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Stuart Levy  
*Monash University*

Holly Campbell  
*Monash University*

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## **Student Motivation: Premise, Effective Practice and Policy**

Dr. Stuart Levy

Holly Campbell

School of Humanities, Communication and Social Sciences  
Monash University

*Abstract: The purpose of this article is to outline how motivation of first year university students can be enhanced through effective pedagogic practices and to discuss policy level decisions that impact upon the cultivation of student motivation. It reports on practices within a specific first year unit, Understanding University Learning, which successfully incorporates teaching and learning strategies to enhance academic motivation.*

If we are to believe our own hyperbole about the commitment of universities to creating independent learners who exhibit a range of desirable graduate attributes then first year learning experiences become critical. Getting the first year experience right entails embedding within it the desirable skills and behaviours we want our graduates to have. Through creating and implementing a first year pedagogy that addresses issues of motivation in order to transform the learning characteristics of students they will arguably become less ‘assistance needy’ in their second, third and fourth years of study. Students are increasingly disinclined to engage in university activities beyond their study requirements because of an initial propensity to study for extrinsic rather than intrinsic purposes, and because of an increasing shift in the perception of tertiary institutions as ‘user pays’ service providers.

It is well reported that academic success at a tertiary level requires motivational states beyond those of secondary school (McKenzie & Schweitzer, 2001). Students must become learners, capable of knowing how to learn, to ask questions and transmit ideas if they are to gain the true benefit of a university education. Nonetheless, as observed by Teese (2002, synopsis) “[h]ow they [students] *learn* is entirely overshadowed by what they hope to *earn*” (emphasis in original). In other words, the academic success of tertiary students is mediated by their goals, or reasons, for attending university; motivation is central to such goals. Academic orientation and motivation have been positively linked to performance and persistence of Australian university students (Abbot-Chapman, Hughes & Wyld, 1992). The problem is how do we facilitate the development of intrinsic motivation in students who are, in a sense, encouraged to be extrinsically motivated?

## Premise

Student motivation, factors that influence it and strategies that can help to encourage it are a perennial concern within academia. This is especially true in efforts to address student diversity, long associated with studies about engagement, which require a necessary shift from the ‘typical student’ learning needs paradigm. This is the case at all Australian universities and arguably most necessary at rural campuses which compete and cater for students often perceived to be among the most academically vulnerable.

In Australia, entry to university is predominantly based upon a student’s secondary school performance as reflected by a derived ENTER score. Whilst tertiary institutions and individual courses have different ENTER scores for admission they are perceived to reflect necessary and desirable minimum entry standards. Nonetheless, students predicted to easily adapt to the increased academic demands at a tertiary level continue to fail, defer or withdraw while others perform beyond expectation. Further, disquiet surrounds the differences that exist between secondary and tertiary academic environments with the “gulf between directed and independent learning, into which poorer students often disappear” symptomatic of these (Levy & Murray, 2002).

There continues to be a lack of available knowledge concerning determinants of student success in the highly diversified student body now enrolled at universities. Uncertainty, imprecision and contending viewpoints often influence attempts to assess the importance of indicators of success such as self-regulated learning, motivation, and the relevance of entrance scores (Carroll & Garavalia, 2002). It has been noted, however, that the characteristics, abilities and experiences of students need to be attended to, both collectively and individually, if academic staff are to effectively fulfill their role of facilitating learning (Kemp, Morrison, & Ross, 2001). Yet despite this recognition, focus continues to be placed upon the content to be learnt rather than the context of learning such as skill development and attitude formation. Furthermore, von Glasersfeld and Steffe noted that:

because there is no way of transferring meaning, *i.e.*, concepts and conceptual structures, from one student’s head to another, teachers, who have the goal of changing something in student’s heads must have some notion of what goes on in these heads. Hence it would seem necessary for a teacher to build up a model of the student’s conceptual world (1991, p. 96).

Understanding the students’ worlds or their needs would enable educators to be better equipped to develop motivation and engagement strategies.

