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On the Fringes:
Identity development for taitamāhine Māori in one secondary kura
auraki

A thesis
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Abstract

Despite Aotearoa NZ's progress in the last 50 years towards enacting Te Tiriti o Waitangi and realising educational success for Māori as Māori, remnants of colonial ideologies remain in educational structures, systems, pedagogies and curriculums. The intergenerational cultural degradation that Māori have experienced through 200 years of racialised and assimilative educational policies are being exacerbated through the current government's educational reforms. This research shows that educators and schools have the power to and must pushback against the government's systemic attacks on the mana of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Māori identity.

The strength of this thesis lies in the voices of the participants; the students, their mothers and teachers, which are presented through collaborative stories. Together they illustrate the barriers to positive tribal identity development for taitamāhine Māori as being cultural essentialism, racial micro and macroaggressions, and teachers not taking full agency to address these. The enablers to positive Māori tribal identity are identified as unfettered support and access to te ao and mātauranga Māori, positive peer recognition as Māori, culturally safe and responsive learning environments, and the conscientisation and agentic discursive (re)positioning of teachers to become agents of change.

This thesis uses a metaphor of weaving to illustrate how a kākahu or cloak of self-sustaining positive tribal identity for taitamāhine Māori can be nurtured and woven through secondary education. When school leaders and educators power-share with Māori and listen to the voices of whānau, hapū, iwi, and work with Māori institutions and organisations within the framework of Ka Hikitia – Ka Hāpaitia, they can support the tribal identity of taitamāhine Māori to flourish. While this research focusses on experiences in one urban single-sex girl's secondary kura auraki, the findings have implications for all schools and educators committed to addressing inequity in education.

Dedication

"Ko te korowai mātauraka ō tātou tīpuna."

The cloak of education/knowledge bestowed upon us by our ancestors.

For my *hākui* (Kāi Tahu dialect for mother, aunts, grandmothers).

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I acknowledge ngā atua wāhine and tāne who I have attempted to honour in this thesis.

May your wisdom and power sustain us all.

I acknowledge my beautiful tīpuna. Thank you for continuing to educate and nurture me.

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To the taitamāhine and their hākui whose powerful, vibrant and articulate voices shaped this research. Your honesty, bravery, resilience, integrity and mana leave me in awe. Thank you for sharing your voice. It matters and it is heard.

Thank you to the kaiako, for your criticality, resilience and resolve in choosing to engage with this research. I hope these findings provide answers to questions you have held, and encouragement for the journey ahead.

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Chapter 1: Conceptualising a Kāhahu of Identity

Introduction

The purpose of this research is firstly, to provide findings that will support the school involved in this research to understand the complexities of identity development for *taitamāhine Māori* (Māori girls on the fringes of womanhood) and the role of educators to support its positive development. The second purpose is to support the positive Māori identity formation of the student participants through the research process. My hope is that the research findings will contribute to the body of literature on identity development for Māori students within secondary *kura auraki*.

Ka Hikitia

The aim of Ka Hikitia - Ka Hāpaitia (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2020) of Māori enjoying and achieving educational success as Māori, is built on aspirations and implications (MoE, 2013) that all those who identify as Māori can enjoy and achieve educational success as Māori. However, this may not be the case when students are not recognised as Māori because of the way they look, or when their knowledge of their ancestry and Indigenous languages, histories and world views have been removed from them through assimilatory schooling and education practices. I have conducted culturally responsive research with *taitamāhine Māori* to understand their experiences of identity formation as Māori in a contemporary *kura auraki* (English medium education) secondary school. This was in response to an observation I have made from working in secondary education; at the end of Year 12 and 13 not all students who identify as Māori leave school with a strong sense of identity as Māori. Durie (2003) argues that if after 12 years of formal education, Māori do not have the knowledge and skills to engage in the Māori world as Māori individuals, by having opportunities to learn about and enhance their identity, then schooling has failed. Therefore, while Māori students may be achieving academically at *kura auraki* not all are achieving educational success as Māori.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi

Our nation has two treaties, Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Te Tiriti) in *te reo Māori* (the Māori language) and The Treaty of Waitangi (The Treaty) in English. Most Māori tribal leaders who signed, signed Te Tiriti o Waitangi (1840) and a few signed The Treaty of Waitangi. They did

so in good faith as a covenant between the Crown and the Chiefs of the tribes of Aotearoa New Zealand. These two texts are distinct, therefore in this thesis I will refer to each by their respective names. As a bi-cultural nation our country has two commonly used names, Aotearoa and New Zealand, which I will refer to as Aotearoa-NZ.

When discussing Te Tiriti o Waitangi, it is essential to understand this document in relation to *He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tirenī*, known as The Declaration of Independence of the United Tribes of New Zealand and referred to as He Whakaputanga (1835), signed by Northern chiefs. He Whakaputanga, which was acknowledged by the British declared that Māori tribal leaders hold authority and sovereign power over their lands. These two documents are widely considered to be the foundational documents of Aotearoa-NZ. Under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Māori maintained *rangatiratanga* (sovereignty and absolute authority) over their lands and *taonga* (treasures) and gave the British Crown the right of *kawanatanga* (governance) (Waitangi Tribunal, 2014). However, it is important to note that “while the Treaty is widely seen as a constitutional document, its status in New Zealand law is less than settled. At the moment, Treaty rights can only be enforced in a court of law when a statute or an Act explicitly refers to the Treaty” (New Zealand Government, 2025b, para. 1). In 2020 the Government introduced The Education and Training Act 2020 which required school boards to give effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi (New Zealand Government, 2025a). This change led to school boards, leaders and teachers actively engaging with understanding what good treaty partnerships look like, deepening understanding on the importance of cultural relationships for responsive pedagogy, an embracing of *mātauranga Māori* (knowledge from a Māori worldview) and local histories into the curriculum. Te reo Māori classes became oversubscribed as Māori and non-Māori alike took up the language, the Aotearoa-NZ History curriculum was released, and finally it felt as though as a country we had grown-up and were ready to honestly face our bicultural past and proactively make right for the future.

Current Political Climate and the effects in Education

Since the inception of this thesis the political and educational landscape has changed dramatically in Aotearoa-NZ. As I will discuss later, the National led coalition government formed in 2023 wasted no time in establishing itself as anti-Treaty. Three observations I have made in relation to this on my research are:

- a destabilising effect for those in education (with teachers, students, and parents commenting on it).
- uncertainty amongst teachers about their role in supporting identity formation of Māori students.
- Māori students and parents noting concern around the safety of being Māori.

ACT, one of the three coalition partners' divisive Treaty Principals Bill was voted down in the house and was vehemently rejected by the public of Aotearoa-NZ (Bailey-McDowell, 2025a; Finlayson, 2025; Iwi Chairs Forum, 2024). However, despite this, the National led Government went ahead and repealed Section 127(1)(d) of the Education and Training Act 2020, removing the "explicit obligation on school boards to give effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi" (MoE, 2025). Understandably, the undermining of public voice didn't go unnoticed and led to an outcry across the education sector (Gerritsen, 2025). These actions to undo the good work that has collectively been achieved over the last 50 years in education to honour and enact Te Tiriti o Waitangi do not sit alone but rather amongst an arsenal of attacks the current Government has unleashed to undermine and diminish the *tino rangatiratanga* (self-determination, sovereignty, autonomy, absolute authority) of their treaty partners, Māori. The Aotearoa Independent Monitoring Mechanism stated that Aotearoa-NZ has "the most overtly racist and white supremacist government it has had in decades" (2024, para. 11). It is hard to argue back to this statement when the Government's current assertion of power and control over Māori taonga (including language, knowledge, culture) by limiting and withholding access to these through the education system and current curriculum design, is taking our country backwards.

Positionality

I identify as Māori and Pākehā, with mixed ancestry from Kāi Tahu, Scotland, Ireland and England. While I grew up away from my *Murikihu* (Southland) tribal lands, my maternal bloodline and the whakapapa that I am most knowledgeable of are Kāi Tahu, Kāti Mamoe and Waitaha (Te Wai Pounamu). While always proud of my Māori heritage, I was not acknowledged as Māori in school, despite my mother making it clear that I was through my enrolment and her engagement with my schools. I came to believe that while she was Māori, I was too fair skinned, and due to the residual effects assimilation practices, I was yet to reclaim my *reo Māori* (Māori language) and tribal knowledge to qualify as a 'real' Māori.

Certainly, uninformed and hurtful articles like that of Debra Harrington which featured in the *Dominion* in 1994, my first year of high school, and which opened with the lines: “When is a Māori tribe not Māori? The answer could well be when it is Ngai Tahu” (as cited in O’Regan, 2001, p.25) contributed to my sense of cultural alienation and confusion.

Throughout my schooling I felt as though I existed on the fringes of *te ao Māori* (the Māori world). In my mind *te ao Māori* resembled a *ngāhere* (forest) which was lush, rich, diverse and bountiful. While I felt that I belonged in this forest, I believed I did not have the knowledge nor skills to enter it, and so throughout my formative years, I stood on the fringes of this forest looking in, wanting to enter, but unsure if I was allowed.

I understand that identifying as Māori while being fair skinned is contentious for some Māori (Kukutai, 2004). I am conscious, and respectful of the fact that the experiences of Māori who are fair skinned will be very different from the experiences of other Māori who are not, and I’m cognisant of the privilege that has come with my pākehā ancestry. But I also acknowledge that I am not alone in having felt this way, and while no means unique to my tribal members alone, many of my Kāi Tahu *hapori whānui* (wider community) such as Hana O’Regan (2001, 2016), Adrian Woodhouse (2021), and Christine Rogers, (2020), have attested to having a more shared experience .

While I identify as Māori and my research is conducted with and for Māori, that doesn’t necessarily mean that I am conducting kaupapa Māori research. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2015) points to the need to be able to converse and communicate through *te reo Māori* as crucial. While I am a lover and learner of *te reo Māori*, English was and is the primary language of this research project and I, like most of my research participants, was educated through *kura auraki*. Therefore, I have selected Culturally Responsive Methodologies as the theoretical framework to guide this research; this will allow me to draw on kaupapa Māori research theories as well as critical theories (Berryman et. al.,2013).

Whatu as a Metaphor

I grew up in a weaver’s house although from an essentialist perspective it may not have looked like stereotypical weavers’ home, it wasn’t just harakeke being woven. My mother was an artist and made clothing for a living. Throughout my childhood I went to sleep to the sound of whizzing sewing machines. My mother was also a storyteller, a dancer, a cake baker

and so many other wonderful things. She was my primary source of knowledge of who I am, the world around me, and how I fit within it.

The garments my mother made were a creative expression of her connecting with her *Māoritanga* (Māori identity) and making sense of the world she lived in, while also providing for her family. This was the late 1980s and across all the 90s in a city in Aotearoa-NZ. Her hand printed fabrics featured her own designs informed by her ancestral stories and were inspired by the proliferation of Māori artists' work becoming publicly recognised and celebrated since *Te Māori*, an exhibition in of Māori art and taonga that opened at The Met in New York city in 1984 and toured the United States for two years. My mother was part of a generation of artist and artisans who, alongside activists, researchers, politicians, educators, broadcasters and everyday Māori and Pākehā people, were reclaiming and renormalising Māori culture and challenging the stereotypes of what it meant to be Māori as we approached the 21st century. I'll admit the first time I saw my mum's signature *kōwhaiwhai* patterns in hot pinks, bright greens, and fluorescent orange prints, I took a breath – they didn't look very 'Māori' to me. I suspect I was expecting dusky colours, or black, white and red, or 'natural' tones. I was taken aback by all the colours, but at the same time I was intrigued by this new (to me) representation of *Māoritanga*.

Through mum, I whakapapa to Te Rau Aroha marae, and those who have visited this special marae will know its famed for many things, three being: it's hospitality; the interior of its *whare* (houses) are full of the most incredible colour and artwork; and all the *pou* (carved posts) honour revered *hākui*. It was only after visiting this marae as an adult that I fully understood who my mother was, and the entirety of her complex identity as a Kāi Tahu woman.

Hineteiwaiwa is the *atua wahine* (goddess) connected to the spiritual guardianship of childbirth, cycles of the moon and weaving. She is associated with *Te Whare Pora* (House of Weaving), the creation of performing arts and for assisting in both the entrance and exit of *te ao mārama* (the world of light and understanding). She, along with other *atua wāhine* depicted in this thesis, is known for her intelligence, authority, leadership and as a resourceful problem solver. At a Waitangi Tribunal hearing for WAI 2700, Ani Mikaere recounted a *pūrākau* (story) in which Hineteiwaiwa outwits and kidnaps the chief Kae, stating that Hineteiwaiwa's "ability to formulate and execute complex and potentially

dangerous strategy in order to achieve a desired goal reveals her as a woman with formidable political skill and significant leadership qualities” (Pihama et al., 2021a, p.5). Hineteiwaiwa is aware of her potential, understands her skills and abilities, and uses her intellect to achieve desired outcomes. Much like others we will discuss, this pūrākau affirms that wāhine Māori are sources of important ancestral knowledge and whakapapa (Mikaere, 2003; Murphy, 2013).

Whatu (to weave), while not entirely an exclusive artform of women, is regarded as one that embodies *mātauranga wāhine* (women’s knowledge) as it is handed down through the generations. Dr. Hinekura Smith (n.d) describes how the language of *whatu* is a ‘maternal language’ as she explains the words *whenu* (strand), associated with *whenua* (land and placenta), and *aho* (thread, umbilical cord) are understood as vital connections between the future and past, and relate to the transmission of feminine and maternal knowledge. When the *whenu* and *aho* of *muka* (flax fibre) that form *kākahu* (cloaks/clothing) is rolled by hand down the leg of the *kaiwhatu* (weaver), it embeds the DNA of knowledge and whakapapa for who it is created, along with that of the weaver, into the garment. When the *kākahu* comes into contact with the skin of the wearer it reminds them of who they are, where they come from and that they are never alone.

Throughout my childhood my mum wove aspects of *tikanga me te reo Māori* (Māori customs and language) into our upbringing and she was a fountain of knowledge. She deliberately coloured in the white spaces for me, teaching me to see bias, prejudice and racism in the world and to not take for granted my Pākehā privilege (Milne, 2013). She ensured I had access to Indigenous Māori knowledge to supplement the shortcomings of my formal education, and to be an ally to all Indigenous people around the world.

Te Whare Pora can be described not only as a physical place of learning but also as a state of being in which one is ready to receive and retain knowledge (Tamarapa, 2011; H. Smith, n.d).

With the imagery of Hineteiwaiwa, Te Whare Pora, and a metaphor of weaving, in this thesis I have woven the narratives of *taitamāhine*, young women on the fringes of identity formation, together with those of their mothers, and their teachers into a metaphoric *kākahu* of Māori tribal identity. Woven through, over and around the ‘white’ spaces in education, the colours of this *kākahu* are fluorescent. I hope that this thesis, like the

aspirations of Ka Hikitia, will help schools to understand how like a kākahu they have responsibilities to nurture, protect, engender connection and pride in the identity of taitamāhine Māori, elevate the voices of their mothers, and help to colour in the 'white' spaces for their teachers.

Research Questions

Having struggled to understand my place in the world as a wāhine of Māori and European heritage, I have often reflected throughout my life, that despite my doubts of 'credibility' as a Māori person, I have always felt 100 % Kāi Tahu. While not appearing Māori on the outside, I felt Māori on the inside. I knew that I probably felt this way because I was a woman and my material bloodline is Kāi Tahu - Kāti Māmoe – Waitaha. But I also felt it had something to do with the land.

25 years after I left school, I wonder what the experiences of Māori tribal identity formation are like for taitamāhine in kura auraki and so this research seeks to answer these questions:

How are schools helping or hindering identity formation for Māori students?

- Why do some students leave school with a stronger sense of positive identity as Māori than others?
- What are schools doing that is (is not) supporting/enabling positive formation of identity for Māori students?

What does it mean (for students) to be recognised as Māori in school?

- How are students who are enrolled at school as Māori, recognised as being Māori by staff and/or peers?
- What are the barriers/enablers to students being recognised as Māori in school?

Overview of Chapters

The next chapter is a review of literature that explores Māori tribal identity formation within the evolving colonial educational landscape of Aotearoa-NZ. This chapter considers how power is maintained and kaupapa Māori responses better support the enactment of Te Tiriti o Waitangi through power-sharing mechanisms. In chapter 3, I explain the methodologies and methods for the research. In the fourth chapter, Rolling Aho-Threads, I present my findings and three separate collaborative stories, one from the teachers, the parents and the

students. In chapter 5, Weaving the Kakahu, I discuss my findings in relation to literature and in chapter 6, I share my conclusions.

Chapter 2: Pā Harakeke of Māori Tribal Identity

Introduction

This chapter explores literature relevant to the identity formation of taitamāhine Māori in secondary kura auraki in Aotearoa-NZ. It discusses the cultural, historic, social and political constructs of Māori tribal identity, and in acknowledging the ongoing impacts of colonisation it looks to Māori voices and theorising to understand what educators in kura auraki need to do to ensure they are supporting and enhancing the positive identity formation for taitamāhine Māori.

Māori Tribal Identity

Wairua (spirit/two waters), *whakapapa* (genealogy/laying down/layering), *whānau* (family/to be born/give birth) and *whenua* (land/placenta) are central features in Māori cosmology. They are also foundational concepts essential to understanding the identity of taitamāhine Māori; therefore, this chapter begins with the creation story according to Māori cosmology.

Māori Cosmology

The creation story begins with *Te Kore* (the void); described as a space full of potential, with qualities and states often varying from one tribe to another (Mikaere, 2003, 2017; Walker, 2004). Following *Te Kore*, various states of *Te Pō* exist in Māori cosmology, for example *Te Pō nui* (the great night), *Te Pō roa* (the long night), *Te Pō te kitea* (the night where nothing can be seen) until we reached the third state of existence, *te ao mārama*. *Te Kore* and *Te Pō* also describe the darkness and emptiness of the mind, a space empty of light and knowledge due to the “self-generation during *Te Kore* of the primeval pair *Ranginui* and *Papatuanuku*” (Walker, 2004, p.12). It was because of their tight loving embrace that light could not enter the world, and it was through their procreation that ultimately led to their separation. This separation of Sky Father and Earth Mother brought about *te ao mārama*, a world of increasing light and understanding. *Te Pō* is also described as the womb of creation, in which *Papatūānuku* and *Ranginui* were conceived (Mikaere, 2003). Yates-Smith (2019) refers to *Papatūānuku* as *te ūkaipō* (mother, source of sustenance, origin), and that as our Earth Mother she sustains and nourishes her descendants as our own mothers nourished us. Therefore, we can see that the female, their reproductive organs and the birth process are important to our understanding of the creation stories (Mikaere & Grace, 2017, p.25).

Tāne Mahuta, and his brothers were *ira atua* (supernatural beings) and as they searched for *ira tangata* (human beings) they realised that *ira tangata* could not be derived from *ira atua* alone and that a separate act of creation was needed (Walker, 2004). Mikaere (2003) states that there were supernatural female beings, but that Tāne Mahuta realised that a union of two celestial beings would not result in a human life. Tāne asked his mother for help. She directed him to Kurawaka, her pubic region, where the sacred soil contains “the necessary female element, the uha, to complement his maleness and create humanity” (p. 17) and with the various qualities provided by his brothers Tāne created Hineahuone. Tāne Matua shared breath with Hineahuone, and from his embrace with her, she gave birth to the first *ira tangata*, Hinetītama.

Thus, the relationship between *wāhine* (women) and *whenua* (land) goes back through Māori cosmology to the creation of *ira tangata*. *Wāhine* hold *te whare tangata* (the house of humanity/womb) and as such, they are of “paramount importance” to the survival of the *whānau*, *hapū* (sub-tribe) and *iwi* (tribe) (Mikaere, 2003, p. 31). However, it is important to remember that “te tapu o te tāne is not different from te tapu o te wahine” (Pihama et al., 2021b, p.20), and so we see deeply embedded in Māori cosmology and reflected in Māori epistemology the understanding of the necessary balance between *wāhine* and *tāne* (men).

The Identity of Wāhine Māori

Given that women are highly revered in te ao Māori, terms like *wāhine toa* and *māreikura* (noble, esteemed, and sometimes supernatural women) are often synonyms with *wāhine* Māori. In the introduction to *Hākui: Women of Kāi Tahu*, Eria (2015) states that the “leadership of *hākui*, their *mātauraka* [*mātauranga*] and their guidance of *iwi* are reflected in their actions as *kaitiaki* of *whakapapa*, guardians of genealogical connections to the ancestors. They cradled their children, shared their knowledge and naturally retained their position on their *whenua*” (p.17). This concept of women as sources of knowledge is reflected in the *pūrākau* of Tāne asking Papatūānuku for advice on how to create *ira tangata*. Not only does she share with him the knowledge of what to do, but through her body she also provides the necessary resources. Throughout te ao Māori we find stories of *wāhine* as *kaitiaki* (guardians) of *mātauranga*. Mikaere (2003) states:

The special role that women play as guardians of *iwi* knowledge is made clear in the stories of Māui and his *kuia*. It is also implicit in the acknowledgement of the

importance of the tupuna-mokopuna relationship, and the fact that education of the young was left in such large part to the elders in the community” (p.63).

Through *waiata* (songs) and *oriori* (lullabies) the authority of *kuia* (female elder) was acknowledged in te ao Māori, as revered as sources of important and vital information. What also becomes apparent, through the pūrākau of Papatūānuku and Murirangawhenua (Māui’s grandmother), are the leadership qualities of wāhine Māori (Mikaere, 2003; Mikaere & Grace, 2017).

