

1 **Title: Sculpting the Science: Teaching Anatomy of the Facial Muscles to Medical Students**

2
3 **Article type:** Original Article

4
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30 **Acknowledgement:** The authors wish to acknowledge and thank all participants of the study for their time and
31 cooperation.

32 **Financing:** None

33 **Conflict of interest statement by authors:** No conflict of interest to disclose.

34
35 **Authors Contribution Statement:** Conceptualization: TONI CHIAPPINI, ADAM TAYLOR, JAN VAN DER
36 MERWE, QUENTON WESSELS. Data Curation: TONI CHIAPPINI, JANINE CORREIA, QUENTON
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2 Review Editing: JANINE CORREIA, ADAM TAYLOR, QUENTON WESSELS.

3

4 **Manuscript word count:** 3408 words

5 **Abstract word count:** 157 words

6 **Number of Figures and Tables:** 3

7

8 **Dates**

9 Submission: 02/15/2024

10 Revisions: 07/04/2024, 09/16/2024

11 Responses: 07/11/2024, 11/25/2024

12 Acceptance: 02/08/2025

13 Publication: 03/27/2025

14

15 **Editors**

16 Associate Editor/Editor: Francisco J. Bonilla-Escobar

17 Student Editors: Leah Komer, Esraa Y. Salem

18 Copyeditor: Leah Komer

19 Proofreader:

20 Layout Editor:

21

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1 **ABSTRACT.**

2

3 Background

4 Clay-modeling in anatomy education is an engaging activity that complements cadaveric dissections. The post-
5 COVID-19 cadaver shortage further necessitates alternative practical modalities.

6 Methods

7 A student-centred clay-modeling practical activity was developed towards the study of the muscles of facial
8 expression due to a shortage of cadaveric material. Student feedback in the form of a questionnaire with closed-
9 and open-ended questions.

10 Results

11 Thematic analysis was manually performed to generate the primary and secondary themes associated with the
12 open-ended questions. Four themes were generated: fun, collaboration, active learning, and bittersweet.
13 Closed-ended questions revealed that respondents found the activity motivational and enjoyable. Feeling
14 around the disassembly of students' anatomical models was of particular interest. Some students expressed
15 emotions of sadness and others stated that they felt devastated.

16 Conclusion

17 The outcome of this study presents the opportunity for further work to link discussions around the humanistic
18 considerations of anatomy and the study of human remains, utilizing clay modelling as a crucial resource.

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20 **Key Words:** clay-modeling, anatomy education, practical, facial muscles

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Accepted, in-process

1 INTRODUCTION.

2

3 The muscles of facial expression are particularly difficult to dissect, as well as time-consuming to study in
4 formalin embalmed cadavers ¹. This holds particularly true in instances where cadaveric material presents with
5 decreased skeletal muscle mass, central adiposity, ² and facial fat atrophy ³. Furthermore, the global shortage
6 of cadaveric material due to the COVID-19 pandemic necessitates alternative approaches to the delivery of
7 anatomy as a subject.

8 One such alternative is clay-modeling ⁴. Studies have shown that teaching anatomy through art activities
9 increases the observational skills and memory of students as well as encourages engagement in the learning
10 process ⁵. An 8-week first-year course of 'Art in Medicine' has been implemented at Brighton and Sussex
11 Medical School and has proven successful according to student feedback ⁵. Clay models are especially used
12 as an alternative to classical cadaveric dissections or as an adjunct ². Globally, there are institutions without
13 access to cadaveric material and animal specimens, such as pigs or cats, are used for routine dissections and
14 surgical training ⁶. Furthermore, dissection is not a uniform learning experience and complementary innovative
15 learning methods, such as clay modeling, should be incorporated ⁷.

