

Sunday School is Marching On: An Exploration of Children's Perceptions of Church, Sunday School, and a Bible-Based Sunday School Lesson

By

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Sunday School is Marching On: An Exploration of Children's Perceptions of Church, Sunday
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SCHOOL LESSON

Abstract

Faith development is a highly significant social and educational experience in many children's lives. According to research, children may thrive in settings that provide opportunities for collaboration, working in small groups, discussing social justice issues and having more intergenerational experiences. Some educators believe children have an untapped resource that is missed in their education. This untapped resource is spiritual practices, which may include faith and religion (Crompton, 2001; Fisher, 1999; Miller, 2000; Bridges & Moore, 2002; Williams & Dixie, 2003). The purpose of this study is to better understand children's (ages 4–8) perceptions of a Bible lesson in a Christian church, using James Fowler's Faith Development Theory as an interpretive framework. Chapter 1 introduces the project and lays out the relevant background and context for studying children's development of faith in a Christian church. Chapter 2 reviews theory and literature on children's faith development and Fowler's (1981) Faith Development Theory. Chapter 2 also includes a description of participatory research practices with children, specifically highlighting arts-based research. Chapter 3 presents the research design, including participant sample and procedures for data collection and analysis. Chapter 4 presents the findings from the study, and Chapter 5 discusses the findings, implications, and suggestions for future research. Children participated in a regularly scheduled Sunday school lesson in a Christian church. After participation in the lesson, within seven days, I interviewed fifteen children about their experiences and perceptions of church, Sunday school, and Bible-based Sunday school lesson. I found that children's perceptions of Sunday school and church included

themes around snacks, classroom interaction, peer relationships, church culture, and worship. Children retold the Bible lesson including comments about characters, events, the moral of the story, and tricks. Fowler's aspects of faith development; form of logic, social perspective taking, form of moral judgment, bounds of social awareness, locus of authority, form of world coherence, and symbolic function were represented in children's interpretations of the Sunday school Bible lesson.

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Dedication

I'd like to dedicate this dissertation to my late grandmother, Shirley Maxine Findle. We called her Lil'Mama, Ms. Findle, Sister Findle, Aunt Shirley, Sis, Mama, cake lady, daycare lady, and much more. You once told me that you really wanted to open your own daycare center. You wanted a special place for your families, just like the one where you did your training.

I tell everyone that I fell into this research, but really, the research found me. My purpose found me. My calling found me. You once said that you thought I would be the one to have the least amount of kids of all the first cousins because I never played with kids much, but I ended up with my own children, completing projects like this one and advocating for families.

When my mama returned to work, six weeks after having me, you were the one who took care of me. You helped lay a foundation of love, security, and belonging. You kept us during the week and on weekends while our mama had to go to work two or more jobs. You took me to church any Sunday that I wanted to go. You encouraged me to serve as an usher and made sure I had the right clothes each week. You were my biggest cheerleader at home, at church, and at my games and programs.

I knew you were not well off, but you would always come pick me up from school when I was stranded. You came to my volleyball games and you made sure I had food to eat before and after. Sometimes, we'd stop by your house because we had very little food at home, and we knew that there would always be enough. Many people felt the same way, and they also stopped by. Some of them did not leave. Many people spent their time and life in your home. These are qualities I try to emulate with my friends and family.

At your funeral, people recounted stories of you babysitting their children and grandchildren. They trusted you. You are grandma goals. You took care of children for less than

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this study is to better understand how children ages 4–8 make meaning of a story from a Bible lesson in a Christian church, using James Fowler’s Faith Development Theory as an interpretive framework. There are a variety of definitions for faith, and some of them contradict each other. Fowler (1991) described faith as the “universal quality of meaning making” as people place personal trust and loyalty in one or more “center of value” such as religion, family, money, power, and so on. Fowler’s model conceptualizes the psychological process of meaning-making or faith in six stages. Fowler claimed that the stages of faith are universal, hierarchical, and sequential. Fowler claimed that faith is a universal quality, applicable in religious and non-religious settings. If FDT is universal, then it should apply to children in a Christian context in which the focus is on Biblical faith.

Faith in the Christian Context

Biblical understanding and interpretation of faith influence the ways that faith is discussed and promoted within Christian churches and how volunteers in each church teach children. Children’s faith was examined in a Christian context because most of the research is derived from the Christian perspective in the United States. To examine children’s faith in a Christian church, we must explore the Biblical definition of faith. The definition for faith, as described in the Bible, comes from a popular passage of scripture, Hebrews Chapter 11:

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. (Hebrews 11:1-3)

There are other scriptures that provide further explanation for how to live that faith.

Religion is one way in which a person may experience, express, or embrace faith (Williams, 2006). Faith, as defined by James Fowler (1981), focuses on the universality of

human meaning-making (how people construe, understand, or make sense of life events, relationships, and self) through the placement of trust in a “center of meaning-making.” For the Christian, the center of meaning-making is belief in Jesus, which requires that we understand Biblical faith, the “assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1). In the protestant Christian (e.g., Baptist) tradition, faith generally translates as belief of, trust in, and reliance on the person of Jesus and his practice and teachings. It is through this definition of faith in Jesus that Christians make meaning, which should be informed by a Biblical worldview, and is sometimes practiced in a church setting. While Fowler’s theory of faith development is secular, it is also universal (permeates all aspects of life) and can be utilized to understand underlying psychological processes of children’s experiences in church.

Why Study Children’s Faith Development in a Church Context?

There are a variety of reasons to study children’s experiences with faith, religion, and church. Attendance at religious services is a common experience for children and adolescents. For example, a 2012 survey found that over 40% of eighth graders reported attending religious services at least once per week; the percentage was even higher for African American youth (Child Trends, 2014). Outside of family, church is an important social and educational setting where young children are socialized in an understanding of Christianity, where their experiences help them make meaning (i.e., understand the world).

For young children of Christian parents, some of the first developmental experiences of public meaning-making (a faith experience) happen at church. Church is an important context in which faith experiences facilitate meaning-making and can inform children’s overall development. However, different individuals in a child’s life may disagree about the role of church in a child’s faith development. For example, in a study of members of Baptist

congregations, many survey respondents indicated a belief that children's faith development should be primarily the responsibility of parents, rather than a process of parents and other members of the congregation working together (Lim, 2009).

Despite the widespread nature of religious faith and attendance at religious services, religion is an understudied domain of human experience, particularly within developmental psychology (Rozin, 2006). Research on faith and religion has mostly focused on aspects of faith in adulthood, or adults using retrospective narratives to talk about their childhood faith or religious experiences.

Religion can help children cope with hardships, assist in identity development, promote character development, and foster positive relationships with peers and family members. However, children can also have detrimental or traumatic experiences within church settings; experiences of physical or sexual abuse by clergy members are one example. Finally, church educators are often volunteers and may lack formal training in education and/or child development. This study will provide an initial exploration of ways in which psychological theory and research can be used to understand education and development in a church context.

It is a difficult task because it is hard to gauge how children make meaning in the church setting. Many children spend a great deal of time in church settings and participating in church activities, but since religious education as it relates to child development is understudied, we are not always sure what experiences children are having that may shape their overall development.

This study is significant because it provided an opportunity for children who are often left out of decisions about church to have a voice in religious settings. A better understanding of faith development will assist church leaders (e.g., staff and volunteers) to teach and lead children more effectively because they have a more holistic understanding of children's faith experiences.

Overall, this study helps further explain how faith experiences in church play a role in child development.

Content and Context of Faith

Christianity is one example of religious faith. According to Fowler (1981), Christianity (or other religious traditions) is considered a content of faith. Religious faith includes the “religious centers of value” and “images of power,” such as God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, which underlie the doctrines of creation, incarnation, and redemption. The concepts comprise the *contents of faith* (tenets, principles, and doctrine).

Fowler’s theory suggests that, rather than focusing on the *what* (contents) of faith, we should instead focus on the *how* of faith, also known as the *form of faith*, which helps connect us to the development of faith in children. If faith is a way of being, then I would argue, like other scholars, that each stage is a style, rather than a fixed, hierarchical way of making meaning. Faith is best described in the form of verbs rather than nouns, so providing a window into faith through the examination of the seven aspects (form of logic, perspective-taking, moral judgment, social awareness, relation to authority, forming a world-view, and relation to symbols), helped interpret children’s faith experiences. As children develop, their way of being in faith changes and transforms.

Definitions of Main Terms

Religion. Religion is an individual or institutional adherence to a belief system and practices associated with an agreement about God or a Higher Being, believed and practiced in daily life (Hill et al., 2000).

Spirituality. Spirituality is a unique and personal focus on meaning and transcendence or the subjective way that one experiences and lives out religion or a set of values (Hill et al., 2000; Sifers, Warren, & Jackson, 2012).

Faith. Faith is an active word, which is a universal quality of human meaning-making. It is an orientation of the total person, giving purpose and goal to one's hopes and strivings, thoughts and actions (Fowler, 1981). "Faith is the most fundamental quest for and construction of meaning. One's attitude toward the ultimate environment. A way of seeing the world and making sense of our own existence" (Steele, 1990, p. 90).

Biblical Faith. Hebrews 11 (see Appendix A).

Christianity. A religion based on the person and teachings of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, and/or its beliefs and practices.

Church. A common gathering of people who believe in Jesus.

Sermon. A talk on a religious issue, specifically one given during a church service or based on a passage from the Bible.

Sunday school. Usually classes separated by age, for children (in this study) to have a developmentally (age/stage) appropriate lesson, with peers, where they learn specific Biblical teachings and practices.

Statement of the Problem and Research Goals

There are several problems with how we currently study children holistically and how we study the intersection of faith on children's development (cognitive, social, emotional and physical) particularly. Research on the study of faith has mostly focused on aspects of faith in adulthood, or people using retrospective narratives to talk about their faith experience(s) as

children. There are limited research and data supporting how children make meaning in church settings, and more specifically in a Sunday school classroom.

In this study, I observed and interviewed children in a Midwestern city church to examine how their responses and interpretation of God and a Bible lesson reflect their sense of meaning-making (e.g., faith). The descriptors used by the children were examined considering the operationalized function of Fowler's six stages of faith development, but the study focused only on the first two stages, based on the population of the participants. This study includes an exploration and explanation provided by the child, through collection of a drawing sample and explanation of the child drawing to examine a faith experience from a Bible lesson in Sunday school. I want to discover what children grasp in this area to contribute to a broader conversation about holistic child development and how the church can be a partner (e.g., the "village") that parents expect us to be.

Research Questions

- What are the salient aspects of Sunday school that have particular significance or meaning?
- How do children understand, interpret, and relate to a Sunday school Bible lesson?
- What aspects of faith (Fowler, 1981; Fowler & Dell, 2004, 2006) are present in children's interpretations of a Sunday school Bible lesson?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Faith and religion are important to study if we are going to examine children holistically. In this chapter, I discuss and define key concepts that play a role in understanding Fowler's (1981) Faith Development Theory (FDT), how the existing literature examines religious faith in children (and some adolescents) using Fowler's framework, as well as research on factors that influence children's faith development (e.g., family, church). My goal in highlighting this specific literature is to talk about how and why the literature framed and examined faith development in children. My goal is to highlight studies that have used the Faith Development Theory to determine faith stage and those that have gone a step further to use the theory to examine targeted populations such as children facing various terminal illnesses. This literature review also covers arts-based research in the interest of supporting the use of drawing as a means of data collection and gathering information that children may inadvertently omit.

Defining Key Concepts

Faith occurs as people place their trust in the center of something. For many people the center of their trust is religion. There are many different religions, each housing their own sets of rules, values, and beliefs. This study focuses on the Christian religion. The Christian religion, or Christianity, is based on the person and teachings of Jesus. This context was chosen because much of the scholarly literature on FDT has been examined and criticized from the Christian perspective, so much of the evidence concerning children's development of faith is also found in the Christian context. Additionally, I am a representative of and a practitioner in this context in my role as a Children's Ministry Director. This is the context in which my participants and data collection setting are situated. Beliefs and practices of Christianity are operationalized through denominational affiliation. For this study, the denominational affiliation is Southern Baptist (see

Appendix B). For this study, I specifically focus on Biblical faith and use the context and content of Fowler's universal definition, which should apply to a Biblical definition of faith, to examine how faith is operationalized through a Sunday school experience for children. Since Christianity is also a religious practice, I briefly discuss some literature on children and religion.

Religion

Boyatzis and colleagues (2006) stated that children may or may not be acculturated that channels intuitive spirituality into expressions (e.g., rituals) that have been passed through the faith tradition. This idea highlights development of more traditional behaviors and characteristics attributed to religious values in the context of family, community, and other faith-based environments (Boyatzis, Dollahite, & Marks, 2006). Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of microsystems (e.g., family, school, and faith-based environments) and macrosystems (e.g., cultural landscape and ideology), Boyatzis and colleagues suggested that children's relationship with the divine emerges prior to being socialized into a religious group or denomination and is subsequently shaped by the way in which the relationship to the divine is cultivated in their environments (Boyatzis et al., 2006). Through this framework, children are very much capable of understanding the relation between themselves and a divine entity from an early age, contrary to what some scholars assume is available only to older children more capable of abstract thinking.

Religious practices have been researched in adults, but religion has been less frequently pursued in children. Children's understanding of religion is more complex than attending and participating in religious rituals, rites, and practices (i.e., attending church or attending a church school). Religion can be an integral part of the study of humanity and resilience. Religion can add value and meaning to a person's life.

Religion can be beneficial to the study of humanity and resilience by providing meaning in a person's life, which could possibly lead to a sense of comfort, hope, and value when faced with challenges and obstacles (Slee, 1990). Research indicates that religion may be an important coping mechanism, even acting as a protective factor against negative psychological outcomes. Religious practices have been researched in adults, but research on religion and religious practices is sparse in children. Research on religion has traditionally focused on attending and participating in religious activities (i.e., attending church or religious instruction such as Sunday school or Hebrew School). Through instruction and relationships, the settings often provide opportunities to learn moral values, interact with multiple generations, learn how to speak in public, understand more abstract concepts and theology through religious stories, learn what it means to have faith, and understand what happens when people die (Carson, 2015; Fowler & Dell, 2004). Traditional ways of measuring religion have not encompassed all or most of these elements or processes, thereby limiting our knowledge of religion (and experiences in a religious setting) as understood from a child's perspective, including the long-term effects of such practices and experiences.

Church as Educator

Among the roles that it plays, the church and the people in it teach things both explicitly and implicitly. The church explicitly and implicitly instructs children and their families through schools, church attendance, and other educational materials. A church school typically includes Bible lessons as part of their general curriculum and instruction. There is a set of belief statements to which the leaders (e.g., staff and volunteers) must adhere. Church schools are considered both communities and institutions. They are communities because many attendees believe the same thing, but they are institutions since they are part of a school system. Kay and

Nye (1996) highlighted three ways that church schools should promote children's spirituality. The church school should be conducted with care and enthusiasm, the church school should make points of simple moral teaching based on scripture, and the church school should be reinforced by religious teaching conveyed through lessons, which include planning for implementation of values. Implementation of values is often explored using Biblical parables and metaphors (Berryman, 1979; Carson, 2015). Therefore, the church educates through church schools.

A similar concept of church schools is the Sunday school classroom. It mirrors the church school in that it provides experiences that help shape meaning for the child. Education of children typically happens in age-specific ways, such as a Sunday school classroom. These classrooms are modeled after the traditional school classroom, and the curriculum is usually developmentally appropriate and nested within a year-long study of a book of the Bible or topic-specific. However, when children are in church on a Sunday, they are learning more than just Bible lessons. They are learning lessons that should be developmentally appropriate to what they may learn in any school setting with peers.

Children and Sermons

The sermon takes place in the context of a worship service at a Christian church. A sermon is a religious discourse delivered in public, usually by a member of the clergy as part of the worship service. A sermon can be delivered in front of a mixed crowd of adults and children (30–90 minutes), in front of the church and the children but explicitly meant to be understood by children (<30 minutes), or can be intended just for children and delivered in a child-centered area (15–30 minutes). The sermon typically includes examples intended to increase understanding of Biblical scriptures, but depending on the skills and expertise of the pastor or teacher relating to

child development, children may not understand, and/or the examples may be too graphic/explicit.

Adults are not always trained in developmentally appropriate practices for teaching the Bible to children. Dunbar found that ministers' awareness of the developing child can strengthen their approach and possibly increase effectiveness of the children's sermon. Effectiveness implies that the sermon was delivered and readily understood by children, which Dunbar described as an act of worship (Dunbar, 1982). Similarly, Carr (1983) described the children's sermon as an act of worship for the community of faith. Carr stated that the child can experience religious emotions before they can entertain religious thoughts, so participation in the church service becomes important as it allows children to perform religious rituals, take part in religious holidays, and be treated with respect while involved in church service activities (Carr, 1983). If adult church leaders have knowledge of how children learn and grow, they can preach sermons that children can understand and include them in the main service.

The church communities' trust in and commitment to God are foundational to enabling *faithing*, activities that are ethical and relational norms that shape the life of the community together. Community pastors and congregants who have an awareness of child development may see the long-term importance of delivering the sermons in child-friendly ways, which can still be understood by adults, and could also include some adult special needs populations. Child-centered sermons are one way that children can be integrated into the life of the church and begin to observe and hopefully aspire to church leadership. In a survey amongst Malaysian Baptist churches, results indicated that although children are given some attention in congregations, they are often not integrated into the mainstream of congregational life. The importance of children's ministry in the local congregations is often not prioritized, since congregations desire various

programs, services, and workshops, but prefer that children not be in the worship service, as they are too disruptive. Scholars concluded that children are generally passive participants in their faith development, unable to contribute in significant ways to congregational life (Lim, 2009; Williams, 2006).

As sermons are preached, messages are sent to the congregation. One of the key Biblical commands is to “train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6). This means that if you teach your children, and children in your sphere of influence, what to believe and how to believe it, they will grow up and follow the teachings of the Bible. In order to follow this tradition, based on Baptist views, a person would need to follow a set of steps to indicate their full support of the Biblical teachings. These steps include, but are not limited to, believing in Jesus’ birth from a virgin, death, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, and then deciding to follow those beliefs (e.g., decision for salvation or assurance of salvation). Studying these concepts collectively helps explain the “how to” of training up a child in the way that they should go. We need to know what that quality training entails so we must examine the practices and ask the children about the knowledge and experiences taking place at church and in classes.

Implications for Salvation Decisions

One area of research on religious development with youth focuses on salvation decisions. Salvation decisions refer to a person deciding that they want to dedicate (e.g., place complete trust or faith) their life to the teachings of Jesus. In a study of 120 six- to 17-year-old Argentinean and Paraguayan children and adolescents, Korniejczuk (1994) explored how the concept of assurance of salvation in Christian religious populations develops. Assurance of salvation is the belief that Jesus Christ is the son of God and died to save people from eternal

damnation in hell, since there is the belief that all people were born as sinners. The cross-sectional design study included semi-clinical interviews and semantic differential scale (measuring attitudes toward salvation, demographic, and religious practices information), survey, and drawings. This study found that there were significant differences in concepts of salvation and assurance of salvation among the separate developmental age groups; 6 and 7, 8–12, and 13–17.

Assurance of salvation was inversely related to age, but there was a shift at about age 10. Frequency of Bible study and other devotional reading was related to the concept of salvation levels. Korniejczuk (1994) found no relationship between family and individual religious practices and assurance of salvation levels but did find significant relationships among many of the religious practices and attitudes towards salvation. Some aspects of the concept of salvation did not appear age-related, but instead were related to environment or instruction. Korniejczuk concluded that cognitive understanding of salvation and affective attitudes toward salvation may not follow the same developmental direction through ages and stages. This is an important finding because we are taught to adhere to the hierarchical nature of the stages for most theories of human development, which is discussed in the following section.

I have discussed children's development of faith, which is informed by an understanding of child development theories (cognitive, psychosocial, and moral). In some churches, people use their experience to support children's education in the church, and in other churches, people are educationally and or professionally trained. Education and training usually include a basic knowledge of how children develop and mature.

Child Development Theories

Child development theories provide an explanation for how children change and grow throughout childhood. For example, these theories cover different aspects of development, such as cognitive, emotional, and social growth. However, the major developmental theories did not include “spiritual and religious” development, so James Fowler sought to explain “human faith” across the lifespan using a stage theory, similar to other stage models of development. While developmentalists, such as Erikson, believed that religion was one of the primary ways that cultures promote virtues associated with each stage of life, he was not explicit in his explanation of how. Alone, child development theories did not explain how children made sense of interactions and experiences at different ages; we just understood that those experiences shaped children and that they were able to understand various aspects of development based on their age and stage. Similarly, child development theories inform our understanding of children and helped lay a foundation for understanding Fowler’s Faith Development Theory.

Faith Development Theory can be enhanced by an understanding of children’s specific experiences related to overall development, so gaining greater insight into the child development theories (e.g., cognitive, psychosocial, and moral development) and how they shape the origins of Fowler’s Faith Development Theory is important. I first provide brief descriptions of foundational theories, such as Jean Piaget’s theory of cognitive development, Erik Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development, and Lawrence Kohlberg’s theory of moral development. Fowler drew inspiration, understanding, and critique from foundational theories before him and developed the initial faith theory, but he did little further empirical testing thereafter.

Erik Erikson and Stages of Psychosocial Development

Erik Erikson (1968) developed the stages of psychosocial development theory based on the idea that personality develops in a predetermined order. Erikson's eight stages of development originally attempted to help explain the development of personality in humans, which he argued develops in a predetermined order. This model still serves as a major framework for understanding human development.

When referring to a psychosocial stage, Erikson is referring to the phase of development, which is marked by significant bodily changes, emotional and cognitive growth, and new relational modes and roles in the context of institutional arrangement, which possibly lead to a new and greater sense of self. One of the key attributes of Erikson's stage theory is that each new stage is initiated by a crisis; a struggle between the optimal possibilities presented and one's emerging new capacities, and a failure to integrate them into one's being (including well-being). The stages are also cumulative, as characteristics from the previous stage require a reworking of both the past solutions and expectation of the issues that the future holds.

Jean Piaget and the Theory of Cognitive Development

For Piaget, cognitive development was a progressive reorganization of mental processes resulting from biological maturation and environmental experiences. He thought that children adjusted their ideas to construct an understanding of the world around them. Piaget also claimed that cognitive development is at the center of the humanity and language is dependent on knowledge, understanding, and awareness acquired through cognitive development. While much of what he said was accepted, Piaget's theory was limited in that it described sharp stages rather than continuous development (Piaget, 1964).

Lawrence Kohlberg and Theory of Moral Development

The theory of moral development is more closely linked to Erikson than to Piaget, because it requires an increased focus on the whole person and what goes into their decision making. Moral development is primarily concerned with justice. Justice is fairness, equity, and impartiality. Many may think of actions as only legally wrong, but a wrong action can also be morally wrong. There appears to be a relationship between moral thought and moral action, but there must be more variables developed to test and clarify that a relationship does exist (Kohlberg & Hersch, 1977).

Kohlberg's theory of moral development occurs in six successive stages: punishment-obedience, instrumental-relativist, interpersonal concordance, law and order orientation, social-contract orientation, and the universal-ethical principle orientations (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). According to Kohlberg, children move through stages by encountering views that vary from their own, which stimulates more exploration and reflection, thereby helping them to formulate better arguments. In this way, moral development is a product of the child's own thinking, while still nested within a system (e.g., school, church, sports) (Kohlberg, 1971).

Fowler utilized various theories (Piaget, Erikson, and Kohlberg) to develop the stages of his Faith Development Theory. Thus, his theory involves consideration of children's cognition, identity, and moral reasoning as aspects of development that may influence or be influenced by faith.

James Fowler and Faith Development Theory (FDT)

James Fowler (1940–2015) was a lifelong member and ordained minister of the United Methodist Church. As an undergraduate, he attended Duke University, where he was challenged to take movements such as the Civil Rights and Anti-Vietnam War seriously and engaged in political activism through student government and NAACP. He then attended Drew Divinity

School, where he participated in the historic March on Washington and heard the “I Have a Dream” speech. He received a Ph.D. from Harvard School of Divinity (Osmer, 1990). Fowler’s dissertation focused on H. Richard Niebuhr. From Niebuhr, Fowler learned to distinguish faith as a human universal from a Christian faith, which includes a relationship of trust in the God revealed in Jesus Christ and mediated by the Christian community (Fowler, 1981). This study of Niebuhr’s work, combined with Fowler’s personal endeavors for social justice, paved the way for the rigorous study of faith development.

While Fowler was working on his dissertation, he was asked to join the staff of Interpreter’s House. Fowler spent a great deal of time teaching, interviewing, and counseling hundreds of people from various walks of life with the goal of achieving healing at Interpreter’s House. Fowler began to see patterns emerge from their stories and believed there were common threads within them, and this served as the beginning of his hypothesis for the stages of faith development. Fowler defined faith as “the universal quality of human meaning-making,” which means it could describe meaning making processes that are derived from any belief system. For Fowler (1981), faith was a “generic, a universal feature of human living recognizably similar everywhere despite the variety of forms and contents of religious practice or belief” (p. 4).

As seen in Myers (2000),

Fowler’s definition of faith is connected to a person’s ultimate concern, is not necessarily theocentric, and is often unrelated to formal creeds and dogma. For example, Fowler can easily accept that an ultimate concern could be a person’s career, and that such a faith position could result in a life that was ordered and sustained (given meaning) through the practices and values of a specific occupation. Faith, therefore, is not necessarily connected with church, temple, or mosque. Faith, therefore, is another shared construct, built, according to Fowler, in an interactive, triadic way: (1) self-interacts with (2) others and the (3) shared centers of value-add power, in a dynamic, relational fashion. (Myers, 2000, p. 104)

This universal faith of self is first experienced at birth, in the context of family. Parents consistently providing for the needs of a baby are teaching the baby about attachment and belonging, so mutual trust and loyalty can develop. At the bottom of the triad, there is a two-way flow between self and others. This flow probably encompasses love, mutual trust, and loyalty that make it possible to have selfhood. The center of value and power (for family in particular) bonds people together through shared identity, shared loyalty, and shared stories. Fowler (1981) suggested that people do not commit to multiple centers of value haphazardly, but instead are committed because of an “intrinsic excellence or worth and because it promises to confer value on us” (p. 18). As people change, their corporate center(s) of value and power will also evolve and be renewed.