Researchers have long suggested a lack of student engagement is possibly due to amotivation or the result of school practices that fail to engage or arouse interest among students (Dev, 1997). In this instance, cognitive, behavioural and social engagement is of concern. The three components of positive and effective engagement outlined by Schlechty (1994) form our theoretical model. Accordingly students are attracted to their work, persist despite challenges and obstacles, and take pride in their accomplishments. Each aspect is clearly underpinned by the concept of motivation.

Arguably, “the study of motivation provides a rich framework for addressing some of the most pressing issues facing our educational system today” (Graham & Taylor, 2002, p.121) in terms of attrition, retention, achievement levels, or engagement.

In academic terms, motivation can be defined as “a student’s willingness, need, desire and compulsion to participate in, and be successful in, the learning process” (Bomia, Beluzo, Demeester, Elander, Johnson & Sheldon, 1997, p. 1). More specifically, in a university setting, motivation is concerned with what it is that drives students to regularly attend classes, complete their work, and whether or not they are active participants and learners (Pintrich, Smith, Garcia & McKeachie, 1993). Many theories of motivation exist. These include psychoanalytic theories, humanistic theories, behavioural theories and cognitive theories. We are concerned with academic motivation which draws upon the social cognitive theory of motivation, according to which, students are active in their education and capable of interpreting rather than merely responding to stimuli.

The following discussion draws on the work of Pintrich and his colleagues (1993) unless otherwise noted. The social cognitive model highlights three commonly used and validated components of motivation: an *expectancy* component; an *affective* component and; a *value* component. These have each been previously linked to motivation in academic settings. Expectancy components emphasize student beliefs about their ability to complete a task and their perceptions of responsibility for their learning. The question ‘can I do this task’ is addressed through these components. Two measures of this are control of learning beliefs, and self-efficacy. Control of learning beliefs refer to the individual likelihood of doing well in academic study without referring to a specific means (*i.e.* I can do well if I want to). They also refer to the relationship between the individual and their goals. Self-efficacy refers to individuals’ perceptions of their ability to organize and undertake the behaviours required to meet their goal. Affective components of motivation refer to the emotional reactions to a learning task and answer the question “how do I feel about this task?” Test anxiety is one affective component. Test Anxiety has two components: a cognitive component that refers to performance disrupting negative thoughts and an emotionality component that involves the affective and physiological arousal of anxiety. The value component includes students’ goals, their beliefs about the importance of required tasks and their interest in the task. Task value refers to the student’s perception of how interesting, important and useful a task is and thereby answers the question “what do I think of this task”. This concept also answers the question “why am I doing this task?” and thereby refers to the underlying reasons for engagement and disengagement from the learning process and tasks in terms of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Students who are extrinsically motivated want to *prove* their competence while students who are intrinsically motivated want to *improve* their competence (Schraw, Horn, Thorndike-Christ, & Bruning, 1995).

Intrinsic motivation occurs when participation in an activity is an end in itself rather than a means to an end (Pintrich, *et. al.*, 1993). In other words, satisfaction is derived from completing the task itself. It is reported that intrinsic value does not directly influence academic performance, but is strongly correlated to independent learning and cognitive strategy use; these variables are directly linked to academic success and occur irrespective of prior achievement levels. Extrinsic motivation occurs when a person participates in an activity purely to either attain a reward or avoid punishment (Pintrich, *et. al.*, 1993). Y Generation students tend to be extrinsic learners equating higher education to socialized expectations of commercial goal oriented activity. It has been suggested (Shor, 1992) that students become unmotivated citizens, passive learners and underachieving workers tempted to buy non-essential items.

Motivation in secondary school is often predominantly extrinsic, with emphasis placed upon attaining high ENTER scores and access to tertiary study (Hesketh, 1998) often culminating in a high level of anxiety for final year students as demonstrated in various empirical studies. For example, Smith (2004) undertook a longitudinal study concerning changes in achievement motivation of final year secondary students. The results, in accord with previous research, suggest that productive achievement motivation such as, academic self-efficacy, declines while non-productive attributes such as anxiety increase (Smith & Sinclair 2000; Smith, Sinclair & Chapman 2002) thus students may enter university with low levels of motivation and high levels of anxiety.

