

El Joven Noble Rites of Passage

Character Development Program

Jerry Tello, M.A.

El Joven Noble Rites of Passage, Character Development Program, is a youth-development, support, and leadership-enhancement program that provides a process, and a vehicle, for the continued “rites of passage” development of youth, ages 10-24. It recognizes that youth need other men/women, their family, and community to care for, assist, heal, guide, and successfully prepare them for true manhood/womanhood.

The program incorporates an approach and curriculum that are based on the philosophy of La Cultura Cura, or Transformational Healing and Development. Consistent with this is the belief that rooted in every culture, there are protective teachings, traditions and expectations that can assist young men/women across their “rites of passage” bridge. At its base, the Joven Noble Program incorporates the indigenous, culturally-rooted concept of “El Joven Noble” or the Noble Young Man/Woman and the value of developing and maintaining one’s sense of “Palabra” (Credible Word). In addition, it is believed that in order for youth to be able to develop in this way, they must have positive living examples in their lives as guides, teachers, counselors, elders, and supporters. With this in mind, it is the eventual goal of the program to employ and/or incorporate young men and women from the community who have gone through the teachings and have been mentored and trained to deliver direct presentations. More importantly, it is essential that adult men (Compadres), and adult women (Comadres) serve as guides, teachers and examples in the program to reflect appropriate manhood /womanhood development. The overall program incorporates a four-phase developmental process, specialized segments (Fire and Water: Violence and Substance Abuse) to address specific areas of need, as well as a parent/family component (Cara y Corazon: Face and Heart) that assists parents in reinforcing the teachings, as they heal and grow alongside their youth.

Each participant is guided progressively through the phases, providing additional teachings with more responsibility. The four-phase process includes:

Phase I	Life Skills Development (Jovenes Con Palabra 10-Session Format)	Turtle Circle
Phase II	Cultural Identity Development	Coyote Circle
Phase III	Circle of Health and Life Character Development	Jaguar Circle
Phase IV	Leadership/Community Service Development	Hawk Circle

Finally, an integral component of the program is the development of “Circulos de Palabra” (Circles of Support), that serve to provide a support and reinforcement process for ongoing healing, growth and development for the young men/women. Ultimately, the entire program attempts to recreate a positive familia/community, or extended kinship network, that will allow our youth to develop to their fullest potential.

Curriculum Theoretical Framework

El Joven Noble (The Noble Young Man/Woman) is a Rites of Passage Process based on the indigenous, culturally- rooted concept of El Hombre/Mujer Noble (The Noble Man/Woman) and the value of developing and maintaining ones sense of “Palabra” (credible word).

El Joven Noble is divided into four stages of development, Conocimiento (Acknowledgement), Entendimiento (Understanding), Integración (Integration), and Movimiento (Movement); and is designed to include the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects of each as a basis for direction. Each stage uses a mixture of activities and teaching experiences relating to a young man’s/woman’s self, family, and community.

Curriculum Research

The following are the protective factors that this program is intended to enhance:

- ✓ Community Domain: Community rewards for pro-social involvement
- ✓ Family Domain: Family opportunities and rewards for pro-social involvement
- ✓ School Domain: School opportunities and rewards for pro-social involvement
- ✓ Peer & Individual Domain: Character development, social skills and belief in the moral order

Theoretical Formulation

El Joven Noble is divided into four, core teachings of development to include: Conocimiento (Acknowledgement), Entendimiento (Understanding), Integración (Integration), and Movimiento (Movement). These four, core teachings directly target four parallel risk areas that contribute to self-destructive behavior of Chicano/Latino youth and other at-risk youth. It is designed to include the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual aspects of each as a basis for direction. Each stage uses a mixture of activities and teaching experiences relating to a young person’s self, family, and community, while focusing on four core teachings.

1. Conocimiento: Acknowledgement and Positive Cultural Identity Development

Chicano/Latino youth live in a world where they have to balance two cultures and many times come from families who have experienced generations of racism, discrimination and oppression (social/cultural detachment). Through these oppressive processes, many youth have internalized a negative (false) concept of who they are culturally, and essentially have learned to “detach” (attachment disorder) from their connection to themselves, their families, their relationships and their own behaviors.

El Joven Noble focuses on a relationship based process of *Acknowledging* them from an indigenous, cultural perspective, while reinforcing the true essence of who they are and *reconnecting* them to their true potential as Jovenes Nobles.

2. Entendimiento: Understanding of Their Sacred Purpose

In the indigenous beliefs of all traditional cultures, every child is a blessing and has a “Sacred Purpose”. However, through living in an oppressive society, many Chicano/Latino youth have come to believe they are high risk, delinquent prone, and a burden to their families and society. After generations of thinking this way, many youth have developed internalized oppressive thought patterns and behaviors, causing them difficulty keeping focused, masked by pushing others away (attention deficit, aggressive/reactive behavior). A basic premise of healing, growth and development is the ability of the individual to have a vision of their true Sacred Purpose. If a person only has a negative view of himself, his history and his culture, then he has no avenue for growth and development. He/She must understand the history that has led to the creation of his present situation. In this process (narrative reprocessing) and with the proper guidance, he/she will be able to separate pain and dysfunction from the true essence and teachings that can lead him/her to manifest his/her “Sacred Purpose”.

3. Integracion: Integrating Bilingual/Bicultural Values

Due to the multitude of economic, social, and family stressors, many youth live their lives based on survival; getting by, getting over and not getting caught. The clash between the values of the families and that of society often leave youth in the middle, feeling stuck, not learning, not growing (depression) and not motivated to do anything else. On the other hand, positive values, a love for life and a circle of support (circulo de hombres/mujeres) are the basis for learning, healing, growing and leading others. As times change, people must learn “new ways” (based on ancient teachings), to be able to analyze and process the changing world’s demands, without losing a sense of their culture and ethnic connection. Living with a sense of Spirit (spirituality) and ganas (internal strength) allows one to better deal with difficult and overwhelming pressures with a sense of greater hope and vision.

4. Movimiento: Safety, Security and Interconnected Trust

Fear is one of the greatest obstacles many youth face today. Living in dangerous neighborhoods, where gangs, drug use and violence is prevalent, creates ongoing insecurity and anxiety (anxiety disorders, post traumatic stress) that many times spills into their relationships as well. Young people need continual adult mentorship and a place to go (circulos) to release burdensome issues in an environment where supportive adults can teach them positive life skills and assist them in navigating their “rites of passage” into manhood/womanhood.

Finally, these youth must understand the significant role they play in protecting, guiding and leading the next generation, so that they may one day become future Joven Noble facilitators.