

**The Making of a Journalist:  
The New Zealand Way**

**Ruth Thomas**

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**Primary Supervisor: Allan Bell  
Secondary Supervisor: Richard Smith**

# Contents

List of Tables	vii
List of Figures	viii
Attestation of authorship	ix
Acknowledgments	x
Abstract	xi
<b>PART 1 THE CONTEXT</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1 Starting the Debate: New Zealand Journalism Education</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Introduction: From journalist to researcher	1
1.2 How the present research evolved	5
1.3 Rationale for the research	9
1.4 Questions posed by this research	10
1.5 The organisation of the thesis	12
<b>2 A Review of the Literature: Placing Journalism Education in an Historical Setting</b>	<b>15</b>
2.1 Introduction	15
2.2 The beginnings of journalism education	16
2.2.1 Early beginnings in New Zealand	18
2.2.2 The industry dominates with “trade schools”	20
2.2.3 The ultimate socialising experience – work experience	24
2.3 The concept of professionalism	26
2.3.1 Historical development of professionalism in New Zealand	27
2.3.2 The professionals of today	30
2.4 Is the academy challenging the old ways?	36
2.5 Into the future	38
2.6 Conclusion	43
<b>3 The Preliminary Study: Setting the Scene</b>	<b>46</b>
3.1 Introduction	46
3.2 Methods	47
3.3 Reform plays a major role	49
3.4 Characteristics of New Zealand journalism schools	53
3.5 New Zealand journalism education	57
3.6 Experience of the “real” world	63
3.6.1 Work placement	64

3.6.2 Supervised field trips	65
3.6.3 Longer term internships	65
3.6.4 Work experience	66
3.7 Conclusion	72
<b>4 Designing the Study</b>	<b>74</b>
4.1 Introduction	74
4.2 Theoretical perspectives	76
4.2.1 Discourse analysis	76
4.2.2 The inverted pyramid	77
4.2.3 Hybrid news stories	79
4.2.4 The three-dimensional framework	81
4.2.5 Retrospective protocol analysis	85
4.3 Implementation of the study	88
4.3.1 Ethical considerations	88
4.3.2 The pilot study	90
4.3.3 The design	92
4.3.4 The characteristics of the participants	94
4.3.5 Introducing the participants	97
4.3.5 Introducing the participants	97
4.3.6 Fieldwork	100
4.3.7 Data collection	102
4.4 Analysing the data	103
4.4.1 The professional version	103
4.4.2 Discourse analysis	104
4.4.3 Analysing retrospective protocols	106
4.5 Conclusion	107
<b>PART 2 THE FINDINGS</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>5 The Case-Study Approach: Two Students' Stories</b>	<b>110</b>
5.1 Introduction	110
5.2 Vin's story	113
5.2.1 The beginning of the year	113
5.2.2 The middle of the year	121

5.2.3	The end of the year	128
5.3	Casper's story	137
5.3.1	The beginning of the year	137
5.3.2	The middle of the year	144
5.3.3	The end of the year	152
5.4	Conclusion	160
<b>6</b>	<b>First Steps</b>	<b>163</b>
6.1	Prologue: The beginning of the year	163
6.2	Introduction	163
6.3	News values	167
6.4	Lead Sentences	171
6.5	Lexical choice	178
6.5.1	News language	178
6.5.2	Intertextuality	183
6.6	Order	187
6.7	Background and additional information	192
6.8	Changes to the students' syntax	195
6.8.1	Tense and aspect changes	195
6.8.2	Deletion and summarisation	197
6.9	Conclusion	199
<b>7</b>	<b>Mid-Year Progress</b>	<b>202</b>
7.1	Prologue: The middle of the year	202
7.2	Introduction	202
7.3	The inverted pyramid	205
7.3.1	Lead sentences	206
7.3.2	Lexical choice	209
7.3.3	Order in news stories	215
7.3.4	Background and additional information	218
7.3.5	Changes to the students' syntax	220
7.4	Hybrid stories	223
7.4.1	Lead sentences	225
7.4.2	Lexical choice	231
7.4.3	Order in hybrid stories	235
7.4.4	Background and additional information	239

7.4.5 Deletion and summarisation	239
7.5 Conclusion	241
<b>8 Almost There</b>	<b>243</b>
8.1 Prologue: The end of the year	243
8.2 Introduction	244
8.3 Lead sentences	246
8.4 Lexical choice	253
8.5 Order	258
8.6 Background and additional information	266
8.6.1 Deletion	267
8.7 Conclusion	272
<b>9 The Background to the Picture: Thinking Aloud</b>	<b>276</b>
9.1 Introduction	276
9.2 The beginning of the year	279
9.2.1 Learning the basics	279
9.2.2 The tutor dominates	287
9.3 The middle of the year	289
9.3.1 The ultimate experience in the real world	290
9.3.2 Towards being independent learners	294
9.3.3 “I don’t want to be a news journalist”	297
9.4 The end of the year	298
9.4.1 Challenges at the end of the year	299
9.4.2 Work experience remains the key	302
9.4.3 Small steps towards self-regulation	304
9.5 Conclusion	306
9.6 Epilogue: Where have all the students gone?	309
<b>PART 3 CONCLUSION</b>	<b>314</b>
<b>10 The Study’s End: Towards a New Beginning</b>	<b>314</b>
10.1 Introduction	314
10.2 Implications of the findings	317
10.2.1 How industry control became dominant	318
10.2.2 Work experience – real world experience	319
10.2.3 Becoming a journalist through learning by doing	320
10.2.4 The effects of “one-on-one” subediting	322