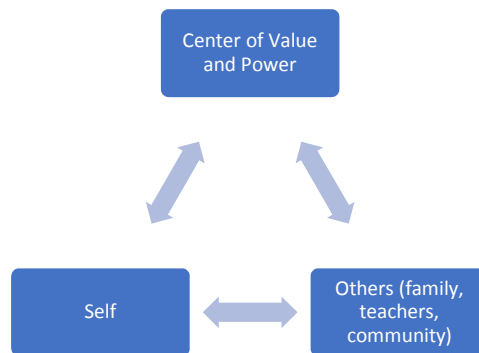


Figure 1. Love, attachment, and dependence displayed through a covenantal pattern in the family, later to be extended in other faith-relational triads.

Faith, then, is a relational dynamic in which a person may claim many (or one) center(s) of value and power in their lives. However, “for the Christian a shared center of value and power is God” (Myers, 2000, p. 105). Many scholars claim that Fowler’s stages are sequential, invariant, and hierarchical. Fowler, however, speaks about stages in more of a spiral. The spiral nature of Faith Development Theory alludes to the idea that it can also be religious. Fowler himself was a minister of the United Methodist Church and admitted that that was the primary

lens through which he conceptualized his personal faith. Within these stages, there is an understanding that religion may be an important coping mechanism, even acting as protective factors against negative psychological outcomes.

Fowler believed that spirituality is a natural part of human existence and develops in predictable ways, or stages. His theory of faith development contains six stages: undifferentiated faith (birth to 2) is deemed a “pre-stage”; intuitive projective (3–7); mythic-literal (mostly school children); synthetic-conventional (preadolescent and up, some stay here forever); individual reflective (usually mid-20s to mid-30s); conjunctive (35+ or midlife crisis); and universalizing (45+) (Fowler, 1981). A person is placed in a stage based on responses to aspects of faith development, which are form of logic, social perspective taking, form of moral judgment, social awareness, locus of authority, form of world coherence, and symbolic function. The following is a brief example of what each aspect is and how it is operationalized in the early stages of FDT, since those are most relevant to the current project.

Aspect A: Form of logic. This aspect describes the characteristic patterns of mental operations the person employs in thinking about the object world. A person exhibiting stage one of this aspect means that a person is not able to “operate” on their environment in a logical manner and trust their own perceptions without question. In stage two, a person is characterized by the emergence of concrete operations, especially since they can construct categories of space and time. Evidence for this stage includes being able to comprehend reversibility and conservation, understanding that things can change or appear differently at times.

Aspect B: Social perspective taking. This aspect describes the way in which the person constructs the self, the other, and the relationship between them. It looks at how the person is constructing the interiority of another person. It also looks at how the individual is thinking and

feeling, and how this relates to the person's knowledge of his or her own internal states. For example, examining a person on social perspective taking in stage one usually means that empathy is not present, and conversations are parallel, so it is hard to reveal this in an interview. Being lost or alone are significant anxieties at this stage, which is related to perspective taking and the failure to distinguish one from the other. In stage two, perspective taking is exhibited by concrete imagery. Letter writing is an example of perspective taking, as it requires a person to imagine the thoughts of the person they are writing to. In stage two, they are also likely to be more judgmental in their characterization of someone different from themselves.

Aspect C: Form of moral judgment. In assessing the form of moral judgment, we are looking at the patterns of a person's thinking about issues of moral significance, including how the person defines what is to be taken as a moral issue and how the person answers the question of why be moral. For stage one, moral judgment is only consequential and focused on physical consequences, such as deprivation. These physical consequences are most important for determining what is right in stage one. For stage two, the moral judgments hinge on instrumental reciprocity. There is usually concrete exchange for one's own needs and interests (reciprocity).

Aspect D: Bounds of social awareness. This aspect has several dimensions. The mode of a person's group identification is a central one. It answers the question of how the person is viewing or constructing the group of which he or she is a member. It also includes how the person relates to the group to which he or she belongs. In addition, this aspect answers the question of how wide or inclusive the social world is to which a person will respond. For a person in stage one, this means that there is little awareness of relationships outside of the family. They may recognize and name people outside of the family but do not place them in proper categories. In stage two, the family is still the primary group, but they can now recognize

others outside of set relationships. They typically accept others according to those who look like them and those who do not.

Aspect E: Locus of authority. The locus of authority aspect comprises three factors: how authorities are selected, how authorities are held in relation to the individual, and whether the person responds primarily to internal or external authority. In stage one, people will often test authority in concrete ways and view authority as external. They tend to focus on size and power as concrete symbols of authority. Since their relationship to authority is based on dependency, they will do their best to avoid punishment. In stage two, people go beyond the dependency-obedience relationship in stage one. They begin to question authority, because they understand the appearance and orthodoxy for assessing claims of authority and ask the reason why they are not allowed to do something.

Aspect F: Form of world coherence. This aspect describes how a person constructs the object world, including the sense of the ultimate environment. It answers the questions, “How do things make sense?” or “How do the various elements of my experience fit together?” The form of world coherence is a type of cosmology, whether explicit or tacit. It includes the person’s worldview but is not limited to that. It also includes the principles by which this worldview is constructed, the logical relations by which elements of the world are held together. In stage one, the episodes of life blend fantasy and reality, while remaining isolated events, not directly tied to anything, which means that there is not a concept of space, time, and order of events. Storytelling is usually imaginative, but episodic, so if they begin to tie events together, then they may be moving towards or be in stage two. For stage two, stories are concrete and are taken literally. Anthropomorphic imagery is more coherent, detailed, and differentiated. Persons in stage two

will see physical events in terms of causality and have interest in objects and events for how they can be predicted and controlled.

Aspect G: Symbolic function. This aspect of faith is concerned with how the person understands, appropriates, and utilizes symbols and other aspects of language in the process of meaning-making and locating his or her centers of value and images of “power.” In stage one, a person does not really make a distinction between a symbol and what it represents, meaning that most things are fluid and lack boundaries. Fairy tales and myths are reality for a person at this stage. In stage two, a person makes a clear distinction between fantasy and reality. A person at this stage also takes stories very literally, and symbols of deity are still anthropomorphic, but they have intention and may be related or similar to the actions of humans. If the symbols do happen to represent an idea, then they must be well defined.

Stages of FDT: Stages Concerning Infants/Toddlers

Stage 0 (pre-stage): Undifferentiated Faith

This stage is primarily concerned with infants and toddlers (birth–age 2). While this stage is important, it is only considered a “pre-stage,” especially as it is mostly inaccessible to empirically test.

The seeds of trust, courage, hope and love are fused in an undifferentiated way and contend with sensed threats of abandonment, inconsistencies and deprivations based on an infant’s environment. The quality of mutuality and the strength of trust, autonomy, hope and courage (or their opposites) developed in this phase underlie (or threaten or undermine) all that comes later in faith development. The emergent strength of faith in this stage is the fund of basic trust and the relational experience of mutuality with the one(s) providing primary love and care (similar to the trust vs. mistrust stage that Erikson describes as occurring at this age range). The danger of deficiency in this stage is a failure of mutuality in either of two directions. Either there may emerge an excessive narcissism in which the experience of being “central” continues to dominate and distort mutuality, or experiences of neglect or inconsistencies may lock the infant in patterns of isolation and failed mutuality. Transition to stage 1 begins with the convergence of thought and language, opening up the use of symbols in speech and ritual play. (Fowler, 1981, p. 121)

Stages of FDT: Stages Concerning Children

Stage 1: Intuitive-projective

This stage is primarily concerned with children ages three to seven years old. During this stage their lives are consumed with fantasies, which, due to fluidity of thought patterns, can be strongly influenced (both negatively and positively) by examples, moods, actions, and stories of the visible faith, which they primarily receive from adults. Like Erikson described, the “self-aware” child is egocentric regarding taking the perspective of others. One of the positive attributes of this stage is the birth of imagination, the ability to unify and grasp more experiences in the world through powerful images, mostly presented as stories that register with what the child’s intuitive mind understands towards which they can then have feelings. This is consistent with the emphasis on pretend play and animism in Piaget’s theory of cognitive development. There are potential dangers of this stage: “possession” of the child’s imagination by terror, and anything destructive to an impressionable mind.

A child transitions to the next stage with the emergence of concrete operational thinking (Fowler, Streib & Keller, 2004). For religious thinking at this stage, for example, children might describe that God had wrapped them up in clothes, God sent them food, or God watched over them in their hearts. They could also “know” that God is up there and can see them (Tan, 1992).

Stage 2: Mythic-literal

This stage is primarily concerned with children ages 6 to 12, who are mostly school-aged children. In this stage, people, usually children, adopt the stories, beliefs and practices that reflect, and may symbolize belonging to a community (Fowler, 1981). Their beliefs, moral rules and attitudes are interpreted as literal. Since the children can now think in concrete operations,

they can use the previous stages' knowledge to make sense of the world. Narrative become a major way to provide unity and value to previous and current experiences.

The goal in this stage is perspective-taking. Perspective-taking allows those in stage two to compose a world where fairness and justice are reciprocated. The participants in their various stories are anthropomorphic. They may be able to describe the narrative in detail, but usually have a hard time finding and giving meaning to experiences. Beliefs are appropriated with literal interpretations, as are moral rules and attitudes. Symbols are taken as one-dimensional and literal in meaning, which conflicts between authoritative stories. For example, Genesis on creation versus evolutionary theory must be faced (Fowler, 1981). For religious thinking at this stage, children assume that God cannot be seen, that He is in heaven, that He hears when they talk to people, that God controls everything in the world and can see all things and has magic (Tan, 1992).

Stages of FDT: Stages Concerning Adolescence

Stage 3: Synthetic-conventional

This stage is primarily concerned with preadolescent and up, but people some stay here forever. In the synthetic-conventional faith, a person's experience of the world now extends beyond the family. Many spheres demand attention: family, school or work, peers, street society and media, and perhaps religion. Faith should synthesize values and information, by providing a basis for identity and perspective. The possibilities of this stage is the forming of a personal myth—the myth of one's own becoming in identity and faith.

Factors contributing to the breakdown of stage three and to readiness to transition typically include: serious clashes or contradictions between valued authority sources; marked changes by leaders or to policies or practices previously deemed sacred and unreachable (for

example, a denomination deciding to change their church belief statement to allow women to preach); the encounter with experiences or perspectives that lead to critical reflection on how one's beliefs and values have formed and changed, which also place emphasis on a person's way of life.

Frequently the experiences or perspectives lead to critical reflection on how one's beliefs and values have formed and changed, and on how "relative" they are to one's group or background. Frequently the experience of "leaving home" emotionally or physically, or both, precipitates the kind of examination of self, background, and life-guiding values that gives rise to stage transition at this point (Fowler, 1981).

Stages of FDT: Stages Concerning Adulthood

The adult-centered stages are not essential to understanding faith development in children, but I have included brief descriptions for the reader.

Stage 4: Individual Reflective

This stage is primarily concerned with adults, usually mid-20s to mid-30s. The movement from stage three to stage four, individual reflective, is particularly critical, for it is in this transition that the late adolescent or adult begins to take seriously the burden of responsibility for his or her own commitments, lifestyle, beliefs, and attitudes. Where genuine movement toward stage 4 is underway, the person must face certain unavoidable tensions: individuality versus being defined by a group or group membership (which is not a bad thing, depending on your community of origin); subjectivity and the power of one's strongly felt but unexamined feelings versus neutrality and the requirement of critical reflection. For this stage, self-fulfillment or self-actualization as a primary concern versus service to and being for others; the question of being committed to the relative versus struggle with the possibility of an absolute. This means that

people in this stage would rather live in ambivalence than verify that there is a concrete, and possibly better way to do something (Fowler, 1981).

Stage 5: Conjunctive

This stage is primarily concerned with adults age 35+ or midlife crisis. The conjunctive faith involves the integration into self and outlook of what was suppressed or unrecognized in the interest of stage 4's self-certainty and conscious thinking and affective adaptation to their world.. This stage develops a "second naiveté" (Streib, 1998) in which symbolic power is reunited with conceptual meanings. In this stage, one must explore a new way of thinking about their past and events and experiences that took place, which sometimes challenges the fixed notions and interpretation of events. This stage requires ongoing depth of reflection (or getting to the roots). The social unconscious (e.g., myths, ideal images, and prejudices) is built deeply into the self-system by one's nurture within a particular social class, religious tradition, ethnic group or the like. The milestone of this stage is being able to recognize your own group's most powerful meanings, while simultaneously recognizing that they are not the totality of what is and can be believed by others. If there is apprehension in accepting this, the danger lies in becoming complacent or cynical, and incapable of moving to Stage 5 (Fowler, 1981).

Stage 6: Universalizing

This stage is primarily exhibited in adults, ages 45 and above, and is exceedingly rare. The people typically classified into this category have generated faith structures in which their felt sense of an ultimate environment includes all people. They have become incarnates and actualizers of the spirit of an inclusive and fulfilled human community. Their commitment to the human community usually accompanies a commitment to sacrifice their own life, and often they have died at the hand of those they intended to save because of their faith. Examples of

Universalizers are Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mother Theresa. Fowler referred to members in Stage six as creating “zones of liberation” from the “social, political, economic, and ideological” shackles we place and endure on human futurity, what people can become. People classified as Universalizers are ready for communication with persons at any stage and of other faith traditions (Fowler, 1981).

Studies Concerning Children’s Faith

This section reviews literature specifically concerning Fowler’s developmental theory of faith and why faith is important to children’s development. I discuss how art, familial relationships, trauma (including war, critical illness, abortion, and death) affect children’s development of faith. While the literature presents these ideas as separate due to the nature of empirical research, I want to note that many of these ideas and findings overlap and intersect, adding additional nuance to the study of faith development in children.

Teaching Faith

In church, Christian children explicitly learn about faith through sermons (understanding of parables and metaphors), specific children’s curriculum, Bible study, and scripture memorization, to name a few. The children are expected to learn concepts related to practices (or spiritual disciplines) within the faith, but often there is disagreement about how to effectively communicate with children and how to ensure that they have understood what is explicitly taught. The purpose of this section is to describe the methods that are utilized to teach children faith, through the children’s sermon, understanding and interpreting Biblical metaphors, parables, and other content. This section also covers the various contexts where the teaching happens, including family, church, and Sunday school.

Church as Partner

Lim (2009) argued that historically the goal of childhood faith formation in the early Baptist congregations was to nurture children to become regenerate believers, persons in community, and persons in ministry and witness. It is presumed that the goal of developing children's faith is also true of the MBE congregations. However, upon the researchers' empirical observation and field survey, congregants were not aware that faith formation should be a goal for children. More importantly children's faith formation should be actualized by support and partnerships between families and congregations (Lim, 2009).

A survey to collect quantitative and qualitative data among 40 MBE congregations was conducted in 2006, with a focus on children ages 7–12. Analysis of the data identified childhood faith formation practices and related beliefs in MBE congregations. Lim proposed that the Vygotsky sociocultural approach could be used as a heuristic device for MBE congregations to recover the original goal of faith formation in children, of which they state that many congregations were unaware. The goal of the Vygotskian approach is to assist in three goals (1) helping children become regenerate believers, (2) helping children contribute to their faith community and persons in ministry, and (3) for children to become persons in ministry and witness because formation of attitudes, beliefs, and personalities are influenced by knowledge, sociocultural values, and personal meaning making (Lim, 2009). These findings are significant because it introduces the idea that MBE congregations use Vygotsky's teaching on the sociocultural context as the "locus for mediation and the instructional settings that promote cognitive developing and facilitate effecting child functioning in community life" (p. 2016). My study examines how children are making meaning in community (e.g., church).

Family and Faith

Family is a cornerstone of development for children and often forms the basis for how they understand how they should operate through their religious context within and beyond the household. In a study of forty 13- to 15-year-old adolescents, mostly Christians and Muslims, Lees and Horwarth (2009) found three themes—meaning of religion, religious parenting, and life in a religious family—that provide positive influences on family life and parenting from the adolescent perspective. The responses concerning “meaning of religion” are the most relevant for this study. The students highlighted religious activities and functions, such as prayer, religious readings, giving to charity, attending worship, and religious pilgrimages or festivals. These adolescents’ responses highlighted the importance of religion maintaining the complex and multi-dimensional definitions, which included seeing religion in family life as a contributor of moral and ethical decision-making and identity development. These findings indicate the importance and complexity of religion as a way for children to make meaning, and professionals should recognize and respect religion, religious beliefs, and religious identity and traditions of students. This meaning making that happens within the family affects their functioning in other settings as well.

Redding (2005) wanted to determine the relationship between a child’s intrinsic orientation of faith and the faith nurturing activities of their mother and father. Intrinsic religious (faith) orientation is the “motivation for experiencing and living one’s religious faith for the sake of faith itself. The person’s religion is an end unto itself, a goal pursued in the absence of external reinforcement” (Redding, 2005, p. 36). Intrinsic orientation (spiritual maturity) was used as a criterion variable. The specific predictor variables of mother’s and father’s faith nurturing activities were parental maturity, parental intentionality, and parental approachability, as part of a theological foundation. Parental maturity is genuine and consistent spiritual role modeling, and

parental intentionality is about how the parent talks about their beliefs, and how interested the parent is in the spiritual growth and development of the child, which is reflected in the parent's clarity in their delivery of the message. Lastly, parental approachability is how a parent respects, responds, and values their child's perspective and the ongoing dialogue that follows. Each of these constructs were split into two predictor variables to gather data for mother and father. Faith maturity was used as a criterion variable. For this study, fifth and sixth-grade children were randomly selected from churches in the state of Florida who had a children's minister on staff.

The study (Redding, 2005) found that maturity of the father was found to be a significant predictor of intrinsic orientation of the child. There were questions as to the suitability of the Children's Religious scale, so much of the data was not used. However, the researchers did find that fifth and sixth-grade children had matured mentally, emotionally, and socially to have developed an intrinsic orientation. Redding also discovered that churches that have a full-time minister on staff are more likely to provide access to parenting education regarding children's faith development (Redding, 2005). The goal of this study was to help parents meet and respond to the needs of their children. Parents can learn these skills through the church, but the church must understand what the needs are. Redding suggested that seminary students should be equipped to help the parents understand how to better communicate with their children, that parents should be able to take training classes through the church, while parents are also nurtured to spiritual maturity while attending church. Through these means, families should also develop more intentionality with their children by being committed to passing along their faith.

Another study including semi-structured interviews with drawings by 12 children from the Wheaton Chinese Alliance Church (Tan, 1992). The interviews were with six 5-year-olds and six 6-year-olds from both Christian and non-Christian homes. The goal of this study was to

explore faith development in children exposed to religious activity in the home. Tan argued that there would be no difference between children in Christian and non-Christian homes and hoped findings would motivate educators and parents to re-evaluate their roles in helping children in the development of their faith. For this study, religious activities referred to teachings and rituals, such as going to church, bedtime prayers, and saying grace (i.e., blessing food before eating).

This study found that Chinese children ages 5 and 6 who had the influence of religious activities in their homes tend to be more mature in their level of faith development. Tan (1992) found no significant differences in the level of faith development between children of Christian and non-Christian homes who were exposed to some form of religious activities. The results provide increased evidence for the significance of the influence of the family life and religious activities on children. The study also concluded that if there were older siblings in the house, the level of cognitive development might be raised a stage higher, and rank in the family could also promote or hinder development. Dual language homes may also lead towards higher faith development level than mono-linguistic homes. One year of age difference between preschoolers may also influence faith stage.

When it comes to faith, people often say it is caught rather than taught, meaning that children remember what is modeled for them, even when it is not explicitly taught. One of the major issues we face today is believing that we must wait for children to become adolescents before they can understand and comprehend Christian faith (Krych, 1987). However, families may promote faith development in their children because they are learning about God through context and experiences, whether parents are raising them in a “Christian home” or not.

Trauma and Faith

There are special circumstances that we refer to as “trauma.” Trauma is a deeply disturbing or distressing event or experience. Some forms of trauma that concern children are critical illness, death, adoption, poverty, absent parents, war, involvement in cults, and abuse (emotional, physical, and sexual). This section briefly covers several of these that have been empirically explored in the context of religious faith and makes mention of others.

Illness, Abuse, Death, and Bereavement

Children and sickness. Many children experience sickness and other forms of critical illness, or death of a parent or other loved one. In a study examining the impact of experiencing critical illness on faith, Underweiser (2004) examined ten school-aged-children (ages 11 or 12) with HIV to better understand how they found meaning in the crisis of their condition, which could eventually lead to an earlier than adulthood death. Each child participated in an open-ended, semi-structured interview informed by Fowler’s (1981) theory of faith development, and included the Heinz Dilemma, which assesses moral development. The qualitative results revealed five themes related to the transformative nature of the critically ill child and their faith journey. The findings included the following themes: loneliness, God as parent, God’s power/limits on God’s power, general worries/fears of death and beliefs about heaven. Through these findings, the researcher developed a term called “pilgrimming,” which is similar to Fowler’s term “faithing.” Pilgrimming refers to the observed undercurrent of the critically ill child’s experience that explains and connects the spaces between the stages, instead of just declaring it a pre-stage, thereby making it a type of “pilgrimage.” By following the idea of pilgrimming, the children are in transformation rather than transition, which is the critically ill child’s way of incorporating faith into their daily experiences (Underweiser, 2004, p. 215).

Much of the literature on the loss of a parent in childhood centers on the discussion regarding the child's ability to mourn the loss of a loved one, and some often include the child as the research participant and their views of death. Similarly, children need opportunities to express feelings following bereavement by suicide. The desperation of children who are contemplating suicide may not always be recognized, and practitioners need constantly to be alert to signs of deep sadness, withdrawal, and difficulty communicating (Crompton, 2001). Practitioners need information about and understanding of beliefs regarding both suicide and termination, including sinfulness and punishment.

Abuse, neglect, and distress. Another area that needs attention is that of spiritual abuse, neglect, and distress. Abuse of any form detracts from spiritual well-being, and is thus abuse of the spirit (Crompton, 2001). Some abuse may be associated with religious teachings which, however intended, can cause confusion and distress, including anger towards a deity. Spiritual strength can also result from abuse, as when children receive acceptance and love from religious groups which help them to grow away from the sense of guilt, shame, and unworthiness. It may be helpful to devise some form of ceremony or rite of passage during which the child can express emotions and through which movement to a new phase of being can be achieved and marked. This could also be coping mechanism.

There are limited longitudinal research studies to understand the strengths and weaknesses of religion and spirituality measures (i.e., concepts specific to a religious group versus broad concepts that transcend religious groups) in children. The frequency and importance of church attendance on child behavior and learning has been scarcely cited in the research but has been shown to act as a protective factor for at-risk children. However, the standard measure for assessing religiosity and spirituality has primarily been quantitative or

questionnaire based. This is problematic because it does not provide evidence of what and how children are learning and how they are processing or internalizing that information in the context of family or other relevant settings.

Children and War

Another form of trauma is children in past or current war-torn areas. Fernando (2007) examined the processes that promote adaptive and maladaptive courses of development in children of war in Sri Lanka. The study included 77 participants (62 children and 15 caregivers). The children ranged between 5 to 18 years of age, and the caregivers were between 25 and 80 years of age. The participants included war orphans, non-war orphans, and a comparison group of children from intact families. The children's measure included: Goodenough Harris Drawings (man and woman), Risk and Resilience Indices, Sand Tray Analysis (Construction and Narrative), Stages of Faith interview (Adaptation of Fowler's) and a Sentence Completion task.

Despite exposure to various levels and types of risk, all children, except for two, seemed to be doing well in academic motivation, peer relationships, and conduct. Contrary to past research, most of these children demonstrated resilience in the face of adversity. Patterns suggested that, although most children can talk about faith at a level commensurate with their cognitive development, orphan children may place more value on having basic needs met and engaging in faith rituals due to their histories of adversity (Fernando, 2007), which leans more heavily on social and emotional well-being.

Findings found similar indicators of general risk and resilience as in previous research, as well as idioms of risk and resilience that were context specific. Idioms of resilience included planned competence, provision of educational and social opportunities within orphanages, tailored caregiving, flexible support systems for parents in transition from trauma, and use of religious traditions for health promotion. (Fernando 2007, p. 3)

Children and Absent Parents

In a qualitative study of spirituality of children with incarcerated mothers, Castillo (2006) attempted to explore and investigate the theoretical implication of spirituality of children with incarcerated mothers. Another goal was to provide children with a venue of expression. Castillo also attempted to continue the scholarly religious and secular interests of defining spirituality. Eight children, ages 7 to 12, were interviewed individually. Utilizing the theoretical perspective of narrative analysis, interview data and field notes were scrutinized for developing themes. This work was narrowed down to include the following themes: prayer, spiritual guidance, importance of family, unconditional love, and hope. The exploration of themes and data sources indicated that the children used prayer as an aid in dealing with their mothers' incarceration, needed greater spiritual guidance, and that overall spirituality was used as a coping strategy for children with absent parents (Castillo, 2006).

Factors that May Influence Faith

It is important to talk about gender, race, and ethnicity in the exploration of faith development in children. These factors may contribute to different experiences with or conceptualizations of faith.

Gender. Research results on gender differences in religiosity have two main paths: emphasis on biology or an emphasis on social influence or social learning. A study including 319 children and adolescents (176 girls and 143 boys) was done in conjunction with several other studies. The purpose was to examine gender differences on religious activity and participation, religious beliefs, concept of Bible, image of God, and existential questions. This study found that children and adolescents between the ages of 4-20 had clear differences in the religious emphasis of girls and boys. There were both qualitative and quantitative differences between girls and boys in the way that religiosity was expressed, with girls being more emotionally in tune than

boys. Although these differences were identified, it was harder to determine how they were caused (Tamminen, 1996).

The children in this stage were still in the “intuitive-projective” stage of faith development. There were 12 participants in this study—six boys and six girls, ages four or five years old. All of the children were white and from gender-traditional, two-parent families and part of the United Methodist Church. Each child was interviewed, evaluated on art work they created, and had questionnaires that were completed by parents. This work also included the voice of Carol Gilligan and John Attanucci (1988) who explained the differences identified between males and females as attributed to the issue of separation and attachment in early childhood. She highlighted the fact that most developmental theories have been developed by men and have been based on research mostly involving males or using them as a normative base, thereby assuming that anything outside of male normalcy is seen as a failure in development (Compton, 2008). Two interviews were conducted with each of the 12 children. They were also asked to draw artwork depicting their view of God. Once the child finished the drawing, they were asked to tell the researcher about the artwork they produced. Gender differences were visually expressed in four of the themes and verbally expressed through six of the themes. There were no significant differences in gender in the actual artwork, but there were differences in how the gender of God was expressed in the artwork. Six children depicted God as gender neutral, three boys depicted God as a male, one girl depicted God as male, but two girls had feminine characteristics in their descriptions of God. This might indicate that children’s understanding of God as a specific gender is not fully formed or developed. Children’s gendered understanding of God may influence how they relate to “Him” as deity and how they form their Christian identity and respond to God.

