

He Kākano: a story of growth

Dean Huakau
University of Otago

Rickie Kewene
Otago Polytechnic

Samuel Mann
Otago Polytechnic
Samuel.Mann@op.ac.nzl

ABSTRACT

This paper describes in narrative form the growth of confidence and identity of two mature Māori IT students now working as IT professionals. The dialogue style provides a rich insight into their journeys and the impact of taking part in a four week Māori student entrepreneurship programme: He Kākano.

Keywords: student, entrepreneurship, Māori, empowerment

1. SCENE 1

Dean: I spoke to Janine today, she wants us to write something for her.

Rickie: Janine Kapa-Blair, the new Kaitohutohu at Otago Polytechnic, what does she want?

Dean: She's exploring reinvigorating He Kākano – wants our thoughts on what it might look like.

Rickie: Ah, the student entrepreneurship programme for Māori students? I loved it, but what can we say? Perhaps we should start with saying who we are, why we care.

Dean:

Dean: All right then, my name's Dean Gary Huakau. I'm a Māori, Tongan, Irish, Scottish. I came to Polytech after being 25 years a fisherman, absolutely terrified, not sure how I was going to stand and how it was going to be. The second day I was here, I went to the powhiri, which changed my aspect on my cultural background as it gave me the desire and the will to actually go and have a look at my Māori side, I'd never really bothered before. Extending from then, I met a few Māori classmates, and I've sort of followed up on stuff like poho, and culminating in He Kākano, at the end of it.

Rickie: Why did you decide to go to Polytech?

Dean: Like I said, I was a fisherman, and I was getting old physically, and I was tired of it. And I said, I could make decent money using my brain, really, and I wanted to create change, and I was interested in computers.

Rickie: Have you always been interested in computers?

Dean: Yeah, more or less. Yep. If you call "Space Invaders" computers, yeah, but I've always been interested in that sort of technology. And I thought it was time for a whole life

change, and it was a good one. I made the right decision, I feel. And I was sick of fishing.

Rickie: But fishing is just sitting on the side of the road, a fishing rod, and drinking beers isn't it?

Dean: Not this fishing, it's a hard job, and I did from 19 to 44 doing it. I really had no idea what it was like to live on land permanently. Land was a holiday for me. I didn't really know, and I was just sick of going to sea, psychologically more than anything else.

Rickie: And you knew you were ... You knew you were Māori.

Dean: Yes.

Rickie: But it hadn't featured in your life.

Dean: No, I was never worried. I was fortunate enough to have a Tongan step father, I had that father figure in my life, I had a bit of culture in my life and it just never really worried me. I'd never felt the need to go and, you know, figure out who the old man was or talk to him or anything like that. I just didn't worry about it. Your turn.

Rickie: Okay, my name's Rickie Kewene. I come from a hotel background of about 25 years. Worked in hotels in Queenstown, Auckland, and Australia for 8 years also, and just recently back into New Zealand or Dunedin since '08. I've been in the hotel industry for so long, and coming back to New Zealand it was more like my career was going backwards, stalling. And I always had an interest in computers and I wanted to move into the IT side of things in hotels. I'd previously done some study in Australia while I was there, but didn't get certified. And so, I came down to Polytech and did the CIT to validate the knowledge I already had, and then decided to continue on from there to do the BIT as I felt the BIT would give me a better to broaden my IT background and increase opportunities of work in the field.

And while at Polytech, I became friends with this guy – Dean, you might know him, - and ... I come from ... I have a Māori father and a pakeha, English mother, brought up mainly by my Mum as my Dad passed away fairly

This editorially reviewed paper appeared at the 8th annual conference of Computing and Information Technology Research and Education New Zealand (CITREZZ2017) and the 30th Annual Conference of the National Advisory Committee on Computing Qualifications, Napier, October, 2-4, 2017. Executive Editor: Emre Erturk. Associate Editors: Kathryn MacCallum and David Skelton.

early on, so basically we grew up only knowing pakeha side of the family. Just recently in the last few years, the family, the Māori side of things, have got back together kind of, regular meetings out and so forth, so the connections are rejoining as you can see. In the cultural side of things, my sisters have taken the lead in regards to the cultural language side of things. Their work involve knowing Te Reo, and all the cultural side of things. Whereas me, being in the hotel industry, and not looking like a Māori, I just blended it in. The hotels were international ones that I worked in, so there wasn't any cultural, local cultural stuff.

