

'I am a peacemaker': Writing as a space for recontextualising children's
identity in a Catholic First Communion preparation course

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Abstract

This article reports on research addressing the role of writing as a space for producing representations of children's identity as Catholics in a First Communion preparation course. It draws on data from ethnographic participant-observation over one year in a Catholic parish in England, focusing on writing in the preparation sessions, taking a social practice approach to identity and literacy. The article argues that in this course, written texts are drawn on to provide spaces within which children produce written representations of aspects of their lives which reify their identities as Catholics. Analysis of the dataset demonstrates four ways in which particular kinds of identities were constructed through writing processes. Writing provided space for reframing aspects of children's unique histories and identities within a faith-based perspective; representing children as active agents in the world; producing reifications of internal emotional states in linguistic form; and making relational connections between the children and their church, home and friendship communities. The article argues that the production of these reframings of children's identities requires multiple kinds of recontextualisations, and that writing provides a key means by which these are brought together.

Keywords: Religious literacy, literacy studies, catechesis, religious identity, Catholic identity, recontextualisation, First Communion, sacramental preparation

'I am a Peacemaker': Writing as a Space for Recontextualising Children's

Identity in a Catholic First Communion Preparation Course

This article addresses the role of writing in the construction of Catholic identity. Catholicism is an identification with a global faith lived out in a local parish. The article focuses on the role of writing and activities around written text in a First Communion preparation course for children and their families in one parish in England, focusing particularly on how writing in the First Communion preparation class was structured by the textbook used, and how this was drawn on in catechesis activities. It is taken from a larger ethnographic study which explored the role of everyday literacy practices in processes of identity construction in the parish.

Focusing on written texts is particularly relevant when exploring social processes in large institutions like the Catholic Church because of the central role of texts in producing and maintaining regularity and order across an institution (Smith, 1990). Materialised semiotic representations enable language to be preserved in the same form across different contexts, transported and reproduced across time and space. This reproducibility of textual form enables bureaucracy and institutions to be co-ordinated across different contexts. But at the same time as highlighting the central importance of written texts in constructing and maintaining institutional order, Smith shows how this institutional order exists only as a result of its ongoing co-ordination within lived experience. Texts can only play a role in social organization when they are part of people's activities of reading and writing, embedded in local social practices. She argues (Smith 2001) that studying texts as they are drawn on in the everyday world provides empirical evidence for understanding how local interactions construct organization and

institution at a larger scale. This article contributes to these understandings, showing how writing and texts in this local setting produce recontextualised representations of children's identities, in ways which reproduce the institutional framings of the global Catholic church.

The article identifies four key ways in which representations of children's identities are written during the course which highlight and reinforce key aspects of Catholic teaching. These are: highlighting the unique individuality of each child; representing the children as active agents with the capacity to make choices; producing oral and written accounts of internal emotional states; and making links between the children as individuals and their communities of family, friends, local parish and global Church. Through the production of these representations, all of which involve different types of recontextualisations, these children are positioned as having the identity of members of the institution of the Catholic Church.

Identity

The concept of identity has long been influential in social science and language research (see Benwell & Stokoe, 2006 for a useful overview). The underlying concept of identity as meaning 'the same as' something highlights the role of identification with a group (and difference from other groups). The notion of an individual's 'self-identity', on the other hand, draws attention to the idea of the self as a distinct individual with a unique autobiography and experience of the world. Social approaches highlight the fact that identity is rooted in social activity, in people's histories of engagement in activities and groups, in how people define themselves (and are defined) in relation to others, and in how these multiple aspects of identity become woven together in the stream of activities people engage in. Gee (2008) conveys identity as a process of becoming apprenticed to Discourses, ways of being which include language use,

through socialisation in the communities people grow up in and participate in, in which particular kinds of behaviour are rewarded or sanctioned in relation to the 'ideal norms' of the Discourse of those communities. This means that individual self-identity cannot be separated from social identity. Our sense of personal identity, indeed even the notion of subjectivity itself (Lemke, 1995), is learned through a process of social participation, and individual identity emerges from our historical positioning in a cultural matrix.

Another way to express this link between individual and social identity is to say that identity is realised through engagement in social practice. By addressing social life at the level of practices, it becomes possible to explore how abstractions like social order and identity are instantiated when people engage in specific, repeated actions in social events, which can be observed and participated in (Gherardi, 2009). As Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999) describe it, social practices are the ways in which resources – including meaning-making resources, but also social, material and mental/affective ones – are combined in more or less habitualised ways in particular settings. It is through these repeated engagements in similar actions that practices can be said to have continued existence. In relation to this article, people mobilise historically-situated semiotic and cultural resources in engagement in practices which construct and maintain their identity as members of a faith community and of a particular local parish.

Research into the role of social practice in shaping language use, learning, and communities led to the development of the concept of 'communities of practice' (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1992), exploring how people interact together in communities, learning ways of using language and becoming members of those communities. The concept emerged in Lave and Wenger's (1991) work on learning through apprenticeship. Wenger (1998) went on to develop the concept in more depth, placing the process of 'negotiation of meaning' as central to

his understanding of practice. He defined negotiation of meaning as a process involving participation – people engaging in interactions with each other – and reifications which people draw on and (re)produce in those interactions. These reifications are both cultural (eg recognised ways of using language) and material (eg the particular texts used during the interaction). Within this model, identities develop as people engage in communities of practice, both through learning how to participate in processes of negotiation of meaning, and through the reifications of identities that are produced as part of this learning trajectory. The current article will address how negotiation of meaning takes place in the First Communion course. It will show how writing produces reifications of aspects of children's identities which are consonant with Catholic teachings, and how participation in the course is structured to produce and reinforce these reifications.

The importance of writing and literacy practices in processes of identity construction has been identified by many (Collins & Blot, 2003). As Leander (2002) shows, writing and other modes of materialised meaning-making can produce 'identity artefacts', stabilised representations of particular aspects of people's identities. Hyland (2010), adopting a Bakhtinian perspective, argues that it is through the patterns of language choices made in writing that coherent and consistent identities are realized. Ivanič identifies four different types of identity which are significant in writing (Ivanič, 1994, 1997), including the autobiographical self, the discursal self, the authorial self, and the range of socially available possibilities for selfhood which people draw on to construct their own particular identity in specific contexts and situations. Building on this work, Burgess and Ivanič (2010) argue that writing should be seen as an 'act of identity', showing how acts of reading and writing develop different aspects of writer identity across different timescales. Lillis (2013) underlines the importance of writing as part of

processes of "inscribing ourselves and others into particular ways of doing/thinking/being" (p. 126), exploring how these processes are regulated in institutional spaces in various ways (and how people struggle against these regulations). The research described below demonstrates how acts of writing are repeatedly producing and drawing on new reifications of aspects of children's lives which produce representations of their identities within the framings of the Catholic institutional church.

