

Māori students and issues of hybrid identity: The response of one inner-city state school

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Abstract

As a result of a more liberal national migration policy than was the case in the past, school communities in Aotearoa /New Zealand are increasingly multi-cultural, with both students and teachers coming from a wide range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In these global village environments, managers and governors strive (with varying degrees of success) to acknowledge, value and accommodate the heritage of new-migrant groups and to address the particular educational needs, interests and aspirations of the individuals within them. While it is extremely important to be inclusive of those students who are newly-arrived in the country, another imperative is, of course to protect and enhance, within an increasingly global educational perspective, the special status of indigenous Māori students, particularly those in mainstream education, as they explore and shape the hybrid identity (part indigenous / part global citizen) that will undoubtedly characterize their lives in the 21st century.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss some identity-building strategies which one central-city, state, single-sex secondary school has initiated to support its indigenous students. While the strategies discussed must be considered as part of an ongoing, evolutionary process, indications are that the approach adopted is having a significant impact on the personal, social and academic development of Māori students.

Introduction

In that body of research literature that concerns the development of bicultural identity, one of the key areas of investigation in the past has been in relation to people who have migrated to a new country and who, through a complex process of accommodation, develop strategies which allow a degree of integration within the new society while still maintaining links with the language and cultural practices that have been left behind. (Berry, 1993; 1997; Giddens, 1991; 2000; Phinney (1990); Phinney & Devcich-Navarro 1997; Robertson, 1992). However, this very broad-ranging subject is increasingly being examined from an entirely different perspective - from the point of view of those who have never moved from their own environment but whose lives are undergoing an equally significant transformation because of the impact of globalisation, including the impact on them of incoming migrants (see, for example, Condon 1988; Verma & Saraswathi (2002) Hermans & Kempen 1998; Ivory 1999).

Globalisation and the formulation of cultural identity

Arnett (2002, p. 777) suggests that “as a consequence of globalisation, most people in the world now develop a bicultural identity, in which part of their identity is rooted in their local culture while another part stems from an awareness of their relation to the global culture”.

Within this context, a number of studies have examined the impact of globalisation on cultural identity in different regions of the world (see, for example, Booth; 2002; Nsamenang, 2002; Santa Maria, 2002; Stevenson & Zusho, 2002; Welti, 2002). While these studies cover a wide range of quite diverse geographical regions such as Latin America, the Middle East; Africa, areas of South East Asia, China and Japan, the findings that emerge from them have a number of things in common. Among the most significant of these are:

- a) those who seek to adopt a global identity in addition to their local identity are generally successful in doing so in direct relationship to their socio-economic status; (the higher the socio economic level, the higher the chance of successfully adopting a global identity);
- b) the drive to adopt a global identity creates tension (often negative) between old and new cultural values and practices;
- c) tension (often negative) between old and new cultural values and practices creates significant intergenerational tension and often rupture of traditional family roles and structures;
- d) the greater the distance between the original cultural values and 'global' values the greater the potential for conflict;
- e) the greater the distance between the original cultural values and 'global' values the greater the possibility of failure to 'belong' to the global community;
- f) the lower the socio-economic position, the greater the possibility that, in attempting to adopt a global identity, both the local and the global identity are lost.

With reference to the context of sub-Saharan African, Nsamenang (2002, p. 13) observes:

The process of acculturation and globalisation has bestowed on contemporary Africa a dual politico-economic and cultural system of old indigenous traditions and imported legacies. . . . This has produced a marginal population whose adults, teenagers and children are groping desperately to reconcile within individual and collective psyches the ambivalences and contradictions of a confusing cultural braid.

Without doubt, these comments also reflect the situation in a number of other countries. There is little wonder then, as Arnett, (2002, 778) argues, that in an increasingly globalised world as local cultures change in response to globalisation, so "some young people find themselves at home in neither the local culture nor the global culture' and experience a kind of confusion which he terms 'identity confusion'".

Failure to develop a bicultural identity: Psychological impact

Several psychological studies, initially developed to examine the issue of bicultural identity development among migrants to new countries, have now been reviewed and reapplied to understanding the development of bicultural identity within the context of globalisation. Not surprisingly, many of these studies have identified commonalities between both contexts. For example, the cross-cultural psychologist John Berry has identified some significant behaviours from his early work on migration and acculturation (Berry, 1993) which appear to be equally relevant to a consideration of

the impact of globalisation on identity and identity confusion. Four of the most important behaviours identified by Berry (1997) are:

Marginalisation - where a person has little interest in maintaining his or her original culture but also rejects or is rejected by the new culture.

