*Jan Grajczonek**

HOW SHALL WE KNOW THEM? PART 1 - THE CONSTRUCTION OF 'CHILD' AND 'CHILDHOOD' IN OFFICIAL CHURCH EDUCATIONAL DOCUMENTS

Abstract

Historically, childhood has been viewed and constructed in a variety of ways, including as: a blank slate, on the way to becoming, innocent, miniature adults and so on. All of these constructs suggest the notion of a universal childhood, that is, all children are the same. Contemporary views of childhood challenge this view of universal childhood suggesting that children's socio-cultural backgrounds directly impact on who they are. Early childhood educators recognise the diversity of childhoods and their classroom practice reflects this deep knowledge and understanding of a contemporary view of childhood. However, pertinent to early childhood teachers in the Catholic school setting is the view of the child according to the Church. How is childhood constructed by the Church? This paper presents the first part of an investigation that analyses key Church educational documents to determine the official view of childhood as constructed by the Church. (A follow-up paper, Part 2, explores the implications such constructions might have for classroom teachers.)

Introduction

A contemporary view of childhood is one that sees children as strong and capable and acknowledges 'multiple childhoods' rejecting the notion of the 'universal' child (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007; Malagazzi, 1993; Qvortrup, 1994). Early childhood teachers recognise the diversity of childhoods and their classroom practice reflects this deep knowledge and understanding. However, pertinent to early childhood teachers in the Catholic school setting is the image of child as constructed in official Church documentation. The common use of the term, 'the child' to represent 'all children' in official policy documents is criticised for its seeming dismissal and disregard of the child as an individual (James & James, 2004). Such criticism has implications for early childhood education in Church-related schools whose curricula and pedagogies are underpinned by Church policy and practice. This paper investigates and analyses official Church educational documents to determine some insights into the official view of childhood as constructed by the Church.

An historical development of the construction of childhood

Images of children that have been promoted over time include: Hobbes' image of the child as naturally wild and untamed who required socialising, Rousseau's *Emile*, the image of the innocent child who innately seeks out virtue, truth and beauty, and Locke's image of child as a blank slate or *tabula rasa* who starts life with and from nothing (Arthur, Beecher, Death, Dockett, & Farmer, 2005; Dahlberg et al., 2007; Woodhead, 2005). Even in biblical times children were understood and constructed in various ways (Bunge, 2008). Some of these included children as needing to be taught or disciplined, such as "train a child in the way he should go" (Prov. 22:6); or bringing up children "in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). In other passages children were constructed as active agents or as models for adults, such as God calling young Samuel, (1 Sam. 3-4), or David slaying Goliath , (1 Sam. 17) (Bunge, 2008, p. xxxiii).

Until more recent times, developmental psychology has had a significant influence on our understandings of childhood. The starting point for such theory has been the universal child, that is, the one child who represents *all* children and develops through a series of stages including physical, cognitive, social and moral as advanced by Piaget, Kohlberg, and Erickson (Arthur et al., 2005). Such developmental theories have also influenced theories regarding the religious development of children as proposed by Fowler

(1981). However, contemporary views of early childhood challenge this view of universal childhood suggesting that *the child* in the singular form cannot be representative of *all* children, as each child's experiences of childhood is unique and distinct to a variety of contexts including their social, cultural, political and religious contexts. It is argued that these constructions produce a 'poor' image of child, one which "is weak and passive, incapable and under-developed, dependent and isolated" (Dahlberg et al., 2007, p48.), rather than a child who is "rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent and most al all, connected to adults and other children" (Malaguzzi, as cited in Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2007, p. 48).

