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Delayed understanding and staying in phase : students' perception of their study situation

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Abstract

Findings are presented from a study of undergraduate students' experiences of understanding in first-year engineering. At the end of their first year of study 86 Swedish students of electrical engineering and computer science were asked to reflect in writing on their experiences of studying and learning. Fifteen of them also took part in interviews which explored in some detail their experiences of understanding in relation to perceived constraints of the teaching-learning environment. The analyses of the students' written accounts and the interview data focused on the students' experiences of studying and of understanding in relation to course work in engineering. The majority of the students reported problematic first-year experiences and testified to a sensation of 'falling out of phase' with their studies. This sensation was frequently coupled with a lag in coming to understand course material, which may be characterised in terms of delayed understanding. The notion of delayed understanding is discussed in relation to ideas about students' perceptions of the learning environment and the impact that those perceptions might have on students' opportunities to

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reflect on learning material and develop a solid understanding of course material in engineering education. In conclusion, it is suggested that the the notion of delayed understanding captures the complications of a study situation in which a perceived lack of time to reflect on learning material obstructs students? understanding of course material in engineering, and also points up a more general aspect of learning observing that time to reflect on previous experiences is an essential component of the process of coming to understand learning material in a particular educational setting. (HRK / Abstract übernommen), Scheja, Max, E-Mail: max.scheja@lime.ki.se