16 The use of clay-modeling helps students to broaden their horizons past the traditional methods of dissecting
17 and written tests. Studies have shown that the use of clay-modeling helps enhance the students' self-
18 confidence, participation, and memory of anatomical musculature ⁸. The use of clay-modeling has also shown
19 an increase in learners' ability to understand spatial relationships as well as understand the relationships and
20 transition between 3D to 2D structures, such as converting clay models into cross-sectional anatomical images
21 ^{9,10}. Furthermore, Correia et al., ⁴ found that students perceived that collaborative learning in clay-modeling
22 enhanced their skills, such as problem-solving, communication and creative thinking. Another alternative to the
23 traditional methods is the use of laboratory animals which was demonstrated in 2009. In this study, Motoike et
24 al., ¹¹, employed 181 students and demonstrated that clay-modeling is more effective compared to cat
25 dissections for the delivery of anatomy. It is important to note that using animal models within the current context
26 is an alternative to human cadaveric material.

27 The purpose of anatomical clay-modeling is to mimic anatomical visualization in a similar way to what would be
28 seen during dissections and to gain a three-dimensional understanding of the human body. Clay-based
29 modeling is a unique learning tool and the experience gained from physically constructing, rather than
30 destructing an anatomical model is invaluable ⁴. Kooloos and colleagues ² found that students performed better
31 in anatomical knowledge assessment when they had an opportunity to build clay models compared to those
32 who only watched a video tutorial on the same topic. The rationale for students' improved performance relates
33 to their increased concentration, engagement, and the novel aspect of cognitive stimulation ². Furthermore, Oh
34 and colleagues noted that the majority of students who participated in clay-modeling as a supplement to
35 conventional study modes reported a positive experience. Students' positive experiences were related to their
36 improved understanding of the three-dimensional structure, improved interest and active participation ⁹.

37 The current study presents a cost-effective and participatory innovation to the practical learning of the
38 muscles of facial expression through clay-modeling. Furthermore, the study also explores the value of clay-

- 1 modeling as a potential alternative to cadaveric dissection to facilitate students' learning of the muscles of
- 2 facial expression.

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1 **METHODS**

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3 A cross-sectional study design was followed involving second-year medical students at the University of
4 Namibia. The intervention was presented as part of students' practical laboratory session on the muscles of
5 facial expression and was necessitated by a shortage of cadaveric material due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
6 White concrete skulls were made after obtaining silicone cake molds (Fig. 1). The silicone molds were first
7 secured in wet sand, serving as a master mold and to prevent distortion, before the cement slurry was added
8 (Fig. 1). Once cured, the casts were removed and sprayed with white paint (Fig. 1).

9 The practical sessions followed theoretical lectures on the embryology of the face and muscles of facial
10 expression. During the practical session, groups of students were provided with one concrete skull cast between
11 them, a practical worksheet, and resources (Fig. 1). The resources consisted of an anatomy atlas, and a
12 laminated worksheet with the respective muscles, their functions, and origins and insertions. Artistic sculpting
13 clay (circa 400g) was provided for each group of four students. A total of nine groups (73 students in total)
14 participated in the practical sessions. The first cohort of 36 students was tasked with a practical laboratory
15 session to model the muscles of facial expression (Table 1). This activity was duplicated for the second cohort
16 on the same day and totaled 37 students (one group had 5 students). An outline of each session and the
17 duration of each phase is provided in Table 1 and each session lasted one hour and 50 minutes. This afforded
18 all staff 10 minutes to prepare for the next session. Lecturing staff served as facilitators during each practical
19 session and rotated among the groups of students.

20 Fig. 1. Please insert here.

21

22 Table 1. An outline of the practical session and expected outcomes.

Phase (duration)	Activity
Phase 1 (10 minutes)	Familiarization with the practical task and planning.
Phase 2 (70 minutes)	Execution: <i>Use the resources provided to model the muscles of facial expression.</i> <i>Model the branches of the facial nerve.</i> <i>In a table, indicate which specific branch of CN VII innervates which muscles.</i>

Phase 3 (10 minutes)	Peer assessment and feedback (informal)
Phase 4 (10 minutes)	Disassembly and cleaning of the workstations.