Recontextualisation

This process involves multiple processes of recontextualisation. Bernstein (1990, 1996) identifies pedagogic discourse as being characterised by a recontextualising principle, through which knowledge from real life fields of activity is brought into education and turned into pedagogic topics. This entails changes such as selection, deletion or simplification of elements, changes in emphasis, or addition of explanation or description. He develops notions of classification (which elements are brought together and which kept apart) and framing (what is brought into the topic and what is kept out) to describe these changes. The sessions discussed here are characterised by similar processes in which elements from children's lives are selectively brought into a pedagogic context and framed in new ways.

Scholars in critical discourse analysis (CDA) have focused on the textual realisation of recontextualisation. Van Leeuwen's (2008) theory of discourse is rooted in the idea that any linguistic representation of social practice, by definition, recontextualises that practice from material to linguistic form. The person making the meaning has to choose how to represent the elements of social practice in the text they produce - the participants, processes, and circumstances of what is going on - and may also incorporate evaluations, legitimations and

purposes into their accounts. He produces sociosemantic networks to map the possibilities available in representing each of these elements,. The current article analyses the representational choices made available to children in writing about the social practices of their everyday lives in this particular setting, although the specific terminology of van Leeuwen's sociosemantic networks is not drawn on here.

Other critical discourse analysts have used the concept of recontextualisation to interpret the transformations which take place when texts, discourses and genres are moved across contexts. For instance, Wodak and Fairclough (2010), studying higher education policies in Europe, show how discourses of international policy including rhetorics of globalisation and competition are recontextualised in different ways in different national contexts. Close attention to texts shows the specific linguistic transformations by means of which these recontextualisations (and struggles over them) are realized. The current article shows the role of writing and texts in the recontextualisation of global discourses of Catholic identity in the local setting.

Recontextualisation is made possible through material and discursive technologies, including "writing, electronic communication, design, and built construction" (Iedema and Wodak 1999). These provide the means by which reified forms of meaning are abstracted from the local settings in which they first emerge and can move across settings; Iedema and Wodak describe this process as "the crux of organizational power" (1999: 13). This article shows how the simple technology of writing in a textbook, in a course designed by the textbook writer and publishers and interpreted by a team of catechists, enables the global organizational power of the Catholic church to be realised in framing personal identity in this local setting.

Silverstein and Urban (1996) have written about the process of 'entextualisation' involved when a textual artefact is produced from spoken interaction. This always involves a process of change (Komter 2012), selecting particular elements of spoken discourse and transforming them in ways which depend on many factors including the immediate co-text of the writing, the context of talk within which the text is produced, and the anticipated uses of the text in the future. Rowsell and Pahl (2007) focus on how such processes of entextualisation sediment multiple layers of identities into the text. Entextualisation produces a physical representation of meaning - such as a reification of identity - which can be detached from its original context and become transportable across space and time, and can therefore be drawn on as a resource for meaning-making in other contexts. As Kell (2006) highlights, recontextualisation processes involve flows of meaning making across different local settings, groups of people, times and spaces. Literacy artefacts 'travel' across these different settings and in each of them form a resource for meaning-making, but this meaning is always shaped by the people, tools and resources, and purposes of the particular local setting.

This article explores the role of writing in constructing identity positions for children in the particular local setting of this course¹. I will show how writing enables a range of recontextualising processes: from the everyday to the pedagogic field; from global to local discourses; from spoken to written discourse; and to enable semiotic flows across different local contexts in the parish. Recontextualisation through writing is crucial in the process by means of which children produce new representations of their identities as members of the faith community.

Methods

This research is rooted in a perspective on writing (and reading) as being situated within institutional and social relationships and practices, as has been developed in approaches to literacy which adopt an ideological (Street, 1984) or social practice (Barton & Hamilton, 2000) approach. Work in this tradition has demonstrated how literacy is shaped by (and shapes) social practices in particular historical contexts, drawing on Heath's (1983) notion of the literacy event as an event in which written language plays a role, and literacy practices as the particular ways of using and engaging with written language associated with a given cultural setting (Barton & Hamilton, 1998). The methodological implications of this stance are clear. In order to understand writing, it is necessary to observe local practices of reading and writing. These observations can identify how literacy practices are part of processes of construction and maintenance of identity, community, and institutional ordering. In the case under study here, observations of the practices of the course and the texts used within them enable us to see how literacy practices are a central means of producing particular possibilities for identity within the framings of the course.

The study from which this article is drawn adopted an ethnographic perspective. Data collection consisted of a year's participant-observation in a Catholic parish community. Over the course of this year I participated in as many parish activities as possible, including social events, the youth group, formal committee meetings, Children's Liturgy, and regular Mass attendance (although the use of texts in ritual settings was not the principal focus of this research). The principal datasets were detailed ethnographic fieldnotes, written immediately after (or, where possible, during) each interaction, with a focus on literacy events, and collections of the documents which played a part in these events. Data analysis focused on sites identified as significant in processes of identity construction and maintenance. The preparation or catechesis

course, which ran throughout the year, was one of these key sites and forms the focus of the present article. Children attended this course as they prepared to receive the sacraments of First Reconciliation (confession) and First Holy Communion.

The First Communion Preparation Course

The process of taking on an identity as a Roman Catholic is marked by several sacraments known as the 'sacraments of initiation'. For a child born into a Catholic family, the first sacrament, baptism, is normally received in infancy. As the child grows up, around the age of seven or eight they participate in Holy Communion for the first time. The First Communion ceremony is traditionally a significant event in Catholic faith communities around the world, marked by special dress (girls often wearing white dresses, boys in suits), and celebrations at church and at home. Later on, in the teenage years, the sacrament of Confirmation is received. (Adult converts to Catholicism would usually receive the Eucharist (Communion) and be confirmed on the same occasion.)

In the parish under study here, children's preparation for the sacraments used to take place in the local Catholic primary (elementary) schools. However, partly as a result of increasing national centralisation of school curricula, the process had shifted some years before the research was carried out to become a parish responsibility, although the three-fold contribution of parish, school and family was often stressed. The parish-based programme, run by volunteer catechists including religious sisters and lay people (most of whom had some training and/or experience in education), had used a variety of different resources to structure the course over the years. The programme which they were using during the time of this research was entitled *God's Greatest Gift* (Wilson, 1995). It included preparation for the Sacrament of

Reconciliation (Confession) as well as First Communion; it is usual for children to receive their First Reconciliation before their First Holy Communion.

