CHILDREN'S SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT: ANALYSIS OF PROGRAM PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS

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(Alexander & Carr, 2006). The current emphasis on cognitive-based outcomes in education influences faith-based schools as these schools emphasize the cognitive knowledge of religious education while often overlooking other aspects of children's spiritual development (Buchanan & Hyde, 2008).

Notwithstanding the emphasis on cognitive-based outcomes in education, during the past ten years a growing interest in children's spiritual development developed both in the social sciences (Roehlkepartian, Benson, King, & Wagener, 2006a) and in religious communities (Anthony, 2006). Evidence of increased attention to children's spiritual development is the addition of a faith-based track to the annual convention of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, which lends support to an interest in spiritual development. The Children's Spirituality Conferences of 2003, 2006, and 2009 examine research, theory, and practice related to children's spiritual development. The Children's Spirituality Conference of 2003 began with a planning team from the North American Professors of Christian Education (Ratcliff, 2009).

This trend of increasing interest in children's spiritual development is also seen in publishing with the release of five major volumes on children's spiritual development since 2003. *Nurturing Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives and Best Practices* (2008), *The Handbook of Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence* (Roehlkepartian, Benson, King, & Wagener, 2006), the *Encyclopedia of Religious and Spiritual Development* (Dowling & Scarlett, 2006), *Nurturing Child and Adolescent Spirituality: Perspectives from the World's Religious Traditions* (Yust, Johnson, Sasso, & Roehlkepartian, 2006), and *Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives, Research, and Applications* (Ratcliff, 2004). Yet, a search of these volumes as well as PsycINFO

and Education Research Complete databases shows no comprehensive research about program practices which support children's spiritual development in faith based schools.

Importance of Preschool Education

Research indicates that children's early experiences lay the foundation for their social behavior, emotional regulation, and literacy (Bowman, Donovan & Burns, 2000; National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Early experiences set in place the foundation for later learning and make learning easier and more efficient (Knudsen, Heckman, Cameron, & Shonkoff, 2006). Enrollment statistics for 2006 show that 74% of 4 year olds and 51% of 3 year olds attended some type of early education center care (NIEER, 2007). Advocacy groups such as Pre-K Now (2009) and research organizations such as the National Institute for Early Education Research (2009) keep the importance of preschool for 3- and 4 year olds on the public policy agenda through research studies, publications, and advocacy.

Preschool experiences take place in both public prekindergartens and faith-based preschools (NCES, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2008). In 2008 researchers identified 21,681 Protestant centers, 1,630 Catholic centers, and 1,255 Jewish centers in the United States that enroll preschoolers (Wilson, 2008). The Alabama Faith Council calls for faith traditions to support preschools with principles of faith, preschool educational programs, and classroom space (AFC, 2007). Reaching out to community leaders in business, faith, civic, and social organization helps prekindergarten advocacy campaigns by highlighting the importance of early childhood education for later success in kindergarten and elementary school (PreK Now, 2008). Prekindergarten advocates urge access to early childhood education services through

development (Best, 2007; Zigler & Finn-Stevenson, 2007). While recognizing that academic learning is imperative, educators also need to keep in mind their responsibility to teach social skills that help children develop into competent members of society (Kremenitzer, 2005). Social skills are as important as cognitive skills in educating the whole child (Garrett, 2006). Appropriate social skills give children the ability to get along with their peers in both classroom and play situations (Mize, 1995). Moreover, writings from world religions promote concepts such as the Golden Rule that promote good relationships with others and help children develop their social skills and spiritual development:

Christianity – All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye so to them; for this is the law and the prophets (Matthew 7:1)

Confucianism -- Do not do to others what you would not like yourself. Then there will be no resentment against you, either in the family or in the state Analects 12:2.

Buddhism -- Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful (Udana-Varga 5, 1).

Hinduism -- This is the sum of duty; do naught onto others what you would not have them do unto you (Mahabharata 5, 1517).

Islam -- No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself (Sunnah).

Judaism -- What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellowman. This is the entire Law; all the rest is commentary (Talmud, Shabbat 3id).

Taoism -- Regard your neighbor's gain as your gain, and your neighbor's loss as your own loss (Tai Shang Kan Yin P'ien).

Zoroastrianism -- That nature alone is good which refrains from doing another whatsoever is not good for itself (Dadisten-I-dinik, 94, 5) (Teaching Values.com, 2009).

The Bible teaches social and emotional skills in passages such as Galatians 5:22, which promotes qualities like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Adults, both parents and educators, are to provide children with social/emotional, intellectual, moral, and spiritual guidance (Bunge, 2004).

The Learning Compact Redefined: A Call to Action calls on communities and schools to create conditions in which all children can develop their capacities for intellectual, social, emotional, physical, and spiritual learning (Marshall et al., 2007). The report, *Hardwired to Connect (2008),* issued by the Commission on Children at Risk, recommends that youth-serving organizations promote the moral and spiritual development of children (Kline et al., 2008). The commission report states that children's spiritual needs are genuine and are as essential to their being as their physical and intellectual needs (Kline et al., 2008). Adults care for the whole child when they support children's spiritual development by instructing children in faith so that they help children develop moral sensibilities, character, and virtue (Bunge, 2004). Ratcliff believes that religion is not just cognitive knowledge: "God cares about the whole child, not just the intellect" (Ratcliff, 2008). Nye (2004) researched children's spiritual development in the United Kingdom, finding that she had to study the child as whole, not just different aspects of development. According to Nye, the child's spiritual life flies like a bird through his intellectual, emotional, social, cultural, and moral life.

Many spiritual traditions embrace the vision that the whole child includes physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual dimensions of development (Miller, 2007). Mahatma Gandhi said,

> But unless the development of the mind and body goes hand in hand with a corresponding awakening of the soul, the former alone would prove to be a poor lopsided affair. By spiritual training I mean education of the heart. A proper and all round development of the mind, therefore, can take place only when it proceeds *pari passu* with the education of the physical and spiritual faculties of the child. They constitute an indivisible whole (Kripalani, 1980).

The Bible says that "Jesus grew in wisdom, stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52). Favor translates from the Greek word *charis,* or grace. It describes an attitude of approval, respect, and good will directed by others toward a person (Tolbert, 1970).

Spiritual Development and the Social Sciences

Spiritual development is the life-long process in response to an awareness of a relationship to God (Thomson, 2009). The study of spiritual development is becoming a major theme in child and adolescent development (Roehlkepartian, King, Wagener, & Benson 2006a). While educators and researchers list spiritual development as important, the study of the spiritual development of children lacks a cohesive, established base of foundational theory or research (Roehlkepartian etal. 2006). Throughout much of the 20th century there was a lack of attention to issues of spirituality and religion in the social sciences in general (Boyatzis, 2008; Ratcliff, 2004; Roehlkepartian et al. 2006).

Wulff identified some of the obstacles to the study of spirituality as (1) a pervasive personal rejection of religion by social scientists, and (2) a view that religion, like the arts and politics is a discretionary human activity (Wulff, 1997). Additionally,

Smith described a reductionist thinking among sociologists that dismisses expressions of religion or spiritual experiences as expressions of something else (Smith, 2003). Reductionism is “an approach to understanding the nature of complex things by reducing them to the interactions of their parts” rather than looking at the phenomena from a holistic viewpoint (Wikipedia, 2009).

Benson, Roehlkepartian, and Rude (2003) searched six leading developmental psychology journals to ascertain the frequency of citations to religion, religious development, spirituality, or spiritual development. Of more than 3,000 articles published between 1990 and 2002, only 27 (0.9%) referenced one of the words spirituality or spiritual development (Benson et al., 2003). However, recently there has been a growth in scholarship related to spiritual development (Ratcliff, 2008). Since 2004, major articles on spiritual development appeared in *Developmental Psychology* (2004) and *Applied Developmental Science* (2003).

Definitional Issues in Spiritual Development

The scope of literature from the social sciences and the wide range of views on spirituality research make it difficult to support a particular definition of spiritual development that satisfies everyone (Roehlkepartian et al., 2006). An emerging framework from the Center for Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence states that spiritual development is a constant, ongoing, dynamic, and sometimes difficult interplay between three core developmental processes:

> (1) Awareness or awakening: Being or becoming aware of or awakening to one’s self, others, and the universe. For example, awareness or awakening means forming a worldview regarding major life questions, such as the purpose of

existence, life and death, and the existence or non-existence of the divine or God.

(2) Interconnecting and belonging: Seeking, accepting, or experiencing significance in relationships to and interdependence with others, the world, or one's sense of the transcendent (often including an understanding of God or a higher power) As an example, a child experiences a sense of empathy, responsibility, and/or love for others, for humanity, and for the world.

(3) A way of living: Engaging in relationships, activities, and/or practices that shape bonds with oneself, family, community, humanity, the world, and/or that which one believes to be transcendent. For example, Living out one's beliefs, values, and commitments in daily life (Roehlkepartain, 2008).

While there is a growing interest in the study of spiritual development, the challenge of those who research this topic is to clarify the definition of the spiritual development for their research (Boyatzis, 2008).

Spiritual Development and Stage Theories

A discussion of research in a Christian perspective of spiritual development is not only rooted in Biblical theology but also is supported by developmental stage theories (Ratcliff, 2008). The theories and research of Piaget (1969), Elkind (1978), Goldman (1969), and Fowler (1981), with their emphasis on cognitive stages, influenced the understanding of children's spiritual development (Ratcliff, 2008). The fundamental principle of the work of these researchers is that cognitive development and religious development are intertwined (Ratcliff, 2008). While Elkind assumed children comprehend religion in the same way that they understand concepts in other areas

(1978), Goldman used Piagetian terminology: intuitive religious thinking (ages 2 to 6), concrete logic (ages 8 to 12), and abstract thinking (ages 14 and older) (Goldman, 1969). The following table illustrates how closely Goldman's theory of religious thinking and Fowler's theory of faith development parallel Piaget's theory of cognitive learning:

Table 1

Piaget, Goldman, and Fowler

Theorist	Stages and ages		
Piaget	Sensorimotor stage (birth-2)	Preoperational stage (ages 3-6)	Concrete operations stage (ages 6-11)
Goldman	Intuitive religious thinking (ages 2-6)		Concrete logic (ages 8-12)
Fowler	Primal faith (birth-2)	Intuitive projective faith (ages 3-6)	Mythic-literal faith (ages 6-12)

Additionally, faith-based educators need to comprehend Erikson's theory of psychosocial development when examining spiritual development (Stonehouse, 1998). Stonehouse believes that Erikson's theory is an important part of spiritual formation because healthy psychosocial development sets the stage for a relationship with God (1998). Erikson states that each stage of psychosocial development has a corresponding basic strength (1950). Erikson's faith correlates of hope, will, purpose and competence are summarized in the following table:

Table 2

Erikson

Stage	Age range	Basic strength
Trust versus mistrust	Birth to 1 year	Hope
Autonomy versus shame and doubt	1 to 3 years	Will
Initiative versus guilt	3 to 6 years	Purpose
Industry versus inferiority	6 to 12 years	Competence

Note: Adapted from Stonehouse, 1998.

Faith Development

The terms spirituality, spiritual development, religious development, and faith development are often used interchangeably without clarity as to the meaning (Hay, 2006). The most comprehensive study of children's faith development to date was the research carried out by Fowler (Roehlkepartian, 2006), who stated that his study of Erik Erikson, Laurence Kohlberg, and Jean Piaget led to his research (Fowler, 1981, 2006). Fowler identified three stages of faith in childhood: primal faith, intuitive projective faith, and mythic literal faith.

> Primal faith: The stage of faith during infancy to age 2. In this stage, a prelanguage disposition of trust forms in the mutuality of the child's relationships with parents and caregivers.
>
> Intuitive-projective faith: Children who are 3 and 4 years old are in this faith stage. This is a time when children learn their faith intuitively rather than with formal logic.
>
> Mythic-literal faith: The faith stage which occurs between the ages of 6 and the middle school years. This stage initiates the beginning of reflection on the feelings and ideas of faith. Children in this stage are able not only to remember facts and the sequence of events but also to discover meaning in them. The meanings, however, are concrete and literal. In this stage children are able to sort out make-believe from real (Fowler, 2006, pp. 36-37).

Fowler‘s view is that faith does not automatically unfold. Children are born with a readiness for faith but need an environment of love, care, and interaction with nurturing caregivers for their faith to develop. Faith involves development and conversion. In a Christian context, conversion means to renounce sin and commit to a life of righteousness (Romans 3:23; Acts 16:31). Development prepares the way for conversion (Fowler, 1981).

Theology of Children’s Spirituality

There are a diversity of views about children, theology, and conversion because the Bible says little about children, leaving room for interpretation by scholars (Sisemore, 2008). Those who seek to develop a theology for children’s spiritual formation must contemplate the following:

(1) Determining when a child is old enough to become aware of personal sin

(2) Determining the means by which spiritual regeneration should be initiated

(3) Determining when a child should be baptized

(4) Determining how a child grows spiritually while taking into consideration the cognitive, emotional, relational, and psychological realities of maturation (Anthony, 2006).

While the Bible and Christian traditions depict children as gifts of God (Bunge, 2004), among Christian traditions there are different views about children’s sin nature (Anthony, 2006). Augustine, bishop of Hippo, held a strict interpretation of Bible passages on original sin. Thus, he taught that an infant who died without baptism was destined to an eternity of hell (Anthony, 2006). A second view of children states that children are not accountable until they reach an age where they have matured enough

to understand the concept of sin as a separation from God (Allen, 2008; Hendricks, 1970). The third view, affirmed by the Wesleyan tradition, is that salvation is a lifelong maturing process. Parents are held accountable to provide an environment of religious instruction (Anthony, 2006).

Recent Thought in Spiritual Development

Many of those concerned with children's spiritual development are theologians, ministers, educators, and parents (Nye, 2004). However, during the past 20 years, interest about children's spiritual development among social scientists has increased (Allen, 2008; Roehlkepartian, 2006). During the 1990s social science researchers began to make note of weaknesses with the spiritual development research of the previous three decades (Ratcliff, 2008).

Ratcliff (2008) identified four weaknesses of Fowler, Goldman, and Elkind: (a) research was too closely linked to Piaget's stage theory; (b) stage theory provided guidance for religious instruction yet did not automatically lead to a prescriptive account of what can be or should be; (c) researchers can unintentionally encourage statements from children that may not reflect their actual thoughts (Vianello, Tamminen, & Ratcliff, 1992); and (d) the stage theory research of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s was removed from the world of the spirit. Ratcliff stated that while belief and understanding are important, it is possible to have cognition without an associated change in behavior, attitudes, and experiences (Ratcliff, 2008).

A different perspective toward research on children's spirituality is found in the work of Nye (Ratcliff, 2008), who supports an approach to children's spirituality that puts more emphasis on emotion and awareness (Huitt et al., 2003). During the mid-1990s

Nye conducted an often-cited study of children's spirituality at Oxford University. Her qualitative study emphasized the need for an adequate definition of children's spirituality (Nye & Hay, 1996). In a subsequent work, *The Spirit of the Child,* Hay and Nye stated that religion should not be equated with spirituality. They declared that religion and spirituality could overlap in the area of religious experiences; however, their belief was that religion also includes nonexperiential content such as doctrines, creeds, and rituals (Hay & Nye, 1998, 2006). Spirituality, on the other hand, is experiential. It encompasses the wonder and heightened attentiveness of experiencing natural wonders as well as a deeply moving experience of God (Hay & Nye, 1998, 2006).

Relational Consciousness

In describing research with children, Nye coined the term *relational consciousness* to describe the ability that children have for conscious relationships (Nye, 2006). The two patterns that form relational consciousness are: (a) an unusual level of consciousness or perceptiveness relative to other passages of conversation spoken by the child; and (b) conversation expressed in a context of how the child related to things, other people, him/herself, and God (Hay & Nye, 2006, p. 109). Hay and Nye believe that relational consciousness points to three categories of spiritual sensitivity: awareness-sensing, mystery-sensing, and value-sensing (Hay & Nye, 2006).

Awareness-sensing is an immediate experience in the here-and-now such as one emphasizes in meditative experiences. Awareness-sensing also refers to tuning, which is a heightened aesthetic experience, such as listening to music. A child might

experience awareness-sensing when participating in a family celebration such as a Christmas celebration (Hay & Nye, 2006, p. 68).

Mystery-sensing is exemplified by awe and wonder that reflects the ultimate mystery of life. The following illustrations exemplify awe and wonder. In a children's book, *Does God Know How to Tie Shoes?,* Katrina says, "I think God wears orange beads when the sun comes up and a big grey hat when it rains" (Carlstrom, 1993). Another third-grade child wrote in a class essay: "[He] created the earth and everything in it. God's power is very powerful. His mind is so big it makes the world spin. There is nothing, I repeat, nothing that He can't do. He loves us and He loves His creation" (Turner, 2007).

The third category, value-sensing, is a quest for meaning in life and is experienced as emotion. Children express their ideas of worth and delight or despair in their everyday experiences (Hay & Nye, 2006).

Anthony speaks of children's spirituality as the time at which a young child initiates an awareness of a spiritual dimension of life and desires to explore this feeling (Anthony, 2006). It is a journey and not a destination. It can be a journey that begins through personal conversion experience, as supported by evangelical groups such as Child Evangelism Fellowship, or it can evolve over time while living in the context of family as described in the Christian classic, *Christian Nurture,* by Horace Bushnell (1847).

Allen and Ratcliff developed a definition of children's spirituality with a Christian focus. It states that spiritual development is "the child's development of a conscious relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit, within the context of a

community of believers that fosters that relationship, as well as the child's understanding of, and response to, that relationship" (Allen, 2008, p 11; Children's Spirituality Conference, 2009; Morgenthaler, 1999; Sheldrake, 2000). For this study I will use Allen and Ratcliff's definition of spiritual development.

Supporting Children's Spiritual Development

As teachers and parents seek to enhance spiritual development and teach the foundational concepts of their faith, they must consider the cognitive, social/emotional, linguistic and physical development of the preschooler (Barber, 1981; Couch & Gamble, 2000; Ruppell, 2004; Stephenson, 2003). Developmentally appropriate practice is the recommended teaching practice of the early childhood profession (Bredekamp & Copple, 2009; Morrison, 2009).

When considering how to promote and support children's spiritual development, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) guidelines address five interrelated dimensions of professional practice provide guidance:

- Create a caring community of learners
- Teach to enhance development and learning
- Construct appropriate curriculum
- Assess children's learning and development
- Establish reciprocal relationships with families (NAEYC, 2006)

Faith-based preschools can apply these principles as they strive to create high-quality programs for young children (Ruppell, 2004).

Yet, there are the spiritual and religious education components to add in a faith-based preschool. In fact, some pastors believe that church educational programs have

to take on the primary role of fostering spiritual development in young children (Thomson, 2009). In the program practices of the faith-based schools, spirituality and religion overlap (Hay & Nye, 2006; Ratcliff & May, 2004). Spirituality is expressed through the mediation of language, rituals, and doctrines of a culture or religious tradition (Hay, Reich, & Utsch, 2006). For example, children experience prayer by learning the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13).

Helm and colleagues utilized the work of Ratcliff and May to create a clear framework to explain the overlapping concept of spirituality and religion. The following illustration explains Helm's framework:

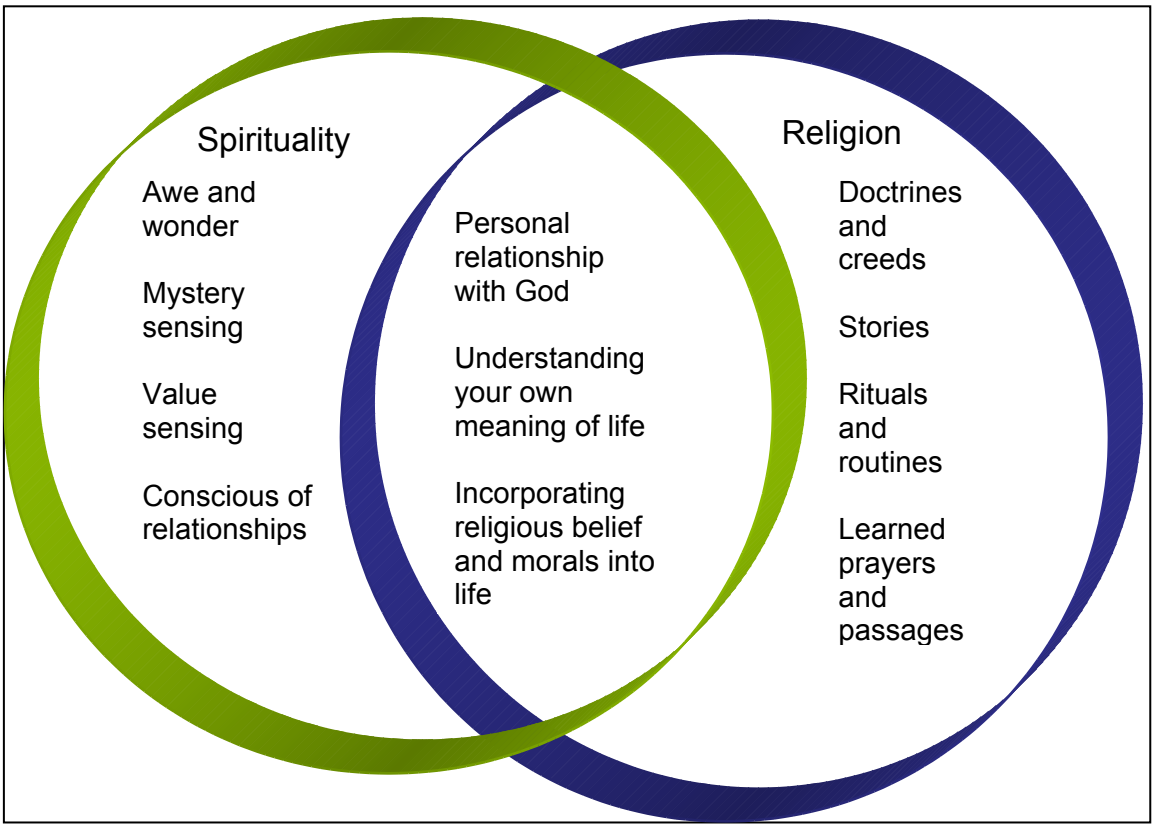


Figure 1. The overlapping of spirituality and religion (Helms, 2008).

