Changing Lives Through Literature is based on the idea that literature has the power to transform. Although it sounds simple, it’s essentially a reading group that meets over a period of weeks and that is attended by an instructor, probation officer, judge, and students. CLTL has the ability to allow us to make connections with the characters and ideas in a text and to rethink our own behavior.

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

We began our 14th year with a successful training at Henderson House, welcoming over 60 participants from across the state as well as from Rhode Island and Maine. We completed sending out approximately 700 CDs across the country, and finalized our major website at: cltl.umassd.edu. Thanks to the NEH, this will continue to help us grow. We need to fan the flame from our conference and continue to think about ways to measure our success.

We extend special thanks to Tam Neville for her terrific coverage of the conference, most of which is reported in this newsletter, and to Jennifer Aradhya at Middlesex Community College for providing our newsletter layout. We also thank Audrey Pinto for her steadfast efforts on our behalf on the UMass Dartmouth campus.

One of the glories of CLTL is the fact that we have a variety of ways we can approach the program, but we recognize some absolutes. A healthy relationship between the facilitators and the POs is crucial. We would like to give this relationship more thought over the next few months.

One idea that we have come up with is a workshop for POs and facilitators on June 10th, 9am - 2pm at Henderson House. At this training, we hope to get into discussion about such topics as: the various roles in the CLTL classroom; a facilitator’s expectations; the demands of the PO outside the CLTL classroom; and how we talk about the texts. We also plan to work with narratives (possibly short stories and/or a novel) and to look at a few teaching strategies. This gathering at Henderson House should let us explore some of the issues we often cannot get into in our larger training sessions. PLEASE SAVE THE DATE.

Some of what we’ll consider: from a facilitator’s point of view, the ingredients that make for a good PO in the classroom; from a PO’s perspective, what makes a facilitator most able to engage students and promote learning? What expectations do we have of each other and how can we together promote an optimal learning environment?

We are looking forward to a fruitful spring and to seeing CLTL move into a larger role in the national debate about how language and literature can change lives, and in fact, change the chemistry of the brain itself.

You all keep this program running. Keep the vision!

And keep reading,

Jean Trounstine & Bob Waxler
Changing Lives Through Literature

The Morning Panel: How Does It Work?

This panel came about as a result of Taylor Stoehr’s diligent work trying to help us all delve more deeply into the workings of CLTL. The panel was composed of three sociology students from UMass/Boston – Allyson Allen, Shauna Murray, and Megan Reynolds – directed by their professor, Russell Schutt. The group described the results of the Dorchester court CLTL men’s program study, conducted as part of their semester long graduate Applied Sociology methods class.

Stoehr gave us the broader context, describing how one of the aims of the class was to create a pilot study of the CLTL program for use in a larger and more intensive assessment of the program, planned for 2005-06 (see “Announcements”).

The class started with the question, “By what process does CLTL change the lives of its participants?” Schutt said they found that the following components of the process made the most difference to the Dorchester program participants: attending a class at the UMass/Boston campus, social bonding with peers in small groups, and learning about other people’s lives through in-depth conversation.

According to the panel, the readings introduced universality into participants’ experience and helped stem their sense of isolation. Students benefited from social interaction with the POs and the judge. In turn, the panelists commented that judges were able to put a face on probationers, something that doesn’t happen easily in a fifteen-minute interview in court. Students were able to understand authority figures on a human level. They also learned how better to resolve disagreements with words, not actions.

Megan Reynolds described the research methods used by her class. Their approach was multi-pronged. The students:

• observed a current CLTL class, a court session, and a focus group of three graduates.

• composed a set of questions and conducted 1 1/2 hour interviews with judges, facilitators, and POs from the Dorchester men’s and women’s programs.

• completed phone interviews with nineteen former graduates of the men’s program.

Allyson Allen spoke about how different types of participants responded to the program and how it affected them. The findings of an earlier study (Cullen and Genreau, 1992) noted that, “Programs work when they impact the offenders’ thought process, especially improving their reasoning skills, problem-solving abilities, and empathy toward others.”

The Sociology class study divided the CLTL students into two groups – those with some college experience and those with a high school diploma or less. The results were surprising, Allen said. Initially the comfort level for the college group was higher, while the low-literacy students were put off by the class and “felt stupid.” But at the end of the semester the less educated students reported a higher comfort level than those with college experience. They said the program was the best educational experience they’d had.