SCENE 2: IT AT POLYTECHNIC

Dean: Right. We need to cover our journey at Polytech. It started for me with the Powhiri.

Rickie: Me too.

Dean: I wasn't going to and my sister said, "You should go." That was it, and so I went. I went, "Okay, I'll go," and then I'm really glad I did. I nearly didn't go, because you didn't have to go. And then she goes, "Oh, you should go to this." That's all she said. She didn't push me or anything.

Rickie: We met the day before at the first day of class, and yeah so went along to the Powhiri and did the thing. And then it's kind of been a whole kind of learning, helping, just for me to get back into contact with that side of things, the cultural side. So, you've been kind of been a bit of an incentive for me too and a partner in crime, you could say.

Dean: At the Powhiri I had to stand up and say where I was from, and you know, my ancestry, and I didn't know. And I thought, "Oh, well I want to know now. I've listened to all these other people, they know their Father's name, their tribe, all that." I knew nothing. And then I just thought, "Well, I'll start looking," and within two weeks I had tracked down my half-brothers and sisters and had actually conversations with some of them on the phone. That year, I flew out to meet them, and I've meet a few of them, yeah. It was good.

Rickie: And your cousin...

Dean: I didn't know him, but I sat right next to him. I didn't know. He lives just up the road from me, at the moment, I see him quite a bit. He taught me a lot about my father and the history and the tribes, and all the culture pertaining to our tribes and that. But, yeah, he was quite a fountain of knowledge, still is actually. It was quite good to meet him, so compounding effect of meeting my cousin, going to the Powhiri, meeting Rickie. You knew yours...

Rickie: Yeah, but they always lived up in Auckland area and we lived down south, so we were kind of cut off. We didn't really get into the family dynamics politics as you probably call it in the family and such. And the cousins and so forth, it's not a ... You could say our

family's not really that tight-knit and such as other Māori families are.

Dean: So, that kind of brings us to the start of the Polytech journey. Both of us, mature, a big background.

Rickie: But not much in IT, not much Māoritanga, and certainly not straight from school.

Dean: For me, it was terrifying. Yeah, "I can't do this. Everyone's way too fast for me, I can't get this, I'm too slow", all that.

Rickie: What did you put that down to?

Dean: I was too slow, and I hadn't studied for years, and years, and years, and I saw that everyone was quicker than me. I know my limitations, you get to know yourself. I'd watch other people pick out stuff faster than me. It's a fact, but what I did watch was other people hard-out help me, lots, and lots, and lots, you Rickie. Everybody helped me through that course, that first year. Mike used to laugh at me, because I'd be so paranoid, and I didn't know, but I came second in the class. I was doing really well, but I didn't know that at the time. It was just the paranoia.

Rickie: We did the CITSS, it had no explicit Māori content in that programme.

Dean: I wonder how it could have been included.

Rickie: That's hard to say. Maybe in the service side, some of the thought processes, maybe.

Dean: Like, yeah.

Rickie: That's pretty hard too, because you can't ... There's nothing specific that you could relate to it, I guess. By putting something in there like that, a lot of the students wouldn't see the relevance of it, but I guess in the service side of things, like dealing with people and stuff, maybe a cultural people. Then, you can introduce it through that way, because society now is all different cultures and so forth, so if you introduce it as a cultural interaction paper, like prepared, involved in professional practice, because if your intention's to go into the management side of things, and particular government department, you'll need to know all protocols, cultural protocols.

Dean: Yeah. So, there we were doing IT. We started in the CIT SS and then moved onto the BIT. Two mature gentlemen picking up IT, and also off to the side, building our own ...

Rickie: Identity.

Dean: Identity. Confidence?

Rickie: More on a personal side of things, building those connections outside of class and so forth. and ... Like getting involved, or hanging out in the poho room. Meeting all the other students and getting used to, for me, getting used to different, what do you call it, socio-economical ... Māori's from different socio-economic backgrounds, and a lot of the foundation students, X...there is a bit of a feeling of coming from a middle-class, white-class Māori family

Dean: That's not I thing I ever felt! Did you ever feel like an imposter? I did.

Rickie: "What am I doing here?" Yeah, like a white Māori?