In this framework the qualities that describe spirituality are awe and wonder, mystery sensing, value sensing, and conscious of relationships. The framework defines religion as (a) doctrines and creeds, (b) stories, (c) rituals and routines, and (d) learned prayers and passages. Spirituality and religion overlap in these areas: (a) personal relationship with God, (b) understanding your own meaning of life, (c) incorporating religious belief and morals into life (Helm, Berg, & Scranton, 2008).

It is in the context of a religious community that adults teach children how to live with others and take responsibility for others as well as supporting children's spiritual experiences within a religious framework rather than as isolated personal experiences (Lawton, 2003). Within the context of the faith-based school, multiple program practices work together to create a climate that supports spiritual development and religious education (Ruppell, 2004; Ratcliff, 2004; Helm, 2008).

Bible Literacy

Telling the story of the Bible is important because it helps children connect with truths and the meaning of life (Wangerin, 2003), which is an aspect of spiritual development (May, 2006). The Bible is not just a collection of stories, but it is metanarrative that God intends to be formative in human lives (Bartholomew & Goldman, 2004). Children meet God in the story of the Bible (Stonehouse & May, 2008). Thus, teachers help preschoolers connect with the stories of the Bible by creating opportunities for children to experience hands-on activities that relate to the story (Ruppell, 2004). *Godly Play,* a curriculum based on Montessori's approach to education, presents Bible stories through the use of manipulatives as well as storytelling

(Berryman, 1995). Research shows that children in Godly Play programs have biblically and theologically accurate concepts (Arbesman, 2007).

Furthermore, teachers must choose stories that relate to the young child's developmental level (Couch & Gamble, 2000). As well as teaching Bible stories to children, some parents and teachers encourage children to memorize Bible verses (Henley, 2005). Christian educators who follow the instructional-analytic model of Christian education believe that learning the Bible will create an educational situation where reflection, practice, and obedience occur (Carlson & Crupper, 2006). This model has a high esteem for cognitive thought processing. Systematic presentation of Bible teaching and an emphasis on Scripture memory characterize the instructional-analytical model (Anthony, 2006). Proponents of this model of teaching the Bible point out that Timothy from infancy knew the Holy Scriptures (2 Timothy 3: 14-15). Additionally, the psalmist said:

> How can a young man keep his way pure?
> By living according to your word.
>
> I seek you with all my heart;
> do not let me stray from your commands.
>
> I have hidden your word in my heart
> that I might not sin against you (Psalm 119: 9-11).

Memorizing Bible verses puts Bible truths within the life of the child where transformation or change (2 Corinthians 5:17) through the Holy Spirit occurs (Carlson & Crupper, 2006).

It is also important to weave Bible truths into teaching and learning in the content areas of the curriculum (Stephenson, 2003). An integrated approach to curriculum takes advantage of the natural relationships between content areas and developmental

domains (Koralek, 2008). Teachers not only talk about Bible stories, but they also build bridges to what children already know and see every day (Stephenson, 2003). Moreover, teachers model Biblical truths by sharing naturally with children on a regular basis (Campbell, 2003). Consequently, the teaching of the Bible is an essential program practice of a faith-based preschool as the school seeks to support spiritual and religious development.

Building Character

Many early childhood programs in the United States include character education in the curriculum in order to teach traditional values such as honesty, respect, tolerance and responsibility (Morrison, 2009). “Character consists of operative values, values in action. We progress in our character as a value becomes a virtue, a reliable inner disposition to respond to situations in a morally good way” (Lickona, 1991, p. 51). For the Christian school, character education is indivisible from spiritual development (Uecker, 2003). Smitherman (2009) believes that character development and spiritual development are so closely woven together that character development will not occur apart from spiritual development. Faith-based schools find guidance for building character in the Bible. Passages in the Bible such as the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20: 1-12) and the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) point to behaviors that exhibit spiritual growth. Additional Bible passages like Colossian 3:12 identify characteristics such as compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. These Bible passages identify affective behaviors that are outward signs of spiritual growth (Uecker, 2003).

Building character in a faith-based program is not simply presenting a list of virtues like honesty, kindness, or obedience to promote right behavior (Gibbs & Butler, 2009). Children observe teachers and parents as they model good character in their relationships within the classroom and home (Keeler, 2008). Additionally, teachers must focus on behavioral outcomes that indicate to children how to apply character traits in their lives (Uecker, 2003). *Rejoicing in Right Choices* is an eight-week program for preschoolers designed to focus on the development of Christian character in the life of a preschool child (Egeler & Egeler, 2007). This program was based on the research of Zigarelli (2005). Character definition is based on Galatians 5:22 and Colossians 3:12 (Zigarelli, 2005). The 10 virtues measured were: love, joy, inner peace, patience and gentleness (combined), kindness and generosity (combined), faithfulness, self-control, forgiveness, gratitude, and compassion. Through cluster analysis Zigarelli sorted respondents into high-virtue, average-virtue, and low-virtue Christians. He found that high-virtue Christians practice three core virtues: gratitude, joyfulness, and God-centeredness (Zigarelli, 2005).

Rejoicing with Right Choices included the virtues highlighted by Zigarelli (2005), gratitude, joyfulness, and God-centeredness, and also added the Biblical traits of patience, self-control, forgiveness, kindness, and love. Each week highlighted one of the virtues. Teachers gave parents resources and ideas to help them promote and assess each character quality with their children. When children returned to the program, teachers affirmed them for their demonstration of the character quality at home (Egeler & Egeler, 2007).

Character development cannot be left to chance (Uecker, 2003). Because character is an inner disposition (Lickona 1991) that reflects spiritual development (Smitherman, 2009), character education is an essential element in promoting children's spiritual development.

Worship

Though learning about the Bible and developing character in their lives are important to children's growing spirituality, there are other aspects to spiritual development. Worship is another way that young children experience God (Stewart & Berryman, 1989). The worship experience is spoken of often in the Bible. Jesus said, "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth" (John 4:25). In the Old Testament, Psalms 95: 1-7 describes worship:

> Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD;
> let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.
>
> Let us come before him with thanksgiving
> and extol him with music and song.
>
> For the LORD is the great God,
> the great King above all gods.
>
> In his hand are the depths of the earth,
> and the mountain peaks belong to him.
>
> The sea is his, for he made it,
> and his hands formed the dry land.
>
> Come, let us bow down in worship,
> let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;
>
> for he is our God
> and we are the people of his pasture,
> the flock under his care.

May states that thoughtful, intentional worship settings provide opportunities for children to encounter God (May, 2006). Children encounter God through doing things for him such as singing songs to him, giving to him, thanking him, and doing things for him (Buechner, 1992). Therefore, worship is an important program practice to include in faith-based preschools.

The Practice of Prayer

One of the most significant concepts to include in faith-based preschool programs is to teach children to pray (Somers, 2006; Standing, 1929; 1965). Prayer is talking and communicating with God (I John 5: 14-15; Osborne, 1998). Young children need to know that God hears them, and that they can talk to him about anything (I Thessalonians 5:17; Trent, Osborne, & Bruner, 2000). Teachers model prayer to children throughout a school day, and children can be encouraged to say their own prayers (Capehart, 2005; Helm, 2008). Watkins writes that adults have much to learn from free-flowing engagement with children in the practice of prayer (Watkins, 2008). Research shows that preschool children desire to draw closer to God through the avenue of prayer and readily invite adults to pray with them (Somers, 2006). For this reason, prayer is an indispensible practice to include in faith-based schools.

Service to Others

Equally important is the value of involving children in service opportunities (Carr, 2008). In the book, *Celebration of Discipline,* Richard Foster says, “Of all the classical spiritual disciplines, service is the most conducive to the growth of humility” (1978, p. 113). Willard (1988) describes a discipline as “an activity that brings us into more effective cooperation with Christ and his Kingdom” (p. 158). The Bible contains many

passages related to service. Paul writes about service in several New Testament letters: (a) he encourages leaders to equip believers for service (Ephesians 4:11-12); (b) he exhorts believers to care for one another (I Corinthians 12:25); (c) he states that we should be compassionate toward one another (Ephesians 4:32); and (d) he urges followers to comfort one another (2 Corinthians 1:4). Jesus said, “Whoever would be great among you must be your servant . . . even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve” (Matthew 20: 26-28). Service based in spirituality is a lifestyle and ministers to people simply because there is a need (Foster, 1978). Spiritual change occurs in people as they embrace service to others (Carr, 2008).

Age is no barrier when it comes to being used by God (Carr, 2008). The process of serving begins in childhood when children have the opportunity to participate in caring and sharing with others (Stonehouse, 1998). There are examples of children in the Bible who served others. In the Old Testament the story of Samuel is a case in point. Samuel’s mother, Hannah, took him to the tabernacle to dedicate him for a life of service. While he remained with Eli, the priest, Samuel assisted in responsibilities of the priest (I Samuel 1:20-28). The New Testament story of the young boy with five loaves and two fish illustrates a child who shared what he had brought. Jesus used this child’s offering to perform a great miracle (John 6:5-13).

In some church programs young children have the opportunity to serve in various ways. In one instance, young children served their church by collecting pennies for a new building (Simpson, 2001). Other examples are children who participated in community and mission projects by collecting items for community service agencies or writing letters to missionaries (Carr, 2008). In a school where I was an administrator,

young children visited nursing homes to sing to the residents, collected gifts for children in other countries through Operation Christmas Child, and brought food for local food shelters. A research study in Southern California asked children why they participated in service projects in their church program. Children's answers were insightful. One child answered, "Well, I want everyone to know about God. Don't you?" (Carr, 2008, p. 208).

Children grow spiritually as they have the opportunity to focus on others (Carr, 2008; 1 Corinthians 12:25; Ephesians 4:32). Involving children in service opportunities at an early age is an effective way to engage them in their faith (Fowler, 2004). Since service allows children an opportunity to live out their faith, it is an important part of spiritual development (Carr, 2008) and is an essential part of program practices that promote children's spiritual development.

Assessment

Additionally, high-quality preschool programs assess children's learning and development (NAEYC, 2006). Assessment is the process of collecting information children's development, learning, health, behavior, and special needs (Morrison, 2009). Faith-based programs should include assessment of children's spiritual development as a part of the program (Helm et al., 2008).

Often spirituality assessments are in the form of survey measurements. A search for existing measures of spirituality and religiosity by the Center for Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence found that measurements fell into three categories: (a) measures of adult religiosity; (b) spirituality measures mostly for adults but some for youth; and (c) psychological personality measures that look at relevant concepts such as empathy, self-concept, happiness, and interpersonal relations

(CSDCA, 2009). The majority of these measurements are not developmentally appropriate for young children because they require reading and comprehension skills beyond the ability of young children (Gorsuch & Walker, 2006).

Another survey, the *Faith Development Interview,* is a semistructured interview lasting up to three hours that measures the faith stages in Fowler's theory (Parker, 2006). This survey is modified for children ages 4 to 11 and includes doll play and story completion. Other assessments that measure faith development, such as the *Faith Styles Scale* developed by Barnes, Doyle, and Johnson and the Faith Development Essay by Hoffman, are not appropriate for young children because of the reflective and writing skills required to complete the instruments (Parker, 2006).

Though measuring spiritual development in early childhood is difficult, it is not impossible (Lydic, Keeler, & Leak, 2007). Assessment in the spiritual realm is a challenge lest teachers simply quantify behaviors (May, 2006). However, teachers can observe and be aware of children's attitudes towards the Bible, prayer, and worship (Ruppell, 2004). Boucher recommends the use of chart that lists age-appropriate spiritual concepts in one column. In a second column write the evidence of behavior that demonstrates the child understands the concept. For example, Column 1: participates in group prayer time. Column 2: Julia prayed for her sick grandmother today (Boucher, 1999). Documentation of spiritual development also includes photographing children involved in worship and religious learning experiences, recording what children say, and engaging children in conservations about spiritual issues (Helms et al., 2008).

The characteristics of young children who are progressing in a positive spiritual manner are closely tied with the manner in which children's spiritual development is assessed (Hay, 2006). Thomson (2009) recommends

> that the focus of assessment become more closely tied into the definition and end goals of spiritual development, those being, an awareness of God the Creator, a proper response to that awareness of God, and Christ-centered living (p. 91).

In order to know how programs support children's spiritual development, assessment is a part of program practices in faith based schools.

Perspectives and Practices in Churches

There is a complex relation between spiritual development and religious development (Hay et al., 2006). Religion overlaps with the spiritual domain (Benson et al., 2003; Hay et al., 2006). Benson (2006) believes that spiritual development takes place from the inside out. He states that "spiritual development moves forward the best, when the best of a tradition, and its symbols and ideas, its traditions and rituals, are linked in a very powerful way, to the inner life of a young person" (radio interview transcript, 2006).

A broad group of churches from various theological backgrounds include faith-based preschools as a part of their ministries. Recent research findings indicate that children's pastors and Christian leaders state that children should be taught the traditions and rituals of the faith, Bible literacy, and information about God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit (Thomson, 2009). The differences in faith traditions, their doctrines, and theology primarily center on diverse views of sin, salvation, and baptism (Anthony, 2006). For example, some churches baptize infants (Anthony 2006), others view children as a part of the covenant community (Sisemore, 2008), and still others regard

children as not accountable until they reach an age where they have matured enough to understand the concept of sin as a separation from God (Hendricks, 1970; Allen, 2008). While Christian early education programs differ in details of their theology, the programs are alike in their adherence to the essence of Christian faith (Lydic et al., 2007). Young children do not think abstractly; therefore, the religious and doctrinal topics in an early childhood classroom relate to the basics of the Christian faith (Lydic et al., 2007).

Yet, while all churches seek to support children's spiritual development (Anthony, 2006), differences in program practices do exist. For example, those programs in faith traditions that believe in a conversion experience often train teachers in how to lead a child to Christ using the plan of salvation (Romans 3:23; Romans 5:8; Romans 6:23; Romans 10:9-10). On the other hand, some traditions believe that "it is precisely in the baptism of infants, who are included in Christ's Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20), that we can see the full meaning of 'through faith alone'" (Nafzger, 2009). Thus, these programs teach using the catechism. As early childhood programs seek to support children's spiritual development, leaders also teach the historical practices of their faith tradition.

Primary Role of Parents

As teachers promote and assess the spiritual development of children enrolled in their faith-based preschools, they must be cognizant of the commandments of Scripture found in Deuteronomy 6: 4-9:

> Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on

> your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Children's spiritual growth and development depends not only on teachers but primarily on parents who model and intentionally teach spiritual truths to their children (Schultz, 1998). The ecological theory of Bronfenbrenner (1979) sheds light on the contexts of relationships that form a child's environment. In Bronfenbrenner's theory the mesosystem is the linkage and interactions between the different environments in which children spend their time (Morrison, 2009). Researchers must study the linkage between the home and the preschool when analyzing children's spiritual development (Boyatzis, 2008).

The traditional goals for religious education include objectives such as: to become good Christians, to get converted, to be in awe of God, to get to know stories of the Bible and to learn to pray (Bellous, de Roos, & Summey, 2004). Developmentally appropriate program practices in faith based preschools seek to fulfill these goals with the study of the Bible (Stonehouse and May, 2008; Wangerin, 2003), the practice of prayer (Somers, 2006), worship (Steward & Berryman, 1989), and service opportunities (Carr, 2008; Stonehouse, 1998). The context of instruction and program practice must allow time for contemplation and reflection (May, 2006), as well as the building of positive relationships between teachers and children (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Maslow, 1943; Morrison, 2009). All of these program practices must include the participation of parents to whom the Bible gives the primary responsibility of religious instruction (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Schultz, 1998) and spiritual nurture (Bushnell, 1847; Stonehouse, 1998; Stonehouse & May, 2008).

Spiritual Development in Faith-based Schools

Educational, social science, and faith-based literature acknowledge children's spiritual and religious development; yet, there is little attention to designing and using methods to promote spiritual development (Hull, 2003; Mountain, 2007). A program for spiritual formation in a school needs not only curricular content but also an intentional programmatic approach (DeBerry, 2007). Northminster Learning Center of Northminster Presbyterian Church in Peoria, IL, developed a clear framework for guiding children's spiritual development. One of the core values of the school is: Children should be introduced to faith and spirituality in developmentally appropriate ways (Helm, 2008*).*

A faith-based school articulates its mission and framework for the school and curriculum through written documents such as vision and mission statements and goal statements (ACSI, 2008). The vision, mission statement, philosophy, and values of a faith-based program should reflect compatibility between the faith based communities' sense of ministry and the purpose of the faith based preschool (ACSI, 2008; Couch & Gamble, 2000; Lawrence, 2002). A good mission statement reflects why the preschool exists and what it hopes to achieve in the future. It articulates the preschool's values and its work (Reno, 2008). The Association of Christian Schools International requirements for accreditation state that schools, beginning with early education, must have a clear written statement of faith in the philosophy section of the report (ACSI, 2008). Additionally, staff must show a commitment to the development of the whole child -- spiritually, intellectually, physically, emotionally, and socially (Luke 2:52). A faith-based preschool demonstrates compliance with accreditation standards when children show growth in Christ. Furthermore, the standards require that programs engage in

constantly assessing effective implementation of the commitment to the whole child (ACSI, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

Nevertheless, the problem is that faith-based preschools are often copies of secular preschools without any intentional spiritual or religious emphasis (Ratcliff, 1988). Some faith-based schools assume that there is religious instruction and a growing spiritual development of the children in the school; yet there is little evidence to confirm the success of Christian schools as being transformational in the lives of children (Cox, 2006; Goldman, 1968; Graham, 2003; Hull, 2003). A search of 12 faith-based curriculums, and 25 program mission, vision, and goal statements shows that few schools articulate their perspectives on a comprehensive program framework to support the process of spiritual development and faith formation in young children.

Given the fact of my inability to find a comprehensive program framework to support children's spiritual development, the purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which faith-based preschools implement a program framework for spiritual development in order to promote spiritual development in preschoolers ages three to five. The study examined various practices such as Bible literacy, the practices of prayer, building character, serving others, worship opportunities, and the context of learning that contribute to and support children's spiritual development.

Research Questions

1. To what extent, if any, do faith-based preschool programs
    A. Support the practice of prayer with preschool children?
    B. Teach the Bible to preschool children?

semistructured interview of faith-based teachers and administrators collected qualitative data about program practices that support spiritual development in children. The semistructured interview is “an interview in which the interviewer asks a series of structured questions and then probes more deeply with open-ended questions to obtain additional information” (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 653).

Definitions of Key Terms

This study used the following definitions:

Biblical integration: The weaving of God’s truth in to teaching and learning by precept, principle, and practice, in a way that presents a unified, God-centered view of life (Stephenson, 2003)

Curriculum: All the activities and plans to help preschoolers grow in their cognitive, socioemotional, linguistic, physical, and spiritual development (Morrison, 2009)

Faith-based: Organizations that are religious in nature. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services uses the term “religious organization” and the term “faith-based organization” interchangeably (2004)

Preschool: A beginning group or class enrolling children younger than 5 years of age and organized to provide educational experiences under professionally qualified teachers in cooperation with parents during the year or years immediately preceding kindergarten or prior to entry into elementary school when there is no kindergarten (NCES, 2008)

Primal faith: The stage of faith during infancy to age 2 during which prelanguage disposition of trust forms in the mutuality of the child’s relationships with parents and caregivers (Fowler, 1981)

Program framework: Outcomes, goals, strategies and objectives (McNamara, 2006)

Relational consciousness: "[A]n unusual level of consciousness or perceptiveness relative to other passages of the child." Relational consciousness is built on awareness-sensing, mystery-sensing, and value sensing (Hay & Nye, 2006; Nye, 1998)

Religious education: "[T]he teaching of a particular religion and its varied aspects -- its beliefs, doctrines, rituals, customs, rites, and personal roles (Wikipedia, retrieved on 2/11/09)

Spiritual development: "[T]he child's development of a conscious relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit, within the context of a community of believers that fosters that relationship, as well as the child's understanding of, and response to, that relationship" (Allen, 2008, p. 11)

Summary

There is a growing interest in the spiritual domain of children's development. Many faith-based preschool recognize spiritual development as a part of their purpose. Program practices of these schools can support children's spiritual development. This study explored the extent to which faith- based preschools implement program practices such as Bible literacy, the practices of prayer, building character, serving others, worship opportunities, parental involvement, and the context of learning, that contribute to and support children's spiritual development. A mixed method research design used quantitative and qualitative methods to gather data. Participants completed a survey, Survey of Faith-based Program Practices Promoting the Spiritual Development of Young Children. Additionally, twenty early childhood professionals took part in semi-structured interviews. Triangulation of the data informed analysis

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature examines the importance of early childhood education today, the significance of the whole child, current and historical perspectives on spiritual development of children, and the role of program practices in promoting children's spiritual development.

Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education in the 21st century is a topic of concern to educators, parents and public policy advocates in the United States (Barnett, 2008; Barnett, et al., 2007; Calman & Tarr-Whelan, 2005; Dickinson et al., 2009; Lovejoy et al., 2005; Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2008). This public policy concern began in 1965 with the implementation of the Head Start program to literally give underprivileged children a "head start" before the children reached first grade (Morrison, 2009). Researchers began to conduct studies that tracked children enrolled in these programs for high-risk children. Three historical programs, Perry Preschool Project, Chicago Child-Parent Center Program, and the Abecedarian Project have results that show the benefits of early childhood intervention (Morrison, 2008). Numerous other research studies support early education as an important component for children's school readiness, literacy and language development, and mathematical achievement (Gormley et al., 2008; Melhuish et al., 2008; National Early Literacy Panel, 2008).

The Whole Child

Because of the outcomes-based approach to education with an emphasis on cognitive development, educators minimize the affective and a spiritual dimension of

children's lives (Buchanan & Hyde, 2008). The concept of the whole child is not new in the 21st century. In fact, both the Old Testament and the New Testament speak to aspects of children's spiritual development. Samuel as a child worked in the temple with the priest, Eli. I Samuel 2:26 says, "And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the LORD and with men." Likewise, Luke 2: 52 says, "And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." Favor translates from the Greek word *charis*, or grace. It describes an attitude of approval, respect, and good will directed by others toward a person (Tolbert, 1970). In the 1930s a report from the White House Conference on Children and Youth said,

> To the doctor, the child is a typhoid patient; to the playground supervisor, a first-baseman; to the teacher, a learner of arithmetic. At times he may be different things to each of these specialists, but too rarely is he a whole child to any of them.

In the 21st century, *The Learning Compact Redefined: A Call to Action* calls on communities and schools to create conditions in which all children can develop their capacities for intellectual, social, emotional, physical, and spiritual learning (Marshall, et al., 2007).

Historical Background of Children's Spiritual Development

Spiritual Development as a Research Topic

Interest in children's spiritual experiences as a research topic began in the late 19th century. Ratcliff identified four distinct eras in the scholarly study of children's religious and spiritual development: (a) early holism, 1892-1928, (b) de-emphasis on spiritual experience, 1928-1961, (c) cognitive religious development, 1961-1990, and (d) children's spirituality, 1990-present (Ratcliff, 2008).

During the early holism era, children's religious comments were recorded and analyzed whether or not the research topic was religious in nature. Religious experiences were not distinguished from other facets of life. Thus, researchers viewed children through a holistic, integrated perspective (Ratcliff, 2008). Throughout this period, journals such as *Pedagogical Seminary,* which later became the *Journal of Genetic Psychology,* published articles that described religious thought and religious experiences of children. Early psychologists such as G. Stanley Hall affirmed the value of studying religion (Ratcliff, 2008).

An early study of this era was "The Theological Life of the California Child" (Barnes & Boring, 1892). Data included 1,091 compositions by children on the subject of heaven and hell, 16 written accounts by adults in which they recalled their early beliefs, and 27 interviews with teachers and parents of young children with prescribed questions. The purpose of the study was to determine the theological atmosphere in which California children lived and to determine how attitude toward the theological atmosphere varies by age. The study concluded that most California children seem to be ignorant of many accepted theological conceptions of Christianity. The researchers recommended that children be given the information to develop good theology, if for no other reason than to become knowledgeable of the literary and artistic life. During the latter part of the early holism period, there was a shift in the publication of research on children and religion from secular journals to religious journals. Scholars believe this shift was due to the rising prominence of behaviorism which began to displace the authority of churches and the Bible (Ratcliff, 2008).

During the late 1920s statistically-oriented research emerged. *Studies in Deceit* (Hartshorne & May, 1928) was a hallmark study of the second phase of children's spirituality research, de-emphasis on spiritual experience, 1928-1961. The study advanced quantitative research and is noted for one finding: children who attended Sunday school were no less deceitful than children who never attended. Hartshorne's research influenced the field for many years. Reactions to the study included abandoning Biblical foundations for studying children, viewing researchers as being biased against religion, and disconnecting the spiritual as necessary to understanding children (Ratcliff, 2008). During this time, studies downplayed the importance of spiritual experience as a rationalistic framework became predominant (Ratcliff, 2008). In mainline churches research on inward spiritual experience and Christian doctrine gave way to an emphasis on making good citizens (Ratcliff, 2008a).

Developmental Stage Theories

The 1940s saw a beginning shift from a focus on character and outward behavior to a study of developmental stages of religious growth. This third era, cognitive religious development, 1961-1990, was heralded by a series of three religious studies by Elkind. He studied children's understanding of religious denomination by interviewing nearly 800 Jewish (1961), Catholic (1962), and Protestant children (1963), using Piaget's semi-clinical interview to conduct the research (Elkind, 1964) and concluding that children's understanding of their faith traditions fell into a pattern of phases closely paralleling Piaget's stages of cognitive development (Elkind, 1978). Elkind assumed that children comprehend religion in the same way as they understand concepts in other disciplines (Ratcliff, 2008).

Concurrent with Elkind, Goldman researched children's spiritual development in the United Kingdom. Goldman summarized stages of spiritual development in Piagetian terms such as intuitive religious thinking to describe ages 2 to 6, concrete religious thinking, and abstract religious thinking (Goldman, 1968). Although Goldman's research was methodologically superior for the era, Ratcliff states that Goldman's approach ignored children's receptive and expressive language limitations (Ratcliff, 1988). Ratcliff asked, "Is it possible for a child to intuit an understanding of faith from a religious experience that surpasses the supposed stage-related limitations that Goldman -- and Piaget -- suggested?" (Ratcliff, 2008, p. 29).

The most comprehensive study of children's faith development to date was the research carried out by Fowler (Roehlkepartian, 2006). Fowler states that his study of Erik Erikson, Laurence Kohlberg, and Jean Piaget led to the research he conducted (1981, 2006), beginning in 1968. For three years he and his graduate students conducted and analyzed 359 interviews on which his stages of faith are based (Fowler & Dell, 2006). In *Stages of Faith* (1981) Fowler identified three stages of faith in childhood: primal faith, intuitive projective faith, and mythic literal faith:

> Primal faith: The stage of faith during infancy to age 2. In this stage, a prelanguage disposition of trust forms in the mutuality of the child's relationships with parents and caregivers.
>
> Intuitive-projective faith: Children who are 3 and 4 years old are In this faith stage. This is a time when children learn their faith intuitively rather than with formal logic.
>
> Mythic-literal faith: The faith stage which occurs between the ages of 6 and the middle school years. This stage initiates the beginning of reflection on the feelings and ideas of faith. Children in this stage are able not only to remember facts and the sequence of events but also to discover meaning in them. The meanings, however, are concrete and literal. In this stage children are able to sort out make-believe from real (Fowler, 2006).

The Association of Christian Schools International Principles and Practices of Christian Early Education philosophy course (2003) explains the application of Erikson's theory in this way:

Trust versus mistrust:

- Learning to trust builds a sense of hope.
- Children cannot learn to put their hope in Jesus if they have not learned what trust means.
- Children learn to trust who they cannot see by having trustworthy caregivers who they can see.

Autonomy versus shame and doubt:

- Children develop a sense of will by going through this stage of autonomy.
- Children cannot submit their will to God without first developing a will.

Initiative versus guilt:

- When children develop a sense of initiative they feel they have a sense of purpose in their lives.
- Children are then able to understand that God has a purpose for their lives and for the lives of others.

Industry versus inferiority

- The ego strength of competence gives children the freedom to use skills and intelligence in completing tasks. It enables them to willingly participate with others in productive work and serve the faith community (Stephenson, 2003).

Children's Spirituality, 1990-present

In 1990 Robert Coles broke ground by articulating the natural, complex, and adaptive function that spirituality played in the lives of children. His book, *The Spiritual Lives of Children,* was the culmination of a 30-year project on the inner life of the child. Coles and his associates gathered data from interviews and drawings from 500 children around the world. From his research Cole noted the positive and sometimes life-changing quality of children's spirituality (Coles, 1990). Because his approach included discussions with children within a phenomenological framework, Coles avoided stage-oriented analysis "as an oversimplification of the child's world" (Ratcliff, 2008, p. 33).

Beginning in the 1990s some psychologists and educators started to write about "the spiritual child." Scarlett writes that the spiritual child movement is, in part, "a reaction to stage-structural theories of religious and spiritual development" (Scarlett, 2006, p. 28). Hay (2006) stated, "The major problems (with stage theories) is their narrowness, coming near to dissolving religion into reason and therefore childhood spirituality into nothing more than a form of immaturity or inadequacy" (pp. 50-51).

The emphasis in this fourth stage of children's spirituality was on experience rather than religious cognitive development. The idea that children are spiritual is not a modern idea. Faith traditions acknowledge an innate spirituality in children. Jesus said, "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein" (Mark 10:15). Though the idea that children are spiritual is not new, the present movement posits itself against developmental stage theory (Scarlett, 2006).

The root of the spiritual child movement is personal feeling, experience, and biology (Scarlett, 2006). Hart noted that children' spirituality may exist apart from

rational and linguistic conceptions of adulthood and from knowledge about a religion (Hart, 2006). Those who support this view gather evidence from interview studies of children, from retrospective paper-and-pencil studies of adults, and from anecdotes (Scarlett, 2006).

Relational Consciousness

Among the leaders in the child spirituality movement are Hay and Nye. Nye's research involved 40 case studies of randomly selected children ages 6 through 10. Participants were from two schools. This research used a grounded theory approach (Nye, 2004). As a result of the study, Hay and Nye coined the term "relational consciousness" to describe "a heightened awareness of relationships with God, self, things, and/or other people" (Ratcliff, 2008, p. 29). Relational consciousness consists of three categories of spiritual sensitivity: awareness-sensing, mystery-sensing, and value-sensing (Hay & Nye, 2006).

Awareness-sensing includes concentration that is intense on an immediate experience (Ratcliff, 2008a). Mystery-sensing involves awe and wonder. Wonder embraces a number of experiences that can be described as connection, joy, insight, and a sense of reverence (Hart, 2006). Many children experience awe and wonder during times when they are communing with nature (Hart, 2006). Value-sensing is an identity seeking quest for meaning. Children often express their ideas of worth as delight or despair in everyday experiences (Hay & Nye, 2006). The research by Hay and Nye currently serves as a reference point for contemporary studies on children's spiritual development (Ratcliff, 2008).

Theology

A study of children's spiritual development includes an overlay with religious and faith development (Hay et al., 2006). Faith development prepares the way for conversion (Fowler, 1981). Yet, there are a diversity of views about children and conversion because the Bible says little about children, leaving room for interpretation by theologians (Sisemore, 2008). Those who seek to develop a theology for children's spiritual formation must think about when a child is old enough to be aware of personal sin, what is the means of spiritual regeneration, when should a child be baptized, and how does a child grow spiritually while taking into consideration how a child grows across all developmental domains (Anthony, 2006).

Central to this understanding of children's spiritual formation are the teachings about sin. Throughout the history of Christianity, different church leaders espoused diverse views of sin and the nature of children (Bunge, 2001). Augustine, bishop of Hippo, held a strict interpretation of Bible passages on original sin (Anthony, 2006). Augustine held that infants were in a state of "non-innocence" and recommended "baptism, the example of others, and God's grace and God's love as vehicles for turning the corrupted will to God" (Bunge, 2001, p. 14).

Definitional Issues in Children's Spiritual Development

The terms spirituality, spiritual development, religious development, and faith development are often used interchangeably without clarity as to the meaning (Hay, 2006). While there is a growing interest in the study of spiritual development, the challenge of those who research this topic is to clarify the definition of the spiritual development for their research (Boyatzis, 2008). The working definition proposed by

Benson et al. (2003) is: “Spiritual development is the process of growing the intrinsic human capacity for self-transcendence, in which the self is embedded in something greater than the self, including the sacred.” (pp. 205-206). Benson’s definition points out the difficulties in defining spiritual development. Radcliff and Nye stated that “’intrinsic human capacity’ highlights the human component while ‘self-transcendence’ and ‘including the sacred’ imply at least the possibility of an alternate spiritual realm” (Ratcliff & Nye, 2006, p. 467). Influences from both within and outside of religious traditions, beliefs, and practices shape children’s spiritual development (Benson et al., 2003). Thus, spirituality and religion have overlapping qualities (Helm et al., 2008; Ratcliff & Nye, 2006). In seeking a global definition of children’s spiritual development, researchers run the risk of ambiguity (Ratcliff & Nye, 2006).

An emerging framework from The Center for Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence states that spiritual development is a constant, ongoing, dynamic, and sometimes difficult interplay between three core developmental processes:

> (1) Awareness or awakening: being or becoming aware of or awakening to one’s self, others, and the universe. For example, awareness or awakening means forming a worldview regarding major life questions, such as the purpose of existence, life and death, and the existence or nonexistence of the divine or God.
>
> (2) Interconnecting and belonging: Seeking, accepting, or experiencing significance in relationships to and interdependence with others, the world, or one’s sense of the transcendent (often including an understanding of God or a higher power) As an example, a child experiences a sense of empathy, responsibility, and/or love for others, for humanity, and for the world.

(3) A way of living: Engaging in relationships, activities, and/or practices that shape bonds with oneself, family, community, humanity, the world, and/or that which one believes to be transcendent; for example, living out one's beliefs, values, and commitments in daily life (Roehlkepartain, 2008).

Allen and Ratcliff developed a definition of children's spirituality with a Christian focus. It states that spiritual development is

> the child's development of a conscious relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit, within the context of a community of believers that fosters that relationship, as well as the child's understanding of, and response to, that relationship (Allen, 2008, p. 11; Children's Spirituality Conference, 2009; Morgenthaler, 1999; Sheldrake, 2000).

Allen stated that to construct a working definition of children's spirituality from a Christian perspective, the planning team for the 2009 Children's Spirituality Conference explored a variety of definitions of Christian spirituality. The planning team found three common elements in the definitions explored: (a) a focus on the Trinity (God, Jesus, Holy Spirit); (b) relationality; and (c) the context of the believing community (Allen, 2009). Any research in children's spiritual development needs to consider the many definitions that exist in prior research (Ratcliff & Nye, 2006). Researchers of children's spiritual development must clarify the definition of spiritual development for their research (Boyatzis, 2008).

Supporting Children's Spiritual Development

It is in the context of a religious community that adults teach children how to live with others and take responsibility for others as well as support children's spiritual experiences within a religious framework rather than as isolated personal experiences (Lawton, 2003). Within the context of the faith-based school, multiple program practices

work together to create a climate that supports spiritual development and religious education (Helm, 2008; Ratcliff, 2004; Ruppell, 2004). Program content for religious instruction includes doctrines, creeds, traditions, rituals, practicing of spiritual disciplines, Bible knowledge, patterns of Christian living, methods of service to others, and other things according to descriptions of the congregational setting (Bunge, 2001).

Bible Literacy

Telling the story of the Bible is important because it helps children connect with truths and the meaning of life (Wangerin, 2003), which is an aspect of spiritual development (May, 2006). The Bible is not just a collection of stories, but it is metanarrative that God intends to be formative in our lives (Bartholomew & Goldman, 2004). Children meet God in the story of the Bible (Stonehouse & May, 2008). Thus, teachers help preschoolers connect with the stories of the Bible by creating opportunities for children to experience hands-on activities that relate to the story (Ruppell, 2004). *Godly Play,* a curriculum which is based on Montessori's approach to education, presents Bible stories through the use of manipulatives as well as storytelling (Berryman, 1995). Research shows that children in Godly Play programs have biblically and theologically accurate concepts (Arbesman, 2007). Furthermore, teachers must choose stories that relate to the young child's developmental level (Couch & Gamble, 2000).

As well as teaching Bible stories to children, some parents and teachers encourage children to memorize Bible verses (Henley, 2005). Christian educators who follow the instructional-analytic model of Christian education believe that learning the Bible will create an educational situation where reflection, practice, and obedience occur

(Carlson & Crupper, 2006). This model has a high esteem for cognitive thought processing. Systematic presentation of Bible teaching and an emphasis on Scripture memory characterize the Instructional-Analytical model (Anthony, 2006). Proponents of this model of teaching the Bible point out that Timothy from infancy knew the Holy Scriptures (2 Timothy 3: 14-15). Additionally, the psalmist said:

> How can a young man keep his way pure?
> By living according to your word.
>
> I seek you with all my heart;
> do not let me stray from your commands.
>
> I have hidden your word in my heart
> that I might not sin against you (Psalm 119: 9-11)

Memorizing Bible verses puts Bible truths within the life of the child where transformation or change (2 Corinthians 5:17) through the Holy Spirit occurs (Carlson & Crupper, 2006).

It is also important to weave Bible truths into teaching and learning in the content areas of the curriculum (Stephenson, 2003). An integrated approach to curriculum takes advantage of the natural relationships between content areas and developmental domains (Koralek, 2008). Teachers not only talk about Bible stories, but they also should build bridges to what children already know and see every day (Stephenson et al., 2003). Moreover, teachers model Biblical truths by sharing naturally with children on a regular basis (Campbell, 2003). Consequently, the teaching of the Bible is an essential program practice of a faith-based preschool as the school seeks to support spiritual and religious development.

Building Character

Many early childhood programs in the United States include character education in the curriculum in order to teach traditional values such as honesty, respect, tolerance and responsibility (Morrison, 2009). “Character consists of operative values, values in action. We progress in our character as a value becomes a virtue, a reliable inner disposition to respond to situations in a morally good way” (Lickona 1991, p. 51).

For the Christian school, character education is indivisible from spiritual development (Uecker, 2003). Smitherman (2009) believes that character development and spiritual development are so closely woven together that character development will not occur apart from spiritual development. Faith-based schools find guidance for building character in the Bible. Passages in the Bible such as the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20: 1-12) and the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) point to behaviors that exhibit spiritual growth. Additional Bible passages like Colossians 3:12 identify characteristics like compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. These Bible passages identify affective behaviors which are outward signs of spiritual growth (Uecker, 2003).

Building character in a faith-based program is not simply presenting a list of virtues like honesty, kindness, or obedience to promote right behavior (Gibbs & Butler, 2009). Children observe teachers and parents as they model good character in their relationships within the classroom and home (Keeler, 2008). Additionally, teachers must focus on behavioral outcomes that indicate children apply character traits in their lives (Uecker, 2003). *Rejoicing in Right Choices* is an eight week program for preschoolers designed to focus on the development of Christian character in the life of a preschool

Berryman, 1989). The worship experience is spoken of often in the Bible. Jesus said, "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and truth" (John 4:25). In the Old Testament, Psalms 95: 1-7 describes worship:

> Come, let us sing for joy to the LORD;
> let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation.
>
> Let us come before him with thanksgiving
> and extol him with music and song.
>
> For the LORD is the great God,
> the great King above all gods.
>
> In his hand are the depths of the earth,
> and the mountain peaks belong to him.
>
> The sea is his, for he made it,
> and his hands formed the dry land.
>
> Come, let us bow down in worship,
> let us kneel before the LORD our Maker;
>
> for he is our God
> and we are the people of his pasture,
> the flock under his care.

May (2006) stated that thoughtful, intentional worship settings provide opportunities for children to encounter God. Children encounter God through doing things for him such as singing songs to him, giving to him, thanking him, and doing things for him (Buechner, 1992). Therefore, worship is an important program practice to include in faith-based preschools.

The Practice of Prayer

One of the most significant concepts to include in faith-based preschool programs is to teach children to pray (Somers, 2006; Standing, 1929, 1965). Prayer is talking and communicating with God (I John 5: 14-15; Osborne, 1998). Young children

need to know that God hears them, and that they can talk to him about anything (I Thessalonians 5:17; Trent, et al., 2000). Teachers model prayer to children throughout a school day, and children can be encouraged to say their own prayers (Capehart, 2005; Helm, 2008). Watkins writes that adults have much to learn from free-flowing engagement with children in the practice of prayer (Watkins, 2008). Research shows that preschool children desire to draw closer to God through the avenue of prayer and readily invite adults to pray with them (Somers, 2006). For this reason, prayer is an indispensible practice to include in faith-based schools.

