Title: The effects of context on the marginalisation of dental students in a shared medical and dental curriculum
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Abstract: The Graduate entry Medical and Dental Programs at the University of Sydney share the majority of their curricula content in the first and second years and use a problem-based learning (PBL) approach. Students from both professional cohorts attend joint lectures and laboratory sessions together on the main campus. Although both groups complete the same PBL cases, this occurs on different campuses and the groups are physically segregated for this part of the course. Anecdotal and program evaluation results have indicated negative attitudes and stereotyping between the students and staff from each group. A qualitative study was undertaken to investigate these reports. Semi-structured interviews, and one focus group, were conducted with 38 students and staff in both Faculties. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and an iterative process of interpretation and analysis was used to group data into themes and sub-themes. Dental students described a sense of feeling “marginalised” and of being “second class citizens”. Medical students and staff regularly questioned the relevance of the medical content for the dental students’ professional careers. Organisational factors such as student numbers, orientation, admission processes and geographical location of the two schools propagated negative attitudes and professional stereotyping of students. This is despite many medical and dental students being class mates and friends in their previous degrees. Findings from this study provide evidence for the negative effects of the physical and organisational context for the socialisation of dental students. Strategies for reducing the marginalisation of dental students in this setting include improved communication between Faculties, common orientation activities, stronger social networks and physical reorganisation.

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The Graduate entry Medical and Dental Programs at the University of Sydney share the majority of their curricula content in the first and second years and use a problem-based learning (PBL) approach. Students from both professional cohorts attend joint lectures and laboratory sessions together on the main campus. Although both groups complete the same PBL cases, this occurs on different campuses and the groups are physically segregated for this part of the course. Anecdotal and program evaluation results have indicated negative attitudes and stereotyping between the students and staff from each group. A qualitative study was undertaken to investigate these reports. Semi-structured interviews, and one focus group, were conducted with 38 students and staff in both Faculties. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and an iterative process of interpretation and analysis was used to group data into themes and sub-themes. Dental students described a sense of feeling “marginalised” and of being “second class citizens”. Medical students and staff regularly questioned the relevance of the medical content for the dental students’ professional careers. Organisational factors such as student numbers, orientation, admission processes and geographical location of the two schools propagated negative attitudes and professional stereotyping of students. This is despite many medical and dental students being classmates and friends in their previous degrees. Findings from this study provide evidence for the negative effects of the physical and organisational context for the socialisation of dental students. Strategies for reducing the marginalisation of dental students in this setting include improved communication between Faculties, common orientation activities, stronger social networks and physical reorganisation.