EXPERIENCING GOD: ENGAGING ELEMENTARY-AGED CHILDREN
IN CORPORATE WORSHIP

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A THESIS PRESENTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF WORSHIP STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

The engagement of children in meaningful worship has been neglected, despite the investment of modern churches in essential safety protocols and digital media in children's ministry. The twenty-first-century consumerist mindset is driving worship design, essentially undermining the worship leader's role as the shepherd of a child-centered and Christ-focused approach. Many churches are neglecting the biblical instruction to cast vision and express value for children's corporate worship. A sense of awe and wonder is notably absent in many corporate services designed for children. Drawing upon biblical principles, educational theory, and corporate worship practices throughout history, this qualitative historical study seeks to recover the perspective of the church body portrayed in Acts 2:42–47. The ultimate goal of worship is to glorify God and seek His presence. Engaging elementary-aged children in worship with this goal in mind requires a vision and a value for their spiritual formation. Overcoming the challenges to worship engagement will significantly impact the design of children's ministry by inspiring a renewed commitment to children's spiritual formation. Identifying strategies for worship engagement highlighted through this project will add vitality to the life of our worship communities.

Keywords: children's worship, children's ministry, children's spiritual formation, children's corporate worship design, worship engagement

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Christian Religious Education – CRE

Contemplative Reflective Model – CRM

Early Childhood Education – ECE

Qualitative Document Analysis – QDA

Research Question – RQ

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background

Jesus loved children, in fact, Jesus clearly rebuked his disciples and proclaimed, "Let the children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:14).[1] Jesus literally hugged them and blessed them (Matt. 19:15). The treatment of children is revisited throughout Scripture, yet this one encounter sets the pattern most vividly for the value Jesus placed upon children.

A closer look into past ministry practices related to engaging children in worship reveals a discrepancy between this biblical pattern and current application. Despite improvements to safety protocols and digital media, the engagement of children in meaningful worship has frequently been neglected. The church as a whole may be disregarding the need to cast vision and express value for children's corporate worship.

Providing physical and emotional safety meets the irreducible needs of children requisite to their ability to fully engage in experiences.[2] Prioritizing safety assists volunteers entrusted with their care.[3] Replacing out-of-date digital media with captivating programming assists the

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[1] Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the *English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

[2] T. Berry Brazelton and Stanley Greenspan, *The Irreducible Needs of Children: What Every Child Must Have to Grow, Learn and Flourish* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2000), xx.

[3] Stephen Rushton and Elizabeth Larkin, "Shaping the Learning Environment: Connecting Developmentally Appropriate Practices to Brain Research," *Early Childhood Education Journal* 29, no. 1 (2001): 32.

church in growing its fellowship.[4] However, children's ministry requires reaching farther than safety protocols and advanced media.

The most essential aspect of a children's ministry is the vertical and horizontal relationships that it inspires. First, vertical relationships are of utmost importance because we were made by God for the purpose of worship. As expressed by Dr. Vernon Whaley, the former Director for the Center for Worship at Liberty University, "God created man because He wanted relationship…and the way to an intimate relationship with God is through *worship*."[5] Second, horizontal relationships become prerequisite to spiritual formation. In her handbook on growing children in faith, Melanie C. Gordon, Director of Ministry with Children at Discipleship Ministries of The United Methodist Church elaborates, "Your primary formational tools are communication and building relationships."[6]

In Psalm 71, the psalmist sings praises to God for having been discipled since his early childhood. Listen to David's voice: "O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds" (Ps. 71:17). David's Psalm eloquently demonstrates the importance of relationships in living out the call to touch children's lives through ministry. As Christian education specialists and professors of the Dallas Theological Seminary, Dr. Robert

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[4] Yvon Prehn, "Want to Attract Young Families to Your Church? These Communication Tips May Help," Ministry Tech, September 11, 2018, accessed July 31, 2019, https://ministrytech.com/mobile/want-to-attract-young-families-to-your-church-these-communication-tips-may-help/.

[5] Vernon M. Whaley, *Called to Worship: The Biblical Foundations of Our Response to God's Call* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 333–334.

[6] Melanie C. Gordon, *Children's Ministries: Help Children Grow in Faith* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016), 12.

Choun and Dr. Michael Lawson underscore this theme. "When a godly adult establishes a caring relationship with a child, he possesses the ultimate teaching tool."[7]

The notion that adult decisions and actions have a profound effect not only upon the administrative aspects of the children's ministry but also on the spiritual formation of the children is addressed by numerous authors. Lydia van Leersum-Bekebrede and her research colleagues at the Protestant Theological University in Amsterdam affirm, "What worship looks like—whether it is a Sunday morning service, family service, children's church, or Sunday School—largely depends on the choices and actions of adults."[8] This becomes problematic as the twenty-first-century consumerist mindset is driving worship design, essentially undermining the worship leader's role as the shepherd of a child-centered and Christ-focused approach.

This study seeks to recover the perspective of the church body from the Early Church (Acts 2:42–47, NLT):

> All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer. A deep sense of awe came over them all, and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. And all the believers met together in one place and shared everything they had. They sold their property and possessions and shared the money with those in need. They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared meals with great joy and generosity—all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved.

In this passage, a model is set forth for the role of the entire community in spiritual growth and worship. One essential facet often overlooked in ministry is the deep sense of awe that comes over the community as they gather together in a variety of acts of worship. When

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[7] Robert J. Choun and Michael S. Lawson, *The Christian Educator's Handbook on Children's Ministry: Reaching and Teaching the Next Generation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 38.

[8] Lydia van Leersum-Bekebrede, Ronelle Sonnenberg, Jos de Kock, and Marcel Barnard, "Setting the Stage for Children's Participation in Worship Practices," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 24, no. 2 (2019): 166.

considering the design of children's ministry, this sense of awe is often neglected. Worship leaders under pressure to increase numbers may hold the false impression that leaving space in the children's church hour for expressing awe and wonder is an ineffective use of their time.

Dr. Scottie May, Associate Professor of Christian Formation and Ministry at Wheaton College, offers the justification for the inclusion of time and space in the design of dynamic discipleship. "But there is more to the effective teaching of children. A sense of awe and wonder plays a significant role."[9] Whether discipleship is developed intentionally by adults or fostered through the curiosity of the children, leaving time and space for awe and wonder in worship encourages connections within the church body.[10]

The strength of this model is that it places a high value on children and their place in the community. Children often kindle a sense of wonder in those around them; yet, activities in children's ministry tend toward cognitive instruction rather than the affective mode of learning.[11] Dr. Jerome Berryman, Senior Fellow of the Center for the Theology of Childhood, resolved this dilemma by designing a model classroom based on his studies with Dr. Sofia Cavalletti, a Hebrew scholar and religious educator of children in Italy whose approach centers heavily on a sense of wonder and belonging.[12] Recounting the negative impact of a consumerist society, false impressions of what children respond to in twenty-first-century worship threaten to derail the inclusion of silence and stillness in the corporate service. As Director of Children's Ministries at

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[9] Scottie May, "Teaching Children," in *Teaching the Next Generations: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching Christian Formation*, ed. Terry Linhart (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 121.

[10] May, "Teaching Children," 124.

[11] Scottie May, Beth Posterski, Catherine Stonehouse, and Linda Cannell, *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 12.

[12] Jerome W. Berryman, *Godly Play: An Imaginative Approach to Religious Education* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), 26.

the American Reformed Church actively practicing Berryman's method, Laura Jonker laments: "Sadly, the structure of our society tends to insulate us from the mystery of God by rushing us past any potential powerful encounter."[13]

Scripture places a premium on the spiritual formation of our children as they affect the life of our worship community. Children whose formation includes authentic intergenerational relationships will be more likely to remain connected to the faith community as they mature.[14] Children's ability to learn and retain biblical concepts may be enhanced by the richness of these interactions as well as an intentional design that mitigates the numerous challenges faced by children related to experiencing God in corporate worship. Many church communities suffer from a lack of vision for children's ministry as well as a deficit in its valuation. Therefore, the diligent study of challenges to worship engagement that stem from these and other factors could significantly impact the design of children's ministry.

Statement of the Problem

The spiritual formation of children should take a high priority in the life of our worship communities; yet, children's ministry may be an arm of the church most in need of regeneration. If church congregations do not collaborate to cast vision and express value for children's ministry, then worship engagement with elementary-aged children will diminish. In her discussion recounting the worship experiences of children, Jonker expresses the need to center the entire approach to ministry with children on trusting God, as reflected in her statement:

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[13] Laura Jonker, "Experiencing God: The History and Philosophy of "Children and Worship"," *Christian Education Journal* 12, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 306.

[14] Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawton Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 102.

Christian educators often hurry through lesson plans, games, and activities that offer little space for quiet reflection or personal discovery of the meanings behind biblical truths. Rushing tends to embody values of efficiency and productivity over the development of a relationship with the Divine.[15]

As churches become more heavily influenced by consumerism in worship practices, curricula, and the worship environment, the absence of a focus on authentically meeting with God will continue to plague children's ministry. Learning to trust God is a process that requires forethought. Acts 2:43 expresses, "And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles" (Acts 2:43). This serves as a powerful reminder that Scripture supports a child's sense of wonder, self, and valued place in the church. When children are invited to experience God through active participation as well as intentional stillness and moments for wonder, spiritual formation is championed; however, when children's ministry is structured simply as a base for activities, the opportunity to truly experience God's presence may be stifled.

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study is to identify challenges faced by elementary-aged children pertaining to worship engagement in order to seek strategies for their resolution. Scripture provides the biblical basis for children's inclusion in worship, yet modern churches interpret the call for "relevant and meaningful" worship in vastly different ways.[16] Widely varying philosophies have influenced both secular and religious pedagogy over the past few centuries. Yet, despite the increase in religious education curricula and studies evaluating its effectiveness,

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[15] Jonker, "Experiencing God," 306.

[16] May et al., *Children Matter*, 243.

there have been few inquiries directly addressing challenges to worship engagement faced by elementary-aged children.

Although many worship leaders have a genuine desire to more productively engage children in worship, they may lack the background necessary to overcome the challenges addressed by this study. This gap may be filled by engaging in conversations bringing together biblical principles and historical practices in corporate worship. Looking to the past toward influencers on religious pedagogy, educational theory, and child development would enrich this exchange. Conclusions may then be drawn that could shape the design of corporate worship services for elementary-aged children. This study may inspire future research respecting a child's ability to experience God's presence through engagement in corporate worship. Having established the problem and the purpose germane to this inquiry, the significance of the study may now be expressed.

Significance of the Study

The engagement of children in worship connects to the biblical principles regarding worship (Acts 2:42–47), evangelism (Matt. 28:16–20), discipleship (Eph. 4:11–16), and leader mentorship (1 Cor. 12:25–27). The research questions are of importance to the body of Christ as worship communities are responsible for the spiritual formation of all members, including children. The research findings may also influence worship leaders whose role includes the design and implementation of corporate worship services for children.

Worship Leaders

This study may be significant to worship leaders as they fulfill biblical commands to shepherd the children in their worship community. Matthew 5:15–16 encourages the leader to let their light shine in a Christ-like manner while Matthew 18:5–6 instructs "anyone who welcomes a

little child like this on my behalf is welcoming me." Looking to past practices and understanding the influences that have shaped ministry will enable worship leaders to make educated decisions relative to the theology, philosophy, and methodology of intentional approaches to children's spiritual formation through corporate worship.

Lay Leaders

This study may be significant to lay leaders as they also fulfill biblical commands concerning the care of the body of Christ. Acts 20 speaks to this notion as the Scripture exhorts, "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). Robin Michelle Turner's doctoral study instructs lay leaders to engage in "studying biblical and theological beliefs, learning the history and philosophy of the ministry area, assessing congregational life, creating a system of evaluation, and crafting a clear vision" as they are responsible to the children for the teaching they provide.[17]

Children's Ministry Volunteers

This study may be most beneficial to children's ministry volunteers as they fulfill the biblical role of leading by example. Wise counsel from Psalm 78 applies expressly to these volunteers: "And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them" (Ps. 78:72). This study may provide compelling evidence for restoring value to the frequently underrated role played by children's ministry volunteers.

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[17] Robin Michelle Turner, "Children's Faith Formation As Mutually Transforming Opportunity: Leading Systemic Change" (DMin diss., George Fox University, 2019), 64.

Statement of Primary Research Questions

As previously noted within this investigation, children's ministry is an arm of the church body in need of regeneration; however, the spiritual formation of its members is mandated by Scripture and should be addressed by ministry leaders who design corporate worship for children. To equip worship leaders, lay leaders, and children's ministry volunteers for their role in children's spiritual formation through corporate worship, certain questions must be fully investigated. This research study sought to resolve the following questions:

Research Question 1: What are the challenges faced by elementary-aged children pertaining to worship engagement?

Research Question 2: What strategies may be utilized to overcome challenges pertaining to worship engagement for elementary-aged children?

Research Question One is significant because it is commonly assumed that attention span is the only factor related to engaging elementary-aged children in worship, while in reality, the challenges are multi-faceted. Most significantly, David Boyd, National Boys and Girls Missionary Challenge Director for the General Council of the Assemblies of God postulates, "What makes a child's spiritual roots grow deep? There are many factors, but let me mention just one—the ability to hear God's voice."[18] Investigating the challenges to worship engagement may lead to a greater understanding of what impedes a child from hearing God's voice and engaging in worship. Research Question Two is significant as strategies may be developed that answer

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[18] David Boyd, "Early Lessons for a Children's Pastor," in *6 Children's Ministry Essentials: A Quick-Access Guide*, ed. Dick Gruber (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2017), 8.

Boyd's question and improve a child's ability to experience God through corporate worship. With an understanding of the research questions, the study's hypotheses may now be considered.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis One: The challenges faced by elementary-aged children pertaining to worship engagement include the quality of leadership, curricula, and environment.

Quality is a significant factor that influences the success of an organization, product, or process. Similarly, the quality of leaders, both paid and volunteer, directly impacts the effectiveness of the ministry.[19] Curricular quality may also vary dramatically and requires a vetting process to determine the soundness of its theology as well as the effectiveness of its pedagogical design.[20] A final factor related to quality is the worship space or environment.[21]

Hypothesis Two: The strategies for engaging elementary-aged children in corporate worship include evangelism, discipleship, and leader mentorship.

Strategies for engaging children may be derived from educational theory as well as best practices in religious pedagogy. Casting vision is essential to the efficacy of any organization, providing a sense of purpose and direction. Leader mentorship enables volunteers and ministry workers to enact this vision as they become vested in these aims through clear communication and intentional mentoring.[22] Evangelism and discipleship are twin goals for the children's

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[19] Mark DeVries and Annette Safstrom, *Sustainable Children's Ministry: From Last-Minute Scrambling to Long-Term Solutions* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 25.

[20] Stacie Reck, "Colouring with Brown Crayons: Evaluating Religious Education Curriculum" (PhD diss., University of Alberta, 2008), 5.

[21] Kathleen Frady, "A Grounded Theory Investigation into How Three–and–Four–Year–Old Children Experience and Express Their Theological Understanding of Mark 10:13–16" (PhD diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 32.

[22] Gordon, *Children's Ministries*, 18.

ministry as the need for witnessing as well as intentional spiritual formation is met in the lives of

saved and unsaved children through the most effective strategies for worship engagement.[23]

Research Methods

A qualitative method with a historical design will be utilized to identify the challenges

faced by elementary-aged children concerning worship engagement. As research experts John

W. and J. David Creswell explain, the qualitative research process "conveys an emerging design"

that allows the researcher to adapt to findings as the qualitative inquiry unfolds.[24] This fluid, yet

systematic design forms the basis of the practice of qualitative document analysis (QDA) as

described in the *Handbook of Emergent Methods*. According to the work of document research

experts Altheide, Coyle, DeVriese, and Schneider, QDA encompasses "an integrated method,

procedure, and technique for locating, identifying, retrieving, and analyzing documents for their

relevance, significance, and meaning."[25]

> The value of the historical design is expressed by historians Monaghan and Hartman:
>
> History is a vital sign of any community's maturity, vitality, and growing self-awareness, and it provides the basis for a collective sense of direction and purpose. By creating a set of connections between past and present, we see ourselves as part of a drama larger than our own particular interests, areas of study, or organizational affiliations.[26]

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[23] Tanya Marie Eustace, "Experiencing God Together: A Practical Theology for Ministry with Children" (PhD diss., Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, 2014), 23.

[24] John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2018), 250.

[25] David Altheide, Michael Coyle, Katie DeVriese, and Christopher Schneider, "Emergent Qualitative Document Analysis," in *Handbook of Emergent Methods*, ed. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy (New York: Guilford Publications, 2008), 127.

[26] E. Jennifer Monaghan and Douglas K. Hartman, "Undertaking Historical Research in Literacy," in *Handbook of Reading Research, Volume III*, ed. Michael L. Kamil, Peter B. Mosenthal, P. David Pearson, and Rebecca Barr (New York: Routledge, 2000), 109.

Coupling these historical connections with an inductive style leads to a versatile process for examining biblical principles, educational theory, and corporate worship practices throughout church history to identify the problem, investigate the challenges to worship engagement, and illustrate strategies to overcome these obstacles.

Definition of Terms

Spirituality and Religion

Spirituality and religion are often equated; however, there is a distinct difference between the two terms. Dr. Barbara Kimes Myers, Professor Emeritus of Child Development at DePaul University, describes *spirituality* in terms of the process of *transcendence*—a term that refers to "going beyond the limitations of our present, here-and-now realities."[27] Dr. Rebecca Nye, a leading research consultant on children's spirituality and National Training Director for Godly Play UK, describes spirituality as *relational consciousness*—a spiritual quality of life, beyond simply being attentive, that indicates a "full awareness of the presence of God."[28] Combining the two researcher's notions, a working definition takes form. For the purposes of this study, *spirituality* may be defined as "a relational connection to the living God that is beyond our understanding and reality."[29]

Although often confused with spirituality, *religion* is more broadly defined as "an array of beliefs about the origins and nature of the universe."[30] According to religious education

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[27] David Csinos and Ivy Beckwith with John H. Westerhoff, *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 42.

[28] Csinos and Beckwith, *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus*, 41.

[29] Ibid., 43.

[30] Ibid.

consultants, Dr. David Csinos—President of Faith Forward and Dr. Ivy Beckwith—Faith

Formation Team Leader, religion involves the intentional practice of this set of beliefs within a

local community.[31] Dr. Patrick Love, Vice President for Student Affairs at Springfield College,

describes religion as an experience of the "ultimate" communicated to others through story and

symbol and reflected in the form of doctrine.[32] Spirituality, then, is our awareness of God's

presence while religion is how we understand and help others express this personal experience of

connecting with God.[33]

Spiritual Formation and Spiritual Development

Likewise, there is a small yet significant difference between spiritual formation and

spiritual development. Dr. MaryKate Morse, Professor of Leadership and Spiritual Formation at

George Fox University expresses how *spiritual formation* is another term that has negative or

misleading connotations. Morse provides this definition while also underscoring the greater

purpose of spiritual formation—glorifying God. "Christian spiritual formation is the process of

being conformed to the image of Christ for the glory of God and for the sake of others."[34]

Similarly, Michael Houdmann of Got Questions Ministries explains the Christian conception of

spiritual development is based on the concept of having been made in the image of Christ with

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[31] Csinos and Beckwith, *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus*, 43.

[32] Patrick G. Love, "Comparing Spiritual Development and Cognitive Development," *Journal of College Student Development* 43, no. 3 (May/June 2002): 357.

[33] Csinos and Beckwith, *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus*, 43–44.

[34] MaryKate Morse, "Evangelism, Discipleship, and Spiritual Formation: Which is What?" MissioAlliance, April 4, 2018, accessed July 13, 2020, https://www.missioalliance.org/evangelism-discipleship-and-spiritual-formation-which-is-what/.

the goal of becoming more like Him by allowing the Holy Spirit to guide this transformation.[35]

By contrast, New Age spiritual development centers on self-actualization as the basis for

discovering the impersonal spirit of the universe as chosen by each individual.[36] Although

distinctions have been made in the literature, for the purposes of this research study, the terms

spiritual formation and spiritual development will be used interchangeably to refer to the growth

process of becoming more like Christ.

Approach, Model, Method

The terms *approach*, *model,* and *method* are sometimes used interchangeably; however,

there are subtle yet distinct differences between these essential concepts, as well. According to

Dr. Marcia Bates, Professor Emeritus of Information Studies at UCLA, a *framework* is basically

"a coherent set of concepts and relationships that, once fully tested, may become a model."[37]

Based on this framework, a *model* becomes "a proposed set of relationships that, once tested,

may be developed into a theory."[38] Utilizing the model, a *theory* is developed into "a system of

assumptions, accepted principles, and rules of procedure devised to analyze, predict, or otherwise

explain the nature or behavior of a specified set of phenomena."[39] Ultimately, a *methodology* is

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[35] S. Michael Houdmann, "What is Spiritual Development?" Got Questions Ministries, accessed July 13, 2020, https://www.gotquestions.org/spiritual-development.html.

[36] Houdmann, "What is Spiritual Development?"

[37] Marcia J. Bates, "What is the Difference Between a Theory, Methodology, Approach, Method, Framework, Tool and Process?" Quora, January 14, 2019, accessed June 14, 2020, https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-difference-between-a-theory-methodology-approach-method-framework-tool-and-process-People-in-academia-tend-to-uncritically-mix-these-expressions.

[38] Marcia J. Bates, "An Introduction to Metatheories, Theories, and Models," in *Theories of Information Behavior*, ed. Karen E. Fisher, Sandra Erdelez, and Lynne McKechnie (Medford, NJ: Information Today, 2005), 1.

[39] Bates, "An Introduction to Metatheories, Theories, and Models," 2.

"a whole set of methods developed according to a philosophical theory about how best to research and learn about natural or social occurrences."[40]

Intersecting with these definitions, management techniques authority Chris Hohmann describes an *approach* as simply a "way of thinking about or dealing with something and is largely influenced by a philosophy."[41] Continuing the discourse, educational research techniques clinician, Dr. Darrin Thomas, designates a *method* as "an application of an approach."[42] The difference between an approach and a method is delineated by Dr. Jack Richards, an internationally recognized applied linguistics expert. An *approach* is a broad strategy that may apply varying techniques and underlying principles in different ways depending upon the context whereas a *method* includes prescribed objectives with more stringent guidelines and roles for teachers and learners.[43] Applying these definitions to the present study, collaborative learning, sensorimotor learning, and storytelling are examples of approaches to instruction. Godly Play is a *method* for teaching spiritual formation in children that incorporates all three of these *approaches* and utilizes the experiential *model* of teaching and learning.

Elementary-Aged Children

For the purposes of this study, the term *Early Childhood Education (ECE)* denotes a branch of education theory that focuses on the teaching and learning of children from birth

[40] Bates, "What is the Difference Between a Theory, Methodology, Approach, Method, Framework, Tool and Process?"

[41] Chris Hohmann, "Approach, Philosophy, or Methodology?" Chris Hohmann, October 30, 2014, accessed August 7, 2019, https://hohmannchris.wordpress.com/2014/10/30/apporach-philosophy-or-methodoogy/.

[42] Dr. Darrin Thomas, "Approach, Method, Procedure, and Techniques in Language Learning," *Educational Research Techniques* (blog), March 16, 2015, accessed August 7, 2019, https://educationalresearch techniques.com/2015/03/16/approach-method-procedure-and-techniques-in-language-learning/.

[43] Dr. Jack C. Richards, "Difference between an Approach and a Method?" Professor Jack C. Richards, accessed June 14, 2020, https://www.professorjackrichards.com/difference-between-an-approach-and-a-method/.

through approximately age eight.[44] The phrase *elementary-aged children* describes children in Kindergarten through fifth grade, typically including children from ages five or six through ages ten or eleven.

Chapter Summary

Biblical commands to shepherd the children in their worship community may be fulfilled when worship leaders design and implement corporate worship services that compensate for challenges through appropriate strategies for engagement in worship with elementary-aged children. Numerous studies have demonstrated the ability of children to experience God; yet, research is still lacking concerning their engagement in corporate worship. With this background in mind, a comprehensive literature review may now be conducted.

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[44] "Early Childhood Education," Teach: Make a Difference, Teach.com, accessed August 7, 2019, https://teach.com/become/where-can-i-teach/grade-levels/early-childhood.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter provides a general overview of the literature relevant to the engagement of elementary-aged children in worship. To address the research questions, the literature review consists of five sections. The first section identifies the connection between children and corporate worship in Scripture. The second section addresses children and corporate worship in doctoral studies. The third section explores children and corporate worship across the social sciences. The fourth section examines children and corporate worship in faith-based publications. The fifth section provides an in-depth view of children and corporate worship in varied publications.

Children and Corporate Worship in Scripture

In 1 Peter 3:15, there is an encouragement to consistently interact with clarity and compassion openly sharing the source of a Christian's hope. "But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect" (1 Pet. 3:15). Scripture stresses the importance of evangelism and discipleship through a positive personal example; yet, the majority of recent publications do not connect this imperative with an intentional practice in ministry with children through corporate worship.

Similarly, Matthew 18:2–5 and Matthew 19:14 are further models of faith toward a mutuality where adults listen and learn from children for the benefit of the worship community.[45]

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[45] Marcia J. Bunge, "Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Children, Parents, and 'Best Practices' for Faith Formation: Resources for Child, Youth, and Family Ministry Today," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 47, no. 4 (Winter 2008): 353–354.

