

Transformed by Diversity

With diversity increasing across our society, Dr Chris Jansen explores the importance of being open and willing to learn from our encounters with others.

DIVERSITY IS INCREASING

across our society and within our schools with many rangatahi (teenagers) identifying with communities that have diverse cultures, beliefs, preferences and identities that differ from the majority community.

There are a range of possible responses to these diverse identities. At worst, this involves exclusion where rangatahi from these groups are marginalised and subjected to openly abusive behaviours – ‘you are different to us ... you are not welcome here’ or ‘you have a problem, it’s not me’. Another possible response is inclusion, where the majority culture says ‘you are welcome here so long as you become like us’. Multiple research studies have identified that rangatahi from minority cultures often feel they need to ‘leave their culture at the school gate’. The school may also seek to accommodate diversity by adapting a system that is already working for the majority or celebrating diversity, where different cultures and identities are able to express their beliefs.

However, another unique option exists – where the majority culture is altered by their encounter with diverse individuals and communities: ‘I see you have something to teach me about what it means to be in this world’. This response requires humility, openness to learn and is the deep critical consciousness work that both individuals and society are invited to participate in.

Leadership Lab’s Puāwai has

a focus on growing identity and confidence in Māori, Pasifika, Rainbow, Disability, Muslim and Care-experienced rangatahi. Through exploring the whakatauki ‘Poipoia te kākano kia puāwai ... nurture the seed and it will blossom’ rangatahi are encouraged to share a ‘window to their world’ leading to validation and the realisation that many identities overlap or are intersectional. Rangatahi are empowered to share their stories with wider society – for example, one group of rangatahi have designed a resource for teachers to connect with diverse students in their classes and empower them to speak to their needs and be part of finding their own solutions.

In the publication ‘Ko tātou tēnei – This is us’ educators Lex Davis and Josh Hough share the voices of ‘Māori rangatahi takatāpui’ – young people who identify with both the Māori and Rainbow communities. Their rangahau (research) aims to bring a voice to a group that is oppressed and marginalised in multiple ways and they wish to empower rangatahi takatāpui by presenting pūrākau (stories) which clearly shift the conversation from negativity to positivity.

Perhaps we can all consider where we encounter the opportunity to say, ‘I see you have something to teach me about what it means to be in this world.’ What worldview do we want our children to adopt towards diversity? ●

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