Gender Identity in the Māori and Colonial Worlds

Māori epistemologies and worldviews understand the critical balance between wāhine and tāne, and this understanding was reflected throughout precolonial te ao Māori. An obvious example is that of the *tikanga* (correct procedures) of *pōwhiri* (ceremonial welcome) and different marae protocols where *tāne* (men) and *wāhine* (women) have distinct roles that are designed to maintain balance and protection. However, Mitchell and Olsen-Reeder (2021) suggest that the gender division we see in many Māori societies today may have not been so distinct in precolonial times. They argue that gender division is most likely because of the ‘pervasive’ influence Christianity has had on Māori cosmological narratives through colonisation and assimilation practices. Mikaere (2003) states that while the balance between tāne and wāhine Māori was honoured and embedded into daily precolonial life, the views that settlers held concerning the role of women was very different. In Biblical teachings women were created from a man’s ribcage, and a Christian God is male. In English common law women were seen as subservient to their husbands and indeed legally they were the property of their fathers and husbands. Through the work of the missionaries and colonial settlers, Māori cosmology and epistemologies became threatened, and a worldview of male superiority began to take hold. Since long before the advent of Christianity in the times of the ancient Greeks, the depiction of women in the Western world has been that of dangerous and troublesome, or meek and subservient. If it is true that the women of high rank in ancient Greece wielded more power than we may have assumed, it is the men of Greek antiquity, who silenced them by moving the locus of power from the home to the polis, preventing their participation in civic life and relegating them to a life of domesticity (Euripides et al., 1999).

In precolonial times the position of wāhine Māori was upheld within the whānau through the recognition of their inherent *tapu* (sacredness) and this can still be evidenced through pūrākau, *whakairo* (carvings), *whakataukī* (proverbs), *mōteatea* (chants or lamentations), *karakia* (incantations) and the naming of ancestral houses and pou. Pihama et al., (2022) suggest that on “every level we see and know the affirmation and recognition of the mana of our kuia” (p.7). However, Pihama (2022) and Mikaere (2003, 2017) contend that the mana of wāhine Māori has come under direct threat through colonial thinking and action. Pihama states that “colonising discourses have had a significant impact on the ways in which wāhine Māori are regarded and how our place in society continues to be marginalised as a direct result” (2022, p.277). When looking at the identity of wāhine Māori through a patriarchal colonial lens that defers to a hierarchical Great Chain of Being (Valades, 1579), as discussed in greater detail below, where European Christians are seen as superior to Māori heathens and men superior to women, our sacred and revered wāhine Māori have been unjustifiably relegated to the lowest denominator.

Māori Identity in a Colonial Environment

John Rangihau (1977) describes being Māori as being a part of a Māori community and growing up raised in a Māori context, with the tikanga, traditions and *kawa* (protocols) of a particular tribe being instilled from a young age. Timoti Karetu (1990) agrees that Māori identity is dictated by one’s upbringing and the observation of social norms of the Māori tribal group(s) in which one were raised rather than by blood-quantum. Ranginui Walker (1989) cites cultural knowledge and traits such as language, tribalism, connection to whenua and *tūrangawaewae* (a physical place where one has the right to stand because of kinship connections to the land) alongside descent from *tīpūna* (ancestors) as forming Māori tribal identity. Professor Wally Penetito describes “multiple ways of being Māori” (2011, p.29) and that Māori tribal identity encompasses whakapapa, *whānautanga* (whānau identity), *hapūtanga* (hapū identity) *iwitanga* (iwi identity) and Māoritanga. He explains that Māori who may have become dislocated or disengaged from their tribal identity may not know “how to join in or belong” (p.40) to their culture. Kukutai (2004) argues that while there are several ways to identify as Māori these need to include ancestry and ethnicity. She states that those of “Māori descent who do not identify as Māori should not be counted as Māori...They are New Zealanders of Māori descent” (p.101). While there are diverse and

varied ways in which Māori tribal identity can be formed and be defined, there are general themes that appear; engagement with cultural practices such as language, tribal knowledge and practices, and connection to whenua. Multiple academics have affirmed that intrinsic to Māori tribal identity is an interconnectedness between *tangata* (people) and whenua (Herbert, 2011; Mahuika, 2019; Roberts, 2013). The connection between tangata and whenua provides tūrangawaewae as a physical place to stand with confidence and belonging. Mead (2003) states that the “land is a source of identity for Māori people. Being direct descendants of Papatūānuku, Māori see themselves as not only ‘of the land’, but ‘as the land’” (p. 51).

Māori Measures of Tribal Identity

There are a number of ways to measure tribal identity as Māori. Pere (1988) illustrated a Māori perspective of integrated health using the imagery of a *wheke* (octopus) which allows us to understand the many contributing factors in the formation of Māori tribal identity. The eight dimensions are *wairuatanga* (spirituality), *tinana* (physical), *hinengaro* (mental), *whanaungatanga* (family), *mana ake* (uniqueness), *mauri* (vitality), *hā-akoro-mā-a-kui-mā* (inspiration from ancestors), and *whatumanawa* (emotions). *Waiora* (holistic well-being) is represented in the eyes of the wheke, where the wairua first forms. Whare Tapa Whā, a Māori framework for understanding health perspectives developed by Sir Mason Durie (1994) included four dimensions that contribute to Māori wellbeing, *taha wairua* (spiritual), *taha hinengaro* (thoughts and feelings), *taha tinana* (physical health) and *taha whānau* (family). Durie (1995) expanded on this model in *Te Hoe Nuku Roa, A Framework for Māori Identity Measure*. In this he describes interacting axes; *paihere tangata* (human relationships), *te ao Māori* (Māori culture and identity), *ngā āhuatanga noho-ā-tangata* (social and economic circumstances), *ngā whakanekeneketanga* (change over time). In axis two, *te ao Māori*, Durie describes Māori cultural identity as containing four elements that support its construction and positioning. These are *mana ake* (personal identity), *taonga tuku iho* (cultural heritage), *ngā rara o Rangi rāua ko Papa* (natural resources), and *whakanōhanga Māori* (Māori institutions). This axis acknowledges the access to and participation in Māori institutions, including marae, and Māori resources, including land and *mahinga kai* (food gathering practices) alongside knowledge of cultural practices as fundamental to Māori identity. In *Te Hoe Nuku Roa*, Durie (1995) sounded a warning to not

oversimplify or codify Māori identity and its formation “by relying on 20th century stereotypes rather than 21st century realities” (p. 470). Durie’s caution of oversimplifying Māori tribal identity echoes other Māori academics concerns around essentialism.

Essentialism in Māori Identity

Essentialism occurs when there is a misguided belief that there is one fixed and ‘authentic’ way to be Māori, when identity as Māori is diverse, dynamic, being shaped by whakapapa, tribal affiliations and lived experience, including the influence of colonial schooling (Kukutai & Webber, 2011). Essentialism can limit and have a detrimental impact on identity formation and personal wellbeing. From an essentialist perspective, Māori identity is seen as uniform and implies assumptions such as that to be Māori; one must speak te reo Māori, know and practice tikanga Māori, have strong connections to hapū and iwi, and share the same values, beliefs and or lifestyle as other Māori. Therefore, creating a narrow idea of what constitutes being ‘authentically’ Māori and ignoring the diversity that exists in tribal, hapū, whānau identities. It also negates the on-going evolution of te ao Māori which is shaped by colonialism, urbanisation, multiculturalism and personal experiences. Essentialism can lead to ‘judging’ if one is Māori enough and marginalises those who don’t fit the ‘ideal’ stereotypes of being Māori (Herbert, 2011). In her research on school reform, Buckley (2020), noted that judgements about the culture of Māori students made by Pākehā staff was “colonisation in action” (p.47). Essentialism oversimplifies Māori identity, relying on exclusive checklists rather than inclusively recognising the dynamic lived experiences of Māori as fluid and evolving, and therefore can re-enforce colonial thinking and stereotypes (L. T. Smith, 2015; Webber, 2007). The term *Māori* (normal or natural) has become an umbrella term used to refer to all Indigenous iwi and hapū of Aotearoa-NZ. It was a colonial term introduced to collectivise the different tribal groups, thus could be seen as the potential cause of essentialism today (Berryman, 2008).

Being Recognised as Māori

Just because one identifies as Māori doesn’t mean people will recognise and accept them as Māori. Herbert (2011) describes the concept of an ‘ideal Māori figure’ as a preconceived notion of what it means to be Māori based on stereotypes. Within this concept there is a fine line between who can identify as Māori and who cannot. She explains that people can hold preconceived notions of what it ‘looks’ like to be Māori, arguing that if you don’t look

Māori it is less likely that you will be recognised as Māori, and those who look Māori but don't fulfil other 'criteria' encounter labels such as 'plastic Māori' (2011).

Gibson (1999) observed that those who did not look stereotypically Māori may face exclusion from Māori activities. Her research with women of dual ethnicities found they had stronger connections to their Māori side than their Pākehā side and although they may not have been recognised by others as being Māori, that didn't affect their feelings of being Māori. She found that while their fair appearance allowed them to pass as Pākehā and gain certain advantages including avoiding forms of racism, this also afforded them a label of not being a 'real Māori.' Webber (2007) also identifies that skin colour can be an 'ethnic cue' in recognition of identity but explains that self-identification as Māori is more layered and complex than skin colour alone. She describes how the whenua on which we stand and the unique connection between tangata and whenua can lead to a stronger connection for mixed ethnic Māori to their Māori side because of the physical proximity to the whenua in Aotearoa-NZ, compared to somewhere distant such as Europe.

A major finding in Gibson's (1999) work was the 'incongruent' nature of the inner and exterior identity, with participants being identified as Pākehā by both Māori and Pākehā alike because of their physical attributes. This led to experiences of continuous justification of their Māori identity. O'Regan (2001) describes constantly defending her Māoritanga to teachers and peers while at school. She explained feeling out of place as a fair skinned Māori student because of the constant questioning of her Māori heritage from both Pākehā and Māori alike. Gibson describes how physical appearance can be used not only as a tool to identify, but also as a tool to exclude. Another finding was the expectation that is placed on those who identify as Māori. There was an expectation that those who identify as Māori would know their whakapapa as well as tikanga Māori and *kawa* (marae protocols), they could represent Māori viewpoints on a range of topics, and they could speak te reo Māori. Adams (2021) Kukutai (2004) O'Regan (2001, 2016) and Webber (2007) affirm Gibson's findings that identity formation for Māori of dual or mixed heritage is complex, and that cues such as physical appearance, alongside cultural knowledge can prevent some Māori from being recognised as Māori by others, and that this failure to be recognised as Māori can affect positive identity formation as Māori.

Pre-Colonial Māori Education

Learning, and the attainment of knowledge was highly valued by Māori individuals and societies. Prior to European arrival Māori education existed within whānau centred communities, with *kaumātua* (elder men and women) playing an important role in passing on mātauranga through the act of *taonga tuku iho* (passing down treasures) to the next generation. The knowledge of *kaumātua* was respected and valued by Māori communities who utilised *oriori*, *mōteatea* (lament) and *pūrākau* to recall whakapapa and important historical knowledge and events. There are also numerous accounts of *whare wānanga* (houses of learning) where knowledge was shared formally outside of the family unit to those who had been formally selected for such learning (Mead, 2025; Walker, 2004).

Mātauranga Māori

While the account of Tāne ascending to the heavens to attain the three *kete* (baskets) of knowledge is well known amongst some *iwi* (tribes), the story of Tāwhaki also features across other *iwi* Māori. In this *pūrākau*, Tāwhaki seeks guidance from his grandmother Ruahine-mata-morari (also known as Whaitiri) on how to gain specific knowledge relating to a quest he was on. She shared information, rituals and *karakia* with him and on opening her throat, she provided a thread for Tāwhaki and his brother to climb to the heavens to attain the knowledge he sought. While his brother does not survive the journey, Tāwhaki overcomes a series of trials to attain great wisdom and understanding of *karakia* which he brings back to share with *ira tangata*.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2015) describes mātauranga as a compound noun, containing the words *mā* (indicating future possession) *tau* (settle) and *-ranga* (a suffix which turns a verb into a noun), she states that “matauranga (‘ma’ and ‘tau’) is said to be attained when it is held or comes to rest within us” (p.50). While mātauranga Māori is difficult to define (Mead, 2025; Royal, 2019), it is described as completely integrated into the way that Māori think, feel, act, learn and share knowledge. Royal (2019), suggests that mātauranga Māori is a diverse and multifaceted “body of knowledge that arose out of the lived circumstances and experiences of Māori people” (p.2) which encapsulates Māori worldviews. Mead (2025) suggests it is a tool for thinking, considering and organising knowledge. As Māori migrated from Polynesia, they brought bodies of knowledge with them that grew and changed as they adapted to their new environment. That knowledge has continued to develop and evolve

over time (Royal, 2019). Mātauranga Māori therefore is not static and continues to be a constantly evolving body of knowledge while also being a tool for considering and creating new knowledge.

Wānanga

Developed across generations wānanga is a living tradition that provides for the sharing of mātauranga Māori. Predominantly an oral practice wānanga, the curriculum of a tribe is shared through philosophical frameworks and pedagogies (Mahuika & Mahuika, 2020). As such, it has been crucial to the development and maintenance of tribal identity. While this style of learning did occur in *whare wānanga* (learning houses), it was not exclusively done so. Wānanga occurs through dialogic exchange, not a one-way transfer of knowledge, and is a verb. L. T. Smith et al., (2019) suggest wānanga are spaces “to meet, to discuss, to deliberate” (p.5), in which the relational dimension of Indigenous knowledge transfer requires participants to “engage in active and collective thinking and problem solving; not just ‘talk’” (p.5). In this sense, through wānanga, mātauranga Māori is continuously reviewed and evolving through the transfer of knowledge from one generation to the next, and through the active questioning, debate and thinking of all participants.

Ako

Through wānanga and dialogic exchange, *ako* (teaching and learning) can occur. Ako acknowledges the teacher can learn from the student and the student themselves can lead the teaching process (Pere, 1994). *Whanaungatanga* (reciprocal relationships) and productive partnerships, that extend beyond the individual to include whānau, hapū and iwi, can effectively support the holistic development and education of the individual.

Māori Experiences through Colonial Education

The impact of colonisation on the tribal identity of Māori people through education is an ongoing process that began well before the first Europeans set foot on Aotearoa-NZ.

The Doctrines of Discovery

A particular set of Papal bulls referred to as the Doctrines of Discovery, supported by social hierarchical structural philosophies such as the Great Chain of Being (Didacus Valades 1579) and social Darwinism of the 19th and 20th Century were used by the British Crown to authorise taking Indigenous people’s land. These doctrines have been used to ‘legitimise’ the colonisation of Aotearoa-NZ and formed a cornerstone to the development of our legal

framework, which alienated Māori from their land, language and culture and were used to exert control over Indigenous peoples as well as their lands and still have manifestations in today's society (Ngata, 2019; Jackson, 2012).

Far from being a distant aspect of our history, the Human Rights Commission (2023) contend that “the Doctrine of Discovery is reflected in every part of the structure of the New Zealand state” (p.3) and the racist legacy that formed them, written hundreds of years ago, far away, remain embedded in government institutions such as education. Institutional racism exists when organisations such as schools operate in a way that has a biasing effect that privileges the dominant race at the expense of minorities. Scheurich and Young (1997) explain that when “a school's standard pedagogical method, is culturally congruent with the culture of White students but not with the cultures of students of color...this is institutional racism” (p.5). Unfortunately, institutional racism and other remnants of the Doctrines of Discovery remain woven into the fabric of our society and psyche (Ngata, 2019; Jackson, 2019; Salmond, 2019) and they are manifest in our education system today (Berryman et al., 2025).

Mission Schools and Education Ordinances 1847

The first missionaries began arriving in Aotearoa-NZ in 1814 to convert and civilise Māori people from a ‘primitive state’ through schooling. Bishop (2005b) states that most missionaries believed that although “Māori were a people of savage beliefs, they could be civilized through the pursuance of paternalistic, assimilationist policies and practices” (p. 56). Walker (2016) explains that valuing education many Māori wanted their children to also attain Western knowledge so engaged with the missionary schools. However, there was no place or mechanism for Māori to be involved in the design and delivery of learning as the missionaries controlled all aspects of schooling which was based on ideologies of racial superiority. Governor Grey's Education Ordinances in 1847 formalised the British Crown's aims of assimilation of Māori into European culture through education. Grey perceived that an efficient way to ‘civilise’ the Indigenous people of Aotearoa-NZ was to place Māori children into boarding houses rather than day schools “thus removing them from the ‘barbaric’ and ‘demoralising influence of the Māori villages’” (Barrington, as cited in Lee and Lee, 1995, p. 99). Grey begun subsidising church boarding schools with public funds, on the proviso that the curriculum was solely delivered through the English language, religious

instruction and industrial training was taught and schools allowed for government inspections.

Native Schools Act 1867 and Education Act 1877

The Native Schools Act (1867) facilitated the establishment of primary schools for Māori communities using the framework of The Mission Schools and the ordinances of the Education Act (1847). The Education Act (1877) made schooling compulsory for all children aged five to 13 who lived within zone of a school; however, Māori children were not compelled to attend. In 1935 the Labour government introduced free secondary schooling and Native District High Schools were established (Walker, 2016). Bishop (2005b) reports the ideology of the Native School system was that “Māori were not capable of abstract thinking or a full education and were better to be trained for manual work” (p.63). This restricted curriculum prevented Māori matriculation with learning programmes comprised of practical subjects. A handful of schools challenged this approach and successfully prepared students for matriculation. An example is Te Aute College, which for a brief period in the 1920s prepared its Māori students to go on to university studies before a government inquiry recommended the school return to its “limited agrarian-focussed curriculum” (p.63). Thus, Māori were deliberately prevented from accessing tertiary education, limiting their career pathways to low-paid manual industries. Bishop argues that a two-tier education system restricted Māori from full participation in the new economy and developed an agenda which pathologised their lives. This was part of a wider assimilative agenda that ran from 1867 to 1969, and effects are still evident today.

Banning te reo Māori in Schools

In 1897 the Inspector of Native Schools instructed that only English be used in playgrounds however teachers interpreted this as an all-out ban on *te reo Māori* and used corporal punishment to prohibit its use (Walker, 2016). Reprimanding and suppressing *te reo Māori* in schools through physical abuse sent a clear message that the language, culture, identities and experiences of Māori were not valued and did not belong in schools or society. To be accepted, Māori had to make themselves invisible, assimilate and leave their culture at home (Cummings, 2001). Neilson (2020) explains that parents who had experienced corporal punishment for speaking *te reo Māori* were less likely to pass *te reo Māori* to their own children, instead developing *whakamā* (embarrassment or shame) and passing that

feeling onto subsequent generations. The suppression of te reo Māori has contributed to the suppression of Māori tikanga, pūrākau and mātauranga.

Pathologising of Māori Identity through the Curriculum

Prior to 1926, Aotearoa-NZ's educational textbooks were produced in England, and firmly held Eurocentric epistemologies. Texts like *Our nation's story* (1936), which told a distorted story of our Indigenous population and denigrated Māori identities, have etched themselves on the national psyche. Bishop (2005b) states this and other textbooks have "played a significant role in the ongoing development of the colonialist discourse" (p. 66). *The cultures collide* (Woodcock, 1988) was published when many of the educators and parents of today's school children were themselves at school, espoused Māori as a barbaric race. The negative impact these depictions have had on the developing identities of young Māori is significant, especially when considering the intergenerational effects of more than a century of repeated and offensive misrepresentation. Bishop argues that for decades all school children not only Māori have been continuously exposed to a hegemonic agenda that has pathologised the lives of Māori. This has shaped Māori and non-Māori perceptions. The persistent 'othering' of Māori through the curriculum has positioned Māori tribal identity as socially and culturally inferior to Pākehā thereby facilitating assimilation. Adams (2021) and Webber (2007) concur that schools have been sites of assimilation and Pākehā cultural domination through the pathologising of Māori and this has negatively impacted on Māori students' positive identity formation.

Maintaining Power in Aotearoa-NZ's Education System

Western education in Aotearoa-NZ established and maintained a "structural relationship of pākehā domination and Māori subordination" (Walker, 2016, p.20). This section looks at how power in education has continued to be maintained by the powerful and privileged.

Reproduction Theory

Education is so much more than imparting academic knowledge to learners; it shapes the minds and prospects of our future generations. By controlling education policy, any government of the day can shape not just what our young people learn in class, but what is expected of them as members of society; their ideas, worldviews and prejudices. Nash (1990) referencing Bourdieu asserts that in pluralist societies, such as Aotearoa-NZ, the dominant group's culture is reflected its education policies, practices and curriculum. The

education system becomes a 'conduit' for reproduction of social inequalities as it perpetuates the attitudes and cultural norms of the dominant group, thus ensuring their continued cultural advantage in education and safeguarding their control of the power structures that maintain them, to the expense of other groups (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

Coercive Relations of Power

The rejection by Aotearoa-NZ's education systems of our Indigenous population's language, culture, identity and experiences in the past has tended to reflect wider society's subordination of groups that don't fit the dominant culture. In many societies around the world, those who face the most severe and persistent educational challenges tend to be those from minority groups. This type of disparity is frequently experienced by Indigenous people in colonial countries. Cummings (2001) argues the dominant group maintains power and control by labelling the subordinate group inferior, thereby asserting their own superiority. This naturally leads to interaction patterns that limit the subordinate group's potential and growth. One way the dominant group legitimise and maintain the "division of resources and status in society" (p.15) using 'coercive relations of power' is by employing a 'blame the victim' approach.