1

2 Student feedback in the form of a questionnaire with closed- and open-ended questions was used. The
 3 questionnaire used was developed to promote critical reflection (Appendix I). Only volunteering participants,
 4 after recruiting and providing written consent completed the questionnaire. Ethical approval for the data
 5 collection was obtained through the Namibian Ministry of Health and Social Services (Ref#TC2022). Data
 6 associated with the closed-ended questions were analyzed for measures of central tendency. Next, responses
 7 to the open-ended questions were subjected to thematic analysis. An inductive approach for latent themes was
 8 followed ¹². Thematic analysis (TA) was manually performed to generate the primary and secondary themes
 9 associated with the open-ended questions ¹³. The generation of primary and secondary themes followed a
 10 similar approach to the work of Radzi et al. ¹⁴. TA was used to identify and analyze patterns of meaning within
 11 the questionnaire responses by identifying latent themes and to understand the attitudes and perceptions of
 12 first-year medical students' first exposure to a cadaver ^{12,13,15}. A reflexive approach was adopted where the
 13 researchers were immersed in data familiarization, coding, and theme development, rather than coding reliability
 14 and using a codebook approach ^{13,16}

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1 RESULTS.

2 A total of 21 students completed the questionnaire (27.8% response rate) and provided written consent. 21/22
3 (95%) of participants felt that they were able to perform the tasks independently. 1/22 (5%) felt that because
4 they were in a group, they did not get to model all the muscles themselves. 22/22 (100%) of participants found
5 this activity motivational and enjoyable. 21/22 (95%) participants indicated the resources were sufficient, and
6 one individual found that supporting resources (paper diagrams) could have been limited without access to
7 textbooks. 21/22 (95%) of participants articulated they had learned something new, one articulated not really
8 but explained it had made them realize how complex making facial expressions was in such a small area. 22/22
9 participants responded positively, some suggested other useful further areas for this type of activity – such as
10 muscles of the hand.

11 The themes generated from the students' responses are shown in Figure 2 and four themes were generated:
12 Fun, Collaboration, Active Learning, and Bittersweet.

13

14 Fig. 2. Please insert here

15

16 **Theme 1: Fun**

17 Respondents overwhelmingly commented that the practical session with clay modeling was enjoyable. Students
18 also noted that they were actively playing while learning the muscles of facial expression.

19 "It showed that learning could be fun instead of stressful"

20 "It was very much enjoyable, it took me back to kindergarten days when we used to play with clay"

21 "It was completely liberating to bring an imaginary image to life"

22 "It was motivational as it gave me the chance to learn as well as have fun at the same time"

23 "It triggered my creativity and enthusiasm"

24 "We had the opportunity to link having fun to studying in a way"

25 "We learned Anatomy in a very playful way"

26 "It was fun so none of us wanted to dismantle it"

27 A participant also mentioned that they wanted to spend more time on the activity.

1 "I wish the session was longer"

2 Participants self-declared that the clay-modeling session inspired their creative side and felt that they were
3 actively playing and having fun while learning the muscles of the face. Clay-modeling permitted creativity and
4 allowed students to put theory into practice and form linkages.

5

6 **Theme 2: Collaboration**

7 Collaborative learning experiences, in the form of practical teams, helped encourage communities of practice
8 in learning and foster deeper learning approaches.

9 "I had the opportunity to learn from my peers"

10 "It allowed us to work as a team, share knowledge, and laugh together"

11 "We had the help of the lecturers to guide us and our fellow students were also willing to help one
12 another"

13 "The teamwork, having to plan and think creatively was very fun"

14 "Wonderful bonding exercise and funner way of learning anatomy"

15 Respondents perceived the group work as being valuable in their learning experience. The participants
16 recognized that such strategies increased their motivation and enhanced their engagement while learning
17 anatomy.

18

19

20 **Theme 3: Active Learning**

21 The students perceived that the active and engaging learning strategy of clay-modeling can be used as a
22 constructive learning tool in anatomy.

