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Changing Lives Through Literature: Implementation & Evaluation

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Changing Lives Through Literature: Implementation & Evaluation

Jackie Lageson and Russell Schutt, Sociology Department

Summary

Juvenile Program

The CLTL program at the Juvenile probation department works with court involved youth between the ages of 12 – 19 years of age. The program is designed to explore prosocial character themes through the use of literature. The program facilitators select short stories, poems, music lyrics, and/or short films that center around themes for example, respect, love, education, violence, family, friendship, leadership, and the like. The judge, probation officer, facilitators and youth read the literature together, then discuss what the author is trying to get across. Then the level of discussion shifts to what reading do they identify with personally or have seen in their community. The last 10 - 15 minutes the participants do a reflective write on what they read and discussed. Each semester the UMass students conduct a tour for the youth at UMass Boston, and have the youth meet with the pre-collegiate programs on campus. The program starts in the first week of each semester and goes on for 11 weeks.



Adult Program Evaluation

Begun in 1991, CLTL is a bibliotherapy program that is offered in several Massachusetts jurisdictions and in several other states. In it, groups of five to 25 probationers read works of fiction, memoir, and social history that are relevant to their lives. They discuss these readings in weekly or biweekly groups that include probation officers, judges, a teacher-facilitator, and sometimes community volunteers. Through participants' engagement in and discussion of readings, CLTL seeks to alter and enhance self-conceptions and social orientations. Schutt and students in the Applied Sociology program conducted an observational study of program process that provides evidence of the program's significance for participants' self-conceptions and social orientations.

Goals and Objectives

Juvenile Program

- To provide an environment where the youth feel respected and heard
- To provide an opportunity for the youth and the UMass Students to discuss the issues from a space of objectivity
- Provide an opportunity to understand their community, and think about how to effectively interact with their community [UMass Students & Youth]
- Provide UMass Students an opportunity to use the academic knowledge to apply it to the interactions with the CLTL program from a systems level as well as an individual level
- Provide UMass students an opportunity to build professional relationships with juvenile court judges, probation officers, and other courthouse personnel
- The faculty, judge, and probation officers mentor UMass Students.
- The UMass students, judge and probation officers mentor the youth.

Results/Impacts

Juvenile Program

+ Youth learn to engage with the judge and probation officer in an informal setting. + Everyone feels respected and heard, as everyone in the room holds the same status regardless of their status before they came session. + There is no hierarchy the emphasis is, discussion with not speaking at, the participants. + UMass Students find the day-to-day dimensions of the juvenile probation, juvenile court, and the youth provide qualitative substance to their classroom learning. + Participants develop a skill to reflect on their community and how they impact their community and what other options are available to them.

Adult Program Evaluation

Even after taking into account those characteristics that predicted program involvement, participation in the CLTL alternative sentencing program was associated with a reduction in both the number and severity of criminal incidents for which the participants were charged compared to those who did not participate. In the 18 months prior to their program participation, prospective participants were at high risk of reoffending. However, after the program experience the participants' criminal propensities were lower in the number and severity of incidents.

Schutt, Russell K., Xiaogang Deng, and Taylor Stoehr. 2013. "Using Bibliotherapy to Enhance Probation and Reduce Recidivism." *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation* 52:181-197.

Student Involvement

Juvenile Program: Undergraduate students contribute 2 hours/week as lead and co-facilitators of the CLTL sessions, provide a campus tour, and organize the youth graduation from the program
Adult Program Evaluation: 15 graduate students contributed 30 hours interviewing program staff, observing program sessions, and conducting phone interviews.

Partnership Information

Changing Lives Through Literature

<http://cltl.umassd.edu/home-flash.cfm>

Massachusetts Department of Probation

<http://www.mass.gov/courts/probation/>

Contacts

Juvenile Program

Dorchester: Honorable Judge Leslie Harris, Dorchester District Juvenile Court, Probation officer Robert Nagle, Dorchester Juvenile Probation Department, Jackie Lageson, Faculty at UMass Boston, Brianna Limbaugh UMass Boston Student, Andrew Trott UMass Boston Student, Samantha Prive UMass Boston Student

Chelsea: Honorable Judge Johnston, Chelsea District Juvenile Court, Probation Officer Bunny Asquith, Chelsea Juvenile Probation Department, Jackie Lageson, Faculty at UMass Boston, Sophya Williams, UMass Boston Student, Homesh Jaglall, UMass Boston Student, and Tanya Morales, UMass Boston Student.

Adult Program Evaluation

Taylor Stoehr (UMB and CLTL, deceased); Robert Waxler (UMass Dartmouth), John J. O'Brien, John Wade, Carmen Cicchetti, Ronald P. Corbett, Jr. (Massachusetts Office of the Commissioner of Probation)