Culture shedding – where aspects of a previous cultural repertoire are discarded because they are deemed to be no longer appropriate.

Acculturative stress – where there are situations of conflict between the original culture and the new one.

Cultural distance – where there is dissimilarity between two competing cultures in their beliefs and practices.

Giddens (1990), Thompson (1995) and Tomlinson (1999) use terms such as ‘delocalisation’, ‘dis-placement’ and ‘deteritorializatio’ to describe situations where young people in particular (since this is the group most affected by globalisation), in developing a global consciousness, lose their ties to the place and the culture where they are living. While some young people are unaffected by this, others suffer from what Arnett (2002, 778) describes as:

... an acute sense of alienation and impermanence as they grow up with a lack of cultural certainty, a lack of clear guidelines for how life is to be lived and how to interpret their experience.

In relation to this, some researchers have examined the long-term impact of identity confusion on individuals and societies. It is strongly suggested that, in contexts where young people experience cultural identity confusion, there can be sharp increases in suicide rates, instances of substance abuse and in manifestations of aggressive and anarchic behaviour (see, for example, Burbank (1988); Condon (1988); Delafosse, Fouraste & Gbobouo (1993); Liechty (1995); and Rubenstein (1995)).

The situation in Aoteroa/New Zealand

The body of research to which I have made brief reference here is of considerable relevance to the situation in Aoteroa/New Zealand. Just as is the case in other countries in the world, young (and sometimes not so young) New Zealanders have global aspirations. Young people in Aoteroa/New Zealand buy designer labels, download reflections of their real and imagined lives onto *You Tube* and *Beebo*, upload music onto iPods and aspire to live international lives with well-paid jobs in what are perceived to be glamorous locations. This means that, inevitably, they are caught up in the same identity issues as their peers in other areas of the globe. The process of identity development in Oceanic societies such as Aoteroa/New Zealand is an even more complex issue than may at first appear to be the case.

The underlying assumption in some of the research work outlined earlier is that societies have at their core some kind of homogenous cultural identity. But what of countries where, even without the impact of globalisation, the issue of bicultural identity is already problematic? For people in countries like Aoteroa/ New Zealand, the impact of globalisation on issues of identity makes an already complex situation even more so. Citizens of this country have always grappled with complex issues associated with identity. In common with many other Oceanic societies, we are a nation built on a combined indigenous and colonial past, with generations of citizens identifying, in complex ways, with issues associated with cultural heritage while at the same time feeling the need to forge some kind of cohesive national identity. Many

of those of Māori heritage struggle with issues of linguistic and cultural loss. Some of those of European heritage have a solid understanding of the dialects and cultural norms of the place their extended families commonly call 'home' but may never have visited these places. This is not, however, a situation that is unique to non-indigenous citizens. References to 'Hawaiiki', the 'homeland' or place of origin of Māori, abound in songs, stories and legends.

Cause for concern in Aotearoa/New Zealand?

In Aotearoa/ New Zealand, there are clear warning signs that the symptoms of identity confusion, with its associated problems, are becoming widespread. There are disturbing images and reports in the media which indicate that, unless we address this issue, there will be a long-term negative impact on society. Significantly, the signs are most visible in relation to young Māori and Pasifika people who are often from families in low socio-economic brackets and who are often faced with the most complex identity development issues in the country. On the one hand, these young people are often urged by their elders to adhere to traditional cultural values and practices. On the other hand, they are encouraged to 'fit' into a society where indigenous world views are not always valued or easily accommodated. Add to this mix the complexity of inter-racial marriage, ease of international migration and the insistent temptations of globalisation, and the situation becomes one in which the potential for confusion and alienation is extremely high. The problem for these young people is not simply to develop a bicultural identity, but to somehow construct what Hermans & Kempen (1998) and Ivory (1999) identify as a 'hybrid identity', one that combines all the different strands of their own ancestral map. The questions facing Aotearoa/ New Zealand as a nation, and particularly those of us engaged in educational sectors, are (a) whether it is possible for us to find strategies to support these young people as they search for some form of identity equilibrium, and (b) whether it is possible to establish cultural synergies and interactions that might mitigate the likelihood of identity confusion. The second part of this paper outlines the strategies implemented by one inner city school in response to this question and examines the impact that this has had on the academic and cultural well-being of Māori students.