'Mythtakes' through Colonisation

It was not only in school textbooks place that untruths were disseminated about Māori in the process of colonisation. Jackson (2020) argues that 'mythtakes' are more than simple misunderstandings, they are a deliberate and repeated stories that becomes accepted as truth, even though they are false or distorted. A classic example is the 'myth' that Māori ceded sovereignty to the Crown, while this did not happen, the story that it did, was created, and repeated until it was believed, albeit falsely. Various 'myths' have been created and used to justify and legitimise colonial power over Māori people and their lands. A current apparent untruth being promulgated by certain groups is that learning Māori histories creates social division, putting the fabric of our society under strain. These questionable claims have been challenged by evidence affirming that understanding Māori histories builds appreciation of bi-culturalism, and a sense of belonging is formed through collective action addressing Te Tiriti o Waitangi breeches (Hellman, 2023).

Middle Class Advantage in Education

Thrupp (2007) questions whose needs are being served through the Aotearoa-NZ education system, arguing the middle class maintain their advantage in education through multifaceted mechanisms, family resources and access, class bias in the curriculum, middle-class resistance to shift from summative to formative assessment, school policies that favour the middle class, and the middle class's access to schools of choice. Thrupp explains that educators, intentionally or not, perpetuate middle-class advantage in education in a myriad of ways, including the languages they use, their worldviews, the content they choose to teach, how they assess learning, their assumptions about students and school policies on zoning which can create an exclusiveness among state education. He also points to research that shows that teachers tend to move towards working in higher socio-economic schools across their careers and taking their experience with them.

Pākehā Paralysis

Both Pākehā and non-Māori play an important part in nurturing the aspirations of Māori learners through education (Walker, 2004) but this can be stymied by the dominant culture's inaction to make change, and manifest through Pākehā paralysis. It is asserted that Pākehā paralysis is built on fear of making mistakes, offending, recolonising and the emotional reactions of guilt, discomfort, or defensiveness to an awareness of power and privilege leading to inaction. In practice Pākehā paralysis can result in an avoidance of engaging in Māori issues, content and ideas because it feels 'too hard', staying silent to avoid criticism, feeling overwhelmed by cultural and political complexity or becoming defensive rather than constructive. SooHoo (2004) refers to this as 'bystander apathy', in which people choose not to intervene even when they observe that interventions are required. Barnes (2015) argues that if Pākehā paralysis is left unchecked it can block meaningful collaboration, prevent positive change in education and reinforce inequality. Tolich (2002) suggests that a starting point for addressing this paralysis is for Pākehā to acknowledge that inequality is their issue, not a Māori one.

Racial Microaggressions

Microaggressions are subtle comments, actions and responses that often unconsciously or unintentionally express prejudiced attitudes towards members of a marginalised group, such as Māori. Berryman and Eley (2021) describe how the pressure from Māori stereotyping can

play out in educational settings as racial microaggressions towards Māori students mirroring experiences of Indigenous and minority students around the globe. Often disguised as ‘jokes’, racial microaggressions can be a dangerous form of casual racism that can go unnoticed when teachers are not attuned to their presence and they can escalate into bullying when left unchecked. They can also be embedded within school practices when the curriculum remains centred on Western knowledge and are maintained through racialised biases and assumptions (Berryman & Eley, 2021). Berryman et al. (2015) warn that one does not need to be a racist to be complicit in racist practices. The micro-interactions between peers can affect students’ sense of belonging in school in both a positive and negative way, thus impacting on the formation of identity. Eley (2020) shows a correlation between a greater sense of belonging and higher educational outcomes, including academic performance, intrinsic motivation and positive attitudes towards school and learning.

Grasping for Power through Education Reforms

Despite the House voting down the Treaty’s Principals Bill, the National Government continues to undermine Te Tiriti o Waitangi by removing it from legislation across different sectors and government agencies. We have seen the removal or relocation of Māori names for Government agencies through the promotion of a ‘English-first’ approach (O’Brien, 2024). In a recent move, closer to home, the education minister removed words in te reo Māori from a junior English reading book. The lengths to remove a handful of words that are found in the Oxford Dictionary and that are part of our national vocabulary, demonstrates the current government’s determination to curtail the national use of te reo Māori. Olsen-Reeder and Seals (2025) use this example to warn that the “persistent and frankly gross anti-Māori ideology that defines this government has found a home” (para. 27) in the MoE.

Aotearoa-NZ has boasted a progressive educational system that valued Te Tiriti o Waitangi, inclusion, equity, diversity, social justice, critical thinking and excellence, alongside literacy and numeracy and this, by and large, has been done by respecting and listening to its workforce. But recently our educational landscape has undergone a seismic shift, and the Government’s offense on the positive structural and systemic changes the education sector has made since the introduction of the Education and Training Act 2020 are being acutely felt. Right now, the education workforce is clearly stating that they do not accept the educational reform currently being implemented and the pace at which it is being done. The

voices of 1,300 school boards who have pledged to honour and enacting Te Tiriti (Bailey-McDowell, 2025b; Te Huia 2025) make this clear as do the open letters by joint subject association, He Rau Ringa (2025), to the Government alongside statements by the Post Primary Teachers Association (2026). Presently the Waitangi Tribunal is considering how the draft curriculum breeches Te Tiriti o Waitangi, with claimants from both Te Akatea (the Māori Principals Association) and New Zealand History Teacher's Association calling out the 'recolonisation' of education through a 'distorted' draft curriculum (Te Akatea, 2026, Gerritsen, 2026). We have witnessed not only the removal of Te Tiriti o Waitangi from our legislation, but also the axing of funding for teachers to learn te reo Māori, the removal of Māori and Pasifika as priority learners from the National Education Learning Priorities, drafting of a Euro-centric curriculum that undermines the place of Mātauranga Māori, the removal of Resource Teachers – Māori, the formal disestablishment of NCEA and a step back to summative style school certificate examinations. Tina Ngata, quoted in Moss (2025), reminded us that education is "a powerful site of social control...if you control the curriculum, you can erase histories and languages" (para. 11). The Government's maintenance of tight control over educational policies, practices and curriculum and, despite clear opposition and racist undertones, their moving ahead with educational reform, can be seen as using reproduction theory and coercive relations of power to perpetuate the attitudes, viewpoints and cultural norms of a select middle class group. Moves such as this ensure their continued cultural dominance in society are promoted through education.

There are growing concerns among the education workforce about the ideology informing these radical and racialised school reforms. Professor Graham Hingangaroa Smith stated, "If we don't understand the logic of what is being done to us, it is very hard to respond accordingly" (Moss, 2025, para. 10). Connected to the Atlas Network, the New Zealand Initiative are a right-wing think tank who have lobbied for a 'core knowledge' curriculum, and it appears their 'Save our schools' manifesto has become the Education Minister's playbook. Concerningly E D Hirsch, founder of Core Knowledge Foundation, the organisation responsible for the research that is influencing our current education reforms is well known for holding sexist and derogatory views towards women and Indigenous peoples (McLauchlan, 2026; Moss, 2025). Professor Margret Mutu (Auckland Women's Centre, 2024)

urges non-Māori to “pushback against harmful government policy” (para.10) that promote ideologies of white supremacy and racism towards Māori, and they are.

Educators, academics and peak bodies have shared concerns that the Minister of Education is overstepping and micromanaging the changes to the curriculum, with the Post Primary Teachers Association stating she “concentrates power in a way that is deeply concerning” (McLauchlan, 2026). The Minister has said she is moving at pace because of alarming literacy and numeracy results, but Professor Peter O’Connor argues there is no literacy crisis. Rather the ‘alarm’ raised by the minister is smoke and mirrors and about undermining the education system (McLauchlan, 2026).

Māori Tribal Identity Formation in Kura Auraki

A primary function of education is the formation of identity and self (Bruner, 1999). Bruner asserts that students actively build a sense of identity through exploration within social interactions. He describes human learning as developed by constructing meaning of shared experiences, interactions and stories. Adams (2021) states that identity is not only socially, culturally and ethically constructed through education, but also politically and that in part, how peers validate our ethnicity, so too will our identity also be defined.

Impact of Colonisation on Māori Tribal Identity through Education

Through colonisation and assimilation policies Māori have been excluded, marginalised, traumatised and oppressed through an education system that failed to value their language, culture, or identity (Bishop, 1997a; Berryman et al.2025). This created what Milne (2013) describes as ‘white’ spaces in education.

The aims of the Native Schools Act (1867) and the Education Acts (1847, 1877) were further strengthened by the Tohunga Suppression Act (1907), which prohibited *tohunga* (experts in Māori knowledge and lore) from practising and sharing mātauranga Māori. The impact of these assimilative policies has resulted in the ongoing underachievement of Māori in our education system (Berryman & Eley, 2019), a trend mirrored in Indigenous populations worldwide (Macfarlane et al., 2007). G. Smith (1992) stresses that Māori had to enter Pākehā tertiary institutions “and to do their best to survive in a largely culturally alienating environment, because of the lack of alternatives available to them” (p.26). Cummings (2001) argues that when culture, language, identity and experiences of a particular group are

intentionally or unintentionally left out of learning programmes, those students start at a disadvantage, because everything they know about the world is negated. Unfortunately, this silence and non-participation can be misinterpreted as a lack of ability or effort and unfortunately this pattern can become self-fulfilling. Royal (2019) states: “The detrimental impact of colonisation upon mātauranga Māori cannot be underestimated as the massive alienation of iwi lands, resources and political power was accompanied by a significant language and culture loss” (p.13). Durie (1997) argued that the alienation of Indigenous people from their land creates a fragmentation to identity, and that this is accompanied with a loss of not only possessions but spirit. Through colonisation Māori Indigenous people have struggled to maintain their cultural integrity and to participate in society “without abandoning the essence of their own identity” (p.32). Durie states that Māori identity can be affirmed through participation in national affairs and self-determination.

Positive Identity Formation of Māori students in Schools.

Educators play a significant role in fostering the positive cultural and ethnic identity formation of its students; however, Webber (2007) warns schools are also “places where we rank, sort, order and differently equip our children along ethnic lines even as we hope for schooling to be the great societal equaliser” (p.48). Teachers have an important role to play in confronting, challenging and deconstructing the mono-cultural nature of kura auraki by recognising and nurturing the importance of Māori culture, language, values and beliefs as contexts for learning (Adams, 2021; Bishop et al., 2014). Gilgen (2010) states that education has the ability to hinder or aid cultural self-esteem and is either exclusive or inclusive, as teachers’ beliefs, values and biases impact learners. Teachers have a significant ability to suppress or nourish Māori language and culture in the classroom (Bishop et al., 2014). Hawaikirangi-Pere (2013) argues that “Māori have not willingly abandoned their Māori identity” (p.14) by choice. Porteous (2016) states that while *taitama Māori* (Māori male adolescents) generally enjoy school, their experiences of racism in the classroom resulted in some Māori students “acting like Pākehā in order to be successful” (p.35) illustrating an ongoing impact of assimilative policies and cultural denigration on the formation of Māori identity.

Complexity of Identity Formation of Taitamāhine Māori in Schools

As introduced above, a number of wāhine Māori have explored the formation of identity for those of mixed, dual, or hybrid heritage in relation to educational experiences. Their work highlights the complexity of identity formation for taitamāhine Māori with mixed heritage in Aotearoa-NZ. Webber (2007) describes a 'hybrid' Māori–Pākehā identity and explains that mixed Māori heritage can add to a sense of marginalisation. She argues this hybridity “often results in complexities articulating ethnic identity” (p. 34). O'Regan (2001, 2016) notes that various historical and contemporary models of categorisation further complicate identity formation, particularly for fair-skinned Māori. Kukutai (2004) acknowledges that determining who can claim Māori indigeneity remains a contested issue, raising questions about whether identity is grounded in culture, ancestry, language, or personal identification. She describes the complexity of mixed Māori heritage, and the challenges posed by stereotyping of these students stating that the “underlying assumption is that those who identify with multiple ethnicities have a weaker sense of cultural identity” (p.91). Adams (2021) and Webber (2007) explain that the experiences of Māori–Pākehā students in school can lead to a feeling of existing in between two worlds or that students may feel that they must choose one culture to identify with. Adams (2021) describes how her own school experiences influenced a shift in her self-identification, from identifying as Māori in primary school to identifying as Māori–Pākehā as she transitioned to intermediate school. Adams (2021) refers to teaching as a political act with teachers as social gate keepers, explaining that Māori and Pākehā identities are socially constructed and we are made ethnic by our peers and colleagues. In discussing the various layers of complexity in the construction of Māori–Pākehā identity, Adams in reference to Kukutai (2004) and Webber (2017) describes how schools can often create negative perceptions of self for Māori students.

'Decolonising' Education

Colonisation is not a historical event nor occurrence, rather an ongoing process in which the Indigenous people of a particular land have been dispossessed and controlled by the coloniser. Central to this thesis is the understanding that we still live in a colonial state. Moana Jackson (2020) argues that to redress the impacts of colonisation we need to restore what the Indigenous people were dispossessed of, and he reminds us that restoration too will take a process, not just an event. Freire (1972) describes *conscientisation* as the process

of critical awareness leading one from a passive to an active state to challenge oppressive systems that maintain the status quo of inequity. Restoration in education will require not only a change of systems and structures, but also a change of hearts and minds (Berryman et al., 2025).

Kaupapa Māori Educational Responses that Support Positive Identity Formation

The kaupapa Māori movement, centered on the concept of tino rangatiratanga acknowledges Māori epistemologies (Nepe, 1991) and asserts a Māori way of knowing and being (G. Smith, 1992; L. T. Smith, 2012). Nepe (1991) describes kaupapa Māori as existing since the beginning of time and the creation of the universe and as such, its distinct epistemological and metaphysical foundations are deeply intertwined in the Māori language and culture and therefore is seen as the philosophy and practice of being Māori. The kaupapa Māori movement has also been described as a ‘resistance initiative’ in response to colonisation (Smith, 1992). In a contemporary context kaupapa Māori theory is focused on challenging and addressing the “unequal power relations within wider New Zealand society that were created with the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840, those structures work to oppress Māori people” (Bishop, 2005a p.114). Mahuika (2009), asserts that kaupapa Māori has provided successful pathways for Māori to assert their ways of being and worldviews “against the mainstream narrative” (p.96).

Evidence of the success of kaupapa Māori initiatives can be demonstrated through the establishment of Kōhanga Reo and Kura kaupapa Māori which have been outstanding success stories in our education history and are examples of the types of success kura auraki can hope to enjoy when they start ‘decolonising’ their teaching spaces, practices and educational systems in order to authentically implement kaupapa Māori strategies like Kā Hikitia (Alton-Lee, 2015).

Goals for Māori Education

Durie (2003), laid out three goals for Māori education acknowledging the critical role education plays in the advancement of Māori people, ascertaining that education should enable Māori people:

- To live as Māori - meaning Māori have access to te ao Māori, including language, tikanga and culture. Durie states that if after 12 years of formal schooling, Māori

youth were unable to engage in te ao Māori, then “no matter what else had been learned, education would be incomplete” (p. 199).

- Māori to actively participate as citizens of the world – meaning if at the end of schooling Māori are not ready to engage and interact in the wider world, then “opportunities for Māori advancement will have been sacrificed” (p. 200).
- Māori to enjoy good health and a high standard of living.

Durie describes three principles to realise the goals of Māori education. The first is *Best Outcomes*, that it is unacceptable for Māori to leave any education setting without having achieved the best possible outcome. Durie argues that what success looks like for Māori might not be the same as what it is for non-Māori. The second principle, *Integrated Action*, recognises there are different stakeholders in education, and it is the integrated action, or not, of these stakeholders that determines the success or failure of Māori learners. “Unless there is some platform for integrated action, the development will be piecemeal, and progress will be uneven” (p. 203). The final principle is *Indigeneity*, which acknowledges that culture matters and that “Māori can lay claim to a set of indigenous rights, and those rights have implications for the type of education Māori children receive” (p. 205).

School Reform aimed at Overcoming System Disparities for Māori

Te Kotahitanga, a kaupapa Māori school reform project occurred at about the same time (from 2001 to 2013), incorporating research and development to address educational disparities for Māori in kura auraki. *Culture Speaks* (Bishop & Berryman, 2006) presents narratives that emerged from Te Kotahitanga. A significant finding was the disconnect between the teachers, who saw Māori achievement in deficit terms blaming factors outside their control, and that of the students, their whānau and principals who understood the biggest influence on Māori achievement was in-class relationships. By listening to the voices of Māori learners, Te Kotahitanga promoted a teacher professional development programme to develop a culturally responsive pedagogy of relations (Bishop & Berryman, 2006). The Effective Teacher Profile (ETP) was developed to support the agentic discursive (re)positioning of teachers to become agents of change by developing teaching and learning experiences that recognise culture, are interactive, dialogic and where power is shared. Classroom evidence informed three levels of co-construction meetings that occurred as part of the programme; school level, department level and classroom level, with shadowing

coaching that came out of these meetings to further support teachers to implement the ETP. Ka Hikitia (MoE, 2009) emerged as the policy and strategic direction to support this to happen.

While positive results were localised to schools that had been involved in Te Kotahitanga, similar reforms have followed with variable results. These reform initiatives include Building on Success: Kia Eke Panuku (Berryman, 2016) and Te Hurihanganui (Berryman et al., 2024). Kia Eke Panuku, working with school leaders across one third of Aotearoa-NZ's secondary schools, demonstrated that while culturally responsive pedagogy provided a very good classroom foundation for learning, because of previous assimilatory practices, many Māori students needed support to have their cultural learning nurtured and enhanced (Berryman & Eley, 2017). Culturally nourishing pedagogy asks educators to respond to the effects of cultural degradation by actively feeding, growing and extending Indigenous identities in the classroom to become self-sustaining (Lowe et al., 2025). Students identified that in order to succeed as Māori, many needed support to grow both their cultural knowledge and academic knowledge (Berryman et al., 2017). Paris (2012) reasons that 'culturally sustaining pedagogies' are required to support young people to become self-sustaining in their (Indigenous) linguistic and cultural competence while simultaneously accessing the cultural competence of the dominant group. In culturally sustaining pedagogy, educators go deeper into responsiveness by seeking "to perpetuate and foster—to sustain—linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling" (p.95). The need to understand the why and how of reform such as this, and a willingness from the Crown to fund it, remain consistent barriers. Te Hurihanganui, introduced in 2020, which sought to collaborate with iwi to sustain the culture of Māori learners coincided with two important system levers, the launch of the Education and Training Act – 2020 and Ka Hikitia – Ka Hāpaitia.

Ka Hikitia – Ka Hāpaitia

Ka Hikitia - Ka Hāpaitia was the MoE's (2020) third iteration of this cross-agency education strategy to support Māori to enjoy educational success as Māori, was designed to address the ongoing educational disparities that exist in our education system between Māori and non-Māori as this "has significant social, cultural, health and economic impacts for whānau, hapū, iwi Māori and New Zealand as a whole" (p.5). The overarching aim of Ka Hikitia – Ka

Hāpaitia would be realised through five guiding principles: excellent outcomes, belonging, strengths-based approach, productive partnerships and Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Building power-sharing partnerships between schools and Māori students, their whānau, hapū and iwi so that Māori can “actively participate in te ao Māori, Aotearoa and the wider world” (p. 5) involves:

- *Learners at the centre* - recognising the learner within the context of their whānau, hapū, iwi.
- *Barrier-free access* to education and learning - meaning that Māori are free from racism, discrimination, and stigma in education. Learning environments are fair, respectful and culturally safe where Māori learners feel a sense of belonging.
- *Quality teaching and leadership* - which recognises Māori diversity and aspirations and works within a Māori strengths-based approach.
- *Future of learning and work* – Māori language, culture and identity matter and are nurtured.
- *A world class inclusive public education* - in which te Tiriti o Waitangi is enacted through Māori exercising their authority and agency in education.

Nurturing Positive Identity Formation with Mātauranga Māori

Engaging with mātauranga Māori provides the opportunity for Māori to learn about themselves, their histories and cultures, generating self-esteem and empowerment which Royal (2019), suggests can contribute “to the positive transformation of the individual Māori person” (p.29). At a fundamental level whakapapa connects the individual to a wider group of people and back to the whenua. Royal explains how mātauranga Māori explored through whakapapa can promote positive identity formation, by fostering self-esteem, confidence and empowerment and that this leads to an ‘openness’ in the Māori individual which improves their social connections. Royal identifies three ways in which whakapapa builds pride and self-worth in Māori tribal identity. Firstly, the sense of belonging to whānau, hapū and iwi can be transformative for Māori looking to confirm their cultural identity. Secondly, this connection with the whanui hāpori provides access to taonga such as an overall group identity, geographical sites and activities that express and foster tribal worldviews, cultural practices and histories. From this knowledge comes understandings that one’s individual identity is part of a collective identity, and one is never alone. Finally, whakapapa, as a

concept of layering genealogical knowledge that connects us back to Papatūānuku, provides a way of seeing and experiencing life through a unique Māori tribal worldview.

Chapter 3: Tikanga of Harvesting Harakeke and Extracting Muka

Introduction

In this chapter I explain the methodologies, methods and Māori metaphors that I have used to gather, analyse and present my research findings. I also explain my ethical considerations and give a brief introduction to the research participants.

Methodology

Culturally Responsive Methodologies

Culturally Responsive Methodologies (CRM) (Berryman et al., 2013) has provided the conjoined theoretical framework of kaupapa Māori and critical theories to guide this research. In utilising CRM, it is essential for the researcher to develop authentic, reciprocal and trusting relationships with participants thereby challenging “objectivity and neutrality” (p.1) in the research process. I am not neutral in this research, I initiated this research project as an insider (Berryman et al., 2013; Smith, 2012). Firstly, as a female researcher who identifies as Māori, and secondly as a member of a senior leadership team in a kura auraki. Working under a critical theory framework has supported me to examine power structures within secondary kura auraki and how power relations impact the formation of identity for taitamāhine Māori students. Central to my research has been the understanding that we are still living in a colonial structure, it was therefore important to utilise the emancipatory nature of critical theory and the resistance and self-determination of kaupapa Māori theory. It was my aspiration that all participants including myself, benefited from this research process by finding ways to connect with each other through shared experiences (Berryman et al., 2013; L. T. Smith 2012). Drawing on kaupapa Māori research methodologies has allowed me to centralise the concept of whanaungatanga and the fundamental importance of establishing and maintaining relationships throughout the research process (Bishop, 1996, 1997b). Using kaupapa Māori research methodologies has allowed myself and the Māori research participants to affirm our identity as Māori and privilege Māori worldviews. Berryman et al., (2013), suggest that kaupapa Māori supports cultural reconnection and supports the “power to define oneself and, in so doing, define solutions that will be more effective for Māori, now and in the future” (p.284).

