

There Are No Shortcuts to Success''

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There is a natural time line for us to become proficient in any given discipline and that is a natural fact. Unfortunately, many times fact and fiction become distorted by our own unreasonable attitude for or against something. Fortunately, a dose of good old common sense can bring us back to reality.

Common Sense #1. In the recently published consultation paper "Building Pathways in Irish Sport" the National Coaching and Training Center stated: "Scientific research has concluded that it takes eight to twelve years of training for a player/athlete to reach elite level. This is called the ten-year rule or 10,000 hour rule, which translates to slightly more than three hours practice daily for ten year.

Many parents and coaches still approach training with an attitude best characterized as 'peaking by Friday', where a short term approach is taken to training and performance with an over emphasis on immediate results. We now know that a long-term commitment to practice and training is required to produce elite players/athletes in all sport.

A specific and well-planned practice, training, competition and recovery regime will ensure optimum development throughout a Player/athlete's career. Ultimately, sustained success comes from training and performing well over the long term rather than winning in the short term. There are no shortcuts to success in athletic preparation. Rushing competition will always result in shortcomings in physical, technical, tactical, mental, personal and lifestyle capacities."

Based on this framework, fun, fundamental motor skills and soccer specific skill development should be strongly emphasized at an early age. Competition for younger children needs to be balanced with the need to develop skills.

Presently in Ireland there is an over emphasis on competition to the detriment of opportunities to practice. If younger players are to develop their skills and decision making, they need to be exposed to enjoyable practices to develop their capacities on a regular basis. There is a need to review existing competition structures to ensure that the right balance is achieved between training and competition at the different age groups.

Common Sense #2. KRISTIN L. SULLIVAN entitled her Article, "Drill and Kill: Relax the Pressure to Read" which goes like this...

"Stop the madness! Do you ever feel crazy sitting at the table with your 5-, 6-, 7- or 8-year-old doing page after page of homework?"

Do you feel crazier knowing that there is no evidence that homework has any effect on academic performance until after the eighth grade?

Do you find yourself asking when elementary school changed? When did we replace the paint and easels for pencils and college-ruled paper?

When did we replace the playhouse and wooden blocks for workbooks and math sheets? When did we decide that recess should be or could possibly be optional? When did we

decide to trade our children's childhood for some bizarre version of Aldous Huxley's Brave New World?

Today, children arrive at kindergarten the same way they arrive at college, ready to learn with a backpack filled with goods. Young children are armed with the tools of an adult learning environment. Unfortunately, they are ill equipped developmentally to master the tasks of the new classroom. The current state standards require that children be reading at the end of kindergarten. Nonsense!

Although some children read early naturally, most children do not master reading until they are about age 7, some even a bit older. Earlier is not better.

We create a whole new set of problems, including later lowered reading and math scores, by trying to force children to understand reading early.

Afraid of failure. We have to change our mode of operation from a deficit-base to a strength-base model of education. We have to trust that, through the integration of knowledge about child development and age-appropriate curriculum, we can achieve maximum benefit with minimum effort in our educational system.

We are so afraid children won't learn that we drill and kill them with arbitrary facts that they do not remember because they are taught without meaningful experience.

"All good things come in good time." This statement could not be truer when talking about human development. There is a natural time when children learn to walk, talk, read and many other things.

If someone told you that your child could learn to walk at 3 months if you just make them practice, would you think they were crazy?

I have yet to find a single person who believes that having babies practice walking creates children who walk sooner or better. Even if it did, what would be the point? By the time a child is 5, you cannot tell an early walker from one who took his first steps later.

Reading is no different. The best preparation for learning to read is being read to by a loving parent or teacher. It takes 7 years for most children to have had enough experience with their primary language to be able to put it all together and actually read.

They become literate and life-long readers, not skill masters who dislike books.

When we only allow children to experience books that include words from the Dolch word list and read stories that have no storyline or literary value, just common phonetic patterns, then we rob them of the inherent joy and purpose that comes from learning to read. Teaching an adult who is illiterate or a child in second-grade to read takes about 30 hours of instruction or less.

One of the biggest problems we face in education is that we are trying desperately to teach curriculum that is out of alignment with natural development.

What we end up with is a classroom that expends maximum effort for minimum benefit.

Teachers know this but are forced to teach material that is inappropriate for young children. We would not ever tolerate trying to teach children to walk at 3 months because it is impossible.

Trust in humanity. Development requires that infants have more time and miraculously without formal practice most children walk by the end of the first year.

When children's development is used to support the process of learning, children learn more easily.

We must trust, first in our own humanity. Natural development is a wonderful predictor of competence.

And the article ends with, "the success of our educational system should not be judged on a yearly basis through standardized test scores, but instead measured in terms of the finished product, when the student becomes a well-rounded, productive citizen".

Reality #1. Success of our player's development should not be judged on a yearly basis through win/loss records, but instead measured in terms of the finished product. When the players continue playing soccer past their early teen's and become well-rounded and 'mature' ball players through 10,000 hours of developmental soccer practice.

Reality #2. Success of a coach's development should also not be judged on a yearly basis through win/loss records, but instead measured in terms of the finished product. When the coach continues coaching soccer past their own child's participation and becomes well rounded.