Additionally, six themes emerged: caring for others; relationships with family and friends; being bad, mean or hurtful; magic and superhero powers; relationships with animals; and understanding of God. In caring for others, girls discussed their relationships with family more than boys, and caring for others was discussed more extensively by girls. Girls discussed being in relationship with animals in greater detail. Boys were more focused on magic or superheroes in relation to their faith than the girls were; even though the girls mentioned superheroes, they did not pretend to be superheroes, as the boys did. The boys were also focused on issues of being bad, mean, or hurting others as it related to physical pain or actions that can hurt. When the girls dealt with the issues, they were primarily focused on hurtful words and emotional pain (Compton, 2008).

Race and ethnicity. Race and ethnicity may influence the content of faith-based messages, since faith can be a source of support for dealing with oppression and reducing and coping with negative factors that impact education (Children’s Defense Fund, 2004). “To deny the history of a people is to deny their humanity. To say that a people have no culture is to say that they have no common history which has shaped them and taught them” (Billingsley, 1968, p. 37). Race is defined as a group of people with the same ancestry and heredity, which usually is depicted in similar skin color or hair type. Ethnicity is an umbrella concept that “easily embraces groups differentiated by color, language, and religion; it covers ‘tribes,’ ‘races,’ ‘nationalities,’ and castes” (Horowitz, 1983, p. 53). Culture is primarily described as human normative behavior in societies and is examined through anthropology and incorporates social learning and shared human behavior, which all constantly changes. Race, ethnicity, and culture are typically studied in adolescents and young adults, especially since identity is one of the key developmental

milestones of adolescents. However, these factors still play a role in socializing young children, specifically in the context of family.

There are very few studies that focus on race as a factor specifically related to faith development. While some studies have included other ethnic minorities, they have not been explicit in how the culture may have influenced faith development. Fowler's original study (1981) included over 97% white participants. Williams (2006) sought to determine if African American children progressed through development faith stages at the same rate as children in Fowler's original study of faith development (Fowler, 1981). This study focused on children who would typically be in Stages 1 and 2 of Fowler's Theory of Faith Development, which center on the early childhood through the middle childhood years (from 2 to 8 years of age). In this case study, there seemed to be positive benefits to faith. However, the faith factor was embedded in the overall Christian African American experience and included all aspects of life, even school. During this study, Williams found that faith was beginning to shape the relationships the children had with others and how they responded to emergencies. The second finding was that all the children perceived God anthropomorphically, and that other dimensions were added with the older children. God was described with human characteristics as well as personal attributes such as friend, loving, and kind. The children said God knows all things and can be everywhere. Although Fowler said this is considered Stage 2 thinking, the children in Stage 1 in the study also expressed this belief as well. The third finding was that faith had a significant impact on how children feel about themselves, and as a result, Christian faith experiences may also be a factor in improving a positive cultural self-image in African American children (Williams, 2006). This study highlighted the need to further explore faith development in African American children and other racial/ethnic groups.

Special needs. Churchill (2000) explored the lives of institutionalized adults with learning disabilities, referred to as faith in suspension. James Fowler's conceptualization of faith does not account for how adults with learning disabilities make meaning or progress through various stages. In both cognitive and social contrast to Fowler's interviewees, the ten research subjects in Churchill's study were people with limited verbal and cognitive ability and much less choice about their lives' direction and values, living as they did either in an old long-stay hospital on the outskirts of the city and due for closure, or in group homes (with one group member living at home, in contrast to the other participants) (Churchill, 2000). Schurter (1987) found that when the chaplain recognized the critical role of the special needs family, they can think of how best to support further development in all areas. One of the things that makes this harder to study in children is that the potential subjects would be under-aged and developmentally different than the age range within the faith development stages would indicate. The special needs population concerning Fowler's faith stages and giftedness has not been studied, to my knowledge. More research should include children, which would also require different methodology for those with more dis/ableism than others.

The foundation for empirical evidence on faith development in children is lacking. There are clearly more opportunities to continue exploring and further examining topics listed here and beyond as they relate to children's development of faith.

Arts-based Research and Children

In this section, I discuss how theories of writing and drawing development provide a foundation or framework for arts-based research (ABR) in studies involving children. It also includes the strengths and advantages of using ABR to facilitate a different epistemology concerning adult understanding of children's lives and elicit greater (more robust) information

about specific topics of interest from children. For example, children will often communicate things in their art that they exclude from their initial conversations and interactions. Finally, this section covers how ABR can be used as a tool to explore and engage the whole child through their communication about and experience with a Bible-based Sunday school lesson.

Arts-based research is considered a communicative tool that helps convey the totality of human experience, when words are unable to do experiences justice (Malchiodi, 1998). ABR is a transdisciplinary approach to knowledge building that incorporates the tenets of the creative arts in research contexts (Leavy, 2015; McNiff, 2014). This process of inquiry therefore involves researchers engaging in art making as a way of knowing (McNiff, 2014). Arts-based research may draw on any art form (Leavy, 2017), including literary forms (e.g., essays, short stories, poetry), performative forms (e.g., music, dance, theatre), visual art (e.g., photography, drawing, sculpture, quilts), and audiovisual forms (e.g., film).

Most researchers studying ABR prefer that it remain a separate paradigm, rather than be included with various forms of qualitative research. The main difference is the variations between artistic practices versus qualitative practices. One of the concerns is that the increase in narrative researchers attempting to bring dignity and a different type of knowing to the human experience made it that much more complex to capture, without simultaneously objectifying people (Leavy, 2017). Narrative, critical storytelling, and creative non-fiction make the relationship between qualitative research and ABR more complicated because it requires the examination of people in a more engaging and holistic way. Artists and researchers with arts backgrounds who believe in the necessity and importance of the arts are choosing to include it in their own work. Janesick (2001) argued that the researcher is the instrument in qualitative research as in artistic practice. Moreover, both practices are holistic and dynamic, involving

reflection, description, problem formulation and problem solving, and the ability to tap into, identify, and explain the role of intuition and creativity in the research process (Leavy, 2015).

Advantages of ABR. Arts-based research is a holistic way to observe the child and find out who they are, based on what they show (e.g., draw) and tell about themselves. Understanding the development of creativity in children stems from a long history of studying their drawings and their communication about their drawings. People began to recognize universal patterns, which has led to increased use of drawing, especially in evaluating traumatic events for children. However, in this study, I wanted to understand what plays into children's drawing and understanding Bible lessons, through a developmental lens at church. Artwork can be used as a diagnostic and expressive tool and is also a way to discover information that might not arise through other forms of communication. Thus, artwork can lead to new insights and learning, unsettle stereotypes, challenge dominant ideologies, and include marginalized voices and perspectives. ABR also potentially allows the research participant to play a greater role in the research process and provides a more holistic view of the child and his or her development.

According to Malchiodi (1998),

[T]he arts are generative processes that are nonverbal and often transcend literal and logical meanings; similarly, the creative arts therapies are approaches that support implicit, embodied, and non-verbal forms of communication that differentiate these practices from other forms of psychotherapy and intervention. Ultimately, the core value of the creative arts therapies as agents of health and well-being is their ability to expand the limits of language and give voice to that which cannot be communicated or completely known through words or logic. (p. 68)

Arts-based Research on Children's Drawing

I believe that everyone is creative and can express that creativity in multiple methods, but that opportunity is not always afforded, especially when it comes to children and their lack of

agency in some faith-based settings, including church. Additionally, as children get older, they lose the ability to think freely, be flexible, and not be bound by their parents' beliefs.

Picture drawing as a diagnostic tool may reveal concepts not recorded in verbal interviews. Considering children's drawings from a meaning-making perspective has more recently been incorporated into the research arena (Picard & Vintner, 2007). The purpose of considering children's drawings from a meaning-making perspective is to understand children's views on a topic and to assist adults to understand children's perceptions, thoughts, and experiences (Driessnack, 2006).

As Driessnack (2006, p. 1415, cited in Holliday, Harrison, & Mcleod, 2009) suggested, "The child's drawing acts as a transitional space in which feelings can be externalized into a concrete form that can then be manipulated, reworked, or reconstructed" (p. 251).

Studies have also considered how children's perceptions of their drawings differ from adult assumptions (Coté & Golbeck, 2007) and explored stories contained within drawings by children (Coates, 2002). Rather than assessing the cognitive or emotional aspects of the drawing, the aesthetic quality of the drawing, or the child's ability to draw, these studies focus on the message conveyed through the child's drawing. These researchers acknowledge the process of creating the image, as well as the final product. (Holliday et al., 2009, p. 252)

Chapter 3: Method

This study explored a church-based faith experience of children 4–8 years of age. This age is significant because a great deal of children’s faith experience happens during early childhood (birth to 8). Children were asked open-ended questions related to a Bible story from a Sunday school lesson participated in at church. They were prompted to recall, interpret, and make meaning of a specific biblical Old Testament lesson.

The study also included a video recording of the lesson, and collection of artifacts (e.g., lesson plan and drawings), to provide further context for how children understand and relate to what they are learning and experiencing in Sunday school. This research used a child-centered method, called the Mosaic approach, which “represents the bringing together of different pieces or perspectives in order to create an image of children’s worlds, both individual and collective” (Clark, 2005, p. 13). The Mosaic approach, phenomenological research design, and Faith Development Theory framework were used to understand children’s perceptions of a Bible story through semi-structured interviews and analysis processes. Children’s understanding of faith was explored through story retelling, aspects of faith development, and experiences in church and meaning-making of a Bible story. These methods are useful in understanding the impact of faith in a church setting, which I chose as the setting for this study. This setting is familiar to me as a church member, the Children’s Ministry Director, and a parent. I’ve also known or interacted with all families in the study for a span of two to eight years.

Positionality

I am currently the Director of Children’s Ministry at my local church. After accepting this position, I realized that I wanted to ensure that evidence-based practices were being used to heighten children’s developmental and faith experiences. This desire stemmed from my own

church upbringing, my motherhood journey, and my role as a scholar. I knew that it was not enough to provide “glorified babysitting” to children on Sunday mornings; it was imperative for me to provide learning experiences, structure, training, love, and support for children and families, and to develop a volunteer team that could help shape that vision. That formation would have to include their nuclear and extended family, the church congregation, the surrounding community, and even their schools. I endeavored to use this study as a glimpse into what children experience in church and to help Christian children’s leaders better understand children.

Recruitment Procedures

Families

Participants in the study were recruited via word of mouth, and letters were sent home to parents, which included a kid-friendly flyer (see Appendix E). All children participated in the lesson, since they normally attend church. For those who had not agreed to it previously, the researcher contacted parents to ask for permission to interview them and schedule a time to do so. No one was excluded from the study who participated in the classroom that day, unless their parent did not reply. Their artwork was stored.

Research Questions

- What are the salient aspects of Sunday School that have particular significance or meaning?
- How do children understand, interpret and relate to a Sunday school Bible lesson?
- What aspects of faith (Fowler, 1981; Fowler & Dell, 2004, 2006) are present in children’s interpretations of a Sunday school Bible lesson?

Research Design

Participants. Fifteen children were interviewed for this study, ranging from ages 4 to 8 years old. There were four girls and eleven boys. Every child interviewed was from a Christian home (based on a verbal parent report that one or both parents agreed to the teaching of Jesus Christ and the Bible) and attended church at least once a month.

Recruitment procedures. Participants in the study were recruited via word of mouth, and letters were sent home to parents, which included a kid-friendly flyer (see Appendix E). All children participated in the lesson, since they normally attend church. For those who had not agreed to it previously, the researcher contacted parents to ask for permission to interview them and schedule a time to do so. No one was excluded from the study who participated in the classroom that day, unless their parent did not reply.

Setting. Each church is different, so it is important to provide a brief summary of what happens at Heart of America Fellowship (pseudonym). At the entryway of the church there is a table and sign that reads “Heart Café” (pseudonym). At this table are water, coffee, and tea. On the first Sunday of the month, there are light refreshments (donuts, fruit, nuts, and cheese). There is another “Welcome Table” where one can sign up to volunteer for various ministry teams, free Bibles, and mints. People usually walk in, take refreshments, if available, and chat in the foyer. They then enter the church where church attendees listen to three to five songs from a small band and singers. There is prayer and then a time to greet each other. The children are dismissed at this time; however, if it is first Sunday of the month, the children remain in service with their parents and caregivers for Family Sunday. When it is not Family Day, the children will attend age specific classes, which are divided into ages 0–3, 4–7, and 8–12. Advancements to the next class are based on date of birth on or by September 1, so one of the children in the study was eight years of age.

In each classroom, there are at least two volunteers and a floater. During class time, the children watch a video, listen to a lesson recap, answer questions, participate in a group activity, and complete an arts-based craft. After these major components, the children have a snack, Frito-Lay chips, and a Capri Sun. The class lasts about 60–75 minutes (see Appendix C).

Video recording of lesson. To give an understanding of the Sunday school context, I observed the Sunday school classroom at Heart of America Fellowship in which the lesson was taught. Each Sunday school class is structured around a lesson from the Gospel Project Curriculum, which is a Christ-centered chronological Bible study for all ages (Gospel Project, 2019). The targeted lesson was based on the story of Jacob and Rachel from Genesis 29-31. The story was told, and classroom observations, which were video recorded, consisted of watching the children interact with the teachers and other children as co-teachers presented the lesson and engaged children with craft/activity materials and the interactive lesson (e.g., game). I observed the classroom teaching, teacher-child interaction, and peer-to-peer interaction by watching and listening to the video recorded during the lesson. The video was used to contextualize the data gathered from the children in the interviews.

Targeted Bible lesson. Each week, children attend church and learn a new Bible lesson, nested within three-unit curricula. Each unit consists of about three months' worth of Bible lessons (for example, see Appendix D, Jacob and Rachel). The curriculum is a three-year chronological Bible study. The overarching theme of the winter term was "In the Beginning," which started with creation and ended with God changing Jacob's name to Israel. In Genesis, God made a promise to Abraham that he would be the father of many nations. Despite many obstacles, (e.g., Sarah not conceiving a child in her youth and attempting to fill God's promise to Abraham by having her servant Hagar have a child with Abraham), God's promise was still

going to be fulfilled. God told Sarah and Abraham that, despite their old age, they would conceive a son. That son was Isaac, and he grew up to have a son named Jacob. Just like God's plan coming to fruition in the pregnancy of Sarah, God planned to use the son of Jacob and Leah, Judah, to show his love to the world through the eventual birth of Jesus (this was part of his lineage).

However, upon meeting Rachel, Leah's more beautiful sister, Jacob decided that he wanted to marry Rachel instead. Laban, Rachel and Leah's father, agreed to have Jacob work for seven years as the wage for taking Rachel as his wife. After that seven years of working for Laban and receiving the word that Rachel could become his wife, Laban tricked Jacob by sending Rachel's sister, Leah, to marry Jacob instead (she was wearing a headdress and veil that covered her face and because he had taken her virginity, it was custom that they were officially married). After realizing this trick, Jacob was angry, and Laban told Jacob that he could marry Rachel if he stayed and worked another seven years, so he did just that. Later, even though Rachel was loved, she was initially unable to bear children for Jacob, but Leah was. However, Leah was still unloved by Jacob, but God showed love for and remembered her, since one of the sons born of Jacob and Leah, Judah, would be part of the lineage of Jesus. God's promise to the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would happen just as God said it would. Laban did not keep his promise, and the overarching theme of the lesson is "God always keeps his promises."

The lesson, Jacob and Rachel, happened to be scheduled at the same time data collection was planned, and to keep the lesson and classroom environment as close to normal as possible, the study was planned around this lesson.

Protection of Participant Rights

Protection of participant rights was done by verbally communicating with the parents about my research which contained a request to solicit their permission to recruit their child, in a more child-centered way (see Appendix F). I then mailed them a formal copy of the consent form for clarification and understanding.

Children also needed to assent to their voluntary participation in this research study through verbal agreement, which was noted by the researcher (see Appendix G). Parents and participating children were informed that at any time during and after the study, but before publication, they could withdraw from the study. They would be able to withdraw by verbal or written consent from the parent or the child. Children's names were kept confidential; most children chose their own pseudonym (see Appendix H). The data from interviews and observations were kept on a secure laptop and only displayed for the dissertation defense with the signed release form from the parents and participating children. Child participants received original copies of their artwork and a brief version of the report once the dissertation was completed.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection consisted of two phases. The first phase was recording a Sunday school classroom lesson and collecting an original drawing completed by the children during classroom time. The second part of the study consisted of children participating in a semi-structured interview and being asked questions relating to the Bible story, and their drawing.

Video Recording and Drawings

Phase one of data collection consisted of a video recording and the collection of a child drawing after a 60-minute Sunday school lesson. There are three classrooms at Heart of America Fellowship, split between ages birth to 12. One classroom was observed for this study, which

contained children ages 4–7. The class has a specific schedule, which includes a DVD about the lesson, Bible songs, discussion-starter videos, a interactive lesson (game), and a lesson-specific “art activity.” The lessons are derived from the Gospel Project curriculum (LifeWay, 2018), which is an age/stage focused curriculum teaching the Bible from Genesis to Revelation across a three-year timeline. A camcorder was used to record the class session, and the tape was later viewed to make observations on how the lesson went, what questions were asked, which children participated, and when. The children knew they were being recorded, so it could have influenced their interactions and responses in class. Each child’s drawing was collected by the teacher at the end of the lesson. The drawings were used in individual child interviews to help the child retell the story and describe their drawing to the researcher.

Child Interviews

Phase two of data collection was a semi-structured interview which involved the child explaining the Sunday school lesson (see Appendices I, J, K and L). The child interview included questions centered on the Bible lesson. The researcher used a child-centered interview method, in order to promote the child retelling the lesson. Open-ended questions and additional probing were used, based on responses to questions. For example, I asked about tricks, and some children changed the word to lying. Additionally, some children were distracted and talked about other things; I had to have flexibility and understanding while soliciting responses to the original interview questions, so that children could better express what they meant. Additionally, probing helped to clarify how the children were making sense/meaning/building understanding about the weekly lessons.

Child drawings. Twelve of the fifteen children completed a drawing based on what they heard from the lesson. Two of the children did not participate in the arts-based portion of the

lesson and one of the children made a paper airplane with his drawing and later lost it. The children agreed that the picture was theirs, and made minimal comments about it, but the primary purpose was to prompt their memory about the lesson.

Questions regarding Sunday school lesson. Children were asked a series of questions specific to the Bible lesson, using the following interview protocol (see Appendix M).

Researcher to child: In the lesson this week, you heard the story of Rachel and Jacob. I have a picture that you drew from the story, and I want you to tell me about it and about other things you heard in your class. I will also ask some more questions along the way. Like the other questions I asked, there are no right or wrong answers.

- What was the story about? (This is where observations come in to help further probe.)
- Who were the people in the story? And what did they do? Where did they live?
- Were there any other things you noticed about the story?
- Have you heard this story before? [if yes: where/from who?]
- What is the moral (point) of the story?
- Was the way that people acted in the story right or wrong and why?
- What does the story teach us about God?
- Did you play any games in class? What did you do when you played the games?
What did the game teach you about the lesson?
- Does this story remind you of anything from your life?
 - How are you different than people in the story? Are you like some of the people in the story?

After the interview, the children could choose a treasure from the treasure chest.

Following the completion of all interviews, recordings of interviews were transcribed.

Trustworthiness and Limitations

The Faith Development Interview (FDI) is a product of Fowler's research on the Faith Development Theory, which utilized 500 interviews with children and adults ranging from four to eighty years old. The literature was not completely clear about how many of those interviews were children versus how many were retrospective narratives. Since 1981, through development, testing, and revision of the FDI, the Manual for Faith Development Research has been designed to introduce reliability and consistency to faith development research (Fowler et al., 2004). The goals of the faith development interview are to collect and classify information about life stages and how various events help us examine and understand faith development (meaning-making), rather than to figure out and solve therapeutic issues, although they may surface.

Researcher as Instrument

While many of the children understood that I am the Director, I normally refrain from teaching, so I believed there was enough distance between our relationships to help them be more authentic with me. For example, I had firsthand knowledge if there was misunderstanding, since the children were comfortable enough with me to tell me if they did not understand the questions. The goal was to elicit their understanding about this lesson as it related to their experience and application to their lives. Since I teach their class, I know that there can be misunderstanding about the lesson, the Bible, and church. I believed that the children would aim to remember more of the story, since they knew that I would interview them that week. I hoped to identify gaps in their understanding based on their developmental stages and my personal experiences working with children in general. This worked in favor of the intended goals, since I wanted the children to retell the story and share their experiences in church.

Limitations

Being familiar with the children helped them relate to me better, but it may also have limited the authenticity of the children's communication. Children know that I am the Director; therefore they may have sought to impress me and tell me what I wanted to hear about their thoughts about God, the Bible story, and church. The wide variety of ages and developmental stages could be a limitation, but children might also benefit from the exposure to each other. The children were recruited to participate in the study through a letter to their parents and a child-friendly flyer (see Appendix E), which was sent to their homes. Some of the parents encouraged their children to "really pay attention" in class, since I would ask the questions about the lesson later that week. This may have prompted increased attentiveness to the teacher, video, and lesson; but not all parents did that. This study may not necessarily be generalizable to all church contexts, but it will provide a barometer to examine different conversations about the Sunday school classroom experiences and interactions. This study could demonstrate how to reflect the intended goals and purposes of the children's ministry, Christian education, and childhood voice (which would include children's ability to make a salvation decision, share their faith, and desire to attend church without parental pressure and prompting as they grow up).

Limitations in Relationships

During one of the interviews, I asked Demario if he had ever lied to someone, and he replied "no," but his voice inflection made me ask him again, as if to say, "Are you sure?" Post-interview, his mother told me they had been having conversations about him being truthful or not. Additionally, there was a sibling group of four in the study, and the mom told them to be sure to pay attention, because I was going to ask them questions. These children were extremely concerned about getting the questions right, so they made sure to diligently draw and were

hesitant about participating in the activity and nervous during the interview, per their mothers' observations.

Limitations in Understanding the Story

The lesson about Jacob and Rachel is complicated due to the various and mostly foreign concepts in it. For example, this lesson involves some elements that are unfamiliar to these children (e.g., having multiple wives, fathers deciding who their daughters will marry) that might make the story difficult to understand. The connection between the events of the story and the broader lesson about God keeping promises are somewhat tenuous. In contrast, other Bible stories (e.g., the ten commandments or the sermon on the mount) are much more straightforward and prescriptive, which may have prompted a different discussion if I had examined a different lesson.

Analysis

The major goals of this study were to explore children's perceptions of Sunday school in a Christian church, to better understand how children understand and interpret a Sunday school Bible lesson, and to determine what aspects of Faith Development Theory (Fowler, 1981; Fowler & Dell, 2004, 2006) were present in children's interpretations of a Sunday school lesson. Each child in the study participated in Sunday school classroom, completed a drawing, and shared their thoughts in a semi-structured interview (see Appendix M). The drawing was used as a tool to help inform the stories that the children told and questions they answered (Appendix N). The emphasis of interpretation was on the symbolic content of drawings, as a prompt for story retelling. The questions about the Bible lesson were analyzed using a phenomenological approach, including the use of research memos (see Appendix O). The observations from the video recording were used for contextualizing and supporting the children's artwork and

responses during the interview. Data was not analyzed by age, since children tend to have differing understanding and awareness of the Bible, based on the number of times they attend church, parent engagement about church, which schools they attend, and how well they paid attention in class. In addition, the sample was too small to allow for drawing firm conclusions about age-related changes. Responses were coded by myself and verified by dissertation supervisor Dr. Meagan Patterson.

Procedures and Processes

This study used the following procedures to assure accuracy of the data by using artifacts, observations, and conversations with families immediately after interviews. To understand the context of the Bible story lesson, I watched the video of the lesson several times and took detailed notes about lesson activities and interactions. I am also very familiar with the Gospel Project curriculum in general, because in my role as children's ministry director I read the lessons each week, and sometimes communicate with team reminders about supplemental teaching materials.

For participant interviews, exploratory coding was used to let the data give a portrait of what the children recalled in the retelling of the story, what they said about the characters and events in the story, what they learned from the story, and to understand children's perceptions of Sunday school and church. I used the constant comparative method of exploring the data in the inductive coding process as an interaction with the data. For example, I read through the interviews several times and made general notes in the margin and made marks for the things that were revealed in my review, such as "tricks played, mentioned kids, Jacob didn't want to marry Leah." I placed those codes in a general list, and then began to move the codes into similar categories, such as "feelings about the story, similarities/differences, what they learned,

and more.” I read the interviews again and put the codes into categories reflecting the research questions or common descriptions among participants, such as themes that related to aspects of Fowler’s Faith Development Theory (e.g., perspective taking), tricks, and perceptions of church. After this, I read each interview again, color-coding the raw data by moving direct quotes under specific themes. I connected the direct quotes to each other and synthesized the data, while watching for possible overlaps reflective of responses to the research questions.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to better understand children's (ages 4–8) perceptions of church and Sunday school and of a specific Bible lesson offered through a Sunday school program in a Christian church. In this chapter, I use James Fowler's Faith Development Theory as an interpretive framework for understanding children's responses to interview questions about the lesson and their perceptions of church and Sunday school. The goal of the interviews was for the children to discuss the lesson and to discover what aspects of faith development were present in their interpretation and perceptions of church and Sunday school.

My first research question was: What are salient aspects of Sunday school that have particular significance or meaning? In order to examine this research question, I referenced children's responses to the following questions: (1) What are some things you like about children's ministry? (2) What are some things you dislike? Four themes related to this research question emerged from the data: snacks, classroom interaction, church culture, and worship. My second research question was: How do children understand, interpret, and relate to a Sunday school Bible lesson? In order to examine this research question, I referenced children's responses to questions based on the Sunday school lesson: (1) What was the story about? (2) Who were the people in the story? And what did they do? (3) Can you think of a time/story/movie in which someone tricked someone else? Four themes related to this research question emerged from the data: characters, events, moral of the story, and tricks.

My third research question was: What aspects of faith (Fowler, 1981; Fowler & Dell, 2004, 2006) are present in children's interpretations of a Sunday school Bible lesson? In order to examine this research question, I referenced children's responses to questions: (1) Who were the people in the story? And what did they do? (2) What are you supposed to learn from this story?

