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INVOLVEMENT OF PRIMARY SCHOOL
CHILDREN IN THE
PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

A Thesis presented
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the
Degree of Master of Technology in
Product Development at Massey University.

CAROL J POUND

1996
It is important to understand children.
Who they are, what they are, what their
abilities are and what they like and need.
It is important to understand children's situation
in a grown up world, dominated by grown up things and thoughts.

This is - in our opinion - the essence of researching children

Anonymous: Quote from Seminar on Researching Children
ESOMAR Aarhus, 18th-20th October, 1978 page iii
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to study some ways in which children could contribute to the development of products for which they were the main consumers. The research was conducted with female primary school children in small groups selected because they were part of the target market. The project had two specific aims; the development of techniques for incorporating ethical standards into projects involving young children, and the evaluation of a series of techniques that would enable children to develop and screen concepts for new products.

This research was undertaken in a local New Zealand primary school using four classrooms of children aged between five and nine years. The first stage of the project involved ninety-one children, male and female in a Group Introduction where a questionnaire on toy products was completed as a class activity.

The second stage of the project only involved the female children from these four classes and they participated in four stages of the Product Development Process. These were; Product Idea Generation and Screening, and Product Concept Development and Testing. In these sessions up to eight children, placed in groups according to age, tried the various techniques to develop a product concept for a new doll. The techniques used by the female children included; Focus Groups, Projective Techniques, Scaling and Preference Questionnaires, Card Sorting, Conjoint Analysis and Multidimensional Scaling. Of these Conjoint Analysis and Multidimensional Scaling were the least successful with the children.

The research showed that female New Zealand children over the age of six years can use the techniques tested to contribute usefully to the Product Development Process. This process was successful in the New Zealand school context because the children had a high standard of literacy and were comfortable with group and creative project work of this kind.
Techniques incorporated in the project to meet ethical standards were; a detailed reporting system to all participants of the project, no screening of the children but screening of the data after the test was completed, and a motivation method that rewarded attendance not performance and many chances for the children to withdraw from the project. The methods on the whole proved to be successful.

The issue of screening is important but the research showed it is not necessary or may not be desirable to conduct a detailed screening programme with children to find those with special skills, to obtain information for the Product Development Project.

The modifications to the techniques used with adults for consumer analysis with children should focus on methods of improving the communication between the researcher and the children.

This project shows general that in much the same way as the average adult consumer participates in the development of products, average children can make a valuable contribution to the development of new products in the first stage of the Product Development Process.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Professor Mary Earle for supervising this project for more years than can be asked of any person, and for finding significance in my results that always escaped my notice.

The children and teachers of Rooms 1, 6, 9B and 11 of West End School, Palmerston North, for allowing my repeated interruptions to their school day over many months. Especially the "Consumer Research Experts" involved in the Small Group Study.

The principal, David Beere and the Board of Trustees of West End School for giving permission to conduct the project at their school and the parents, of the children, for taking an interest.

Rachael Foubister for typing endless survey forms and other assorted materials, Leeann Wojtal for typing graphs and difficult tables and John O'Connor for help with the computer which never seemed to do what was wanted without appropriate encouragement.

Professor Richard Earle for photocopying papers that were unavailable in New Zealand while on overseas trips and for carrying parts of my thesis at various times to Mary.

Joan Brookes for her constantly asking "How is the thesis going?", and her encouragement to finish.

Professor Raymond Winger for allowing me the time to complete this thesis.

Last but not least, Michael, who learnt to stop asking how my thesis was going, and always thought what ever I had done was just the most intelligent thing he had ever read.
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