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The History, Nature and Future of Faith-Informed Research in English Language Teaching¹

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Abstract

Although scholarship on Christian faith and education is well established (see Bleistein, Wong, & Smith, 2013), research of Christian faith and English language teaching (ELT) is just starting to emerge. As the recent volume edited by Wong, Kristjánsson, and Dörnyei (2013) demonstrated, what started as a debate on the dilemmas of imperialism in Christian missions (Wong & Canagarajah, 2009a), “has enlarged to include empirical studies that demonstrate the importance of faith to the motivation of language learners, the impact of faith on ELT pedagogical approaches, and the significance of faith for teachers’ professional identity formations” (Bleistein, Wong, & Smith 2013, p. 236). This article traces some of the roots of scholarship on Christian faith and ELT, reflects on the nature of faith-informed research, discusses how this area of inquiry has been developed, and identifies areas ripe for further research in faith and ELT. It concludes by noting the benefits and obstacles encountered in research on faith and ELT and offers suggestions regarding its future.

Key words: ELT, CELT, CELEA, Christianity, faith, research

Tapping into the Roots of Scholarship on Christianity and Language Learning

Scholarship on the interrelationship of language and Christian faith is both deep and wide, going back in time and reaching across many disciplines. In the account of creation in Genesis 1, God *spoke* the world into existence. Several accounts in scripture reveal aspects of the interconnection of God and language from the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11), Pentecost (Acts 2), to the declaration that every nation, tribe, people and language will stand before the throne (Revelation 7). Scholars throughout history have explored the connections of Christian faith and education and some have written specifically about faith and foreign language teaching such as Comenius, a 17th century Bishop (see Murphy, 1995; Howatt, 2004). It can be said of Comenius that one need not update his teaching, only translate it, which attests to the relevance of his seminal work that considered the spiritual nature of students and the spiritual aspects of the task of foreign language learning and teaching. Other scholars such as Lull and Bacon also made a

¹ This article is based in part on the plenary address “Creating and Sustaining Research on Christian Faith and ELT” presented at the Christians in English Language Teaching (CELT 2013) Conference, Dallas Baptist University, Texas, U.S.A., March 20, 2013.

connection of Christian faith to language pedagogy (see Smith, 1996, 2000). Consider also the thousands of missionaries and Bible translators, including those in SIL International², who over the past few centuries have devoted their lives to Bible translation. Their work and experiences have much to say about the connections of languages and faith (e.g., Makoni & Makoni, 2009).

Research on language teaching and faith needs to be informed by and draw upon these deep roots to enhance our understanding of the history of the intersections of faith and ELT. But in addition to these deep roots that go back in time, there are also “wide roots” that span several disciplines, potentially enriching our research on faith and ELT. Scholarship within Christian higher education on the connections of faith and learning is extensive. Since 1970, more than 9,000 articles related to faith and learning have been published in Christian peer-reviewed journals (Bleistein, Wong, & Smith, 2013, p. 235). It is important to be aware of the relevant conversations and findings on faith and learning in related disciplines that extend outside the fields of applied linguistics and TESOL³. Research and scholarship on faith and language teaching needs to acknowledge and draw from both classic work related to our discipline and more recent scholarship outside our discipline in order to achieve more informed and nuanced understandings.

Although the scholarship on faith and learning is well established, discussions in the literature of the interconnections of Christian faith and the field of English language teaching did not begin to emerge until the 1990's. In response to Stevick's (1990) book, *Humanism in Language Teaching*, a discussion called “Keeping the Faith” between Stevick (1997) and Edge (1996a, 1996b) appeared in *TESOL Matters*. Other publications problematizing the connections of ELT and missions soon followed, most notably Phillipson's (1992) often cited book *Linguistic Imperialism*. In the first decade of the 21st century several publications taking a positive view of the connections of faith and ELT appeared including the seminal books by Smith and Carvill (2000) and Snow (2001). A few articles also appeared supporting the role of faith such as McCarthy (2000), Tennant (2002), Scovel (2004), and Purgason (2004). Publications with a

² SIL International is a global Christian non-profit organization that studies lesser-known languages.