Service to Others

Equally important is the value of involving children in service opportunities (Carr, 2008). In the book, *Celebration of Discipline,* Richard Foster said, “Of all the classical spiritual disciplines, service is the most conducive to the growth of humility” (Foster, 1978). Willard described a discipline as “an activity that brings us into more effective cooperation with Christ and his Kingdom” (Willard, 1988, p. 158).

The Bible contains many passages related to service. Paul wrote about service in several New Testament letters: (a) he encouraged leaders to equip believers for service (Ephesians 4:11-12); (b) he exhorted believers to care for one another (I Corinthians 12:25); (c) he stated that Christians should be compassionate toward one another (Ephesians 4:32); and (d) he urged believers to comfort one another (2 Corinthians 1:4). Jesus said, “Whoever would be great among you must be your servant . . . even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve” (Matthew 20: 26-28). Service based in spirituality is a lifestyle and ministers to people simply because there is a need (Foster,

1978). Spiritual change occurs in people as they embrace service to others (Carr, 2008).

Age is no barrier when it comes to being used by God (Carr, 2008). The process of serving begins in childhood when children have the opportunity to participate in caring and sharing with others (Stonehouse, 1998). There are examples of children in the Bible who served others. In the Old Testament the story of Samuel is a case in point. Samuel's mother, Hannah, brought him to the tabernacle to dedicate him for a life of service. While he remained with Eli, the priest, Samuel assisted in responsibilities of the priest (I Samuel 1:20-28). The New Testament story of the young boy with five loaves and two fish illustrates a child who shared what he had brought. Jesus used this child's offering to perform a great miracle (John 6:5-13).

In some church programs young children have the opportunity to serve in various ways. In one instance, young children served their church by collecting pennies for a new building (Simpson, 2001). Other examples are children who participated in community and mission projects by collecting items for community service agencies or writing letters to missionaries (Carr, 2008). In a school where I was an administrator, young children visited nursing homes to sing to the residents, collected gifts for children in other countries through Operation Christmas Child, and brought food for local food shelters. A research study in Southern California asked children why they participated in service projects in their church program. Children's answers were insightful. One child answered, "Well, I want everyone to know about God. Don't you?" (Carr, 2008, p. 208).

Children grow spiritually as they have the opportunity to focus on others (Carr, 2008; 1 Corinthians 12:25; Ephesians 4:32). Involving children in service opportunities

at an early age is an effective way we can engage them in their faith (Fowler, 2004). Since service allows children an opportunity to live out their faith, it is an important part of spiritual development (Carr, 2008) and is an essential part of program practices that promote children's spiritual development.

Assessment

Additionally, high-quality preschool programs assess children's learning and development (NAEYC, 2006). Assessment is the process of collecting information children's development, learning, health, behavior, and special needs (Morrison, 2009). Faith-based programs should include assessment of children's spiritual development as a part of the program (Helm et al., 2008). Often spirituality assessments are in the form of survey measurements. A search for existing measures of spirituality and religiosity by the Center for Spiritual Development in Childhood and Adolescence found that measurements fall into three categories: (a) measures of adult religiosity; (b) spirituality measures mostly for adults but some for youth; and (c) psychological personality measures that look at relevant concepts such as empathy, self-concept, happiness, and interpersonal relations (CSDCA, 2009). The majority of these measurements are not developmentally appropriate for young children because they require reading and comprehension skills beyond the ability of young children (Gorsuch & Walker, 2006).

Another survey, the *Faith Development Interview,* was a semistructured interview lasting up to three hours that measured the faith stages in Fowler's theory (Parker, 2006). This survey was modified for children ages 4 to 11 and included doll play and story completion. Other assessments that measure faith development, such as the *Faith Styles Scale* developed by Barnes, Doyle, and Johnson and the Faith Development

Essay by Hoffman, are not appropriate for young children because of the reflective and writing skills required to complete the instruments (Parker, 2006).

Though measuring spiritual development in early childhood is difficult, it is not impossible (Lydic et al., 2007). Assessment in the spiritual realm is a challenge lest teachers simply quantify behaviors (May, 2006). However, teachers can observe and be aware of children's attitudes towards the Bible, prayer, and worship (Ruppell, 2004). Boucher recommends the use of chart that lists age-appropriate spiritual concepts in one column. In a second column write the evidence of behavior that demonstrates the child understands the concept. For example, Column 1: participates in group prayer time. Column 2: Julia prayed for her sick grandmother today (Boucher, 1999). Documentation of spiritual development also includes photographing children involved in worship and religious learning experiences, recording what children say, and engaging children in conservations about spiritual issues (Helms et al., 2008).

The characteristics of young children who are progressing in a positive spiritual manner are closely tied with the manner in which children's spiritual development is assessed (Hay, 2006). Thomson (2009) recommended "that the focus of assessment become more closely tied into the definition and end goals of spiritual development, those being, an awareness of God the Creator, a proper response to that awareness of God, and Christ-centered living" (p. 91). In order to know how programs support children's spiritual development, assessment is a part of program practices in faith based schools.

Primary Role of Parents

As teachers promote and assess the spiritual development of children enrolled in their faith-based preschools, they must be cognizant of the commandments of Scripture found in Deuteronomy 6: 4-9:

> Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates

Children's spiritual growth and development depends not only on teachers, but primarily on parents who model and intentionally teach spiritual truths to their children (Schultz, 1998). The ecological theory of Bronfenbrenner sheds light on the contexts of relationships that form a child's environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In Bronfenbrenner's theory the mesosystem is the linkage and interactions between the different environments in which children spend their time (Morrison, 2009). Researchers must study the linkage between the home and the preschool when analyzing children's spiritual development (Boyatzis, 2008).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study used a mixed-method research design that involved both quantitative and qualitative approaches. In the *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* (2007), the editors defined mixed methods as research "in which the researcher collects and analyzes data, integrates the findings and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or program of inquiry" (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007). The mixed method design allowed me to use approaches that complemented each other and explored different aspects of the research questions, thus allowing for stronger inferences from the data (Pole, 2007). Ratcliff and Nye recommended conducting mixed method research in religious development because this method would represent both empirical relationships and personal meanings attributed to those relationships (Ratcliff & Nye, 2006). Thus, I used a concurrent triangulation design to confirm, cross-validate, or corroborate findings within the study (Creswell & Clark, 2007). In this strategy the quantitative and qualitative research and data analysis takes place at the same time (Pole, 2007). "Through triangulation of results, information from the different measures used in the study converges to support an interpretation of the results" (Lauer, 2006, p. 50).

Participants

Participants in this research study were teachers, administrators, and leaders in 25 faith-based preschools. Participants were from California, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Oklahoma and Wisconsin, with the majority of participants in Texas. Individuals in the

Development of Young Children. The survey contained 46 items presented as attitude statements for which the respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement. The anchors of this scale were: *1 = strongly disagree,* 2 = disagree, 3 = tend to disagree, 4 = tend to agree, 5 = agree, and *6 = strongly agree*. Several items on the scale were worded negatively. The items surveyed 8 dimensions of program practices that supported children's spiritual development, including prayer, Bible literacy, service opportunities, worship, assessment, parental involvement, building character, and context.

Table 4

Survey Items by Dimensions

Dimensions of program practices	Survey items
Prayer	6. Preschool children, ages 3, 4, and 5 should learn to repeat prayers such as the Lord's prayer. 15. In my classroom preschoolers pray on a daily basis. 30. In my classroom preschoolers have an opportunity to state their prayer requests. 45. In my class preschool children have an opportunity to express how God answered their prayers.
Bible literacy	4. I emphasize Bible truths which when I teach literacy and math. 10. In the preschool program where I teach, teaching Bible stories is a part of the curriculum. 11. I apply truths from the Bible in my daily conversation with preschool children. 13. In my classroom I talk about Bible truths in my teaching of all content areas. 14. Memorizing Bible verses is a part of my preschool curriculum.

(table continues)

Table 4 *(continued.)*

Dimensions of program practices	Survey items
Bible literacy	16. In my classroom Bible verses are posted in the learning centers. 21. Preschool children in my classroom can identify the Bible as a book that tells about God and Jesus. 23. I teach about Bible truths and Bible verses as I teach science in my classroom. 27. Teachings from the Bible are a part of all that I teach in the preschool classroom. 31. Spiritual development includes more than learning Bible stories. 32. I use teachings from the Bible as a part of guidance in my preschool classroom. 35. The spiritual development program in my preschool consists of teaching Bible stories.
Service opportunities	2. In the preschool program where I teach, teachers find opportunities for young children to help others, such as making cards for someone who is ill. 8. Preschool children should take part in projects to help others such as collecting food items for the needy. 18. Preschoolers in my school participate in a service or humanitarian project to help others such as Operation Christmas Child. 41. Preschoolers in my class help plan service projects that will help others 43. Preschool children in my class grow spiritually because they participate in helping others in the community
Worship	19. Worship opportunities are a part of my preschool program. 28. In my school preschoolers learn about the Bible through music. 36. In my classroom there are quiet moments for children to reflect on God and Jesus. 37. My preschool program celebrates religious holidays such as Christmas and Easter.

(table continues)

Table 4 *(continued.)*

Dimensions of program practices	Survey items
Building character	7. Teaching character traits is a part of promoting spiritual development. 22. In my school preschoolers study character traits. 46.I model virtues such as gratitude, gentleness, compassion, and patience in my classroom
Assessment	3. It is important to set goals for preschoolers' spiritual development. 20. I set goals for the spiritual development of the children in my classroom. 29. The curriculum of my preschool states objectives for spiritual development. 39. When I write lesson plans, I intentionally write objectives for spiritual development.
Parental involvement	25. I work with parents to help them understand how to promote spiritual development of preschoolers 34. Parents of children in my preschool program receive training about the spiritual development of preschoolers 38. I talk to parents of the children in my classroom about the spiritual growth of their children. 42. My relationship with parents is important to children's spiritual growth. 44. Parents of children in my class express interest in their children's spiritual development.
Context	1. Spiritual development is a part of child development. 5. Spiritual development takes place as a part of religious education. 9. My relationship with preschoolers affects their spiritual development. 12. The faith-based preschool where I teach places a high value on the spiritual development of children.

(table continues)

a Christian school principal, and a university administrator/statistician. Upon their recommendation, I made some modifications to the survey instrument. Because of comments from the university department chair, I decided to change the study to a mixed-method study. Other recommendations included better wording of items on the survey.

Subsequently, I conducted a pilot study of 25 preschool teachers and administrators. The participants of the pilot study taught in two different schools. One school was a faith-based preschool that has classes only for 3- and 4-year-old children. The other preschool was part of a faith-based school which includes 3-year-olds through Grade 12. In this school only the teachers teaching 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds not in kindergarten participated. The use of Cronbach's alpha established the reliability of the survey. The Cronbach's alpha of the survey was .947. According to Huck (2000),

> A third method for assessing internal consistency is referred to as coefficient alpha, as Cronbach's alpha, or simply as alpha. . . . [A]lpha is more versatile because it can be used with instruments made up of items that can be scored with three or more possible values. Examples of such a situation include . . . a Likert-type questionnaire where the five response options for each statement extend from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree" and are scored with the integers 5 through 1 (pp. 91-92).

The qualitative aspect of the study was a 15-question semistructured interview of faith-based preschool teachers, administrators and leadership. The semistructured interview is "an interview in which the interviewer asks a series of structured questions and then probes more deeply with open-ended questions to obtain additional information" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 653). A group of experts reviewed the interview questions. The reviewers included a preschool minister of a large congregation, a person with a Ph.D. in theology, a leader of preschool ministries for a national Christian

organization, a seminary professor of Christian education, and a university professor of Christian education. The reviewers made positive comments about the content of the interview questions. Stonehouse (personal communication, April 30, 2009) wrote, “Your questions are significant and clearly stated, I believe, and I have no suggestions for refining them.” May (personal communication, June, 2009) stated, “I find your protocol to be thorough and thoughtful.” Some questions were edited for clarity.

Variables and Measurements

I determined the extent to which faith-based preschools implemented a program framework for spiritual development in order to promote spiritual developments in preschoolers ages 3 to 5. Therefore, the dependent variable of this study was dimensions of curricular and program practice in faith-based preschools. A 6-point Likert scale measured 8 dimensions of curricular and program practice. The dependent variables were prayer, study of the Bible, worship, building character, service opportunities, assessment of spiritual development, the context of spiritual development, and parental involvement. The independent variable was the faith-based preschool program.

Data Collection

Participant recruitment for the quantitative paper survey consisted of contact with individual faith-based preschool programs for approval to conduct research at their sites. All participants received a verbal invitation to participate through a letter and from their supporting center director or supervisor who emphasized participation was strictly voluntary. I delivered or emailed the survey to each preschool. I collected the surveys in

person with the exception of one set of surveys mailed from Georgia. Participants completed 204 paper surveys.

The online participant recruitment for the quantitative survey consisted of email or Web-posted contact of early childhood teachers through public membership in existing online educational forums and other education-related communities such as the Association for Christian Schools International Early Education Services. The online participant statistics at QuestionPro.com showed that 65 people viewed the survey; 42 started the survey; and 28 people completed the survey for a completion rate of 66.67%.

A semistructured interview was conducted with 20 teachers, administrators and faith-based preschool leaders from a sampling of participants in the survey. Creswell (2005) described the semistructured interview as one in which the interviewer asks a series of structured questions followed by more closed-ended questions and open-ended questions to obtain additional information.I invited participants through telephone conversations and e-mail. One person declined to be interviewed; however, she recommended a colleague who accepted the invitation. The interviews were conducted in person and recorded with the permission of those participating. Interviews lasted from 45 minutes to 1½ hours. Eighteen interviews took place in schools while 2 interviews were at lunch meetings. I took notes and recorded the interviews to document the response of participants. Transcribed interviews totaled 249 pages. The transcripts are archived.

Data Analysis

Data Screening

To ensure the accuracy of the data analysis, the investigator screened surveys for errors in the data set Missing data is a problem in data analysis. “Data are considered missing if a case in the data file has no data for a particular variable” (Hays, 2005, p. 79). The seriousness depends on the pattern of missing information, how much is missing, and why it is missing (Graham, Cumsille, & Elek-Fisk, 2003). Three guidelines were used to screen the data: (a) surveys with 5 or more unanswered questions; (b) surveys with the same answer for all questions; and (c) surveys of teachers of children under 3 years old. Fourteen surveys met the criteria of 5 or more unanswered questions. Three participants answered each survey question identically. Nine participants indicated that they were teachers of infants or 1-year-olds in the demographic data. When the screened surveys were excluded, a total of 201 surveys were analyzed.

Analysis of Quantitative Data

Quantitative study analyses were performed using SPSS® 17.0 statistical and data management package (SPSS Inc., Chicago, www.spss.com). The data from the quantitative survey was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to classify and summarize the results. All questions were examined using mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentages.

A 1-way ANOVA using the demographic data explored the group differences in promoting the spiritual development of children. Hinkle, Wiersma, and Jurs (2003) noted, “One-way ANOVA involves the analysis of one independent variable with two or

more levels" (p. 333). There are three fundamental assumptions about 1-way ANOVA: (1) random and independent samples, (2) normal distribution of dependent variables, and (3) homogeneity of variance (i.e., equal variances of the population distributions) (Hinkle et al., pp. 344-345). I checked for kurtosis and skewness to determine normal distribution of dependent variables (Field, 2004, p. 39). According to Huck (2004), "skewness is not considered to be too extreme if the coefficient of skewness assumes a value anywhere between -1.0 and +1.0" (pp. 29-30). Furthermore, skewness and kurtosis values in the range of -3.0 to +3.0 can also be acceptable (Henson, 2006).

Levene's test checked for homogeneity of variance. If the ANOVA indicated statistical significance, the Tukey post-hoc test was run to investigate where differences lay. If the homogeneity of variance assumption was not met, the ndependent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis test and Games-Howell follow-up post-hoc test were run to see where differences lay. According to McDonald (2009), the Kruskal-Wallis test is most commonly used when there is one nominal variable and one measurement variable, and the measurement variable does not meet the normality assumption of an ANOVA. It is the non-parametric analogue of a 1-way ANOVA (pp. 153-154). The Games-Howell test was used for variables that had unequal variances (Morgan, 2004).

Qualitative Interview

Data analysis is an essential aspect of qualitative research yet it is arduous (Basit, 2003). The researcher interviewed 20 faith-based educators using a semi-structured interview. Creswell (2005) described this type of interview as a series of structured questions followed by more close-ended and open-ended questions to obtain

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

This mixed-method study used a concurrent triangulation design (Creswell, Clark, Gutmann, & Hanson, 2008). This research design gives equal emphasis to both methods which are introduced concurrently. Houser (2009) stated, “The purpose of this model is to use the strengths of both methods and combine them in the interpretation phase, which promotes the triangulation of the data” (p. 79) Thus, the chapter is organized into three main sections. The first section explores the data gathered from the survey. The second section investigates the data from interviews. The third section discusses the results from both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the study.

Quantitative Study

Data Screening

I screened surveys for errors in the data set. There are different ways to handle the missing data, and there is no absolute best solution (Graham, Cumsille, & Elek-Fisk, 2003). Three guidelines were used to screen the data: (a) surveys with 5 or more unanswered questions; (b) surveys with the same answer for all questions; and (c) surveys of teachers of children under 3 years old. Any survey that met the guidelines was excluded from the data set. After application of the guidelines, there was some missing data. A total 46 pieces of data (0.5%) were missing from the survey. It appears that the missing pieces were random. If less than 5% of data are missing in a random pattern from a large data set, the problems are less serious, and almost any procedure for handling missing values gives comparable results (He, 2009).

Reliability Analysis

Table 5 shows the internal consistency of the eight program practice dimensions of the survey as measured by Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach's alpha is a measure of how well each individual item in a scale correlates with the sum of the remaining items. The measure tends to be larger with more items in the same content domain (Streiner & Norman, 1996). The dimensions of Bible Literacy, Service, Assessment, Parental Involvement, and Context of Learning met the acceptable reliability coefficient level of .70 (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). The prayer dimension alpha of .595 approached the lenient cut-off value of .60 (Nunnaly, 1978). Only two dimensions, worship and building character, had alpha values lower than .595. Lower thresholds are sometimes used in exploratory literature (Dangayach & Deshmukh, 2006; He, 2009). On the whole the Cronbach's alphas indicated that the survey had acceptable internal consistency reliability in this research.

Descriptive Statistics

Frequency, Mean, and Standard Deviation for Dependent Variables

Arranged by program dimensions, Table 6 displays frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation of the survey questions. Item 15, "In my classroom preschoolers pray on a daily basis" had a majority of participants (*n* = 167, 83.1%) who strongly agreed. Conversely, item 45, "In my class preschool children have an opportunity to express how God answered their prayers" showed fewer participants (*n* = 60, 29.9%) strongly agreed.

Table 5

Reliability of the Survey of Faith-Based Preschool Practices Promoting the Spiritual Development of Young Children

	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha
Survey	46	.947
Subscales		
Prayer	4	.595
Bible literacy	11	.878
Service	8	.690
Worship	4	.424
Building character	3	.356
Assessment	4	.761
Parental involvement	5	.781
Context	9	.833

For the Bible literacy dimension, Item 16, "In my classroom Bible verses are posted in the learning centers," received the lowest mean (*M* = of 4.35; *SD* = 1.462); however, 28.4% of participants marked strongly agree while 17.4% indicated disagree. On the other hand, Item 10, "In the preschool program where I teach, teaching Bible stories is a part of the curriculum," obtained the highest mean (*M* = 5.80, *SD* = .533). In the service opportunities dimensions one fourth (*n* = 54, 26.9%) tended to disagree with Item 41, "Preschoolers in my class help plan service project that will help others." Item 43, "Preschool children in my class grow spiritually because they participate in helping

others in the community," had a low mean (*M* = 4.44, *SD* = 1.028); yet almost one third of respondents (*n* = 66, 32.8 %) agreed with the statement. In the worship dimension Item 36 "In my classroom there are quiet moments for children to reflect on God and Jesus," had a low mean (*M* = 4.42, *SD* =1.265). The highest mean (*M* = 5.71, *SD* =.538) in this dimension was Item 28, "In my school preschoolers learn about the Bible through music."

Teachers strongly agreed (*n* = 139, 69.2%) with Item 7 in the building character dimension, "Teaching character traits is a part of promoting spiritual development." The lowest mean (*M* = 4.59, *SD* = 1.117) in the assessment dimension was 4.59 for Question 39, "When I write lesson plans, I intentionally write objectives for spiritual development." On the other end of the spectrum, the highest mean (*M* = 5.49, *SD* = 0.758) was for Question 3, "It is important to set goals for preschoolers' spiritual development." All the means for the parental involvement dimension were below 5.0 with the lowest mean (*M* = 3.64, *SD* = 1.203) for Question 34, "Parents of children in my preschool program receive training about the spiritual development of preschoolers." A high percentage of participants (*n* = 162, 80.6%) strongly agreed with Question 1, "Spiritual development is part of child development"; yet, there was a mean (*M* = 4.80, *SD* = 1.238) for Question 26, "I receive training in understanding and promoting the spiritual development of preschool children."

