

Brisbane State  
High School

Parents as Partners 2020

*In Conversation  
Series - #1*

*Positive Motivation*



*Dr Andrew Martin  
Educational Psychologist*



## Parents as Partners 'In Conversation Series'

Dear Parents and Guardians,

At Brisbane State High School, we are deeply committed to our goal of personal excellence for all students and acknowledge the critical role parents and guardians play in contributing to their child's education and success.

State High is pleased to design opportunities for parents and guardians to engage with leading educational and parenting experts. We are pleased to share with you a four-part series of 'In Conversation' interviews with [Dr Andrew Martin](#), Educational Psychologist, Sydney, AU.

Dr Martin specialises in student motivation, engagement and achievement. He is also published on important areas such as ADHD, gifted and talented, academic resilience and academic buoyancy, adaptability and teacher-student relationships. Dr Martin's research bridges other disciplines through assessing motivation and engagement in sport, music and work.

Dr Martin's Motivation and Engagement Wheel, which outlines positive and negative motivation as well as positive and negative engagement is included here for your reference. Within each of the four areas of the Wheel, there are contributing parts. The three parts of positive motivation are self-belief, learning focus and valuing school. We begin this *In Conversation Series* with *Positive Motivation*.

We trust you will enjoy these conversations designed to support you and your children's learning.

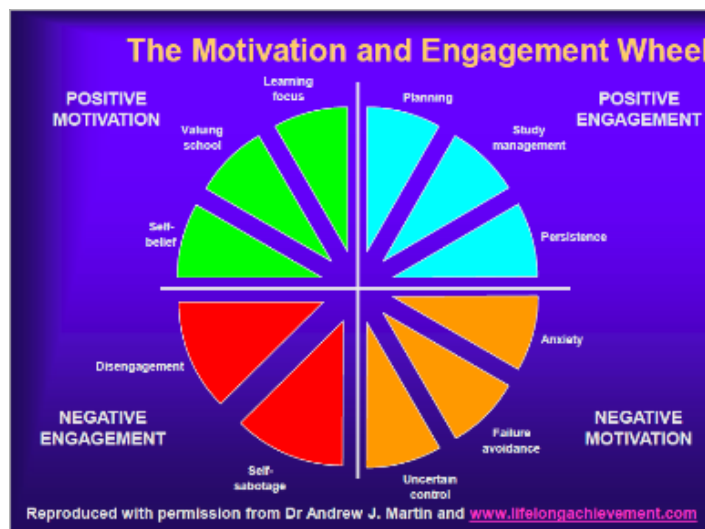
Warm regards,

*Deanne Clark*

**Deanne Clark**  
Leadership, Learning & Research Institute

*Wade Haynes*

**Wade Haynes**  
Executive Principal



## In Conversation Series # 1

### Dr Andrew Martin, Educational Psychologist



*Deanne Clark: Welcome State High Families to our 'In Conversation - Parents as Partners Series'. It is my pleasure to interview Dr Andrew Martin, Educational Psychologist and share his research and insights with you. Andrew, thank you for giving your time today.*

Dr Andrew Martin: It's a pleasure.

*DC: Andrew, on your Motivation and Engagement Wheel, you separate the two concepts of motivation and engagement. Can you share with us a little about the difference between the two, please?*

AM: That's a good question and one that researchers have been debating for the last 50 years! But, if I was to put it in a nutshell, motivation refers to the internal drive, energy and inclination to do something. And so for students, that might refer to their internal energy and drive to study, to do their homework, to practise football, tennis, dance or music. Engagement is more the observable behaviours, the manifestation of motivation. For example, you will see someone investing effort, or trying hard, or organising themselves.

