

MAIRANGITIA TE ANGITŪ

Ngāpuhi student role models and aspirations for the future

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Abstract

Role models serve multiple functions as they influence Māori students' goals and school aspirations. While Māori students are faced with various educational barriers, scholars contend that having a positive role model can influence their educational persistence and overall engagement at school. Therefore, it is important to consider who Māori students choose as role models and how they influence their goals and aspirations. This study describes the ways role models influence the educational aspirations of self-identified Ngāpuhi secondary students attending schools in Te Tai Tokerau, Northland. Following a qualitative research approach, this investigation examined the survey responses of 89 Ngāpuhi secondary students aged between 13 and 18 years. The Ngāpuhi students chose role models who exemplified tenacity, ambition and self-determination—the same attributes of their many tūpuna who came before them. The findings of this study suggest that influential whānau role models, and cultural values, play a pivotal role in informing the educational decisions made by Ngāpuhi secondary students.

Keywords

Ngāpuhi, Māori, role models, success, education, motivation

Introduction

Ngāpuhi are the largest iwi in Aotearoa, with an epic history of powerful leaders and role models who have had a positive impact in the Māori world and beyond (Healy et al., 2012). Prior to 1840, Ngāpuhi were an integral player in the Pacific region's economy (Waitangi Tribunal, 2014). Their approach, then as now, was driven by a fierce determination for rangatiratanga,

economic development and iwi enterprise (Petrie, 2006). Ngāpuhi's pursuit of knowledge and self-determination was purposed by an obligation to maintain the intergenerational well-being of people while upholding the capacity of collective iwi advancement (Te Tai Tokerau Iwi Chief Executives' Consortium, 2015). The degree to which these values inspire iwi endeavour has not diminished. Indeed, adherence to these values has

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enabled the tenacity and ambition of Ngāpuhi to endure.

It is important that all Māori students throughout Aotearoa learn about the stories of how their ancestors adapted, took advantage of opportunities and thrived in the face of change—as a means of expanding their own aspirations for the future. This study contributes to this discussion by examining the ways role models influence the educational aspirations of Ngāpuhi secondary students attending schools in Te Tai Tokerau. Following a qualitative research approach, this study examined the survey responses of 89 Ngāpuhi secondary students aged between 13 and 18 years to understand the ways influential whānau role models, and cultural values, play a pivotal role in informing the educational decisions made by Ngāpuhi secondary students.

Ancestral role models.

Every Māori tribe has its own distinct history and standing. Ngāpuhi have always been seen as an iwi who are fierce, entrepreneurial, uncompromising, risk-taking and innovative (Healy et al., 2012). For example, Rāwiri Taiwhanga from the takiwā of Ngāti Tautahi, Ngāpuhi, was one of many rangatira from Te Tai Tokerau who flourished economically during the early to mid-19th century. Taiwhanga held multiple positions in the early 1800s, including participating in many war expeditions alongside Hongi Hika, while simultaneously honing his horticultural and agricultural knowledge, both on the Kerikeri Mission Station and then in Sydney, Australia, with Samuel Marsden. Once back in Aotearoa, Taiwhanga worked at another mission station and grew a flourishing garden. Five years later, Taiwhanga was simultaneously running a school and a business, establishing a farm in east Kaikohe. Before long, Taiwhanga had successfully established a thriving farm and was selling produce—mostly butter—to a merchant in the Bay of Islands. This made Taiwhanga Aotearoa’s first commercial dairy farmer (Henare et al., 2014; Petrie 2006).

This narrative about Taiwhanga is only one of many stories about Ngāpuhi thriving and ambition. Taiwhanga continues to serve as a Ngāpuhi role model in contemporary times—exemplifying the benefits of being industrious, entrepreneurial and disciplined. Many people of Ngāpuhi descent have retained Taiwhanga’s tenacity of spirit, demonstrating that one’s iwi identity can be a powerful and enduring legacy for others (Henare et al., 2014; Martin, 2012; Webber & O’Connor, 2019). A powerful and culturally sustaining

pedagogical tool for enhancing the motivation of Māori students from Te Tai Tokerau is to integrate curriculum content about Ngāpuhi role models and narratives that “look, sound and feel” like Ngāpuhi students themselves.

