



Bringing the Generations Together: Support from Learning Theory

Holly Catterton Allen

During the last 100 years, steady changes have occurred in society that have separated families and segregated age groups, not only in educational settings, but also in life in general. These changes include the universality of age-graded public education, the geographical mobility of families, the movement from extended to nuclear family, the rise of divorce and single-parent families, and the prevalence of retirement and nursing homes for older persons and preschools for the young.

Faith communities are perhaps the only places where families, singles, couples, children, teens, grandparents — all generations — come together on a regular interacting basis. Yet, the societal trend toward age segregation has moved into churches also. Though church leaders endorse intergenerational approaches in theory, in practice American mainline and evangelical churches generally conduct many of their services and activities (worship, Sunday school, fellowship, outreach, etc.) in age-segregated settings. Consequently, children are rarely with teens or adults in religious settings, and certainly not on a regular basis. Separating children by age may seem efficacious, practical, and desirable, especially when excellent children's programs are offered to complement the adult activities and services. However, as this age-segregating trend developed over the last few decades, religious educationists such as Nelson, Westerhoff, White, and Fowler began to question the validity of the practice.

Faith communities are perhaps the only places where families, singles, couples, children, teens, grandparents — all generations — come together on a regular interacting basis. Yet, the societal trend toward age segregation has moved into churches also. Though church leaders endorse intergenerational approaches in theory, in practice American mainline and evangelical churches generally conduct many of their services and activities (worship, Sunday school, fellowship, outreach, etc.) in age-segregated settings.

Holly Catterton Allen (Ph.D.), serves as Associate Professor of Christian Ministries and Director of the Children & Family Ministry Program at John Brown University in Siloam Springs, Arkansas. Dr. Allen's areas of scholarly interest are children's spirituality and intergenerational issues. She speaks regularly at conferences and churches concerning these issues, and has written about them in several journals; she has also written chapters in two books. She is currently a co-director for a triennial national conference, the Children's Spirituality Conference: Christian Perspectives. Dr. Allen's first book, *Nurturing Children's Spirituality: Christian Perspectives and Best Practices* (Cascade, 2008), is the edited volume of the best papers presented at the 2006 conference. The next conference will be held June 14-17, 2009 at Concordia College, River Forest, IL.

(This article originally appeared in *The Christian Education Journal* Series 3, Volume 2, Number 2. Published by Talbot School of Theology in Cooperation with the North American Professors of Christian Education, www.biola.edu/cej. Reprinted with permission.)

Consequently, children are rarely with teens or adults in religious settings, and certainly not on a regular basis. Separating children by age may seem efficacious, practical, and desirable, especially when excellent children's programs are offered to complement the adult activities and services. However, as this age-segregating trend developed over the last few decades, religious educationists such as Nelson, Westerhoff, White, and Fowler began to question the validity of the practice.

Some scholars (e.g., Harkness, Prest, Stonehouse) are now offering biblical, theological, educational, and even developmental support for the idea that all ages should be together often.¹ These scholars believe that faith and spiritual development are especially nurtured as children participate with adults in teaching/learning/worshiping settings. They do not argue that age-segregated grouping is harmful; rather they contend that regular intergenerational religious experiences should complement other age-grouped religious activities for optimal spiritual growth and development. Though the conceptual arguments for such cross-generational practices seem educationally and biblically strong, two problems emerge: little empirical research exists to support the claims, and no all-encompassing learning macrotheory has been proposed that explicates the value of intergenerational learning. In other words, is there any evidence to suggest that intergenerational religious experiences are especially beneficial for faith and spiritual development in children? And, if so, *why* might intergenerational religious experiences contribute significantly to children's faith journeys?

The primary purpose of this article is to address the second problem/question—the theory issue. However, before learning theory is discussed, the following background information will be offered: (a) a short definitional section concerning intergenerational concepts, (b) an overview of existing research that examines the effects of intergenerational Christian experiences, and (c) a brief treatment of the scriptural support for intergenerational community.