Reconceptualised views of childhood are emerging (Arthur et al., 2005; Soto & Swadener, 2002) including Vygotsky's (1967) sociocultural theory, Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecological theory, the new sociology of childhood (James & James, 2004; Mayall, 2002), poststructuralism influenced by the work of Foucault (1972), and postmodernity (MacNaughton, 2003). The reconceptualised view of childhood criticises the universal child construct for its emphasis on progression, rather than valuing the present for what it is. In other words, when the focus of childhood as a stage in the life course is on becoming, maturing, wanting, and so on, childhood is constructed as a journey towards adulthood, that is, children are constructed as *becoming* rather than *being* (Qvortrup, 1994). It is as if this stage is not significant in its own right; it is simply a means to an end.

The view of childhood as a stage in the life course is criticised by Allison James and Adrian James (2004) who contend that whilst "a developmental stage of life characterised by basic physical and developmental patterns is common to all children", the ways in which this is interpreted, understood and socially institutionalised for children by adults "varies considerably across and between cultures and generations, and in relation to their engagement with children's everyday lives and actions" (p. 13).

A further significant element of the reconceptualisation of childhood is its focus on the child as participant (Mayall, 2002; Skelton, 2007). Skelton (2007) and others connect this focus on participation with the introduction of the *United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC) ratified by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 20th November, 1989. Whilst the UNCRC maintained the two previous 'P's, provision and protection of the 1959 Declaration of the Rights of the Child, it introduced a third 'P', participation, which emphasises participation of children in decisions that affect their own lives (Skelton, 2007, p. 167).

Childhood then, is not a universal stage experienced in the same way by all children. The child is not representative of *all* children who are passive recipients, rather than active agents. A contemporary, reconceptualised view of childhood is understood to be a social construct constructed by many social structures, and historical, political, cultural, and economic contexts (James & James, 2004; Skelton, 2007). Within these structures and contexts, the Church also must be considered as a valid constructor of childhood.

A reconceptualisation of childhood also requires that we clarify and distinguish amongst the terms, 'childhood', 'child' and 'children'. James and James (2004) argue that too often these terms are used interchangeably and criticise the common practice of using 'the child' in social science literature and government policy to represent 'children' as misleading and "would *never* occur in relation to adults, except ironically, in other politically marginalised groups such as 'the elderly'" (p. 14).

Policy and practice in the Catholic school is to a large extent shaped and determined by key Church educational documents in which a number of references are made to 'childhood', 'children' as well as to 'the child'. Critical insights regarding the Church's construction of these terms can be gained by analysing these policy documents.

The study reported in this paper builds upon and extends research conducted thus far into the construction of 'childhood', and the image of children conveyed by such constructions, specifically in the context of educational Church documents.

The present study

The purpose of the present study is to investigate how childhood is constructed specifically in key Church educational documents. The following sections analyse key Church educational documents in order to ascertain how Church educational documents construct 'childhood', 'children' and 'the child'.

Methodology

The key documents chosen to analyse for this study, are those that are specific to Catholic Education and include: *Gravissimum Educationis*, Declaration on Christian Education (Vatican Council II, 1965), *The Catholic School* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977), *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988), and finally *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997). These documents are formal communications written by the Congregation for Catholic Education in Rome.

Extracts that directly focus on the specific characteristics and constructions of the terms 'child', 'childhood', and 'children' were selected from the documents. It is important to note that these terms appear at other times throughout the documents but not in significant ways relevant to this analysis with its specific focus on: who they are, what they do, what is done to them, and how they are categorised, and therefore other references were not included in this analysis. The documents also refer to young people but this term was omitted from the study as it was associated with the activities of adolescents. Further, whilst it is acknowledged that such terms as 'student', 'students', 'pupil' and 'pupils', are also present in these documents, these terms also have been omitted, as they raise a range of other issues not specifically relevant to the focus of this present study. For the purposes of this study then, childhood is understood to include children between birth and twelve years.

