

Visual thinking strategy in the medical curriculum: training the “clinical eye” in classrooms and art museums

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Medicine intertwines with arts as part of the wider field of humanities since its origin; they integrate creating a new synergy. Clinical diagnosis involves the observation, description and interpretation of visual information. These skills can be developed and trained by analysing visual art works. Visual thinking strategy (VTS) has been recognized as a legitimate cognitive tool (1,2). Thanks to a collaboration between our medical faculty (Sant’Andrea Hospital) and the Borghese Gallery and Museum we are piloting an innovative experience with small-group interactive sessions within the course of Methodology (3rd-year students). This activity is carried out under the tutelage of art education curators and faculty members. Sessions focused on the analyses of selected original paintings. Students were evaluated through pre- and posttest questionnaires and with short oral presentations. Discussion was warm and enthusiastic and students appreciated the interaction with faculty on a non-medical level. By engaging with art works, students learn a broader conception of human-ness, enhancing mindfulness, rendering learning enjoyable and meaningful. Museums as teaching labs are valuable resources for enhancing learning beyond the classroom walls. VTS in medicine encourages critical thinking and problem solving, thus improving clinical abilities by means of observation and clinical reasoning, promoting empathy and getting used with team work. These activities can be integrated with art works shown in the classroom as clinical triggers: several figurative paintings are shown within our course of human and clinical anatomy (first and second-year students), i.e. self-portraits of Piero della Francesca and Mantegna’s “Virgin and child” well illustrate goiter; Raphael’s *La Fornarina* and Rubens’ “The three graces” show breast cancer. Rombouts’ “Allegory of the five senses” is a nice introductory image for the sense organs as Bigot’s “A doctor examining urine” for the urinary tract. An art-based approach to teaching observational skills should be included continuously within required courses in the medical curriculum.

References

- [1] Bardes et al. (2001) Learning to look: developing clinical observational skills at an art museum. *Med. Educ.* 35(12): 1157-61.
- [2] Klugman et al. (2011) Art rounds: teaching interprofessional students visual thinking strategies at one school. *Acad. Med.* 86(10): 1266-71.

Keywords

Teaching; art; visual thinking strategy; medical curriculum; museum.