

Barn Raising: Fostering a Collaborative Culture to Design Curriculum in HE

This paper discusses a collaborative approach, capitalizing on the knowledge, experience, and practices of HE academics, encouraging a sense of ownership and engagement from all of the contributors.

Barn raising, describes a collective action of a community, to address a need of an individual by enlisting others to assist (traditionally in the building of their neighbours' barn), in time this favour eventually gets returned to other members of the community. This work focusses on taking a collaborative approach to designing curriculum in the higher education context, developing multi-skilled teams to work together in curriculum development. The advantages of this approach is in capacity building within academic teams and curriculum design that takes a whole of degree approach in comparison to a series of individually designed units. However this approach requires a cultural change for a lot of academics, which needs to be fostered through effective participative leadership and collegiality within the higher education context.

Good practice from across Australia show that this cultural change process has been most successfully managed when it includes: strong senior management commitment and leadership demonstrating a constant and high level drive for staff engagement until change becomes an institutional norm; developing leadership and champions to share practices and promote the benefits of the process; providing professional development opportunities to discuss and resolve tensions around change; demonstrating success and effectiveness by selling staff on the evidence that change makes a difference; and making the process inclusive with academics collaborating in the development and implementation of the process.

This presentation will explore the principles behind collaborative curriculum design providing examples of how it has been applied to strategically lead cultural change in the higher education context.

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