Whakapapa narratives: An educational imperative for Ngāpuhi students

Culturally sustaining pedagogical approaches use students’ ethnic and cultural backgrounds as a context for learning, and connect “to and through [students’] personal and cultural strengths, their intellectual capabilities, and their prior accomplishments” (Gay, 2010, p. 26). In the New Zealand context, Bishop et al. (2012) have argued that teachers who use culturally sustaining pedagogies “care for the students as culturally located individuals” (p. 52), and McRae and Averill (2020) have stated that languages, cultures and histories are a fundamental prerequisite for the development of culturally healthy students and communities. In addition, one of the ways the Education and Training Act 2020 obliges schools to bring Te Tiriti o Waitangi into effect is by ensuring their plans, policies and local curriculum reflect local tikanga Māori, mātauranga Māori (knowledge/wisdom) and te ao Māori (worldviews). A focus on culturally sustaining approaches in Te Tai Tokerau schools would put hapū and iwi identity, language and culture at the centre of teaching and learning, with an expectation that Māori students should be engaged, challenged and affirmed in their cultural identities at school.

Penetito (2009) has proposed that place-based education approaches are an integral part of a culturally sustaining approach, especially when they focus on questions like “What is this place and what is our relationship to it?” (p. 5). When questions like these are asked in ways that draw on a Māori students’ knowledge of self, community and connectedness to place, their cultural identities are reinvigorated and their sense of belonging is affirmed. Place-based education essentially draws on the significant features, characteristics, history and personalities of the land or place where students are born, raised and educated, thereby creating a synergy between what is being learned and the unique context of the surrounding ecology (Penetito, 2009). It teaches “through” rather than “about” culture and encompasses ecological studies, biodiversity, community education and community relations, local history and sustainable development (Barnhardt, 2005). To achieve a genuinely place-based education for Māori students, schools and teachers need to build reciprocal

and enduring relationships with Māori students, whānau and communities to ensure they can teach content that resonates with the communities they serve. Research has shown that the promotion of whānau and community role models, through the use of place-based whakapapa narratives, can positively affect Māori students educational efficacy, aspiration and engagement (Webber & Macfarlane, 2020; Webber & O'Connor, 2019).

The importance of role models

The term *role model* was originally used to refer to individuals who serve as examples of the behaviour associated with a role (Merton, 1957). Since then, the term has become widely used by the general public, in organisations and in schools—resulting in different definitions. Lockwood (2006) described role models as “individuals who provide an example of the kind of success that one may achieve, and often also provide a template of the behaviours that are needed to achieve such success” (p. 36), whereas Gauntlett (2002) defined a role model as “someone to look up to and base your character, values and aspirations on” (p. 211). These definitions differ in that Lockwood’s (2006) definition focuses on success and achievement and the fact that role models can make this success seem more attainable, whereas Gauntlett’s (2002) definition has admiration at its core. Moreover, role models are important because they influence self-stereotyping through either decreasing negative self-stereotyping or increasing positive self-stereotyping (Morgenroth et al., 2015).

Māori narratives about iwi role models have existed since the beginning of time (Keelan & Woods, 2006); however, the characteristics of nominated role models has changed over time in response to contextual factors and societal expectations. Research from a te ao Māori perspective tells us that effective role models prioritise Māori identities, promote persistence and academic success, and are involved meaningfully and regularly in others’ lives (Webber & Macfarlane, 2020). Educational role models are important when they promote ambitious goal setting and academic striving because Māori students look to see themselves in their role models (Macfarlane et al., 2007). Macfarlane et al. (2014) concluded that parents need to “role model or provide role models of the success qualities they want to see in their children” (p. 117) because role models can drive student achievement if they appeal strongly to students’ self-identities. The research also tells us that Māori student-identified role models draw less on individual goals and more on

what uplifts the collective (Webber & Macfarlane, 2018). Webber and Macfarlane (2018) argue that students should be encouraged to draw upon the inspiration of others to support their developing aspirations and the aspirations of their family, and that role models can be “an extremely influential feature of students’ lives” (p. 21). Role models make sure they are “present” in Māori students’ lives, model tenacity and show students how to live “as Māori” in the world. However, up to now little effort has been given to using iwi role models in classrooms to boost Māori student aspiration and cultural pride.

