

## Learning Māori as an Adult

George Grey

*Kāhore te toka e haere ki te paua*

I come from the in-between generation. The generation when our parents stopped speaking Māori to their children, and the time before Kohanga Reo. As an adult, it was difficult in places like the hospital where I would be happy to see our people, but could only converse with basic greetings and sentences.

So after completing two and a quarter years as a house surgeon, I decided to do a full-time Māori language course this year. I had tried learning Māori at secondary school and then part-time through correspondence as a house surgeon, but got frustrated with book learning and the intermittent nature of exposure to the language through unstructured programmes. I did lots of research to find the course that would give me maximum benefit from my one year of learning and found the best kura available.

Many people from around the country recommended the kura *Te Reo Maioha* in Otaki to me. It is a small kura which is a separate entity from Te Wananga o Raukawa which is also based in Otaki. Te Reo Maioha has 42 students this year. Most of them are adult learners with the same background of Māori language as myself. The kura runs full-time Monday to Thursday and we have Fridays for personal study time or to work. Every day is full-immersion ie. only Māori is spoken, which is great for your brain because you start to *think* in Māori after a while.

The best thing about Te Reo Maioha is that the course is taught with a variety of colourful accelerated learning techniques including games, action songs, plays, and small group activities. Fortunately, there is an absence of writing, rote-learning, and books. From the first day of the course you actually start to use the language, rather than learn the difference between a verb, pronoun, passive verb, active pronoun, and proactive noun, and other things that you learned in secondary school!!! However, all of the course notes are available for students to revise in their own time. The course uses rakau (cuisinere rods) of Ataarangi fame for many of the activities.

Our class even have a garden which we work in for an afternoon once a month, all in te reo! Activities like this get us out of the class, like field trips did when you were at primary school and learning was fun. We have been to the beach to gather kai moana, and have also been to Te Papa. In November our class is travelling to Northland.

Otaki is a great place to live. My partner and I live right at the beach where we can see Kapiti Island, and behind us are the Tararua ranges which currently have snow on them. Otaki is central to both Palmy North, and Wellington, approximately 50 minutes drive from each.

It was difficult at first moving down here from Tauranga but the course has made it all worthwhile. To pay the bills I work in Palmerston North every Friday for the Ngati Rangitāne iwi clinic.

If you are considering doing a Māori language course, I rate this one very highly. I have tried many different methods of learning and investigated other courses from around the country. For maximum return on your time I believe this course is the best. If you need any more information about the course or Te Reo Maioha give me a call or send an email. I can let you know where best to live, who to work for, and who not to work for.

The advantages of improving your Māori language ability include being able to interact better with your Māori patients, and being able to participate more in Māori language events that occur in your area. The greatest benefit for me is the development and continuation of a precious and unique taonga.

The not-so-good things about doing a full-time Māori language course are firstly a significant drop in income. This is especially a worry if you have a family or a student loan to repay. Mine was \$73 000 when I graduated and you will not pay any off while doing a full-time Māori language course. One day of locum work a week provides enough to pay your living costs. Second, the absence of scholarships/grants to help with fees. The course costs \$3000 and assistance is as common as cases of Wilder-Williamson syndrome. Try and look it up – you won't find it in your textbooks....similarly with reo scholarships/grants.

Overall, I would still take the time to do a full-time Māori language course. For me, the advantages overwhelm the challenges and your new skill will have benefits for you, your patients and your people.

*Hikina te wero e hika mā me akona te reo*