Intergenerational Concepts

In the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, several prominent religious educationists were asserting the importance of the whole believing community to the growth of faith in children. Though the term *intergenerational* was not widely used, Nelson's "community of believers," Westerhoff's "faith enculturation," Moran's "interplay across the generations," and Fowler's "church as an ecology of faith nurture" were ways of saying that cross-generational experiences

within the community of faith, the church, are crucial to faith and spiritual development in children—and adults.

Faith communities are perhaps the only places where families, singles, couples, children, teens, grandparents—all generations—come together on a regular interacting basis.

By the 1980s the term *intergenerational religious education*, or IGRE, was the general term for bringing the generations together. James White, in his 1988 book entitled *Intergenerational Religious Education*, defines IGRE as "two or more different age groups of people in a religious community together learning/growing/living in faith through in-common-experiences, parallel-learning, contributive-occasions, and interactive-sharing" (18). Though the E in IGRE stands for *education*, White really uses the word far more broadly than it is typically understood. The word *experiences* would connote White's meaning more accurately—that is, intergenerational religious *experiences*, not *education* in the more narrow classroom sense.

More recently, and in explicitly Christian research, the term *intergenerational Christian education* [or *experiences*], or IGCE, is being utilized. The general idea (of IGCE or IGRE) is that children, teenagers, and adults (young, middle, and older adults, both single and married) gather in settings where all members give and receive from each other. All ages can participate actively in prayer and worship, and, in some settings, share spiritual insights, read Scripture, and minister to one other. Another current phrase that describes this concept in general is James Gambone's "intentional intergenerational ministry" or IIM.

IGCE stands in contrast to the typical way "church is done" in the contemporary American context. For example, in formal worship experiences, children, teens, young adults, and women are rarely heard from. Activities of the church are often age-group oriented; consequently, children seldom hear older children or "lay" adults express spiritual thoughts, and adults rarely hear the spiritual insights of children. Even Sunday school classes, whether they follow the typical educational model (teacher-centered, content-oriented) or have adopted more contemporary educational approaches such as discovery learning, active participation, and cooperative learning, tend to be age-segregated.

IGCE calls for more common learning experiences involving mixed age groups.

Recent Research Concerning IGCE

Intergenerational Christian experiences have been studied in a variety of settings, though most of the research offers primarily soft data. Anecdotal and observational data is quite supportive and encouraging; people seem to enjoy IG religious education; after they experience it, they seem to like being in age-inclusive settings; they like interrelating with each other; and intergenerational friendships develop (Chesto, Marr, White). IGRE events seem “to draw the people of a church closer together” (Marr, 201).

A few studies also offer empirical support. Chesto describes a program involving 72 families in her Catholic diocese who used Chesto’s intergenerational curriculum. Most of the families (67 out of 72) returned the evaluative surveys, offering generally positive comments, including phrases such as “it helps families to pray together, to share with other people, to be more open, to grow,” and “the children become more comfortable expressing their feelings about God and they see their parents doing so” (75). White collected pre- and post-data on the IGRE programs that he conducted for nine summers in a large mainline Christian denomination, reporting increased attendance and improvement in biblical knowledge.

For my dissertation, I interviewed children in Christian families in two settings: children who participate regularly in intergenerational settings (they worship with their parents and attend an intergenerational small group at least twice a month) and children who have no regular opportunity to be in intergenerational Christian settings (they regularly attend Sunday school and children’s church during adult worship, but do not participate in an intergenerational small group).² In general, though both groups of children gave eloquent testimony to their relationships with God, the children in the intergenerational sample were more aware of their relationship with God, that is, they spoke more often and more reciprocally of that relationship than did the children in the non-intergenerational sample. Other researchers around the country and the world are continuing the efforts to explore the impact of IGCE on both children and adults.

