

# Pirika (she/her): Tuakiritanga

## Pirika's kōrero

Pirika had often watched from the outside: from the edges of her identities. Though she loved kapa haka and waiata Māori, she had been shy and reluctant to join in because she didn't feel she fit in. Sometimes it was because she felt she didn't look Māori enough, other times, there were other louder and better voices.

She also felt like this in regard to her sexuality and gender identities; it wasn't something she felt she could talk about with whānau at home or with others at school. She felt that although she didn't have the chance to, or couldn't, fly the flag on the outside, it didn't match how she felt on the inside. Even her friends would be surprised at how she felt on the inside. People misread or assumed so much about her.

Pirika had the chance to lead tikanga Māori at the wānanga, and though it scared her, it also made her feel good, powerful even. She had space made for taha Māori and she stepped into it. Having space to think about and understand how she felt about her own gender and sexuality gave her some understanding, things to think about, and questions to answer.

On her return from the wānanga, Pirika gifted the pounamu she had made to a teacher who she felt had supported her in finding her identity. Though it still isn't easy pulling the rau of her identities together, she has had some space and time to consider this and can build from here. She knows that walking in the spaces in and around her identities will be a gradual and lifelong process, with stumbles and progress at different speeds, but she is ready to walk that journey.

### Negotiating identities, walking between worlds

**No one had actually shown me what it was like to be yourself. I was so locked up in the closet... I didn't like talking about the LGBTQ community because I thought it was a bad subject to talk about with some people. Some of them would get really offended by it and go off at me, saying "you're not a part of that", but I actually am. It just made me close up more and more within myself which really sucked.**

- Pirika



## Whakaaro

Pirika's narrative speaks to how those with positional power and influence have, and often continue to underserve our rangatahi takatāpui.

In the past, when Pirika took the brave step to share deep truths about her identities, she was gaslit, rebuffed and ignored. The damaging effect of this is internal withdrawal; shrinking away from self-expression and being denied the affirmation that comes from being supported in living into an identity.

At the wānanga, Pirika showed her courage again, accepting an opportunity to step into a position of leadership as she led the wider group through waiata. Everyone fed off her strength and confidence, and in this moment, Pirika felt powerful, able and whole. Unfortunately, opportunities for Pirika to live into her fullest identities don't come around too often as most experiences aren't designed for her or people like her.

This experience is a common one for rangatahi takatāpui, and is symptomatic of how they are left on the margins, excluded entirely, or erased from the very same support networks and systems which should be serving them. Yet, there is hope. Systems are created by design – sometimes intentionally, sometimes not – so it follows that the implicit racism, sexism, gender-bias, ableism, classism, and harm that have been designed into them can indeed be designed out.

### Whaiwhakaaro

- Rangatahi takatāpui refrain from making assumptions about each other's identities and invite us to do the same.
- People want to be accepted for who they are and treated with dignity and respect. This is no different for rangatahi takatāpui.
- Rangatahi takatāpui have a voice and know what's best for them #NothingAboutUsWithoutUs.

### Pātai/Whakapātaritari

- Are you aware of your own identities and how these impact the wellbeing of rangatahi takatāpui?
- Have you identified, explored, and challenged your assumptions about intersectionality?
- School culture can be oppressive and biased against rangatahi takatāpui. Are you actively trying to disrupt this? And if so, how?
- Are you intentionally listening to, advocating for, and allying with rangatahi takatāpui? If so, how?
- How will you take responsibility to ensure the systems and assumptions influencing your work are transformationally equitable, diverse, and inclusive?



### Supporting quotes

**I felt so powerful because no-one was judging me for my singing. Usually when I used to lead kapa haka people would say, "you're white" and, "you're a fake Māori". When I did it at the wānanga everyone said, "well done Pirika" and I was like, "thank you, so much".**

**We're just like everyone else. We're not one big personality, we're not all the same, we're all different. Just approach us. You don't have to be all homophobic or scared of us. Just be normal like you would with any other person.**

**I'm glad that I went to the wānanga otherwise I wouldn't know who I was today. I'd still be in the closet. I'd still be shutting myself away.**

- Pirika

