Dear Colleagues and Friends:

On June 4th we again gathered at Henderson House just outside of Boston to continue our ongoing conversation about CLTL. As always, the day was bright and meaningful as we explored the depth of our new website - generously supported by the National Endowment for the Humanities - listened with care to the inspirational panel discussion about three remarkable CLTL juvenile programs, considered carefully the wonderful words of Earl Shorris, and completed the afternoon with our ritual “go-round.” It was a day to remember.

Tam Neville has again given us, in this newsletter, the highlights of that day. We appreciate her hard work and ongoing commitment to CLTL. This newsletter, together with the 100 or so photos taken that day, will now become part of our history, further expanding our website for the world to consider.

Despite limited funding, CLTL has done remarkably well this year. Jean MacCormack, the UMass Dartmouth Chancellor, and the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities provided support to help run 18 programs in the Commonwealth. Our programs in Kansas, Texas, Arizona, Connecticut, New York, Rhode Island, Maine, and the United Kingdom continue with success. I am also confident that our new website, now live, will boost our presence throughout the country.

CLTL was also the proud recipient this year of a prestigious award from the New England Board of Higher Education - another important mark of our collective achievement. Massachusetts Representative John Quinn and Senator Mark Montigny have worked very hard to get CLTL back in the state budget for the upcoming cycle.

We are now headed into our 14th year. Thousands of people have benefited from this incredible experiment testing the value of literature and conversation. CLTL stands as a noteworthy example of democracy forged from a deep understanding of the meaning of education and community justice. Collectively we have made a difference.

Thanks especially to: Beth Lehr for her tireless work throughout the year; Marc Lalosh, Don King, Sparsh Parimoo, and other members of the web team, who were responsible for the technical development of our NEH website; and to the principals of this NEH project - Jean Trounstine, Taylor Stoehr, and Larry Jablecki. Congratulations as well to the 40 or so facilitators, probation officers, judges, and students who contributed in so many ways to this important effort, making this another magical year.

Please keep the vision alive and keep reading,

Bob Waxler
On June 1, 2003, members of the CLTL community began to create a new and comprehensive website. Although some work remains to be completed, the June 4th presentation was a culmination of that year-long effort, a chance to show the general CLTL membership the final results. Now we are nearing the end, special attention belongs to the four principal authors of the website: Jean Trounstine, Taylor Stoehr, Larry Jablecki, and Bob Waxler. Our special thanks goes to all the writers: facilitators, probation officers, judges, students, and friends of the program, 40 plus in number, who offered us their expertise, insight, and experience via essays, forms, lesson plans, teaching methods, testimony, and many other types of contributions. This site would have been meager without their input.

Beth Lehr and Marc Lalosh were the primary movers behind setting up the website itself. They were helped by Don King, UMass/Dartmouth Webmaster; at least three undergraduate and two graduate students; additional UMD technical staff; and many many writers. Credit also goes to Harry Bernard for creating the new CLTL logo.

June 4, 2004: Henderson House

On June 4th, we gathered at Henderson House to introduce the new CLTL website to participants and supporters, to hear from new and ongoing juvenile programs, and to renew our commitment to CLTL. The day opened as Bob Waxler, Co-founder of the original CLTL program, gave a quick overview of the past year.

Opening Remarks >>

Co-Founder Bob Waxler opened with praise for the new NEH website, saying it shows the scope and depth of the twelve-year history of the Changing Lives program. It is comprehensive and inclusive, filled with wonderful essays, lesson plans, photos, and videos. Waxler opined that the website, funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, should give the CLTL program a substantial boost in its efforts to expand throughout the country and the world.

Waxler also pointed out that the day’s Panel of Juvenile Programs would add a new dimension to CLTL conferences. As a result of the panel and the panelists hard work, we will be developing a Juvenile component on the website, an important new dimension for CLTL. Facilitators and POs have come from as far away as Kansas to participate in this panel.

