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Marlene Bruno

Beth Bentham

Karen Brininstool-Gazella

Karen Burlington

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Building Noncompetitive Young Authors' Celebrations



*Marlene Bruno, Beth Bentham,
Karen Brininstool-Gazella and Karen Burlington*

This article is a collaborative effort involving four of the individuals who are members of the Tri-County Reading

Council of southwestern Michigan. We have successfully organized a Young Authors' Celebration each year for the last seven years. We are very proud of our efforts and would like to share them with other local councils and encourage you to use our ideas and the organizational shortcuts we have learned through years

of trial and error. To help you get started, we have included a time line (see Figure One) some of the sample communications that we use.

The format of this article is a little different—a conversation between the four individuals. Hopefully you will be able to use our ideas to generate interest in your local council or school district hosting a Young Authors' Celebration.

Karen Burlington: Tri-County Reading Council, in conjunction with Lake Michigan College, sponsored its first Young Authors' Conference in 1985. The purpose of this project was to motivate students to write and to have their stories published.

Each public and private school district in the Tri-County area (Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren) was invited and encouraged to select an outstanding young writer from each grade, kindergarten through sixth

grade. These young authors from each district were honored at a very special event at Lake Michigan College. All the partici-

pants received certificates and keepsakes of the event. All of the district entries were judged, and the outstanding three works at each grade level were compiled and published in book forms. These books were presented to the young authors and their teachers, and were also distributed in the Tri-County area.



Authors (l-r): Marlene Bruno, Karen Burlington, Karen Brininstool-Gazella and Beth Bentham

I worked on the steering committee as a resource person to help initiate and assist school systems in becoming involved in the Tri-County Young Authors' Conference in 1986. It was our last conference in which the children's books were judged.

Karen Gazella: In the fall of 1986, Marlene Bruno, Karen Rumph and I joined the planning committee. Linda Castle representing Lake Michigan College and Linda Vingelin from the Berrien Intermediate School District also became involved that year.

Marlene Bruno: The college was important to have involved because it is the only facility in the area that is large enough to host the event. They have provided the office staff and custodial staff. The Intermediate School District was important to involve because they provided the secretarial help to type and print the forms to be

Tri-County Young Authors' Conference Time Line

Oct.-Nov.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter to Principals
Early Jan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deadline for principals' responses
Mid Jan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet with building representatives to revise forms and suggest presenters • Prepare forms • Search for presenters
Mid Feb.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deadline for presenters forms • Student registration form designed • Workshop descriptions printed (allow time for typesetting and mailing)
Mid March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student registrations and money due • Notify local media
Spring Break	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slot children into sessions
Early April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Room assignments made • Materials lists compiled
Mid April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Name tags with assigned sessions made • Presenters' materials purchased and assembled in paper bags • Purchase gifts for presenters • Purchase door prize gift certificates • Send letter to presenters
Day Before	<p>At event site:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put name tags on registration tables in alphabetical order • Label rooms • Distribute materials bags • Tape ribbons to books and set out on display
Event Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoy watching students and parents • Troubleshooting • Cleanup
After Event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thank you notes written • Debriefing meeting held • Materials inventoried and stored

Figure 1

distributed. Tri-County Reading Council provides the labor and organizes the Celebration. We arrange for all the speakers, and do all the organizing and planning.

Beth Bentham: Principals designate teachers to serve as *building representatives*. These volunteers are responsible for copying and circulating all information from the steering committee, attending a few organizational meetings, bringing the students' books to the college, and setting up the book display on the Saturday before the Celebration.

Karen G.: Marlene voiced her concerns in 1986 about the competition between children to have the best book and to win an award. She thought that every child who wrote a book should have an opportunity to be recognized and to participate in some sort of a celebration.

Karen B.: Since our goal is to motivate all students to become authors, we felt that these books should not be judged, and that all students' writing should be featured and honored.