Why do you think this is an important Bible story? What does this story teach us? (3) Does this story remind you of anything from your life? (4) How are you like people in the story? (5) How are you different than people in the story? Are you like some of thdie people in the story? (6) Did you play any games in class? What did you do when you played the games? What did the game teach you about the lesson? Seven themes related to aspects of faith development were discussed: form of logic, social perspective taking, form of moral judgment, bounds of social awareness, locus of authority, form of world coherence, and symbolic function. A discussion of each emerged from the data.

Salient Aspects of Sunday School and Life at Church

This section examines children’s perceptions of church, particularly Sunday school. What are children’s perceptions of Sunday school? When I asked about their likes, dislikes, and things they might change, their thoughts and ideas centered on food (including snack preferences), classroom activities (including games played in class), peer relationships, and church culture and worship. Some children stated that they liked everything about church.

Snacks

Many of the children mentioned food, snacks, or mints (see Appendix X). Some even wished to move the mints to the classroom, since they are typically placed in the entryway of the church.

Diamond: Can—at church there’s the life-savers...
I: Ohhh, where do you want the life-savers to go?
Diamond: I want them to go in the rooms.

If they were moved to the classroom, then it would be easier to receive one if they had a good day in class, according to Diamond. While many of them liked the mints, Kai and Diamond did prefer the life-savers over the peppermints.

Miles: And the—And there's something else about that I like sometimes in the morning there's like donuts and stuff at the front.

Miles: But but I do like when the mints are there.

Miles: The donut mints.

Miles: That are shaped like a circle [makes circle with hands] and the white.

One of the children announced that she does not like when there are not healthy snacks. Another child said he does not like when he is hungry upon his arrival to church.

Classroom Interaction

The children talked about their experiences in the classroom. One child mentioned that he does not like the program that he is involved in. Playing games was also important to many of the children. One of the children remembered having an Easter Egg hunt, and that was one of Demario's favorite activities, especially since it involved playing outside. James liked "that we can play games sometimes. That we can play, you know, learn more about God." Kai liked playing the games and watching the videos. Doing fun things in class was also important to the children such as playing games, watching TV, and coloring. They consider playing games and coloring as activities they like, especially if it included bringing the large pillows into the class. Demario liked to "run around. Like, when you get to hold stuff," as part of games. Miles thought it was particularly important to mention that he liked the videos about the Bible, and Lexi liked that the lessons actually go with it.

Diamond said, "I would, change uh...the way...of the boards to make the board...somewhere else," which I discovered was because of his inability to see from far back. Charles said, "Like when we first go in we're having to listen to that stuff on the TV; we have to do all of these papers; all I want to do is play." Kevin also enjoyed "that we get to learn something new."

Peer Relationships

Peer relationships are significant for children ages 4–7. They are figuring out who they are based on those around them. Some of the children liked that there are new friends and/or siblings in their classroom. However, peers can also present challenges if people are talking too much or if the video is too long or hard to see. Lexi found it upsetting that the children do not understand the video, even after watching it multiple times, especially if it was due to too much talking. Lexi stated, “Another thing I dislike is that when, like, when you don’t understand what you’re watching, and then we have to watch it all over again, you still don’t understand. and then we watch it again and still don’t understand.” Kevin really enjoyed meeting with friends each Sunday. When I asked who his friends were at church, he replied, “mostly everybody.”

Church Culture

On the first Sunday of the month, the parents are asked to attend church with their children in the main sanctuary. Many of the children claim boredom, while some love that their parents bring activities for them and color with them. For example, Zumeiah said, “I like that we get to draw out...my mom and dad like to draw,” and Toby agreed that a highlight for him is getting to stay with mommy and daddy. Miles stated that he does not like that “sometimes we have to wear like fancy shoes.” Lexi did not like that the main church service tends to go by slower than when they have their children’s classes. Being sleepy and being bored in church is a problem for some children. Quincy said, “I don’t like when people do in church sssshhhhh. I mean if someone said I can be loud in church and you, that means they will be like sssshhhhh and that would be lying. Kai said, “like just listening and listening sitting down and doing nothing.”

Some children are kept quiet with pre-preparation done by the parents, which may play a role in the child’s active engagement and peace during sermons. Miles said, “Cause, uh,

sometimes our family gets to bring like stuff and put them in a baggie, like coloring stuff and put them in a baggie to bring with them when the parents are, the parents are singing.”

Worship

The children had thoughts about the worship music as well. Princeton said, “We get to worship for God.” But some of the children are experiencing boredom, especially when it comes to listening to music and sitting down for long periods of time. Kai mentioned several part of the church experience he did not like:

Yeah I don’t like that piece part and I hate just sitting and sitting and sitting.

Yeah there’s like ten songs each day or nine ten or nine songs each day.

There’s never like or it could be eight seven or six.

The children do not like the “stuff on the TV.” Miles said, “I don’t like, uh, the like sometimes I don’t like to stand when the singing. They don’t want to stand up while singing and the music takes too long each Sunday. We get to pray and learn about God.”

The Bible Lesson

The first major goal of this study was to examine how children understood and interpreted a Bible lesson of the type typically presented in Sunday school. I expected that children would have a basic memory of the Bible lesson, including characters and events, and an understating of the overall “story point.” Each session (or lesson) in the Gospel Project Curriculum has a “story point,” which is the main idea of each session in a unit. For this session, the story point was Laban tricked Jacob. The children seemed enthusiastic to discuss tricks, especially in response to tricks played on them or tricks they planned to play on others, so tricks became a focus of the interviews, which also parallels the curriculum story point, “Laban tricked Jacob.”

Characters

Initially, many of the children did not remember the names of the characters, but with prompting, they were able to recall Jacob, Rachel, Leah, and Laban. Most of the children did not remember the names of the women but described their clothing or their facial expressions. The children remembered that Jacob loved Rachel but not Leah. Children often described Rachel as happy and drew her with a smiling face, and they drew Leah in an opposite way. Following is an excerpt from an interview with one of the children, Kevin.

Um, Jacob and Rachel. Um, they were, Jacob was in love with Rachel and Rachel was in love with him and then...His uncle, um...Jacob said he would work for seven years if he could marry Rachel, and then, when the seven years were up...Um...His uncle, said, that...You would have to work seven more years to marry Rachel because he tricked him into marrying Leah, who was the oldest. So, he worked for seven more years and then he married, Rachel. And then...Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah.

Some of the children also remembered Jacob tended sheep and worked very hard doing that in order to marry Rachel and Leah.

Events

Children in this study generally understood that there was a man who was tricked into marrying someone, which probably made him sad, but then he got to marry the original woman that he really wanted to marry. They remembered Jacob not wanting to marry Leah, and they knew Laban tricked Jacob into marrying her. Some of the children described Jacob as a shepherd. The interactive lesson included cotton balls, which were supposed to be sheep, in order to help the children remember the importance of Jacob's twelve sons and his vocation as a shepherd. Many of the children also described the amount of time Jacob worked, which was seven years. Some of the children also remembered that Jacob had to work another seven years to marry the other sister and that Leah had children, but Rachel could not at first have children.

In remembering Jacob marrying the wrong girl, some of the children made comments about Jacob not wanting to marry Leah. When I asked why Jacob did not want to marry Leah, their responses ranged from, “Not sure why, he just didn’t want to marry the other girl,” to “I would not marry her.”

Moral of the Story

Each story also has a big picture question, and for this story, it was “Does God keep His promises? God always keeps His promises.” Instead of focusing on God keeping his promises, the children generally focused on the morality of playing tricks and what tricks can teach them. For example, when I asked about the lesson of the story, Kevin stated, “You shouldn’t trick people. But even though if you get tricked you can turn it around.”

Tricks

Descriptions presented by the children included definitions and synonyms for tricks, the types of tricks played or planned for, and responses to those tricks. Several of the children provided definitions for “trick.” Miles said, “It means like, when someone says that you’re gonna—he was—you’re gonna do it and then you don’t actually do it.” Some of the younger children stated that a trick means to marry someone different and a trick is when you are going to trade something for something better. Some children assumed tricks were synonymous with lies and stealing. If I asked them if there was a time that someone tried to trick them, they described people stealing from backpacks at school. Quincy said, “If someone said they can be loud in church, and then they said sssssshhhh, that’s lying.” Since stealing and tricks came up a few times, I asked children if they thought tricks were good or bad.

Tricks are bad. In general, the children believed Laban’s trick played on Jacob was bad. They described how Jacob might feel and how it’s “not cool to trick someone that has already

worked very hard” and stated, “When you trick someone, it’s not fun for anyone else.” One of the children stated, “A trick can be bad if you take it too far.” A child said, “Nah, that just doesn’t sound good,” in response to Laban’s trick against Jacob.

Several of the children described Jacob as “mad” or “sad” and the trick played on him as “very bad” because he had to marry Leah. It may seem that children would try to retaliate, but one of the children said, “I would not play a trick back.” She said she wouldn’t cry or laugh, she would ignore her family when they played tricks on her. She said ignoring them made her feel better. Some of the children said that tricks could never be good, but others disagreed. Following is the dialogue from my interview with Nick.

I: No? What are some tricks that aren’t funny?

Nick: Like like there’s a there are there is a knife behind you.

I: A knife that wouldn’t be very funny. What are some other tricks that might not be that funny?

Nick: Hmm there is a there is a scissor behind

I: A scissor behind you, why would those not be funny things?

Nick: Because they might they’ll hurt you.”

Tricks are good or funny. The children described tricks as good and funny, and a few smiled or laughed at the mention of playing tricks. The children’s understanding of “good tricks” seems to be synonymous for joke, but only one child used the word *joke*. A child stated that they would trick people with easy tricks, and one stated, “I like to be tricked if it’s funny.” Another said, “A trick can be happy, like if someone says you can go to a birthday party, but they do something even better.” After telling me about a trick that he played on his family, one of the children said that the trick made his friend feel happy because he laughed.

Charles: I like give them like easy tricks

I: What are easy tricks?

Charles: I put something on the floor and they step on it. Something like that.

Diamond told me that he played a trick on a friend, by telling him, “Your mom is behind you,” but his mom was not behind him. I asked him how he thought his friend felt, and he responded with “It made him feel happy.”

Descriptions and plans for tricks. The children expressed varying types of tricks that have been played on them or that they could play on someone else. They described tricks centered on food, trading, and various situations involving family and friends.

Tricks about food. Children described tricks involving food. For example, Lexi stated that she would trick someone if they had something she wanted, like chocolate. She said she would convince someone that she had real donuts, but they would be fake. Lexi felt that selling the donuts for money would be an additional way to trick someone. One of the children stated that a “friend got tricked to trade for a sandwich and chips because the friend knew he didn’t like those chips.” One of the children saw a trick that someone wanted oranges and they knew that but hid the rest and didn’t give them any.

Tricks about trading. Charles indicated that sometimes siblings or friends promise you can trade something, but they don’t follow through. He said, “We trade with our brother, but sometimes he doesn’t want to give us what we traded for.” Sometimes not letting someone play with you leads to them devising a trick to play on you, according to James. A friend promised James a slap bracelet, but he did not give him this bracelet, so James assumed “he lied,” as he described to me when I asked him if anyone had ever tricked him. Another friend was supposed to get the same amount of slime, but Toby gave them less than they were supposed to have.

I: You forgot. Have you ever tricked anybody?

Toby: Yeah.

I: What did you do?

Toby: I did I (giggling and grinning)

I: (chuckles) what did you do? Tell me, Toby.

Toby: uh uh uh (slight giggle) uh I said I'll sample the same amount of slime and I said I know what equals and I didn't what it equals and I gave her a tinsy tiny bit less but the good thing is that its just a this much (signs hand) that is less than mine.
I: Oh okay so there was a trick did that girl feel sad that you gave her less slime?
Toby: But it almost up to mine this much.

Zumeiah described being tricked: "I've been tricked by my mom and [my siblings]. They tricked me into getting stuff and getting a high five. The family laughed." Diamond told me, "When I was at school, in class, Cleo said...your mom is behind you, and I looked, and he said, 'made you look.'" Nick said, "I was thinking the water bottle was under my coat, but it was not." Charles said, "I didn't know. I just thought they were laughing. Because they keep on saying, how do you know we're tricking you...? You don't know if we did do it or not."

Responding to Tricks

Children also talked about how they might respond when encountering a trick. Zumeiah said, "When someone tricks you, don't talk to them." Ryann said, "If a trick made me sad, I would tell them I didn't like that." A trick made James feel "really bad." Although he said it made him feel really bad, when I asked what he thought should have happened to Benjamin, he responded, "Nothing." Toby said that he would not try to trick anyone because that would make them feel sad. Toby's sibling said she'd been tricked by her mom and [her siblings]. She said that she would never trick them back, because she "don't like doing it to them." Although she does not like that they do it to her, she would not do it back to them. She doesn't cry or laugh, but if she ignores them, she feels better.

The children recalled most of the lessons characters, events, and moral of the story and connected it to the story point, "Laban tricked Jacob," which they expounded upon by describing tricks played or that could be played in their lives. Tricks seemed to be most salient to the children since many of them seemed to want to talk about their perspectives on tricks, including

tricks being good, funny, bad, and how they would respond to tricks. Thinking and talking about tricks seemed to be a way in which children could connect the Sunday school lesson to their own lives.

Aspects of Faith Development

This section covers aspects of faith development that were identified in the children's interview responses. The aspects of faith development identified in Fowler's Faith Development Theory (1981) are: form of logic, social perspective taking, form of moral judgment, social awareness, locus of authority, form of world coherence, and symbolic function. The following is a brief example of what each aspect is and how it is operationalized in the early stages of FDT, since those are most relevant to the current project.

These aspects are typically explored within the context of the Faith Development Interview, which is specifically tailored to examining the aspects and stages of FDT. For this study, aspects were examined through story retelling using the Bible lesson from a Sunday school class. The aspects were pre-determined based on Fowler's Theory of Faith Development; children's interviews and story retelling were used to better understand how responses map onto aspects.

One challenge of mapping children's responses onto Fowler's aspects of faith is that, unlike the Faith Development Interview, the current interview protocol was not designed specifically to classify children into faith development stages. Thus, questions and responses could potentially map onto multiple aspects of faith development. For example, participants describing the role of work in the Bible story could reflect a form of logic but could also relate to social perspective taking and the child's ability to take the perspectives of others.

Aspect A: Form of Logic

This aspect describes the characteristic patterns of mental operations the person employs in thinking about the object world. Within this category, breakthroughs, crises, changes in self, and decisions are observed. For this aspect of faith development, form of logic, Lexi identified multiple facets of a situation and provided a rationale for what would be most beneficial, according to God's plan. For example, Lexi said, "I think the story teaches us that people may trick you, but you gotta go with the flow." She was the only child who explicitly explained the big picture question of the story, "Does God keep his promises? God always keeps his promises." The overarching unit theme should be part of every session to help children understand the big picture question.

Aspect B: Social Perspective Taking

This aspect describes the way in which the person constructs the self, the other, and the relationship between them. Within this category, current relationships, past relationships, and parent-child relationships were examined through children retelling what happened between Laban, Jacob, Rachel, and Leah, responding to how they might have felt about various parts of the story and how they felt others should have responded, and talking about how they are similar and different than characters in the story.

Relationships. Understanding relationship dynamics, including how they function, may indicate a child's ability to construct the self, especially in relation to others. Many of the children agreed that the trick played on Jacob was wrong, and it made him sad or mad. When referring to the trick that Laban played on Jacob, many of the children remarked that being tricked is "not fun for anyone else" (Diamond). One of the children, Kevin, described how Leah felt by drawing her with a frowny face. Children who can construct a sense of self based on

observations of relationships, including those found in stories, demonstrate their ability to take what they know about a relationship and interpret how it fits within the narrative and possibly how it relates to their own lives.

Laban made Jacob work for seven more years after he had already worked for seven years to marry Leah. Princeton said, “It’s not nice” and Jacob felt mad. Toby, Miles, and Ryann also said they felt sad. Nick also said that he “would feel kinda sad, but I would say okay.” Some of the children provided solutions for what could have made the characters happier. One of the children thought, “Jacob should have married the right girl and not the wrong girl.” The children also talked about reasons why Leah was the wrong girl and why Jacob didn’t want to marry Leah: because “she looked so ugly,” and because she wasn’t popular, according to Ryann. When it came to understanding how Leah might have felt, Zumeiah said having more kids could have made her happier.

Similarities/differences. The children were asked if they were similar or different than others in the story. This question required them to think about the characters in the story and the events of the story and interpret whether there was a connection. In order to do this, they had to describe the characters and understand their responses. Some of them highlighted the difference in physical attributes, while others talked about their thoughts and feelings about how the characters acted in the story. Some of the children included their household jobs and chores and how that related to the work of the people in the story. For example, Demario said that, like Jacob, he takes care of his animals. He talked about the sheep needing water and how it was hard to get water for his dogs, but “I can give them food because that’s not hard for me.” Jillian said she was similar to the girls in the story, “Cause she likes cleaning up stuff.” Princeton said, “Yeah. I work for the neighbor and he pays us money.”

A few of the children stated that they would pursue an alternative path for marriage. Charles said, “I wouldn’t trick. And then like if, to work seven years, that’s already enough for me.” He also said that he would have given up if he had to work for another seven years, or not listened to Laban’s instructions. Kevin also said that Jacob should have married Rachel anyway, and asked how Laban would have responded, he said, “He would be mad and ban him to see Rachel ever again.”

The children were asked if they were like anyone in the story, to which they replied. Kevin said, “No, I’m definitely not like his uncle.” Kai said that he also wasn’t like anyone, because “he just does stuff with sheep and I don’t do that. And he works for somebody and I don’t.” Miles stated that he was not like anyone in the story because “I do not get tricked by anyone and I can’t marry anyone yet.” Not being able to marry seemed to be related to other aspects of “bigger than” the interviewees. For example, Quincy stated that the boy is bigger than him, and that the girl was probably 20 and the Jacob was the age of his dad, about 35. Toby also stated that the people in the story were way bigger than him.

Two of the children remarked that they are different than those in the story because they have a different skin tone than the characters in the video. Toby said that he was like the “right girl” because he “doesn’t look ugly,” complete with a big smirk.

Aspect C: Moral Judgment

Assessing the form of moral judgment involves studying the patterns of a person’s thinking about issues of moral significance, including how the person defines what is to be taken as a moral issue and how the person answers the question of why be moral. For this aspect, examples and responses centered on right action, sin, evil, and religious conflicts that typically show up as examples of moral judgment. The aspect of moral judgment encompasses unfair

work requirements, household relationships, lessons learned, responsibility or ownership, and response/reciprocity. Moral is defined as “being right or wrong about something or a determining if a behavior is good or bad” (“Moral,” Dictionary.com).

Unfair work requirements. Some children commented that it was unfair for Laban to require Jacob to work for seven additional years to marry Rachel. Kevin stated that Jacob should have just married Rachel anyway. When in conflict, some children felt that it was not worth the fight. Charles indicated that if they were unable to marry the wife they wanted, they would just find another one. Charles also stated,

That’s not cool. Working that many years is already enough. Would have not make him work for seven more years. If he worked for like 10 or 9 years already, I wouldn’t have made him work for seven more years. That’s already enough. Like I would let him take a break off from his work, like 15 days off or something.

Household relationships. Households are the primary socializing agents for children. These relationships teach children how to respond to various people and situations, including appropriate behavior for people or for the aspects of moral judgment, helping children determine “right action.” Family relationships were an issue for some children in the study, from parents laughing at jokes played on children, to sibling rivalry, and even how parents might respond to potential tricks played. Children know there are consequences for their actions, so they must decide between right and wrong, in addition to filtering through how it might make them or someone else feel. This is consistent with the importance of relationships as a setting to help children understand moral issues, since the family is a primary socializing agent. Charles also understood that if he takes tricks too far with his older brother, “he’s gonna hit me or something.”

Lessons learned. Children learned moral “life lessons” from the Bible story. Children understood that what the father did was not just a trick, but a lie. Children knew that the trick that

Laban played was not a good trick, and they took messages home with them. Some children simply stated that Laban lied, with the connotation that it was wrong. Since this was a wrong act, the children had strong opinions about what they learned. Charles said, “Like how they’re good and never to be bad people.” Diamond simply said that since Jacob didn’t want to marry Leah, it was not a good trick. Jacob stated, “If someone does happen to play a trick on you, which is wrong, you can turn it around.”

Responsibility or ownership. Children developed opinions about a person’s character based on their responsibility in the story. When I asked what he thought about Laban tricking Jacob, Kevin stated that he did not like him (Laban). He also stated that he tries to trade with his younger brother, and he doesn’t give them (the other siblings) what they traded for, which he labeled as a problem. James understood the lie Laban told, but also had a concept that sometimes friends might forget things, especially “when I go to sleep, maybe he would think about not doing it,” and it may not have been a lie. Since Jacob was supposed to marry Rachel, which did not happen, James said it meant that Laban lied to Jacob. Lexi supposed it might be a good idea to trick someone, if they had something she wanted, like chocolate. She went on to tell a story of how she would plot to have a “fake donut” (see Appendix P).

Response/reciprocity. Children need to understand how to respond in situations of moral judgment, so their interpretations about how to govern themselves on matters of sin and right action is important. In the study, when I asked about what they would do if they were tricked, they responded based on the type of the trick. Miles would feel sad if someone tricked him by stealing something, while Quincy stated it would be bad. The children in the study mostly echoed those sentiments, indicating an awareness that tricks that harm others are wrong because they make others feel bad. Additionally, one of the children knew that someone didn’t keep their

promise, but it was a matter of changing your mind, not of right or wrong for them, thereby making it alright. One of the things children learned from this story is that they should avoid tricking people, but some children said, if they do trick you, you can just trick them back.

However, one of the children mentioned repercussions in school. Miles stated,

Uh, if somebody stole something. And then uh I uh and then uh I would say if I saw that person steals it and then I would say to Mister Morton uh that like that that like that like some like someone stole it from me.

Quincy thought of tricks as someone changing their mind about something. When I asked two different ways, Quincy defined a trick for me. He said, “Just like I promised you would work with my house. I mean you would live with me and have candy. I would be like this (serious face), “You have to work for seven more weeks.” He mentioned a recent battle won against his parents as they tried to trick him. “Mommy and daddy changed the plan once and we cried. I mean, we keep on whining and whining and whining until it happened. But when it happened, we were not sad.” Ryann stated that she would just tell someone she didn’t like it, but also said we shouldn’t trick people. However, she agreed that “Jacob should’ve tricked him.”

Aspect D: Bounds of Social Awareness

The mode of a person’s group identification is a central one. It answers the question of how the person is viewing or constructing the group of which he or she is a member. It also includes how the person relates to the group to which he or she belongs. In addition, this aspect answers the question of how wide or inclusive the social world is to which a person will respond. Children may understand relationship dynamics around them and how they can operate based on how someone else might govern themselves. For this aspect, marker events, changes in relationships, and groups were examined. The aspect bounds of social awareness have more to do with how the children understood the “how and why of relationships,” mostly centered on

marital interactions between people in the story. For example, if someone wrongs you, then you have a response for that based on prior experiences and the current situation.

Marriage relationships. Marriage relationships, for this aspect, are centered on how people function in the institution of marriage, not just their role in the marriage. For example, James stated,

When Joseph [Jacob] married the pink girl, and cuz the blue girl shirt didn't get...Joseph [Jacob] had two girlfriends, but he really loved the pink girl, instead of the blue girl, so God gave the blue girl kids and they gave Joseph [Jacob] and the pink girl kids too.

It is merely about the logistics. Miles said, "Like, if you read this [points to drawing], it says 'he married the wrong girl and then he married the right one.'" Nick remembered Joseph (Jacob) "had to like he had to marry those two person, and then and then he had a wife." He also remembered that Jacob was not happy to marry both of them "cause he cause cause his uncle tricked him and he said he had to marry the other one too and he got mad." Nick did not remember why Jacob didn't want to marry her, but Ryann stated, "Rachel was like more popular than Leah and Jacob wanted to marry Rachel but then married Leah." Toby was not worried about that. He said if he married the wrong girl, "I would not love her and then I then would marry the right girl I would get someone to love."

Kevin had a more complex understanding of marriage. He stated, "And cuz, you can't get married to two people you have to divorce and then get married to someone else." The children also understood Leah got more children, even though Jacob did not like Leah, but some did not understand why that was the case. However, Kevin stated, "So, then she was jealous, and then God loved Leah so he gave her kids. And then, Leah wanted kids so God gave, him, her kids. And then, all together Jacob worked for 14 years and he had twelve sons."

Aspect E: Locus of Authority

Locus of authority centers on how authorities are selected, how authorities are held in relationship to the individual, and whether the person responds primarily to internal or external authority. This aspect focused on life-meaning, beliefs, and authority. In this case, the children understood that Laban and God and parents are in charge, All of the children attend church and understand God having more power than parents and other people. From this aspect, rationale for God, God and the Bible, and permission emerged.

Rationale for learning about God and church. Children understood church as a place where they are free to talk about and discuss God. When I asked what he learned from the story, Miles stated, “Um, cause, like, we had to learn about it cause we—one of the—church is about God and we need to learn about God at church.” When I asked why we learn about God at church, again, Miles said, “Cause, cause, um because we don’t want, like to make like, we don’t want to—We want to go to heaven.”

God in the Bible story. The children tried to understand the purpose of God in this story, as well as why God would put this story in the Bible. When I asked what the story told them about God, Diamond replied, “God is nice.” Kevin responded, “He [God] thought that would be a good lesson for our generations.” Jillian understood that the Bible is about God and His plans, so she said that’s why God put the story in the Bible. When I asked what they learned from the story, Jillian stated that he gave women children and that it was God’s plan. Lexi understood God’s plan as “kinda good and kinda bad, because it went in with God’s plan, but it also wasn’t very nice.” Nick stated that God put this story in the Bible because he wanted people to learn. Zumeiah included a rationale for other things God likes about us.

Zumeiah: Because.... He likes when we, when we, when we do it.

I: He likes when we do what?

Zumeiah: When we draw stuff.
I: He likes when we draw stuff?
Zumeiah: Yeah.
I: Yeah. Why do you think he likes when we draw stuff?
Zumeiah: Because. Because we make things for Jesus and God.
I: Why do you make things for Jesus?
Zumeiah: And we do it for God.
I: Oh! Why do we make things for God and Jesus?
Zumeiah: Because they like when we make this for them.
I: What do you think they do with the pictures? Do they do anything with them, or do they just look at them?
Zumeiah: They just look at them.