Morgenroth et al. (2015) defined role models as “individuals who influence role aspirants’ achievements, motivation, and goals” (p. 467). This definition is useful because it identifies the varying functions of role models and introduces the term *role aspirant*, which acknowledges the person who is being influenced or inspired. The authors argue that while each of these factors may be important predictors of role model effectiveness, it is the perception of these factors by the student that really matters. Students must decide who their role models are in line with their personal aspirations and goals. Under the right conditions, role models can have positive effects on students, including changing their competence beliefs and aspirations (Morgenroth, 2015). According to Morgenroth et al. (2015), role models influence role aspirants in three key ways:

1. *They act as behavioural models.* Role models often demonstrate how something is done and the attributes required to achieve one’s goals (Hurd et al., 2018; Morgenroth et al., 2015). According to Morgenroth et al. (2015), a behavioural role model needs to “embody a role aspirant’s already existing goals” (p. 477) to be a source of motivation for role aspirants. Essentially, behavioural models demonstrate to role aspirants how they might achieve their goals.
2. *They are representations of the possible.* Role models represent what is possible for people “like them”. Being a role model that represents what is possible requires three elements: they must be perceived as successful, share the role aspirant’s background and demonstrate that they are capable of achieving their objectives (McIntyre et al., 2011; Morgenroth et al., 2015; Webber & Macfarlane, 2018; Zirkel, 2002). The importance of representing the possible is captured in Zirkel’s (2002) proposition that “young people only pursue that

which they can imagine as possible” (p. 358). Therefore, role models “like them” encourage role aspirants to imagine beyond what is available to them in their immediate environment. In educational settings, a role model who represents the possible motivates role aspirants by increasing their self-efficacy, usually through “shared group membership, similarity, level of role model and role aspirant success and attribution of this success” (Morgenroth et al., 2015, p. 477).

3. *They are inspirational.* Role models inspire others and “contribute to [the] role aspirants’ adoption of new goals” either because they are “inspired by [the role model] or inspired to [be like the role model]” (Morgenroth et al., 2015, pp. 468–476). Role models who act as inspirations prompt role aspirants to increase the value they place on educational goals, and encourage them to set higher, more aspirational goals.

The empirical evidence also suggests that exposure to role models can reduce a role aspirant’s negative self-stereotyping when their success appears attainable to the role aspirant (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997; Morgenroth, 2015). This is a particularly important factor when considering role models for Māori students because they are a negatively stereotyped group. However, shared group membership itself is not necessarily sufficient to motivate and inspire role aspirants (Morgenroth, 2015). Exposure to successful role models does not lessen the impact of racism and stereotype threat (Steele, 1997, 2003). Racism in Aotearoa, experienced at individual, interpersonal and structural/systemic levels, has been shown to be a powerfully prevalent social influence in the lives of Māori students (Pihama & Lee-Morgan, 2018; Webber et al., 2013). What is needed is a better understanding of who Māori students select as their role models, and the ways student-nominated role models can encourage students to positively self-stereotype, be ambitious and pursue similar levels of accomplishment.

Method

This study employed mixed-methods surveys to gather quantitative and qualitative data to answer the research question: Who do Māori students select as their role models and why? A concurrent nested qualitative and quantitative design was selected, meaning that all data were collected simultaneously via a survey, and equal emphasis was placed on the two sets of data during analysis

(Punch & Oancea, 2014). The rationale behind this approach was to fulfil the research objective of triangulation: “seeking convergence of findings” (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007, p. 284). The full survey comprised a combination of 49 open-ended and closed questions. Initially, students were asked to provide demographic data and then complete multiple-choice questions, Likert scale items and open-ended questions.

