

# Changing Lives Program (CLP) Manual

**Revised: 1/09**

**Printed: 10/7/12**

The Changing Lives Program was developed under the auspices of the Youth Development Project and the Adult Development Project of the 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.

**Contributors:** Richard Albrecht, Lisa Arango, Ondina Arrufat, Steven Berman, Ervin Briones, Kyle Eichas, Laura Ferrer-Wreder, Zoeann Finzi-Smith, Arlen Garcia, Arlene Garcia, Gabrielle Kortsch, William M. Kurtines, Carolyn Cass Lorente, Vanessa Madrazo, Brent Maximin, Marilyn J. Montgomery, Roberto Rinaldi, Rachel Ritchie, Seth Schwartz, Rebecca Wang, Aida Varela.

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# CHAPTER 1:

## The Changing Lives Program

This manual describes the Changing Lives Program (CLP) of the Miami Youth Development Project. The Changing Lives Program is a community-supported positive development program that aims to empower youth in their efforts to change their lives in ways that promote positive development. Our goal is to create contexts in which people can transform their sense of self and identity in ways that optimize their likelihood of having a positive impact on their life course.

Our intervention goal is changing lives and we use intervention strategies that are participatory and transformative to achieve this goal. A participatory and transformative approach seeks to create an intervention context in which participants take an active role in the intervention process and the interventionist (facilitator, teacher, etc.) works with the participant to identify ways for promoting optimal positive development, i.e., ways that open up possibilities for participants to realize their fullest potential.

In CLP, the learning process is participatory. In the process of identifying effective methods for overcoming obstacles and challenge to the realization of their potential *and* engaging in transformative activities to bring about change, participants become empowered as they experience the possibility of creating and constructing positive directions for development. In CLP, participants not only talk about their problems; they *do* something about them. In the context of such mastery experiences, they become empowered to transform themselves, their lives, and their communities.

CLP is an approach that considers positive change that takes place as part of youth development intervention to serve as a catalyst for future change. More specifically, it holds that what is important about future change is that it will be under the control (and responsibility) of the people who have changed during the intervention. CLP further holds that it is change that is youth-selected and youth-directed that will be most likely to persist past the end of the intervention.

The basic concepts that provide the foundation for CLP evolved out of our work with the multiculturally diverse population of urban youth that participate in our programs. These basic concepts have proved useful to us in promoting positive change in the lives of our participants, but they are not limited to this population. They can be used by anyone who feels the need to change their life in directions that are more positive and in need of practical methods for moving their lives in positive directions. The basic concepts apply to anyone who feels the need to change their life and is looking for way to make it happen.

### Overview of the CLP Intervention Components

This chapter provides an overview of the basic components of the Changing Lives Program and intervention, beginning with the developmental and intervention theory that provides the basic theoretical orientation for the program.

#### Developmental Theory: A Psychosocial Developmental Life Course Approach

The “developmental theoretical” framework (i.e., theory of *what* changes and *how* it changes) for our positive development program, which we call a “psychosocial developmental life course approach,” draws from both psychosocial developmental theory (Erikson, 1968) and life course theory (Elder, 1998). From psychosocial developmental theory, this approach adopts a view of the transition to adulthood that begins with the onset of adolescence as the developmental period at which the individual is first confronted with the difficult challenge (and responsibility) of choosing the goals, roles, and beliefs about the world that give life direction and purpose as well as coherence and integration (i.e., a positive sense of identity). From life course theory, it adopts an emphasis on how individuals construct their own life courses through the choices they make and actions they take within the constraints and opportunities of historical and social circumstances.

## Targeting the Developmental and Historical Moment: Linking Identity and Life Course Theory

The concept of identity derived from psychosocial developmental theory, when unified with the concept of life transitions and turning points derived from life course theory, provides a link between development, context, and human agency - i.e., a coherent conceptualization of individuals as producers of their own development (for a detailed discussion of this conceptualization see Kurtines, Montgomery, Eichas, et al. (2008). Linking these concepts highlights the role of identity as the “steering mechanism” guiding the individual’s life course. A life course (Elder, 1998) is the pathway of the individual’s life as it moves through the sequence of socially defined, age-graded events and roles over time, and identity (Erikson, 1968) the “self-structure” (i.e., the self-constructed, coherent, and dynamic structure) that steers the individual along this path. Thus, this conceptualization does not privilege any particular process or determinant (social/historical, biological/maturational, agentic, etc.) in regulating movement through the life course. Rather, it adopts the view that human agency can be numbered among the multiple determinants (e.g., social/historical, biological, etc.) that play an important role in which the life course is followed and how it is followed.

Although human agency is one determinant among many, it is one that is critical to understanding how individuals work out their lives in particular contexts. As Elder (1998) observed, one of the basic principles of life course theory is that “individuals construct their own life course through the choices and actions they take within the constraints and opportunities of history and social circumstances” (p. 961). Exemplifying this potential, in response to the question “*Who Am I?*,” one participant in the CLP program said:

*“Who Am I? ... I am what I want to be and not what society or my parents or anybody but me wants me to be. Because I see myself as an individual not to be trying to change myself for the better of someone else, but I should change myself for the better of me.”*

### Changing Life Courses

Life course theory thus offers a vocabulary for talking about the process by which individuals change. Life course theory not only holds that life transitions involve qualitative state changes that are both social and psychological, but also that qualitative state changes that occur during transitions are always elements of a larger trajectory (the individual’s life course). To this, life course theory adds the view that a particular state change may represent a “life course turning point” as well (Elder, 1998). A turning point is a specific type of state change, one that is characterized by a qualitative directional change. A directional change has two features -- the first is a discontinuation of movement along a previous pathway, the second is continued successive movement along a qualitatively different trajectory or pathway. A turning point thus results in a qualitative change in direction and that change can be either short term or long term relative to an individual’s life course history. A *life course turning point* is a long-term qualitative change in an individual’s life course. As such, whether a turning point is a “life course” turning point cannot be determined prospectively; it can only be done retrospectively, relative to a specific individual’s lived life course. Moreover, because a life course is a pathway that the individual, through her/his choices, selects from the array of available trajectories (e.g., institutional, developmental, etc.), the individual is in this sense the “producer” of the pathway of her/his life course. Agency in the selection of particular roles or situations represents a mechanism through which life advantages/disadvantages may begin to accumulate according to the Law of Effect in which behavior is sustained or changed by its consequences (Elder, 1998).