The document extracts were analysed using Systemic Functional Linguistics and Membership Categorisation Analysis. Systemic Functional Linguistics (henceforth, SFL) as proposed by Halliday (1975) is a way into analysing text through focusing on the function of grammar that affords insights into how language functions in crafted texts; it is concerned with how people use language to produce meaning (Freebody, 2003). Membership Categorisation Analysis, (henceforth, MCA) is a discourse analysis tool that looks at the particular categories generated in text, the category bound activities and attributions which are either assigned to them specifically or can be implied (Baker, 2004; Freebody, 2003; Hester & Eglin, 1997; Silverman, 1993).

The analysis of the selected extracts involved an integrated investigative process, which applied SFL to determine how the language functions, and MCA in order to gain deeper insights into the nature of childhood as described in the specific and implied category bound activities assigned to children. SFL was applied using the process proposed by Freebody (2003, pp. 188-189). First, the analysis focused on the specific nouns/participants and nominal functions, 'child', 'children' and 'childhood' in terms of where they were positioned in the text: as foregrounded active agents or as passive recipients. It then focused on the verbal processes associated with these participants: what did they 'do'; what was done to them; what was getting done. This initial step explores how the text builds its field around these three terms. Along with the SFL analysis, MCA was then utilised as a means to reveal how identities, social relationships and even institutions were produced (Baker, 2004) in each of the extracts. MCA's specific focus was to investigate how the categories 'child', 'children' and 'childhood' were produced by the specific attributes and characteristics assigned to them in the documents. By examining these documents in terms of the activities and/or attributions assigned to the three categories, "their functions and roles and the ways childhood is constructed within the text is revealed" (Freebody, 2003, p. 181).

Analysis and findings

***Document 1: Gravissimum Educationis*, Declaration on Christian Education (Vatican Council II, 1965)**

Gravissimum Educationis one of the Second Vatican Council documents published in 1965, specifically

focused on Christian education.

Table 1: Relevant extracts from the document: *Gravissimum Educationis*, Declaration on Christian Education
(Vatican Council II, 1965)

Introduction

The rights of men to an education, particularly the primary rights of **children** and parents, are being proclaimed and recognized in public documents. ...Mighty attempts are being made to obtain education for all, even though vast numbers of **children** and young people are still deprived of even rudimentary training and so many others lack a suitable education in which truth and love are developed together.

1. The Meaning of the Universal Right of Education

Therefore **children** and young people must be helped, with the aid of the latest advances in psychology and the arts and science of teaching, to develop harmoniously their physical, moral and intellectual endowments so that **they** may gradually acquire a mature sense of responsibility in striving endlessly to form their own lives properly and in pursuing true freedom as **they** surmount the vicissitudes of life with courage and constancy. Let **them** be given also, as **they** advance in years, a positive and prudent sexual education. Moreover **they** should be so trained to take their part in social life that properly instructed in the necessary and opportune skills **they** can become actively involved in various community organizations, open to discourse with others and willing to do their best to promote the common good.

This sacred synod likewise declares that **children** and young people have a right to be motivated to appraise moral values with a right conscience, to embrace them with a personal adherence, together with a deeper knowledge and love of God.

2. Christian Education

Since all Christians have become by rebirth of water and the Holy Spirit a new creature so that they should be called and should be **children** of God, they have a right to a Christian education.

3. The Authors of Education

Since parents have given **children** their life, they are bound by the most serious obligation to educate their offspring and therefore must be recognized as the primary and principal educators. ... It is particularly in the Christian family, enriched by the grace and office of the sacrament of matrimony, that **children** should be taught from their early years to have a knowledge of God according to the faith received in Baptism, to worship Him, and to love their neighbour. Here, too, **they** find their first experience of a wholesome human society and of the Church.

The Church is bound as a mother to give to these **children** of hers an education by which their whole life can be imbued with the spirit of Christ and at the same time do all she can to promote for all peoples the complete perfection of the human person, the good of earthly society and the building of a world that is more human.