Likewise, Psalm 145:4 demonstrates the need for one generation to learn from another. "One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts" (Ps. 145:4). Yet, many congregations still hold a low view of children and either exclude them from the corporate service for adults or fail to recognize the value of mutuality in spiritual development.[46]

Children and Corporate Worship in Doctoral Studies

There has been a gradual increase in dissertations and thesis projects investigating children and worship with a steady progression toward acknowledging the child's voice and exploring the mutual benefits of making meaning together. One of the early publications in the field came from a Canadian Christian religious educator, Stacie Reck, who passionately believed that children deserved a thoughtfully-designed curriculum rather than hastily assembled activities to meet the needs of children in diverse environments.[47] In the same year, 2008, a doctoral study ranking the priorities of children's ministry programs was published by researcher Karen Kennemur who discovered the past experiences of adults influenced their perceptions of current ministry programs for children.[48] Four years later, Gloria Roorda's doctoral study warned that these types of misperceptions may hinder a child's relationship with God.[49]

A significant milestone in the progression of research appeared in 2013 when Robin Rezek, a research assistant in the Concordia University Research and Evaluation Services

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[46] Marica J. Bunge, "Rediscovering the Dignity and Complexity of Children: Resources from the Christian Tradition," *Sewanee Theological Review* 48, no. 1 (Christmas 2004): 62; Frady, "A Grounded Theory Investigation," 44; Robin Rezek, "Young Children in Worship" (PhD Diss., Concordia University, Chicago, 2013), 43; Turner, "Children's Faith Formation," 21–22.

[47] Reck, "Colouring with Brown Crayons," 2.

[48] Karen Kennemur, "The Prioritization of Southern Baptist Programs for Children Determined by Children's Ministers, Pastors, and Parents" (PhD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008), 79.

[49] Gloria Roorda, "Bible Trek, A Proposal for a New Catechetical Curriculum for Spiritual Formation in Children Ages Five to Ten" (PhD diss., Northeastern Seminary, 2012), 1.

Department, reframed Dr. Shirley Morgenthaler's research to view corporate worship from the child's perspective.[50] Rezek's doctoral study brought to light one of the many challenges to worship engagement. If the primary purpose of gathering is biblical knowledge, then age-separated instruction may be appropriate; however, if the primary purpose is worship, then corporate worship with the faith family is necessary for children to develop appropriate dispositions toward worship.[51] Similarly, Reverend Tanya Marie Eustace of Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, a strong advocate for the child's ability to "recognize, claim, and respond to God's active presence in their lives," designed her 2014 study to hear the perspective of the children as they made meaning together as a faith community.[52]

Three dissertations published in 2015 further this dialogue. From the voice of Mary Ellen Durante at Fordham University, the ways prayer can be expressed were thoroughly evaluated.[53] From Amelia Boomershine of the United Theological Seminary, the means for providing regular discipleship through a loving relationship was investigated.[54] From Kathleen Frady at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, the conversation turned to the way an environment where children are safe to think and wonder may be fostered.[55] The following year, in her doctoral study for Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Dena Moss Moten explored Reuven Feuerstein's Mediated Learning Experience which is a methodology where a healthy adult

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[50] Rezek, "Young Children in Worship," ii.

[51] Ibid., 72.

[52] Eustace, "Experiencing God Together," 5.

[53] Mary Ellen Durante, "Teaching Children to Pray: An Essential Dimension of Religious Education in a Postmodern Age" (PhD diss., Fordham University, 2015), 27.

[54] Amelia Cooper Boomershine, "Breath of Fresh Air: Spiritual Empowerment Through Biblical Storytelling with Incarcerated Men and Women" (DMin thesis, United Theological Seminary, 2015), 59.

[55] Frady, "A Grounded Theory Investigation," 23.

mediator assists children to productively learn from and experience their environment despite past trauma or current obstacles.[56] Moten expressed the struggle to balance biblical truths, such as those found in Genesis 1:26–27 and Luke 3:11, with child development theories that may not express value toward the child's inherent potential.[57]

Transitioning to the theme of the acquisition of knowledge, in her mixed methods study examining biblical literacy in Southern Baptist churches in 2017, Valerie Davidson of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary revealed that children's ministers as a whole felt that biblical literacy was important but were often overwhelmed with administrative tasks, including volunteer recruitment, to the detriment of relational and educational aspects of ministry.[58] The following year in a Doctor of Ministry thesis at Liberty University, Kenneth Warren found a similar weakness where a lack of volunteer development coupled with a systemic favoritism toward adult ministries inhibited the feelings of value and empowerment in children and volunteers alike.[59] Tracing this theme in his Doctor of Worship Studies thesis at Liberty University, Jeremy Sauskojus expressed a possible solution where, in order to equip believers and overcome inadequate past training, local church fellowships might offer a pedagogy of worship for small groups.[60]

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[56] Dena Moss Moten, "The Effects of Mediated Learning Experience on Students from Low Socio-Economic Communities: An Ethnographic Case Study Analysis" (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016), 30–32.

[57] Moten, "The Effects of Mediated Learning Experience," 28.

[58] Valerie J. Davidson, "A Mixed Methods Study of the Relationship Between Children's Ministry Programs and Biblical Literacy in Selected Southern Baptist Churches" (EdD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017), 1.

[59] Kenneth G. Warren, "An Examination of Children's Ministry Volunteer Development from Pastors and Laity in the Local Church" (DMin thesis, Liberty University, 2018), 1.

[60] Jeremy G. Sauskojus, "Incorporating a Pedagogy of Worship in the Community Group Ministry of Grace Bible Church" (Doctor of Worship Studies thesis, Liberty University, 2019), 53.

In the same year, Angela Hazel's Doctor of Ministry thesis at Liberty University took an in-depth look into why parents struggle to disciple their children revealing a lack of time and preparation, personal conflict within the home, and a lack of equipping through the local church as primary challenges to discipleship.[61] Robin Turner's Doctor of Ministry dissertation from George Fox University takes this decade of research to its culmination in an expression of a high view of children whose holistic formation is neglected in favor of the acquisition of religious knowledge when leaders are not trained to mutually engage in the spiritual formation process with children and families.[62] Despite the progression toward the inclusion of the child's perspective in doctoral research, a gap exists in the literature regarding challenges to the engagement of elementary-aged children in corporate worship.

Children and Corporate Worship Across the Social Sciences

There has been a notable increase in interest across the social science fields in connection with faith communities. Rachel Carson, the groundbreaking naturalist, wrote of her experiences with her grandson in making time for wonder and encouraging a connection to the spiritual side of the human experience.[63] In an article from the *American Sociological Review*, demographer Dr. Ross Stolzenberg and his distinguished sociology research associates hypothesized that church attitudes toward the family affect participation and suggested that parents of primary school-aged children attend Sunday school because they value religious education.[64] However,

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[61] Angela Hazel, "Discipling Children and Youth: Helping the Church Enable Parents to Lead" (DMin thesis, Liberty University, 2019), 52–55.

[62] Turner, "Children's Faith Formation," x.

[63] Rachel Carson, "Help Your Child to Wonder," *Women's Home Companion*, July 1956: 24–27, 46–48.

[64] Ross M. Stolzenberg, Mary Blair-Loy, and Linda J. Waite, "Religious Participation in Early Adulthood: Age and Family Life Cycle Effects on Church Membership," *American Sociological Review* 60, no. 1 (1995): 86.

the authors made the surprising claim that preschool-aged children are too young to attend Sunday school and therefore do not provide an actual incentive for parents to join the church.[65]

In a 2002 article for the *Journal of College Student Development*, Love differentiated religion from spirituality and demonstrated cognitive development may be dissimilar to spiritual development within the same individual.[66] Although Love's research is comprehensive in its coverage of the convergence and divergence of spiritual and cognitive theories, his study relates to college students and magnifies the issue of the large gap in research intersecting the cognitive, affective, and spiritual development in elementary-aged children.

In a paper published in 2010 recalling examples from her previous research, Susan Edwards, Faculty of Education at Monash University in Australia, noted the powerful effect of consumerism on the early childhood curriculum especially as it applies to contemporary versions of play experiences in children's learning.[67] "Conceptual and language-based tools change over time within the social and cultural context, therefore what and how young children are learning must also be changing."[68] In the journal, *Social Work and Christianity*, Dr. Katie Terry writes from the lens of a social worker advocating all-ability inclusion in faith communities. Terry, a licensed independent social worker, documented how important it is for leaders, including pastors, as well as lay teachers and community members to understand how behaviors connected

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[65] Stolzenberg et al., "Religious Participation in Early Adulthood," 86.

[66] Love, "Comparing Spiritual Development and Cognitive Development," 369.

[67] Susan Edwards, "Numberjacks are on Their Way! A Cultural Reflection on Contemporary Society and the Early Childhood Curriculum," *Pedagogy, Culture, and Society* 18, no. 3 (October 2010): 261–272.

[68] Edwards, "Numberjacks are on Their Way! A Cultural Reflection," 260.

with the autism spectrum disorder may be influencing their ability to include and welcome those affected by the disability.[69]

Gordon, in conjunction with Guidelines Children's Ministries, published a handbook in 2016 on helping children grow in faith with the suggestion that an understanding of how children learn in the digital age will assist ministry workers in selecting developmentally appropriate curricula.[70] In the same year, Assistant Professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling Mary Beth Werdel published in the weekly magazine, *America*, her personal experience in creating a space for a child with autism to fully participate in corporate worship with the goal that he would carry forth a positive impression from a lifetime of experiences with the gathered body.[71] Acknowledging these types of contributions from across the social sciences, a gap still exists relative to engagement in corporate worship.

Children and Corporate Worship in Faith-Based Publications

Similarly, there has been a marked increase in interest in children's spirituality as well as a movement toward a theology of childhood within the religious-based journals and peer-reviewed publications. Writing for the quarterly theological journal, *The Ecumenical Review*, the Director of the Portfolio for Biblical Studies at the World Council of Churches in Geneva, Hans-Ruedi Weber, was an early advocate of Christ's special presence in children.[72] In 1992, Assistant Professor of Elementary Education at Gordon College, Dr. Lorelie Farmer, published the results

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[69] Katie Terry, "A Wrinkle in the Fold: Inclusion of People with Autism Spectrum Disorders in Faith Communities," *Social Work and Christianity* 42, no. 4 (2015): 449–469.

[70] Gordon, *Children's Ministries*, 12, 22.

[71] Mary Beth Werdel, "Praying as a Parent: Gratitude and Not Giving Up," *America*, 214, no. 6 (February 22, 2016): 29–30.

[72] Hans-Ruedi Weber, "The Gospel in the Child," *The Ecumenical Review* 31, no. 3 (July 1979): 233.

of her descriptive study interviewing adults recollecting their early religious experiences confirming her hypothesis that religious knowledge, including "early transcendent experiences," might develop independently of cognitive and emotional capacities.[73] Prior to 2001 with Dr. Marcia Bunge's groundbreaking editing for *The Child in Christian Thought*, little had been written recognizing a theology of childhood or the complex and changing views held considering children and theology over the centuries.[74] Continuing her research, Dr. Bunge, Professor of Religion at Gustavus Adolphus College, has published in the *Sewanee Theological Review* advancing the need to structure education programs that honor children's questions while making room for mutual learning between children and adults.[75] By 2008, Bunge had established the beginnings of a theology of childhood with an article summarizing virtually a century of historical research articulating best practices in children's faith formation.[76] Nearly a decade later in *The Christian Century*, Bunge expressed how Christian religious education programs are still missing the mark by focusing on entertainment and trends over quality conversations and authentic connections.[77]

Around the same time Bunge edited *The Child in Christian Thought*, Dr. Catherine Stonehouse, Professor of Christian Education at Asbury Theological Seminary, published an article explaining how educators had begun to look at the work of developmental paradigms, yet

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[73] Lorelie Farmer, "Religious Experience in Childhood: A Study of Adult Perspectives on Early Spiritual Awareness," *Religious Education* 87, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 260.

[74] May et al., *Children Matter*, 53.

[75] Bunge, "Rediscovering the Dignity and Complexity of Children," 62.

[76] Bunge, "Biblical and Theological Perspectives," 348–360.

[77] Marcia J. Bunge, "Honoring Children," *The Christian Century* 134, no. 5 (March 1, 2017): 37–38.

theology and spiritual formation of children had generally been neglected.[78] While serving as Associate Professor of Christian Education at San Francisco Theological Seminary, Dr. Joyce Ann Mercer, along with her research assistant Deborah Matthews, analyzed liturgical practices with children from a study on children in congregations and highlighted the notion that adults have not always recognized the alternative ways through which children participate in worship.[79] Three years later in the *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, Jacqueline Watson, a researcher with the Evaluation of Children's Trusts, published a study asserting that the lack of an agreed-upon definition of spirituality made developing a mandated spiritual education program problematic under the Education Reform Act of 1988 in the United Kingdom.[80] Publishing a follow-up study in the same international journal, Watson revealed the lack of a standard definition for spirituality and the absence of the child's voice was still prevalent eleven years later.[81]

One of the next voices to join the conversation belongs to Wheaton College professor, Donald Ratcliff, whose article in the *Christian Education Journal* exposes the hundreds of studies that have been carried out contemplating religious and spiritual development in children, yet the study of the child's actual spiritual experience has received less attention.[82] Fourteen

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[78] Catherine Stonehouse, "Knowing God in Childhood: A Study of Godly Play and the Spirituality of Children," *Christian Education Journal* 5, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 28.

[79] Joyce Ann Mercer and Deborah L. Matthews, "Liturgical Practices with Children in Congregations," *Liturgy* 18, no. 4 (2003): 28.

[80] Jacqueline Watson, "*Every Child Matters* and Children's Spiritual Rights: Does the New Holistic Approach To Children's Care Address Children's Spiritual Well-Being?" *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 11, no. 2 (2006): 252–253.

[81] Jacqueline Watson, "Every Child Still Matters: Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Spirituality of the Child," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 22, no. 1 (2017): 6.

[82] Donald Ratcliff, "The Spirit of Children Past: A Century of Children's Spirituality Research," *Christian Education Journal* 4, no. 2 (2007): 226.

years later, Heather Ingersoll of Seattle Pacific University addressed the same types of barriers blocking a holistic environment for the nurture of children's spirituality.[83] In 2009, journalist and Christian columnist, Emily Wierenga, furthered the case for children's spirituality highlighting from Stewart's curriculum the fact that "children can have their own faith in God—as children."[84]

In 2010, Brendan Hyde, Senior Lecturer in Education at Deakin University in Australia, conducted a case study consistent with his original research programs to specifically explore the connection between Jerome Berryman's "Godly Play" and Sofia Cavalletti's "The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd" and children's spirituality.[85] A notable feature of these methods, a "safe and stimulating environment," allows children to integrate two primary pathways to learning—the language (verbal) and play (nonverbal) systems.[86] In his findings, Hyde suggests that the safe environment, time and space for engaging meaningfully in materials, and the ability to repeat work from a previous session were all factors in the child's ability to encounter Jesus, the Good Shepherd through playful work.[87] A further and critical factor in the child's ability to experience God was his use of meditative silence over spoken language, a technique promoted by a combination of the two methods for nurturing the spiritual lives of children.[88] Published five years later, Jonker wrote for the *Christian Education Journal* depicting this ongoing struggle to

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[83] Heather Nicole Ingersoll, "Making Room: A Place for Children's Spirituality in the Christian Church," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 19, nos. 3–4 (2014): 167.

[84] Emily Wierenga, "Young Children and Worship," *Presbyterian Record* 133, no. 1 (January 2009), 32.

[85] Brendan Hyde, "Godly Play Nourishing Children's Spirituality: A Case Study," *Religious Education* 105, no. 5 (October–December 2010): 504–518.

[86] Hyde, "Godly Play Nourishing Children's Spirituality: A Case Study," 508.

[87] Ibid., 509–516.

[88] Ibid., 516–517.

create a worship structure that invites children to engage in worship in developmentally

appropriate ways that truly foster spiritual formation.[89]

Returning to the *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, Joyce Bellous—

Professor of Christian Faith Education at Taylor Seminary and David Csinos—Assistant

Professor of Practical Theology at Atlantic School of Theology combine years of expertise in the

fields of spirituality and ministry with children to outline four spiritual styles that, taken together,

may nurture a holistic spiritual environment.[90] The spiritual styles assessment designed by

Bellous and Csinos, along with children's pastor Denise Peltomaki, outlines the general styles

children may utilize to express worship including a Word-centred [sic] Approach, an Emotion-

centred Approach, a Symbol-centred Approach, and an Action-centred Approach.[91] Arriving at a

long-anticipated definition of spirituality, their work in highlighting spiritual styles was intended

to inspire a secondary benefit where adults learn to make room in the environment to support

different types of spiritual expressions from children including words, emotions, symbols, or

actions.[92] Despite the significant expansion in scholarly writing favoring children's spiritual

formation, little attention has been devoted specifically to engagement in corporate worship.

Children and Corporate Worship in Varied Publications

There has also been a steady increase in interest in worship topics depicting children and

youth from magazines, journals, and books. Paul Little, originally graduating from the Wharton

School of Finance, provides the example of evangelism that draws others in by building trust

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[89] Jonker, "Experiencing God," 298.

[90] Joyce E. Bellous and David M. Csinos, "Spiritual Styles: Creating an Environment to Nurture Spiritual Wholeness," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 14, no. 3 (August 2009): 213.

[91] Bellous and Csinos, "Spiritual Styles," 215–219.

[92] Ibid., 219.

before sharing the fundamentals of a life of faith through an authentic outreach. In *How to Give Away Your Faith* (1966), Little's evangelism techniques apply equally to adult-adult, adult-child, or even child-child witnessing as evidenced in his urging to be sensitive to those around them, repeating back their thoughts and feelings.[93] Little's lifetime spent gently answering questions about Christianity—especially to new Christians—revealed, "It should not surprise us that the people whom God has greatly used throughout the centuries have not just known their Bibles well; they have known other people well too. And loving both, they have made the Word relevant to others."[94]

Drawing conclusions from a research base of four-thousand respondents, biblical geography pioneer Edward Robinson (1977) concluded that "children can remember and interpret profound experiences" and demonstrated young children are capable of engaging in religious thought and experiencing a "sense of presence."[95] First published in 1983, Dr. Sofia Cavalletti's *The Religious Potential of the Child: Experiencing Scripture and Liturgy with Young Children* introduced notions articulating a child's ability to experience God that have profoundly influenced educators and theologians across the globe for the past four decades.[96] Similarly, Marlene LeFever, now Vice President of Educational Development for David C. Cook, was an early voice advocating a balance between biblical facts and creativity.[97] LeFever's article from

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[93] Paul Little, *How to Give Away Your Faith* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1966), 24.

[94] Little, *How to Give Away Your Faith*, 24.

[95] Jonker, "Experiencing God," 303.

[96] Sonja Stewart, "Children and Worship," *Religious Education* 84, no. 3 (Summer 1989): 350.

[97] Marlene LeFever, "Refiner's Fire: Beyond the Divorce of Faith and Art," *Christianity Today* 25, no. 15 (September 4, 1981): 83.

Christianity Today presents the concept still relevant nearly thirty years later that knowing facts to the exclusion of creativity leaves out developing creativity to worship creatively.

Published in 1987 in the *Reformed Review*, Dr. Sonja Stewart, Professor of Christian Education at Western Theological Seminary, took this advocacy to a new level bringing Cavalletti's approach to the worship education of young children to create an environment that allows them to experience stories, parables, and liturgical presentations in order to worship God.[98] Berryman brought his personal experience as an educator and headmaster, his work at the Texas Medical Center, and his study under Sofia Cavalletti in Rome to the collaborative effort in creating a curriculum with Stewart that resulted in their book, *Young Children and Worship*.[99] Two years later, Berryman published *Godly Play*, detailing a method of religious education in development since 1972 that has now been adapted for use in numerous doctoral studies, utilized in churches across denominational boundaries, and has established a foundation offering training, resources, and materials.[100] Based on storytelling, a child's natural sense of awe and wonder, and active participation with materials, the method is founded on Berryman's research-based observation that children experience God at deeper levels than they may be able to verbally articulate.[101]

Within this same time frame, Tim Stafford, Senior Writer for *Christianity Today* magazine reflects the growing concern over the decline of Sunday schools in an era when the need for a higher quality of educational method and authentic community of small groups was at

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[98] Sonja M. Stewart, "Children, the Bible, and Worship," *Reformed Review* 40, no. 3 (1987):189.

[99] Sonja M. Stewart and Jerome W. Berryman, *Young Children and Worship* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 13.

[100] Jerome Berryman, "What is Godly Play?" Godly Play Foundation, accessed July 5, 2020, https://www.godlyplayfoundation.org/.

[101] Stonehouse, "Knowing God in Childhood," 30.

its peak.[102] Betty Bedsole, choral composer and Professor of Music at Union University, joins this conversation detailing the incongruence between parental expectations, educators, and the purpose of the church toward participation rather than performance with children in worship.[103] Leon Blanchette—Chair of the Department of Christian Ministry at Olivet Nazarene University and Robert Crosby—Associate Professor of Psychology at California Baptist University echoed this effect whereby the expectations of children and parents, rather than the research-based scientific study of children's ministry models, began to drive the design of children's Christian education.[104]

Moving toward studies evaluating the effectiveness of such methods as those created by Berryman and Stewart, other researchers began to observe the effects of curriculum quality, teacher preparation, and training on learner participation and success. Associate Professor of Christian Education at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary Laura Lewis' study relating to teaching practices and the use of prepared curricula revealed both novice and seasoned teachers utilized the published materials but adapted them significantly for their individual classroom needs and according to their teaching styles and preferences.[105] Sauskojus' doctoral study also recognized the need to adapt pedagogy materials to overcome inadequate past training and equip believers toward a pedagogy of worship for small groups.[106]

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[102] Tim Stafford, "This Little Light of Mine: Will Sunday School Survive the "Me Generation"?," *Christianity Today* 34, no. 14 (October 8, 1990): 29.

[103] Betty Bedsole, "Participation or Performance: Preschoolers and Children at Worship in Southern Baptist Churches." *Review and Expositor* 87, no. 4 (1990): 625–637.

[104] Leon Blanchette and Robert G. Crosby, "The Measurement and Evaluation of Children's Ministry Praxis," *Christian Education Journal* 13, no. 2 (November 2016): 248–249.

[105] Laura Lewis, "Teacher's Guides and Teacher's Choices: Is Lesson Planning by the Book?" *Religious Education* 89, no. 1 (Winter 1994): 80–100.

[106] Sauskojus, "Incorporating a Pedagogy of Worship," 53.

Along with her team of researchers, van Leersum-Bekebrede believed that when adults perform contributing and facilitating roles with children in addition to traditional directing roles, adults learn alongside children and are spiritually nourished together.[107] Similarly, Jane Carr of the Talbot School of Theology posited that opportunities for serving alongside one another aids not only in the spiritual formation of the child but also of the faith community.[108] Ratcliff points to two key ideas from Becky Fischer's curriculum—that children need to experience God and should be encouraged to serve and minister to others; however, the author notes the availability of what he believes to be other less controversial methods for accomplishing these aims.[109]

A rising theme in recent publications is the value of ministry with children. Dawn Devries, Professor of Systematic Theology at Union Presbyterian Seminary, was a leading voice distinguishing the instrumental valuation for what a child may become in the future from the intrinsic valuation of a child because of their inherent worth.[110] Olivia Whitener of the Social Science Research Council addressed the issue of value by creating a physical space to meet the needs of a diversity of children.[111] Robin Turner, author of the web resource Worship with Children, affirmed through her doctoral study when children are valued, the church family grows together in Christ.[112] Gloria McCall's doctoral research further substantiated this need to express

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[107] van Leersum-Bekebrede et al., "Setting the Stage," 166.

[108] Jane Carr, "Equipping Kids for Ministry," *Christian Education Journal* 14, no. 2 (Fall 2017): 359.

[109] Donald Ratcliff, "Redefining Children's Ministry," *Christian Education Journal* 3, no. 2 (Fall 2006): 410.

[110] Dawn Devries, "Toward a Theology of Childhood," *Interpretation* 55, no. 2, April 2001: 162–163.

[111] Olivia Whitener, "It's Not Really About the Waffles: A Child-Centered Worship Service Encourages a Sticky Faith," *Sojourners* 45, no. 5 (May 2016): 30–31.

[112] Turner, "Children's Faith Formation," x.

value by selecting curricula that accurately reflect the personal situations and experiences of children and families in a broader cultural context.[113]

Although several how-to books have been published illustrating administrative aspects of ministry, Choun and Lawson offered a handbook that seeks to elevate the importance of ministry with children.[114] Dr. Andrew Root, Professor of Youth and Family Ministry at Luther Seminary, took a different stance as he encouraged the church community to embrace the younger generations by seeking the Holy Spirit instead of a youthful spirit.[115] In *The Unbelievable Gospel*, pastor Jonathan Dodson addressed the idea that a worship language exists by defining "gospel fluency" as the process by which adults and children interact in a natural, unscripted flow.[116] Reverend Dr. Constance Cherry, Professor of Worship and Pastoral Ministry at Indiana Wesleyan University, also emphasized the need for a natural way by which the community could express its relationship with God and defined the term "worship voice" to describe this community speaking in dialogue with God.[117]

Another theme common to this era of publications is the recruitment, training, retention, and celebration of volunteers. John Michael Chase's doctoral study brought out the notion that volunteers feel the tension between being valued yet expected to perform at the professional

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[113] Gloria McCall, "Cultivating the Spiritual Awareness of Children to Hear from God and Pray for Their Peers" (DMin thesis, United Theological Seminary, 2018), 129.

[114] Choun and Lawson, *The Christian Educator's Handbook*, 46–48.

[115] Andrew Root, "Stop Worrying About the Millennials*:*And Learn To Love Them Instead." *Christianity Today* 59, no. 1 (January/February 2015): 35.

