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**Children's Writing
in New Zealand Newspapers,
1930s and 1980s**

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**Thesis submitted for the degree of
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Abstract

This thesis is an investigation of writing by New Zealand children in the Children's Pages of five New Zealand newspapers: the *New Zealand Herald*, *Christchurch Press* and *Otago Daily Times* in the 1930s and 1980s, the *Dominion* in the 1930s; and the *Wellington Evening Post* in the 1980s. Its purpose is to show how children reflected their world, interacted with editors, and interpreted the adult world in published writing, and to examine continuities and changes between the 1930s and 1980s. It seeks evidence of gender variations in writing, and explores the circumstances in which the social role of writing was established by young writers. It considers the ways in which children (especially girls) consciously and unconsciously used public writing to create a public place for themselves. It compares major themes chosen by children, their topic and genre preferences in writing, and the gender and age differences evident in these preferences.

The thesis is organised into three Parts, with an Introduction discussing the scholarly background to the issues it explores, and its methodology. Part One contains two chapters examining the format and tone of each Children's Page, and the role and influence of their Editors. Part Two (also of two chapters) investigates the origins and motivations of the young contributors, with a special focus on the *Otago Daily Times* as a community newspaper. Part Three, of four chapters, explores the children's writing itself, in separate chapters on younger and older children, and a chapter on the most popular genre, poetry. The conclusion suggests further areas of research, and points to the implications of the findings of the thesis for social history in New Zealand and for classroom practice.

The thesis contains a Bibliography and an Appendix with a selection of writings by Janet Frame and her family to the *Otago Daily Times* Children's Page in the 1930s.

Preface

This thesis took shape as I was searching for children's views on enfranchisement. Reading the *New Zealand Herald* Children's Pages, I discovered that children's own work was not substantially part of the Page until the late 1920s. However as I read some of these voices from the past I was entranced with the direct tone, and decided to study what children and young people published in the newspapers in two decades - the 1930s and the 1980s. I would find out what differences there were in the writing and the writers of these two decades.

I considered a number of approaches to centre the work and concluded that a study of the topics and the forms of writing that children chose for publishing their work would be most illuminating. I discovered the work of Anne Haas Dyson at the University of California at Berkley who, although she based her research in classrooms, clearly felt the same determination as I did to find out what children *themselves* think. Her research directed me toward Bakhtin, and strengthened my resolve to report on the children's world.

I found my years of primary school teaching supplied a depth of experience and familiarity with children's work, which although not usually referred to directly in the study underpinned all my thinking.

I would like to thank the librarians of the Sylvia Ashton Warner Library at Auckland College of Education (and I include those who *were* there and have now moved) for their continued help over a long period, and to acknowledge how helpful their collection has been in the area of children's voice. The English

Librarian, Linda George, at the University of Auckland Library helped me in searching the databases. The librarians in the microfilm rooms in the Turnbull Collection in the National library, the University of Canterbury, the Auckland Public Library and the Hocken Library in Dunedin all offered expert professional help when I was reading the newspapers.

I am most grateful to all the people who gave time and their idiosyncratic expertise toward the writing of the thesis. To Sue Gray, to Rachel Holt, to Julie Park and Rose Lovell-Smith and most of all to Robin Hooper I offer my heartfelt thanks. I would also like to thank Daniel Holt and Tony Hunt for their expert computer help.

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Finally I would like to thank Professor Terry Sturm for supervising the thesis. Terry recognized the elemental and exciting strand in the thesis of listening to what children themselves say and write at a time when this was barely an accepted field of academic study. He encouraged me to continue research despite the initial dearth of academic work in the area. If it were not for his expert supervision, his on-going conviction that it was worthwhile, and his most valued help in improving the text, it would not be here. I hope this thesis adds to our understanding of New Zealand children, their writing and the role of women journalists who edited the Children's pages in the 1930s.

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