Biblical Support for Intergenerational Community

In Scripture, coming to know God is typically presented as a family- and community-based process. God’s directives for his people in the Old Testament clearly identify the Israelites as a relational community where the children were to grow up participating in the culture they were becoming. In the religion of Israel, children were not just included, they were drawn in, assimilated, and absorbed into the whole community with a deep sense of belonging. The directives for feasts and celebrations illustrate this point best. These commanded festivals were celebrated annually and included elaborate meals, dancing, music, singing, and sacrifices. All of Israel participated, from the youngest to the oldest.

These festivals included Passover, the Feast of Weeks, the Feast of Booths, and the Feast of Trumpets.³ The purpose of these festivals was to remind the Israelites of who they were, who God was, and what God had done for these, his people, in ages past. As children and teens danced, sang, ate, listened to the stories, and asked questions, they came to know who they were and who they were to be.

Emerging from its Jewish heritage, the early church was a multigenerational entity. All generations met together, worshiping, breaking bread, praying together, and ministering to one another in the context of the home (Acts 2:46–47; 4:32–35; 16:31–34). Besides meeting with parents and others in house churches, children were clearly present in other spiritual settings. In Acts 16:15, Lydia was baptized “with all her household,” and in Acts 16:33, the jailer was baptized “with his whole family.” Also in Acts is the story of the youth, Eutychus, who, while listening to Paul preach until midnight, fell out of a window (Acts 20:7–12). Luke also reports that children accompanied those bidding farewell to Paul as he boarded a ship at Tyre (Acts 21: 5–6).

These explicit intergenerational concepts in Scripture clarify that religious community as described in the Bible included the idea that children were actually present. Intergenerational community was apparently the norm for Jewish children and for Christian children of the first century. This intergenerational emphasis elicits the question: Have educational psychologists or pedagogical theorists explored the learning principles that might explain the importance of such an emphasis? The primary focus of this article is to examine the biblical idea of IGCE from the field of educational psychology and

specifically to explore the situative/sociocultural perspective as a cohesive, illuminating learning macrotheory for the concept of church as a relational intergenerational community where Christians grow and learn.

A Learning Macrotheory for Intergenerational Christian Experiences

Intergenerational religious education (IGRE), or intergenerational Christian experience (IGCE), has been a practice in search of a theory. At this point, those who extol the benefits of IGCE (e.g., Harkness, Stonehouse, White) ground their (extra-biblical) theory in the work of social scientists such as G. H. Mead, Margaret Mead, and Erik Erikson, developmentalists such as Jean Piaget and James Fowler, and religious educationists such as John Westerhoff, III, Donald Miller, Ellis Nelson, and James Michael Lee. Yet, no broad undergirding learning macrotheory for IGCE has been proposed, even in White's book, *Intergenerational Religious Education*. White says he offers only a "first draft for the missing systematic theoretical base" (91).

Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Learning Theory

In my dissertation, I proposed the situative/sociocultural perspective as introduced by Lev Vygotsky and developed and elaborated by contemporary educational psychologists and social scientists to explain the basic learning principles at work in an intergenerational Christian community. The situative/sociocultural perspective brings the work of the earlier-mentioned social scientists, developmentalists, and religious educationists under the umbrella of this broader learning macrotheory.

The situative/sociocultural perspective on knowing and learning focuses on the way knowledge is distributed among individuals in a social group, the tools and methods that they use, and the practices in which they participate (Greeno, Collins, & Resnick). Lev Vygotsky is the best-known theorist in this category (though Jerome Bruner shifted from the cognitive to the social cognitive—sociocultural—over his career). This theory places a stronger emphasis on the social interaction of the learning environment than do cognitivist and behaviorist theories,⁴ and promotes the idea that the social setting itself is crucial to the learning process.

Intergenerational community was apparently the norm for Jewish children and for Christian children of the first century.

Lev Vygotsky was born in Byelorussia in November 1896 to middle-class Jewish parents. He graduated with a law degree from Moscow University in 1917 and studied history and philosophy at Shanyansky's Popular University just before the Bolshevik revolution. He began teaching at Moscow University's Psychological Institute in 1924 and wrote and taught in the area of psychology, human development, and learning over the next 10 years. He died of tuberculosis in 1934 at the age of 37. During those 10 years (1924–1934), Vygotsky authored approximately 200 papers, most of which have only recently been published in English.