Life course theory thus offers a view of life transitions such as adolescence as periods of increased likelihood of a radical break or departure from a previous life course pathway. Interventions that target the transition to adulthood thus have the potential to not only to reduce risky or problem behaviors; they may also increase the individuals’ prospects for positive long-term life course change. The concepts of a life course pathway, agency, and life course turning points, when coupled with the concept of identity as a self-constructed, coherent, and dynamic organization of the self, yield a useful perspective on improving positive development interventions -- particularly when linked to the life course concept of *events* as key building blocks that can be combined into *event histories* or *trajectories*.

## **Intervention Theory: A Participatory Transformative Approach**

The “intervention” theoretical framework (i.e., theory of *what to change* and *how to change it*) for our positive development program, which we call “a participatory transformative approach,” draws from both Freire’s (1983/1970) transformative pedagogy and multicultural counseling theory (Sue & Zane, 2006) for its strategies to enhance intervention effectiveness when working with multicultural and/or marginalized people. Freire referred to such an approach as transformative pedagogy, a pedagogy of dialogue rather than instruction.

### **Participatory Co-learning and Transformative Activities**

Our primary intervention goal is to *empower* people to change their lives in positive directions that enhance the quality of their lives. To this end, CLP group work involves three phases: (1) Engagement, (2) Participatory Co-learning, and (3) Transformative Activities. The Engagement phase (1) and the Participatory Co-learning experiences (2) provide the foundation for the participant-directed Transformative Activities, our key change-producing “intervention strategy” (3). While engaged in youth-directed transformative activities involving proactive problem posing and solving, program participants are expected to be the “experts.” As in other forms of intervention, engaging in transformative activities creates change that often solves participants’ short-term problems, an important outcome. However, although important, this is not our primary therapeutic goal. Rather, as described below, we consider the opportunities for “mastery experiences” that these activities create to be the primary “therapeutic ingredient” of our programs.

The implementation phases are designed to be flexible and can be adapted to diverse populations and problems, goals, and settings. After participants are engaged, the facilitator shifts the focus to the participatory co-learning and transformative activities to the participants. However, the sequencing tends to be iterative (back and forth between phases) as facilitator uses the CLP strategies when opportunities present themselves in the sessions.

The aim is to create contexts in which young people can transform their sense of control and responsibility and, in ways that optimize their likelihood of enhancing the quality of their lives. Our intervention program thus aims at changing lives and we use intervention strategies that are both participatory and transformative to achieve this goal. Using Freire’s (1983/1970) work as a springboard, our participatory transformative approach also draws on multicultural counseling theory (Sue & Zane, 2006) and the empowerment literature (Brandtstadter & Lerner, 1999; McWhirter, 1997; Peterson & Reid, 2003; Zimmerman, 1995). The aim is to create contexts in which program participants take an active role in the intervention process with the interventionist (facilitator, teacher, etc.) participating as a co-learner in their efforts to construct optimal strategies for enhancing the quality of their lives. In CLP program, participants not only talk about their problems, they do something about them. In the process, they are empowered as they experience the possibility of creating new and better ways for living out their lives.

### **Mastery Experiences: CLP’s Core Mediator of Life Course Change**

CLP uses youth-directed transformative activities as its key behavioral intervention strategy for facilitating empowerment (Kurtines, Montgomery, Eichas, et al., 2008). While intentionally identifying problems and engaging in transformative activities to solve life’s problems (changing the way things are for the better), participants become the “experts” and in the process become empowered. Because of such mastery experiences, a person learns “to see a closer correspondence between their goals and a sense of how to achieve them, gain greater access to and control over resources and . . . gain mastery over their lives” (Zimmerman, 1995, p. 583).

We extend and refine the concept of mastery experiences by articulating a psychosocial developmental life course conceptualization of positive mastery experiences as a mediating mechanism of life course change. That is, although our key “intervention strategy” is comprised of a primarily behavioral intervention (i.e., facilitating participants’ engagement in transformational change producing “activities”), it is the quality of the cognitive and affective processes associated with mastery experiences generated by transformative activities that are hypothesized to operate as cognitive/affective mediating mechanisms by transforming the way people understand and/or feel about their current life course.

Specifically, the quality of the cognitive and affective processes associated with mastery experiences generated by transformative activities (positive or negative) are hypothesized to precipitate complex cascading change in either (or both) “cognitive” and “affective” components of the individual’s subjective evaluation of the experience (see Kurtines, Montgomery, Eichas, et al., in press).

Although we consider positive mastery experiences to have the potential to transform the subjective meaning and significance of all types of life course experiences, we consider mastery experiences that result in change in a participant’s experiences of “self” and “identity” to be a particularly important type of “life course change” experience. In addition, we further consider mastery experiences that result in a transformative change in a participant’s experiences of “self” and “identity” one of the most important types of life course experience changes, because it is the type of change that is most likely to result in directional life course change that is long-term. From a psychosocial developmental life course perspective, an identity is seen as a relatively stable “self-structure” (i.e., the self-constructed, coherent, and dynamic organization of the drives, abilities, beliefs, and personal history) that serves as an individual’s “steering mechanism” for directing an individual’s choices and actions, within the constraints and opportunities of history and social circumstances, throughout the duration of a life course.

