

Brisbane State
High School

Parents as Partners 2020

In Conversation

Series - #2

Positive Engagement



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 engagement are planning and monitoring, task management and persistence. We continue this *In Conversation Series* with *Positive Engagement*.

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

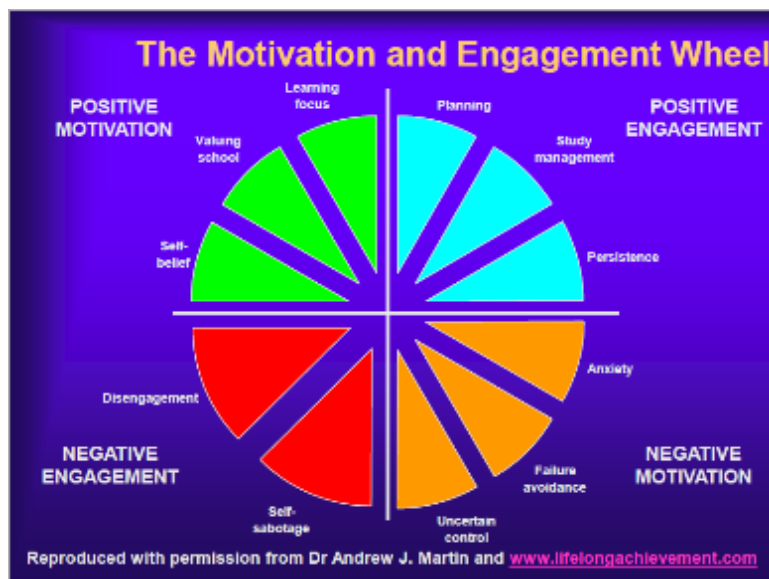
Warm regards,

Deanne Clark

Deanne Clark
Leadership, Learning & Research Institute

Wade Haynes

Wade Haynes
Executive Principal



In Conversation Series # 2

Dr Andrew Martin, Educational Psychologist



Deanne Clark: Welcome State High Families to our second, '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, in our first conversation, we spoke about your Motivation and Engagement Wheel and specifically, positive motivation. Today I'd like to ask you about engagement. May we begin, with your definition of both motivation and engagement?

AM: Yes, of course. 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, persisting, developing a timetable or organising themselves; or you may see a student doing none of those things! While we can't see motivation, we usually see the behavioural manifestation of motivation which we tend to refer to as engagement.

DC: I'm looking forward to learning more about engagement. On your Motivation and Engagement Wheel, positive engagement, just like positive motivation, is separated into 3 areas or parts. Can you explain these 3 areas, please?

AM: The Motivation and Engagement Wheel is comprised of eleven parts in total and three of those refer to positive engagement. The first part of positive engagement refers to students' planning and monitoring behaviours, the second is students' task management and the third is students' persistence.

DC: How do you define the first area of positive engagement - planning and monitoring?

AM: Planning and monitoring refers to the extent to which students plan out their activities, assignments, homework or study and how much they keep track of their progress as they are doing these things. Planning, refers to planning goals or ideas for the short term, the year ahead and even for the duration of a student's high school years. Proximal, or immediate short-term plans are critical and are necessary for students to meet their distal or longer-term plans.

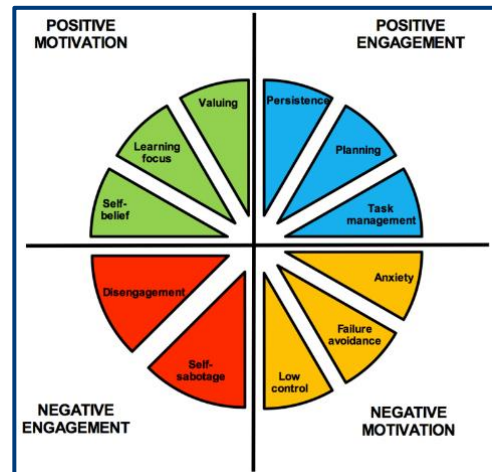
The other critical part, monitoring, is when students monitor their progress as they work towards goals or plans. Ideally, monitoring provides students with some positive feedback so they know they are on track. Sometimes students need to re-jig their plans (but not too soon), because otherwise they wouldn't finish anything; but sometimes it is necessary.

DC: The relationship and importance of both planning and monitoring is very critical for families to know.

AM: What we know about planning and monitoring is that the best way to plan and deal with next week, is to get today right. And the best way to plan and deal with year 12 is to get year 7 right. And the best way to plan and get year 7 right, is to deal with today.

