

Oskar FRISCHENSCHLAGER¹, Karl KREMSER & Richard MARZ (Wien)

Evaluation of the Short Remedial Course “SOL“ for Beginning Medical Students in Vienna – Which Subgroups Benefit Most?

Abstract

Introduction: The academic year 2001/2002 saw a change of the curriculum of the University of Vienna Medical School from discipline based to integrated blocks using the organ/systems approach complemented with lines focusing on clinical reasoning and skills. Unique to the institution is its size with entering classes between 1000 and 1600 students in the last years. The reform also included a pruning of previously required content to reduce the effective course time from more than 9 to 6 years. First year courses with an emphasis on the review of highschool material were eliminated; instead students are expected to enter with a sound command of the relevant chapters of Chemistry, Physics, and Biology.

Problem: The evaluation of the effectiveness of “self organized learning” (SOL). This 10-hour course is offered during the first few weeks to confront students with some prerequisite high-school knowledge and to enable them to develop and use self-study techniques to make up deficiencies. Groups of 15 students guided by a faculty member work through one problem each in Chemistry, Physics, and Biology using a PBL (problem-based learning) style procedure.

Methods: At the end of the first semester 1090 students, about 84% of the total group, answered retrospectively a questionnaire about their experiences with SOL and their own subsequent use of the study-skills covered. 197 students agreed to have their anonymity lifted so that their answers could be analyzed in light of their performance on the exam.

Results and Discussion: We found no gender differences, but several correlations with the mother tongue of the students. In addition there were some correlations between answer patterns and exam results. Students who had received more intensive training during high school in Chemistry also exhibited a greater interest in the natural sciences and participated more intensely in SOL. They also were more self-critical: they judged the module 3 (From Molecule to Cell) with a heavy emphasis on natural sciences at the end of the semester as more difficult and had better results on the exam.

Keywords

Curriculum reform, Medical School, Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Evaluation, Remedial Classes, PBL, POL

¹ e-Mail: oskar.frischenschlager@meduniwien.ac.at

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