The lead researcher’s long-established relationship with schools in the study ensured that a respectful, culturally responsive and appropriate pathway was used for undertaking this important work alongside school communities. It involved teachers and school leaders in the gathering of the data, liaison with students and families, and inclusion of their perspectives in the interpretation of findings for this study. This was critical in terms of ensuring that the study interpretations were presented from an authentically local perspective. To this end, it is also important to clarify that two of the authors of this article are of Ngāpuhi descent.

The data used for this study were taken from a larger national research project led by Dr Melinda Webber titled *Kia tū rangatira ai ngā iwi Māori: Living, thriving and succeeding as Māori*. This strengths-based research project investigated how students, but particularly Māori students, learn, succeed and thrive at school. This nationally representative project had large numbers of students ($n = 18,996$), family members ($n = 6,949$) and teachers ($n = 1,866$) who participated. The project was funded by a Rutherford Discovery Fellowship, administered by the Royal Society of New Zealand, Te Apārangi.

The current study is a small subset of that wider data set and is focused on examining the self-nominated role models of secondary school students ($N = 89$) aged 13–18 who satisfied two criteria: they self-identified as Ngāpuhi in the survey and they attended secondary schools in Te Tai Tokerau (see Table 1).

Data collection

The student survey took between 15 and 20 minutes for students to complete. The lead researcher, Dr Melinda Webber, attended school staff meetings and parent meetings to explain the project and answered any questions about the project. After permission from the school principal and board of trustees was granted, parents were informed of their child’s invitation to be involved in the project. Both students and parents had two opportunities to withdraw from or decline to participate in the study. The lead researcher then distributed

TABLE 1 Study participants

Participants	Male	Female	Yr 9–10	Yr 11–13	Total (N)
Ngāpuhi secondary students	58%	41%	44%	56%	89

participant information sheets, or an electronic link to the online questionnaire, for all students at the school, inviting them to participate.

Open-ended question analysis

Participant answers to one open-ended and one multiple-choice question were coded and analysed to answer the overall research questions for this small study. The survey questions asked:

- Name someone from your family/whānau, school, hapū/iwi or community that inspires you? Explain why they inspire you? Describe this person in five words.
- Is this person a: Teacher Family/Whānau member Friend Other

The data analyses were informed by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis process and included (1) Familiarising myself with the data, (2) Generating initial codes, (3) Searching for themes, (4) Reviewing themes (5) Defining and naming themes, and (6) Reporting the themes. In relation to phases 4 and 5, Saldana (2013) also emphasises that recoding and recategorising is generally inevitable because "qualitative inquiry demands meticulous attention to language and deep reflection on the emergent patterns and meanings of human experience" (p. 10).

Findings

Nominated role models

There were 201 role models nominated by the 89 Ngāpuhi students in this study. Despite there being fewer female survey respondents overall, female students nominated more role models ($n = 121$) than male students ($n = 111$). Approximately 66% (133/201) of all the Ngāpuhi secondary students nominated role models who were their parents or grandparents. There was also an interesting gender bias to some of the students' answers. For example, approximately 70% (31/44) of all grandfather or father nominations were made by male students. To a lesser degree, approximately 58% (24/41) of nominations for mothers or grandmothers were made by female students. Other role models most commonly mentioned were "both parents" (23%, 43/201) and brothers (22%, 44/201). Only 7% of all role model nominations were teachers, and 13% of nominations were friends. Interestingly, female students were more likely to nominate their friends (16%) than male students (7%). See Table 2.

