



INSPIRE

The Annual Newsletter of the Writers Matter Program



From the Pen of the Director

By Kimberly Lewinski, Ph.D., Director

We are extremely excited to open this school year with a new sense of optimism. As we enter our seventeenth year of providing a unique and innovative opportunity for elementary, middle and lower high school students to learn critical writing skills through the use of journal writing as a vehicle for self-expression, we do with our largest number of school, teacher and student participants. This year we welcome 6 new schools and are working with over 80 teachers and 3,000 students.

In just the first two months of the school year, we have had opportunities to come together in person and online to prepare for the year ahead. We are building on the momentum we started last year as we looked at Writers Matter through a trauma-informed lens. This year, we are not only helping the teachers use trauma-informed practices in writing with their students, but we are providing trauma-informed workshops where they, as educators, can be heard and work together to support one another. In this newsletter, you will learn about a newly published article highlighting the work we have been doing with our teachers, conferences that were attended, a new spin on our writing contest, and how we continued to provide professional development to our teachers in a virtual and in person settings.

Please check us out at www.writersmatter.org to learn more about our program and current offerings.

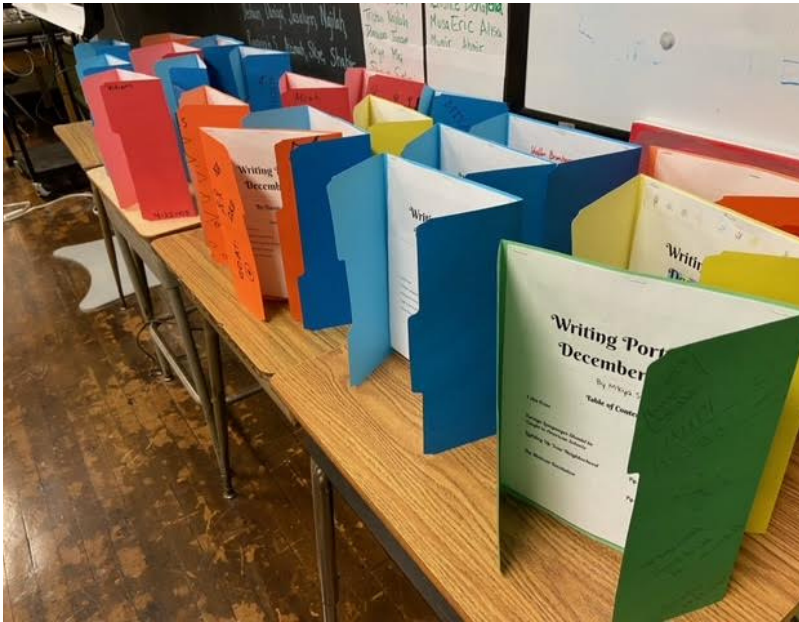
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A Trauma-Informed Approach

by Trent McLaurin, Ph.D., Consultant

Writers Matter is an approach not a curriculum. The same can be said about trauma-informed pedagogy. Fortunately, much of what has been a part of the Writers Matter approach is closely aligned with trauma-informed pedagogy. For example, student choice, student empowerment and voice as well as peer support are elements that have always existed in Writers Matter. We have highlighted these approaches that align with trauma-informed pedagogy. The need to highlight and enhance trauma-informed pedagogy within our approach is critical given the unforeseen circumstances we have seen in the past 20+ months.

We have all experience unprecedented events that were outside of our control and had varied affects on our lives. The global pandemic has shifted the way education is delivered, but most importantly it has shaped the way many of our students experience the world. We wanted to make sure we were prepared to meet students where they are while continue to support their growth as writers! We believe that incorporating and being intentional about trauma-informed pedagogy will help us to do just that.