³ Space does not allow for a description of the salient findings in related disciplines here, but see Bleistein, Wong, and Smith (2013) for lists of references of scholarship that fall under 14 related disciplines or subcategories of: 1. Christian thought and research, 2. education (post-secondary), 3. education (primary and secondary), 4. intercultural communication, 5. identity and experience, 6. language, 7. learning and learners, 8. materials and resources, 9. missions, evangelism and global Christianity, 10. pedagogy, 11. religion, 12. spirituality, 13. teacher education, 14. values, ethics, and social justice.

more critical view of faith and teaching surfaced during this decade as well, highlighting the connections that Christian missions have with imperialism, colonialism, and neo-liberal agendas. These publications include Vandrick (2002), Yeoman (2002), Pennycook and Coutand-Marin (2003), Edge (2003), and Johnston (2003) among others⁴.

Two recent and relevant publications on faith and ELT in major academic journals include Baurain (2007) and Varghese and Johnston (2007). Smith's ongoing work in this area includes a notable (2008) article focusing on the learner as a spiritual being, as well as dozens of other articles, many appearing in the journal launched in 2000, the *Journal of Christianity and Foreign Languages*, as well as those published in mainstream academic journals. A collection of 30 chapters which brought together 15 evangelicals, and 15 non-evangelicals to discuss the tensions and dilemmas among Christian and critical language educators can be found in a Routledge volume (Wong & Canagarajah, 2009a). This anthology is written in a chapter and response format providing a series of articles followed by a set of responses, gathering many of the authors mentioned above (Julian Edge, Bill Johnston, Alastair Pennycook, Robert Phillipson, Stephanie Vandrick, Manka Varghese, Don Snow, David Smith, Earl Stevick) and several other luminaries in the field (including Zoltan Dörnyei, Dana Ferris, Brian Morgan, Ryuko Kubota, Douglas Brown, and Andy Curtis) in an attempt to dialogue on these issues. Stevick (2009) notes in the afterword that balancing honest confidence and appropriate diffidence is essential in this discussion, which readers of the volume may note was not always easy for the contributors to do. Other relevant books published in the last five years addressing faith and teaching include Romanowski and McCarthy (2009), Smith (2009a), Dormer (2011), Smith and Smith (2011), and Pasquale and Bierma (2011). These works mainly discuss how Christian faith relates to pedagogy and practice providing a much-needed discussion of practical applications of faith and teaching.

Towards a Definition of Faith-Informed Research

But what is also needed in addition to (and not instead of) this scholarship on faith⁵ and practice, are empirically based studies that complement these discussions and provide a foundation and theoretical framework that can inform our thinking and practice. Establishing an

⁴ For a more detailed description of this history, see Wong, Dörnyei, and Kristjánsson (2013).

⁵ "Faith" in this paper refers to Christianity unless noted otherwise. However, readers should also consider how other faiths, such as Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, etc., might affect one's scholarship and research.

empirical base will not replace non-empirical scholarship, nor will it likely persuade most non-believers of the importance and relevance that faith has on language teaching. The value of faith-informed empirical research is in its potential to build theory, inform practice, explore God's created world, and respond to God's calling on one's life. The following discussion of faith-informed research will center around eight questions that I will attempt to answer briefly.

1. Are religion and research incompatible?

Scores of Christian scholars have written about the tensions inherent in faith-informed scholarship and the difficulties of the intentional blending of one's faith and one's discipline. As far back as the second century when the North African theologian Tertullian asked "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" the relationship of human learning and the Christian faith has been problematized. Canagarajah (2013) notes that for some people, "faith and research perhaps do not go together" (p. xxi). But he suggests that we reexamine the assumptions of "value free" research. Canagarajah contends that the dichotomy of faith as subjective, committed, and absolute, while research is viewed as objective, skeptical and context-sensitive, does not mean that faith and research are in opposition. Values-based researchers such as Christians, much like post-positivist researchers, base the reliability of their research upon other principles than "objectivity," such as making research practices and assumptions transparent; triangulating findings through multiple data sources; disciplined data collection and recording; rigorous, repeated, and close analysis of data; as well as interpretation from diverse angles. Thus faith-informed researchers and post-positivist researchers can find commonality, not incompatibility, in the way they approach the research process.