DC: How do you describe the next area of positive engagement - task management?

AM: Task management is the way in which your child manages themselves as a student. It is how they use their study time, organise their study timetable, manage their room or study area, manage themselves through a particular task, and even inform you when they've run out of a resource!



In our modern world, we also have another part of our life that needs to be managed, and that is our e-life or our virtual life. This is a very important part of task management or self-management and we need to ask ourselves and our children, “How well do we self-regulate or manage appropriately our behaviour and our time when it comes to technology?”

Some students are able to self-regulate technology quite effectively. For example, they keep devices out of bedrooms when they are sleeping, they turn off notifications when they are ready to study and they are able to stay on task and not switch screens between study, games, Youtube and social media. This has become a major area of self-regulation for students - being able to regulate their impulse control, their time appropriately, their activities and their schoolwork. (Some advice for self-regulation is included later in our conversation).

DC: And the third and final part of positive engagement - persistence?

AM: Persistence is how much your child keeps trying to work out an answer or understand a problem, even when the problem is difficult or challenging. Persistence is what your child does when they hit a wall, when they don't get an answer right the first time, when tasks are large or multi-part. Persistence will be a large part of how they navigate through and out of that. Students who persist tend to achieve what they set out to do, are motivated to succeed and are good at problem solving.

DC: Thank you for outlining the three areas of positive engagement - planning and monitoring, task management and persistence. Is one area more important than another?

AM: You are going to predict my answer, as it is the same for when we considered this with positive motivation. And that is, as a motivational researcher, I am a little biased and think they are all very important! However, as with motivation, one engagement factor may be more important for you and your child at a particular time and that will depend on the child and the situation. Over the course of 13 or so years at school, different parts of positive engagement will ebb and flow.

DC: So as with positive motivation, the three areas of positive engagement ebb and flow depending on your child and the specific time in their academic life?

AM: Yes, depending on your child and the time in their schooling, some students are a little more self-directed or able to organise themselves. Some students are a little more receptive to suggestions on how to organise themselves or are very persistent. Some students may be able to persist for a long time on some things, but in other ways, they may be cutting corners and just getting through. Some students find it hard to hang in there when things get tough. Whatever it is, you can see your child's engagement.

It's important to mention here, that some students have clinical disorders that directly impact task management, including conditions such as Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder. ADHD is a clinical disorder and executive functioning, self-regulation, impulse control, persistence and the capacity to self-direct are directly impacted by ADHD.

DC: Considering the three parts of positive engagement, the area of task management seems particularly important when it includes skills such as self-regulation, impulse control and the capacity to self-direct.

AM: If I had to choose one engagement area to focus on as a parent, I would say task management and self-regulation. When we do pathways research, when we look beyond the school and look at functioning in early adulthood - the capacity to self-regulate and the capacity to self-control is fundamental to functioning through adulthood.

How you self-regulate in the workplace, how you self-regulate alcohol, exercise, leisure habits, conversations and even appropriately control emotions, is fundamental to functioning through adulthood. The capacity to self-regulate is a key factor that differentiates adult pathways. If we wind that right back, attention to self-regulate through childhood and adolescence lays the foundations for a functioning adult.

***“The capacity to self-regulate is a key factor that differentiates adult pathways.”
Dr Andrew Martin***

DC: Those words are so powerful, “the capacity to self-regulate is a key factor that differentiates adult pathways.” How can families support self-regulation?

AM: The nice thing about unpacking engagement into three key parts means that we can very specifically and concretely improve a specific area if we need to and sustain the areas that are travelling well.

Research and practitioners have identified many ways that you can support a child or a young person in these three areas of engagement. I'm going to group two together: planning/monitoring and task management because they create a broad constellation of self-management and self-regulation.

Tips for promoting planning, monitoring and task management

✓ *Check with your child's teacher*

If you believe your child is having difficulty with organisation, impulse control, self-directing or managing themselves, email and check with their class teachers. Your child may either be similar to their peers in this area, or you may find they are having a bit of difficulty. It's important to check there isn't a clinically underlying factor. 4 times of our 5, there isn't. Don't hit the panic button, but do your due diligence and collect some information so you can rule things in or out. With additional information from the teacher, there are often plausible reasons why your child is having trouble organising themselves and can be supported.

✓ *Self-organisational strategies*

Develop a study timetable for the week - I know State High supports and asks students to do this. But, if your child hasn't made a study or homework timetable yet for this term, when they know the reason why it is important, this can be enough to get them over the line and develop one.

