

Parents Victoria Conference 2019

“Everyone’s Mental Health and Wellbeing Matters”

(notes as taken by Parents Victoria)

My Learning Strengths – Andrew Fuller

- Prior to conference, Andrew had suggested delegates complete the Strengths and Weaknesses exercise via his website:- <https://mylearningstrengths.com/>
- It’s powerful and beneficial to know what your strengths are. And it’s handy to know and identify your kids’ strengths. Understanding this can assist with discussions with schools.
- Learning strengths can be used in many ways. Even if “maths” is not your thing, you can use it for example, in a planning way! The idea is to not box your kids into the one of their strengths, but to stretch into other areas and work out how best you can use this strength.

The point is to use what you are already good at to lift other areas.

- Andrew also challenged delegates to think about significant changes which happened in your parents life at a particular age and what happened in your life at that same age? He suggested we look for patterns – they are significant. But you can change them – once you are aware of them!

Official Conference Opening – Hon. James Merlino, Minister for Education

The Minister commented that Parents Victoria’s conference is an important time on the calendar.

He shared that:

- Relationships between families & schools are vital. Thinking of ways we can better connect is important work. Parent engagement is one of greatest predictors for student outcomes.
- If students are happy and healthy, they can focus on learning. Mental health without doubt is the number one issue. We are hearing it from student voice and hearing it from parents.
- The Minister touched on the mobile phone policy. 2020 phone bans – all schools – from first bell to last bell and including play and lunch. They are a chronic distraction. There is a growing evidence base that stress, anxiety, obsessive behaviour is linked to mobile phones.
- The Minister acknowledged the work of PV and specifically the 2019 August Parent Forums, Conference, and his regular meetings with the PV Team.

The Minister looks forward to hearing the deliberations from conference – especially on mental health and wellbeing. The ‘signature’ of the State Budget next year will be addressing the Royal Commission.

Identifying and Building Learning Strengths – Andrew Fuller

Some snapshot take-outs:

- It is not enough to possess a good mind; the most important thing is to apply it correctly.
- The quickest way to promote wellbeing is to have our students be successful. (Shifting what we do in schools.) However, rather than focussing on gifted and talented - let’s have a school where it’s most important that everyone gets smarter! “Here everyone gets smarter.”
- When children know their learning strengths, it makes sense and they can utilise them. Kids say to Andrew – “can you tell my mum or my teacher that I’m smart!”
- We can assist students to succeed if we know their blockages.

- It's important to know that not everyone sees the world as you/we do.
- Debate the idea rather than the personal attack.
- It's important for parents to recognise their student/child learns in their own way.
- Parents can do a lot with the knowledge they have of their student – without having to battle the storm.

From Surviving to Thriving: Promoting Mental Health in Young People - Andrew Fuller

- Life is like a pack of spaghetti. It seems neat and organised but put some pressure on it and it can become a mess!
- Most kids function really, really well.
Most kids don't take drugs. Most kids don't cyber-bully. Most kids are kind, generous, worldly. Never forget when you hear talking about how bad young people are – by and large they are good.

Identify and Build Learning Strengths

- Who else knows you're a good person? Often this person is someone who is no longer available. This also links to grief or loss. You don't just lose that person, but you've lost what they saw of you through their eyes.
- What did they know about you that others don't know?
- Grief is hard for kids. Managing grief is to have some portion of that person's life, in your life. So it's about re-integrating that within themselves and slowly speaking about what that was. Watch them pull back that sense of who they can become.
- Having an adult who can look beyond the smokescreen. An adult who can see something in that kid, which they can't see themselves. Give a gift that they spend a lifetime unwrapping.
- Connect. Protect. Respect.

Attunement

- Tune ourselves with one another. Focus and make an effort to "be" with others.
- Michaelangelo saw his job as to peel back the excess marble to reveal the treasure within.
- To do this we need to have - good ears, a good heart and a good spirit. Listen beyond the ears. Behind the bluster, are scared kids. Be prepared to listen for the fears – have an awareness.
- Having a good heart is to look for the best in as many people as you can (it requires a kind approach). Good spirit – living life broadly/richly. Live life well yourself – it shows kids a great future/life is possible. Take care to nourish self – it teaches them to do the same.

Removing Barriers to Improve Wellbeing - Sue Karzis, CEO State Schools' Relief

- Kids want to be accepted.
- Belonging is primal; it's fundamental to our sense of happiness and wellbeing.
- School is often the only safe place some children have.
- SSR has a long list of support items. If you know someone who needs these things, let the school know. If no one actions, then contact SSR directly and they will advocate.

<https://ssr.net.au/>

Launch of the Relationship based Learning Resource (RbE) – John Hendry OAM

The real stakeholders here are parents. We trust our kids to our schools.