Permission. Children usually must ask “grown-ups” for permission to do things, and many understand asking God for permission. The children seemed to grasp the idea that Laban oversaw Jacob, Leah, and Rachel, so it made sense that Jacob had to follow any orders given by Laban. Participants referred to Laban with a variety of labels, including boss, uncle, father, and grandfather (all positions children typically understand as authority). Many children understood that, in his role as an authority figure, Laban required Jacob to work for what he (Jacob) wanted, and that Jacob, Leah, and Rachel all needed Laban’s permission to act. For example, Charles described the story of Jacob and Rachel as: “It was him and it was a girl from work, I think. And the guy [Jacob] wanted to marry her and the boss [Laban] said you have to work for seven years, I think, seven more years.”

In the context of discussing the Bible story, and particularly their understanding of tricks, children also discussed parents and teachers as authority figures who could grant or withhold permission for particular actions. For example, when I asked about tricks he might play on others, Charles stated that he could not play certain tricks that would involve making a mess in his mom’s house, so he would need to go outside to play that trick. Children understood that teachers have authority as well. This was made clear in a child’s statement about if someone were caught stealing, the teacher would address it one-on-one and then talk to the entire class

about it. When I asked what he learned from the story, Nick said he learned that “if people trick you that means you have to do it.” I think this goes back into the nature or permission centering on what adults allow children to do. For them, the only option is to follow directions of adults in charge.

Aspect F: Form of World Coherence

This aspect describes how a person constructs the object world, including the sense of the ultimate environment. It answers the questions, “How do things make sense?” or, “How do the various elements of my experience fit together?” For this aspect, mature faith, purpose of human life, death, and religious person are examined, which means an increased focus on making sense of human purpose, where knowledge and wisdom could possibly meet.

Children make sense of the world by practical things. As they learn about history and which technology predated them, they comprehend more of what is going on around them. When I asked Lexi if she was like anyone in the story, she stated, “Probably not. Because that was a long time ago and there’s phones now.” Charles understood that adults are sometimes forgetful. He alluded to memory loss by saying “I’m growing up, so now I’m forgetting things.” Maturity comes about when a child understands that the world does not center on what they want and how they want it. Charles understood that activities and games in class help you relate to people better, by doing some of the following: “To take turns, to be nice. To share and be kind.” Some children in the study reiterated the story rather than using abstract thinking. For instance, when Toby was asked, “What do you think about her [Leah] looking ugly?” his reply was, “The story said that. I don’t think she is, but the story said that.”

Aspect G: Symbolic Function

This aspect of faith is concerned with how the person understands, appropriates, and utilizes symbols and other aspects of language in the process of meaning-making and locating his or her centers of value and images of “power.” In this aspect, children communicate about image of God, harmony, symbol/rituals, and spiritual discipline.

One primary use of symbols in the Sunday school lesson was the interactive lesson, in which a game was played in which children raced to transport cotton balls from one cup to another. The goal was for the cotton balls to represent sheep, and the children were supposed to be shepherds herding them, as Jacob was a shepherd.

In describing the game, many of the children described the cotton balls as “fluffy things” that they had not seen before. Some of them did understand that the cotton balls were supposed to represent sheep and others even connected them to the story. Still others said the cotton balls reminded them of Jesus. Lastly, some children stated that they just played with the cotton balls because of the story and one child said they pretended the cotton balls were marshmallows. Toby understood that the cotton balls were sheep but did not know how exactly they fit into the story. Lexi seemed to have the most coherent connection to the sheep and the interactive lesson.

We played one where about how the seven years and how he had to herd up sheep, Jacob had to herd up sheep. We had little cotton balls that were white and we had to pick them up with tweezers. And the tweezers were big tweezers. The tweezers came from my house and I didn't know that until it looked at it and I was like whoa. When we were playing the game, the fake tweezers, that we had upstairs in our playroom, they broke and so...the teams were going against each other, but those tweezers broke, so we had to see how long it would take to see how many cotton balls we can get. Jacob had 12 sons and there were some people that went, and in one minute we had 12 cotton balls.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to better understand how children ages 4–8 make meaning of a story from a Bible lesson in a Christian church, using James Fowler’s Faith Development Theory as an interpretive framework. In this chapter, I discuss the findings, implications for research, implications for practice, limitations and trustworthiness, researcher as instrument, contributions to the literature, and my future research agenda.

Fifteen children who attend church at least once a month participated in their regularly scheduled classroom lesson and activities. After the lesson portion, they were asked to draw a picture reflective of the lesson learned. The story point of the lesson about “Jacob and Rachel” from the Gospel Project curriculum was “Laban tricked Jacob.” Through a semi-structured interview, completed within a week of the Bible lesson, the children were asked to retell the story, answering questions related to the lesson, their experiences with tricks, and their perceptions and other experiences in Sunday school and at church.

Findings

In this study, three major sections emerged from responses to the research questions: significance of Sunday School and church, understanding of the Bible lesson, and aspects of faith development. The research question, what aspects of Sunday school have particular significance and meaning, focused on perceptions of Sunday school and church, and included themes around snacks, classroom interaction, peer relationships, church culture, and worship. For the research question, how do children understand and interpret a Sunday school Bible lesson, children retold the Bible lesson including comments about characters, events, the moral of the story, and tricks. Responses to the research question, what aspects of faith (Fowler, 1981; Fowler & Dell, 2004, 2006) are present in children’s interpretations of a Sunday school Bible lesson, produced

responses representing each of the seven aspects: form of logic, social perspective taking, form of moral judgment, bounds of social awareness, locus of authority, form of world coherence, and symbolic function.

Faith and development are important to Christian thought and practice. A church's practices and rituals (i.e., infant baptism, the age of first communion, decisions for salvation, and so forth) tend to be dependent on developmental processes and have implications for theology of faith, and must be considered a major issue (Droege, 1972). Surprisingly, this is still the case today. Many churches debate about what developmental age or stage a child is ready for baptism, and how churches can *really* know that a child is ready to make that decision. How children discuss their faith and development is also important to Christian practice, and according to cognitive anthropologists, the counterintuitive quality of religious claims makes religious teachings easy to retain (Boyer, 2002; Sperber, 1982). Therefore, we must ask children about their experience of the practices and rituals at church.

Interpretation of Findings

Many studies examined the concept of God as a barometer for how well children understand religious matters. Children who attend church often will typically have a working understanding of God, or at least when I asked what they learned at church, they typically know to respond with something about "God or Jesus," so asking such things is not necessarily helpful for our long-term understanding of development specifically related to church experiences and interactions. Fowler believed that spirituality is a natural part of human existence and develops in predictable ways or stages. Children can learn from stories, parables, and metaphors based on their developmental stage. Their learning is also upon how ideas are presented and taught and their level of opportunity to engage with the various types of stories. For this study, the Bible

lesson provided a way to examine children's understanding of a Bible lesson and of topics related to religion and faith more broadly.

Barrett, Richert and Driesenga (2001) found that by the age of five or six years, children growing up in Christian culture credit God with special cognitive powers. They understood that He is not subject to the visual constraints which other humans beings are. Similarly, the majority of five-year-olds in another study asserted that God could understand their ambiguous drawing, even though their mothers probably could not, because they claimed that God "just knows." They also claimed that prayers did not have to be said aloud (Phelps & Woolley, 2001). In a study of Yukat'n 7-year-olds, they claimed that God had special cognitive powers, which would be displayed in His ability to know what the true contents of a container were, even if someone had put something in there other than what was supposed to be (Knight, Sousa, Barrett, & Altran, 2004).

Most existing research focuses on the basic understanding of God; I wanted to build on these findings by exploring children's understanding of Bible stories and how they might interpret them. In this study, I was concerned with what they thought about this Bible story.

Experiences and Perceptions of Church

Given the enduring presence of religion in the U.S., with at least one in five people attending church weekly (Newport, 2015), it is important for researchers to understand the role of religious faith and practice in children's lives. Crosby and Smith (2017) believed the church should be considered as a potential social support source for children. Larson, Hansen, and Moneta (2006) found that churches may be especially effective at providing certain types of support due to their unique organizational structure, strongly pro-social worldview, and spiritual functions.

Research on the benefits of church attendance, such as social and emotional support, has largely been conducted with adults. Adults identify a variety of reasons why they attend church, including to become closer to God, to be a better person, to find comfort during times of trouble or sorrow, and to be part of a larger community (Pew Research Center, 2018). In a survey of adults who attended church at least once per month, participants frequently mentioned family-based reasons for attending church; in particular, 69% of participants indicated attending church to provide a moral foundation for their children (Pew Research Center, 2018).

However, children may not be able to identify the benefits of church attendance in the same way that adults do. Children typically attend church because their parents, caregivers, or grandparents bring them. Parents want to provide foundational values of morality, and healthy functioning, so they are part of the church community. In some cases, parents may consider certain features they think their children would enjoy when choosing a church, although little research has examined this topic.

This raises a variety of questions, including: What do children want from church, and do they think it is possible for them to get it? Why do children attend church? What would church be like if children got what they wanted? When I asked, children in this study discussed their perceptions of church by talking about snacks, classroom interaction, church culture, and worship. Scholars concluded that children are generally passive participants in their faith development, unable to contribute in significant ways to congregational life (Lim, 2009; Williams, 2006).

Church as community that fulfills needs. Churches can satisfy basic needs for both children and adults by providing things such as safe spaces, food, and clothing. Children have basic needs. I think food (such as the snacks several participants mentioned as something they

liked about church or Sunday school) meets a basic need children have, especially when they are dealing with busy mornings and rushing off to church. When basic needs are met, children can thrive. Church as a way to have basic needs met may be especially important to children with histories of adversity (Fernando, 2007).

Those who grew up in church often talk about the “church candy” that was often given to them by older women in the church. At first glance, it may seem like it is just candy, but I would argue that it is part of children’s sense of belonging. Being given a piece of candy may communicate to children that the giver cares about them and wants them to get something fun or enjoyable from the church experience. These kinds of actions may contribute to ways in which church can satisfy the basic needs for safety, love, and belonging.

In addition, churches can provide sustained social connections when other support sources have been disrupted, either across normative developmental transition periods (e.g., going from elementary school to junior high) or in the midst of non-normative events, such as parental divorce (Boyce, 1985). Larson et al. (2006) argued that churches may be “particularly effective” developmental settings because the peer group is only partly separated from the adult community. Children address relevant issues and experience agency with their peers, but the peer group is also interconnected with adults around a shared pro-social worldview.

Finally, the developmental impact of church relationships may differ from those of other contexts because the church is constructed around a set of religious tenets and rituals intended for the spiritual formation of its members (Larson et al., 2006). For example, nurturing and supportive relationships within the church community may engender a corresponding concept of God, similar to the way parents’ behaviors do in early childhood (Dickie et al., 1997; Krause & Ellison, 2009). The resulting perception of God as loving and responsive is a significant facet of

religious support (Pargament, 1997), which has been associated with a number of positive youth outcomes, including life satisfaction, pro-social behavior, and religious coping (Bjorck, Kim, Braese, & Gililand, 2008; Crosby & Smith, 2015; Van Dyke, Glenwick, Cecero, & Kim, 2009).

Children in the study had varying interpretations of the importance of church attendance and the rationale behind church attendance. Although few children explicitly discussed the role of community in their perceptions of church or Sunday school, some participants did refer to aspects of the setting that were relevant to the notions of community, such as liking that their siblings were in Sunday school with them. Future research should explore peer relationships in the church setting.

Church as educator. Curriculum developers and church leaders spend a great deal of time deciding how to present material to children so they can understand it. However, a lot more goes into it. The children are not just learning the Bible lesson; they are learning how to interact with each other and how the parts of the lessons fit together. The video helps them understand the lesson. Schools often talk about the hidden curriculum (Wren, 1999). Churches also have a hidden curriculum.

The church teaches more than traditionally cognitive skills or moral values. It can also be a place of teaching social emotional skills. Children are more likely to exhibit behavior problems when they have relationships with adults who also have problem behaviors (Chen, Greenberger, Farruggia, Bush, & Dong, 2003). In contrast, many churches strategically facilitate relationships between children and trustworthy adults for the express purpose of transmitting the group's pro-social norms (Crosby & Smith, 2017). When children believe the important adults in their lives will disapprove of their behaviors, they are less likely to behave badly (Chen et al., 2003; Crosby & Smith, 2017).

As with community, few children explicitly discussed the role of learning or education as a reason they attended Sunday School or something they liked about it. However, some children's responses indicated they viewed church attendance as serving a broader purpose. For example, When I asked about why we learn about God and church, I had the following exchange with Miles:

- Miles: Um, cause, like, we had to learn about it cause we—One of the—Church is about God and we need to learn about God at church.
I: So why do we learn about God in church?
Miles: Cause, cause, um cause we don't want, like to make like, we don't want to— We want to go to heaven.

Similarly, Zumeiah indicated a belief that God is pleased when children learn Bible stories:

- I: Yeah? Okay. So, why do you think that this is a Bible story? Why do you think that God wanted us to learn this story?
Zumeiah: Because.... He likes when we. when we. when we, do it.
I: He likes when we do what?
Zumeiah: When we draw stuff.
I: He likes when we draw stuff?
Zumeiah: Yeah.
I: Yeah. Why do you think he likes when we draw stuff?
Zumeiah: Because. Because we make things for Jesus and God.
I: Why do you make things for Jesus?
Zumeiah: And we do it for God.
I: Oh! Why do we make things for God and Jesus?
Zumeiah: Because they like when we make this for them.
I: What do you think they do with the pictures? Do they do anything with them or do they just look at them?
Zumeiah: They just, look at them.

These responses suggest that, as in other studies (Fernando, 2007), children are thinking about church and faith at a level commensurate with their cognitive development.

The Bible Lesson

My first research question was how children understood and interpreted a Bible lesson, specifically the story of Jacob and Rachel. Most of the children reported the story point that

Laban tricked Jacob by promising he could marry Rachel after working for seven years, and instead, tricking him into marrying Leah. Four main themes emerged from the discussion about the Bible lesson: characters, events, the moral of the story, and tricks. Most children viewed Laban's trick as a bad thing and described Jacob as sad because of the trick played on him. Most of the children agreed it was wrong for Laban to trick Jacob, but their responses varied in what they thought Jacob should have done in response to being tricked.

The findings related to this research question suggest that children's ministries must teach all of the Bible in a developmentally appropriate and contextually accurate way, with an understanding that church is both an educational institution and place to help children develop morality, values, and integrity. For example, children in the study did grasp the story point, but most of them did not seem to grasp the Big Picture Question and response: Does God keep his promises? God always keeps His promises. Since this question was the focus of the unit and was intended to help children connect the sessions within the unit, I expected it to be a part of children's responses. However, children cannot respond to certain things without the "readiness" to do so. The lack of understanding of this question may be due to children's level of cognitive development, lack of framework for understanding the Bible story, or deficiencies in the way in which the Bible story was presented.

Gospel-centered Teaching

Gospel-centered teaching is showing Christ in all Bible teaching and engagement. Each unit has a big picture question which ties in all the sessions within a unit. For the unit containing the Bible lesson on Jacob and Rachel, the big picture question was, "Does God keep His promises? God always keeps his promises." However, only one of the children seemed to discuss this particular concept in a way parallel to the interpretation of the lesson. The teacher talked

about promise, and James mentioned a promise, but nobody else did, and he did not connect it to the Jacob and Rachel story, only to a trick his friend played on him. Lexi understood the trick had to play out as it did, because God's promise had to go forward.

In Dembowczyk's book, *Gospel Centered Kids' Ministry*, he asked,

Are we teaching Bible stories out of context, gravitating toward only the safe and feel-good stories? Do our kids hear Jesus each week and understand how the Bible is really one big story about Him? Or do they only hear about Jesus when we talk about the New Testament. (Dembowczyk, 2017, p. 18)

The children's responses to the questions seemed to depict the need to do a better job of making the gospel connection for children through the lesson. He stated,

We see a movement toward gospel-centeredness. Churches and individuals are intentionally focusing on the gospel story of God providing Jesus as the one and only solution for sin. The gospel is no longer being seen as a merely a five-minute explanation of how to become a Christian; it is being taught as the sustaining foundation for what a relationship with Jesus looks like. (Dembowczyk, 2017, p. 23)

If children understand that we are not only asking and hoping for them to become Christians, but also to focus on how Jesus and the Bible can change their lives, then they might develop a broader concept of faith.

Much of the gospel-centered ministry is implemented and navigated through the children's ministry director or pastor, and then taught and implemented through weekly volunteers. Parents may play a role in how they help children understand the gospel. Scholars have found it important to have someone in place. For example, Redding (2005) discovered that churches that have a full-time minister on staff are more likely to provide access to parenting education regarding children's faith development. Children may not understand these big messages if they are not presented in a developmentally appropriate way.

Developmentally Appropriate Teaching

There is a conversation about children being developmentally ready to hear certain Bible stories, so much of children's ministry centers on popular stories such as creation, Adam and Eve, Jonah and the Whale, Daniel and the Lion's Den, and other common Bible stories.

...we tend to sanitize the stories we want to share with kids. When we teach on Noah and the ark, we focus on Noah and his family in the ark, but we simply ignore all of the people drowning outside of the ark. We paint Noah, his family, and the smiling animals on our preschool walls, but we leave out the screaming, drowning people in the water. (Dembowczyk, 2017, p. 42)

In recent years, there has been pushback to teach the whole Bible to children, which would include stories that people may not be as quick to connect to children. For example, in the story about Jacob and Rachel, there are themes of loyalty, jealousy, infidelity, partiality, and more, so there could be fear on the part of leaders as to how children may connect to the story, and for the connection to take them down a path for which the ministry leaders, parents, and children are not ready. The fear is for one of the children to ask about specifics of what it meant to be married, and how Jacob would not have known Leah was not the woman he was supposed to marry. Therefore, teaching to children must be prepared in a way to be understood by children (developmentally appropriate), but not diluted because we assume children are unable to understand. The children's sermon (teaching) is effectively delivered when it is easily understood by children (Dunbar, 1982).

Children receive a new Bible lesson each week, and we have to be sure they observe, interpret, and apply it to their own situations, whether we prompt them to do so or not. This is done by developmentally appropriate teaching methods and gospel-centered teaching. Everything taking place in class should point children back to the gospel: the teaching, the interactive lesson, and the review of the lesson (which should happen before, during, and after

the main lesson for the day). This means the teacher is using moments with children to connect the current lesson to the good news of Jesus. Based on the desire to expose children to the Bible in its entirety should permeate every story children encounter. This particular lesson may not have been developmentally appropriate for all children. For example, most children grasped the concept of tricks, which was the story point, but they did not grasp the Big Picture Question: Does God keep His promises? The Big Picture Question requires connections with the lesson prior, and possibly varying levels of abstract thinking, which neither of which were examined by this study.

Aspects of Faith Development

The aspects of faith development are form of logic, social perspective taking, form of moral judgment, bounds of social awareness, locus of authority, form of world coherence, and symbolic function. Aspects of faith development help us see the complexity of childhood development and socialization, but sometimes children must be explicitly asked their thoughts on various topics and tasks. In the current study, Fowler's Faith Development Theory was used as a lens to examine the interpretation of a Bible story, but the faith development interviews have historically focused on one or two aspects at a time, rather than examining a specific Bible story and having children answer questions. The focus of this study was different.

The faith development interview is designed to help scholars think in structural terms. The goal of the current study was to allow the children to talk about the story and see what aspects of development were present in their narratives. In contrast, "The goal of the faith development manual was to include dimensions of life history and narrative dynamic" (Fowler et al., 2004, p. 9). In general, children have very little "life history" to draw from in making sense of the world and forming worldviews, but they can still make sense through stories. However, it

seems that the teaching of the lesson, by the teacher and through the videos I watched in class, provided interpretations for the children, rather than letting the children provide the interpretation by simply telling the story or reading the relevant Bible passages aloud and asking them what they thought.

It is increasingly important to focus on developmental psychology in our understanding of faith due to its complex nature. Fowler's theory has multiple aspects and reflects the ways that children's cognitive and social development plays out in their thinking and in their faith. Lim (2009) argued that historically the goal of childhood faith formation in the early Baptist congregations was to nurture children to become regenerate believers, persons in community, and persons in ministry and witness. This is done as children hear Bible stories, also known as narratives, which can also be testimonies of God's character and nature. The goals of child development seemed to exclude faith development. Understanding how faith formation interacts with child development from the children's perspective is complex because it must consider children's voices, not just adults' interpretation of children's faith development.

Narrative Structure of Bible Stories

The logic behind aspects of faith development center on the use of a narrative structure. Narrative structure is the organization of a story. As people—children, in this case—interact with church, they are also interacting with historic stories, ideas, and texts. As children retold the Bible story, while connecting to a deeper conversations about how characters in the story responded and how they respond to various situations in their life, the aspects of faith development provided a way to make meaning based on how people making meaning and interpret various events to which they are exposed. Stories may act as a substitute for life

experiences. Bible stories may also help to organize children's life experiences by providing a framework for understanding.

Learning from Stories and Books

Learning from Bible stories provides a specific example of the more general phenomenon of ways in which children can learn from books and stories. Books and stories can teach factual information, influence worldviews, and impact children's views of themselves. As the children retold the story, some of them highlighted details about clothing, facial expressions, and differences between themselves and characters in the story. Williams (2006) found that faith had a significant impact on how children feel about themselves. As a result, Christian faith experiences may also be a factor in improving a positive cultural self-image in African American children. The study has some confirmatory evidence about improving self-image. In the current study, children discussed their faith through the content of the Bible lesson, mapped onto the aspects of faith development, as an important way to learn about themselves. Retelling stories may result in learning morality, building character, and other qualities through narrative structure.

To understand what children can know and comprehend, we must ask them about things that extend beyond their world, to help them engage. This includes the use of books, stories, and other forms of media (art and TV) which introduce them to other things and expand their imagination about possibilities beyond them. Learning and engagement with children may have bi-directional benefits for children and adults, which can be observed through stories and books.

Children learn from many experiences and interaction in their lives, specifically picture books. One of the primary ways children are socialized is through picture books (Flack, Field, & Horst, 2018) and picture books may provide increased communication between children and

adults (Heath, Moulton, Dyches, Prater, & Brown, 2011). Influential models, especially picture books, encourage children to copy actions, which may have positive consequences for children who later attempt to imitate behaviors they see depicted in picture books, particularly if these actions are shown to have positive consequences (Simcock & DeLoache, 2006; Simcock, Garrity, & Barr, 2011), and would be beneficial for healthy childhood experiences..

Reading stories can promote desired behaviors (Montgomery & Maunders, 2015). Books or stories that involve positive relations between in-group and out-group members can improve intergroup attitudes, a process known as vicarious contact (Husnu, Mertan, & Cicek, 2018; Vezzali, Stahi, & Giovanni, 2012). Through vicarious contact, children learn appropriate ways of behaving and relating to others. For example, Quincy understood from the story that people can change their mind and was able to relate that to his own experience. The children made sense of the lesson and made attempts to connect it to their own situations.

Populations

Age specific comparison. Future research should further explore the way children's thinking about faith and church develops with age. Previous research found that there were significant differences in concepts of salvation and assurance of salvation among children who were 6–7, 8–12, and 13–17 (Korniejczuk, 1994). Because the four-year-olds had thoughts and feelings about tricks that were played at school, I would like to explore the perceptions of even younger children.

Special needs. Special needs concerning Fowler's faith stages and giftedness has not been studied. Special needs is important area of future research on faith development. The children in this study had some developmental needs, and the church must explore opportunities to support those children. Schurter (1987) found that when the chaplain recognized the critical

role of the special needs families, they could think of how best to support further development in all areas. One of the things that makes this harder to study in children is that the potential subjects would be under-aged and developmentally different than the age-range within the faith development stages would indicate.

Longitudinal Study

The Gospel Project curriculum is for ages birth to adult and walks through a three-year chronological Bible study. Therefore, a child who attends a church using this curriculum could potentially be taught the same Bible story five or six times before graduating from high school. Two of the children mentioned learning this story at “their old” [formerly attended] church, and I wondered how their perceptions and understanding of the story changed when hearing the story at two different points in development. Longitudinal research that examines interpretations at different points in the life course could be very interesting. I expect that as children get older, they will have an increased cognitive and social-emotional capacity to understand different cultural practices then and now, and how that development across time shapes biblical observation, interpretation and application.

Recommendations for Practitioners

Church should be more child-centered, which means children have a voice in their church-related experiences and content, including lesson, teaching, and videos that are appropriate to the children’s developmental age and stage. Churches should utilize pre-made curricula or develop curricula that facilitates age-appropriate engagement with the Bible and emphasizes narrative engagement as a primary way to help children understand and respond to the Bible.

Sunday school engagement for children should also be gospel-centered, since this is a church setting. Dembowczyk (2017) focused on five gospel-centered areas: teaching, transformation, mission, leaders (paid and unpaid), and parents. Each of these areas should strive to provide an explanation for how to best partner and prepare churches and children's ministries to focus on Christ, his message, how that relates to their lives, and how children can respond. Some ideas for gospel-centered engagement are making sure to incorporate the Big Picture Lesson and tie it back to other parts of the lesson. I would also encourage churches to partner with parents by having a conversation about what their child is doing in the classroom. If possible, practitioners should spend time with children and their families outside of church to foster greater relationship development.

There seems to be a greater emphasis on the gospel being the "whole picture" of what Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection means for our lives. In the past, the gospel was seen as something a person got one time or an event where you "gave your life to Christ." The movement now is to have the gospel permeate every part of one's life, for one to be changed by it, and to be moved to action because of it. That action is seen as essential to and prompted by the initial conversation and then the process of sanctification. The goal of the Gospel Project curriculum is to do just that: to teach the entire Bible, not just the "fluffy" and "feel good" parts, but all of it. This means that such stories as Jacob being tricked by Laban to marry a woman whom he did not love, and then being required to work an additional seven years for the one he did love, shows us the faithfulness of God to Leah, in that he allowed her to be the carrier of the promise that was to go forth. However, it seems that the "promise" was de-emphasized in this story and hidden in plain sight for many reasons.

- The story was not taught clearly

- All children did not participate
- It was a confusing story, because there was no context/explanation for how and when people get married, both then and now
- It was unclear for some children how and why the cotton balls connected to the game, although it was explicitly stated outright by the teacher

Based on what I learned from the data collected and the observations, it is clear that we need to be more concrete in achieving the intended goals of the lesson and then communicating that message.

