

RAIHA JOHNSON

IWI: TE RARAWA / NGĀPUHI

BACHELOR OF EDUCATION – MAJOR: MĀORI – BILINGUAL TEACHING

At 24, Raiha Johnson became motivated to train as a bilingual primary school teacher after completing, what was for her, a refresher course in Te Reo Māori.

"I love learning Te Reo and realised that many of the adults in my class had missed out on this opportunity when they were young. I decided then I wanted to introduce Te Reo and Tikanga Māori to children at a young age."

Raiha studied at the College of Education's campus in Southland. "The course was amazing. We were like one big whānau, tutors and students. It was a really close-knit team. I learnt about the Māori curriculum and how to incorporate Māori into mainstream curriculum and I learnt a lot about myself. The teaching component was excellent and so thorough, by the time I went teaching I felt I was ready."

Now a third year teacher at Waverley Park School in Invercargill, Raiha teaches Years 5 and 6 students: 40 per cent of her class are Māori.

"You can see their eyes light up when their own life experiences are acknowledged. It's fantastic making those connections."

Raiha started a kapa haka group at the school. There were 16 children in the group, although Raiha says only 10 of them really wanted to be there. Three years later when her kapa haka group took the stage at the Polynesian festival in Invercargill they were 120 strong – half of the entire school!

It's grown into a large whānau with great teacher and parent support. Raiha encouraged children without Māori heritage to join and found that those who were Māori had initially been embarrassed about joining because of their own lack of knowledge.

"I like to think I am planting a seed. Māori children can be proud to be Māori and know they have a right to learn about their own language and culture. And what I see from all children is more acceptance and respect for another culture. Now we have a Pasifika cultural group. It's okay to acknowledge who you are. We are building better adults.

"It is making a difference however small. I feel my journey has only just begun."