Around 30 children aged seven and eight, most of whom attended local Catholic schools, came to sessions of the programme on Sunday afternoons in the church hall once a month for nine months. They and their families were also expected to be attending Mass regularly. Each child was given a *God's Greatest Gift* textbook, split into chapters, each of which related to one session of the programme. The titles of the sessions were all 'gifts': the first session was entitled "A Very Special Gift", followed by the Gifts of "Baptism", "Friendship", "Forgiveness", "God's Word", "Peace", "Joy", and "God's Greatest Gift".

The pattern of the sessions was similar each week. At the beginning, children were registered as they came in and then engaged in a craft activity relevant to the theme of the session in groups of five or six, on tables set around the parish hall. A full-group talk introduced the theme of the session, and then children returned to their small groups to work on related activities, including some of the relevant pages in the textbook. A short service closed the session, with a Gospel reading, prayer and hymn. Catechists planned the structure of each session in a meeting the week before, drawing on the children's programme book, the catechists' book which went with it, and their own experience and training.

The content of the sessions did not focus predominantly on Catholic doctrines or teaching, but more on the child's own experience. Catholic knowledge and practices (eg what happens at Mass, regular prayer, how to make the Sign of the Cross) were introduced, but these were all framed in relation to the child's experience. The programme was not designed to be a 'teaching' programme; catechesis was described as being different from school, the sharing of

faith was understood to be a different process from the transfer of knowledge. This was made explicit in the introduction for parents at the beginning of the programme, where the parish priest emphasized that faith is 'caught, not taught' several times. The catechists' role therefore was seen to be one of sharing their faith with the parents and children. As Poveda et al. (2006) emphasise in their study of religious instruction classes for Gitano children, the role of the adult as literacy mediator in these situations is central in enabling the children to engage with the texts drawn on in the classes, and to relate these texts appropriately to the domains of their everyday lives.

Data Collection

Data was collected through a year of participant-observation, including attending catechists' preparation meetings and attending all the sessions with children. Parents and children attended separate sessions on the Sunday afternoons; my principal focus was on the children's sessions. I observed the Enrolment Mass in which families made their initial commitment to the programme, two Celebration Masses during which children brought artefacts produced during the programme into the main Sunday service, the First Reconciliation service held on a Friday in January, and the First Communion Masses in June. I also participated in the regular planning meetings the catechists held before each of these events. I collected, as far as possible, examples of all the texts which played a part in these events. The dataset includes the textbook used; detailed fieldnotes on all the sessions I attended; copies of the catechists' plans for the sessions; the texts produced by the catechists to supplement the programme; photographs of the display at the back of the church; and most of the artefacts produced for the display during this year.

Researching activities significant to the development of the personal faith lives of parents and children raises some ethical challenges, which were considered carefully throughout the research. Ethical approval consonant with the procedures of my university at the time was obtained. The research was explained to the parish priest, the key gatekeeper, who gave his permission for it to proceed, in a formal meeting. I also discussed the research openly with members of the parish whenever meeting new people, for instance during coffee after Mass, whenever I joined a new group or meeting, and whenever someone joined a group I had been attending. I also participated in the parish's safeguarding training for all those working with children.

For the First Communion preparation course in particular, I spoke with parents at their first introductory meeting, and information and consent forms were distributed to parents via the catechists. To explain my research to the children, I told them that I was doing a project about the parish and asked for their permission verbally. I presented my findings to the catechists in a series of meetings, and some of them read and commented on written pieces about the work. Early in the data collection process I made a commitment not to use recording devices, since many of the interactions I observed involved people discussing personal and private issues, and the detail of how this interaction worked linguistically was not the main focus of my research.

Data Analysis

A qualitative data analysis approach was adopted, a process of repeated reading and grouping of data to allow analytic categories to emerge, informed by the theoretical understandings outlined above. The process brought together analysis of the written texts used in

the sessions, drawing on the documents collected, with analysis of the practices in which they were embedded, drawing on the fieldnotes.

In concrete terms, this entailed firstly reducing the data by producing summary matrices. The first summarised the events in the preparation sessions, identifying the sequence of events common to the different sessions as described above. The second (see Figure 1) organised the texts used in the sessions by type and specified how these were used in each session. The different text types identified were texts created for use in the celebration Mass displays; texts created for use in the session; pages from the textbook worked on in small groups; Gospel reading text, taken from the textbook; texts to identify children and catechists (name stickers); administrative texts (register); prayer books; texts private to catechists (session outlines); posters; texts used as examples or props; texts given out in the session for use outside the session (holy pictures, invitations to Celebration Mass); and texts used in the ceremony (one week only). The texts produced and worked with in each session were listed.

WRITING AS A SPACE FOR RECONTEXTUALISING CHILDREN'S IDENTITY

MATRIX 2. SUMMARY OF TEXTS USED IN SESSIONS BY TYPE.

