

The Med/Mid Writing Project: Medical students and middle school students document experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic

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Background

Globally, students have been affected by the COVID pandemic, and many have chosen to write about their experiences. At the University of Colorado, medical students joined with eighth grade students to document their experiences in The Med/Mid Writing Project. Over two weeks in May 2020, both groups of students wrote reflective pieces and shared in "open-mic" sessions via teleconferencing.

Objectives

To better understand the student perspective during a pandemic through reflective writing, and learn from interactions between two groups of students representing different generations.

Methods

Students were given a writing prompt each week. No formatting or content requirements were specified. All writers participated in virtual open-mic sessions, during which students volunteered to read pieces aloud and receive feedback. After the last session, students completed a survey and focus groups were conducted to elicit details of student experiences. A qualitative approach using iterative coding techniques was used to analyze student writings, focus groups, and survey comments. Survey data was analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Results

Seven medical students and five middle school students participated in the project. Themes common to the writings of both groups of students included: feeling enhanced external pressure to succeed and perform, friendship, family, hobbies, memories, and hope for the future. Representative comments from middle school students include: "I am self-conscious about my writing, but I improve my writing when sharing" and "Everyone was so supportive!". Representative comments from the medical students include: "They had just as much to bring to the table as the medical students" and "I was surprised at the emotional maturity the younger students showed." The survey revealed that 80% of middle schoolers reported they agree or strongly agree that the project helped them gain confidence working with older students. 100% medical school students and 80% of the middle school students reported that they would participate in the project again.

Discussion

Despite differences in age and experience, both groups of students wrote about similar themes, feelings and archetypes. By working with one another to create, share and discuss reflective writing about the pandemic, students gained self-confidence, perspective and empathy. Both groups gained understanding of the other group, as well as themselves, through participation. Next steps include a writing group with medical school and middle school students over a longer timeframe to evaluate changes in writing and development of near-peer relationships and mentoring.

The author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest.

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