Culturally Responsive Methodologies have been appropriate for this research, not only because they supported me as a researcher to engage with research participants in a *mana*

(prestige) enhancing, respectful, authentic way based on cultural awareness, but also because they reflected the bicultural and multicultural heritages of many of the research participants. In addition, utilising CRM supported the bi-cultural aspirations of the school in which the research was conducted.

Methods

Data Collection - Interviews-as-Conversations

Interviews-as-conversations was the method used to collect my research data. CRM supports “interviews to be developed to position the researcher within a co-joint reflection on shared experiences, a position where the stories of the research participants merge with that of the researcher in order to create new stories” (Bishop, 1997b, p. 41). This style of interviewing supports a sense of connection and collaboration, that enables new ideas or knowledge to be generated within the interview itself by promoting “free interaction and opportunities for clarification and discussion between research participants” (Tripp, 1983, p. 34). Using interviews-as-conversations, allowed me to collect qualitative research data in a non-intrusive way that engaged research participants in dialogic, mutually respectful and reciprocal conversations. Working in this way supported me to address Māori desire for self-determination in research by ensuring the power dynamic lay not with the researcher but with the research participants (Bishop, 1997b).

The interviews-as-conversations were conducted through choices made by the research participants. Students had the option of being interviewed alone, or with a whānau member present. There were also options for any of the research participants to have a support person with them. This offered additional support for the participants and helped to address issues around power imbalance. There was also choice in where the interview was conducted, at school, at an approved off site venue or at the home of research participants. All but one interview was conducted at school in a shared space which resisted the domination of the researcher. Within CRM contexts such as these, the researcher is seen as the learner and not an expert, and the participants are seen as leaders of the research (Berryman et al., 2013). It was my aim to establish the leadership of participants from the outset, by asking them to determine how, when and where the interviews-as-conversations would be conducted.

I had prepared questions to initiate and guide our interviews-as-conversations, however, due to my existing relationships with participants, I found that the conversations flowed freely and participants quickly took the lead. I experienced many moments of shared learning and new understandings occurring through these conversations. I audio-recorded and transcribed the interviews-as-conversations and shared these with the research participants to annotate and verify. This ensured that the participants had the power to redact anything they felt they no longer wanted to share and clarify anything they felt had been misinterpreted.

Data Analysis - Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is the method that I used to analyse the research data, as it focuses on the generation of theories grounded in the experiences and voices of the participants. Noble and Mitchell (2016) suggest that grounded theory helps to reveal “social relationships and behaviours of groups, known as social processes” (p.34). In grounded theory a researcher enters field research without preconceived notions or concepts of what they will find, instead drawing conclusions from the themes that emerge from the data itself (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). In line with grounded theory, while cognisant of my own experiences of Māori identity formation while at school some 25 years ago, I did not enter the research process with any pre-conceived notions of what I might find in 2025, nor did I seek to meet with people that may have had a similar experience to me in being fair skinned. Grounded theory allowed me to extract and “conceptualise the hidden social and collective patterns and constructions” (Noble & Mitchell, 2016, p.34) that lay in the conversations-as-interviews I had with participants around identity formation for taitamāhine Māori currently enrolled in secondary kura auraki. Charmaz and Thornberg (2021) point out that in grounded theory, the purpose of interviewing is not an effort to mirror reality, but instead to highlight “emergent iterations through a mutual exploration of the interviewee’s experiences and perspective” (p.14). As such all of themes and theories that I have discussed in this thesis have emerged organically from the voices of the research participants.

Data Presentation - Collaborative Storying

It is important that the participants who were involved in this research benefit from the experience and the resulting data and material, therefore I utilised collaborative storying to present my research findings. Bishop (1997b) states that collaborative storying allows for

“connectedness, engagement, and involvement with other research participants” (p. 41), thereby creating a sense of unity and inclusion by sharing individual experiences through a collective voice. Presenting my findings as collaborative stories for each of the participant groups taitamāhine, their mothers or hākui, and *kaiako* (teachers) allowed participants greater anonymity. The three separate collaborative stories also provided opportunities to hear about how colonial power structures that have oppressed Māori continue to be perpetuated through education on micro and macroscales.

Weaving Metaphors

Utilising CRM as a participatory methodology has allowed me to draw on elements of te ao Māori such as whatu or weaving as a metaphor through which to view my research data collection, analysis and presentation of findings. In the writing process of this thesis, I have visualised each participants voice as contributing aho-threads to the weaving of a kākahu. Each voice bringing colour and adding to the texture of the discussion on identity formation in kura auraki. When woven together with the whenu-threads extracted and rolled from the literature review, a kākahu of Māori tribal identity is formed.

The table below illustrates how I have used understandings informed by Diggeress Te Kanawa (1994) about whatu, and the preparation and harvesting of harakeke to weave a kākahu, as a metaphor to guide my thesis conceptualisation, research methods, and writing processes.

Table 1.

Using Whatu as a Metaphor for Writing a Thesis.

Whatu as a metaphor	Whatu Processes	Academic Processes
Literature Review		
Caring for pā harakeke (literature Review).	- Investing in the soil. - Preparing the ground. - Planting and caring for harakeke.	- Reviewing literature. - Develop research questions. - Building relationships.
Methodologies		
Planning to harvest harakeke and extract muka (conceptualisation and methodologies).	- What will the harakeke be used for? - Who is the garment for?	Develop methodology and methods for research project.

	• What resources and tools are needed? • When, where and how will harakeke be harvested?	• Gaining school and ethics approvals. • Advertising the research. • Gaining informed consent.
Methods		
Harvesting harakeke (method, data gathering).	• Following tikanga. • Only take what you require. • Be respectful and take care. • Return to the whenua what is not used.	• Interviews –as- conversations. • Maintain confidentiality. • Follow ethical considerations. • Verify transcripts with research participants.
Extracting the muka (applying grounded theory).	• Carefully extract the muka from the harakeke.	• Applying grounded theory to extract the themes.
Research Findings		
Preparing and rolling muka treads (Findings presented as collaborative stories).	• Prepare the muka for weaving. Hand roll muka into threads.	• Coding the research data into categories and subcategories. • Write collaborative stories.
Discussion and Conclusion		
Weaving the kākahu.	• Using whatu to weave the muka threads into a kākahu. • Examining and presenting what the design reveals.	• Synthesis research data with literature. • Discuss answers to the research questions. • Draw conclusions.

Note: This table outlines how I have used the metaphor of whatu to inform my process for collecting, analysing, presenting and discussing the research findings in this thesis as a kākahu.

Research Procedure

After attaining Board of Trustees consent and full ethics approval, I advertised the research project to the school community. I attended a school *hui* (meeting) where I spoke about the research, answered questions and gauged if the whānau Māori were supportive.

Overwhelming they were and could see the benefit to their daughters and future students. Information on the research project was emailed directly to students, whānau and teachers and was regularly advertised in the school newsletter for two months. I talked through the consent forms and answered any questions with potential participants before obtaining written consent (including assent from parents for students) and arranged meeting times and places based on participants preferences. I voice recorded the interviews-as-conversations and transcribed these. All interviews-as-conversations were held *kanohi-ki-te-kanohi* (face-to-face). This was important, not only in supporting the building and maintaining of reciprocal relationships, but also because of the sensitive nature of the conversations we had (Berryman et al., 2013). I was moved by the honesty and generosity of the research participants in detailing their experiences. I shared the transcripts with participants to verify and edit. I used grounded theory to analyse the data I had collected and used collaborative storying to present the findings. Voices were five taitamāhine Māori students, three of their hākui and five of their kaiako from the school.

Research Participants

I have chosen not to publish the name of the school nor the identity any of the participants in the research. By chance, all the participants were women and were raised and educated in Aotearoa-NZ. I met with five taitamāhine Māori who were in Year 12 or Year 13 at an urban secondary, single-sex, girls' kura auraki. While all identified as Māori, most also identified with other cultural or ethnic groups (Pākehā and/or Pacific Islander). Two students were interviewed alongside their hākui, the others individually. The three hākui I met with identified as Māori, and two spoke of having mixed heritage (Māori and Pākehā). The five kaiako that I interviewed were experienced educators and some held leadership portfolios. Two identified as having mixed heritage (Māori and Pākehā) and three identified as Pākehā. In chapter 5, I have used the metaphor of whatu to weave the research participants' voices; in doing so I have used colour-names to represent the voice of each participant. Those that

have Māori heritage have Māori colour-names, those who are Pākehā have English colour-names.

Ethical Considerations

When conducting research with Māori participants, one must also pay special consideration to ethical concerns Māori have raised around research into their lives (Bishop, 1997a; Berryman et al., 2013; L. T. Smith, 2012). As a woman of Māori heritage working with CRM, I believe I have addressed concerns on research into the lives and experiences of Māori as outlined by Bishop (1997a). I have *initiated* this research, as educator who identifies as Māori, in response to the question - why some Māori students leave school with a stronger sense of identity than others? Those who will *benefit* from the research will be the school community in which the research is based including the student research participants and future Māori students. I have aimed to address concerns on *legitimacy* and *representation* by working in a collaborative way with research participants as an insider. Ultimately, I will be *accountable* for the research and to research participants. I have worked with a kaumatua in the school as a cultural advisor.

While the students I interviewed were all over 16 years old and were able to give informed consent, because of the sensitive nature of cultural identity, I chose to also seek parents assent for the interviews and provided options for students to be interviewed alongside a whānau member or a support person. I have maintained the confidentiality of participants and their information throughout the research and thesis writing process. All ethical requirements as outlined by the University of Waikato and its Ethics Committee have been followed throughout the research and thesis writing process.

Chapter 4: Rolling Aho-Threads

Introduction

This chapter presents the voices of taitamāhine Māori, their hākui and kaiako in three collaborative stories. By applying Grounded Theory to my Interviews-as-Conversations, I have extracted the 'muka fibres' to reveal the themes that emerged from our discussions. In this chapter I roll these muka fibres into aho-threads of commonly identified themes through collaborative storytelling. In the Discussion these threads are woven together with whenu to create a kākahu of Māori identity.

Through my conversations with participants, I was cognisant that the location of power resides within school institutions. For this reason, I have chosen to begin the collaborative stories with the kaiako, whose voices paint a picture of the educational landscape and the status quo. Secondly, in acknowledging that Māori parent voices continue to be marginalised in education I have centralised the collaborative stories of the hākui, between those of the kaiako and their daughters. These voices provided insight into the impact 200 years of colonisation has had on tribal identity formation for taitamāhine Māori and speaks to their hopes and dreams, their past and future aspirations. Finally, the voices of the five taitamāhine, who illustrate what is happening inside the 'status quo' of education by 'colouring in' what Māori tribal identity formation looks like for them in 2025.

As discussed in chapter 3, I have used colour-names to represent the voice of each participant. The taitamāhine and hākui voices are vibrant and full of colour. The teacher voices are more neutral in tone.

Aho-Threads of Kaiako Voices

Kaiako voices form the first collaborative story. Five experienced female kaiako were interviewed; all were born, raised and educated in Aotearoa-NZ.

Māori Enjoying Educational Success as Māori and Positive Identity Formation

Kaiako had varying degrees of confidence in their ability to articulate what Māori achieving as Māori meant. While they lacked a common language, throughout our conversations it was clear there was a foundational understanding of this concept. Hina suggested:

It looks different for every kid...what makes an artwork Māori medium? Like, yes, this one we can visibly see is Māori, but why does that make this one any less?...And so, I think it really depends on the kid.

Ash: From my perspective, it's when students feel that they don't have to...whitewash themselves to belong in a classroom, to be successful in a classroom, or to be seen in a classroom, that they are existing in their own space... and there are opportunities for them to explore whatever content we're doing from their perspective.

Another teacher, Kokorā, expressed some uncertainty on defining this confidently:

I think that generally...my answer would be erring towards the side of not really.

Hina agreed that teachers may not have a universal and deep understanding of this concept:

For most staff, I think that concept is lost. I don't think we understand what it is. For me, I would probably equate it to a student being comfortable to be that identity...So, when someone sits there and says, 'oh, what nationality are you?' They go, 'I am Māori.' ...and that doesn't mean that they need to join kapa haka or be taking te reo as a language or anything like that, but if they're not comfortable to...say, 'I am Māori', then that would be that they're not meeting that...So...to me...achieving as Māori means that you're comfortable in being Māori.

Despite a desire to affirm and support the positive identity formation of taitamāhine Māori, Lavender expressed uncertainty understanding her responsibility and role as a kaiako in supporting this:

I think I do, and it'll be really hard to articulate...empowering our Māori students for them to see that... I can see the road they are taking...which is te ao. And that they can do that with confidence and competence and have, even if it's tacit, acknowledgement from me, but then sometimes I think because I'm an educator, I go further than tacit, I want to affirm...I don't really feel the approval is mine to give, but...because I am the kaiako, I can see in their eyes. They need that. I get that. But I...also think I'm the facilitator. I'm not the boss of them. I want them to find their own.

Agency and Power Sharing

Kaiako discussed what they perceive as the limitations to positive identity formation for Māori students as being systemic in education while also acknowledging the limitations of individual teacher knowledgebases. In response to my question about what hinders positive identity formation as Māori, one kaiako, Hina, said:

I feel like the easiest thing that we're encouraged towards is content. And I don't feel like we have many discussions around pedagogy. It's like build relationships...We're doing that with all our kids...what did these kids need that's slightly different?

Hina acknowledged putting in effort matters, students can see when staff don't 'bother.'

...there's definitely things that I'm like, yep, that would hinder it. Like...when people don't bother. You can...tell when people are trying to understand something versus just not bothering.

Another kaiako suggested this could be exacerbated by the teaching professions' lack of acceptance or understanding of mātauranga Māori. Sage said:

It's primarily a teaching force of middle-aged Pākehā women [and] it's very difficult to understand mātauranga... when...mātauranga...is presented as something that's in the past. That mātauranga isn't something that is constantly evolving and shaping and...being added to and progressing. I think different disciplines and subjects have embraced mātauranga Māori and culturally responsive pedagogy in different ways, and to differing levels of success.

She spoke of non-Māori teachers' apprehension to engage in mātauranga Māori, stating:

I've spoken with other teachers, particularly around mātauranga Māori and being Pākehā or non-Māori, they've been afraid to walk in there, into those spaces because...it's not their culture. They don't want to misrepresent something.

Acknowledging that for some non-Māori teachers embracing mātauranga means relinquishing power, Sage states:

Surrender yourself to something that you're not in control of, and you might be uncomfortable, and I probably will muck up and do something wrong. But you kind of have to be okay with that.

Another kaiako, Ash, discussed the importance of understanding the locus of power in kura auraki. Understanding and being consciously aware of this is critical for teachers to challenge the location of power. She suggested:

The construct is that we have the power. We can power-share to a certain degree but we're an organisation that follows very rigid rules...And unless the rules allow for flex, then it's just like from one space to the next is all the same.

She discussed the implications of this for her subject area, and how she needed to position herself as agentic to navigate this reality. Her sphere of influence is the classroom, and while she may not have the ability to address the location of power on a school or system wide level, she does have the ability to do so in her classroom:

...my subject area is by its very nature imposing a structure and a construct and a set of beliefs which are colonising...I think my first steps are when I am in my classroom acknowledging that the text... is not necessarily from our space...We're going, well, how can we draw parallels with our New Zealand society?...And bring it into the New Zealand space.

In acknowledgement that the then current Aotearoa-NZ Curriculum allows teachers to frame teaching and learning sequences in a way that engages students to explore topics, content and ideas from their unique cultural and social perspectives, Ash states:

The beauty of current level three New Zealand...curriculum is that the students are asked for their own personal voice, their own response, and their own take.

Discussing the beginning of her conscientisation process, she states:

I started teaching in [urban area]and I came from white middle class [region]. So, my worldview simply didn't fit there....I think that was a groundwork because, I mean, I was taught "The Coming of the Māori" as a social studies unit.

Ash discussed how these teaching experiences challenged her cultural positioning early in her career and led her to personally pursue professional development to deepen her understanding of Aotearoa-NZ history and kaupapa Māori theories in education. Lavender also spoke of teachers' need to pursue their own learning outside of what is offered by schools and the MoE to develop their cultural competencies:

I wonder if SLT has a handle on the further education that staff partake in outside of school in te reo and wānanga.

The Teaching Standards were signposted as impetus for improved culturally responsive practice, honouring Te Tiriti is seen as a professional obligation. Ash said she:

...felt motivated when the new [current in 2025] professional standards came in. And I was like oh there's an entire standard there which is about Te Tiriti, if I'm going to continue teaching then I've got to meet this standard because it's my professional obligation.

Identity Complexity

Complexity in students' cultural identity added to the hesitation of kaiako to recognise all Māori students as Māori. Kaiako discussed identifying Māori students through various methods including Student Management Systems (SMS) data, but also through observation, interactions, and school engagement. Ash said:

I would run a Kamar ethnicity...I'm always interested when I see people who...I thought...were Māori, and yet they've got European or they haven't got an iwi...acknowledged. Or they're...Māori...but they've never...shown anything...and I'm just like, if I hadn't seen it on paper, I wouldn't have known.

Other kaiako explained they don't rely solely on SMS data but also how students engage in class. Sage suggested:

I try and look at all the ethnicity.... But also, what they bring to class.

Two kaiako spoke of not using SMS data initially but instead spoke of identifying students' cultural heritage through processes that were built into learning programmes. Kokorā said she is aware of who her Māori student are in an:

...organic way.... because we do a lot of looking at your whakapapa and your identity...So much of it is like, 'oh, so where did it come from?' So, it's all part of the assessments that we do.

Hina discussed not wanting to have assumptions based on SMS data and only referred to it once she had started to establish relationships with students:

I don't like to walk into the class with an assumption about people... I prefer to see how they present...So, once I've kind of established a bit of knowledge about them, then I often go back and look.

Hina discussed the importance of role modelling and normalising cultural identity complexity in classrooms, saying:

I do a little demo...and I'll be like... 'so, on my dad's side, I've got this and this and this, and on my mum's side, I've got this and this'. So, they see that...actually, I'm not just one thing. It's okay to put down multiple of things from lots...of places.

Sage spoke of not always recognising students with mixed cultural heritages as Māori on first impressions, even if they are enrolled as Māori. She admitted:

To my shame for the first couple of months of teaching her, I didn't realise she was Māori. Because the Pacific side was stronger, and she was in, I think, maybe in one of the Samoan groups or the Tongan group. And I never saw her at kapa haka. I don't think she does kapa haka.

Some kaiako discussed seeing students as individuals and perceived that some Māori students choose not to engage as Māori at school. Two kaiako discussed a reluctance to push these students into spaces that they did not appear to be comfortable in. Sage recalled:

I had ... quite a few very strong Māori students in my class in terms of strong in their identity outside of the classroom, but they wouldn't really talk about it in the classroom.

Hina affirmed:

[Student] is identified as Māori on the roll, but I don't think she identifies as Māori or feels comfortable in that space...I don't want to push...onto her that I think she should be trying to be Māori...I don't necessarily think...that she didn't feel Māori, it was just that it wasn't something she wanted to explore in school.

Discussing if judgments are being made about who Māori students are, based on their physical appearance, Lavender was very clear that physical appearance is not an indicator of cultural or ethnic identity. However, she acknowledged that this may not be a commonly held understanding across the teaching workforce:

I can't tell by looking. Like, my [family member] is a blue-eyed blonde Māori. You wouldn't know until she opened her mouth and started speaking te reo that she was Māori...Because we cannot see. We can't. Probably with all humans what you see is not necessarily what you get, once you get to know them.

Another kaiako, Kokorā, commented that Māori students may not engage as Māori while at school because of stereotypes:

It's just that fear that people around them are going to be like, 'what? You're not Māori, you're white.' 'Yes. I am. I whakapapa.' And then...they'll be like, 'well, no. It's not enough.' So, it's just judgment from other people that you're not Māori enough...I'm sure that is a feeling that...if you don't know enough or if you're not sure..... You're not enough. You weren't raised in, it so therefore you aren't it.

Ash reflected that some Māori students with mixed heritage may feel distanced from their culture, which in turn can create a barrier to accessing further cultural knowledge:

You're more adjacent [to cultural identity as Māori].

She related this to observations of Māori students 'choosing' to not engage in kapa haka and mused on whether this was due to their discomfort in those spaces:

I think you can see that from the students who you know are quite capable of performance, but they choose not to join kapa haka... the fact that you wouldn't join it or that you'd only join it when you're in [intermediate] and then you'd leave it when you were in year nine... Smacks to me of not feeling comfortable in the space

for a reason. It's probably got to do with your identity, rather than necessarily, you being able to swing a poi particularly well.

However, when the learning environments are safe to explore Māori content, the experience has the potential to be transformative for Māori students. Hina recalled a learning conversation she had with a colleague who described ako in action:

She was like, 'man and every time I'd get lost, one of the kids would be like, actually, Miss, this is what's going on', and jump in and kind of be like, 'oh, miss, I know what we should do here.' And they got really, really involved in the actual process. And there was one student...who did turn around and go, 'oh Miss, I have never actually looked at my Māori side. This is the first time I've done it.'... And so, she... went and chatted with her family and tried to understand where she's from on that side. So, there was cool little run on effects like that.