Arguably behavioural patterns established in secondary school tend to persist (Schilling & Schilling, 1999) thus students commencing university may already be disengaged from the learning process, having already acquired a cumulative deficit in terms of attitudes, study habits and academic skills (Levine & Cureton, 1998). In contrast, MacDonald (2000) notes that university literacy is a skill which can be taught suggesting experience and learning outweigh incoming characteristics. Nonetheless, studies indicate that the differences between the two contexts can prove highly detrimental to students. In a national study of first year Australian university students, Krause and her colleagues (2005) found over one-third of respondents (36%) reported difficulties in self-motivation for study. In addition, just below one-third of respondents (28%) considered leaving university in their first year. Of these, 36% cited fear of failure as the main reason for these thoughts.

Furthermore, the application process for entry to university encourages a performance-oriented learning environment with an implied emphasis upon extrinsic motivation. In a longitudinal study of student motivation over their final year of secondary schooling, Smith (2004) found that performance-approach learning goal orientation and academic self-efficacy levels decreased with self-handicapping strategies, anxiety and depression concomitantly increasing. It is argued that the focus on performance begins early and increases as students advance through the levels of education (Covington & Mueller, 2001). Two reasons have been advanced for this, both by Harari and Covington (1981). First, is it suggested competitive performance grades providing access to higher education, and subsequently to 'prestigious' occupations becomes linked in the students' minds. Second, as students grow older their sense of self-worth is increasingly dependant upon their ability to achieve in a competitive milieu.

Tertiary study, in contrast to a performance-oriented environment, has the implicit aim of developing learners who are independent, confident and self-directed (Gordon, 2000). These attributes are encompassed by various terms such as 'independent learner' (Kantanis, 2001), and 'expert' learner (Knapper & Cropley, 2000). For our purposes the term 'lifelong learner' (Marshall & Rowland, 2006) refers to, and encapsulates, the core notions of both terms. An oft-cited requisite outcome for a successful university student, lifelong learners are sought after by employers because they are believed to possess more adaptable skills and cognitions, and to be better citizens due to their propensity for being ethical, fair minded and having a developed ability to form considered opinions (*e.g.*, Knapper & Cropley, 2000; Pintrich, *et al.* 1993). A lifelong learner is someone who a) plans their own learning, b) assesses their own learning, c) is active in their learning, d) can learn in formal and informal environments, e) learns from others, f) integrates knowledge across contexts when appropriate, and g) adapts their use of learning

strategies to new situations (Knapper & Cropley, 2000). For such students, knowledge is no longer inert and superficial; it instead becomes active and attains meaning for the individual. Skills such as adapting learning strategies in terms of the context, learning from others and learning both formally and informally are not a part of motivation per se. The proficiency and efficacy of such skills, however, are mediated by motivation.

Research suggests that students who are intrinsically motivated fare better academically in an educational context than those who are extrinsically motivated (Abbot-Chapman, *et. al.*, 1992). Intrinsically motivated students tend to attain higher grades, are more self-confident in their ability to learn new material, more prone to persistence and task completion, maintain knowledge for longer periods, and are less likely to require remedial assistance (Dev, 1997). They also tend to use more complex learning strategies and choose to engage in tasks that are within their zone of proximal development whereas extrinsically motivated students select tasks with minimum difficulty (Lumsden, 1994). In essence, intrinsically motivated students are more inclined to be lifelong learners (Kohn, 1993).

### **Effective Practice**

Understanding University Learning (UUL) is the first semester unit of the Diploma of Tertiary Studies (DoTS – formerly Diploma of Foundation Studies) offered at a number of Monash University campuses/teaching centres outside of metropolitan Melbourne. One of the core aims of DoTS, and UUL in particular, is for students to develop insider knowledge, that is, explicit knowledge of what is expected of them at university. The differences between secondary and tertiary study are highlighted in the initial weeks of study as part of an examination of the first year transition process. This entails promoting the idea that learning is continual rather than contextualised to an educational institution. The skills and attitudes of a critical thinker are also examined as they are considered central to the activities of universities, their students and graduates. This is then linked to an explicit study of the concept of lifelong learning to contextualise the relevancy of university located skills and attitudes in the learning and professional careers of students. In particular, students are introduced to self-regulated learning strategies in a directed manner. These involve knowing what strategies are (declarative knowledge), how strategies may be used (procedural knowledge) and when and why the strategies should be used (conditional knowledge). This is assisted in part by the deconstruction of the production and categorization of knowledge (Clerehan, 2003). The attitudes and values developed within this unit demonstrate successful teaching and learning strategies for enhancing academic motivation.