In general, all the Dorchester CLTL male students felt that the professors listened to them and that their views were respected. The students were proud to be attending a class at an urban state university and felt comfortable because they blended right into the diverse student body.

Allen concluded that “Most CLTL staff members interviewed believed the greatest impact the program had on [the students with less schooling] was in encouraging them to continue their education.” Some graduates of the program have gone on to get GEDs, take literacy classes, and/or return to school. Others work at home, reading and studying with their children and pushing them to achieve more in school.
Shauna Murray reported on the social interaction among participants and with others involved in Dorchester’s CLTL – POs, judges, and facilitators. She found that, outside the program, when the probationers were talking to someone such as a district attorney, they tended to feel confused, intimidated and not equal due to race, education and class differences. On the other hand, when interacting with authority figures within the CLTL program, the results were more positive. Here probationers felt on a more equal footing with their POs, and the POs felt they got to know their clients as people. The study concluded that this relationship was very important to the success of the program.

Murray said they found that CLTL probationers related well with their peers. In class they felt less alone and were relieved to find others with similar struggles. Classmates helped each other with things like practice interviews and job information. Dorchester probationers felt most at ease in small group discussion where talk about their lives flowed easily. Readings were discussed in this “safe learning environment” where student responses were met with respect and where there were no right or wrong answers and no grades.

Murray also said that everyone involved had positive reactions to the program. Students spoke about their teachers. “The professor could talk street without talking slang,” reported one student. Another said that the program showed him that he, not “the man,” was holding himself back from achieving his own goals. POs were able to focus on positive options, not punitive ones. Judge Robert Ronquilla reported that being in the class made him a different kind of judge. “I get to see probationers as human beings. . . . I get to see something good. It’s a wonderful antidote to all the violence I see in my court.” Murray concluded: “This program allowed court staff and probationers to break down the stereotypical barriers found inside the courthouse. The CLTL program has enabled staff to see probationers as people who make mistakes but still have potential.”

In discussing the class findings, Schutt cited Robert Sampson’s study that followed teenagers over time. (Sampson was a participant in the afternoon panel.) The results were analyzed by both quantitative and qualitative criteria. Sampson found that success is made up of small steps. The UMass/Boston study, like Sampson’s, found that married graduates or those with partners were better off than those without. Joining the military, getting a job, or going to school are also positive steps.

Schutt also said that four in five students felt that the program helped them to solve their problems, and that others in the program respected and cared about them. Discussion, not reading and writing, emerged as the key element in the Dorchester men’s class. Less positively, the UMass/Boston group felt it was unfortunate that two thirds of the class said they had no interaction with classmates once the semester was over.

Schutt ended by making several suggestions for the future of the program. He felt we should experiment more with different components, trying to understand the value of the varied features in each Changing Lives program. These features include the specific books read, the use of a literacy requirement, the inclusion of probation officers and/or judges, the use of mixed or same-sex groups, and the extent to which small discussion groups are emphasized.

Finally, there is the critical issue of students “disappearing” once the semester is over. How might we do a follow-up study? How would ongoing support help our graduates? Schutt also stressed the value of thinking of success in a multi-dimensional way.

Questions and comments followed from the floor. There was a consensus that though recidivism is the most widely accepted measure of success, it’s not the only one. We all acknowledge that people are not just defined by what happens in the legal system. However, the problem is how to capture the multi-dimensional impact of the CLTL program in language politicians and budget makers can understand.

The Afternoon Panel: How Do We Judge if it Works?

There was an air of excitement as people gathered after lunch. Jean Trounstine introduced the moderator, Robert Johnson, and explained that the afternoon panel had been created to help us all understand how better to weigh and evaluate what we do.

Johnson, chair of the Africana Studies Department at UMass/Boston and noted lawyer and playwright, introduced the panel members. Then he opened the discussion by asking several leading questions. Can you gauge CLTL by comparing it with other programs? Should evaluations be limited to recidivism rates? How do you translate the results into language that speaks to politicians, budget directors and judicial systems? Should there be follow-up assessment? What is the effect of CLTL on students? What is its effect on public opinion and policy at the local, state, and national level?
Each panelist began with a short statement. **Robert Dellelo**, former prisoner and prison-reform activist, spoke from his own experience, the experience of spending two-thirds of his life in reform school or prison. As a young man he had idolized criminals and felt it was “an honorable thing to outrun a cop when stealing cars.” He came into prison with a seventh grade education and left with a B.A. As a result of this experience, he knew first hand that the prison system can turn not only car thieves but even killers into good human beings. He advised us to bring our program into the prisons.

