



**M**āori under-achievement has long been a source of controversy and has generated many different approaches to both understanding and addressing the issue. Now a group of academics is taking a slightly different approach to the problem. Instead of looking at the reasons for under-achievement, they are trying to isolate the factors that characterise successful Māori students.

Working in partnership with their tribe, Ngāti Whakaue of Te Arawa, and Western Heights High School in Rotorua, the four

researchers last year completed a very modest pilot study involving a handful of successful Māori secondary school students.

Professor of Māori research at the University of Canterbury, Angus Macfarlane, is happy to share the findings from the pilot research, though he stresses that a much larger study is needed to provide definitive results.

He says the researchers wanted to find out what it was that enabled some Māori to be resilient, motivated, self-regulated learners and why some Māori students realised their



potential while others languished. Important in this was the ability to achieve scholastic success without compromising one's Māori identity and whether this was something successful Māori students demonstrated.

They asked Western Heights to identify

six successful Māori students whom the researchers could study. The early indications from the pilot study are that successful Māori students are positively influenced by whānau-specific, teacher-specific and learner-specific factors.

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### **Education Review looks at a new study that focuses on the characteristics of successful Māori secondary school students**

He notes that the students and their parents all valued education, seeing schools as an avenue that would provide them with choices in future.

Teacher support was also important, with teachers ensuring students stayed on track and also having high expectations for the students.

Macfarlane says the students in the pilot study all praised their school for the range of

programmes it provided.

As for the students themselves, Macfarlane says it was notable that their parents said they had developed a strong work ethic from their early days at school. As a result they were self-motivated and confident.

He says the students were also risk-takers, happy to give things a go and take on new challenges.

He notes that while some of the factors of Māori student success might be true of all successful students, there are several clear points of difference related to whānau, teachers and students. For teachers these included familiarity with and recognition of Māori culture. They do not need to be Māori, but they tend to be visible in the Māori community, know some of the Māori language and are conversant with it.

Perhaps most important of all, the students identified strongly with their Māori culture, Macfarlane says. This goes to the heart of Māori aspirations for success without compromising Māori identity.

Macfarlane notes the work of Māori academic Mason Durie, who encapsulated the following core goals for Māori – to live as Māori, to be global citizens, and to enjoy good health. "With these kids who seemed to be successful, they were that," he says. "They lived as Māori, they did that global identity as well, and they seemed to be in good shape."

The real trick of course, will be to extend that model as far as humanly possible. ■

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