Enthusiasm and the effective modern academic

Brett Freudenberg & Lisa Samarkovski

Griffith University

Academics today face an array of challenges to their enthusiasm, including teaching students from diverse backgrounds with wavering levels of engagement with their studies. Furthermore, reform to the tertiary education sector has seen the corporatisation of universities with management increasingly measuring academic outcomes in respect of both teaching and research. This is proving to be problematic, particularly in measuring and recognising good teaching. With these select measurements, academics can feel that a substantial part of their work is not recognised in a meaningful way, which may impact morale, intellectual time and autonomy. This limited recognition can result in academics' enthusiasm, especially towards teaching, waning. This could result in unfavourable outcomes, as an academic's lack of enthusiasm may have an adverse impact on student learning, may also affect their own wellbeing and, ultimately, be detrimental to the institution they work for.

Introduction

The notion of enthusiasm may seem far removed from the traditional attributes that an academic needs in order to succeed, but in this article we argue that enthusiasm is an important part of being an effective modern academic.

Reforms in Australian universities have resulted in the implementation of corporatised management practices including attempts to measure the outputs, and more recently the impact, of the sector (Universities Australia, 2013). These reforms raise ideological questions about what universities are about, and how and whether it is appropriate to measure outputs and impact. Also, it appears that institutions have placed emphasis on measuring (and rewarding) research as opposed to teaching – which may have more to do with the ease of measurement of research outputs, however problematic (Carr,

2011). The purpose of this article is not to argue the pros and cons of the modern tertiary sector, but to highlight that this environment can cause an academic's enthusiasm to wane, especially towards their teaching. The word 'enthusiasm' derives from the Greek meaning 'God *(entheo)* inside *(iasm)*'. While Sanders and Gosenpud (1986, p. 52) state that 'enthusiastic teaching' means simulating, animated, energetic and mobile – it suggested that Ballantyne *et al.*'s (1999) notion that it extends beyond mere kinetics and includes a love of one's discipline, the act of learning and the role of being a teacher is more insightful.

The waning of academics' enthusiasm should be of concern to everyone in the tertiary sector, as an academic's enthusiasm towards their teaching has been linked to promoting student engagement and positive learning outcomes (Evans, 2007), which is beneficial for the insti-

tution and the sector overall. Given the demands of the contemporary tertiary sector, academics more than ever need enthusiasm to face the challenges of their teaching. Hence, we argue, an academic's enthusiasm is intrinsically linked to being an effective academic in the 21st century.

The challenges

Some of the challenges arising in modern universities include the corporatisation of universities, funding pressures and a changing student cohort, each of which is discussed below. There are also other challenges, such as advances in technology and the modes of educational delivery available to contemporary students, that are beyond the scope of this article.

Corporatisation

One of the challenges facing modern academics is the corporatisation of universities. Similar to other countries, the tertiary sector in Australia has been subject to reforms based on economic rationalism and related ideological (neo-liberal) orientations – most notably, managerialism (Biggs, 2002). In Australia, these reforms can be traced back to John Dawkins (Minister for Employment, Education and Training from 1987–1991) and the release of a discussion paper (Dawkins, 1987), and then a government policy paper (Dawkins, 1988). These reforms resulted in amalgamations of institutions and changes in government funding along with the funding being directed towards particular activities (Group of Eight, 2012).

This new market driven tertiary environment provides a stark contrast to the historical perception of the tertiary sector as an elite activity, with high levels of autonomy and little directed financial support from government and industry (Coaldrake & Steadman, 1999, p. 3). This history can be romanticised as a time of freedom of thought that was not bound by financial compromise and government agendas. However, Noll (1998) queries whether liberties had been taken and that universities needed to be subjected to more public scrutiny and accountability. Also, this era has been describe has having 'autocratic manager[s]' and 'god professors' and privilege (Marginson & Considine, 2000, p. 98), with 'club members' being protected (p. 110).