Moreover, because life course theory views a life course as a pathway that the individual directs through her/his cumulative choices from the array of available trajectories (e.g., institutional, developmental, etc.), the forward edge of an individual’s movement through a life course is located at the intersection of these possible trajectories and the future direction of the pathway as directed by each individual’s interpretation of the subjective meaning and significance of the cumulative effects of the alternatives selected. Agency in the selection of particular roles or situations thus represents a mechanism through which life advantages/disadvantages accumulate and life courses are sustained or changed by the interpretation of the meaning and significance of their consequences to the individual.

Consequently, for purposes of intervention and measurement, we adopt the meaning and significance of a program participant’s life experiences in the context of the available array of possible trajectories at the time of entry into the program as the lead point of that participant’s movement through a life course and, hence, it is not only the focus of our empowerment intervention strategies but also the focus of our efforts to measure and track qualitative life course change that is long-term as well as directional. Specifically, from the perspective of our psychosocial developmental life course approach, the most empowering type of transformational change to promote is positive transformational change in the person’s experiences of self and identity. Thus, we consider the occurrence of proactive transformational activities that promote the formation of a positive sense of identity to be a key change-producing ingredient in our intervention work. We consider it among the most empowering types of transformational change because such change alters the individual’s personal sense of identity that serves as the “steering mechanism” for directing the course of their lives “over the long haul.”

### **Group Exercises: The Life Course Journal**

The Life Course Journal (LCJ) that is used in conjunction with the manual is integral part of the implementation of CLP. The Life Course Journal is the focal point for our efforts to foster the positive identity development. Thus, although the specific issues that are addressed in groups are important in their own right, CLP goes one step further. We work to address not only current issues participants present, we also use our work on these problems and issues as an opportunity to promote long-term positive developmental change.

## **CHAPTER 2: Intervention Strategies - : A Participatory Transformative Approach**

This Chapter describes CLP's intervention process, strategies, and objectives. Although the intervention process, strategies, and objectives are described separately in this manual for purposes of explanation, they are conceptually interrelated and integrated in actual implementation. Moreover, as described below, the implementation of the program involves the interweaving and layering of CLP intervention strategies and objectives.

### **Freire's Transformative Pedagogy**

Freire's Transformative Pedagogy (1983/1970) provides the framework for our intervention strategies. Freire's approach to educational intervention offers an alternative to traditional didactic approaches in which the teacher or facilitator is viewed as the source of knowledge to be transferred to the student – i.e., the teacher as the “expert” and the student as a passive recipient of “knowledge” with respect to both the means and goals of education. For Freire, the goal of education is to change or transform the world and the proactive participation of the student in this process is critical for achieving this goal. In contrast to the traditional structured, content oriented didactic approach, Freire offers a problem-posing and participatory learning model, in which student participation is an essential part of the co-construction of a transformed reality. Freire (1970/1983) called this learning model “collaborative learning in the sense of co-intentional education.”

CLP uses a participatory co-learning approach (Freire, 1970/1983) in all its psycho educational and counseling activities. A participatory learning approach is one in which the youth takes an active role and the facilitator/teacher works in cooperation with the youth as part of the process of collaboratively exploring and challenging them to develop in positive directions. In the process of intentionally engaging in posing problems and in following through by engaging in transformative activities to solve these problems, youth come to increase their proactive participation in defining who they are and what they believe in. Freire referred to such transformative pedagogy as pedagogy of dialogue rather than of instruction. It is problem posing and also problem solving through a co-learning process that is collaborative and participatory.

### **Intervention Strategies**

#### **Participatory Co-learning and Transformative Empowerment Activities**

The two basic intervention strategies that we use in CLP define the basic orientation we adopt toward all teaching and learning activities, at both the group and individual levels, namely, participatory co-learning and transformative empowerment activities. These basic strategies are at the core of the efforts the Youth Development Project to empower troubled youth to change their lives in positive directions. They are also at the core of the efforts the Adult Development Project to empower emerging adults to change their lives in ways that optimized their life experiences in ways that positively transform themselves and their historical circumstances.

#### **Working with Multi-Ethnic Multi-problem Youth**

Because a very large proportion of these young people we work with as part of the Miami Youth Development Projects are lower income inner city minority youth who begin life already marginalized with respect to mainstream social institutions, they have historically lacked the opportunity to participate proactively in the mainstream institutions that have historically provided young people normative support and value reference. A result of this lack of participation is that, in addition to not being invested in these institutions, these young people also tend not to have developed the critical skills needed to effectively engage in these institutions. Moreover, the nature of their mastery experiences when engaging these institutions tend to be negative rather than positive and they tend to be disengaged from the system, lacking in a sense of direction or purpose, investment in the system, and characterized by a broad and pervasive sense of hopelessness and helplessness.

Consequently, when working with multi-problem youth one of the primary objectives of CLP is to facilitate the process of empowering these youth and getting them re-engaged (or often engaged for the first time) and invested in the system by means of youth-directed transformative activities. Such activities are intended not only to provide the opportunity to set goals for themselves and develop effective skills for achieving their goals, but also to engage in positive mastery experiences, hopefully with respect to those goals.

As described below, in the CLP facilitator may employ any opportunity (e.g., self-disclosures, disclosures in informal interactions, etc.) in which participants identify issues and problems that are personally meaningful to them (i.e., life challenges, life goals, and possible future selves) and that they want to do something about to use these two interrelated strategies, and should do so whenever the opportunity arises.

In addition to capitalizing on serendipitous opportunities, the Life Course Journal (LCJ) designed for use in conjunction with the CLP provides a structured opportunity for exposing participants to mastery experiences via transformative activities. The early LCJ exercises open for discussion participants change goals for the counseling sessions. The notion of counseling change goals sets the stage for later exercises and discussions of other types of goals, including life goals and transformative goals. Transformative goals are different from life goals. Life goals are what we want to do with our lives; transformative goals are the things we want to change about our life and our world *to be able to reach our life goals*. Transformative goals provide a link between life goals and transformative activities to achieve those goals (and associated mastery experiences).