Reflections from the Study

The purpose of this study was to better understand how children ages 4–8 understand and discuss a Bible lesson in a Christian church, how their understanding of the Bible lesson is related to aspects of James Fowler’s Faith Development Theory, and discover what their perceptions and experiences in Sunday school and church were. Fowler’s FDT helped me “see” what was happening between the children’s retelling and interpretation of the story, as it mapped onto different aspects of faith development. This study centered on children’s voices as the primary instrument for communicating their understanding of a Bible lesson and perceptions of church and Sunday school. The research substantiated my intended research goals to hear from children as they explained what they gained from interactions in church and with the curriculum. The children understood the major purpose of church and what stories can teach them about various aspects of faith development, which can hopefully be retrieved for interactions in church and beyond.

Church is an educational and developmental institution that can provide additional avenues for children to grow in knowledge and depth of insight of themselves and the Bible,

while connecting them to the mission and vision of the local church. I expected the children to re-tell key elements of the story, since the teachers taught the story, the video explained the story, and there was usually an activity (interactive lesson) to help children make connections to the Bible lesson. Children not only connect with the Bible lesson, but they may find comfort in having snacks, participating in the larger church body with their parents, which includes worship songs, which some determine are too long or too many. Church is not just a place for children to learn the Bible; it should be a place where children grow and develop their voice, character, love for others, and resilience. Within the church setting, children have opportunities to develop and engage with the Bible and may have an opportunity to find and make meaning, understand purpose, and engage in long-lasting change.

This work was deeply personal for me. I grew up in a church where I was one of the few children there. I saw the church as a place of caring, encouragement, love, and belonging. I wonder if the care we provide (even if it includes an emphasis on snacks), is a foundational component for how children respond and relate to us. If this does happen, children in church would build more confidence and compassion for others. Instead of viewing the Bible as a set of stories from long ago, they would see practical application for their lives, while also building confidence to question what they are learning and what they believe, outside of their children's ministry and their families. I want children to dissect a story, to think about what it meant then and what it means now. The goal is always for the educational institution to accomplish its mission.

From research, we see that we are not listening to the many voices asking for more Bible study despite several decades of innovation in providing powerful church experiences for

children and teenagers. Young adults are not even able to articulate basic truths about the Christian faith (Smith & Lundquist Denton, 2005).

I hope that this study motivated others to explore church as an authentic place for holistic development, not just a holding space for children's separate spiritual endeavors. The call to action is for researchers doing "whole brain" research to include church as a place to be examined and explored. "If you love Jesus and love kids, come work for us" is not enough. You do not have to be a theologian, but you need to be prepared and ready to accurately teach the curriculum.

The Study's Contribution to the Literature

This study contributed to the literature by asking children to retell a Bible story from a Sunday school lesson and connected their responses to their current experiences in various contexts. When I asked them to contribute, children may make positive suggestions towards children's ministry and church. For example, a child explained his discomfort with wearing fancy shoes to church, while other children expressed positive experiences related to church involvement at church and in the Sunday school classroom. Some children expressed their experiences at church: what is important to them and what they prefer not to have, and, in some cases, why.

This study also contributed to the literature by showing evidence of the seven aspects of faith development in interviews with children. The aspects of faith development can help us determine how a child is interpreting and applying stories to their own lives. Additionally, the children should have experienced real-life connection and changes in church, based on their responses from the interview. For example, Demario stated that he liked when the church used to have Easter Egg hunts, which the church had not done last year. As a result of his comment, we

had the Easter Egg hunt this year. This study provided a model for providing hope for children to feel heard and feel valued in church and beyond.

Lastly, children connected the Bible lesson to everyday issue of morality, including which types of tricks are good or bad, how to respond to tricks, characteristics of various relationships, and more. This study allowed children to retell a Bible story that they heard in class, which may lead to more questions about how the church, a setting many children frequent, can be a place to incorporate other character development topics through storytelling, specifically with the use of the Bible.

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Appendix A: Hebrews 11 (The Faith Hall of Fame)

Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.

² This is what the ancients were commended for.

³ By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.

⁴ By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead.

⁵ By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death: "He could not be found, because God had taken him away."^[a] For before he was taken, he was commended as one who pleased God. ⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

⁷ By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By his faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that is in keeping with faith.

⁸ By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. ⁹ By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. ¹⁰ For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. ¹¹ And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she^[b] considered him faithful who had made the promise. ¹² And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore.

¹³ All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. ¹⁴ People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, ¹⁸ even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned."^[c] ¹⁹ Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.

²⁰ By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future.

²¹ By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff.

²² By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions concerning the burial of his bones.

²³ By faith Moses' parents hid him for three months after he was born, because they saw he was no ordinary child, and they were not afraid of the king's edict.

²⁴ By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

²⁵ He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. ²⁶ He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward. ²⁷ By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger; he persevered because he saw him who is invisible. ²⁸ By faith he kept

the Passover and the application of blood, so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel.

²⁹ By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as on dry land; but when the Egyptians tried to do so, they were drowned.

³⁰ By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the army had marched around them for seven days.

³¹ By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.^[d]

³² And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets,³³ who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions,³⁴ quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies.³⁵ Women received back their dead, raised to life again. There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection.³⁶ Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment.³⁷ They were put to death by stoning;^[e] they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—³⁸ the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground.

³⁹ These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised,

⁴⁰ since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

Appendix B:
Sample of the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message (Southern Baptist Convention)

The Church

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.

The New Testament speaks also of the church as the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.

The Family

God has ordained the family as the foundational institution of human society. It is composed of persons related to one another by marriage, blood, or adoption.

Marriage is the uniting of one man and one woman in covenant commitment for a lifetime. It is God's unique gift to reveal the union between Christ and His church and to provide for the man and the woman in marriage the framework for intimate companionship, the channel of sexual expression according to biblical standards, and the means for procreation of the human race.


The husband and wife are of equal worth before God, since both are created in God's image. The marriage relationship models the way God relates to His people. A husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. He has the God-given responsibility to provide for, to protect, and to lead his family. A wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband even as the church willingly submits to the headship of Christ. She, being in the image of God as is her husband and thus equal to him, has the God-given responsibility to respect her husband and to serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation.

Children, from the moment of conception, are a blessing and heritage from the Lord. Parents are to demonstrate to their children God's pattern for marriage. Parents are to teach their children spiritual and moral values and to lead them, through consistent lifestyle example and loving discipline, to make choices based on biblical truth. Children are to honor and obey their parents.

Appendix C: Classroom Timelines

Time	Ages 0-3	Ages 4-7	Ages 8-12
10 am	Greet each child Play Time	Greet each child Greet kids + Countdown + Big Picture Video+Review of Last Week's Lesson	Greet / ice breaker game
10:15			Review Last week's lesson
10:20	Clean up Toys	Watch Current Lesson (take dvd player to 0-3 after finished)	Scripture Memory Review/ Big Picture Story
10:30	Review last week lesson, Bible Story, Big Picture Story - <i>have kids sit on blanket and prepare to watch and listen to story</i>		Intro new story with interactive (as suggested in lesson)
10:35	Potty Break/Check Diapers	Bathroom Break	Read the story / tell the story / re-tell the story (I have the kids help me with all three, if possible)
10:45	Watch DVD (have snack) : move dvd to 8-12 after video Coloring Time	Lesson Interactive	If I use the video, I may insert it here Ask questions about the story: What do you like about the story? What does this teach us about: -God / -man / -the Kingdom of God?
11am	Clean up toys	Children Dismissed (probably need to have an extra "activity" in this spot in case service is longer than expected?)	Is there: -a command to obey? -A promise to keep? -An example to follow? -A sin to avoid? Practice retelling the story (I need to work this in as we have been skipping this)
11:10	Memory Verse/Singing Time		Final question: WHO WILL YOU TELL THIS STORY TO THIS WEEK?
11:15	Parents Arrive/Check-out		Parents Arrive/Check-out
11:15 -11:30	Clean/Sanitize Toys Replace all supplies and load cart	Replace all supplies and load cart	Replace all supplies and load cart

Appendix D: Example of Gospel Project Curricula (Jacob and Rachel)



Use Week of:

Unit 3 • Session 2 Jacob and Rachel

BIBLE PASSAGE:
Genesis 29–31

STORY POINT:
Laban tricked Jacob.

KEY PASSAGE:
Genesis 28:15a

BIG PICTURE QUESTION:
Does God keep His promises? God always keeps His promises.

INTRODUCE THE STORY
(15–20 MINUTES)
PAGE 146



TEACH THE STORY
(10–15 MINUTES)
PAGE 148



EXPERIENCE THE STORY
(20–25 MINUTES)
PAGE 150



Additional resources are available at gospelproject.com. For free training and session-by-session help, visit www.ministrygrid.com/web/thegospelproject.

LEADER Bible Study

When Isaac and Rebekah sent Jacob away from his home in the promised land of Canaan to escape the wrath of his brother Esau, Rebekah expected him to be gone for a few days—just until Esau calmed down. (Gen. 27:44) But days and then weeks and then months passed; Jacob was with Laban for twenty years. (Gen. 31:38)

Before Jacob left home, Isaac blessed him and instructed him to find a wife among his relatives. And that's what Jacob did. On his way to Laban's house, God appeared to Jacob at Bethel in a dream and gave Jacob the same covenant He gave to Abraham. Jacob believed God had chosen him as an heir of the promise—to follow God, to lead the family, and to teach the next generation to follow God too.

This meant Jacob would have a family. He arrived in Haran and saw Rachel, the daughter of Laban. Jacob loved Rachel. He agreed to work for seven years for Laban if Laban would let him marry Rachel. After seven years, Laban deceived Jacob. Instead of giving him Rachel, Laban gave him Rachel's older sister, Leah.

Jacob was angry. Laban demanded that Jacob work another seven years if he wanted to marry Rachel. So Jacob worked seven more years. Jacob's own plans for his life were not lining up with the Lord's plans. He wanted to have children with Rachel, but she was barren. His first four sons came from Leah. Finally, Rachel had Joseph and Benjamin.

In time, Jacob fathered twelve sons—Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin. Even though Jacob did not love Leah, God loved her and He chose Jacob and Leah's son Judah to be the heir of the promise. Through Judah's family, God would show His love for the world by sending Jesus to be the Savior He promised.

The BIBLE Story

Jacob and Rachel

Genesis 29–31

Jacob had left his home and **traveled to the land of his uncle Laban**. He came to a well where shepherds were giving water to their sheep. “Do you know Laban?” Jacob asked.

“Yes,” they said. “Here comes his daughter Rachel.”

Rachel came to the well with more sheep, and Jacob gave them water. Jacob told Rachel that he was her relative, and Rachel ran to tell her father, Laban.

Laban welcomed Jacob into his house. Jacob stayed and helped him. Then Laban said, “What should I pay you for your work?”

Now Laban had two daughters: the older was named Leah, and the younger was Rachel. Jacob loved Rachel, so he said, “I will work for you seven years if you let me marry Rachel.”

Laban agreed. Jacob worked for seven years. Then Laban had a feast, but instead of letting Jacob marry Rachel, he tricked Jacob into marrying Leah.

Jacob was upset. “Why did you trick me?” he asked.

Laban said, “I will let you marry Rachel too, but you must work seven more years.” So Jacob married Rachel, and he worked for



Laban seven more years.

Now Jacob had two wives, but he loved Rachel more than Leah. When God saw Leah was not loved, He gave her children. Rachel wanted children too. God heard her prayer, and in time, God gave her children too. In all, Jacob had twelve sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin. God told Jacob to go home to the land of Canaan. So Jacob took his family and everything he owned, and he headed home.

Christ Connection: Nothing could stop God's plan for the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God loved Leah and used her in His plan. Through the family of Jacob and Leah's son Judah, God would show His love for the world by sending Jesus to be the Savior.

Bible Storytelling Tips

- **Portray emotions:** While telling the story, pause and draw (or enlist a volunteer to draw) different faces that represent how the Bible people feel or react during certain parts of the story.
- **Use dramatic conversation:** Vary your voice for the dialogue of different people. For example, use one voice for Laban and another voice for Jacob.

INTRODUCE the Story



SESSION TITLE: Jacob and Rachel

BIBLE PASSAGE: Genesis 29–31

STORY POINT: Laban tricked Jacob.

KEY PASSAGE: Genesis 28:15a

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Does God keep His promises? God always keeps His promises.

Welcome time

- "You Are God" song
 - offering basket
 - Allergy Alert download
 - favorite toys related to the Bible story theme
- Play a theme song in the background as you greet preschoolers and follow your church's security procedures. Set an offering basket near the door to collect at an appropriate time. Post an allergy alert, if necessary. Set out a few favorite theme-related toys, such as puzzles and blocks.

Activity page

- "Many Sons" activity page, 1 per child
 - markers or crayons
- Invite preschoolers to count the brothers on the page. Guide them to circle the brother with his hands on his hips.
- SAY** • Remember God promised Abraham that he would have as many people in his family as there are stars in the sky. God gave Abraham a son, Isaac. Isaac had two sons, Jacob and Esau. In today's Bible story we will hear how God gave Jacob twelve sons. God planned to send Jesus to earth through Jacob's son Judah's family.

LOW PREP

- blocks

Option: Find a picture of a Bible times well online. Print the image or show it to preschoolers on a mobile device to inspire them as they build.

Build a well with blocks

Set out blocks and invite preschoolers to work together to build a well. Explain that people dig into the ground to find water. This is called a well. They often build a wall around the hole to identify the well.

SAY • A few weeks ago, we heard the story of how Abraham's servant met Rebekah at a well. She would be the wife of Abraham's son Isaac. In today's Bible story, Isaac's son Jacob met his future wife at a well!

Sort in twelves

Color the bottom of each cup of a egg carton (dozen-sized) with a primary color marker. Some of the cups will have to be the same color. Set out coordinating pom-poms, one for each cup. Invite a preschooler to count the pom-poms and then sort each one into the cup with the matching color.

Guide her to count the cups. Allow preschoolers to take turns sorting and counting. Consider providing tongs for preschoolers to use to place the pom-poms in the cups as added fine motor skill practice.

SAY • Great job counting to 12! Do you remember how God promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that they would have as many people in their family as stars in the sky? Well, in today's Bible story, God gave Jacob twelve sons! Let's hear how God grew Jacob's family.

Transition to tell the story

To gain the attention of all the preschoolers to move them to Bible study, show the countdown video, flip off the lights, or clap a simple rhythm for the children to copy. Invite preschoolers to bleat like sheep as they move to Bible study.

- clean, empty dozen cardboard egg carton
- 12 pom-poms in primary colors
- markers in primary colors
- tongs (optional)

- countdown video (optional)

TEACH the Story



SESSION TITLE: Jacob and Rachel

BIBLE PASSAGE: Genesis 29–31

STORY POINT: Laban tricked Jacob.

KEY PASSAGE: Genesis 28:15a

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Does God keep His promises? God always keeps His promises.

Introduce the Bible story

- Bible
- bookmark
- Giant Timeline

Place a bookmark at Genesis 29–31 in your Bible. Invite a preschooler to open it. Reverently display the open Bible.

SAY • Did you know the Bible is the most special of every book in the whole wide world? That's because it's the only book with God's words in it, and God's words are true. Today's Bible story is found in Genesis, the very first book of the Bible.

Point to the Bible story picture on the giant timeline. Remind children that all the stories in the Bible fit together to tell an even bigger story. The Bible tells us the big story of how God rescues sinners through His Son, Jesus.

Watch or tell the Bible story

- Story Point Poster
- "Jacob and Esau" video (optional)
- Bible Story Picture Poster

Show the video or tell the Bible story using the provided storytelling tips. Use the bolded version of the Bible story for young preschoolers.

SAY • Last week, we heard the story of how **Jacob tricked Isaac**, and this week we heard how **Laban tricked Jacob**. But Laban's trickery could not stop God's plan. Jacob did not love Leah, but God loved Leah and used her in His plan. God would show His love for the world by sending Jesus to be the Savior through Leah and Jacob's son Judah.

Practice the key passage

Cut out the “Key Passage Marker” and place it at Genesis 28:15a. Invite a volunteer to come up and open your Bible to the key passage. Read the key passage aloud. Practice the motions you created for the verse. Say the key passage using different voices such as high, low, loud, soft, and so forth.

SAY • Our key passage is a promise that God made to Jacob. He promised Jacob that He would be with him and watch over him wherever he went.

Sing the key passage song, “Wherever, Wherever You Go,” and the theme song, “You Are God.”

• “Key Passage Marker” printable
• Key Passage Poster
• “Wherever, Wherever You Go” song
• “You Are God” song

Learn the big picture question

SAY • Can you answer our big picture question? *Does God keep His promises? God always keeps His promises.*

God made a promise to the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Nothing would stop God from keeping His promise. God planned to show His love for the world by sending Jesus to be the Savior through the family of Jacob and Leah.

• Big Picture Question Poster



Missions moment

SAY • God’s plan is also for all nations to hear the good news about Jesus, but many people live in countries where sharing the gospel is not allowed. People from those places are moving to countries where they can hear the good news. Nothing can stop God’s plan!

Invite children to look at the “People in Your Place” graph and read the people group names listed.

• “People in Your Place” printable

Pray and transition to experience the story

The Nation Grew

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EXPERIENCE the Story



SESSION TITLE: Jacob and Rachel

BIBLE PASSAGE: Genesis 29–31

STORY POINT: Laban tricked Jacob.

KEY PASSAGE: Genesis 28:15a

BIG PICTURE QUESTION: Does God keep His promises? God always keeps His promises.

LOW PREP

- markers or crayons
- paper

Draw family portraits

Invite preschoolers to draw a picture of their family. Ask them about each family member as they work.

SAY • Nothing could stop God's plan for the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. **Laban tricked Jacob** into marrying Leah, but God loved Leah and used her in His plan. Through the family of Jacob and Leah's son Judah, God would show His love for the world by sending Jesus to be the Savior.

Build a sheep pen

Set out blocks. Guide preschoolers to build a sheep pen. Invite children to play out Jacob caring for Laban's sheep using plastic sheep and people figures.

SAY • **Laban tricked Jacob** into marrying Leah and working for him seven more years. Laban's tricks could not stop God's plan for the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Through the family of Jacob and Leah's son Judah, God planned to show His love for the world by sending Jesus to be the Savior.

- blocks
- plastic sheep
- people figures

- construction paper
- scissors (adult use only)
- markers
- glue sticks

Make "I am loved" art

Before the session, cut out 2-by-4-inch rectangles from construction paper. Make at least six rectangles for each

preschooler. Cut out one heart from construction paper for each child. Write *God* on each heart. Then write *I am loved!* at the top of a sheet of construction paper for each preschooler.

Give each preschooler a sheet of construction paper and six rectangles. Ask a preschooler to tell you who loves her. Write each of her responses on a separate rectangle. Then ask her to tell you who loves her most of all. Give the preschooler a God heart. Guide the preschooler to glue the God heart in the middle of the page and the rectangles around it.

SAY • Laban tricked Jacob. Jacob did not love Leah, but God did. God loved Leah and used her in His plan. Through the family of Jacob and Leah's son Judah, God would send His very own Son into the world. No one loves you as much as God does. God showed His love for you when He sent Jesus to die on the cross and rise again to rescue you from sin. You matter to Him!

Run a sheep relay

Form teams lined up in straight lines. On the opposite side of the room, set a bucket on the floor for each team. Spread cotton balls around the buckets. Give the first child in each line a set of tongs. When you say go, invite her to use the tongs to pick up one cotton ball "sheep" and put it in the bucket. She will then take the tongs to the next person on her team and move to the back of the line. Continue until all the "sheep" have been put into the bucket.

SAY • Jacob worked for Laban for 14 years as a shepherd caring for Laban's sheep. Jacob worked hard so he could marry Rachel, but **Laban tricked Jacob.** But

• buckets, 1 per team
• cotton balls
• tongs, 1 per team

tricks cannot stop God's plan. God used Leah in His plan to send Jesus to the world.



Play "Talk to Me" game

- "Talk to Me Game" printable
- heavyweight paper
- brad fastener
- paper clip

Practice talking about Jesus with this game. Print the "Talk to Me Game" printable on heavyweight paper. Push a brad fastener through the center of the spinner and loop a paper clip around the brad so that it spins freely. Guide preschoolers to take turns spinning and answering the questions.

SAY • God's plan is for all people to hear about His Son, Jesus. Just like nothing could stop God's plan for the family of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, nothing can stop God's plan for people from every nation to hear the good news about Jesus. God showed His love for the world by sending Jesus to be the Savior. People can hear this good news when we tell them!

Snack and review

Play the countdown video to signal the end of activities. Wash hands and gather preschoolers for snack time. Pray, thanking God for the snack.

Serve cookies you might find at a wedding for snack. Remind preschoolers that **Laban tricked Jacob** into marrying Leah. God loved Leah and used her in His plan to send Jesus as the Savior of the world.

Display the Bible story picture as you ask the following review questions. Retell portions of the Bible story as needed:

1. Whom did Jacob stay with and work for? (*his uncle Laban*)
2. Whom did Jacob love and want to marry? (*Rachel*)
3. Whom did Laban trick Jacob into marrying? (*Leah*)
4. Whom did Jacob trick in last week's Bible story? (*his father, Isaac*)
5. How many sons did Jacob have? (*12*)
6. What did Jacob do when God told him to go home? (*He obeyed.*)
7. ***Does God keep His promises? God always keeps His promises.***

Transition

When children finish their snack, preschoolers may color the Bible story coloring page, play a simple game to practice the key passage or big picture question, or sing along to the key passage or theme song.

If parents are picking up their children at this time, tell them something that their child enjoyed doing or did well during the session. Distribute the preschool big picture cards for families.

- countdown video (optional)
- Allergy Alert download
- paper cups and napkins
- snack food
- wedding cookies (optional)
- Bible Story Picture Poster
- Big Picture Question Poster

- Bible Story Coloring Page
- crayons
- Key Passage Poster
- Big Picture Question Poster
- "You Are God" song
- "Wherever, Wherever You Go" song
- Big Picture Cards for Families: Babies, Toddlers, and Preschoolers

Appendix E: Child-Friendly Flyer



**RESEARCH STUDY
(AGES 4-7)**

JANUARY 2019

come talk
about
God and
the
Bible!

Small
Prize for
everyone!

Tell Grown-
ups what
kids think
about
church.

You will need to listen and pay attention in your class, draw a picture about the story and then Ms. Jumesha will have to take it home and then come to your house for an interview.



Appendix F: Parental Consent

Parent-Guardian Informed Consent Statement

Children's Faith Experiences in a Midwest City Christian Church

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish your child to participate in the present study. You may refuse to sign this form and not allow your child to participate in this study. You should be aware that even if you agree to allow your child to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. If you do withdraw your child from this study, it will not affect your relationship with this unit, the services it may provide to you, or the University of Kansas.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to better understand how children ages 4-7 make meaning of a story from a Bible lesson in a Christian church, using James Fowler's Faith Development Theory as an interpretive framework.

PROCEDURES

Your child will be asked a series of interview questions about their experience in a church, including thoughts and feelings about church and a Bible lesson. Each interview will take about 30-45 minutes.

A video camera will be used to record the interview. Your child will have the option of stopping the recording at any time, but they are required for your child to participate in the study. An audio only recording can be used upon request. I will keep all tapes in locked cabinet at my house, and I will transcribe them and keep them for at least one year, then discard them. You are welcome to have a copy of the video and a transcription of the interview.

RISKS

There are no expected risks for participating in this study. This study does not ask your child for any personal or sensitive information. Through the interview, I will be asking your child how they feel answering the questions. If during the interview, I believe your child is at any risk, the interview will be stopped, and I will speak with you about it. Throughout the interview process, your child will be reminded that they may withdraw from participation at any time during the meeting.

BENEFITS

Although you and your child will receive no direct benefits, it is expected that the children who participate in this study will enjoy a meeting with a researcher (Jumesha Wade) and contributing to the research. You and your child's participation will help us learn more about how faith develops in children. It is hoped that this information will ultimately improve you and your child's experiences with children's ministry, and the experiences of other children (e.g., indirect benefit). Your child will be made to feel important throughout the interview. Your child will be made to feel special through the interview process and will receive a thank you note, as a reminder of the importance of his/her participation and contribution to the study. Again, you may obtain the results of the study if you like.

PAYMENT TO PARTICIPANTS

Participants will not be paid for their participation in the study. At the end of the interview your child will be allowed to choose a toy (worth less than \$5) from the treasure chest.

PARTICIPANT CONFIDENTIALITY

Your child's name will not be associated in any publication or presentation with the information collected about your child or with the research findings from this study. Instead, the researcher(s) will use a study number or a pseudonym rather than your child's name. Your child's identifiable information will not be shared unless (a) it is required by law or university policy, or (b) you give written permission. There is not expiration date for data used in this study. Permission granted on this date to use and disclose your information remains in effect indefinitely. By signing this form, you give permission for the use and disclosure of your child's information, excluding your child's name, for purposes of this study at any time in the future.

REFUSAL TO SIGN CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION

You are not required to sign this Consent and Authorization form and you may refuse to do so without affecting your right to any services you are receiving or may receive from the University of Kansas or to participate in any programs or events of the University of Kansas. However, if you refuse to sign, your child cannot participate in this study.

CANCELLING THIS CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION

You may withdraw your consent to allow participation of your child in this study at any time. You also have the right to cancel your permission to use and disclose further information collected about your child, in writing, at any time, by sending your written request to: Jumesha Wade, Joseph R. Pearson Hall, 1122 West Campus Rd, Lawrence, KS 66045.

If you cancel permission to use your child's information, the researchers will stop collecting additional information about your child. However, the research team may use and disclose information that was gathered before they received your cancellation, as described above.

QUESTIONS ABOUT PARTICIPATION

Questions about procedures should be directed to the researcher(s) listed at the end of this consent form.

PARTICIPANT CERTIFICATION:

I have read this Consent and Authorization form. I have had the opportunity to ask, and I have received answers to, any questions I had regarding the study. I understand that if I have any additional questions about my child's rights as a research participant, I may call (785) 864-7429, write to the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7568, or email irb@ku.edu.

I agree to allow my child to take part in this study as a research participant. By my signature I affirm that I am at least 18 years old and that I have received a copy of this Consent and Authorization form.

Type/Print Participant's Name

Date

Parent/Guardian Signature

Would you like a copy of the study? Circle one: YES NO

[If signed by a personal representative, a description of such representative's authority to act for the individual must also be provided, e.g., parent/guardian.]