This market-based rationalisation which was assumed to lead to improved quality and productivity (Hancock *et al.*, 2009) has been described as the 'enterprise university' where money is a key objective, but is subordinate to advancing prestige and the competitiveness of universities (Marginson & Considine, 2000, p. 5). While it is

not clear whether these aims have been fully achieved, there has been an increase in the quantity of output from the sector in terms of both research and teaching (Soo, 2008).

Furthermore, the conversation about the role of universities and the economy, in terms of the economy today and into the future has been clearly articulated. Currently, the tertiary sector directly contributes $17.2 billion (2008–09) to the Australian economy, making it the fourth largest earner of export dollars, much of which comes from international education (Malkovic, 2010). In terms of Australia's future economic prospects the tertiary sector is seen as playing a key role in providing a skilled workforce (CPA Australia, 2010).

Studies have postulated links between time spent in education and a country's gross domestic product (GDP) (Parker, 2011), although, other studies have qualified that this depends upon the quality of the education, rather than just the quantity (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2009).

This market-based reform has seen Australian universities adopt corporate management principles and practices since 1993 (Winter & Sarros, 2002), including corporate forms of work organisation (for internal and external transactions), active engagement in entrepreneurial activities (such as consulting), and the marketing of their education services internationally. This has seen the growth of 'superdeans' and faculty leader managers with the installation of targets acting as powerful restraints and responsibility shifting (Marginson & Considine, 2000, pp. 10–11). This has marked a move away from collegial decision making which included academics to more executive decision making (Marginson & Considine, 2000). Hil also points to concerns about the rise of administrative practices with people getting caught up in the process rather than the outcomes, and academics struggling with administrators to gain status (Hil, 2012). This includes policies to protect the university brand which may involve limitations on academics' discourse.

While some see this a 'very exciting time' for universities (Parker, 2011, p. 52, quoting McDonald), others are concerned about whether higher education and commercialisation are necessarily compatible (Valsan & Sproule, 2008). Part of the concern is that academic freedom in research is being driven more by industry and government priorities (Soo, 2008). Also, the commercialisation is being modelled on the assumption of 'profit-maximisers', which is an awkward fit given that universities are typically public or non-profit organisations (Soo, 2008, p. 24), and they strive for 'prestige' not profit (Garvin, 1980) although Slaughter and Leslie (1997) indicate that uni-

versities now strive for prestige and profit. Recently Hil (2012) has given a scathing assessment of the university sector in Australia, which can see academics valued more for 'how much they contribute to revenue streams than to ideas'.

Funding

Another challenge facing the modern academics can be funding pressures for their institutions. Even for institutions that have built up surpluses, universities have to be far more strategic in allocating limited resources.

Compared to the early 1990s, Australian universities now have a diverse funding pool to draw upon, with contemporary funds coming from '[C]ommonwealth government grants, HECS, fees and charges, investment income, state government allocations, and donations and bequests' (Soo, 2008, p. 17), as well as corporate sponsorships. Student fees are a particularly important source of revenue, as reforms have allowed universities to enrol fee-paying overseas students, which has led to strong increases in international student numbers (Department of Education, Science and Training 2007). Underfunding, coupled with discretionary/conditional government funding, can act as a strong inducement to modify university priorities and behaviour (Marginson & Considine, 2000). This appears to be due, in part, to universities adjusting to the uncertainties in the new funding environment (Bexley & Baik, 2011). This has been made more severe by recent government budget cuts.

However, universities appear to be doing more with less, particularly for teaching, as resources for teaching have been reduced on a per student basis, with increased staff:student ratios over a ten year period, moving from 15 students to one academic in 1996 to over 20 to one in 2006 (Davis, 2010; Coaldrake & Steadman, 1999). Guthrie claims that in business schools this was as high as 60:1 in 2010 (Malkovic, 2010, p. 37, quoting Guthrie). In contrast, dedicated funding for research has risen significantly in this period (Group of Eight, 2012).