**Lori Pompa**, founder of the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program at Temple University, spoke of education from a different angle. She takes groups of Temple University students into prisons where they attend a college-level class with people on the inside. This is a different kind of service. Instead of doing “fox,” the students have the experience of being and growing “with.” Implied gaps and hierarchies disappear and the exchange is one of equals. Pompa urged CLTL to involve college students in the program.

Success for Pompa is seeing a change in attitude toward three things: self, world, and the self in the world. “As a measure of success, recidivism doesn’t cut it and neither do testimonials,” she concluded.

**Robert Sampson**, sociologist from Harvard University, whose research interests include the life course juvenile study, disagreed. Recidivism is important, he said, but he wanted the term to include a complex range of components. Instead of “recidivism” he used the word “desistance” and asked, “Why do men and women desist from criminal behavior?” He had studied five hundred men from reform school on through adulthood and compared them with people without criminal records. He discovered that desistance is a process over time and builds on turning points in a person’s life. He gave employment, marriage, enlisting in the military, and education as examples.

Success for Sampson means the following: all of the above life changes work to provide support mechanisms, alter harmful everyday routines, cut a person off from his or her past negative behaviors, and bring about a shift in identity. All of these involve changing thought patterns, a result that is vital to any successful program. Sampson stressed the importance of verbal skills, saying such skills are a major predictor of crime. Through language men and women learn to negotiate disagreement without using violence.

**Fred Marchant**, author of three books of poetry, Director of the Creative Writing Program at Suffolk University and a board member of PEN-New England, took us in an intuitive direction and showed through his words why learning often occurs in subtle ways for our students. He read an original poem that celebrated the value of “finding a place at the table” where everyone is equal. He wants more poetry in our program because of its “truth-carrying language” that gives everyone “practice in telling the truth.”

**Carmen Cicchetti**, Director of Research in the Massachusetts Office of the Commissioner of Probation, spoke as a person who deals daily with politicians, budget planners and other “hard-nosed people.” Goals they stress are “behavior controls” which are very different from the goals of CLTL. Cicchetti asked, “How do you convince these hard-nosers that ‘It’ works? By showing them that the program is not an ‘It’ but a ‘They’ composed of twenty diverse programs.” He suggested we do a “process evaluation” that would include many components of CLTL and show which are working and which are not.

Among others, he felt the following goals were central to success: getting clients to read and to enjoy it; strengthening the bonds between them so they feel less alone; improving their ability to listen to peers; increasing their ability with words; and helping them feel they have realistic choices. Tallying results of these short and long-term goals could convince “hard-nosers” that CLTL is effective in changing lives.

Another important factor is cost, said Cicchetti. “If you demonstrate the cost of incarcerations versus the cost of rehabilitation – $500 per CLTL probationer vs. $21,600 for annual incarceration – they will choose rehabilitation.”

Comments from the floor centered on the problem of recidivism as the sole measure of success. **Dorothy Donnelly** said, “The problem is how to describe the complexity of the program to policy makers without over simplifying it.”

Pompa again objected to recidivism as a measure. “What bothers me is that it’s totally centered on the individual and based on the premise that there’s something wrong with this person. By singling out the individual it ignores socio and economic considerations.”

Jean Trounstine said, “My idea of recidivism changed today. I now see it as a process composed of small and big steps. We’re trying to provide many results, not just one. We need to find ways to make the things we do more explicit.”

Everyone agreed that recidivism needs to be re-conceptualized. The term itself can hide certain positive changes, such as a probationer who returns to prison for a lesser offense or someone who begins using the prison library.

**Judge Milton Wright** suggested keeping the CLTL alumni involved. “They will help you see what you’ve accomplished.”
Schutt advocated linking the program with other groups for people in transition. “Look from above. What are various other pathways?”

Bob Waxler reminded us that it’s time to meet again with local and state legislators.

Marchant spoke for art as a transforming force. “Art works indirectly and will show up in unexpected ways. Remember too, there’s a correlation between a probationer’s change over time and the fact that characters also change in the course of a novel or story.” He urged us to use poems in the classroom because they “get down to words charged with possibility and provide a link to what is complex, ambivalent, and dynamic in a student’s life.”

