

NEW ZEALAND ASSOCIATION FOR RESEARCH IN EDUCATION

TE HUNGA RANGAHAU MĀTAURANGA O AOTEAROA

# Sutton-Smith Award 2010

*The thesis is titled: Different Ways of Knowing? Understanding Disabled Students' and Teacher Aides' School Experiences within a Context of Relational Social Justice*

*Dr Rutherford was awarded her PhD with Distinction*

Dr. Rutherford's thesis addresses an area of critical importance to education in New Zealand, for which there is scant research. It examined how disabled students work with teacher aides, a sensitive topic that Dr. Rutherford handled with thoughtfulness and care for all concerned, while simultaneously challenging the reader to respond to the conclusion that reform is needed to benefit not only disabled students, but all students and teachers in inclusive classrooms. In fact, its findings provide a sound basis for such changes in policy and practice that will improve the educational system in New Zealand.

One of the striking features of Dr. Rutherford's thesis is its readability. The clear organisation and writing style make the thesis easy to read and understand. This is not easy to do, yet so effective when done properly, as it is here. As one of the examiners observed, she was "... happy to finally find a typographical error on page 91!" From the first chapter, the reader is caught up, concerned with the topic and eager to learn the outcomes. Additionally, the argument for the study is built with care and on a solid theoretical framework.

In terms of the research design, Dr. Rutherford presents an excellent justification for the use of the qualitative interpretivist paradigm. She takes this cutting-edge methodology to new heights, through her insightful and gently conducted interviews. The thesis literally comes alive with the voices of the participants, making the results and conclusions more authentic and poignant than they would have been in less skilled hands. By the end of the thesis, the implications for the education and the social development of disabled children are transparent, and promise to result in truly inclusive classrooms that encourage excellence for all children, not just those who are disabled with teacher aides. All that remains for sensible educators and policy makers is to do what Dr. Rutherford defines as needing to be done.



**Dr. Gill Rutherford**