Table 6

Frequencies, Percentages, and Means for Questions in the Survey of Faith-Based Preschool Practices Promoting the Spiritual Development of Young Children

	Question	*SD* (%)	*D* (%)	Tend to D (%)	Tend to A (%)	A (%)	*SA* (%)	*M* (*SD*)
Prayer dimension								
Q6	Preschool children, ages 3, 4, and 5 should learn to repeat prayers such as the Lord's prayer.	1 (.5)	1 (.5)	21 (10.4)	34 (16.9)	59 (29.4)	85 (42.3)	5.01 (1.068)
Q15	In my classroom preschoolers pray on a daily basis.		1 (.5)	1 (.5)	3 (1.5)	28 (13.9)	167 (83.1)	5.80 (.533)
Q30	In my classroom preschoolers have an opportunity to state their prayer requests.	2 (1.0)	3 (1.5)	19 (9.5)	25 (12.4)	63 (31.3)	87 (43.3)	5.04 (1.116)
Q45	In my class preschool children have an opportunity to express how God answered their prayers	1 (.5)	6 (3.0)	18 (9.0)	49 (24.4)	63 (31.3)	60 (29.9)	4.74 (1.154)
Bible literacy dimension								
Q4	I emphasize Bible truths which when I teach literacy and math.	2 (1.0)	4 (2.0)	14 (7.0)	37 (18.4)	78 (38.8)	60 (29.9)	4.85 (1.113)
Q10	In the preschool program where I teach, teaching Bible stories is a part of the curriculum.	1 (.5)	1 (.5)	4 (2.0)	7 (3.5)	21 (10.4)	167 (83.1)	5.80 (.533)
Q11	I apply truths from the Bible in my daily conversation with preschool children.	1 (.5)	1 (.5)	4 (2.0)	14 (7.0)	61 (30.3)	120 (59.7)	5.45 (.818)

(table continues)

Table 6 *(continued.)*

	Question	*SD* (%)	*D* (%)	Tend to D (%)	Tend to A (%)	A (%)	*SA* (%)	*M* (*SD*)
Q13	In my classroom I talk about Bible truths in my teaching of all content areas.	1 (.5)	3 (1.5)	14 (7.0)	19 (9.5)	82 (40.8)	81 (40.3)	5.11 (.994)
Q14	Memorizing Bible verses is a part of my preschool curriculum.	5 (2.5)	13 (6.5)	15 (7.5)	39 (19.4)	42 (20.9)	86 (42.8)	4.79 (1.369)
Q16	In my classroom Bible verses are posted in the learning centers	6 (3.0)	20 (10.0)	35 (17.4)	32 (15.9)	48 (23.9)	57 (28.4)	4.35 (1.462)
Q21	Preschool children in my classroom can identify the Bible as a book that tells about God and Jesus.		1 (.5)	2 (1.0)	6 (3.0)	30 (14.9)	161 (80.1)	5.74 (.612)
Q23	I teach about Bible truths and Bible verses as I teach science in my classroom.	5 (2.5)	8 (4.0)	18 (9.0)	44 (21.9)	57 (28.4)	63 (31.3)	4.69 (1.268)
Q27	Teachings in the Bible are a part of all I teach in the classroom.	3 (1.5)	4 (17.9)	18 (9.0)	36 (17.9)	67 (33.3)	73 (36.3)	4.89 (1.145)
Q31	Spiritual development includes more than teaching Bible stories				6 (3.0)	45 (22.4)	148 (73.6)	5.71 (.516)
Q32	I use teachings from the Bible as a part of guidance in my preschool classroom.		3 (1.5)	2 (1.0)	21 (10.4)	69 (34.3)	105 (52.2)	5.36 (.826)
Q35	The spiritual development program in my preschool consists of teaching Bible stories.		4 (2.0)	6 (3.0)	17 (8.5)	62 (30.8)	109 (54.2)	5.34 (.909)

(table continues)

Table 6 *(continued.)*

	Question	*SD* (%)	*D* (%)	Tend to D (%)	Tend to A (%)	A (%)	*SA* (%)	*M* *(SD)*
Service opportunities dimension								
Q2	In the preschool program where I teach, teachers find opportunities for young children to help others, such as making cards for someone who is ill.		1 (.5)	2 (1.0)	10 (5.0)	75 (37.3)	113 (56.2)	5.48 (.686)
Q8	Preschool children should take part in projects to help others such as collecting food items for the needy.			1 (.5)	14 (7.0)	60 (29.9)	126 (62.7)	5.55 (.647)
Q18	Preschoolers in my school participate in a service or humanitarian project to help others such as Operation Christmas Child.	1 (.5)	7 (3.5)	17 (8.5)	22 (10.9)	60 (29.9)	90 (44.8)	5.05 1.149
Q41	Preschoolers in my class help plan service projects that will help others	3 (1.5)	22 (10.9)	54 (26.9)	45 (22.4)	43 (21.4)	32 (15.9)	4.00 (1.310)
Q43	Preschool children in my class grow spiritually because they participate in helping others in the community		6 (3.0)	30 (14.9)	63 (31.3)	66 (32.8)	31 (15.4)	4.44 (1.028)
Worship dimension								
Q19	Worship opportunities are a part of my preschool program.	2 (1.0)	2 (1.0)	4 (2.0)	10 (5.0)	60 (29.9)	122 (60.7)	5.45 (.890)
Q28	In my school preschoolers learn about the Bible through music.				8 (4.0)	43 (21.4)	149 (74.1)	5.71 (.538)

(table continues)

Table 6 *(continued.)*

	Question	*SD* (%)	*D* (%)	Tend to D (%)	Tend to A (%)	A (%)	*SA* (%)	*M (SD)*
Q36	In my classroom there are quiet moments for children to reflect on God and Jesus.	4 (2.0)	11 (5.5)	33 (16.4)	47 (23.4)	60 (29.9)	45 (22.4)	4.42 (1.265)
Q37	My preschool program celebrates religious holidays such as Christmas and Easter.		2 (1.0)	2 (1.0)	1 (.5)	49 (24.4)	146 (72.6)	5.68 (.641)
Building character dimension								
Q7	Teaching character traits is a part of promoting spiritual development				12 (6.0)	48 (23.9)	139 (69.2)	5.64 (.594)
Q22	In my school preschoolers study character traits.		2 (1.0)	3 (1.5)	27 (13.4)	73 (36.3)	94 (46.8)	5.28 (.828)
Q46	I model virtues such as gratitude, gentleness, compassion, and patience in my classroom		1 (.5)		5 (2.5)	58 (28.9)	135 (67.2)	5.64 (.586)
Assessment dimension								
Q3	It is important to set goals for preschoolers' spiritual development.		1 (.5)	5 (2.5)	11 (5.5)	61 (30.3)	121 (60.2)	5.49 (.758)
Q20	I set goals for the spiritual development of the children in my classroom.	1 (.5)	7 (3.5)	10 (5.0)	38 (18.9)	81 (40.3)	60 (29.9)	4.88 (1.046)
Q29	The curriculum of my preschool states objectives for spiritual development.	1 (.5)	4 (2.0)	9 (4.5)	26 (12.9)	60 (29.9)	98 (48.8)	5.19 (1.019)
Q39	When I write lesson plans, I intentionally write objectives for spiritual development.		6 (3.0)	32 (15.9)	44 (21.9)	65 (32.3)	47 (23.4)	4.59 (1.117)

(table continues)

Table 6 *(continued.)*

	Question	*SD* (%)	*D* (%)	Tend to D (%)	Tend to A (%)	A (%)	*SA* (%)	*M (SD)*
Parental involvement dimension								
Q25	I work with parents to help them understand how to promote spiritual development of preschoolers	2 (1.0)	6 (3.0)	27 (13.4)	69 (34.3)	54 (26.9)	40 (19.9)	4.45 (1.111)
Q34	Parents of children in my preschool program receive training about the spiritual development of preschoolers	7 (3.5)	26 (12.9)	56 (27.0)	59 (29.4)	35 (17.4)	12 (6.0)	3.64 (1.203)
Q38	I talk to parents of the children in my classroom about the spiritual growth of their children.	3 (1.5)	10 (5.0)	41 (20.4)	56 (27.9)	48 (23.9)	42 (20.9)	4.31 (1.238)
Q42	My relationship with parents is important to children's spiritual growth.		6 (3.0)	6 (3.0)	28 (13.9)	69 (34.3)	87 (43.3)	4.44 (1.028)
Q44	Parents of children in my class express interest in their children's spiritual development.	2 (1.0)	3 (1.5)	21 (10.4)	76 (37.8)	66 (32.8)	29 (14.4)	4.46 (.987)
Context dimension								
Q1	Spiritual development is a part of child development.			3 (1.5)	4 (2.0)	31 (15.4)	162 (80.6)	5.76 (.560)
Q5	Spiritual development takes place as a part of religious education			4 (2.0)	15 (7.5)	71 (35.3)	111 (55.2)	5.44 (.719)
Q9	My relationship with preschoolers affects their spiritual development.		3 (1.5)	3 (1.5)	10 (5.0)	57 (28.4)	128 (63.7)	5.51 (.788)

(table continues)

Table 6 *(continued.)*

	Question	*SD* (%)	*D* (%)	Tend to D (%)	Tend to A (%)	A (%)	*SA* (%)	*M (SD)*
Q12	The faith-based preschool where I teach places a high value on the spiritual development of children.		1 (.5)	2 (1.0)	12 (6.0)	28 (13.9)	158 (78.6)	5.69 (.674)
Q17	The mission statement of my preschool program includes a statement about spiritual development.		4 (2.0)	3 (1.5)	8 (4.0)	42 (20.9)	142 (70.6)	5.58 (.811)
Q24	I model the teachings of the Bible about relationships in my relationship with preschoolers.		1 (.5)	3 (1.5)	17 (8.5)	67 (33.3)	113 (56.2)	5.43 (.753)
Q26	I receive training in understanding and promoting the spiritual development of preschool children.	3 (1.5)	10 (5.0)	17 (8.5)	37 (18.4)	62 (30.8)	72 (35.8)	4.80 (1.238)
Q33	The beliefs of my sponsoring religious organization are the foundation for the preschool program where I teach.		4 (2.0)	13 (6.5)	34 (16.9)	63 (31.3)	80 (39.8)	5.04 (1.022)
Q40	The mission statements and goals of the preschool program include spiritual development.		1 (.5)	6 (3.0)	20 (10.0)	51 (25.4)	120 (59.7)	5.43 (.832)

Note: N = 201

Demographics

Table 7 illustrates the demographic data of the participants. A total of 201 faith-based early childhood teachers and administrators participated in the study after deleting surveys with missing data on the dependent variable. One hundred ninety-nine

and type of faith-based program with two or more groups. If the ANOVA indicated statistical significance, a Tukey post hoc test was run to explore where the differences lay. There are three fundamental assumptions about one-way ANOVA: (1) random and independent samples, and (2) normal distribution of dependent variables, and (3) homogeneity of variance (i.e., equal variances of the population distributions) (Hinkle et al., pp. 344-345). Since the faith-based educators were asked to complete the survey independently, the first assumption of independent samples was met.

Table 7

Demographic Characteristics of Faith-Based Preschool Teachers

Teacher characteristics		*N* = 201	%
Gender	Male	0	0
	Female	199	99
	Missing	2	1.0
Ethnicity	African American	7	3.5
	Asian/Pacific Islander	3	1.5
	Latino	6	3.0
	White/non-Hispanic	182	90.5
	Other	2	1.0
	Missing	1	.5
Education	High school	58	28.9
	Associate degree	31	15.4
	Bachelor's degree	43	21.4
	Bachelor's degree + additional credits	32	15.9
	Master's degree	24	11.9
	Other	9	4.5
	Missing	3	1.5
Major	Child development	7	3.5
	Early childhood education	26	12.9
	Teacher education	25	12.4
	Family sciences	2	1.0
	Other	29	14.4
	Missing	112	55.7

(table continues)

Table 7 *(continued.)*

Teacher characteristics		*N* = 201	%
Years in ECE	Less than 1	6	3.0
	1 to 2	25	12.4
	3 to 5	37	18.4
	6 to 9	45	22.4
	10 or more	70	34.8
	Missing	18	9.0
Hours of training in spiritual development of young children	None	12	6.0
	1 to 3	35	17.4
	4 to 7	37	18.4
	8 to 15	42	20.9
	16 or more	50	24.9
	Missing	24	11.9
Type of preschool	Part of a K-12 Christian school	25	12.4
	Part of a church ministry	138	68.7
	Independent	19	9.5
	Other	3	1.5
	Missing	16	8.0

. I checked kurtosis and skewness to determine normal distribution of dependent variables grouped by program dimension. Table 8 lists each dimension with kurtosis and skewness. According to Huck (2004), “skewness is not considered to be too extreme if the coefficient of skewness assumes a value anywhere between -1.0 and +1.0” (pp. 29-30). Furthermore, skewness and kurtosis values in the range of -3.0 to +3.0 can also be acceptable (Henson, 2006). Four dimensions met the range of -1.0 to +1.0, while the remaining 4 dimensions had acceptable values at -3.0 to +3.0 range.

Table 8

Dimensions of Program Practices

Dimension	*M*	*SD*	Skewness	Kurtosis	Valid *N*
Bible literacy	5.26	.635	-1.638	3.547	187
Prayer	5.15	.668	-.868	.623	196
Service opportunities	4.90	.659	-.421	-.159	192
Worship	5.31	.533	-.868	.830	199
Building character	5.52	.454	-1.077	1.651	195
Assessment	5.04	.767	-1.071	1.30	188
Parental involvement	4.39	.816	-.489	.353	187
Context of learning	5.42	.548	-1.782	3.985	190

I examined homogeneity of variance through Levene's test. If the homogeneity of variance assumption was still not met at $\alpha = 0.01$ level, alternate statistical tests were used, depending on the number of levels in the independent variable. In the instances where the independent variable had 2 levels (e.g., gender), independent sample *t*-tests were run and "equal variances not assumed" results used. In the instances where the independent variable had more than 2 levels (e.g., overall high school average), the Kruskal-Wallis test or the Games-Howell post-hoc test (where equal variances not assumed) was run (Field, 2004, p. 276).

Table 9 shows that all dimensions met the homogeneity of variance assumption in ANOVA with level of education as the independent variable. Only 2 dimensions did not meet the homogeneity of variance assumption in ANOVA with the type of faith-based

school as the independent variable (Table 9). The independent-samples Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to determine whether differences existed. There was no statistically significant difference on each dimension among groups for the independent variable, type of faith-based school). The type of faith-based school did not have differences in promoting children's spiritual development.

Table 9

Analysis of Variances for Level of Education and Survey

Dimension	Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*P*	η^2
Prayer	Between	2.763	6	.460			
	Within	84.186	187	.450	1.023	.412	
	Total	86.949	193				
Bible literacy	Between	.417	6	.069	.167	.985	
	Within	74.064	178	.416			
	Total	74.471	184				
Service	Between	3.709	6	.618	1.446	.199	
	Within	78.260	183	.426			
	Total	81.970	189				
Worship	Between	1.336	6	.223	.776	.589	
	Within	54.493	190	.267			
	Total	55.829	196				
Character	Between	.508	6	.085	.409	.873	
	Within	38.541	186	.207			
	Total	39.049	192				
Assessment	Between	1.357	6	.226	.376	.894	
	Within	107.630	179	.601			
	Total	108.987	185				
Parental involvement	Between	5.582	6	.947	1.455	.196	
	Within	115.876	178	.651			
	Total	121.558	184				
Context	Between	.704	5	.141	.460	.806	
	Within	55.762	182	.306			
	Total	56.466	187				

Note: $p < .05$

For the independent variable, hours of training in children's spiritual development, 4 of the 8 dimensions did not meet the homogeneity of variance

assumption (i.e., prayer, service, character building, context). Therefore, the Independent-Samples Kruskal-Wallis test and Games-Howell follow-up post-hoc test were run to see whether differences lay.

Results of the Kruskal-Wallis test showed significance in the Prayer dimension; thus the distribution of the Prayer dimension as the same across categories of Question 52 was rejected. The Games-Howell test showed Group 2 (M = 4.8643) was statistically significant lower than Group 5 (M = 5.3350) and that group 3 (M = 5.0571) was statistically significant lower than Group 4 (M = 5.4451). Results of the Kruskal-Wallis test showed significance in the Service dimension; thus the distribution of the Service dimension as the same across categories of Question 52 was rejected. The Game-Howell test showed that Group 2 (M = 4.6857) was statistically significant lower than both Groups 3 (M = 4.7722) and 4 (M = 5.1900).

Results of the Kruskal-Wallis test showed significance in the Building Character dimension; thus the distribution of the Building Character dimension as the same across categories of Question 52 was rejected. The Game-Howell test showed that Group 2 (M = 5.3137) was statistically significant lower than Group 3 (M = 5.6019), Group 4 (M = 5.6270), and Group 5 (M = 5.6122). Results of the Kruskal-Wallis test showed significance in the Context dimension; thus, the distribution of the Context dimension as the same across categories of Question 52 was rejected. The Games-Howell test showed Group 2 (M = 5.2778) was statistically significant lower than Group 5 (M = 5.6336).

Table 10

Analysis of Variances for Type of Faith-based Program and Survey

Dimension	Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*P*	η^2
Prayer	Between	.457	3	.152	.346	.792	
	Within	78.365	178	.440			
	Total	78.822	181				
Bible literacy	Between	2.905	3	.968	2.659	.050	.044
	Within	63.001	173	.364			
	Total	65.906	176				
Service	Between	1.284	3	.429	.994	.397	
	Within	74.949	174	.431			
	Total	76.233	177				
Worship	Between	.416	3	1.39	.479	.697	
	Within	52.084	180	.289			
	Total	52.500	183				
Character	Between	.418.	3	.139	.666	.574	
	Within	36.796	176	.209			
	Total	37.212	179				
Assessment	Between	2.412	3	.804	1.571	.198	
	Within	87.515	171	.512			
	Total	89.927	174				
Parental involvement	Between	2.479	3	.826	1.290	.279	
	Within	110.158	172	.640			
	Total	112.636	175				
Context	Between	2.931	3	.977	3.440	.018	.056
	Within	49.127	173	.284			
	Total	52.058	176				

Table 11

Analysis of Variance and Training Hours in Children's Spiritual Development

Dimension	Source	*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*P*	η^2
Prayer	Between	9.247	5	1.849	5.299	.000	.136
	Within	58.631	168	.349			
	Total	67.878	173				
Bible literacy	Between	9.268	5	1.854	8.349	.000	.201
	Within	36.631	165	.222			
	Total	45.898	170				
Service	Between	6.135	5	1.227	3.054	.012	.084
	Within	66.292	165	.402			
	Total	72.427	170				
Worship	Between	3.935	5	.787	3.104	.010	.083
	Within	43.099	170	.254			
	Total	47.034	175				
Character	Between	3.212	5	.642	3.854	.002	.104
	Within	27..669	166	.167			
	Total	30.880	171				
Assessment	Between	9.983	5	1.997	5.045	.000	.136
	Within	63.323	160	.396			
	Total	73.306	165				
Parental involvement	Between	18.317	5	3.663	7.104	.000	.179
	Within	83.542	162	.526			
	Total	101.859	167				
Context	Between	5.543	5	1.109	5.906	.000	.153
	Within	30.595	163	.188			
	Total	36.138	168				

For Question 52, four dimensions met the homogeneity of variance assumption (i.e., Bible literacy, worship, assessment, parental involvement). The Tukey HSD follow-up post-hoc tests were conducted to see where differences lay. For the Bible literacy dimension the Tukey HSD post-hoc test showed that Group 1 (M = 4.8250, p = .000), Group 2 (M = 5.0794, p = .000), and Group 3 (M = 5.2194, p = .017) were statistically significant lower than Group 5 (M = 5.5468). I then resorted 5 levels into 3 levels (none and 1-3 = 1, 4-7 = 2, 8 up = 3). For the parental involvement dimension the Tukey HSD

Table 12

Sample of Participant Responses Prayer Dimension

Sample of Participant Responses
• We start the day with prayer
• We always pray before snack, and before lunch.
• From the get go we have opening prayer, closing prayer at the end of the day
• Children do pray at the traditional times around meals
• We do have prayer time. It is a sharing time and then we pray.
• In chapel we go on a prayer and praise walk. We walk, pray, and sing. We listen to praise music. Then we stop. Then we pray Then we walk some more around the chapel.
• We try to do make ourselves available to have conversations, “Is there something you want me to pray about for you?”
• They pray for each other; they pray for teachers
• Some children over the years will say when someone gets hurt, “We must pray over this.”
• They’ll walk to each other and say, “Will you pray for me on this one? Braxton, will you pray for me?”

