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Research Note

Using drawings to probe the affective experience of pharmacy students on rotation: A pilot study

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The objective of this study was to use drawings to assess the global affective experience of pharmacy students on rotation.

Methods: Students nearing graduation were asked to submit a drawing that captured the essence of their Advanced Pharmacy Practice Experience (APPE). Drawings were analyzed qualitatively using inductive content analysis and the affects portrayed in the drawings were coded, themed and categorized.

Results: Of the 22 (21% response rate) submissions, four categories emerged as positive, negative, bisemous (can be positive or negative), and mixed.

Discussion: The results from the study demonstrated a range of feelings such as easiness, inadequateness, busyness, tiredness, learning, and excitement. The drawings also appeared superficially to fit well into the flow model of subjective experience.

Conclusion: Drawings by pharmacy students provided insight into their feelings about their rotations. Further studies are needed to determine how this method can be utilized to record affective experiences and how they can be used to improve experiential learning.

Introduction

Advanced Pharmacy Practice Experience (APPE) rotations that usually occur in the final year of a PharmD program, play an important role in producing competent, entry-level pharmacists because they allow students, under the supervision of a preceptor, to actively participate in the provision of patient care. Generally, students complete six to eight APPE rotations during their experiential year and are asked to evaluate their experiences, preceptors, and practice sites at the end of each rotation as a part of a college of pharmacy's own institutional assessment. The American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy Graduating Student Survey also asks about APPE experiences, focusing on students' satisfaction with direct patient care, the variety and quality of APPE rotations available, and how well students felt they were prepared for APPE rotations, with an emphasis on continuity of care. These surveys are very valuable in that they allow quality control of experiential rotations to ensure that preceptors, practice sites, and curricula are meeting the educational objectives of the college and the profession. Indeed, there are studies that have examined the impact of a specific APPE rotation or how to organize a specific APPE rotation.^{1–4} However, these studies employ directed questions rather than allowing the students reflect freely on their experiences. Additionally, none of the studies reported the student's experiences of the APPE year as a whole. Thus, there is a gap in the pharmacy education literature regarding self-reflection of the overall experience of pharmacy students during APPE rotations. Less work has been done on understanding a student's affective experience over the course of rotations, yet the role of personality and emotional factors in student success is becoming more widely appreciated in academic

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literature.^{5,6} According to Watts and Alsop,⁷ affective experience consists of various dimensions such as disappointment, disaffection, aversion – as well as challenge, enjoyment, pleasure, fulfilment – and all these play a significant role in learning science. Students may find the rotation experience to be challenging to the extent that it requires them to recall and apply principles from the didactic curriculum and to develop new skills that are specific to practice. Alternatively, students may find APPE rotations to be boring and unfulfilling if they require only superficial knowledge and easily-acquired or highly repetitive skills. The APPE rotations expose students to the “real” practice component by asking them to work independently, collaborate with other health care providers, and increase self-confidence. Additionally, this also is the time when students are making various professional and personal decisions surrounding their career. Thus, affective experiences play an important role in APPE year.

A variety of methods may be used to assess affective states, including surveys, interviews, open-ended questions, and drawings. While surveys are easy to interpret, the use of fixed responses can prevent students from fully expressing their thoughts. Though interviews and open ended questions can overcome this drawback, an important component of a successful interview is the establishment of rapport and a shared understanding with the interviewee. Drawings have been used extensively for research with young children, but have not been used as much for adults, possibly because adults are presumed to have a better command of verbal or written modes of communication.⁸⁻¹¹ However, according to Weber and Mitchell,¹² drawings have the potential to “offer a different kind of glimpse into human sense making than written or spoken texts do, because they can express that which is not easily put into words: the ineffable, the elusive, the not-yet-thought-through, the sub-conscious”. This aspect of drawings may make them particularly powerful at capturing emotional responses, regardless of the age of the subjects. In healthcare education, this method has been utilized in medical schools to examine formation of professional identity in medical students.¹³ Simple pencil or ink drawing has been used by Ryan¹⁴ in his newborn medicine class to let the students represent their most memorable experience from the tutorial. Another study that has used this technique is by Schabert¹⁵ to understand the student's perceptions about anatomy after lectures and practicums. McLean et al¹⁶ used drawing to understand how students experienced problem based learning. Moskal et al¹⁷ used drawing to understand computer students' perceptions of “learning to program”. Helmich et al¹⁸ used drawings to understand the experiences of medical trainees when faced with complex clinical situations and were able to capture some strong emotions. Pearce and Lee¹⁹ also used drawings to understand the marketing student's perceptions about viva voce examinations, which were used as an alternative assessment technique. This technique has also been used in a graduate level statistics course as a part of course evaluation by Ludlow.²⁰ The objective of this study was to use drawings to assess the global affective experience of pharmacy students on APPE rotations as a whole.

Methods

Study design

This study used a prospective research design. At Roseman University College of Pharmacy, the APPE year has eight rotations, each six weeks long. At the end of all experiential rotations in the APPE year, all graduating students are required to attend a review course in preparation for board exams. During the 2016 review course, the study was explained to Class of 2016 students located on the Utah campus. The students were asked to voluntarily participate in the study by reflecting on their APPE rotation experience as a whole, drawing out on paper a visual representation they felt captured the essence of this experience, and placing their anonymous drawing in a locked box located in the classroom. Text was allowed in the drawing, but at least one hand-drawn illustration was required. Though not monitored, students were asked to turn in only one drawing per person. The instructions given to the students about the drawings were overarching and simply used the key phrase “overall APPE experience”. There was no particular effort made to direct their focus to any particular topic, such as their everyday work, preceptors, or interactions with other healthcare providers. Flyers explaining the study were left on bulletin boards in the classroom and common areas. The students were given two weeks to be part of the study before the collection box was removed from the classroom. The study was approved by the Roseman University Institutional Review Board.

Data analysis

The submissions were analyzed qualitatively using content analysis.²¹ Since there was not much previous knowledge on this topic, the inductive method of data analysis was used. In the inductive method, data observations move from specific to general. In other words, each submission is initially coded, the codes are grouped into themes, and the themes abstracted to form categories. The study investigators (TR and EU) worked independently to achieve immersion, obtain a sense of the meaning of each submission, and code their impressions accordingly. Each drawing was individually coded and when the initial coding was done, notes were made on the submissions based on the sense of meaning. As the investigator went through each submission, notes kept adding, resulting in either editing the older codes or creating newer codes. Each submission was analyzed several times before the initial codes were assigned. At this point, the investigators met and discussed their independent findings and any discrepancies. The discrepancies in coding were discussed, referencing the original submissions as necessary, until agreement was reached on the interpretations of the submissions. Once all the drawings were coded, these codes were further analyzed to understand the emerging themes based on similarities. Depending on the relationship between the themes, categories were formed. Both the investigators are pharmacy educators, have similar roles in the college, are not associated with the experiential courses, and have remained unbiased throughout the analysis.

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