23 "It was a new experience learning about the muscles from a superficial to deep layer"

24 "Helped many if not all of us understand the positioning of the facial muscles"

25 "Understand the positioning of the facial muscles"

26 "It helped me differentiate between the different facial muscles from deep to superficial"

1 “It was different from just looking at 2D pictures in a textbook”

2 “It helps a student to think about the anatomy of the muscles (in relation to each other)”

3 “It helped me in understanding which muscles are positioned where and what they do and how
4 superficial or deep the muscles are”

5 Some participants commented on the fact that creating the anatomical clay models reinforced the learning of
6 that structure. Students can physically manipulate and mold the clay to create a more accurate representation,
7 which can help them remember the structure better.

8 “By modeling the muscles and learning their anatomical relations to one another, it makes it easier to
9 retain the knowledge”

10 “Now there will also be a memory linking the information which will make it memorable”

11 “You learn names without forcing to memorize them”

12 “It also made learning the muscle easily because the activity required to take into account the origin
13 and insertion of each muscle”

14 The clay models also allowed the students to express their creativity and artistic abilities while learning about
15 anatomy.

16 “Learn the muscles of the face in a more creative manner”

17 “Express my creativity and gave me a platform to freely learn without any external pressure”

18 Participants commented on the fact that creating the models allowed them to learn through hands-on
19 experience. This can be particularly helpful for students who are tactile learners and prefer to learn by doing.

20 “I loved the fact that I could get my hands dirty while actually learning”

21 “it was a hands-on exercise and that makes it hard to forget”

22 “it was a hands-on exercise and that makes it hard to forget”

23 “practical way of learning facial muscles and not just memorizing them from an atlas”

24 “I find I prefer hands-on learning more than just being told about it”

25 “It encouraged a hands-on experience”

1 In a learning system of parrot-fashion memorization, muscle actions, origin and insertion of facial muscles have
2 little context and, thus, are less relevant to students and become difficult to learn and remember. Rather,
3 interacting in a hands-on manner with clay-based modeling can help students better visualize the facial muscle.

4

5 **Theme 4: Bittersweet**

6 The students had conflicting emotions regarding the building and the breaking down of the clay models after
7 the session was completed.

8 "I was sad"

9 "It was a bittersweet moment"

10 "It was sad but also satisfying"

11 "No hard feelings since we were allowed to take pictures"

12 "It felt emotional because we put in a lot of effort"

13 "I was sad because my group and I worked hard on it. We even named our clay model

14 "Unfortunate but understandable "

15 "It was really devastating destroying something we created"

16 A participant even stated that the clay-modeling process of building and breaking down reminded them of the
17 cycle of life and death.

18 "It made me realize I don't really like the concept of "the cycle of life"
19
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22

1 DISCUSSION

2 Clay-based modeling is the construction of anatomical models that emulate the three-dimensional structure of
3 an organ or system ⁹. Through this hands-on, interactive approach, the building of clay models allows for an
4 improved understanding of spatial relationships between structures and the precise location of structures. This
5 form of anatomy teaching is creative and fun, allowing students to actively enhance their long-term retention of
6 anatomical knowledge in an enjoyable, positive environment.

7 Student involvement was increased during this study and students' grasp of the anatomical relationships in the
8 human body was improved by using clay-modeling, an active, tactile learning tool ⁴. Research has shown that,
9 for effective learning, students must actively participate in the learning process ¹⁷. Furthermore, in this study,
10 the active learning process was employed when the students were required to build and manipulate the models
11 ¹⁸. However, research suggests that clay-modeling does not improve anatomical knowledge compared to
12 students who only employed video material ². The most important pedagogical advantage of clay-modeling, as
13 noted by Kooloos and colleagues, is active involvement ².

14 The building of anatomical clay models additionally adds a tactile approach to learning, which offers an
15 alternative approach to the comprehension and retention of information. Furthermore, respondents from the
16 current study also commented that they would prefer different colors of clay. According to Akle et al., adding
17 color-coding structures may also supplement the learning effect as there have been correlations between color
18 recognition and the recall of information ¹⁹. A possible solution within the current context would be to add a color
19 pigment to the clay. Furthermore, on a technical note, we found that artistic clay is excellent compared to
20 plasticine in that it is easy to clean from the casts and workstations. This in turn optimizes the time students can
21 spend learning and reduces the time between sessions spent by staff on recalibrating stations, enabling them
22 to focus on other aspects of student learning, such as questions.