Waxler also reported good news: CLTL has $100,000 in the House budget for next year, thanks primarily to Representative John Quinn and the Southcoast Delegation. CLTL is also in the Senate budget, thanks primarily to the ongoing commitment and energy of Senator Mark Montigny.

Although we received no funding from the Massachusetts Legislature this year, we ran 18 programs in Massachusetts. The Chancellor at UMass Dartmouth, Jean MacCormack, provided some funding, and CLTL received a small grant from the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities.

Waxler also acknowledged the ongoing work being done in Rhode Island to start a statewide program there. Following his remarks, the web presentation began.

Bob’s remarks were followed by a presentation of the website by Beth Lehr and Marc Lalosh, a Juvenile Program Panel, moderated by Judge Joseph Reardon, speaker Earl Shorris, Founder of the Clemente Program, and a Go-Round, which was an opportunity to catch up on the innovations occurring in CLTL programs, as well as new solutions to old problems.
Presenting the Website >> Beth Lehr began by giving us the history of the website, which began last year when CLTL received a grant of $180,000 from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The CLTL program, which has grown to have a national and international presence, has been carefully reconstructed and strengthened as the website grew over the past year. This major effort, with its dozens of contributors in various capacities, will culminate with a public relations campaign aimed at spreading the word. The site’s audiences, current participants, potential participants, and the merely curious, will all find a welcoming presentation of our history and background, as well as lots of practical help and the sharing of ideas.

Beth began with navigation tips and then Marc and Beth took the group on a tour of the web site. Major categories include:

About CLTL: This section includes the History and Philosophy of the program along with the various approaches to CLTL roles by participants.

Programs: Start a Program, lengthy descriptions of Four Model Programs, or individual program Homepages can be viewed. Results & Evaluations provide information on CLTL's effect.

Key Issues: General topics for essays that appear under this heading include: Changing Lives, In the Classroom, Gender Issues, Sentencing, and Literacy. An entry of note is an article by Megan Barrett entitled “Good Books Save Lives.” Megan Barrett is the CLTL connection at the Library of America. She and LOA make it possible for our students to receive free graduation books.

Resources: Instructional Materials includes sample syllabi, lists of texts, lesson plans, and teaching strategies. Court Forms and Methods includes ideas donated by Probation Officers on how to organize the paperwork and the classes, bibliographies, outside links, and a video archive.

Outreach: An Announcements page will broadcast news from this section. An electronic Press Kit, a set of Newsletters, and a page that includes links to several articles about CLTL are found here.

Site Resources: The site also has a Discussion Forum linked on the left side of the CLTL Homepage. Marc explained how, with the use of a password, users can sign in, enter into discussions, and ask or answer questions such as “Which story works best in your CLTL class?”

Panel of Juvenile CLTL Programs

Interest and participation in Juvenile CLTL Programs is growing across the country. While aspects of the philosophy of these programs are, by necessity, geared towards youth rather than adults, the fundamentals of CLTL remain the same. On June 4th, we asked three groups already in existence to teach us about running a juvenile program. The panel was moderated by the Honorable Joseph J. Reardon, First Justice of the Barnstable District Court. He was joined by panel members from Johnson County, Kansas and Dorchester and New Bedford, Massachusetts.

Judge Joseph Reardon introduced the panel and began with some remarks about the nature of working with juveniles and how CLTL staff working with adult populations can learn a lot from the adjustments made for youth. (Go to our web site to view his words: cltl.umassd.edu: click on Programs/Other Programs/Juvenile.)

Kansas >>

Kathy McLellan, Youth Outreach Librarian, Johnson County
Marlys Shulda, PO, Johnson County Corrections
Tricia Suellentrop, Teen Services Librarian, Johnson County

The library’s involvement with CLTL began six years ago when a judge in Johnson County sentenced teen probationers to read a classic. This was a time when juvenile justice reforms were just
In 1999, the Johnson County Department of Corrections started two adult programs, and, with library facilitators, began a juvenile session for teens.