Note. Comments are direct quotes from interviews

Student behaviors showed the influence of prayer in the faith-based program. One administrator gave the following example:

> A little boy, when he would get in trouble, or do something not so appropriate would go off by himself. The teacher would say, “Why are you off by yourself?” Well, I’m praying to Jesus to see what I need to do. (It was to keep my hands to myself)

Another participant related this example:

> Our assistant's son was in a very tragic accident and our children had the chance to really go thorough the experience with our staff. We had a place in the hallway, like an altar, where the children could go and sit and read what the parents had written about C's progress and pray for very specific prayers that the parents were asking for, whether it be a specific part of the body that needed mending. It was a wonderful growth opportunity to see our children walk away and then have conversations on the playground or at lunch or when mom and dad were picking them up. Today I prayed for C. for __ (a specific request.) or did you know that God answered our prayer for C. and that he is doing better in this area.

Bible Literacy

Interviews yielded three ways that Bible literacy occurred in the faith-based preschools participating in the study: (a) learning Bible stories; (b) memorizing scripture; and (c) integrating Bible truths into other content areas. Preschools emphasized the importance of learning Bible stories. One teacher said about the Bible curriculum: "We use Bible stories and curriculum that are age appropriate. We use curriculum that is designed by Christian educators." Another director used a different approach:

> We do not use a set faith-based curriculum although the teachers do and are expected to on a daily basis to spend time reading scripture, talking about that scripture, modeling and even hands-on about the story exploration based in a center.

While some programs wrote their own curriculum, one participant cited the challenge of that choice:

> We've had disagreements between teachers about what is appropriate at different age levels especially around Easter time. As you are talkingabout the Easter story, about what they can learn. The disagreements are really about how to understand this concept that Jesus died for me. How far to go with these harder stories that some teachers feel like they (the children) are not ready to handle emotionally yet.

Bible memorization occurred in several schools. Passages memorized by the children included The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13), John 3:16, and excerpts from Psalm 139. Other preschools have Bible verses that are associated with the curriculum; however, the children do not learn them by rote memorization. One teacher said, "They hear it often, before they eat, before they go to the playground."

Infusing Bible throughout the day, or Biblical integration, was a frequent theme in the interviews. A preschool music teacher expressed her thoughts. "Even with music I try to let them know that God gave us our voices to sing and that God us individual voices." At two schools teachers mentioned the relationship between Bible and reading. One mentioned that "our stories are integrated-reading a story about Jesus." A curriculum director pointed out:

> They (preschoolers) have a lot of their reading as a Christian base to it and on the curriculum side of it a lot of the textbooks at that age are Christian based publishers.

Preschoolers at one school played in a Bible center. The teacher put "hands-on" materials in the center after telling the Bible story. The children were able to retell the Bible stories in their own words. The teacher commented:

> They will talk to another child and say "Remember we have to be kind. One of our Fruit of the Spirit is to be kind. They tell in their own words."

Service Opportunities

Participants pointed to involvement in a variety of service projects: (a) Operation Christmas Child; (b) canned food drives; (c) collecting clothes; (d) donating to school or family mission trips with items such as toys or crayons; (e) trike-a-thons to raise money for St. Jude's hospital; (f) care packages to military personnel; (g) visiting nursing homes; and (h) gifts made for helpers in the school such as the custodian or office

staff.I asked participants in Question 9b to tell why providing service opportunities in a faith-based preschool is important. Responses of 8 teachers cited a theme of serving others. One teacher said, “It (service opportunities) teaches the children to give to others. By the children actually doing the act they are learning something.” Another stated:

> They learn by doing. You can tell them. They can learn it but until they have that actual emotional experience it will not be intrinsic. You want the authenticity and intrinsicness of it. You hope they will say, “Here is someone who needs some help, so let’s help them.”

A theme based on Biblical teaching emerged in the interviews of 12 respondents. One declared:

> They need to understand that there are children or adults, even though they are trying, they don’t always have enough money to buy food. We need to help them because that is what Jesus tells us to do. We need to help. A lot of times we will say what Jesus would do in this situation.

Another teacher said:

> Well, I think as Christians, part of who we are is helping others who are less fortunate or have needs. To me that training is just as important as what we do physically or cognitively.

Furthermore one teacher quoted Proverbs 28 27, “He that giveth unto the poor shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse.” She went on to say:

> All these things are Biblical and God blesses us in as much as you’ve done unto the least of these you’ve done it unto me. In 3 and 4 year olds it develops the richness of the heart because we store up riches in our heart when we give.

One teacher related how giving impacts her preschool students.

> What we are doing are canned goods at chapel for the ____Center. It is a place for mostly adults who have challenges. Before we were doing money and they just didn’t get it. So when we went to canned goods for people that needed food, they got it. They brought those and never forget. When they forget, mom has to go to store and bring it back. They really relate to people who are hungry.

Worship

Respondents pointed to various practices of worship in their preschools. A text search of the words “praise” and “worship” yielded examples. Two themes surfaced regarding worship in faith-based preschools: (a) planned worship activities and (b) spontaneous worship. The majority of schools have a chapel service. One school has a monthly chapel, while two others start their day with chapel every day. Chapel was described as a time of praise, singing songs, and prayer. One interviewee related that their preschool worship has all the elements of adult worship:

> One of the things is that we want them to understand that you want to worship God together. That’s how we start everyday. We sing together, pray together and we just rejoice together every day. That’s very much like what we do together in our church. You look forward to seeing those that you care about and fellowship with. It doesn’t look like an adult worship service but it has all the elements of a church service. And the kids love it.

In addition to a formal time of worship, teachers related spontaneous examples of children’s worship. Sometimes children sang songs of worship while playing. Other times they portrayed worship in their play. The following example came from a Montessori faith-based school:

> For instance one of our directives in Montessori is that you do a work and return it to a shelf. One day I found a child that had the nativity set and the Good Shepherd lesson. Luckily I didn’t say, “Oh, you’re only allowed one work out at a time.” Because he brought all the sheep to the nativity railing and when I came over he said, “All of creation is coming to worship the baby Jesus”. That is not something I gave him. But I got a little glimmer of where that thought process is going. We’re all to come and worship God.

Another worship experience occurred during a science lesson.

> In the spring last year our 4 year teacher was teaching about building a nest. The children went out and gathered their things and to make a long story short, but the child were building their nests and talking. That’s a piece of plastic. That would hurt the bird. And they were talking about caring for God’s creatures. They were building their own nest with the things they had gathered. Then all of a

sudden, there is something we play here-a song, the Divine Mercy Chaplet The teacher was talking, let's put the glue down. I was in the room. All of a sudden one of the children said, "___can you put on the Divine Mercy Chaplet Then they are all sitting there singing their song of praise while they are making their bird's nest. Totally impromptu!

Building Character

Question 15 of the interview questions explored the dimension of building character in faith-based preschools. Five themes emerged. These are indicated in Table 13.

Table 13

Themes Regarding Building Character

Theme	Number of responses
Integration of character traits in the Bible lessons and stories	10
Teaching the Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)	4
Coordinating with public school curriculum	1
Secular resources	2
No character education	3

Additionally, I asked respondents to explain how they connected character development to spiritual development. Thirty percent (6) did not connect character education to spiritual development. Some participants cited the fact that the program integrated Bible stories and character traits. Teacher 19 said, "We start with the traits and selecting Bible stories that reflect obedience, self-control, patience, sharing, etc." Another teacher stated:

> There are Bible verses. Then we will also give them real situations and say, "How can we show kindness, or goodness, or patience when waiting your turn?" Having Bible verses to back those actions.

One respondent declared:

> Character development is so much of spiritual development. We are supposed to be honest. Why? Because this is where the Bible comes in. Let me tell you a story from the Bible. It only has true stories. One by one you can give them character stories. Give them Biblical stories to implement character development. The 10 Commandments implement character development.

Assessment

Interview question 7 addressed assessment in faith-based preschool programs. Although all programs assess some domains of child development, 11 participants (*n* = 20) indicated no assessment of spiritual development in their preschools. They gave a variety of reasons such as (1) not required for NAEYC accreditation and (2) not assessed in High/Scope curriculum. One teacher said, "I don't think it is up to me to assess that. It is relationship. A director related that "our board has talked about getting it together and working on that. They want to be involved in that not just me."

In those schools which assessed spiritual development, there were two types of assessments mentioned. Three schools used checklists. One administrator related this example:

> What we do on our checklist-Mastered, Acquiring Not Mastered, Not ready, Refused to participate. And in the area of spiritual "Can remember parts of memory scriptures" is a part of things we assess. I've tried to come up with the different spiritual items by listing it all and putting it on a continuum, and breaking it up so that we have a little to focus on each year. Because it's very hard. How do you assess spiritual things? So even with the 3's: (a)recognizes the Bible, (b) can tell someone that Jesus is our friend, (c) identifies God as Creator which is a very big thing for us. We want children to leave here knowing that God is our creator and provider, that the Bible is true, and Jesus is our friend. Those are foundational things that we can send preschoolers out in the world.

Another school used anecdotal records and observations.

> Spiritual development is included in anecdotal records and observation. On an individual level if you hear a child that comes out of their shell at prayer time--We do a “Let’s talk to God” where it is an open form. Our teachers always have their notebooks. We want parents to know about good character traits and their spiritual development.

The remaining 5 schools relied on informal observations as a means of assessment and reported these as conversations with parents.

Parental Involvement

Three interview questions (Questions 3, 5, and 11) addressed the role of parents in supporting spiritual development of preschoolers in faith-based preschool programs. Ten respondents agreed that the primary persons responsible for children’s spiritual development are children’s parents. One teacher said, “The parents are the primary educators of their children whether it is spiritual, behavioral.” Another statement reflected the diversity of the school.

> In our school we say it is the parents. We have other faiths including Buddhist. So it is their responsibility for the spiritual development of the child.

Other participants believed that parents fall short in their responsibility to support children’s spiritual development. Teacher 20 answered, “Parents but that’s not always the case.” A different respondent said, “The religious focus does not parallel with what is going on in the home.” A third response focused on the role of the school and church. This participant said, “Primarily parents, but because the parent’s don’t always do that the church and school partner with them.” Responses indicated that the partnership between the school and parents in supporting children’s spiritual development fall into four categories (Table 14).

Table 14

Partnership between Parents and Teachers

Category	Sample Response
Written communication	Open communication. Daily sheet that shares Bible story and Bible verse for the day.
Personal communication	Most of our contact in promoting children's spiritual development was through that contact (pick up time at half-day) building the relationship with the parent. Talking about where they go to church.
Parent training	Parent classes at least each semester, but some years on a monthly basis.
Encouragement	To encourage them to go to church, to encourage them to find a church home.

Additionally, respondents pointed to the quality of the relationship between parents and teachers as an important component for modeling spiritual behaviors. One person said:

> The child feels support and agreement because we (teacher and parent) are saying the same thing. A foundational message of truth is established.

Reinforcement between the home and school was another key component noted by participants.

> The parents and the staff members working together building a community of teaching the children God's word and communicating what we are doing in the classroom. Then the parents are reinforcing this at home. And this helps build their (children's) spiritual growth.

Furthermore, parents related to the teachers examples of children's spiritual growth that were observed at home. One director related:

> We have reports this year of a 2 year old sitting at the dinner table with the family, and the parents are arguing and the 2 year old says: "I know what will help. We need Jesus."

Another parent wrote the following to her child's school:

> ___was really excited to be a chapel angel and had a joy box with him. He was so happy to open the box and lead the 'very first time family chapel'. We listened to the CD and read a Bible story. Even though we don't have enough knowledge about the Bible we could still talk about the story. It was very interesting. At the end of our own chapel, ____ wanted to do the "blessing". He put his hand together and closed his eyes and said. "We love each other. Because we are family and we are friends."

Context of Learning

Qualitative data for this program dimension looked at the relationship between teacher/child/parent, teacher training in children's spiritual development, the mission and goals of the faith-based preschools in this study as well as the influence of the sponsoring faith-based organization. Participants viewed the relationships between teachers and children as important. One commented, "The teacher has to model Christian Christ-like behavior and exemplify the Fruit of the Spirit. When a teacher models those then I think that values of the teacher transfers to the child." Another said, "A critical key is that the teacher is very important. The interview process is critical to the development of a faith based perspective that is geared toward spiritual development." While some participants cited the character of the teacher and the modeling of Christian Christ-like behavior, another teacher looked at the situation through a different lens. She said, "I feel it is more like we are on an equal plane with the children. . . We're all on a path trying to become more of the people God created us to be. And together we are walking on that path."

Educators pointed to a varied background in training about children's spiritual development in their interviews. They cited personal experience, their own Bible studies, conference sessions, seminary classes, and no training at all. Yet, conference

sessions were on topics such as chapel programs, and how to teach the Bible to children. One teacher said, “No one has ever presented training on spiritual development at a training that I’ve attended.” Directors pointed to attendance at conferences as the primary type of training they provide their staff; however, a director said,

> In the conference we attend each year never a breakout session about promoting spiritual development in the children. And it really stuck in my mind this year as I was training our teachers. That’s not ever an option. What a disadvantage as much as we minister to our families and children.

Whereas faith-based preschools had mission statements that referred to spiritual development (Table 4.12), out of 20 interviewees, 11 said they did not have program goals for children’s spiritual development. One response was, “No I don’t. I never even thought about that.” Another person said, “I don’t know that we have specific goals and that is something that we need to look at.” The goals of other participants fell into categories such as conversion, good character and Bible knowledge. Table 15 is an example of one preschool’s program goals for children’s spiritual development.

Table 15

Example of One Preschool's Program Goals for Children's Spiritual Development

Example of One Preschool's Program Goals for Children's Spiritual Development
To help children understand that they are special ad loved by God.
To lay a foundation to the understanding that the Bible is our source of knowledge of God
To relate through exploration and application how Scripture relates to life
To learn that talking to God is pray.
To reinforce Bible stories that the students are familiar with ad to introduce new Bible stories.
To sing songs that are Scripture based

Table 16

Sample Mission Statements

Sample mission statements
The mission of the Weekday Program is to provide a safe and nurturing environment promoting the physical, social, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual development of children.
To connect children and parents to the gospel message and to the transforming power of Jesus Christ and bring them into a fellowship of Christian believers and to educate and prepare each child to meet the spiritual emotional and academic challenges that he/she will face
It is our mission to provide a quality Christian early education experience while partnering with parents to provide children with the best start possible
Our mission is to partner with families as a nurturing biblical community to provide child-relevant/age-appropriate opportunities for connecting, discipling, and equipping children to enjoy God for their entire lives.

The qualitative data indicated that faith tradition was an important element in the context of the faith-based preschool. There were 8 faith traditions represented in the study. Program practices varied across traditions. Liturgical churches taught the colors used during the church year, particular prayers such as the birthday prayer from the *Book of Common Prayer*, and lessons on baptism. One teacher said, "You know our church annually focuses on the birth, death, resurrection of Christ. Those concepts are introduced through chapel time and our goals and focus. They are reintroduced through programs and traditions in the church." Teachers in evangelical church preschool programs mentioned salvation or conversion. "We don't take it for granted assuming that someone is saved or has a relationship if they don't have a defining moment." Furthermore educators from Baptist and Bible churches stated that in preschool doctrine is not taught. A director said,

> We don't teach in preschool what Baptists believe. Out of our own individual lives we reflect. We don't teach baptism; we don't teach about the Lord's Supper. We share Christ; we talk about the love of Jesus. We talk about God's plan for our lives.

Research Questions

Research Question 1

Research Question 1A asked to what extent, if any, faith-based preschool programs support the practice of prayer with preschool children. Results of the survey showed a high mean (5.15 out of 6.0) in this dimension of program practice. While 83.1% of participants strongly agreed that preschoolers pray on a daily basis, the interview answers enlightened this further by identifying 4 categories of prayer that occurred in classrooms: (a) corporate times of prayer such as in circle time or chapel time; (b) prayer before lunch or snack time; (c) teacher-initiated prayers; and (d)

spontaneous prayers of children. Participants held varying views about the memorization of prayers such as the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-16). Survey answers indicated that 10.4% of respondents tended to disagree that this is developmentally appropriate. While 42.3% of survey answers strongly agreed with this practice, only 4 interviewees cited this practice of prayer memorization in their preschool.

Research Question 1B asked to what extent, if any, faith-based preschools teach the Bible to preschool children. Survey analyses showed a mean of 5.26 for the Bible literacy dimension. A majority of participants (83.1%) strongly agreed that teaching Bible stories is a part of the curriculum in their schools. This finding was supported in interviews. A word search query in NVivo8® listed the word *Bible* as used 79 times. One teacher said, "We use Bible stories and curriculum that are age appropriate." Another added that her school has Bible curriculum for all ages even infants. In addition to Bible stories, 42.8% of survey participants strongly agreed that memorizing Bible verses was a part of their curriculum; however, 16.5% (2.5% = strongly disagree, 6.5% = disagree, 7.5% = tend to disagree) recorded no Bible memorization in their curriculum. Interviews pointed to varying practices regarding scripture memorization. These are: (a) one Bible verse per month; (b) one Bible verse per unit; (c) long passages of scripture such as Psalm 139.

Research Question 1C surveyed to what extent, if any, faith-based preschools provide age-appropriate service opportunities for preschool children to serve others. The mean for this dimension on the survey was 4.90 with 4 = agree. Whereas 56.2% of teachers strongly agreed that they should find opportunities for preschoolers to help others, 26.9% tended to disagree that the children helped plan the service projects. The

majority of participants (31.3% = tend to agree, 32.8% = agree, 15.4% = strongly agree) believed preschoolers grow spiritually because they participated in helping others in the community. Data from the qualitative study shed more light on this topic. Interviews from 12 out of 20 people indicated that serving others is a part of Biblical teachings.

Research Question 1D looked at to what extent, if any, faith-based preschools made available worship occasions for preschool children. In the interviews participants described worship as a time of praise, singing songs, and prayer. According to a word search query on NVivo8® interviewees used the word *chapel* 50 times. Additionally, 95.6% of survey respondents answered 4 = tend to agree, 5 = agree, or 6 = strongly agree on the Likert scale to Question 19 (Worship opportunities are a part of my preschool program.) Though data from both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the study confirmed a high degree of worship opportunities, the interview data yielded another type of worship. Teachers related illustrations of spontaneous worship behaviors by the preschoolers.

Research Question 1E inquired to what extent, if any, faith-based preschools teach character traits. The building character dimension of the survey yielded a mean of 5.52. A majority (69.2%) of respondents strongly agreed that teaching character traits is part of promoting spiritual development (Question 7). Yet, 6 of the interview participants (30%) did not connect character development to spiritual development. A large number of educators (96.5%) indicated that preschoolers in their school studied character traits. The qualitative data illuminated this further by pointing to 4 themes in the school curriculums (see Table 15).

Research Question 1F asked to what extent, if any, faith-based preschools encourage reflection and meditation by students. Survey data indicated that 23.9% (strongly disagree = 2%, disagree = 5.5%, tend to disagree = 16.4%) did not provide quiet moments for preschoolers to reflect on God and Jesus (Table 4.2). However, interview data provided more insight (Question 8). Respondents' answers pointed out that this practice is sometimes difficult to implement. One director commented: "I did training on salient moments-to take a moment to reflect, but I've found that teachers can't grasp that very well. They don't understand that." Another person enlightened this practice further with an example of going on a nature walk. She said, "The teachers ask questions like, 'What do you hear? Do you hear God speaking?'" In another classroom children had access to an altar in the classroom. The teacher noted, "They might go over to the altar and just be kneeling at the altar and saying thank you." Ten participants mentioned quiet times in the classroom, but as one said. "We have rest time but it is not designated for reflecting on spiritual needs at all." Yet one teacher commented,

> I do think that some children are acutely aware, a thinking through eternal things or just an awareness of God's presence that is there in those unique few.

Research question 1G explored to what extent, if any, faith-based preschools partner with parents in supporting the spiritual development of preschoolers. On the survey the parental involvement dimension was the lowest mean of the study at 4.39 (4 = tend to agree) on a 6-point Likert scale. Furthermore, quantitative data illustrated that teachers did not think parents always followed through in their parental responsibility toward children's spiritual development. One participant said, "Primarily parents, but because the parent's don't always do that the church and school partner with them."

Though 34.3% of survey respondents tended to agree that they work with parents to help them understand how to promote spiritual development of preschoolers, 27% tended to disagree that parents received training in children's spiritual development. Interview data showed that only 4 out of 20 interviewees mentioned parent training as a part of how they partnered with parents in supporting children's spiritual development. As well, teachers indicated in the qualitative data that they used written communication with parents to inform the parents about Bible stories and Bible verses in the curriculum. In the survey 43.3% respondents strongly agreed that their relationships with parents affected children's spiritual development. Interview responses strengthened this concept with statements about agreement and cooperation between parents and teachers. One teacher said: "As the children see this partnership develops, the children have a great trust in their teachers because they see that their parents trust them as well.