Most of the Ngāpuhi students named at least one role model from their own whānau, and others mentioned teachers and friends. Many students also named more than one role model. The impact of role models on the Ngāpuhi students can be explained through the lens of social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981), which argues that a person's sense of who they are is based on their group membership(s). Social identity theory proposes that the groups to which people belong, such as

TABLE 2 Nominated role models

Role model named	Total nominations	%	Male (n)	%	Female (n)	%
Mother/grandmother	41	17	17	16	24	20
Father/grandfather	44	18	31	28	13	11
Both parents	48	20	20	18	28	23
Brother	44	18	22	20	19	16
Sister	16	7	7	6	9	7
Teacher	16	7	6	5	9	7
Friend	29	13	8	7	19	16
TOTAL	238	100	111	100	121	100

whānau, are an important source of pride and self-esteem for students (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Family connectedness gives individuals a positive sense of social identity and a sense of belonging to the social world. It is clear that extended family, friends and teachers play an important role in Ngāpuhi students' lives.

The primary social unit of Māori society has always been family (Edwards et al., 2007), which is inclusive of immediate and extended family. In many Māori families, the grandparents have the greatest responsibility and influence for guiding the rest of the whānau, and “these elders, commonly called tūpuna, kaumatua, koroheke, ruruhi and kuia, were responsible for the learning and development of the young and youth until adulthood” (Edwards et al., 2007, p.4). Te ao Māori has always upheld elders and extended family as educators, mentors and role models for healthy youth development because of their mana, life experiences, patience and wisdom (Henare, 1988). Extended family role models are of considerable cultural, emotional and social importance to Ngāpuhi students.

Role model attributes

Ngāpuhi students appear to be less interested in the position or status of their nominated role model, and instead place value on the kind of person they are and the values they hold. Role models were described as caring, loving and supportive by 34% of male students and 30% of female students. Some of the most frequently mentioned role model attributes were dedication, strength and reliability. However, there were some interesting gender biases to role model attributes. For example, the attribute “supportive” was more commonly mentioned by female students (67%) than male students (33%), and reliability was

also more likely to be named by female students (96%) than male students (4%). Attributes more likely to be named by male students were skilful or knowledgeable (63%) and strong, staunch or protective (63%) (see Table 3). The perception of female role models as nurturing and caring, and male role models as staunch, strong and protective reflects the perception of gendered relationship bonds and familial roles.

School support. Students nominated family role models who were supportive of their school endeavours. These role models turned up when it mattered and supported student learning. One male (m) student stated that his parents “are always there for me, taking me to school programmes”, and female (f) students stated “My nana and my sisters, help me to get up and motivated, encourage me to succeed” (f), “My sisters, tell me to go to school and stay on track” (f), and “My friends motivate me because I want to be as smart as them. Also my brothers help me at home and it makes what I learn in class easier” (f). Finally, one student who nominated a mother and cousin said:

They have always been there, at every maths tournament, at every sport game ... been there all the way through. When I needed to study they would tell the little kids not to bother me and to give me peace and quiet and I really appreciate them. (f)

The New Zealand Ministry of Education (2013) has described effective whānau community involvement in schools as starting “with the understanding that Māori children and students are connected to whānau and should not be viewed or treated as separate, isolated, or disconnected” (p. 18). This study illustrates that whānau are a critical lever in the educational well-being of

TABLE 3 Role model attributes

Nominated attribute	Attribute mentions	%	Male (n)	%	Female (n)	%
Caring/loving/considerate	35	32	17	34	18	30
Supportive/encouraging	18	16	6	12	12	20
Hard-working/dedicated	16	14	5	10	11	18
Inspirational	13	12	7	14	6	10
Skilled/knowledgeable	11	10	7	14	4	6
Strong/staunch/protective	11	10	7	14	4	6
Honest/reliable	7	6	1	2	6	10
TOTAL	111	100	50	100	61	100

Māori students because they communicate and model the value of educational success.