[116] Jonathan K. Dodson, *The Unbelievable Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 136.

[117] Constance Cherry, *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 51–55.

level of paid staff.[118] Sue Miller and David Staal (2004) published *Making Your Children's Ministry the Best Hour of Every Kid's Week*, Tina Houser (2008) authored *Building Children's Ministry: A Practical Guide*, Larry Fowler (2012) wrote *Rock-Solid Kid's Ministry*, and Mark DeVries and Annette Safstrom (2018) published *Sustainable Children's Ministry: From Last-Minute Scrambling to Long-Term Solutions* in response to the overwhelming need for solutions to problems encountered in designing and directing children's ministry, including the management of volunteers. By contrast, rather than focusing on administrative aspects, *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus* was co-authored by David Csinos and Ivy Beckwith (2013) to fill the gap in the literature concerning children's faith development.

In a 2003 article for the *Christian Education Journal*, May shares that many modern church curricula are designed around award systems or competitions for prizes as motivators.[119] May, Posterski, Stonehouse, and Cannell addressed this ministry model in *Children Matter* with the conclusion that this method is often used with at-risk populations when at-risk children are the ones most in need of experiencing gifts with no strings attached to connect to the ultimate no-strings-attached gift of God's grace.[120] In the same year, Christian children's theatre teacher and ministry leader, Kathleen Chapman, wrote in *Teaching Kids Authentic Worship: How to Keep Them Close to God for Life* that worship is about life-long relationships, not the activities or lesson books completed.[121] Recognizing the drawbacks to an emphasis on extrinsic motivation,

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[118] John Michael Chase, "Best Practices of Actively Engaged Volunteers Within a Megachurch" (PhD diss., Nova Southeastern University, 2015), 88.

[119] Scottie May, "A Look at the Effects of Extrinsic Motivation on the Internalization of Biblical Truth," *Christian Education Journal* 7, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 48.

[120] May et al., *Children Matter*, 12–15.

[121] Kathleen Chapman, *Teaching Kids Authentic Worship: How to Keep Them Close to God for Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 14.

Ted Olsen, Editorial Director of *Christianity Today*, chronicled the shift in methodology that

Awana has undergone and acknowledged its challenges were not coming from the new way of

looking at competition and incentives but rather the challenge of volunteers putting in personal

preparation time.[122]

Csinos' ethnographic study revealed a child's meaning-making reflects the broader

congregation's theological culture.[123] Reverend Tanya Eustace recounted a similar experience in

her 2014 research study investigating the children's ability to experience God. The sense of

community built in the tight-knit group supports Csinos' assertion considering how children

think and how their communal nature had a tremendous impact on their experience in worship

through the Godly Play method.[124] The growing awareness that a mini kingdom or ministry silo

mindset is antithetical to meaningful connections led to research on inclusion levels like those

reported by clinical psychologist Linda Blair demonstrating that shared positive experiences

contribute to psychological health and bolster a sense of belonging.[125] Cindy Merten, Director of

Christian Education and All Abilities Inclusion Ministry at First Presbyterian Church in

Michigan, built on this notion of creating a sense of community by cultivating a culture of

belonging that begins as a ministry with children yet extends to the greater congregation and

leadership.[126]

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[122] Ted Olsen, "No Child Left Behind Comes to Awana: The Children's Ministry Rethinks the Competition At Its Core," *Christianity Today* 61, no. 8 (October 2017): 33.

[123] David Csinos, "From the Ground Up: Cultural Considerations in Research into Children's Spirituality and Theology," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 23, no. 1 (2018): 53–66.

[124] Eustace, "Experiencing God Together," 239–242.

[125] Linda Blair, "The Psychological Benefits of Shared Experiences," *The Telegraph*, May 17, 2018, accessed July 17, 2020, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/health-fitness/mind/psychological-benefits-shared-experiences/.

[126] Cindy Merten, "Everybody's Church," *The Presbyterian Outlook* 201, no. 6 (April 15, 2019): 14.

Even among the greater congregation and leadership, there is a widespread, yet false belief that worship is a one-hour-per-week event; however, true worship unfolds as a lifestyle pattern of ascribing glory and honor to God through the daily rhythm of life. An under-researched aspect of this rhythm regards how children fit into the church body's pattern of corporate worship. While the literature germane to child development, religious pedagogy, and corporate worship practices is substantial, May's research on teaching children offered a chief principle often overlooked by designers of corporate worship. May urged, "We need to remember to put the child in the middle as Jesus did—not our teaching or my methods, but the child—and for us to become like children, blessing them each time we are together as Jesus also did."[127] Csinos concurs, "How a congregation works to include children often depends on the theological perspective that dominates its vision of children."[128]

Although varied publications have increased their focus on ministry with children, this theological perspective has been underreported in the literature encompassing corporate worship with children. A theology of worship based on 1 Peter 3:15 speaks to the need for a kinder, gentler evangelism to contextualize to today's culture. Approaches to worship design are dependent upon the theological perspective casting vision for a child's place in corporate worship. Addressing the need to move along the inclusion spectrum, Csinos suggested churches adapt their worship style based on the radical love that Jesus demonstrated toward children.[129] Cherry summarized the direction of a growing interest in research along this continuum. "People miss the purpose of gathering for worship as a community. It is not purely for social or political

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[127] May, "Teaching Children," 126.

[128] David Csinos, "A Little Child Shall Lead Them," *Sojourners Magazine* 45, no. 5 (May 2016): 29.

[129] Csinos, "A Little Child Shall Lead Them," 29.

gain but rather to invite the active participation in response to God's revelation and invitation to worship."[130]

Similarly, how the congregation views its responsibility to the faith formation of its community is gaining prominence in varied publications, including websites dedicated to evangelism and discipleship. Dallas Willard, the respected Christian author and former Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the University of Southern California, defined spiritual formation in an article on the website dedicated to his teachings. "Spiritual formation in the tradition of Jesus Christ is the process of transformation of the inmost dimension of the human being, the heart, which is the same as the spirit or will."[131] Willard clarified that spiritual formation does not occur by simply listening to sermons or by the Holy Spirit alone in a one-time act of formation.[132] Morse shares this view, "Spiritual formation requires submission to the Spirit, humility of mind and heart, and space for solitude, reflection, and accountability. Formation happens best in diverse communities."[133]

A final area affecting corporate worship with children that has received growing attention in the literature is leadership. Creighton Tamerius quoted his mentor, Josh Huckabay, "Worship ministry is not about telling people where to go, but about leading them as you go there yourself."[134] There has been an increase in publications advocating the need to cultivate positive daily habits of personal strengthening through Bible study and prayer as the basis for a sound

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[130] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 55.

[131] Dallas Willard, "Spiritual Formation: What it is, and How it is Done," Dallas Willard, accessed July 12, 2020, http://www.dwillard.org/articles/individual/spiritual-formation-what-it-is-and-how-it-is-done.

[132] Willard, "Spiritual Formation: What it is, and How it is Done."

[133] Morse, "Evangelism, Discipleship, and Spiritual Formation: Which is What?"

[134] Creighton Tamerius, "How to "Set the Table" in Worship," Austin Stone Worship, October 20, 2017, accessed July 17, 2020, https://www.austinstoneworship.com/set-table-worship/#wpautbox_about.

ministry with children, and that includes an ability to answer their legitimate faith questions.[135]

Dr. Robert Morgan's lifetime of pastoral experience illustrates the best way to lead others is to become so saturated in Scripture that worship is the most natural overflow of this personal time with God.[136] Morgan, Teaching Pastor of The Donelson Fellowship, shared how attitudes are the result of where thoughts are focused and the cultivation of joy makes leaders effective and productive.[137] Despite the diversity of attention to children's spiritual formation across varied platforms, a gap persists regarding challenges to the engagement of elementary-aged children in corporate worship.

Chapter Summary

A large body of literature has been documented from a diversity of sources relative to children's ministry. The rise in publications detailing solutions for building and sustaining children's ministry is one indicator toward a systemic need for change due to the influence of consumerism on ministry. Conversations documenting a child's ability to build relationships and make meaning constitute a growing body of literature from across the social sciences. There are also indications of a convergence of thought consolidating the connection between theory and practice. However, despite the recent increase in models for ministry, there is very little in the way of a holistic model of biblical practice, educational practice, and its use in designing corporate worship *for children* and *with children* that is truly engaging.

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[135] Jerome Berryman, "Holy Story, Sacred Play: Helping Children Become Fluent in Faith," *The Christian Century* 136, no 8 (April 10, 2019): 23; Olsen, "No Child Left Behind Comes To Awana," 36; Turner, "Children's Faith Formation," x; Watson, "Every Child Still Matters," 12.

[136] Dr. Robert Morgan, *Mastering Life Before It's Too Late: 10 Biblical Strategies for a Lifetime of Purpose* (New York: Howard Books, 2015), 163–169.

[137] Morgan, *Mastering Life Before It's Too Late*, 202–203.

The literature review revealed a predominantly age-separated delivery method for discipleship and worship with elementary-aged children. Although several studies do address individual facets of worship engagement, none of the literature integrates a holistic picture of the factors affecting the ability of elementary-aged children to engage in corporate worship. This chapter provided an overview of key concepts from relevant literature indicating the need for an in-depth investigation into the unique topic of the challenges faced by elementary-aged children toward engaging in corporate worship. The following chapter will outline the method of research utilized to answer the research questions and hypotheses.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Introduction

The topic of worship engagement is multi-faceted and requires a detailed investigation following protocols for verification consistent with exemplary research techniques. The purpose of this qualitative historical study was to identify challenges faced by elementary-aged children pertaining to worship engagement and investigate practical strategies for overcoming these challenges. The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate the design utilized to conduct this qualitative inquiry. This chapter outlines the methodology applied in the research design, the process of gathering sources, the types of sources included, analysis of sources, and synthesis and interpretation of data in an effort to resolve the research questions.

Research Design

A qualitative historical design was employed to identify the unique challenges faced by elementary-aged children pertaining to worship engagement. Although qualitative designs have been utilized for decades in the social sciences, compilations—such as the *Handbook of Emergent Methods*—are extending the acceptance of such designs into other disciplines. As the chapter by Altheide, Coyle, DeVriese, and Schneider reveals, the practice of qualitative document analysis (QDA) is now considered an emergent methodology with a fluid, yet systematic set of procedures that qualify as a sound research protocol.[138] An emergent design allowed for shifts in data collection forms that ensured qualitative validity. Triangulation of different data sources accorded the convergence of sources to illuminate research themes. With

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[138] Altheide et al., "Emergent Qualitative Document Analysis," 127.

QDA, discovery and description are emphasized as the means for uncovering patterns, processes, context, and underlying meaning.[139]

Interacting with a variety of documents, this immersion became a conversation that inspired the researcher to travel back and forth in the community of documents to refine interpretations as underlying categories were discovered. Reading with an openness to emergent themes, categories, and subcategories allowed the researcher to work inductively to build patterns from the bottom up with the freedom to navigate between these constructs.[140] Following the inductive structure, codes remained fluid as new research was incorporated before codifying the data for analysis and synthesis.

This ebb and flow with documents produced expected codes while simultaneously making space for the surprising codes and special conceptual interest codes described by research design experts John W. and J. David Creswell.[141] In this study, expected codes were often generated linked with learning style; yet, surprising codes were discovered where children positively influenced adult perceptions toward spiritual formation in an unexpected reversal of direction. Unusual codes of special interest enlivened the conversation when factors that inspire or impede a sense of awe and wonder were revealed.

In addition to the immersion and interaction with a diversity of documents, the strength of QDA lies in its tendency to promote the exploration of additional documents not part of the initial research plan.[142] Biographies, strategic plans, and YouTube videos created by top-tier

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[139] Altheide et al., "Emergent Qualitative Document Analysis," 128.

[140] Altheide, 138; Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 181.

[141] Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 195.

[142] Altheide et al., "Emergent Qualitative Document Analysis," 148.

universities added unexpectedly to the rich, thick description as a result of this methodology.

Another facet of QDA that enhances its emergence from conventional content analysis is that

contradictions of relationships are sought to strengthen the framework of the investigation.[143]

Although the majority of resources pointed to the value of attending church from nursery

onward, one study suggested children too young to attend Sunday school are not providing an

incentive for parents to join the church.[144] Considering the background associated with this

contradiction in the relationship between perceptions of church and the value of worship

engagement added to the validity of the analysis.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research questions and hypotheses were formulated in order to provide the proper

framework for investigating children's spiritual formation through corporate worship design.

The research questions addressed in this study are:

Research Question 1: What are the challenges faced by elementary-aged children pertaining to

worship engagement?

Research Question 2: What strategies may be utilized to overcome challenges pertaining to

worship engagement for elementary-aged children?

To fully investigate these questions and equip worship leaders, lay leaders, and children's

ministry volunteers for their role in children's spiritual formation through corporate worship, the

hypotheses for this study are:

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[143] Altheide et al., "Emergent Qualitative Document Analysis," 148.

[144] Stolzenberg et al., "Religious Participation in Early Adulthood," 86.

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Hypothesis One: The challenges faced by elementary-aged children pertaining to worship engagement may include the quality of leadership, curricula, and environment.

Hypothesis Two: The strategies for engaging elementary-aged children in corporate worship may include evangelism, discipleship, and leader mentorship.

Process of Gathering Sources

The initial process for gathering sources included scholarly searches across four main categories including journal articles, relevant magazine articles, books, and dissertations forming an introductory survey of literature about worship engagement with children. After determining the research questions were unique yet answerable through this qualitative design, an in-depth investigation toward a diversity of scholarly documents was initiated. Once a framework of high-quality scholarly documents had been located, this network of resources led to the discovery of an array of other types of documents including audiovisual sources, strategic plans, blogs, and biographies.

Types of Sources

Multiple sources of data were utilized in this study to increase the depth and diversity of the data field. Dissertations and journal articles selected from respected institutions of higher learning and publishers formed the foundation of documents. Several sources were included due to their landmark placement in the field of children's worship or their historical value as works forming the cornerstone of ministry with children. Magazines, blogs, and alternative documents may be questioned as scholarly sources; therefore, a thorough vetting process ensured these documents represented valid and reliable sources for this level of study. Document and audiovisual information constitute the majority of source types admitted into the data set.

Analysis of Sources

All data, whether quantitative or qualitative, requires analysis and interpretation. Research techniques coach Derek Jansen explains that a coding structure is essential to a high-quality analysis and that structure remains fluid based on the researcher's active role in the analysis.[145] Dr. Virginia Braun and Dr. Victoria Clarke, international experts in the design and pedagogy of qualitative research, concur the quality of qualitative analysis is dependent upon the level of engagement, creativity, commitment, and interpretive skill of the researcher.[146] It is not necessarily a formal procedure that makes a successful analysis but rather the researcher's personal active role in the analysis that becomes essential to the interpretation of the data.[147]

According to Dr. Philip Adu, Methodology Expert at the Chicago School of Professional Psychology, the first step is to determine the appropriate coding strategy while the second step is to create an anchor code for each research question (RQ).[148] The coding strategies utilized in this study included description-focused coding and interpretation-focused coding.[149] The anchor code for RQ1 was challenges while the anchor code for RQ2 was strategies.

Coding strategy matters to the effectiveness of the process and the overall excellence of the research. As Dr. Adu encourages, "Coding is about reducing the data without losing the

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[145] Derek Jansen, "Qualitative Data Coding, Simplified," GradCoach, December 14, 2019, accessed May 13, 2020, https://grad.coach/qualitative-data-coding/.

[146] Dr. Victoria Clarke, "What is Thematic Analysis?" December 9, 2017, video, 1:01:37, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4voVhTiVydpbell.

[147] Clarke, "What is Thematic Analysis?"; Jansen, "Qualitative Data Coding, Simplified."

[148] Dr. Philip Adu, "Coding Qualitative Data: A Practical Guide to Completing Qualitative Data Analysis," Methodology Related Presentations—TCSPP, November 9, 2019, video, 1:10:33, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4KOpSG7myOg.

[149] Adu, "Coding Qualitative Data: A Practical Guide to Completing Qualitative Data Analysis."

meaning behind the data."[150] After skimming the literature for impressions about worship engagement, the researcher followed an inductive process to work systematically through subsets of document types to develop codes. To travel from code to theme, Nicole Kipar, Deputy Director in Academic and Digital Development at the University of Glasgow, recommends developing categories to narrow and identify these patterns.[151] Progressing from articles to dissertations, the researcher narrowed patterns for the two main research questions regarding challenges and solutions to visually distinguish themes.

Based on Clarke's analogies, the process is less about discovering the "X" that marks the spot—finding a buried treasure to dig out diamonds from the sand and more toward actually building a sandcastle to highlight those diamonds created from the interaction of the researcher with the data. Clarke summarizes, "Themes don't just emerge. They are actively generated by the researcher."[152] Following this process based on lessons from Clarke, Adu, and other teachers of qualitative research techniques, the researcher returned to the literature where codes were developed, revised, and connected. Expressing the steps taken through coding and analysis is one means of ensuring validity in this historical design. This inductive approach was utilized to develop a map as a visual representation of the patterns found in the data. Rather than simply restating the data, this entire process of immersion, code generating, and theme building prepared the researcher to analyze and then synthesize the data (see Appendix A).

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[150] Adu, "Coding Qualitative Data: A Practical Guide to Completing Qualitative Data Analysis."

[151] Nicole Kipar, "Coding Qualitative Data for Categories and Themes," February 20, 2019, video, 8:56, https://www.youtube.com/ watch?time_continue=7andv=YP3yAX5w6x8andfeature=emb_logo.

[152] Dr. Victoria Clarke, "Thematic Analysis Part 2–Braun, Clarke, and Hayfield," June 24, 2019, video, 24:45, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DzMgUGPl5S0.

Synthesis

Having collected and analyzed the documents through this organic approach, synthesis was a natural extension of the immersion process. Outlining the challenges according to vision and value, the findings coalesced to allow for interpretation in a holistic view of worship engagement. For instance, research centering on challenges to worship engagement due to quality of environment was conjoined with studies related to valuing children's presence by senior leadership. Filtering these findings through the lens of biblical principles associated with worship engagement, the research questions were evaluated to determine how current and future worship design might impact the ability of children to experience God in corporate worship. As part of this interpretive process, synthesis of research enabled the researcher to draw conclusions and express limitations as well as suggestions for future research exploring worship engagement.

Chapter Summary

This study examined existing literature relevant to historical practices in corporate worship, educational theory, child development, religious pedagogy, and biblical principles. Coding enabled the researcher to refine further searches as clusters of themes emerged. Once a sense of the whole was established, a protocol for assessing themes was developed and considered to determine the underlying meanings of the findings from the QDA. After summarizing the findings, discussing the researcher's personal view, and stating limitations, recommendations were made based upon the discoveries in this historical design. Suggestions for future research were included. A pedagogy for the design of corporate worship based upon the findings completed the inquiry for engaging elementary-aged children in corporate worship (see Appendix E).

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of research relevant to the engagement of elementary-aged children in worship. The biblical basis for the inclusion of children in worship is established and the need for a theology of childhood is uncovered. Discoveries bridging educational principles with religious pedagogy and child development theory are reported, and corporate worship practices are described to inform both research questions. Addressing the first Research Question (RQ1) and Hypothesis (H1), the literature suggests that the challenges faced by elementary-aged children pertaining to worship engagement include the quality of leadership, curricula, and environment. In regard to the second Research Question (RQ2) and Hypothesis (H2), findings reveal that challenges may be overcome through strategies for evangelism, discipleship, and leader mentorship.

Biblical Principles

Regarding RQ1, an overarching challenge to a child's fundamental ability to engage in worship depends upon whether the community holds a high or a low view of children and childhood. Scriptural references and historical studies provide insight relevant to the ability of children to experience God, and a historical precedent is set for the inclusion of children in all facets of the worship community's life. Establishing the role of children in the Bible, the child's place within the worship community, and a Christian theology of childhood clarifies biblical principles concerning children's engagement in worship.

Children in the Bible

A detailed investigation into Scripture reveals that the Bible contains references throughout both the Old and New Testaments expressing the place of children within God's

creation. Scripture is filled with word pictures, metaphors, and instructions describing children. An in-depth study of the Bible provides a window into worship practices of the past as well as Jesus' view of children and the children's place within the body of believers.

The term *child* occurs throughout the Bible in imagery ranging from the deepest love (Mark 9:36–37) to the most agonizing pain (Ps. 58:8) to the one filled with promise (Isa. 11:6). The terms *child* or *children* are used to represent entire nations such as Israel (Hosea 11:1) or concepts such as foolishness (Prov. 22:5) or innocence (Matt. 18:3). Children are portrayed as gifts from God (Ps. 127:3) and ones who must be nurtured and protected (Matt. 18:6).

This complex view of children in the Bible is reinforced by Choun and Lawson's thorough concordance search. With hundreds of references to children, a range of spiritual conditions are noted and the imperative toward time and training in making godly choices is emphasized.[153] While Proverbs 10:11 stands as a prime example of this urgency toward guidance in life choices, Hebrews 5:11–14 supports the necessity of repetitive training.[154] There are also instances where adults are reminded to temper expectations according to a child's capacities (Eph. 4:14) and for adults to resemble children in their innocence (1 Cor. 14:20).[155] Bunge concurs, "Children are depicted in a host of ways in the Bible, not only as ignorant, capricious, and in need of instruction and discipline, but also as gifts of God, signs of God's blessing, and models of faith."[156]

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[153] Choun and Lawson, *The Christian Educator's Handbook*, 18–20.

[154] Ibid., 18–19.

[155] Ibid., 19.

[156] Marcia J. Bunge, "The Child, Religion, and the Academy: Developing Robust Theological and Religious Understandings of Children and Childhood," *The Journal of Religion* 86, no. 4 (2006): 561.

Children in the Worship Community

In addition to verifying the place of children in the Bible, scriptural accounts provide a biblical basis for the inclusion of children in worship. In *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community*, respected seminary professors offer an in-depth overview of children in the Bible detailing their place in the worship community. Scottie May, Beth Posterski, Catherine Stonehouse, and Linda Cannell demonstrate the dynamic relationship between children and the worship community as they detail Moses' challenge (Deut. 6) to the Israelites to pass down their faith from generation to generation.[157] The authors note this is not simply a telling in words but rather through words, symbols, and most importantly "a response from the whole faith community."[158] Dr. Holly Catterton Allen—Professor of Family Science and Christian Ministries at Lipscomb University and Dr. Christine Lawton Ross—Professor and Director of Christian Education at Concordia University are seminal researchers in the field of intergenerational worship. Allen and Ross cite Exodus 12:26–27, Deuteronomy 6:6–9, and Psalm 78:1–8 not only for the implication that faith is to be modeled and passed down from one generation to another but also that this modeling takes place in full participation "with their children, singing, dancing, eating, hearing the stories and responding to questions."[159]

Two examples from the Old Testament are worth noting to underscore the high value of childhood and punctuate the active presence of children in the worship community. Referring to Joshua's assembling of the people to reaffirm their covenant with God, May and associates explain, "The action, concrete symbols, and participation in the covenant affirmation held great

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[157] May et al., *Children Matter*, 32.

[158] Ibid., 34.

[159] Allen and Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 80–82.

potential to engage the mind and the heart of a child."[160] The second example is from a time of desperation rather than celebration where, during King Jehoshaphat's reign, the king called the people together to pray, praise God, remember his past deliverance, and express full obedience to God.[161] The authors elaborate on the significance of this moment in the life of the community. "What a wonderful way for children to learn about their powerful God. They were present to sense the human hopelessness and the need for God, to hear God's promise, and to experience the joy and celebration of the promise fulfilled."[162] Allen and Ross parallel this precept as they summarize, "Throughout Scripture there is a pervasive sense that all generations were typically present when faith communities gathered for worship, for celebration, for feasting, for praise, for encouragement, for reading of Scripture, in times of danger, and for support and service."[163]

Although most of the previous examples embrace older generations passing down their faith to the younger generations, there is evidence that adults have much to learn from children, specifically for younger generations to lead and teach as in Psalm 145:4.[164] Bunge cites Matthew 18:2–5 and Matthew 19:14 as models of faith for Christian adults who "have a responsibility to listen to children and to learn from them" since children exert a positive influence on the worship community.[165] Research findings from Csinos and Beckwith echo this citation affirming when it comes to models of faith "children have much to teach us."[166] May and associates emphasize,

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[160] May et al., *Children Matter*, 37.

[161] Ibid., 37.

[162] Ibid., 37.

[163] Allen and Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 84.

[164] Ibid., 80–81.

[165] Bunge, "Biblical and Theological Perspectives," 353–354.

[166] Csinos and Beckwith, *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus*, 68.

"Like Jesus' first disciples, we need children in our midst, showing us how to trust our gracious God and encouraging us to live kingdom values by welcoming, respecting, and serving the least among us, who are greatest in the eyes of God."[167]

Pursuing this investigation into the New Testament, children continue to be included in the spiritual life of the worship community. They are present in the feeding of the five thousand (Matt. 14:15–21), follow Jesus into the temple on Palm Sunday (Matt. 21:15), are healed (Luke 8:54–55), and are physically blessed (Luke 18:15–17).[168] Similarly, the Early Church sets an additional example for the inclusion of children in worship. According to Cherry, a protégé of Robert Webber and expert on worship design, Acts 2:1 records the first corporate worship event of the church, "one that thousands experienced together."[169] Whether gathered in homes for teaching, fellowship and worship (Acts 2:42–47), in spiritual settings such as Lydia's baptism (Acts 16:15), sharing possessions (Acts 4:32), or listening as the jailer came to faith at Paul and Silas' words (Acts 16:31–34), children were active participants in the life of the worship community.[170]

The rich descriptions of children in the Bible, both positive and negative, and their inclusion as active participants in the life of the worship community were evident in the findings from the literature. This study found the ambivalence of modern society toward children and childhood is mirrored in the attitudes toward children and childhood depicted throughout Scripture. Eustace sums this tendency as the normative theological framework favors adults and

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[167] May et al., *Children Matter*, 42–43.

