

MESSAGE FROM THE NATIONAL PRESIDENT, ACEL

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Hi everyone,

I would like to start my foreword to this edition by noting the sad and recent passing of one of my heroes, Stephen Covey, who left an indelible mark on my work ethic when many years ago I read in his highly acclaimed book, *The Seven*

Habits of Highly Effective People, "... that nobody on their death bed ever wished they'd worked harder!" (Covey, 1989).

In that vein, I trust that your work and life are in perfect harmony and that if they are not then you do something about it before it is too late!

As I introduce this edition I can't help but ponder what it is that causes educational outcomes in Australia to lag behind those of acknowledged 'top tier' PISA performing countries such as Finland, South Korea, Hong Kong, Singapore and Shanghai in China. Many articles produced in this journal over the years have dealt with a myriad of aspects related to school improvement and there is no doubt that it is possible to transform a school given the right conditions and high quality leadership. What we seem to be having difficulty achieving in most jurisdictions across Australia however, is sustainable systemic improvement across the board that matches, or better still, exceeds those jurisdictions identified above. The "*thousand flowers blooming*" (extended from Mao Zedong, 1957) approach does not seem to be working for us too well under the present conditions.

The work of John Hattie and many others indicates very clearly that we first and foremost need to be in the business of improving teacher quality if we are to achieve these gains. How then, would we do that in light of the fact that, from my view, most teachers seem to be working to capacity and there does not seem to be scope to increase contact hours or to demand that they all work faster? So I ask in the spirit of Covey, how would we improve teacher quality while providing a work/life balance for all involved?

It occurs to me that it might be instructive to look to professional sport to identify how player quality has been significantly improved in recent times in order to see if there might be learnings that we could harness in the teaching profession. To further this point I look to AFL which is arguably the most professional sport in this country with television rights providing a financial base that other sports can only admire or envy. With the advent of the rapidly expanding purchasing power, AFL clubs have naturally left no stone unturned to ensure that all players play to their absolute potential. So how do they do it?

Unlike in past eras, contemporary players are recognised as having unique skills and needs so training has now become highly differentiated. They train most days of the week but sessions focus on replicating aspects of the game and the roles that individuals play within the team structure and agreed game plan. As the need arises, some players focus on improving tackling, others concentrate on kicking goals, while others build stamina for their linking role all over the ground. On game day, players have a small GPS sewn into the jumper high on their back which tracks their every movement. How

far they ran and walked is measured as is where on the ground they moved to in addition to how long they remained static. They also have their heart rate measured and some even have a drop of blood taken during the game to measure CO₂ levels. Along with these data a personalised video is produced which provides the basis for review and analysis of every interaction the player had during the game. In addition, a myriad of statistics are professionally produced identifying every conceivable aspect of the game to aid feedback and support between games. All of this material is then utilised extensively to ensure remediation and intervention is differentially enacted through training, recovery and if need be, psychology before the next game.

Specialist coaches are employed to deal with all needs with some clubs employing up to eleven staff to support about forty-six players; not to mention the dietician, conditioning coach, psychologist, lawyer (if required!) and welfare personnel.

Compare this to the average teacher. How often do we provide quality and relevant feedback to teachers in order to effectively support growth and development on an ongoing basis? How many teachers have lessons regularly videoed and then reviewed with a mentor or coach as an aid to improvement? A friend of mine told me recently that nobody had ever watched her teach in thirty years! She said that she does not even know whether she is a good teacher or not.

In my day job I often have to review documentation relating to teachers and Principals who have been deemed to be underperformers but invariably I find nothing substantial in those files. Where are the detailed records that form evidence of the teacher's ongoing performance reviews and analysis; the identification of resources allocated and deployed to ensure that training is provided; and then the follow up to maximise the investment?

I take the view that it would be ridiculous to expect an AFL Coach to manage his player resources effectively without watching the players play in the game. It therefore strikes me as quite bizarre that we expect teachers to be the best they can be without ongoing and relevant feedback and resources to improve. We can't help teachers perform at their peak if we don't have a game plan and analyse the way they play on match day!

Teacher quality would improve across Australia if we treated all staff like high profile and important sports stars! I think the investment would be worth it.