A belief that university literacy is a skill which can be taught underpins the Diploma of Tertiary Studies and informs teaching and learning practices within the first semester unit Understanding University Learning (UUL). Clerehan (2003, p. 72) described this unit as “de-construct[ing] some of the issues that typically mystify, including the construction and departmentalization of knowledge, the nature of university teachers and teaching, and so on.” From this perspective UUL can be described as an engagement subject with explicit teaching of the values considered central to the nature of university learning. This unit seeks to ‘grab’ the attention of the students. It focuses

upon the students, their needs and relative concerns to enhance positive motivation. Alternatively, UUL can be seen as a subject that explicitly outlines the expectations and requirements of university learning and subsequently reduces student anxiety and increases self-efficacy. As a result, students become cognitively, behaviorally and socially engaged, with each form of engagement requiring different motivational states.

Students enter university relying upon what they already know and routinely significant proportions of them struggle to adapt their knowledge and learning practices to the teaching and learning culture of universities. For many, this is the transition challenge and process. Within Understanding University Learning the learning and teaching strategies characteristic of secondary schooling are explicitly contrasted with those characteristic of university. As a result students develop an awareness of the issues and become more prepared to ‘leap the gap’. This unit recognizes that skills such as critical thinking cannot be developed without the student first realizing the efficacy and value of these skills.

Students are exposed to university preferred skills and behaviours such as essay writing, research, discourse differences between disciplines and the centrality of critical thinking. It then becomes the choice of the individual whether or not they take these on board and develop them. In addition to introducing a behaviour or skill, staff members also outline and model the positive aspects of developing such behaviours and cognitions. In doing so, students are provided with a ‘starting point’ for their intrinsic motivation. This approach has proven to be effective.

Evidence gathered over the past six years indicates several measures which are suggestive of motivational development (see Levy & Murray, 2006). One important finding is that for UUL students a 20 point gap in ENTER scores translates to an approximate difference in mean results of 5%. In addition, the pass rates of DoTS students are similar to the pass rates of mainstream students and completion rates for the program have an aggregate rate of 90%. Shown in Table 1 are the average GPA’s of first year degree and DoTS students for the period of 2000-2004. What is clear is that students who graduate from the program (those who pass all units) achieve at a higher rate than their mainstream counterparts except for one instance where the difference is negligible (0.01).

| Year         | 2000 |      |      | 2001 |      |      | 2002 |      |      | 2003 |      |      | 2004 |      |      |
|--------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
|              | Deg  | D-A  | D-G  | Deg  | D-A  | D-G  | Deg  | D-A  | D-G  | Deg  | D-A  | D-G  | Deg  | D-A  | D-G  |
| Less than 50 | 1.94 | 1.63 | 2.01 | 1.95 | 1.49 | 2.18 | 1.44 | 1.31 | 2.19 | -    | 1.36 | 1.80 | -    | 1.24 | 1.84 |
| 50-54.95     | 1.80 | 1.60 | 2.30 | 1.71 | 1.18 | 2.21 | 1.13 | 1.63 | 2.00 | -    | 1.91 | 2.14 | -    | 1.56 | 1.90 |
| 55-59.95     | 1.88 | 1.25 | 1.94 | 1.91 | 1.78 | 2.03 | 1.30 | 1.53 | 2.34 | 1.88 | 1.52 | 2.11 | -    | 1.82 | 2.15 |
| 60-64.95     | 1.39 | 1.32 | -    | 1.33 | 2.07 | 2.11 | 1.37 | 1.68 | 2.14 | 1.43 | 1.82 | 2.20 | 2.23 | 1.98 | 2.35 |
| 65-69.95     | 1.57 | 3.00 | 2.69 | 1.75 | 2.00 | 2.00 | 1.42 | 1.65 | 2.57 | 1.61 | 1.85 | 2.38 | 2.25 | 2.10 | 2.24 |
| 70-74.95     | 1.91 | -    | -    | 1.91 | 2.00 | 2.00 | 1.79 | -    | -    | 2.03 | 2.76 | 2.76 | 1.88 | 2.75 | 3.01 |
| 75-79.95     | 1.69 | -    | -    | 2.11 | -    | -    | 1.91 | -    | -    | 2.07 | 0.25 | -    | 2.28 | -    | -    |