[168] Ibid., 38–39.

[169] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 12.

[170] Allen and Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 82–83.

creates a low view of children whereas a new anthropological understanding would allow the church to "include and encourage active participation of all persons" regardless of age, race, socioeconomic status or other man-made barriers to equality.[171] Having examined the biblical basis for the inclusion of children in worship, findings relative to a Christian theology of childhood may now be reported.

Christian Theology of Childhood

Most children's ministries are built on theories of child development whether they are aware of it or not; yet, this study revealed a notable absence of ministries acknowledging a theological perspective.[172] Sources show research efforts are increasing as, until recently, contemporary theologians had focused more on human rights issues than the basic subjects of childhood, parental involvement, and the spiritual formation of children.[173] The findings from the literature also revealed a growing interest in the impact of a theological perspective on worship engagement and the need for a theological perspective on childhood (see appendix B).[174]

Intrinsic Valuation

The research exposes a monumental gap in the valuation of children. Dawn Devries, Professor of Systematic Theology at Union Presbyterian Seminary, notes the modern consumerist view of children is typically that of producers, consumers, or burdens.[175] By contrast

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[171] Eustace, "Experiencing God Together," 23.

[172] Csinos and Beckwith, *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus*, 63–64.

[173] Bunge, "Biblical and Theological Perspectives," 350.

[174] Ibid., 350–352.

[175] Devries, "Toward a Theology of Childhood," 163.

to consumerist views of children, Jesus "not only welcomes children but sets them up as models to be emulated."[176] Mark 10:13–16 highlights this contrast:

> And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands on them.

Joyce Mercer, Professor of Pastoral Care and Practical Theology at Yale Divinity School, adds to this discussion with further insights from the Gospel of Mark as Jesus welcomes the children—not the clean, cheerful, iconic version often depicted in art but rather the dirty, ill, and neglected children that Jesus welcomed with open arms.[177] Jesus models the reversal of the devaluation imposed by the secular world. Devries concludes that the church needs to model this intrinsic valuation "by listening carefully to the voices of children, and by incorporating their insights into our understanding of Christian faith."[178]

By including the exchanges between the father and his demon-possessed son (Mark 9:14–29) and the mother and spirit-possessed daughter (Mark 7:24–30), Mark is demonstrating that even the most marginalized in society have value in God's divine economy. "Children and childhood are gifts from God not because they are carefree, but because God has a purpose for children. God gives children to the church and the world so that God may be known."[179] Bunge accedes, "Regardless of race, gender, or class, they [children] have intrinsic value."[180]

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[176] Devries, "Toward a Theology of Childhood," 164.

[177] Joyce Mercer, *Welcoming Children: A Practical Theology of Childhood* (Saint Louis: Chalice Press, 2005), 44–63.

[178] Devries, "Toward a Theology of Childhood," 173.

[179] Mercer, *Welcoming Children*, 66.

[180] Bunge, "Biblical and Theological Perspectives," 353.

Imago Dei

A growing consensus was discovered in religious writing associating children and the concept of *imago Dei*. According to Houdmann, Founder and President of Got Questions Ministries, the Latin *imago Dei* literally means "image of God" and refers to "the immaterial part of humanity."[181] In other words, human beings are set apart with a mental, moral, and social likeness to God enabling the ability to develop a relationship with their Maker.[182] Csinos and Beckwith report that contrary to the ancient Greco-Roman view of children as similar to animals in status, theologian Karl Rahner considered children fully human and deserving of dignity and respect.[183] Humanity was made in the image of God, and this includes children.[184] This claim is verified in Genesis 1:27 as "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." This belief has been expressed in the teachings of pastors such as Gloria Roorda[185], Leon Blanchette[186], and Tanya Marie Eustace.[187]

Developing Beings

Sources reveal a stark division in belief systems contending children's capacity toward spiritual formation. Theologians such as John Calvin, Johann Arndt, and more recently James Dobson, who viewed children as inheritors of original sin, cite biblical verses such as Genesis

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[181] S. Michael Houdmann, "What Does It Mean That Humanity is Made in the Image of God (Imago Dei)?" Got Questions Ministries, accessed May 23, 2020, https://www.gotquestions.org/image-of-God.html.

[182] Houdmann, "What Does It Mean That Humanity is Made in the Image of God (Imago Dei)?"

[183] Csinos and Beckwith, *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus*, 68.

[184] Bunge, "Biblical and Theological Perspectives," 353.

[185] Roorda, "Bible Trek," 72–73.

[186] Leon Marcel Blanchette, "The Relationship Between Ministry Praxis and Spiritual Development Milestones in the Lives of Children" (PhD diss., The Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008), 53.

[187] Eustace, "Experiencing God Together," 57.

8:21 and Psalm 58:3.[188] Augustine, Bishop of Hippo in North Africa and one of the most

influential theologians of the Middle Ages, would add Romans 5:12–21 as further evidence.[189]

By contrast, the Italian philosopher and theologian Thomas Aquinas viewed children as sinful

yet capable of development through strong attachments within the family and society.[190] Writing

in his *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas would cite Ecclesiastes 9:14 as direction for the strong love

of family, Romans 5:17 for abundant grace through Christ, and John 3:5 and Proverbs 22:6 for

instruction and then salvation through Christ.[191]

     Csinos and Beckwith join the conversation citing Proverbs 22:6 and Ephesians 6:4 as

evidence of "children as beings in a state of development who require instruction, guidance, and

nurture in order to properly develop."[192] Horace Bushnell, a leading pastor in the nineteenth

century, placed the family as the primary agents in a child's spiritual formation in a natural

process that unfolds through the example of the family in everyday practices.[193] In *Christian

Nurture*, Bushnell upholds the notion of children as developing beings:

> Your character is to be a parent character, unfolding lovingly the spirits of your children,
> as birds are gathered in the nest, there to be sheltered and fed, and got ready for the flight.
> Every hour is to be an hour of duty, every look and smile, every reproof and care, an
> effusion of Christian love. For it is the very beauty of the work you have to do that you
> are to cherish and encourage good, and live a better life into the spirits of your
> children.[194]

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[188] Bunge, "The Child, Religion, and the Academy," 564.

[189] Marcia J. Bunge and John Wall, "Christianity," in *Children and Childhood in World Religions: Primary Sources and Texts*, ed. Don S. Browning and Marcia J. Bunge (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 209), 89.

[190] Bunge and Wall, "Christianity," 89.

[191] Ibid., 114–116.

[192] Csinos and Beckwith, *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus*, 67.

[193] Bunge, "Biblical and Theological Perspectives," 351.

[194] Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong and Co., 1876), 59.

Covenant Relationship

Several sources addressed the nature of the covenant relationship as residing in this process of fostering meaningful generational relationships. In *Children Matter*, the covenant relationship is demonstrated as essential to the spiritual formation of the community. Genesis 12–22 teaches, "Without Isaac there would have been no covenant. God's design requires that the "great nation" come from a child whose life is a gift from God."[195] Deuteronomy 6 reminds that within the formal covenant, children's formation is a nonformal process that occurs in the daily rhythm of life within the entire faith community.[196] The covenant becomes an internal guiding force "When obedience flows from a transforming love relationship with God, others sense that love and are drawn to it. Such a relationship prepares a person for teaching the next generation."[197]

Challenging the people of his day to remember God and his covenant with His people, Moses reminds the community to teach the children about the covenant and in so doing strengthens the faith of the adults. Research conducted by May and her colleagues demonstrated how the grounds for spiritual formation were part of the plan from the beginning with Abraham and Isaac and are now reiterated through Moses as in Deuteronomy 4:9–10, by 6:7, 12, and through 11:16, 19.[198]

> When we recite God's commandments to our children and talk with them about God in the flow of everyday life; when we remember the importance of the life our children see us live; when we tell our children the story of God at work throughout history and in our lives; it is hard to forget God. Teaching the faith to children strengthens the faith of adults.[199]

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[195] May et al., *Children Matter*, 29.

[196] Ibid., 32–33.

[197] Ibid., 33.

[198] Ibid., 35.

[199] Ibid., 35.

From the theological perspective of a covenant relationship that includes children in both the old and new covenants between God and His people, these studies demonstrate that God calls the people into relationship with Him in order to form a faith community.[200]

Gifts of God

Numerous sources reveal a significant shift from the Medieval church's low view of children to a higher view where children are perceived as gifts of God. Flowing from this theological perspective, Bunge shares emphatically, "The Bible depicts children as gifts of God and sources of joy who are fully human and made in the image of God; and therefore parents and other caring adults are to respect them, enjoy them, and be grateful for them."[201] May and associates begin their discussion of children in the Bible with the proclamation that God's very first recorded words to Adam and Eve are a blessing, "a blessing involving children."[202] Csinos and Beckwith reiterate the biblical view of children as divine gifts and underscore the notion that they are a blessing not just to an individual family but to the entire community.[203] Bunge concludes a theology of childhood that views children as valuable members of the community and upends the consumerist view as outlined by Devries. "Viewing children as gifts of God to the whole community radically challenges common assumptions of them as property of parents, as consumers, or as economic burdens to the community."[204]

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[200] May et al., *Children Matter*, 128–129.

[201] Bunge, "Biblical and Theological Perspectives," 353.

[202] May et al., *Children Matter*, 26.

[203] Csinos and Beckwith, *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus*, 66.

[204] Bunge, "The Child, Religion, and the Academy," 563.

Models of Faith

Returning to the theme of ambivalence toward childhood, Judith Gundry's research

indicates the Greco-Roman culture held a negative view of children and considered childhood

merely a "training ground for adult life."[205] Jesus, however, powerfully challenges the prevailing

culture as he reversed the values of the kingdom of the world and placed children as teachers of

adults in the kingdom of God.[206] Weber is quick to point out that Jesus placed childhood in its

biblical perspective, neither idealizing children nor underplaying their vulnerability.[207] In reverse

pedagogy, Jesus places a child as a teaching model in the midst of adults.[208] Similarly, the

German Protestant theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher expressed, "Adults who want to enter

the kingdom of God need to recover a childlike spirit."[209]

Belonging

Joining the conversation connecting the relationship between children, adults, and the

faith community, theologian and educator Reverend Dr. John H. Westerhoff's research indicates

when children are included in all facets of the community, the sense of belonging and identity

with the faith community grows.[210] Dr. Craig Dykstra, author of *Growing In the Faith*, shares

this same premise as he outlines how children come to faith when actively included in worship,

learning, service, and outreach.[211] Drawing on the writings of Dr. Lawrence Richards, one of the

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[205] Csinos and Beckwith, *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus*, 68.

[206] May et al., *Children Matter*, 42.

[207] Weber, "The Gospel in the Child," 228–230.

[208] Ibid., 230.

[209] Bunge, "The Child, Religion, and the Academy," 567.

[210] May et al., *Children Matter*, 140.

[211] Ibid., 140.

most prolific Christian theorists and educators of the twentieth century, a clear picture of children in the faith community emerges: "Children are nurtured most effectively in communities where they feel a sense of belonging, where they are able to participate in its life and ministry, and where adult members model a vital faith."[212] This sense of belonging is modeled by Jesus as he equated being in his "Father's house" (Luke 2:49) with "a deep sense of belonging to God."[213] May and colleagues summarize, "A sense of belonging grows as children build relationships with adults and other children in the church, as they receive love and in turn love others. As children are welcomed into and participate in various facets of the congregation's life their sense of belonging grows."[214]

Vulnerability

This study found the vulnerability of children is a frequent theme in Scripture and in the literature covering ministry with children. Framing the magnitude of Jesus' actions, May and colleagues shared how Jesus "shocked the disciples by setting a mere child in the place of honor beside him as children in the world of Jesus had no status; they were the weakest and most vulnerable in society."[215] The Old and New Testaments are filled with exhortations toward proper treatment (Exod. 22:22–24), serving justice (Deut. 10:18), avoiding oppression (Jer. 7:6), and caring for the fatherless (James 1:27). This designation is generally understood to mean

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[212] May et al., *Children Matter*, 119.

[213] Ibid., 119.

[214] Ibid., 139.

[215] Ibid., 40.

orphans, yet many view "fatherless" as representing the vulnerability of children.[216] This may include those whose fathers are physically absent, for whatever reason, leaving them more vulnerable in a societal structure where women had more limited ability to provide for their family.[217] Summarizing the direction of many studies in twenty-first-century research describing vulnerability, May and associates conclude, "Jesus used children as a symbol of all the vulnerable, powerless persons of low status who are important in the kingdom of God."[218]

Capacity to Experience God

Having conducted extensive studies investigating children and their faith, May, Posterski, Stonehouse, and Cannell posit the question, "Can children really experience God?" According to Scripture, the answer is a definitive 'yes.' This study also found that accounts of children experiencing God are not merely anecdotal in the modern research literature. The Bible references a number of occasions where children are called by God or experience God's presence. The authors cite Samuel (1 Sam. 1–3; 1 Sam. 3:1), Zechariah (Luke 1:15), and David (Pss. 2:9–10; 71:6) as well as their personal experiences with young children as evidence of a child's capacity to experience God.[219]

A growing number of researchers are also affirming the presence of God among all ages and abilities and are discussing a child's specific capacity to experience His presence. Cavalletti's research methods and her observations that children can and do experience and love God

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[216] Shannon Dingle, "Christians, Are We Being Wise with the Words Orphan and Fatherless?" *Church4EveryChild* (blog), May 7, 2015, accessed May 27, 2020, https://church4everychild.org/2015/05/07/christians-are-we-being-wise-with-the-words-orphan-and-fatherless/.

[217] Dingle, "Christians, Are We Being Wise with the Words Orphan and Fatherless?"

[218] May et al., *Children Matter*, 42.

[219] Ibid., 48–49.

challenged the prevailing view that preschool and early childhood was simply a training ground for worship.[220] Profoundly influenced by Cavalletti, Stewart contends that young children can experience God instead of simply learning about him.[221] Stewart's experience with the Children and Worship project affirms how: "One of the places to meet God is in a worship setting which creates space, time, and silence for the Holy Spirit to encounter, interact, and interpret the Scriptures through the children's imagination."[222] Similarly, Weber provides an exegetical basis for the claim that Christ is specially present among us in his words and sacraments, affirming the "special presence of Christ among us…namely, his mysterious presence in children."[223] Reading from the book of Mark, "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me" (Mark 9:37).

Likewise, this study found a growing number of researchers expressing the need for a theological view of children in order to fulfill the command toward the spiritual formation of the worship community as a whole. Bunge summarizes this necessity, "We will also begin to understand spiritual formation as a serious area of inquiry in all areas of theological and biblical studies—not just pastoral care or religious education. In these and other ways the church could build up a strong theology of childhood."[224] This study further reinforced that what worship leaders, lay leaders, and volunteers believe about children's nature and the path of their development will significantly impact the chosen curriculum. Roorda explains how the child perceived as basically sinful and in need of instruction may fail to have adults who delight in

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[220] Stewart, "Children, the Bible, and Worship," 189.

[221] Ibid., 189.

[222] Ibid., 190.

[223] Weber, "The Gospel in the Child," 231–232.

[224] Bunge, "Rediscovering the Dignity and Complexity of Children," 63.

their ways and learn from them; by contrast, the child perceived as a model of faith and a gift of God may not receive direct instruction in faith development.[225]

Educational Principles

Relevant to RQ1, a second overarching challenge to a child's ability to engage in worship depends upon the community's view of how children make meaning from instruction; therefore, the background related to educational principles required in-depth investigation. Christians are called by the Great Commission to share the Gospel (Matt. 28:18–20), and worship communities are instrumental in children's spiritual formation (Acts 2:42–47). The research exposed a need to allow educational principles, including religious pedagogy and child development theory, to inform praxis for worship leaders, lay leaders, or volunteers responsible for the design of ministry with children. Curricula designed to engage elementary-aged children in worship could take into account how children process information as well as their capacity to comprehend intellectual, moral, and social constructs. By conversing with developmental theorists and historical practices of the past, their voices and the subsequent interchanges inspired by their work may assist leaders as models for worship design are considered.

Child Development Theory

Many theories, approaches, and methods associated with child development were useful to this inquiry. Dr. Bates, an expert on information systems and theory building, details the importance of a single theory as "a system of assumptions, principles, and relationships posited to explain a specified set of phenomena."[226] Expressing the value of models in theory

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[225] Roorda, "Bible Trek," 48.

[226] Bates, "An Introduction to Metatheories, Theories, and Models," 2.

development, Bates elaborates, "Models sometimes stand as theoretical beacons for years, guiding and directing research in a field, before the research finally matures to the point of producing something closer to a true theory."[227] This assessment was instrumental to the study as it accentuates this pattern from the case of Montessori and those who followed in the fields of child psychology, human growth and development, and learning acquisition.[228]

Similarly, the study highlighted several notable theorists and researchers whose theories are no longer utilized in their original form but whose contributions to the field of inquiry were groundbreaking. Arnold Gesell is one such pioneer in the field of child development. Gesell's maturational-developmental theory, although no longer followed in fixed stages, has provided parents, educators, and pediatricians with expected norms to meet the needs of children requiring interventions that are more effective at younger ages.[229] One of his major discoveries is that children's abilities differ from their peers in large part due to experiences and environment.[230] Gesell advocated, "Ensuring strong relationships and providing high-quality learning experiences are imperative to helping all young children—regardless of background—reach their potential."[231]

Although it was beyond the scope of this inquiry to detail the intricate historical relationships between the entirety of child development theorists, psychologists, and theologians, the study found many individuals whose contributions are instrumental to the development of

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[227] Bates, "An Introduction to Metatheories, Theories, and Models," 3.

[228] "History of Montessori," American Montessori Society: Education that Transforms Lives, accessed August 7, 2019, https://amshq.org/About-Montessori/History-of-Montessori.

[229] Peg Oliveira, "Our Proud Heritage. True Then, Truer Now: The Enduring Contributions of Arnold Gesell," *Young Children* 73, no. 3 (July 2018): 87–89.

[230] Oliveira, "Our Proud Heritage," 88.

[231] Ibid., 89.

delivery models for children's worship. To provide a brief comparative study of historical

relationships, theoreticians were considered according to three major perspectives. Kendra

Cherry, an educational consultant in the field of psychology whose work is peer-reviewed by

licensed medical professionals, provided three common lenses utilized by theorists: Grand

theories—describe human experience, Mini-theories—focus on a more narrow range of

behaviors, and Emergent theories—combinations of mini-theories.[232]

Grand Theories

The abundance of literature delineating grand theories reveals the significance of their

historical value. Additionally, the research for this study reveals this type of biographical

information differentiating child development theory is often overlooked to the detriment of

children's ability to engage at developmentally appropriate levels. Sigmund Freud, along with

Melanie Klein and Anna Freud were several of the first psychologists to describe child

development from a psychoanalytic viewpoint. Freud described a series of stages influenced by

conflict where failure to resolve that conflict could result in fixations altering adult behavior.[233]

While Melanie Klein developed a form of play therapy from her studies, Anna Freud believed

children could not be psychoanalyzed.[234] Influenced by Freud, Erik Erikson added to the central

tenets of Freudian theory by developing his own theory, based on an epigenetic principle that

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[232] Kendra Cherry, "The Purpose of Psychology Theories," Verywellmind, May 8, 2020, accessed June 6, 2020, https://www.verywellmind.com/the-purpose-of-psychology-theories-2795084.

[233] Kendra Cherry, "Child Development Theories and Examples," Verywellmind, January 4, 2020, accessed June 6, 2020, https://www.verywellmind.com/child-development-theories-2795068.

[234] Kendra Cherry, "Biography of Psychologist Melanie Klein: Creator of the Play Therapy Technique," Verywellmind, May 14, 2020, accessed June 6, 2020, https://www.verywellmind.com/melanie-klein-biography-2795547.

people go through a series of eight stages with developmental conflicts influenced through social interaction and experience.[235]

By contrast, John Watson developed a cognitive theory that led to the development of behaviorism. Demonstrating, once again, that although a theory may be replaced by updated research results, aspects may still be utilized in the present. This study found that Watson's use of conditioning and behavior modification form the basis of many therapies that assist skill development and behavior training today.[236]

Another highly significant grand theory, Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory, is one of the most influential theories in human development. Piaget provides four stages in the sequential intellectual development of children: Sensorimotor Stage (birth to age 2), Pre-Operational Stage (ages 2 to 6), Concrete Stage (ages 7 to 11), and Formal Operational Stage (ages 12 to adulthood).[237] Another revolutionary contribution was Piaget's notion that children think differently than adults.[238] This finding significantly impacts the lens through which worship leaders design services for children as the majority of researchers build on Piaget's theory when claiming their hermeneutical lens. For instance, Dawn Devries declares, "Children are not simply small and deficient adults, and their worth is not to be reduced to what they will become in the future."[239]

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[235] Kendra Cherry, "Biography of Erik Erikson," Verywellmind, March 20, 2020, accessed June 6, 2020, https://www.verywellmind.com/erik-erikson-biography-1902-1994-2795538

[236] Kendra Cherry, "Biography of Psychologist John B. Watson," Verywellmind, April 1, 2020, https://www.verywellmind.com/john-b-watson-biography-1878-1958-2795550.

[237] Cherry, "Child Development Theories and Examples."

[238] Cherry, "Child Development Theories and Examples;" Devries, "Toward a Theology of Childhood," 167; Roorda, "Bible Trek," 19.

[239] Devries, "Toward a Theology of Childhood," 167.

The research uncovered other highly valuable grand theories describing the social development of children including Bowlby's Attachment Theory and Bandura's Social Learning Theory. Similarly, pastors and leaders of children's ministry who look to these child development theories may gain much-needed perspectives toward the overarching challenge of how children make meaning from relationships. From the research of John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth, leaders may establish that secure attachments help children learn to trust and enter into relationships with others in the world around them.[240] Eustace applies this theory for leaders and volunteers, "Children make meaning in response to their social interactions and relationships and this affects how they engage in relationship and trust others throughout their lifespan."[241]

Adapting and expanding Piaget's research, Lawrence Kohlberg outlined a Theory of Moral Development that consisted of six stages in three different levels including the Preconventional, the Conventional, and the Postconventional levels.[242] Although later criticized by Dr. Carol Gilligan and others as gender-biased and overly concerned with justice as the basis for making moral decisions, Kohlberg's theory was foundational to the fields of both psychology and education.[243] It also set the stage for James Fowler's *Stages of Faith*.

Profoundly influenced by Kohlberg, Fowler pioneered a cognitive-developmental approach to faith development through six stages of faith including a pre-stage Primal faith (infancy to 2 years), the first stage Intuitive-Projective faith (toddler and early childhood), the second stage Mythic-Literal faith (middle childhood and beyond), a third stage Synthetic-

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[240] Eustace, "Experiencing God Together," 83.

[241] Ibid., 86.

[242] Kendra Cherry, "Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development," Verywellmind, September 28, 2019, accessed June 6, 2020, https://www.verywellmind.com/kohlbergs-theory-of-moral-development-2795071.

[243] Cherry, "Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development."

Conventional faith (adolescence and beyond), a fourth stage Individuative-Reflective faith, the

fifth stage Conjunctive faith, and the sixth stage Universalizing faith.[244] Fowler's theory is

significant to worship leaders, lay leaders, and volunteers as the youngest of the elementary-aged

children belonging to the Intuitive-Protective faith stage respond well through experiences and

stories and rely heavily on a sense of security and safety.[245] Children in the primary age grouping

for this study begin to feel strongly about justice and take metaphors and symbolism literally as

they move into the Mythic-Literal faith stage.[246] These findings are vital to leaders and

volunteers as they choose theologically accurate heart language contextualized to the faith

development levels appropriate to the children with whom they are worshiping.[247]

Conceding criticism toward gender bias and measuring language development rather than

faith development, Fowler's theory remains significant as it calls attention to the risk of a false

identity formation if children's developmental levels are not taken into account in religious

instruction.[248] This marks a consequential finding as the research unveils this risk has become a

prime concern for researchers of children's spirituality. Cavalletti and Nye have spoken out

strongly surrounding this danger. Cavalletti warns, "In our estimation, we compromise the

child's very moral foundation, which should be based on love, and should be the response of the

child's love to the love God first gave him."[249] Nye adds the risk of employing "an adult version

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[244] James W. Fowler and Mary Lynn Dell, "Stages of Faith and Identity: Birth to Teens," *Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America* 13, no. 1 (January 2004): 17–33.

[245] Fowler and Dell, "Stages of Faith and Identity," 19–20.

[246] Ibid., 20–21.

[247] Dodson, *The Unbelievable Gospel*, 136.

[248] Roorda, "Bible Trek," 4, 38.

[249] Ibid., 50.

of spiritual or moral development on children, at the risk of harming their intrinsic way of relating to God."[250] Berryman addresses this same notion as he makes the case for ordering materials in the curriculum "so that children never need to unlearn something in order to take a next step."[251]

Another momentous finding relates to what education theorists believe about how children create meaning. Writing in the early 1900s, educational reformer, John Dewey, was a pragmatist who believed that education had to be experienced "hands-on" and a child-centered, interdisciplinary approach meets the needs and interests of the whole child.[252] According to Dewey, creating meaning is not simply a cognitive process but is the result of the child actively making meaning within the social context and the environment.[253] This finding substantiates May's claim critiquing rote memorization that lacks true understanding.[254] May differentiates, "What is learned rotely has little effect on the life of the learners. When material is memorized, the content comes into the personal experience of the learner."[255]

In Jørgensen's study, children experienced a common wondering and reflection as to why the jellyfish were stranded and then used previous knowledge and experiences to rescue them.[256] This environmental consciousness demonstrates the type of knowing that French philosopher

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[250] Roorda, "Bible Trek," 50.

