

Brisbane State
High School

Parents as Partners 2020

*In Conversation
Series - #4
Relationships*



*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.

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

Warm regards,



Deanne Clark
Leadership, Learning & Research Institute



Wade Haynes
Executive Principal

In Conversation Series #4

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 previous conversations, we have discussed four big constructs - motivation, engagement, academic buoyancy and adaptability. This article on relationships will be the last in our 'In Conversation Series.'

Motivation and Engagement (Articles 1 and 2)

DC: Before we discuss our final topic, may we rewind and briefly recap on our learning so far?

AM: Yes of course.

DC: Can we start with a reminder about motivation and engagement please?

AM: Motivation refers to the internal drive, energy and inclination to do something. 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. Also, motivation and engagement are very highly associated. Students who are motivated, tend to be engaged.

DC: The Motivation and Engagement Wheel is such a great visual for families showing the main parts of motivation and engagement.

AM: Yes, I developed the Motivation and Engagement Wheel to make the key elements of motivation and engagement really clear to students, parents, and teachers. The Wheel is comprised of eleven parts. We pay a lot of attention to the six positive motivation and engagement parts.

The three parts of positive motivation refer to students' self-belief, students' valuing of school, and students' learning focus. The three parts of positive engagement refer to students' planning and monitoring behaviours, students' task management, and students' persistence.

DC: It is very empowering for families who are looking for concrete ways to assist their children's motivation and engagement, to find which one or more parts of the Wheel they might like to target.

AM: In unpacking the key parts of positive motivation and positive engagement, the Wheel helps students, parents and teachers to deal with motivation and engagement in a specific and targeted way. Understanding the specific components of motivation and the specific components of engagement is the first critical step in doing something about them. Then, the parent and child can really know what to focus on.

Adaptability (Article 3)

DC: Another construct we unpacked together was adaptability and how families can assist their children navigate change.

AM: All students will experience change, variability, novelty and transitions in school - and beyond. This being the case, students' adaptability is very important to help them navigate these disruptions. Our research has revealed there are three parts to adaptability. The cognitive or thinking part (adjusting your thinking, expectations, or assumptions to adapt to the change), the behavioural part (adjusting your behaviour to adapt to the change), and the emotional part (managing emotions when things change – especially disappointment). When students are faced with a new situation or change, it's often the case they need to adapt in one or more of these three ways.

Academic Buoyancy (Article 3)

DC: The fourth construct was academic buoyancy. Can you remind us of that term, please?

AM: Academic buoyancy refers to a student's capacity to effectively navigate and successfully overcome everyday academic setbacks and challenges. All students experience academic setback at some point in their schooling life and 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. We called them the 5Cs of academic buoyancy. They are listed below (along with their label in the Wheel) and strategies to address them are in Articles 1 and 2.

- Confidence** – *self-belief* (in the Wheel)
- Coordination** – *planning and monitoring*
- Commitment** – *persistence*
- Composure** – *(low) anxiety*
- Control** – *(low) uncertain control*

DC: The 5Cs are very reassuring for families when academic setback or challenge are experienced by our children.

AM: Yes! 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 that adversity. When we direct our students to the 5Cs, they start feeling a little more in the driver's seat. Moreover, alongside the 5Cs, we have also found that good relationships with teachers, parents, and peers can help students deal with adversity.

DC: That's a great segue into the focus of our final interview: relationships.

AM: Everything we have spoken about - positive motivation, positive engagement, academic buoyancy and adaptability, the glue that binds it all together is relationships.

DC: I like that statement - "The glue that binds it all together is relationships."

AM: When parents have a reasonable relationship with their children and when children feel their interests are important to their parents, they are more likely to be receptive to what their parents may say or ask them to do.