**Participatory Co-learning Experiences.** Participatory co-learning experiences provide a context for youth participation in a conjoint skills learning process. Like treatment and prevention intervention programs, positive development programs target the development of skills and competence (e.g., problem solving skills, a positive attitude toward personal control and responsibility, etc.). The development of these skills is thus an important objective of the participatory co-learning experiences. In addition, however, they also have another important objective, namely, to set the stage for using these skills in the empowerment activities that flow from the development of these skills. To achieve this goal, the facilitator works to provide the opportunity for these participatory co-learning experiences to take place in the context of youth-directed problem posing activities that are designed to facilitate the identification of the problems that eventually become the goals for the youth-directed transformative activities described next.

**Transformative Empowerment Activities.** Transformative activities provide a context for fostering empowerment. The goal or target for these transformative activities are “identified” by the participants as part of the problem posing process that takes place during the participatory co-learning experiences. The identification of the goal for the transformative activities is thus part of the “problem posing” participatory co-learning process and the transformative activities that are carried out by the participants is the “problem solving” part of the participatory co-learning process. Sometimes the transformative goals “fall out naturally” from the counseling process and sometimes the facilitator has to work to bring them into the counseling process. The LCJ is designed to help facilitate this process. The transformative and participatory approach used by CLP considers participation in transformative empowerment activities to be the key ingredient for facilitating transformative life course change regardless of how it is precipitated. That is, the intervention goal is to facilitate change, with the facilitative method being of secondary importance. Whether a mastery experience is the natural outcome of the ongoing flow of the counseling process or of participation in a relatively structured exercise is less important than the fact that the mastery experience happens.

Participation in these youth-directed transformative activities serves to provide the participants with experience in engaging in successful activities that have a direct impact on their lives. As part of their participation in these empowerment activities, youth learn to apply the problem posing and problem solving method in ways that enhance the quality of their lives.

The experience of participating in successful youth-directed transformative activities has two goals. The first is to solve the problem that the participants present and/or identify, and in this way provide a direct and successful mastery experience. The second and more long-term goal is that the experience of participating in successful youth-directed activities empowers youth by strengthening their sense of



control and responsibility over their lives. As a consequence of these experiences, participants come "to see a closer correspondence between their goals and a sense of how to achieve them, gain greater access to and control over resources and .... gain mastery over their lives (Zimmerman, 1995; p. 583)."

CLP's basic intervention strategies (participatory co-learning and transformative empowerment activities) are *not* implemented in a fixed sequence; rather, they are implemented contingently in layered and interwoven fashion. In implementing these intervention strategies, the primary goal is to use the strategies, as the opportunity arises, to foster skills development and the identification of transformative goals. As noted, sometimes the opportunities arise as a natural outcome of the ongoing flow of the counseling process. The use of the LCJ exercises, however, ensures that at some point in the counseling process, each young person in the program has the opportunity to participate in participatory co-learning experiences and transformative empowerment activities.

The participatory co-learning experiences and transformative activities are thus two interrelated procedures for achieving one of the primary goals of the CLP intervention: empowering troubled youth to change their lives in positive directions. The LCJ is designed to provide relatively structured participatory co-learning experiences to enhance participants' skills and knowledge, attitudes and orientations, and self-understanding and insight. The facilitator capitalizes on serendipitous opportunities to supplement and enhance value of the exercises. The youth-directed transformative activities provide the opportunity to apply these skills, attitudes, and insights into transforming their lives. Successful transformative activities, in turn, provide positive mastery experiences, enhancing a sense of control and responsibility. It is this transformed sense of control and responsibility that carries forth and enables young people to themselves make the choices and take the actions (and responsibility) for changing the direction of their life course and maintaining it beyond the intervention. Thus, as each young person's life course history plays itself out, the youth will be better equipped to act critically, constructively, and adaptively to the changes that take place.

## **The Flow of the CLP: Interweaving and Layering the CLP Intervention Strategies and Objectives**

The general structure of the implementation of CLP is phasic in nature (with the participatory co-learning experiences typically preceding the youth-directed transformative activities) but, as noted its implementation involves the interweaving and layering of the CLP intervention strategies and objectives involves three phases: (1) *Engagement*, (2) *Participatory co-learning*, and (3) *Transformative Activities*. The engagement phase (1) and the participatory co-learning experiences (2) provide the foundation for the youth-directed transformative activities (3). The phases are designed to be flexible and open to being adapted to diverse populations and problems, goals, and institutional and cultural settings. The duration of the program and sequence of the phases can be adapted to educational and other institutional settings. The specific aim of the CLP is to empower troubled adolescents to change their lives in positive directions. Table 1 outlines the three phases of the CLP

As can be seen from Table 1, in the later phase of the CLP the focus shifts from engagement to the primary intervention strategies and objectives of the CLP, participatory co-learning and transformative activities. The CLP facilitator applies these phasically, with the participatory co-learning activities generally preceding the transformative activities, although the sequencing most often tends to be iterative (back and forth) rather than invariant and sequential. That is, it is often useful, even when at the transformative activities phase, to "go back to" the participatory co-learning phase, particularly if the outcome of the participatory co-learning is to promote a skill, attitude, or insight that facilitates a positive outcome for the transformative activity or even identifies a more meaningful and significant change or transformative goal.

The *Life Course Journal* (LCJ) is designed to facilitate the implementation process. The LCJ provides a focal point for the participatory co-learning experiences. The exercises in the LCJ are designed to help empower youth in their efforts to change their lives in ways that promote positive development. Our goal is to create contexts in which people can transform their sense of self and identity in ways that optimize their likelihood of having a positive impact on their life course.

Our intervention goal is changing lives and we use the exercises as intervention strategies that are participatory and transformative to achieve this goal. As noted, a participatory and transformative approach seeks to create an intervention context in which participants take an active role in the intervention process and the interventionist (facilitator, teacher, etc.) works with the participant to identify ways for promoting optimal positive development, i.e., ways that open up possibilities for participants to realize their fullest potential.

