

November 2020



Welcome to the first edition of the Critical Agendas Monthly Newsletter.

As with any major event in our lifetime - positive or negative, the acceptance/realization that life will change forever can be very daunting. Whether we are in our prime or reaching maturity, change can be very scary. The decision to move forward in life, despite the many challenges and uncertainties, certainly tests our resilience and resolve. As Winston Churchill once said; "To improve is to change, to be perfect is to change often". In these most challenging times, I have come to the realization that most people have been so busy trying to get somewhere else that they have never been able to stop and appreciate all the beauty surrounding them. They have never stopped to appreciate the magic of the journey of life. At Critical Agendas the motto; "the only constant in life is change" rang true back in March 2020, when along with so many other businesses, the need to reinvent oneself or be left behind was the only option. Moving from face to face workshops/conferences to Webinars was never easy. The need to change was evident, although the journey was a difficult one. At this point, I would like to acknowledge my Office Manager - Janet Irving for her untiring professionalism, as we navigated these new and uncharted waters. I would also like to acknowledge all our Presenters who have come with us on this new journey and embraced the many new challenges they have faced along the way. It is because of these people that Critical Agendas has been able to continue to provide quality Professional Development to the Education sector all around Australia and beyond.

As we move forward, the need to keep evolving will continue as we manage new adversities and see them as another opportunity to grow, develop and create new visions. The Learning Library and the On- line Resources sections of our website have opened up the possibility for Teachers to complete their Professional Development in their own time. The Learning Library will continue to expand as new topics are created by our Presenters.

To all our Teachers around Australia and beyond, I would like to extend my sincere congratulations for your unwavering commitment to your students and for your ability to manage and embrace all the changes that have been placed before you. I am sure many parents and the wider community will finally appreciate the crucial role you play in transforming the lives of their children.

"People seldom see the halting and painful steps by which the most insignificant success is achieved" - Anne Sullivan.

Anne Sullivan Mace, the famous companion and teacher of Helen Keller, knew a thing or two about perseverance. Blind herself from the age of 5 from trachoma, she began teaching from the age of 20. Keller was her first student. The immediate connection between them blossomed into a lifelong journey of overcoming the absence of vision with an abundance of heart and determination. As a teacher, you and you alone, see the painful steps your students sometimes experience in your classroom. They are fighting their own demons, breaking personal barriers and moving towards success. Only someone who has taught can fully understand the often painful but always rewarding journey of teaching children. That is why Teaching is and always will be one of the noblest professions anyone can undertake. As Booker T Washington once said; "I think I have learned the best way to lift one's self up is to help someone else".

Stay positive and always remember you are appreciated.

Rick Vagnoni  
Director  
Critical Agendas Pty Ltd

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# **“Getting everyone on the school bus and navigating our way back from Covid 19”**

*Written By David Vinegrad*

Firstly, what an amazing job all teachers and non-teaching staff have done in coping and responding to this pandemic. So much has been done by all to support our kids and their families. What an effort and hopefully the profession will receive a much-needed injection of respect from those who made assumptions about how easy school teachers have it in the classroom and playground.

So, there we were at the start of the 2020 having a ripper of a school year and then along came the Covid 19 bus that took everyone on an unknown journey. Some of our schools, their families and staff are still in a state of disbelief and don't know if the bus will ever bring them back from this terrifying journey. Consider these questions -

- *Did everyone get on your bus?*
- *Who wanted to drive it?*
- *How much will the ticket eventually cost your school and community?*
- *How did you decide where people sat?*
- *Did you have a way to find out where the Covid bus was taking you?*
- *Do you want to get off the Covid bus at the same stop or somewhere different/better?*

At the front of the bus we have those in our school community who were coping quite well with the stress. They had strong supportive relationships and good coping mechanisms, growth mindsets, they could even see some opportunities from this disaster, they even had good internet!

Those at the front of bus quickly learnt how to Zoom and use other platforms. I heard one teacher comment that their SMART board won't have the better of them when they return to school after coming to grips with remote learning. Many families have had been seeing the benefit with home schooling and the extra family time together. They have been reminded about the importance of attachments to care givers, the simple things about relationships, and that university entrance scores and league tables are not everything in life and should not be the only measure that defines the time we spent at school or who we are.

At the back of the bus are our most vulnerable who have been devastated by this pandemic. These are our A.C.E (adverse childhood experience) kids and their families coping with situational and generational poverty and disadvantage. It should be a national disgrace that we have families going without food and surviving in the family car as this pandemic overwhelmed them and our support agencies. There are others feeling alone and ignored at the back of the bus, those that make up about 25% of our student body with diagnosable forms of anxiety, those without supportive relationships. Many schools will be feeling the impact of Covid 19 for many years once the most disadvantaged in our community get off the bus.

The sausage sizzle that raised \$200 to fund the second hand uniform shop didn't happen in 2020. The school camp to the beach that so many kids looked forward to or needed didn't go ahead either. The ripple affects from this pandemic will be far reaching and some yet unknown as you read this.

It was heartbreaking to hear about a student who only had his mother's phone to use for remote learning and to connect with his classmates and when she was out of credit or charge that when his learning stopped and the loneliness took over.