	12/10/97 Preparation for Reconciliation: "A Very Special Gift"	9/11/97 Preparation for Reconciliation: "The Gift of Baptism"	7/12/97 Preparation for Reconciliation: "The Gift of Friendship"	18/1/98 Preparation for Reconciliation: "The Gift of Forgiveness"	8/2/98 Preparation for Communion: "The Gift of God's Word"	15/3/98 Preparation for Communion: "The Gift of Peace"	26/4/98 Preparation for Communion: "The Gift of Joy"	17/5/98 Preparation for Communion: "God's greatest gift"	5/7/98 Post-First Communion final session: "Our Gift to God."
Texts created and used in display.	Friendship chain with one link for each child's name.	Paper candles, each child wrote name on 2 candles (one for each church) and decorated.	Hands with children's names on, decorated.	Sorry stars to hang on Reconciliation tree.		Clouds with 'peacemaking' on, stuck around dove for use in display.	Leaves used to decorate Tree of Joy		
Texts created and used in session.		Thin sheet of paper which prayer (agreed on in discussion) was written on and read from.			A5 sheets of paper on which children drew Gospel stories; paper for writing bidding prayer on.	"I am a peacemaker" stickers decorated and worn by children.		"Invitation from Jesus" decorated in small groups	
Pages from God's Greatest Gift worked on in small groups	Pages on 'friendship'	Pages on 'baptism'		"Lost" pages: have you ever been lost, story of young girl lost, idea of saying "I feel lost"		Things you have done to be a peacemaker, places where there is war in the world, laws made for peace.	Pages about things which make us joyful.	Pages about meals with families.	GGG: Gifts from God and "When I was hungry ..." pages.
Gospel reading text.	[probably from GGG though I wasn't there for this]	Story of Jesus' baptism from GGG. Carried ceremoniously round and Mass practices (+++ Alleluia This is the Gospel of the Lord) used. Listened to standing.	Story of Zacchaeus <i>from GGG? or Bible?</i>	Story of Prodigal Son from GGG. Carried round in procession, Alleluia, read Gospel, listened to standing, asked questions about it	Beattitudes read from Bible, preceded by Alleluia procession, listened to standing.	Discourse on peace read from Last Supper, read from Bible not from GGG, without usual ceremonial introduction. Instead, introduced by referring to when 'peace' said in Mass.	Road to Emmaus from GGG, preceded by +++.	+++ GGG story of Last Supper.	GGG story "When I was hungry" read twice: first just with children then in service with children and parents. Introduced by +++ and Alleluia. Listened to sitting down because long.
Identification texts.	Name stickers for children and catechists.	Name stickers for children and catechists.		Name stickers for children and catechists.	Name stickers for children and catechists.	Name stickers for catechists and children.	No stickers this week.	No stickers this week.	
Administrative texts.	Register.	Register.		Register.	Register.	Register.	Register.	Register.	Register.
Prayer books.	Prayer books. Told how to use - daily - and keep safe			Closing prayer read from prayer book.	Closing prayer read from prayer book.				
Texts private to catechists.	<i>outline of session</i>	<i>outline of session</i>	<i>outline of session</i>	<i>outline of session</i>	GGG catechists' book used for leading meditation on Beattitudes. <i>outline of session</i>	Prayer for peace read out as closing prayer - catechist read, children repeated line by line. <i>outline of session</i>	Opening and closing prayers read from handwritten papers. <i>outline of session</i>	Opening prayer about taking Communion reverently, read by catechist. <i>outline of session</i>	<i>outline of session</i>
Posters.	Words of hymn.	Picture of Easter Candle on wall with "Easter Candle" written underneath it. Words of hymn		Reconciliation tree, words of hymn.	Words of hymn.	Words of hymn, doves: "Blessed are the peacemakers".	Words of hymn.	Words of hymn "Jesus thou art coming".	Words of hymn "God's greatest gift".
Texts used as examples or props					Each catechist had Bible to show children, referred to in large group discussions.				
Texts given out in session for use outside session.					Children shown "blessed are" pages to fill in for homework.		Holy pictures to give to prayer sponsors; invitation to Celebration Mass to give to someone.		Certificates of 1st Communion: asked by PP to put them in a prominent place and every time they looked at them to remember they are special individuals.
Texts used in ceremony.									Prayer cards and order of service given out to parents and children and used in service.

Figure 1: Matrix of texts used in the sessions

The movement of texts between the different sessions of the course was visually mapped (Figure 2), to show the spaces where the textual activities were planned and reflected upon (catechists' meetings), the sessions where the textual activities were carried out, and the places

between which the textual artefacts travelled (home, sessions, church display, Celebration Masses).

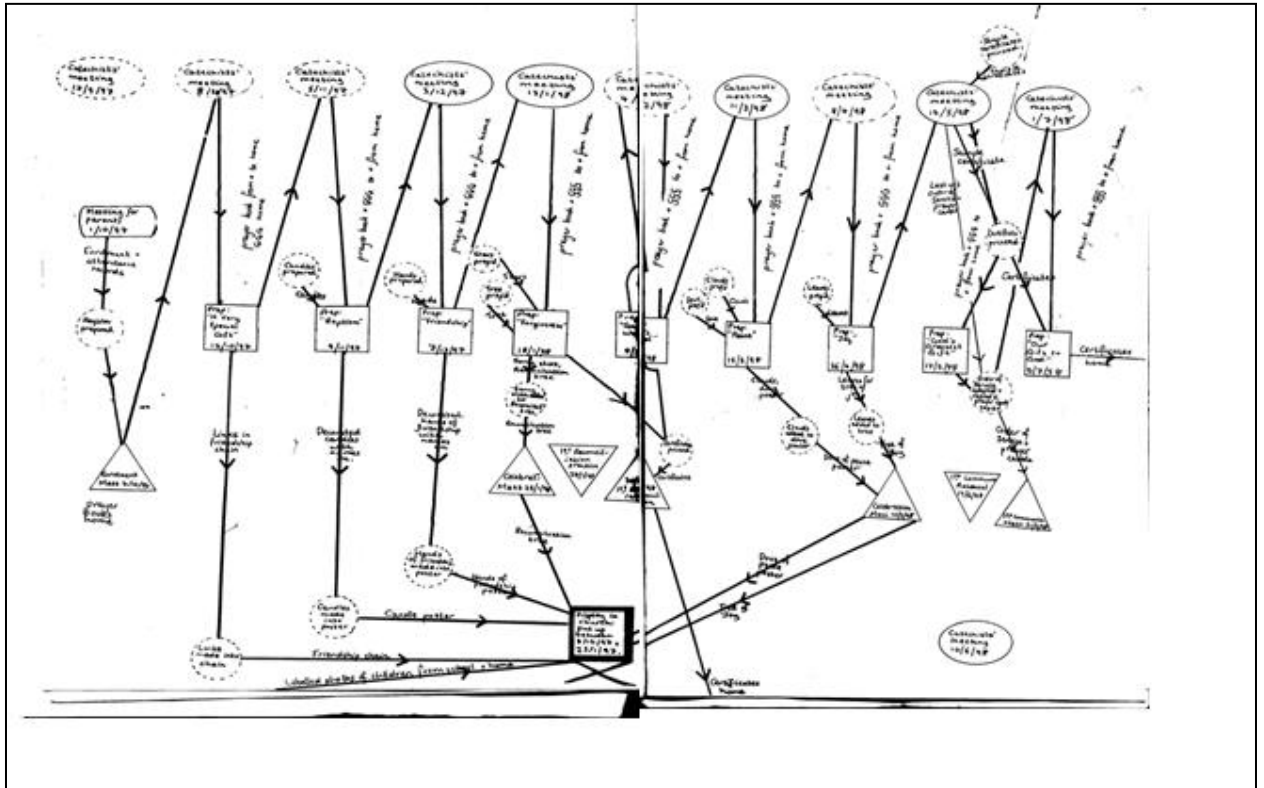


Figure 2: Mapping of text travels

I then revisited the fieldnotes of the different sessions, writing them again with particular attention to the questions: How are individuals positioned by the texts used in this session? How are individuals positioned by the discursive events in the session? This was done by combining the description of the event from the fieldnotes with a summary of the texts used and an interpretation of these in relation to any particular identity positioning of individuals, drawing on the social understanding of identity outlined above. These longer texts were then marked up by hand (Figure 3), underlining each instance of positioning identified in the account.

