



Art for the Development of Skills and Promotion of Well-Being - Experience on the Use of Art in Medical Students, in Tucuman, Argentina

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Abstract

The art, within the Medical Humanities, develops skills in health, medical training and Burnout prevention. La Sapienza University (Rome), since 2016, applied the method of Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) in students of Medicine and Nursing. This work presents the experience of the use of VTS at the National University of Tucumán and this is based on the Italian experience. The method was applied at volunteer medical students. Previously selected works of art and others proposed by the students were used, which served as tools to address the ability to express themselves, problems of tolerance to ambiguity, the improvement of teamwork and empathy. Before and after the workshop, self-assessment questionnaires on perception, participation, expression and group work skills were administered. In line with what is shown in the literature regarding the subject, students find this technique to have a great educational impact, emphasizing that it improves the student-teacher relationship, they perceive it as an effective method for the development of clinical skills. In addition, they do not feel it as a greater academic load. Given this, it is imposed as a pedagogical suggestion to be incorporated into the curriculum.

Keywords: Skills; Visual art; Visual Thinking Strategies; Medical Education

Introduction

One of the objectives of medical education is to develop various competencies necessary for professional practice. Among these are the capacity for observation, communication, tolerance for ambiguity and empathy. Art is considered an effective tool to develop these skills [1-3]. Thus, many universities have seen the potential in the use of art and have incorporated it into different study plans as proposals that have been refined and, above all, validated in different investigations [4,5]. In the field of medical training, it was also found that health and disease can be studied through works of art [6], develop visual thinking strategies [7] or encourage artistic thinking [8], all measures they tend to improve observation skills, increase self-esteem, which can help a better physical examination in the diagnostic process [9]. Many studies also confirm that the use of art is a resource that produces psychological well-being by reducing stress and both physical and mental exhaustion, which is a protective factor against burnout [10-12].

Based on the aforementioned, we can affirm that the systematic use of art contributes to the development of positive relationships between interprofessional groups in a health context. Among these activities is the use of the method known as Visual Thinking Strategies[®] (VTS). This method was developed by Abigail Housen and Philip Yenawine in the 1980s in New York. It consists of a conversation about works of art selected specifically for this purpose and with a guide based on three questions, which are used by the moderator to promote careful observation, listening and proposal of ideas from all the participants, either to justify said ideas and discuss the different interpretations. Among the centers that are developing this proposal is the Laboratory of Art and Medical Humanities of the Faculty of Pharmacy and Medicine of the “La Sapienza” University of Rome [13,14]. This work presents a collaboration that this center carried out with the Faculty of Medicine of the National University of Tucumán (UNT). In the course of 2020, a workshop was held as a pilot experience with the use of the VTS technique, where students from the UNT Faculty of Medicine participated.

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Developing: Taking into account that the VTS technique consists of using works of art to increase class participation, improve interpersonal relationships, to promote empathy, group work, problem solving and the capacity for tolerance and integration between the different points of view of all the protagonists, generating a better communication capacity and interpersonal relationships both among colleagues and with patients, it also manages to improve the capacity for observation and reasoning (semiological and hermeneutical ability). In this work, it was proposed to verify how this activity could contribute to the psychological well-being of the students according to their participation, to evaluate the usefulness of the proposed technique and the appreciation on the part of the students.

Methodology

Given the pandemic situation of 2020, which only allowed virtual activities, this workshop was carried out remotely (Figure 1). Medicine students between 20 to 25 years old were selected and for the method to be effective due to virtually, we worked with a small group of 7 students. five meetings of 90 min each were planned, during the 5-week period using the Google Meet platform. During the meetings, oral and written VTS were carried out that seek to improve observation, practice problem solving and stimulate communication skills, active listening and artistic production.

In the workshop, the application of VTS (oral) is first carried out. They are shown a work of art without knowing information about the author, title, period in which it was made, etc. Then, the first question "What is happening in the image?" is used. There, the participants are invited to describe what they are seeing in the image after a first observation. Immediately afterwards, the second question is asked: "What are the visible elements that can prove what they said?" At this point in the workshop, the participants are encouraged to give a logical response to what they have described in the first observation. Therefore, they are guided to understand the details (individual elements) and the relationships between them, to reorganize the information and find the key to favor the understanding of the proposed image. At the end, the third question is used: "What else can you find or talk about the image?" Here, the participants refine the idea they created of the image, allowing them to inquire about those details that resulted in the first analysis. For its part, the written VTS consists of the same method, only that they must write it individually on a sheet, from an image that is delivered to each participant.