Another area of concern for modern academics is the casualisation of the industry, with a greater reliance on casual academic staff (estimates between 40 and 70 per cent, with the majority being female) rather than full time tenured staff (Bexley & Baik, 2011). This can lead to apprehension about quality, but also, to the actual viability of an academic career (Malkovic, 2010, p. 37, quoting Guthrie). This is a worry for a sector that needs to focus on recruiting as thousands of new academics will be required to replace academics retiring in the next decade (Parker, 2011). Also, casualisation can add to the work-

load of tenured staff, as they have to 'manage the army' of causal staff (Coaldrake & Stedman, 1999, p. 20).

Furthermore, academics appear to be doing a lot of unpaid overtime, with their hours increasing as their career progresses. Research shows that associate lecturers work on average 46 hours a week, compared to 51 hours for a senior lecturer, which then climbs to 58 hours for a full professor (Coates *et al.*, 2009).

An expanding area of potential revenue for universities is students, in particular the growth in post-graduate and international students (Bexley & Baik, 2011). This has led to the idea of education as a commodity, with students described as 'customers' (Anderson *et al.*, 2002, p. 12), who demand full value for their money (Biggs, 2002). Given that university funding is contingent on student numbers, attracting students is big business which creates concerns that this can lead to pressure to pass students (Anderson *et al.*, 2002). Australia is not alone in this fear. There is evidence from the USA of grade inflation and/or concerns with soft assessment (Leigh & Ryan, 2008). Academic integrity is seen as compromised due to the commercial nature of education and concern about buying an education.

Student cohort

Another challenge facing the modern academic is that the student cohort has changed dramatically with greater heterogeneity. This diversity poses a number of issues; teaching approaches, cultural knowledge, prior skills and knowledge. Given that academics may have limited knowledge about theories of learning and teaching strategies, this can mean they need assistance to meet these challenges (Freudenberg, 2012).

Full time undergraduates, for example, are working longer hours with their average hours of work increasing nearly threefold from five hours per week in the 1980s to 14 hours per week in the early 2000s (Anderson *et al.*, 2002). Research has demonstrated that, depending upon the hours worked and whether it is a career job, this increased work commitment can have an effect on whether students complete their degree (Zakirova & Polidano, 2011, p. 8). This may also mean that academics feel students are less engaged with their tertiary studies due to their absences.

Furthermore, students can have increased family and parenting responsibilities (Cushman, 2004) and many have adjustment challenges due to the less regulated learning environment, and they may lack the time management skills to deal with this (Lahmars & Zulauf, 2000). Increasingly, there are students from diverse socio-

economic backgrounds (Anderson *et al.*, 2002), whose members are likely to increase due to the Australian government's policy to increase the level of 25–34 year olds who have attained a bachelor's degree or higher to 40 per cent (Parker, 2011).

This means there are concerns about whether students (domestic and international) have sufficient skills to cope with or to even undertake tertiary study. Students with poor language and academic skills can struggle with academic requirements, as academic achievement and ability to engage with learning are both necessary (Carini *et al.*, 2006).

There are also greater numbers of international students who can be concentrated in certain disciplines; estimates are that up to 80 per cent of the student body in accounting degrees are international students (Malkovic, 2010). While additional resources or support may be provided to address this, it is questionable to what extent these might be adequate (CPA Australia, 2010). Additionally, there has been an internationalisation of the Australian academic staff that can lead to challenges for such staff lecturing in English when it is not their first language (Horstmanshof, 2010). This internationalisation of student and academic populations can be positive, but it does present potential language and cultural difficulties (Arkoudis *et al.*, 2012).

All of these factors can lead to an increased workload for academics in assisting students to successfully adjust to university (Biggs, 2002).

Consequently, it can be appreciated that the modern university culture and the changes that have and continue to take place in terms of corporatisation and increased student diversity mean that the work for the modern academic is both dynamic and challenging. These challenges have taken on new dimensions, with universities exploring the ways they can use online teaching to deliver their courses. What this means for academics in terms of workload, skill base and pedagogical techniques is still uncertain (Todd, 2012). The next part of the article will focus on how management practices may be having a detrimental effect on academics' enthusiasm, especially towards teaching.