Teenagers are referred to their in-library program by judges or POs. The class meets for two hours each week for seven weeks, reading a different book every time. The facilitators choose books that are not difficult so the group can focus on the issues. Books center on themes that range from domestic violence or community and legal issues to substance abuse. These stories depict teenagers making choices and dealing with consequences. Students are able to keep their books thanks to a local lawyer, who established a fund raising organization called “Back Road Books.”

Kathy McClellan went on to say, “We pick books that will capture students’ interest, and we make the discussions personal, talking about peer pressure, betrayal, anger and prejudice. Tricia added, “The kids are expecting us to ruin the book for them so we want to make it clear that this is not school and we’re not here to discuss literary quality. We establish trust by assuring them of their confidentiality, by making sure they have a say in things and by respecting their opinions. This is the first time they’ve had a chance to discuss these issues with adults.”

Marlys Shulda concluded, “We have some privileged kids and some who are homeless or working to support the family. It’s remarkable how respectful they are of each other’s opinions.”

New Bedford >>

Honorable Bettina Borders, Justice, New Bedford Juvenile Court
Stella Rebeiro, Juvenile PO of the New Bedford Court

Some time ago, Judge Borders had a conversation with CLTL Co-Founder Judge Robert Kane and they agreed that the goal of juvenile court is rejuvenation, not punishment. Eventually, Judge Borders partnered with Stella Rebeiro and they began a program for teens on probation, which takes place at UMass Dartmouth. At first, the students are overwhelmed by the setting, but soon they try to meet the expectations for behavior on a college campus and can be overheard urging each other to “stop being so ghetto.”

In the beginning, the facilitators sent books home with the students but found that reading was often discouraged at home. Now the students read sections from a young-adult book in class and everyone participates.

Stella Rebeiro, who’s been a PO for twenty-one years, said that this program is one of the most exciting things about her job. She praised Judge Borders, saying: “We are lucky to have an innovative, creative, female judge. Our group is composed of Judge Borders, Susan Major, and myself. In class we’ve had car thieves, truants, child molesters, and white and black students. It’s remarkable what these kids have survived and that they all have respect for each other.”

Dorchester Girls Program >>

Honorable Marjory A.C. German, Justice, Suffolk County Juvenile Court
Barbara Anne Loftus, Juvenile PO, of the Dorchester Court
Idella Carter, Juvenile PO, of the Dorchester Court

In the beginning, they held fast to the rules. The students had to be there every week and they could have no violations or repeat arrests. In exchange for completing the program, students earned six months off their probation period.
The Dorchester Girls group concentrated on writing as well as reading. Judge German said, “We didn’t give them books, but we had them write books. We used poems and essays in class and we expected them to write poems and essays. We gave them disposable cameras so they could take pictures of their world. Each student had a scrapbook she had made. Their work had a lot of depth, sometimes more than they knew.”

In court, Judge German sees as many as 30-40 juveniles a day. Some are homeless, some shoplift because they are hungry, some rob to get drug money. There are probationers who haven’t been to school in two years. These are young people living in desperation, and the program had to deal with their real world. Many of these teenagers have never had a success or received recognition or congratulations from any adult.

PO Idella Carter spoke enthusiastically, especially about the time she spent with her students riding to class in her car. She said “I enjoyed being myself with the kids, riding with them in the car, listening to rap. They were very comfortable with themselves and me. This was a good part of the class.”

Dorchester Boys Program >>

Robert Nagle, Juvenile PO of the Dorchester Court

The group wasn’t able to have a judge present at their sessions, but they had the experienced leadership of Rev. Matt Gibson who has worked several years with the adult CLTL program in Dorchester. Several of these troubled teenaged boys were already part of a youth group that Rev. Gibson was leading at the Ella Baker House, where the CLTL Boys program also met. Despite expected difficulties and several unforeseen crises, the original group of ten students was able to graduate seven, better than the average for juvenile programs according to the panelists. Their studies focused primarily on poetry and stories. They also took a trip to UMass Boston that brought a sparkle to their eyes and a glimmer of hope.