23 Other, more pragmatic factors make clay models a useful educational tool. For example, clay specimens are
24 convenient to store, odorless, easy to handle and relatively cost-effective ²⁰. Clay modeling allows students to
25 construct models rather than spend hours dissecting and potentially damaging important structures, which is of
26 benefit in an educational climate that is seeing reduced contact hours for anatomy education ^{21,22}. Furthermore,
27 clay-modeling allows for the re-use of both the clay and skull template. The proposed concrete alternative as
28 presented in the current study serves as a cost-effective modality in resource-constrained settings. This
29 alternative has the potential to permit students to model the muscles of facial expressions remotely and thus
30 serve as an extracurricular activity. Therefore, to a degree, clay models make an excellent complement to
31 traditional dissection and a potential alternative where cadaveric material is not feasible due to scarcity or
32 affordability issues. However, Curlewis and colleagues noted that clay-modeling cannot serve as a complete
33 substitute for human tissue as it lacks detailed anatomy ¹⁸.

34 Other potential advantages, such as students being able to work on the anatomical variability that occurs with
35 muscle and nerve courses. The dissection room provides exposure to some of these normal variants, but it is
36 not always present in each donor cohort and therefore clay modeling may provide a useful adjunct to students
37 looking to convert the 2D presentation they see in textbooks into 3D resources. The challenges of observing

1 nerves such as the facial nerve, or chorda tympani in the dissecting room are well documented and clay-
2 modeling may present a resource that enables students to visualize the course and relationship with neighboring
3 structures without having to dissect for prolonged periods in the hope that they can observe all the necessary
4 structures and their relationships ²³. The importance and value of clay in increasing student performance on
5 peripheral nervous structures has been shown by DeHoff and colleagues in undergraduate anatomy class ¹⁷.
6 One possible drawback within the current study relates to the anatomical accuracy of the casts that were used.
7 However, staff ensured that the necessary anatomical landmarks were present, and all students found them
8 identifiable enough to permit completion of the task at hand, as evidenced by student feedback, with no
9 reference to issues relating to origin or insertion points.

10 This study shows the value of clay-modeling for medical students in their learning of anatomy. It has also
11 recently been shown that clay-modeling is a valuable tool to postgraduate students as a revision resource to
12 increase their confidence in pelvic anatomy knowledge amongst obstetrics and gynecology residents,
13 demonstrating that clay-modeling has longevity in learning and revision across the healthcare spectrum ²⁰.

14 Our findings also highlight the importance of collaboration among students. The importance of collaborative
15 learning in anatomy is well-documented and includes students' ability to learn communication and leadership
16 skills ²⁴. From our findings, we noticed that students were forced to plan in a group during the planning phase
17 of the activity, grappling with translating theoretical knowledge into practice. They had to think of the layering of
18 the muscles (superficial to deep) and the associated origin and insertion of each. The alignment and portrayal
19 of muscle fascicles was another element students had to compete with and portray in their clay model. The peer
20 assessment and feedback phase provided a further opportunity for collaboration. The sharing of knowledge,
21 though informal, is encouraged and is advantageous even if not formally included in the learning outcomes ²⁵.
22 In hindsight, a formal peer-assessment checklist could be used to further foster collaborative learning and could
23 include specifics such as muscle fascicle orientation, anatomical accuracy for the origin and insertion, and
24 muscle layering.