Karen G.: The committee quickly decided to make the young authors' program noncompetitive, and we began to brainstorm how we could change the awards program.

Marlene: It was important to us that the focus be on children's expression. Each child who participates in the Celebration must have published a piece of writing. Because of the numbers of children, each child can submit only one of his/her pieces of writing. We do allow a classroom to do a class book. We have had poetry anthologies and class novels, where each child contributes a chapter.

Karen B.: Thus, the steering committee did away with the competitive type conference and made it a celebration where all students were honored and recognized. The 1987 "Young Authors' Celebration" featured workshops for young writers and their parents. Ever since then, this three-hour event has taken place on a Sunday afternoon in April.

Karen G.: When we decided to do workshops, we wanted the student authors to choose which workshops they would attend. Suddenly we were brainstorming kinds of workshops and we were on our way. Our list of workshops included dramatics, puppets, calligraphy, choral reading, illustrations, poetry and computers. After finishing the list, we tried to think of people to do workshops on those topics and then began calling them. We had twelve presenters scheduled to do twelve different workshops.

That first year we planned our program for 250 to 300 children grades K-8. The Saturday before the program we met at the college to set up, and to slot children into workshops. Suddenly we realized we had 560 children registered to divide among our 12 scheduled presenters. We were thrilled to have so many children but we needed 15-20 more presenters and workshops to handle the numbers.

We sat in the office at the college with the phone book and called every teacher, librarian and talented friend or parent we could think of. We were desperate! We would call up and say, "Hi...We're putting on a Young Authors' Celebration here at the college for 560 students. Could you put on a 45 minute workshop for us?"

Oh, by the way, it's tomorrow at 1:00." As we were making these desperate phone calls, we realized that we had worked backwards in identifying workshops topics and then seeking presenters for those topics.

Marlene: Now we contact people and ask them to do their favorite language arts activity that can be encompassed in 45 minutes. Each child may choose to go to two workshops.

Karen G.: We did find presenters to do more workshops and we were able to open up more rooms at the college for additional space. We sent someone out to buy more supplies. I think we bought every magic marker, calligraphy pen and children's scissors in town. Our two hour set up meeting lasted about 8 hours, and we all went home

exhausted and worried about how Sunday would go.

On Sunday 560 registered and many other unregistered young authors eagerly charged into the college. We were greatly understaffed, but parents gladly helped by finding name tags, directing children to workshops, and passing out our supplies. Beth Bentham, our present chairman, showed up that day as a parent and ended up working all day. By the end of the day we were exhausted again, but the students and parents had loved the workshop format. We would do it over next year—but better!

Karen B.: That first year we had no money to put on our program so we applied for a Michigan Reading Association grant for \$200.00 and voted to charge \$2.00 per child for supplies. We continue to charge \$2.00 per child.

Karen G.: We worried whether parents would pay the \$2.00 fee and then bring their child to the workshop on a Sunday afternoon.

Marlene: We feel very strongly that the two dollars should come from the family of the child. We have found that when school districts pay for the children to come, the parents don't have any investment in the Celebration; the parents aren't interested and therefore the children do not show up on Sunday for the Celebration.

Karen B.: We have lots of no-shows, especially from the school districts which pay the registration. When this happens speakers that have been promised a certain number of children to present to may end up presenting disappointedly to three or four children when they have planned for twenty. The other drawback about no shows is that we have slotted the children into a space that some other children may have wanted and didn't get. There is no way to adjust the placements at the last moment.

Beth: Also we have purchased materials for the number of children registered. For these reasons we prefer that the parents

and not the school district, pay the \$2.00. We feel most families can manage to spend that amount. This year out of the 650 children who registered about 550 actually attended.

Karen G.: One year we decided to have a professional presenter do a large group presentation for parents to attend while their children were in workshops.

Marlene: That didn't work. Parents were reluctant to let their children go to sessions alone in the huge building, so they ended up going to the sessions with their children.

Karen B.: Anyway, the parents enjoy the regular sessions as much as the children do.