2. In what ways might faith inform research?

Marsden (1997) notes that religious faith can have a bearing on scholarship in four ways: motivation to do one's work well, the applications for one's scholarship, questions one asks and topics one studies, and the wider implication of one's scholarship and its assumptions on larger issues and perspectives. Marsden suggests that Christians must come ready to play by the rules of the academic game, but not hesitate to be vocal about the influence of their faith on their work. He adds that although Scripture will inform one's perspectives, "the trump card" of special revelation cannot be played on the table of the academy, as all players must agree to the sources

of authority. These comments highlight that faith informs both why and what one researches, as well as how one engages in it and who it benefits.

3. In what ways might research inform faith?

Noll (2011) contends that scholarly pursuits are part of the command to love God with our minds and states “for believers to be studying created things is to be studying the words of Christ” (p. 25). To fully know Christ, we must study his creation, thus Noll (1994, 2011) pleads for greater intellectual involvement of evangelicals and implies that there is a Christian way of knowing and thinking. Noll (2011) argues that the careful study of creation and of our disciplines will reflect the creator. He cites Colossians 1:15-16, “Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities: all things were created by him and for him.” To apply this to linguistics, we can see in its complexity, diversity, order, creative essence, immensity and potential reflections of the nature of Christ. Noll believes that the motive of all learning is to know Christ, and that teaching about Christ provides powerful motivations for serious scholarship. “In sum,” Noll (2011) concludes, “to confess Christ is to make an extraordinarily strong statement about the value of studying the things Christ has made” (p. 26). This means that not only does faith inform one’s research, but also one’s research can inform one’s faith.

4. Why avoid the term Christian research?

Although there may not be such a thing as “Roman Catholic chemistry or Aryan biology” (Marsden, 1997, p. 60), it cannot be denied that our faith beliefs and worldview impact what we research, the way we research, and whom our research benefits. However it must be stated clearly, that there is surely not one single way that faith informs research. The term “faith-informed” is used instead of “Christian” intentionally, because as Marsden (1997) notes it might be best to refer to one’s scholarship with more modesty (p. 67) while identifying oneself as a Christian, as there is not just one Christian way to engage in scholarship or research. Faith-informed research will take on myriads of forms as each person seeks to apply their own understanding of their faith and what they believe God has called them to do, and as Marsden (1997) notes, it will “defy classification and easy formulae” (p. 70).

5. *Why distinguish faith-informed research from faith-informed scholarship?*

The literature on faith and learning does not often make a distinction between faith-informed *scholarship* and faith-informed *empirical research*, but for the purposes of this discussion, such a distinction would be helpful. Scholarship that explores and articulates the theoretical underpinnings of Christian faith and ELT practice is needed, to be sure. And this type of scholarship may involve integrating and applying what has been found in the thousands of articles and books on faith and learning published in recent decades. But what is also needed is a body of empirical studies on faith and language teaching that would help to more firmly establish Christian faith and ELT as a legitimate area of inquiry and better inform our practice. Thus seeking to define and identify faith-informed research as different from scholarship might be helpful.

6. *What would disqualify research from being faith-informed?*

Three things would disqualify research from being considered faith-informed: unethical practices (such as putting participants at risk), dishonest procedures (such as falsifying data), and substandard research (such as inaccurate or sloppy procedures in data collection or analysis). Ethical research is that which follows the guidelines of international review boards in terms how one treats participants (ensuring that their risk is minimized, they are protected, and their identity is concealed). Related to ethical procedures is honesty in providing an accurate account of the data, not concealing or falsifying data to promote one's interests. Thus unethical procedures or dishonest practices would disqualify research from being considered faith-informed because they violate the Christian values of dignity for human life and honesty in interactions (which are not unique to the Christian faith, but are core values found in scripture). Some may argue that our research will be imperfect as we are imperfect, but Christians should strive to conduct excellent research as far as can be managed in our limited understanding as we seek to be a witness for Christ and do all things to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31; Col. 3:17, 23).

