

Ko Whaea Kēkē te Haumi | Aunty Ally: Sowing seeds of partnership

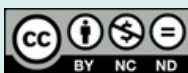


Nā Holly Bodman

Over the last ten years, I've thought a lot about the ethics of being a Pākehā who is learning te reo Māori. I've reflected on cautionary tales from the likes of Dr Alison Jones that warn of people like me perpetuating colonisation through "acquiring te reo",^[1] and as a history teacher I absolutely understand why some Māori only want te reo for Māori. However, with many maintaining that language is a window into culture then it follows that learning te reo Māori will help me better understand the Māori world, and so I have ploughed ahead, hoping to sow seeds as I go.

Mitigating any potential harm in my learning of te reo by intentionally recognising a need to be mindful around re-indigenisation, I bring awareness to the privilege I hold in having the time and resources to do so. I try my best to take the lead from Māori classmates, and to try not to take up too much oxygen in those spaces. And perhaps most importantly, I try my best not to make Māori students or colleagues feel small by making assumptions about their knowledge of te reo. (On this topic, Leone Hayden suggests that consent is key and recommends that reo-speaking Pākehā wait for an indication that the other person wants to kōrero Māori with them first).^[2] Despite my best of intentions, I've made mistakes along the way, and I anticipate that there will be mistakes ahead. But as my boss Liz reminded me today, making mistakes is how we learn and grow (and demonstrate our willingness to do better when we know better).

The more te reo Māori I learn, the more I realise how little I know about te ao Māori, but one thing I've learned is that being a Pākehā who is learning te reo Māori is about sowing seeds of partnership. In (slowly) developing proficiency in te reo Māori, I can pronounce and spell a colleague's name without them having to correct me; I can transcribe a passage of te reo for a colleague to edit rather than relying on them to do it all; I can support colleagues with proof-reading bilingual documents; I can carry a waiata if a colleague has a moment of overwhelm; and I can step up to lead a mihimihi or a karakia if it helps a colleague to step back when they need to. To me, these small acts seem like the least that I should be able to do as a Pākehā New Zealander, and I will continue my reo journey so that I can continue to sow seeds of partnership along the way.^[3]



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[1] <https://e-tangata.co.nz/reo/alison-jones-when-pakeha-acquire-te-reo/> accessed 18-09-24.

[2] <https://thespinoff.co.nz/atea/17-02-2021/some-thoughts-about-pakeha-learning-and-speaking-te-reo-maori> accessed 18-09-24.

[3] For further reading on the subject of Pākehā learning te reo Māori, see Bell, A. (2024). *Becoming Tangata Tiriti: Working with Māori, Honouring the Treaty*. Auckland University Press. Chapter 6, pages 73-91.



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