The first point to note is that neither 'child' nor 'childhood' is specifically referred to in the document. The term 'children' and various pronouns for it, occurred a total of 15 times in the relevant paragraphs and statements, as highlighted in Table 1. Key insights are afforded into how 'childhood', 'child', and 'children' are constructed when attention is paid to whether they are placed into the *active* or *passive* position. It is only placed in the foregrounded active agent position once in this document, "as they surmount the vicissitudes of life with courage and constancy" (see in section 1). However, such agency comes with conditions which are morally defined in slightly pessimistic circumstances.

In all other statements in this document, children are constructed as agentless passives: that is, they are being acted upon by an unnamed agent, "... vast numbers of children are still deprived from even rudimentary training". Who or what is preventing them from receiving an education is not explicitly revealed (Collerson, 1994, pp. 51-51). In this statement then, the focus is on children being deprived an education, rather than who is responsible for this deprivation. In the same statement, others (children) "lack a suitable education in which truth and love are developed together" implying that whilst many of types of education are available, only a Christian education "offers truth and love." In this statement the term 'children' is constructed in two ways: (i) is referred to as "vast numbers" so it does not represent *all* children; and (ii) is referred to as "so many others" and so another separate cohort of children is established. In both instances they are representing many children, but not *all* children.

In the next section of this document, "Children must be helped, with the aid of the latest advances in psychology and the arts and sciences of teaching, to develop harmoniously their physical, moral and intellectual endowments..." The persons who must help children are implied to be teachers. Here 'children' is used to represent *all* children and further, the language functions to construct *all* children as first, needy, unable to take agency themselves, and second, as *becoming* rather than *being*. This statement

continues "so that they may gradually acquire a mature sense of responsibility in striving endlessly to form their own lives properly and in pursuing true freedom as they surmount the vicissitudes of life with courage and constancy". Here children are constructed again as passive participants who may be on their way to maturity. As the section moves on, children continue to be constructed as agentless passives, representing *all* children and as *becoming* rather than *being*. The focus and emphasis here is on the need for children's training, particularly in sexual education.

Section 2 expresses a new construction of the term 'children' as "children of God". Two key insights regarding the language construction here are important to note. First, children are not the only ones in this cohort; adult Christians are also "children of God". What can be implied here is that God makes no distinction between childhood and adulthood, all are God's children. Second, the tone of this construction is authoritative, as it is issued as an imperative, a command modified by the adjunct modal, "should" signifying the processes of being called and being children of God, as proposals of obligation issued by a high authority (Derewianka, 2000p. 66; Halliday, 1985, p. 50). This is not an invitation nor a declarative statement, all Christians whether they are children or adults, should be *called* children of God, and *be* children of God. In Section 3 which focuses on the authors of education, whilst children are still positioned as passive recipients, the agents acting upon them are now explicitly named: the family and the Church.

In this document, *Gravissimum Educationis* (Vatican Council II, 1965), children do not have agency and are constructed as needy and wanting, *becoming*, rather than *being*, as they require help to mature physically, morally, intellectually and sexually in a responsible way. During this time as children, they are to be given appropriate and prudent training in order to be able to face life's challenges, and become productive members of society. Childhood is a time for learning to be a good Christian. Within this site of childhood, children are constructed at different times, in four cohorts including as: all children, children of God (along with adults), many children who have no education, and others who lack quality education. In these various cohorts, as they mature they are to be trained how to live responsibly and morally, imbued with the spirit of Christ.

Document II: The Catholic School (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977)

The Catholic School (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977) was published some twenty-two years after *Gravissimum Educationis* (Vatican Council II, 1965) and describes yet another context in terms of our views on children. During this time developmental psychology was having significant influence on our understandings of how children developed their cognitive, behavioural and moral capabilities. The concept of the universal child was implicitly advanced in educational circles. The specific extracts that focus on the construction of 'child' and 'children' are highlighted in Table 2. The term 'childhood' is not used in this document. Both terms 'child' and 'children' are placed into the passive position, that is, they are acted upon throughout the document.