At this point, Judge Reardon stepped in to say, “I’ve noticed a recurring theme: “The need to establish trust and respect, us for them and them for us.” He posed several questions to the panel, beginning with: What changes are necessary when we try to adapt adult CLTL to juvenile CLTL?

“When we discuss things as adults our minds are working pretty fast. Kids need twenty-to-thirty seconds longer before they are ready to answer.”

“We let them know right away this is not school. We invite a graduate back and we leave the room so the students can hear what it’s really like.”

How can we accomplish the transition from the opening state of distrust of and alienation from schooling to a final interest in higher-level education?

“The POs, judges, instructors, and students all talk together about their school experiences.”

“We’ve had kids who hadn’t been to school for a long time, kids who read on a second or third grade level, but we make sure that no one looks down on anyone else.”

“There are anthologies of teen writing. We pick a poem or an essay for them to read on the day’s discussion topic.”

“We read aloud in class and stop if an issue comes up. Some questions that we’ve dealt with are, ‘What does a parent mean morally?’ ‘Should a father be allowed to say, “I don’t want to see her?”‘

How important is literature to a juvenile program? Is it central or is class discussion more important?

“There is a balance. Literature is a vehicle that brings out our own stories.”

“The text is a bond among students.”

“Students start out objectifying through characters and then internalize.”

“Writing is also a tool. Through writing, students realize they can read better than they thought they could.”

On the whole, the panelists formed a lively and enthusiastic group, reflecting the youth and vital energy of the teenagers they work with.
Our invited guest, Earl Shorris, traveled from New York City to speak to us about literature and the difference he believes it can make in people’s lives. The Clemente Program, founded by Earl Shorris, is a college-level course in the humanities for people living in poverty. As we drank our coffee after lunch, Shorris gave us the history of the program. It began with a book he was writing called *New American Blues: A Journey Through Poverty to Democracy*. He told us, “I wanted a book that tells us what can we do for poor people. I went North, South, East, and West. I interviewed 800 families, people of every kind, all of them poor. I got a good idea of what was going on in the country.

“I came to believe the poor live in a “surround of force” (as in a surround of buffalo). Those caught in the middle are easy to kill. This happens in our country very often. Public housing, hunger, helpers (who harm), bad luck, the legal system, guns, drugs, racism, a negative image in the media – all these create a surround of power that makes it impossible for most people to be anything but helpless. In this situation, they tend to hurt each other. I wanted to find he poor could gain power.

Shorris explained about the roots of his program, and later went on to relate this anecdote:

“There was a big violent guy from the class who got into a fight with a woman. Just as he was about to throw her against a wall he stopped and asked himself, ‘What would Socrates do?’ He had become political in the sense that he was more interested in negotiation than force.”

After Shorris finished speaking, a member of the audience wondered aloud whether a humanities program could be just as successful with young people? Shorris mentioned a fifth-grade teacher who had translated Socrates to a fifth-grade level. “If you give a student the newspaper to read and then Socrates, Socrates is so much a better writer that they can understand him better than the newspaper."

“You can always give anyone the best. Blake and Shelley are easy for kids. You can give them a sense of what’s beautiful in this world, and that’s power. Kant says no child is simply a means for something else but each has dignity in themselves. Give them the best there is to offer. Give them Toni Morrison, not Alice Walker. Let them hear the English language with all of its history behind it.”

We ended the day with our traditional Go Round, during which each court or state program offered an update. To focus the mini-presentations, Jean Trounstine asked each group to answer the question, “What do you think constitutes success or failure in your CLTL program?”