7. *What would qualify research as faith-informed?*

Research is systematic inquiry which aims to enhance the understanding of that which is being studied and includes the identification of a question, the collection and analysis of data, and the dissemination of the findings. Faith-informed research is distinctive in the following ways: in the identification of a question (faith informs the "what," the topic or subject under

inquiry even if it is not about faith), the collection and analysis of data (faith affects the “how,” the way it is studied including ethical precautions, the lenses that are used in analysis, and the integrity of data collection, recording, and reporting), the dissemination of the findings (faith informs the “who,” in terms of who the study benefits and who has access), and the wider implications and purposes of the research (faith informs the “so what,” the practical implications the research may have). I contend that faith-informed research from a Christian perspective is research in which the majority of the decisions are made with the intentional application of one’s understanding of Biblical values and God’s calling on one’s life. While the researcher may not have been mindful or intentional in aligning every research decision with their faith beliefs, the extent that they make such a connection at each phase of the research process, or can provide justification upon further reflection, is a key indicator that it is faith-informed.

8. Can atheists conduct Christian faith-informed research?

Consider research that is about faith but is conducted by those who do not believe in the existence of God. What about research that leads to the greater good, such as more equitable distribution of educational resources to a group of previously underserved students? And what if this research is conducted ethically and to the highest standard of excellence? I contend it would not be considered faith-informed if the researchers did not have faith beliefs to apply. All research is informed by a particular worldview, and there is no neutral, value-free approach, but in order for research to be informed from a Christian perspective, the researcher would need to hold and seek to live out Christian values. Research by an atheist is informed by an atheist worldview, and not by a religious faith, so it would not qualify as being informed from a Christian faith.

The objective of this discussion is *not* to apply a reductionist approach to label others’ research as faith-informed or not, but rather to become more aware of the complexity of the process of allowing faith to inform research. Instead of searching for a litmus test to identify faith-informed research, we might instead be more aware of the many ways that the process and products of our work glorify God or deny his presence and purpose in our lives. Becoming more mindful of the many decisions we make that either confirm our faith beliefs and values or deny them is crucial to this process. To put it succinctly, *faith-informed research involves awareness, understanding, and intent to apply what one understands to be God’s word and will to one’s*

work. The thousands of decisions made during the process of conceiving of and conducting research and writing it up for publication might fall on a wide continuum from faith-informed on one side to unexamined in the middle, to outright denial of one's understanding of biblical values on the other side. Thus identifying research as faith-informed is a complex task but begins with the question: *To what extent does what I am doing, the way I am doing it, why I'm doing it, and who it benefits align with my understanding of what God has revealed in scripture and creation and what I believe he has called me to do?*

Sustaining Research from the Margins and the Center

With the exception of the 11 data-driven research studies found in Wong, Kristjánsson, and Dörnyei (2013) and a few other notable exceptions including Varghese and Johnston (2007), Han (2009), and Lee (2012), most of the scholarship on Christian faith and ELT are monographs that do not report on empirical-based research studies. A body of scholarship that includes empirical studies on Christian faith and ELT may help to establish legitimacy of this area of inquiry within our field. While there are book reviews, opinion pieces, and other non-empirical articles in publications such as the former *CETC Newsletter* produced by the Christian Educators in TESOL Caucus (CETC)⁶ within the professional organization of TESOL, and more recently in the *CELEA News* newsletters that are produced outside of the TESOL professional organization, what is needed to sustain *research* on faith and ELT are more data-based studies published in academic journals. Again, this is in addition to, not instead of non-empirical scholarship.

