

Editorial

The teachers must learn too

A false assumption on the part of some university dental school faculty—those who put themselves above learning from anyone—is that because they teach they don't have to learn. After all, they know more than anyone else about their subject, so what can they learn? The older such a faculty person gets, the more dangerous he or she becomes: the mind gets locked in denial—new technology is rejected out of insecurity—technology transfer is delayed—traditional, conservative techniques are taught repetitively to each annual class of students. And everyone loses.

If the truth be told, it is absolutely imperative for a teacher to learn, and to continually learn. Teaching traditional material is necessary for building a foundation. But students need to graduate from our dental schools with all possible knowledge of new research developments, new techniques, and new materials. This is just not happening at the majority of the 54 US dental schools, and many students are left wondering why they must learn new procedures after they graduate.

In the 4 years since I left my last faculty teaching position to work in dental industry, a variety of experiences have afforded me a much wider perspective from which to view dental education. Several good ideas have emerged from consultations with some friends in dental education and industry whose opinions on the subject of the future of dental education I value highly.

In our discussions of the problem of the endemic resistance to change that pervades some university departments, I recalled the Neanderthaloid attitudes of some operative dentistry faculty with whom I worked in the 1970s during the early years of pit and fissure sealants and the acid etch technique. I also remembered my private sense of inadequacy as a teacher in later years when I realized that I was not as secure teaching a new procedure as I should be. Why? Because I had not taught myself the procedure well enough, or used it enough clinically, to feel secure in teaching it to students. Perhaps this is the same reason why my operative faculty colleagues from earlier years refused to acknowledge that acid-etched resins were a reasonable alternative to, let alone an improvement on, traditional operative procedures.

The major problem is now, as it was then, that there is nowhere to go for a university teacher to learn the

new, cutting-edge procedures. So by the time teachers learn the procedures, and the technique is adopted into the curriculum, the students are already several years behind.

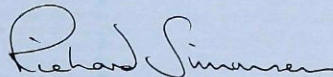
One answer to the significant problem of university departments whose teaching curriculum is far behind the state of technology is mandatory continuing education courses for teachers. But, who will teach the teachers?

In the matter of new technology, for example, who better than the superb scientists from industry who are consistently developing new generations of dental materials? But they are biased you say, and we will have to weed through mounds of commercial claims and sales pitches. I don't think so. Those who reject the idea that industry scientists can be a valuable continuing education resource are rejecting the future. For, I believe the future of dental education depends on a much broader spirit of teamwork and mutual assistance being developed between dental industry and our universities.

Perhaps a working committee of the International and American Associations for Dental Research (IADR and AADR), the American Association of Dental Schools (AADS), and the American Dental Trade Association (ADTA) could be formed to provide a framework for a combined panel to study the issue of providing continuing education courses for university dental faculty. The IADR has the potential to make this a global program through work with organizations similar to the AADS and the ADTA in other countries.

By working together, and by accepting the open hand of dental industry and other outside resources, university faculty could rapidly transfer new technology to students and provide a much-needed shot in the arm to the curricula of many dental schools and to the learning potential of many students.

After all, the teachers must learn too.



Richard J. Simonsen
Editor-in-Chief