Table 2: Relevant Extracts from the document: *The Catholic School*
(Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977)

---

7. Evangelisation is, therefore, the mission of the Church; that is she must proclaim the good news of salvation to all, generate new creatures in Christ through Baptism, and train them to live knowingly as **children** of God.

9. ... the Church fulfills (*sic*) her obligation to foster in her **children** a full awareness of their rebirth to a new life.

12. ...Her **children**, then, will be capable both of resisting the debilitating influence of relativism and of living up to the demands made on them by their Baptism.

50. Without entering into the whole problem of teaching religion in schools, it must be emphasised that, while such teaching is not merely confined to " religious classes " within the school curriculum, it must, nevertheless, also be imparted explicitly and in a systematic manner to prevent a distortion in the **child's** mind between general and religious culture.

73. This responsibility applies chiefly to Christian parents who confide their **children** to the school. Having chosen it does not relieve them of a personal duty to give their **children** a Christian upbringing.

82. ...These Catholics need to be assured, as they strive to regularise the frequent injustices in their school situation, that they are not only helping to provide every **child** with an education that respects **his** complete development...

'Children' in paragraph 7 are again constructed as "children of God" but in this document these children are the newly baptised. They require training "to live knowingly as children of God". 'Children' in paragraph 9 refers to those children being educated in the Catholic school. The focus on baptised children continues in paragraph 12 in which the specific context of a secular culture is considered, "will be capable both of resisting the debilitating influence of relativism and of living up to the demands made on them by their Baptism." In this statement 'children' is placed in the foregrounded position but are not as active agents, as the processes 'will be capable' is a behavioural one and it is not stated that children will actually resist such influences.

A further attribute is assigned to the child's developing intellectual ability in paragraph 50 wherein the school is charged "to prevent a distortion in the child's mind between general and religious culture". Again, the child is constructed as on his/her way to *becoming* and therefore unable to distinguish between their secular and religious lives. In paragraph 73, responsibility is assigned to the parents to ensure their children's Christian upbringing, whilst in paragraph 82 this responsibility, which must respect the child's development, is directed to the school "to provide every child with an education that respects his (*sic*) complete development...". In this statement three salient points need to be noted: first, exclusivist language, specifically 'his' is used to describe 'child', signifying that the individual child is not the focus here, and second, this child's (in the sense of individual and unique) complete development is not respected as all are presumed to be male. Third, this universal child is constructed as *becoming*, on 'his' way to adulthood, not *yet* complete.

Some key insights are afforded in this document about the ways 'children' and 'child' are constructed. In the first instance nowhere in this document are 'children' and 'child' active agents. Second, the concept of universal children in terms that 'children' represents *all* children is not the construction here. Rather, 'children' is specifically those children who are baptised and belong to the "children of God", although some as newly baptised are wanting and therefore require further training. As baptised children they will be able to resist the temptations of the secular culture and the male child's complete development is to be respected by the Catholic school.

Document III: The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988)

In 1988 the Congregation of Catholic Education published the educational document, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*. In this document the three terms, 'child', 'children' and 'childhood' are explicitly referred to, as highlighted in Table 3, but never in the foregrounded active agent position.

Table 3: Relevant Extracts from the document: *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*
(Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988)

22 Catholic schools are spread throughout the world and enroll literally millions of students. These students are **children** of their own race, nationality, traditions, and family. They are also the **children** of our age. Each student has a distinct origin and is a unique individual.

56. ...A human being has a dignity and a greatness exceeding that of all other creatures: a work of God that has been elevated to the supernatural order as a **child of God**, and therefore having both a divine origin and an eternal destiny which transcend this physical universe.

83. ...The virtues of faith and religion, thus rooted and cultivated, are enabled to develop during **childhood**, youth, and in all the years that follow.

84 The human person is present in all the truths of faith: created in "the image and likeness" of God; elevated by God to the dignity of a **child of God**; unfaithful to God in original sin, but redeemed by Christ; a temple of the Holy Spirit; a member of the Church; destined to eternal life.