Looking through a Trauma-Informed Lens

This year, WM will continue to equip our teachers with trauma-informed pedagogy. Specifically, we will have a resource/guide to support Writers Matter educators as we navigate another school year with all that comes our way (i.e. constant adjustments to life with COVID still present, gun violence, pressures of high-stakes testing, etc.), and incorporate trauma-informed practices into our monthly meetings. This resource will be a “live” resource throughout the school year as we will seek teacher feedback as we develop a tool that can support WM teachers for years to come.

Teacher Leader Professional Development Course

This summer, we offered a virtual professional development workshop that was well attended by over 30 teachers. The session topics were responsive to the feedback the teachers provided.

We met once a week for 4 weeks. As a learning community we listened and learned from one another. Our final session allowed the teacher an opportunity to collaborate with one another for a special project to be implemented in the 2022-2023 school year.



Events and Presentations

HOLDING ON TO THE GOOD IDEAS:

Preparing Resilient Teachers of Writing in Disruptive Times



Haley Sigler, Jamie Marsh & Kim Lewinski
2022 ATE ANNUAL MEETING

National Council For Teachers of English

In November 2021, Dr. Kimberly Lewinski presented at that National Council for Teachers of English Conference which was held virtually this year. Her presentation was titled *Our Voice Matters: Pre-Service Teachers Claim Their Identities through Equity-Oriented Writing Instruction*. In this presentation, Kimberly highlighted how the Writers Matter community created the RESET curriculum to allow teachers to see how equity-oriented curriculum can be infused into their literacy instruction. This curriculum was both an innovation of lessons for the teachers as well as a form of professional development to help them have a better understanding of Trauma informed practices.

PACSALS: Beyond the Textbook

In October, Dr. Trent McLaurin presented at PACSALS: Beyond the Textbook Conference. His presentation was titled “Stories of Trauma and Resilience told through the Narratives of Hip-Hop.” This connected the work we do in Writers Matter using mentor texts as a means to incorporate trauma-informed practices in their classrooms.

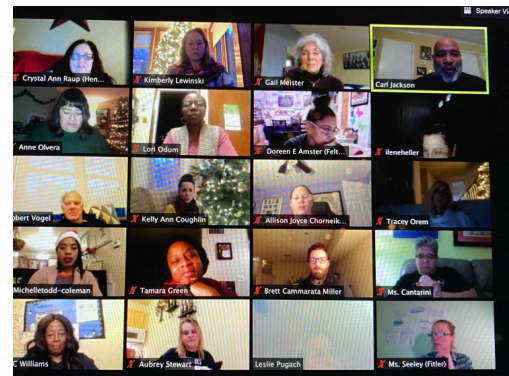
Keystone Literary Association

In April 2022, Dr. Kimberly Lewinski and Writers Matter teacher KellyAnn Coughlin presented at the Keystone Literacy Association (KSLA) Spring Conference: Putting Research into Practice. The focus was on Cultivating students’ civic identity through participation in a social justice-themed book club and through writing practices. During this presentation, KellyAnn demonstrated how the Writers Matter program explicitly incorporates social justice practices and provided the audience with activities that incorporate equity and social justice in their literacy instruction.

Annual Writing Institute

On September 6th, we opened the school year to 42 enthusiastic Writers Matter Teachers for our 7th Annual Writing Institute.

Once again, our institute was held virtually to enable more teachers to attend. During this abbreviated workshop, the writing contest video was revealed, the teachers were introduced to Andre, our Poet in residence, and learned ways he can help work with the students in the program, new initiatives were highlighted and the teachers were introduced to the theme of being trauma-informed educators by Trent McLaurin. It was a wonderful event for all who attended and the appreciation and excitement for the support was evident.



Association for Teacher Educators

In February 2022, Dr. Kimberly Lewinski presented at the Association for Teacher Educators conference. The title of presentation was *Holding On to the Good Ideas: Preparing Resilient Teachers of Writing in Disruptive Times*. This presentation highlighted the work the Writers Matters teachers had been doing to help their students during the difficult days of the pandemic. The audience got to hear how our teachers were able to continue to engage their students in meaningful writing and learning throughout the year in both in person and virtual settings.