Dean: "They'll find me out", both Māori and computing.

Rickie: Yeah, but it's also about giving you the confidence to follow it up, or the drive that you need to. So, you don't have that plastic Māori kind of thought that people have. Yeah, so quite often you'd find, or I'd find, that the guys coming from that socio-economical background are more closer to the culture than urban-based Māori, or like myself.

Dean: Did you feel like you had a lot to learn from them though?

Rickie: Yeah, on that side. Yeah, plus, also learning from my family background.

Dean: You went home too.

Rickie: Yeah. We went back to the family base a couple of times. From there, one of the locals came up to us, was very familiar with our family background, so she had done her thesis on the Māori court during the land laws and stuff. My grandfather's name came up quite often. My grandfather was my only translator on the ports up in Auckland. He was running for the Māori, one of the government seats in 42, but he died in a workplace accident. You never know what might have happened if ...

A friend of mine wanted me to come out to South Auckland. He flew me out there three times in the years that I was here. My brothers and sisters, my half brothers and sisters, are in South Auckland, so I physically meet them. That was an eye opener. It was really cool. They're all really nice.

Considering all I've got to go on is hear say, I have no proof. Just what I know. And they just, "Yeah. Hey, brother." Instantly, it seemed to fall in. No one said, "Why would you do this? Prove who you are." It was none of that. Apparently, I look like one, anyway.

Dean: Have you been back to ... Have you been to the family marae?

Rickie: No, never been to one that I know of. That would be a special trip. Because, obviously, when I go to South Auckland I see them, but I see other people, my friends and that.

Dean: We should mention the symposium, we went through the first year or so of the BIT building up confidence in both computing and our identities, both your personal identity and computing identity. Then we got asked to create a website for a Ta Moko symposium.

Rickie: When I got asked to do the symposium. Yeah, there was a bit of both. As a Māori, I do see a crossover of the culture and IT skills,

adjusting that stuff to make the website for that.

Dean: There's a learning experience of kind of working for someone, trying to get their ideas on what they want and what they needed and producing something that suited the needs and it all worked out good. Yeah, because Rickie took 99% of it. Pretty much.

Rickie: And we got to go to the symposium.

Dean: Oh, we got to go there. We got free tickets and for, like I've got a few tats. I knew absolutely of nothing about Ta Moko and I was pleasantly educated, I must say. And I really enjoyed it and I found out a lot of things I didn't know, I saw it was quite good.

Rickie: For me, I've always wanted to get one done but didn't know the correct process to go through, and by doing the website and going to it, I found out like some of the history about it and the guys that were down here doing the main tattooing and stuff. So it made me think about things and the next year when they were down there, I decided to get one. I knew the guys and trusted them and even though, Stew, wasn't from Tainui, but he knew the designs and stuff so I was comfortable with that.

Yeah, in the process, also, they booked me to, I don't know, cross off a few things like knowing our pipiha, and like throwing them out and knowing your river and so forth. That was also after going back to the marae where our river is not actually a river to the ocean because it's a five minute drive by the coast, we got by the sea. And the correct mountain and our main marae.

SCENE 3: HE KĀKANO

Dean: And then we saw the poster for He Kākano.

Rickie: The poster said "free feed". To pull a student that's always a good hook. But we need to start at the start.

Dean: From my perspective, for four weeks they aim for Māori entrepreneurship. Basically, they want promote to being an entrepreneur. Come up with a really cool idea, turn it into a business, and make it a good business. Also, there's areas of ... Look it's not just about making a whole lot of money, it's about looking after the people you work for. What else can you, goodness can you bring apart from money? Can you do good for schools? Can you do good for the environment? That was a real learning curve for me. It's not solely about financial gain. That's what I found.

Rickie: From my perspective, it's about creating entrepreneurs with connecting Māori. It was a bit different from previous years. When we did it, it was more ... Previous years it was create a product relating to the Māori side of things. Our year it was more to do with providing a service to help with the goals of the runaka. You were providing a service rather than providing a product.

Dean: A big bit of it was the other students. . It was a combined Otago Polytech with the University. Polytech had four students, and 12 from the other side. What happened was, we got there and we were all split up into groups. Each group had one of us from Polytech. I'm not too sure on how they separated ...

Rickie: The others were from all the different faculties.