War happens when some people choose to ignore the Gift of Peace, and then other people get pulled into the fight."

"In many places people are not able to enjoy the Gift of Peace because they are very poor. It's hard to be at peace when you have no money to buy food or medicines."

Then on both pages the children are asked to complete the sentences "I have heard that people are [at war / very, very poor] in ... This makes me feel ...". The 'right' answer to the 'feeling' question is clearly something along the lines of 'sad' or 'unhappy', and given that children are schooled in giving the 'right' answer most of them would probably put something like this. In the session I observed all the children wrote "sad". This positions children as being concerned about issues of social justice, a concern which is not typical of traditional Catholicism but has been an important feature of the post-Vatican church. On both pages they are also asked to write what 'laws' they would make against war and poverty if they were in charge of the country. Their relation to people in this situation is constructed as one in which they know about them, are concerned about them, and would do something to help if they were in a position of power to do so.

The child's voice continues to be taken on on the second page with the phrase "I asked my family if they knew of any laws in our country that helped those in need.", constructing their relationship to their family as one in which the family provides knowledge to the child.

Other texts used in the events.

The sticky labels used both actually and metaphorically label the children as being peacemakers, reinforcing the message of the book texts. While each label is initially the same, children are asked to individualise them by decorating them and adding their names to them.

How are individuals positioned by the discursive events in the session?

In the talk to the large group, children are told we are all given the gift of peace from God that we should share with other people, and that we can choose whether to use it or not. Their relation to God is constructed as being one where God gives gifts that they can then choose to put into action or not, and their relation to other people as being one where we should share our gifts with them. Children were given a binary opposition choice between being a peacemaker or a troublemaker, and told that they have the agency to make that choice.

The catechist talked about the difference between peaceful families and noisy families, saying that peaceful families produce peaceful people and vice versa, illustrating the idea of peace itself as being relational, about relations with other people. Individual's relation with family is constructed as being one in which their choice about whether or not to use their gifts from God is influenced by the family they are with.

Figure 3: Marking up positioning in extended fieldnotes

The resulting text was physically cut up, with one description of the event and associated interpretation of positioning on each piece of paper. These pieces were sorted and re-sorted until all were placed in groups, which were grouped again into overarching categories (Figure 4) which form the four key themes of the subsections below.

Unique individual identity	Focus on child as an individual
	Giving accounts of individual biography
	From identical to individual
	From general to particular
Emotional responses	Written representation of emotional states
	Talking about emotional states
Representing agency	Explicit reference to choices child makes
	Child asked to do things in text
Representing relationships in community	Text incomplete without voices from family and friends
	Textual presence in parish community
	Relationship to family
	Relationship to friends
	Relationship to parish community
	Relationship to global Church

Figure 4: Categories identified through the analysis process

Findings: Writing to Recontextualise Identity

This analysis identified a principal role for writing in the course as providing a space for children to produce textual representations of their identities, in ways which draw on their unique life histories and experiences and recontextualise them within the framework and understandings

of the programme. The pages of the textbook invited completion with elements from children's lives, providing spaces in which children recontextualised their identity in ways which highlighted the uniqueness of their individual biographies, supported them in verbalising internal emotional experiences, highlighted their agency and their identity as active choosers, and situated them in relation to a particular set of broader communities. The practices of discussion and writing during the sessions supported this process. This produced a new set of written reifications which identified them as First Communicants and as Catholic children.

The 'Gift of Peace' Session

To give a sense of how writing was integrated in the sessions, I will describe one of them in full, before presenting each analytic theme in more detail. The session described focused on 'The Gift of Peace'. It involved a re-categorisation of the children's identities as 'peacemakers', both through discussion and through the production of written reifications.

The parish hall had been prepared by the catechists in advance, with a crucifix and candles placed at the front, surrounded by large posters with white doves on them with 'Blessed are the Peacemakers' written underneath. As children arrived, they were given sticky labels with 'I am a peacemaker' written on them. They decorated these and wore them throughout the session, already explicitly labelling them with a particular identity in writing. This redefinition of the children's identity as peacemakers through writing continued throughout.

Once all the children had arrived, they sat in a horseshoe formation on the floor while one catechist led a discussion about peace. She asked what sorts of families are peaceful families and what sorts of families are not, inviting them to supply examples from their own lives. Then she asked them to produce examples of things that 'peacemakers' and 'troublemakers' might do.

Much of this discussion revolved around the idea of peace as 'freedom from noise', referring to people playing their stereos too loudly and disturbing others as examples of not being a peacemaker. The children were then asked to sit quietly and think about what peace meant to them for a couple of minutes, before returning to small group work.

The next stage began with the production of written artefacts for the church First Communion displays. Each child was given small white paper clouds and asked to write on them, "Peace means to me ...". They were prompted to reflect on what they had just been thinking about. The resultant phrases included mainly examples of behaviour, for example "Loveing to my family and friends and no souting", "I will stop a fight", but also a couple of negative behaviours to avoid: "I will not be a trouble maker by fiting with my sister", a couple of attributes of being: "A peace maker is someone whos kind", and a few about the concept of peace itself: "Peace means to me quiet and happy" (children's original spellings have been retained). When the clouds were complete, they were added to the doves posters which were moved into the church in time for the following week's Mass.

The next activity was to work through some of the pages in the 'Gift of Peace' chapter, first discussing them as a group and then asking the children to fill in the blanks in writing. The pages used began: "The best place to start ... is with the people around you. Ask yourself these questions: 1. Have I ever helped friends make up after a quarrel? 2. Have I ever refused to join in when friends are saying unkind things about someone? 3. Have I ever tried to be kind to someone who is unkind to me? If the answer is "Yes", then you are a ... Peacemaker." It is relatively unusual in the book for the second person to be used, and on the next page of this double-page spread the book switches back to first person, assimilating the 'Peacemaker' categorisation (made highly salient, written in large font and centrally positioned on the page)

into their own self-description: "When I choose not to get into fights, When I help my friends make up after a quarrel, When I do something to help my neighbour, When I try to stop something unfair happening, I am a ... Peacemaker". The text presupposes (through the use of the word "When" rather than "If") that the child does engage in these activities. The new information introduced is the re-interpretation of these biographical events in service of the recategorisation of their identity as Peacemaker.