After Vygotsky's death, his work was suppressed during Stalin's reign. His works began to be published in the 1950s in Russia, but only in 1978 with the publication of his works in English has Vygotsky's thought begun to widely impact educational thought and practice in the West.

During Vygotsky's era, psychologists were divided on the issue of human development and learning into two basic camps—either behaviorist or cognitivist. Vygotsky initially identified more closely with the behaviorist view but was also in contact with Piaget and those from the cognitivist camp. He eventually rejected both theories. Rieber and Carton explain it best: "Vygotsky argued that [psychological processes] have their source not in biological structures or the learning of the isolated individual but in historically developed *socio-cultural experience* [italics added]" (19). Vygotsky came to believe that for persons to learn concepts, they must experience them and socially negotiate their meaning in authentic, complex learning environments.

A key concept crucial to understanding Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Actually, Vygotsky describes three zones of developmental activity:

- **Zone of Actual Development:** Where the student *actually* is developmentally
- **Zone of Potential Development:** Where the student *potentially* should be developmentally
- **Zone of Proximal Development:** The amount of assistance required for a student to move from the Zone of Actual Development to the Zone of Potential Development. (Estep, 15)

When a young person collaborates with a more competent peer or adult, the distance between the student's actual development level and the level of potential for development determines the zone of proximal development. Vygotsky says that most learning happens in this zone.

Wertsch and Rogoff have conceptualized the ZPD as:

that phase in development in which the child has only partially mastered a task but can participate in its execution with the assistance and supervision of an adult or more capable peer. Thus, the zone of proximal development is a dynamic region of sensitivity in learning the skills of culture, in which children develop through participation . . . with more experienced members of the culture. (1)

Vygotsky developed the ZPD partially in protest to the growing concept of IQ testing. Vygotsky (1978) recognizes that "when we determine a child's mental age by using tests, we are almost always dealing with the actual developmental level" (85). He points out the obvious—that teaching a child at this level would be unnecessary since the child had already mastered this level of functioning. He proposes that "what children can do with the assistance of others might be in some sense more indicative of their mental development than what they can do alone" (85).

Vygotsky illustrated these concepts with an example from current educational practice of his day. Since it had been found that mentally retarded children were not very capable of abstract thinking, the special schools had decided to teach these children utilizing only concrete, "look-and-do" methods. But after a time it was found that this approach not only did not help these children advance, it actually reinforced their handicaps. Vygotsky (1978) comments:

Precisely because retarded children, when left to themselves, will never achieve well-elaborated forms of abstract thought the school should make every effort to . . . develop in them what is intrinsically lacking in their own development. (89)

Vygotsky continues:

Similarly in normal children learning which is oriented toward developmental levels that have already been reached is ineffective from the viewpoint of a child's overall development. It does not aim for a new stage of the developmental process

but rather lags behind this process. Thus, the notion of a zone of proximal development enables us to propound a new formula, namely that the only "good learning" is that which is in advance of development. (89)

And, for Vygotsky, this type of "good learning" requires a more capable peer or adult to happen.

In other words, the concept of ZPD is the idea that when a person is ready to learn the next thing, the best way to learn it is to be with those who are just ahead on the learning journey. This concept is not a new one, though perhaps it has not been well articulated in educational terms. Mothers of several children know ZPD as the "potty-training phenomenon:" the first-born child is the most difficult to potty train—the next child learns from the first and so on.

ZPD is a key idea in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. Vygotsky would say that persons learn to be members of their community as they actively participate in that particular identified social community, learning alongside those who are further ahead in the journey. Intergenerational Christian settings are authentic, complex learning environments, made up of individuals at various stages in their Christian journey, teaching some, learning from others, as they participate in their community of believers.