10.2.5 Developing independent critical thinkers	322
10.2.6 Encouraging career focus	323
10.3 Strengths, limitations and further implications of this research	325
10.4 Recommendations	328
10.5 Conclusion	333
References	<b>335</b>
List of appendices	<b>347</b>
Appendix I: Research Materials	<b>348</b>
Appendix II: Students' news stories and the professional versions	<b>363</b>
Appendix III: Sample excerpts of retrospective protocols	<b>395</b>

## List of Tables

Table 3.1 Year bands when journalism courses established	49
Table 3.2 Size of journalism schools	53
Table 3.3 Average age of students per school	54
Table 3.4 Ethnicity of students per journalism school	54
Table 3.5 Number of full-time staff	55
Table 3.6 Additional staff employed to make full-time equivalents	55
Table 3.7 Teaching qualifications of journalism educators	56
Table 4.1 Age of students	95
Table 4.2 Gender of students	95
Table 4.3 Highest qualification of students	96
Table 5.1 Vin's early news story and the professional version	114
Table 5.2 Vin's mid-year news story and the professional version	122
Table 5.3 Vin's end-of-the-year story and the professional version	130
Table 5.4 Casper's early news story and the professional version	138
Table 5.5 Casper's mid-year story and the professional version	145
Table 5.6 Casper's end-of-the-year story and the professional version	153
Table 6.1 Changes made to five students' early stories	173
Table 6.2 Henreitta's inverted pyramid compared with the professional version	190
Table 6.3 Background and additional information inserted in five student stories	194
Table 7.1 Changes made to students' mid-year stories	204
Table 8.1 Changes made to students' end-of-the-year stories	248

## List of Figures

Figure 4.1 Three-dimensional framework for discourse analysis of a communicative event (Fairclough, 1995, p.59)	82
Figure 4.2 A modified diagram of the influences on the students' texts, based on Fairclough's three-dimensional framework for the discourse analysis of a students' news story	84
Figure 5.1 Changes to the order of Vin's early story	120
Figure 5.2 Changes to the order of Vin's mid-year story	127
Figure 5.3 Changes to the order of Vin's end-of-year story	135
Figure 5.4 Changes to the order of Casper's early story	143
Figure 5.5 Changes to the order of Casper's mid-year story	151
Figure 5.6 Changes to the order of Casper's end-of-year story	157
Figure 6.1 Changes to the order of Henreitta's early story	191
Figure 7.1 Changes to the order of Henreitta's mid-year story	216
Figure 7.2 Changes to the order of Sully's mid-year story	217
Figure 7.3 Changes to the order of Brendan's mid-year story	237
Figure 7.4 Changes to the order of Kathie's mid-year story	238
Figure 7.5 Changes to the order of Agnes's mid-year story	238
Figure 8.1 Changes to the order of Miranda's end-of-year story	260
Figure 8.2 Changes to the order of Sam's end-of-year story	261
Figure 8.3 Changes to the order of Jamima's end-of-year story	263
Figure 8.4 Changes to the order of Brendan's end-of-year story	264
Figure 8.5 Changes to the order of Kino's end-of-year story	265

## **Attestation of authorship**

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief it contains no material previously published or written by another person, nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree of diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made in the acknowledgements.”

**Ruth Thomas** .....

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## **Abstract**

This study is a first of its kind for New Zealand journalism education, following 20 students at two different schools throughout a year-long training programme. It used two methods to gain a deeper understanding: a discourse analysis of their news stories written at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the year, and retrospective protocol analysis, to provide insight into their thinking processes, through their taped reflections.

The research found that journalism education controlled by the New Zealand Journalists Training Organisation still resembles that of 20 years ago, despite increasing numbers of students learning journalism as part of degree programmes. Students are trained for the media industry through learning by doing. They receive basic instruction and then are expected to perfect their skills by practising their writing and to learn the conventions and routines of the media industry through socialisation and work experience.

In the first half of the year, the students developed some skills in writing the traditional inverted-pyramid news stories. However, by the end of the year, their news writing showed technical signs of regression. Firstly, they were not writing in a succinct, clear fashion, emphasising news values. Secondly, they had been inadequately trained to write outside of the inverted-pyramid news story or to use popular “soft” lead sentences, so that their writing tended towards being promotional. Thirdly, journalism institutions strongly favour subediting by tutors and this detracted from the students gaining understanding of their own writing and being able to self-monitor and evaluate it. Lastly, they failed to show the critical thinking skills and independence necessary for a professional journalist so that they could research thoroughly, reflect deeply and write entertaining, informative and important news stories with flair.

Their reflections confirmed these findings, suggesting some stress and disillusionment. The students could “declare” what they knew about writing a news story but could not put it into practice. They blamed their failure to write high quality news stories on the pressures of the course, the deadlines and high volumes of stories. The gaps in their journalism education were also revealed through what was not mentioned in their taped reflections: in particular, they failed to mention the importance of news values in

making their stories more appealing. The major influence at first was the students' tutors, followed by work experience and the "real world" of the media industry.

The concentration on job skills and gaining a job coupled with a lack of knowledge and discussion provided the students with an incomplete understanding of the pressures of the media industry they were entering. The study recommends more debate about journalism education and more research, as well as a change away from "learning by doing" to a more critical, reflective approach.