

How toddlers make friends

Early education studies



DOCTORALSCHOLARSHIP: Bryndis Gunnarsdottir.

Photo: SUPPLIED

New Zealand's reputation as a world leader in early childhood research and practice spurred Icelander Bryndis Gunnarsdottir to apply for a doctoral scholarship at the University of Waikato. Gunnarsdottir is the recipient of the Wilf Malcolm Institute of Educational Research (WMIER) threeyear doctoral scholarship worth \$22,000 a year plus fees. She'll be based in the faculty of education at Waikato which has a long-held reputation for quality early years research. Her research focuses on toddlers' socialising and how teachers in early learning centres might assist or inhibit aspects of friendship. She will also study the influences of curriculum and day to day routines on toddlers' social development. Gunnarsdottir's two bachelors degrees are in English language and literature, and preschool teacher education, and she has an international MA in early childhood education and care which she undertook in Oslo, Dublin and Malta. "It was while I was doing my masters that I met associate professor Sally Peters from Waikato, she was one of my lecturers in Malta, and she encouraged me to apply for the WMIER scholarship." Gunnarsdottir became involved in early years education by chance. "I returned home from doing my first BA and needed a job. Our village in Iceland didn't have a lot of choice and I ended up teaching at a playcentre. I'd found my calling and a few years later got my second bachelor degree as a preschool teacher." She said research showed children with good social relationships are generally more confident and happy, even at toddler age. "Knowing how to interact helps them to adapt and helps their social confidence, which is known to advance academic learning." Gunnarsdottir's doctoral research will take her to different types of learning centres and as well as observing children's interactions, she plans to hold focus groups with teachers. "I am looking at toddler friendship, how the power dynamics within early years' settings impacts young children and how these issues are reflected in the curriculum and teachers' views and actions in the daily workings of the settings." Gunnarsdottir's scholarship is one of seven awarded to students undertaking doctoral research with one of the University of Waikato's six research institutes.