Academic persistence. The Ngāpuhi students mentioned the encouragement they received from their role models to remain resolute and persistent at school. One student commented, “Nan gave me the courage to push forward and never be scared to try new things” (f), and another student stated:

My family has pushed me to strive better in everything I do whether it's something I may be amazing at or something I may struggle at. My mum has always helped me and pushed me to do well in school and gave me ideas of what I wanna do if I succeed in school; same goes with my nan. (m)

Other students' comments were “My granddad wouldn't let me drop out” (f), “My teachers and parents all say I can do great if I try. They say I have potential to do great—all I have to do is put in the hard work and I can make a good life for myself” (m), “My dad came from a family in poverty and worked all his life. He dropped out of high school but still became a principal” (m), and “My teacher taught me that through times of adversity one can always work through and beyond that barrier, and work towards success no matter how humble a path it may be” (m). Persistence is evidenced by a willingness to continue to endure in the face of challenge, and research suggests that persistence can derive from how students understand who they are and what they want for their lives (Destin & Williams, 2020). For Ngāpuhi students, the persistence and determination of their role models appears to be a driving force to help them achieve their academic and personal goals.

Pride and reciprocity. The Ngāpuhi students spoke about their hopes to make their role models proud of them. There was a mutuality between the ways role models made students feel and the ways students wanted to reciprocate—by doing well at school or by pursuing jobs that would enable them to “give back” to their families, iwi and communities. Students wanted to make their role models feel proud of them. They said things like “My teacher believed in me” (m), “My parents tell me they're proud of me” (m), and “My cousin was able to encourage me to aim for my goals and do better than she did. She also said that I've made my family proud already and that's what keeps me going” (m). The drive to make one's family proud is known as familism (Stein et al., 2014). Familism values typically include obligations to the family (including extended family), expectations of familial support and family serving as a referent when

making decisions (Knight et al., 2010; Stein et al., 2019). Ngāpuhi students are driven to make their families proud of them.

Some of the Ngāpuhi students planned to pursue careers that aligned with what their role models did. One student commented, “My granddad told me about being in the navy and that having a job or career doesn't have to be a chore. Travelling and protecting your country while having fun is an option” (m). Another student commented:

My dad works really hard and always puts 120% into everything he does so he's set a really good example for how I should be with anything I do, and also my older brother, he's always done well in any job he's had and has worked his way up to a top position in the job. He's made good connections in the work industry and has the same work ethics as my dad so they're both great role models for me. (m)

Family role models can empower young people to imagine they can create the life they want by making good career choices. It is evident from this study that young people not only listen to what their families say but also observe the behaviour or actions of family members, and model their behaviour and aspirations for their future on them. Family role models are a significant source of learning and aspiration for Ngāpuhi students.

Inspiration to succeed. Other Ngāpuhi students commented that they felt inspired by their role models. They were inspired by what their role models had to overcome or how much they had to achieve. One student stated, “My dad inspires me, because despite the rocky past he's been through, and the struggles he had in childhood (not having much money, and bad education), he has made a life for himself and has made a life for his family” (f), and another student commented, “My mum. Me and her moved from Australia to New Zealand alone, bought a house, she didn't have a big job qualification so she started polytech classes at 28. Got a great degree and now has an awesome job working with Māori land, has given her family an amazing life and helps so many people with her job” (f). Finally, one student said:

My brother works with troubled children and I went to work with him because he was with someone my age. He used to do drugs and other stuff but he has stopped that now and he is back at school going for a degree in law. My brother inspires me because that boy is my age and my brother just

changed his whole life just by being there for him and believed he could do it. (f)

Other students commented, “My nan inspires me because she’s very successful and she is very brave” (f), “My dad ’cause no matter when times were rough he would always keep a smile on his face” (f), “Uncle Chris because he started from nothing and now is very successful. He is inspirational” (m), and “My mother. She is confident and cares for others that aren’t doing so well. I know that I don’t want to work in a school like she does but, but I want to be as courteous as she is” (f). Finally, rather than being inspired, one student aspired to succeed because “being Māori” gave him extra motivation to do well. The student stated:

I’m not inspired by any one person to be honest. I’m inspired and motivated by my people—Māori. This is because I love my people and the events in history that we as a people have overcome. They inspire me to pave a way for an even brighter future for all of us. (m)