Clear and consistent home routines – Home routines help your child to be organised and consistent. Generally, if you try to have home events such as dinner and lights out at the same time each night, this assists your child's self-organisation. Also, include in your routine when games or social media can be a part of your child's week and where devices are to be kept each night at bedtime. Gaming and social networking are important parts of childhood and youth today. But I do advise, "Everything in it's time and place during the week!"

Home environment - How does your family support your child to concentrate and stay on track? If the TV is too loud in the next room, or there is a lot of movement and activity near their study area, or if your child doesn't have all resources, it may be hard to stay on track and concentrate.

Clear and positive expectations - Positive expectations communicated to your child, lets them know that you believe they can do this! Know how your child is achieving or how much effort they are investing and raise the bar just a touch ahead of where they are.

Your child will make their own e-life choices as they grow older, and some of those choices you won't like! But in the early years, and as long as you are able to, aim to instil good practices with boundaries and clear expectations around devices and screen time. If it comes to a point, where your child or young adult realises they are tired of spending most of their life online, the boundaries you earlier established will be a good source of guidance for them to make better choices.

Model desired behaviours - It's a hard sell for parents and guardians to ask students to hop off their devices, when they themselves are spending a lot of time online. We have a responsibility as parents and guardians to model online self-regulation.

Tips for promoting persistence

✓ Goal setting and goal striving

Our research repeatedly indicates that students who are persistent and who push through when things get tough, are those who have set a goal **and** mapped out the steps involved in reaching that goal. I have found that goal setting is the relatively easy part. This is where students state what they are aiming for. *It is goal striving that is the hard part.* This is where students map out the steps required in working towards that goal and then spend the following hours, days, weeks, or months adhering to that map. One goal setting strategy we have done a lot of research on is, *Personal Best Goals, or PB Goal Setting.*

PB goal setting is where students strive to match, or exceed their previous best effort, or previous best performance. PB goals are really nifty! Not only do they enhance persistence, but when you also consider our previous conversation about motivation and the importance of students being able to access success to boost their self-belief, PB goals make success accessible. For example, if 'study effort' is your child's PB goal, then they can do a little bit more extra study than they did last week. Their PB goal is accessible.

PB goals are also known goals. Students know what mark they received on their previous exam, so they know what mark they are striving to achieve this time. The problem with being too competitive with other students, is that students don't know what mark others are going to get, so they actually don't know what mark they have to strive for to out-perform them. The goal is immediately rendered unknown.

The research is clear on this: when a goal is vague, when it is not specific or when it is unknown, students are less likely to strive towards it or achieve that goal. The nice thing about PB goals, is that they are known and accessible because it is *your child's benchmark!*

When setting PB goals, there are two types, Process PB goals and Outcome PB goals. Process PB goals are related to effort, building knowledge, skill building and knowing more than you did last time. It may be developing a skill further than your existing skillset, or studying more for the maths exam than you did last time. Outcome PB goals refer to a grade or mark. For example, a student states they want to get a better mark in a subject than they did last time.

The important point is that our research shows again and again that those students who set and strive towards Personal Best goals, are significantly more likely to persist and significantly more likely to invest effort, especially when things get difficult.

“Students who set and strive towards personal best goals, are significantly more likely to persist and significantly more likely to invest effort, especially when things get tough.”
Dr Andrew Martin

DC: Andrew, your tips and strategies for promoting positive engagement are wonderful, thank you. I can see the importance of strong, family relationships so families can talk about the areas of engagement and the strategies to assist positive engagement.

AM: Absolutely! Broadly, I would recommend when you're together as a family at home, make the opportunities count and use them as a way of building your relationship. When you have time together, some guiding questions about school include:

- *What did you achieve today?*
- *What was fun about today?*
- *What did you learn today that you didn't know yesterday?*
- *Who did you spend time with today?*
- *What's coming up tomorrow?*

Sometimes, the best thing is not to talk about school at all! There are other parts of your child's life that are very important and helpful to talk about and understand. A great place for a conversation with your child, is often in the car. Especially when your children are adolescents and you become a taxi driver as a parent! The car allows for an idle chat and is a great way to pass the time together. Car screen time (the windscreen) can be amazingly effective and non-threatening as you watch the road and traffic together! As distant as it seems now, they will get their driver's license and that time together will be gone. Engage with your children and make the most of the time that you have together.

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

Our next 'In Conversation Series' for State High families, will focus on **Academic Buoyancy and Adaptability** with Dr Andrew Martin. For other articles, please visit: <https://lifelongachievement.com/pages/download-corner>