Reviewer’s report

Title: Student feedback on the use of paintings in Sparshanam, the Medical Humanities module at KIST Medical College, Nepal

Version: 3 Date: 10 February 2011

Reviewer: Johanna Shapiro

Reviewer’s report:

This version is substantially improved, and is much clearer, better organized, and more coherent. Nevertheless, it would benefit from one more effort to clarify a few points and tighten the structure of the paper in a few places.

The two most important points are a) the discussion about module objectives (#3) and b) the discussion of “Selected studies (#6).” Regarding (a), please try to strengthen your argument that the points made in Tables 3 and 4, while not directly related to the module objectives, indirectly are related to the module objectives. You can’t simply say this, you have to demonstrate what the connections are (imagination is related to empathy; creativity is related to developing a dr/pt relationship etc.). Regarding (b), the Discussion is not the appropriate place for a lengthy examination of a series of articles. I think the point you’re making is that, although it is unclear from your study whether art integration promoted empathy in your students, studies in western settings suggest that it does. You can still make this point, but do it more succinctly, with the focusing remaining on YOUR findings, not those of other studies.

I hope you will take the following suggestions into consideration, as I believe they will strengthen and tighten your paper.

Minor Corrections

1) I think it would be more professional to refer to Jack Coulehan, Johanna Shapiro, and Leopoldo Acuna as “well-recognized scholars” rather than “famous personalities”

2) I’d recommend eliminating the final two sentences of the first paragraph under the heading “Interpretation of art in Nepal.” They have to do with interpreting literary excerpts, while the focus of this article is interpreting paintings.

3) Under the heading, “Painting and the module objectives,” in para 2 I’m unclear about the point you’re making regarding Table 3. The point should be about the extent to which story-writing appeared to advance module objectives. But the examples you cite of imagination, exploring creativity, and expressing feelings were not module objectives. Similarly, with the exception of empathy, Table 4 does not contain direct reference to module objectives. If you are arguing that the content in these tables is indirectly related to the module objectives, that’s fine, but you need to state that more clearly, and show how (e.g., imagination is needed in cultivating empathy).
4) Under the same heading, the sentence starting “The study was semi-structured…” and the following two sentences to the end of the paragraph should go under a section headed “Limitations.”

5) Under the same heading, the two paragraphs “The questionnaire focused on many aspects…” and “However, we have to reassess” could be combined into a single paragraph.

6) The section “Selected studies from the literature linking visual arts and empathy” is NOT appropriate in a Discussion. It should either be integrated into the Introduction; or the articles should be cited (i.e., referred to) in making points about the findings of this study. In other words, the authors might make the point that, although their students did not often note improvement of empathy as a result of exposure to paintings, art has been used successfully elsewhere to increase (self-reported) empathy. But such citations should not involve a summary of these studies.

7) The section “Potential clinical implications of study findings” should come AFTER all the findings are discussed. It should be the final section before Conclusions, right after Limitations.

8) I would simply delete the small paragraph “Interpreting paintings” which does not really add anything. The point that the role-plays, poems, and songs were not evaluated has already been made in the Methods. This is not an appropriate Discussion point.

9) Under the section “Scores according to gender and method of financing,” the final two sentences should go under the NEXT session, Limitations.

10) The single sentence after the Limitations discussion, “The arts can free the imagination…” should go under the Conclusion section. It makes no sense where it is currently positioned.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare I have no competing interests