A significant point acknowledged for the first time in paragraph 22 is that children are "of their own race, nationality, traditions, and family. They are also the children of our age. Each student has a distinct origin

and is a unique individual." For the first time children's individuality is recognised in terms of their race, nationality, traditions and family. These children have not been cast as one single cohort of *all* children.

In paragraph 56, the child is a human being and is assigned elevation above all other creatures and named as "a child of God". The child is constructed as being the work of God and therefore possesses, "both a divine origin and an eternal destiny." Such assigned attributions to 'the child' imply *all* children because the child has been categorised as a human being. Further, this assigned category also implies that all humans are created by God. The concept of childhood being a stage in the life course is once again constructed in paragraph 83, but in this construction it is a time during which the virtues of faith and religion are to be developed. However, this development continues along the life course so childhood is not the only time of *becoming.* Paragraph 84 elaborates further on the construct of the human person as a "child of God" as created in the "image and likeness of God".

Whilst children's individual uniqueness and diversity are acknowledged, whether religious diversity is part of that acknowledgement is not clear. In terms of their religious contexts, on the one hand, children as human beings are all constructed as made in the image and likeness of God. Further on in the document, "children of God" is then qualified as members of the Church. Childhood is the time in which the virtues of faith and religion begin to be developed, but this development continues along the life course, implying that adults also require further development in these virtues.

Document IV: The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997)

The document *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997) published at the end of the last century presents a different construction of childhood than its predecessors. Only one paragraph in this document is explicitly focused on children, in terms of who they are, what they do and what is done to them. As in the previous documents, throughout this paragraph, children are placed into the passive position. However, in this document children have been assigned the attribute of gender: the terms, 'girls' and 'boys' have been used, albeit as constructions of times past, as highlighted in Table 4.

Table 4: Relevant Extracts from the document: *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*
(Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997)

15. ... It is no novelty to affirm that Catholic schools have their origin in a deep concern for the education of **children** and young people left to their own devices and deprived of any form of schooling. In many parts of the world even today material poverty prevents many youths and **children** from having access to formal education and adequate human and Christian formation. ...The **girls** from poor families that were taught by the Ursuline nuns in the 15th Century, the **boys** that Saint Joseph of Calasanz saw running and shouting through the streets of Rome, **those** that De la Salle came across in the villages of France, or those that were offered shelter by Don Bosco, can be found again among **those** who have lost all sense of meaning in life and lack any type of inspiring ideal, **those** to whom no values are proposed and who do not know the beauty of faith, who come from families which are broken and incapable of love, often living in situations of material and spiritual poverty, slaves to the new idols of a society, which, not infrequently, promises them only a future of unemployment and marginalization. To these new **poor** the Catholic school turns in a spirit of love.

Paragraph 15 begins by positioning children as agentless passives, "left to their own devices and deprived of any form of schooling." The origin of Catholic schools was founded on their (Catholic schools') deep concern for such children and young people's education. 'Children' in this statement does not represent *all* children, only those who are poor. The concern is with their lack of formal education, as well as their human and Christian formation. Concern for such children continues as explicit links are made between on the one hand, past images of "girls from poor families", "boys running and shouting in the streets of Rome", "those in the villages of France" "those offered shelter by Don Bosco" and on the other, images of today's children, "who have lost all sense of meaning in life..." Children in the cohort, "these new poor" are assigned the following attributes and characteristics: lost all sense of meaning in life; lack any type of

inspiring ideal; to whom no values are proposed; do not know the beauty of faith; come from families which are broken and incapable of love; often living in situations of material and spiritual poverty; slaves to a new society; a society which not infrequently, promises them only a future of unemployment and marginalization. Throughout this bleak indictment of the contemporary world, children or 'these new poor' as they are now constructed, have no agency. The assigned attributions to children in this document construct them as vulnerable, disheartened and hopeless. No positive attributions are assigned to children in their lives outside of the Catholic school.