Research Question 1H asked to what extent, if any, faith-based preschools integrate Biblical teaching into secular themes and content. Survey answers supported the practice of Biblical integration into the content areas of literacy, math, and science (see Table 6, Questions 4, 13, 16, 23, & 27). Yet the means for these questions ranged from 4.35 to 5.11. Means were highest in a general content area statement (Table 6, Question 13). They were lowest in posting Bible verses in learning centers (Table 6, Question 16). Comments from interviewee participants indicated some Biblical integration. For example, "We try to tie in Biblical truths to everything that we are teaching one way or another." However, most participants talked about curriculum: "Well the program is geared around our curriculum which is Christian based."

Research Question 1I looked at to what extent, if any, faith-based preschools articulated their mission and goals for the spiritual development of preschool children. Preschool programs included spiritual development in their mission statements. Survey participants by 59.7% strongly agreed that their program's mission statement included spiritual development. Qualitative data collected mission statements (see Table 16). Additionally, interview data (Question 13) explored program goals for children's spiritual development. Out of 20 interviewees, 11 said they did not have program goals for children's spiritual development. One response was, "No I don't. I never even thought about that." Another person said, "I don't know that we have specific goals and that is something that we need to look at." The other 9 responses fell into 3 categories: (a) conversion (b) good character and (c) Bible knowledge. Sample answers were:

> Personal relationship with Jesus Christ. At three and four the seeds are planted for a trust relationship and a love relationship.
>
> We are hoping that we are helping them develop the mind of Christ, to show love for friends, the hope is that they take on the characteristics of Jesus, in the way that they treat each other through lots of coaching and modeling.
>
> Our program goals would be just teaching our Bible curriculum.

Research Question 1J explored to what extent, if any, faith-based preschools reflect the historic practices of their sponsoring faith-based organizations. A majority of survey participants (55.2%) strongly agreed that spiritual development takes place as a part of religious education. Interview Question 14 examined this further by looking at how traditions influenced preschool program practices. Answers fell into 5 categories: (a) teaching basic tenets of the faith; (b) teaching liturgical practices; (c) not including historical practices in the preschool program; (d) emphasis on salvation; and (e)

modeling. One teacher commented: “We don’t take it for granted assuming that someone is saved or has a relationship if they don’t have a defining moment.”

Programs sponsored by Episcopal and Catholic churches taught preschool children such things as the colors used during the church year, particular prayers such as the birthday prayer from the *Book of Common Prayer,* and lessons on baptism. Programs sponsored by Baptist, Bible church and Lutheran schools indicated no teaching of doctrine.

Research Question 1K asked to what extent, if any, faith-based preschools provide a context that supports spiritual development. The mean for this dimension was 5.42. While 35.8% of survey respondents strongly agreed that they received training in children’s spiritual development, the Tukey HSD post-hoc test showed that hours of training received was statistically significant. Those participants receiving none to 3 hours of training were statistically significant lower than 2 other groups (group 2 = 4 to 7 hours, group 3 = 8 hours and up). Interview answers gave more insight. Answers about training ranged from personal experience (“My training has been personal experience”) to attending classes in seminaries. Other answers revealed that conferences provided little options for spiritual development training. Interviewee 20 said:

> In the conference we attend each year there is never a breakout session about promoting spiritual development in the children. And it really stuck in my mind this year as I was training our teachers. That’s not ever an option. What a disadvantage as much as we minister to our families and children.

Survey responses indicated that a majority (63.7%) of participants strongly agreed that the relationship between the teacher and child affects children’s spiritual development. Additionally, 56.2% strongly agreed that they modeled Biblical teachings in their relationships with the preschoolers. A teacher said,

> The teacher has to model Christian Christ-like behavior and exemplify the Fruit of the Spirit. When a teacher models those then I think that values of the teacher transfers to the child.

Research Question 2

This question explored to what extent, if any, faith-based preschools document and assess children's spiritual development and growth in religious knowledge. Respondents from the survey agreed (M = 5.04, SD = .767) that assessment of children's spiritual development is important. While answers from item 3 (M = 5.29, SD = .758) and item 29 (M = 5.19, SD = 1.046) showed agreement with the importance of setting goals and having curriculum that stated spiritual objectives, qualitative data further illuminated assessment practices. Although all programs assess some domains of child development such as cognitive development, the majority of interview participants (n = 20, 55%) indicated no assessment of spiritual development in their preschools. This lack of assessment is highlighted by the fact that 15.9% (n = 32) of survey participants indicated that they did not intentionally write objectives for spiritual development in their lesson plans.

Three schools reported using checklists to assess spiritual development. The checklists had items such as, "Can remember parts of memory scriptures," or "Participates in Bible time." One director reported that spiritual development was recorded in anecdotal records and observations. Another mentioned that spiritual development was written into progress reports with such items as "beginning to understand the difference between right and wrong." A further teacher pointed to informal conversations with parents about observed behavior as a way of assessment of spiritual development.

In this study triangulation of the data enlightened and strengthened the results of the quantitative and qualitative methods. Research Question 1 investigated faith-based program practices in the dimensions of prayer, Bible literacy, service opportunities, building character, parental involvement, and context. The second research question examined assessment of children's spiritual development in faith-based preschools.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Summary

Children's early learning experiences set in place the foundation for later learning and make learning easier and more efficient (Knudsen et al., 2006). Educators and parents focus much attention on children's on children's cognitive, linguistic, social/emotional, and physical development (Morrison, 2009; National Research Council, 2001; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). However, both public and faith-based preschools often overlook the spiritual dimension of children's development in their program practices (Buchanan & Hyde, 2008; de Souza, 2006; Ratcliff, 1988).

Children's spiritual needs are genuine and are as essential to their being as their physical and intellectual needs (Kline, 2008). Spiritual development is a life-long process in response to an awareness of a relationship with God (Thomson, 2009). The Bible says that "Jesus grew in wisdom, stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52). Adults care for the whole child when they support children's spiritual development by instructing children in faith so that they help children develop moral sensibilities, character, and virtue (Bunge, 2004).

Within the context of the faith-based school, multiple program practices work together to create a climate that supports spiritual development and religious education (Helm, 2008; Ratcliff, 2004; Ruppell, 2004). The program must have not only the curricular content, but also an intentional programmatic approach to spiritual development (DeBerry, 2007). The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which faith-based preschools implement a program framework for spiritual development

in order to promote spiritual development in preschoolers ages 3 to 5. The study examined various practices such as Bible literacy, the practices of prayer, building character, serving others, worship opportunities, and the context of learning that contribute to and support children's spiritual development.

This study was a concurrent triangulation mixed-method design. The quantitative aspect of the study was a survey of faith-based program practices supporting the spiritual development of young children. Participants educators in faith-based preschools (*n* = 201). The qualitative part was a 15-question interview with 20 educators randomly selected from the survey participants. Triangulation of the data endeavored to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent, if any, do faith-based preschool programs:
    A. Support the practice of prayer with preschool children?
    B. Teach the Bible to preschool children?
    C. Provide age-appropriate service opportunities for preschool children to serve others?
    D. Make available worship occasions for preschool children?
    E. Teach character traits?
    F. Encourage reflection and meditation by students?
    G. Partner with parents in supporting the spiritual development of preschoolers?
    H. Integrate Biblical teaching into secular themes and content?
    I. Articulate their mission and goals for the spiritual development of preschool children?

J. Reflect the historic practices of their sponsoring faith-based organization?

K. Provide a context that supports spiritual development?

2. To what extent, if any, do faith-based preschools document and assess children's spiritual development and growth in religious knowledge?

Summary of Results

While the study yielded some statistically significant results, it also provided insights into the practice of faith-based preschools which promote children's spiritual development. The qualitative data illuminated ways that educators plan, teach, assess, and implement the program and curriculum in regards to spiritual development. The results of the study showed that educators in faith-based preschools generally agree that they are promoting children's spiritual development in eight different dimensions of program practice: (a) prayer; (b) Bible literacy; (c) service opportunities; (d) worship; (e) building character; (f) assessment; (g) parental involvement; and (h) context of learning.

Results across dimension areas of the study were not the same. The first research question explored 11 aspects of support for children's spiritual development within faith-based preschools. Participants in the study showed strong support for the spiritual discipline of prayer in their preschools. Clearly, the majority (n = 167, 83.1%) indicated that preschoolers pray on a daily basis in school. Research pointed out four categories of prayer that occurred in classrooms: (a) corporate times of prayer such as in circle time or chapel time; (b) prayer before lunch or snack time; (c) teacher-initiated prayers; and (d) spontaneous prayers of children.

However, the most noteworthy findings in Research Question 1A were examples of the spontaneous prayers of preschoolers. These spontaneous prayers were

indicative of learner outcomes in the spiritual domain. Preschool children were able to ascertain situations that needed prayer and then to pray in their own words about the circumstance, thereby indicating spiritual growth.

The centrality of the Bible was the focus of Research Questions 1B and 1H. Overall respondents strongly agreed with three items: (a) that they taught Bible stories as a part of the curriculum in their schools (*n* = 167, 83.1%); (b) Bible memorization was a part of the curriculum (*n* = 86, 42.8%); and (c) preschoolers can identify the Bible as a book that tells about God and Jesus (*n* = 161, 80.1%). Interviews revealed that there were no uniform curriculum practices across preschool programs. Whereas some schools memorized passages of scripture such as the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13), other schools memorized one verse per month or per unit.

Curricula varied as well. Schools used Bible curricula prepared by Christian educators as well as writing Bible curriculum themselves. One teacher whose school wrote its own curriculum commented: "We've had disagreements between teachers about what is appropriate at different age levels especially around Easter time." Yet, another school used no faith-based curriculum but expected teachers to read scripture to the children daily. Curriculum also varied according to faith tradition with some traditions teaching liturgical colors, prayers from prayer books, and the rosary. Though this study did not explore in detail the connection between Bible curriculum and faith tradition, it is an area for further study.

A definition of Biblical integration is "the weaving of God's truth in to teaching and learning by precept, principle, and practice, in a way that presents a unified, God-centered view of life" (ACSI, 2003). This study looked at the extent to which faith-based

preschools integrated Biblical teaching into secular themes and content. A majority of the teachers (*n* = 82, 40.8%; *n* = 81, 40.3%) either agreed or strongly agreed with a general statement, “In my classroom I talk about Bible truths in my teaching of all content areas.” However, specific questions about content areas such as math, literacy, science, and learning centers showed mixed results. Means were: (a) Bible verses in learning centers (*M* = 4.35); (b) science (*M* = 4.69); and (c) math and literacy (*M* = 4.85). From these results the conclusion is that even though teachers believed they talk about Bible truths when teaching content areas, actual practice was less than the perception.

The study examined the extent to which faith-based preschools provided age-appropriate service opportunities for children in service to others. Findings were varied. Almost one third (*n* = 63, 31.3%) of participants tended to agree that preschoolers grow spiritually because they participate in service to others, and 14.9% (*n* = 30) tended to disagree with this statement. Furthermore, interview data said that 12 (*n* = 20, 60%) educators cited a Biblical reason for the importance of the service dimension. Nonetheless, faith-based preschools engaged children in age-appropriate service projects. Teachers emphasized the importance of children “learning by doing.” Additionally, preschools took part in projects that children related to such as Operation Christmas Child, Trik-a-Thon, and collecting canned food goods.

Interestingly, few survey respondents (*n* = 32, 15.9%) strongly agreed that preschoolers helped plan the service projects. In the qualitative data no examples of children’s spiritual behaviors related to the service dimension leading to a supposition that service opportunities in the faith-based preschool are teacher-directed. One teacher

stated, “You hope they will say, ‘Here is someone who needs some help, so let’s help them.’” However, no one related a behavior of this type from the children.

Research Question 1D explored worship in faith-based preschools. The majority of participants strongly agreed (*n* = 122, 60.7%) that programs made worship occasions available for children. Interviewees described worship as a time of praise, singing songs, and prayer. Though participants cited worship as available, the scheduled planned worship varied as daily, weekly, or monthly. A second theme of worship, spontaneous worship, emerged in the qualitative data. Educators gave examples of children engaging in worship during play and lesson activities. This spontaneous worship was evidence of preschoolers’ spiritual behaviors and spiritual growth.

The extent to which faith-based preschools teach character traits was the focus of Research Question 1E. A majority of participants (*n* = 139, 69.2%) strongly agreed that teaching character traits is a part of promoting children’s spiritual development. Yet, fewer than half (*n* = 94, 46.8%) strongly agreed that preschoolers in their schools studied character traits leading to a possibility that belief and practice were not identical in the schools. The curriculum regarding character traits was diverse among schools and five themes emerged from the interviews: (a) integration of character traits in the Bible lessons and stories; (b) teaching the Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23); (c) coordinating with public school curriculum; (d) secular resources; and (e) no character education. One participant mentioned that the curriculum for character education was a decision left to individual teachers. Though the study did not explore this aspect of curriculum development, the previously mentioned practice could impact the extent to which preschools implement character education. While the majority of participants (*n* =

139, 69.2%) strongly agreed that teaching character traits is a part of promoting children's spiritual development, 30% (*n* = 6) of interviewees did not connect character education to spiritual development in their schools. Thus, one hypothesis is that not all faith-based preschools with character education view the character education as supporting children's spiritual development. Nonetheless, teachers cited children's expressions of empathy, obedience, kindness, and willingness to share as examples of the preschoolers' spiritual development.

Reflection and mediation were the foci of Research Question 1F. Faith-based preschools varied in their implementation these practices. Some participants (*n* = 33, 16.4%) tended to disagree that reflection and meditation occurred in their classrooms. In the qualitative data respondents' answers pointed out that this practice is sometimes difficult to implement. Though some schools had quiet times, these times were not spiritual in nature. However, in one case a teacher related that children will go to the altar in her classroom and kneel to say "thank you." Data indicated that the practice of reflection and meditation different among faith traditions. The scope of this study limited a closer examination of this difference.

Research Question 1G asked to what extent, if any, faith-based preschools partner with parents in promoting children's spiritual development. Data from the study fell into the following categories: (a) parents' interest in children's spiritual development ;(b) the parent/teacher relationship as it pertains to children's spiritual development; (c) training in children's spiritual development; and (d) communication about children's spiritual development. Early childhood educators indicated agreement that parents' express interest (tend to agree, 37.8%; agree, 32.8%; strongly agree, 14.4%) in their

children's spiritual development. Additionally, 50% (*n* = 10) of interview participants believed parents are the persons primarily responsible for their children's spiritual development.

However, educators pointed out two issues related to parental responsibility: (a) some parents are not Christians; and (b) some parents do not accept their responsibility for their child's spiritual development. Even though participants expressed concern about parental responsibility and involvement, data showed that almost one fourth of teachers (*n* = 52, 25.4%) do not talk with parents about the spiritual growth of their children. Schools relied mostly on written communication such as newsletters, emails, and daily notes home to communicate spiritual things such as the Bible story and Bible verse for the week.

On the other hand, one school sent home a devotional box with directions so that children could lead a family devotional. This proved to be a teaching tool for the parents as they learned how to read a Bible story to their child and to hear him pray. Another preschool held parent training classes. A different school invited parents to participate in the sponsoring church's parent education classes. Though some preschool programs emphasized the parental responsibility for children's spiritual development, training for parents is an area for growth for other preschools.

Teachers strongly agreed (*n* = 87, 43.3%) that their relationships with parents contributes to children's spiritual development. One teacher described the quality of that relationship in terms of verbiage. Another commented that: "The child feels support and agreement because we (teacher and parent) are saying the same thing. A foundational message of truth is established." Building strong relationships through communication

was a theme throughout the interviews. Teachers gave examples of parents' sharing with them incidences of children's spiritual behaviors at home. "Mrs. A. before I put my child to beside the bed, he said, 'We need to pray mom, we need to pray dad, before I go to bed.'" The participants in this study believed that they created positive relationships with parents which resulted in supporting children's spiritual development.

Current practice among organizations is to write mission statements and program goals. Research Question 1I investigated the extent to which faith-based preschools articulated their mission and goals for the spiritual development of preschool children. Mission statements were generally included in brochures, handbooks, or Websites. A large number of participants (*n* = 142, 70.6%) strongly agreed that their preschool mission statement included a statement about spiritual development. Yet, a majority of educators (*n* = 20, 55%) did not have program goals for children's spiritual development. Other respondents cited informal goals. One program included spiritual development goals in their developmental checklist. Another school wrote well-defined goals for spiritual development (Table 15). The research data indicated that faith-based preschools need to better formulate and articulate program goals for children's spiritual development. A possibility for further investigation is that assumed goals need to be clarified and written.

Research Question 1J explored to what extent faith-based preschools reflect the historic practices of their sponsoring faith-based organization. The schools in this study reflected 8 faith traditions. Teachers from liturgical traditions readily answered this question. These preschool programs purposefully taught children prayers and liturgical colors. One Episcopal preschool taught children the birthday prayer from the *Book of*

Common Prayer. In a Catholic school the teachers taught tenets of the faith, major saints, Mary and her place in the faith, the rosary, and about blessings.

Survey participants strongly agreed (*n* = 111, 55.2%) that spiritual development takes place as a part of religious education; yet, interviewees from evangelical churches struggled to articulate their answers to this research question. One respondent said, "We don't really teach doctrine." Teachers pointed out practices such as celebrating religious holidays like Easter and Christmas. Others referred to teaching the Bible and understanding that God has a special plan for our lives. Another teacher made the comment that historical practices and traditions were not important in the program. Overall, the data showed that there was a difference in the content of some faith-based preschools in this study. A number of the differences lay in the traditions of the sponsoring faith-based organization. However, the range of faith traditions in this study was small, and the demographics were skewed toward evangelical churches. The researcher suggests additional study in this area.

The context in which children's spiritual development takes place was the focus of Research Question 1K. Data from the study enlightened two parts of program context: (a) the teachers' relationships with preschoolers, and (b) the importance of teacher training in how children develop spiritually. Survey responses indicated that a majority (*n* = 128, 63.7%) of participants strongly agreed that the relationship between the teacher and child affects children's spiritual development. Moreover, 56.2% (*n* = 113) strongly agreed that they modeled Biblical teachings in their relationships with the preschoolers. Teacher comments affirmed the survey responses. Interviewees said such things as "model Christ-like behavior" or "It needs to be obvious to the parents and

to the children that the teachers believe it and are living it." Some responses pointed to the importance of the teacher in the faith-based classroom and the rigor of the interview process for teaching applicants in their faith-based school. Responses confirmed that faith-based educators agreed with the significance of the teacher/child/parent relationship and believed positive relationships occurred in their schools.

Demographic data explored education level of teachers, the type of faith-based school, and the hours of training on the topic of spiritual development in young children. Analysis of variance tests and the Kruskal-Wallis statistical tests showed that there was no statistical significance between groups for education level of teachers or the type of faith-based school. However, results for the hours of training on the topic of spiritual development were different. All tests (i.e., ANOVA, Tukey HSD Post-Hoc, Kruskal-Wallis, Game-Howell) confirmed that results for teachers with none or 1-3 hours of spiritual development training were statistically significant lower in all program dimensions than for groups with more hours of training. These findings lead to the assumption that training in children's spiritual development is important across all educational levels of teachers from high school through master's degrees.

Responses to the survey question, "I receive training in understanding and promoting the spiritual development of preschool children," resulted in a mean of 4.80 on a 6-point Likert scale. Yet, answers from interviews indicated no uniform type of training received in children's spiritual development. Teachers relied on personal Bible training and conference sessions; however, they also indicated that conference sessions offered classes in how to teach Bible or chapel but few choices on how children develop spiritually. Interestingly, participant descriptions of spiritual

development training for staff in their preschools were diverse. A few respondents indicated no training programs. Others described training in terms of how to use the Bible curriculum, while some wrote training modules themselves. Overall, these results pointed to two important conclusions:

1. Hours of training in spiritual development are important for all educators in faith-based preschools.
2. Spiritual development training is not standardized in faith-based preschools.

Research Question 2 addressed to what extent, if any, faith-based preschools document and assess children's spiritual development and growth in religious knowledge. Respondents from the survey agreed (M = 5.04, SD = .767) that assessment of children's spiritual development is important. Although participants in the qualitative study indicated assessment in some domains of child development (i.e., cognitive, physical, social/emotional), 55% (n = 20) indicated no assessment of spiritual development in their preschools. Reasons varied: (a) not a part of NAEYC accreditation; (b) not a part of High/Scope curriculum; or (c) "I don't think it is up to me to assess that. It is relationship." This lack of assessment is highlighted by the fact that 15.9% (n = 32) of survey participants indicated that they did not intentionally write objectives for spiritual development in their lesson plans. As a result of the mixed method study, data indicated that belief and practice were not always consistent.

Assessment varied among preschools which did assess spiritual development and growth in religious knowledge. Answers from item 3 (M = 5.29, SD = 0.758) and item 29 (M = 5.19, SD = 1.046) showed agreement with the importance of setting goals and having curriculum that stated spiritual objectives. Some educators pointed to the

practice of assessing knowledge such as memorization of scripture or understanding the Bible as true. Others assessed behaviors such as participation in Bible time or showing kindness to others. One school used observation and anecdotal records to record examples of spiritual development in preschoolers. Checklists were the most common form of assessment tool, though not all faith-based preschools included spiritual development in their checklists. Various interviewees mentioned informal assessment as another way of evaluating spiritual development and growth in religious knowledge. Additionally, some educators relied on parent feedback to gain knowledge about children's spiritual behaviors away from preschool.