- It's the relationship you have with your teacher which deems whether you learn or care about what they are teaching.
- No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship

- John spoke about the five elements of a relationship – **Trust. Forgiveness. Integrity. Hope. Compassion**
- John refers to #MeFirst or #WeFirst. Me First defines fairness in relation to self rather than others.
- Do you have a team of champions or a champion team.
- How do we take schools on the journey? Put in a culture which moves to We First. Relationships built on what you can **give**.
- The object is to empower parents. Do you trust the school that you work at; are on the board of; or that your children attend?
- Kids are looking for “meaning” in their lives.
- Form relationships on the basis of what you can give, not what you can take.
- No-one has a licence to harm another.

Relationship Based Education (RbE) - Launch of a New Resource from Parents Victoria in Collaboration with John Hendry

There is a lot of work behind the RbE resource which will translate to a web platform. Parents Victoria is solution focused. Parents can be part of the change (change agents). From the 2017 conference, 3 x delegates contacted John and are on the pathway to The Way Forward. PV will be having a conversation with government about investment in the RbE.

[View the RbE Resource on the Parents Victoria website](#)

The Way Forward – Panel discussion of two scenarios

The panel discussion videos are available to view on the Parents Victoria website:-
www.parentsvictoria.asn.au

Doing Diversity in Schools – Using Culturally Inclusive Practices to Enhance Belonging – Monique Toohey, Managing Director, Nasihah Consulting Group

* See Moniques presentation on the Parents Victoria website

* Cultures influence decisions which parents make (at birth). We are encultured at birth and shaped re what’s right / wrong.

* Human behaviour is driven around our need to belong. Schools can provide a deep sense of belonging. We join clubs to try to belong. We stay in the same job, at the same school. We fear moving schools for kids for fear of losing belonging.

* Teenagers will fulfil their need to belong above the need to be good. Can I bring my friends, means can I bring my sense of belonging.

* Different cultures view teachers in various ways

*Being nice or kind does not mean cultural intelligence – but we can teach it.

* We are inherently encultured in the way we speak and teach. We need to learn to be cultural bridgers.

Building School Communities – The Fathering Project – Wayne Bradshaw, CEO

- Fathers can add support. Traditionally mums have done the heavy lifting.
- Want men to take their time at the school – meet the teachers, stay and chat...
- Building communities of dads. Once we start them talking, you can't shut them up!
- This is not in opposition to mums or P&Cs – we want to work in conjunction.
- If fathers are performing there is down-stream impact.

<https://thefatheringproject.org/>

Making your Child's School Safer: How to Effectively Address Bullying and Sleep Deprivation due to After-hours Device Use - Jac Van Velsen, CEO, WISA Wellbeing in Schools Australia

* See Jac's presentation on the Parents Victoria website

* Federal government acknowledges the support needed in this space.

* Majority of bullying is done face to face. (It trickles onto cyber-bullying).

* Who has the responsibility to make a school safe? **Schools. Families. Students.**

* Invite cultural groups in.

* Mend and maintain caring climates.

* Schools need to do annual bullying surveys? Resulting in a map to show areas where student feel less safe. **It's critical to ask the question.**

* www.aspiringworld.com Reference to a forthcoming conference.

* Teaching of social and emotional learning is not embedded.

* Start the year on the **relationships** – kicks off to a great start for students.

* How welcoming is your school community? Does the signage celebrate diversity and community.

* "Be You" initiative – has made transformations happen!

<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/media/news/news/2018/11/01/beyond-blue-launches-be-you---a-new-mental-health-initiative-for-schools-and-early-learning-services>

** Please give regular reports to your school council. They need to have an awareness. Why wouldn't we want to build that with governance bodies? Including for sustainability purposes. i.e. a school might have a great Principal in place – but what happens when they leave. School Council needs to have the history!*

What the Royal Commission into Mental Health means for Education - Justin McDonnell, Acting Executive Director of the Wellbeing Health and Engagement Division Department of Education and Training.

- Health & Wellbeing of young people in our system – is kids being the best people they can be – and being well. Definitely see the link to the academic outcomes.
- Influencing this is a **collective effort**
- The Royal Commission is looking across community settings, education sector and explicitly at the role of parents/family members/carers of people living with people with mental health conditions. A challenging role. Their mental health is important to consider as well.
- A good positive school setting is a key.
- Interaction between school and students is not enough. Parents need to be included.
- Prevention and Intervention is being looked at closely via the Royal Commission. Also Workforce support, access to services and capability building.
- Getting it right is important – schools need to better understand the issues and deal with situations and to know who it is necessary to touch in with. This is a very big issue for DET. If we don't get this right it puts students and families in a position where they don't trust.
- Part of the curriculum for Uni students should be on mental health, family engagement and all of the things spoken about today.
- Family Engagement officers (Parents Victoria is advocating).
- Need to normalise mental health in schools. Demystifying mental health. Therapy in schools – i.e. using local expertise (art therapy, speech therapy). It then becomes normal within the school. Mental Health is everyone's responsibility.
- Wellbeing or behavioural plans being treated akin to asthma and allergy plans.
- It's about relationships.
- Schools operating in a revenge cycle is destructive.
- Working with families, rather than against. It needs to be acknowledge that for families of special needs students – schools will see them or hear from them more regularly. State it and recognise it up front. (No labelling as the pesky parent.)