Childhood as a structural site is not a happy or hope-filled state. This document focuses on a particular cohort of children for whom its only hope is the Catholic school. Implied here is that no other institution, including the children's own families, can offer any hope. Because no other cohorts of children have been described, an overall view of childhood as hopeless is implied. The prospects of childhood in the new millennium, in which we are now living, are not optimistic. Children are indeed deficient and vulnerable.

Discussion

Childhood as constructed in these educational documents does not align with the contemporary construction of childhood as a social construct. Children are not viewed as active agents in their own experiences of childhood and participants in decisions that affect their own lives. In all but one statement (Vatican Council II, 1965, section 1), children are agentless passives; it was made clear what was to be done to them and for them, but those responsible were not always named. At times these were implied to be teachers or parents. At other times though, the family, Church and Catholic school were explicitly named as responsible for children's training and actions. Children need to be trained and educated as they mature physically, intellectually and morally. Such training is to be prudent, particularly with regards to sexual education. Children are *becoming*, rather than *being*. Overall the training of children is to both *provide* for, and *protect*, children (two of the 'Ps' in the *United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child* (United Nations, 1989).

Children are constructed as vulnerable in terms of their inability to cope with secular culture which is implied to be harmful and pessimistic in three of the documents (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, para. 12; 1997, para. 15; Vatican Council II, 1965, section 1). This was particularly evident in the final document, *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium* (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997) which placed children into a bleak world (para. 15) from which children seem to have no escape save through the Catholic school. This construction more than any other, constructs children as lacking any ability to initiate or enact change themselves. Children are deficient and vulnerable rather than capable and strong (Dahlberg et al., 2007; Malagazzi, 1993).

Throughout these documents, children have been cohorted (Austin, Dwyer, & Freebody, 2003) in several ways, mostly as the universal child, representing *all* children, which disregards the sociocultural (Vygotsky, 1967), bioecological (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) and new sociology of childhood (James & James, 2004) theories. Only in one document are children acknowledged as unique individuals (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, para. 22). Other cohorts into which children are placed include: vast numbers denied an education; many others denied a Christian education; and finally, in most cases as "children of God". It is this construction, "children of God" which is particularly remarkable in that it places children alongside and equal with adults. From this theological point of view, Dillen (2007) cites the construction "created in the image and likeness of God" as grounds to claim that the child is a 'competent subject' "(p. 41). As each person - both adults and children - is a child of God, Dillen argues that "it is not necessarily true that adults can be seen as more like God than children" (p. 41), and in addition, both children and adults have the task to strive for likeness with God.

So in these documents, on the one hand, children are deficient, on their way to becoming and therefore require prudent training. In this construction, they are not in the same cohort as adults who are responsible for them and their training. On the other hand, as children of God, they are equal with adults and both require further development in faith and religion.   This view that all humans are "children of God" is problematic as not all humans see themselves as "children of God". A contemporary view of childhood

would reject the images of childhood as constructed in these documents.

Conclusion

This study investigated the construction of childhood in key Church educational documents and found that children are constructed at different times as: all children, some children or individual children. It also found that children are constructed as becoming, needy and vulnerable. However, they are also, along with adults, constructed as children of God created in the image and likeness of God. In this latter construction children are afforded human dignity and their uniqueness and individuality are acknowledged and respected. These particular images indicate some ambiguity within the documents, as they are not aligned with other constructed images of children as becoming, needy and vulnerable. So not only does a tension exist between the view of childhood as constructed in these Church educational documents and the contemporary view of childhood, but also within the documents themselves. It is important that teachers in Catholic schools are explicitly aware of how children are constructed and positioned in texts, and further that they are cognisant of implications such constructions might have for their classroom practice. Part 2 of this investigation (to be published in a later issue of the journal) explores the implications this investigation might have for classroom teachers.

