



## Rae Munro Award 2013

*Maria Cooper*

This study is an outstanding example of high quality research, theorising and writing. Maria Cooper chose an under-researched pedagogical arena, that of infant and toddler care and education. She explored tensions in philosophy and practice that emanate from the co-existence of two different curriculum philosophies. One is a specialist infant and toddler philosophy that is favoured by many New Zealand early childhood services, Magda Gerber's (1979) Resources for Infant Educators (RIE), and the other is the sociocultural, bicultural New Zealand early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa* (1996).

An interpretive, qualitative, case study methodology was employed to gather data from semi-structured interviews with five teachers, a range of centre documentation, and researcher field notes. Adopting Claxton and Carr's (2004) socio-cultural notion of a potentiating environment to inform the thematic analysis, Maria was able to identify that reliance on the infant and toddler philosophy (RIE) influenced teachers' assessment processes, and in particular their selection of learning dispositions. Furthermore, the individualistic model of assessment promoted by RIE was not consistent with the inclusion of families in assessing learning dispositions, in contrast to the expectations of the early childhood curriculum *Te Whāriki*.

Whilst highly relevant to the early childhood sector, the implications of this thesis reach much wider, to any context in which diverse approaches to curriculum philosophies co-exist. Maria's study has implications for the ways in which the teacher education sector prepares students to rigorously critique curriculum philosophies, and to develop skills to negotiate common understandings with parents and whānau around learning disposition aspirations. Maria is to be commended for her meticulous survey of relevant literature; sensitive fieldwork in an early childhood setting with teachers of birth to three year olds; and systematic documentation and analysis of findings, which went well beyond the usual expectations for master's level research. Maria has already begun disseminating these findings through presentations and publications.

She is a worthy recipient of the Rae Munro Award 2013.