Evidence of a decline in enthusiasm

It is important to appreciate that management practices can act as extrinsic motivators for academics in terms of focusing their attention and effort less. In order to measure the economic performance of the sector's outputs, key performance indicators (KPIs) have been created and implemented on a number of fronts (Hancock *et al.*,

2009). These KPIs can relate to the three main areas of an academic's role: teaching, research and service, with a traditional model being a 40:40:20 split.

For teaching, these KPIs typically cover graduate feedback on teaching, course pass and retention rates, and levels of graduate employment. The volume and status of publications and research grants have been used to measure research outputs. However, these KPIs can have unintended consequences. For example, attempts to try to ascertain the quality of research outputs with the ranking of journals has been said to lead to undesirable managerial practices that resulted in the withdrawal of the scheme (Carr, 2011).

In terms of teaching KPIs, the use of student evaluations of teaching has also been highly criticised, with implications that these can be manipulated (Sawyer *et al.*, 2007). Also, the use of student evaluations of teaching for administrative purposes leaves some to ponder whether there is collusion between students and academics (Valsan & Sproule, 2008).

While measuring good teaching is problematic, for the university's management system to work in terms of providing extrinsic motivation to the modern academic, good teaching must not only be measured but it must also be rewarded and acknowledged, appreciated and valued. If this does not occur in a meaningful way, it can lead academics to view teaching as a 'distraction', as students are getting in the way of academics progressing their careers through a greater research profile. Guest (2009, p. 22) persuasively argues that:

> whenever one of two outputs of an employee is rewarded (extrinsically) and the other is not, there is likely to be a decline in the relative and absolute standards of the unrewarded line of output.

One visible way that good university teaching has been recognised is through teaching awards, which can be granted at the faculty, university and national levels. The rise and fall of Australia's national award body (Carrick/Australian Learning and Teaching Council) adds credence to the scepticism of the value placed on teaching. However, it appears that these awards may not be a good external motivator for academics. A survey of teaching award recipients found that the award was of 'minor importance' and that some found them to be 'alienating' – in that they placed the recipients separate to their colleagues (Ramsden & Martin, 1996, p. 312). The award can also carry 'negative connotations' when the particular institutional academic community is engrained in a research culture, as teaching expertise may not carry the same respect as research expertise (Leon, 2002). This was still the case

in 2010 when fewer academics placed a higher value on award for teaching excellence (58.7 per cent) compared to research awards (74.4 per cent) (Bexley, James & Arkoudis, 2011).

Rather than teaching awards, recipients have thought that the promotions system would be a more effective and appropriate way to recognise good teaching (Ramsden & Martin, 1996). Some universities have made tentative moves to try to establish a career trajectory for high performing teachers, so they can achieve career advancement. Nevertheless, academics feel there is more work to be done as there continues to be a perception gap between the recognition and reward of teaching as opposed to research.

Australian research by Ramsden and Martin (1996) revealed that most academics consider that research and teaching should be highly valued. While 84 per cent of academics thought that research is actually highly valued by their institutions, only 37 per cent thought that teaching was actually highly valued. This is somewhat inconsistent with respect to the institutions' own perceptions, as 81 per cent of Australian universities indicated that equal value was given to research and teaching with promotions. Only 47 per cent of the universities surveyed at the time indicated that the promotion could be primarily on the basis of excellence in teaching.

The perception continued in 2010 as 88 per cent of academics believed that teaching should be rewarded in promotion but only 31 per cent believed that it is currently rewarded (Bexley *et al.*, 2011). This means that over the decade there are now 'far fewer' academics believe that teaching is recognised through the promotion criterion (Bexley *et al.*, 2011). This may be related to the finding that more than 40 per cent of academics were dissatisfied with 'the way teaching expertise is valued in academic recruitment' and used as the criteria for promotion (Bexley *et al.*, 2011, p. 23). This dissatisfaction with the recognition of teaching can be contrasted with the finding that 70.6 per cent of academics were of the view that research activity is currently highly rewarded and 73.8 per cent believe that it should be rewarded (Bexley *et al.*, 2011).