[251] Berryman, "Holy Story, Sacred Play," 23.

[252] Adam Jordan, "John Dewey on Education: Impact and Theory," Study.com, July 8, 2014, accessed July 11, 2020, https://study.com/academy/lesson/john-dewey-on-education-impact-theory.html.

[253] Kari-Anne Jørgensen, "Bringing the Jellyfish Home: Environmental Consciousness and 'Sense of Wonder' in Young Children's Encounters with Natural Landscapes and Places," *Environmental Education Research* 22, no. 8 (2016): 1140.

[254] May, "A Look at the Effects of Extrinsic Motivation," 50.

[255] Ibid., 50.

[256] Jørgensen, "Bringing the Jellyfish Home," 1149–1150.

Merleau-Ponty described as intertwined with the environment further reinforcing Dewey's teaching that former experiences and knowledge allow children to create meaning that leads to new knowledge.[257] This study uncovered recent research underscoring these theories and emphasizing the importance of connecting previous knowledge and experiences with the worship environment to create a positive, lasting impression on children and families toward their faith development.[258] Coupling experiential learning with interpersonal supports could allow children to *experience God* rather than simply *knowing about God* despite cognitive difficulties.[259] This study indicates leaders who keep these theories in mind may arrange the environment to design routes to learning that connect past experiences to present knowledge by engaging "bodily sensations and emotions" rather than solely through intellectual activity.[260]

Mini-Theories

This study found a prime example of mini-theories comparable to Watson's research of laws of behavior. Based on Watson's grand theory, Ivan Pavlov developed the mini-theory of classical conditioning while B. F. Skinner worked in the direction of operant conditioning.[261] Both theorists describe development as a reaction to rewards and punishment that were reinforced or extinguished; however, how the response to the stimulus is achieved distinguishes the two mini-theories as classical or operant conditioning.[262] Positive use of classical

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[257] Jørgensen, "Bringing the Jellyfish Home," 1149.

[258] Werdel, "Praying as a Parent," 29–30; Warren, "An Examination of Children's Ministry," 21; Turner, "Children's Faith Formation," x; Frady, "A Grounded Theory Investigation," 49; Jonker, "Experiencing God," 311.

[259] Terry, "A Wrinkle in the Fold," 462.

[260] Ibid., 462.

[261] Devon M. Werble and Dalila Ramos, "Breaking it Down: Concepts and Theories of Child Development I," accessed June 6, 2020, https://www.careerladdersproject.org/docs/Child%20Development%20Reader.pdf.

[262] Cherry, "Child Development Theories and Examples."

conditioning comes from Berryman's design of a scripted method for entering the worship space and interacting with the materials in the environment in a sacred manner that reinforces an atmosphere of reverence.[263] Positive use of operant conditioning was evidenced by the shared positive experience elicited through the action of the grandmother consistently sitting next to her granddaughter with her arm around her shoulder in corporate worship.[264] By contrast, negative examples of classical and operant conditioning have surfaced in studies of perceptions of young adults from the competition-aspect of Bible club programs.[265]

Another example of a mini-theory is Sara Smilansky's play theory based on Piaget's notions of the importance of play in child development adding the connections between sociodramatic play and cognitive development.[266] Berryman expresses how his Godly Play method helps children associate what they learn cognitively through sociodramatic play with what they experience in church as Christianity so "those feelings get buried as the years go by, but it is always deep inside them as part of what it means to be a Christian."[267] Godly Play, Montessori, Reggio Emilia, and Mediated Learning Experience[268] are examples of methods that place a high value on the child and make room for child-led decisions discerning play and learning materials, goals, and making meaning together with adult models as initiated by the child.

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[263] Berryman, *Godly Play*, 90–93.

[264] Rezek, "Young Children in Worship," 83.

[265] May, "A Look at the Effects of Extrinsic Motivation," 57–58.

[266] David Cohen, *The Development of Play* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 57.

[267] Berryman, "Holy Story, Sacred Play," 22.

[268] Moten, "The Effects of Mediated Learning Experience," 40–41.

Emergent Theories

In addition to grand theories and mini-theories, psychological theories known as emergent theories draw upon the research and ideas from different disciplines.[269] This study found one sometimes overlooked example is Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems approach. This approach combines mini-theories in a social-ecological model of child development that centers heavily on the relationship to the child's environment and the convergence of biology, psychology, and social science.[270]

One of the most significant findings in this study regards how the influential Russian psychologist, Lev Vygotsky, developed a sociocultural theory that emphasized the social and cultural environment as critical to a child's cognitive development.[271] According to Vygotsky, child development is "largely influenced by their surrounding culture" where interacting socially produces higher-order functioning.[272] Differing from Piaget, Kohlberg, and Fowler, Vygotsky believed cognitive development can and does differ between cultures.[273]

An essential construct in Vygotsky's research is the zone of proximal development that encompasses the knowledge and skills a child cannot yet understand or perform on their own yet

[269] Kendra Cherry, "Types of Psychological Theories," Verywellmind, February 3, 2020, accessed June 6, 2020, https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-a-theory-2795970.

[270] Urie Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1979), 13.

[271] Saul McLeod, "Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory," SimplyPsychology, 2018, accessed June 6, 2020, https://www.simplypsychology.org/vygotsky.html.

[272] Kendra Cherry, "Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development," Verywellmind, November 16, 2019, accessed June 6, 2020, https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-sociocultural-theory-2795088.

[273] Cherry, "Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development;" McLeod, "Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory;" Roorda, "Bible Trek," 23.

is capable of with guidance of a "more knowledgeable other."[274] This study found religious

educators acknowledging this construct as they consider how children make meaning from their

instruction. Dr. Deborah Court, a Senior Lecturer in the School of Education at Bar-Ilan

University in Ramat Gan, Israel, addressed the theme of engaging with Scripture rather than

simply memorizing it as she applies Vygotsky's zone of proximal development to finding

alternate ways of explaining and making meaning through the scaffolding of religious

language.[275]

Rezek's study informs the thoughts and behaviors of the influence of Vygotsky's "more

knowledgeable other."[276] As Rezek chronicles a child's experience in church with her

grandmother, she expresses the value of Vygotsky's theory, linking the more knowledgeable

other with shared positive dispositions toward church attendance developed through teachable

moments in the corporate worship service.[277] Rezek explains that adults—such as worship

leaders, lay leaders, and volunteers—who are aware of the value of teachable moments will more

effectually accomplish their role in influencing "the development of the child's positive

dispositions and feelings relevant to worship."[278]

A crucial difference between Piaget and Vygotsky is this "cooperative or collaborative

dialogue" that places a greater emphasis on the social interaction over self-initiated discovery.[279]

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[274] Cherry, "Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development;" McLeod, "Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory."

[275] Deborah Court, "What Happens to Children's Faith in the Zone of Proximal Development, and What Can Religious Educators Do About It?" *Religious Education* 105, no. 5 (2010): 497, 501.

[276] Rezek, "Young Children in Worship," 84.

[277] Ibid., 83.

[278] Ibid., 84.

[279] McLeod, "Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory."

This finding informs one of the central tenets of this overarching challenge to a child's ability to engage in worship by making meaning from instruction. The theme of children as meaning makers is essential to their ability to experience the world and interact and build relationships. Applying this historically instrumental emergent theory, Eustace explains,

> The work of Vygotsky affirms that children not only possess the capability and tools necessary to do this work, but also that they can sharpen and develop these tools when engaged in relationships with others. Therefore, my research seeks to create a space where children of different ages can wonder and discover together uncovering their own language revealing how they recognize, claim, and respond to God's active presence in their lives.[280]

Extensions of Theories

Attachment theory, beginning with John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth, has grown and changed as new research sheds light on attachment styles; yet, their studies provided a basis for viewing the process by which children form attachments with parents.[281] This is relevant to a child's engagement in worship as their ability to form bonds signals the beginning of trust that, in turn, opens the door for faith. Similarly, the study revealed Vygotsky's zone of proximal development is relevant to worship engagement as it incorporates the concept of the scaffolding of knowledge by teachers to expand the abilities of children. The research demonstrated Vygotsky's theory is especially significant in that it stresses play as a recognized form of learning including "imaginary play, role-playing, games, and reenactments of real events" to promote abstract thought.[282]

Robert Coles' work, *The Moral Intelligence of Children*, extends the research of Horace Bushnell correlating the essential modeling of moral behavior by parents with development in

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[280] Eustace, "Experiencing God Together," 83.

[281] Cherry, "The Purpose of Psychology Theories."

[282] Cherry, "Sociocultural Theory of Cognitive Development."

children.[283] David Elkind applied Piaget's stages of development to religious thinking identifying the first stage as Global (ages 5–7), the second stage as Concrete Conception (ages 7–9), and the third stage as Abstract Conception (ages 10–12).[284] Elkind's research led to further investigation including children's conceptions of prayer as well as the idea that modern children are hurried rather than afforded time for developmental play.[285]

Conversely, Ronald Goldman, in reaction to Piaget's age boundaries, identified three stages of religious thinking including Pre-Religious (ages 5–7), Sub-Religious (ages 7–12), and Abstract Religious (ages 14+). Goldman's supposition that the Bible was written by adults for adults led to a restructuring of curriculum design that was often criticized at the time; however, what created the most friction was his recommendation that children younger than secondary age did not have the cognitive functioning to comprehend theological concepts, including parables.[286] Goldman's notion is similar to Fowler's that misunderstandings and misconceptions at this age could lead to a later rejection of faith.[287] While some continue to debate Goldman's findings, many theorists such as Cavalletti, Nye, and Fowler now reiterate his concerns. Roorda shares this view as "even with the best intentions, in the process of catechesis it is possible to actually distort or hinder a child's relationship with God."[288] Worship designed with these theories in mind may prevent barriers that are rushing children past appropriate experiences.

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[283] Roorda, "Bible Trek," 34.

[284] James Russell Moore, "Children's Religious Thinking, Worship Forms, and Church Responsibility: Perceptions of Children's Worship Leaders" (PhD diss., Trinity International University, 1995), 14.

[285] Moore, "Children's Religious Thinking, Worship Forms, and Church Responsibility," 14.

[286] Moore, "Children's Religious Thinking, Worship Forms, and Church Responsibility," 15–16; Roorda, "Bible Trek," 47–48.

[287] Roorda, "Bible Trek," 47–48.

[288] Ibid., 1.

Theories on Spirituality

A noticeable increase in publications regarding spirituality and children raises and answers questions relative to both RQ1 and RQ2. Rebecca Nye contributed significantly to the body of research on spirituality—"an awareness of our relationship with God."[289] Following the thoughts of twentieth-century theologian Karl Rahner expressing a child's openness and eighteenth-century theologian Jean-Pierre de Caussade's definition of consciousness as "the sacrament of the present moment," Nye's research studies have led the field with her description of children's spirituality as *relational consciousness*.[290] Qualitative research in collaboration with David Hay has solved the issue of finding language with which children might describe their experiences of God and contributed that a 'well-tuned ear and heart" also help adults recognize a child's spiritual awareness.[291] In analyzing conversations with children, these researchers have looked "beyond the words the children use and are paying special attention to the dimensions of awareness, mystery, value sensing, and meaning making."[292]

Concerning spiritual experiences, the study found a growing body of evidence toward the need to correct learning that took place under duress or at levels incompatible with a child's developmental abilities. Schleiermacher subscribed to the philosophy that formation should take place gradually through nurture rather than forcefully in a single, crisis-driven conversion experience.[293] Fowler's theory was developed following the premise that inappropriate developmental levels may be harmful to a child's ultimate concept of faith and the formation of

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[289] Csinos and Beckwith, *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus*, 41.

[290] Ibid; See also Definition of Terms.

[291] May et al., *Children Matter*, 86.

[292] Ibid., 86.

[293] Bunge and Wall, "Christianity," 140.

personality.[294] Csinos and Beckwith lament the fact that spiritual experiences in children's ministry are often incongruent with the greater faith community.[295] The result is "ministries with children pass on beliefs, values and practices that many of the adults in their church—including their pastors, teachers and parents—found they have to unlearn on their journey of walking in the way of Jesus."[296]

Religious Pedagogy

The findings from this section of the study demonstrate that research describing child development has important implications for the design of religious pedagogy. Although the impetus for religious education has been significantly influenced by social, cultural, political, and economic variables, the research from this study strongly demonstrated that the need for models of religious pedagogy has remained constant. Dr. David Rahn, Senior Vice President for Youth for Christ USA, expressed, "Intuitively, we recognize that students need to be engaged if they are going to learn."[297] Historical analysis revealed trends in Christian religious education often responded to shifts from society's changing views of children. The intensive study of prominent models and methods by which educators and church leaders have designed instruction to elicit student engagement constitutes a profound set of findings.

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[294] James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1981), 132.

[295] Csinos and Beckwith, *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus*, 77.

[296] Ibid., 78.

[297] David Rahn, "Motivation and Ministry," in *Teaching the Next Generations: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching Christian Formation*, ed. Terry Linhart (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 93.

Some of the earliest advocates for children, John Comenius, August Francke, Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, and John Wesley, were prominent theologians in their day.[298] It is evident that as early as the ninth century, innovative educators like Alcuin of York were sought out to improve education to reach a greater percentage of the population.[299] Alcuin's methods included "positive motivation, simplification of core concepts, valuing individual gifts, and conversation."[300] Likewise, in the sixteenth century, the Moravian Bishop, John Amos Comenius, advocated a holistic education and was "appalled by the common teaching method of forcing children to memorize and recite material of which they had little understanding."[301] Theologian educators and psychologists to follow included Johann Herder and Friedrich Schleiermacher who also held high views of children and faith formation.[302] Schleiermacher's writings would influence practitioners well into the twentieth century. The following eight models were studied to inform the Research Questions and Hypotheses.

Schooling-Instruction Model

The schooling-instruction model for religious education grew out of the social justice efforts to minister to underprivileged children as the early modern period marked a noticeable shift from thinkers such as Jean-Jacques Rosseau toward a higher view of children and childhood.[303] The rise of "Ragged Schools" and the subsequent formation of schools on Sunday

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[298] Bunge and Wall, "Christianity," 127–134.

[299] May et al., *Children Matter*, 94–95.

[300] Ibid., 95.

[301] Ibid., 98–99.

[302] Bunge and Wall, "Christianity," 134–141.

[303] May et al., *Children Matter*, 100.

by the newspaper publisher and philanthropist Robert Raikes affirmed the community's response to wholesale neglect of children that arose as a by-product of the Industrial Revolution.[304] At this time, other businessmen, such as William Fox, borrowed from this model to promote Sunday schools that hired teachers to educate the underserved.[305] In America, the Presbyterian minister, Lyman Beecher, extended the schooling to all children and adults rather than those denied education elsewhere.[306] Furthermore, by the 1830s, a shift to a more religious purpose reflected changes in the social structure of education as enrollment in public schools replaced Sunday school as a primary means of education.[307]

In the early twentieth century, Christian religious education borrowed from improvements to teaching methods emanating from secular education systems as a major statement of their commitment to higher-quality programs.[308] Csinos and Beckwith reveal the reason why this formal schooling-instructional model worked so well was that volunteers were committed to teaching every Sunday and willing to take training sessions.[309] As a consumerist mindset took hold, however, parents were more willing to pay someone else to work with their children, and professionalization of ministry contributed to a decline in well-trained and willing volunteers.[310] The collaborative research of Leon Blanchette and Robert Crosby reveals a paucity of resources for children's ministers as instructional models are mainly based on philosophical

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[304] May et al., *Children Matter*, 101.

[305] Ibid., 102.

[306] Ibid., 104.

[307] Ibid.

[308] Csinos and Beckwith, *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus*, 30.

[309] Ibid.

[310] Ibid., 31–32.

theory and anecdotal evidence rather than empirical research. The authors support the findings of Csinos and Beckwith expressing the reality that "fervent expectations of attendance growth and ministry that satisfies the desires of both children and parents" is driving the design of children's Christian education rather than the research-backed scientific study of children's ministry models.[311]

The research does reveal that the schooling-instruction model is highly successful since it utilizes a diversity of lay volunteers typically requiring little training; however, it has also garnered a growing share of criticism in the literature chronicling models for ministry with children. May and associates cite one common downside as volunteers sometimes feel unqualified to teach while another shortfall is a lack of acknowledgment of the Holy Spirit working within the child's life.[312] According to Gordon College Associate Professor of Theology and Christian Ministries, Dr. Sharon Ketcham, Westerhoff was a vocal critic of this model, arguing in the late 1970s the primary mode of communication is not effective in an era where the "daily encountered lived expression of the Christian faith" is no longer the norm.[313] Csinos and Beckwith share Westerhoff's argument that "a schooling-instructional model of children's Christian education tends to encourage us to assert our power over young students as we seek to make them in our own image, to make them into miniature versions of ourselves, into people who see the world as we see it."[314]

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[311] Blanchette and Crosby, "The Measurement and Evaluation of Children's Ministry Praxis," 248–249.

[312] May et al., *Children Matter*, 12.

[313] Sharon Galgay Ketcham, "Faith Formation with Others," in *Teaching the Next Generations: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching Christian Formation*, ed. Terry Linhart (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 83.

[314] Csinos and Beckwith, *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus*, 101.

Experiential Model

While still utilizing the schooling-instruction model, the transformation of *Group*
magazine to Group publishing and the Willow Creek model, Promiseland, led to a hands-on
version known as the experiential model.[315] Many churches began copying this model as a
remedy for an out-of-date methodology. Csinos and Beckwith narrate, "What child after sitting
all week wanted to come to church and do the same thing, only this time with Jesus-themed
worksheets and rote learning about the Bible?"[316]

The problem with this version of the model, according to researchers, is that it was
designed specifically for the Willow Creek community whose Sundays are seeker-oriented but
whose mid-week services are built on a highly relational small-group culture; therefore, churches
structured for small groups find this model tremendously successful while others find a cookie-
cutter copy ineffectual.[317] "So someone taking this important component of Promiseland's
success back to a church without this communal ethos valuing small groups might have had a
difficult time conveying the importance of this weekly commitment to the volunteers in his or
her church."[318] One of the downsides, according to Csinos and Beckwith, is experiential
education requires extensive training.[319] This is a monumental research finding as the quality of
instruction, then, is directly proportional to the quality and amount of training.

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[315] Csinos and Beckwith, *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus*, 32.

[316] Ibid.

[317] Ibid., 32–33.

[318] Ibid., 33.

[319] Ibid., 32–34.

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

Profoundly influenced by Maria Montessori, Sofia Cavalletti developed a method called

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd where worship and age-appropriate learning are central.[320] The

environment, including full silences, is essential to her approach as she believed "children need

space between the setting of the classroom and of the sanctuary in which they can experience

God and his story and wonder about these things."[321] May and associates explain this curriculum

has three levels of atria each with its own three-year curriculum that closely mirrors the church

calendar and is appropriate for ages three through twelve.[322]

Godly Play

Similarly, Jerome Berryman developed his method entitled Godly Play based on

Cavalletti's approach and Montessori's philosophy. Minor differences allow modifications for

non-liturgical churches.[323] A central approach in this method is the storyteller's role using a calm

voice, no direct eye contact, and simple movements that allow children to focus on the natural

objects that bring them into the story where they are invited by the storyteller to wonder aloud to

make meaning together with the adult leaders.[324]

Young Children and Worship

"In *The Religious Potential of the Child*, Cavalletti claims that all children experience

God; and whether exposed to or devoid of religious instruction, all have as humans an essential

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[320] May et al., *Children Matter*, 233.

[321] Ibid.

[322] Ibid.

[323] Ibid., 234.

[324] Ibid.

or natural religious inclination."[325] This high view of children focuses on sensorimotor experiences, an environment for working with biblical stories, and a liturgy that encourages making meaning through a four-fold order of worship.[326] Building on Cavalletti's work, Stewart and Berryman collaborated to create a method where the focus is authentically experiencing God rather than socializing children into the church.[327] This use of the model of experiential learning "involves helping children worship in a special place *apart* from the worshiping congregation so they become able to worship meaningfully *with* the congregation."[328]

Children and Worship

Stewart created a worship method that borrows and expands on this framework for Christian formation in three-to-seven-year-old children. Stewart describes, "I have chosen a worship perspective instead of a schooling or educational perspective not only because churches express a need for a way to worship with young children, but also because I am curious about working from a theory of worship."[329] This method centers on actual worship of God rather than simply teaching about God and utilizes special materials with an indirect method of storytelling as communication.[330] "Essential words, silences, figures, and movement combine to provide the possibility of encounter with God," and wondering together—in both personal and communal responses—is an essential element of her method.[331]

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[325] Stewart, "Children and Worship," 351.

[326] Ibid., 352–353.

[327] Ibid., 361.

[328] Stewart and Berryman, *Young Children and Worship*, 13.

[329] Stewart, "Children and Worship," 351.

[330] Ibid., 354.

[331] Ibid.

Inclusion Models

Sources indicate a recent increase in studies reflecting special needs populations in children and worship as well as alternate methods of reaching people whose language acquisition prevents traditional communication. According to Christine Hargraves, a Masters of Divinity student researching connections between art and spirituality, "There is no limit to the meaning that can be found when someone without words is finally able to express themselves. The same can be said for any of us. So much of the way we experience God goes beyond words, and yet we spend so much time trying to embody the divine in words."[332] Merten expressed how congregations may heed the apostle Paul's call to value all parts of the body of Christ not by creating new programs but rather by increasing awareness, pairing children with buddies, and focusing on abilities rather than disabilities.[333] Merten explains that the "worship rotation model" used by her church includes an interactive educational model based on varying the learning styles and engaging multiple intelligences.[334]

This rising awareness of approaches to learning has led to a surge of interest in learning styles and multiple intelligences as guideposts in curriculum design. Reacting to the inherent limitations of intelligence tests, Howard Gardner questioned the ability of one moment's reflection to adequately assess the complex and diverse expressions of intelligent behavior.[335] Gardner developed his theory to address this gap and assist educators and psychologists in

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[332] Christine Hargraves, "Recreating Worship," *Presbyterian Outlook* 198, no. 2 (January 18, 2016): 23.

[333] Merten, "Everybody's Church," 13–16.

[334] Ibid., 15–16.

[335] Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 2–3.

understanding how individuals process information.[336] The varied intelligences—including

Linguistic, Musical, Logical-Mathematical, Spatial, Bodily-Kinesthetic, Intrapersonal, and

Interpersonal Intelligences with the later addition of Naturalist Intelligence—provide windows

into the multi-faceted ways by which children learn.[337] The succession of research has also led to

studies of learning styles. LifeWay's research team has assembled not only a summary of a set of

generally accepted styles—visual, natural, musical, physical, logical, reflective, verbal, and

relational—but also ways in which leaders and volunteers might adapt to teaching various

learners about God.[338] These findings speak directly to RQ1, RQ2, and both Hypotheses.

Cognitive vs. Affective Models

Sources have begun to focus on the physiological evidence for differences between

cognitive and affective learning in childhood. Research by Portuguese-American neurologist

Antonio Damasio examining the human limbic system provides the physiological evidence for a

"connatural knowing" that is the result of emotions and relational responses that come through

this limbic system rather than the neocortex.[339] As pastors and researchers, Karen-Marie Yust

and Berryman have written extensively affirming the need to allow children to *know* God rather

than to know *about* God by providing opportunities for children to experience Him.[340] Yust

advocates, "Adults must *wonder* with children about personal spiritual experiences and their

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[336] Gardner, *Frames of Mind*, 10–11.

[337] Ibid., 77–292, 350.

[338] Jerry Vogel, Bill Emeott, Klista Storts, *Wholly Kids: Guiding Kids to Life in Christ*, ed. Jeff Land (Nashville: LifeWay Press, 2012), 68–85.

[339] May et al., *Children Matter*, 225.

[340] Ibid., 225.

faith tradition's understanding of who God is rather than merely instructing them in the faith."[341] Writing in *Religious Education*, Stewart echoes this need to meet God rather than simply learn about Him: "While I do not wish for less than welcoming, loving, providing security, and fostering healthful development, I also wish that young children meet God, not just learn about God."[342] These same findings led May and associates to conclude that the interaction of both hemispheres of the brain with the limbic system—"enabled by the Holy Spirit of God, helps children worship."[343]

Rezek reached a similar conclusion in her doctoral study as parental expectations favored learning biblical information over spiritual development.[344] Turner's study underscored this dilemma: "Attempts to welcome and value children in faith communities have focused on their acquisition of religious knowledge rather than their holistic formation."[345] Roorda cited Westerhoff's definition of catechesis for its emphasis not only on the life-long pilgrimage aspect but also for its emphasis on communal formation, not simply cognitive processing.[346] These are beneficial findings for this study as researchers have noted the essence of engaging the heart, soul, mind, and strength rather than simply the mind.

Extending an original doctoral study on children's ministry praxis by utilizing alternate measurement techniques, professors Blanchette and Crosby concluded different ministry models—for instance the schooling-instruction model or the Godly play model—will produce

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[341] May et al., *Children Matter*, 225.

[342] Stewart, "Children and Worship," 351.

[343] May et al., *Children Matter*, 226.

[344] Rezek, "Young Children in Worship," 82.

[345] Turner, "Children's Faith Formation," x.