Let us remember that the VTS practice structured in this way will favor dialogue and encounter as well as collaboration between the participants, since together they will have to find a proposal of what is happening in the image on which the observation was made. In addition to applying VTS, the following technique is used, which consists of sending an image to one of the participants (without the others knowing what the image is) and they must describe to their colleagues what they are observing, who must draw what they understand by listening to the story (Figure 2). This activity encourages "active listening". For each meeting, different works of art, appropriately selected, were used. This workshop was based on the structure proposed by the laboratory organized in "la Sapienza" [15].

The following diagram shows the activities of each meeting of the workshop:

- 1st meeting: The following works are used: "Il cavadenti"

(Longhi)

- 2nd meeting: The following works are used: "The Surrealist" (Brauner)

- 3rd meeting: The following works are used: "The doctor's visit" (Fildes), "Science and charity" (Picasso), "Self-portrait" (Dick Kett)

- 4th meeting: The following works are used: "Marriage contract" (Hogarth)

- 5th meeting: The following works are used: "Embroidering the terrestrial mantle" (Varo)

Results

At the end of the workshop, a questionnaire was provided whose answers were used to qualitatively measure the results and questions with answers using the Lickert scale. These questionnaires were applied before and after the workshop. Question 1 was about the perception of the abilities to express ideas. In their analysis, the following data can be recognized (Figure 3).

Regarding the questions asked at the end of the activity, the answers have confirmed how art can be useful for the medical profession, in particular one of the answers represented all the others "I think that art gives us tools when we stop in front of a patient and learn a little about his life story. It gives us perspective, sharpens our eyes and our senses. The exercise of seeing the patient as a whole, as a system, as a story leads us to practice medicine in a different way, in a more holistic way."

The questions about comfort and safety also had positive and important answers for the study, since when asked: "How did you feel during the development of the workshop?" the responses were highly favorable:

1. Very good! It allowed me to break the influence of my environment on the interpretation.
2. Very entertaining and fun, also in each workshop something new was learned.
3. Excellent! I enjoyed it very much and I also feel that it developed a lot of observation.
4. It amused me, captivated me and I felt comfortable.



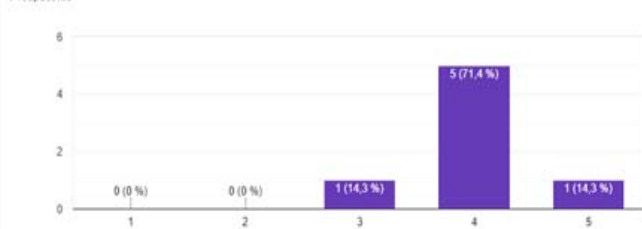
Figure 1: Students during the virtual activities.



Figure 2: Results of active listening.

2- Luego del taller ¿Cómo evalúa usted, en general, sus capacidades a nivel de la expresión (uso de palabras, vocabulario para expresar sus ideas)?

7 respuestas



3- Luego del taller ¿Cómo evalúa usted, en general, su capacidad de participación en grupos que no conoce en la facultad? (incluyendo clases)

7 respuestas

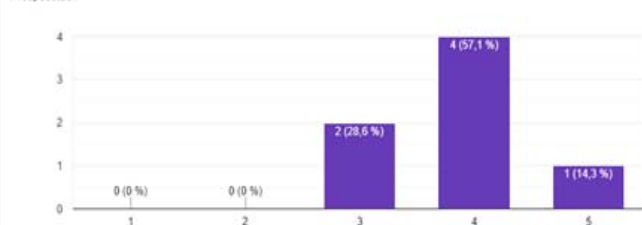


Figure 3: Evaluation boards.

5. Very happy, I loved it.
6. Very comfortable. There was a space for each one of us and every expression was valid. I was very pleased.
7. Comfortable, a respectful and willing group.

Conclusion

Although due to the pandemic the experience had to be carried out with a small number of people to be able to work virtually, the results gathered respond to the premise. Art can also be very useful in medical training and, in particular, it can demonstrate how it is possible to combine competence and well-being. We are sure that this method could be included in the curricula of the Faculty of Medicine and that it would give very good results in improving the clinical competencies and skills of doctors, as well as in other careers. This study has also shown how important the exchange between different academic areas is and proves that collaboration between research and training institutions can lead to new goals and joint work between the art and health sectors. The results of this first experience have confirmed the results of what the literature suggests.

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