Chapter 7 Empowering Literacy Educators Through Trauma- Informed Practices

Trent McLaurin
La Salle University, USA

Kimberly E. Lewinski
La Salle University, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter will discuss trauma-informed pedagogy that values student and teacher voice. This approach leads to an anti-deficit lens that builds on resiliency through literacy instruction. Additionally, the authors demonstrate how to incorporate a trauma-informed approach into literacy instruction using a model that has been used in real-world classrooms during the COVID-19 pandemic. Educators can use trauma-informed pedagogy to develop a more inclusive environment while improving engagement in curriculum through literacy instruction.

INTRODUCTION

There is no denying that our current landscape of education is changing and changing rapidly due to

A New Publication

Trent McLaurin and Kimberly Lewinski published a chapter in Handbook of Research on Learner-Centered Approaches to Teaching in an Age of Transformational Change. The chapter discusses trauma-informed pedagogy that values student and teacher voice. This approach leads to an anti-deficit lens that builds on resiliency through literacy instruction. Additionally, the authors demonstrate how to incorporate a trauma-informed approach into literacy instruction using a model that has been used in real-world classrooms during the COVID-19 pandemic through the Writers Matter Program. It discusses how educators can use trauma-informed pedagogy to develop a more inclusive environment while improving engagement in curriculum through literacy instruction.

Summer Writing Camp at La Salle University

Once again Writers Matter sponsored the La Salle University Summer STEM Enrichment Camp. This camp is wonderful opportunity to provide an enrichment opportunity to many of the students in the community. Close to 100 students attended the three week “Dream it, Design it, Build it!” themed camp where they engaged in integrated STEM activities throughout the day. Writers Matter provided scholarships to many of the students to attend the camp.

Additionally, Dr. Kim Lewinski and Writers Matter teachers Aubrey Stewart, provided a literacy STEM experience by have the student invent stories and then bring them to life through coding ozobots to react as they read their stories aloud and created 3 dimensional spaces. The students had a blast and learned a lot while doing so.

To learn more about the La Salle STEM Summer Enrichment camp, please visit www.lasalle.edu/summer-camp/stem-enrichment/

Summer Writing Camp Highlights



Poet-in-Residence Program Expands in 2022

For the past three years, Andre Saunders, a local poet and hip-hop artist has worked directly with our Writers Matter students and teachers in the schools. Andre and his colleagues conducted school assemblies, classroom programs coordinated with a Writers Matter teacher, small group writing sessions for selected students and assistance with students who wanted to present their writing through visual media. Andre coordinated visits with Writers Matter teacher leaders who assisted in the scheduling of assemblies, class visits and individual sessions. Writers Matter plans for Andre to work with many of our schools this coming year. Through his modeling of writing and performance, Andre will be helping our students discover the power of their voices while providing opportunities to improve writing and speaking skills.

Through the generosity of our funders, Andre will be working with 15 selected young writers on a weekly basis, in grades 6th through 8th, throughout the school year. Each of the schools selected will have a teacher coordinator who will work with the students between Andre's visits and provide opportunities to explore new outlets for their personal writing. The student writing over the year will result in a collective video production and book publication showcasing the voices of the students. The students will have the option to choose their own writing topics that might include gun violence in the city, trauma-related issues children are experiencing in school and other issues important to them.

Additionally, these students will serve as mentors for younger students in their schools providing leadership development opportunities. It is the hope that many of the mentees will enter the program next year as selected students to work directly with Andre.

Classroom Chronicles

By Carl Jackson, Participating Teacher

Hello my name is Carl Jackson. I teach 3rd grade at Charles Henry Elementary School. I have been fortunate enough to work with Writers Matter for over six years. I have loved being a part of such a wholesome program. The students have the opportunity to use their "VOICE"!

This is important because students need to know that what they think/say/feel is important and worthy to be heard. I believe in this philosophy and help bring it out of my students yearly. I see such growth and confidence during each year. The students take pride and love to share about "THEM". We all learn to appreciate each other on a different level. 3rd grade focuses on community and this amazing program helps build our class/family.