[346] Roorda, "Bible Trek," 42.

different outcomes. The researchers report, "No one model of ministry was universally effective at bringing about all of the measured outcomes."[347] The authors recommend, "Since children's spiritual formation is multifaceted and is nurtured through a diversity of experiences, it would seem that a key to successful ministry is the realization that intentionality on the part of the practitioner is critical."[348] One of the most crucial findings comes from the consistency in the literature declaring, while the church is significant in a child's spiritual development, parents are to be the primary leaders in the spiritual formation of their children.[349]

Summary of Biblical and Educational Principles

The research findings powerfully demonstrate there is a wealth of information examining religious pedagogy and child development theories (see Appendix C and Appendix D). The perspectives explored through this review of the literature demonstrate a wide range of beliefs distinguishing the mental, physical, social, emotional, and spiritual growth patterns of children. While leaders responsible for the design of corporate worship advocate incorporating child development theory and religious pedagogical principles into worship design, actual implementation has not been fully documented in the corporate worship environment with children.

Corporate Worship Practices

A third and final overarching challenge to a child's ability to engage in worship relevant to RQ1 and RQ2 depends upon how and where the community's worship structure places

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[347] Blanchette and Crosby, "The Measurement and Evaluation of Children's Ministry Praxis," 259.

[348] Ibid.

[349] Blanchette, "The Relationship Between Ministry Praxis and Spiritual Development," 64; Roorda, "Bible Trek," 19.

children for corporate worship. Historical research indicates Christian corporate worship practices have varied dramatically according to the social, cultural, historical, and political climate of the time period. In nearly unanimous agreement, sources confirm specific theologians and denominations had distinct preferences for the placement of children in the worship community often dependent upon whether they subscribed to a low or a high view of childhood. This study uncovered four primary delivery modes commonly seen in the gathering of God's people for corporate worship.

Full Inclusion

Moses may have been one of the first leaders to establish the intentional gathering of people for the express purpose of learning about God's nature (Deut. 31:12–13). Many factors influenced Christian worship since this first gathering. Evidence from the research of the Reverend Dr. William A. Strange for *Children in the Early Church* indicates children were historically active participants in worship alongside their parents in the earliest days of the organized church.[350] As described by Dr. Beverly Johnson-Miller, Professor of Transformative Education and Aging, "Worship in a visually rich Christian environment was part of the faith formation of children at this time."[351] For instance, a strong oral tradition with visual cues such as stained-glass windows with biblical scenes was common in the fifth-century church.[352]

The church as a whole experienced controversy codifying beliefs—including those related to the place of children in worship—and was impacted by power struggles from within the church over theology. Ideas about the nature and character of God have been significantly

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[350] May et al., *Children Matter*, 90.

[351] Ibid., 94.

[352] Ibid.

influenced by world events—such as the Reformation, awakenings, and world wars—and have led to paradigm shifts in a community's perception of theology. Generational shifts in thinking have led to micro- and macro-movements that affected society's inclusion or exclusion of children in worship, as well. Especially significant to the research questions for this study, findings confirm that Martin Luther and John Comenius placed a high value on the education of all children, advocating for a gentler, holistic inclusion.[353]

While the Enlightenment Period marked significant challenges to theologians and Christian educators, a shift back to the elevated view of children was soon to follow with Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the early modern period.[354] John Wesley was known at this time for vocalizing his preference that children remain with parents for corporate worship.[355] In many modern churches today, sources report churches with a liturgical tradition are more likely to include children intentionally as active participants in the worship service.[356] In the full inclusion approach, pastors recognize the presence of children by including illustrations that speak of children, inviting them to the altar for a special message, or providing resources to enhance the worship experience for children.[357]

Partial Inclusion

In the partial inclusion approach, children are present for part of the worship service but leave during the main sermon. Children in some denominations are taken to a separate worship

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[353] May et al., *Children Matter*, 98–99.

[354] Ibid., 100.

[355] Ibid., 103.

[356] Ibid., 228.

[357] Ibid., 228–229.

space where they participate in their own age-appropriate version of the service which may include a "call to worship, a welcome, time for prayer, silence and reflection, and a message from the Word" that may be live or through digital media.[358] In other denominations, children are more likely to be engaged by forms of entertainment that may or may not coordinate with the theme of the service they have just experienced.[359]

Separated

This study found two approaches for separate corporate worship: one places children in Sunday school while adults worship and the other serves children in an extended Sunday school or children's church service while adults transition from small groups to the corporate worship service.[360] These experiences vary widely according to denomination and are influenced largely by both church and secular politics and the dominant culture. Contemporary churches typically attract families with a children's experience that includes game time, worship bands, and videos leading up to a Bible story time followed by small groups where adult volunteers meet with the children until their parents arrive to pick them up.[361] Further research indicates some denominations have adopted programs such as "Learning by Doing," a model where elementary-aged children are divided into five groups of mixed ages who are then led by a 'shepherd' who helps them prepare to lead one another until the adult sermon concludes their worship time.[362]

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[358] May et al., *Children Matter*, 232.

[359] Ibid.

[360] Ibid., 235.

[361] Ibid.

[362] Ibid., 235–236.

Still others purchase curricula for the children's worship hour.[363] A growing body of sources has documented congregations who have adopted the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, Godly Play, Young Children and Worship, or Children and Worship as the approach for the age-separated children's worship time.[364]

Intergenerational

As mentioned previously, until recently, all generations worshiped together; yet, this inquiry found strong evidence that historical and cultural influences particularizing education practices have influenced the design of worship with children. Allen and Ross express why these have not always translated seamlessly to the church because spiritual development is fundamentally different from cognitive development.[365] Furthermore, "The unique spiritual benefits of all ages worshiping together are lost when segmented populations worship exclusively; among these spiritual benefits are a deep sense of belonging and the blessing of participating in the spiritual journeys of those across the age spectrum."[366]

Common to the literature regarding worship with children is an either/or mentality when designing the structure of gatherings; however, recent research is disproving this view, replacing it with a both/and methodology. Allen and Ross demonstrated, "Churches that embrace an intergenerational culture also deeply value the unique and important place of age-graded learning settings, the appropriate bonding fostered in youth groups, and wonderful blessings of fellowship

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[363] May et al., *Children Matter*, 236.

[364] Ibid., 233–234.

[365] Allen and Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 195.

[366] Ibid.

with those in shared seasons of life."[367] Dr. Allan Harkness, writing from Trinity Theological College Singapore, explored valid reasons for homogeneous-age groupings such as age-related growth markers, social issues, and comfort levels; yet, the researcher concluded *exclusively* homogeneous-age formats fail to account for the holistic process of faith formation that takes place through the intergenerational approach.[368]

Summary of Corporate Worship Practices

The research for this study determined forms for gathering for corporate worship have been shaped over the centuries not only by social, political, economic, and cultural factors but also more recently by preference. Research established a biblical precedent for intergenerational worship, first set by Moses, then Ezra, and then through Paul's letters.[369] Further, it is "well established that when teaching children, one should utilize all the senses—seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling—as well as a variety of learning styles."[370] As experts on intergenerational worship, Allen and Ross concede designs that take into account senses, learning style, and diversity of age groups are "a labor-intensive undertaking;" however, the authors believe such forms are worth exploring to enhance learning for all ages, including adults.[371] While a growing number of authors and researchers are exploring these and other approaches to corporate worship, their focus is typically on the challenges faced by adults when

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[367] Allen and Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 186.

[368] Allan Harkness, "Intergenerational and Homogeneous-Age Education: Mutually Exclusive Strategies for Faith Communities?" *Religious Education* 95, no. 1 (2000): 52.

[369] Allen and Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation*, 205.

[370] Ibid., 207.

[371] Ibid., 207–208.

children are present rather than the challenges faced by elementary-aged children pertaining to corporate worship.

Three overarching challenges were discovered relative to the engagement of elementary-aged children in worship. These include the worship community's valuation of children due to quality of leadership, the view of how children make meaning from instruction due to quality of curricula, and the quality of environment where the children are invited for corporate worship. These three challenges hypothesized as affecting children's engagement in worship will now be enumerated and are followed by a discussion of the strategies hypothesized in this study.

Challenges Faced by Elementary-Aged Children Regarding Worship Engagement

Quality of Leadership

The first challenge hypothesized is Quality of Leadership. This study found the most prevalent theme in the literature is the need for strong leaders with a high value of children and a clear vision for their inclusion in the worship practices of the local community. In addition to the call of the gathered church to "devote themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship" in Acts 2:42, Scripture clearly delineates the quality of leaders who should teach and lead the church in ministry. James warns, "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness" (James 3:1). Paul echoes this warning in the book of Acts, "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). Cherry's research notes the incongruence between the call from Scripture and the pastor's ability to lead. "For some reason leaders have assumed that worship just happens—that folks will automatically discover what is needed for them to become

worshipers."[372] Research by Turner revealed, "Many church leaders are ill-equipped to value children's presence in their broader community."[373] Warren's study exposed a common weakness in children's ministry as the children themselves need to "know that the church values them by empowering and equipping leaders who will assist them in becoming all that God desires for them."[374]

Durante's study accentuates Karl Rahner's notion of valuing children *as children,* expressing that adults who do so are more likely to "gather up the time of their lives" and to value childhood and its memory as valuable to God.[375] Devries also cites Rahner in his belief in the instrumental valuation of children and his thought that as adults, "Christians should seek to cultivate the openness, trust, and receptivity of the child as the essence of true saving relationship with God."[376] Turner's study echoes this need to value children. "By valuing children as full participants in the life of faith, the whole church family grows together in Christ."[377]

Gordon declares the primary task of children's ministry is servant leadership and highlights how the highest quality leaders emphasize the connectional commitment to children and value relationships above logistical aspects of ministry.[378] James Comer, Professor of Child Psychiatry at Yale University, shared a concept that is experienced unilaterally across fields of study from education to business to ministry when he stated, "No significant learning occurs without a

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[372] Cherry, *The Music Architect*, 51.

[373] Turner, "Children's Faith Formation," x.

[374] Warren, "An Examination of Children's Ministry Volunteer Development," 15.

[375] Durante, "Teaching Children to Pray," 159.

[376] Devries, "Toward a Theology of Childhood," 166.

[377] Turner, "Children's Faith Formation," x.

[378] Gordon, *Children's Ministries*, 8–10.

significant relationship."[379] Internationally recognized leadership expert John C. Maxwell shares this same philosophy. The high value Maxwell places on individual people is evidenced through his leadership principles. "It takes some time to develop the people skills needed to become a better leader, but it takes no time at all to let others know that you value them, to express appreciation for them, and to take interest in them personally."[380]

Leaders effectively fulfill the Great Commission by offering "opportunities, resources, and experiences for children that are steeped in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ" from a servant leader perspective.[381] Dr. Mark Cannister, Professor of Christian Ministries at Gordon College, relayed the importance of top leadership collaborating with a ministry team to design an effective approach in ministry with children. [382] Intentional planning for corporate worship with children would illustrate this level of valuing by leadership and is evidenced in Rezek's study as she calls for "preparations on behalf of the young worshipers" by the senior leadership.[383]

There is a strong consensus in the literature that leaders are not being equipped with the skills needed to administer their current worship ministry or to navigate future changes to the ministry landscape. This study found one of the many challenges complicating leadership involves defining the purpose of activities and programs for children.[384] Ministry with children, especially when involving them in worship activities with the larger congregation, requires

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[379] Moten, "The Effects of Mediated Learning Experience," 100.

[380] John C. Maxwell, *How Successful People Lead: Taking Your Influence to the Next Level* (New York: Center Street, 2013), 43.

[381] Gordon, *Children's Ministries*, 8.

[382] Mark Cannister, "Recognizing the Importance of Educational Philosophy," in *Teaching the Next Generations: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching Christian Formation*, ed. Terry Linhart (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 48.

[383] Rezek, "Young Children in Worship," 40.

[384] Turner, "Children's Faith Formation," 3.

forethought and collaborative planning.[385] Valerie Davidson's study reveals the need for leadership to cast a vision with intentional goals rather than letting curricular materials or tradition dictate a temporary direction for the children's ministry.[386] Robin Turner concurs, "Training congregational leaders in the theological foundations and practical resources of children's spiritual formation helps them lead congregations to value and nurture the entire community's spiritual formation."[387]

In addition to leadership and administrative skills, this study recognized the amount of formal training a children's ministry leader has received encompassing children and families has a profound effect upon their preparation.[388] Although many leaders seek education opportunities or attend conferences, as a whole the church leaders lack the training needed to value and promote the spiritual capacity of children in their worship communities.[389] Two other factors related to ministry leadership include the fact that the senior pastor typically is directly involved in the hiring and programming of the children's ministry and publishing companies play a significant role in the education of these leaders.[390] The failure of leadership to contextualize worship not only to their local community but specifically to the children in their community represents a tremendous challenge.

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[385] Kennemur, "The Prioritization of Southern Baptist Programs for Children," 83–84; Merten, "Everybody's Church," 14; Terry, "A Wrinkle in the Fold," 462; Turner, "Children's Faith Formation," 3.

[386] Davidson, "A Mixed Methods Study," 151.

[387] Turner, "Children's Faith Formation," x.

[388] Ibid., 22.

[389] Ibid., 29.

[390] Ibid., 23, 24–25.

Quality of Curricula

The second challenge hypothesized is Quality of Curricula. This study found that materials used for "teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom" (Col. 3:16) are primary to worship engagement. Although the hypothesis confirmed that the quality of curricula directly impacts an elementary-aged child's ability to engage in worship, this study revealed the challenges associated with curricular materials are much greater and multi-faceted than expected.

Religious pedagogy has changed dramatically over the past century.[391] There is now a diversity of curricula ranging from church-sponsored materials to professionally created packages produced by companies and research groups and even materials free of charge through internet blogs and websites.[392] This study revealed worship leaders may become overwhelmed by the range of choices now available while others simply lack the educational background to properly vet curricular options.[393] The need for advanced training in vetting and contextualizing resources for the local community is underscored by Reck as she established a tool for the evaluation of Christian Religious Education (CRE) curricula. "Christian religious education is a significant vehicle through which the Christian church transmits its core values and worldview to its followers. Because Christian religious education curricula directly impact the believer's way of being in the world, it must be taken seriously and examined in a critical manner."[394]

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[391] Ratcliff, "The Spirit of Children Past," 218–237.

[392] Prompted with the search term *curriculum for children's ministry*, Google's search engine returned over one hundred seventy-nine results in approximately sixty seconds. Entering the search term *ideas for children's Sunday school* produced one hundred sixty-eight results in less than two minutes. One hundred twenty-eight options appeared in one minute for the search term *Sunday school activities free printables*.

[393] Ratcliff, "The Spirit of Children Past," 229; Reck, "Colouring with Brown Crayons," 26.

[394] Reck, "Colouring with Brown Crayons," 5.

In the research study for her Doctor of Ministry degree, McCall cited Becky Fischer's *Hearing God's Voice (for Kids) Children's Church Curriculum for Ages 6–12* and Jennifer Toledo's *Eyes That See and Ears That Hear* curriculum as forming the basis of her training program to teach children to hear God's voice that they might, in turn, be able to pray for their peers. McCall's study actually introduces two challenges. First, McCall's survey of available curricula brought out the often-overlooked challenge to worship that many children face when the children and families and personal situations in the curricula do not accurately reflect their personal experience.[395] A second challenge in addressing the spirituality of children stems from the denominational differences interpreting prophecy, healing, and the supernatural. While Becky Fischer's curriculum may be appropriate for some denominations, others might not agree with her teaching on healing the sick or becoming prophetic spokesmen.[396]

The second facet of quality regards the training pastors and teachers receive toward utilizing the curricular materials. One subset of this challenge is the lack of background information provided to teachers to successfully utilize a curriculum. Although it is not surprising that teachers use less than half of the prepared curriculum, Lewis's research suggests the curricular materials fall short in providing enough background information for the interpretation of Scripture and fail to explain why specific teaching methods are being suggested for that particular lesson.[397] Lewis addressed the notion that teachers often adapt published materials significantly to meet their classroom needs[398] while van Leersum-Bekebrede's team

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[395] McCall, "Cultivating the Spiritual Awareness of Children," 129.

[396] Ibid., 140.

[397] Lewis, "Teacher's Guides and Teacher's Choices," 96.

[398] Ibid.

observed a similar phenomenon as adults made decisions to follow curricular materials as printed, to make small changes, or to redesign the format.[399] Thomson's study revealed a primary criterion in selecting curricular materials is the ease of use for the adult teacher thereby reflecting a struggle some congregations experience where adult needs are elevated over those of the children.[400]

The second subset of this challenge was found in McCall's report of adult misperceptions hindering the implementation of curricula. McCall makes a cogent notation that by the fifth lesson children had become accustomed to beginning with prayer and "now seemed comfortable with the quiet moments before each session."[401] This is another significant challenge found by this study as children, more often than not, will readily adapt to curricular options such as stillness and silence; however, adult misperceptions over the children's capability and desire to quietly reflect may lead adults to skip this valuable teaching tool and process and miss the opportunity to engage children in genuine worship.[402] Similarly, Donald Ratcliff's research reveals it is important to look to theorists and their conclusions; yet, the disparity in findings creates a challenge for children whose curricula may or may not reflect their developmental level either intellectually, emotionally, socially, or physically.[403]

A final subset of this challenge revealed the need for leadership to cast a vision with intentional goals rather than letting curricular materials or tradition dictate a temporary direction

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[399] van Leersum-Bekebrede et al., "Setting the Stage," 169.

[400] Ingersoll, "Making Room: A Place for Children's Spirituality in the Christian Church," 171.

[401] McCall, "Cultivating the Spiritual Awareness of Children," 170.

[402] Ibid.

[403] Ratcliff, "The Spirit of Children Past," 227–228.

for the children's ministry.[404] Davidson's research implies a lack of background in education or formal training in seminary as well as formal classroom experience or training in instructional design is at the heart of shortcomings faced by children's leaders in long-range planning, vision casting, and differentiating curriculum design from a choice of instructional materials.[405] Davidson made the assertion verified by her research that opportunities for practical training in instructional design and educational strategies need to be made available to churches.[406]

This study found strong evidence for reviewing historical practices in religious pedagogy and child development theory to inform worship design that holistically engages children; yet, an unexpected finding was the need to allow flexibility while interpreting how children make meaning from instruction. Ratcliff's article poignantly suggests if worship leaders place limits based on how strictly they perceive a child's developmental stages, they might miss opportunities for allowing a child to stretch beyond what might be expected for their age and stage of growth.[407] For example, Catherine Stonehouse's research suggests preschoolers may be capable of formal operational thought that is outside of the expected boundaries for their stage if the curriculum is more open-ended.[408]

Similarly, there is little information on how the needs of the local population are being met. Some learners flourish when learning is student-led with minimal adult scaffolding while others require a direct-instruction approach with more scripted adult interactions. The curriculum selected also needs to take into account how past experiences, present environment, and

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[404] Davidson, "A Mixed Methods Study," 137.

[405] Ibid., 150–151.

[406] Ibid., 151.

[407] Ratcliff, "The Spirit of Children Past," 227.

[408] Ibid.

socioeconomic status effect a child's ability to learn. For this reason, many leaders of Christian education programs have written their own lessons and activities due to a lack of appropriate contextualization in commercially available materials.[409] McCall's survey of available curricula brought out the challenge to worship that many children face when the children and families and personal situations in the curricula do not accurately reflect their personal experience.[410]

Quality of Environment

The third challenge hypothesized is Quality of Environment. The importance of the environment to the capacity of children to experience God in worship has become a dominant theme in the literature. This study found that challenges result not only from the physical arrangement of the environment but also from psychological and physiological factors affecting the religious space. Drawing from Piaget's notion that the physical environment is an essential concern, Rezek proposes "the young believer comes to associate God's house and worship with warmth and love" through a sensory-rich environment.[411]

Frady's background as a missionary, college professor, librarian, and preschool educator uniquely positions her as an authority with personal experience in this domain. Frady describes the study by Stonehouse and May where an existing religious education classroom was physically altered to create a feeling of "a place of sanctuary in which children could reflect upon God."[412] Frady outlines how Montessori was a tremendous advocate for a functional and beautiful environment with "items of quality" such as "religious writings prepared in beautiful

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[409] Reck, "Colouring with Brown Crayons," 2.

[410] McCall, "Cultivating the Spiritual Awareness to Hear from God," 129.

[411] Rezek, "Young Children in Worship," 20.

[412] Frady, "A Grounded Theory Investigation," 32.

handwriting on the walls;" furthermore, everything in the environment was to be child-sized and within reach and provide objects such as models of Bible stories and "elements of church history" that children could actually "touch and explore."[413] Frady also cited the Reggio Emilia method as creating a similar emphasis on the environment, including viewing the space from a child's point of view.

This study also discovered how Stewart focused heavily on the environment as a primary means for encountering God in worship by fostering a bond between the adults and children to make meaning together from the biblical stories, parables, and liturgy.[414] Similarly, Berryman's method of Godly Play consistently and intentionally places objects in the worship environment to create a comfort zone for children.[415] The unspoken lessons and nonverbal details of the worship environment have also become a topic of interest in the literature.[416]

A major theme in these models is the creation of a physical space by adults for the children. For example, in addition to a well-ordered physical environment with aesthetically pleasing signs and symbols, adults provide materials such as art, story figures, and areas of the room designated for prayer and music as in the Contemplative-Reflective model outlined by Michael Anthony.[417] Likewise, Durante encouraged religious educators to not only display but explain signs, symbols, and images of the faith tradition in their environment that children would

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[413] Frady, "A Grounded Theory Investigation," 39.

[414] Stewart, "Children and Worship," 359–360.

[415] Jonker, "Experiencing God," 306.

[416] Jonker, "Experiencing God," 306; Rezek, "Young Children in Worship," 39; Turner, "Children's Faith Formation," 33.

[417] Frady, "A Grounded Theory Investigation," 31.

come to understand this language over time.[418] In the findings of their quantitative study, Bellous and Csinos addressed the need to make room in the environment for different types of spiritual expressions from children including words, emotions, symbols, or actions.[419] Similarly, the findings to Mercer and Matthews' study revealed the need to recognize the "multiple ways children engage in the work of the liturgy through their movement, drawings, and sensory experiences."[420]

In this same way, sources affirm congregations need to create an environment that fosters inclusion and offers hospitality to all members. Whitener's work discloses worship environments and materials are not always constructed in a way that reflects all the members of the community in its broader cultural context.[421] Whitener summarizes her findings, "We understand the table as being extended to *all* people, and especially to those who sit at the margins. So when we welcome children at the table, we're not just saying children, we're saying *everybody*."[422] Taking this a step further, Terry's work reveals how the worship space is not set up to include those of other abilities.[423] Terry's conclusion applies to children's advocacy and culture building in the church environment, as well. "Where the pastor, elders, and church leadership are committed to inclusion of people with disabilities, congregants follow suit."[424]

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[418] Durante, "Teaching Children to Pray," 101.

[419] Bellous and Csinos, "Spiritual Styles," 219.

[420] Mercer and Matthews, "Liturgical Practices with Children in Congregations," 32.

[421] Whitener, "It's Not Really About the Waffles," 30.

[422] Ibid.

[423] Terry, "A Wrinkle in the Fold," 462.

[424] Ibid.

Another aspect of the environment is the psychological space created by adults for children. The theme of security is common in the research embracing children and worship. Eustace takes up this motif as she claims the metaphor of the good shepherd maintaining relationships should be built on trust, not fear.[425] Eustace's study revealed the role of the teacher or researcher as a shepherd is the one most likely to create a safe space where children feel free to express their thoughts and engage with the materials without fear of judgment.[426] Continuing the theme of safety and security, Berryman explains how consistency and intentionality in the placement of objects in the worship environment creates a comfort zone for children.[427] Jonker reported similar findings expressing, "Young children need love, security, freedom, continuity, order, and meaning."[428] Berryman intertwines the themes of security and imagination as he expresses that open-mindedness allows children the space to ask questions which alleviates their anxiety and invites imagination that "leads to faith, hope, and love."[429]

Addressing these themes of security—both physical and psychological, Stonehouse and May advocate making the worship space "psychologically safe for children" where children feel safe because of the physical arrangement of the room as well as how they are addressed and the attention that is paid to what they are doing and thinking and feeling.[430] This study found that Montessori was a huge proponent of creating a space where, rather than forcing children to sit still and learn boring facts that often led to the use of rewards and punishments, children's

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[425] Eustace, "Experiencing God Together," 69.

[426] Ibid., 144.

[427] Jonker, "Experiencing God," 306.

[428] Ibid., 304.

[429] Ibid., 308.

[430] Frady, "A Grounded Theory Investigation," 33.

learning style was considered in ways that promoted topics of personal interest.[431] Eustace joins

this chorus of researchers who attribute children's active participation and ability to respond and

reflect to the space created intentionally for them by adults as instrumental to the purpose of

making meaning through the unfolding of God's story.[432]

Correspondingly, van Leersum-Bekebrede's research team found, "Adults largely

determine the physical, social, and spiritual setting."[433] Adults shape liturgical rituals by deciding

where children attend and what roles they are allowed to fulfill during worship time.[434] Eustace

also noted that the liturgy is part of the structure of the environment created by adults when she

expressed, "The children's participation and attention to the various pieces of the liturgy reveal

the importance of creating a structure that is followed on a regular basis, one that sets a rhythm

for the time together and creates a safe space where children know what to expect and can look

forward to their favorite parts of our time together."[435]

A final aspect is the physiological space created by adults. Shirley Morgenthaler's

research revealed, "It is important that worship planners seek to prepare an environment and an

experience that is sensory-rich in order that children will be able to become fully immersed in the

act of worship. The environment must also indicate that the child is expected to be a participant

rather than a spectator."[436] Although interacting with materials in active participation is another

prominent theme in the literature, the method for accomplishing this varies. Some studies reveal

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[431] Frady, "A Grounded Theory Investigation," 40.

