



Jean Anne Clyde, Ed.D., is an advocate of arts-infused, inquiry learning who finds inspiration in young children. She has dedicated her life's work to helping teachers become skillful 'kidwaters' who appreciate young learners' brilliance. Jean Anne enjoys collaborating with teacher/researchers on innovate projects. Her most recent work integrates digital RealeBooks – the perfect venue for celebrating and inspiring young authors and their families to read and write. She has coauthored books: *Get Real: Bringing Your Kids' Learning Lives into the Classroom* (with husband Mark W. F. Condon), and *Breakthrough to Meaning: Helping Your Kids Become Better Readers, Writers and Thinkers* (with three teacher friends).

Mark W. F. Condon, Ph.D., is committed to promoting the freedom and full self-expression that comes from being avidly literate. A Professor Emeritus at the University of Louisville, his abiding interest is in extending full access to literacy to traditionally underserved populations. Over the last ten years he has worked to promote culturally and linguistically relevant local publication by and for those learning to read and write. Co-creator of RealeWriter and the RealeLibrary system, he currently works as a literacy coach with several American Indian schools.

making digital books with children? you really must try it!

by Jean Anne Clyde and Mark W. F. Condon

Forever, teachers have spent endless hours cutting and pasting children's photos and artwork, creating one-of-a-kind class books for the children in their classes to enjoy. Those texts have always been most cherished by children, worn to tatters – a sure sign of how much children love stories about themselves. Teachers figured out long ago what researchers have documented: Children are most passionate about books that feature characters and lives like their own. And the most perfect texts of all are books that include the children themselves!

Ten years ago, digital cameras with their hefty price tags were unaffordable; color printers were even rarer, and no software programs existed for children and teachers to create locally focused books. But thanks to recent technological advances, things have changed and making books has never been easier. Class books, once a rare and time-intensive labor of love, can now be created quickly, easily, and inexpensively . . . as in free!

Making books: A very good thing

When we make books for or with children, we make it clear that their stories, their cultures, and their lives are worth reflecting upon and celebrating. Incorporating even very young children's artwork honors their efforts at self-expression, making and sharing meaning. That simple act of recognition serves as a tribute, proclaiming, "Your artwork is a wonderful gift . . . and the insights you're sharing about your life are valuable to us!"

Going public: Publishing books with children

When we publish books written by or with children, we are taking that a step farther, in essence saying that their lives have worth beyond the family or classroom community. Imagine how thrilling it can be for pre-

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schoolers to learn that a book about them – or one they had helped write – is being shared with 'the big children' and with older people whom they admire!

Creating and publishing books with children:

- Demonstrates the power of reading and writing.
- Plants the seeds for a life-long interest in books.
- Inspires even young children to write more.
- Establishes a foundation for avid reading and writing!

A story will help make this point:

Early in the school year, Juanita Becenti was dismayed that her second and third graders were resisting writing. "They just hate it!" she told her colleagues at a faculty meeting. One month later, things had changed dramatically in Juanita's room. Children rushed up to visitors to share the latest books they'd created; and they could each name the two or three book titles that were next on their writing agendas. What caused this remarkable shift in children's enthusiasm for writing? Publishing. Once children finished creating their first books, Juanita printed copies of each for every student in their K-8 building. Each book reflected its author's life, giving readers a glimpse into what mattered to the young writer. And each child was thrilled at the attention and response by readers. There is simply nothing like a real-world audience to inspire authors of all ages that their lives are worth sharing.

Juanita's decision to publish her children's books caused such a stir that soon children in other classes were begging to make books. Some teachers were responsive and began making room for bookmaking in their classrooms. When teachers didn't, children began working on books in their free time, eventually publishing their writing outside the classroom.

From scissors and glue to ePublishing

How do we move from one-of-a-kind books that are housed in the class library, to creating and sharing multiple copies for readers — at home, in the community, and across the globe — to enjoy? Technology is the key. With the costs of technology dropping daily, computers, printers, and software are within the reach of virtually every teacher. Wondering how to get started? Here we provide a small glimpse into a few of the book-making experiences we've witnessed or been a part of. We hope to inspire you to see that you, too, can create and publish books with your children.

The possibilities? Endless!

Peter Carlton-McQueen is a kindergarten teacher who makes several books a month to celebrate his children's learning. A lover of lively language, Peter creates rhyming books that are playful, informative, and memorable. He sends copies of each book home as part of families' growing home libraries and keeps others at school for children to enjoy during independent reading time. Families so love these books that Peter's greatest challenge has been convincing them to take them out of keepsake boxes so children can actually read them! His solution is simple: He has offered to replace any book that is so 'loved' at home that it becomes shabby. And with modern printers, that is easily done. Peter's kindergarten collection is vast (he's been at this for three years), springing easily from events in his room.