Teachers and scholars wishing to publish faith-informed research in academic journals have the following options: They can publish in the hundreds of secular journals related to education and ELT or publish in journals related to Christianity and education such as the following:

⁶ There are four distinct entities. CETC existed as a formal caucus within the TESOL organization for 11 years, from 1997-2008, and had elected leadership, bylaws, newsletters, a booth, and session slots at the annual convention. In 2008 when all seven caucuses were dissolved by the TESOL board, the non-profit Christian English Language Educators Association (CELEA, see <http://www.celea.net/>) formed, which maintains a website and produces an electronic newsletter but currently has no formal relationship with the TESOL organization. In 2008, TESOL allowed a forum to meet at the convention in order to transition out of a caucus (and appease caucus members). However the Christian English Language Educators Forum (CELEF) is just a shadow of the former caucus, stripped of its formal status, sessions, booth, funding, and administrative support. TESOL has provided CELEF with one slot on the program until 2014, but that may be phased out. CELEA leadership organizes the CELEF. Christians in English Language Teaching (CELT) is a grassroots group of educators whose main task is to promote and organize conferences, which it has done since 2004. Some people were/are active in all four entities, while others are active in just one or more. CELEA, CELEF, and CELT are currently active and supportive of each other in their unique roles.

- *Christian Educators Journal*
- *Christian Higher Education*
- *Christian Scholar's Review*
- *International Journal of Christianity and English Language Teaching*
- *Journal of Christian Education*
- *Journal of Christianity and Foreign Languages*
- *Journal of Education and Christian Belief*
- *Journal of Research on Christian Education*
- *Religion and Education*

Until recently, the only Christian journal related to the field of language education was the *Journal of Christianity and Foreign Languages*. However, with the launch of this inaugural issue, the *International Journal of Christianity and English Language Teaching* provides an important venue to promote scholarship and research that specifically targets ELT and the Christian faith. Both of these options, publishing in secular *and* Christian journals, are important in order to sustain research in faith and ELT. Publication within the more widely circulated and highly esteemed academic journals is crucial in establishing a presence and gaining legitimacy, while publication within Christian journals provides more opportunities to speak to those within the Christian community and may increase one's likelihood of having an article accepted. Quite frankly, research on faith issues is sometimes shunned by the academic community and is viewed as irrelevant and/or inappropriate to some journal editors and reviewers. Providing a venue that is set aside for faith-informed research provides, as Canagarajah (2007, 2009) says, "a safe haven," while continuing to publish in the more competitive journals on the role of faith and ELT prevents Christians from appearing to hide, as Johnston (2009) claims evangelicals in ELT have been doing by publishing only within Christian publications and circles.

Although publications are essential to promote research, conferences are also valuable. The creation of and decade-long support for conferences on ELT and Christianity is due in large part to one individual, Kitty Purgason, who has mobilized others to host twelve successful Christians in English Language Teaching (CELT) conferences. What started as a meeting in a church in Long Beach in 2004 is now an annual and sometimes international event⁷. The 9th

⁷ The following is a list of the past CELT conferences (and plenary speakers): 1) 2004 Long Beach, CA: 1st CELT conference (Tom Scovel), 2) 2006 Chiang Mai, Thailand: 1st international & 2nd CELT conference (Don Snow, Marilyn Lewis, and Alan Seaman), 3) 2006 San Francisco, 3rd CELT conference (no plenary speaker), 4) 2007 Seattle, WA: 4th CELT conference (Suresh Canagarajah & David Smith), 5) 2008 New York, NY: 5th CELT Conference (Zoltan Dörnyei), 6) 2009 Denver, CO: 6th CELT Conference (no plenary speaker), 7) 2010 Boston, MA: 7th CELT Conference (Dana Ferris), 8) 2012 Philadelphia, PA: 8th CELT Conference (Michael Pasquale), 9)

North American (11th overall) CELT Conference will be held in Portland, Oregon on March 26, 2014, followed by the 3rd international (and 12th overall) CELT Conference in Taipei, Taiwan, May 23-25, 2014 (see <http://www.celtconference.org/>). Other relevant conferences include NACFLA (the North American Christian Foreign Language Association), which meets annually in the U.S. Just as it is important to publish in both Christian and secular journals, it is important to present at both faith-based and secular conferences. Although faith-based proposals can be denied because some reviewers feel religion is an inappropriate topic in education, it is possible for faith-based proposals to be accepted at the larger secular international conventions⁸.

