



Following the Path to Revision and Reinvention

by Emma D. Dryden

I admire the ways in which authors and illustrators, when faced with a blank page, screen, or canvas, find the strength and inspiration to reinvent themselves for the sake of a new idea, new story, new book, new project. Such reinvention takes an *enormous* amount of courage, no matter how established that author or illustrator is—because it's that fiercely daring blank page, screen, or canvas that forces an artist to question their abilities, their creativity, their mastery of their own craft. And then—with that first word, first keystroke, first brush stroke—the artistry reawakens and the creative process begins anew. It's hard. It's time consuming. It's frustrating. It's surprising. It's marvelous.

Being laid off after nearly two decades with a company strips a person of their familiar surroundings and labels, forces a person to face a fiercely daring blank slate, and question their mastery of their own abilities—*Who am I without the company? What do I do now? Am I any good?* When this happened to me in 2009 I was blessed to learn that though I no longer had the business card, expense account, title, or “clout” of a company name to cloak me, I still had my name, reputation, and a remarkable skill set as an editor and publisher. What had not been taken away was my deep understanding of the business of children's books within an ever-changing publishing landscape, and my expertise as an editor of picture books, fiction, fantasy, and poetry. What I also discovered was that I had a hugely supportive and

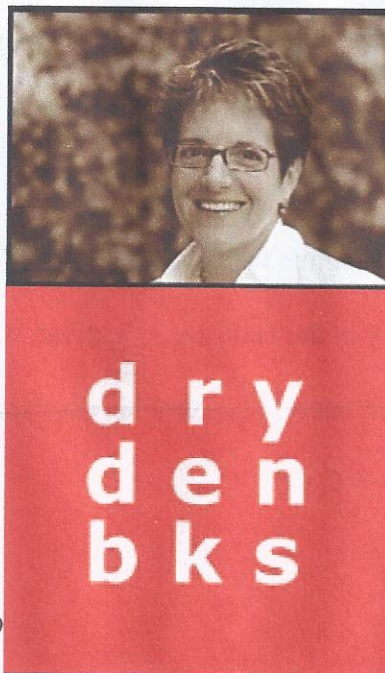
enthusiastic community of colleagues and friends—often called our SCBWI “tribe.” Armed with all of this, and at the urging of an author who insisted she pay me for assessing her manuscript, in March 2010, I launched drydenbks (www.drydenbks.com). Originally meant only as a means to tide me over until a new “real” job came along, drydenbks has *become* the “real” job—

indeed, this little children's editorial and publishing consultancy firm has evolved into a multi-platform business that's keeping me enormously busy and enormously gratified while also enabling me to learn new things all the time.

My work consists primarily of helping authors define, enrich, and craft their work to make it viable for the marketplace; in addition, I consult with authors and illustrators to help them define career goals and strategize approaches to meet those goals. As agent and publishing options have become more varied (i.e. more confusing!), I've made it a point to stay abreast of digital developments and platforms as they affect

children's books, and independent publishing so I can advise clients about best practices to employ in these arenas. It's my position that any work carrying a by-line ought to be considered nothing less than a reflection of that artists' reputation as a professional craftsman and business person. Whether print, e, or transmedia; whether a story is meant to be experienced on pages, screens or both, I'm interested in providing expert

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...EDITOR'S PERSPECTIVE

feedback so that whatever is published, regardless of delivery system or format, represents only that creator's best and most professional work.

I consult with people interested in publishing eBooks (on platforms such as uTales and Open Road Media), apps (with such groups as Ruckus Media Group, Oceanhouse Media, and Nosy Crow) or independent/self-publishing (on any number of platforms, including BookBaby and iBook Author) as well as those seeking agent representation and traditional publication. My approach with everyone is the same: let's be sure your work is as polished and as professionally presented as possible before you put it out into the world.

The fact that authors and illustrators are seeking out services from drydenbks indicates they're willing to invest time and money and are taking their work and career seriously. Beyond providing editorial input, for those who want agents, we work hard on crafting smart query letters; for those interested in indie publishing, we talk about options and about design, marketing, promotion, and discoverability; for those seeking information about apps or eBooks, we talk

about presentation and expectations. Through it all, we talk about best practices in the chair at the desk, best practices in the social network, and best practices balancing work, life, and family.

I keep my editorial instincts sharp by reading, writing, and staying engaged with the children's book industry; I learn about new publishing, marketing, and social networking options by taking seminars, webinars, and experimenting with the platforms myself. I urge authors and illustrators to do much of the same, if they can. They need to devote most of their time to writing and illustrating, of course, so I'm thrilled to be in a position to provide information and inspiration they may not be able to obtain elsewhere as they navigate an ever-changing creative landscape.

Emma D. Dryden is a children's editorial and publishing consultant with drydenbks, LLC, the firm she established after 25 years with several major publishing houses. She is an SCBWI Board member. Her website is: www.drydenbks.com

