

Early Reflections on a Collaborative Research Project About the Safety of Rainbow Ākonga on Te Pūkenga Campuses

By Lee Smith, Helen Gremillion, Susan Beaumont, Rachael S. Burke, Fleur Kelsey, Lauren Addington and Meg Nelis

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Abstract

This paper reports on the experiences of a research team designing and beginning to implement a research project exploring how safe and inclusive the various campuses of Te Pūkenga are for Rainbow ākonga (students). As Aotearoa New Zealand's largest tertiary education provider, Te Pūkenga is bound and shaped by current anti-discrimination social policies. Under the 1993 Human Rights Act, discrimination based on gender was banned in Aotearoa. Same-sex marriage was legalised in 2013, and since 2021 people have been able to change their birth sex on official documents. In 2021, the Government also banned conversion therapy. However, despite these policies and as numerous national studies have documented, educational institutions remain hostile spaces for Rainbow ākonga. We aim to investigate ākonga and kaimahi (staff) experiences of inclusivity and discrimination across Te Pūkenga campuses. A research design was established, and we are in the process of collecting data. Because we have just begun the fieldwork at the time of this writing, we cannot discuss our findings to date. Instead, this article uses the feminist method of storytelling to explore the formation of a collaborative multi-site research team, the necessity of consulting with a Rainbow youth organisation when designing the survey, the research team's duty of care to participants, the ethics process involved in conducting a multi-site organisational study and managing 'teething problems' when the online survey went live. This paper thus reports on our experiences of overcoming hurdles associated with a multi-site research project at a time of transition into one organisation, Te Pūkenga.

Keywords: Rainbow students, inclusivity in education, tertiary education, student safety

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