Role models who act as inspirations motivate role aspirants “to strive toward something new or something better than before” (Morgenroth et al., 2015, p. 468). Many of the Ngāpuhi students equated success with owning a house or attaining a well-paid job but not because they associated that with success or wealth. Rather, they believed that these things would enable them to “give back” to their families, reciprocating their enduring support and encouragement. The Ngāpuhi students were also inspired by family members who have been tenacious in the face of adversity. To be inspired by another’s accomplishments, one must believe oneself capable of comparable success. According to Lockwood and Kunda (1997), “Self-enhancement stemming from inspiration results from strengthened belief in one’s own capabilities” (p. 101). That is, role aspirants can be inspired by the role models only when the role model’s accomplishments, achievements and pathways to success seem attainable.

Discussion

There has been a growing interest among researchers in Aotearoa in investigating the competencies, resilience, resources and protective factors leading to student success at school that emerge despite adverse circumstances for Māori students (Rubie-Davies et al., 2018; Turner et al., 2015; Webber et al., 2018). However, an overwhelming emphasis

on individual levels of resilience and competence has led to a neglect of more detailed investigations of the family, cultural and societal contexts that support student success at school—including the influence of role models. The current study found that Ngāpuhi secondary students’ role models play a central role in motivating them to persevere at school. Ngāpuhi students’ role models shaped the type of person they wanted to be in the future, and how they behaved in school, in family relationships and with their peers, or when making difficult decisions.

Overall, the Ngāpuhi students’ responses show that they have numerous role models in their lives. This is evident in the fact that 89 students nominated 201 responses. Most of the role models were members of the students’ own families. Male students were more likely to nominate their fathers and grandfathers as role models and describe them as caring, loving, considerate, strong, staunch and protective. Female students were slightly more likely to nominate mothers and grandmothers, who they generally described as caring, loving, considerate, supportive, encouraging, hard-working and dedicated. Both male and female students emphasised the importance of family role models, highlighting attributes, including their ability to serve others in the community, provide for their families and overcome adversity. Throughout the students’ accounts of family members as role models, four key reasons why these family members were admired and respected by the students emerged. They (1) were supportive of students’ school aspirations, (2) encouraged them to be academically persistent, (3) increased their sense of pride, and (4) inspired them to have higher expectations of themselves. These types of support act as sources of strength and mechanisms of resilience in the lives of the students.

The positive attitudes of the Ngāpuhi students’ familial role models towards school had an encouraging effect on their sense of school belonging and academic aspiration. Research has shown that family involvement facilitates students’ identification with their school and teachers, and students are more likely to report the perception of being accepted and supported by the school community when their families are engaged in the school context (Stewart, 2008; Uslu & Gizir, 2017). This impact can be amplified if the students also see their family members as positive role models. Family involvement in student education has been linked with better school outcomes from pre-school to through the high school years (Uslu & Gizir, 2017), and Comer (1980) has stressed that

adolescents need the full support of their parents to maximise their potential from schooling. The findings of this research show that Ngāpuhi students who feel supported socially and academically by their familial role models are motivated to try their best at school. When schools and teachers actively invite Māori role model involvement and participation in co-teaching activities related to the learning of the role aspirant, the partnerships can result in improved student attendance, whānau involvement in learning and student achievement (Rubie-Davies et al., 2018). Therefore, schools must cultivate a climate in which whānau—as critical role models—feel comfortable to initiate involvement in their children’s education and should provide them with the appropriate opportunities to do so.