If we reflect on the 1918 influenza pandemic, schools in the USA realised the need for a wellbeing response and placed a nurse in every school. School nurses were crucial to managing the crisis so instead of sending sick students home, where they would miss school while receiving no treatment, nurses cared for children's illnesses and [provided health information to their families](#). We learnt 102 years ago that the best way to tackle a crisis is with a wellbeing response.

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Our brains crave what is familiar, what is recognisable because that signals safety. Our response to Covid 19 has been a *flight, fight* and *freeze* response.

We want to get off the dangerous Covid 19 bus and seek safety. The fastest way schools can do this is to repeat what was; get back into the curriculum, test kids so they have something at the end of a disastrous year 12. Our brains need predictability and that's why we have routines and procedures in our school day. When the brain feels safe it can learn. When the brain is in a state of stress survival is key. This is why change is so hard to implement in schools and why 'we have always done it this way.'

Right now schools need a wellbeing response first and foremost. We all need to get back together at school and re-establish relationships and promote psychological safety. Not subjects, not course designs, not content but meaningful connection with each other through dialogue, understanding, play, empathy, boundaries etc.

Schools are in such a strong position to guide the Covid bus back to some sort of safety and normality with well established programs including Restorative Practices, Positive Education, Respectful Relationships, Mindfulness, Trauma Informed Classrooms etc.

We can have the choice of 2 drivers for our Covid bus to get it back on the right track; curriculum or wellbeing. My strong recommendation is that the return to school is driven by wellbeing and curriculum takes a back seat for a while. We need to *connect* before *content*. We need to use our wellbeing programs to reinforce our mission and vision and allow our values to drive the remainder of 2020 and the start of 2021.

We can all go to university or learn a trade at any age or stage in our lives. We can't undo some of the emotional harm and reinstate those feeling of psychological safety, trust, and healthy peer relationships by diving right back into the curriculum. The Covid bus must make a few necessary stops so that everyone on the bus can -

- \* *Be reminded of the expectations and agreements in the classroom, playground and corridors*
- \* *Be taught and reminded of the necessary behaviours that may have been forgotten about sharing, respect and responsibility etc.*
- \* *Be reconnected with significant others (teachers/support staff) and classmates*
- \* *Be mindful of restoring our schools through a wellbeing lens*

And all of the above can't happen over a Monday assembly in the gymnasium or in several Pastoral sessions.

Check out the Restore our Schools website for more helpful advice and strategies - <https://restoreourschools.wordpress.com/>

Check out Maggie Dents 3 C's before grades article - <https://www.maggiedent.com/blog/schools-key-to-our-kids-recovery-why-the-3-cs-count-before-grades/>

During this pandemic I have been guided by these 5 simple rules of happiness by Norman Vincent Peale -The Power of Positive Thinking. Norman was born in 1898 so it could be said that he was one of the pioneers of the Positive Education movement.

*Free your heart from hatred  
Free your mind from worry  
Live simply  
Expect less  
Give more*

Try this simple mantra for a week and you will be surprised!

Dave Vinegrad.

# Webinars

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## REMINDERS

*6<sup>th</sup> November 2020*  
*Differentiation -*  
*The key to successful Educational Challenges*

*Featuring Glen Pearsall, Andrew Douch, Jo Prestia and Greg Mitchell*

*Who Should Participate? Primary/ Secondary Teachers, School Leaders, Heads of School, YLCs, Student Support Staff, Other Professionals Working with adolescents.*

*20<sup>th</sup> November 2020*  
*Developing the Skills and Performance of Our School Administration Staff*

*Featuring David Vinegrad, Christina Katopis and Karen Smythe*

*Those who should register: Any person who is employed in an administration position in any sector who is interested in enhancing their skills.*

*Please visit our website for more information and to register.*

## THE MONTH AHEAD

- 4/11/2020 *Dyslexia - Practical Skills and Ideas to use in the classroom*
- 4/11/2020 *Inspiring Boys to Write and Write Well*
- 10/11/2020 *Building Classroom Discipline*
- 10/11/2020 *How to inspire the best writing from your students*
- 11/11/2020 *Strategies to Overcome Student and Teacher Stress*
- 12/11/2020 *Classroom journeys into the technologies of the future*
- 12/11/2020 *Unlocking Autism: The Keys to Deep Defensive Mood*
- 13/11/2020 *Effectively Teaching Students with Low Working Memory*
- 13/11/2020 *Supporting Challenging Students*
- 16/11/2020 *Differentiating for High Achievers*
- 16/11/2020 *Spelling Made Easier*
- 17/11/2020 *Amplifying Student Leadership*
- 17/11/2020 *Behaviour Management 101 and 10 Essential Teacher Skills*
- 18/11/2020 *Coping with Castastrophe*
- 18/11/2020 *Effectively Teach Superb Essay Writing in English & Literature*
- 19/11/2020 *Behaviour management for difficult to teach males*
- 19/11/2020 *Using micro:bit for STEM projects and The Internet of Things*
- 24/11/2020 *Agile Leadership in Fragile Times*
- 25/11/2020 *Creating Purposeful Individual Learning Plans*
- 25/11/2020 *Masterful Leadership Communication*
- 27/11/2020 *Behaviour Regulation Toolkit*
- 27/11/2020 *Emotional Intelligence: The Secret to Superior Leadership*
- 30/11/2020 *Leading the Management of Students - For YLC's & HoD's*
- 30/11/2020 *Making Maths Dyslexia Friendly*

