



# What's Happening to Me?

## Exploring Transformation in Medical Education Through Poetry

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### OBJECTIVE

The metamorphosis from an everyday citizen to a practicing physician is complex. The objective of this project was to explore the student experience of this transformation. To this end, we asked: beyond the acquisition of medical knowledge, through what processes do students become doctors? Furthermore, what is the nature of the student experience of this process?

This is an important area of inquiry because, separate from the academic rigours of training, the process of personal change in medical school has been described in traumatic terms<sup>1</sup>. A better understanding of the student experience of transformation in medical training could help inform interventions to decrease the psychological stress associated with this transition.

### BACKGROUND

- Arnold van Gennep's model of a rite of passage describes the structure of a transition between social identities<sup>2</sup>.
- It is employed in this investigation as a basis for understanding the nature of transformational experiences.
- A rite of passage involves three phases:
  - Separation (detachment from previous role)
  - Liminality (a state of limbo between roles)
  - Incorporation (assumption of new identity)<sup>2</sup>

### METHODS

- An autoethnographic poetic inquiry was undertaken in order to explore the lived experience of a student during the first two years of medical training.
- The process of writing poetry was employed by the student as a method of observing and reflecting on personal experiences. Additionally, the writing process served to distill and communicate important elements of the student's experience.
- Final products and drafts from the writing process were analyzed using grounded theory in order to elucidate prominent themes within the data set.
- The process of grounded theory summarizes the key message from data into a meaning unit. Meaning units are dissected into component parts (codes). Similar codes are grouped together to create categories. Conceptual connections between categories are identified as themes<sup>6</sup>.

Autoethnography	Poetic Inquiry	Grounded Theory
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A research approach that uses personal experience as a vehicle through which to understand cultural experience<sup>3</sup>.</li> <li>An effective way to examine emotionally complex experiences, which may be difficult to communicate to an external researcher<sup>4</sup>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The process of writing poetry is an effective way to distill the most relevant ideas present within research findings<sup>5</sup></li> <li>An effective method by which to communicate data<sup>5</sup>, especially research findings that are, by their nature, esoteric.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A method of qualitative analysis used to identify themes present in a collection of data<sup>6</sup>.</li> </ul>

Figure 1. Description of research and analysis methods employed

### RESULTS

- Observations and reflections were documented over a 9 month period spanning the second half of MS-1 (first year of medical training) through the first half of MS-2.
- In total, 9 poems and drafts were analyzed (Figure 3).
- Written works highlighted experiences representing different facets of medical training, including patient interactions, classroom learning, and the experience of professionalization (Figure 2).
- The grouping of conceptually similar categories evoked 3 themes emphasized in the written works:
  - Experience of Medical Training
  - Influence of Training on Personal Self
  - Emotional Response to Training

#### The Reason That I'm Here

I wonder if his grandsons are old enough to fish with him  
But I don't ask

That's not the reason that I'm here

I'm just supposed to determine why he's short of breath

But he blushes as he tells me how he met his wife  
And I remember

That's not the reason that I'm here

Figure 2. Example of completed poem used in analysis

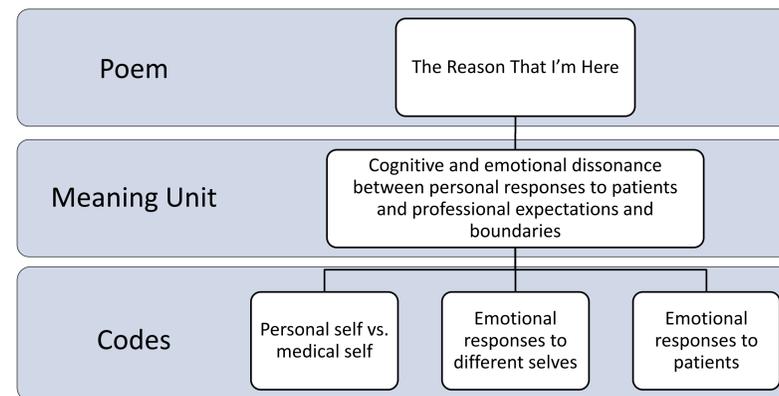


Figure 3. Example of qualitative analysis demonstrating generation of codes from poems

