Preparing students for gender equity in the workplace of tomorrow

THE WOMEN IN TRADES PROJECT:

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Societal and cultural perceptions were that women were not cut out for manual work – “men’s work”

She represents female empowerment – is unusual and highly visible but perhaps doesn’t want to be

Family commitments made working outside the home difficult

Gender pay gap

Viewed as an interloper into a masculine domain. Taking jobs from men – anxiety about gender roles

Faced discrimination and harassment

Brought into manual work because of a skills (man) shortage

Tradeswomen today are almost as unusual as they were in WWII – between 1 & 2 % of all tradies.

We argue that perceptions of gender roles and traditional ideas about what is socially and culturally appropriate that is responsible for the low numbers of women in the trades.

• So what exactly causes low numbers?

• And where does Vocation Education and Training fit in – including the classroom environment?

• And what factors can make a successful apprenticeship that leads to a successful take up of a trade?

Our STUDY: Women in Trades – Understanding Resilience

Cross faculty team at CSU - Donna Bridges, Branka Krivokapic-skoko, Larissa Bambery, Stacey Jenkins, Elizabeth Wulff

In-depth interviews with 15 tradeswomen
And with other 12 stakeholders including – career advisers; educators in TAFE; Group training organisations; employers

Systemic literature review

3 industry consultations in regional NSW - 60 participants
Stakeholders included: industry bodies, employers, tradeswomen, Group Training Organisations, education providers, government, council, unions

Commonly understood reasons why there are so few women in trades? **Attraction & Recruitment …**

- Socialisation
  - Sex role stereotypes drive work preferences
  - Parental resistance
  - Schools – promote university pathways, gender stereotypes/roles
  - Lack of female role models

- Employer bias - gender stereotypes/roles poor understandings of women’s capacity for the work

- Lack of understanding of career pathways in the trades, specialisations, further training …
Commonly understood reasons why there are so few women in trades? Retention…

- Culture of the industry – predominantly men (white, heterosexual – limited diversity)
- Social exclusion, discriminatory employment practices, harassment (LaTour, 2008).
- Expectations women will ‘fit in’ to the culture – to ‘toughen up’; to not take offense; not be a ‘princess’
- Lack of flexibility and work/life balance
- Spotlighting – extreme visibility of women
- Lack of mentors and role models
Where does vocational education and training fit in?

Is unique:
- Provides skills directly applicable to the labour market
- Promotes economic growth
- Accessible - reduces barriers to education
- “Superior” because it increases social inclusion (Nilsson, 2010, 251 & 252).

Is highly gendered:
- Marked gender segregation
- Very little change to no change in gender compositions of the classroom since the 1980s (Niemeyer & Colley 2015, p. 2).


Automotive industry, TAFE SA available from https://www.tafesa.edu.au/courses/mining-engineering/automotive/automotive
Therefore Vocational Education and Training …

• Contains gendered structures and dynamics
• These impact on labour force participation and the gendering of professions (Haasler & Gottschall, 2015, 78).

Therefore:
• VET provides skills and qualifications and simultaneously “functions as a means of social integration …” (Haasler & Gottschall, 2015, 81).
THEREFORE - “The focus of VET must be beyond skilling for a job (and its technical competencies) to one that encompasses ‘soft skills’ and imparts continuous learning and adapting mind sets across a lifetime career that will involve change” (Payton & Knight, 2018, p. 9).

- Communication
- Teamwork - negotiation
- Relationship management- interrelationships – cultural awareness - empathy
- Organisational awareness Social/cultural awareness
- Sociability and teaching others.
Soft skills: also called - employability, generic, transferable, or 21st century skills are vital for:

- gender equity, diversity and inclusion

‘The World Health Organization … soft skills are abilities for adaptive and constructive behavior that allow individuals to deal effectively with the challenges of life”. (Mamun, 2012, p. 327).
Cultural change? WHY?

Our research:
- Manual trade VET classrooms can be described as culturally masculine
- Female apprentices have diverse experiences and understandings of that culture
- Masculine cultures in education have been described as:
  - anti-academic
  - resistant to learning
  - “contempt for the ‘feminine’
  - glorification of ‘toughness’” (James, 1999, p. 396)

Attitudes of men toward women, constructed in the classroom, can be perpetuated in the workforce (James, 1999, p. 397).
Our research identified factors that lead to failure to join a desired profession and attrition from work and education:

- Reduced knowledge regarding legislation
- Sexism
- Discriminatory stereotypes about femininity - lesbian
- Lack of networks

Pre-apprenticeship
Societal factors: Family/School

- Parental opposition
- University
- Peer group
- Gendered expectations

Apprenticeship:
worksites
Colleagues
Contractors
supervisors

- **Sexualising
- **Lack of mentors, role models, networks
- Lack of support or intervention from teachers
- Reduced knowledge regarding equal opportunity, harassment & bullying legislation

VET - Registered Training Organisations:
Curriculum
classmates
Teachers

Fully qualified tradesperson

Masculine cultures:
- Long, inflexible hours
- Discrimination in hiring, promotion, opportunity
- **Isolation and **Visibility
- Understanding carer pathways – self efficacy

Employers:
Group Training Organisations
Business

Preparing students for gender equity
Quotes from research – positive experience of teachers & peers

Jemma (45yrs Tradeswoman for 6yrs): When I did my … apprenticeship … [the teachers] were quite accepting there was a female … they just treated you like you were just somebody else doing … based on your skills, not your gender.