Robert Johnson summarized the afternoon panel with these comments and questions.

• Does the student come to see self, world, and self and world in a different light?
• What is the experience of the alumni? How can we record this?
• How does CLTL tie into public policy?
• What can the court system learn from our program?

A general consensus arose out of the meeting that we need to look at the program “from above” and think of it as “part of an umbrella.” Trounstine called for new people with fresh energy to accomplish this. The idea of an advisory board was suggested and several people volunteered.

Stoehr ended by saying, “I always like to conclude with something we can do. We can take in more under-educated students. Those that come in with the least education make the most progress in the program.”

Waxler urged us all to bring these ideas to the discussion forum on the web.

Judith Caprio and Rana Smith from R.I. District Court

Announcements/Media Appearances/New Publications

• Good News! Bob Waxler reports that various researchers and scholars around the country have found overwhelming scientific evidence suggesting that the use of language (reading, writing, and talking) does change brain chemistry. There are two recent books on this subject: The Talking Cure by Dr. Susan Vaughan and The Midnight Disease: The Drive to Write, Writer’s Block, and the Creative Brain by Dr. Alice Flaherty.

• NEH has offered to promote the CLTL program by including information about us in their monthly e-newsletter, NEH Connect! that reaches more than 22,000 members of the humanities community.

• Our new Flash person has kindly added another feature to the home page — “Announcements” (the left-hand menu). Be sure to take a look periodically for news items. We would welcome short notices of newsworthy items.

• An article by Taylor Stoehr, “Is It A Crime To Be Illiterate?” just appeared in the March/April issue of Change magazine.

• Thanks to Texas Program’s Larry Jablecki and Rice University’s Vice Provost Charles Henry, Bob Waxler and Jean Trounstine met with a group of CLTL supporters at Rice in Houston. They discussed and planned for a one-day conference to be held at the renowned Baker Institute on the campus next year. We hope to get James Baker to “welcome” the audience at the conference, says Waxler, and to offer continuing education credits for the judges in Texas who attend.

• Waxler also gave a presentation in Lebanon, Indiana, at a judges’ in-service day and another presentation at the state-wide Indiana library conference in Indianapolis which included a number of trustees enthused about the CLTL possibilities in that state.

• A study of Changing Lives Through Literature that will examine five representative programs and their graduates up to the present, with particular attention to recidivism rates, is now in its initial stages, with approval from the Office of the Commissioner of Probation for the Commonwealth. The principal investigators are faculty members of the University of Massachusetts at Boston: Professors Xiaogang Deng (Sociology), Taylor Stoehr (English), Milton Butts, Jr. (Sociology), and Russell Schutt (Sociology). The jurisdictions to be studied include New Bedford, Lynn/Lowell, Dorchester, Roxbury, and Framingham. Several hundred graduates of these programs will be included in the sample, and the study is expected to take at least a year to complete.

• Kathy McLellan and Tricia Suellentrop have been named 2005 Movers and Shakers by the editors of the Library Journal for their outstanding work in our juvenile CLTL program and in the "Read to Succeed" program in Johnson County (Kansas).

• Special thanks go to Megan Barrett and Library of America for their generous donation of books.
England
Mary Stephenson reports that the program is still running at C-Far, a center for young male offenders in Middlesex, and at the women’s prison, Bullwood Hall. A new CLTL program called “Stories Connect” has been set up at HMP Canterbury, Kent, as part of their arts festival.

Maine
Julia Walkling reports that the Maine Humanities Council’s “Stories for Life” program has been suspended due to budgetary restraints of the Maine Department of Corrections and escalating caseloads of probation officers. She and PO Bud Hall hope to revive it. Recently, “Stories For Life” has been piloted successfully with mental health clients.

Rhode Island
Professor Dorothy Donnelly has stepped down as coordinator, and Professor Valerie Karno is the new coordinator from the University of Rhode Island (URI). A joint agreement has been signed between the district court and three university English departments in Rhode Island; URI, Bryant University, and Rhode Island College. (RIC will offer CLTL courses throughout the state.) Other news: The Providence Journal reported on a class taught by Dr. Donnelly; Dr. Terri Hasseler, chair of Bryant's English department, has taught two other courses on RIC’s campus; and a documentary on the Rhode Island CLTL program is being planned. In addition, a class is currently running at URI’s Providence campus, co-taught by Dr. Hasseler and Dr. Karno. Judith Caprio, the director of the court’s Pre-Trial Services Unit, has been administering the program with her staff on behalf of the court.