Through our conversations kaiako expressed a deepening appreciation of the complexity for Māori students to confidently identify as Māori in all learning spaces. One kaiako pointed out that students should not only experience affirmation of te ao Māori in their classroom but across the wider school environment. Sage commented:

Having te reo Māori and tikanga represented in assemblies and in public spaces. To feel like that there's that sense of inclusion, but then also having the opportunity in their teaching and their learning to be able to learn, or, to draw on [Māori] context.

Kokorā agreed about culturally safe and responsive school environments and added that perception of peers was important aspect of the school environment:

It's valued by the school...and by their peers.

Culture Matters – feeling safe, included and able to engage in te ao Māori spaces

Sage discussed the positive impact Māori spaces and the whenua had on taitamāhine identity formation, after observing a student's increase confidence in her Māori identity while on camp in her iwi's *takiwā* (territory):

I...felt like when we were on that trip, wouldn't it be amazing if we could take all our Māori students on a trip with their peers back to their place they whakapapa to, to have that experience? Because you saw [student name] on that trip, just come out

of her shell. She was asking questions, engaging with things in the museums... 'oh, well, I think I whakapapa to that', and 'I have this connection with that'... the person at the museum said, 'is anyone from [iwi] here?' And she was like, 'yes!'... The affirmation of - you're in your space at the moment.

Sage acknowledged that some students are nervous going into Māori spaces, needing support and guidance from kaiako to walk comfortably in those spaces. In turn kaiako need support and guidance from those with cultural experience and understanding, like kaumātua. She explained:

They're nervous to perform in front of the other kura because they know how strong those kura are... How does that experience of being with predominantly kaupapa Māori schools and being immersed in that culture impact the Māori students?... I really hope it will be affirming, and I'm sure it will be because the support from [kaiako from another kura]. She wrote me this massive email about how schools who are new to this process, we know it can be really scary, and it can be, you know, and we will awhi [embrace] you through, and we will support the girls and all of that sort of stuff.

Lavender described how affirming tikanga Māori can normalise Māori ways of being, and this can lead to the empowerment of Māori students. Recalling a scenario at school she said:

I just kind of quietly said side on, 'just think about where you're sitting'... And other kids heard my comment... And they said, 'yeah can you?', you know, basically, telling them... to get off the table and sit on chairs. And I thought it was... great because they might just need that. They must have felt slightly empowered. They knew that they were going to get back up from me.

Her observation that students felt empowered to assert Māori ways of being because they had the backing of the teacher, is important. What is essential here is that the teacher, although not Māori herself, upheld not sitting on tables because she had a deeper understanding of why this tikanga is important. She had learnt this from an authentic and reliable source. Lavender explains:

A te reo teacher... was teaching tikanga, and she explained to the kids, we don't sit on tables, and she told them why, and in really blatant language...I was quite surprised...by how she was just black and white...I thought it was great.

Hina discussed why it was important teachers are taught fundamental tikanga Māori for it to become embedded across school practice. She explains:

We have diverse teachers. We've got people who weren't born here or have grown up in very different kind of areas...they don't know that stuff...you can't just assume that people know it.

She also discussed how peers respond to Māori content in class can impact on the safety of the learning environment for Māori students, stating:

...we're encouraged to pick Māori content, and I don't know if it's always helping. Because I think...[it] depends on...how it is...received. I've definitely had classes where you see the rolled eyes and the, 'oh, here's another Māori content thing' because they aren't Māori...and they haven't been brought up with the value of learning about it as New Zealanders

Hina explained kaiako should ensure the delivery and reception of Māori content is done in a way that does not diminish or undermine the very point of its inclusion, saying:

Figuring out how to manage it in a way that...the kids aren't approaching it negatively. So that the kids in the class that are Māori...don't feel like they can't speak up about it.

Ash reflected on the 'comfortableness' of Māori learners to be Māori in their classroom in general.

I'm just thinking about students in my class that I have once a fortnight, who I know are Māori. And how they don't always look like they're comfortable in themselves, and they don't want to stand out.... When they speak about things or put their hands up, they're blushing and they've gone all hot...And I'm just wondering how much of that is just themselves because they're a [year level]...Or if it is their peers looking at them who are non-Māori and if they wonder if they're feeling judged. Because I've got one little table. One, two, three, four, five students in it. Four of

whom I would say are uncomfortable. And I don't know if it's because they're not comfortable being Māori.

Peers

Sage observed that positive recognition of Māori identity by peers builds identity confidence. She described students joking with a Māori student with mixed heritage about her Māori identity:

That hassling though was two students who are very strong in their Pasifika identity with a good relationship with [her]...who were able to...do it in a way that was...affirming of her identity...The girls recognised that she wasn't just Pacific. She's Māori as well.

However negative recognition by peers had also been observed by Sage in another situation. She discussed witnessing how negative peer recognition had hindered Māori students' confidence to express their identity as Māori, recalling:

After our kapa haka group performed their bracket at assembly I spent about an hour comforting [students]. Because there was a group of students who were laughing and mocking them while they performed...whether it's right or not, their perception was that we hate performing in front of the school because some because kids are... going to mock us.

Sage acknowledged that the actions of a few can distract from the majority who were engaged and supportive, exposing the vulnerability of developing cultural confidence for Māori students:

I said, 'girls...so many people are so proud of you, and everyone else was just so in awe of your poi. And you know that's a universal thing of when...you get feedback...1% of it is negative and that's what you hyper focus on'...But also, I was just so upset that our school assembly might not be a safe place for them to feel like they can get up and perform.

Kokorā reflected on whether teacher or peer recognition has the biggest impact on students' developing confidence as Māori:

I suppose it would be your peers. I reckon they would be worried that their peers would be like, 'What you're not Māori, you can't claim to be Māori.' And then I think teachers would be supportive.

Discussing the impact peer perception has on developing identity confidence, she commented:

That's the thing I'm really sad about it. It's this thing that people don't want to...flaunt.

Lavender agreed that the perception of peers is significant for adolescent teenage girls stating:

Our perception of peers is hugely important. Because they're teenagers. So, my guess maybe it's 80%. Might even be 90%...I think parents at that stage have about 3%.

She discussed hearing the term plastic Māori being used by students.

Sometimes the kids will joke about that. I'm weary about that kind of joking...I tend to shut it down...I don't like where that's going...I'm kind of thinking more about times when I'm on playground [duty]. Because...they wouldn't do it in the classroom. Not my classroom.

Sage observed that teachers may not be attuned to all responses of peers in the classroom, which were hurtful and might be described as racial microaggressions:

Being pākehā myself, I probably wouldn't notice the microaggressions or things that our students are necessarily attuned to...maybe something is happening that I am just not picking up on.

Summary

Despite a clear desire to do so, kaiako were unclear as to what their role in the positive identity formation of Māori students, this is due partly to a lack of common understanding of what 'Māori enjoying and achieving educational success as Māori' means. Kaiako acknowledged the complexity in Māori identity formation and discussed diverse ways Māori students are recognised as Māori in the classroom. While SMS data was used, it was not the

only way students were recognised as Māori. Kaiako spoke of taking a range of cues from students to indicate their identification as Māori or not.

Kaiako recognised that positive identity formation occurs in spaces that are culturally safe and inclusive. One kaiako explained how visiting physical sites of significance to Māori can be transformative in the positive identity formation for Māori students and supports recognition as Māori by their peers. Through our discussions, awareness was raised on the presence of racial microaggressions and stereotyping in educational settings.

Aho-Threads of Hākui Voices

Three hākui share their perspectives of how their daughters' identity as Māori has been shaped through secondary education. In doing so, they also reflected on their own and their parents' experiences of Māori identity formation through schooling.

Enjoying and Achieving Educational Success as Māori

Like kaiako, hākui articulated mixed responses on what Māori enjoying and achieving and enjoying educational success means for them. Pūwhero answered:

Not necessarily success academically or with grades and things, but success as identifying who they are as Māori women leaving school.

Kōkōwai: Being able to see it [Māori culture]...not just across the school physically, but in everything that the [students] are doing at school as well. From karakia i te reo Māori [incantation/prayer in the Māori language], processes, tikanga...pōwhiri...and...that they aren't tokenistic but are embedded.

Kōkōwai gave an example of her expectations of kaiako supporting this, by explaining the importance of simple acts like correct name pronunciation, she said:

The expectation would be that...our kaiako are making an effort and not just with Māori names, but all different cultures...I think that's a massive sign of respect for tīpuna of that that child.

Parent responses were also mixed when discussing if they saw this happening for their daughters. Pūwhero said:

I think you're doing all the right things, like creating the opportunities for students to come together.

Kōkōwai saw positive things happening at school.

Whether she's had to make it clear to the teacher, this is because it's my culture or whether it just comes out. I'm not a 100% sure, but the stuff that we see at home where she has put her culture forward, we're really happy with it. It seems like it's well supported.

Whereas Amokura felt more could be done.

As a Māori, I think at this stage of the process that they're...not really achieving as a Māori student...You're sort of just teetering on it as an education system, and...in ten years or five years, if we integrated that more into the syllabus...then there might be a...heightened differentiation between the two (Pākehā and Māori worldviews). Whereas right now, it's sort of like...vanilla with chocolate sprinkles.

Pride and Shame in Māori Identity

In my conversation with Pūwhero and her taitamāhine she clearly identified a theme that I realised, while not as clearly articulated, was woven through my conversations with others: pride and shame in cultural identity. She speaks of her experience watching a kapa haka performance at school:

I went...and it was so powerful and beautiful...and I was so proud of her...I was crying watching these girls...then I looked around, and...you could see that the other girls didn't feel the same. You watch the Samoan group and...the Tongan group...perform, and everyone respects them as you should, and it just doesn't feel the same. I felt that...It's almost like you're so proud of yourself and you're so proud of your culture, but then that also comes with a little bit of shame because no one else can see that or no one else understands or respects it.

When discussing the lack of respect some students were showing of the kapa haka group's performance, she asked:

How do you address that? How do you teach that?

This led Pūwhero to articulate concern around what spaces were safe to be Māori in, in a society that has historically and still is currently grappling with the place of Māori within the wider fabric of society:

What spaces do I feel comfortable to be proud to be Māori? And what spaces are safe? And what spaces do I have to not be Māori? Do I have to hide that from people?...I think it might be something that if they don't experience it here [school]...they're going to experience it out in the big world anyway. Which is not okay...Because there's a lot of resistance [to Māori culture] outside of the gates as well.

Complexity in Māori Identity

Two parents discussed how the intergenerational impact of colonisation and mixed cultural heritage adds to complexity in the identity formation of their children as Māori. Pūwhero explained:

With Tongan and Samoan cultures, they come from whānau that are very strongly attached to their culture. Whereas for some of us Māori...generations of us are still trying to find our culture...and...there's that little bit of an extra battle...of trying to identify ourselves and then letting that filter through to our children so they feel a strong attachment to where they come from and who they are.

Pūwhero discussed the challenges she faced accessing her Māori culture and identifying as Māori in school through her own upbringing:

My mother is Pākehā and my father's Māori...I was raised by my mother... I know myself as a student at school...very shy and would have not [engaged as Māori]...easy for me to just put my head down and pretend I didn't exist.

Pūwhero observed the progress made in the education system since she was at school, and how proud she is of her daughter, for ensuring that the Māori identity of their whānau is reclaimed and restored:

I've seen huge progress since she started here in terms of identifying who she is as Māori. I think one of the big things that impacted that was when my father died...Our attachment and connection to being Māori kind of felt like it died there as well. So, watching her not let that die and really on her own accord...actively seek out all of those opportunities in identifying as Māori and joining kapa haka and creating a relationship with [name] who apparently knew my father...It's been really beautiful to watch.

Pūwhero reflected on the complexity in identity formation for Māori students of mixed heritage stating:

I think...being half Māori... and I experienced it as well. It's like you've got to put on a different face in different crowds and different environments, which is tricky.

Amokura also spoke of her and her daughter's mixed Māori heritage and the complexity this creates in cultural identity formation:

She might identify with being [Pacifica] a bit more than Māori because she hangs out with her grandma all the time who is [Pacifica]...Whereas you look at myself and my parents,...my dad...he could speak Māori, but when he went to school, he got the ruler from the teacher, and that was traumatic for him...So then when I did kapa haka and Māori at school, my dad said it was a waste of time because in New Zealand they don't speak Māori, learn Japanese...Yeah, it trickled down to her.

Amokura discussed how the intergenerational cultural denigration and assimilation of Māori through schooling impacts on Māori children in education today:

Imposter syndrome, right?... But that's not necessarily her fault. It's a thing that's cascaded down...And...my mum, she's Māori...but then she was brought up by a white mum, and she didn't know her brown dad. And then she had [European] brothers and sisters. So...me, plastic Māori, because I got brought up with my nana who was white...I, again, cascade that down to my daughter...so, it's sort of hard with her 'imposter' because...it's generational.

Culture Matters – feeling safe, included and able to engage in te ao Māori spaces

Amokura discussed how Eurocentric assimilatory schooling practices and cultural denigration have impacted on Māori students' feelings of comfort being in Māori spaces. She spoke of her daughter visiting their marae:

So, she's been to them, but that's because something specific has happened...and then when we get there, she freaks out. It's an uncomfortable space. 'Oh my God, I've got to sleep with everyone around me'...But why does the Māori culture do that? That's the important part. And if you educate them at school as to why they all sleep in one meeting house...it's sort of disrespectful if I don't do that. It's not just

take your shoes off [and] there's no explanation as to why it would be a cultural perspective.

Having been forced to relocate to urban environments in search of jobs, Amokura acknowledged the challenges Māori face in maintaining traditional customary ways that provide authentic opportunities for Māori students to be immersed in mātauranga Māori in contemporary society:

I think...with...colonisation...traditional tangihanga [funeral rites] aren't utilised as much because there's so much protocol. Then that doesn't give...children the opportunity to go back...learn and develop...When I was little we would go there and there'd be heaps of us and...we would sit there and listen to...cute kuia talk about...the people on the wall, this why they're here and stuff like that...that's traditional Māori learning. Which now isn't done...and I think that...reflects on the education of the younger generation.

Amokura was clear that Māori who had become alienated from marae needed support to re-engage. She suggests teaching aspects of tikanga and kawa at school:

You could have wānanga twice a year where Māori students came in, and they were taught these things, because some Māori students don't get those opportunities to go to those experiences until their great aunt Gladys dies, and then it's just really overwhelming...So, from a school perspective, if you could integrate some of that...that would then make them feel more comfortable in their selves as Māori when they go out to the world.

While she acknowledged that it was especially important for Māori students to have opportunities to understand how to conduct themselves in te ao Māori spaces, she also noted that it was also important for all students to also gain these skills:

If you took them to the museum and just went to the ...Māori part, then you could practice Māori protocol...because one day they might have that opportunity where they get to do something like that.

Amokura explained that this was about inclusivity and not creating barriers to Māori students wanting to engage in Māori cultural experiences because of potential division with their peers:

They might feel...weird in themselves because your best friend who's not Māori is like, 'oh, why did you get invited to this?'...I sometimes feel that in trying to help Māori students that sometimes it's excluding [others]...then that...appears to be racist.

Pūwhero suggested *tuakana-teina* (older and younger sibling relationships) to support Māori students to feel safe and welcomed in te ao Māori spaces at school:

Maybe having older girls identifying...[junior students] that might be shy and inviting them along to kapa haka and letting them know that there's no expectations. We don't expect you to know everything, but this is a safe space for you.

Enablers and Barriers to Positive Identity Formation as Māori.

Kōkōwai acknowledged the effort and progress made by the school to support the positive identity formation of Māori students, and the positive impact this was having on her daughter's identity development:

Where [child's name] has come in, is quite a good time because we're reaping the rewards of some hard work that's obviously happened beforehand....We felt that the whole way through that its being well supported by the SLT team.

She also talked about the school's whānau hui as a space in which whānau felt safe to raise their concerns within the school:

I don't know if it was a mum or a nan that threw something a little bit tricky, but [the school] dealt with it beautifully...and that's...obviously a safe space where they felt comfortable bringing that to the forum knowing that that's what [the school] wanted to hear, not just the good things.

Kōkōwai gave two specific examples of actions the school had taken to support the positive identity formation of its Māori students:

The investment in kapa haka...that's been massive... and the quality of tutors... I think in itself speaks volumes...The Kaiāwhina role...I think has shown students that te ao Māori is valued and it is a leadership role...I think that's incredibly valuable...to have these girls aspire to want to be in that role.

However, she noted the importance of maintaining strong and open lines of communication with whānau Māori:

Sometimes whānau aren't aware of all the awesome stuff that's happening in schools.

Amokura advised schools to not over complicate their approach to enacting the Treaty by applying a socio-culture lens rather than taking a political/historical perspective:

So, everyone talks about the Treaty, and it is very important and I get that. It's just...for some children, it's a little bit confusing. Whereas as...identity, as a Māori person, you're like, I am from here...that [is] really important to Māori culture, in regard to their iwi and things like that.

An example of how students could explore the concept of whakapapa in way that is inclusive of all cultures and promotes unity, was given by Amokura:

Like what is your pepeha?...that engages the students with their parents...their koro and their nan...you're going to have people who aren't Māori...And you could do...when your family landed in New Zealand,...it resonates with them, because it's specific to them,...and then that would give them a bit of uniformity.

Amokura acknowledged the progress schools are making but also challenged them to avoid ticking boxes and to weave 'Māori culture' and 'a lot more things' throughout:

So, if we just talk about the Treaty, then we sort of tick off Māori stuff. Right? But...I think that there's other things that we can incorporate now that we've had a bit of exposure since the 80s to...Māori culture...we could...interpret a lot more things than just kapa haka or Māori language class.

Summary

Hākui were generous in discussing the ongoing impact colonisation, cultural denigration and assimilative education policies and practices had on their identity formation and that of their family. More than one hākui spoke of the intergenerational trauma the education system had on their identity formation and the impact this had on their daughters'. They spoke of the effect living in urban environments had on their children's ability to access marae and te ao Māori spaces and discussed the importance of accessing Māori institutions and traditions through schooling to open pathways to engaging in te ao Māori.

Hākui acknowledged the challenges faced by their children as multicultural to identify as Māori and perceptions held by society about what it meant to be Māori. There was an acknowledgement of how far the education system had come in supporting the positive identity formation of Māori students. However, when hākui discussed if they saw their daughter enjoying and achieving educational success as Māori, there was uncertainty if it was occurring because of student choices or if it was woven throughout the teaching and learning programmes. Ensuring that it feels safe to identify as Māori at school, even if you look stereotypically Māori or do not have deep knowledge of te ao Māori was discussed as either an ongoing barrier or potential enabler to this occurring. A real importance was placed on inclusivity, that all students no matter their heritage should be able to engage in concepts that relate to Māori culture and identity in a way that affirms Māori culture, and their own cultural heritage.

Aho-Threads of Taitamāhine Voices

Five taitamāhine Māori were interviewed. All were enrolled as Māori and have whakapapa to diverse iwi around Aotearoa-NZ.

Enjoying and Achieving Educational Success as Māori

Taitamāhine articulated what it meant for them to enjoy and achieve educational success as Māori.

Waiporoporo explains it is:

...being able to be comfortable with my culture...Like, you're able to be proud of it.

Kikorangi states that:

It means participating in Māori culture...not just being Māori. Being Māori is enough, but it's participating...in your culture as a Māori person.

Kōwhai said it is:

Being confident in my culture.

Māwhero suggested:

I'm understanding that as learning as a Māori student.

Kōwhai also explained that it was about the perception of Māori students being capable of educational success without letting go of their identity as Māori. She said:

Knowing that...you can aim high and still be Māori...And I feel that would be a good feeling, because I feel people might doubt Māori...with education.

Taitamāhine described developing confidence and pride in their Māori culture at school through participation in their culture. For them it's not just about having exposure to Māori culture but being able to engage with their culture comfortably as Māori, which might be different for non-Māori students.

Complexity in Identity Formation

Taitamāhine described their identity as Māori as not yet being completely woven. Kōwhai states:

For me personally, I feel there's still a lot for me to know about myself as a Māori individual.

Māwhero agrees and explains:

I feel confident being Māori, but it's...still developing because I...only started reconnecting with my Māori side when I started [current school].

Waiporoporo perceives that her identity is not yet as strong as that of others:

Some of them [other Māori students] are more confident in their identity than me.

Māwhero described how fragile Māori identity can be for students who have mixed Māori heritage, and that this can be a barrier to engaging with te ao Māori through school:

With some of my friends...I've tried to get them to come along to kapa haka or come to our whanau hui, but it's like, 'I'm not even Māori, or I don't know where I come from, I'm 5% Māori' but it's like you're Māori. How else could you be Māori? Like, what more?

Waiporoporo describes how sometimes she is not recognised as Māori, and this impacts her identity formation:

Sometimes, not all the time, you don't have people immediately tell your Māori...People think you're something else. It's kind of awkward...you don't feel like you...have a confirmed identity.

Kākāriki, Kikorangi and Waiporoporo describe how physical appearance, which may not be stereotypically Māori, can lead to feeling judged, self-doubt, insecurity and feelings of imposter syndrome, all feelings that I too experienced as fair skinned and Māori while at secondary school. Kākāriki shared:

I don't look like a stereotypical [Māori] person...no one really knows I am, until I tell them. Then if I don't tell people and I try join kapa haka and stuff, people are always looking at that one little white girl in the row, and they're like 'oh, is she even Māori?'

Kikorangi: *When I joined kapa haka, I was like everyone here...looks Māori, and I don't. And...I just became really insecure. Not about my personal identity, but my exterior...identity...Inside, I felt Māori, but outside I just didn't look it, so that wasn't valid enough.*

Waiporoporo: *Sometimes if you are confused on who you are it can kind of leave you to be self-conflicted. And that can...make you self-doubt. Like, if I were to say, 'oh I'm Māori', you get this self-conflict...you feel like an imposter.*

Kākāriki explained that imposter syndrome can also occur within one's own family, demonstrating just how complex identity formation is for Māori students with mixed cultural heritages:

When I go to my family's house, like my full Māori family. Sometimes [I'm] just like okay, I'm an imposter in here.