\* Deg – Degree Students; D-A – DoTS students (all students); D-G – DoTS students (graduates)

**Table 1: Average GPA of First Year Degree and DoTS Students 2000-2004**

Arguably, using grades as a means by which to demonstrate the efficacy of the program implies the continuation of the secondary school preoccupation with assessment. Grades tend to be linked with extrinsic motivation and it is not unheard of for a student high in intrinsic motivation to receive pass and credit levels. It must be remembered, however, that there are various ways in which motivation can be defined and measured.

We argue that students' completing the full DoTS year indicates that the practices of the program develop motivational states such as self-efficacy, task value and control of learning beliefs. It is quite plausible that this shift in motivational states plays a pertinent role in reducing the correlational gap between ENTER score and GPA's and contributes to the high completion rates. Support for this contention is found in comments made by prior students in focus group sessions which indicate that the program does indeed enhance motivation.

These focus groups were conducted at the end of 2005, by the Gippsland Research and Information Services, with recruitment letters sent to former DoTS students from 2001-2004. No current or former staff members were involved in the process other than providing student contact details. Responses indicate the experience and knowledge gained through completing the DoTS program resulted in participants noticing a difference in their skill level when they entered the degree program compared to that of their peers. Overall, a sense of gaining valuable insights into not only how to learn but also the resources from which they could seek assistance, was considered to give them an 'edge' over their peers. Comments to support this contention include "it [the DoTS program] gave me confidence ... in myself" and "it helped a lot in other subjects that I was doing that were outside of the Do[T]s program", and "it was ... a nurturing course ... just sort of easing us in, where other people from other units just went 'oh yeah, you're in university'".

Positive relationships developed with staff members featured highly in the focus group responses, especially in relation to an increase in self-efficacy. For instance, one participant reported the DoTS lecturer said:

well that was year 12 it doesn't matter that you got a bad mark for that, it doesn't reflect ... what you know and what skills you have. I know you can do the work, I know that you can do well at uni and achieve.' And having someone ... that believes in you, you start to think hang on ... I can actually do this, it isn't so scary.

Other respondents clearly indicated the focus on student-directed rather than teacher-directed learning, "if we hadn't done a reading or something for one tutorial [staff members] would be standing there going 'well I'm not going to discuss it. You're the one I gave the reading to' .... [There] was a lot of onus on us to kind of get the tutorial going". Increased self-efficacy and self-confidence also came through as a major theme, "For shy kids ... it gave them the opportunity to be a little bit unshier [sic] .... It gave them the opportunity to ... say what they wanted to say and give them a little bit more self confidence". In this way, student's felt permitted to convey who they are and what they think in a non-threatening and non-critical environment, which was then carried over into their other university studies.

Carnegie (2007, cited in Parry, 2007) stated "kids first, curriculum second.... When a kid is respected for who they are, kids discover their own greatness." This line of thinking is reflected in DoTS. The program is based on the premise that students become engaged when their goals, or motivations, are met. In the academic setting these goals are success (mastering a skill), curiosity (development of understanding), originality (need for self - expression) and relationships (involvement with others) (see Strong, Silver & Robinson, 1995). Staff members in this program are personable, enthusiastic and



motivational. They believe in the capacity of the students to acquire the necessary skills, behaviours and cognitions to become successful university learners and relay this through their teaching. Where possible staff model preferred behaviours through practices such as talking through the critical thinking process. New students are also introduced to previous students who discuss their experiences and the ways in which the unit facilitated and enhanced their learning. The following is an overview of some methods employed to meet these motivational needs (for a detailed overview see Levy & Campbell, 2008).