What these finding suggest is that the promotion system is unlikely to be a strong extrinsic motivator to encourage good teaching which can lead to a sense that research productive academics will get promoted even if they are 'mediocre teachers' (Ramsden & Martin, 1996, p. 300). Such preconceptions can encourage junior staff to think that their institutions do not care about teaching (Ramsden & Martin, 1996) which could be a reason

why McInnis' study (1996) found a decline in academics' commitment to teaching as they progress through their careers. Even for staff at the associate lecturer and lecturer levels the perceived lack of institutional support for teaching can have a depressing effect on academics' motivation and work performance (Winter & Sarros, 2002).

This evidence demonstrates that for academics there is a perception gap between the recognition and rewarding of teaching compared to research, even if the reality is that they are equally recognised and rewarded by their universities. We argue that this perception gap is critical as it may have a demoralising effect on the modern academic in terms of their enthusiasm towards teaching. A 2010 study of 5,525 Australian academics began its Executive Summary with the following participant quote:

> Even though there is a spoken acknowledgement that all three (teaching, research, and service) are important, every academic knows there is a hierarchy, with research sitting at the top (Bexley *et al*., 2011, p. xi).

This means there can be incongruity between academics' roles and what they get meaningful recognition for, referred to as the workload–reward paradox. Currently, in Australian universities, a large proportion of the income for a university can come from teaching students. The authors' institution, for example, gains approximately 70 per cent of its income from teaching students, with a large percentage of the university's output being graduating students. Even though teaching accounts for only 40 per cent of a traditional academic's workload. This can mean that the academic is faced with the arduous fact that 40 per cent of their work (which accounts for 70 per cent of their employer's income) is not comparably measured with the other 40 per cent of their work load (research), which may account for less than 30 per cent of their employer's income. However, this may not be technically correct, as there may be a link between student enrolment and research, rather than teaching. There is, for example, some contention that students use indices that rank universities (such as the Shanghai Jiao Tong or the *Times Higher Education* university ranking) to choose universities. These indices are driven by the institutional research status (as opposed to teaching) (Soo, 2008). Even though research by Hattie and Marsh (1996) comprising a comprehensive review and meta-analysis of 58 quantitative studies, found that there was only a loose coupling between research and teaching. In terms of these rankings, Marginson and Considine (2000, p. 193) argue that it is 'not value added in teaching that matters' but instead 'scores of students who enter, the reputation of the academics who teach them, the suc-

cess of the university in research, and the labour-market status of graduates'.

We argue that managerialisation (and measurement) has had a major impact on external motivation for academics. McInnis' (1999) study of over 2,000 Australian academics found that the level of work satisfaction declined rapidly from 1993 (67 per cent) to 1999 (51 per cent). In a later survey of Australian academics, they responded negatively to the statements that their university 'inspires the very best in the way of job performance' (mean = 2.46, scale 1:5) (Winter & Sarros, 2002, p. 247). This is despite caring about their university and willing to put in the extra effort (mean = 4.22) (Winter & Sarros, 2002).

Research also demonstrates that junior staff at associate lecturer level have a stronger interest in teaching as opposed to research (Ramsden & Martin, 1996). For lecturers and senior lecturers the interest in research

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and teaching is much more aligned, however, for senior academics (associate professors and professors) there is clearly a preference for research as opposed to teaching.

This is of concern, as research by McInnis (1996) found that those who considered themselves as more teaching orientated were more likely to hold negative attitudes about their careers and working conditions compared to those who were research orientated. The impact of such negative attitudes for academics is considered later in this article.

Further evidence of the decline in enthusiasm is found in the national survey of 8,732 staff members from 17 participating Australian universities, which was regarded as representative of the population of university staff and included academics from various disciplines. This study concluded that the 3,711 academic staff surveyed showed greater psychological stress than general staff (Winefield *et al.*, 2003). This means that academics were more likely to be 'at risk of psychological illness' compared to the Australian population (Hil, 2012, p. 93). This may be due to a mismatch in academics' skills and modern job requirements, as well as expectations (especially with older academics) (Winefield *et al.*, 2003). In a follow-up survey a number of years later there was not a significant difference in psychological strain and job satisfaction for those academics surveyed again (Winefield *et al.*, 2008).