Lauren (19 yrs, Apprentice in 3rd year): Boys at TAFE have told me numerous times, you’re one of us. If we say come on boys, we’re going here, you’re automatically included in that … they don’t see me as a girl per se, they see me as one of them …

Samantha (40yrs Tradeswoman for 23yrs): So I was the only woman … they were amazing. I did really well. I’m very studious, and … I was very, very lucky because the class that I got allocated into … were all older guys retraining.

Abigail (22 yrs - Apprentice 3rd year): There’s one … [swears] but the rest are really cool, they talk to me and they hang out with me which made it so much easier because if I didn’t like TAFE, it would be so much harder.
Quotes from research – sexualising women

Jemma (45yrs Tradeswoman for 6yrs): They would stand behind me and try and look down my shirt. I remember one of them making noises and you look over and he’s got his scrotum hanging out ... And I didn’t complain, because being young, stupid, immature teenagers and if they do something like that, they could have lost their jobs. All I had to do was say something and they would have been kicked out of TAFE, and it could effect the rest of their lives.

Olivia (15 yrs - Apprentice 1st year): Oh, like some real weird shit gets said, but you’ve heard it all your life. You’ve been around boys in a high school. ... They talk about your boobs, they talk about your ass, they talk about whatever there is to talk about, but you’re kind of just like yeah, funny.

Abigail (22 yrs - Apprentice 3rd year): Yeah, they’ll say something to offend you but joke about it and say we’re only joking. Yeah, they do that to me all the time.

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Quotes from research – discouraged / not supported based on gender

Holly (44yrs Tradeswoman for 5yrs): His [TAFE teacher] boss was very discouraging. Mmm. He was kind of like, you’ll be in and out in a flash. You’ll probably only do your first week and then you’ll decide it’s not your thing. You know? So he was not very forthcoming with being helpful, and I was like pulling hen’s teeth to get any information from him. Just to let him know I was actually serious. He was just treating me like people would treat women trying to get in, you’re just a gender bender, or you’ve got some aggression issue with men or you’ve got some point that you want to prove or, you know?
Quotes from research – isolation / disruption in the classroom

Holly (44yrs Tradeswoman for 5yrs): when we were at TAFE and if we broke up in groups, the boys would sort of be like, oh, I don’t want to end up with (P). Because then you’d be the special group, because then you’re the one with the special person, you know? …So I very much kept to myself and I didn’t give them too much of me either. Yeah, because it’s just safer that way.

Caitlin (19 yrs - Apprentice 1st year): Yeah, like the boys in my class always muck up, they leave and come back whenever they feel they need to. We’ll be doing a prac and they will just walk over to (P1)’s class … so they’ll go back and forth and distract each other, which isn’t very good
“Gender autonomy refers to the extent to which people, regardless of gender, are able to develop their chosen career path ... according to individual predilections, without penalty or disadvantage accruing from that choice” (Evans, 2006, 403).

Gender autonomy does not mean that “people should become more resilient and determined to succeed, while the barriers” (Evans, 2006, 403) caused by gender segregation in the workforce remain.
Women will succeed if “they have the right attitude”
Women will succeed if “they don’t be a princess”
Women will succeed if they develop a ‘thick skin’ – not being overly sensitive to swearing and jokes or unwanted sexual behaviour (Pringle & Winning, 1998)
Women will succeed if they be “one of the boys”

Gender autonomy does not mean “people should become more resilient and determined to succeed, while the barrier” caused by gender segregation remain (Evans, 2006, 403).
Support for a better experience and success: aiming pedagogy toward

- Counteract ‘tiredness’ about gender issues
- Establish networks of practitioners who are gender sensitive (Evans, 2006, 406)
- Provide mentoring by others who made an atypical choice (Evans, 2006, 403 & 404)
- Support / encourage networking with other women – peers, role models
- Make gender visible
What could support women to have a better experience and succeed

- Supporting mutuality with male teachers and peers
- Supporting the development of confidence – including bodily confidence (Smith, 2013).
- Demonstrating how pleasure in work and mastery is a point of connection between women and men (Smith, 2013).
Teaching / making visible - Providing information about, advocating for and discussing:

- Sexual harassment and bullying legislation
- Equal opportunity legislation
- ‘Ethical hiring and employment practices (IR legislation)
- Sign up for unconscious bias training
- Occupational health and safety laws
- Providing sound career advice: Encouraging further skills development
- Encouraging further training and education
Preparing students for gender equity

Women only training environments – Rommes, Faulkner & van Slooten (2005) argue that benefits include: reducing assoc between work and masculinity; increasing self esteem; positive role models

Developing ‘complementary skills’ - encouraging training is called ‘personal, social and vocational development’;

What could support women to have a better experience and succeed
References

References continued


