

The Art of Observation: A Qualitative Analysis of Medical Students' Experiences

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Background

- The Art of Observation is a 14-hour, 7-session enrichment elective.
- The course consists of guided visits to the Dallas Museum of Art, Nasher Sculpture Center, The Warehouse, The Crow Collection and UT Southwestern Medical Campus.
- Activities include discussion, drawing and writing exercises, lectures, and interactive experiences.
- Arts in medical school curricula has garnered much attention recently.
- Goal of arts-based courses is to stimulate personal reflection and engage students in a holistic and humanistic way in addition to teaching technical skills.
- Arts-based courses help students develop professionalism and empathy, which are difficult-to-teach topics in the curriculum.
- There is a need for studies that assess the effect of arts-based interventions on behaviors, attitudes, and technical skills of students.

Research Questions

- How do arts-based courses enrich students?
- What did students learn from the Art of Observation?
- How did students apply the topics covered in the Art of Observation to their medical practice?

Methods

- Evaluations were collected from students participating in our elective from 2015 to 2017.
- Evaluations were analyzed using a qualitative methodology.
- Qualitative analysis focuses on identifying themes in data.
- Two investigators independently read all evaluations line-by-line and generated preliminary themes.
- The themes were refined and sub-themes were identified.
- Data was analyzed until no new relationships could be found.



Guided discussion at the Dallas Museum of Art



Playing with color interaction inspired by Joseph Albers



Finding meaning from furniture at the Dallas Museum of Art



Touring the art collection at Clements Hospital

Emerging Themes

1. Enhanced observation skills

- Students developed the ability to synthesize a compelling narrative in addition to learning technical skills.

2. Improved physician socialization

- Students reported enhanced self-awareness, increased tolerance of ambiguity, and development of a humanistic view of medicine.

3. Reduction in burnout symptoms

- Students reported an enhanced sense of well-being after each session, which mitigates the process of burnout.

Discussion

The Art of Observation was designed to:

- Teach students relevant clinical skills, including the ability to observe, interpret, and communicate visual information.
- Encourage self-reflection and promote a humanistic understanding of medicine.
- Provide practical opportunities for students to work in teams and gain exposure to diverse perspectives.

We found that the Art of Observation:

- Enhanced observational skills, particularly in the development of a focused, deliberate process for analysis, as well as a nuanced and deep understanding of artwork and visual cues.
- Helped develop positive physician socialization skills, including teamwork, communication of complex thoughts, development of a humanistic view of medicine, and a tolerance of ambiguity.
- Improved students' overall wellness, thereby preventing burnout.

Conclusion

- One of the major challenges in medical education is training students to become competent and humanistic in their approach to patient care.
- Medicine and art both emphasize:
 - The importance of reading gestures and expressions
 - How to interpret context
 - How to determine what is symbolically as well as literally important
 - How to be skeptical of initial assumptions
 - How to empathetically perceive emotional dimensions and narrative
- The arts play a role in developing physicians who are observant, empathetic and better-rounded.

Selected References

1. Lake J, Jackson L, Hardman C. A fresh perspective on medical education: the lens of the arts. *Medical Education*. 2015;49(8):759-72.
2. Shapiro J, Rucker L, Beck J. Training the clinical eye and mind: using the arts to develop medical students' observational and pattern recognition skills. *Medical Education*. 2006;40(3):263-8.