Background to the educational context

For many years, particularly through the 1960s and 1970s, New Zealand's educational achievement was among the best of the OECD nations. NZ students scored well in international literacy and numeracy tests and were consistently highly ranked on the international leagues tables. Over recent years, however, New Zealand's sound educational reputation has diminished, and while the best of NZ students still score well, it is now acknowledged that there is a large tail of students who are under-achieving in relation to international benchmarks. In 2004, the then NZ Secretary for Education, Howard Fancy (2004), in a speech to NZ school Principals reported that "the reality is that too many students - especially those from poor socio-economic backgrounds or who are Māori or Pasifika are not doing as well as they should".

Considerable efforts have been made throughout the country to explore ways of responding to the needs of groups such as Māori and Pasifika students whose educational performance overall is of concern. Thus far, with some exceptions, these efforts have not led to a marked increase in overall educational performance.

The local educational context

The school which forms the focus of the interventions reported on in this part of the

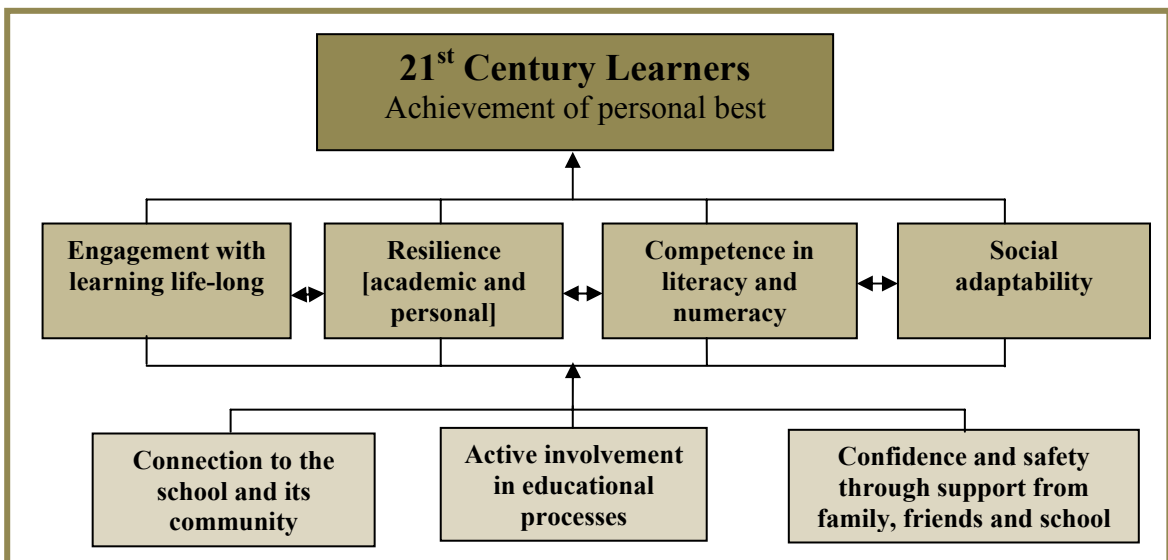
paper is an inner-city state school for girls. There are 1430 students and over 120 staff. The Board of Trustees and the senior leadership team aspire to create an innovative and stimulating educational environment for all students and are mindful of the need to attend to the particular needs and interests of different groups. The focus is on preparing learners and enriching teachers for the 21st century. However, with a community of over 1600 people working and interacting in the school on a daily basis, the potential range of learner and teacher profiles and relationships is immense.

This school, like many others, is increasingly multi-cultural with both students and teachers coming from a wide range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Among the student body alone, there are 60 different countries of origin. The countries of origin of staff members include the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, South Africa, India, Cina, Africa, Japan, Poland and Pacific Islands countries. Among those staff members born in Aotearoa/ New Zealand are some who identify as Māori. The school strives to value and accommodate the heritage of new-migrant groups in the school and to address the particular educational needs, interests and aspirations of the individuals belonging to them. It willingly acknowledges that it has a responsibility to be inclusive of those students and teachers who are newly-arrived in the country and those who, although they may have been in the country for some time, in some cases since birth, have linguistic and cultural links that extend beyond Aotearoa/ New Zealand. However, it also willingly accepts that it has a particular responsibility to protect and enhance the special status and identity of indigenous Māori students, particularly as they explore and shape the form of hybrid identity that will undoubtedly characterize their lives in the 21st century.

