

CHANGING LIVES PROGRAM

Life Course Journal: Taking Charge of My Life Journey¹

Name _____

Student # _____

Group _____ Group Facilitator _____

Initial Journal (Yes No) Semester, Year _____

Update Journal (Yes No) Semester, Year _____

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¹The Life Course Journal was developed for use in the Changing Lives Program of the Youth Development Project under the auspices of the Youth Development Project and the Adult Development Project of the Child and Family Psychosocial Research Center, Child and Family Psychosocial Research Center, Department of Psychology, Florida International University, Miami, Florida, 33199. Any comments or suggestions regarding the material should be directed to William M. Kurtines at the above address (email: kurtines@fiu.edu).

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Taking Charge of My Life Journey

About this Journal

This Journal tells the story of my life. It is a story about who I am and what I want to do with my life. It is the story of a journey that will take a lifetime. This Journal will help me prepare for this journey.

I will be creating this Journal as part of a counseling group. As I begin my life journey, I recognize that the task of understanding who I am will be both challenging and rewarding. This Journal is intended to provide me with the opportunity to work on:

- Who am I? What do I want to do with my life?
- Taking charge of my life and being in control and responsible for my actions and decisions
- Identifying the life challenges (e.g., my anger) that make it difficult reach my life goals
- Identifying what I need to change to reach my goals
- Developing ways for meeting these challenges and overcoming obstacles
- Identifying and using the resources and support that I have to draw on
- Engage in transformative activities intended to change or transform my life

As part of creating the Journal, I will identify some aspect of my life or my world that I want to change. This will be my *Transformative Project*, and it will be the central focus of my work in the counseling groups.

Format for using the Life Course Journal

We will work on the Journal as part of a counseling group. In counseling groups, members work to establish a safe and trusting environment where they talk openly and honestly. Group members also give feedback to each other by sharing their feelings and thoughts about issues. This gives group members new information and differing perspectives. This also provides members with the opportunity to experiment with new ways of thinking, feeling, and acting.

The Group Assistant will be responsible of keeping the Journals for the entire group. The Journals will be given out at the beginning of each session and returned to the Group Assistant at the end of the session.

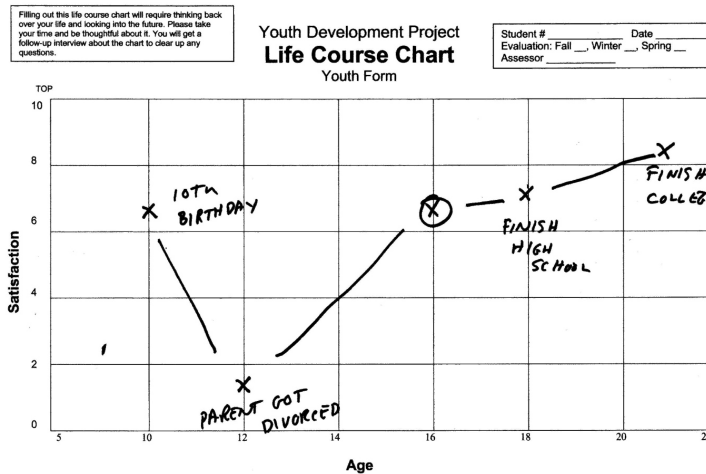
For individual members of the group, the Journal will provide a focal point for their life transforming activities. It will contain a record of what they have accomplished and what remains to be done in steering their way along their life course.

Each member of the group will be responsible of maintaining her/his own personal Journal. The Journal tells the story of each person's life journey as they undertake it. Each individual will be responsible for keeping the Journal up to date and for making up for missed sessions.