Situated Learning

An article on situated cognition by Brown, Collins, and Davidson is one of the seminal articles quoted in sociocultural learning literature. Brown et al. contend that those who study the learning process often ignore the influence of the social context on what is learned. This article on situated cognition addresses directly the school context rather than the church context; however, the transfer can easily be made. Brown et al. assert that knowledge is always situated; it is in part a product of the activity, context, and culture in which it is developed and used. They call this concept "cognitive apprenticeship" (32).

Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's work builds and expands on the work of Brown et al. Lave and Wenger, both educational psychologists, looked at what they called "situated activity" (29). In situated activity, learners must be given access to the practices that they are expected to learn and be able to have genuine participation in the activities and concerns of the group. At first, learners are relatively peripheral in the activities of a community, but as they become more experienced and adept, their participation becomes more central. Their participation must be legitimate; that is, they must actually practice the

activities themselves, not just observe or receive instruction about them.

In studying situated activity, Lave and Wenger focused on apprenticeships. They examined five ethnographic studies of specific apprenticeship situations: midwives, tailors, quartermasters, meat cutters, and non-drinking alcoholics. They drew principles from these apprenticeships that apply to other situative learning settings: (a) apprentices are guided and supervised by masters; (b) masters teach by showing the apprentice how to do a task (modeling), and then helping them as they try to do it on their own (coaching and fading); (c) the apprentice derives identity from becoming a part of the community of workers; and (d) productive apprenticeship depends on opportunities for the apprentice to participate legitimately in the activities to be learned.

These situated learning activities do at least two things: (a) they forge a person who now identifies with the community of practice; and (b) they create an environment where “knowing is inherent in the growth and transformation of identities and it is located in relations among practitioners, their practice, the artifacts of that practice, and the social organization . . . of the community of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 122).

Situative learning approaches fit what those in intergenerational Christian education have been saying for years—to be a Christian one must participate fully in Christian community. If novice midwives and tailors learn best by participating fully with practicing midwives and tailors, then perhaps Christians learn best from participating fully with practicing Christians further along on the journey. IGCE provides continual opportunities for this type of learning to take place.

Situative/Sociocultural Theory and IGCE

This article has examined three aspects of the situative/sociocultural theory that offer a rationale for IGCE as an effective approach: (a) Vygotsky’s premise that persons learn best in *authentic*, complex environments; (b) Vygotsky’s assertion that the best learning happens when children participate with more experienced members of the culture (the Zone of Proximal Development); and (c) Lave and Wenger’s thesis that persons identify with their community of practice as they are allowed to participate legitimately in the activities to be learned.

These situative/sociocultural principles are clearly interrelated, and, more importantly for this article,

can be seen to transfer readily to the concept of Christians learning in intergenerational community. IGCE concepts fit what the situative/socioculturalists are describing:

1. The gathered church is the authentic, complex community being addressed here.
2. In intergenerational settings, children participate with “more experienced members of the culture”—older children, teens, young adults, and older adults.
3. As a child (or a new believer) participates in relational community doing “Christian” things with those further down the road, the child comes to identify with the Christian community.

Intergenerational Christian settings are authentic, complex learning environments, made up of individuals at various stages in their Christian journey, teaching some, learning from others, as they participate in their community of believers.

As loving church leaders diligently seek to build communities of faith that help children come to know God, many are re-evaluating the current common practice of separating the generations for worship, Bible study, and ministry. They are reconsidering the biblical example and looking for guidance in fostering a more intergenerational mindset in their churches.