Children were then invited to write about a particular occasion in their own lives, in a box headed: "Here is a time I remember when I made peace ...". Before filling this in, the catechist asked each of them to tell a story about a time when they made peace. The child who began spoke about a time when they had made peace between themselves and an elder sibling. Almost all of the children then recounted similar examples, summaries of which became the written account in their books. Events from the child's life history are recontextualised here, first in oral then in written form, to produce a particular written representation of their identity as 'peacemaker'.

The next page to be worked with was a double-page spread dealing with war and poverty. At the top of the page came general assertions: "War happens when some people choose to ignore the Gift of Peace, and then other people get pulled into the fight." "In many places people are not able to enjoy the Gift of Peace because they are very poor. It's hard to be at peace when you have no money to buy food or medicines." Underneath come blank lines for the child to complete sentences: "I have heard that people are (at war / very, very poor) in ... This makes me feel ...". Here, writing is used to produce reifications of the child's emotional response to information about the wider world.

At a quarter to four, the children were invited to sit in a large circle on the floor. One catechist asked the children to supply examples of times the word 'peace' is used during Mass, then a Gospel reading was read: the discourse on peace from the Last Supper. A prayer for peace was read out by the catechist, the hymn 'Peace is flowing like a river' was sung, then children returned to their small groups working through the textbooks until their parents collected them.

This account of one session shows how central the role of writing was in re-categorising the child's identity as 'peacemaker', achieved in several different ways: the stickers labelling them as peacemakers; the recontextualisation of the children's life history in large group discussion and small group discussion, which fed into textual productions in the book and for the display; the explicit redefinition of their identities in the textbook, and re-interpretation of their life experiences in the light of this; the written verbalisation of their individual emotional responses. Throughout the course, writing served as a space to recontextualise children's identities in similar ways.

Writing to Recontextualise Unique Individual identity

The uniqueness of each child as an individual was a theme running right through the data, from the enrolment Mass to the First Communion ceremony. Children worked in a small group with the same catechist every week, in order that the catechist could get to know them as individuals. It was also important that each child be known by name. The first thing that happened when the children came in was that they were registered and given a sticker with their name on it. The books were also given out with these name stickers on them, making them individual to each child from the moment that they were received.

The focus on each individual child is evident in the overall format of the book. Each child was initially given an identical copy of the 'God's Greatest Gift' book, at that point a black-and-white printed A4 size (roughly US letter size) textbook. But from the moment the children began to work with the book, it developed into a multicoloured representation of (certain aspects of) their lives. Children wrote, produced drawings and coloured in the text with information from their everyday lives and their life histories, making the copy of the book which they possessed particular to themselves. Almost every page in the text requires unique input from the child to whom the book belongs, asking them to write about their lives, memories, feelings and histories. As the account above shows, the preparation sessions were structured to support children to provide this input.

For instance, in the chapter used in the first session, entitled "A Very Special Gift", children were asked to provide specific details about themselves throughout the chapter, writing about their homes, families, towns and churches. This focus on the child as a unique individual is symbolised by a page at the start of the chapter. The first double-page spread consists of a gift tag on the left hand side, labelled: "To: _____ (Write your name here) 'A Very Special Gift'", and on the right, the words "Yes, it's you!" in a large, shadowed bubble font, surrounding a double frame surrounding a flat piece of reflective foil. This 'mirror' provides the child with a 'real presence' in the text. In the phrase "Yes, it's you!", the 'you' only has a referent in terms of the face reflected. This page fascinated the children. During the whole of the first session, the group which I was with kept turning back to it, colouring in the words around the frame and making faces in the mirror. The parents also remarked on it during the introductory meeting. Even the publishers emphasise this page: the main title, 'God's Greatest Gift', is supplemented on the back with a second title, 'The Mirror Book'.

Throughout the book, generalised information invited completion in writing in a way specific to the child addressed. This ongoing invitation to write, taken up predominantly in the small group preparation sessions, changed the textbook from a manufactured replicated product to an individualised artefact. The book is for the most part written in the first person. Second person imperatives such as “(Write about a time when you were lost)” are written in a very small font, usually placed between parentheses, and backgrounded through their position underneath large blank spaces for the child to fill in. These imperatives are used less and less as the programme goes on, replaced with the implicit imperatives of incomplete sentences with just a drawing of a small pencil. This backgrounding of the explicit imperative reinforces the impression that the discourse of the book, the sentences and phrases completed by the child, are ‘their own’; the book is not just telling them things but inviting them to write themselves in.

This reliance on the child’s input to change the text from identical to individual was evident in almost every page, and also in many of the additional texts produced during course activities. For example, the last session before the First Communion Mass was marked by each child being given an ‘Invitation from Jesus’ to First Holy Communion. These invitations began as identical but each child filled theirs in with their own name and decorations, thus making it - through their own work - an invitation which applied to them alone.

The move from identical to individual is mirrored by a similar move from general to particular. In the second chapter, most of the session was spent discussing a double-page spread which begins with assertions which could be applied to all the children: “I am human. I can move, touch, see, hear, smell - I can feel happy, excited, joyful, loving. ... Sometimes I feel angry, frightened, jealous.” These are followed by spaces for the child to write about feelings they have had in particular situations: “Here are a few feelings I remember having ... at home; in

school; at the park; in church; watching TV. (Write your feelings in each circle.)” The children were invited first to put their feelings into words in discussion in their small groups, based on memories of specific situations, and then to write these accounts down, so the general assertions at the top of the page could be complemented by accounts of particular situations at the bottom.

This pattern of beginning with an identical artefact which the child individualises in writing was also followed in the texts produced for the church display. These varied in format, including a friendship chain made out of paper rings, a poster made up of multiple paper candles, and a Tree of Joy, made from twigs arranged in a plant pot with paper leaves hung on to them. The children were given identical elements (gummed strips, paper candles, cut-out leaves), which they individualised by writing their names and a short phrase on them. These then became a display made up of many superficially similar elements, each of which is - on closer examination - unique.

This explicit focus on the child as an individual was welcomed and deliberately fostered by the catechists. For the most part, the pages which were focused on in the small group sessions were those which invited the children to write about their own life experiences. Several catechists said that they would like to spend even more time talking about the children's own lives and felt constrained by the time pressures of having to 'do' the book. The parish priest reinforced this focus on the individuality of the child, insisting that the children's names be used during the First Communion ceremony. The sermon during this Mass focused on the specialness of each individual child and the importance of being 'called by name'.

