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Te Hautaka Mātauranga o Waikato



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Book Review

Waring, M., & Kearins, K. (2011). *Thesis survivor stories: Practical advice on getting through your PhD or Masters thesis*. Auckland, New Zealand: AUT Media. ISBN 978-0-9582997-2-5: 240 pages.

This book was part of my summer 'holiday' reading. Some would suggest that there are nicer things to read; however this book was intrigued, insightful and thought provoking, and will be one of the books I consistently encourage post-graduate thesis candidates to engage with. The editors are to be congratulated on their ability to draw together stories that are representative of the diversity of individuals who engage in post-graduate thesis and their circumstances.

Based on the narrative accounts of 23 individuals' thesis experiences, each story tells of the insights, challenges, frustrations and achievements of the thesis journey. The nature of the writing makes the stories very easy and appealing to read, with most of the authors reflecting on their own decisions/choices while offering practical real world advice to those who are starting out or working through their own thesis. This is also demonstrated in the editors' telling of their own experience as masters and doctoral candidates. Only a couple stories were overly self-centred and offered little insight that would support others undertaking the process. The editors also provide a useful summary in the final section of the book of the practical advice given throughout the stories.

There are a few stories that I believe are worthy of special mention. Helen Tregigda's story offers useful advice about the advantages and disadvantages of continuous study, and about the thesis process more generally. In exploring the challenging of negotiating, refining and settling on a research question, Greg Coyle, highlights a problem I believe frustrates and tests most thesis students. In doing so he offers the reassurance that multiple iterations are necessary before you know what your research question really is, and that it is indeed part of the process. Belinda Luke offers broad insights about publishing as you go, establishing the writing and feedback cycle and keeping things in perspective. Her practical tips on managing the process provide a useful starting point for all thesis students in need of systems to help them start and finish the project. I found Julienne Molineaux's personal account of managing full-time work and a PhD very honest and refreshing. It is the story I will share with colleagues and students who seem to always find some other priority that takes them away from their thesis. The realistic and practical strategies Julienne used to finish her thesis provide useful and thought-provoking guidance to support the student who is 'stuck' to move forward. Michelle Schaaf offers some very useful and survival tips for the PhD candidate. Nicky Black's story, titled *The nine myths of the doctorate: A beautiful*



conspiracy, is beautifully written and very much emphasises the apprenticeship that is the thesis experience.

As I read through the book it quickly became apparent that it would make an outstanding text for any student considering undertaking a thesis. Each story is unique, and as a result offers the reader/student the opportunity to determine which gems they will take away, adopt and adapt. In addition, as a supervisor of post-graduate thesis students, I quickly started to make note of different stories for my own students, identifying which would best support them with some of the challenges they are currently grappling with.

The usefulness in the book lies in the practical advice evidenced through the voices of the writers as they reflect on their personal journeys through the thesis process. Marilyn Waring and Kate Kearins are to be commended on their ability to support emerging/experienced academics to publish, and on developing a book that provides a unique and useful account of how to complete a thesis.

Kirsten Petrie

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