



Special Article

The Teaching of Rheumatology at the University. The Journey From Teacher Based to Student-centered Learning[☆]



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ABSTRACT

In recent years, university education has undergone profound changes as a result of the creation of the European Space for Higher Education. It has gone from a teacher-centred model, based on the transmission of knowledge through lectures, to being student-centred, based on the acquisition of skills and attaching great importance to independent learning. This transformation involves the need to reorganise academic activity and employ new teaching tools, such as active learning methodologies, more in line with current requirements. In this article, the backbones of the European Space for Higher Education are presented, and diverse experiences of teaching innovation described under Reumacademia and from three Spanish universities.

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La enseñanza de la reumatología en la universidad. La travesía desde el aprendizaje basado en el profesor al centrado en el alumno

RESUMEN

En los últimos años la enseñanza universitaria ha experimentado un profundo cambio como consecuencia de la creación del Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior. Se ha pasado de un modelo centrado en el profesor, basado en la transmisión de conocimientos a través de las clases magistrales, a otro centrado en el alumno, basado en la adquisición de competencias y que otorga gran importancia al aprendizaje autónomo. Esta transformación comporta la necesidad de reorganizar la actividad académica y de emplear nuevas herramientas docentes, como las metodologías activas de aprendizaje, más acorde con las exigencias actuales. En este artículo se exponen los ejes vertebradores del Espacio Europeo de Educación Superior y se describen diversas experiencias de innovación docente en el marco de Reumacademia y de tres universidades españolas.

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New Teaching Model

The advent of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) has led to a change in the traditional teaching model, which is based

almost exclusively in the transmission of knowledge from the teacher to the student (passive learning). It is not easy to adapt to the new paradigm, in which the student becomes the protagonist of his education (active learning). To overcome the challenge, it seems necessary to both understand the key elements on which the transformation is based and explore the potential of new learning methods.

European Higher Education Area

In 1999, the education ministers of 29 European countries signed the Declaration of Boulogne,¹ the foundation document of

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Table 1
Differences Between Traditional University Teaching and European Higher Education Area (EHEA) Teaching.

	Traditional university teaching	Teaching at the EHEA
Model	Teacher-centred	Student-centred
Academic load	Credits based on the activity (hours) of the teacher	Credits based on the activity (hours) of the student
Type of learning	Dependent	Autonomous
Role of the teacher	Dominant	Companion
Role of the student	Passive	Active
Teaching technique	Presentation (magisterial) class	Active methodologies
Formative objective	Transmission of knowledge	Acquisition of competences
Teaching method	Face-to-face activity	Great importance to information technologies and communication

a convergence process aimed at creating the EHEA. The Boulogne process, which ended in 2010, intended to foster the European dimension of higher education through the establishment of a common system of qualifications, the promotion of student mobility and the encouragement of cooperation between centres. The changes implemented regarding traditional teaching are evident (Table 1).

International Credit System

One of the main foundations of the EHEA, which currently comprises 45 countries, is the use of an international credit system, called European Credit Transfer System (ECTS).^{2,3} Credits were created as a result of the exchange programme ERASMUS, in order to recognise the courses taken by the students. The EHEA chose the ECTS as a benchmark that would ensure the quality and the homogeneity of qualifications across all universities. ECTS credits consider all the learning process activities of the student and, therefore, not only hours of classes are taken into account, but also hours of study and the time dedicated to practices and assignment preparation. This new calculation formula implied an important change in the traditional measuring method, in which credit was more likely used to take into account the dedication of the teacher rather than to assess how difficult it was for a student to pass a subject. An ECTS credit has a minimum limit of 25 h of work from the student and a maximum limit of 30 h. In practice, all the Spanish universities have decided that an ECTS credit is worth 25 h. Most of the EHEA degrees have an academic load of 240 ECTS credits, though the degree in Medicine has 360 (60 per year).

A New Pedagogical Model

The ECTS leads to a new pedagogical model, given that it is mostly based on the autonomous learning of the student. This implies a challenge for both the teacher, who must prepare out-of-class activities, and the student, who is inevitably responsible for the organisation of his work. To some extent, the responsibility of the educational process passes from the teacher to the student, though this circumstance does not imply less dedication from the teacher. In fact, the teacher has to adopt the role of a guide and a counsellor, giving accurate instructions about where and how the student should obtain knowledge. Thus, the level of involvement and dedication of the teacher is necessarily greater. Besides, the teacher must conduct a personalised follow-up of the student to detect whether there is any difficulty in his learning process and, if so, determine the way of overcoming it.

Curriculum Oriented to Professional Work

One of the key demands of the Boulogne process is the need to adjust the training to the requirements of the labour market. In other words, it is advocated that the academic curriculum is oriented to professional work. That is why in 2002 the Tuning

Project (Tuning Educational Structures in Europa Project)⁴ was put in motion, in which degrees are considered in terms of competences which are a dynamic combination of attributes related to knowledge, skills, attitudes and responsibilities that the students have to be able to prove at the end of the educational process. Competence and knowledge are not synonyms; competence includes knowledge but its development takes more time.

There are 2 kinds of competences^{5,6}: generic or cross competences, which are common to all degrees, and specific competences, which are related to each specific field of studies.

There are 3 kinds of generic competences: (a) instrumental competences, which include methodological and technological abilities; (b) interpersonal competences, which refer to the ability of personal relationships, either individual (e.g., self-criticism) or social (e.g., teamwork), and (c) systemic competences, which allow the person to observe how the parts of the whole group work together (e.g., planning skills).

On the other hand, specific competences are divided into 3 classes: (a) academic (*to know*); (b) field-related, which include the practical skills of each field (*to do*), and (c) professional, which are the skills related to each specific profession (*to know how to do*).

Teaching Modalities

Autonomous learning and competence training entail the need to reorganise teaching activities. In essence, 3 teaching modalities can be considered: directed, supervised and autonomous.

Directed activities are carried out mainly in the classroom; they are led, to a greater or lesser extent, by the teacher and they have a pre-established schedule. They involve master (presentation) classes, which have experienced a clear decrease in lecture hours, and seminars, which have been granted greater importance in terms of academic load. It is during seminars that active learning methodologies are usually included (problem-based learning, case-study method, cooperative learning).^{7–9}

Supervised activities, which usually take place outside of the classroom, require somewhat regular follow-up with the teacher. This includes, among others, tutorships, assignment control, clinical practices and checking of the learning folder, a portfolio containing different documents, finished or in progress, which evidence the work and evolution of the student in that subject and to which the EHEA grants special value.^{10,11}

Autonomous activities are those in which the student organises his time freely and they involve tasks such as bibliographic searches, assignment preparation, studying and incorporating content to the portfolio.

Information Technologies and Communication

For the EHEA, information technologies and communication are essential in the educational process.¹² It is believed that the university must encourage the so-called “electronic learning” (e-learning), i.e., distance (virtual) learning, through new electronic

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