In CLP, the learning process is participatory. In the process of identifying effective methods for overcoming obstacles and challenge to the realization of their potential *and* engaging in transformative activities to bring about change, participants become empowered as they experience the possibility of creating and constructing positive directions for development. In CLP, participants not only talk about their problems; they *do* something about them and the group exercises provide a context in which this can happen. The aim is to use the context of mastery experiences as a means for the youth to become empowered to identify change and transformative goals to foster life course change.

The LCJ exercises are basically designed to be integrated into the participatory co-learning phase, in which participants identify and carry out youth-selected and youth-directed transformative projects. We have also found, however, that it is generally helpful to move to the participatory co-learning phase as early as possible in the intervention. Consequently, it has proved helpful to implement the first exercise as *part of the engagement phase*. The first exercise addresses issues of life history experiences and counseling/life change goals, and have proved to be useful “ice breakers” as well as exercises that get participants involved and invested in concept of life change in the first few sessions. The other three exercises are more involved and involving, and are typically conducted over multiple sessions. However, the timing of the use of these exercises (indeed, all of the exercise) may be adapted to the flow of each particular counseling setting.

The second exercise is emotion focused and intended to help participants get in touch with and identify the types of activities and experiences that tap into their best potentials. It includes identifying most important life goals, essential activities for fulfilling those goals, and evaluating whether such activities are capable of eliciting a state of “flow.” The third exercise pushes the envelope further along by focusing on life “change” goals. This exercise moves into the youth-selected and youth-directed phase of the intervention strategies. We typically begin with the customary practice of having participants identify group goals (i.e., what do you want to get out of the group session). Using that as a starting point, the first exercise moves them into an exploration of their life course history, and its events and turning points. This is intended to set the stage for moving into change goals at a broader level, i.e., life change goals. Life change goals, in contrast to group or counseling goals, involve identifying what a participant needs or wants to change about her/his life in order to achieve their life goals, i.e., “If you had the power to change anything you wanted about your life, what would be the most important thing you would want to change?” From a psychosocial developmental life course perspective, this is the most important target for intervention change. The fourth exercise is cognitive focused and intended to help participants develop the type of problem posing and problem solving skill and attitudes need to get the self-directed component to their life course on a path toward the fulfillment of their best potentials.

The intervention exercises, which are both emotion focused and cognitive focused, are useful in transforming the CLP participants into empowered agents of life course change, in control of (and responsible for) their lives. The participatory co-learning (and the exercises that facilitate this process) and the transformative activities help to lay the foundations for facilitating youth empowerment. The participatory co-learning experiences provide participants with useful tools for helping them to understand (and change) themselves. In addition, they also help in identifying counseling change goals and transformative life goals. Consequently, in implementing the CLP the facilitator has an important role to play in guiding the direction of the participatory co-learning experiences, the youth-identified transformative goals, and the youth-directed transformative activities – that of helping to focus the participant in engaging in youth-directed transformations that provide them with the opportunity to transform their lives for the better by transforming themselves into agents of change.

In implementing the CLP it is important that the facilitator be always aware that each of the CLP’s intervention domains (setting change goal, emotion focused validation, cognitive focused critical problem posing and problem solving) may receive differing emphasis at differing times (depending on the salience

of that objective to that particular point in the process) and that none are exclusive to any particular time. The facilitator should continually look for ways of sharing skills and knowledge, attitudes and orientation, and understanding and insight with the participants. This means using the CLP's basic intervention strategies as the opportunities present themselves in the sessions. In addition, the facilitator is also always alert to the task of guiding the evolution of the participants understanding of these concepts and how they can be applied to their problems. That is, for the CLP to work it is important for the facilitator to understand that the intervention strategies need to be interwoven and layered throughout the intervention and that they should use every opportunity to fulfill the CLP objectives at the point they are most relevant.

## (1) Engagement

The CLP is implemented in either an individual or a group format. In both formats, establishing a working supportive relationship--between the counselor and the individual in the individual format or the counselor, individual members of the group, and among group members -- is always the initial phase of the intervention activities. This means that the initial phase of the intervention involves dedicating as much time as needed to the establishment of rapport in individual counseling and the development of group cohesion in the group format. Because the CLP model of counseling focuses on group work as a way of maximizing the efficient way of limited counseling resources, the flow of the CLP will be illustrated in this section using a group format and group processes. The flow of the CLP in individual counseling, however, follows a parallel process.

Genuine cohesiveness is not an automatic condition of getting together as a group, but rather an ongoing process arrived at through building connections between people. This shared sense of cohesion facilitates structuring the implementation of the intervention to fit the specific participants in each group.

Phase	Objective	Strategy
Engagement	Group cohesion	Cohesion-building activities
Participatory Co-Learning	Facilitator-participant rapport	Joining/establishing therapeutic alliance
	Identity Exploration	Exploration of alternatives (critical problem posing)
Participatory Co-Learning	Self Construction	Acceptance of responsibility, identify change goals, challenges, obstacles
		Exploration for insight (emotion-focused problem posing)
Participatory Co-Learning	Identity Diffusion	Envisioning future selves; Identifying transformative life goals
		Subjective distress accompanied by inability to choose among alternatives
Transformative Activities	Personal empowerment Proactive participation in self- and community development	Problem posing (identify right problem not a solution for the wrong problem)
		Youth-directed transformative activities (aimed at self, school, or community)

As the implementation of the intervention proceeds, the focus shifts from establishing group cohesion to the task of helping the youth to transform themselves through participatory co-learning experiences and the youth-directed transformative activities.

## (2) Participatory Co-learning Experiences

The participatory co-learning experiences helps to set the stage for engaging in transformative activities. The practical implication of drawing on Freire's approach, at least with respect to working with the marginalized youth that the CLP targets, is that in the group participants take an active role and the facilitator works in cooperation with them as part of the process of collaboratively exploring the participant's life goals by creatively identifying and co-constructing alternatives for taking charge of and changing their lives in ways that move them in directions the participants want them to move. The CLP, as noted, considers engaging in mastery experiences to be a key change producing ingredient. In the process of intentionally engaging in critically posing problems and in following through by engaging in transformative activities to solve problems, challenges, and obstacles to achieving life goals, participants come to identify issues and problems that are personally meaningful to them (i.e., life challenges, life goals, and possible future selves) and that they want to do something about.