Implications for Ministry & Education Practice

Most churches already offer occasional intergenerational (IG) activities such as dinners and “fellowships,” church-wide service projects, or annual musicals or cantatas in which children and adults participate together. While these are excellent means of providing IG experiences, the ultimate goal is for churches to become intergenerational in their outlook and practice. This will not happen simply by adding an IG activity occasionally. A paradigm shift will be required, and paradigm shifts must be guided by leaders who understand the issues and communicate well. Suggestions for church leaders who desire to cultivate a more intergenerational outlook could be:

1. Revisit the basic goals or purposes of Christian education/spiritual formation. This discussion generates phrases such as “growth into Christ,” “commitment to Christ,” or “Christian maturity.” The usual questions that follow such a discussion are: “How well are we meeting our goal?” and “What else can we do?” In this case, the question is: “How can an intergenerational approach foster our goal?”
2. Contrast/compare the spiritual needs of adults and children, recognizing ultimately the surprising similarities.
3. Discuss the factors that have led churches to develop age-segregated approaches to church and religious education (e.g., developmental concerns, societal norms).
4. Study the biblical examples of Jewish community life and early house churches, perhaps exploring how children learned in those settings.
5. Share the theoretical support (from this article) for learning socioculturally and intergenerationally (See theories of Vygotsky, Westerhoff, Fowler, Harkness).
6. When it is deemed feasible, begin to re-incorporate children into church life.

This last step would need to be a multi-stage undertaking, beginning at a simple, less disruptive level and moving to more complex levels later as the church begins to recognize the blessing and benefits for the children as well as others in the body.

Intergenerational activities in Christian settings can take a variety of forms. Five promising possibilities are described below.

Including Children in Worship

If children are normally separated during the primary worship service, search for ways to include the children for 15–20 minutes (or more) of praise in the Sunday morning worship on a regular basis (once a month, every fifth Sunday, every other week, or *all the time*). Major religious educationists (e.g., Fowler, Westerhoff) recommend this approach as well as IG advocates (e.g., Prest, White). Simply stated, children need to be participating with the significant adults in their life, worshipping God, praying, and listening to the Word.

Special Programs

Another common IG activity is allowing children to be present at such special programs as baptisms, “baby dedication Sunday,” and church-wide

congratulatory celebrations for graduating seniors of the church, retiring ministers, etc.

Intergenerational Events

Some churches may wish to plan one or more events a year that are envisioned, planned, created, and performed by an intergenerational group of people. This could be a Thanksgiving program, a short drama for Easter, a Christmas musical, or some other event that requires time, effort, creativity, brainstorming, and work for a group of people of all ages.

Intergenerational Bible Study

This approach might take a variety of forms, for example, an IG Sunday school class, a whole congregational study, or IG small groups.

A few churches have experimented with intergenerational Sunday school classes, typically focusing on such topics as the fruit of the Spirit or the Beatitudes. Recommendations for a successful IG Sunday school would be to (a) offer it as an option, (b) suggest an age limit (e.g., children seven years and up), (c) limit the study to six to ten weeks, and (d) recruit the most creative and experienced adult and children’s teachers to collaborate in constructing the teaching/learning materials.

At the full congregational level, the church as a whole could focus on a particular biblical concept for worship and teaching. For example, the whole church could study several names of God. Worship could focus here. Testimonies of adults and children who have experienced God as Yahweh Jireh (the Lord our provider) or El Roi (the God who sees) could be shared with everyone together. Banners that depict each name could be created and made by intergenerational groups. Sermons (and the children’s sermon or children’s church) could focus on these names. At the end of the series, cross-generational groups could share the banners or a drama illustrating the names.

Intergenerational Small Groups

A more comprehensive (even radical) approach to IG Christian experience would be forming weekly (or bi-weekly) intergenerational small groups for the purposes of ministry, fellowship, prayer, worship, and/or Bible study. This approach is a church-wide undertaking requiring support of not only the leaders but also the whole church. Because it is so radical, churches may be fearful of such an approach until they begin to see some of the potential benefits of IG

experiences. Though there is an abundance of practical material available on small group approaches in general, few offer suggestions for ways to incorporate children fully. TOUCH Outreach Ministries of Houston, Texas (www.touchusa.org) offers detailed information and support materials for intergenerational small groups.

