

A Welcome Place for Diverse Learners

Trinity Learning Catalysts help to create scholars



"Unique" is a word that appears in two of Trinity's foundational elements: the Honor Code pledge to "respect the uniqueness and gifts of others," and the school's mission, which calls for students to be "challenged to academic excellence, while honored as an individual with unique potential."

Helping to fulfill that mission is Trinity's team of K-8 Learning Catalysts - a team that expanded to three members this school year.

"The elevator speech I used to give people is that we're a school counselor but for academics," said Anna Okrah, who returned to Trinity this school year as a Learning Catalyst, a role she previously held at Trinity for 10 years. The catalyst team also includes Suzanne Newsom, who joined Trinity in that role in 2021, and Kimberly Monteleone, who moved into the catalyst role this school year after many years as a Lower School classroom teacher at Trinity.

The primary role of the Learning Catalyst - "What *doesn't* a Learning Catalyst do?" joked Monteleone - is to work with teachers on

needs of student applicants, serve on Trinity's literacy task force, and manage Trinity's tutors and occupational and speech therapists.

"We want everybody who sees the child during the day to have input," Newsom said.

Having been a teacher in nearly every Lower School grade level since joining Trinity in 2007, Monteleone knows the diversity of academic needs teachers face. "We do our best to meet those needs with two teachers in the classroom" - a lead teacher and an instructional assistant. "To have a third person" - the Learning Catalyst - "come in and support the diversity of learners is huge."

In Lower School, where Newsom and Monteleone are focused, that support could mean going into a classroom to work with a group of students on a specific skill or working one-on-one with a student in need of additional support inside the classroom. Catalysts also work with groups outside the classroom to reinforce a subject matter or spend time on something that wasn't mastered when it was first taught.

"As a parent of neurodiverse children, this is one of the most welcoming places," she said. "Because students are with classmates who are different from them in so many ways, they are able to have an appreciation for those differences and see them as positives. It's a special place."

Okrah said Trinity's embrace of those differences along with other types of diversity - racial, cultural, socioeconomic - is "one of the reasons I came back and one of the reasons I always loved working here."



With more children nationwide being diagnosed with some level of learning difference, Okrah wondered "at what point does different become the norm?"

ANNA OKRAH



classroom strategies to support the variety of learning needs they encounter, and to work with students and their families on understanding a student's needs. Catalysts also support the admission department in evaluating the learning



I love the variety of our skills and our experiences.

SUZANNE NEWSOM

Okrah, whose focus is Middle School, also provides some of the same inside- and outside-the-classroom support and coaching for teachers on strategies. "I feel like it gives me a chance to be creative because every kid is different and every issue is different," she said.

That diversity of learners, Monteleone said, "is one of the beautiful things about Trinity."

Having a team of three catalysts allows students to be "known and loved in a deeper way," Okrah said, as each of them focuses on a specific grade-level bloc (K-2, 3-5, and Middle School) to offer more student-specific support.

"I feel like I know the families better and the students better," said Newsom.

Monteleone said being able to spend more time in the classroom "and see the children in action" allows her to help support teachers in a very intentional way. "I love that we'll be able to see their growth," she said.

Reflecting on a 3rd Grade student she previously taught, Monteleone said that having known her since kindergarten and to "be able to see the growth in that child with the support we've put in place for her, that's why we do what we do."