The concepts of setting change goal, emotion focused validation of those, and cognitive focused critical problem posing and problem solving provide conceptual links to the emancipatory potential of

Freire's transformative pedagogy. More specifically, it highlights the need to focus on the problems and choices that young people encounter as a means for both understanding and transforming their lives and their communities (Freire, 1970; Kurtines, et al., 2008; Wells, 1990). In the intervention, participants have the opportunity to critically pose problems and engage in transformative activities to solve these problems. Through participatory co-learning activities young people can investigate, question, and challenge the grounds and implications of not playing an active role in their lives (e.g., not accepting responsibility or control for life choices) versus proactively participating in life (e.g., accepting control over one's life and responsibility for one's life choices). This process involves the mutual sharing of knowledge and the reciprocal co-learning that takes place during the participatory co-learning phase and is implemented by LCJ exercises that focus on setting change goal, emotion focused validation, cognitive focused critical problem posing and problem solving. The two main processes by which this goal is accomplished are through *exploration* and *problem posing*.

## Exploration

The CLP uses the counseling session as a starting point from which the participants can use *exploration of alternatives and exploration for insight*. The use of both types of exploration is intended to facilitate the identification of the problems that eventually become the goals for the youth-directed transformative activities. The sessions provide a context in which participants explore life challenges, life goals, and possible future selves. In group counseling, as the group becomes more cohesive and inclusive, the group also provides a context for the members to challenge one another to think critically about the problems, challenges, and issues they face. In individual counseling, the facilitator plays the same role.

As part of the participatory co-learning process, the participants explore life challenges and life goals, gather and share information, generate and critically evaluate alternatives. We have found that the use of LCJ exercises facilitates this process, particularly when participants are encouraged to assume a genuinely active and participatory role.

The use of exploration of alternatives and exploration for insight as intervention strategies in the CLP is rooted in what has been termed the construction and discovery approaches to promoting positive identity development (Schwartz, 2002). Both approaches to facilitating identity formation include efforts to conceptualize and operationalize domain appropriate components of the exploration process. The self-constructive approach has its roots in Kelly's (1955) person-as-scientist viewpoint, where, through information seeking and critical problem solving, individuals are seen as formulating and testing hypotheses about the world around them (Berzonsky, 1999;). From the perspective of the self-constructive approach, effective exploration processes include both social-cognitive style and problem solving competence (Berman et al., 2001). *Style* refers to the individual's orientation toward exploration, closure, or avoidance (Berzonsky, 1989). *Competence* refers to the individual's ability to generate potential alternatives, to evaluate each alternative without bias, and to select the best supported alternatives (Berman et al., 2001). From a self-constructive perspective, intervening to promote positive identity development involves the use of intervention strategies to facilitate the effective use of both cognitive style and competence in identity exploration.

The self-discovery approach, on the other hand, is rooted in Maslow's (1968) theory of self-actualization and in Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) concept of flow. From the perspective of the self-discovery approach, effective exploration processes includes three levels of affective processing, with each higher level incorporating and integrating the previous one. In order of increasing integration, the three process levels are flow, personal expressiveness, and self-actualization (Schwartz, 2001; Waterman, 1990). The experience of *flow* is the outcome of a balance between the challenges posed by an activity or goal and the skills that one brings to it (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996), and results in a distorted sense of time and intense interest and involvement in the activity or pursuit of the goal. Feelings of *personal expressiveness* result from the incorporation of flow-producing activities, goals, and ideals into one's sense of identity (Waterman, 1992), and results in the feeling that this activity or goal represents what one was meant to do. *Self-actualization* results in a sense of identity that is entirely congruent with the true self, such that the person no longer needs to participate in specific activities to tap into his/her unique potentials. From a self-discovery perspective, then, intervening to promote positive identity development involves the use of intervention strategies to facilitate the use of three levels of affective processing in identity exploration.

Moreover, in addition to providing rationale for what needs to be targeted, these two approaches offer two potential types of intervention strategies to facilitate the process of exploration (a) a cognitively based, *self-constructive approach* whereby individuals are encouraged to use cognitively based problem solving strategies to sort through externally presented options and select the best alternative; and (b) an affectively based, *self discovery approach* whereby individuals are encouraged to use to gain "insight" into their "unique potentials" and to formulate life goals that correspond to those potentials.

As described next, we have found both approaches to proactive exploration to be useful intervention strategies for facilitating each participant's identification of issues and problems that are personally meaningful and significant to them (e.g., life challenges, life goals, etc.).

### Exploration of Alternatives

The facilitator uses appropriate spontaneous opportunities (e.g., discussion or disclosure of a participant's life choice, goal or challenge) to foster the use of exploration of alternatives via the type of critical skills discussed above. These critical skills are viewed as including information seeking as well as critical problem solving and decision-making. Because information seeking is a style or orientation toward to problem solving, we have found it useful to cover information seeking orientation before critical skills in the sequence of concepts. The CLP also broadens previous conceptions of problem solving (i.e., generating alternatives) to include a critical evaluative component. Finally, this approach also extends the construct of critical thinking by contextualizing the use of critical skills within the problems and choices of individuals' lives (Freire, 1970; Kurtines, et al., 1995). Wells (1990) has stated that the most efficacious interventions with at-risk high school students have components that include the "...use of 'real life' examples" (p. 23).