Researcher Contact Information

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Appendix G: Child Assent

Hi! My name is Jumesha Wade. I am a college student at the University of Kansas and I study children. I am very interested in how children make sense of what happens in the world. I want to learn how kids feel about these things. I believe that what kids have to say is very important and I hope that what I learn can help other grownups take care of the kids even better.

Your parents said that it was okay for me to talk with you, and for me to ask you some questions. This means that I will ask you to tell me a little bit about yourself and then ask you about things that happen at our church. If you want to meet with me, you will be helping me with my homework which is to learn how kids think and feel about church, the Bible and themselves. However, if you do not want to do this, this is fine. I want you to have fun meeting with me.

I also want you to know that I will be using a video camera so that I don't forget what you say. If it is okay with you, I will keep the tapes in locked cabinet in my house, and I will throw them away after I copy the words on paper. What you say is confidential, this means that your name will never be used on the paper.

If you don't feel like answering any questions, you don't have to, and you can stop speaking with me anytime and that will be all right. Just let me know. If you ever want to stop the tape, just to listen to it, or to erase it, that is fine too. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have now or when we are talking together.

I know that this has been a lot to listen to and it has already been fun talking with you. It is your turn now. Do you have any questions? If you would like to answer my questions, you must write your name on a paper, but if you don't want to, just say now, and that is ok too. Do you want to help with this?

Thanks for listening,
Ms. Jumesha

Appendix H: Interviewees

Interview Name	Age at time of interview
Jillian	7
Diamond	6
Ryann	7
Miles	6
Toby	6
Zumeiah	5
Nick	5
Princeton	6
Charles	8
Demario	6
Quincy	4
Kai	5
Kevin	6
Lexi	8
James	4

Appendix I: Interview – Lexi

- I: So, I have your artwork that you did here. Can you tell me about your picture?
- Lexi: We were talking about Rachel and Leah and Rachel.
- I: And if you don't know all the answers. Rachel and Jacob
- Lexi: I forgot...Rachel, Jacob and Leah and his uncle, Jacob's uncle, which was...
- I: Laban
- Lexi: ...which was Laban...he tricked Jacob into marrying Leah and he didn't want to marry Leah, he wanted to marry Rachel and so he let Jacob marry Rachel but he was already, he made a deal with Laban, that if he worked 7 years, Laban would let him marry Rachel, and then he tricked him into marrying Leah. And then he said he had to work 7 more years to marry Rachel, and then he worked 7 more years and then he married Rachel. But then he had 2 wives, and he loved her (Rachel) more and but God blessed Leah with lots of children and Rachel wanted children and she got some. And then Jacob had lots of children and God had a promise to Abraham that he would have as many people in his family as there is in the sky and the stars, and so he did that, and he said that's how many grandchildren you will have. He had a lot of grandchildren and so after that, God told Jacob to go back to where he came from.
- I: Mmmmm hmmm
- Lexi: And then they went back and then it was the end
- I: Ok, wow, you remembered so many things from the story, that's really cool. Okkkk, so what did you think about Laban tricking Jacob?
- Lexi: I think it was kinda good and kinda bad, because it went in with God's plan, but it also wasn't very nice.
- I: Can you think of a time where you've seen somebody get tricked in real life that's maybe not in the Bible?
- Lexi: I know one time, where somebody tricked to trade out their sandwich for a little bit of some of somebody's chips, and then when he traded out half the sandwich that he had, the chips weren't the chips that he liked and so he got tricked. And his friend knew that he didn't like those chips. so....
- I: Yeah, How do you think the friend felt?
- Lexi: The friend felt very bad.
- I: Yeah, Have you ever tricked anybody?
- Lexi: No...mmm...mmm
- I: Would you trick anybody?
- Lexi: Only if they had something that I wanted.
- I: Yeah, what kind of trick would you play on somebody?
- Lexi: They had some chocolate and some donuts.
- I: Then you'd maybe play a trick on them?
- I: Laughs
- I: Have you heard this story before?
- Lexi: Yeah, I heard it when we lived in Cincinnati and we went to another church.
- I: So does this story remind you of anything in your life?
- Lexi: It reminds me of when I had a dream of, when there was the donuts and there was another person, and the person who owned the donuts, was like these are all my donuts and then

the person with the donuts, for the donuts made fake donuts, but the fake donuts used edible paint, to make them look like donuts and it was really broccoli.

I: Oh man. Laughs

Lexi: So then the guy ate them because he tricked him into selling them to the guy who wanted the donuts for 100 bucks, and then he paid a hundred bucks and they were broccoli and the guy had 100 bucks and ate the real donuts.

I: What do you think you are supposed to learn?

Lexi: I think we are supposed to learn that

I: What does the story teach us?

Lexi: I think the story teaches us that people may trick you, but you gotta go with the flow.

I: Did you play in games in class?

Lexi: We played one where about how the 7 years and how he had to herd up sheep, Jacob had to herd up sheet. We had little cotton balls that were white and we had to pick them up with tweezers. And the tweezers were big tweezers. The tweezers came from my house and I didn't know that until it looked at it and I was like woah. When we were playing the game, the fake tweezers, that we had upstairs in our playroom, they broke and so...the teams were going against each other, but those tweezers broke, so we had to see how long it would take to see how many cotton balls we can get. Jacob had 12 sons and there was some people that went, and in one minute we had 12 cotton balls.

I: Do you think that game is gonna help you remember the lesson?

Lexi: Yes.

I: So, what did it teach you about the lesson?

Lexi: It taught me that...what do you mean?

I: So, like...were the cotton balls connected to something in the story?

Lexi: I think they were were connected to how Jacob had 12 sons, with marrying Leah *and* Rachel, so

I: Are you like anybody in this story?

Lexi: Um...probably not.

I: Why not? Why do you think you are not like anybody?

Lexi: Because that was a long time ago and there's phones now.

I: That's true, they didn't have phones back then

I: Now I'm going to ask you some question about church and MoKids. Are there some things you like?

Lexi: I like that sometimes, we have snacks at the end. And one thing that I dislike is that the first Sunday every month we have to go and to where the parents learn and so that takes a long time. A lot. So, and when we're in MoKids, its like 5 minutes and then time to go bye bye.

I: Seems really fast...?

Lexi: Yeah.

I: What are some other things that you maybe like or don't like?

Lexi: What I like, sometimes there are new friends and every lesson, there is always a game to go with it.

I: Ok, anything else you can think of?

Lexi: Another thing I dislike, is that when, like, when you don't understand what you're watching, and then we have to watch it all over again, you still don't understand. and then we watch it again and still don't understand.

I: Do you think it's because the video is hard or because the kids aren't listening?
Lexi: I think it's both. There's a lot of talking.
I: Do you like the videos?
I: I like them, and like they're always fun to watch, but sometimes, it's hard to watch them because people are always talking.
I: People get excited to be back there with the friends. So do you have anything else about the lesson or about church that you want to tell me or talk about?
Lexi: Um...like...no.
I: Well...if you think of something, you can have your mommy tell me. My last question, is do you have any questions for me?
Lexi: No....

Appendix J: Interview – James

- I: Do you remember coming to church last week and having a Bible lesson at MoKids? I have your picture that you did right here? Do you remember that? What did you draw on that picture?
- James: Um, I don't, um... It was their house.
- I: It was their house? What can you tell me about their house? Whose house was it?
- James: I don't know.
- I: Do you remember if I give you some names, maybe like, Rachel and Leah and Jacob. Do you remember those names?
- James: Uh huh.
- I: Ok, what were those people doing in the story?
- James: Um, they were um, they were lying to Joseph.
- I: They were lying to Jacob, what were they lying about, what did that say
- James: Instead of marrying the woman with the pink shirt, he had to marry the one with the blue shirt.
- I: Oh, ok, ok. And what do you think about that?
- James: That means the man was lying to Joseph.
- I: Have you ever lied to anybody?
- James: No.
- I: Has anyone ever lied to you?
- James: Benjamin, my friend.
- I: He did, what did he say? Benjamin at church or Benjamin at school?
- James: Benjamin at my school.
- I: What did he say?
- James: He promised me he would get something this day like, he said he would give me another slap bracelet, but instead he lied.
- I: Oh, what did he give you instead?
- James: Nothing.
- I: Nothing at all, how did that make you feel?
- James: I was still happy, but it just made me feel really bad.
- I: What do you think should have happened to Benjamin since he didn't get you your slap bracelet?
- James: Nothing.
- I: Nothing at all? Ok, can you tell me more about Rachel and Jacob and Leah in the story, what else did they do?
- James: When Joseph married the pink girl, and cuz, the blue girl shirt didn't get...Joseph had two girlfriends, but he really loved the pink girl, instead of the blue girl, so God gave the blue girl kids and they gave Joseph and the pink girl kids too.
- I: And which one of those girls were happy?
- James: Both.
- I: Both of them. Were they happy with Joseph/Jacob...were they happy with him too?
- James: Um, yeah.
- I: Were any of the girls sad about anything?
- James: No.
- I: Are you the same as anybody in this story?

James: No.

I: What do you think you learned about in this story?

James: I don't know, but um, I learned that, sometimes you can not lie, but sometime you just don't think about getting stuff for your friends.

I: Sometimes, when do you think about getting stuff for your friends?

James: Because you don't want to think that you want to, so you just go to sleep, sometimes you're gonna think that if I promise I would do something to Benjamin, I would say that I'm going to give you something, but when I go to sleep, maybe he would think about not doing it.

I: Oh maybe he would forget about it?

James: Yeah.

I: Does this story remind you or make you think about anything in your life or at your house?

James: No.

I: Did you play any games in class?

James: uh

I: Do you remember some cotton balls that you played with?

James: Yeah.

I: What did you do with those cotton balls?

James: Well, I didn't play with, I didn't play to it...I was playing with my paper airplane...and but, they were playing a game and you have to pick up the cotton balls. And yet, they're gonna set a timer. When the timer goes off, then the last, and if you can't do it with the timer, the last one, that means, the game's over.

I: Mmmm ooooookkk....so what do you think, why do you think you played that game?

James: Because um

I: Why do you think your friends played that game?

James: I didn't know.

I: Were the cotton balls supposed to be an animal?

James: No.

I: No, ok...is there anything else you want to tell me about the story or about your picture?

James: No.

I: So, now I want to talk about a some things that you like about church. What are some things that you like about coming to church?

James: That we can play games sometimes. That we can play, you know, learn more about God.

I: Mmmm hmmm mmmhmmm. What else do you like about church?

James: Nothing else.

I: Are there some things that you don't like about church?

James: No.

I: This was a really fun interview to get to talk to you and everything like that about everything. Are there any questions you want to ask me?

James: No.

I: Or anything else you want to talk about?

James: No.

I: Thank you for doing the interview with me.

Appendix K: Interview – Diamond

- I: Alright. So now it's recording, so, tell me something things about you and your school. What are some things you like about school?
- Diamond: * fiddling with a chip * I like, that, the teachers are teaching me try and be a better student, and I like, it when, that, we go to lunch because it makes me happy.
- I: What's your favorite thing to eat at lunch?
- Diamond: Chicken nuggets.
- I: Mmm, I like chicken nuggets too. So, um, who are your friends at school?
- Diamond: Anthony.
- I: Anthony...
- Diamond: Mason.
- I: Mason...
- Diamond: Larry.
- I: Larry, ok.
- Diamond: And Cleo.
- I: Cleo?
- Diamond: Cleo.
- I: Cleo. Ok, I like those names! So, tell me some things about your family.
- Diamond: My brother's a little bit crazy.
- I: Mmm...
- Diamond: But, I like it.
- I: Mmm...
- Diamond: Or my sisters... are... kind of, uh, nice to Maliky and me.
- I: Mmm...
- Diamond: And I like it, um, Annabelle. That me and Annabelle play on our walkie-talkies.
- I: Mmm, sounds really cool. What about your mom and dad, what do they like?
- Diamond: I like when they help, helping me be a better person.
- I: Mmm, I like you're a really great person. You know that?
- Diamond: * shakes head yes *
- I: Yeah, I think so. So, do you remember having a Bible lesson today?
- Diamond: Mmm.
- I: At church? I have your picture here somewhere, I just have to find out which one is yours. * Flipping through pictures * Let's see... Ope that one's yours. Do you remember that?
- Diamond: * shakes head yes *
- I: Can you tell me about your picture today, and about the story?
- Diamond: Mmm..... Mmm, yeah...
- I: Who's that?
- Diamond: The man.
- I: The man? Do you remember his name?
- Diamond: * shakes head no * No.
- I: Was it Laban or Jacob?
- Diamond: Jacob.
- I: What do you remember about Jacob?
- Diamond: Jacob, like her.

I: What's her name?

Diamond: Her name... * ponders * Rachel. And, Leah got mad. Leah wanted him, and then, he showed that he got tricked and then Leah was his... But then, he had to work for seven more years, and then he, he married Rachel. * Pointing at drawing *

I: ...and then he married Rachel. So, who tricked him? Who tricked Jacob?

Diamond: Laban. * eating chips*

I: Laban? And why did he, how did he trick Jacob?

Diamond: By, marrying Leah.

I: By marrying Leah? So he was supposed to marry Rachel, and he tricked, Laban tricked Jacob. So what do you, what do you think about that?

Diamond: Not fun.

I: Not fun. Why do you think that's not fun?

Diamond: Because.... That when you trick someone it's not fun for anyone else.

I: It's not fun for everyone else. Hmm, have you heard this story before?

Diamond: No.

I: No? Um, what do you think you're supposed to learn from this kind of story? Why do you think God put it in the Bible?

Diamond:.....(Idunno) * Shrugs shoulders *

I: What did you learn from this story?

Diamond: I learned, that... Leah got more kids than uh... than uh..

I: Than Rachel?

Diamond: Than uh, Joseph, then Joseph and Rachel.

I: Mmm, why do you think God gave her more kids?

Diamonds: Because... * eating chips *...Because...The man doesn't like Leah.

I: Who didn't like Leah? Because, Jacob didn't like Leah?

Diamond: Jacob.

I: So why do you think God gave Leah more kids?

Diamond: Because... Joseph didn't like Leah.

I: Mmm, so what does that tell you about God?

Diamond: * flipping book * That God.... is nice.

I: That God is nice, mmm. Does this story remind you of anything in your own life or your school or your family?

Diamond: Mmm... * flips through pages in his book *

I: Is there a time where you may have tricked somebody, or somebody might have tricked you?

Diamond: Uh huh.

I: No... So....

Diamond: Yeah! There's one.

I: Yeah, ok, tell me about that.

Diamond: When I was at school. When I was at school in class at and Cleo said your mom's behind you, and I looked, and he said made you look.

I: Mm, what'd you think about that trick?

Diamond: Not cool at all.

I: Not cool at all. Have you ever tricked anybody?

Diamond: Mmm.

I: When did you trick somebody?

Diamond: When I said, your mom's behind you.
I: You said that to somebody? * laughs * Who did you say that to?
Diamond: I said that to... My... My, friend.
I: Mmm, said that to your friend. How do you think that made your friend feel?
Diamond: It made him feel happy.
I: Oh, because he laughed?
Diamond: * Shakes head yes*
I: So, sometimes, like, a trick can be a joke?
Diamond: * Shakes head yes*
I: Do you think that, uh, Jacob thought that trick was a joke?
Diamond: * Shakes head no*
I: No, why not?
Diamond: Because that, that, he got married to Leah and that wasn't, and he didn't want Leah.
I: He didn't want Leah, so, that was not a good trick?
Diamond: * Shakes head no*
I: Hmm. So, did you play any games while you were in class today?
Diamond: * Shakes head yes*
I: What'd you play?
Diamond: We played don't smile.
I: Don't smile? * Laughs * How do you play don't smile?
Diamond: So, when someone yells and says I like your hair, and, in a funny voice. You have to, you can't laugh.
I: Mmm... Did you play a game with like some cotton balls or something?
Diamond: ... * Shakes head no* Mmm.
I: Were those cotton balls like pretending to be sheep or something like that?
Diamond: * Shakes head yes*
I: Do you remember that? What was that game about?
Diamond: It was... To get sheep hair, as you could.
I: Mm, why were you doing that game?
Diamond: I dunno * Shrugs shoulders *
I: What did, why did you think you were doing it?
Diamond: ...
I: Hmm, did you learn anything from that game?
Diamond: Yeah!
I: What'd you learn?
Diamond: That. That was, that. We were taking care of sheep.
I: So why did, why were the sheep, were the sheep important to this story?
Diamond: Mmm * Shakes head no*
I: No. So, why were you taking care of the sheep?
Diamond: Because.... That's what the story was doing.
I: The story was.
Diamond: So we decided to do it.
I: Oh, well ok, that sounds interesting. So, did you think the game helped you remember what you learned today?
Diamond: No...

I: Okay, well, I wanted to ask you a few questions about more kids if you want to answer some more questions. Um, so what are some things that you really like about more kids?

Diamond: * Shrugs shoulders *

I: Is there anything you like a lot?

Diamond: Mmm * Shakes head no*

I: No, you don't like anything? So, if you could change some things, what would you change?

Diamond: * finishing the rest of his chips from the bowl * I can... I would... * thinking and playing with the empty bowl * Change... the.... this house, into a mansion.

I: You would change this house into a mansion?

Diamond: Mmm. * Shakes head yes*

I: I'm talking about what would you change about church?

Diamond: I would, change uh.... the way... of the boards to make the board... somewhere else.

I: What board?

Diamond: The board that, that, we write on.

I: Oh, why do you want that board to go somewhere else?

Diamond: So... so then, we, * Throwing bowl up and down. Also thinking * have somewhere to look more.

I: Mmm, so you feel like you can't see the board that good?

Diamond: * Shakes head yes*

I: So you wanna be able to see a little bit better?

Diamond: * Shakes head yes*

I: Okay, what else would you like to change about more kids?

Diamond: I don't know.... Oh! I know!

I: Oh, what's up? What's that?

Diamond: I wanna change, the, I want to put the candy into the room.

I: Some candy in the room? How much candy were you, are you going to have candy every week?

Diamond: No. * Shakes head no*

I: Oh, when would you have candy?

Diamond: Can-, at church there's the life-savers...

I: Ohhh, where do you want the life-savers to go?

Diamond: I want them to go in the rooms.

I: * chuckles * Rooms, so you can get them anytime you want them? Would you get them anytime you want them or would you know when you should get them?

Diamond: Ohhhuhummm. I think.... If um... I have a good day, at the end of the day I should get them.

I: Okay! Um, okay. I like that idea.

Diamond: Are we done yet?

I: Almost, I have onnee moreee questions. Is there anything else that you wanna change?

Diamond: No. * talking into a pipe *

I: Okay well then my last question is....

Diamond: * mumbles into pipe *

I: I just want to thank you for doing the interview with me and wonder do you have any questions for me.

Diamond: Where's Junior?

I: Where's Junior? Junior is at home.

Diamond: Why didn't you bring him with you?

I: Because I needed to do a interview with us just by ourselves. But I will try to bring him again, bring him over one day. Or, you come, come to our house again or something like that.

Diamond: Okay.

I: Okay. Do you have any more questions for me?

Diamond: No...

I: Okay, cool. Well, that's the end of the interview.

Appendix L: Interview – Toby

- I: Can you still see yourself?
Toby: Yeah.
I: Do you like that?
Toby: Yeah
I: Alright, sounds good. Mokay so tell me a little bit about yourself .
Toby: That uhh me and (:23 someone's name) made an art room in our room.
I: You made an art room in your room?
Toby: Yeah.
I: That sounds really cool you like to play up there and do different kinds of art?
Toby: Yeah.
I: Okay what uh grade are you in?
Toby: Kindergarten.
I: Kindergarten, wow that's a big step. How what do you feel about kindergarten?
Toby: Almost in first grade.
I: And you're almost in first grade?
Toby: Yeah going...
I: Say that again you gotta say where the camera can hear.
Toby: I feel good about it.
I: You feel good about kindergarten.
Toby: Yeah.
I: Oh, that's great. I have a son in kindergarten. You know Junior? He's my little guy he's my son he's in kindergarten too so he feels pretty good about kindergarten. Um, so what is something you might wanna tell me about your family?
Toby: Uh that we go to bed at 7:00 or 8:00.
I: You need a lot of rest so that's probably a good idea. Do you like going to bed at 7 or 8?
Toby: Yeah.
I: You feel good when you wake up in the morning?
Toby: (mumbles) Hmm.
I: Yeah yeah. Okay, anything else you wanna tell me about your family?
Toby: No.
I: Okay, well, I have your picture that you did at church on Sunday. It's right there do you remember doing that picture? Which way does it go, that way or this way?
Toby: This way.
I: It goes that way. Ok can you tell me about your picture?
Toby: That the guy married the wrong girl which is this girl (points to his drawing) and then he married the right girl which is this girl (points to his drawing).
I: Okay why was she the wrong girl?
Toby: Because he wanted to marry this girl (points to his drawing).
I: You gotta stay over here a little bit. Let me see okay there you go stay right there over there (moves camera position). Okay, so why was she the wrong girl?
Toby: What?
I: Why was she the wrong girl?
Toby: Because he didn't wanna marry her.
I: He didn't wanna marry her.

Toby: Yeah.
I: Why do you think he didn't wanna marry her?
Toby: Because she looked so ugly.
I: She looked so ugly.
Toby: Yeah.
I: What do you think about her looking ugly?
Toby: The story said that. I don't think she is but the story said that.
I: The story said that, so what do you how do you feel about when someone is called ugly? What do you think about that?
Toby: Uh I don't know.
I: You don't know have you ever called somebody ugly?
Toby: Hmm I don't really know.
I: That's okay, that's okay. So how do you think Jacob felt when he got to marry the wrong girl?
Toby: Sad.
I: Sad. How do you know he married the wrong girl?
Toby: Because.
I: Because what?
Toby: Because the story said it (soft giggle).
I: The story said it. Okay so Rachel and Leah were the girl's name. What else do you know about Rachel and Leah?
Toby: That then the married the right girl and
I: Jacob married the right girl?
Toby: Yeah.
I: How do you think Jacob felt when he married the right girl?
Toby: Happy.
I: Happy. Are you like anybody in this story?
Toby: Yeah.
I: Who are you like in this story?
Toby: The right girl.
I: The right like the right girl?
Toby: Yeah.
I: How are you like her?
Toby: Because she doesn't look ugly (big smile/smirk).
I: Because she doesn't look ugly (laughs).
Toby: That's the reason.
I: Toby, that's really cool (laughing continues) what else um are you like anybody else in this story?
Toby: Uh I don't know.
I: You don't know. Are you are you different?
Toby: Yeah.
I: How are you different than anybody in the story?
Toby: Because they are like way bigger than me.
I: Mmm they are way bigger than you. So what would you do if you married the wrong girl?
Toby: And uhh

I: What would you do?
Toby: I would not love her and then I then would marry the right girl I would get someone to love.
I: You would get somebody to love?
Toby: Yeah.
I: So what did you think, did Jacob teach you how to get the right girl?
Toby: Yeah, from working from his grandpa.
I: Looking for his grandpa?
Toby: No working for.
I: Oh working for okay working for Laban so how did he get to marry them?
Toby: Because he worked for to like seven years.
I: Mmm he did work for seven years and then he said let me marry Rachel and then what did Laban say? He said sure, what did he say?
Toby: Yeah he said sure.
I: Uh huh so then what happened when he married the wrong girl? Laban did Laban trick him?
Toby: Yeah.
I: Has anybody ever tricked you?
Toby: Mhmm yeah.
I: What did they do to trick you?
Toby: I forgot.
I: Huh?
Toby: I forgot I keep forgetting.
I: You forgot. Have you ever tricked anybody?
Toby: Yeah.
I: What did you do?
Toby: I did I (giggling and grinning).
I: (chuckles) What did you do? Tell me, Toby.
Toby: uh uh uh (slight giggle) uh I said I'll sample the same amount of slime and I said I know what equals and I didn't what it equals and I gave her a tinsy tiny bit less but the good thing is that it's just a this much (signs hand) that is less than mine.
I: Oh okay, so there was a trick. Did that girl feel sad that you gave her less slime?
Toby: But it almost up to mine this much.
I: Okay, so almost the same but she thought you were trying to trick her?
Toby: Yeah.
I: Would you try and trick somebody?
Toby: No.
I: Why not?
Toby: Because that would make them feel sad.
I: Yeah yeah are there any like happy tricks that people play on each other?
Toby: Yeah.
I: What are some of the happy tricks that people might play on each other?
Toby: My sister might I mean my friend might say I can't come to her birthday party but she does something even better.
I: Oh, what would be something better than a birthday party?
Toby: Um I don't know (shuffles paper)

I: Okay, do you remember playing like a game in class with some cotton balls?
Toby: Hmm we didn't have to we could sit at these tables drawing.
I: At the table drawing were you drawing these picture or were drawing something else?
Toby: We were drawing these pictures and something else.
I: Oh okay so you didn't play the game.
Toby: Yeah.
I: Do you remember what they did in that game?
Toby: Yeah.
I: What did they do in the game?
Toby: They played cotton balls.
I: What were they doing with those cotton balls?
Toby: Uh pretending they were sheep.
I: Pretending they were sheep?
Toby: Yeah.
I: Why were they pretending they were sheep?
Toby: I don't know.
I: Oh well, what were they doing with the cotton ball sheep?
Toby: I don't know.
I: Was there like a cup or something?
Toby: Yeah.
I: Was there a timer, do you remember that?
Toby: Yeah.
I: Oh okay what was that about?
Toby: Uh I don't know.
I: You don't know. That's okay, you don't have to remember. Do you remember anything else from that story?
Toby: Uh no.
I: Okay, so you know how you come to church every Sunday. What are some things you like about church?
Toby: Um that sometimes we get to stay till mommy and daddy
I: Mhmm you like that?
Toby: Yeah.
I: Okay is there anything else that you like?
Toby: No.
I: Not really. Okay what are some things that you don't like?
Toby: Uh that uh sometimes at the front we don't get any snacks.
I: Sometimes at the front you don't get any snacks?
Toby: Yeah.
I: Is there anything else that you don't like?
Toby: Uh nope.
I: Okay, well I'm really glad that you answered so many questions and that you stayed where I could see you. That was really good. Um is there anything that you wanna ask me?
Toby: Uhh no.
I: Nothing?
Toby: Yeah.

I: You have something you wanna ask me?

Toby: No.

I: Okay. Well, that's the end of the interview. I'm gonna keep your picture for a little bit longer and you can get a prize from over here.

Toby: Okay.

I: Thank you.

Toby: I'm wearing my sister's for a while

I: Your sister's what?