My newest 3rd grade family has started the process of "I Am From". We always start with the heart! We share with the whole class and in groups. We are enjoying this process as we begin the journey of "US". We look forward to sharing samples of our work just like my previous classes. Here is just a sample of some of the amazing things happening in room 113. We hope you enjoy hearing our VOICE!

Bridges of Dialogue: The Writers Matter Interfaith Initiative

For four years, the Writers Matter Interfaith Initiative brought together students at Jack M. Barrack Hebrew Academy, St. Christopher Catholic School, and Al-Aqsa Islamic Academy, three faith-based schools, and created opportunities for students to use the Writers Matter personal writing methodologies, which are designed to encourage writing, communication, and listening skills, to increase students' understanding and appreciation of similarities and differences across religions and communities. After a post-COVID restructure, the initiative continued in 2022 through a collaboration between the 8th grade at Barrack Hebrew Academy in Bryn Mawr and a 9th grade English skills class at Monsignor Bonner & Archbishop Prendergast Catholic High School in Drexel Hill.

According to initiative facilitator Leslie Pugach, "the goals of this program were: improvement in writing and skills, positive social interactions when there are a variety of opinions, as well as greater understanding and appreciation of the similarities among many faiths and diverse communities."

The two classes participated in several projects meant to foster dialogue about their own religious traditions and school experiences including an "I Am From" poem exercise, selfie slide introductory activity, digital tours of both schools, and religious experience questionnaire. Rogers even used this unique digital collaboration to teach his students about photography and videography, and these skills were used to create the digital tour of Bonner & Prendie.

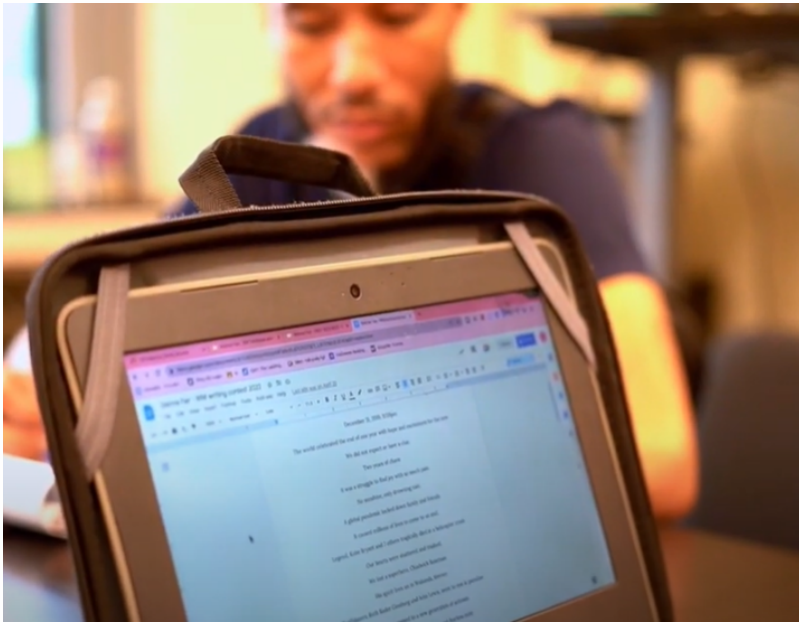
The collaboration allowed students to learn about the customs held closely by members of the Jewish and Catholic faiths. For example, students at Bonner & Prendie learned about the sacredness of visiting Israel just as the Barrack students learned that attending Mass is a focal point of Catholic education.

Despite COVID-19 restrictions of gathering in person and the typical challenges of school scheduling in the spring semester, Barrack teachers Stephanie Raphel and Cindy Miller and Bonner & Prendie teacher Joseph Rogers designed a pen-pal project for students to keep in touch with each other.