Stress levels continue to be very high, even though a 2010 study indicated there was a decrease, with 44.6

per cent of academics in 2010 finding their work to be a considerable source of personal stress compared to the high base of 56 per cent in the late 1990s (Bexley *et al.*, 2011 c.f. McInnis, 1999). The researchers do not provide an explanation for this decline, but it may be related to the retirement of older academics who recall the prior system, with newer academics knowing no other system. In any event, it is argued that the 2010 levels of personal stress are of concern.

Overall, it is argued that this provides evidence to support the claim that academics' enthusiasm towards teaching is under strain in the modern university environment. What this means for the modern academic is that the systems (and rewards) implemented in today's corporatised universities provide little as an extrinsic motivator for teaching, and this, we argue, is detrimental. Luckily university management is not the only source of extrinsic motivation, as students can be an important source of motivation for academics (Houston *et al.*, 2006):

> What makes it all worthwhile is that very small percentage of the time where you see something catch. I often wonder whether it's the kind of thing that *pyromaniacs* have. There's a certain absolute joy in striking that match ... and then seeing it suddenly start to grow (quote from participant, Ballantyne *et al.,* 1999, p. 251; emphasis added).

This personal and intrinsic motivation appears to be strong in academics who take teaching seriously (Bexley *et al.*, 2011). This is a factor recently highlighted by Hil that '[good teaching] occurs in spite and not because of the organisational cultures within which academics work' (quote from participant, Hil, 2012, p. 104).

Is this internal motivation enough to drive modern academics to meet the challenges of their new work environments, and will such academics have a long fruitful career, or will they risk being burnt by being pyromaniacs for learning?

The importance of enthusiasm

If the goals of reforms to the university sector were to improve outcomes, and to advance the position of Australian universities compared to their international counterparts, then the institutions' own wellbeing is intrinsically linked to the wellbeing of academics and students (Coates

et al., 2009). Coaldrake and Stedman (1999) argue that there must be greater alignment and linkage of individual academic careers to the institutional goals to ensure success for the sector. More recently, they argue that universities themselves need to take more responsibilities for the challenges they face (Coaldrake & Stedman, 2013). However, there is currently a perception of a lack of alignment, which can result in academics' enthusiasm waning. This tainting of academics' enthusiasm can be adverse for the individual, the institution and students' learning.

Positive emotions produce the tendency in people to approach rather than avoid, which prepares the individual to seek out and undertake new goals (Lyubomirsky *et al.*, 2005). Such positive emotions would seem critical in assisting academics to deal with the challenges they face and will continue to face in academia.

Research has also demonstrated that increases in harmonious passion were shown to predict increases in job satisfaction and decrease burnout symptoms (Carbonneau *et al.*, 2008). Harmonious passion relates to an internalisation of an activity important to the person and relating the person's idea of self. Furthermore, employees with a positive disposition receive relatively more favourable evaluations from supervisors (Staw *et al.*, 1994). Researchers argue that it is not necessarily success that leads to happiness, but that:

> Positively balanced moods and emotions lead people to think, feel, and act in ways that promote both resource building and involvement with approach goals (Lyubomirsky *et al.*, 2005, p. 803).

Positive emotions can mean that academics 'have a greater likelihood of working actively toward new goals while experiencing those moods' (Lyubomirsky *et al.*, 2005, p. 804). Also, there are benefits for institutions because satisfied workers show less job withdrawal, such as absenteeism and job burnout (Donovan, 2000). Positive moods also relate to increased belief in one's capabilities (self-efficacy) (Baron, 1990) and the setting of higher goals (Baron, 1990; Lyubomirsky *et al.*, 2005). The link with self-efficacy is important as it can be related to a person having a greater sense of control, which can assist them in persisting with difficult tasks (Bandura, 1982). Having a positive frame of mind (as opposed to a negative one) can also be linked to more efficient problem solving (Staw *et al.*, 1994).

