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Learning Spaces in Community-based Dental Education

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Introduction

In response to various institutional and national policy drivers, a community-based dental education (CBDE) initiative in a non-dental setting has been proposed as a new curriculum offering in Paediatric Dentistry in University College Cork (UCC). The new, student-led Paediatric Dental Clinic for children aged 0-5 years will be located in a new primary healthcare centre, which serves as a hub for health and wellbeing service provision in an urban area of disadvantage of Cork city.

Method

The potential of a modern healthcare centre as a novel, off-campus teaching and learning space for dental students will be explored by analysing a series of photographs of key locations in the centre. A specific comparison will also be made between the planned location of student-family interactions in the new centre with the conventional Dental Teaching Hospital clinical environment. Architectural parameters such as space, light, internal-external connections are contrasted at both sites. Internal design features such as colour schemes and layout are considered, along with type and positioning of furniture and equipment.

Findings

Principles of contemporary design are evident in a new community centre. The entrance and circulation areas are bright, spacious and inviting, with visible internal-externals links (Figures 1 & 2). In contrast, small, basic rooms for various types of clinical interactions are suitably private, with continued emphasis on light and the maintenance of a connection to the outside world (Figure 3). Internal walls make appropriate use of bold, bright colours, creating a sense of positivity and optimism throughout the building. Colour also features strongly in the existing, open plan Paediatric Dental Clinic of the Teaching Hospital (Figure 4). However, the presence of multiple dental chairs is significant, as is the open clinic design. These characteristics of the learning space are likely to be influential in determining the type and quality of interaction between students, very young children and their families.



Figure 1: Entrance and main foyer of primary healthcare centre



Figure 2: Circulation area in primary healthcare centre



Figure 3: Clinical interaction room in primary healthcare centre



Figure 4: Paediatric Dental Clinic in Cork University Dental School and Hospital

Conclusions

The innovative use of learning spaces to imbue a culture of community-engaged scholarship in higher education is widely encouraged (Campus Engage, 2014; Galvin, O'Mahony, Powell & Neville, 2017). This preliminary, visual interrogation of a healthcare centre as a learning space is not only essential for the practical planning of a CBDE initiative, but also begins to inform the development of a relevant conceptual framework; an opening gambit in

answer to Boys' call for "better theoretical frameworks for, and analytical methods of, examining the relationships between space and the activities that go on within it" (Boys, 2010, p.1).

This work highlights a key learning connection, that of community-engaged scholarship, in the education of oral healthcare professionals, with a particular emphasis on the impact of the learning space as a moderator in the relationship between scholarly activities and community engagement. The output of this visual analysis of relevant images forms the basis of a disciplinary pedagogical development, which is simultaneously informed by, and a consequence of, the characteristics of the learning space.

References

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