Attending diverse school contexts provides Ngāpuhi students with opportunities to explore and develop a deeper understanding of who they are and how they belong. The various aspects of these dynamic and developing identities will guide how they navigate the world and pursue their goals, including how they engage with academic opportunities and challenges. Research shows that students want to do well in school, demonstrate high academic achievement and succeed in university (Destin & Williams, 2020; Domina et al., 2011), but achieving these goals requires them to maintain a significant level of consistent focus and academic persistence. It is likely that many of the Ngāpuhi students in this study encounter vastly different and unequal opportunities and experiences that will strongly affect their likelihood of reaching their academic goals (Turner et al., 2015). There are also structural barriers endemic to our society (e.g., structural racism) that have long undermined success for Māori students (Pihama & Lee-Morgan, 2018). In other words, “identities alone do not determine student persistence, and persistence alone does not determine student outcomes” (Destin & Williams, 2020, p. 452). Identities develop in context, and this study illustrates that ongoing, reciprocal interactions with role models can play an important role in identity development and academic persistence.

Role models also play a significant role in the relationships between contexts, identities, and academic persistence, making them an important force to incorporate into efforts to support student outcomes (Destin & Williams, 2020). There is no single solution to encourage academic persistence and well-being for all Ngāpuhi students at all times; however, the extent to which these students demonstrate persistence and express their

academic potential is dependent upon more than just individual choices and actions; it is also shaped by the behaviour, aspiration and inspiration of their role models. In these ways, familial role models act as both representations of what is possible and inspirations for new futures. Familial role models help students to have high expectations of themselves, persist in the face of challenges and help connect what they are learning at school to their future selves.

Familial role models also shape students educational outcomes through expression of family expectations, values, engagement with school contexts and support for university attendance (Webber et al., 2018). Ngāpuhi students feel a sense of family responsibility, strongly identify with and respect their parents, and have strong connections to their immediate and extended families. This strong sense of shared identity is often referred to as familism, a construct that encompasses feelings of identification with, respect for, and connectedness and loyalty to family (Stein et al., 2014, 2019). Students that have a strong sense of familism, like those in this study, are deeply connected to their families and often consider the needs of their family over their own needs (Edwards & Barber, 2009). Familism is positively associated with students’ educational aspirations, sense of reciprocity, family obligation and pride, and valuing of school (Fuligni & Pedersen, 2002; Macfarlane et al., 2014). Family act as behavioural role models by demonstrating how and why things are done, the attributes required to achieve one’s goals and, perhaps more importantly, the “right” way to do things in line with family values like humility, reciprocity, service to community and cultural pride.

Conclusion

Role models served multiple functions as they influenced the Ngāpuhi students’ goals and school aspirations in this study. They acted as behavioural models by showing students how to perform a skill or achieve a goal. They represented the possible, in that they showed the students that their aspirations were attainable by modelling how to overcome adversity and be academically persistent. They influenced the students’ self-stereotyping through either decreasing negative self-stereotyping or increasing positive self-stereotyping. They were also inspirational because they motivated the students to set high expectations for themselves—realising the lofty goals of their families, hapū and iwi. Aligned with Māori values, and a long history of Ngāpuhi thriving, the role models also placed

emphasis on demonstrating the “right” way to do things—in accordance with community expectations and tikanga. The Ngāpuhi students chose role models who exemplified tenacity, ambition and self-determination—the same attributes of their many tūpuna who came before them. Kia tū tika ai te whare tapu o Ngāpuhi—The sacred house of Ngāpuhi stands firm.

Glossary

Aotearoa	New Zealand
hapū	subtribe
iwi	tribal kin group; nation
kaumātua	elders
koroheke	elderly men
kuia	elderly woman, grandmother, female elder
mairangitia te angitū mana	accentuate the positive prestige, status, authority, influence, integrity; honour, respect
mātauranga	knowledge/wisdom
rangatira	chief (male or female)
rangatiratanga	self-determination, autonomy, the right of Māori to be self-determining
rūruhi	elderly women
takiwā	area
te ao Māori	Māori worldviews
Te Tai Tokerau	Northland
Te Tiriti o Waitangi	Māori version of the Treaty of Waitangi signed in 1840 proposing alliance with the Crown
tikanga	protocols
tūpuna	ancestors
whakapapa	genealogy, ancestry, familial relationships
whānau	family; nuclear/extended family

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