The data showed a range of practices in assessment among the faith-based preschools in this study. The number of respondents not assessing spiritual development was large (n = 11, 55%). Suppositions for this result are: (a) the lack of a readily available tool for assessing children's spiritual development (b) a lack of understanding of how to assess children's spiritual development. The faith-based educators who assessed spiritual development in this study primarily relied on checklists. There seemed to be no consistent method of assessment across the schools. While some schools wrote their own assessment tool, others relied on the accreditation process for guidance. Few schools utilized anecdotal records or observations of children's spiritual behaviors as a formal means of assessment in their program. Given that assessment is indicative of learner outcomes, faith-based preschool practices in this area need improvement.

Conclusions

Study data indicated that participants in the survey generally agreed that their schools supported children's spiritual development across the eight program dimensions. The interviews clarified survey results and brought to light specific program practices. Information from the study supported the fact that faith-based preschools engaged to a large extent in practices such as Bible literacy, prayer, and worship which support children's spiritual development. Results from two dimensions, service opportunities and building character, showed preschools included these practices in their programs; however, not every program connected these dimensions to spiritual development. The lack of connection to spiritual development may reside in one of two reasons: (a) the school's philosophy of children's spiritual development, or (b) a lack of awareness of the connection between spiritual development and the aspects of building character and serving others. While data showed that participants supported the concept of assessment, actual program practices varied. Though the mean for this dimension (M = 5.04) indicated agreement, qualitative data pointed to a lower degree in the actual practice of assessment of children's spiritual development.

In the parental involvement dimension, faith-based educators made good efforts to communicate with parents about children's spiritual development. Yet, a lower mean (M = 4.39) reflected teachers' concerns about parental interest and involvement. This may be due to the fact that schools had different admissions policies. While some schools require parents to interview and show Christian commitment, other schools reach out to a diverse community. Participants also came from various types of preschool programs (i.e., child care, 2-day preschool programs, preschool connected

with a K-12 Christian school). Though the study did not look at the differences in parental interest in children's spiritual development by program type, this distinction might have influenced teacher responses to questions about parental interest in this topic.

Data relating to spiritual development training for teachers, teacher relationships with parents and children, mission, traditions of faith-based sponsoring organizations, and goals for children's spiritual development were all part of the context dimension in the study. Participants showed agreement in this context though qualitative data indicated a need for program goals in support of children's spiritual development and the importance of training for teachers in children's spiritual development. Additionally, data showed differences in program practices among different faith traditions.

While faith-based preschools in the study included elements of the 8 program dimensions in their programs, not all schools included every dimension in their program. Furthermore, in the data it became clear that dimensions were not always connected in a way that communicated support of children's spiritual development (i.e. building character, service opportunities, and assessment). While educators related examples of behaviors of children which showed spiritual growth, they often did not keep track of the data. One director remarked, "I need to keep a folder of the neat stories. You know, that is what reinforces parents."

The following figure illustrates a possible way to organize the support of children's spiritual development in a faith-based preschool:

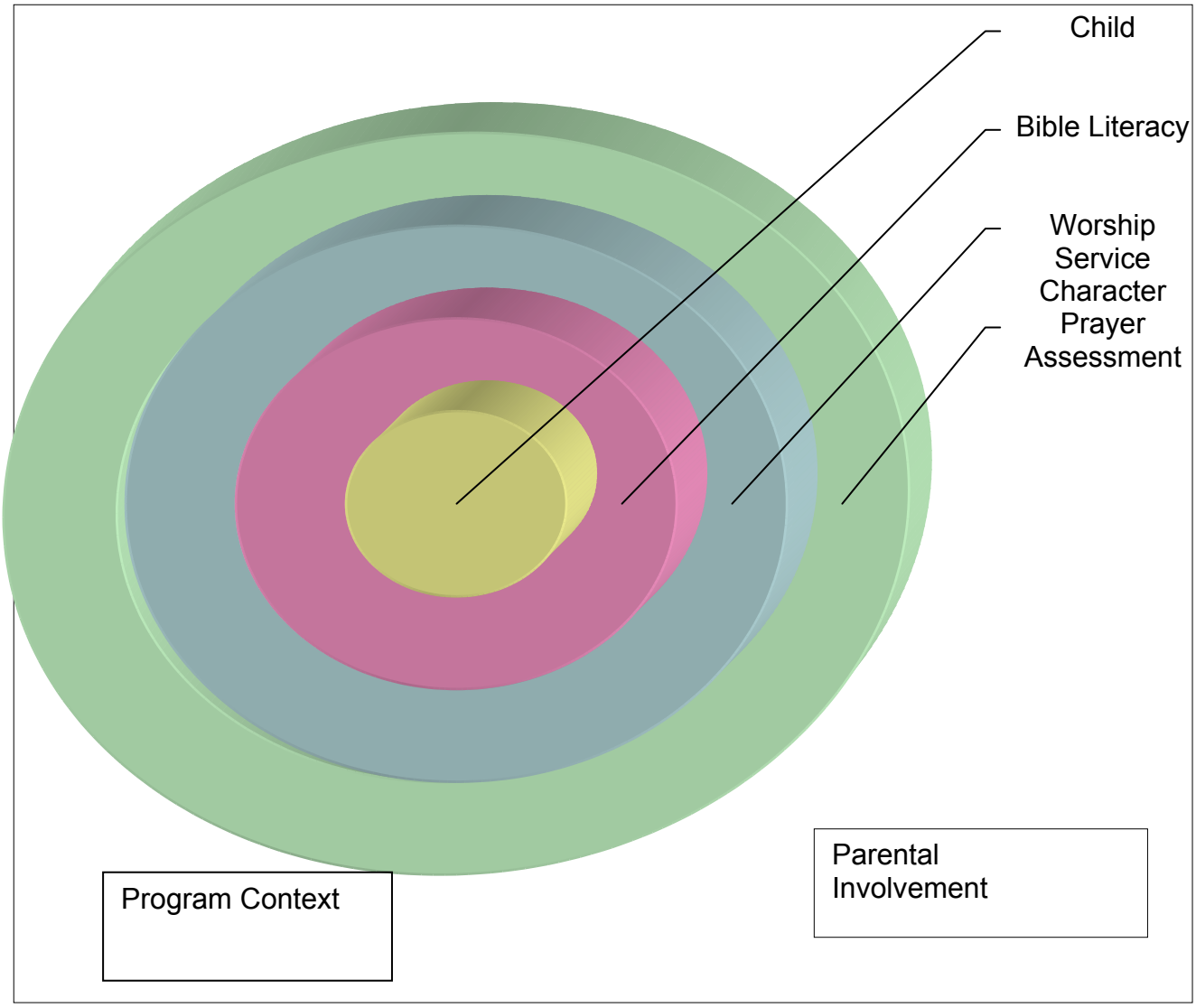


Figure 2. One possible way to organize the support of children's spiritual development in a faith-based preschool.

The yellow circle represents the child who develops spiritually (Luke 2:52). The next circle symbolizes the Bible which is central to a faith-based program with a Christian focus. God/Christ/Holy Spirit, faith traditions, and the Bible are identified by Christian leaders and children's pastors as the content that must be taught to foster spiritual development (Ratcliff, 2004; Thomson, 2009). In the faith-based preschool program, spirituality and religion overlap (Hay & Nye, 2006; Ratcliff & May, 2004).

Knowledge of Bible stories, Bible memorization, and Bible skills are all part of this dimension. Telling the story of the Bible is important because it helps children connect with truths and the meaning of life (Wangerin, 2003) which is an aspect of spiritual development (May, 2006). Memorizing Bible verses puts Bible truths within the life of the child where transformation or change (2 Corinthians 5:17) through the Holy Spirit occurs (Carlson & Crupper, 2006).

It is also important to weave Bible truths into teaching and learning in the content areas of the curriculum (Stephenson, 2003). Bible literacy is at the core of practices to promote children's spiritual development. This circle in the diagram symbolizes the cognitive aspect of children's spiritual growth and development.

The third circle represents the practices of worship, prayer, service to others, and character. These dimensions of program practice are indicative of experiences, actions, and affective behaviors of children. Spirituality is experiential. It encompasses the wonder and heightened attentiveness of experiencing natural wonders as well as a deeply moving experience of God (Hay & Nye, 2006). In worship children experience God. The worship might be in a chapel service or on a nature walk. May states that thoughtful, intentional worship settings provide opportunities for children to encounter God (May, 2006).

Prayer is talking and communicating with God (I John 5: 14-15; Osborne, 1998). Children encounter God through doing things for him such as singing songs to him, giving to him, thanking him, and doing things for him (Buechner, 1992). Research shows that preschool children desire to draw closer to God through the avenue of

prayer and readily invite adults to pray with them (Somers, 2006). Teachers in the study related examples of children's spiritual behavior as seen through the practice of prayer.

Service based in spirituality is a life-style and ministers to people simply because there is a need (Foster, 1978). Spiritual change occurs in people as they embrace service to others (Carr, 2008). Age is no barrier when it comes to being used by God (Carr, 2008). The process of serving begins in childhood when children have the opportunity to participate in caring and sharing with others (Stonehouse, 1998). As faith-based preschools engage children in service projects, they make a connection between service and spirituality. As one director said,

> All these things are Biblical and God blesses us in as much as you've done unto the least of these you've done it unto me. In 3 and 4 year olds it develops the richness of the heart because we store up riches in our heart when we give.

"Character consists of operative values, values in action. We progress in our character as a value becomes a virtue, a reliable inner disposition to respond to situations in a morally good way." (Lickona, 1991, 51) Teachers must focus on behavioral outcomes that indicate children apply character traits in their lives (Uecker, 2003). Though faith-based schools have character education, the study indicated that it often times more of an afterthought than an intentional part of the support of children's spiritual development. For the Christian school, character education is indivisible from spiritual development (Uecker, 2003).

The outer circle stands for assessment in faith-based preschool programs. High-quality preschool programs assess children's learning and development (NAEYC, 2006). As such faith-based programs should include assessment of children's spiritual development as a part of the program (Helm et al., 2008). Though measuring spiritual

development in early childhood is difficult, it is not impossible (Lydic et al., 2007).

Assessment in the spiritual realm is a challenge lest teachers simply quantify behaviors (May, 2006). More often than not assessment in children who are making positive spiritual development rely on cognitive skills such as recall and verbalization, participation in activities, and the child's social skills (Hay, 2006). The faith-based schools in this study relied on the previous methods as well as observation and documentation. However, assessments were often informal and anecdotal. To support children's spiritual development adequately, assessment needs to be an intentional practice of the faith-based school.

The program practices of Bible literacy, worship, prayer, building character, service to others, and assessment are set within a framework that includes both parents involvement and the context of the program itself. First of all, children's spiritual growth and development depends, not only on teachers, but primarily on parents who model and intentionally teach spiritual truths to their children (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Ratcliff, 2004; Roehlkepartain et al., 2006b; Schultz, 1998). Educators in the study supported the role of parents in their children's spiritual development; yet, the teachers also see their role as filling in the gaps when parents did not take on the responsibility.

Cooperation between parents and teachers must take place for optimum spiritual development in young children. The relationships in the child's environment are a complex system affected by multiple levels of the environment (Berk, 2005). In the faith-based preschool relationships are the child/teacher, child/parent, child/preschool program, teacher/parent plus numerous other relationships in society and culture (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). One teacher said,

“The child feels support and agreement because we (teacher and parent) are saying the same thing.” Another stated, “The parents and the staff members are working together building a community of teaching the children God’s word and communicating what we are doing in the classroom.” In order to promote children’s spiritual development, program practices should pay close attention to supporting parent’s understanding of their children’s spiritual development.

The context of the faith-based preschool program includes the staff and the goals of the program. Staff must show a commitment to the development of the whole child -- spiritually, intellectually, physically, emotionally, and socially (Luke 2:52). The relationship between teacher and child is important. Educators in the study affirmed the value of modeling Christian virtues and behaviors to the children in their classrooms. Programs have a responsibility to train teachers in children’s spiritual development. The research in this study points out the significance of teacher training specifically in children’s spiritual development. Additionally, leadership in faith-based programs has a responsibility to guide their program in the formulation of written goals for the spiritual development of children. Goals help connect all the different aspects of the faith-based program that contribute to children’s spiritual development. With the purpose of strengthening faith-based program practices that promote children’s spiritual development, recommendations are: (1) the definition of spiritual development; (2) training in children’s spiritual development; and (3) assessment in faith-based preschools.

Recommendations

Definition of Spiritual Development

The study of children's spiritual development is an emerging theme in child and adolescent development; yet, there are a wide range of views about children's spirituality (Roehlkepartian et al., 2006a). Though the focus of this study was not the definitional issues in children's spiritual development, these issues were present in the study's findings. While the preschool programs surveyed included the term "spiritual development" as a part of their mission statements, different explanations emerged in interviews with faith-based educators. The majority of interviewees defined spiritual development in terms of their curriculum or in terms of Bible knowledge. A few educators used terms like "developing a relationship with God." The latter is in line with a working definition from the Third Children's Spirituality Conference (June 14-17, 2009):

> Children's spirituality is the child's development of a conscious relationship with God, in Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit, within the context of a community of believers that fosters that relationship, as well as the child's understanding of -- and response to -- that relationship.

Formulating a definition of spiritual development upon which Christian educators can agree is a work in progress; however, it is important that this working definition become a part of the field in a way that the definition is accessible to practitioners in the faith-based preschool. Furthermore, individual schools need to define what spiritual development means for their program in order to formulate meaningful program and curriculum goals for children's spiritual formation. Likewise, communication of the definition to both teachers and parents will create a purposeful partnership benefitting children's spiritual development.

Training in Children's Spiritual Development

Christian education must be concerned with the holistic education of the child which includes spiritual development as well as other domains of child development (Thomson, 2009).Teacher training programs from Christian organizations and textbooks in early childhood education discuss developmental stage theories (Henley, 2002; Morrison, 2009; Stephenson, 2003); yet, training in spiritual development is minimal. While early childhood education conferences offer sessions about teaching Bible stories or conducting chapel, teachers find few sessions which touch on the topic of spiritual development apart from cognitive knowledge. Nevertheless, this study shows that training hours in children's spiritual development are significant. Given the fact that many of the teachers in faith-based programs rely on their own personal Bible study and experiences for knowledge in spiritual development, training needs to include: (a) listening and responding to children's spiritual questions; (b) how to talk about spiritual matters and use Bible conversation with children; (c) using salient moments to convey spiritual truths; (d) how to create an environment in the classroom that promotes children's spirituality; and (e) assessment of children's spiritual formation. Since faith-based educators find few training opportunities to address the subject of children' spirituality, recommendations are the following:

1. Christian colleges and seminaries offer courses in children's spirituality for those in leadership in faith-based organizations and churches.

2. Professional organizations such as ACSI and NAEYC provide conference sessions in children's spirituality that relate to all program practices that promote children's spiritual development.

3. Christian publishing companies such as LifeWay, Group, Standard Publishing, etc., provide sessions in children's spirituality in their curriculum training conferences.

4. Individual preschool program make training opportunities on children's spirituality a part of their in-service education on a regular basis.

Assessment of Children's Spiritual Development

Faith-based programs should include assessment of children's spiritual development as a part of the program (Helm et al., 2008) because high-quality preschool programs assess children's learning and development (NAEYC, 2006). Often spirituality assessments are in the form of survey measurements; yet these types of assessments are not appropriate for young children because they require reading and comprehension skills beyond the ability of young children (Gorsuch & Walker, 2006). Though measuring spiritual development in young children is not easy, it is not impossible (Lydic et al., 2007). Thomson (2009) says, "One of the greatest challenges in assessing children's spiritual development is knowing what to assess and how to assess it" (p. 87). Data from this study confirmed that educators struggle to know "what to assess and how to assess it." Therefore the recommendations are:

(1) Faith-based preschool programs align assessment with their definition of children's spiritual development and their program goals for children's spiritual development. For example, if the program's definition states that spiritual development is the development of a conscious relationship with God then the preschool must write definitive goals that support children's spiritual development. A sample goal is, "To learn that talking to God is prayer."

Assessment takes place as teachers observe and document instances of children praying their own prayers. These observations become a part of the child's portfolio. The connection of definition, goals, and children's behaviors lead to assessment of children's spiritual development.

(2) Faith-based programs choose assessment methods that are age-appropriate for the preschoolers in their programs. Appropriate methods for preschool assessment are observation, documentation such as anecdotal notes, checklists, and portfolios (Morrison, 2009). Documentation of spiritual development also includes photographing children involved in worship and religious learning experiences, recording what children say, and engaging children in conservations about spiritual issues (Helms et al., 2008).

(3) Teachers intentionally document spiritual behaviors observed in their classes. While Bible literacy is a core dimension of the faith-based preschool, assessment of children's spiritual development depends on more than recall of Bible stories or memorization of Bible verses. Spiritual growth in children can be seen when children apply principles from the Bible stories in their observed behaviors. For example, a teacher related about the child in the Montessori classroom who was playing with the Nativity set and the Good Shepherd lesson:

> One day I found a child that had down the nativity set and the Good Shepherd lesson. Luckily I didn't say, "Oh, you're only allowed one work out at a time. Because he brought all the sheep to the nativity railing and when I came over he said, "All of creation is coming to worship the baby Jesus." That is not something I gave him. But I got a little glimmer of where that thought process is going.

In this instance the child demonstrated a clear spiritual connection between the creator and creation.

As teachers present Bible stories to children, it is important to emphasize higher-order thinking skills to make the connection between the Bible lesson and a life application. For instance, in the Bible story of Jesus feeding the 5,000 (Matthew 14:13-21) the boy shares his five loaves of bread and two fish. A life application from the story is sharing. An example of a question the teacher might ask is, “What is a way that you might share with other people?” Furthermore, there are many “hands-on” activities that teachers can use to teach this story (i.e., making a treat and sharing with a friend). A scenario that indicates spiritual growth in children is when the children initiate sharing with someone else.

During the interviews in this study, teachers related examples of children’s spiritual growth in the children’s behaviors. Early childhood educators assess spiritual growth through intentionally observing and documenting behaviors that show spiritual sensitivity. An example from this study is:

> Praying spontaneously with a classmate who is hurt. In one classroom a mom came in and had just come from the doctor’s office. Her child had a broken collarbone. The kids said, “We need to pray right now.” She said, “You would do that right now?” They stopped and put their toys down and 2 or 3 of them prayed. The mom said,” I did not know that they would offer to pray for T.”

This example shows spiritual growth in children. As teachers observe these behaviors, documentation charts growth.

Assessment of Faith-Based Preschool Programs

Even as teachers assess the spiritual growth of preschoolers in their programs, it is important for faith-based programs to review their program practices which promote children’s spiritual development. Some programs look at elements of their programs during an accreditation process; however, data from the survey indicated that

accreditation was not an aid to assessing program practices related to children's spiritual development. A study of the survey used in this research can provide a tool for preschool programs to use to assess teacher beliefs and practices in the faith-based school. Additionally, the development of guidelines for program design in supporting children's spiritual growth would assist early childhood professionals as they plan their program structure and curriculum.

Faith-based Preschool Program Framework to Support Children's Spiritual Development

Faith-based preschools play a role in the spiritual development of children enrolled in their programs. The preschool's role is strengthened when the program framework and curriculum include the all the dimensions which contribute to children's spiritual development. While faith-based preschools include some of these dimensions, all dimensions are not included in every program. Recommendations to strengthen the program framework are:

1. Arrive at a definition of spiritual development to guide program planning and teaching.
2. Make Bible literacy the center of the spiritual development framework. Based on this research a complete program of Bible literacy includes Bible stories, Bible memorization with age-appropriate methods, and Biblical integration into secular themes and content areas. Additionally, this study supports teaching methods that include high-order thinking skills so that children connect Bible lessons to real life situations in age-appropriate applications.

3. Connect the dimensions of prayer, worship, service opportunities, and building character to children's spiritual development in both the program goals and curriculum design. It is recommended that faith-based early childhood education leaders connect these dimensions to children's spiritual development in their training materials for teachers and program literature for parents.

4. Recognize the importance of learner outcomes in education. Outcomes in spiritual development are important as well. Thus, faith-based preschools must include assessment as part of the program framework that supports children's spiritual development in order to appraise spiritual growth of children.

5. Acknowledge that the context of the program framework includes both teachers and parents. A framework that supports children's spiritual development will include training for teachers and parents in understanding children's spiritual development. Additionally, relationships between child/teacher/parent are important for an environment where children grow spiritually. A focus on intentionally building positive relationships is necessary to promote optimum spiritual development in children (Figure 2).

In conclusion, this research furthers the field of faith-based early education by identifying a program framework that supports children's spiritual development. The framework includes both content that supports spiritual development as well as context that allows children to grow spiritually.

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