



## Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire



In the education life cycle, every year, I witness a new cohort of dental students starting whilst another, having completed their course, qualifies and leaves. It is a familiar journey we have all personally undertaken. Remember the day you qualified as a dentist?

I recall the elation and relief not only because it was the end of a long, arduous training period but also the eagerness to experience an independent practising life. There will be no one telling me what to do. Naively, there was also the feeling of invincibility, not having inhabited the real world of dentistry, ignorant of the challenges ahead. Never mind that my confidence in my abilities was not actually matched by my experience.

Not long after a period of clinical practice, I came to realise how little I knew. Take endodontics, for example. I was carrying out treatment in a mechanistic cookbook fashion with very limited understanding of the biological basis. I was vague on the role of microbes in the pathogenesis of endodontic disease, oblivious of the rationale for each of the treatment stages and unaware of the prerequisite for a favourable treatment outcome, to name just a few knowledge deficiencies.

The sense that I knew it all at qualification soon gave way to the frustration and the reali-

sation that I knew relatively little. I may be a 'safe beginner', but I was not fully conversant or competent in many aspects of dentistry. I was certainly not 'fit for purpose' for the long practising life ahead.

Like many, it led me to embark and pursue postgraduate education. The 'fire' was lit; learning was not only more enjoyable this time around but immensely more fulfilling. Instead of being fed information and filled with knowledge unquestioned, it was gained through proper understanding, critical and independent analysis of the evidence base. I was being educated rather than being trained.

Continuing professional development should be a lifelong mission. Education should be seen as a continuum. The headline of this Editorial, of arguable origin but often attributed to WB Yeats, is a poignant reminder of the true role of education. After all, as Nelson Mandela said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

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