Beth: This combination of conference and celebration has grown into such a huge success that we had to split the participants by grade levels—into grades K-3 and 3-8.

Marlene: The first two years we kept the Celebration K-8. The third year 1500 reservations came in. We had to turn away 600 children. We were able to place 900 children in workshops that day. It was extremely crowded. After that we decided to split the Celebration. One year we have K-3, then the following year it is 3-8. We made the split at those levels because there is a larger number of participants in the lower elementary grade levels, and that makes the number of participants about equal each year.

Karen G.: We include grade three each year otherwise there is a year when some children miss an opportunity to participate. We figured it was better to be able to go two years in a row than for an entire grade level to miss an opportunity completely.

Marlene: The problem was that we made the deadline for registrations to coincide with the beginning of the Celebration chair's spring break. Because school districts' vacation schedules differ, registrations that had been sent through the school mail were not received until after the spring break.

April 25, 1993 Lake Michigan College
 Doors open at 1:00 p.m. Workshops from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m.
 Book browsing and refreshments 3:30 to 4:00 in Student Union

The 8th Annual Young Authors' Celebration Workshop, sponsored by Tri County Reading Council in conjunction with Berrien County Intermediate School District and Lake Michigan College is being held to recognize area Young Authors. This celebration will be open to each student who has written and submitted a book to his/her classroom teacher. Eligible students are invited to participate by choosing six of the following workshops of which students will be assigned two. Parents are encouraged to attend the sessions (at no charge) with their children. Each Young Author must return the form below and \$2.00 registration fee to his/her classroom teacher by March 19. When you arrive at L.M.C. on April 25, you will receive your session assignments, room number, etc.

No.	Grade	Workshop/Presenter	No.	Grade	Workshop/Presenter
1.	K	Enormous Watermelon Marge DuVernay	17.	1-2	Safari Jane Knickerbocker
2.	K	Popcorn Sally Matzke	18.	1-2	Newspaper Theater Dianne Todd/Mary Ann Titus
3.	K	Books Alive Pat Steenbergh/Rosetta Myers	19.	1-2	Pop Up Books Janine Goering
4.	K-1	<u>Clifford</u> Sharon Foxworthy/Nancy Brown	20.	1-2	Pop Up Books Pen Campbell
5.	K-1	Everyday Is A Reading Day Nikki Schreiber	21.	1-2	<u>Cloudy With A Chance of Meatballs</u> Shelia Schultz
6.	K-2	Prince of Pals Don Frank	22.	1-3	<u>I Saw It On Mullberry Street</u> Stacy Czuba
7.	K-2	Story on a String Marrienne Smith	23.	1-3	Meet An Artist Ruth Pomeroy
8.	K-3	Music and Imagination Marlene Bruno/Robert Smith	24.	2-3	Paper Bag Stories Gloria Perry/Pat Spaulding
9.	K-3	Story-telling John Jarpe	25.	2-3	Mystery of the Mummy's Tomb Janet Seaman/Ann Rudman
10.	K-3	<u>Thunder Cake</u> Roberta Nelson	26.	2-3	Word Birds Marnie Heyn
11.	K-3	Make Puppetry Come Alive Mary Wilson	27.	2-3	Music Games Sharon Mitchell
12.	K-3	Rainbow Writing Karen Green	28.	3	Radio News Bob DeWitt
13.	K-3	Pop Up Books Beth Kenagy/Gail Harrah	29.	3	On Trial Eileen Hart/Mary Klug
14.	K-3	Pop Up Books Mary Mather	30.	3	Creative Painting Kris Hosbein
15.	K-3	Clowning Mime Nick Auringer/Carol Henning	Parents		Parenting In Support Of Your Child's Languages Arts Development.
16.	1-2	Native Americans Ethel Janiszewski			Jerry Jennings

 RETURN THIS PORTION AND \$2.00 BY MARCH 19, 1993

Name _____ Grade _____

Home Phone _____ School District _____

Building _____

Workshop Choices _____

WE RESERVE THE RIGHT TO PLACE CHILDREN WHERE THERE IS SPACE AVAILABLE.