Susan Peterson reports that Rhode Island also has classes in a prison. Fourteen men graduated last fall. Their program weaves in material on non-violence, using books by Martin Luther King.

Barnstable Co-ed
Judge Reardon reports: “We have had great success with our co-ed group. Recently we had a drug counselor, Susan Kelly, attend the class. Rachel McCormick (PO Bill McCormack’s wife), a professor at Roger Williams College, is conducting a study on the efficacy of the CLTL program. She’s done interviews and started video taping. I’ll have the results next time.”

Concord
Sandi Albertston-Shea reports that with the help of CPO Ed Gaffey, she and her husband, Ray Shea, intend to have a group beginning next October.

Dorchester Juvenile Boy’s
Rev. Matt Gibson reports that the class began with eight boys and graduated six. These students had a strong relationship with their POs, Robert Nagle and Peter Jennings. Gibson remarked, “Though the setting at Dorchester Court was unlike that of a classroom, the boys had fun in a place that isn’t usually fun.”
Dorchester Juvenile Co-ed

PO Barbie Loftus reports that this fall they began with ten girls and ten boys and graduated thirteen students. Each participant produced a small book of poems or essays.

Dorchester Men’s

Bert Stern says that this past class was the best ever (co-teacher Taylor Stoehr reminds him that he says that every semester). A strong community sense developed. This contrasted sharply with the “outside” world where many feel that it’s difficult to trust anyone. As one student said, “When I get outside, I look straight ahead ’til I get home to my room.”

Dorchester Women’s

ACPO Renee Nixon reports that the fall class began with fifteen and graduated fifteen. The focus was on women’s relationships with men and more generally, on love. For these probationers the program is strictly voluntary, not court ordered.

Fall River Adult and Juvenile

Attorney Charles Zalewski reports that a new adult program has begun with the support of Judge Gilbert Nadeau. "Attorneys are best able to choose the right clients and we have been educating them about CLTL," Zalewski says. He has been working closely with Don Frier, another attorney in Fall River. Both Zalewski and Frier have been long-term supporters of CLTL, having attended Professor Robert Waxler's sessions in New Bedford for many years. Jim Danville of Bristol Community College has said he will provide a place on the campus for the class sessions. A juvenile program has also started in Fall River facilitated by Michael Habib, a local lawyer, with assistance from Judge James Cronin and PO Kim Banville. Reverend Robert Lawrence of the First Congregational Church is funding that program.

Framingham Co-ed

PO Ann Schneider reports that last spring they graduated eight students. Their program has been incorporating drug court probationers. This past class had an unusual student: when he didn’t have a ride he wheeled his wheelchair all the way to class, a distance of several miles through downtown traffic.

Lynn/Lowell Women’s

Lowell ACPO Robert Hassett says that last semester Jean Trounstine chose a book that was a “disaster.” Even Judge Dever said, “This is a bad book.” “But it was good for the students to see that a judge had the same response they did,” says Trounstine. “Sometimes the best discussions come from books that everyone hates.” In addition, a book that everyone loves may not stretch students to figure out what it is that so disturbs them in the characters they meet. The fall session had a student who was voluntarily taking the program for the third time.

New Bedford Men’s

Wayne St. Pierre says that at the beginning of every class the CLTL students are very noticeable in the parking lot because they dress differently and stand out. By the end of the semester’s program their clothes have changed. They blend into the mainstream at UMass/Dartmouth and are less marginalized.

Wrentham Co-ed

Trudy Schrandt reports that Judge Jack Connors now attends classes and that the court’s presiding judge, Judge Warren Powers, has become very supportive of the program. Gayle Weinberg-Kraus mentions a change for Wrentham’s CLTL: “Graduation is now mandatory. The students speak at graduation and love the ceremony. It brings everything together.”
Join Us For Our

3rd Annual Facilitator/PO Workshop

Friday, June 10th, 2005
9 am – 2 pm
Henderson House, Weston, MA

Please Save the Date!

You will receive a reservation form and more details in early May.