Dean: They were third year minimum, and we were second year. They were all really, really cool people. They were really interesting... final year dentists...

Rickie: Yeah, Marketing students.

Dean: Microbiologists.

Rickie: Finance, they all came from all the schools, basically.

Dean: Psychologists.

Rickie: Also, there were ones that were they had knowledge of their culture. There were some that knew little. I found that quite good, the ones with the knowledge gave it freely. Great way.

Rickie: The first three days It was a lot of team building.

Dean: Yeah, lots of team building. Playing games.

Rickie: There was a business creation kind of exercise that we did. That set the basis for the rest of the three weeks. All of the products that we developed were social good. They were trying to make a difference. Did that happen by chance? Where did that come from do you think?

Dean: We were all in the same world. I'm saying that sarcastically. We all wanted a project that would help feed starving kids. We all want to think that would have been the holy grail, but of course we couldn't do that. We all wanted to aim towards something like that.

Rickie: We were on the marae. The runaka challenged us, showed us the real opportunity.... Pointed us in that direction. It was part of the direction that they wanted to go towards. Getting away from creating products, a new widget that nobody really needs stuff like that from a product, a physical product to more of a social kind of, environmental aspect. Is that something special about Māori business?

Dean: More or less, what I mentioned before, not that businesses don't have morals. A very moralistic view, as I perceive it, and the ideal Māori businessman would be somebody that looks after their workers. You need the money to come in to cover the bills, but it's not the be all end all of it.

Rickie: It wasn't our physical product based the year we were in, it enabled that idea to come through. In previous years, you've got a physical product that had a Māori background to it. You don't get the emphasis on the social aspects of the culture.

Dean: You had to pay for it then.

Rickie: Anyone can produce a product and call it whatever, it's a lot harder just to ... The physical product is more easily recognised as Māori.

Rickie: I liked how they gently steered us anyway from brownwashing. Away from baking muffins and stuck a Māori logo on.

Dean: We wouldn't have gotten away with it and we wouldn't have wanted to, more to the point. I don't think any of one of us would have wanted to do that. To try and dress something up as Māori and sell it. That would have gone against the grain inherently. Maybe because of the environment we're in and how we were being taught. Maybe because we wouldn't want to disrespect our tutors. There's a whole ball of reasons. It wouldn't have even crossed our minds.

Rickie: After that first week... we went through a business development process that took those ideas and refined them into product development. How far did you get?

Dean: I wanted to make, the quickest way I can say this, is another version of LinkedIn, but for Māori businesses. We wanted to make it say that all Māori businesses in New Zealand or anyone that identified as Māori could go on this website and link into anyone around the country. The reason we never built it was because it was a massive programme to build and it takes time. I didn't physically know how to do it at that time.

Rickie: What problem were you solving? Was it aiming to solve?

Dean: Basically, solve a disconnect in Māori culture. Each tribe is close ... To have their own business group. Then I talk to people in Wanganui, then I talk to people in Hawk's Bay. It just doesn't happen. We wanted to get right across the board. The challenge is that you have to go to each tribe and say, "We need to talk to these guys." You have to physically do it. You've got to follow protocol. Big job.

Rickie: Our main premise to try and reduce student poverty within the Māori group. By doing that, the idea was to link up with students from their area, so they could get other employment, or internships so they can assist students financially. We got to a certain stage, a lot of interest, the problems will be getting the correct link to students and so forth..

You didn't mention your award.

Dean: I can, but I'm not sure if it's the right thing to say. OK, one thing that really helped me was when I got the award. I did not expect it.

Sam: You deserved it.

Dean: I got the continuing education award, which was what we voted each other for. Did not believe it, blew me out of the water. It was quite cool. It's hard for me to know what people think of me.

Rickie: I think a lot of people saw that A- no matter what your background is, no matter what your age is, you are still capable of learning.

Dean: I was going to say something similar like that. I'm pretty much proof of that.

Sam: That's all right. Do you have specific moment of learning?

Dean: Amazing isn't good enough. It was really cool. I met these really cool people. I liked all the speakers and I could go on, and I mean it. I liked everyone I met. Even when I was on a different level of understanding and professionalism too. We go through in the deep end. Here's some stuff, you've got an hour, come up with a presentation. We did it. Everyone did it. It wasn't, "Oh my God we can't do it." We didn't even know each other. Everyone just played the game. No one spoke out of turn. No one was rude. All four groups came up with something within the hour and we had to present it. That was really amazing. I keep saying because we were different backgrounds, educationally. Studying in different fields. Everyone was able to direct ... One thing we all had in common was we all identified as Māori.