Waiporporo described how mixed cultural identity adds to the complexity of identifying as Māori:

It makes you confused on how to fully identify yourself. You could say you're mixed, but then... you're not really sure whether or not you say that, or you say you're just Māori. That's what makes it so hard.

Waiporporo and Kikorangi described experiences through school where they were able to recognise diversity in Māori identity as a strength. Waiporporo states:

It made me realise...there's so many different versions of how people identify themselves as Māori. There could be people that literally look like what you would think of when you think of Māori, and there's some people that...wouldn't. It really makes you think there's a lot of individuality...That's what makes us unique.

Kikorangi: Everyone there is...Māori, but they're different as well. They don't all look the same. And this is comforting to know.

They both discussed the importance of knowing who you are in terms of cultural identity and feeling confident in yourself despite what others may think. Waiporporo put it like this:

I feel like even if you don't get recognised by other people, you should be able to recognise it in yourself as Māori. You don't have to have people's representation of you...basically ruin your representation of yourself.

Kikorangi: People need to realise that being Māori doesn't mean looking stereotypically Māori. Māori isn't face value. It isn't external. It's all internal.

Three students described feelings of exclusion based on misrecognition of their cultural identity. Kikorangi shared:

I got mistaken for being Japanese instead of Māori because of my last name... because I looked paler...They tried rationalising it to be like, 'oh, wait...it sounds sort of Asian.'

Waiporporo: I had someone tell me that I looked American because of my skin, and I was like 'oh, no. I'm Māori. I just look different.' It made me feel kind of...excluded from what people think of, when they think of Māori. They think of more tanner skin

or darker hair or whatever, and I feel like I don't really fit into that. Like, you feel out of the role.

Kākāriki: If...there's a different crowd that I don't know, and they're like, 'oh, where's your name from?' I'm like, oh, I'm [Polynesian] and Māori. They'll be like, 'oh, you don't look it.' I was like, okay, you're brown and your [name is] what? Irish?

Kākāriki explained that students with mixed heritage, who may not look stereotypically Māori, need to stand strong in their identity as Māori:

You really have to hold yourself high...Because it's not just people that aren't Māori that pick on people. It's also our own people. I can 100% guarantee that every single fair Māori person has been ridiculed by someone that's Māori but darker...but most of the time they're not Māori...they're either white or a different kind of Polynesian.

She explains that this ridicule has a negative impact on cultural identity formation, explaining:

That's why so many people are dying out of their culture because they're not getting fostered.

Regardless of whether the type of ridicule Kākāriki describes steams from within the Māori community or outside, it was observed and felt by other taitamāhine.

Impact of Peers on Identity Formation

Students discussed how the racial microaggressions of peers has a negative impact on the developing identity confidence of Māori. When asked if peers have more influence than teachers on identity formation for Māori, Kikorangi responded:

Yeah. Especially in the time of social media...TikTok. I see a lot of Māori people that are also pale, and they're like, 'oh, I'm proud to be Māori.' And then I see students in the comments saying 'no, you're not. You're too white to be Māori.' And it's like, it makes you wonder if people, students, your peers in the school think that about you.

Kōwhai states that this could lead to an insecurity in one's identity and make Māori reluctant to show or acknowledge their Māori identity at school:

I see a lot of things online...there's a lot of comments and videos of someone talking Māori, but they look very fair. And then the comments are all like, 'oh, but you're not Māori.'...Sometimes it makes you wonder. I just know you don't have to look a certain way to know what you really are. But I can see how it might take a toll on other people. Like, probably [it] could make them feel less confident to show that or even, like, not deny it, but just not show it or acknowledge it.

Taitamāhine also discussed Pākehā students being ridiculed for engaging in te ao Māori and that this had a negative impact on their identity formation as Māori. Kākāriki described a situation:

Whenever she stands up and tries her best, you'll always hear little whispers 'oh, what's that white girl doing?' She's trying, and she's embracing a culture that she's not a part of. Why are you judging her? So then obviously hearing someone say 'oh, that white girl is trying too hard.' It's makes me, who looks white not want to try at all.

Māwhero described another situation:

I have witnessed some people mocking the way people say things. Not, like deliberately, but it's obvious that they're giggling about it..... which is quite upsetting because you see...Pākehā putting in the effort to learn about the culture of this country and then Māori students degrading them.

Kākāriki discussed an appreciation for non-Māori fostering the Māori culture:

People should prioritise fostering it, even if it's not your own culture. You should not be making fun of someone that's trying to express a different culture...are people forgetting what country we live in? You need to realise that the native culture is Māori. So why are you making fun of other people who are trying to keep advocating for it?

She also explained the negative impact casual joking and dismissive comments made about our nation's history has on Māori students:

When people make insensitive jokes sometimes it's like, oh, hee hee. But you need to remember that if you're talking to a Māori person and making those jokes, that that was their family. That was their ancestors. It's personal.

Kākāriki gave an example of this type of behaviour:

I absolutely hate it when I hear my other friends...be like 'oh, I'm so sick of Māori people shoving their culture down our throat. No, we don't want to change New Zealand to Aotearoa. No, we don't want to change all of this and that.' And I was like, are you forgetting that it was changed? Aotearoa is here.

She explained that teaching Aotearoa-NZ history was very important:

I have family [overseas]...and they know everything about history. But then...over here...when was the land march? I don't think many people could answer that. I don't even think I could answer that. I think people should know what soil they're on. They should remember who it belongs to.

Kikorangi also explained that her mixed Māori identity had also caused conflict with friends:

I've definitely lost a lot of friendships because of it.

Equally, Waiporoporo discussed the positive impact affirming joking from peers can have on developing confidence in Māori cultural identity:

You know how friends make jokes and stuff? Seeing it in you, kind of a thing. Like affirming it...Yeah like it feels really empowering. Like you recognise that [Māori identity].

Kōwhai also discussed the way in which peers respond to Māori content at school can have a positive or negative impact on Māori students:

Because it can be off putting when people are joking about it or you can just tell that they're not engaged.

Asked if that felt hurtful, she responded:

Yeah. It does. Especially because we are in New Zealand. And I feel it can be quite ignorant sometimes. Because I also remember in [intermediate], I don't think people really enjoyed learning te reo.

Asked if those students made it known that they were not enjoying learning te reo Māori, Kōwhai responded:

Yeah. And then it just became not a free period, but almost. We wouldn't really do much because people just weren't engaged. I feel like [te reo Māori teacher] probably feels that a bit as well, and it probably affects him, and his job.

Māwhero discussed a negative experience while performing kapa haka items in a school assembly:

Judgment from the girls, like performing our item at assembly wasn't that nice. I saw a lot of girls laughing. And just not giving it the right attention as us Māori girls would to the [other cultural] groups. After we performed our item, a lot of the girls went away crying, a lot of the juniors, because...people were falling asleep, people were laughing, and everyone was just really upset by it.

Two students discussed that a sense of cultural insecurity may result in a belittling of one's own culture, or a reluctance to engage in their culture at school. Kākāriki explained:

Obviously, in the past, I have been a little bit like, oh hehehaha, but that was when I was embarrassed myself... It really depends who I surround myself with. If I'm around more Pākehā people, I feel like I should just kind of belittle it [Māori culture]. Because ... I don't want to talk about it and overwhelm them, because different people have different views...So, if I talk about where I stand, sometimes they're like 'oh, okay.'

Kikorangi: I was in kapa haka for a few years, but after my sister left and I was by myself, I was like, I don't feel confident enough to be myself. Because everyone else around me, I feel were judging me. Because I was so pale. And I was like; I don't belong here. I was so embarrassed that I just left kapa haka. And with other cultural festivals outside of school, I could not bring myself to go because I knew everyone was looking at me. And I just wanted to fit in. So, I just I didn't [attend].

These students acknowledged that confidence and sense of identity develop over time. While Kikorangi had left kapa haka as a junior student, because she felt she didn't belong, she described re-engaging in Māori spaces as a senior student:

Recently, there's a Māori and Pasifika tutoring group that happens after school. I've been going with my friend...at first, I was like, oh my gosh, they're going to judge me because I'm so pale. People aren't going to include me, but they were really nice. And I was like, you know what? I am Māori. I enjoy this. And it's just sort of experiencing what it's like to be different but just flourishing in that. Accepting that.

Kākariki talked about being less confident to engage in school as Māori during Year 9 and 10. When asked if she would have been confident to share her knowledge of te reo Māori in the classroom then, she answered:

Probably not. No. I would be like, 'what? I don't even know how to speak Māori.'

So, do you think it's a phase? Like, it's a development?

Yeah. 100%. It's also environment.

Culture Matters – feeling safe, included and able to engage in te ao Māori spaces

Like Kākariki, Kikorangi explained that feeling confident in her identity as Māori was dependent on the environment she was in. She states:

Environment is such a big thing to take into consideration. Because even if Pākehā people were raised around culture...they have a different approach to it...I wish everyone could find a common ground. And just know that respect is respect. And racism goes all ways, whether it's jokes or if it's just snarky comments.

Kōwhai spoke of positive Māori identity formation occurring in geographical locations of significance to Māori. She discussed the impact being in these spaces had on her peer's understanding and respect for te ao Māori:

The most confident I felt was...the camp...I thought it was a really positive experience...we also went around Waitangi and got to see things and then I feel like it was good for other people who may not be Māori to also see things that we're

actually learning about. Because obviously sometimes they might...complain about having to learn about the Treaty of Waitangi.

Asked if the students who were not Māori enjoyed the camp and if their attitude towards the importance of learning about Te Tiriti o Waitangi change after to camp to Waitangi, Kōwhai responded:

Yeah...some of [them] even talk about it now.

Waiporoporo acknowledged growing up away from one's tribal environment added to complexity in developing Māori identity, she discussed how this can lead to feeling uncomfortable with marae or Māori settings:

I'm not used to it [being on marae]. I did grow up with it [but] we don't really learn any of that. So, it's kind of like it wasn't new, but I wasn't really used to it.

Waiporoporo and Kōwhai acknowledged that being taught tikanga Māori through school could alleviate reluctance and remove barriers to Māori students engaging in te ao Māori opportunities within and outside of school:

Kōwhai: I remember I didn't want to go because I don't know my pepeha. So, that kind of put me off. But if there was a space where maybe you learned about it. That it would have been more helpful.

Waiporoporo: Teach you the customs...Oh, yeah. That would be a cool experience.

Māwhero discussed the potential benefit of having opportunities to spend time on marae for Māori students' positive identity formation, while also acknowledging that it requires staff and other students to understand the importance of such experiences for Māori:

I do hear about spending weeks...on marae for [cultural competition] preparation. But I do understand that we have a smaller school and our school's not very...aware of Māori as other schools are. So, it would be a lot to ask for. Also from a student, because I feel like if you're going to want to stay on the marae, the students are going to want to, but I'm not quite sure how many of them really want to.

In addition to providing opportunities for students to develop knowledge of tikanga Māori so they can comfortably engage in te ao Māori, Kōwhai also spoke of creating spaces for Māori students to connect with each:

I feel like having...a space with the others that are Māori, that would be cool to do.

Based on her schooling experiences, Kōwhai explained what she would do if she were a teacher to ensure learning environments fostered positive identity formation as Māori:

I feel like if they just needed extra support in their identity because I know that's something that I probably would have liked ... especially if we were learning about topics like the Treaty of Waitangi. I would make sure the classroom has a good vibe around it. Because it can be off putting when people are joking about it or you can just tell that they're not engaged.

Enablers and Barriers to Positive Identity Formation in Kura Auraki

Kākariki discussed that feeling 'known' and recognised as Māori at school helps her to feel confident in her identity as Māori.

In this school, I feel really supported because I've been here for so long, right? If I were to be thrown into a school where I don't know anyone, I think it would be a little bit different. I would be like, 'oh, I'm Māori,' and then the second that someone says, 'no you're not'... 'alright, okay, I'm not.'

She described how affirming it was to be 'singled out' and recognised as Māori by her teacher when starting secondary school.

When she [kaiako] heard that I was Māori, she would come around with (te reo Māori) cue cards and she'd be like, 'oh, [name] can teach you guys what this means'...I felt so popular...That was nice. It made me feel so welcomed.

Other taitamāhine spoke specifically about emails and opportunities from the careers advisor as recognising and affirming their identity as Māori, and that participating in these offsite opportunities allowed them to connect with other Māori students which further affirmed their identity as Māori. Kikorangi explained:

I find that getting emails from the careers adviser about Māori opportunities. It's just like, oh, yeah, I'm Māori. Like just to remind you of who you are.

Māwhero: She gave me an opportunity to go on Māori Achieving Success and Health which was very cool because I was surrounded with Māori students...And it was very special to be chosen. And it was just like learning ways to study for subjects with Māori students and stuff, which is really cool...We stayed on the marae as well.

Waiporoporo: It made me feel included. It made me feel like I wasn't ... too different because we're able to share our different experiences.

Kōwhai spoke of an opportunity while on a camp to Waitangi that brought all the Māori students together as affirming of Māori identity.

The most confident I felt...was the camp...That was a really good experience because I remember...one night they got all the Māori students in a room. And then we all just sat, talking to each other, with the guy [kaumatua] that was there...It was also exciting, like 'oh, we get to be part of something.' I didn't think that it was awkward. I just thought it was exciting to be able to talk to other people who feel the same...It was nice knowing that we all shared something in common, and that our voices did matter.

But other than this one experience, Kōwhai had not had other experiences where she felt she was recognised as Māori.

I don't think there's been a time when that's happened.

She discussed that opportunities to engage in te ao Māori, where identity formation could occur through school felt rare, optional and lacked clarification.

I feel maybe twice a year in the notices, there will be like if you want to be part of the Māori committee...but I feel like that's quite optional and it's not very much explained...I just didn't know anyone else that was going...But if... they brought all the Māori students together. It was something that maybe had to be done. That might have been better.

Kōwhai observed that opportunities to explore Māori culture through the curriculum were more likely to occur in the junior school, felt 'minor' and were not linked to individual identity formation as Māori.

We never really...[do] Māori stuff. We do in Year 9 or 10, but then it's pretty minor...I feel like it's just a topic rather than being able to...go deeper into who I am.

Even when they are enrolled in the school as Māori, some students did not feel recognised as Māori in the classroom by their kaiako.

Waiporoporo: Well, they don't always mention culture...I don't think they really do.

Kōwhai: Teachers wise, I feel like that's just never something that's brought up...I don't think a teacher has ever talked to me about like being Māori or anything like that...that's just never been the discussion.

When asked if she thought it was important to be recognised by her kaiako as Māori, Kōwhai responded:

To be honest, I don't think I would know. Because that's never happened. I don't think I would know what that would be like.

Kākāriki warned that teachers may not recognise students as Māori, even if they are enrolled as Māori, because of their physical appearance. She spoke about a friend in her class.

She is Māori. And no teachers ever call on her when it comes to Māori names...If a teacher's reading out something and there's a Māori word, they'll ask all of the brown kids before they move on to the white kids. And I think it's different for me because I've been at this school for a while. And my mum's been advocating 'oh, she's Māori.'

Kākāriki explained that this school friend was surprised to be emailed directly about this research project, saying:

She was like 'oh, I'm really surprised that [she] emailed me.' And I was like 'why?' And she was like 'I didn't realise that anyone knew that I was Māori.'

Taitamāhine who took te reo Māori as a subject described this as the space, they felt most recognised as Māori and connected to their Māori identity.

Kōwhai: *The most connected I felt is when I took [te reo] Māori.*

Māwhero: *Te reo's a good class...It just feels so much more relaxed and especially my te reo Māori class, we feel like a whānau. Because...everyone helps each other in our activities. Whereas [in other subjects] you wouldn't help your friends as much as we help each other in Māori.*

Kikorangi: *I find that with my te reo Māori class, I feel a lot more acknowledged than in other classes.*

Like Kōwhai, Kikorangi felt Māori content was rarely brought into the classroom and explained that when it does, teachers miss opportunities to engage with Māori students through the content or recognise the contributions that Māori students could have made to the class exploration of the topic.

I find that in my other classes; it [Māori content] never really comes up...Just aspects. I know that in one of my classes...we were talking about...a Māori topic and I looked over because I was like, oh hey, I know this. No one said anything. No one looked at me. I was like, I don't expect everyone to know I'm Māori, but.

Along with identifying barriers, taitamāhine also identified actions their school was taking that was having a positive impact on their positive identity formation as Māori students.

Waiporoporo: *I feel like when I see different aspects of Māori culture around the school. Like, whenever I see kapa haka at school, I feel represented as a Māori person...I feel proud that I'm able to be represented...it's accepted at school. It is encouraged.*

Māwhero: *I do think the Matariki hikoi, the Māori committee, and having Te Wiki o Te reo Māori has encouraged that a little bit more...I think the teachers do good stuff like the Māori signs all over the school. And a lot of teachers are now incorporating [te reo] Māori...I feel [principal] gives us gives the kapa haka a lot of chances to perform...kapa haka is involved in the school quite a bit now...the group is getting bigger...We're incorporating Māori phrases at assembly. The PowerPoints have Māori design on them. I don't know what more we could do for our school.*

Kākāriki: Our school does not like bullying when it comes to cultural. Which is really nice...The language weeks are really good!

Māwhero spoke of her appreciation towards those teachers who make an effort to normalise use of te reo Māori in the classroom, stating this practice can quickly become embedded when supported by teachers.

Nobody makes a fuss out of it. People will respond in te reo...They give it a go and they try.

Summary

Students described being proud of their Māori culture and enjoy being able to increasingly participate in their culture through their education. Students describe the importance of having exposure to Māori culture but also being able to engage with their culture, as Māori, as supporting their identity formation. When there were opportunities to be recognised as Māori and connect with other Māori students in Māori settings, this was hugely beneficial for Māori students' positive identity formation.

Students frequently describe not feeling Māori enough to engage in te ao Māori or to identify as Māori. They referred to blood quantum, knowledge of whakapapa and physical appearance as ways of being recognised as Māori by others. At least three students spoke of feeling imposter syndrome in their identity as Māori. Students explained that those who are not recognised as Māori by others are less likely to engage in te ao Māori spaces. Peer perception appears to be a significant factor in positive identity formation as Māori for taitamāhine, although students articulated they clearly understood that it was more important to know who you are, as Māori, than what others perceive.

Students discussed how they are sensitive to cultural settings, and they make judgements on whether it is safe to express themselves as Māori and adjust how they respond to Māori culture and ideas in different spaces. One student said she has even belittled their own culture depending on who she has been surrounded by. Māori students are aware of latent and overt racism that lies within our society and are acutely aware when other students show disrespect to Māori culture and content. How kaiako manage learning environments, so Māori content is respected, is of real importance to Māori students and has an impact on their identity formation as Māori.

Students spoke of the importance of knowing tikanga as an enabler to accessing culture by feeling safe and prepared to engage in Māori spaces. They discussed wanting to engage in te ao Māori but are still developing the skills and knowledge to do so confidently. They explained that kaiako are unlikely to go deep into Māori content in classrooms to provide them with knowledge of tikanga that would provide pathways and enablers to engaging in te ao Māori. However, when they did have the opportunity to engage in te ao Māori, taitamāhine appreciated these opportunities. They explained that these experiences were beneficial for Māori and non-Māori students, as they describe Aotearoa-NZ as still being quite 'ignorant' of our history.

Chapter 5: Weaving the Kākahu

Introduction

In this chapter the different aho-threads that emerged from the voices of participants have been woven together with elements of the literature to answer my research questions. Together, a kākahu of tribal Māori identity has begun to emerge, adding colour, richness and texture into the white spaces in this school.

By utilising whatu as a weaving style requires two different sets of threads, whenu and aho. The whenu are the vertical threads, larger than the horizontal aho threads, they are the foundational threads that make up the white spaces of the education system (Milne, 2013) that has been built over generations, as presented through the literature review in chapter 2. Woven across, through and into the whenu are the voices of taitamāhine, hākui and kaiako. The voices of the hākui and their taitamāhine belong together, and in forming the vibrant coloured aho-threads of this kākahu, they illustrate the importance of tribal identity formation for Māori in kura auraki. The kaiako aho-threads are more neutral in tone, shaping the design of the kākahu, reminding us that educators have always maintained the power to control the formation of identity of Māori students through schooling in both positive and negative ways.

Aho-threads of educational policies, research and initiatives that enhance positive identity formation add to the texture, depth and potential of this kākahu for enjoying and achieving education success as Māori. However, since 2008 when Ka Hikitia was first introduced and 2020 when the Education and Training Act sought to support these changes, this research shows that spaces for reforming Māori identity in more positive ways, continues to be vulnerable to political and societal influence. The research affirms that when educators invite learners, whānau, hapū and iwi into schooling to listen to their voices they can centralise their differently located mātauranga and theorising into decision making through power-sharing (Bishop & Berryman, 2006). The richness of what these voices can bring will ensure that the kākahu of identity will be greatly enhanced.

The *aho tapu* (sacred thread) is the first thread and establishes the foundational pattern of the kākahu. The aho tapu of this cloak was woven generations ago when the education system was first being developed and our ancestors believed that they were being promised an education that would benefit their *taitemariki* (young people) into the future. Despite

evidence showing that many of these expected benefits have not ensued, the voices in this thesis have not given up on educational success for Māori. Their voices bring answers to the research questions and in so doing can help lead change into the future.

Research Question 1: How are Schools Helping or Hindering Identity Formation for Māori students?

This research question is answered through two sub-questions. The first asks: Why do some students leave school with a stronger sense of positive identity as Māori than others?