Writing to Reify Emotional Responses in Words

This focus on each child's individuality is reflected in how the texts invite the children to produce written representations of emotional states. Children were often invited to write not only about the events of their everyday experience but also about what they felt about them. By putting these feelings into words, both in written form and in small group discussions, children produced an externalised, reified version of their feelings. This construction of verbal representations of their internal affective experience is essential preparation for the sacrament of Reconciliation in particular.

For example, the chapter 'The Gift of Friendship' begins with the words "Our friends can help us change, too! Sometimes when I am alone, I feel ...". Underneath these words is a picture of a box, tied up with chains, padlocks and barbed wire, with the words "Sad", "Angry", "Jealous", "Lonely", "Scared" written on it. This picture is followed by the words "And then a friend comes along, and I feel ..." next to a picture of the same box, open, with the chains and padlocks lying broken around it, and balloons floating up out of it with the words "Happy", "Kind", "Loving", "Excited" written on them. Under the box is written, "(You can write some of your own feelings on the box above)", and under the balloons "(Fill in the empty balloons)". The intentions of the text are clear: to have children produce verbal labels for their emotions, distinguishing between 'bad' emotions, linked to being alone, and 'good' emotions, linked to being with a friend. In the session, the catechist physically modelled the idea of being closed in and trapped - associated with the 'bad' emotions - by drawing her arms into her body and frowning, and the feelings of the 'good' emotions by opening her arms out and smiling. The use of these metaphors categorises emotions into two opposing types, 'closed' and 'open', giving the child access to a classificational system which provides verbal labels for physical and emotional states.

The next chapter, 'The Gift of Forgiveness', has as its main theme the idea of feeling 'Lost'. It begins with a space for children to write about a time when they have been lost, and then to write about how they felt about it. In the session observed, each child was asked to tell a story about a time when they had been lost, and then to write about it on this page. At this point, most of the children told stories about being lost as a moment of adventure, with only one of them recounting feelings of confusion or concern; nevertheless, the catechist encouraged them to write about feeling scared, worried or confused in the textbook, fitting their representations into the dominant interpretive frame provided by the text.

The text then extends the reach of these feelings associated with being 'lost', saying that "sometimes we use 'lost' to describe the 'feelings' we have when we are unhappy about our lives." "We say ... 'I feel lost' and we mean ... 'I feel as if I am lost'." This page is headed with the word "Lost" in a very large bubble font, foregrounding it and inviting colouring in, with the words "Lonely", "Worried", "Sad" written inside the letters and, underneath, "(Can you write in any more 'lost' words)". Examples are given in three circles at the bottom of the page of occasions when "we" may feel like this: "We can feel like this when ... someone we love has been unkind to us; a friend doesn't want to be friends any more; we know we have done something wrong." So children began by constructing interpretations of their own experience, which they represented in textual form in the format offered by the book, associating these particular experiences with patterns of emotional responses. These feelings were then re-interpreted as being similar to those felt when "unhappy about our lives", providing verbal labels to associate with these feelings which again prepared children to speak about emotions in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Writing to Represent Child as Active Agent

This individuality is associated with a representation of the child as an active agent, capable of making their own choices. Consistently through the book the focus is not just on who they are, but on what they can do and choose. In the chapter on Baptism, there is one full page relating to 'choice', which was used as one of the main focuses for that session. The text reads: "Most of us were baptised as babies. We didn't choose to be baptised - our parents made the choice for us. But ... As we grow up ... we will have to make choices for ourselves." It is unusual for a page to be written in the first person plural, and this highlights that this choice was not one made by the child themselves. But the relational change of having become a member of God's Christian family, associated with the sacrament of Baptism, then does become a choice, since continuing membership in this family is dependent on their active choice: "We can choose to stay a member of the Christian family ... by learning about Jesus and the life he lived, and by trying to do the things he asks us to."

While there are references to the child's active agency and choices throughout the book, the final session, entitled "Our Gift to God", is the most explicit session developing how this should be put into practice. Throughout the course, the children's relationship with God is constructed as being one in which God gives them gifts. At the end, the book turns this into a relationship of reciprocity. The chapter begins, "Look back at all the Gifts God has given you", with the word "Gifts" in a larger font. Underneath are nine small pictures, each labelled with the name of one of the chapters of the programme. At the bottom of this is a question, which challenges the children: "What will be your gift to God?". The gift tag which begins the chapter is atypical, reflecting this: while the rest have asked the children to fill in their names, "To: _____", this one has already filled in this section - "To: God" - and asks the children to fill in their names in the "From: _____" section. The use of the second person also marks this as

deviant in terms of the norms of the text: the book is no longer taking on the children's voices, but is someone else making a request of them.

The things that the children are asked to 'give back' are related to the Gospel reading from the start of the session, in which Jesus tells his disciples that he will say to them in heaven, "I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. ... If you did these things for anyone, you did them for me." The final part of the book consists of blank spaces with headings like, "When I was hungry ...", "When I was thirsty ...", "When I was a stranger ...". The children are asked to fill these in over time with pictures, drawings or writings about people who they can help in some way. The discussion around this chapter during the small group session focused on what the children could actively do to help people under these conditions, and in the early blanks the children filled in things they could do (such as: visit sick people in hospital, give money to charity).

Writing to Relate Children to Communities

While the focus is on the child as unique individual, this individuality is always situated in relation to a set of communities: family, friends, local and global Church. The books become multi-voiced, because in their production the child is not expected to fill them in alone. The text invites children both to write about their lives from their own perspectives, and to summarise conversations with other people. Each chapter includes at least one page which the child cannot complete without talking to other people. The discussion of 'feelings' in the first session ends by inviting the child to ask their family and friends about how long it takes to grow up, and to write this down. Similarly, the "Gift of Baptism" chapter includes a page about the specificities of the

child's baptism which includes a section entitled "I asked my family about the day and this is what they remembered ...".

In the sessions themselves, discussions with the catechists and with other children contributed to a great extent to what children wrote in their books. Often, as in the Peace session described above, several children in one small group would write almost exactly the same thing, particularly if one of them was specifically praised by the catechist for what they had written, when there would usually be a rush by the other children to write something very similar. The children were also explicitly asked to discuss things with their 'friends and families' outside the sessions, and to write about what these people said to them. In the parents' sessions, parents were asked to spend time at home, outside the preparation sessions, working through the book with their child. They were told that the sessions would not cover the whole book and that their support in completing the rest was a key part of the sacramental preparation programme.

