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Who Cares?
Accountability for public safety in nurse education.

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**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
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ABSTRACT

Nursing students assessed as being unsafe by nurse educators present specific challenges in tertiary education organisations. Nurse educators and education administrators are required by law to respect the rights of students to receive education, if it is deemed they will benefit from it. As registered nurses, nurse educators are also required by law to protect the public from unsafe nursing practice. The focus of this study is the management of unsafe nursing students within the tertiary education context. The moral dilemmas experienced by nurse educators, specifically linked to the issue of accountability for public safety, are explored.

The theoretical framework for the thesis is informed by the two moral voices of justice and care identified by Gilligan and further developed using the work of Hekman and Lyotard. Case study methodology was used and data were collected from three schools of nursing and their respective educational organisations. Interviews were conducted with nurse educators and education administrators who had managed unsafe nursing students. Interviews were also conducted with representatives from the Nursing Council of New Zealand and the New Zealand Nurses Organisation to gain professional perspectives regarding public safety, nurse education and unsafe students. Transcripts were analysed using the strategies of categorical aggregation and direct interpretation. Issues identified in each of the three case studies were examined using philosophical and theoretical analyses.

This thesis explores how students come to be identified as unsafe and the challenges this posed within three educational contexts. The justice and care moral voices of nurse educators and administrators and the ways in which these produced different ways of caring are made visible. Different competing and conflicting discourses of nursing and education are revealed, including the discourse of safety - one of the language games of nursing. The way in which participants positioned themselves and positioned others within these discourses are identified.

Overall, education administrators considered accountability for public safety to be a specific professional, nursing responsibility and not a concern of education per se. This thesis provides an account of how nurse educators attempted to make the educational world safe for patients, students, and themselves. Participants experienced different tensions and moral dilemmas in the management of unsafe students, depending upon the moral language games they employed and the dominant discourse of the educational organisation. Nurse educators were expected to use the discourses of education to make their case and manage unsafe students. However, the discourses of nursing and education were found to be incommensurable and so the moral dilemmas experienced by nurse educators were detected as differends. This study bears witness to these differends.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
TABLE OF FIGURES.....	viii
TABLE OF CASES.....	ix
CHAPTER ONE IDENTIFYING THE DILEMMA.....	1
CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW.....	11
Nursing, Caring and Ethics.....	11
Nursing and Moral Agency.....	14
Nursing and Managerialism.....	18
Public Safety.....	23
Managing Failing Students.....	27
The Tertiary Education Sector.....	37
Nurse Education in the Tertiary Sector.....	43
Accountability for Public Safety.....	46
Summary.....	49
CHAPTER THREE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	52
Different Voices.....	52
Moral Voices and Moral Selves.....	67
Postmodernism, Lyotard and the Differend.....	74
Towards a Synthesis.....	80
Summary.....	84
CHAPTER FOUR METHODOLOGY.....	86
The Researcher.....	86
Interpretive Paradigms.....	87
Research Strategies.....	89
Methods of Data Collection and Analysis.....	98
The Art, Practices, and Politics of Interpretation and Presentation.....	100
Key Assumptions and Limitations.....	105
CHAPTER FIVE UNSAFE BEHAVIOUR AND UNSAFE STUDENTS.....	107
Presentation of Findings.....	107
Outline of Three Educational Organisations.....	109
Three Case Studies.....	109
Unsafe Behaviour.....	113
Unsafe Students.....	114
Lack of Insight.....	123
The Bottom Line and Gut Feelings.....	125
Moral Voices.....	129

Moral Selves and Moral Language Games.....	130
The Discourse of Safety.....	131
Summary.....	133
CHAPTER SIX CASE A.....	136
Managing the Case.....	136
Making the Case	137
The Tyranny of Kindness	142
Special Circumstances – Special Treatment.....	144
Due Process.....	146
Being Burnt, Passing the Buck and Covering Your Butt	147
Decision-Making	150
Two Hats – Nursing and Education.....	155
Moral Voices.....	160
Moral Selves and Moral Language Games.....	162
Summary.....	164
CHAPTER SEVEN CASE B	166
Managing the Case.....	166
Making the Case	167
Not Using the ‘F’ Word.....	172
Decision-Making	177
Making the Hard Calls, Being Tough and Not Going Soft	178
Two Hats - Nursing and Education.....	182
Signing-off.....	187
Moral Voices.....	190
Moral Selves and Moral Language Games.....	192
Summary.....	194
CHAPTER EIGHT CASE C	196
Managing the Case.....	196
Organisational Policy.....	197
Failing Processes and Responsibilities	205
Making the Case	211
Decision-Making	214
Team Support and Organisational Support.....	214
Two Hats - Nursing and Education.....	224
Moral Voices and Moral Selves.....	227
Moral Language Games.....	229
Summary.....	230
CHAPTER NINE LOCATING ACCOUNTABILITY	232

Statutory Discourses - Education Act and Nurses Act	232
Accountability: Education and Nursing.....	239
Safety Strategies	244
Summary	246
CHAPTER TEN CONCLUSION.....	249
Justice and Care: Do you want to be right or do you want to be kind?	249
Recommendations.....	253
Concluding Comments	256
Appendix A.....	258
Appendix B	259
Appendix C	260
Appendix D.....	261
Appendix E	265
Appendix F	266
REFERENCES	267

TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1	Conceptual Framework.....	92
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TABLE OF CASES

Malster vs Manakau Polytechnic, High Court of New Zealand, Auckland Registry,
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