

Brisbane State
High School

Parents as Partners 2020

*In Conversation
Series - #3
Academic Buoyancy
and
Adaptability*



*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 with the 5Cs outlined is included here for your reference.

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

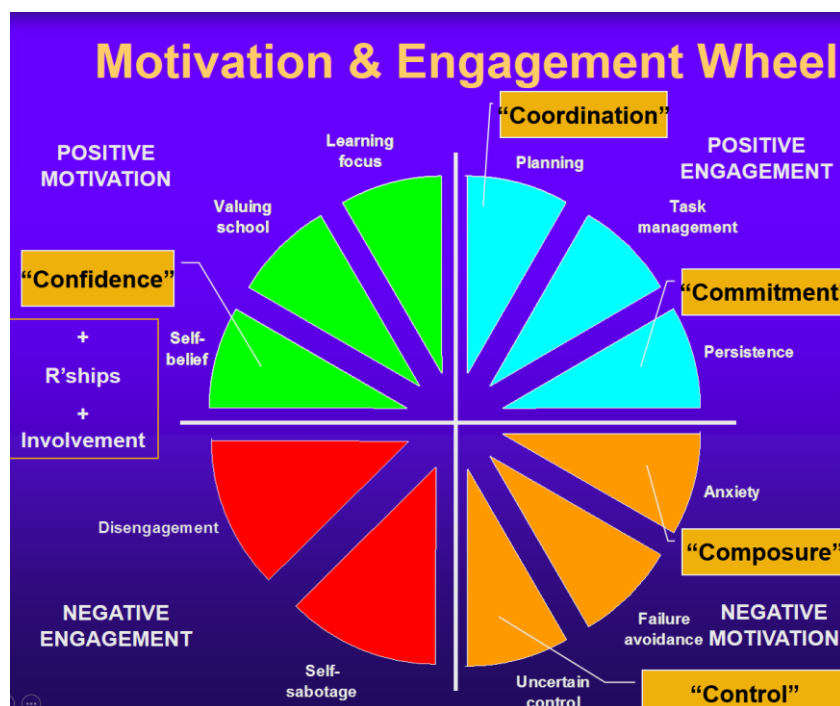
Warm regards,

Deanne Clark

Deanne Clark
Leadership, Learning & Research Institute

Wade Haynes

Wade Haynes
Executive Principal



In Conversation Series #3

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 in our recent conversations, we discussed motivation and engagement. However, you are also published in other important areas including academic buoyancy and adaptability. Can you explain academic buoyancy, please?

AM: Academic buoyancy is a term we developed that refers to a student's capacity to effectively navigate and successfully overcome everyday academic setbacks and challenges.

We refer to everyday school setbacks and challenges as academic adversity. At some point during schooling, all students experience academic adversity and academic buoyancy is being able to bounce back from the setbacks.

DC: I am sure all parents can recall a time when their child has experienced an academic challenge. What would you define as a setback?

AM: Examples of academic setback include receiving an exam result that is lower than what your child was hoping for, or when a unit of work involved particularly challenging content to learn and understand. Your child may experience academic adversity during study time at home or with particular schoolwork content in the classroom.

DC: These examples seem typical of everyday, school life. Is that right?

AM: Yes. We developed the term academic buoyancy as a way to differentiate between the everyday, typical challenges that all students experience at school, from the extreme adversity that resilience relates to.

DC: What would you consider to be an example of extreme academic adversity?

AM: In schools, there is a relatively small number of students who experience extreme academic adversity or setback, more than the everyday, academic challenges of schooling. These include students who have a physical or mental health concern or diagnosis, or are experiencing chronic academic failure. For the students in this category, academic resilience is the term that refers to their capacity to navigate the major challenges that hinder their learning and schoolwork. Specialists often support students to be resilient with personalised education plans.

DC: That sounds like an important difference between academic buoyancy and academic resilience. Is that correct?

AM: If you read the classic research on resilience, it was originally developed to refer to extreme adversity experienced by individuals or families. The word resilience has been picked up and used often. For example, you may hear it used in the sporting context to describe a team who was trailing and then bounce back to win. They are described as resilient, but we would describe them as buoyant or adaptable. On the other hand, a sportsperson who overcame mental health issues or a disadvantaged background would be described as resilient, as they have overcome major adversity.

DC: I think academic buoyancy sounds exactly like what all parents would hope for their children each day - the capacity to have another go and to keep focused when schooling setbacks occur. Would you agree?

AM: Yes and also, to be adaptable when there is change.

While we were researching academic buoyancy and academic resilience, it emerged that *change* was another phenomenon that students also have to successfully navigate.

If you think about the school day, there are a number of adjustments your child needs to make, that are not necessarily difficult or overly challenging. They go from one lesson to another, they have more than one teacher in a school day, they move from proper fractions to improper fractions or they work with new students whom they don't know well. None of this is adversity, but to get through the school day and thrive, your child does need to handle the situations effectively and adapt.

Some children get stuck in the face of change and uncertainty, while others adapt and fit in quite well. Of course, sometimes change is adverse and that's when you also need buoyancy and resilience. But a lot of times, you just need to adjust.

“Some children get stuck in the face of change and uncertainty, while others adapt and fit in quite well.” Dr Andrew Martin

DC: Is there a connection between being adaptable as a learner and being buoyant as a learner when things get tough?

AM: We do speculate that if you are able to adapt and adjust as things change or as new situations present themselves, whether that may actually reduce adversity and therefore reduce the need for buoyancy.