[432] Eustace, "Experiencing God Together," 182.

[433] van Leersum-Bekebrede et al., "Setting the Stage," 166.

[434] Ibid., 169.

[435] Eustace, "Experiencing God Together," 245.

[436] Rezek, "Young Children and Worship," 20.

an overemphasis on extrinsic motivation. May and associates call this the "Gold Star/Win a Prize Model" for children's ministry.[437] Their research expresses the downside of this model for structuring the environment. "Scripture learning is valuable; however, in some situations, especially in ministries with children, that value sometimes seems to be trivialized by reducing the significance of learning Bible passages to contests, candy bribes, awards, and other forms of extrinsic motivators, as if the end justifies the means."[438] Other students note, as Edward Deci and Alfie Kohn's research reveals, that their desire to learn verses ended when the quizzing ended. They lost their extrinsic motivation.[439]

Another critical piece of this puzzle is the notion that adults can get in the way of a child's learning when an attitude of superiority is projected. Rezek's study addressed how adult actions affect a child's ability to worship. "The reader may begin to see how parents and other caring adults have the potential to both help and hinder the process [of experiencing God during the corporate worship service]."[440] Similarly, Frady's study concluded that the religious teacher should prepare the environment, help the child help herself, allow children to learn through movement, and project a humble attitude complementing learning together.[441] Another aspect of preparing the environment involves creating an atmosphere or a culture where wondering is the norm. Sources reveal inviting children to ponder and wonder about aspects of the story rather

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[437] May et al., *Children Matter*, 12–15.

[438] May, "A Look at the Effects of Extrinsic Motivation," 48.

[439] Ibid., 58.

[440] Rezek, "Young Children and Worship," 43.

[441] Frady, "A Grounded Theory Investigation," 44.

than only asking knowledge-based questions helps children to more actively engage in spiritual formation and worship.[442]

This study found one unexpected barrier attributed to the physiological space that was highlighted in a response to Rezek's survey. Connecting with God may be the result of adult actions, the environment, or the order of service; however, a child in Rezek's survey responded, "Connecting with God requires some effort."[443] Therefore, another challenge and opportunity reside in teaching children how to do their part to experience God in corporate worship. In her same study, another unexpected finding was that the environment had less of an impact than expected identified with the survey question of how close children felt to God; however, Rezek discovered instead that the visual representations such as stained glass or colors served a different purpose in providing a stimulus for teachable moments.[444]

Additional Findings

Although not part of the original hypothesis, the need for social interaction was not only discovered in the literature but also has quite suddenly become a topic of international interest as the coronavirus pandemic of 2020 has escalated this sensed need in the body of believers. Rezek's study revealed a common thread in children's interviews was their need for social interaction. "Among the different worship languages, personality traits, and dispositions that were revealed through the children's responses was the need for social interaction."[445]

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[442] Frady, "A Grounded Theory Investigation," 34; Eustace, "Experiencing God Together," 144; Stonehouse, "Knowing God in Childhood," 39; Jonker, "Experiencing God," 310.

[443] Rezek, "Young Children in Worship," 50.

[444] Ibid., 65.

[445] Ibid., 50.

Another challenge to worship engagement alluded to in the conversations about the environment involves the mental and physical state that a child arrives at and settles into for the worship service. For some children, the time before the service can be a barrier to worship as the morning may have been rushed or stressful getting to the church. For others, there may be barriers at the church. One young girl in Rezek's survey said she wanted to sit next to her brother, but because he would not let her, she felt bad and did not feel as though God was with her in church on that day.[446] Even when adults prepare the environment making it physically, psychologically, and physiologically sound, there are outside barriers to the ability to engage in worship that sometimes cannot be prevented or compensated for.[447]

Summary of Challenges

An extensive study of the entirety of theologians, psychologists, and child development theorists was beyond the scope of this inquiry; however, the preceding findings were provided as a backdrop for the many ways leaders conceptualize a child's ability to make meaning from instruction, to develop physically, mentally, intellectually, socially, emotionally, and spiritually, and to engage in worship. Rezek, in her dissertation researching the *Young Children in Worship* method, demonstrated how "without the anchor of empirical proof to defend a practice, critical decisions are made based on the often unpredictable whims of the culture."[448] Moore echoed this research noting, "A plethora of forms, appear in the literature, developed seemingly out of practice rather than with child development considerations in mind."[449] To make educated

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[446] Rezek, "Young Children in Worship," 50.

[447] Ibid., 51.

[448] Ibid., 10.

[449] Moore, "Children's Religious Thinking, Worship Forms, and Church Responsibility," 90.

decisions discerning strategies for overcoming challenges faced by elementary-aged children in worship, leaders require personal equipping toward their role in quality of leadership, quality of curricula, and quality of environment.

Strategies for Engaging Elementary-Aged Children in Corporate Worship

Introduction

To address strategies for engaging children in corporate worship, a holistic picture of Jesus' commands must be understood in context. Perceiving the proper interpretation of Jesus' commands, John Stott wrote, "The Great Commission neither explains, nor exhausts, nor supersedes the Great Commandment. What it does is to add to the requirement of neighbor-love and neighbor-service a new and urgent Christian dimension. If we truly love our neighbor we shall without doubt share with him the good news of Jesus."[450] This holistic dimension expresses the motivation for authentic outreach and sustainable connections. Servants International would add the Great Compassion (Matt. 25:34–40), coupled with the Great Commission, in order to fulfill the Great Commandment as motivating factors in outreach.[451] This holistic picture— following each of the commands of Jesus—provides the foundation a children's worship leader needs to design biblically authentic corporate worship for children that includes a balance between evangelism and discipleship. To balance these commands, findings consistent with strategies for evangelism, discipleship, and leader mentorship must be explored.

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[450] Trevin Wax, "5 Ways We Get the Great Commission Wrong," The Gospel Coalition, March 22, 2018, accessed July 16, 2020, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/5-ways-get-great-commission-wrong/.

[451] Jackson Portfield, "TfAF: The Four GREATs of Wholistic Ministry," Servants, June 26, 2014, accessed July 16, 2020, http://servantsasia.org/ftaf-four-greats-wholistic-ministry/.

Evangelism

Confirming the Second Hypothesis (H2), one aspect of ministry—evangelism—includes the fulfillment of the mandate to spread the Gospel to all nations (Matt. 28:16–20) and to do so with compassion (Matt. 25:34–40) may be accomplished through positive strategies. The primary motivation for outreach and connection in any ministry area is to gently and respectfully share the hope of Christ with others (1 Pet. 3:15); yet, accomplishing this mission requires practical strategies. This study found David Guzik's message applicable to worship leaders designing such strategies. David Guzik's commentary on the life of the first believers demonstrates how vital this mode of sharing a biblically accurate picture of the Christian life was to the first believers. Guzik relays, "They [the first believers as described in Acts 2:42–47] relied on the apostles to communicate to them who Jesus was and what He had done."[452] Guzik concluded, "Thankfully, God allows us to sit under the apostle's doctrine—the New Testament record. Every pastor should seek to be unoriginal in the sense that we don't have our own doctrine, but the apostles' doctrine."[453] It then becomes the worship leader's mission to be 'unoriginal' in their doctrine yet highly creative in their outreach and in-reach—their evangelism and discipleship efforts throughout the local community.

Many churches include evangelism in their mission statement yet neglect to connect this to the children's ministry. May described the challenge as a "disconnect between purpose and program" when she iterated, "The appropriateness of a certain ministry within the church may be ignored because the church has always had this program, or because the leaders just wanted to try something different; or, even more concerning, because a church across town was drawing

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[452] David Guzik, "Acts 2—The Holy Spirit is Poured Out on the Church," Enduring Word, 2018, accessed July 16, 2020, https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/acts-2/.

[453] Guzik, "Acts 2—The Holy Spirit is Poured Out on the Church."

scores of kids using that same program."[454] One of the twenty-first-century issues with

evangelism, then, is its use of children's ministry to attract families to the church. Csinos and

Beckwith assert, "There's something inherently wrong with using ministry with children to attain

a primary goal other than the spiritual formation of children, of helping children live as disciples

of Jesus."[455] Turner's research revealed a similar finding that the deeper purpose of true

evangelism with children is being ignored. "Many church congregations as well as the broader

Christian culture view children's ministry as primarily a form of respite care for parents,

attractional element for church visitors, evangelistic moment for children, or place of learning

about the Bible and Christian faith."[456]

The literature provides a consensus that outreach is about building relationships.[457] This

study found practical tips for evangelism from authors such as Melanie Gordon. It is not only to

guests but also to the children and families of the congregation that evangelistic efforts need to

be considered regularly.[458] "Talk to children about their faith stories. Ask them regularly and

often their thoughts about God, Jesus, the church, love, and doing good. Knowing how to

articulate what they believe will give them the tools that they need to talk about their faith

together and to connect what they believe with who they are in the world."[459]

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[454] May, "Teaching Children," 119.

[455] Csinos and Beckwith, *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus*, 188.

[456] Turner, "Children's Faith Formation," 13.

[457] Eustace, "Experiencing God Together," 83; Durante, "Teaching Children to Pray," 143; Gordon, *Children's Ministries*, 16; Allen Jackson, "The Contribution of Teaching to Discipleship," in *Teaching the Next Generations: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching Christian Formation*, ed. Terry Linhart (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 18; Merten, "Everybody's Church," 13; Moten, "The Effects of Mediated Learning," 100; Olsen, "No Child Left Behind Comes to Awana," 36; Turner, "Children's Faith Formation," 52–53.

[458] Gordon, *Children's Ministries*, 30.

[459] Ibid., 32.

Discipleship

Linked with confirming H2, another purpose in ministry, discipleship, is also commanded by Scripture (Eph. 4:11–16). Dr. Don Ellsworth once said, "Start early and choose wisely, beginning with children."[460] Building believers requires both authentic outreach and sustainable connections. Grow curriculum authors Kenny and Elle Campbell suggest discipleship tends to be placed in mid-week or separate programs created specifically for discipleship when it is meant to be a journey, not a program.[461] Another facet of this issue is sometimes churches and parents are both attempting legitimate efforts at discipleship; however, the vision has not been communicated clearly or the programs and methods have not been structured in ways that personally equip parents to disciple their children outside of the church.[462] Davidson found a similar disconnect among pastors who noted a reluctance from ministry teams to plan collaboratively with biblical literacy in mind.[463] Davidson's study also reveals a common theme that parents feel the church is not offering enough training opportunities and is not communicating what the children are learning in their classes.[464]

Stafford defines a loss of distinctiveness in the Sunday school movement, the absence of congregational loyalty, a paucity of quality lay leaders, and the rise of church-shopping as grievous factors implicating the decline of discipleship in twenty-first-century churches.[465]

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[460] Dr. Don Ellsworth, "The Worship Leader's Role as Theologian," *Building a Theology of Worship Workbook: WRSP635, LUO Edition* (Academx Publishing Services, Inc., 2013), 12.

[461] Kenny and Elle Campbell, "The Complete Annual Strategy for Kids Ministry," Stuff You Can Use, November 2, 2018, video, 45:03, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KU4VCt0rIuQ.

[462] Hazel, "Discipling Children and Youth," 60.

[463] Davidson, "A Mixed Methods Study," 72.

[464] Ibid., 82.

[465] Stafford, "This Little Light of Mine," 29–33.

Bunge laments this loss as she outlines the lack of strong commitment churches are supplying

not only to their congregations but also to the children and children's religious education

programs in their communities:

> While many organizations and international groups express these concerns, it remains the case that many countries fail to meet even the basic needs of children, and children around the world continue to suffer hunger, poverty, abuse and neglect, and depression. In the United States, for example, 16 percent of children live in poverty, and approximately nine million children have no health insurance. Many children attend inadequate and dangerous schools, and solid preschool programs, such as Head Start, lack full funding. Children are one of the last priorities in decisions about budget cuts on the state and federal level; road maintenance and military budgets take precedence over our children, even though politicians pledge to "leave no child behind" in terms of health care or education.[466]

This study found that discipleship would ideally take place in both small group and

corporate experiences to promote a comprehensive spiritual formation. Rezek's study delineated,

"Young children need both the Sunday School experience and the corporate worship experience

to obtain the biblical knowledge, skills for worship, appropriate dispositions, and positive

feelings toward worship if they are to become and remain life-long participants in the corporate

worship service of their faith family."[467] Rezek concluded, "Helping young children toward this

end should be one of the main goals of the church since worshiping God is one of the most

important things we were created to do."[468]

This study found one common strategy for making authentic loving and caring

connections necessary for regular discipleship is through storytelling. While telling stories by

heart may not seem unique, Boomershine's internalization of the biblical story places God's

stories in long-term memory in a manner that surpasses the simplistic surface-level knowing

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[466] Bunge, "Rediscovering the Dignity and Complexity of Children," 51.

[467] Rezek, "Young Children in Worship," 74.

[468] Ibid., 75.

typified by rote memorization into an internalization that shows love for God.[469] In the Godly

Play method, the storyteller tells the story by heart in a manner that some critics say is highly

scripted; yet, Berryman demonstrates the method is, in reality, highly relational.[470] Berryman's

lifetime of research indicated the children are trained, as in Proverbs 22:6, as to what to expect

and then how to enjoy this experience.[471] "If the space is well organized and the mentors have set

the tone with respectful wonder, children are eager to listen to the story and delve deeply into

their own spiritual practice."[472] Turner's research further verified the value of the storyteller who

"invites the children to share their own thoughts, feelings, and questions in response to materials

presented, nurturing children's curiosity."[473]

Davidson's study underlines this desire to journey beyond the surface level in spiritual

formation with children. "Educators in all Christian settings have such little time with the

students that God has entrusted to them, not a minute of it should be wasted on ineffective

methods, programs, or materials."[474] With this same underlying philosophy, Turner found,

"Children remain disengaged from their own spiritual formation as they over-engage with

content and delivery style."[475] Turner's research suggests, "By receiving answers to questions

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[469] Boomershine, "Breath of Fresh Air," 60.

[470] Berryman, "Holy Story, Sacred Play," 23.

[471] Ibid.

[472] Ibid.

[473] Turner, "Children's Faith Formation," 48.

[474] Davidson, "A Mixed Methods Study," 1.

[475] Turner, "Children's Faith Formation," 22.

before they begin to ask them, children may lose their sense of wonder and internal curiosity about who God is and what God has done."[476]

Turner's study lists the media-guided lesson approach and the Montessori method as two of the most common approaches to children's faith formation.[477] Along these lines, Westerhoff described the production line and the greenhouse as two metaphors for spiritual formation in children. In the production line metaphor, children are led by adults to increase knowledge and adopt procedures.[478] In the greenhouse metaphor, children lead through their natural interests.[479] Westerhoff, however, promotes a pilgrimage philosophy whereby children learn alongside adults through intergenerational worship where children are valued.[480] "Neither the production-line nor the greenhouse approach to children's faith formation inherently values the role of children in the broader faith community; at best, the child-specific programming is seen as the ideal place for young faith to grow, at worst, it is cobbled together as babysitting."[481] Turner's research provides a similar evaluation, "Holistic spiritual formation happens in the context of engaging with the person of God often through the use of particular spiritual disciplines, a kind of quiet, deep engagement that cannot be diminished to recalling information or outsourced to watching a screen."[482]

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[476] Turner, "Children's Faith Formation," 22.

[477] Ibid., 31.

[478] Ibid., 52.

[479] Ibid.

[480] Ibid.

[481] Ibid.

[482] Ibid., 36.

This study also uncovered several tensions in the direction of discipleship. The first tension is a result of how worship leaders tell God's story. This study observed that the Bible is often told as a story in bits and pieces of episodes rather than through a comprehensive plan for a coherent whole.[483] Csinos and Beckwith share a solution, "When the Bible is offered to children as the overarching story of God's interaction with humanity—one that includes many different episodes—these shorter lessons and points are infused with larger meaning and truth."[484]

A second tension exposed by this study involves the direction of power in discipleship. The issue of parents driving the design of worship rather than research-based studies on children's ministries demonstrates this pervasive influence of consumerism in the design of discipleship for the church. Hazel actually promoted a reversal of traditional Sunday school with a parent-led curriculum and explained how the family-equipping ministry model refocuses programs as more than evangelism, placing parents in the primary role to disciple their children by simultaneously connecting teams of workers in the church with families.[485] One of the most widespread findings in the literature is a movement toward acceptance that adults have much to learn from children and the worship community suffers when this relationship is neglected.[486]

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[483] Csinos and Beckwith, *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus*, 83; Ratcliff, "Redefining Children's Ministry," 408; Stewart, "Children and Worship," 354; Wierenga, "Young Children and Worship," 32.

[484] Csinos and Beckwith, *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus*, 83.

[485] Hazel, "Discipling Children and Youth," 71–72, 75.

[486] Bunge, "Rediscovering the Dignity and Complexity of Children," 62; Devries, "Toward a Theology of Childhood," 166; Durante, "Teaching Children to Pray," 142; Eustace, "Experiencing God Together," 9; Ingersoll, "Making Room," 175; Turner, "Children's Faith Formation," 21–22; May et al., *Children Matter*, 71–72; Mercer and Matthews, "Liturgical Practices with Children," 32; Ratcliff, "The Spirit of Children Past," 233; Roorda, "Bible Trek," 14; Stonehouse, "Knowing God in Childhood," 43; van Leersum-Bekebrede et al., "Setting the Stage," 179; Weber, "The Gospel in the Child," 233.

This study establishes a rising consistency in the literature relaying the notion of adults learning from children. Merten affirms that children continue to teach adults.[487] Bunge stated emphatically, "Finally, if we truly believe, as Jesus did, that children can teach adults and be moral witnesses, models of faith, and sources of revelation, then we will listen more attentively to children and learn from them, structure our religious education programs in ways that honor their questions and insights, and recognize the importance of children in the faith journey and spiritual maturation of parents and other adults."[488] Lydia van Leersum-Bekebrede's team verified, "When adults and children participate in worship practices together, it may contribute to a sense of community in which faith can be lived and shared."[489] Ratcliff's research confirmed these findings, as well. "Children may have spiritual abilities that are rarely, if ever, tapped by those around them. If children are exemplary in some respects spiritually, as Jesus affirmed, they have much to teach adults."[490] Devries sums the tension in this endeavor. "The more challenging demand is for us to accept children as our guides and teachers as well as our students and dependents."[491] Eustace is a strong proponent of making meaning together as she proved by inviting children to join her in the investigation, "teaching me and each other as we worked to discover how we experience God."[492]

Evidence for building a culture of community through effective strategies was documented across several studies. "Friendships may grow through sharing common

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[487] Merten, "Everybody's Church," 13–19.

[488] Bunge, "Rediscovering the Dignity and Complexity of Children," 62.

[489] van Leersum-Bekebrede et al., "Setting the Stage," 166.

[490] Ratcliff, "The Spirit of Children Past," 233.

[491] Devries, "Toward a Theology of Childhood," 172.

[492] Eustace, "Experiencing God," 145.

entertainment, but entertainment alone cannot facilitate the exchange of thoughts, ideas, and mutual support that form friendships."[493] Discipleship is typically thought of as adult-to-child or adult-to-adult; however, our notion of discipleship may expand to include opportunities for discipleship through everyday interactions, including ones between children. Familiar with movements to spark discipleship, Olsen relays, the Awana program was restructured to encourage children to "sacrifice personal achievements for the sake of others" rather than compete against one another in their discipleship journey.[494] Dr. Allen Jackson, Senior Pastor of Dunwoody Baptist Church, contributed to this conversation by adding the dimensions of context and relationships in discipleship efforts with children. "When a disciple is taught in the context of a relationship that is not agenda driven but one that has a love motivation, like a parent to a son or daughter, the lessons move down from the head to the heart, from "learned" to "convinced of."[495] Turner's study, once again, sums the decade of research in this direction. "In order for systemic change to take place in congregations, senior leadership and lay leaders—people outside of traditional children's ministry—must share and adopt a vision for formation-focused children's ministry as well as intergenerational ministry."[496]

A viable strategy for discipleship was found in the works of Jane Carr. Learning about God and experiencing God are two different things. One aspect of discipleship is service. Carr believes the inclusion of children in authentic opportunities for worship through serving others plays a foundational role in their faith formation.[497] Although some worship leaders fear that

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[493] Turner, "Children's Faith Formation," 42.

[494] Olsen, "No Child Left Behind Comes to Awana," 35.

[495] Jackson, "The Contribution of Teaching to Discipleship," 18.

[496] Turner, "Children's Faith Formation," x.

[497] Carr, "Equipping Kids for Ministry," 354.

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removing children from age-separated classes will prevent discipleship, Carr's study reveals the reverse holds true.[498] By helping others, children build confidence and realize how much they already know about God and may become inspired to learn more.[499]

Another strategy toward worship engagement through discipleship is to provide training and resources through the local worship community or the denomination's discipleship materials.[500] Turner makes the valid assessment that the philosophy, psychology, and methodology of a multi-sensory approach to learning the Bible experientially has not caught up with current understandings of children's spiritual formation due to delays in training and adopting new practices.[501] Turner designed a training module to teach leaders "how to value the mutually transforming role of children's spiritual formation, considering the breadth of available resources for children's spiritual formation in order to slowly adapt and lead their congregation through theologically and philosophically rooted changes to achieve an intentionally crafted vision."[502] The literature is in concert that opportunities for practical training in instructional design and educational strategies would better equip pastors for their role in discipling children and families.

In addition to training worship leaders, lay leaders, and volunteers, parents would benefit from training including ways to initiate conversations naturally with children about what they learned in Sunday school and ways to lead their children in personal discipleship and family

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[498] Carr, "Equipping Kids for Ministry," 358.

[499] Ibid.

[500] Roorda, "Bible Trek," 42.

[501] Turner, "Children's Faith Formation," 15–16.

[502] Ibid., 78.

devotional times.[503] Hazel delineates a family-equipping ministry model to prevent parent apathy and disconnect and also offers ideas such as a once-a-month "family day" where Bible study is focused on helping parents learn how to do family devotions and how to pray with children.[504] This strategy includes teaching families how to engage with their children in Bible reading plans.

In a similar manner, Stewart expresses how an environment that fosters a bond between adults and children becomes a discipleship strategy when they are engaged joyfully in "work" that does not feel like work by co-wondering and making meaning together from the storytelling in her method of spiritual formation.[505] Likewise, this study conveyed an often overlooked discipleship strategy is to allow enough time by not rushing the child and by allowing longer pauses after making statements so children have time to think.[506]

Stonehouse also addressed this notion in her findings. "As adults respect the child's spiritual potential and leave them to wonder about meanings and applications, children learn that they can make their own discoveries. They can hear from God."[507] Stonehouse made the perceptive assessment that children's questions may grow and change along with them but allowing this process to unfold naturally helps children to ask the hard questions that ultimately help them to accept the Bible as true.[508] May encountered a similar truth as even after a shift to an effective, experiential model for engaging children in the biblical story, her team had not left

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[503] Davidson, "A Mixed Methods Study," 151.

[504] Hazel, "Discipling Young Children and Youth," 74–78.

[505] Stewart, "Children and Worship," 359–360.

[506] Frady, "A Grounded Theory Investigation," 23.

[507] Stonehouse, "Knowing God in Childhood," 39.

[508] Ibid., 42.

the time and space needed for the children to actually experience God.[509] Her solution to provide intentional ways for children to become aware of God's presence in worship included silence, symbols, and music that focused on fostering an awareness of His presence.[510]

This study also uncovered theologian William L. Hendricks' explanation of why it is essential not to wait until children are older to begin any kind of religious training because "children's patterns of learning and stages at which they learn are interwoven in such a way that children use their earliest learning experiences as models for later learning experiences."[511] Based on her research study, Stonehouse also found, "Children are not passive vessels that we fill with biblical facts and theological concepts for use later, when they are ready for spiritual formation."[512] Stonehouse concluded, "In the early years of life, children… are forming their understanding of God, understanding that will help or hinder them in their future walk with God."[513] These studies provide a practical application of Dewey's learning theory, underlining the value in connecting previous knowledge and experience to make meaning from the environment.

Finally, Ingersoll composed a chorus of scholarly voices—including Allen & Ross, Beckwith, Bunge, Miller-McLemore, Roehlkepartain and Patel, and Thomson—who cite active participation in the worship life of a congregation as key to children's spiritual development and

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[509] May et al., *Children Matter*, 251.

[510] Ibid., 252.

[511] Davidson, "A Mixed Methods Study," 13.

[512] Stonehouse, "Knowing God in Childhood," 42.

[513] Ibid.

best practice in nurturing children's spirituality.[514] Bunge's lifetime of research accurately summarizes the findings for this study.

> Finally, if we truly believe, as Jesus did, that children can teach adults and be moral witnesses, models of faith, and sources of revelation, then we will listen more attentively to children and learn from them, structure our religious education programs in ways that honor their questions and insights, and recognize the importance of children in the faith journey and spiritual maturation of parents and other adults.[515]

Leader Mentorship

Just as evangelism and discipleship are evident in the Bible, the precedent for leader mentorship is set in Scripture as illustrated by Paul's mentorship with Timothy. Connecting to H2, further evidence is found in the book of 1 Corinthians: "That there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Cor. 12:25–27). Even more specifically, "Jesus invested three years of ministry leadership training in a small group of leaders and then released them to use their gifts."[516] Expanding on this theme, Assistant Professor of Youth Ministry and Adolescent Studies at Bethel College, Dr. Robert Brandt, speaks to the exponential impact this intentional investment has made for well over two thousand years.[517] Brandt continues, "Developing other ministry leaders is part of this Christian heritage of teaching and multiplication."[518]

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[514] Ingersoll, "Making Room: A Place for Children's Spirituality in the Christian Church," 170.