“I think we have a success if we can light a fire, if we can get people thinking, if we can get them to feel they have a voice.” (Wayne St. Pierre, New Bedford)

“We had an illiterate student in the [CLTL] class who began by saying, ‘I can’t read.’ I was shocked and asked him, ‘How did you graduate High School?’ He had just been pushed through without being able to read. He could sound out words but didn’t understand what he read. I came in a half hour earlier to tutor him. Now he’s going to take a literacy program.” (Ean Alleyne, Dorchester Men’s Class)

“We had a student who was like a tiger, very eruptive. For the first four weeks he was always starting small side conversations and
distracting the other students. But at a certain point he started to complain about how hard the reading was. And it was clear that he had done the reading and struggled to understand it.” 

(Bert Stern, Dorchester Men’s Class)

“I think the first word of the program's title, “change,” is important when we talk about success. We had a bi-polar suicidal student, who came out of the course with her life together.” 

(Trudy Schrandt, Wrentham)

“We made a mistake - we had someone from the beginning who did not fit in. I think it’s important to really select your students. If you have a bad seed, get him or her out early. This student hampered the success of the others.”

(Gail Weinberg-Kraus, Wrentham)

“Changing Lives Through Literature of RI, Inc. has begun facilitating a program at the State prison. This is a fifteen-week course that meets two nights a week and challenges student participants to analyze literature through the lens of law and non-violence. Student participants who complete the course are given ‘good time’ credit, and those who are released from prison before the fifteen weeks will have the opportunity to continue in an academic setting and will be referred to prison re-entry programs. We are also exploring the possibility of obtaining college credit for all student participants. On June 11, 2004 Judge Kane and Bob Waxler will join me, Rhode Island District Court Judge Frank Cenerini, and representatives from the University of Rhode Island Center for Non-Violence in presenting the program to members of the Rhode Island Bar Association.”

(Patty Fairweather, Rhode Island)

“We have worked with Chief Justice DeRobbio. We’ve made an agreement with the district court to work with CLTL throughout the state. We are starting a program in two weeks and hope by September to have four or five programs running in Rhode Island.”

(Dorothy Donnelly, Rhode Island)

“Failure is not using the wrong book – a book the students don’t like. There’s a whole other life in the room that is sometimes even more interesting when they don’t like the book. Success for me is following the trail and allowing it to occur. One woman has come back, voluntarily, three times. She was almost illiterate the first time and now she likes to read.”

(Jean Trounstine, Lynn-Lowell)

“Success is just finishing the program because it’s difficult for these juvenile probationers. It’s also good to remember that we may never see the success – that we are planting seeds.”

(Tricia Suellentrop, Kansas)

“I’ve worked with teens for twenty years now. The thing that keeps haunting me is that teens today don’t have dreams. They live only in the moment. When we started the group, dreams and hope came. We have to remember to dream for them and not worry so much about failure.”

(Idella Carter, Dorchester Juvenile Girl’s Class)

“When I take off the robe I’m a different person. It’s good for a student to come to understand a judge and know her as a person.”

(Judge German, Dorchester Juvenile Girl’s group).

“I’m tired of people who are so success oriented they won’t donate money unless there is a way to evaluate success. Our program works in the opposite way. Each student has a story and there are many different answers to the question of what constitutes success.”

(Jane Hale, Framingham)

Closing Remarks >>

In closing Bob Waxler spoke about two recent trips: “I just went to England and also to Texas. In Texas I met with very conservative judges. The courts take capital cases there, so the judges have sent people to their death. But they believe in story and literature, and they are deeply committed to our CLTL Program. One of the judges made a very interesting comment about the meaning of “changing lives” while I was there. ‘Though a change may seem small to us, it can often make all the difference in the world,’ the judge pointed out. ‘To a probationer that small change can be profound.’”

Waxler also reported that the program in England was doing very well and that he is confident it would continue to grow.
CLTL IS LIVE!

Visit our new web site at cltl.umassd.edu and let us know what you think!