*DC: What a great way to define the two concepts. So, motivation is the internal drive or energy and engagement is the manifestation of that, the observable behaviours.*

AM: Yes, motivation refers to the internal drive to be engaged or to behave in engaged ways. And therefore, motivation and engagement are very highly associated. Students who are motivated, tend to be engaged. The research suggests there is a little bit of causal ordering, so your motivation drives your engagement. When you have a strong internal positive drive, you tend to behave in ways consistent with that; for example, you will try harder or persist longer.

*DC: So we can say there is a small ordering, and motivation drives your engagement?*

AM: Yes. However, there is a critical feedback loop because when you are more engaged, you tend to become more motivated. So there is a virtual cycle that happens. Ideally, that cycle is upwards but it is also true to say that it can be downwards. If you are not so motivated, you tend to be not so engaged and because you try less and less, you become less and less motivated and on that goes.

*DC: Acknowledging that motivation and engagement are linked, may we today begin with your Motivation and Engagement Wheel and the three areas that you have identified that contribute to positive motivation?*

AM: The Motivation and Engagement Wheel is comprised of eleven parts in total, and three of those refer to positive motivation. The first part refers to students' self-belief, the second is students' valuing of school, and the third is students' learning focus.

DC: *How do you define self-belief?*

AM: Self-belief refers to a student's academic self-confidence. Quite often a student can be confident in sport or socially, but not confident academically. So, it is a student's belief in their capacity to do what they set out to do in their schoolwork and study. Or, the extent to which they back themselves in their academic life.

DC: *And how do you describe valuing school?*

AM: Valuing school is the extent to which a student believes school is useful, relevant and connected to their life now and connected to their life down the track. When students value school, it tends to suggest that what they are doing is important, interesting or arouses their curiosity, or maybe connected to a course or job they would like to enter after school.

DC: *And learning focus?*

AM: The third positive motivation factor is learning focus. This is where students are focussed on the progress or the journey through school and schoolwork, more than the outcome. That is, they are focussed on their effort, their skill development, their knowledge building, their understanding, more than being focussed on their competition, marks, rank or pecking order. And so, learning focus is when students are focussed on the task at hand, the process and mastering the skills and knowledge needed at school.

DC: *I like your explanation of learning focus, 'where students are focussed on the progress.' I wondered Andrew, are all the areas of motivation that you outlined: self-belief, learning focus and valuing school, equally important?*

AM: As a motivational researcher, I am a little biased. I think they are all very important. Whether they are equally important will depend on the child and the situation. And, over the course of 13 or so years at school, different parts of positive motivation will ebb and flow. That is, some parts of positive motivation will be more important and salient than others at different points of the student's school journey.

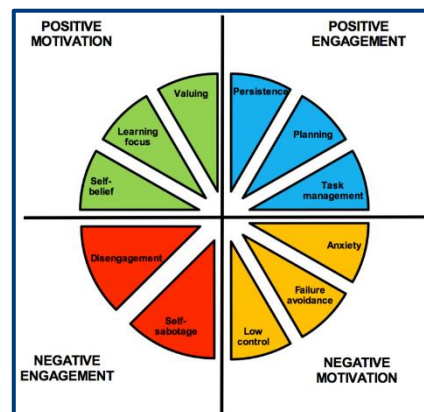
DC: *Can you provide us with an example of that, please?*

AM: Sometimes, a student might be thinking a particular subject is boring, and find themselves in a bit of a slump. If this is the case, that means, **valuing school** is an issue to deal with.

At other times, a student might be really caught up in marks, or being outperformed by others, or worrying about getting into university. That's where the **learning focus** will be an issue to deal with.

Sometimes, there is a crisis of confidence in a particular subject, a particular topic, or about school more generally. That's when **self-belief** is an issue to deal with.

As you can see, therefore, at different times and for different reasons each of the positive motivation factors are salient and important to deal with.



*DC: So the three areas of positive motivation can ebb and flow depending on the child and the specific time in their academic life?*

AM: What we know is that the three areas of positive motivation go together, they create a synergy. When all three are going your way, from a motivational perspective, you are firing!