References

Arthur, L., Beecher, B., Death, E., Dockett, S., & Farmer, S. (2005). *Programming and planning in the early childhood settings.* (3rd ed.). Southbank: Thomson.

Austin, H., Dwyer, B., & Freebody, P. (2003). *Schooling the child: The making of students in classrooms*. London: RoutledgeFarmer.

Baker, C. (2004). Membership categorization and interview accounts. In D. Silverman (Ed.), *Qualitative research: Theory, method and practice.* (pp. 162-176). London: Sage.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (Ed.). (2005). *Making human beings human: Bioecological perspectives on human development*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Bunge, M. (2008). Introduction. In M. Bunge (Ed.), *The child in the Bible* (pp. xiv-xxvi). Cambridge: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

Collerson, J. (1994). *English grammar: A functional approach*. Newtown: Primary English Teaching Association.

Congregation for Catholic Education. (1977). *The Catholic school*. Homebush, NSW: St Paul Publications.

Congregation for Catholic Education. (1988). *The religious dimension of education in a Catholic school*. Homebush: St Paul Publications.

Congregation for Catholic Education. (1997). *The Catholic school on the threshold of the third millennium*.

Dahlberg, G., Moss, P., & Pence, A. (2007). *Beyond quality in early childhood education and care: Languages of evaluation* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.

Derewianka, B. (2000). *A grammar companion: For primary teachers.* Newtown NSW: Primary English Teaching Association.

Dillen, A. (2007). Religious participation of children as active subjects: Toward a hermeneutical-communicative model of religious education in families with young children. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality, 12*(1), 37-49.

Foucault, M. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge*. London: Tavistock.

Fowler, J. (1981). *Stages of faith: The psychology of human development and the quest for meaning*. Blackburn: Dove Communications.

Freebody, P. (2003). *Qualitative research in education: Interaction and practice.* London: SAGE Publications.

Halliday, M. A. K. (1975). *Learning how to mean: Explorations in the development of language.* London: Edward Arnold.

Halliday, M. A. K. (1985). *An introduction to functional grammar*. Caulfield East: Edward Arnold.

Hester, S., & Eglin, P. (1997). The reflexive constitution of category, predicate and context in two settings. In S. Hester & P. Eglin (Eds.), *Culture in action: Studies in membership categorization analysis.* (pp. 25-48). Washington, DC: International Institute for Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis & University Press of America Inc.

James, A., & James, A. L. (2004). *Constructing childhood: Theory, policy and social practice*. Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan.

MacNaughton, G. (2003). *Shaping early childhood: Learners, curriculum and context*. Berkshire: Open University Press.

Malagazzi, L. (1993). For an education based on relationships. *Young Children, 11*(93), 9-13.

Mayall, B. (2002). *Towards a sociology for childhood: Thinking from children's lives.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Qvortrup, J. (1994). *Childhood matters: Social theory, practice, and politics.* Aldershot: Avebury.

Silverman, D. (1993). *Interpreting qualitative data: Methods for analysing talk, text and interaction.* London: SAGE Publications.

Skelton, T. (2007). Children, young people, UNICEF and participation. *Children's Geographies, 5*(1-2), 165-181.

Soto, L. D., & Swadener, B. B. (2002). Toward liberatory early childhood theory, research and praxis: Decolonizing a field. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood 3*(1), 38-66.

United Nations. (1989). United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.   Retrieved 16 June, 2009, from http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/pdf/crc.pdf

Vatican Council II. (1965). Gravissimum Educationis: Declaration on Christian education. In A. Flannery (Ed.), *The basic sixteen documents Vatican Council II: Constitutions, decrees, declarations.* (pp. 575-591). Dublin: Dominican Publications.

Vygotsky, L. (1967). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge: Harvard University press.

Woodhead, M. (2005). Early childhood development: A question of rights. *International Journal of Early Childhood, 37*(3), 79-98.

*Dr Jan Grajczonek is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Religious Education, Australian Catholic University