



## Rae Munro Award 2012

Lara Sanderson

Lara Sanderson is the recipient of the 2012 Rae Munro Award for an excellent Masters-level thesis that has implications for teacher education and classroom practice. Titled *"I Learn Stuff": An Ethnographic Case Study of Disabled Senior Secondary Students' School Experiences*, her thesis makes an outstanding contribution to New Zealand's evidence-base of education and disability research.

Lara documented and conceptualised the schooling experiences of four disabled female senior secondary school students over the course of two school terms. These students shared their experiences of social interactions, which included peer-, teacher aide-, and teacher-relationships, as well as their physical encounters with building and classroom access and use. These experiences prompted Lara to explore the many "barriers to doing" and "barriers to being" that disabled students face as they negotiate the complex relationships within the classroom. Not only does her thesis raise issues of human rights and agency for disabled students but it also provides evocative details of how disabled students are able to participate in the complex social environments of school. The wealth of data she was able to obtain is a testimony to the careful, rigorous, and systematic research she conducted, enabling the students' voices to be heard. These voices highlight aspects of students' schooling experiences that address the concepts of inclusion, exclusion, identity, and aspiration.

Her thesis has implications for teaching and classroom practice, exemplified by the central importance of relationships. As a consequence of this research educators are reminded of the need to engage *all* students in the classroom environment and learning processes, and that the relationships students build are crucial to their participation within the classroom. The research also encourages educators to support colleagues who strive to make their classrooms inclusive by being open to their colleagues' initiatives and willing to learn from their example.

Lara is continuing with her focus on disability research as a confirmed doctoral candidate at the University of Otago College of Education, by extending her inquiry to include the experiences of secondary school teachers with impairments and/or chronic illness.

Lara's dissertation is a fine example of the high quality inquiry expected of the recipient of the Rae Munro Award, 2012.