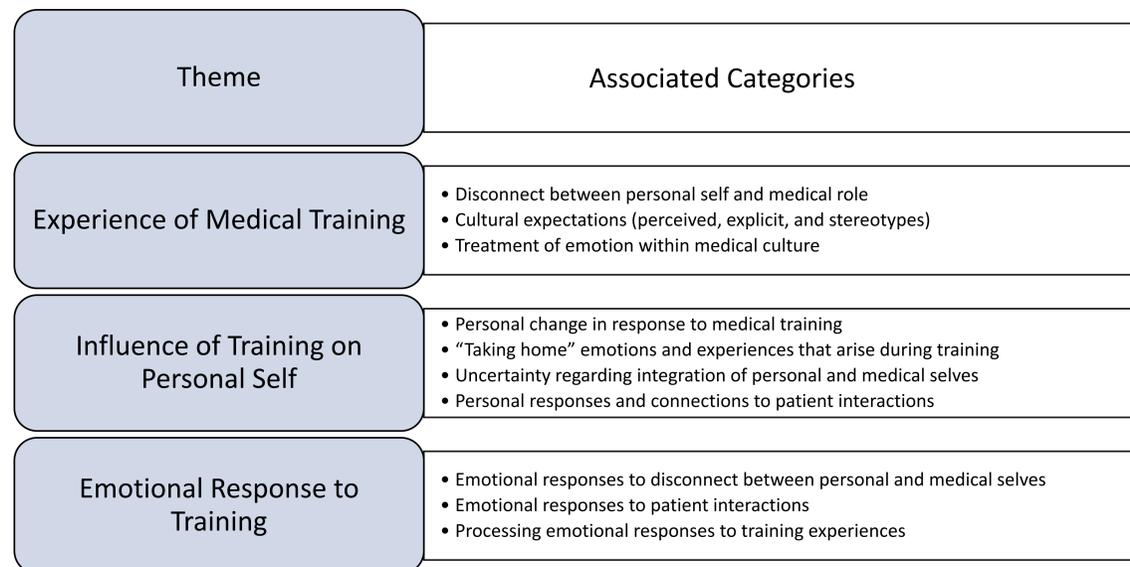


Figure 4. Themes and associated categories present in written works identified through qualitative analysis

### CONCLUSION

- Autoethnographic poetic inquiry is an effective method to explore the student experience of transformation during medical school.
- Results of the analysis suggest a dual nature of experience in medical education, namely that the experiences of medical education influence both the personal self as well as a developing medical self. Themes and categories identified in this investigation suggest that the development of the medical self is foundational to the process of becoming a doctor.
- Examining the nature of themes and categories, as well as their relationship to each other, suggest that significant dissonance arose between the values, behaviours, and emotional responses of the personal and medical selves (Figure 5).
- Viewed in terms of a rite of passage, the experienced divide between personal and medical selves suggests that medical school is a liminal period for students in which they exist in limbo between their personal identities and their developing professional identities.
- The disconnect between personal and medical selves, and the resulting liminal state could be a source of the psychological distress associated with this period. Future research should further investigate this hypothesis, as well as consider how this understanding could inform possible interventions.

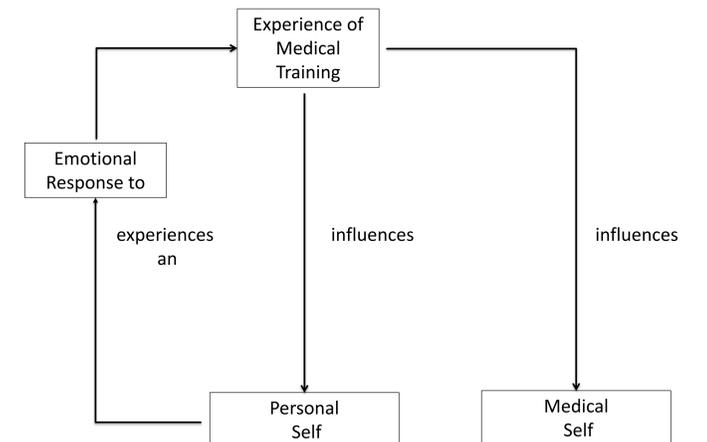


Figure 5. Conceptual relationships between identified themes and student experience

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