Journal Exercise 1 Life Course Chart

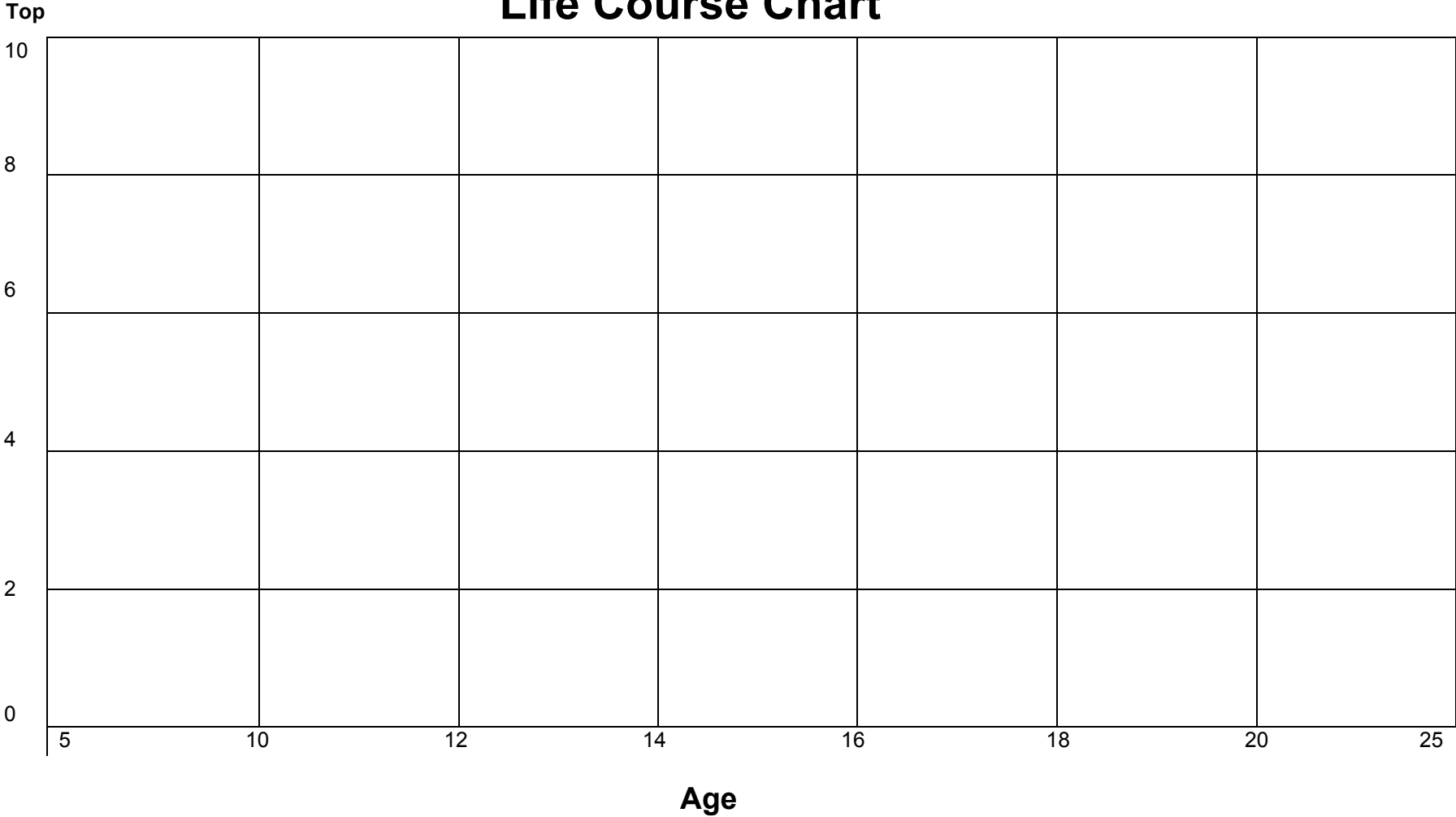
Directions: On the Life Chart on the next page, start the exercise by marking a circle with an x in it ⊗ where you are now (age) and degree of satisfaction with your life (0 to 10). Using that as a starting point, first think backward and identify the most important high and low points of your life up to the present. Locate the age and satisfaction of each of these points on the chart, mark it with an x, and briefly label it (e.g., started high school, [age, 14; satisfaction, 9], parents divorced [age, 7; satisfaction, 3]). Next, think forward and identify what you anticipate will be the most important high and low points of your life in the future and how satisfied you believe you will be. Locate and mark these on the chart the same way. Finally, look back over your chart and pick out any point or points along your life course that you would call a turning point – where your life really took a different direction. These points may be already included or they may be other points. Mark them (∧ for positive turning points or ∨ for negative) and briefly label them if they are not already labeled. We will discuss each life chart in group to clear up any issues.