### **Explicit Teaching About Unique University Culture**

Increasingly it appears that students see themselves as clients in a user pays system who expect and anticipate learning that incorporates motivational components. This is exploited within UUL through the use of pop-culture resources that are intended to locate the expectations and requirements of university learning in a familiar and accessible genre. Such an approach increases student interest and desire to learn by exploring links between the known and familiar with the as yet unknown and unfamiliar using the Vygotskian notion of scaffolding and creating cognitive dissonance in a supported and supportive context (Vygotsky, 1978). Topics explored and addressed through assessment include transition, independent learning, critical thinking and the role of universities.

First year assessment tasks are the point at which motivation and perseverance are tested and, for some students, signify the beginning of the end. Numerous strategies exist to ameliorate student apprehension and anxiety such as modelled answers, scaffolded and staged task complexity, regular formative assessment and feedback that is encouraging and structured as a learning tool. Students who submit their first pieces of assessment are those most likely to see out the semester and then the year and their degree. A number of derivatives of these practices, and those articulated earlier, have been progressively incorporated into the core units of Monash University's DoTS program and have contributed to the successes of its students over the almost 10 years of operation.

### **Personalized Learning and Transition Strategies**

The differences between secondary and tertiary study are highlighted in the early weeks as part of a study of the first year transition process. This sets the foundation upon which the ideal of lifelong learning can be examined to make students aware that learning is continual rather than simply located within educational institutions. The idea that this may only be the student's first foray into tertiary learning is explored, and how the skills they acquire will be valuable for subsequent forays and / or further vocational training. Knowing what to do and what is expected facilitates academic engagement, thus students are not left floundering and confused. Self-efficacy is thereby increased as students know what is expected and feel the goals are achievable. Staff set out to break down preconceived notions of academics as experts who the students have to satisfy and instead promote learning as a collaborative process. This then permits the development of individual rapport and strategies to support student learning.

The recognition of transition to higher education as an extended period of individual transformation rather than an initial event offers a potential window of opportunity in which initial student enthusiasm can be channelled, through innovative curriculum, into meaningful engagement activities. Coupling institutional data about student diversity with the enthusiasm of new students and curriculum design incorporating an involving pedagogy, clear and supportive guidance from staff (academic, support services and administration) and team based learning practices it is possible to quickly foster among student cohorts a sense of community, belonging and shared academic identity. In this manner initial enthusiasm and extrinsic motivation may potentially be rechannelled into intrinsic motivation identifiable when students claim they “want to” learn and excel. Student outcomes, as outlined previously, indicate DoTS students apply themselves to learn and, in the end, surpass expectations based upon ENTER scores.

### **Creation of a Strong Sense of Community**

A unique, albeit underutilized resource available to universities are the staff who are themselves engaged lifelong and independent learners. This resource is well used in the Understanding University Learning unit. All staff members attend lectures so that students have a clear sense they are not undertaking their learning journey alone. Staff are thus presented as members of a ‘team’ rather than solitary instructors working in isolation. Pastoral care remains a central obligation along with an interventionist approach to encouraging student engagement with effective learning practices. Other strategies include an increase in tutorial time and smaller tutorial sizes. Significant effort is expended in encouraging students to become connected with each other through the assisted formation of informal peer support networks. The program succeeds because the students establish firm friendship networks, support each other, identify with a personalised university learning environment, and establish a learner identity through which they see themselves as an integral part of the university learning community (Levy & Murray, 2002).

The Diploma of Tertiary Studies draws heavily upon the ideas of an ‘empowering education’ (Shor, 1992, p.15), which itself draws upon the works of Friere, Dewey and Piaget.

Empowering education... is a critical-democratic pedagogy for self and social change. It is a student-centered program for multicultural democracy in school and society. It approaches individual growth as an active, cooperative, and social process, because the self and society create each other. Human beings do not invent themselves in a vacuum, and society cannot be made unless people create it together. The goals of this pedagogy are to relate personal growth to public life, by developing strong skills, academic knowledge, habits of inquiry, and critical curiosity about society, power, inequality, and change.

An empowering education is participatory, affective, problem-posing, situated, multi-cultural, dialogic, desocializing, democratic, researching, interdisciplinary and activist.