Once churches begin to think intergenerationally, creative ways to bring the generations together will begin to emerge. One church in the Northwest constructs a large banner each year that depicts symbolically important milestones and spiritual markers of its members, for example, births, baptisms, and marriages. It also records deaths, graduations, and special honors members receive. The banners for the last 12 years hang in the foyer of the church where children (and others) can point to special markers in their lives and the lives of those in their community of believers.

Moving to a more age-inclusive approach is a large undertaking. It will entail more than “simply being in one place and doing the same thing together;” it is “a mindset . . . in which all belong and interact in faith and worship—a communion of believers” (Prest, 22).

Conclusion

Cognitive developmental theory has convinced Christian educators that children learn best with other children their age doing developmentally appropriate activities. And it is true that children may learn *some* things better in this way. The fundamental difficulty is that *spiritual* development is not essentially *cognitive* development. In other words, the way children (and adults) grow in their understanding of math or history is not fundamentally the way they (and we) grow spiritually. Other factors are at work in spiritual development, not all primarily age-specific. Therefore applying cognitive developmental principles to a primarily spiritual enterprise may not, in itself, produce mature members of the Christian community of practice, the church. This principle-to-product dichotomy may explain the fact that the learning environments for children described in Scripture are primarily intergenerational. Perhaps God knew that some things are learned best in authentic, complex communities where children and others participate regularly with more experienced members of the culture.

In addition to the biblical record and growing empirical evidence, this article has proposed a cohesive learning theory to support IGCE. The situative/sociocultural perspective on knowing and

Perhaps God knew that some things are learned best in authentic, complex communities where children and others participate regularly with more experienced members of the culture.

learning explains in a new way the strengths of such an approach.

No better place exists for the most number of people to learn Christian ways from “more experienced members of the culture” than in intergenerational Christian communities. People of all ages and maturity levels are present actively carrying on the very essentials of Christianity. In IG communities, children learn from each other, younger children, older children, teens, and adults. And adults learn from teens and children. All benefit from each other with a sense of mutuality; in essence, they grow each other up into Christ. As Lave and Wenger say, “The *person* has been correspondingly transformed into a practitioner, a newcomer becoming an old-timer, whose changing knowledge, skills, and discourse are part of a developing identity—in short, a member of a community of practice” (122).

End Notes

¹ Harkness, Prest, and Stone-house have made strong cases for the theological, educational, developmental, and spiritual promise of intergenerational religious experience. Harkness marshals evidence from theology, education, and the social sciences that he believes demonstrates that intergenerational strategies can contribute to “the achievement of normative educational goals of faith communities, which . . . integrate the gaining of knowledge, holistic growth to maturity of individual believers, and the development of the corporate Christian community for its mission” (53). More specifically Harkness believes that the evidence he has gathered attests “to the significance of IG [intergenerational] interaction for spiritual formation of both individuals and faith communities” (52). Prest offers a similar opinion: “The optimal spiritual impact upon children will take place in a warm, belonging, caring and concerned interaction with the gathered people of God” (20).

² I interviewed 40 nine-, ten-, and eleven-year old children from six churches in Tennessee and California in 2001–2002. All of the children attended church regularly with their parents. I interviewed children from a cross-section of evangelical churches—two Vineyard churches (one large, one small), one large Baptist church, a large Bible church, a medium-size renewal Presbyterian church, and a large progressive Church of Christ. The purpose of the

dissertation was to explore the connection between intergenerational Christian experiences and spiritual development in children.

³ Passover (Ex. 12; 23:15; 34:18, 25; Lev. 23:5–8; Num. 9:1–14; 28:16–25; Deut. 16:1–8; Ezek. 45:21–24), the Feast of Weeks (Ex. 23:16; 34:22; Lev. 23:15–21; Num. 28:26–31; Deut. 16:9–10), the Feast of Booths (Ex. 23:16; 34:22; Lev. 23:33–36; Num. 28: 12–39; Deut. 16:13–18), and the Feast of Trumpets (Lev. 23:23–25; Num. 29: 1–6).

