

*20 Years Graz Conference on  
Medical Education: Why was it  
held the first time in 1995 and  
why did it continue?*

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Wegen Verhinderung des Autors wurde der Vortrag  
bearbeitet und gehalten von Jörg Stein



...I send my sincere regrets, but while you are hearing this I am in the AKH Vienna accompanying my wife to a consultation where none of the options we will be asked to consider are palatable.

Yet even here I can make a positive connection to Medical Education - the attending physician is a former student of mine, who can pretend quite credibly that he has some good memories.



So how can I bring you back to where we were **20 years ago**? That time travel like this is not easy I learned when I gave a JC a few years ago. I was asked to discuss two “**historical**” papers that had been influential when designing our Vienna curriculum reform. As one of these papers I chose the original version of the GMCs **Tomorrows Doctors published in 1993**. (GMC)

As I laid out the GMCs demands like

***“Factual information should be kept to the essential minimum”***

I noticed that the message did not carry; nothing seemed exceptional to my audience though it certainly was when published. 20 years can indeed be a long time.

## Tomorrows Doctors....

So the ideas in **Tomorrows Doctors** sound very “**obvious**” today, though many of them are still not fully implemented in Austria. But **in 1995** this message was really **new** and truly **revolutionary**. Thus I need to take you back to a time in which discussions about educational methods were considered useless and even frivolous: why bother when we had lectures given by wonderful people like ourselves. Likewise a discussion about the curriculum was totally unnecessary: We already had one!

I do remember the remark of a clinical professor during our reform discussions in Vienna: All we needed to do was to find a way to make students attend lectures – serious and fruitful learning was bound to follow.



## Personal milestone....



A personal milestone on my road to the first Graz Conference were the many discussions I had with **Karl Krajic** (brother of **Elizabeth Kachur**), a medical sociologist, who in the early 1990s studied the teaching process at the Institute of Medical Chemistry.

In his report he characterized my colleagues and me as being **“frustrationstolerant”** – willing to subject ourselves in our teaching activities to continuous failure.

He observed correctly that we were well aware that most of our students ***derived little or no meaningful learning from our efforts***, yet ***we kept on expending many hours and additional financial resources on the same activities year after year.***

## Personal milestones ...ÖGHD....



But in the early 1990s – as in the preceding decades – it was considered strange, or even frivolous, to spend time on developing ideas to reform the situation. In the spring of **1991 the ÖGHD** – meaning **Gottfried Csanyi** - organized a week-long workshop with 2 British experts on educational methods in **Strobl**. When I asked my department head for a leave to attend, he signed the necessary paper but not without making the comment: “**actually I was under the impression you already knew how to teach.**”

The ***workshop in Strobl*** was another ***personal milestone***:

it was my first introduction to education as an interesting and challenging academic endeavour,

it introduced me to **Lewis Elton**, who should later become a personal mentor and who was also an expert speaker at the **2<sup>nd</sup>**

**Graz Conference in 1997**, and

***Gottfried and I started a cooperation, which continues to this very day.***

## Personal milestones ...Medizinkommission...Grazer Konf...

The cooperation between **Jörg Stein** and myself developed more slowly. We were both members of the so-called **Medizinkommission der BUKO**, an Austria-wide organization representing the interests of junior faculty members. Under the leadership of **Kurt Grünewald**, who in later years became a member of the Austrian parliament for the Greens party, we considered many issues. It was here that I encountered for the first time members of the academic community who actually also cared about educational issues. **Jörg and I** discovered our common commitment to **educational reform** through our unplanned encounters in **1992 in Munich and again 1994 in Cologne** at conferences on medical education organised by **Florian Eitel**. Here we first met not only **Florian Eitel** but also **Wim Gijsselaers** and **Lambert Schuwirth** from **Maastricht** as well as **Ralph Bloch** who was just starting in **Bern**.

**All 4 should become regular speakers at the Graz Conference. Jörg and I were deeply impressed and decided to plan a similar event in and for Austria.**



## ...Grazer Konferenz ... Graz Conference...a story of success...

Thus we come to ***the first reason*** the **Graz Conference was successful** from the start:

It was a **mutual support group** for those who thought spending time considering such strange ideas like ***how to improve higher education*** was important and even gratifying and fun. Here we could reassure each other that it was the other ones – not us – ***in desperate need of enlightenment.***

The ***second reason*** for our success was that we were **a community of learners**. None of us – and this includes the 3 organizers – were experts in this field. But we were motivated to become experts. What set the organizers apart was:

**We knew where we could find expert help and**  
**We knew how to organize a friendly and productive meeting**





## ... Graz Conference...a productive meeting...

A productive meeting must include space for **discussions** – both *formal and informal*, and for **networking**.