Figure 2

Beth: Now we have a home address instead of a school address where the registrations are to be sent. The building representatives must send a check or money order, no cash. The registrations can be mailed to the address, or dropped off. Also we number the registrations as they come in so that we know which ones to process first. When our number of registrations hit 600, we can immediately return those registrations beyond 600. 600 is a comfortable number of children to slot into the workshops based on the number of rooms we have available. The deadline date still coincides with the spring break of the Celebration chair.

Karen B.: Part of spring vacation is spent slotting students into workshops. We no longer wait until the day before the event. It takes a lot of work hours; usually two people spending two full days of their spring break.

Beth: Participants are asked to indicate on the bottom of the registration sheet, six sessions they would like to attend (see Figure Two). They are slotted into two of these choices. Students are given their first and third choice, or second and fourth choice to ensure that as many students as possible are slotted into at least one of their first two choices. It's important to have a policy for assigning sessions.

Karen B.: We don't want the expense of a printed program, so the child's name tag becomes a crucial organizing element. Session numbers assigned to each child are recorded on the registration slip. The registration slips are given to the building representatives who transfer the child's name to a name tag. Included on the name tag is the number of the session the child has been assigned to and the time the child is to attend that session. The name tag the child receives when he/she arrives at the college is the only confirmation we give. The building representative brings the name tags to the college on the Saturday we set up, and they are arranged in alphabetical order at the entrance.

Marlene: To help students choose sessions, we send each representative a sheet with one or two sentence abstracts describing each session; but we realize for the most part, the students are making their choices based on title only. Therefore, titles of sessions need to be snappy and descriptive.

Karen G.: We feel that all of the sessions are good, but the children, and parents, do get upset when they come to the event and discover that the session they wanted most isn't what they were given.

Beth: Getting presenters is challenging. It seems that many of the same people will do sessions for us each year. When teachers lead a session, they love it, and that's why we get the same people to come back for many years. It's often difficult getting teachers to participate the first time.

Marlene: Presenters are found from many walks of life. Classroom teachers, business men and women, parents, radio personalities and even children have volunteered their talent to do workshops. The local newspaper is notified of the upcoming event, and a reporter is assigned. If you get a newspaper, radio or television personality to present at your Young Authors' Celebration, we have found that you get wonderful media coverage.

Karen B.: We ask principals to give us names of teachers in their building who would be willing to present their favorite language arts activities.

We ask presenters to fill out a sheet telling what their topic is going to be, a brief abstract describing the session, room requirements, and the number of children they would like in the session. Rooms at the workshop site must be assigned to the session titles according to the presenters request for space and equipment. Tables, desks, floor space, computer labs, availability of audio visual equipment, and seating capacity are all options to be considered. We ask what supplies will be needed to present their language activity. All of their supplies are put into grocery bags and

labeled with the session number and room number. The bags are waiting in the presenters' rooms when they arrive.

Beth: If presenters choose to purchase their own supplies, we will reimburse them. Many presenters donate the supplies for their workshops.

Karen G.: Part of the success of these workshops is the organization of supplies, rooms, and the dedication of the presenters. We have many dedicated educators and community people who volunteer their time to make this a successful Celebration.

Karen B.: Despite dedicated people, there are always going to be problems to iron out. It's important to build in mechanisms to solve these. Several years ago we added a "trouble shooting" room. When the participants come to this room with problems, committee members have workshop schedules, extra supplies, and "gophers" available to immediately address problems.

Marlene: The biggest problem we have is that a child claims to have registered, but there is no name tag for him/her. Another problem is that a child is unhappy because he/she did not get into a preferred session. This problem is not as common since we started doing the slotting on a first-third choice, second-fourth choice basis.