If you are adaptable you tend to stay ahead of the curve, before things actually become adverse or become a setback. But if you don't adapt, that need for change or that novelty, turns from a novel or new situation to a challenging and difficult situation.

DC: These are really important areas for parents to separate. I know I've asked my child to be resilient in the past, when really, I should have been helping them to adapt!

AM: Yes! So, let's be more precise about the two constructs that are relevant for all students.

Tips for promoting Adaptability

AM: All students experience change, variability, novelty and transitions in school. These changes are not necessarily difficult or overly challenging. Our research has revealed there are three parts to adaptability. The cognitive or thinking part, the behavioural part, and the emotional part. When students are faced with a new situation or change, it's often the case they need to adapt in three ways.

Adapt your thinking – Students who are adaptable can adjust their thinking. They do this through changing some of their assumptions and attitudes about the new situation. Whereas students who get stuck with change may say, “It shouldn't be like this.”

Adapt your behaviour – Students who are adaptable can adjust their behaviour. For example, they may ask for help from a teacher, try a new resource to assist their learning, or adjust their timetable or plans.

Adapt your emotions - When things change, it can be either disappointing or joyous. Sometimes it is important to keep a “level head” and steady emotion to navigate this change. For example, they may minimise their disappointment or anger when things change on them – or keep their excitement at a good level to maintain performance through the change. Students can adjust and regulate their emotions in the face of change, so they remain focussed and disciplined in the task.

DC: So, if a child finds change or uncertainty difficult, families can focus their conversations on the three parts of adaptability?

AM: Absolutely. When we take adaptability down to these three components, it means you can identify concrete behaviours that you may like to adopt with your child. You can identify the way your child is thinking about a change or transition and explore another way they might look at the situation. You can explore how they are feeling and look at how to manage that feeling.

Some children find this easier than others. Some children may not even know they are using these adaptable strategies, it's just the way they go about things. But others need to be made aware of the way they think, behave or control their emotions and then learn realistic and achievable alternatives.

DC: Is there a good time to start talking to your child about adaptability?

AM: Teenagers as we know, are at a developmental stage ready for change. They are developmentally seeking ways to understand themselves and their world and how to operate better in that world. They are developmentally ready to hear these messages and it is a good window to be talking about this from primary school all the way up to the end of high school.

Tips for promoting Academic Buoyancy

AM: When we look at how to help students deal with adversity, we generally find it is not effective to simply tell a student to, "Toughen up, it'll be ok." This general, vague advice isn't concrete enough for a student to do something about. It is the same with motivation and engagement, which is why we have the Wheel, to identify the key parts. We always go to the behaviours and the thinking. We start with a general construct (motivation, engagement, buoyancy) but get concrete as quickly as we can.

*"We always go to the behaviours and the thinking. We start with a general construct but get concrete as quickly as we can."
Dr Andrew Martin*

All students experience academic setback at some point in their schooling life. With academic buoyancy, we wanted to identify the key ingredients for students to successfully navigate and overcome academic challenge. We found 5 parts of the Motivation and Engagement Wheel were really important for students to bounce back from setback.

Confidence – is *self-belief* on the Wheel and you can read more about self-belief in our #1 article.

Coordination – is *planning and monitoring* on the Wheel and you can read more about planning and monitoring in our #2 article.

Commitment – is *persistence* on the Wheel and you can read more about persistence in our #2 article.

Composure - is *anxiety* on the Wheel. Composed students are able to manage their anxiety and are more likely to bounce back from academic adversity. Composure and anxiety, usually has two parts. The first part is the thinking part which we usually refer to as worry. The second part of anxiety is the feeling part, what we may call nerves or nervousness and may involve some more physiological symptoms.

Control – is *uncertain control* on the Wheel. Control refers to a student's feeling that they do have a say in decisions. For example, if a student invests effort they can bring about change and an outcome. Control, or uncertain control, is where a sense of helplessness may start creeping into a student's academic life and they may have the sense they are not in the driver's seat. Students who have the sense that they are not on top of things, have more difficulty dealing with academic setback.

DC: Is there one particular strategy you would suggest for composure and control?

AM: To address both composure and control, there are a number of stress and anxiety management strategies available. But additionally, an effective strategy is to encourage students to focus on the things that are in their control. For example, effort is in their control (how hard they try) and strategy is in their control (the way they try).

DC: Since the 5Cs for academic buoyancy stem from your Wheel, does that also help with motivation and engagement?

AM: When you have a child who is struggling with academic adversity, and you are looking for concrete ways to assist them through that, you can look at which one or more of the 5Cs or 5 parts of the Wheel, you might like to target. When you address adversity with the 5Cs from the Wheel, you are addressing the factors that we found were important for students to bounce back from academic adversity, as well as optimising motivation and engagement. When we direct our students to the 5Cs, they start feeling a little more in the driver's seat.

The 5Cs are important for academic buoyancy but we also found good relationships with teachers, parents and peers is a protective factor when students experience adversity. So, to those 5Cs, I would add relationships as important for getting through adversity.

DC: Andrew, what a perfect place to finish, as our next conversation will focus on relationships! Thank you so much for sharing your insights with us and for giving your time and expertise to discussing Academic Buoyancy and Adaptability. I look forward to our final conversation.

Our final 'In Conversation Series' for State High families, will focus on **Relationships** with Dr Andrew Martin. For other articles, please visit:

<https://lifelongachievement.com/pages/download-corner>