According to Raphel, "the [Barrack] students were so excited about the pen pal letters and hearing about the lives of the Bonner & Prendie kids. Sharing the slides was also a lot of fun, as that allowed our students to 'see' a bit about the lives of their students."

Rogers, Raphel, and Miller found this collaboration to be beneficial for their students because it showed them that there was such a larger world out there and that the religious traditions they experienced at school were each deeply meaningful. And while the students clearly gained new understandings and perspectives, the adult facilitators also were impacted by lively planning sessions and a shared love for inter-faith dialogue.





Not Just Writing, But Performing!

The 2022 Writing Contest this year prompted us to think about something that the kids could look forward to, something that could bring joy, maybe something that could encourage a community event in their schools either in person or virtually. We also wanted to build on the technology skills that the students have learned throughout the pandemic, and so we invited them to perform their writing in some form that would be submitted in a video.

We compiled all of the videos of the students reading their work, singing their work, or creating a digital story of their work and created a video collection for them to view. Under the direction of Andre Saunders, Writers Matter Poet-In-Residence, students who wrote winning entries professionally recorded their pieces. To view the snapshot from Andre's session and the compilation of winning entries, visit www.writersmatter.org.



Classroom Chronicles

During the 2020-21 school year, Monsignor Bonner & Archbishop Prendergast Catholic High School in Drexel Hill, Pennsylvania became part of the Writers Matter program. Using adapted program materials to meet the needs of 9th grade students, teacher Joseph Rogers taught poetry, literary devices, and grammar skills through reflective writing.

In the fall of 2021, Rogers teamed up with Andrea Ciliberti, Assistant Principal of Academic Affairs, to build a culture of writing across their respective English, Spanish, and Freshman Seminar classes. Through participating in the Writers Matter Interfaith Initiative, which involved a unit on Holocaust literature and a guest speaker who survived the Holocaust, and the 2022 Writing Contest, 9th grade students at Bonner & Prendie learned how writing can unlock many doors.

Writers Matter continues at Bonner & Prendie under the leadership of Ciliberti and Ms. Anne Marie Dolceamore, Assistant Principal for Student Affairs.

Below: Christian Anderson, now a 10th grader at Bonner & Prendie, celebrates with his teachers, Mr. Rogers and Ms. Ciliberti, after his poem "I Am Black" was selected as a winning entry in the 2022 Writing Contest.



Pages to Performance: Behind the Scenes of the 2022 Writing Contest

by Joseph Rogers, Coordinator of Special Projects

Writers Matter Poet-in-Residence Andre Saunders always loved music and writing poetry, but never did he think that this combination would change the trajectory of his life or career.

An alumnus of Edward M. Stanton, a Writers Matter participating school, and Roman Catholic High School, Andre Saunders has devoted his career to inspiring young poets through hands-on and interdisciplinary workshops at local schools. That is where he met Writers Matter Founding Director Bob Vogel who happened to be visiting Stanton on the same day as one of Saunders' programs. This introduction and subsequent collaboration gave Saunders a lot of freedom to pursue his own creative vision and sparked additional partnerships in the process.

All of these formative experiences led to this year's innovative writing contest where Writers Matter students were challenged to not only write an original, creative work, but also perform it for a chance to create a professional video under Saunders' direction.

Saunders described the process of this year's contest as one where "the students worked with their teachers to create their pieces, while I served as a consultant during school visits to guide and answer questions."

A subsequent session with the winners allowed him to get to know them through natural conversations about their own aspirations and dreams. These ice-breakers gave students the confidence to read their pieces in full while Andre and his colleague, Jay, worked to structure and place each segment.

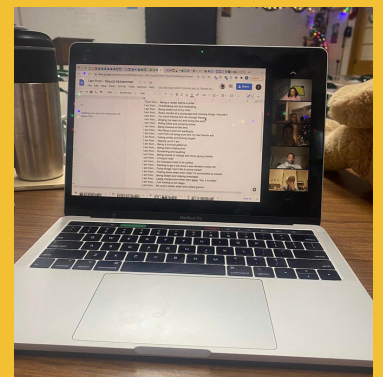
The final product, a video featuring the 2022 contest winners, captured the student's individual voices and their interactions with Saunders to showcase the full process rather than just the performance.