⁴ Two learning theories dominated the 20th century:
Behaviorist/Empiricist: In the behaviorist/ empiricist view, knowing is an organized collection of associations and skills. Behavioral learning theories have tended to view persons as neutral human animals whose behavior can be controlled through training and manipulation in the form of reinforcement (and lack thereof). Learning can be defined as a change in behavior or performance resulting from experience and practice. (Greeno, Collins, & Resnick, 1996)
Cognitive/Rationalist: Around mid-century, some behavioral learning theorists began to shift the definition away from behavior toward a cognitive approach that focuses on what happens inside the mind rather than merely focusing on the outward changes in behavior. Learning came to be defined more as a restructuring of knowledge and a change in understanding. In general, the cognitive/ rationalist perspective is concerned with how persons organize knowledge about their world. It focuses on understanding the individual mind—its abilities or achievements in perceptions, reasoning, and problem solving. (Greeno, Collins, & Resnick)

Works Cited

- Allen, H. A qualitative study exploring the similarities and differences of the spirituality of children in intergenerational and nonintergenerational Christian contexts (Doctoral dissertation, Talbot School of Theology, Biola University, 2002). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 65–04A.
- Brown, J. S., Collins, A., & Davidson, J. Situated cognition and the culture of learning. *Educational Researcher*, 18, 32–42, 1989.
- Bruner, J. S., & Haste, H. (Eds.). *Making sense: The child's construction of the world*. New York: Methuen, 1987.
- Chesto, K. O. FIRE (Family-centered intergenerational religious education): An alternative model of religious education (D. Min. dissertation, Hartford Seminary, 1987). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 48–08A.
- Erikson, E. H. *Childhood and society* (2nd ed.). New York: Norton, 1963.
- Estep, J. R., Jr. *Spiritual formation as social: Toward a Vygotskian developmental perspective*. Paper presented at North American Professors of Christian Education Annual Conference, San Diego, CA, 1999.
- Fowler, J. W. *Weaving the new creation: Stages of faith and the public church*. New York: HarperCollins, 1991.
- Gambone, J. *All are welcome: A primer for intentional intergenerational ministry and dialogue*. Crystal Bay, MN: Elder Eye Press, 1998.
- Greeno, J. G., Collins, A. M., & Resnick, L. B. Cognition and learning. In D. C. Berliner & R. C. Calfee (Eds.), *Handbook of educational psychology* (pp. 15–46). New York: Macmillan, 1996.
- Harkness, A. G. Intergenerational and homogeneous-age education: Mutually exclusive strategies for faith communities? *Religious Education*, 95, 51–63, 2000.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Marr, P.R. Development of an inter-generational curriculum for Christian education ministry in the church. (Doctoral dissertation, Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1990). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 51–04A.
- Moran, G. Where now, what next. In P. O'Hare (Ed.), *Foundations of religious education* (pp. 93–110). New York: Paulist Press, 1978.
- Nelson, C. E. *Where faith begins*. Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1967.
- Prest, E. From one generation to another. Capetown, South Africa: Training for Leadership, 1993.
- Rieber, R. W., & Carton, A. S. (Eds.). (1987). *The collected works of L. S. Vygotsky*. New York: Plenum Press, 1987.
- Stonehouse, C. *Joining children on the spiritual journey: Nurturing a life of faith*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998.
- Vygotsky, L. S. *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological process* (M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Souberman, Eds.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978. (Note: Vygotsky's original works were written in the 1920s and 1930s, published variously in 1930, 1935, 1956, 1960, and 1966)
- Vygotsky, L. S. *Educational psychology* (R. Silverman, Trans.). Boca Raton, FL: St. Lucie Press, 1997. (Original work published in 1926) Wertsch, J., & Rogoff, B. (1984). Editors' notes. In B. Rogoff & J. Wertsch (Eds.), *Children's learning in the "zone of proximal development": New directions for child development* (pp. 1–6). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Westerhoff, J. H., III. *Will our children have faith?* New York: Seabury Press, 1976.
- White, J. *Intergenerational religious education*. Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, 1988.