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## EurECA Conference 2003

### A Christian Perspective on the Learning Revolution

#### Evangelical Theological Seminary, Osijek, Croatia

At breakfast on the first morning, I sat with Andy, a deputy headteacher of a multi-ethnic school near London. Over lunch I spoke with Kornelia and Sylvia from Bulgaria where they have recently been involved in the setting up of a national Christian teachers association in that former communist country.

And so it went on through the three-day conference. The variety of people was wonderful, as was the range of schools and countries represented. From state schools through church-affiliated state-sponsored schools (there are 500 such in Hungary!), to independent Christian boarding schools for missionary kids (e.g. Black Forest Academy, Germany). Furthest north, we had Norwegians (including main speaker Per Garmannslund). A Scripture Union worker from Madrid, Spain, was the most southerly European delegate (David was also a most pleasant room-mate, never accusing me of snoring!) His southerly location was beaten only by two sub-equatorial visitors from South Africa. Anita and Neels are educators and trainers with great experience. They added a trans-continental flavour to discussions.

And discussions we had aplenty. Not only were small groups provided to process our responses to the plenary sessions but each of the three afternoons were basically free. This was an ideal chance to exchange ideas, network and even do some sight-seeing in Osijek and in Vukovar.

Croatia's beautiful Dalmatian coast has become a popular holiday destination for East and West Europeans alike. However, Osijek is, I found, rather off the beaten path. Not least because uncleared landmines lie in fields outside the city limits. However, despite the slight inconvenience in getting there, the choice of conference venue was courageous and even prophetic.

The conference theme was 'The Learning Revolution'. We sought to understand what it is and to critique the various strands as Christian educators. Needless to say even with effective plenary sessions led by Per Garmannslund, we were only scratching the surface.

An insight I treasure as I return to work is that teaching is much more than schooling. This more holistic view of teaching is about influencing learners very positively, as well as passing on subject knowledge. This, in fact, is more akin to the New Testament understanding of 'discipleship'. Into what values, skills and knowledge will you be discipling learners this coming year?

*Bernard Bowers (Association of Christian Teachers, Scotland)*

At this year's conference, 15 countries were represented with a total of 54 participants. We worshipped together, exchanged experiences, encouraged one another and studied together the main theme of 'The Learning Revolution'.

The conference was hosted by the Evangelical Theological Faculty in Osijek in northeastern Croatia. This school for tertiary and church-related education is constantly growing and has very suitable facilities for such an event. In choosing this location, the EurECA Board had taken into account accessibility for participants from Eastern Europe, who consequently made up a good proportion of those present.

The conference programme was intentionally designed to provide not only for worship, teaching and learning together but also for plenty of informal sharing and building of relationships. This was greatly appreciated.

The programme included a historical tour of Osijek and a visit to the war-ravaged city of Vucovar on the Serbian border. There, the evidence everywhere of destruction, and, at the same time, the perseverance of hope displayed in the results of ten years of reconstruction, were especially impressive. A visit to a small but growing local evangelical church, which is strongly committed to bringing Christ's forgiveness to this city marred by ethnic mistrust, brought home to us how much Christians here need the support of Christians in other parts of Europe.

The main speaker on the theme of 'The Learning Revolution' was Per Garmannslund from Norway. He is engaged there in several national and local projects dealing with new approaches to learning.

The term 'Learning Revolution' refers to a rather broad movement which started in the 1980s. The common denominator in the various currents might be found in the saying 'It's not How smart am I? but rather How am I smart?'. This indicates a shift from focusing on the teacher to focusing on the learner. It also reminds us of the Christian belief that every human being has gifts which make him or her unique, and which oblige us to discover the unique plan for each human being.

Per Garmannslund said that three main streams may be discerned within the broad Learning Revolution movement:

- a) the Accelerated Learning movement
- b) the Learning Styles movement
- c) the Multiple Intelligences movement

The various approaches to 'Accelerated Learning' all focus on techniques for more efficient learning. They have reminded us of the importance of visual, auditory, and practical learning, and also of the impact of the subconscious as well as of cooperation on learning processes. It must be noted, however, that Accelerated Learning is preoccupied with learning as memorization i.e. it deals only with acquiring factual knowledge and not with value orientation and attitudes. It reduces the multi-dimensional human being made in the image of God to nothing more than a brain-on-legs.

The 'Learning Styles' movement assumes that every person has their own individual style of learning, which is as individual as a fingerprint. The aim is to know one's own individual style of learning, and to apply this knowledge for best learning results. Consequently, it is the school's task to provide for the right amount of freedom, so that every pupil may learn according to their own style.

The 'Multiple Intelligences' movement has revised the belief, predominant until the 1980s, that intelligence is inborn, static, and to be assessed with a single measure known as IQ. Howard Gardner, on the other hand, has proposed that there are a number of different intelligences, e.g. linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intra-personal etc.

The Learning Revolution has also questioned some myths held within our culture, four of which are still very influential in our classroom atmospheres:

1. Learning is painful (Question: How can learning become more joyful?)
2. Learning is isolated (How can learning become more social?)
3. Learning is separate from the rest of life (How can learning become more meaningful and real?)
4. Learning is with the mind only (How can learning become multi-sensory?)

A range of criticisms of some aspects of the Learning Revolution from a Christian perspective and of ideas for practical consequences were discussed in groups.

### **Suggestions for further reading**

*The Learning Revolution*, G.Dryden & J.Voss, 1994

*Accelerated Learning*, Colin Rose, 1985

*Bringing Out the Giftedness of Your Child*, Rita Dunn, 1992

*Frames of Mind*, Howard Gardner, 1983

*Matthias Kaegi (Switzerland)*

