

## **Just another Conference**

It was a hot and stuffy conference in Bratislava, a typical academic event in which, for 3 hours, many worthy experts with 10 minute slots had spoken for anything between 15 and 30 minutes about many worthy things from the platform. One had even used slides. The audience, from schools, universities and government, was now visibly restless and hungry. Many had just awoken from a boredom-induced slumber. The Chairperson looked at his watch and reminded the last speaker of the morning that lunch would be in 5 minutes and could not be delayed because of staff difficulties. The speaker blanched, the audience breathed a huge inward sigh of relief.

As the speaker reached the platform, he looked at the audience, and then at the chairperson and very visibly tore up his notes. 'Thank-you Mr Chair,' he said ' I was going to talk about what my organisation has been doing to promote Lifelong Learning in Europe. Instead I now only have time to say what I really think.' 'So since food is imminent, I want to present the first course - that is food for thought.'

He waved the morning newspaper. 'This,' he said ' represents today's news' and he listed the national and international doom and gloom of wars, burglaries, murders, crime, divorces and poverty in that edition. 'This is not the sort of world I want to live in. This is a world created by present structures, including the educational ones which you are helping to maintain' he said.

He paused to allow the sense of blame to sink in. 'What I do not want' he said 'What we do not need, is more of the same. We do not even need better than the same. What we want, and can create between us, is more and better of something different.' Different? thought the audience. What is he talking about, and just before lunch?

'So, what is this something different? I have three minutes left to try to change our mind-sets from the way we see things as a progression from what we do now. I therefore recommend a 3 point plan.' The audience, now hanging on every word, relaxed. Only 3 points. That we can cope with.

'Number one,' he said 'Close down the Ministry of Education!.' One third of the audience paled and others gave a nervous laugh. There was even a cheer or two. 'But', he continued 'Only for one week'. Another sigh of relief. 'And then re-open it under an entirely new name.' Puzzlement in the audience. 'I suggest' he said 'the Ministry for the Development of Human Potential.' Further puzzlement and a few pennies dropping, as they thought about the meaning of what was being said.

'In the week it is closed', he continued 'there should be brain-stormings, creative development sessions, team meetings, new job descriptions for everyone, written and re-written by the employees themselves, and all of this activity focusing on exactly how the human potential of Slovakia's young people will be developed and allowed to flourish.' The audience considered this - mind-sets adjusted a notch. OK what next?

'Number two,' he said, 'Close down the Schools!' Another third of the audience stopped smiling, while two-thirds relaxed. This was not their problem. 'That's everybody's problem', said the speaker, 'because during the week they are closed down, they should have the same brain-stormings, creative development sessions, new curriculum development programmes - And they should bring in parents, children and members of the community into all those sessions, ready to re-open as 'Institutions for the development of Human Potential.' focussing on the best ways the youngsters can be persuaded to do that.'

The audience briefly considered this. Mind-sets softened further and insights flashed. 'Lastly,' said the speaker, 'You know what is going to be closed down next, 'The University section of the audience nodded, 'and I don't have to tell you what happens - simply that Universities now become 'Institutions for the further development of Human Potential.' 'And while we are at it, companies in Industry, business and commerce might become organisations for the application of human potential.' The few business-men in the audience applauded.

'Lastly' said the speaker, now in his dying seconds 'I know you won't do any of this. But at least regard it as a metaphor for what might need to be done to create a lifelong learning society in Bratislava and in Slovakia as a whole. Thank-you and enjoy your meal.'

It was a noisy lunchtime.