Karen B.: The college is a large complex, and sometimes it's just overwhelming for kids and parents. They just don't know where to go or what to do. The rooms are labeled according to sessions, and volunteers direct people to the rooms, and we provide maps.

Beth: We make signs out of hot-colored poster board and put them in key locations.

Karen B.: As a culminating event after the workshop session, students and their parents are invited to the student union to view the children's books. Students' books are displayed on tables by school district, with a separate table for each building within the district.

Marlene: Each table has a sign on a tall pole which indicates which school's books can be found on that table. It makes it

easy for children to walk into this huge room and within a few minutes find their books.

Karen B.: Attached to each book is a ribbon honoring the young author. Excited parents and children enjoy browsing and looking at their own, and other students', books. Many times you will hear children comment about ideas they have for a new book based on looking at another child's book.

Karen G.: Cookies and punch are provided in the union where the books are displayed.


Marlene: We have become very strict about controlling the books. We lost one book the first year because we tried to display in too small of an area. The tables for the different districts were too close together, and when people looked at a book, they might set it down on the wrong table, a table meant for a different school or school district. To prevent the possibility for a book to be mislaid, we spread out tables which also allows the crowd to access books from all sides of the tables.

Karen B.: Also that first year some children took their books home with them when they left, and we had no way of knowing what had happened to those books.

Beth: Now we are very specific that the building representative bring the books, and the building representative is responsible for taking the books back to the building. I think all the teachers throughout the county understand this policy now too, so they help reinforce it.

Marlene: The importance of identification labels on each child's book cannot be stressed enough. We provide labels in the packet we send to the representative in each school (see Figure Three). We ask that the label be attached permanently, either by being laminated to the inside cover or by taping the entire perimeter to the book. We try very hard to make sure each child's book is returned. The building representatives need to check each book

Figure 3
Young Authors Book Label



YOUNG AUTHORS


Name _____

Grade _____

Teacher _____

School _____

School District _____

 **Educational Service Agency**

Berrien County Intermediate School District

711 St. Joseph Avenue • Berrien Springs, Michigan 49103-1602 • (616)471-7111
FAX Number (616)471-7112
November 30, 1992

Dear Principals,

We are happy to announce the "Eighth Annual Young Authors Workshop Celebration" on April 25, 1993 from 1:30 - 4:00 p.m. at Lake Michigan College, sponsored by Lake Michigan College, Tri-County Reading Council, and Berrien County Intermediate School District.

Due to the overwhelming number of participants in the last several years, the Young Authors Steering Committee has decided to focus on specific grade levels again this year. The 1993 Young Authors Celebration Workshop will focus on grades K-3. We encourage teachers at the other grade levels to continue Young Authors activities in their own classrooms.

Your help is needed to encourage staff members to present their favorite (45 minute) Language Arts activity. Presenters are needed for this event. We would like you to submit names of persons interested in presenting at the Young Authors Celebration. Principals are also encouraged to participate. Enclosed are examples of workshops offered in the past.

All districts are invited to participate on April 25, 1993. If your building would like to participate this year, please select one person from your building who will be responsible for: copying and circulating all information from the Young Authors Steering Committee, attending Young Authors Steering Committee meetings, and bringing building books and setting up your display on _____.

The celebration will be on January 19, 1993 at 4:15 _____ in the student union. _____ ham, 2240 Mount Curve, St. _____

Sincerely,
_____ Young Authors Steering Committee 1993

_____ Lake Michigan College

_____ Phone _____
_____ Phone _____
_____ Phone _____

_____ Principal's Signature

Figure 4

for an identification label before it ever leaves their building.

Karen G.: With the increasing number of children participating, it has been vital to have a plan for returning the books to the proper owner.

Marlene: Also because of the increasing number of participants, our registration fee proceeds typically surpasses our expenses. We find that our expenses are not as high as they used to be. This is because we have a good supply of materials, (e.g. scissors, pencils, glue, pens, etc.) that we own and use year after year, and because we have decided that our local talent is every bit as wonderful as special speakers we used to pay. This surplus of money has allowed us to give gift certificates to a local bookstore as door prizes.