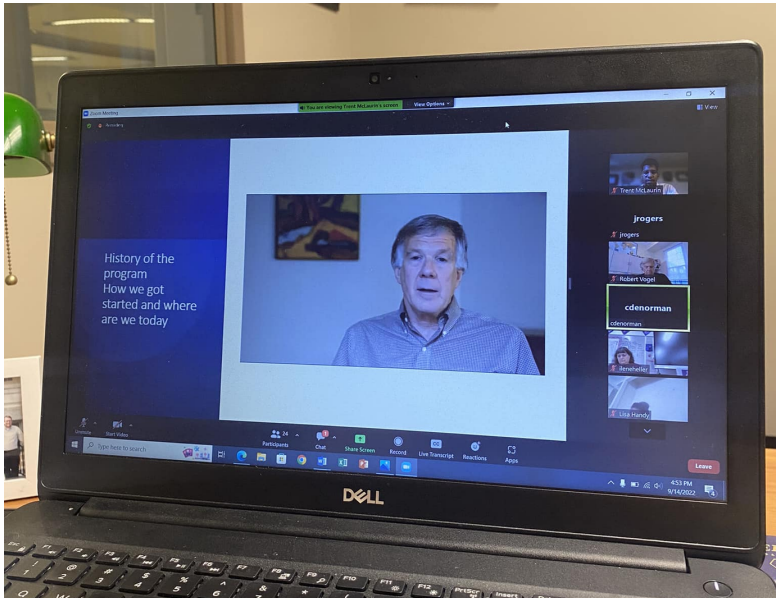
Saunders reflected that he is "both a student and teacher and enjoys learning about what shaped their thoughts and the meaning behind their learning."

Their openness and his expertise helped create a unique opportunity for participating students to express themselves in a new format.

Monthly Teacher PD Sessions Continue Online

Writers Matter teachers meet monthly through Zoom to share best practices and student work while also learning about new ideas and activities to try in their classrooms. Dr. Lewinski, Dr. Vogel, and Dr. McLaurin from La Salle University also present on topics relevant to trauma-informed pedagogy, writing across the curriculum, and ways teachers and the program can collaborate with each other. To join our Zoom sessions, please contact Kim Lewinski for more information.





Special Thanks

This program is generously supported by the following lead funders: PTS Foundation (Pam and Tony Schneider); Berstein Family Foundation (Jeff and Dana Berstein); Kessler Family Foundation (Howard and Michele Kessler); Mari Shaw Charitable Trust; Alan and Debbie Casnoff and Howard and Phyllis Fischer.

A heartfelt thanks to these special individuals for their vision to help those less fortunate than themselves.

Supporting Writers Matter

Please consider making a contribution to Writers Matter. Your contribution goes directly towards the purchase of books and writing materials for the students, as well as for afterschool programs.

If you are interested in participating in our adopt-a-school program, please contact Bob Vogel. All contributions are tax deductible and La Salle University meets all requirements for a 501C3 organization

Checks can be made out to Writers Matter and mailed to 1900 West Olney Avenue, Box 809 Philadelphia, PA 19141. If you prefer to make a contribution on-line, please go to <https://securelb.imodules.com/s/1206/index.aspx?sid=1206&gid=1&pgid=2660&cid=4565&dids=40>

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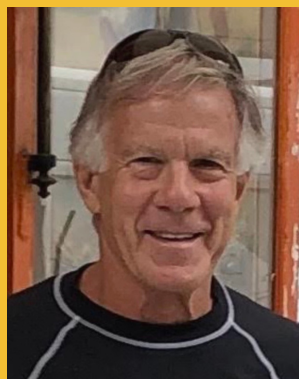
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