The school’s pluri-ethnic perspective

The overall strategic vision for the school is expressed in *Figure 1* below. If each student is to achieve her personal best as a 21st Century learner, she needs to be connected to the school and its community, supported by family, friends and the school, and actively involved in her own educational processes. With this in place, the keys to overall achievement are competence in literacy and numeracy, engagement with life-long learning, personal and academic resilience and social adaptability. It is the combination of these factors that will shape her capacity to forge a strong identity and underpin her success.

Figure 1: Strategic Vision for School



There is an understanding in the school that students with diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds may need special support to take best advantage of their educational opportunities. Although there are some special programmes that have been proposed by academics in New Zealand to support Māori student achievement, these have not been adopted by the school. While often very well intentioned, some of these initiatives only address the needs of small numbers of students at any one time and they are often short-term, rather than sustained. For these reasons, they may fail to produce any real, long-term gain. Programmes that are longer-term, often involve a considerable financial commitment that the school simply cannot afford. Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of some of these ready-made initiatives is that they oversimplify Māori student profiles, categorising Māori students into some kind of pre-determined mass. Implicit in the philosophy underlying some of these initiatives is the assumption that a similar course of action will necessarily be appropriate for all. The fact is, however, that Māori students are individuals with varying degrees of involvement in, and association with, Maori linguistic and cultural heritage and, therefore, with differently constituted senses of identity.

While fully acknowledging the need to adopt culturally sensitive approaches to pedagogy, the school is determined not make assumptions about individuals that are based on ethnicity. There is, after all, a considerable body of research that indicates that such assumptions can reinforce rather than diminish disadvantage. (see, for example, Aboriginal Education Unit (1993); Anderson (1988); Andrews & Hughes (1988); Banks (1988); Bindarriy, Yangarriny, Mingalpa, Warlkuni (1991); Cole, Gay, Glick, & Sharp (1971); Cooper, (1980); Irvine & Berry (1988); Jacob & Jordan (1987); Keefe (1987); Kleinfeld, & Nelson (1991); Malin (1990); More (1989, 1990, 1996); Ogbu (1987); Reynolds & Skilbeck (1976); Sternberg (1988,1990); Swisher & Deyhle (1989); Vyas (1988); Yu & Bain (1985)). It does not follow from this that the school fails to accept that there are cultural and linguistic issues that can have a profound impact on students' engagement with learning and, by extension, their well-being and success. Students need genuine and sensitive support if they are to come to terms with issues relating to linguistic and cultural heritage, global citizenship and the development of an academic persona within the context of 'mainstream' schooling. It is an important part of the school's role to help them to manage the complexities involved.

Support for Māori students

Māori students have always held a special place in the school. In line with its Treaty of Waitangi obligations, the school acknowledges Tainuitanga, the protocols of the tribal group in whose area the school is located. While the school has always had a strong commitment to the tangata whenua (people of the land) status of Māori students, the quality of support offered to Māori students has increased over recent years, with students now being encouraged to use their linguistic and cultural heritage as a platform upon which to build their aspirations and endeavours and as a solid foundation from which they can take advantage of educational opportunities that will bring them success.

Environmental support

The school has built a *whareniui* (meeting house) in a traditional style which is used for meeting and as a teaching and learning space. In a departure from normal protocols, and because they understood the school's aspirations, local *kaumātua* (tribal elders), gave special permission for the carvings surrounding the *whareniui*

(meeting house) to represent the lives and strengths of significant Māori women within the region. Use of the wharenuī is not limited to Māori students but protocols for its use are based on Māori custom and practice.

The *wharenuī* has an attached *wharekai* (dining room) so that, for some of the time at least, students can meet, interact and learn in a culturally familiar setting. The school has recently constructed *whare paku* (toilet) and *horohoroī* (shower) blocks so that overnight (and longer) stays can be accommodated at the school in line with customary practice.