*DC: What a lovely goal, to ‘create a synergy!’ That leads me to ask Andrew, how can families best support their child’s learning motivation, to ensure all three areas of positive motivation are ‘firing’?*

AM: Ah, yes! We find ourselves now at the all-important question, “So, what do I do now?”

This is where the Motivation and Engagement Wheel becomes really helpful. It unpacks the key parts of positive motivation and allows students, parents and teachers to deal with motivation in a specific and targeted way.

It is important to be specific and targeted, because telling a student to be motivated is too vague. Students have no idea what to do or what to address when we tell them to “be more motivated”. In fact, we often throw around vague advice that isn’t specific or targeted enough for the student to take appropriate action. For example, we will tell them, “You’ve got to try harder” or “You’ve got to pull your socks up.” When we ask students what they will do in response to this wisdom, they haven’t got a clue! This is because the advice is too vague and general.

***“The best benchmark for your child is your child.”  
Dr Andrew Martin***

*DC: So using the terms from the three areas of positive motivation provides a language for families to focus on?*

AM: Yes, absolutely!

- Understanding the three specific components of motivation is the first critical step in doing something about it, so you and your child really know what to focus on.
- The next step is to do an audit. Have a good think about your child and their self-belief, learning focus and value of school. What are your child’s strengths? (We always start with strengths). If you want kids to switch off and ignore what you are about to say, start with a problem and a weakness! So recognise what is going their way. Remember: the best benchmark for your child is your child.
- Then ask yourself, relative to my own child and his/her own life, what things are travelling OK? Where is the glass half full? Then you may be able to identify something to improve. When you’ve identified the areas for improvement, and because we have been able to name these motivational factors specifically, it means we can address them quite specifically.

*DC: If, after families have conducted an audit, identified their child's strengths and found the area of improvement from either self-belief, valuing school or learning focus, how can they support and encourage their child?*

AM: We can separate the three areas into specific strategies and tips.

### Tips for promoting self-belief

#### ✓ **Give students greater access to genuine success**

There is nothing that will fuel confidence more than doing something OK. We can't artificially impose success. We can't just give students an A-grade to cheer them up, if they don't deserve it. We actually find that doesn't work as a motivational device. It has to be genuine success.

#### ✓ **Try 'chunking' as a strategy for success**

Chunking has two parts. The first part is for students to look at a task they have and break it into bite-sized, doable pieces. This helps boost self-belief at the start of a task. Sometimes we lose self-belief when we look at a task and think, "Oh, that's too much! I can't do that!" When you break it down, you realise that you can do parts of it. And the bits your child is not so sure about, they can ask their teacher about.

The second part of chunking is to see the completion of each chunk as a success. When kids tick off parts or bits of their task, they feel good! Just like when we tick off parts of a 'to do' list. So this builds success through the process. You don't have to wait two weeks to get your mark back to feel some level of success; students will have experienced success and this builds self-belief and energy through the task.

#### ✓ **Challenge negative thinking**

We can slip into negative thinking easily and start believing we are not as good as we actually are. We can think that things are going to go badly or that the questions on the exam will be too hard for us or that the marking will be too tough or unfair. This type of negative thinking can start becoming automatic after a while. So we need to identify our children's automatic negative thinking and encourage them to think through the situation and challenge it with some good old-fashioned common sense. A common sense approach may be to talk to the teacher when a test approaches, if they are feeling concerned about it. Teachers aren't in the business of guessing games, they are in the game of instruction and are usually delighted when kids ask for assistance.

### Tips for promoting valuing school

#### ✓ **Connections and relevance**

The key hallmark of valuing school, or valuing a subject, is when you and your child see it as relevant. To help students in this area, parents can have a conversation asking them, "*How is this subject connected to other subjects?*" "*How does thinking in this subject help your thinking about other things in your life?*" "*What are the interesting parts of this topic?*" For example, in science the teacher might talk about the importance of hygiene and how viruses are passed on. Until COVID-19, this may have been seen as somewhat irrelevant and uninteresting to adolescents, but there is a renewed relevance today! Relevance promotes valuing.