Academics' enthusiasm can be central to their ability to effectively teach (disseminate) knowledge. Evans (2007) found that students considered that an academic's enthusiasm was central to their learning and a pre-requisite for student involvement'. Research has found that students'

interest in a topic is enhanced by the academic's enthusiasm and use of real world examples (Hodgson, 1984). This is supported by an Australian study which found that good teaching was demonstrated by 'motivating engagement' (Lizzio, 2010, p. 51). Similarly, the study with engineering students by Davies *et al.* (2006) concluded that a key feature of a good lecturer was the lecturer's enthusiasm. Studies have also concluded that the energy level and enthusiasm of the teacher is important in terms of student learning (Gilbert, 1995). Accordingly, if academics' enthusiasm for teaching has been diminished this could be adverse for students' learning.

Academics' enthusiasm that can feed student motivation is critical given that students themselves are facing challenging circumstances in undertaking their studies (such as other demands on their time, difficult course material and differing academic ability). Being able to motivate students is important as what the student does can be 'more important in determining what is learned than what the teacher does' (Shuell, 1986, p. 429).

Referring to an academic's enthusiasm is not to suggest that academics have to be performers or tell jokes for entertainment, as:

> students recognised that 'good lecturers' could be good in different ways. They appreciated that different personalities could produce equally satisfying lectures by playing to strengths ... But students indicated that *sine qua non* for most overall was that the lecturer should demonstrate enthusiasm for the subject (Evans, 2007, p. 6).

It should be recalled that students can be an important source of motivation for academics, so an academic's enthusiasm could be self-perpetuating, with enthusiasm feeding enthusiasm. If academics are enthused about teaching then it is more likely that their students will be enthused about learning. Then, when academics see their students wanting to learn and enjoying what they are learning, this drives the academics to do better and become a 'pyromaniac' for learning as expressed in the earlier quote (Ballantyne *et al.*, 1999, p. 251).

The link between academics' enthusiasm and student engagement and learning is supported by the research of Ballantyne *et al.* (1999) in which they surveyed 708 Australian academics who were considered by their universities to be exemplary or had noteworthy teaching practice. This was the result of approaching some 1,996 nominated academics from 40 universities around Australia, with representation from all disciplines. This research found one of the strongest teaching characteristics of exemplary teaching practices was motivating

student interest (Ballantyne *et al.*, 1999). This was then supported by themes of 'love for one's discipline, which included the concepts of 'enthusiasm' and 'creating and maintaining student interest' (Ballantyne *et al.*, 1999, p. 239). But this is not just enthusiasm for their subject matter, but also for the act of teaching and 'instilling the love of learning' (Ballantyne *et al.*, 1999, p. 244). The absence of such enthusiasm can be obvious to students:

> the subjects I've least enjoyed learning and the people I've least enjoyed being taught by were the ones that were most disinterested *sic.* They may have had a great love for their subject – they may have been world experts – but they didn't come across as getting a kick out of their subject (quote from participant, Ballantyne *et al.*, 1999, p. 244).

Indeed, an academic's enthusiasm can rise above the course content and ignite the student's desire to learn:

> Students consistently referred to the need for engaging, enthusiastic lectures, indicating that the most important issue is not the course content *per se*, but rather the way in which it is delivered in the classroom (Horstmanshof, 2010, p. 17).

This would support Hodgson's contention that 'students' engagement with content is likely to be more penetrating if they share the lecture's sense of challenge and enthusiasm' (Hodgson, 1984, p. 90). This potential link with enthusiasm and student engagement is important, as students play a pivotal role in their own learning (Shuell, 1986).