- Investigating patterns? He and his children go on a pattern hunt where he snaps photos and creates a book.
- Cooking? Each recipe — along with 'how-tos' and photos of junior chefs at work — is preserved in a child-sized book.
- Science fair projects? Yet another opportunity for Peter to create language experience texts, this one showcasing his children's science investigations.
- Even something as simple as a new poem becomes a learning opportunity when Peter converts the poem into a book, with children as illustrators. What a brilliant way to promote a love of literature while engaging children in visualizing, a key reading comprehension strategy!

Once a teacher starts making books with children, the possibilities for topics seem to expand to every corner of home and school! Everywhere we look, we see a book waiting to be written, illustrated, and enjoyed.



Even classroom problems can inspire new books. In Holly Hartman's center, teachers struggled to find a solution to the battles children were having in the block area. To address this problem, she and the children created a book — *Who Uses Blocks?* — that showcased all of the ways children might use blocks (see Resources). This not only validated each unique approach, but also spotlighted the young workers, architects, and artists who developed them.



Making books for even the youngest learners

Fifteen-month-old Shaun is a scientist-in-the-making! A close observer of his world, he seems to notice everything around him. His mom, Jan, is a delighted co-conspirator, snapping photos of his latest investigations. She recognizes that although her young inquirer does not yet have the formal language to express them, Shaun is already posing and seeking answers to his own 'questions.' Photos of his efforts, combined with Jan's thoughtful narrative, tell the story of each adventure.

Jan can barely keep up! In a single week, she photographed Shaun experimenting with his new 'squeaker' shoes, discovering the wonders of his very first snowstorm, and conducting sink-and-float (and-drink!) experiments in the tub. Using free software from the Internet (see Resources), Jan made these into books for her son and added them to his growing collection of beloved books.

Soon Shaun will be able to read his books to his mom and dad. But for now — thanks again to free technol-

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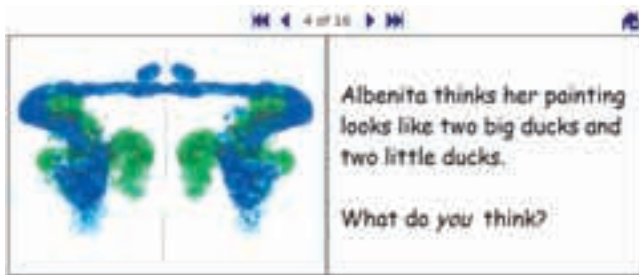
ogy — their voices, along with his responses, can be recorded and added to the digital version of his books, further preserving special moments. Meanwhile, Jan e-mails copies of these treasures to her family to keep them abreast of Shaun's latest adventures.

Look around! There are book topics everywhere!

Sometimes books just beg to be written! A bulletin board of children's symmetry paintings in Ms. Yatsattie's kindergarten class was the inspiration for a predictable book that was created by scanning children's artwork then adding text.

- Images were projected on a screen.
- Children were invited to talk about what they thought each painting looked like.
- Children decided on the text that would accompany their artwork.
- The group devised a title for their book.

What began days earlier as a math activity was converted in less than an hour into *The Mystery: The Line of Symmetry* (see Resources). This polished pattern book incorporated each child's name and artwork, and was instantly readable by its kindergarten co-creators.



New take on a classic text

Five-year-old Leah may be struggling with her letters; but she was able to adapt Bill Martin's famous *Brown Bear, Brown Bear* (1996) into an original book of her own! Her book featured her darling drawings of favorite animals (and one favorite friend). Completed in 30 minutes, the resulting *Sea Lion, Sea Lion, What Do You See?* left Leah beaming. You can surely imagine the impact on self-esteem when a struggling reader becomes a published author! Thrilled by her own success, Leah exclaimed "I can read!"

Personalized alphabet books

These days there is more pressure than ever for young children to learn 'skills' that are associated with their being 'ready' for school. But convincing little ones that the alphabet is interesting can seem daunting. How can we make letters relevant and meaningful to little ones? Create personalized alphabet books that include children's names, faces, and/or drawings! Ideas will abound . . . and so will children's enthusiasm for making alphabet books that feature them.

So what's next?

By now, we hope you can see that class-made books are in your future. We encourage you to start slowly and enjoy learning what technology can do to make a difference in the developing literate lives of your little ones. No matter what you do, the children will love any book that includes familiar faces, places, and events. Even if all you have is a digital camera on your telephone and a computer, you and your children can still make and share books that celebrate your lives together. With free software, you can make books — like all of the books featured here — that can be viewed on screen, no printer required. And once the children see that books can be made in their classrooms, they'll be coming up with ideas for books!

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Resources

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RealeWriter: A free software program used by all teachers and parents mentioned in this article. It is made for young children, their families, and caregivers. Download it from www.realebooks.com. It comes with everything you need to learn how to get started making books that neither you nor your children will ever forget.

Yatsattie, C. (2008). The mystery: The line of symmetry. [Online] Retrieved April 9, 2009, <http://bie.realelibrary.com/index.php/read/333>.