This dual strategy, to work from both the center and the margins, seems to be working. While faith based research and approaches are not fully embraced by all professional colleagues, conferences, and publications, a space is provided when research is framed in ways deemed appropriate by the academy. As stated in the introduction to Wong, Kristjánsson, and Dörnyei (2013),

. . . the unspoken agreement to not allow one's religious faith to "intrude" on one's professional practice is still present within TESOL, as it is in other fields, but research on identity has provided some space to explore how faith and foreign language teaching and learning impact each other in powerful ways. (p. 2)

Finding these areas of entry and working within the rules of academy are key strategies.

Areas Ripe for Research

The following list of research topics⁹, listed below with related scholarship/research, provides areas of interest or need in the exploration of Christian faith (CF) and ELT.

1. The interrelationship of CF and language (Robison, 2011; Snow, 2009)
2. The interrelationship of CF and critical pedagogy (Canagarajah, 2009, 2013)
3. The interrelationship of CF and social justice (Kristjánsson, 2007; Smith & Osborn, 2007)
4. The interrelationship of CF and pedagogy (Purgason, 2009; Smith, 2009b; Baurain, 2011)
5. The interrelationship of CF and L2 motivation (Chan, 2013; Ding, 2013)
6. The role of sacred texts in the motivation of L2 learning (Lepp-Kaethler & Dörnyei, 2012)

2012 Hong Kong: 2nd international & 9th CELT Conference (Suresh Canagarajah, Zoltan Dörnyei, & Agnes Lam), and 10) 2013 Dallas, TX: 10th CELT Conference (Mary Wong).

⁸ As an example, from 2002-2010 I had eight faith-based proposals accepted at the international TESOL convention, and six of these were *not* within the Christian forum (CELEF) or Caucus (CETC) sessions that were reserved for papers related to Christianity and ELT. Thus even with the relatively high rejection rate of proposals at TESOL (which has been up to 75%), it is possible for faith-based proposals and even whole panels on faith based issues to be accepted. (I have had several rejections of faith-based proposals, as well, but persistence can pay off.)

⁹ This list is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather just a starting point.

7. CF and teachers' professional identity (Wong, 2009, 2013; Chan, 2013; Kristjánsson, 2013)
8. CF and teacher beliefs and values (Pasquale, 2013; Hall, 2010; Li, 2012; Varghese & Johnston, 2007)
9. Church-run ESL programs (Han, 2009; Baurain, 2013)
10. Spiritual development and intercultural outcomes (Wu & Wong, 2013; Smith, 2009a)
11. NNEST issues within missions (Wong & Stratton, 2011; Wang-McGrath, 2013)
12. Christian missions and imperialism (Snow, 2013; Johnston & Varghese, 2006; Edge, 2003)
13. Students' spirituality in the classroom (Smith, 2008)
14. Faith-informed ELT materials
15. Faith-informed classroom interactions (Purgason, 2009; Lessard-Clouston, 2013).
16. The impact of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and other religions on language teaching and learning (Wong & Mahboob, forthcoming)
17. Archival research on missionary experiences in teaching as mission (Wong, 2012)
18. The marginalization of non-Christian L2 students on a Christian college campus (Lee, 2012)
19. Survey and evaluation of training for Christian English teaching volunteers
20. Theorizing CF & ELT (Dörnyei, Wong, & Kristjánsson, 2013; Scovel, 2007; Smith, 2013; Wong & Canagarajah, 2009b)

The scholars who wrote response chapters in the Wong, Kristjánsson, and Dörnyei (2013) volume offered suggestions for research on Christian faith and ELT. Kubanyiova (2013) suggested researchers construct rich portraits of Christian teachers and generate thick description of practice. She also suggested that researchers enhance methodological rigor and include examinations of power and bias. Smith (2013) suggested researchers allow the exploration of the relationship of CF and ELT to be more complex and expanded and provide a richer picture of practice. He also suggested the application of coordinated attention to beliefs, practices, institutional dynamics, different contexts, and divergent interpretations. Ushioda (2013) recommended researchers use qualitative and exploratory research approaches, as they have much promise for this type of inquiry but also acknowledge the researchers' voice in the co-constructed context and co-text of the interview data in analysis.

