

Economist & Sun • Stouffville Tribune

BOOKS

TINY BOOKS

for growing minds

*Author believes
it's never too early
to teach children to read*

BY SARAH PARKER
Staff Writer

If necessity is the mother of invention, then Melanie Parkes certainly knows how to turn need into a deed — and a profitable business.

Thirty years ago when Parkes, now a nursery school owner/teacher in Queensville, taught kindergarten, she found that many of her young students were ready to read, but none of the available readers were suitable for five-year-olds.

Reading was not yet part of the kindergarten curriculum and education consultants told Parkes that five-year-olds were not capable of reading. Parkes had a hunch they were wrong.

She had an idea and quickly stapled together a book of simple words and pictures made from newsprint and construction paper and stood back to watch the results.

It worked. The kids in her class were learning to read on their own using her simple books. But that was only the beginning.

"Then I wondered if four-year-olds could read," said Parkes. "Guess what? They read as well as five-year-olds. Then I thought, I bet three-year-olds can read."

Turns out she was right. Parkes continued with her books, making them with Bristol board and a book-binding machine, and used them in her own pre-school.

Their continued success has now led Parkes to her latest venture, the launch of Miss Melanie's Early Readers.

"I wanted to do it where children

taught themselves," explained Parkes of the purpose of her books.

She said this not only builds a sense of confidence in children, but also helps busy parents and caregivers.

Her books come in a set of eight entitled *Tiny Books for Tiny Hands, Level 1*. Each book is a different colour and uses that colour to emphasize sounds and words. For example, blue ball, blue box.

Each page focuses on a single concept with one picture and only a few words below to explain it. The laminated board books are short in story length and designed for little hands to hold.

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Melanie Parkes
author/teacher

"It's amazing to see little kids all reading," said Parkes, adding children learn early to "finger track" the words as they read along.

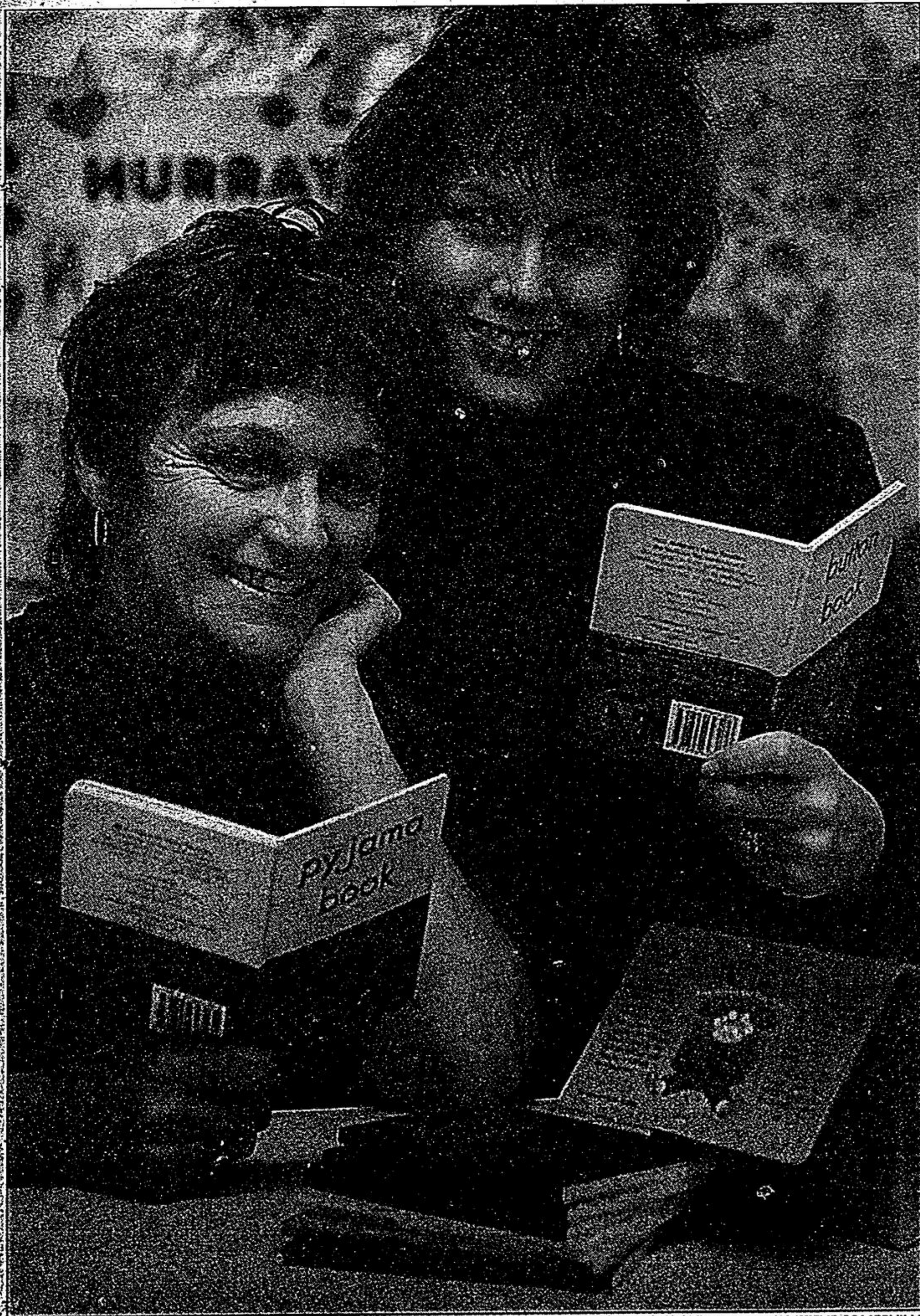
She said she will introduce a word or two to the children first, then let them try to read the book on their own.

Parkes has had tremendous reading success with her pre-schoolers, most of whom leave her care for kindergarten with a Gr. 1 reading level.

"I can honestly say every kid in my nursery school is a reader."

Parkes has been running Country Kids Preschool out of her home in Queensville for 18 years. She looks after

See NEVER, page 21.



STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

Melanie and Hilary Parkes of Queensville created and published a series of children's books called Miss Melanie's Early Readers for children six months old and up. They help children teach themselves to read using pictures and text. Melanie runs the Country Kids pre-school centre, while Hilary, an executive on Bay Street, runs the publishing side of the business.

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