Leaving School with Positive Identity as Māori

Some students leave school with a stronger sense of positive identity as Māori because of how safely and authentically they are able or supported to be Māori while they were at school. Te Tiriti guarantees Māori tino rangatiratanga over their taonga and way of life. Breaches to Te Tiriti have stripped Māori of mana, denigrated their culture, identity and language, and denied them access to equitable educational outcomes (Berryman, 2022).

Te Tiriti is enacted when Māori have the power to reclaim what was taken from them through the process of colonial assimilation (Jackson, 2020) to restore the mana of Māori tribal identity in education. The Crown has a responsibility to support this happening. It also has a responsibility to listen to its people. The education system, which has played a key role in the negative identity formation of generations of Māori through cultural assimilation has a responsibility to return what it has taken and give power back to Māori, to self-determine their identity and futures. Despite the Government's attempts to remove it, school boards, leaders and educators across the country have made their voices heard, they will enact Te Tiriti (Bailey-McDowell, 2025b; Te Huia, 2025). The Māori voices from this research and the voices of other Māori can and must have a role in this.

Ka Hikitia is the framework through which to achieve this objective. However, despite being in its third iteration, it is still not being enacted consistently and meaningfully across kura aoraki. Ka Hikitia lies in Durie's (2003) three goals for educational success as Māori. However, school leaders and educators are yet to fully realise that 'achieving as Māori' requires schools to ensure students' positive identity as Māori is nurtured and that as educators, our responsibility is to proactively support this. While taitamāhine and hākui were able to point to wider actions the school was taking to support positive identity formation of its Māori students, it was clear this was not consistently filtering into the classroom, with taitamāhine

speaking of kaiako missing opportunities to support them to learn more about themselves as “Māori individuals.” In this school, while there are multiple positive actions occurring to support it, there was a lack of *integrated action* (Durie, 2003) and common vision (Bishop et al., 2014) to achieve Ka Hikitia’s goal schoolwide. If after 20 years of research, professional development and educational strategies to create school settings and contexts where the mana and positive identity of Māori learners is affirmed, teachers are still not understanding their role in facilitating this meaningfully, it indicates that we may have yet to scratch the surface of Māori potential in kura auraki. By turning to kura kaupapa Māori, we can see what this looks like.

It was clear from my interviews-as-conversations that the hearts of the kaiako involved in this research are in the right place in wanting to support positive identity formation for taitamāhine Māori, however, they are not yet taking full agency to achieve this. This in-action could be for several reasons.

Kaiako spoke of a fear of getting it wrong, making assumptions, recolonising, discomfort, or misinterpreting their role in fostering positive identity formation of taitamāhine Māori. This fear that they assert, prevents them from taking agency to act and make positive change for Māori has been referred to as Pākehā paralysis (Barnes, 2015). In addressing Pākehā paralysis, it is important teachers gain conscientisation of our colonial history and assimilative educational policies that have led us to today’s educational inequities and importantly, how they continue to play out in contemporary contexts. Without these, teachers may not fully grasp their role in perpetuating colonial thinking nor take agency to change their teaching praxis and challenge the status quo. The long and entrenched legacy of cultural denigration, assimilative and racialised practices in our education system, as experienced and described by the hākuī in this research, have remnants that are visible today on both micro and macroscales:

- Microscale - students, parents and teachers all spoke of racial microaggressions occurring at school and commented on how detrimental these are to identity formation for Māori. These aggressions can go unnoticed in educational environments by teachers who are not attuned to them because they are not aimed at them.

- Macroscale - the actions of the current government can be described as racial macroaggressions towards Māori identity formation in kura auraki, through an arsenal of attacks on Māori language, culture, histories and the Te Tiriti itself. These actions have created a disabling effect in schools, and despite a significant number of school boards rejecting (Bailey-McDowell, 2025b) the removal of Te Tiriti from the Education and Training Act 2020, the suggestion that the Crown's obligations to enact what is widely accepted as a constitutional document of this country, as being beyond the responsibility of schools, dangerously implies that honouring and enacting the Te Tiriti is optional for teachers.

When we consider the racial micro and macroaggressions currently being experienced by taitamāhine in kura auraki while bearing in mind schools' responsibility to maintain safe learning environments, the need for schools to address Pākehā paralysis and develop teacher agency becomes a priority. When we weave this together with insufficient relevant evidence supporting the Government's assertions that addressing the breeches of the Te Tiriti strains the fabric of our society, but instead builds a sense of biculturalism (Hellmann, 2023), we might begin to understand the moral responsibility for educators to pushback against injustices that are currently being promulgated. It appears that the current educational reforms are continuing to privilege and ensure power is maintained by an elite few while denigrating the mana of our Indigenous population and all those who stand proudly beside them as *Tangata Tiriti* (People of Te Tiriti).

Barriers and Enablers of Positive Identity Formation for Taitamāhine Māori

The second sub-question to my first research question, asks: What are schools doing that is (is not) supporting/enabling the positive formation of identity for Māori students?

Identity Marginalisation

My research findings show that schools remain spaces where Māori identity is marginalised resulting in taitamāhine Māori being left to mostly figure it out for themselves. Hākui articulated uncertainty if positive identity formation for their daughters was occurring at school by design or by chance despite the important role schools play in shaping the identity of its students (Adams, 2021; Webber, 2007). Central to positive identity formation for Māori is the need for educators to encourage the development of language and culture in the classroom and build on the experiences of Māori learners. If these are overlooked it builds

into a perception that identity as Māori is worthless. A secure sense of identity and worth is fostered when students know their voices will be heard and validated. This will only happen when power-relations between educators, students, whānau and communities work together to challenge historical patterns of subordination (Berryman et al., 2015) and culturally safe learning environments are provided. Participants provided ways to mitigate and support these spaces.

Culturally Safe

Students spoke of the need for careful classroom management by culturally aware teachers that ensured peer responses to Māori topics and context were positive as a prerequisite to ensuring they felt safe to explore and share their identity as Māori in school settings. Students spoke of positive peer recognition as being highly influential in their positive identity formation, this requires teachers to be acutely aware of racial micro-interactions and racial microaggressions. When schools focus solely on the academic achievement of its students and neglect investing in student wellbeing and sense of belonging, students' language, culture and identity can become marginalised and overlooked (Berryman & Eley, 2019). Ka Hikitia states that learners should enjoy learning environments that are free from stigma, bullying and racism (MoE, 2020). If racial microaggressions, in the classroom or across the school are left unchecked, this could escalate into bullying or even racist behaviour. If educators are not responding to these forms of aggression in the classroom, they may be complicit in affirming racist acts (Berryman et al., 2015). Taitamāhine described learning environments where mocking, joking and microaggressions towards Māori culture, Māori students and non-Māori students who embrace Māori culture as hindering their confidence to articulate themselves as Māori and therefore their confidence to deepen or reinforce their understandings of themselves as Māori was diminished. They explained that when classrooms are culturally safe, they become more willing to explore their identity as Māori openly. This support of positive identity formation can lead to the increased likelihood of students engaging in te ao Māori spaces, which continues to build their knowledge and identity as Māori.

Access to Te Ao Māori

Access and participation in Māori institutions and contexts are fundamental to the positive identity formation of Māori students (Durie, 1995) because it allows students to connect to

te ao Māori, revitalise Māori ways of being and to provide opportunities to experience being Māori. Taitamāhine, their hākui and kaiako spoke of how engagement in te ao Māori nourished Māori identity formation (Lowe et al, 2025). However, Hākui explained due to the impact of cultural denigration and assimilative policies, urban Māori households often experience limited access to marae and other Māori institutions, creating barriers to their daughters feeling confident to engage in Māori spaces. They argued that access to te ao Māori through schooling was essential to addressing the cultural alienation generations of Māori have suffered.

Mātauranga Māori

Mātauranga Māori plays a significant role in positive identity formation for Māori, by supporting students to gain knowledge of themselves, the Māori world and building self-esteem by understanding and affirming the beauty and complexity of Māori knowledge (Royal, 2019). Māori and non-Māori students equally benefit from engaging with mātauranga Māori as they experience a sense of belonging and learn how to participate in the Māori world. This provides understandings of different epistemologies and deepens their understanding of their own identity.

Whenua, Whakapapa and Whānau

Taitamāhine spoke of the powerful learning the whenua itself provides, and how connecting with whenua can strengthen their positive identity formation as Māori. This is not surprising if we have had access to learning that shows in Māori cosmology, we can all whakapapa back to Papatūānuku, our Earth Mother. The implications for taitamāhine, girls on the fringes of womanhood, are only amplified and sustained through our collective understandings of their innate sacredness as descendants of Hineahuone, the first woman, created from Papatūānuku's most fertile soils (Mikaere, 2003). Kaiako also described experiencing the importance of whenua on identity formation and discussed the potential for schools to explore this as a way for nurturing cultural identity formation.

Students also spoke of the powerful effect whanaungatanga and opportunities to connect with other Māori students had on their identity formation. These experiences allowed taitamāhine to recognise the diversity that exists across Māori peoples, thereby challenging notions of stereotypes and essentialism in Māori identity. These opportunities provide a sense of unity and connection and supported positive peer recognition of Māori identity.

Adams (2021) explains that we are made ethnic through our peers' recognition, and by providing situations in which taitamāhine Māori can have their identity validated not only by their kaiako, but by their peers is hugely beneficial, particularly for those who experience feelings of imposter syndrome.

Accessing te ao Māori through Kura Auraki

Taitamāhine and hākui explained that in order for Māori students to comfortably engage in te ao Māori opportunities, schools had an important role to learn about, understand and be prepared to teach about te ao Māori so that students felt safe and prepared to engage in these spaces confidently, and more likely to embrace future opportunities when they arise, becoming self-sustaining (Paris, 2012). In this sense, Hākui and taitamāhine described understanding tikanga as providing access to te ao Māori opportunities and further enhance identity formation. One hākui argued that it was important for all students to know how to conduct themselves in te ao Māori spaces, as they too are likely to engage in multiple Māori spaces across their lifetimes.

Going Deeper into Identity in the Classroom

Taitamāhine spoke of the need to have learning opportunities that allow them to explore their individual identity as Māori in classrooms, not just opportunities to explore Māori content in general, which can feel surface level. One hākui explained that schools need to look beyond the Treaty when integrating Māori content into learning, explaining that we have come a long way in our understanding of Māori culture since the 80s. She explained the Treaty is complex and confusing for young people, whereas identity is something understood by all. She argued that exploring Māori identity in an inclusive way in the classroom allows all students to connect with the content, as we all have ancestors and places of origins we connect to.

Research Question 2: What does it mean (for students) to be Recognised as Māori in School?

This question is also answered through two sub questions. The first asks: How are students who are enrolled at school as Māori, recognised as being Māori by staff and/or peers? The second sub-question asks: What are the barriers/enablers to students being recognised as Māori in school?

Being Recognised as Māori

It was clear from my interviews-as-conversations with kaiako and taitamāhine that students who are enrolled as Māori in kura auraki are not automatically recognised as Māori by staff and by extension their peers. This is an issue that has been widely discussed by academics (Gibson, 1999; Herbert, 2011; O'Regan, 2001; Webber, 2007). Kaiako described various ways they identify Māori students which included using data from School Management Systems (SMS) but not exclusively. Kaiako also take cues from how students present in class and their engagement in activities like kapa haka. Taitamāhine were aware of these judgements being made and they added that physical appearance also affects being recognised as Māori.

Kaiako spoke of not wanting to make assumptions about the cultural identity of students, often leaving it to students to self-identify as Māori. This meant that students who are Māori might not be being recognised as Māori. As positive peer recognition and validation is an enabler to positive identity formation, educators' failure to recognise all students who identify as Māori (including through enrolment) as Māori, potentially presents a threat to their identity formation. By relying on taitamāhine to self-identify before they are recognised as being Māori, kaiako are limiting the potential of positive identity formation through an absence of nurturing that child's Māori tribal identities to flourish. While all taitamāhine may not yet feel confident to identify publicly as Māori, it is the responsibility of the kaiako to build cultural connections with students to understand how to approach this in more respectful ways.

Kaiako recognised taitamāhine as often having complex identity compositions and understood that all layers of whakapapa are important. Taitamāhine with dual or multicultural identities may face feelings of marginalisation, which can add to complexity and hesitancy in articulating their identity (Webber, 2007). Kaiako can foster positive identity formation by creating culturally safe and nourishing learning environments that normalise identity complexity. In contexts such as these, students are more likely to explore the various aspects of their cultural identity with greater comfortability (Adams, 2021; Webber, 2007). Taitamāhine spoke of positive identity recognition as affirming, and motivated them to explore their identity more deeply, see themselves as Māori, and gave them confidence to engage in te ao Māori spaces. This was particularly felt by those students who have experienced feelings of imposter syndrome. Perhaps it is the failure to be recognised as

Māori by others that leads to notion of an 'inner and outer identity' as Māori, rather than a holistic view. While kaiako, hākuī and taitamāhine all articulated that those with mixed Māori heritage may face more barriers to being recognised as Māori, for all the taitamāhine I spoke with, having mixed heritage did not diminish their feeling Māori. They described their inner and outer identity as Māori as connected but separate, stating clearly that even if they are not recognised by others as Māori, they still know in themselves that they are (Adams, 2021; Gibson, 1990).

Kaiako interpret taitamāhine holding back from articulating or exploring their Māori identity in school activities as choosing to not identify as Māori. However, taitamāhine and hākuī argued that being responsive to cultural environments Māori students will make judgements about when it feels safe to be Māori, before they publicly share and explore their identity and viewpoints as Māori, because of the latent and overt racism towards Māori people that exists in current Aotearoa-NZ society including the education system (Berryman et al., 2025). Somewhat ironically the kaiako are also holding back, not wanting to engage with taitamāhine identity out of an asserted fear of getting Māori-identity wrong and causing offence. Taitamāhine interpret responses such as this as their cultural identity doesn't matter to some kaiako. Buckley (2020) states that judgements made by Pākehā teachers on whether students are Māori or whether students want to explore their Māori identity at school based on their involvement in te ao Māori in or outside of class, can be seen as acts of ongoing colonisation.

Woven through the narratives was evidence that essentialism and stereotyping of what it means to be Māori continue exist in society and schools. These mindsets limit the potential for positive identity formation of Māori, particularly those who feel dislocated from their culture, or who don't fit the stereotypes of what it looks like and means to be Māori. Essentialism negates the varied and authentically lived experiences of Māori people which have been shaped by colonialism, assimilation, multiculturalism and urbanisation (Webber & Kukutai, 2011). This situation completely disregards the mana ake of the individual (Pere, 1988; Durie, 1995). Thirty years ago, Durie warned that "prejudice about a 'typical' Māori could distort a view of Māori people by relying on 20th century stereotypes rather than 21st century realities" (Durie 1995, p. 470) and he was right. We have a society that has done just that. However, taitamāhine Māori have shown that when they engage in whanaungatanga

and recognise each other in their cultural and tribal identity diversity, they challenge stereotypes and essentialism.

Barriers and Enablers to Positive Recognition as Māori

Barriers to recognition often stem from teachers' inconsistent approach to recognition of Māori students, essentialist views of what it means to be Māori and negative peer reactions to students identifying as Māori. The pride and shame experienced in response to identity expression as Māori was clearly articulated by one hākui but was woven through my conversations with others. Enablers to positive identity formation as Māori are seen as a consistent understanding of the diversity in the Māori population by educators, and inclusive learning environments where cultural diversity is embraced and explored. These spaces provide the context in which taitamāhine Māori can confidently reclaim their rangatiratanga to define their own tribal identities (Adams, 2021).

Physical Appearance

Physical appearance as a key barrier to recognition as being Māori was discussed by taitamāhine, hākui and kaiako. Taitamāhine spoke at length on this issue and even those, for whom it wasn't a barrier, were still acutely aware of its presence. Webber (2007) noted that while being an 'ethnic cue', identification as Māori is much deeper than skin colour alone, with connection to whenua and tangata holding greater value. She explains our physical proximity of tangata to whenua means that one may feel a stronger identification with their Māori Indigeneity than their European ancestry.

Imposter Syndrome

Taitamāhine frequently spoke of not feeling or looking Māori enough and discussed their feelings of imposter syndrome on both accounts, this was often linked to prior experiences of being recognised as Māori or not by others. They identified physical appearance and blood quantum as qualifiers to be recognised as Māori by others. While historically who can identify as Māori has been a contentious issue (Kukutai, 2004), these measures complicate identity formation, are derogatory, and are not Māori methods of measuring identity which are much more holistic and integrated (Durie, 1994, 1995; Pere, 1988). Imposter Syndrome can be particularly acute for fair-skinned Māori who feel connection to their tribe and identity as Māori (O'Regan 2001, 2016) but can prevent any taitamāhine from outwardly identifying as Māori out of identity insecurity, a fear that they are not enough or will be

rejected, and is linked to stereotyping and essentialism. When teachers rely on students to self-identify as Māori before recognising them as Māori, imposter syndrome creates a barrier.

Responses of Peers

Taitamāhine Māori spoke of peer judgement that they were not Māori enough as a barrier to recognition and this affected their confidence to identify themselves as Māori and explore this part of their identity. Students explained are more likely to feel recognised as Māori when their peers validate their identity rather than by kaiako. Being recognised as Māori at school feeds into the internal confidence of Māori students to openly identify as Māori as our peers validate our ethnicity or not (Adams, 2021).

Nurturing Cultural Identity

There are many ways teachers can gently weave in acknowledgement with their interactions with students. Taitamāhine spoke of their identity building confidence over time and that repeated positive recognitions of being Māori motivated them to continue to want to engage in Māori experiences and that their identity developed through these experiences. However, they warned that their identities are still being woven, the threads are still loose, and with one or two tugs the weaving can come partially undone. Taitamāhine identity formation as Māori requires care and nurturing (Berryman & Eley, 2019), the first step a teacher can take in supporting this is to positively acknowledge them as Māori.

Chapter 6: A Kākahu of Māori Tribal Identity

Introduction

In seeking to understand how kura auraki help and hinder positive identity formation for taitamāhine Māori, and what it means to be recognised as Māori, in this chapter a kākahu of Māori tribal identity was created from important themes that emerged from the related literature and participants' voices. This includes the foundational whenu that make up the white spaces of the education system together with potentially more colourful aho provided by taitamāhine, hākui and kaiako voices, and educational policies, research and initiatives that enhance positive Māori tribal identity formation. The chapter begins by discussing limitations and implications of the research, the goals of Māori education and the barriers and enablers to positive identity formation for taitamāhine Māori. It concludes by describing Ka Hikitia as a framework through which kākahu of Māori tribal identity can be woven in kura auraki.

Ethics, Limitations and Wider Research Implications

This was a small-scale research project that focused on the experiences inside one secondary kura auraki in an urban setting. The scope of research could be expanded to involve a wider range of schools, and or compare the experiences of those in urban to rural environments. While the focus of this project was on the experiences of taitamāhine Māori, similar research could be extended to include the experiences of taitama Māori. All ethical requirements as outlined by the University of Waikato and the Ethics Committee have been followed throughout the research and thesis writing process.

Goals of Māori Education

The first goal of Māori education is for Māori to live as Māori; this implies that Māori students are able to engage in te ao Māori. At the start of this thesis, I referred to Durie (2003), who explained two decades ago that if at the end of formal education this has not been achieved, then education has failed Māori. Crucial to developing positive tribal identity as Māori is fostering a sense of belonging in te ao Māori spaces. Rangihau (1997) explained last century that a key to accessing these spaces is an understanding of tikanga, traditions and kawa. Through colonisation and cultural denigration, Māori had their language, culture and identity taken through assimilatory schooling practices. This included the dispossession of tikanga and kawa at a societal level. If we understand that to address the impacts of

colonisation, we need to restore what was taken (Jackson, 2020), then we must understand the responsibility of schools to teach about te ao Māori, including aspects of tikanga and kawa to our students, so they can engage comfortably in te ao Māori spaces.

Identity as a Political Construct

The literature in this thesis highlights that critical theory allows us to understand how identity is politically, socially, culturally and ethnically constructed (Adams, 2021) by the colonial power structures which continue to shape our society and education system today. The jobs of colonisation are aided by social amnesia (MacDonald, 2018). Educators have largely failed to recognise, understand or address how the intergenerational beliefs, educational policies and discourses that have pathologised Māori for two centuries continue to play out today. This means that we are unlikely to realise the change we need, especially if we are “building over racialised policies and curriculum” (Berryman, 2020, p.2) thereby contributing to settler silencing and cultural fugue. Teachers often misunderstand their role in supporting positive identity formation of Māori students because they themselves have not fully understood the long history of assimilative policies that have marginalised Māori identity and shaped their own viewpoints, including essentialist understandings of Māori identity (Bishop 2005b; Jackson, 2020). Addressing this requires time and space for educators to become aware of the role they play in perpetuating disparities in educational outcomes. Conscientisation (Freire, 1972) occurs when educators have opportunities to understand and reconcile how colonial education systems have and continue to deliberately normalise bias, prejudice and racism towards Māori. With this knowledge educators can take agency to address social injustices by power-sharing with Māori to challenge colonial ideologies and pushback against racist political agendas (Auckland Women’s Centre, 2025). By learning about and showing respect to the mana of Māori tribal identity, teachers can support its positive formation in taitamāhine.