In addition, the facilitator also uses the structured exercises from the LCJ to promote participatory critical problem posing and problem solving activities with respect to life choices, goals or challenges and transformative activities. For our work, this includes four related processes: 1) creativity, 2) suspension of judgment, 3) critical evaluation, and 4) taking action. The process of creativity involves identifying or generating alternatives for solving a problem. The process of suspension of judgment involves viewing all the possible alternatives related to a particular problem objectively (i.e., including alternatives that the individual disagrees with). The process of critical evaluation involves activities such as questioning and challenging the utility and validity of all of the available alternatives and selecting an alternative. Taking action (transformative activities) includes doing what is necessary to solve the problem. These processes are operationalized as involving activities that the individual participates in and each activity is considered an important part of critical problem solving and decision-making. The LCJ incorporates opportunities to learn and apply critical problem solving and decision-making through its exercises.

Facilitative strategies (i.e., strategies that facilitate the implementation of the intervention strategy) are used as appropriate. For exploration of alternatives, facilitative strategies that we have found useful include: *sharing experiences, role-playing, and positive feedback*.

*Sharing Experiences.* In group counseling, the continuing and ongoing interactions among the group members contribute to the experience of group cohesion and trust. Consequently, members of the group begin to feel more comfortable sharing experiences related to their own choices. The process of sharing experiences primarily facilitates exploration of alternatives. When one member discusses his or her past experiences as part of the group exercises, the sharing of these experiences serves to broaden the range of types of experiences and alternatives to which the members of the other relationships are exposed. The diversity of types of experiences that emerge in the context of group discussion thus exposes the group members to a broader and more diverse array of alternatives as they explore their own life choices.

*Role Playing.* Role playing (e.g., switching roles, Gestalt empty chair exercises, etc.) is used to facilitate perspective taking. Role playing is used to gain greater understanding of the implication of choosing specific life goals and future possible selves from the perspective of other people. In role play, the focus is on the person's understanding of the nature and degree of the other person's involvement in the life choice.

*Positive Feedback.* Positive feedback serves primarily to facilitate skills training with respect problem posing and problem solving. With regard to facilitating skills training, when a member of the group observes another group member successfully using one of the critical skills (e.g., critically examining a life

choice, life goal, possible self) it provides the opportunity for positive modeling to occur. The successful use of the skill, in turn, provides the opportunity for peer reinforcement from the other members of the group and from the facilitator. The group can also provide corrective or instructive peer and facilitator feedback, e.g., as when an individual shares with the others in the group his/her concern about a particular aspect of his/her life choice, goal or challenge that is “out of touch.” The group also facilitates social comparison processes, i.e., the presence of others in the group facilitates the youth’s evaluation of his/her decisions and actions relative to consensual standards of appropriate behavior. For example, hearing about how other individuals have handled issues involving different life choices, challenges, and goals contributes to the individual’s understanding of how to handle his/her own life issues.

### Exploration for Insight

The facilitator uses appropriate unplanned or spontaneous opportunities (e.g., participant’s disclosure of a personal issue) to foster the use of exploration for insight as a means for facilitating the identification and fulfillment of participants’ unique talents, competencies, abilities, and potentials as well as identifying the means for live up to or fulfilling those potentials.

In addition, the facilitator also uses LCJ exercises to promote participatory exploration with respect to personal life goals and the realization of one’s personal potentials in achieving those goals. We operationalize these goals as ‘personal strivings’ (Emmons, 1989), or everyday life goals. These personal strivings are those life goals that, when reached, lead to increased self-worth and feelings that one is doing what one was meant to do (Emmons, 1989; Waterman, 1999). Exploration for insight as an intervention strategy, consequently, focuses on processes that are affective in orientation, with a primary emphasis on looking inward. Participants are asked to discuss their feelings about their personal strivings and the consistencies and inconsistencies that exist between their ‘true selves’ and the personal strivings that they bring to the group. The goal is to provide participants the opportunity to learn to understand and monitor their own feelings, to operationalize these wants and needs in the form of personal strivings, and to increase the degree to which those personal strivings are reflective of who and what the participants believed themselves to be. In this way, exploration for insight is used to facilitate participant movement along the path to self-actualization.

Additionally, dialogue and exercises concerning feelings about personal strivings and their component activities are also used to facilitate constructive changes in the strivings themselves. Such changes are most apt to occur when a participant’s feelings about a striving are negative in nature (e.g., “sad,” “angry,” “depressed,” et cetera), but even in cases where individuals are satisfied with their strivings, the possibility of coming up with something even better might lead to change. Sometimes personal expressiveness and flow can be increased not only by becoming happier with one’s current goals but by replacing those goals with others that have more potential to be personally expressive.

For exploration for insight, facilitative strategies that we have found useful include: *disclosure, interpretation, and positive feedback.*

*Disclosure.* Disclosure is used to facilitate interpretation and group discussion. In exploration for insight, the focus is on facilitating the expression of each participant’s feeling about his or her goals and strivings. In addition, disclosures serve as models for the other group members both for future disclosures and for the responses and interpretations offered in response to those disclosures.

*Interpretation.* Interpretation is the process of assigning probable reasons or motives for a participant’s disclosures or behaviors. Interpretation is an important element in exploration for insight because the feedback provided leads the participant to whom it is directed to explore its potential truth. It also contributes to the building and maintenance of group cohesion.

*Positive Feedback.* Positive feedback serves the same function in exploration for insight that it does in exploration of alternatives.

## **Problem Posing**

Sharing life challenges, life goals, and possible future selves in the exercises also provide an opportunity to engage in *problem posing* as a means for identifying for themselves an issue or problem in themselves (or their school or community) that they want to do something about, i.e., change goals.

Although problem *solving* is widely recognized as a useful skill, Freire draws on the tradition of critical theory and stresses the importance of identifying *what is a problem* (i.e., “problem posing” in contrast to “problem solving”). In stressing *problem posing* as the foundation for transformative activities, he recognized the crucial need to examine critically our understanding of what is a problem if problem solving transformative activities are to be effective. That is, he recognized that it is important to solve the problem that will produce the results we want (i.e., the “right” problem) and to not be deflected or distracted by solving the wrong problem or problems. As long as impoverished peasants focus their energy and activities on the inadequacy of and reform to the welfare system that is supposed to support them in their poverty, for example, they remain oblivious to the fact of their economic marginalization (in the service of other interests) and its role in creating the poverty that makes the welfare system necessary. In such a case, is the problem the welfare system or their economic marginalization? Would reforming the welfare system (assuming that this problem could even be solved), solve the problem of the poverty that is created by their economic marginalization? Does channeling the peasants’ activities toward solving problems that need not (or perhaps cannot) be solved distract them from solving the real problem? Does this distraction serve other interests? “Problem solving” skills, consequently, are not sufficient for successful transformative activities. Critical “problem posing” is also crucial because it is foundational for effective problem solving.