Sample Life Course Chart



Youth Development Project

Life Course Chart



Filling out this life course chart will require thinking back over your life and looking into the future. Please take your time and be thoughtful about it. Follow the directions that were provided on the previous page.

Journal Exercise 1 Life Course Events and Turning Points

1. Introduction

Directions: Each person is moving along a life path or life course. Like any pathway, the course of our lives goes through many changes. It sometimes twists and turns and even circles back on itself -- but in the end, it always moves forward.

2. Important Life Events

Directions: Let's think about the most important events in your life so far. We would like you to describe in as much detail as possible the most important high and low events in your life so far.

What were the most important high points of your life in the past?

What were the most important low points of your life in the past?

3. Turning Points

Directions: A turning point is a time in which your life really took a different direction or underwent a dramatic change in how you saw yourself or the world.

When in your past did the direction of your life change?

Is your life currently undergoing a turning point? Is the direction of your life currently changing?

4. Discussion Questions

Everyone turns to the *Understanding Your Life Course* Facilitator's Box. The group will discuss what are **Life Course, Life Goals, Turning Points, Control, Responsibility, and Challenge**. After group discussion, everyone opens to their "life chart." Each person takes a turn and describes:

Where I am coming from? (The most important high and low points of your life in the past).

Turning points in the past. (Times in the past when your life changed).

Where am I now? Who am I? (The circle with an x in it ⊗).

Turning points in your life now.

How satisfied are you with your life now.

What do you like about your life and want to keep the way it is (or want more of)?

What do you not like about your life (or what you would like to change)?

Where am I going? What do I want to do with my life?

Most serious challenges and most important resources.

Facilitator's Box: Understanding Your Life Course

Here are some basic concepts that are useful for understanding your life.

A **life course** is the unique course or path of the individual's life. Each person constructs her/his life course through the choices they make and actions they take within the constraints and opportunities of their life and times.

Life goals are the goals that you would describe as your most important goals. They are the goals that come to mind when you ask yourself the question, "What do I want to do with my life?" They are the goals that give direction to our life course and guide our choices as our life unfolds.

Sometimes lives change.

A **turning point** is a time in which your life takes a really different direction or when you undergo a dramatic change in how you see yourself or the world. Sometimes your life changes because of something that happens to you (e.g., your life circumstances change), and sometimes your life changes because of something that you do (e.g., YOU change your life goals or plans). This type of life course change may involve change in the direction of your current life path (e.g., from positive to negative). People who are in charge of their lives develop goals, make plans, and choose from among the alternatives that can shape and alter their life course rather letting the choices be made for them.

What we mean by **control** is when you feel like you can do things that will change or influence something.

What we mean by **responsibility** is when you feel like you are accountable (deserve credit **or** blame) for your decisions and actions **and** for the consequences or outcome of those decisions and actions.

A **challenge** is an obstacle, problem, issue, barrier, limitation, etc. that might keep you from moving your life in the direction you want it to go.

Journal Exercise 2 Life Goals

1. Introduction

Directions: *Life goals are your most important goals. In this group session, we are going to talk about your life goals – what they are and why they are important.*

Some people work hard and are successful at achieving their life goals (e.g., have “good” careers, make a lot of money, etc.) but they are still not happy with their lives. They often experience a profound sense of unhappiness about their life, as if something very important was missing from it. Many times this happens because the life goals they choose for themselves when they were your age (and later achieved) were not compatible with their best potentials (we will talk more about best potentials later). Although they achieved their life goals, the goals they achieved did not bring out the best that was in them. Helping you to understand how to identify life goals that will help you realize your full potential and how to use this knowledge to change your life in ways that help you reach your goals are the main aims of the Changing Lives Program.

