

Learning leadership in Higher Education – the big and small actions of many people¹

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With a focus on innovating practice, this paper details a research project which sought to understand institutional change in blended and flexible learning and distance education through stories of adaptation and leadership development at two major Higher Education distance providers, one based in Australia and the other in New Zealand. DeHub, a DEEWR funded research consortium designed to investigate best practice in distance education provided the funding and opportunity for this study. Adopting a case study approach, four strategies and eight activities implemented over the past four years (2008-2011) were considered. Cases were chosen as purposive samples and developed, in the main, with a retrospective gaze. Building upon relevant literature in the areas of leadership capacity development (Parrish & Lefoe, 2008), learning leaders (Scott, Coates & Anderson, 2008), peer learning (Boud, 1999) and communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), a 'learning leadership' frame of reference was adopted. Although designed originally as a study of distributive leadership and institutional change, the need to broaden this focus was recognised and the research question refined to ask: what do the strategies and activities designed to foster change in blended and flexible learning and distance education developed at XXXX² University (Australia) and XXXX University (New Zealand) help us to understand about learning leadership? The study was appreciative rather than evaluative and the findings and theory formation were grounded in the lived experience of institutional change. The findings offer principles for fostering learning leadership and question the contemporary sectoral emphasis on whole-of-institution approaches.

Notes:

1. The title of this paper was inspired by the thoughts of Moncrieff (1999).

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Parrish, D., Lefoe, G., Smigiel, H., & Albury, R. (2008). *The GREEN Resource: The development of leadership capacity in higher education*. Wollongong: CEDIR, University of Wollongong.

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