“C: Don’t Just Look”! The design and evaluation of a Perception in Art Module
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Introduction
Observation, narration and interpretation are core elements in medical decision making. With this in mind, “C: Don’t Just Look!” was created as a student selected module, with the aim of developing these key skills. Previous studies\(^1\)\(^,\)\(^2\) have shown improvement in observational and empathic skills in medical students. We intend to develop this work to examine interpretative and critical thinking skills.

The Module.
The module was limited to twelve students. Students examined portrait paintings during interactive sessions at an art gallery. They were asked to describe their observations and to infer from the gestures, clothing, and facial expression as to the relationships and ethnicity of the people depicted in the work. Subsequently, they were asked to apply the skills learned in the gallery to a series of patient images.

The Pilot Study.
Students completed a pre-test, where they examined 6 images and wrote a description of them. Similarly, at the end of the module students took a post-test with a series of images. Both the pre and post-tests were scored using key features. The pilot study provided an opportunity to develop a key features model using a modified grounded theory approach. Concepts were extracted from the student descriptions and then verified by an art historian. Students also completed an evaluation questionnaire.

Results.
Analysis of the student responses revealed that students identified on average 3/5 key features in the pre-test and 4/5 in the post test, \(N= 11\), one test incomplete. The study led to the development of a key feature model which will be employed in future research to analyse any changes in students’ perceptual/interpretive abilities. Finally, students’ perceptions of the module were very positive. Students commented that they valued the module highly and would recommend it to other students. Whilst face validity is sometimes seen as the least important of the validity constructs, it is an important factor in developing student engagement with new courses.

Conclusions
The abilities to see, articulate, and postulate explanations for those observations are fundamental skills required for medical decision making. The creation of an innovative module in Perception in Art may be used to develop or further hone these skills. Further research is required to validate the method, however, initial results are encouraging.

References

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