Children and young people look to adults and ask themselves (consciously or unconsciously), "Who's values will I take on?" When you have a good relationship with your child, you are more likely to be one of the role models that they will look to emulate. Your child may not adopt your values immediately and they may even be a little rebellious for a while. In fact, it may be years before you see your values starting to play out in their lives. But, when our young people move beyond that and they have been allowed to move through that and your relationship is still intact, it's often your values that they will adopt – at least in part.

Relationships are also a buffer against stress. When you have healthy relationships with other people, you tend to have a bit more of a protective layer around you when stress happens.

In addition, relationships have an amplifying effect. When you are in a good relationship it tends to amplify positive outcomes and escalate good things. Good relationships make good things happen. Thus, relationships are not just a protective factor when things go wrong, they are an enabling factor that optimise positive outcomes. For these reasons, you can see why I say, "Relationships are the glue for everything that I have been talking about."

DC: Andrew, may you provide us with three final tips for how parents of teenagers can help their relationships best support their children?

Listen

When young people feel that a parent has made an effort to listen and understand their perspective, they feel validated and taken seriously. Young people value when their parents do not dismiss a conversation and instead listen and weigh up the possible options.

A lot of adolescents will have a decision from a parent given to them that they don't enjoy. For example, a teenager may want to stay the night at a friend's house when the friend's parents are not home and you reply, "No, you can't go." In this situation, the parent has made an immediate decision which often leads to a 'yes or no' outcome. The child may feel they have not been listened to or that the situation was not taken seriously. There is nothing more marginalising and frustrating than being dismissed out of hand.

However, when a parent listens to their child's request and refrains from jumping to an immediate decision, a partial win-win situation may be found. For example, instead of the child not being able to go at all, an agreement may be reached that you collect the child at 11:00pm or midnight instead. It may not be a perfect outcome for the child, but it may be minimally acceptable to them – and you have kept the relationship intact in the process. When parents listen and children feel that the conversation is being considered and taken seriously, a middle ground can often be found.

Understand

Understanding who your child is and accepting that is very important. It can save a lot of heartache, resentment, and disappointment. When you understand your child and accept your child, it puts you on a pathway to see their strengths and allows you to adjust your attitudes and value their needs.

Wishing your child was someone else, wishing they were like their perfect cousin, wishing they had study habits similar to the ones you (probably unreliably) recall that you had when you were at school, is not productive. As your child has been growing up, you may have been envisioning they will pursue a particular educational or occupational pathway. But if that pathway does not suit your child, there are benefits in supporting them to explore and pursue their pathway of choice. This does not mean you can't offer some balanced advice – of course you can; that's part of your job as a parent. But make sure that advice comes after you have taken the time to really get to understand who your child is. When you do this, your advice is likely to be realistic, constructive, on-the-mark, and useful. When we offer advice like this, our children are likely to be more receptive to it.

Alongside understanding, acceptance is also very important for relationships. That's not to say that you accept things that are unsafe, or you allow inappropriate behaviours. Without question, you must bring maturity, authority, and wisdom to situations. But at the same time, there are a lot of things that parents do need to accept about their child and come to terms with. When you do, you will find a positive relationship comes along for the ride.

Care for yourself

Look after yourself too! One research study found that children know when their parents are stressed and that this had a negative impact on the child. It can be hard to have the emotional space for someone else when you are feeling worried, when you are ruminating on unpleasant things, or when you are feeling overwhelmed. Thus, as you provide love and care and support to your child, it is vital that you look after yourself as well. It is important to find some time in the week to do something nice for yourself – this may be something small each day, or it may be a few hours at one point each week that is enjoyable and gives you something to look forward to. This will help ease the pressure-cooker feel of life, allow you more emotional space to support your child, and in turn help support your relationship with them.

DC: Andrew, it has been a pleasure to learn and engage with you and produce the four-part 'In Conversation Series'. On behalf of Brisbane State High School, thank you sincerely for sharing your time, leadership, and expertise with our community. Thank you for providing us with these fantastic resources that acknowledge the critical role parents and guardians play in contributing to their child's education and success.

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