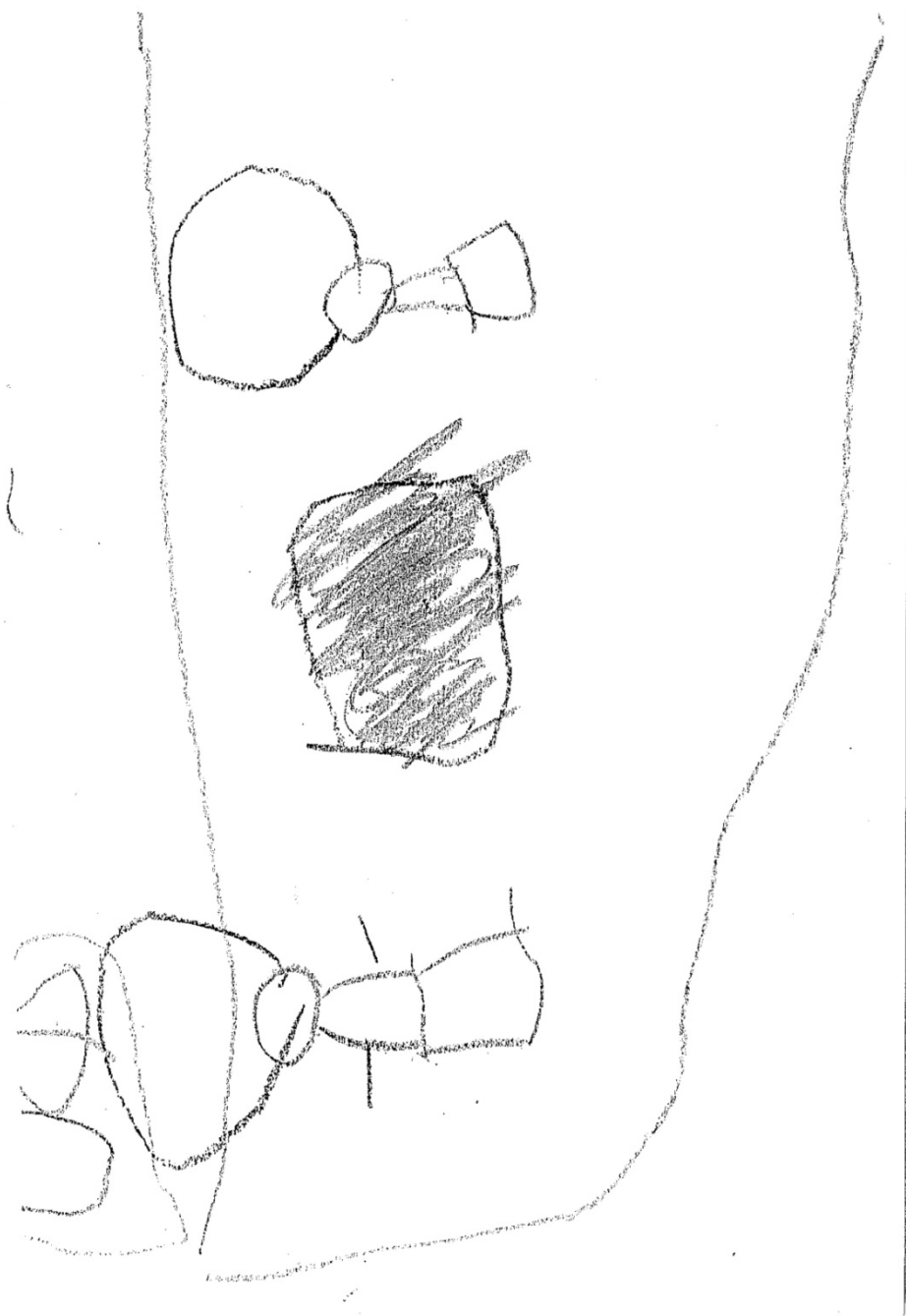
Appendix M: Protocol for Children's Faith Development Interviews

(Center Research in faith and Moral Development, Chandler School of Theology, Emory University; Underweiser, 2004)

Interview Questions

1. Tell me some things about yourself. Where you go to school, some of the things you do there. Tell me about the things you like to do most.
2. I would like to know some things about your family. If we had a picture of your family we could look at, who would be there? Can you tell me something about each member of your family?
3. What was the story about?
4. Who were the people in the story? And what did they do?
5. Have you heard this story before? [if yes: where / from who?]
6. What are you supposed to learn from this story? Why do you think this is an important Bible story? What does this story teach us?
7. Can you think of a time/story/movie that someone tricked someone else?
8. Does this story remind you of anything from your life?
 - a. How are you like people in the story?
 - b. How are you different than people in the story? Are you like some of the people in the story?
9. Did you play any games in class? What did you do when you played the games? What did the game teach you about the lesson?
10. What are some things you like about children's ministry? What are some things you dislike?
11. My last question is about God. Please tell me what you think of when you or someone refers to God. If someone asked you to explain who or what God is, what would you tell them?
 - a. How is God related to us? To the earth? To the universe?
 - b. Does God know you and care about you? Does Gods care make a difference to you?
 - c. Does it matter to God whether we do right or wrong?
 - d. Is God powerful? What does God do?
12. Thank you for doing this interview with me. Form what we have talked about, are there any questions you have for me? (Ask for elaborations of the questions. Try to respond as candidly as you are able.) thank you for sharing your thoughts with me.

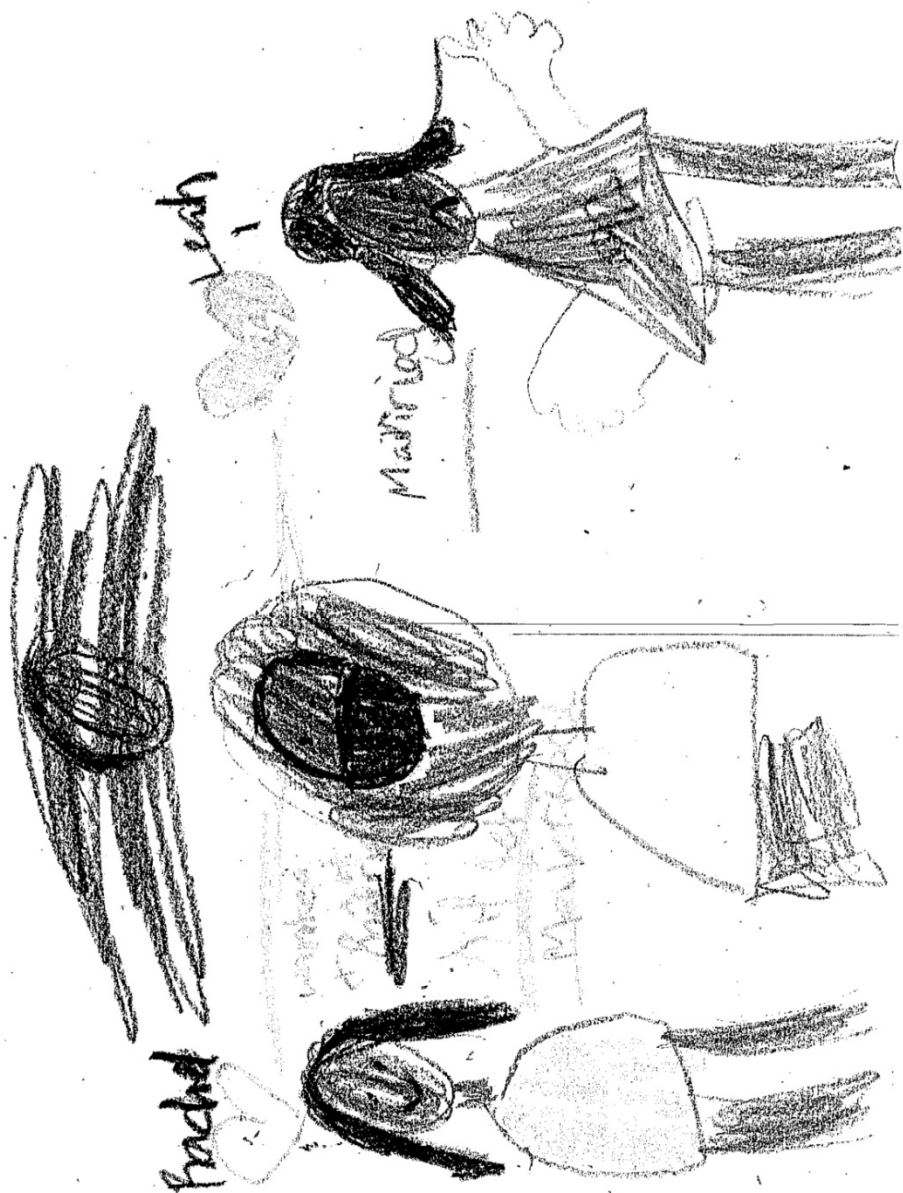
Appendix N: Children's Drawings



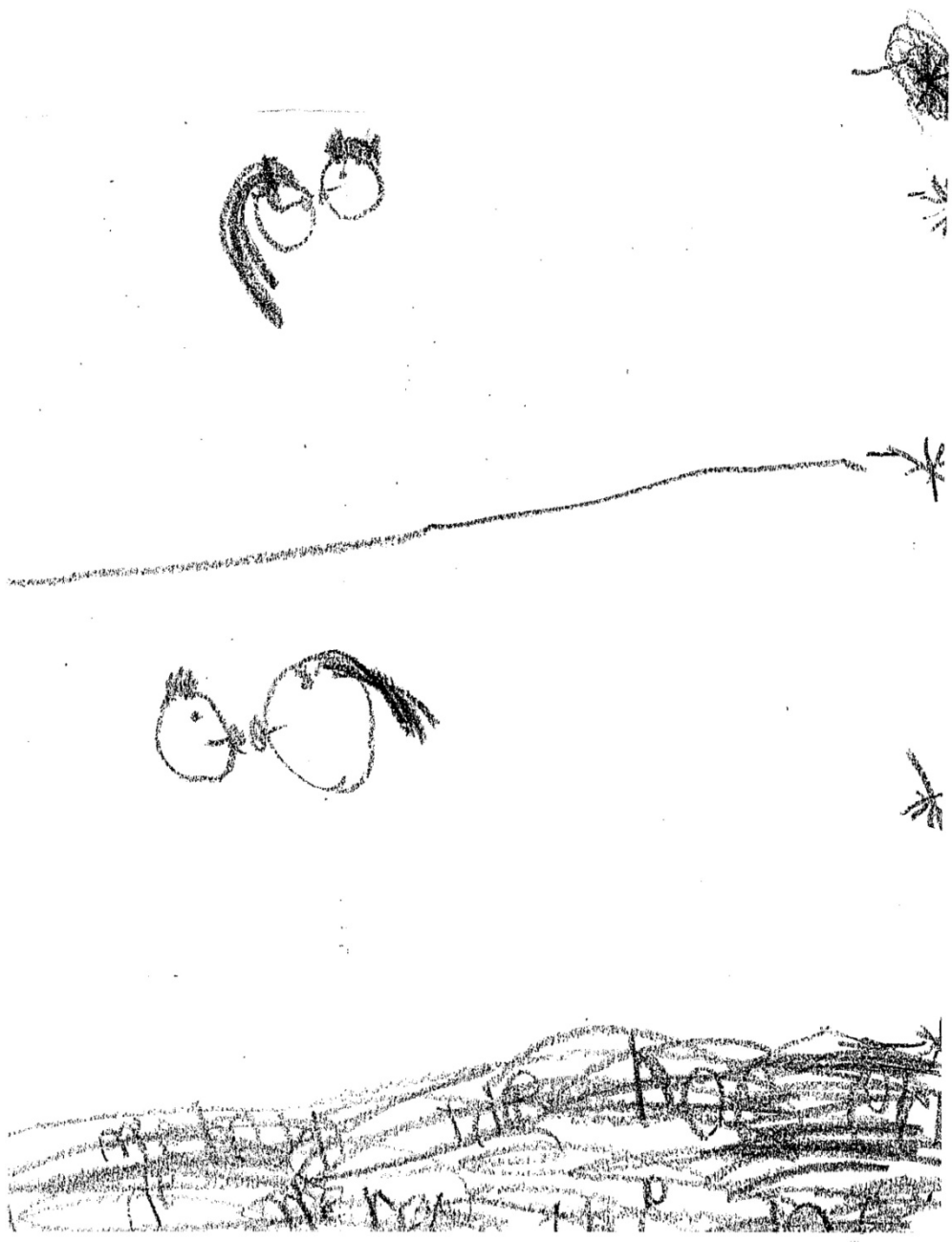
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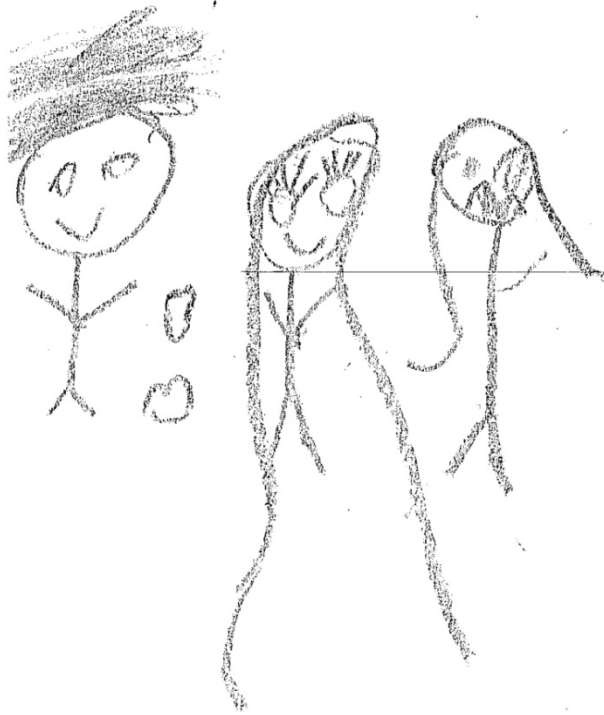
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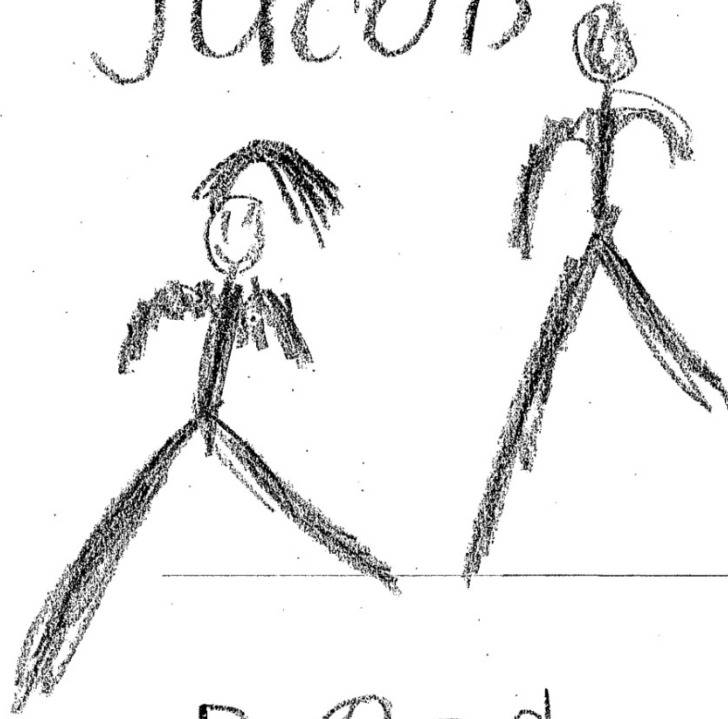


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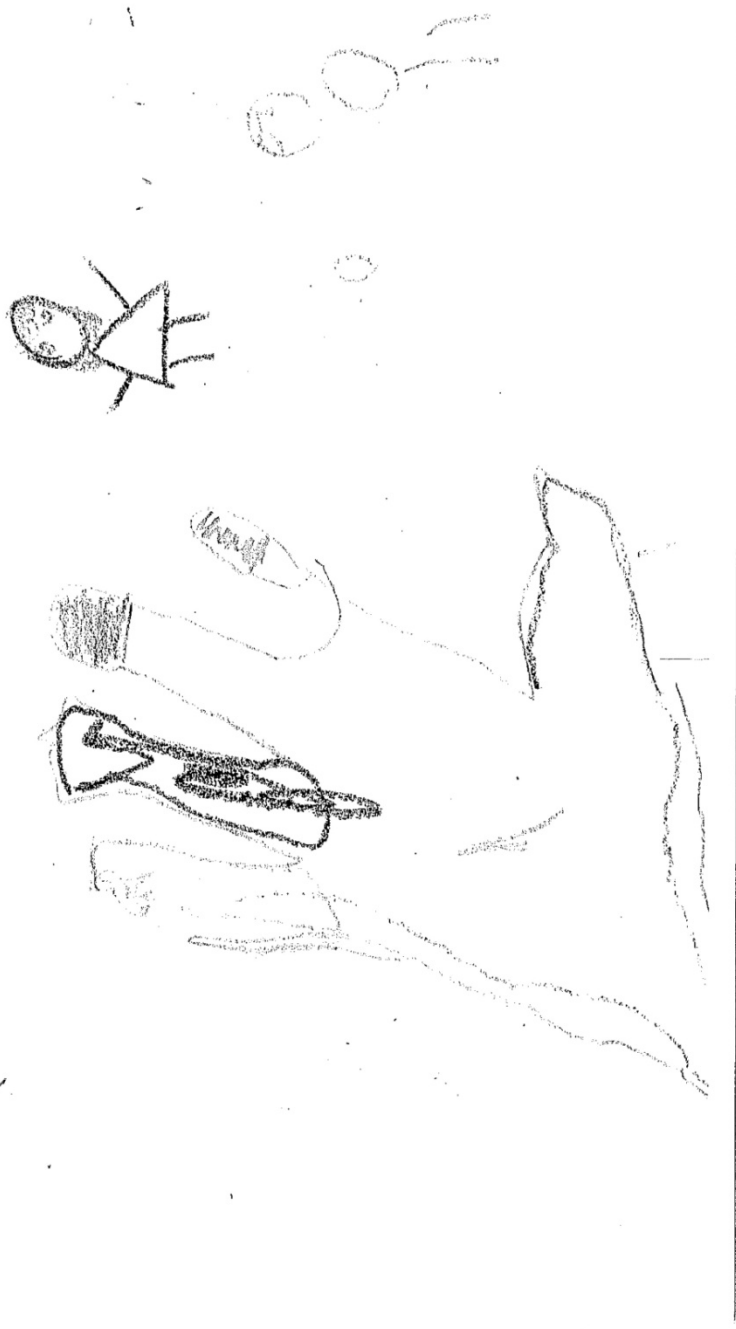
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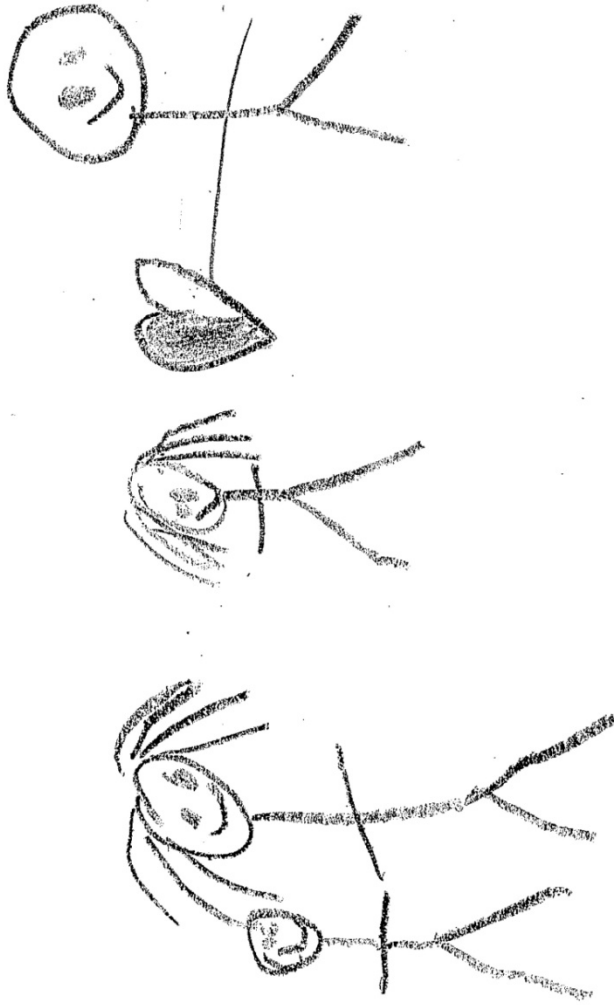
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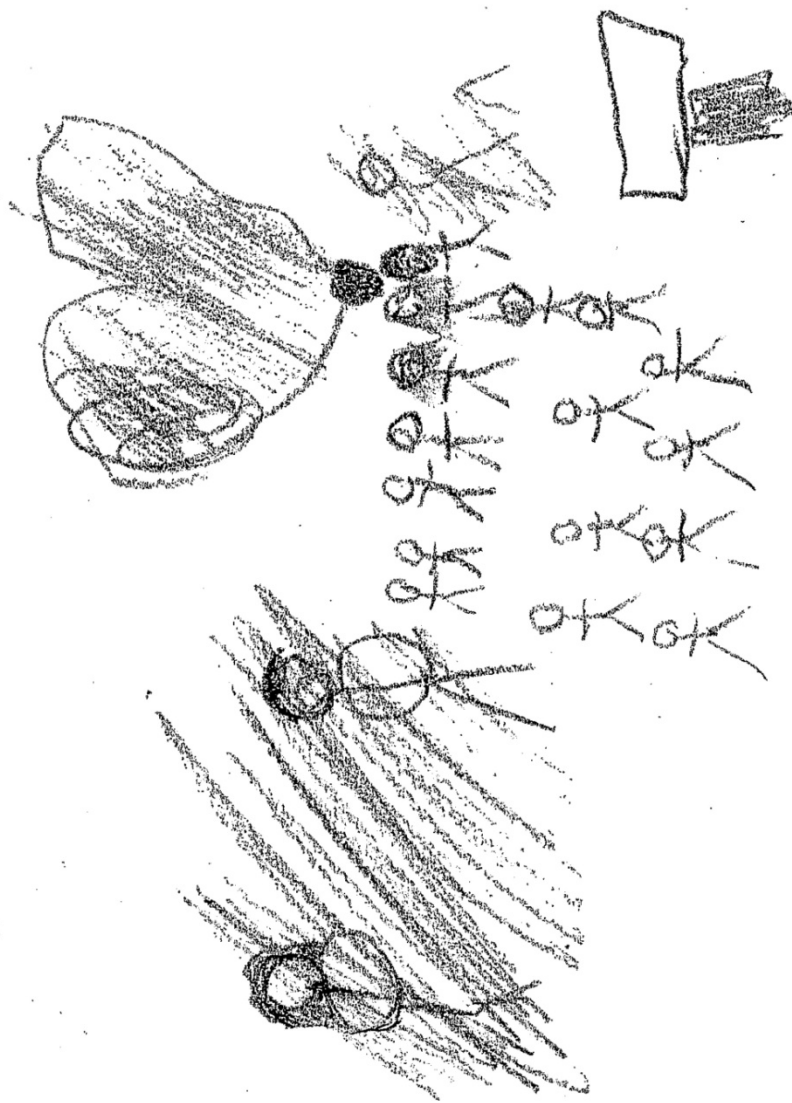
Jillian



Demario



James



Kevin

Appendix O: Research Memo March 13, 2019

A guide to coding qualitative data...

<http://salmapatel.co.uk/academia/coding-qualitative-research/?fbclid=IwAR2Gdh1DmKwFxnNzP84j3tp1xF4x4yBcS3HDipjEcwRJiiE4VHPL3aLVv90>

Counting is easy, thinking is hard.

“Gordon-Finlayson (2010) emphasizes that “coding is simply a structure on which reflection (via memo writing) happens. It is memo-writing that is the engine go grounded theory, not coding.” Glazer and Holton (2004) further clarify that “Memos present hypotheses about connections between categories and/or their properties and begin to integrate these connections with clusters of other categories to generate the theory.”

Coding decisions are based on the methodological needs of the study.

Affective methods investigate subjective qualities of human experience (e.g., emotions, values, conflicts, judgments) by directly acknowledging and naming those experiences. They include:

- Emotion coding labels the emotion recalled or experienced
- Values coding assess a participant’s integrated value, attitude, and belief systems. (side note: Questionnaires and surveys such as Likert scales and semantic differentials, are designed to collect and measure a participant’s values, attitudes, and beliefs about selected subjects).
- Versus Coding acknowledges that humans are frequently in conflict, and the codes identify which individuals, groups, or systems are struggling for power.
- Evaluation Coding focuses on how we can analyze data that judge the merit

Second cycle coding is reorganising and condensing the vast array of initial analytic details into a “main dish.” They include and worth of programs and policies.

Theoretical coding progresses towards discovering the central or core category that identifies the primary theme of the research.

After Second Cycle Coding

Code weaving is the actual integration of key code words and phrases into narrative form to see how the puzzle pieces for together. Codeweave the primary codes, categories, themes, and/or concepts of your analysis into as few sentences as possible. Try writing several variations to investigate how the items might interrelate, suggest causation, indicate a process, or work holistically to create a broader theme. Search for evidence in the data that supports your summary statements, and/or disconfirming evidence that suggests revision of your statements.

If I cannot develop a theory, then I will be satisfied with my construction of a key assertion, a summative and data supported statement about the particulars of a research study, rather than generalisable and transferable meanings of my findings to other settings and contexts. The coding journey should be noted in the analytical memos and discussed in your dissertation.
Appendix: Research Memo 4/13/2019

Interpretation is constant revision. I think about the “church candy” as more than just candy. Candy was given to quiet you as a gesture of support, love and care. Now, candy is just available as a means of hospitality, but all of the kids mentioned When a church lady gave you candy, they were usually older and

Researcher must make personal biases explicit. This could be in journal form or other. My bias comes in as “church as a savior.” Church helped me to be resilient in the face of hardships when I was having a hard time.

Lenses makes sense

Modified nature of understanding and interpretation is created by the constant process of *renewed projection* (Gadamer, 1975/2004).

- Preunderstanding
- Faith development theory
- New meaning and
- On and on in a circle (how to do this)---

Heidegger says you have these pre-understandings because of who you are, how you look at the data, and how you make sense of it.

I know exactly what they mean because I understand this context and this experience because I was a “church kid,” mostly by choice.

Appendix O: Donut Mints

