

Visual Thinking Strategies: The Art of Seeing in Medical Education

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BACKGROUND

During practical sessions and assessments for 'clinical reasoning' and 'physical examination,' Dutch medical students struggle to adequately describe their observations. Students are focused on providing the correct answer and just give up when they do not know. We aimed to design a first-year practical course where students can practice observation skills. Additionally, we wanted to evaluate whether students are enthusiastic about this new teaching method.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

We have developed the practical course 'The art of seeing', which is based on the Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) method. This method has been successfully implemented at Harvard University (Naghshineh et al., 2008). Using art as a visual prompt, combined with a drawing assignment and two VTS discussions, students practiced their observational skills. We focused on the concepts of looking, seeing, perception and interpretation. Additionally, students also worked on collaboration and gained insight into personal meaning-making as well as the value of others' perspectives. We conducted a pilot with two groups of 11 first-year medical students in September 2022. Students provided feedback through evaluation forms and the results were analyzed both quantitatively (in frequencies) and qualitatively.

RESULTS

Most students found the practical session 'fun' (59%, 13/22), while the others rated it as 'neutral' (41%). The majority experienced the practical session as 'educational' (55%). Only one student felt it was 'not educational' (4%), while the rest rated it as 'neutral' (41%). Of the students, 41% considered the practical session meaningful for their development, 41% rated this aspect as 'neutral', and 18% did not find it meaningful. When asked what watching art could contribute to their development, 54% responded that it can help them 'zoom out' to avoid tunnel vision and look from different perspectives. Furthermore, 14% learned to see more details, 9% found it contributed to developing a critical perspective, and it helped one student observe calmly (5%). Two students were critical of the relevance (9%), for example because they believed these skills 'are learned anyway during their studies'.

DISCUSSION

First-year medical students found the practical course 'The art of seeing' enjoyable and educational. Students learned not to judge too quickly, but to first observe together from different perspectives. From the critical students, we can learn that this method may not be suitable for everyone.

CONCLUSION

Nevertheless, this practical course with creative working methods seems to be a valuable addition, and it is worth considering implementing this teaching of observational skills in some form within the medical curriculum.

REFERENCES

Nagshineh, S, e.a (2008) Formal Art Observation Training Improves Medical Students' Visual Diagnostic Skills, *J Gen Intern Med* 23(7):991–7