How Communities Awaken – Tū Tangata Whenua is a four-month Masterclass for Active Citizenship which was first established in Taranaki in 2011. It is designed to bring a diverse group of local people together to awaken their involvement in civic life, or in hapū and iwi affairs, and to strengthen their skills and abilities to make things better in our communities.

The Masterclass achieves several objectives at the same time:

– adult education ... where participants are encouraged to reflect on their own citizenship, remember their gifts, and re-examine how communities can awaken, heal and thrive.

– community-building ... where participants are encouraged to get to know each other better, and explore friendships and connections with strangers.

– transformation ... where participants are inspired to renew their own sense of belonging, and to reclaim the deeper meaning and purpose of a common good.

Our Masterclass has been part of a string of local activities that represent a citizen-based response to community development and education on our most important issues.

Amidst the problems and challenges and urgencies of everyday life, these activities have been a way that we can pay attention to what it looks like when our communities are well, thriving and abundant.
Several hundred people have joined us as participants on the Masterclass, coming from church committees, marae committees, sports clubs, service clubs, kaumātua groups, local authorities and social service and economic development agencies. We have encouraged them to turn up not as representatives of these organisations, but as citizens, friends, neighbours and family members.

The Masterclass workshops are held once a fortnight and are facilitated with processes which are based on tikanga Māori and wānanga as well as community-led adult education practices.

Our strategy for transformation is based, very simply, on conversation. Our conversations focus on the cultural competencies which enable citizens and communities to develop and prosper.

The topics for conversation were first offered by the US author Peter Block in his book “Community – the Structure of Belonging”, and they include: Invitation, Possibility, Ownership, Dissent, Commitment, Gifts and Action.

The content of each workshop is initiated by the participants themselves, as they are invited to give a keynote on one of the competencies — drawing from their own life stories and cultural heritage. We also invite local elders and thought leaders to “stretch the conversations” with their own perspectives from tangata whenua and community development traditions.

In terms of Mātauranga Māori, these “stretches” have included insights into Tū Tangata Whenua, Tikanga, Rangatiratanga, Whanaungatanga, Māramatanga, Ōhākī and Koha.

We also examine the local issues of peace, reconciliation and healing that arise from a history of colonisation, and the inter-generational impact that this has had on our communities.
We give participants three books for their study and reflection during the Masterclass. And we also provide them with links to a database of articles, audio interviews, videos, poetry and music which connect to a wider movement of citizen-led initiatives.

In the weeks between workshops, the participants are encouraged to make an appointment with another member of the group and talk about what they are learning. This helps to weave the participants more informally, and also deepen relationships that are outside their normal networks or areas of activity.

Participation in the Masterclass is by personal invitation. We fundraise beforehand so that this invitation is a genuine koha or gift to the participants.

We do this to make the Masterclass completely accessible, and also to ensure that this learning journey demonstrates what we are advocating – the fostering of community commitments that are based on invitations, generosity and our gifts.

The Masterclass has emerged as a social innovation that is having an impact on civic engagement, on race relations, and on our wider strategies of adult education for the common good.

This impact might be local and modest, yet it also seeks to play its part in the bigger picture of national and global challenges that the average citizen needs to engage with at this time.

In our evaluations, participants report a significant influence of the Masterclass on their personal lives, and on the conversations and activities they are engaged in with their families, their workplaces, their faith groups, and with hapū and iwi.

This has many ongoing and unexpected results, as the Masterclass participants come to realise they are now connected to a growing network of active citizens contributing to the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of our place.
What Participants Say

“The Masterclass has given me a fundamental change in headspace about my work in the community.”

“The Masterclass is giving people a shared language to talk about community approaches to development.”

“I enjoyed the bi-cultural aspect of the workshops, and felt that the Maori leadership was particularly inviting, generous and respectful in opening up windows to Te Ao Māori.”

“It has made a great difference in all my conversations. I now ask harder questions, and push for community-based perspectives.”

“I have applied the Masterclass knowledge to my work environment and integrated it into team meetings where everyone speaks and is listened to.”

“The ‘above and below the line’ tool has become a special favourite for me, and I use that in my work with whanau.”

“It gave me permission to step outside my own community ‘bubble’.”
Conversations That Matter

“If we want to change the nature of our communities, then we need to change the nature of the conversations we are having with one another.” — Peter Block

The Invitation Conversation
A call for active citizens to change, create and care

The Ownership Conversation
Shape the communities you want to belong to

The Possibility Conversation
Imagine what our future can be

The Commitment Conversation
What promises are you making for the common good?

The Gifts Conversation
Focus on your talents and assets

The Dissent Conversation
If you can’t say ‘no’, then your ‘yes’ has no meaning
Te Kai a Te Rangatira

He aha te kai a te rangatira? He Kōrero.

Rangatiratanga

Nā wai te poi?
Nāu te poi!

Kātu te mānuka

Ōhākī

Māramatanga

He maunga tītōhea,
he waipuna kōrōpū

Whanaungatanga

Mā wai e whakakī
i ngā whāwhārua?

Tikanga

Parau kau tū kau

Koha

He kai kei āku ringa
Tū Tama Wahine o Taranaki

ngati mutunga tangata whenua
development and liberation service

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