[515] Bunge, "Rediscovering the Dignity and Complexity of Children," 62.

[516] Robert Brandt, "Equipping Others to Teach," in *Teaching the Next Generations: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching Christian Formation*, ed. Terry Linhart (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 227.

[517] Brandt, "Equipping Others to Teach," 227.

[518] Ibid.

Although mentorship can be passive, there is often a need for active mentoring, especially in the area of spiritual formation. In his doctoral research on mentoring worship leaders, Robert Craig demonstrates this concept of multiplication as he notes one single leader mentoring another quickly turns "one plus one equals two" into twenty iterations that would result in over three-hundred-thousand leaders being mentored.[519] Likewise, Sauskojus teaches, "Even more, Paul [2 Timothy 2:1–2] stresses the importance of training people who will come after us, cultivating a godly heritage that will be passed down from one generation to the next generation."[520]

This study indicated this type of leader mentorship is a recurrent theme in business, education, and other sectors, including ministry. There is a tremendous amount of research affirming the positive impact on ministry engagement when leaders mentor potential leaders and an equal share of research noting the detrimental effects of a lack of leader mentorship. The concluding paragraphs to Kenneth Warren's doctoral study highlight the latter. Despite verbally pledging support to the children's ministry volunteers, Warren notes that a lack of substantive training or a clear vision for children's ministry translates to poor quality and lack of momentum.[521] Warren connects the senior pastor or "children's ministry point person" with the responsibility for providing the "why" of children's ministry, attaching a vision to the need by not only placing value on the ministry but providing a system for coaching and training.[522]

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[519] Robert Todd Craig, "Mentoring Worship Leaders to Become Mentoring Worship Leaders" (Doctor of Worship Studies thesis, Liberty University, 2020), 19–20.

[520] Sauskojus, "Incorporating a Pedagogy of Worship," 4–5.

[521] Warren, "An Examination of Children's Ministry Volunteer Development," 98.

[522] Ibid., 99–102.

Csinos and Beckwith echo Warren's philosophy that the senior pastor cannot be the only person responsible for leader mentorship. The authors propose mentors may answer the call for adult role models to engage in the spiritual formation of children within their community through leader mentorship by taking an active interest in the lives of their protégés outside the church walls.[523] Rezek's strategy involves a call for inclusion within the church body in corporate worship where mature learners are mentoring "less accomplished learners."[524] Rezek discovered, "It is through mentoring and modeling of the Christian faith that young children have optimal opportunity to grow in their relationship with God."[525]

This study emphasized the amount of formal training a children's ministry leader has received has a profound effect upon their preparation.[526] Dr. Brad Johnson, international speaker and professor of psychology in the Department of Leadership, Ethics, and Law at the United States Naval Academy, would agree that a community could quickly create what he calls a constellation of mentors—an array of people whose investment in others results in a diversity of relationships, connections, and experiences for those being mentored.[527] Maxwell concurs, "If you invest in people, they will never be the same again. And neither will you. It is impossible to help others without helping yourself."[528] Maxwell concludes, "Every time you develop a leader, you make a difference in the world."[529]

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[523] Csinos and Beckwith, *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus*, 184.

[524] Rezek, "Young Children in Worship," 9.

[525] Ibid., 3.

[526] Turner, "Children's Faith Formation," 22.

[527] W. Brad Johnson, "Mentoring: Make it a Constellation," *Milestone* (blog), Soderquist Leadership, January 14, 2014, accessed June 11, 2020, http://blog.milestoneleadership.com/mentoring-make-it-a-constellation.

[528] Maxwell, *How Successful People Lead*, 96.

[529] Ibid., 146.

Chapter Summary

The qualitative historical design for this thesis allowed an in-depth exploration of biblical principles, educational principles, and corporate worship practices to authenticate corporate worship with children as a viable field of pedagogical interest. This study sought to bring together the work of theologians and practitioners to gain a more holistic view of the corporate worship experience that includes the child's perspective confirming the ability of elementary-aged children to engage in authentic worship. The findings from this study demonstrated why the absence of a holistic approach to children's corporate worship is problematic. The final chapter will offer a summary, limitations, implications for practice, suggestions for future research, and conclusions for the thesis.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Introduction

This final chapter presents a brief summary of the study including its purpose, procedure, and research findings. Limitations of the study are acknowledged and recommendations for future research are suggested. Finally, the chapter concludes with the implications this study may have for worship leaders, lay leaders, and volunteers.

Summary of Study

The engagement of children in worship connects to the biblical principles of worship (Acts 2:42–47), evangelism (Matt. 28:16–20), discipleship (Eph. 4:11–16), and leader mentorship (1 Cor. 12:25–27). While there is a growing body of research examining religious education curricula and spiritual formation in children, a paucity of either quantitative or qualitative studies exists relative to the spiritual formation of elementary-aged children through engagement in corporate worship. In context, Jesus gives the two Great Commandments (Matt. 22:35–40) —to love the Lord our God and to love our neighbors as ourselves—along with the Great Compassion (Matt. 25:34–40) —to personally minister to those around us—in order to fulfill the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20) —to share the gospel as we go about our daily lives discipling those with whom we come into contact. This qualitative historical study was conducted to determine how these four biblical mandates have been answered signifying the evangelism and discipleship of children and families both within and without our worship communities.

Summary of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to identify challenges faced by elementary-aged children pertaining to worship engagement in order to seek strategies for their resolution. Although many

worship leaders have a genuine desire to more productively engage children in worship, they may lack the personal equipping necessary to overcome the challenges addressed by this study. The research questions were designed to investigate how worship leaders who are responsible for the spiritual formation of all members might engage children in relevant and meaningful ways. This study may be significant to worship leaders, lay leaders, and volunteers as they fulfill biblical commands to shepherd, care for, and lead the children in their worship communities.

Summary of Procedure

Sources were gathered according to scholarly research standards and a qualitative document analysis was conducted to uncover patterns, processes, context, and underlying meaning.[530] Engaging in conversation with biblical principles, educational principles, and corporate worship practices with a variety of scholarly documents aided this procedure. Looking to the past toward influencers on religious pedagogy, educational theory, and child development enriched this exchange. This study set the stage for conclusions to be drawn that could shape the design of corporate worship services for elementary-aged children.

Summary of Research Findings

The research findings support the initial hypothesis that challenges to engagement in worship for elementary-aged children include quality of leadership, curricula, and environment. The findings also demonstrate that evangelism, discipleship, and leader mentorship are viable strategies for overcoming obstacles to worship engagement in elementary-aged children. Acts 2:42–47 provides the biblical model for spiritual formation in children and families. Three overarching challenges were discovered relative to the engagement of elementary-aged children

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[530] Altheide et al., "Emergent Qualitative Document Analysis," 128.

in worship. These included the worship community's valuation of children due to quality of leadership, the view of how children make meaning from instruction due to quality of curricula, and the quality of environment where the children are invited for corporate worship.

Leaders should be trained in corporate worship design because children's spiritual formation is at risk when obstacles to their engagement in worship are not thoughtfully considered. This study found the view of children held by the senior leadership of the worship community has significantly influenced the ability of children to engage in worship.[531] First, the findings of this study indicate valuing children,[532] building relationships,[533] and equipping leaders[534] are three ways to improve leader quality. Second, research findings reveal the ability of volunteers and lay leaders to adapt to curricular options such as silence and stillness and to clear misperceptions involving the children's ability to engage in worship are ways to ensure quality in the use of curricula.[535] Third, the study discovered when the triad of leaders works together to create a high-quality environment that is physically,[536] psychologically,[537] and physiologically[538] safe, children and adults thrive.

Worship leaders, lay leaders, and volunteers should cultivate a culture of leader mentorship to create authentic outreach and sustainable connections because strategies for

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[531] Kennemur, "The Prioritization of Southern Baptist Programs for Children," 84.

[532] Warren, "An Examination of Children's Ministry Volunteer Development," 15.

[533] Gordon, *Children's Ministries*, 8–10.

[534] Turner, "Children's Faith Formation," x.

[535] McCall, "Cultivating the Spiritual Awareness of Children," 170.

[536] Rezek, "Young Children in Worship," 20.

[537] Frady, "A Grounded Theory Investigation," 33.

[538] Rezek, "Young Children and Worship," 20.

engagement in worship depend upon collaboration. The findings of the study indicate that establishing relationships,[539] considering heart language,[540] practicing deference,[541] and valuing diversity[542] are all ways to overcome obstacles to worship engagement through evangelism. Constructing meaning together[543] and educating and considering others[544] are strategies for overcoming obstacles to worship through discipleship that are consistent with the findings of the study. Leader mentorship[545] is the key to cultivating a culture of community that accomplishes holistic spiritual formation through shared positive experience within the worship community. This research study found these strategies for engaging elementary-aged children in worship verify the need for a holistic approach to children's spiritual formation.

Statement of Limitations

As with any research study, certain limitations were unavoidable. As a novice qualitative researcher, personal experience and prior knowledge may have influenced data collection, observations, and conclusions whereas more experienced researchers might employ more advanced techniques to improve validity and reliability. When drawing conclusions regarding the research, the following limitations should be considered:

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[539] Eustace, "Experiencing God Together," 83; Durante, "Teaching Children to Pray," 143; Gordon, *Children's Ministries*, 16; Jackson, "The Contribution of Teaching to Discipleship," 18; Merten, "Everybody's Church," 13; Moten, "The Effects of Mediated Learning," 100; Olsen, "No Child Left Behind Comes to Awana," 36; Turner, "Children's Faith Formation," 52–53.

[540] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 51–55.

[541] Csinos and Beckwith, *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus*, 188.

[542] May, "Teaching Children," 119; McCall, "Cultivating the Spiritual Awareness to Hear from God," 129.

[543] van Leersum-Bekebrede et al., "Setting the Stage," 166.

[544] Bunge, "Rediscovering the Dignity and Complexity of Children," 62.

[545] Csinos and Beckwith, *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus*, 184.

1. There is limited research related to challenges faced by elementary-aged children in the age-separated corporate worship setting. Although some research delineated the challenges experienced by adults with regard to the engagement of elementary-aged children in worship, very little research specifically identified the challenges children experience within varied corporate worship environments.

2. Separating the cognitive and affective facets—including the intellectual, physical, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects—of a child's development was beyond the scope of this paper. Similarly, it was beyond the scope of this inquiry to detail the intricate historical relationships between the child development theorists, psychologists, and theologians and the impact this has toward worship engagement.

3. Although there are several generally accepted definitions of spirituality and spiritual formation, quantitative and qualitative measurements and descriptions of active engagement in worship by children have not been fully developed.

Recommendations for Future Research

Despite the recent interest in religious pedagogy and biblical principles of worship design, the experience of children in corporate worship is a topic in need of scholarly research. Children's ministry observed through the lens of educational theory may look very different than ministry viewed through a theory of worship. A theology of childhood is noticeably absent even after decades of growth pointing toward the need for its formation. A growing interest in constructing a visible theology of childhood coupled with movements toward intergenerational worship is authenticating corporate worship with children as a viable field of interest.

1. Qualitative and quantitative studies on corporate worship with children. Both qualitative and quantitative studies are needed to further define the challenges to

worship and provide strategies for overcoming obstacles in corporate worship services. The perspective of the child has frequently been neglected in research comprising engagement in the corporate worship environment.

2. Evaluation of corporate worship design. Systems have been devised for evaluating pastors, worship leaders, and volunteers in the greater church environment. However, research illustrating systems for evaluating the effectiveness of the children's corporate worship education program would aid worship leaders in fulfilling the biblical commands toward the spiritual formation of children and families.

3. Evaluation of curricula for diversity. Some studies have created tools for the evaluation of religious curricula; however, new conversations are needed in light of renewed movements toward equality for all people in all nations. A significant research question to answer would include how diversity and inclusiveness have been addressed in the corporate worship environment specifically concerning children and families. Ensuring curricula accurately reflect individual experiences would improve inclusiveness and the ability to engage a diversity of children and families in authentic corporate worship.

4. Tools for spiritual development. Parents and guardians are supposed to be the primary leaders in the spiritual development of children. An investigation into the efficacy of tools provided to families for their role in a child's spiritual formation would be useful to the body of believers also responsible for its community's discipleship.

5. Constructing a theology of childhood. This study revealed why a lack of focus by contemporary theologians promoting a theology of childhood is problematic. A collaborative investigation into the theological perspective regarding spiritual

formation could highlight the potential of theologies of childhood to shape the direction of ministry with children.

6. Continuation of substantial research. A continuation study could move Turner's foundations in systemic change forward to the next step of collaboration in the design of corporate worship. To improve the sustainability of Turner's curriculum guiding church leaders into a mutually transforming model of spiritual formation with children, a pedagogical application in worship design would contribute significantly to Turner's concept of the "Church Toolkit."

Implications for Practice

Interpreting the findings in light of the study's limitations, the outcomes of this study may be beneficial to worship leaders, lay leaders, and volunteers whose roles include the design and implementation of corporate worship services for children. The findings have implications that worship leaders should consider when selecting the model of corporate worship most appropriate for their worship community and when designing the liturgy for that model. A renewed commitment to the mutually transforming edification of the body of believers would benefit the entire worship community and would inform best practices for the worship leader, lay leaders, and volunteers with shepherding roles in this community.

Misunderstandings about the primary purpose of children's ministry and the responsibility toward spiritual formation in children and families have given rise to methods of discipleship, evangelism, and leader mentorship that are antithetical to biblical principles for worship with children and families. As a result, our worship communities are short-changed by settling for what appears from the outside to be successful children's ministry; in reality, minor

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systemic changes would dramatically refocus the direction toward a mutually edifying journey of faith formation for all children and families within the gathered body of believers.

The challenges faced by elementary-aged children connecting with worship engagement center around the notion that all children do not experience God in the same way nor do children return worship to Him in an identical fashion. The research indicates that children need strong worship leadership capable of administrating a child-centered curriculum in a high-quality environment in order to experience God by engaging in worship. Fostering a sense of community through authentic outreach and sustainable connections is one method for accomplishing this aim and adding vitality to the life of the worship community. Research conducted by Eustace illuminates one effective strategy for implementing this aim. "During our time together, the children's actions revealed the importance of the liturgy, the process, and the words we use. This liturgy formed our community, our gatherings, and helped create the sacred space where the children feel safe to share and wonder together."[546] The perspective of the body of believers merges through time and space in awe and wonder as the worship community practices a gentle and joyful version of evangelism and discipleship from within and without their local community.

When challenges related to the quality of leaders, curricula, and environment converge with strategies for evangelism, discipleship, and leader mentorship, there are three actions a leadership team may consider when designing corporate worship with children as indicated by this study. First, cultivating a culture of awareness toward meeting the needs of a diversity of children within the local community will foster unity. Second, selecting excellent curricular materials accurately reflecting personal situations and experiences of children from a broader

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[546] Eustace, "Experiencing God Together," 243.

context will elevate the level of inclusiveness and educate the congregation. Finally, constructing a high-quality worship environment and materials in a way that reflects all of the members of the community will create a worship structure that engages children holistically with their heart soul, strength, and mind.

For worship leaders who seek safety and relevance for their worship environment, there are resources available to appropriately fill those needs. Yet, following the inferences of this study would assist the leadership team in creating children's ministry in the way of Jesus that stretches beyond the administrative and pedagogical aspects to the spiritual and pastoral concerns of the ministry. Lay leaders and volunteers would become partners with worship leaders in effecting the spiritual formation of the children and families within their community.

Building leadership teams from what Turner referred to as a triad of leaders would ensure a strong foundation for a community's ministry with children. The goal of this triad is to "dedicate themselves to an ongoing dialogue, guided by the Holy Spirit, to examine their theological convictions, assess the current situation, and create a cohesive and dynamic vision of children's spiritual formation within their congregation."[547] Selecting a triad of leaders and building a collaborative ministry team consisting of the worship leader, lay leaders, and volunteers—including children and youth—to assess needs, formulate a strategic plan, and implement the transition plan to reach the church community with systemic changes would set this process in motion. This triad of leaders could then apply an intentional method for spiritual formation that includes child-centered, Christ-focused, and diversity-inclusive approaches based on a mutual edification model.

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[547] Turner, "Children's Faith Formation," 60.

Conclusions

A single, systematic handbook for children's ministry does not exist. Each congregation must use the materials available to design worship best suited to the context of their ministry. Looking to practices of the past and understanding the influences that have shaped ministry will enable worship leaders to make educated decisions accordant to the theology, philosophy, and methodology of corporate worship with elementary-aged children. If churches are to partner with parents to promote biblical literacy and spiritual formation, strategies for teaching children the Bible, enabling worship, and experiencing God need to become the new pressing need for the modern church in its ministry with children and families. With the understanding that ministry with children and families must balance historical practices with contextualization to the changing culture, the researcher offers a pedagogical application [see Appendix E] as a tool for pointing the next generation to a lifestyle of worship through a mutual edification within the worship community.

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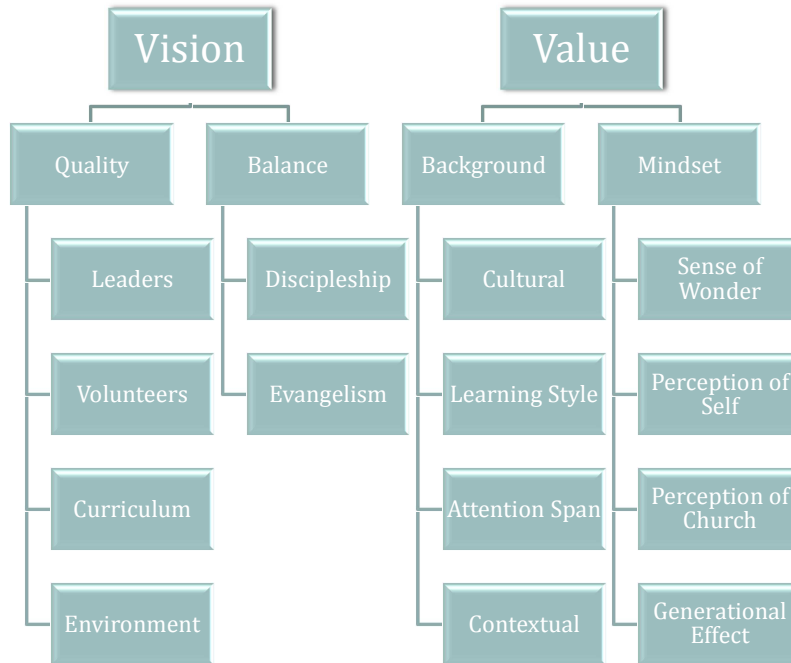———. "Children, the Bible, and Worship." *Reformed Review* 40, no. 3 (1987):188–199.

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Challenges to Worship Engagement

Vision		**Value**	

Quality	Balance	Background	Mindset
Leaders	Discipleship	Cultural	Sense of Wonder
Volunteers	Evangelism	Learning Style	Perception of Self
Curriculum		Attention Span	Perception of Church
Environment		Contextual	Generational Effect

Source: Table created by author, June 5, 2020.

Appendix B

| Theology of Childhood | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
View of Childhood	Intrinsic Valuation	Instrumental Valuation	Developing Beings	Inheritors of sin	Covenant Relationship	External Restrictions	Gifts of God	Burdens to Community	Models of Faith	In-Training	Belonging	Fringe	Vulnerable	Capable of Experiencing God
High	♦		♦		♦		♦		♦		♦		♦	♦
Low		♦		♦		♦		♦		♦		♦		
Jesus'	♦		♦		♦		♦		♦		♦		♦	♦
Greco-Roman		♦				♦		♦		♦		♦		
Early Church	♦		♦		♦		♦		♦		♦			♦
Medieval Church		♦		♦		♦		♦				♦		
Reformation														
Martin Luther	♦		♦		♦		♦		♦	♦	♦		♦	♦
John Amos Comenius	♦		♦		♦		♦		♦	♦	♦		♦	♦
Early Modern														
John Locke		♦		♦		♦								
Jean-Jacques Rosseau	♦		♦		♦		♦				♦		♦	♦
Horace Bushnell	♦		♦		♦		♦		♦	♦	♦		♦	♦
Modern														
John Watson		♦				♦				♦				♦
Maria Montessori	♦		♦				♦		♦		♦			♦

Sources: Data adapted from Bunge, "Biblical and Theological Perspectives;" Bunge and Wall, "Christianity;" May et al., *Children Matter*.

Appendix C

Author	Method	Primary Tenets of a Sample of Educational Methods
Maria Montessori	Montessori	Method of teaching that is child-led based on interests and emphasizes the work a child chooses to complete; nondenominational with a deep appreciation for spirituality
Rudolf Steiner	Waldorf	Method of teaching that emphasizes play and natural materials such as wood and fabrics for toys; nondenominational with spiritual aspect
Sofia Cavalletti	Good Shepherd	Method of religious education focused on a sense of wonder and belonging: Catechesis of the Good Shepherd curriculum
Loris Malaguzzi	Reggio Emilia	Method of teaching that takes Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences into account with the concept of the hundred languages of children; focus on environment, arts, and culture as well as community and parent support
Jerome Berryman and Sonja Stewart	Young Children and Worship	Method of religious education constructed together based on Sofia Cavalletti's curriculum whose prime focus is a sensorimotor approach to biblical stories, parables, and liturgical materials with the aim of building a child's worship language vocabulary
Jerome Berryman	Godly Play	Method of religious education based on the schooling-instruction model with scripted storytelling, wondering together, and materials for children to work with, alone or in groups, to make meaning from the stories
Sonja Stewart	Children and Worship	Method of religious education based on a worship perspective instead of a schooling-instruction model retaining the fundamental ideas from Young Children and Worship yet adding the role of anamnesis, making meaning from memory, imagination, and shared stories

Sources: Data adapted from Henry Barnes, "Rudolf Steiner & the History of Waldorf Education," Waldorf Education, accessed June 5, 2020, https://www.waldorfeducation.org/waldorf-education/rudolf-steiner-the-history-of-waldorf-education; Eustace, "Experiencing God Together;" Frady, "A Grounded Theory Investigation;" Reck, "Colouring with Brown Crayons;" Alisa Stoudt, "The Reggio Emilia Approach," Scholastic, accessed June 5, 2020, https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/reggio-emilia-approach/; Turner, "Children's Faith Formation."

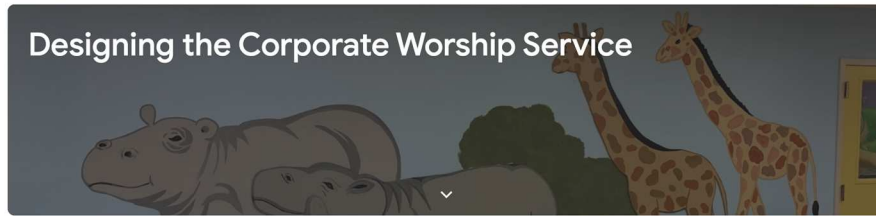| Founder	Program Name	Work-based	Play-based	Developmentally appropriate	Individualized instruction	Activates sense of wonder	Culturally Influenced	Self-Directed	Other-Directed	Shared Meaning-Making	Incorporates the Arts	Natural and Purposeful Materials	Sensorimotor	Secular Basis	Spiritual Basis
Arnold Gesell	Yale Program		●	●	●	●		●	●	●			●	●	
Maria Montessori	Montessori	●		●	●	●	●	●		●		●	●	●	●
Rudolf Steiner	Waldorf		●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Loris Malaguzzi	Reggio Emilia	●	●	●	●	●	●	●		●	●	●	●	●	●
Sofia Cavalletti	Good Shepherd		●	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●		●
Jerome Berryman	Godly Play	●	●	●		●	●			●	●	●	●		●
Sonja Stewart	Children in Worship		●	●		●	●			●	●	●	●		●
Scottie May	Pilgrim's Journey			●		●	●			●		●	●		●

Sources: Data adapted from Barnes, "Rudolf Steiner;" Eustace, "Experiencing God Together;" Frady, "A Grounded Theory Investigation;" May et al., *Children Matter*; Stewart, "Children and Worship;" Reck, "Colouring with Brown Crayons;" Stoudt, "The Reggio Emilia Approach;" "The Gesell Program in Early Childhood," Gesell at Yale Program in Early Childhood, accessed June 5, 2020, https://gesellinstitute.org/pages/about-us; Turner, "Children's Faith Formation."

Appendix E

Worship leaders, lay leaders, and volunteers benefit from tools that promote efficient and effective learning opportunities. Classroom, sponsored by Google, is an application for teaching and learning that utilizes the digital platform to communicate, collaborate, instruct, and inspire learners across a variety of domains. Its widespread use for the delivery of K-20 instruction has made Classroom familiar and accessible to a growing percentage of children and families. This tool holds tremendous potential as a strategy for leader mentorship across a diversity of denominations and contexts.

In response to the need for efficient and effective training for ministry leaders and volunteers, the researcher has developed a strategy for leader mentorship that has the potential to link team members for meeting and exchanging ideas, coordinate volunteer scheduling, and improve collaboration across ministry teams through the use of the free digital application, Classroom. The unique use of this platform in a ministry context accomplishes the goal of reaching church communities with the tools for intentional approaches to children's ministry that are child-centered, Christ-focused, and intergenerationally inclusive in order to engage children and improve their ability to personally experience God in corporate worship.

In response to the findings of this study, the researcher has designed a pedagogical application—Designing the Corporate Worship Service—to assist in the design of corporate worship for and with children that is truly engaging. The beta-phase of the curricula may be accessed in Classroom by emailing the author at victoryartsga@gmail.com for an invitation with a class code to join the learning community.

Source: Screenshot of the training, Designing the Corporate Worship Service, created by the author in Classroom, the pedagogical application available through Google; Photo by author.