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EXCEPTIONAL PIONEERS:

Women in Trades, Tertiary Education, and Collaborative Research

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education (Adult Education) at Massey University, Wellington New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores women's experience in trades education in Aotearoa/New Zealand polytechnics in the late 1990s. It highlights issues, which are still affecting women in spite of discourses of equal opportunity. While looking at reasons for attrition, it also celebrates the courage and determination of women pioneers in trades and tertiary education.

Three case studies chosen from 23 research participants emphasise the issues for women in the trades and are used to develop themes for analysis. Interviews were also carried out with staff working in trades education. Current literature and three key advisors assisted in creating a wider perspective of the issues. The two researchers are central to the research process. A collaborative and feminist methodology was used to produce the thesis in a safe, productive and trusting environment, both for the researchers and the participants.

The experience of women in the trades provides a link to compare women's experience in trades education to the experience of women educators in male-dominated educational organisations. The process of collaboration is explored for its useful to this post-graduate research.

The incorporation of trades culture into tertiary education culture produced some conflicts in philosophies of education, highlighting inconsistencies in equitable practice. Women's experiences in the trades do not appear to have changed significantly in the last 20 years and centre around issues of gender, sexuality, power and culture. Their experiences represent evidence of women in tertiary education generally and the inequities that still exist. The future for women in educational organisations is dependent upon constructive achievement in the re-culturing of tertiary educational organisations to make equitable practice part of the fabric of those organisations.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND DEDICATION

We dedicate this thesis to all the exceptional pioneers who have been and who are in the trades and trades education and to the educators who have supported them. All have had to transverse boundaries of gender, culture, sexuality and power. This thesis is for all those women who stand up and make inequities visible.

To our children and our grandchildren – we have fought to make this world more inclusive of diversity, we have said what some did not want to hear, we have made visible what others would like to keep invisible and irrelevant. It has taken courage, wisdom, energy and determination to keep going when we were disillusioned and weary. This is part of your heritage. Take it and be pioneers if you will – strength to you on your journeys.

We acknowledge the courage and strength of the women participants, who allowed their stories to be told so that women’s experience in trades education does not go unheeded. We acknowledge Marg Gilling, our supervisor, who insisted we be ourselves. We acknowledge Eleanor Gully, Wendy Neale and Kim Hunt, our key advisors, who affirmed our journey and the experiences of the women participants in this research. We acknowledge our partners, Laureen Nation Plimmer and Jim Gray, for their love, understanding, patience and encouragement. We thank Tina Scott and Jill Abigail for their precision and expertise when checking our thesis and our work peers for their listening and encouragement. To Nicola Armstrong - in life and death you inspired us, and so many women to use their courage and strength to bring women’s issues to the attention of academic research.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................... ii  
Acknowledgements and Dedication ................................................................ iii  

LIST OF DIAGRAMS AND TABLES .................................................................. vi  

CHAPTER 1 ........................................................................................................ 1  
INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY .......................................................... 1  
Where It All Started ......................................................................................... 2  
A Feminist Methodology ................................................................................ 3  
Ethical Considerations ................................................................................... 4  
The research process ....................................................................................... 5  
The Thesis As It Is Today ............................................................................... 9  

CHAPTER 2 ....................................................................................................... 11  
WOMEN'S JOURNEYS IN TRADES EDUCATION .............................................. 11  
Narratives .................................................................................................... 12  
Bringing The Stories And Themes Together ................................................. 42  

CHAPTER 3 ....................................................................................................... 57  
WOMEN IN TRADES—LITERATURE SEARCH .................................................. 57  
Introduction .................................................................................................. 58  
Gender distribution of occupations ............................................................... 58  
Gender distribution of income ..................................................................... 60  
Work Environment and Equity Legislation ................................................... 62  
Women's Representation in Non-traditional Trades ....................................... 63  
Access To Apprenticeships For Women ......................................................... 64  
Reasons For Women Entering Non-Traditional Trades .................................. 66  
Barriers For Women ..................................................................................... 68  
Employment Prospects ............................................................................... 72  
Success Strategies ....................................................................................... 76  
Literature Summary ...................................................................................... 78  

CHAPTER 4 ....................................................................................................... 81  
TRADES CULTURE IN EDUCATIONAL ORGANISATIONS .......................... 81  
A Clash Of Cultures ..................................................................................... 82  
Power Relations in Trades .......................................................................... 83  
Women Entering Trades Culture ................................................................ 85  
Maori in Trades ........................................................................................... 86  
Education Culture ....................................................................................... 87
LIST OF DIAGRAMS AND TABLES

Percentage of Students Interviewed, by Year of Study .................................................. 7
Comparison of the occupational groups for full-time employed women and men . 59
Occupational groups for full-time employed women .......................................................... 59
Total Personal Income and Sex by Occupation (Full-time) ................................................ 60
Average Income By Qualification 25–34 Age Group 1999 ............................................... 62
Human Rights Chart ............................................................................................................ 102
A Women’s Culture .............................................................................................................. 108
Complexity of Power Relations for Women in Male-Dominated Culture
  Organisations .................................................................................................................... 110
The Development of Our ideas .......................................................................................... 131
Percentage Of Female Enrolments .................................................................................... 153
Information On Participants Including Course, Year And Employment ....................... 161
"Me aro ki te hā o Hine-ahu-one"¹

Pay heed to the dignity and essence of women

¹ Maori proverb cited in Ministry of Women’s Affairs, 1999.