25 Finally, and certainly an interesting finding, students' experiences associated with the disassembly of the models
26 revealed feelings of loss and grief among some respondents. Dueñas and colleagues highlight the lack of
27 research on coping strategies employed by students and staff when faced with stressors within an anatomy
28 practical laboratory²⁶. Our findings reflect varied responses associated with the activity of disassembly of
29 students' clay models. Gross anatomy laboratories elicit emotional responses, and much understanding has
30 been gained around students' first experience with death ²⁷⁻²⁹. It should be noted that students within the current
31 study have had prior exposure to cadavers and cadaveric material. However, the varied emotional responses
32 ranging from "sad" to "devastating" further support the need to bolster humanistic considerations in anatomy
33 education. The emotional responses from our respondents were associated with clay-modeling and not linked
34 to the cadaveric material. These responses highlight the need to be actively cognizant of students' emotional
35 well-being at all times. The incorporation of reflective writing is one possible approach to better understanding
36 students' emotional responses and personal experiences within the gross anatomy laboratory³⁰. An
37 interdisciplinary and formal approach to dealing with death is not new and exists within many anatomy
38 programmes ^{31,32}.

1 Critical reflection by the participants presents the opportunity for further work to link discussions around the
2 humanistic considerations of anatomy and the study of human remains, such as “ownership”, morality, ethics,
3 loss, and grief. Clay-modeling presents a resource which can allow for the development of multiple skills as well
4 as knowledge acquisition in the presence and absence of traditional cadaveric dissection.
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1 **SUMMARY - ACCELERATING TRANSLATION**

2

3 Main Problem to Solve:

4 Traditional methods of studying facial muscles, such as cadaveric dissections, are time-consuming, resource-
5 intensive, and affected by global shortages of cadaveric material due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Finding
6 effective alternatives to teach anatomy, particularly the intricate muscles of facial expression, is crucial.

7

8 Aim of Study:

9 This study aimed to assess the effectiveness and student perceptions of using clay modeling as an alternative
10 method for learning the muscles of facial expression among medical students. The study also sought to explore
11 the emotional responses associated with this learning approach.

12

13 Methodology:

14 A cross-sectional study design was employed involving second-year medical students at the University of
15 Namibia. Due to a shortage of cadaveric material, white concrete skull casts were made using silicone molds.
16 Practical sessions were conducted where students, working in groups, modeled the muscles of facial expression
17 using artistic sculpting clay. A questionnaire with closed- and open-ended questions was used to gather
18 feedback from participants.

19

20 Results:

21 Twenty-one students participated in the study, with overwhelmingly positive feedback. Participants found the
22 activity motivational, enjoyable, and conducive to learning. The themes from the responses included enjoyment,
23 collaboration, active learning, and bittersweet feelings associated with disassembling the clay models.

24

25 Conclusion:

26 Clay modeling emerged as a cost-effective, enjoyable, and effective method for teaching facial muscle anatomy.
27 It fostered collaboration, active learning, and creativity among students. The emotional responses observed
28 during the disassembly phase highlight the need for considering students' emotional well-being in anatomy
29 education. Clay modeling shows promise as a valuable complement or alternative to traditional cadaveric
30 dissections, particularly in resource-constrained settings or during times of cadaveric material shortages.

31

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1 **FIGURES AND TABLES.**

2

3 **Figure Legends**

4 Fig. 1. Practical clay-modeling setup. A: Casting cement slurry into a silicone cake mold. B: The cured
5 concrete skull after being sprayed with white paint. C: Students working in groups during the practical
6 laboratory session. D: Work-in-progress demonstrating the muscles of facial expression and muscle fascicle
7 direction.

