competencies of psychology bachelors. Paul Geiss from Austria discussed the concept of psychological literacy in the teaching of psychology. Jamie Barnes presented the psychology course in the International Baccalaureate and the concept of curriculum formation.

Conference participants could also choose from seven practical interactive workshops. Evie Bentley from the United Kingdom introduced the topic of self-care. Raisa Chumicheva and Olga Zvereva from Russia presented the topic of digital technology and young children. Morag Williamson from Scotland and Teija Jokinen-Luopa from Finland led a workshop on curriculum design, Jock McGinty from England and Ebba Christina Blåvarg from Sweden opened a discussion about using textbooks in the psychology classroom. Nikola Vorelova, Dominika Vajdová and Radomír Masaryk from Slovakia showed practical tips on how to develop critical thinking skills and how to identify fake news. Alena Nohavová and her students from the Czech Republic presented the use of mobile apps to combat stress. Miroslava Lemešová and Lenka Sokolová discussed the use of storytelling in the teaching of topics of neuroatypical development. The participants also had the opportunity to join informal sessions with online ice-breaker games, discussions and quizzes, to get to know each other and to further develop possibilities for future international cooperation.

The title of the 2021 EFPTA conference "Psychology for every day - promoting life skills through the teaching of psychology" was agreed by the EFPTA board in 2019 and it brought to our participants many topics, presentations and workshops highly relevant in the covid-19 and post-covid learning and teaching. They got inspiration on how to support mental health, take care of ourselves, use innovative methods in psychology classes like storytelling or the use of mobile apps supporting mental health, how to identify hoaxes and disinformation, or the impact of digital technology upon children and youth. They learned how to design psychology courses relevant for future young people, and develop critical thinking and overall psychological literacy. This conference is an example of unique and effective cooperation and sharing knowledge among different organizations involved in the teaching of psychology (including EFPTA, EFPA's Board of Educational Affairs, ESPLAT or IBO). We believe that EFPTA 2021 conference was a source of teaching inspiration and virtual collaborative space for pre-tertiary psychology teachers, student teachers and teacher educators around Europe.