

# NEW ZEALAND ASSOCIATION FOR RESEARCH IN EDUCATION

## TE HUNGA RANGAHAU MĀTAURANGA O AOTEAROA

# Rae Munro Award

**Thesis Title:** *Un/silencing lesbian and bisexual students:  
Some women's experiences of how high schools met their needs.*

The recipient of the 2006 Rae Munro Award, for an excellent master's thesis with implications for New Zealand teacher education or classroom practice, is Lee Smith from the University of Otago. Lee's thesis is titled *Un/silencing lesbian and bisexual students: Some women's experiences of how high schools met their needs*. Lee's research has direct implications for teacher education and classroom practice. As noted by one of the examiners, the final chapter in particular "really portrays the sense of the research project as a work of praxis", or an example of a synthesis of theory and practice.

In her thesis research, Lee conducted individual and focus group interviews with six young lesbian/bisexual women to explore their experiences of being other than heterosexual in a New Zealand secondary school. She used aspects of queer theory and poststructural theory to examine how discourses of lesbianism/bisexuality and lesbian/bisexual subjectivities were made available within the official school context, how discourses of lesbianism/bisexuality were policed, and how compulsory heterosexuality was enforced in the participants' peer groups. Lee found that discourses of lesbianism/bisexuality were policed and silenced in the heteronormative learning environment, and that although lesbianism was occasionally mentioned in class, it was rarely discussed by teachers. The thesis concludes by examining recommendations for change made by the participants, alongside recommendations from the literature on queer pedagogy. Lee's thesis provides a powerful research base for discussion and action among teacher educators and teachers via the documentation of the lesbian/bisexual students' experiences, coupled with practical strategies which schools and teachers can implement.

As noted by one of her examiners, this area of research "is significant given the issues that many lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered youth face continue to [be] negotiate[d] within the predominantly heteronormative culture of New Zealand schools". This Masters thesis "provides a contemporary picture of the experiences of lesbian and bisexual students in schools, and builds on and elaborates previous research undertaken in this area". Both examiners praised Lee's work for her "careful, considered... [and] complex analysis" as well as its "thorough [and] thoughtful" findings. One of the examiners concluded that this "thesis offers a real contribution to the literature on young people's sexuality in New Zealand".

It is with pleasure that the New Zealand Association for Research in Education confers on Lee Smith its 2006 Rae Munro Award.



Lee Smith