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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.

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**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 class rooms 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 room 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.

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