Beth: For the older children we give away two week-long scholarships to a language arts camp that is organized by Jerry Jennings, a principal from Mars Elementary School in Berrien Springs, Michigan. These are awarded through a door prize drawing.

Karen B.: In the past we had little slips of paper and a box near the entry, and the children needed to remember to fill out a slip and put it in the box in order to be eligible for the drawings. Something new we plan to try this year is to have the children take off their name tags and write their phone numbers on it and drop it in a box on their way out the door. Then we will draw the name tags out to determine the prize winners.

Karen G.: In summary, we've made many changes over the years, but one of the best changes was to stop trying to have a small committee of three-five people do all the work. We now write the principals in each building and ask them to return a form indicating a person in their building who will be the representative for that building (see Figure Four). We ask that person to be

the liaison for us and also to do several little jobs, that when added up, makes the whole job much easier.


Marlene: When we first started, the Berrien County Intermediate School District provided for distributing the registration forms to every district. We get better every year, and with the changing of leadership, another good change we made was to stop sending every school in three counties the registration forms for all children. Now, to save paper and money, we send each school one copy of our printed materials and leave it to the school representative to provide a copy for each teacher; each teacher then decides whether or not he/she is going to provide copies for students.

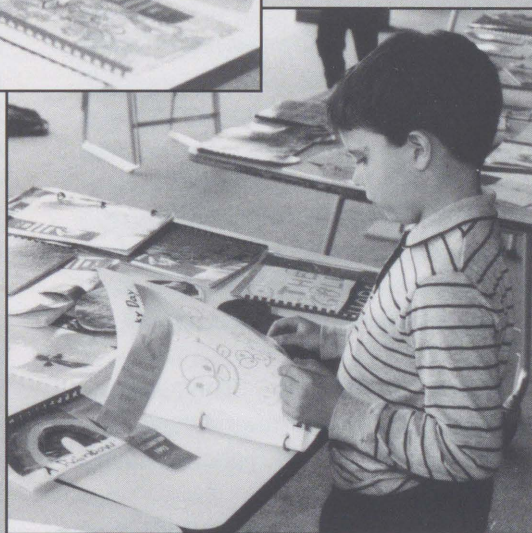
Karen G.: We also ask the representatives to help recruit presenters from their buildings. As Beth said earlier, each representative is also responsible for getting the books with their ribbons of celebration back to the students!

Marlene: We hope our conversation helps you see how to organize a noncompetitive Young Authors' Conference. We have also developed a time-table of responsibilities and deadlines which sums up the steps to take (see Figure One).

Establishing a Young Authors' tradition is a lot of work, but it is well worth the trouble. For one thing, collaborating with other teachers is fun. More importantly, students attend because they want to be there and want to express themselves. It is gratifying to see students' enthusiasm and the parents' appreciation. Seeing teachers, principals, parents, and students celebrating and conferencing together is a unique experience which shows that Young Authors' Conferences broadly influence both curriculums and kids.

Marlene Bruno teaches kindergarten and Chapter 1 for St. Joseph Public Schools. Former chair of the Young Authors' Steering Committee, she served as elected secretary of MRA from 1987 until 1993. Beth Bentham, who teaches first grade at Lybrook Elementary School in Eau Claire, has been the chair of the Young Authors' Steering Committee since 1989. Karen Brininstool-Gazella has taught first and

second grade for 17 years in the Hartford School System and is currently coordinating a tutoring program for the Salvation Army of Benton Harbor. Karen Burlington is a Chapter 1 reading teacher for Coloma Public Schools. She has served as Young Authors' Celebration co-chair and in many other council roles. All four have been executive officers of the Tri-County Reading Council. 



*Children
Participating
in
The Young Authors'
Celebration*