Nurturing Research and Reaping the Harvest

Perhaps most Christian English language teachers may be thinking that this sounds all well and good, but they are just *too busy* to engage in research. Borg (2013a) compiled findings from 1,700 international surveys that he conducted over six years looking at the ways that teachers engage with research. He investigated how teachers view research, to what extent they read it (engaging *with* research), and whether or not they do it (engaging *in* research). Borg explored this area because in spite of the great potential that research has to inform practice, he

suspected that in reality it went underutilized. He wanted to know the nature of teachers' engagement with research and the factors that influence it. Borg found that there was only a moderate level of teachers engaging with research and there were many barriers to overcome. Teachers said that lack of time, limited access, and the lack of skills were barriers that prevented them from engaging more with research. There was also the underlying belief that research did not give teachers practical advice and in some cases teachers were just not interested in research.

Borg (2013b) contends that teachers' engagement with research could be improved if teachers had 1) the technical skills needed to read, interpret, and apply the research; 2) enhanced access to research; 3) the attitudes to see the potential of research to offer possibilities (not solutions), as enabling (not deskilling), and as facilitative (not determinative); 4) training that highlighted the pedagogical relevance of research through a cycle of reading, reflection, applying, reflecting, reading, etc.; and 5) collaborative communities such as reading groups, external partners, and virtual discussions. Perhaps this offers direction in attempting to create and sustain research on Christianity and ELT. A survey of the barriers Christian teachers face as they try to engage with and in research may be a starting point. Are the barriers due to lack of access, training, or skills? Or are the barriers more attitudinal, such as a lack of interest or the belief that engaging with and in research on faith and ELT would not make a difference to their practice? Once barriers are identified, it is easier to overcome them.

What are some other strategies to encourage Christian language teachers to engage with and in research? Some suggestions include encouraging Christian language teachers to: locate and read research on Christian faith and ELT in journals and books; contribute to *CELEA News* on an aspect of faith and teaching; conduct research on a faith-based topic; attend and present at both faith-based and secular conferences; publish findings in both Christian and secular journals; volunteer to chair a CELT conference or work on conference committees; get more training to conduct research if needed; start a teacher research group to read, reflect, and apply research findings; engage in collaborative research; work with others who have the skills, access, or time needed for the project.

Considering and envisioning (Lepp-Kaethler & Dörnyei, 2013; Chan, 2013) the end result may motivate us to engage more fully in this work. The fruits of our labor in creating and sustaining a culture of research on Christianity and ELT could include: a deeper understanding of how faith informs our practice of language teaching and learning which may help us better meet

the needs of our students; a greater awareness of the tensions and complexities of the relationship of faith and ELT which may lead to an increased openness to other people's perspectives; the ability to make pedagogical decisions based on empirical research instead of hunches or assumptions; the opportunity to explore the mysteries of Christ in the exploration of our ability to create, learn, and teach languages; learning from and about other faiths and their impact on teaching and learning; fellowship in joining a community of researchers and educators with a common bond in Christ.

Conclusion

To conclude, publications in the last decade and most notably in the past five years have established a small but growing body of scholarship and research on the interconnections of Christianity and ELT, giving birth to a new area of inquiry waiting to be further explored. This article raised and offered initial responses to several questions about the nature of faith-informed research. It provided an overview of how Christians have been engaging in scholarship within TESOL and suggestions for ways faith-informed research within ELT could be sustained. Multiple actors including English language teachers, graduate students, teacher educators, administrators and program managers all have a role to play in encouraging faith-informed research and scholarship and in answering the question: *To what extent does what I am doing, the way I am doing it, why I'm doing it, and who it benefits align with my understanding of what God has revealed in scripture and creation and what I believe he has called me to do?*

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