

MESSAGE FROM THE NATIONAL PRESIDENT, ACEL

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It was brought to my attention when I recently renewed my membership that I have been an ongoing member of ACEL for twenty years. This caused me to reflect on what impact this organisation has had, not only on my career but, more importantly, my thinking and understanding of the educational landscape.

I have to admit that twenty years ago I was a beginning Principal in my third and final year at a very small school south-east of Perth which was located in a paddock surrounded by sheep and very little else! I could most generously be described at that time as an intuitive leader and I got by on my wit (well half of it), sounding confident when I wasn't and most importantly, enlisting the help of my neighbouring colleagues. I wasn't really well prepared for the job which involved teaching four grades at once, administering the school, and performance managing the only other teacher who just happened to be my wife, and who knew a lot more about effective teaching and learning than I ever would!

During these hectic and somewhat spine-tingling years, nobody had to provide research or instruct me to be part of a local leadership network or cluster because my survival instincts led me directly to this understanding. It was clear to me that the essential (and safest) way to find out how things should be done was to ask one of the many high performing school leaders who worked around me. The more experienced Principals knew it all but none of them thought for one minute that they were experts or that they radiated world's-best school leadership. They all knew how hard it was when they started and they consequently shared vital knowledge and understood what support was required, usually before I even knew that I needed it! As I now reflect, many of them were the absolute best in the business and most remain so to this day. Strangely enough, in 2012, while we search for answers and expertise in Finland, Singapore, Shanghai and other 'flavour of the month' locations, most of the innovation and best practice we need, as it was all those years ago, is still in the same suburb or region, just up the road at neighbouring schools. (Much cheaper to get there, far more relevant and contextually more appropriate ... but I digress.)

One of those local experts of twenty years ago; a humble but high performing fellow by the name of Steve Yates insisted that I should join ACEL straight away. This was most likely a collegiate way of telling me that I needed more help than he could provide! He even checked the next week to see that I had actually joined because he recognised that ACEL had the best publications available at the time, which were mostly written by practitioners, Australian researchers and the best thinkers. As with most things Steve said, his advice about ACEL turned out to be vitally important to me, and more importantly, the teachers and students that I was to lead in much bigger schools over the next decade.

Twenty years later ACEL is still assisting educators with the latest thinking and research as we push forward in very complex and challenging times. Recently, I had the privilege to open the annual ACEL conference held in Brisbane which was attended by over

700 colleagues who, mostly during their holidays, wanted to be challenged and updated on how we can improve outcomes for all students across the country. Since Steve pushed me into ACEL, I have participated in most conferences and this year's was the equal of any that I have attended.

Our lead keynote speaker, famed international business consultant Daniel Pink, forced me to reconsider my understanding of what we need to do for our students in the "Conceptual Age" with his logical and compelling interpretation of neuroscience, psychology and sociological and economic trends. His recognition and articulation of the developing trend of routine white-collar and algorithmic work being outsourced or being replaced by technology has implications for our students as we plan for future employment in a world where right brain thinking will dominate. Pink observes however, that our schools are still primarily orientated around left brain, standardisation and recall which will not adequately provide the required skills and opportunities.

Lee Crockett from Canada, unknown to me before Brisbane, turned out to be a real highlight with a pragmatic and incredibly engaging presentation about how we can make sense of Pink's 21st century learning imperatives while at the same time ensuring that the foundations are still implicit in all that we do in the classroom.

My personal conference highlight however, came through the reminder by Rev Tim Costello as to why we as educators choose to do this for a living. I didn't actually know that I needed to revisit what my educational legacy or unique contribution should be, but Tim certainly woke me up and made me feel like I have been daydreaming for a while. His concept of finding one's 'bliss' was a life lesson for all lucky enough to be in the auditorium. He intelligently explained that, "a person's calling is where their bliss meets a world need." I now feel reinvigorated!

The best thing that I continue to derive from ACEL however, apart from quality world class speakers and literature, is what Steve and all of those other brilliant Principals were providing in spades to me twenty years ago; collegial advice, support, encouragement, an opportunity to test my ideas and good old fashioned help. In today's rapidly expanding autonomous world, ACEL provides hope, community and a chance to fully develop your bliss so as to leave a sustainable legacy.

Thanks for reading,

