

# Editorial

## Why stop learning when you start teaching?

In order to teach, one must continually learn — otherwise one can only teach the knowledge of the past. So why do some teachers stop learning when they start teaching?

Of course, what is taught at any individual school of dentistry depends on who is doing the teaching — or, more accurately, who is in charge of the department that is responsible for the teaching of any particular course. A narrow-minded, “I-am-always-right” type of professor who does not “believe in” (take your pick): glass-ionomer materials; dentinal bonding agents; the “Maryland” bridge; any material other than amalgam or gold for Class I and II restorations; or any impression material developed since the days of hydrocolloid and rubber base impression materials is going to be responsible for graduating students who will practice the techniques of the past. Thus, many new dentists will graduate with an education that is obsolete in many respects.

Students of dentistry are entitled to an education that covers all facets of the basic sciences and clinical dentistry including newly developed techniques. As our knowledge base grows by leaps and bounds, the task of keeping pace with new discoveries, and incorporating new developments into the already-overburdened dental school curriculum, becomes more difficult for our educators.

However, it is the teacher's responsibility to put a major effort into learning, and teaching, new techniques. Unfortunately, many safely tenured faculty take the easy way out by rationalizing that what is new is not as good as what is old and tried. Adding something new to a clinical curriculum requires a major investment of time and effort. An investment that many excellent teachers willingly make — but that others are unwilling, or unable, to make. They stand bovinely by while progress, unseen and unheard, marches on.

It is understandable that a teacher feels most comfortable teaching a subject or technique in which he or she is experienced. A teacher must therefore accept, learn about, and use new procedures and new materials before he or she can teach them to our future colleagues.

While a conservative approach to some new techniques and materials is warranted, a complete disdain

for what is new is unhealthy for students. That at least one of the most prestigious universities in the United States still does not teach its students the concepts of dentinal bonding with resins, when we are presently using the third generation of such materials, is incomprehensible. Why does another major university not allow glass-ionomer materials inside its hallowed halls?

Who will teach the students how to use the new vinyl polysiloxane impression materials or glass-ionomer materials, or how to evaluate and use properly dentinal bonding agents, if the students do not learn about these things during their dental education?

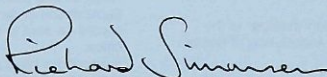
One thing is certain: newly graduated dentists will willingly adopt new techniques at the expense of those learned at the university if they feel their education was lacking a realistic approach to new developments. And the new techniques will be learned from manufacturers' representatives or from a 1-day continuing education course. Is this the place for newly graduated dentists to learn?

Surely it is better for a student dentist to learn thoroughly all procedures in the academic environment of the university dental school. Even if certain faculty members do not agree with a new technique, it should still be presented to the students with all the advantages and disadvantages explained. Then, a student may decide, on graduation, if the technique is one that should be incorporated into his or her practice.

A university is the place for teaching and testing new developments. It should not simply be a place that regurgitates knowledge from the past, year after year, to each crop of new students.

There is some truth to Woodrow Wilson's words, “The only thing harder to move than a cemetery is a university faculty.”

So, why stop learning when you start teaching?



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