

Visual Thinking Strategies

in Medical Education - Benefits for Teachers?

Maher B., Bennett D., McCarthy N., Ryan A. Duggan E. O'Flynn S.

Medical Education Unit, School of Medicine, University College Cork, Ireland



Background

In Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS), students look at carefully-selected images of increasing complexity. VTS is widely used in primary school education in the US and recently, in medical schools. A VTS facilitator helps students:

- Look carefully at works of art
- Talk about what they observe
- Support their ideas with evidence

VTS is thought to enhance critical thinking and observation skills and to help students understand ambiguity and difference of opinion.

University College Cork (UCC) introduced VTS into the healthcare curriculum in 2013. While research suggest benefits for students, there has been little research on the perceived benefits of VTS for VTS teachers.

What's going on in this picture?
What do you see that makes you say that?
What more can we find?



Methods:

Healthcare Faculty trained in VTS facilitated a six-week VTS programme for third year medical students. Facilitators completed a post-VTS questionnaire (open-ended questions). Semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed. Thematic analysis of responses was carried out.



Results

Key themes included potential benefits of VTS in listening, observation, and understanding group dynamics. Facilitators enjoyed teaching VTS and found it 'energising' and rewarding.

Discussion

VTS has potential benefits for VTS teachers including improving attentive listening and observation and understanding student group dynamics.

What they said ...

'I realised that how we view images is affected by age.'

'It made me look more closely – I had missed a number of things.'

'It was a good way of seeing how group dynamics affect teaching.'

'Learning to be non-judgmental was difficult.'

'VTS changed my own thinking about the students – I saw them in a different light, as multi-dimensional and talented individuals.'

'VTS made me feel much better about myself as a teacher.'

'I learned how much I interrupt normally in clinical teaching.'

'I saw a different side to my students, how they communicated, how they interacted and worked together.'

'I can see how VTS can change the class dynamic - students learn to understand each other.'

'I've used the VTS techniques in other settings such as feedback.'

'It helped me stand back, and give the students more time.'

'Made me aware of different cultural interpretations.'

'We all see things so differently.'