

Challenging lad

By Hiria Rakete

FACES OF ROTORUA



Eleven-year old, Leonard Weneti would give school up any day to devote his time to Maoritanga.

Since attending special Maori development and discipline courses on Mokoia Island Leonard has come to respect Maori ways as well as understanding the pakeha expectations.

At school, they teach you, but they don't listen, said Leonard. This is one reason why he prefers learning about Maori weaponry than going to school.

"We learned to use the taiaha, patu, mere and even how to do a wero. If we were naughty, Uncle Mita would use the manuka stick on us," he smiled shyly.

Mita Mohi, a community officer for the Maori Affairs Department, has great confidence in Leonard.

"Leonard was a real problem child at school," he said. However, when it comes to Maoritanga, Leonard is a 'whiz kid'.

This definitely shows in Leonard as a potential leader amongst other children his own age. Many of his friends are involved, with him, in the Ngongotaha Primary School Maori culture group.

Leonard said his parents didn't mind him taking his school holidays on Mokoia Island with the 116-strong team of other boys around the same age.

But does Leonard think his knowledge will have much value in the future.

"I'm not sure, he said, but I'm just happy the way I am now."