Each of these pedagogic components is integral – one cannot work without the other. In the same manner, each component of academic motivation is also essential. Within UUL the pedagogic practices and development or enhancement of positive academic motivation feed into each other. Teaching about the university culture, rather than assuming students will somehow pick it up along the way makes the unfamiliar familiar, thus students begin to believe they ‘can do this task’, whether that is university as a whole or individual assessment tasks. In addition, by believing in their capabilities to achieve their goals, student’s levels of negative affective motivation, such as test anxiety, decrease, while positive affective motivation, or positive feelings toward university learning and its culture, are enhanced through the creation of a strong sense of community among the student cohort and the teaching team. Furthermore, value motivation is enhanced as students are encouraged to make links between presented tasks and the intended immediate and long-term outcomes.

## **Policy**

Teaching and learning policies provide important structural mechanisms to direct the development of practices that extend and shift innovations across first year university learning experiences. Appropriate policies and supporting structures enable innovations to be extended beyond the roles of specific teaching staff. However, sector wide recommendations are fraught in a diverse sector that relies upon individual institutions and campuses. Nonetheless, commonly held concerns about the first year experience and a desire to more effectively engage students provide the basis for the following observations and recommendations.

If the first year in higher education is to be about more than simply attending to transition and the retention of students then it must necessarily concern itself with appreciating the characteristics of the student clients that it seeks to address and assisting them to become genuinely motivated and engaged. An important aspect of this involves an informed appreciation of the components of motivation and how these can be developed in order to transform students into more intrinsically motivated learners. Whilst policy formulation about what should constitute appropriate first year teaching and learning strategies are at times somewhat distant from the tutorial room and lecture theatre, it is at this level that broad ranging and effective initiatives can become institutionalized practices. Policies implemented at the coalface are influenced, directed and shaped by university, faculty and school/departmental level policies. These then impact practice. Policies developed and put into place at the institutional level filter down to faculty and departmental levels.

### **University Level Policy**

Policies at the university level signal long term commitments. One such commitment of Monash University is outlined in the document *Strategic Framework – 2004-2008* (Monash University, 2004). The institution proposes to  
formulate strategic plans for each of its campuses that ensure that  
not only are educational opportunities provided to students from a

diverse range of backgrounds but that each campus provides high quality education and research appropriate to its region and consistent with Monash's overall vision.

The Diploma of Tertiary Studies (DoTS) can be viewed as providing educational opportunities to regional students whose motivation and engagement with learning processes have contributed to modest levels of achievement which would typically constrain their aspirations of university study. Furthermore, DoTS is offered at outer-Metropolitan regions which is indicative of the institutions acceptance of, and concern with, factors such as rurality and socio-economic status, that typically place students at academic risk (Edwards, Birrell & Smith, 2005; Sheehan, 2004).

Concerns about the costs of funding student transition and engagement strategies could be nullified through the preferential allocation of resources to first year programs (Yorke, 2006) which should then produce savings in subsequent years. In light of some students' initial, extrinsic reasons for study, there is a need to fund and integrate strategies to address motivation within formal coursework commitments rather than leaving it to additional, social or voluntary activities. For many students, their perception of university and their learning experiences are shaped primarily by their contact with teaching staff. Despite this some universities have rationalized support services due to funding reductions and have shifted such services into online virtual realms that are neither inviting nor motivating for disengaged students. There arises something of a tension between the expectations of the universities for their students to be motivated and engaged learners at a time when staff are increasingly encouraged to reduce their direct contact with students in order to pursue other activities more central to career development and securing increased institutional funding. The subsequent decrease in the teacher-student interface reduces the opportunity to enhance intrinsic motivation amongst students. Indirectly this decrease in contact time serves to enhance the perception of a user-pays system rather than encouraging students to become independent learners.

#### **Faculty Level Policy**

At the Faculty level, policies provide implementation details for institutionally articulated directions and priorities. They indicate desired changes to the scope of curriculum and specify how progress is to be evaluated. Consequently, specific targets, outputs and milestones are often emphasized. In developing policies to promote student engagement, ensuring uniform and coherent learning experiences can promote levels of personal identification and commitment to education among students.