A good place to start is to identify all the life goals that we think we might like achieve. Identifying life goals is a good place to start because you have to know where you’re currently headed before you can know whether it’s the right direction for you to go in – like a road map for your life. So that’s where we will start.

2. Important Life Goals

Directions: *We would like you to describe your three important life goals. The goals that you describe should be your most important life goals. Focus on your three most important life goals when you ask yourself the question, ‘What do I want to do with my life?’*

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

3. Most Important Life Goal

Directions: *Would you please tell us which of these life goals you consider your most important life goal, that is, the goal that comes to mind MOST when you ask yourself the question, ‘What do I want to do with my life?’*

1. _____

This life goal serves as a good starting point. We recognize, of course, that everyone has many things they want to do with their lives. We also recognize that the meaning and significance of our life goals may change as we work out our life course. But for the time being, we are going to use as our starting point the one you have just identified as *your most important* life goal. It may change and evolve as we work on it (or you may even come up with a new one), but for now we will consider it your most important life goal.

4. Essential Activities

Directions: *It sometimes helps in clarifying your life goals to make a list of activities that you consider most essential to the achievement of these life goals. This is called searching for essential activities. The aim of searching for essential activities is to identify the activities necessary for the achievement of your life goals*

Break down your life goal into the Essential Activities for achieving this life goal (i.e., things that if you did not do them you would most likely not be able to reach this goal). These are not challenges or obstacles. Challenges or obstacles are things that KEEP YOU from reaching your goals; essential activities are things you have to DO to reach your goals. For example, if someone had the goal of running in a marathon, activities important for reaching this goal might include running every day, learning about nutrition and changing how you eat, etc. Some activity might be related to preparing to run a marathon, but not really essential for achieving this goal. For example, finding other running buddies, choosing a color for your running shorts, etc. Please only include those activities that you consider essential or important to reaching your life goal.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

5. What are Best Potentials and why are they Important?

We have talked about the importance of living up to your best potentials, but we have not said what we mean by the term. *Best potentials* are those special talents that we have that, if we realize them, often leads to one of the highest form of happiness that we can achieve, i.e., self-fulfillment. What we focus on in this Journal Exercise is work on determining whether the activities essential for reaching your most important life goal or future self are tapping into your best potentials. This is important because if the essential activities are tapping into your best potentials, then life goals built around these activities are also likely tapping into your best potentials.

The technique we will be using is called **emotion focusing**. Emotion focusing involves exploring our emotional reaction to things (persons, events, activities, etc.). What we are especially interested in for this exercise is your emotional reaction to the activities necessary for achieving your life goals and future selves, particularly the chosen one. The aim is to use your emotional reactions to help you decide whether the activities essential to your life goals are in tune with your best potentials.

Go with the Flow

Emotion focusing is helpful in understanding emotional states in general, but in this case we are particularly interested in a special emotional state, one that has been identified as often related to fulfilling your best potentials.

When we are doing something that fulfills our best potentials and is challenging to us, we may experience a special emotional state that is called **flow**. When we are in a flow state, we lose track of time, we feel more involved than we do in most other activities, and we are not easily distracted. The Group Facilitator will tell you more about “flow” during the discussion. If you would like to read more about what flow can tell you about your best potentials, a more complete explanation can be found in the Facilitator’s Box on Flow.

How do I know if my life goals and future selves create a flow state in me?