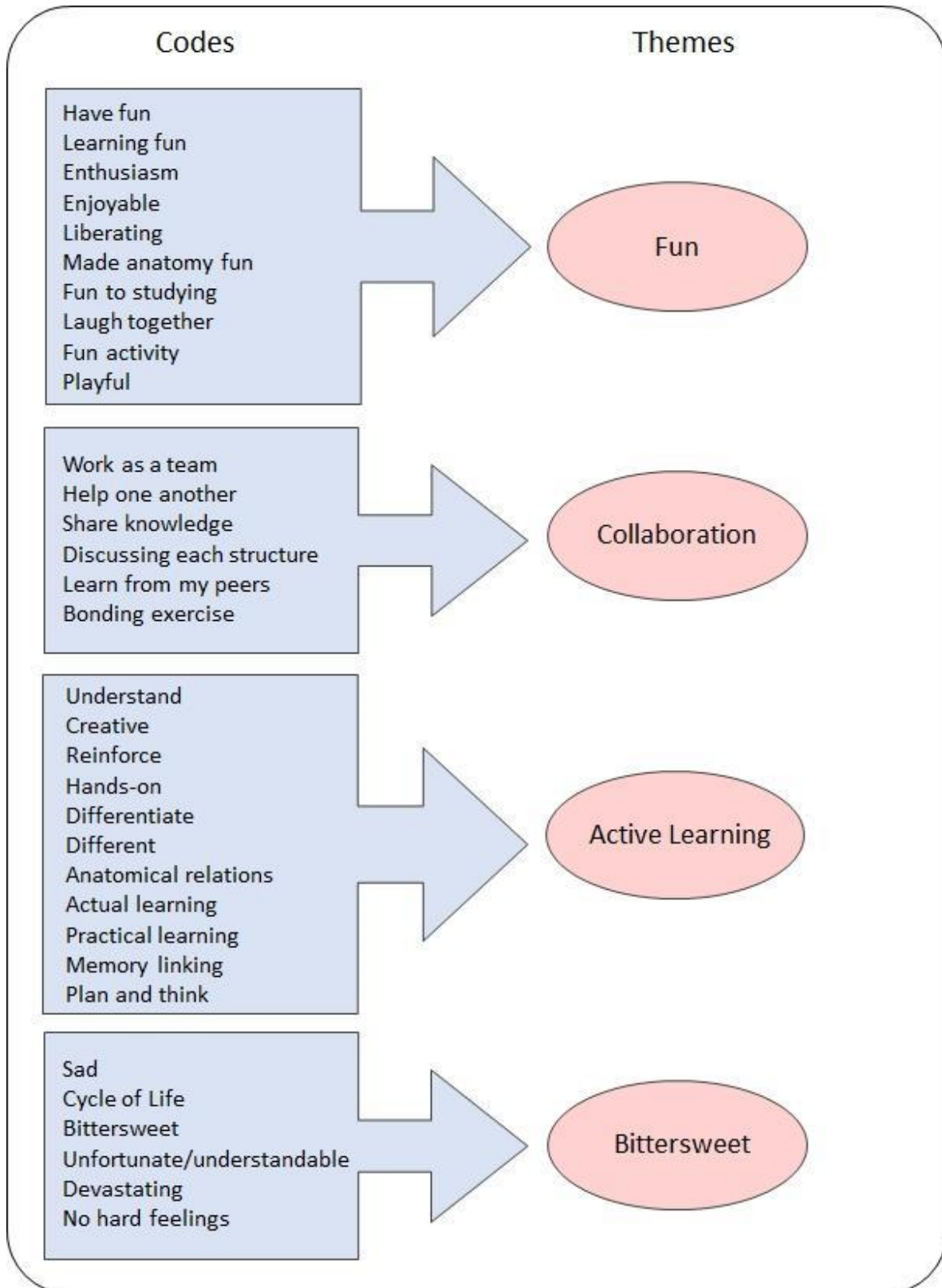


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1 Fig. 2. The four themes that were generated were based on thematic analysis of the open-ended survey
2 questions.



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2 **Appendix I**

3 *Do you feel that the activity allowed you to perform the tasks independently?*

4 *Did you find the activity motivational? In what way? If not, please explain.*

5 *Did you find the activity enjoyable? In what way? If not, please explain.*

6 *Were the resources provided adequate? If so, in what way? If not, please explain.*

7 *Did you find the activity was easy to follow independently? Please explain.*

8 *Would you recommend the activity? Why or why not?*

9 *Did you find this to be an effective learning experience? In what way? If not, please explain.*

10 *Did you learn something new?*

11 *Would you like to do something similar when studying anatomy?*

12 *Do you think the students will benefit from modeling in clay? In what way? If not, please explain.*

13 *What could change? What would you do differently next time?*

14 *What were your thoughts and experiences when you had to dismantle the model? I.e. remove the clay?*

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Accepted, in-press