As we use them in the CLP, the processes of exploration and problem posing work hand-in-hand. Exploration processes, particularly exercises that address life choices and challenges and life goals that have meaning and significance to group members either individually or as a group, have the potential for becoming the target of youth-directed transformative activities. These problem-posing activities help to set the stage for the next phase of the program, engaging in youth-directed transformative activities.

As noted, in the CLP each participant is encouraged to assume a genuinely active and participatory role in the co-learning process. In this case, each participant shares with other members of the group issues and problems that are personally meaningful to them (i.e., life challenges, life goals, and possible future selves) for the group’s consideration. When introducing the concept of problem posing, we find it helpful to focus on problems that are personally meaningful for either the group or members of the group. We do not have “teacher-directed” activities that all participants are expected to engage in. Because the problem posing is done as part of a school-counseling program, we also find it useful to focus on problems and issues that are relevant to educational and local community settings. More specifically, we have found it useful to suggest that members of the group focus on issues or problems involving:

- themselves personally (e.g., the life challenges they face, their own personal life goals, their potential or possible future selves, etc.)
- their school (e.g., as students, as graduates, etc.)
- their community in the broadest sense (e.g., neighborhood, city, nation)

We find that many participants experience the process of problem posing as extremely useful. It not only provides a context for each participant to identify an issue(s) or problem(s) that are personally meaningful, but also to do something about those issues or problems. Although the focus of the program is on issues each participant brings into the group (e.g., the life challenges they face, their life goals, possible future selves, etc.), groups also sometimes identify issues and problems as a group. Both have the potential to carry over to the transformative activities phase of the program (and beyond) in ways that produce results. Consequently, each individual participant is provided the opportunity to move in the direction of identifying an issue or problem (life challenge, life goal, possible future self, etc.) that they want to do something about. Groups that choose to identify group issues or activities are also provided the opportunity to move in the direction of doing something about them. Each participant’s transformative activity (i.e., what they want to do about their most significant life challenge, life goal, etc.) provides their own personal transformative activity. The group’s transformative activity (if the group chooses to identify one) similarly provides the group’s personal transformative activity.

This type of participatory co-learning and problem posing, in which participants play an active role, helps participants learn how to “suspend” judgment and adopt multiple perspectives. Problem posing also

helps to foster in them the use of critical problem solving and decision making skills. They learn to think creatively about issues and problems and to identify and generate alternatives for solving problems and to critically evaluate alternatives. They learn, in other words, to take a proactive stance and accept responsibility for their decisions and actions.

In nurturing a proactive, critical, and reflective perspective in our participants—of their own lives, their school, and their own communities, in addition to providing a context for the development of critical understanding, skills and knowledge, and awareness, insight, and understanding, participatory co-learning processes thus also provide the foundation for the next phase of the intervention, namely, the youth-directed transformative activities. Through these self-directed transformative activities and the success of these activities in real life problems, participants become empowered and develop a sense of control of (and responsibility for) the choices and decisions they make.

### **(3) Transformative Activities**

The third phase of the CLP involves the participants' engagement in transformative activities. We look to these transformative activities to help us to meet the challenge of developing in the participant a greater critical understanding, of transforming their sense of control and responsibility, and of increase their proactive participation in defining who they are and what they believe in. That is, we seek to engage our participants in more than “learning” processes but also in processes with the potential to transform themselves and the communities in which they live. In this phase of the CLP, *participants do more than talk about problems; they do something about them.*

As noted, we begin the process of identifying change goals early in the program. The goal is to get the participants prepared for change at all levels (thinking, feeling, doing) by starting with counseling change goals and, through the dialectical use of the goals or targets for transformative activities are chosen by the participants themselves during the “problem-posing” phase of the participatory co-learning experiences. Participants choose to intervene in ways that are personally most meaningful to them, as individuals and/or as a group. As individuals, each participant identifies a life challenge, life goal, or possible future self that they want to do something about, identifies alternatives, and then takes responsibility for doing something about the problem – taking action to change things. These youth-directed endeavors provide mastery-building experiences in making meaningful change.

Transformative activities are thus youth-directed (as opposed to “teacher directed”) in that participants who make the choice of the problems to be solved, and *they are the ones who carry out* the transformative activities. The group provides a supportive context for participants who tackle the problems that have an impact on their lives, their school, or the life of their community.

Engaging participants in successful self-initiated transformative activities has as its primary long-term goal the empowerment and reinvestment, particularly for the highly marginalized. For all participants, however, transformative activities strengthen a sense of personal responsibility. Because of these experiences, participants gain an increased sense mastery over their lives. For individuals who come from backgrounds that have limited access to social, political, or economic power, the experience of gaining influence is particularly important. It is both the increased critical understanding and transformed sense of commitment and responsibility that enable participants to go forth to address issues that impact their lives after they have finished the CLP.

As depicted in Table 3, the interweaving and layering the CLP intervention strategies and objectives involves three phases: (1) *Engagement*, (2) *Participatory Co-learning*, and (3) *Transformative Activities*. The engagement phase (1) and the participatory co-learning experiences (2) provide the foundation for the youth-directed transformative activities (3). The phases are designed to be flexible and open to being adapted to diverse populations and problems, goals, and institutional and cultural settings. The duration of the program and sequence of the phases can be adapted to educational and other institutional settings. In addition, as discussed below, the program can be adapted for the degree and intensity of activity directed toward individual versus social or institutional change.