It's not so much where you come from. For me it's who I am. Success is being able to hold on to who we are as Māori. Just because I'm 'smart' doesn't mean that I'm not capable of anything we set our mind to.

I consider myself Māori. It's not the colour of my skin, it's my ancestors. So that's who I follow and who I want to be like. My biggest success would be overcoming the barriers, the doubts, the stereotypes about me being Māori - and also the limitations of my school.

It feels good to prove other people wrong when they're stuck thinking that because we're Māori we can't achieve in an academic world, and we can only achieve in Visual Arts and nothing related to English and careers and Science and Technology. Everyone is capable of anything we set our mind to. It's not the achievement itself. It's what happens afterwards - being able to provide and give back to the community. I think that's what our goal in life is - just being there to help you along the way, and to help them along the way.

My grandparents always pushed my brother and me to try hard. My brother - he always wanted me to try my hardest and not finish high school. My grandparents always pushed my brother and me to try our hardest. They don't want us to be like them and think of who we are as Māori and the experiences of others. But all that changed when my grandparents passed on.

I think being there as a role model was one of the biggest things that really made me feel like I was making a difference, when they felt like they had someone to come and talk to, they could relate to. I felt really special.

Times have changed. In our school we now see our Māori students succeeding at the same level as the Pākehā students. Just because I'm 'smart' doesn't mean that I'm not Māori. Success is being able to hold on to who we really are as Māori. It's not so much where you come from, for me it's who you make yourself to be.

Being strong in your Māori cultural identity

It's achieving academically, in sports and in a range of different areas - but still holding on to your culture and who you are as Māori, and what it means to be Māori. Culture's important going through education. Culture just brings it all back home.

We have a culture to be proud of. Kapa haka is amazing. It makes your blood boil. It makes your eyes open. It's amazing.

What makes me proud is that I can connect myself to the land and to the environment around me. That spiritual connection helps me push forward in my education and embrace it.

I'm a white boy. People don't expect me to be Māori, but I consider myself Māori. It's not the colour of my skin, it's my ancestors. So that's who I follow and who I want to make happy.

It's not surrounding yourself in the environment that you need to be surrounded in. You don't want to be put, or you don't want to put yourself, in a negative area that's not going to help you, not going to support you, take you in the wrong direction and lead you the wrong way, when you know where to go. So you need to put yourself in that position, te haere tikia (the right path).

Every time I feel down, I go and talk to my Nan. She gives me some advice. Make yourself able to grow. Don't limit your thinking. Allow it to expand, and allow people to speak into your life. Listen to it and filter it, cause what you listen to grows in you, and you speak it. Just allow people to speak into your life so you can grow and create new paths.

A lot of young Māori have this thing in them, this whakamā. I'd like to break that shame.

Knowing, accepting and acknowledging the strength of working together

Knowing that you've got somebody in your corner who wants you to succeed, makes you want to succeed. It's mostly my whānau who tell me never to give up.

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The learning of kapa haka, of environment, of nature; connect it to Māori and release it to the generations. That's the bigger picture that I see for the future in my life and that's what makes me proud.

There's a huge drive on excellence, but there's also a huge drive on keeping your culture alive - making it known to you and to everybody else, that you are Māori and you're proud to be Māori.

I'm doing it because I want to give back to my community. I think that's what our goal in life is - just to give back.

It's not the achievement itself. It's what happens afterwards - being able to provide and give back to the people who have helped and supported you along the way.

I think being there as a role model was one of the biggest things that really made me feel like I was making a difference, when they felt like they had someone to come and talk to, they could relate to. I felt really special.

Doing the best that you can do academically, still holding on to who you are as a Māori person. Not just thinking of yourself and your immediate whānau, thinking of your whole iwi, your whole rohe, all your people. Wanting to help others, but holding on to who you are.

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