Day (2004, p. 3) considers that this enthusiasm (passion) is 'not an option' but is critical for academics to successfully deal with the challenges they face, particularly because of the energy and time academics need to invest. Such enthusiasm is also important if students are to be engaged and attend (Pithers & Holland, 2007), because:

> students are encouraged to attend and engage if they enjoy the teaching style of the lecturer, if the lecturer is engaging and enthusiastic, if they are included through interactions and questions and if they see the lecture as adding value (Horstmanshof, 2010, p. 17).

While the sincere presence of a lecturer's enthusiasm to engage students is important, as boredom may be linked to diminished academic achievement (Mann & Robinson, 2009), it is naive to think that enthusiasm by itself is a cure all. The process of education is more complicated:

> I had a lecturer this semester that you could tell that he really did love the subject but he wasn't very good at conveying it at all ... he knew what he was doing and he could do the course fine but he couldn't teach very well ... it's not just enthusiasm for the subject (quote from participant, Horstmanshof, 2010, p. 16).

Another important attribute for academics to teach effectively is 'valuing students and their perspectives' (Ballantyne *et al.*, 1999, p. 245), which can relate to a 'student-centred' approach to learning (Samuelozicz & Bain, 1992, p. 93). This can potentially lead to motivating students to adopt a deep learning approach to their studies (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999).

This may mean that students appreciate academics who relate the course content to the students' future professional careers, as research demonstrates that two-thirds of students are at university with the hope of of obtaining a worthwhile job and to improve their standard of living (Newstead *et al.*, 1996), which is supported by the finding that a highly appreciated teaching trait of effective academics is 'linking theory and practice' (Ballantyne *et al.*, 1999, p. 242). Accordingly, linking the theory to practice should appeal to most students as doing so clearly demonstrates that their studies are important and relevant to their future careers.

This concept of engagement, whether through enthusiasm or linkages, is important as it may be able to substantially assist those students who are struggling most with academic life compared to more able students (Carini *et al.*, 2006). Such engagement is an issue that will continue to grow with the Australian government's objective to increase tertiary participation rates to 40 per cent.

Consequently, there is evidence to suggest that academics' enthusiasm is important, not only for their personal wellbeing, but also that of the institution (and sector) they work in and for student learning. If an academic's enthusiasm for teaching is at risk of waning, then it is an important issue that managers in this new corporatised tertiary environment need to address.

Conclusion

Universities are places for the creation and the dissemination of knowledge. The value of universities is appreciated in economic terms, and can be intrinsically linked with the future prospects of a country. However, this neoliberal economic ideology has resulted in a new mindset about how universities operate, which has led to a corporatisation of the sector and the introduction of managerialism to measure outputs.

For those in the sector this has created a dynamic and challenging environment, and for academics it has had an adverse impact on their enthusiasm, particularly for teaching. This is in part because (good) teaching is hard to measure, and universities have tended to focus on recognising and rewarding research. This work-

load–reward paradox may cause academics' enthusiasm towards teaching to wane as rewards offered by universities appear not to adequately provide a good external motivation.

If an academic's enthusiasm for teaching was to wane, then this could lead to adverse results. In particular, it was highlighted how an academic's enthusiasm was an important prerequisite for students' engagement with the learning process, as well as for the academic to address the issues and challenges that they face.

If the purpose of the systemic corporatisation of universities is to improve the quality of the outputs of the tertiary sector, then it is critical that the sector addresses the lack of appropriate and adequate recognition of good teaching. It is argued that good teaching is an essential component for universities to achieve their goal of creating and disseminating knowledge. This needs to be achieved through providing meaningful recognition of teaching through the normal means of promotion, and not just through external (and sometimes alienating) awards. Similarly, as Bexley *et al.* (2011) recently argued, good teaching needs to be recognised through the promotion process.

While some steps have been made towards these goals, the journey has only just started. Are university managers up to the challenge of implementing and seeing through to fruition the rewards for good teachers? If this is not achieved, then academics' enthusiasm towards teaching will continue to be under threat and academics risk being burnt out in their quest to be pyromaniacs for learning.

Brett Freudenberg and Lisa Samarkovski are colleagues at the Griffith Business School, Griffith University, Brisbane.

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