

Leaning into difficult conversations



VOICES

Deb Mitchell

Tena koutou katoa
Ko Putauaki toku maunga
Ko Rangitikei toku awa
Ko Mātaatua toku waka
Ko Ngāti Awa toku iwi
Ko Deborah ahaup

I graduated with my teaching degree in 2003. I currently teach a Y0-2 class at a small rural school outside of Rotorua, and I am our Kāhui Ako Across School Lead Teacher.

The above pepeha is through my mother's line. My father was of English/Scottish heritage. I grew up being called a "half-caste". I came to understand that this meant I wasn't 'fully Māori' or 'fully Pākehā'. I went to primary school in Mount Albert, and I remember friends from a variety of nationalities (Phillipino, Malaysian, Pasifika, Māori, Pākehā). My high school experience was a little less diverse, but overall I was fortunate to not experience (or certainly not remember) any explicit examples of racism.

My schooling experience generally was a positive memory. It wasn't until I went to teacher's college, that I first heard the term 'institutional racism', and I began to compare and contrast my formative and schooling experiences with those of my peers.

I quickly came to learn about how culture, ethnicity and socio-economic differences are played out for individuals and whānau, within the capital of schools.

I reflected on not only my experiences, but my mother's too, who was one of the last students of the 'Native Schooling' scheme.

I came to deeply understand the role I had as a teacher to empower the capital each of my student's bring to the classroom, and to be aware, open and reflective on how my own biases, experiences, privileges and assumptions could become a barrier to that empowerment.

Unteach Racism is a fantastic tool that provides a guided module format to dig into these barriers in a safe and non-threatening manner. I value how the modules are supported with robust evidence and considerations. I have been working through these with colleagues at my school, and find the interactive and reflective tools a great way to guide discussions and lean into difficult conversations in a respectful but honest manner. I am now looking for opportunities to extend this mahi to the kaiako in our Kāhui Ako, as a means by which to spread the 'Unteach' message and enlighten our practices as teachers even further.

Tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tatou katoa.