The relationship between the child and the parish and wider Church community is manifested both in the text, particularly in the chapter on Baptism which highlights the membership of the child in 'God's Christian family', and in the practices associated with the course in the parish. The parish priest and catechists felt it was very important that the First Communion programme should be part of parish life, and that the parish as a whole should be aware of the First Communion cohort and their progress. Written artefacts produced in the course played a key role in this. The artefacts became displays at the back of the two churches in the parish, offering a permanent visible presence of the children in the worship space. The catechists saw these displays as very important. During the year of my fieldwork, the display did not go up until Christmas, for various reasons, and this became an issue for serious discussion at the catechists' meetings. As a result, to substitute for the presence of the display, one of the

catechists wrote a brief article about the programme in the parish magazine, distributed free to all Mass-goers once a month; this was another written manifestation of the preparation programme in the community.

The elements which made up these displays also had a more visible and dynamic role to play in the two Celebration Masses, one just before the First Reconciliation ceremony and another towards the end of the programme. During these Masses, children took up the posters and artefacts produced for the display in procession, and the priest spoke about these artefacts to the community as a whole. So these artefacts served not just to give the children a (reified) permanent presence in the environment of the church, but also contributed to the (participatory) presence of the children in parish worship events.

Discussion and Conclusion: Producing Children as Catholics

During these sessions, writing played a role in the construction of a child's identity as a member of this faith community in several different ways. The social meanings constructed through writing did not represent a single, unified Catholic identity to which each child was supposed to assent. Rather, each child's life history and experience was written about in the textbook to produce a particular reification of their lives and a reflexive verbalisation of their activities and emotions. The role of writing in these sessions was not to construct Catholic identity as allegiance to the Church as an institution, or as assenting to a particular set of beliefs. Instead, children were writing new ways of seeing themselves, as a special individual, with a particular role to play in their communities, and the responsibility to make active choices. Each artefact produced was unique to the individual child concerned, and yet was constrained within

the framework of the programme. This was achieved through a complex interaction of texts and practices.

While the programme focused on the children's unique individuality, this was not as a collection of isolated individuals. Throughout the course there was a focus on the children's relational identities, their identities within communities: in the communities of their families and friends, and in the parish community as a whole. This was achieved through the multi-voiced nature of the texts, completed not by the child alone but by the child talking to other children, to catechists and to their families and friends, filling in the text through drawing on these conversations. It was achieved through explicit presentations of the children's identities as relational, dependent on their relationships with friends, families and Church for change and development. It was also achieved through the production of displays which became part of the textual environment of the parish churches, and through the active participation of children in parish worship activities, during which they symbolically presented these texts to the community. So, throughout the programme, the focus on the unique individuality of the child was balanced by the insistence on the relational nature of this identity.

The materiality of text allowed this reification a permanence over time, and therefore enabled this to be built up over the course of a year-long period of sessions. The fact that these meanings were written rather than spoken meant that they were portable, permanent, and reproducible. The textbook was taken back and forth from home, to church, to the preparation sessions, reinforcing the recontextualising links made between the different communities to which the children belonged. It also served as a permanent record of the recontextualisation process in which the child engaged, which they could continue to refer to during and after the course.

So far, this process has been discussed primarily in relation to the local First Communion preparation course, extending to include the local parish and families of the children. But to exclusively focus on these local social relations would be to overlook the fact that this programme is part of the process of taking on an identity as a member of the global Catholic Church. Although there can appear to be a difference in kind between this powerful institution and the small community of children and catechists meeting every month in a church hall, it is through the multitude of local interactions of this kind all over the world that the existence of the institution is constructed and maintained: through the links that are made in social practice between Catholic individuals and the Church as a whole. One of the key ways this is done is through text, providing written reifications of Catholic identity by linking outwards to the Church as an institution (as discussed in Tusting, 2000).

In the First Communion texts, this is achieved for the most part implicitly. The only place in the textbook where the child's membership of the Church as an institution is explicitly mentioned is in the chapter on Baptism. The chapter includes references to the global Church as the Family of God, and Baptism is referred to throughout as "becoming a member of God's Christian family". But apart from this reference, the focus of the content of the texts is principally on the child's way of being, rather than on their institutional affiliation.

In the past, First Communion preparation used to consist of children learning the catechism, a set of questions and answers which summarised, in simplified form, the theological arguments of the sixteenth-century Council of Trent. Until the 1950s and 1960s, Catholicism in Great Britain was a religion characterised by strong adherence to practices which kept Catholic identity distinctive and very separate from other religious communities. This has been characterised as a 'fortress' church (Hornsby-Smith, 1991) requiring adherence to a very fixed

set of beliefs, a strict moral code, and a set of very explicit behavioural rules and prohibitions. One of the changes associated with the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s, influenced by more general changes in relations to authority associated with modernity which have been termed the 'decline of deference' and 'turn to the self' (Heelas, Woodhead, Seel, Szerszynski, & Tusting, 2005), was the adoption of a different approach to children's religious instruction, so that the focus was less on *knowledge* and more on *faith and understanding*.

This change in focus can be clearly seen here. The process of recontextualisation of identity in the book is a process which begins with the children themselves, their autobiographies, experiences and identities. Rather than requiring them simply to learn knowledge, to acquire a set of learnt phrases, children are here being led through interaction and through writing to engage in new ways of representing themselves. This new reification stresses the child's value as a unique individual; demands that the child verbalise their feelings and take responsibility for their actions; and situates that individuality within a set of communities, of family, friends, school and parish, within which the 'gifts' of the different chapters (friendship, forgiveness, joy, peace etc) can be used and appreciated. This is therefore a representation of self which stresses key values associated with Catholic social teaching in particular: the value and dignity of the individual human person, the call to participate in communities of family, friendship and Church, and the responsibility to take action in the world (Hornsby-Smith, 2006). Through their interaction with the texts, the children produced a reified version of their identity which represents them as Catholic subjects. Writing is central to this process as it affords multiple kinds of recontextualisations: from real life experiences to the pedagogic setting of the course; from the global discourses of the Catholic Church to the specific interactions in the local

setting; entextualising the spoken discussions around the sessions into reified written form; and permitting the flow of these reifications across many different local settings.

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ⁱ The primary focus of the research was on texts and text use in the parish, and the children were not interviewed directly. Therefore, I am not making claims here about the children's understandings of taking on identities as Catholics. Rather, the article develops an understanding of how the texts used in the course, and the practices they were part of, make particular kinds of identities and subject positions available in this setting.