ALEA Doctoral Thesis Award 2016 – Winner

Dr Lucinda McKnight

Institution: Deakin University

Supervisors: Dr Joanne O’Mara; Dr Claire Charles

Thesis Title: The Glitterbomb: Designing Curriculum and Identity with Girls’ Popular Culture

Thesis Citation: This thesis contributes to the fields of gender and English education through an empirical account of how female teachers design curriculum around girls’ popular culture in a contemporary coeducational secondary setting. The research focuses on school-based curriculum planning, an aspect of teachers’ work that takes place outside the classroom. This project enables the expansion of the design space in the search for an absent subject – the teacher – marginalised in discourses of neoliberal curriculum. In this collaborative project, completed in 2012–2013, the researcher and teachers at a school near Melbourne set out to design a unit of work on girls’ digital popular culture. In contemporary neoliberal discourses and policy documents such as the Australian Curriculum: English, curriculum is depicted as the anonymous, rational articulation of aims and pedagogy to achieve outcomes. In contrast, the study views the formulation of curriculum from the standpoint of teachers involved in the everyday work of preparing lessons. This highlights the way curriculum emerges from struggle as teachers, and the researcher, seek to produce and perform both individual gendered identities and plans for the identities of student subjects, while negotiating subject positions made available to girls and women in broader social contexts. The link between the personal and political is created by a methodology combining narrative inquiry and discourse analysis. The thesis itself becomes a heteroglossic text, invoking centripetal and centrifugal forces, with extracts from memory and popular culture resonating with and against the more unified voices of other chapters, realising creative ways to write and think about curriculum design. The study also claims the space of school-based curriculum design as a site for reflexivity around textual stability; this is a space under threat as curriculum becomes more centralised, and teachers are re-imagined as deliverers of mandated curriculum rather than locally situated expert designers.