You know you are in a flow state if while in an activity you experience some or all of the following:

- Lose track of time, at least to some extent
- Feel more involved than you do in most other activities
- Engage in the activities without needing any external rewards
- Feel a 'special fit' with the activity or goal
- Feel challenged by the activity but also feel that you are good enough at it

You will know that your life goals are tapping your best potentials when engaging in activities essential to achieving your life goals tend to create a flow state in you. It is also possible to go beyond flow to what are called "peak experiences," moments of intense joy or happiness. The Group Facilitator will tell you more about what these experiences involve during the discussion. If you would like to read about them, a description can be found in the Facilitator's Box on Peak Experiences.

6. Emotion Focusing Exercise

Directions: *Emotion focusing is a helpful way to identify whether activities and/or life goals move you into a flow state. Write down the most important of the life goal and the three essential activities. Then rate each (your most important life goal and the essential activities) for flow level using the Flow Scale. Enter a rating for the goal and each activity.*

Most Important Life Goal

_____ 1. __, 2. __, 3. __, 4. __, 5. __

Essential Activities

_____ 1. __, 2. __, 3. __, 4. __, 5. __

_____ 1. __, 2. __, 3. __, 4. __, 5. __

_____ 1. __, 2. __, 3. __, 4. __, 5. __

Flow Scale

	Not at all		Neutral		Very Much
1. Lose track of time, at least to some extent	1	2	3	4	5
2. Engage in the activities without needing any external rewards	1	2	3	4	5
3. Feel more involved than you do in most other activities	1	2	3	4	5
4. Feel a 'special fit' with the activity or goal	1	2	3	4	5
5. Feel challenged by the activity but also feel that you are good enough at it	1	2	3	4	5

Journal Exercise 3 Life Change Goals

1. Description

Life Change Goals are different from Life Goals. Life change goals define the things we want to change in our lives. Life goals are what we want to do with our lives; life *change* goals are the things we want to change about our lives to be able to reach our life goals. In this exercise, group members will think about and discuss what, if anything, they want to change about their lives to be able to reach their life goals or what to do if they want to change their life goals. For this exercise, group members are going to focus on the most important things we want to change – the thing we want to most change if we are going to be successful in achieving our life goals.

2. Introduction.

Directions: *“In this group session, we are going to talk about life change goals. Life change goals are different from life goals. Life goals are what we want to do with our lives. Life change goals are the things we want to change about our lives to be able to maximize the possibility of*

Part 1. Life Change Goals

This exercise takes place in three parts. In the first part, group members conceptualize their own life change goal on their own.

Directions: *“For questions 1 and 2, we would like you to think about your most important life change goal. For question 1, write down what you most want to change about your life.*

1. What do you most want to change about your life?

For question 2, try to picture in your mind how your life would be different if you were to make this change. Write it down.”

2. How would your life be different if you were to make this change?

Part 2. Sharing Life Change Goals.

In the second part, group members share their life change goals with each other and, in the process, may begin to recognize the ways in their lives overlap and how they are unique. This represents an opportunity for the facilitator to call attention to how the members of the group relate to each other (or don't relate to other).

Directions: *For questions 3 and 4, we would like you to talk to each other about the change that you most want to make in your life. For question 3, find the other person or people in the group with life change goals most similar to your own. Write down how they are similar and how they are different.*

3. How are your life change goals similar? How are they different?

For question 4, think about everyone else's life change goals. Write down any other changes that would also make sense to you.

4. After listening to everyone's life change goals, are there any other changes that would make sense for you?

Part 3. Changing the Group.

The third part is done as a group. For this part, it is important that all group members have equal opportunity to contribute to the answer to the question and that the final answer represents a consensus.

Directions: *For question 5, we would like all of us to work together as a group to come up with an answer that all of us can agree on. We can take all the time that we need – there is no rush. It is important that we listen to everybody's ideas because everybody's ideas are important. We are going to do our best to make sure everybody gets the chance to contribute, but we need your help. If you think that someone, including yourself, is being left out, please invite them back in. For question 5, picture what our group would look like if all of us made the changes we have talked about. Now, let's discuss how our group would be different and try to come up with an answer together.*

5. How would our group be different if we made all of these changes?

Journal Exercise 4 Problem Solving

1. Description.

Our program is called the Changing Lives Program because one of the things these counseling sessions do is provide a context in which group members have the opportunity to learn skills, make choices, and take actions in ways that change their lives for the better. We emphasize taking action because in this program we do more than talk about our problems – we do something about them. The kinds of actions we are talking about are what we call “transformative” actions – actions that change or transform group member’s lives. Taking action is what matters. If we don’t DO something about our lives, they won’t change -- they will most likely continue along in the same direction. This session is very important because it is the one in which group members work on constructing the path towards their life change goals. The goal is to help them change their lives by moving it in more positive directions, but it will be done one step at a time.