I would like to give an example from a meeting I attended only last week in **Szeged**, in Hungary. There was a question:

*“how well do skills learned in a skills lab actually transfer to a clinical setting”*. A wonderfully innocent question by an (maybe even hostile) outsider, which nevertheless made the experts sweat.

I at once remembered the lecture from **Robert Hulsman** he gave the last time the Graz Conference met in **Innsbruck** in **2009**. He showed us a short video from the movie “The Doctor” which illustrates a technically perfect ENT (Ear-Nose-Throat) examination as performed on a puppet – the problem was, there was not a puppet but a patient in the chair.

Thus questions like the one asked in Szeged need to arise often. But for this to happen we need plenty of space for **reflection**.



... **Graz Conference...a productive meeting...the design**



The community of learners' concept was reinforced by a design decision:

**Expert speakers** for the conference were **always** invited from outside **Austria**, even when there would have been a plausible local choice.

This caused on occasion some hurt feelings but I am convinced led to a ***more productive working atmosphere***

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## ... Graz Conference...a first start...

The **first Graz conference (1995)** was a memorable event. Yet it seemed like we were hearing stories from another planet – so foreign were the concepts being presented. To add a counterpoint to the colleagues from Maastricht talking about quality control in higher education I had invited **Bil Fulton**, the academic director of **Webster College Vienna**, to present us with the **USA viewpoint**. To our surprise we found hardly a difference in the positions in the USA and the Netherlands, which led me to speculate that there must be an **ocean** of huge dimensions **between the Netherlands and Austria**.

The **first conference** may have well been the only one, were it not for an important political event that took place in **1996**: the Austrian parliament passed a law demanding that all university faculties draw up new curricula and giving them at the same time real autonomy to do so.

Thus when the **second Graz Conference** took place in the spring of **1997**, **Jörg, Gottfried, and I were following a political agenda: we were going to organize conferences which would enable participants to become agents of real change!**



... Graz Conference... further tasks...



Which brings us to the **third reason** for our **success**:

The Graz conferences were **working conferences** and **real outcomes** were expected.

**In the early years a typical conference workshop was led by one of the invited experts and lasted about 6 hours.**

## Topics for the 4<sup>th</sup> conference in 1999

- **Ralph BLOCH:**

"Kapazitätsplanung aufgrund definierter Qualitätsparameter"

- **Henny P.A. BOSHUIZEN:**

- "Modern Theories of Learning and Implications for Medical Education"

- **Florian EITEL:**

"Das 1. Jahr im Medizinstudium:  
Lernmöglichkeiten und Leistungsbeurteilung"

- **Charles ENGEL:**

"How to design a Block in the new curriculum"

- **William FULTON:**

"How Can We Use Student Course Evaluations to Improve Teaching and the Curriculum?"

- **Nu Viet VU & Wim GIJSELAERS:**

"A guide to integrated curriculum design:  
A beginning practical exercise"

## ... Graz Conference...continuing...developing...spreading out

The **5<sup>th</sup> conference in 2000** brought the first cycle to a close. **Curriculum reform** was happening at each of the (then) 3 Austrian medical faculties.

Thus initially there were no real plans for another conference until we got requests to get busy and organize something. Thus we retooled and the conferences got a focus on faculty development.

The **6<sup>th</sup> conference** featured PBL and computer-based learning; a later conference introduced team-based learning to Austria

Another change had us reach out to our *neighbours* to the east and south-east.

While the initial conferences had a total **focus on our needs in Austria** and the **conference language** was **German** unless our speakers preferred English we are now an **English language** conference and we try to cover **world-wide issues**



... **Graz Conference... future ... what to do on Monday?..**



At the *close of a conference* we had a *plenary session* where

**each workshop had to provide a summary**  
as well as present  
**plans for future work** to be done at each university.

At the *second conference* one of these presentations was not very  
focused which led me to exclaim:

***“But what will you do on Monday?”***

This became our motto for the following conferences.



... Graz Conference... thanks and future ...!!!..

At the close ***I do want to thank*** the many colleagues who have made these conferences a success but who have also made it a lot of fun.

It was gratifying to see that world-renowned experts like ***Geoff Norman*** came to our conferences because we had established a reputation.

This is a complement to the ***audience*** who are responsible for the friendly but also challenging environment.

My ***special thanks*** go to ***Herbert Plass*** who has taken on the responsibility for editing a program book, which meets every need. He has also made the conference web-site a valuable archive of our conference history and thus the history of Austrian medical education.

I do wish the ***new generation*** of organizers ***success*** but also as much ***gratification*** and ***fun*** as Jörg, Gottfried and I had...