Pākehā Paralysis

The voices in my research show that there is a disconnect between what kaiako perceive as the barriers to positive identity development for Māori and what the taitamāhine and their hākui understand it to be. While taitamāhine and hākui understand the critical role educators play in positive identity formation, kaiako themselves did not acknowledge their role as either being a key enabler or a barrier to this occurring. Rather kaiako cited students’

disposition and choice to identify as Māori as the issue. Importantly, Māori haven't given up on being Māori (Hawaikirangi-Pere, 2013), rather it is the coercive relations of power by members of the dominant group, that redefines in deficit terms and thus limits the growth of Indigenous communities. By legitimising their own inaction to make meaningful change for the benefit of the Indigenous group, the dominant group are maintaining power (SooHoo, 2004). It can happen even when there are many teachers who assert to having the best intentions to make change. Teachers may claim it feels too hard or they feel overwhelmed by the complex culture and political landscape in education which leads to a defensive rather than proactive stance, this can result in failure to act. By doing so teachers miss opportunities to recognise and affirm Māori cultural identity in classrooms, nor do they see the racial microaggressions between peers that hinder its positive development. Addressing Pākehā paralysis requires conscientisation and Pākehā understanding that inequality is their issue and making change requires discursive (re)positioning. Without this occurring, inequality is reinforced and meaningful collaboration is unlikely to occur (Barnes, 2015; Berryman, 2020).

Mātauranga Māori

Currently there is a politically proclaimed reluctance in the education sector to engage with mātauranga Māori out of a fear of misappropriation, recolonisation, or an ongoing misguided belief that it has no place for anything Māori or diverse in our curriculum. Educators and school leaders can move through this paralysis by understanding that they have permission and a mandate through Ka Hikitia, and Te Tiriti o Waitangi to engage with and explore mātauranga Māori in respectful ways that affirm and nurture the Māori tribal identities of their students. In the last five years, there has been a wealth of mātauranga Māori that has been shared publicly by tōhunga, Māori academics, hapū and iwi Māori for kura auraki to access. Understandings about Matariki are one such example. While some tribal mātauranga may rightfully remain protected, there is sufficient resourcing for schools to be able to delve into and explore Māori mātauranga, histories, language, culture and tribal identity with their students in safe and affirming ways.

Mātauranga Māori has the potential to be transformative in the positive identity formation of taitamāhine Māori, as it engenders self-esteem, pride and confidence in tribal identity which can lead to empowerment (Royal, 2019). Taitamāhine also explained that this

knowledge is important for their peers, who are not Māori, to appreciate the complexity and beauty in te ao Māori, and to understand the historical and contemporary bicultural and multicultural foundations of Tangata Whenua (Māori) and Tangata Tiriti (non-Māori) in Aotearoa-NZ. When schools embrace the concept of ako being learning about and from each other, they might begin to harness the potential of power-sharing with students, whānau, hapū and iwi. Then the sky is the limit with where mātauranga Māori can take us; for Māori and non-Māori alike.

Culturally Responsive, Nourishing and Self-Sustaining Pedagogies

Culturally responsive pedagogies rightly ask educators to be responsive to the cultural experiences of taitamāhine Māori in their pedagogies, practices and curriculum. But when we consider that generations of Māori have been exposed to hegemonic, assimilative and abusive practices of an education system that have denigrated their tribal identities and prevented access to te ao Māori, alongside the barriers of stereotypes, essentialism and Pākehā paralysis that have created contexts for taitamāhine where they might not want to be recognised as Māori, we might begin to understand that much in education has deliberately and systematically diminished Māori cultural identity (Berryman & Eley, 2017). In this case, while educators and school leaders recognise that culturally responsive pedagogy requires us to build from the cultural experiences of Māori, if Māori identity has been diminished through cultural denigration, this requires us to nourish it (Lowe et al., 2025) to the point that cultural knowledge and identity can once again become self-sustaining (Paris, 2012). One way to do this, is by educators learning about mātauranga Māori, and weaving that into their pedagogies, practices and curriculum to provide rich, authentic, positive and meaningful contexts for taitamāhine Māori to learn more about themselves as Māori. Mātauranga Māori provides understandings that open pathways into te ao Māori and with cultural-esteem becoming more sustained, taitamāhine may begin to take those pathways themselves.

Te Ao Māori

Through conscientisation of the cultural undermining that Māori have been and continue to be exposed to, and with teacher agency and Ka Hikitia, schools have the tools to identify and remove barriers to the positive identity formation of taitamāhine Māori. In doing so schools are better positioned to enact Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Taitamāhine and hākuī spoke of the need

to understand tikanga and kawa as a means of feeling comfortable to engage in te ao Māori. While it may not be appropriate for teachers to teach all aspects of tikanga and kawa, they can teach about those aspects of te ao Māori that can be integrated into their pedagogies, practices and curriculum. School leaders support the positive identity formation of their Māori students when they provide authentic ongoing contexts and opportunities for Māori students to be Māori, this relies on power-sharing with Māori whānau, institutions and organisations to ensure Māori students have increasing access to te ao Māori through education. Kaiako spoke of the guidance and support that kaumātua and Māori experts can provide to navigate these spaces. Taitamāhine explained how engaging in te ao Māori provided them with opportunities to see themselves as Māori and to recognise the diversity in Māori identities.

Hākui were generous in providing many solutions to address the barriers to positive identity development for taitamāhine Māori. This was an important reminder that when educators are willing to position themselves as learners, and power-share with Māori whānau and communities, pathways to te ao Māori open-up and the aims of Ka Hikitia start to be realised.

Whenua, Whakapapa and Whānau

The connections amongst whānau, whakapapa, whenua with positive identity formation for taitamāhine Māori have been woven throughout this thesis. It is the sacred thread that connects us back to Hineahuone, to Papatūānuku and to the importance of the female element in our creation stories. The powerful influence of Papatūānuku on the positive identity formation of taitamāhine has been affirmed through the observations of both kaiako and taitamāhine in this research.

At the beginning of this thesis, I reflected on my own theorising as to why I have always felt a stronger connection to my Māori identity than my Pākehā. As a young woman I suspected this was because of the whakapapa of my maternal bloodline being Kāi Tahu – Kāti Māmoe – Waitaha, but I also had wonderings about the role of the whenua on which I was born and live. Through my research I have come to understand that my suspicions and wonderings were valid. It is my whakapapa and the layering of genealogical knowledge that connects me to Papatūānuku through Hineahuone, and my Waitaha, Kāti Māmoe, and Kāi Tahu hākui. This whakapapa is the aho tapu that connects me to the whenua and affirms my authentic

identity as a Kāi Tahu wahine of mixed heritage. I have come to recognise our Earth Mother Papatūānuku as te ūkaipō - the great nourisher and sustainer of our identity as wāhine Māori (Yates-Smith, 2019). When taitamāhine Māori learn about and deepen their understanding of this important mātauranga Māori and have opportunities to consciously engage with and learn from Papatūānuku, their Māori tribal identities are affirmed, nourished and sustained.

[Ka Hikitia as a Framework to Weave Kākahu of Māori Tribal Identity.](#)

Realising the aim of Ka Hikitia (MoE, 2020), Māori enjoying and achieving educational success as Māori, requires educators to be conscious of, and responsive to the white spaces created and maintained by the education system. Ka Hikitia, stepping up the education system also requires educators to take agency to ensure their policies, pedagogies, practices and curriculum choices nourish Māori tribal identities in culturally safe and inclusive learning environments constructed with, and for Māori.

In supporting the weaving of vibrant and strong kākahu where positive tribal identity for taitamāhine Māori in kura auraki can begin to flourish, educators must understand how and why the whenu of white space in education where formed. Although Māori have and continue to value education, it cannot be at the expense of their identity as Māori. By creating learning contexts which are culturally responsive to student and whānau voices, celebrate cultural identity diversity, and connect taitamāhine Māori with each other and te ao Māori, educators can weave the rich and textured aho of the kākahu tightly together. Thus, ensuring that gaps don't appear, exposing the white spaces of the educational whenu which lead to the inequity and racial microaggressions these taitamāhine experience. The mana of Māori tribal identity in kura auraki is nourished and sustained when the colourful aho of taitamāhine Māori and whānau voices, alongside those of iwi and hapū intertwined with mātauranga and Māori theorising are woven into the fabric of the curriculum and classroom practices. This requires power relations where Māori and non-Māori can work together in respectful power-sharing ways. Then, when this is realised, Māori voices and tribal identities no longer exist on the fringes, and the kākahu of identity in kura auraki becomes richer, stronger and more radiant.

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Appendix A



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Seeking Research Participants

- We are looking to meet with students who are 16 years+ and have Māori heritage. We are also looking to meet with a whānau member.
- We want to hear from students who are developing their sense of identity as Māori and from those feel confident in their *tuakiri Māori* (Māori identity).
- We also want to meet with teachers of Māori students.

What's Involved? An informal interview/conversation (approx. 35-45 mins) on your experiences of developing your sense of identity as Māori while at school. Involvement in voluntary, and there are no consequences if you don't want to be involved. You have the right to refuse to answer specific questions in the interview, and you will have the opportunity to review and amend your transcript (a written copy of what you say in your interview.)

Why be Involved? This is a wonderful opportunity to have your voice heard on how XXXX can best support all Māori students to develop a positive sense of identity as Māori while at school.

How will I benefit? All research participants will be invited (not compulsory to attend) to a wānanga later in the year, where the initial research findings will be shared with you. At this wānanga we will learn raranga (traditional Māori weaving) and discuss how your contributions to the research will be woven to tell a 'collaborative story.' This will be an opportunity for whakawhanaungatanga (build meaningful connections) with other students and families who are Māori at XXXX. In 2026 when the research is published you will be invited to a dinner and received an electronic copy of the thesis (again it is not compulsory to attend this).

If you would like to volunteer or find out more information, please email Emma Johnston XXXX

Alternatively, you can contact the principal if you don't feel comfortable contacting the research team directly regarding concerns or questions. XXXX

Research Project Title: On the Fringes: formation of identity for Māori girls in a mainstream secondary school in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Researcher: Emma Johnston, University of Waikato, master thesis research.

Supervisors: Dr Mere Berryman XXXX & Katie Virtue XXXX **Research Approved by:** XXXX Board of Trustees XXXX



This research has been approved by the University of Waikato Faculty of Education Ethics Committee on 29/06/2025. Approval number: FEDU023/25.

NOTE: As the research process began it became clear that a dinner in which the research findings were shared was not going to be appropriate as the research participants wanted to remain anonymous. Instead, a copy of the thesis will be shared electronically with participants and there will be an invitation to have a follow up conversation with myself. The wānanga did go ahead, however just with the students. Responding to taitamāhine and hākui voices, I invited all Y12 and 13 Māori students in the school and non-Māori that wanted to be involved to attend a trip to a museum where we looked at examples of kākahu and discussed kākahu as symbols of tribal identity.



Participant Information Sheet

Research Project Title: On the Fringes: formation of identity for Māori girls in a mainstream secondary school in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

The purpose of this research is to understand the role of schools in supporting the positive formation of identity as Māori, for Māori girls in a contemporary mainstream secondary setting in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Why be involved?

This is a wonderful opportunity to have your voice heard on how schools can best support all Māori students to develop a strong sense of identity as Māori. Involvement is voluntary, and there are no consequences if you don't want to be involved.

What's involved? An informal interview/conversation with Emma Johnston for approx. 35-45 mins. This conversation will be sound recorded and then transcribed (written as a conversation in a word doc.)

What will I be asked about?

- **For students:**

Do you feel confident in your identity as Māori? Or is it developing? What things do the school/teachers do to help you develop your sense of identity as Māori? What doesn't help? What other things could the school/teachers do to help you develop your identity as Māori? What does it mean/look like to you, to be recognised as Māori at school?

- **For parents/caregivers:**

What do you feel is the role of school in the positive identity formation as Māori for your daughter? What actions do you see the school taking to support this? What else could they be doing? What does Māori achieve as Māori mean to you?

- **For Teachers:**

Do you feel confident in understanding your role to support the positive identity formation for Māori students in your classes? What actions do you make in your daily practice? How do you recognise/validate Māori students' positive sense of identity as Māori?

Where will the interviews take place?

There are options on where we can meet for your interview, depending on where you feel most comfortable. We can meet in a private soundproof room at XXXX, or if you would prefer to meet off school site, there is the option of meeting in a soundproof room at community venue in the local area, alternatively you may wish to meet at your home. On the Consent Form you can indicate where you would like to meet.

What happens with the information I share?

All research participants' identities will be anonymised, and the identity of the school and participants will not be disclosed in the research findings.

All conversations will be recorded and then transcribed into a word document; these will be stored securely in a password protected file for the duration of the research project.

You will have the opportunity to review what you have said and correct it. You can refuse to answer any question, and you have the right to withdraw from the research up until 7 days after your interview.

Research data will be stored securely on a password encrypted file and will be stored for up to 5 years in a secure location. After 5 years the data will be deleted permanently.

The findings from the research will be published in a masters thesis and may be used in other scholarly publications such as journal articles, book chapters and/or presentations. You will be given access to the thesis early in 2026. The name of the school and the names of participants will not be disclosed in the thesis.

Participation is voluntary and there are no consequences for declining to participate or withdrawing. You have the right to refuse to answer specific questions in the interview, and you will have to opportunity to review and amend your transcript (written copy of what you say in your interview.)

What are the possible risks?

There are minimal risks in being involved in this research. There is a small possibility of becoming emotional when discussing things that help or hinder development of identity as Māori. If this is the case, we have safeguards in place to ensure participants are supported and cared for. Remember you can decline to answer any question and ask to withdraw up until 7 days after your interview.

Although all efforts will be made to protect your anonymity, absolute confidentiality of your information cannot be guaranteed. If by any chance, there is a breach in privacy you will be contacted.

Counselling Support

Counselling is available if participants require or request it. Counselling is provided through XXXX (including access to a Māori team member.) EAP counselling services is available for adult participants. There will be no cost to participants for this service.

Tikanga Māori

In consultation with a Māori cultural advisor, all interviews will follow tikanga Māori practices such as appropriate karakia to open and close, and sharing of kai at the conclusion of interview (kai will be provided). All efforts will be made to uplift the mana, wairua and mauri of all participants at all times.

Rights to Access Your Information.

You have the right to request access to your information held by the research team. You also have the right to request that any information you disagree with is corrected.

Any questions please contact Emma Johnston XXXX

Alternatively, you can contact the principal if you don't feel comfortable contacting the research team directly regarding concerns or questions. XXXX

Researcher: Emma Johnston, University of Waikato, master thesis research.

Supervisors: Dr Mere Berryman XXXX & Katie Virtue XXXX

Research Approved by: XXXX Board of Trustees, XXXX



Image and artwork by Emma Johnston.

This research has been approved by the University of Waikato Faculty of Education Ethics Committee on 29/06/2025. Approval number: FEDU023/25.

Appendix C



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO

Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

STUDENT Research Participant Consent Form

Research Project Title: On the Fringes: formation of identity for Māori girls in a mainstream secondary school in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

- I have read or have had read to me, and I understand the Participant Information Sheet.
- I have had time to consider whether to participate in this research project or not.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research.
- I understand the answers I have been given regarding the research project, and I understand how my information will be used.
- I consent to participate in a recorded interview which will be transcribed (written down).
- I understand that taking part in this research project is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw up until 7 days after my interview.
- I understand that my participation in this study is confidential and that no material, which could identify me personally, will be used in any reports on this study.
- I know who to contact if I have any questions about the study in general.
- I understand that my parent can sit in on my interview or I may invite a support person.
- I understand that I may request my interview to be conducted in te reo Māori. If this is the case, I understand that a translator will attend the interview and will translate and transcribe my interview. I understand that the translator will have signed a consent form ensuring they will keep information shared in the interview confidential.

STUDENT Participant Declaration

I hereby give consent to participate in this research project

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Contact phone number:

Please tick the appropriate box for **where** you would like interview conducted:



At XXXX (in a soundproof room)



At XXXX (in a soundproof room)

☐ At my residence (please give address)

Are you happy for your parent or caregiver to attend the interview with you?

☐ Yes, I want a parent/whānau member to be present.

☐ No, I do not want a parent/whānau member present.

Parent/Caregiver Declaration (for student participants)

I hereby give consent for my child (named above) to participate in this research project

Please tick the appropriate box for **how** you would like the interview to be conducted:

☐ I will attend the interview with my child.

☐ I give permission for my child to be interviewed without parent/caregiver attendance.

☐ I give permission for _____ to sit alongside my child as a support person for the interview. I understand that only my child's responses will be transcribed for the purpose of this research.

Name:

Relationship to student:

Signature:

Date:

Contact phone number:

Any questions please contact Emma Johnston XXXX

Alternatively, you can contact the principal if you don't feel comfortable contacting the research team directly regarding concerns or questions. XXXX

Researcher: Emma Johnston, University of Waikato, master thesis research.

Supervisors: Dr Mere Berryman XXXX & Katie Virtue XXXX

Research Approved by: XXXX Board of Trustees, XXXX



Image and artwork by Emma Johnston.

This research has been approved by the University of Waikato Faculty of Education Ethics Committee on 29/06/2025. Approval number: FEDU023/25.

Appendix D



THE UNIVERSITY OF

WAIKATO

Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

PARENT/CAREGIVER Research Participant Consent Form

Research Project Title: On the Fringes: formation of identity for Māori girls in a mainstream secondary school in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

- I have read or have had read to me, and I understand the Participant Information Sheet.
- I have had time to consider whether to participate in this research project or not.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research.
- I understand the answers I have been given regarding the research project, and I understand how my information will be used.
- I consent to participate in a recorded interview which will be transcribed (written down).
- I understand that taking part in this research project is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw up until 7 days after my interview.
- I understand that my participation in this study is confidential and that no material, which could identify me personally, will be used in any reports on this study.
- I know who to contact if I have any questions about the study in general.
- I understand that I may invite a support person.
- I understand that I may request my interview to be conducted in te reo Māori. If this is the case, I understand that a translator will attend the interview and will translate and transcribe my interview. I understand that the translator will have signed a consent form ensuring they will keep information shared in the interview confidential.

PARENT/CAREGIVER Participant Declaration

I hereby give consent to participate in this research project

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Contact phone number:

Please tick the appropriate box for **where** you would like interview conducted:



At XXXX (in a soundproof room)



At XXXX (in a soundproof room)



At my residence (please give address)

Any questions please contact Emma Johnston XXXX

Alternatively, you can contact the principal if you don't feel comfortable contacting the research team directly regarding concerns or questions. XXXX

Researcher: Emma Johnston, University of Waikato, master thesis research.

Supervisors: Dr Mere Berryman XXXX & Katie Virtue XXXX

Research Approved by: XXXX Board of Trustees, XXXX



Image and artwork by Emma Johnston.

This research has been approved by the University of Waikato Faculty of Education Ethics Committee on 29/06/2025. Approval number: FEDU023/25.

Appendix E



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO

Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

STAFF Research Participant Consent Form

Research Project Title: On the Fringes: formation of identity for Māori girls in a mainstream secondary school in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

- I have read or have had read to me, and I understand the Participant Information Sheet.
- I have had time to consider whether to participate in this research project or not.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research.
- I understand the answers I have been given regarding the research project, and I understand how my information will be used.
- I consent to participate in a recorded interview which will be transcribed (written down).
- I understand that taking part in this research project is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw up until 7 days after my interview.
- I understand that my participation in this study is confidential and that no material, which could identify me personally, will be used in any reports on this study.
- I know who to contact if I have any questions about the study in general.
- I understand that I may invite a support person.
- I understand that I may request my interview to be conducted in te reo Māori. If this is the case, I understand that a translator will attend the interview and will translate and transcribe my interview. I understand that the translator will have signed a consent form ensuring they will keep information shared in the interview confidential.

STAFF Participant Declaration

I hereby give consent to participate in this research project

Name:

Signature:

Date:

Contact phone number:

Please tick the appropriate box for **where** you would like interview conducted:



At XXXX (in a soundproof room)



At XXXX (in a soundproof room)



At my residence (please give address)

Any questions please contact Emma Johnston XXXX

Alternatively, you can contact the principal if you don't feel comfortable contacting the research team directly regarding concerns or questions. XXXX

Researcher: Emma Johnston, University of Waikato, master thesis research.

Supervisors: Dr Mere Berryman XXXX & Katie Virtue XXXX

Research Approved by: XXXX Board of Trustees XXXX



Image and artwork by Emma Johnston.

This research has been approved by the University of Waikato Faculty of Education Ethics Committee on 29/06/2025. Approval number: FEDU023/25.



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Research Instruments

Research Project Title: On the Fringes: formation of identity for Māori girls in a mainstream secondary school in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Interviews as conversation starters:

- **For students:**

Do you feel confident in your identity as Māori? Or is it developing?

What things do the school/teachers do to help you develop your sense of identity as Māori?

What doesn't help you develop your identity as Māori?

What other things could the school/teachers do to help you develop your identity as Māori?

How do the thoughts and actions of your peer's impact on your sense of identity as Māori?

What does it mean/look like to you, to be recognised as Māori at school?

What does 'Māori achieving as Māori' mean to you?

- **For parents/caregivers:**

What do you feel is the role of school in the positive identity formation as Māori for your daughter?

What actions do you see the school taking to support this?

What else could they be doing?

What does 'Māori achieving as Māori' mean to you?

Is this occurring for your child? If so, how? If not, what do you perceive as the barriers to this occurring?

- **For Teachers:**

Do you feel confident in understanding your role to support the positive identity formation for Māori students in your classes?

What does 'Māori achieving as Māori' mean to you?

How do you know who your Māori students are?

What do you know about them?

What actions do you make in your daily practice to affirm the positive identity of your Māori students?

How do you recognise/validate Māori students' positive sense of identity as Māori?

How are you developing your capability as a teacher of Māori learners?

How is the school actively supporting your capability in this area?

Any questions please contact Emma Johnston XXXX. Alternatively, you can contact the principal if you don't feel comfortable contacting the research team directly regarding concerns or questions. XXXX

Researcher: Emma Johnston, University of Waikato, master thesis research.

Supervisors: Dr Mere Berryman XXXX & Katie Virtue XXXX **Research Approved by:** XXXX Board of Trustees
XXXX

This research has been approved by the University of Waikato Faculty of Education Ethics Committee on 29/06/2025. Approval number: FEDU023/25.