2. Introduction.

Directions: *This group session is very important because now we are going to start doing something to accomplish our life change goals. In this program we do more than talk about our problems – we do something about them. If we don’t DO something about our lives, they won’t change -- they will most likely continue along in the same direction. For question 1, please write down your most important life change goal.*

3. Creating Alternatives.

Group members have already identified the problems that they want to solve by thinking about and naming their life change goal. The next step is to create potential alternatives for solving the problem and to think about the positives and negatives of each alternative.

Directions: *For question 2, we would like you to think about what you can do to accomplish your life change goal. List everything you can think of to do.*

4. Evaluating Alternatives.

The next step involves evaluating alternatives and selecting the best solution from among the alternative created.

Directions: *For questions 3 and 4, we would like you to think about which of your choices is the best and why it is the best. First, please circle your best choice.*

3. Why is this one the best?

Now, we want you to think about what bad things might result from your best choice.

4. What are the bad things that could come out of doing this?

5. Talk with the Group.

The next part is done with the entire group. For this part, it is important that all group members have equal opportunity to talk about their life change goals.

Directions: *For question 5, we would for the group to share life change goals. We can take all the time that we need – there is no rush. It is important that we listen to everybody's ideas because everybody's ideas are important. We are going to do our best to make sure everybody gets the chance to share, but we need your help. If you think that someone, including yourself, is being left out, please bring them back in.*

Describe to the group your life change goal, the best thing you can think of to do to accomplish it, and the bad things that could come from doing this. Pick one person from the group and ask that person what other things he or she can think of to do and why you should consider doing them.

You can ask additional group members if you want.

5. What new ideas might you consider?

Now, think about we have talked about, and (6.) write your final best choice.

6. Taking Action.

Taking action is what matters. If we don't DO something about our lives, they won't change -- they will most likely continue along in the same direction.

Directions: *There is a difference between talking about our problems and doing something about them. This program is about more than talking about changing our lives- it's about taking action to change them. Take a moment to think about your final best choice for achieving your life change goal. Think about what it would take for you to try doing this. For question 7, write down what it will take for you to try doing this.*

Notice that all of us here have challenges in life that we want to work on. None of us can solve anybody else's problems, but when we meet as a group there may be things that we can do to help each other. What can the group do to help you achieve your goal, and what are you willing to do to help other group members meet theirs?

7. Discussion Questions

The group should briefly discuss alternative ways for solving problems. After group discussion, look at the “ICED” Facilitator’s Box on the next page. Talk about the ICED way of solving problems. Each person takes a turn, and relate the ICED way to the answers to the Alternative exercise.

Facilitator’s Box

ICED

Identify the problem

Create alternatives, generate options;

Evaluate the alternatives, what are the pros/cons for each alternative;

Do something; take action to solve the problem.

People who work in the area of problem solving have identified four basic elements in successful problem solving. We use the acronym **ICED** to remind us of what is involved in successful problem solving. First, successful problem solving involves recognizing when a problem exists, **I**dentifying what the problem is (i.e., problem posing) and gathering information about the problem and about how it might be solved. Second, successful problem solving involves **C**reating or generating potential alternatives for solving the problem. What are the positives and negatives of each alternative? Third, problem solving involves **E**valuating the alternatives and selecting the best solution (problem solving). Fourth, it involves **D**oing something about the problem (transformative activity). The problem is not solved until you do something to change it!