✓ **Pathways beyond school**

When parents know a little about the educational and vocational pathways beyond school and what sorts of things in school connect to those pathways, this enhances relevance and valuing too.

✓ **Curiosity and interest**

Arouse curiosity and encourage your child to identify the fun, unexpected, surprising or interesting aspects of a subject to make it a little more engaging for them.

✓ **Model valuing**

If parents want their child to value a subject, parents will need to model that valuing themselves. That's not to say parents can't be empathetic about things. Sometimes parents need to lend a sympathetic ear when their child might be experiencing difficulty with a subject. At the same time, they can look for ways to be solution focussed and ask, "How can we navigate that?" However, if the child continues to struggle, the parent can contact the school and speak to the teachers. Even here, though, it is important to be solution focussed, more than problem focussed.

**Tips for promoting a learning focus**

✓ **Focus on your child and their journey**

Children are more learning focussed when in the home, there's a greater focus on effort, knowledge building, skill building, participation and involvement; more than a focus on "Where did you come?" "Who beat you?" "Why did you miss out on those three marks?"

A parent can encourage a child to go to their teacher and find out how they can improve for next time. Keep the focus on your child's own journey. Another way to help a learning focus is to encourage your child to set and pursue 'personal best' (PB) goals. Here the child has themselves (not others) as the benchmark for improvement and progress.

***"Children are more learning focussed when there's a greater focus at home on effort, knowledge building, skill building, participation and involvement." Dr Andrew Martin***

*DC: That is a tremendous list with wonderful strategies, thank you. You mentioned chunking, and the importance of effort and energy building through the process. Is that a way families can help to redefine and build genuine success for their children?*

AM: Good question and that nicely follows on from self-belief. A reason some students may suffer from low self-belief is because of how they define and see success. Some students see success in very narrow ways (example, topping the class, beating others) and so when you define success in narrow ways, also by definition, you really limit your access to success.

*DC: How can families help to ensure their children are not limiting their own access to success?*

AM: If you define success as being the top of the class, well only one student can be the top of the class and in doing so, you have really limited your access to success. Even if you define success as passing the test, only half the kids will typically attain that success (depending on how it is marked or scaled). If these are the only benchmarks for success, then over time you risk being systematically cut off from success. If this happens, your self-belief starts suffering and declining.

So, how parents and children define success has big implications for how children see themselves. Encouragingly, what we find is when students broaden their view for success, they have more access to it and we find their self-belief tends to elevate at that point.

***“When students broaden their view of success, they have more access to it and we find their self-belief tends to elevate at that point.” Dr Andrew Martin***

*DC: Elevating self-belief and broadening a child’s view of success. What a nice path to tread. What would that look like?*

AM: Examples of authentic, broader successes are personal bests (which we will talk more about in our next conversation), doing better than you have done before, how much effort you invest. All these successes are accessible to all students. They are also entirely within the students’ control, which is motivating. Another example of success is a student’s skill development and how much knowledge they are building. When you start defining success in these accessible ways, you actually start broadening your access to it and by implication, your self-belief starts growing.

*DC: This sounds like a great cycle back to the start of our conversation on positive motivation.*

AM: Yes, absolutely! When you genuinely broaden your notion of what success is, you have greater access to success and greater opportunity for your self-belief to grow.

Thus, across the three areas of self-belief, valuing school and learning focus, it is clear there are lots of things that we can be doing in our homes to be promoting positive motivation.

*DC: Andrew, thank you so much for sharing your insights with us and for giving your time and expertise to discussing positive motivation.*

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Our next ‘In Conversation Series’ for State High families, will focus on **Positive Engagement** with Dr Andrew Martin. For other articles, please visit: <https://lifelongachievement.com/pages/download-corner>