Student motivation has been recognised as complex and multi-faceted and responses to it must be likewise considered and cannot be developed separate from the broader first year experience. Six first year curriculum design principles have recently been articulated (Kift, 2008b) and supported by a select series of international case studies exhibiting exemplars of best practice in first year teaching. These principles could be adopted to provide a coherently structured approach to first year learning and teaching to enhance student motivation and potentially transform extrinsically valued learning experiences into intrinsically valued experiences. Re-ordering Kift's interconnected principles into the following chronology: Diversity, Design, Transition, Engagement,

Assessment and Evaluation/Monitoring, offers a policy blueprint for first year curriculum and pedagogy renewal.

Translating these principles from the pages of journals into coordinated theory based institutional practices has been recognised as taking as long as ten years (Swing, 2003) and could expect to be routinely buffeted by adverse budgetary decisions and the career movements of staff. Policy steps to weatherproof this process could include the creation of First Year Experience coordinators supported by First Year Education reference groups or steering committees (Kift, 2008a). Aspirations for educational 'best practice' could be articulated through the development of checklists from these principles. First year shell units, reflecting practices derived from these principles, could be created into which teaching staff insert disciplinary specific content, rather than current practices which often appear the reverse. Evaluations of good teaching practices could have criteria drawn from 'off-the-shelf options' articulated from these principles. Such developments could unify top-down and bottom-up policy innovations in the provision of a first year educational experience that students find engaging, rewarding and motivating.

#### **School/Departmental Level Policy**

Policies at this level tend to be specific and narrowly scoped. They include guidelines for decision makers and procedures setting out a prescribed course of action for explicit situations. With respect to student engagement, teaching and learning it is at this level that the effects of policy decisions about the distribution of resources are most directly felt within classrooms. Proximity to students offers opportunities to more accurately assess their capacities and characteristics than centrally located assessments. This information about student diversity within discrete educational cohorts could then be used to better tailor learning and support policies.

Localised evaluation and monitoring of first year programs should be conducted regularly to facilitate ongoing curriculum renewal in order to address the changing patterns of student diversity and characteristics. It provides the necessary evidence to support the development of more interventionist pedagogies. A closely monitored learning experience requires a shift away from the institution-at-a-distance experiential mode of engagement, learning and attrition that has characterised first year education in the past. The Diploma of Tertiary Studies achieves this by encouraging student feedback through university and faculty level evaluations as well as focus groups and exit surveys at program level and informally canvassing the views of current and former students. This extends the collaborative learning model beyond the classroom providing students with a sense of valued membership within a learning community which considers their views for future revisions to the program. A testament to the effectiveness of this is, perhaps, evident by the fact former students have become independently proactive in recruiting new students to the program.

## Conclusion

As previously observed, institutional research to identify the nature and characteristics of diversity among first year student cohorts provides a necessary foundation upon which to develop targeted and effective educational strategies. The curriculum design that follows could then be student focused in an informed manner utilising any number of already recognised strategies such as scaffolded learning tasks, contextualising the relevance of university located skills and attitudes in the learning careers of students and utilising student feedback to develop/enhance pedagogic practices. In this way curriculum and pedagogy can become tools not simply for the transmission of knowledge but constituent components in the creation of a sense of learning community that fosters individual commitment to further education thus balancing extrinsic and intrinsic motivations among students.

The implications of this article for teacher education at tertiary level are tri-fold – as premise, effective practice and policy. In order to assist academic staff in curriculum and pedagogy renewal it is suggested that the premise, student motivation is central to higher education and may be enhanced through effective pedagogic practices, becomes a central feature of university first year experience policies. In this way institutions can create effective practices across their first year programs rather than leaving such innovations in the hands of individual and isolated teaching staff.

It is essential that policies which impact upon the first year learning experience are coherent and coordinated in their support of fostering amongst students the preferred graduate attributes of their institution. Essentially, the practices of today and yesterday are no longer adequate. We should not be adding more to the curriculum but rather reflecting upon our practices and implementing strategies that encourage preferred graduate skills such as critical thinking and independent lifelong learning. Pedagogy should “relate personal growth to public life, by developing strong skills, academic knowledge, habits of inquiry, and critical curiosity about society, power, inequality, and change” (Shor, 1992, p. 15). The need for a comprehensive first-year pedagogy that addresses student motivation offers a further opportunity for universities to enrich the first year learning experience.

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