



The Rotorua project

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Melinda's Rotorua tribal research project is all about flipping the coin.

"Stop looking at the deficit stuff. Start looking at the good stuff that whanau are doing, focusing on that. We know enough about what doesn't work. We don't know enough about what does work."

This is what's driving this project which is looking at Māori student success in Rotorua.

Melinda and her team have just finished the pilot and the next part is to get all of the high schools in the district to participate.

Tribal support

"It'll be a very big tribally supported and funded project looking at all the contributors to Rotorua Māori student success."

It's a focus on the positive, rather than the negative.

"My personal contribution and interest is in the identity stuff. So, you ask: how has Māori knowledge and identity assisted you here?"

Students of other ethnic groups aren't excluded. Melinda wants to know what has strengthened students across all groups.

She already has an idea about this.

Multiple, positive identities

"One of the things I think we'll find – and we found it in the pilot – is that Māori students who are successful have multiple positive identities, who are positive in who they are as Māori, who also belong in other networks and other worlds as well.

"This means they are legitimate members of all of these different groups and networks. They're more likely to be successful at school than anyone else.

Students who just see themselves as Māori and nothing else probably won't have the same success.

"You know, if they go to school and suddenly their mates from the Māori club reject them, they have nothing else to fall back on, so they disengage. It's just too hard to come to school if you've got no mates."

Encouraging Māori to join in

Melinda says the findings from the pilot show we need to encourage Māori kids to participate in a whole range of different stuff.

"Being Māori is a key one, the Māori world, because it gives you a sense of belonging and place, but our students talked about 'I'm the leader of the kapa haka group, I play netball, I'm in the gifted class.'

"In other words, 'I'm a legitimate member of all these groups and I have

friends and networks and I've learnt the different discourses for all of those groups. I can interact in multiple contexts."

Living in many worlds

"That fascinates me. It's kind of moving beyond the racial identity to the multiple identities, living in

many worlds. These are the buffers to the negative stuff."

And this has prompted Melinda to think about the research project after this.

"Looking at successful kids and saying, 'Right, now be explicit, what worlds do you belong to, what

networks do you belong to and how do they help make you strong and the person you are?'"

She's looking to this project in Rotorua as well, "because that's my place".

From this work she's hoping to develop a model or theory that can be used in other places.