Architecturally, the buildings surrounding the wharenuī form a traditional paepae (threshold/ forecourt) where, in a more traditional context, learning would take place. A group of kaumātua regularly work in the wharenuī engaged in traditional handcrafts. Recently, for example, they have created a korowai (ornamental cloak) for the school to use on ceremonial occasions. Students can be seen wandering in and out, engaging in conversation and/ or working alongside the visitors on a range of projects.

Organisational support

The school has a Māori student council convened and managed by the Māori students themselves with support from Māori staff and senior managers of the school. The kapahaka (culture) group has trainers who are not volunteers but salaried through special funding initiatives. Māori parents and caregivers form a whānau (family) support group that meets each month to discuss issues of relevance to the students and to offer advice to the school about issues of interest or concern to the Māori students. The chairperson of the whānau group is a member of the Board of Trustees so that this group, in particular, has a strong advocacy role and a voice in policy and decision making.

Procedural support

All important school occasions centrally involve Māori protocol. There is a powhiri (welcome ceremony) each year to welcome new students and staff; new buildings and equipment are blessed in accordance with Māori tradition, and small but significant issues such as correct pronunciation of Māori words and names and bilingual signage are encouraged.

Courses of special interest to Māori students

A number of additional initiatives have been put in place to support Māori students to engage with learning and to commit to those academic processes that will bring them the highest level of success. These include the development of specially targeted courses in art, English and drama. In English, for example, one of the courses has a focus on Māori authors who write in English. This kind of course is proving highly popular with the students and they are experiencing a high level of success. In drama, special courses have targeted Māori playwrights and traditional forms of Māori performance that are relevant to women.

Students have the opportunity to learn te reo Māori and students coming from kura kaupapa Māori (Māori medium schools) are placed at levels appropriate to their language proficiency levels rather than wasting time repeating work already covered. Students for whom English is an additional language are given literacy support.

A specific new venture that the school has just initiated is an artist in residence position. A professional artist is appointed to this position to work in a specially

designed studio in the school for a period of 3 months each year. The first artist in residence, appointed in 2008, was a Māori weaver, a woman with affiliation to Tainui, who produces traditional Māori weaving with a contemporary twist. She provided another strong role model for Māori students and staff, as well as contributing to the creative culture in the school.

Personnel support

One of the most significant innovations the school has implemented has been to give two Māori staff members time allowances and management units to be mentors for Māori students. Their job is not to deal with behavioural issues which are referred to a guidance network, but to be academic coaches for Māori students for who find school and learning problematic. In the first two years of operation of this scheme, students were identified and shoulder tapped by the mentors. Now, the scheme is one of self referral, and most interestingly, the number of students taking advantage of the mentor's time has almost doubled this year, to a point where other mentors may need to be appointed. What is very rewarding is that those referring themselves to the mentors are not just those who are struggling, but also those who want to reach high levels of achievement to enter competitive training programmes or contestable places at University in disciplines like medicine and engineering.

In all kinds of both overt and covert ways, the school attempts to create a community where strong, positive images of Māori language and cultural practice are set alongside core values that might be expected in New Zealand society generally. In this way, everybody in the community learns about the significant place that Māori hold in our society and Māori students are encouraged to engage with aspects of their own culture within a supportive school context.

Successes for Māori students

Overall, initiatives to support Māori students in the ways outlined have had a positive impact on teaching and learning and the extended family concept has met with a very positive response from Māori students and their families. In particular, the mentors have:

- visited every home of those who have self-referred to make connections with parents and caregivers;
- offered special support in study periods;
- established a homework group;
- run special tutorials during lunchtime.

Other positive signs of success include:

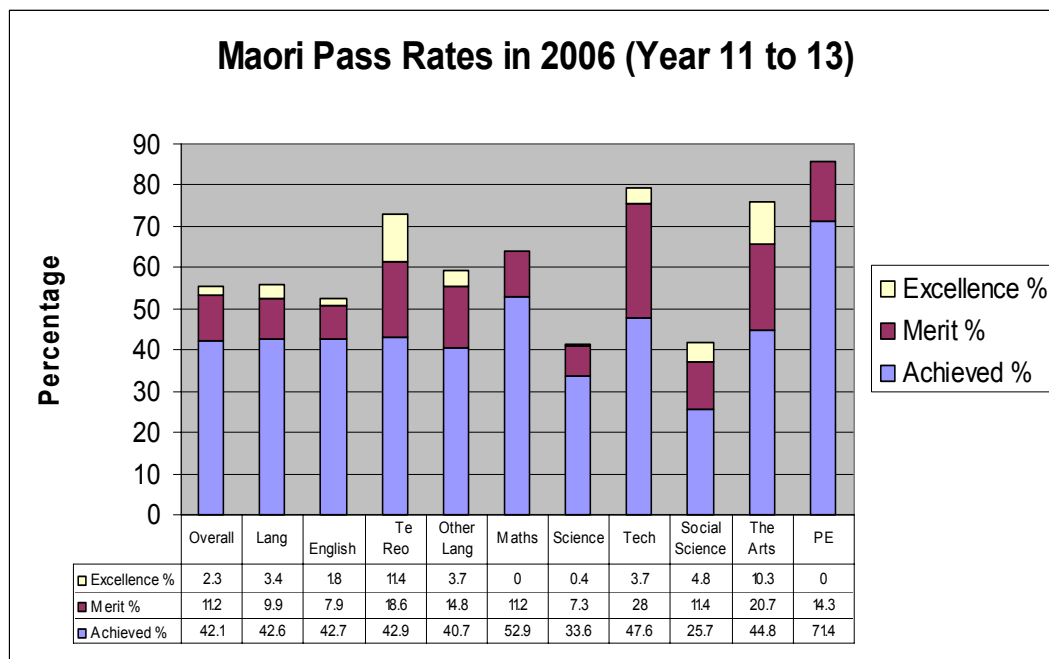
- the *whānau* group (homeroom group) - a vertical group with approximately 60 students and three teachers involved - is meeting a need highlighted by parents for students coming from *kura kaupapa* Māori and making the transition into a mainstream school;
- Kapa Haka is highly successful and visible, with a combined group involving a boys' high school having been selected as the top mainstream group at local kapa haka competitions by regional judges and having taken part in the national competition in the capital Wellington in 2008;
- more Māori students are accepting positions as student leaders so that in the past few years, Māori students have held positions as:

- Head girl;
- Deputy Cultural Captain;
- House leader;
- Deputy Sports Captain.

Impact on Māori student outcomes

Importantly, the initiatives to which reference has been made are also having an impact on learning outcomes. Māori students are beginning to achieve very creditable grades in National Achievement although, there is still work to do in the area of science, mathematics and, very surprisingly for students who are traditionally very talented sportswomen, in the area of physical education. Māori student

Table 1: Māori Student Pass rates Years 11-13 (2006)



One of the most satisfying academic results for the school is that Māori students at the school are increasingly achieving above the national norm. Results for 2007 show that they are performing just over 13% better than cohorts of Māori students in schools overall.

Table 2: Māori Student Pass rates at Year 11 (2004-2007)

	Overall Pass Rate		
	School	National	Comparison
2004	59.5	48.7	+ 10.8
2005	56.6	49	+ 7.6
2006	63.9	51.4	+ 12.5
2007	62.4	49.3	+ 13.1

Outcomes and indications

What this school is doing is neither perfect nor particularly different from what happens in many other educational institutions. However, the approach is consistent,

sustained and is being expanded each year. Staff acknowledge that there is still a great deal of work still to be done. Nevertheless, they believe that the work that has been done thus far is at least partly responsible for a significant reduction in the number of Māori students who are suspended and excluded from school for truancy or for anarchic behaviour each year. The Board of Trustees, the Principal and the senior management team believe that the approach adopted in the case of Māori students provides systematic, substantial, individualized and locally-contextualized support for successful personal, cultural and educational outcomes. They also believe that a similar approach could be beneficial in the case of other groups. Thus, many of the initiatives that have been created for Māori students are now being recreated for Pasifika students and also for other minority groups, particularly the children of refugee families.

Conclusions: Future dreams and directions

It is clear that globalisation will continue to have an increasing impact on the development of identity. As Giddens (2000, 65) observes, “when globalisation alters and erodes traditional ways, identity has to be created and recreated on a more active basis than before”.

At this school, it is hoped that the active support for positive identity creation will allow Māori students to find a strong future with the various aspects of their hybrid existence intact and that, to the extent of their aspirations and abilities, they become successful participants in both local and global villages.

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