Rickie: I think we need to make the point that He Kākano is Māori business, student business. The mix of that. Is it something about that intersection ... Is that what interested you in going? Is that what interested you ... Is that why it was successful? None of us carried on in business but we're still saying that this was a huge success.

Dean: I'm saying I really liked it. I don't know if that's the difference between success or ...but would I do it again? Yeah.

Rickie: Yeah. It was a success then. Would you recommend other people to do it?

Dean: Yeah, I would do. Definitely the Māori calling card was the clincher. That's why, "Yeah, I'll go to this."

Rickie: If they had done Māori sport?

Dean: Probably not.

Rickie: Māori painting? I'm grasping at straws here.

Dean: You're right though. There's something about the word entrepreneurship. Painting is too obvious for me. No, I don't really get into painting. Entrepreneurship, well I can't say I'm not into that.

Dean: No. I don't. I'm not sure how you'd do that.

Rickie: You'd have to get the dentists involved to start.

Dean: Yeah. That's a very broad base, entrepreneurship.

Rickie: Yeah, because the difference between the two years. One was product based, one was more service orientated. It would have to ... It would have to be under the banner of entrepreneurship.

Dean: To get everybody.

Rickie: Yeah, to get all different fields together.

Dean: So if Janine is looking to rejuvenate He Kākano, bring it in house. What's our message to Janine about that? Firstly do it?

Rickie: Yeah, do it. Definitely. The problem we'll come to is where will it fit? Whether it will be an undergrad, or post grad paper or whatever. It would be good one to bring.

Dean: I think the problem will be trying to weed out students. Do you want to do this, or just playing games? I don't know how it's going to be presented.

Rickie: Short story is, it would be worth doing.

Dean: Yeah.

Rickie: If you could have a blank piece of paper to design how it would run, where would you start?

Dean: Where would I start? I was thinking more of where would I finish. I can't really compare it, because we only had four weeks.

Rickie: Would you do it in a block? Would you do it in a four week block or would you spread it out over a semester, a year?

Dean: Yeah, because our one group, just talking amongst each other was we wish we had more time to actually develop the product. We were saying we would have like to have started the last two weeks to actually start the product. It's hard to stuff that into a four week course. If you do it over a semester, then you have lots of time.

Rickie: Would you want to do it credit bearing? Would you want people to find a way of getting 15 credits in the BIT?

Dean: Yeah, for sure. That's a real calling card.

Rickie: Yeah, because if you did that, you'd get people interested in looking at it. The He Kākano we did, got around that by it being a financial thing rather than a credit thing. The four weeks were paid for, even though you didn't get any credits.

Dean: I wonder how it could spread out. Would you want to do it more than once? Could you see benefits of doing it all three years?

Rickie: Yeah, I think it would. Like with the BIT, everything was working toward your third year project. You could do the same thing. The first two years you are developing your business plan and then between those two years you're deciding what product or service

SCENE 4: FUTURE

Rickie: We should think about what He Kākano might look like in future. If they managed to pull off a month long Māori immersion in computing, do you think you would have got the same benefit from it?

that you want to develop in your third year. Your third year gives you a good year to develop a sound business plan, or whatever that you could ... At the end of the year, everything is complete. If need be, you're ready to go out in the big world and sell that product.

EPILOGUE

Rickie:: For me, currently I'm still working in hotels full time, though I have a casual job here at the Polytech doing the windows rollout. Unfortunately He Kākano, nothing has physically developed from it, which is a shame. If it was an actual product that you could see being built, it might have been a different story. With our project, everyone went their separate ways. I'm continuing to try to get full time work on the IT side.

Dean: I finished my BIT. Bachelor's in IT. I was fortunate enough to score a job at University at the commerce building as part of the commerce IT team. I'm working there now. He Kākano was a little bit contagious, when I went to the interview Janine was quite good for me, because the people employing asked Janine what I was like. They all knew the course. Over the years I've met a lot of people that know the course. "Oh you did that course." They're very interested in it.