

# Religious Faith and Teacher Knowledge in English Language Teaching



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By

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*For Anna*



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# INTRODUCTION

Spiritual and religious beliefs are a foundational and enduring aspect of human thought and culture, and thus a foundational and enduring aspect of teaching and learning. Whether or not a person adheres to an organized religion, such beliefs are often at the core of who we are, what we do, how we perceive ourselves and others, and how we envision and pursue purpose, relationships, moral goodness, and overall well-being. The purpose of this book is to explore this significant dimension of life and teaching by means of qualitative research situated in the field of TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), also called English Language Teaching (ELT).

Perhaps surprisingly, academic research has begun only recently on the interrelationships and interactions between personal religious beliefs and professional teacher knowledge in TESOL (Wong, 2014). The current trend is positive, as seen most clearly in the 2014 launch of a new academic journal devoted to these issues, the *International Journal of Christianity and English Language Teaching* (<http://cook.biola.edu/publications/ijcelt/>). Nonetheless, there remains at present a significant research gap. The present study steps into this gap, gathers qualitative data, reports findings, identifies key issues (particularly the concept of Christian witness), and suggests a way forward for future research—all standard moves in academic discourse—but in the end this project does not attempt to justify its existence mainly by claiming forward progress in social science knowledge. Rather, the issues raised, analysed, interpreted, and discussed here are seen as intrinsically important and valuable in and of themselves, throughout the world of education and beyond.

The specific central research question for this study is: *How do overseas Christian ESOL teachers describe putting their religious beliefs into practice in their profession?* The purpose of asking this question is to explore the influences of teachers' religious beliefs on their overall teaching lives, including teaching philosophies, pedagogical commitments, curricular choices, and cultivation of student relationships, among other areas. Specifically, the focus is on mostly evangelical Christian teachers of ESOL working in secular or pluralistic higher education contexts, with this study's participants further identified as teaching overseas in Southeast Asia.

This project approaches this question from a teacher knowledge perspective. Teacher knowledge is defined within language education as the “complex, practically-oriented, personalised, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs” on which teachers draw (S. Borg, 2003, p. 81). Broadly, it is how teachers know what they know and why they do what they do. Though this concept is nominally open to a wide variety of interrelationships between beliefs and practices, personal religious beliefs have been largely ignored in teacher knowledge theory and research. This study’s participants, however, perceive, explain, and interpret a variety of such connections within their lived teaching experience.

## **Overview of the Book**

### **Chapter One**

The first chapter, “Setting the Stage: Education, Language, and Religious Faith,” reviews relevant academic background and research literature. This literature review begins from the main theoretical orientation adopted in this study, that of teacher knowledge and beliefs, especially as conceptualized and constructed within TESOL and language education. Teacher knowledge is defined throughout this study as the “complex, practically-oriented, personalised, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs” on which teachers draw (S. Borg, 2003, p. 81). The idea is that teacher knowledge lies at the heart of how teachers know what they know and why they do what they do. Teacher knowledge research seeks to explore the beliefs teachers hold about what works pedagogically—that is, how they know what they know about what constitutes successful teaching, learning, and overall professionalism—as well as how they come by such beliefs, how these beliefs develop over time, and how the beliefs might be changed.

This theoretical section on teacher knowledge and beliefs is followed by a brief, discipline-specific review of the available literature on novice teachers and TESOL certificate students. As this project’s participants all earned TESOL certificates and were for the most part newer teachers, this background helps to contextualize further the qualitative data presented in the findings, leading to more nuanced understandings of this book’s key themes and issues.

Since personal religious beliefs have yet to be explored as a dimension of teacher knowledge, this chapter next proposes to ring the study with five kindred topics or domains, working on the premise that reviewing

literature on these topics will help to provide frameworks and categories for analysing and interpreting this study's data (Figure 1-1). This approach is also intended to support an argument for expanding current notions of teacher knowledge in TESOL and language education to include personal religious beliefs (Baurain, 2012). The treatments of these five related topics do not aspire to be complete reviews of these fields, but rather selectively to identify and discuss aspects of them that might prove useful within the present study.

The first area is teacher morality and values, here broadly conceived as ideas and judgments concerning right, wrong, and intrinsic worth or value. Though TESOL as a discipline weighs in rather weakly in this area (the key exception is Johnston, 2003), there is a rich thread of literature from education in general exploring the morality of classroom discourse, classroom management and discipline, grading and assessment, curriculum, attitudes toward parents and colleagues, and approaches to professional development, among other concerns.

The second area is teacher spirituality. Spirituality can, but need not, be connected with traditional religion or formal religious structures; it comes instead from a generally humanist orientation in acknowledging extra-rational, non-materialist, and transcendent aspects of existence. Beginning from Dewey's *A Common Faith* (1934), this section discusses classroom-related lines of theory and research on spirituality in education—again largely from education in general, given that TESOL-specific scholarship for the most part ignores this domain. Among other sources and references, the ambitious Spirituality in Higher Education (SIHE) project at UCLA (<http://www.spirituality.ucla.edu>) is reviewed, especially its helpful but problematic report, *Spirituality and the Professoriate: A National Study of Faculty Beliefs, Attitudes, and Behaviors* (SIHE, 2006).

The third area is teachers' religious beliefs. Teachers' personal religious beliefs have not been explored in teacher knowledge research, though they manifest themselves elsewhere in the educational literature and have also been discussed within the Christian TESOL community. In the mainstream TESOL literature, personal religious beliefs, particularly those of evangelical Christians, appear almost exclusively as targets for criticism. Sporadic negative comments over the past decade or so culminated in a landmark *TESOL Quarterly* article by Varghese and Johnston (2007), a qualitative study of ten evangelical Christian pre-service ESOL teachers that positions itself as opening a new chapter in formal academic research and dialogue in this area.

The fourth area is sociocultural intersections of education, language, and religion—another topic which can help inform the issue of how teachers’ personal religious beliefs might interact with their professional knowledge, practices, and identities. This topic is loosely defined and consists here of three subtopics. The first is the hot-button policy and curricular issue of the role of religion in public schools. The second focuses on a group of articles from English and composition studies featuring transformative encounters between liberal, non-religious university instructors and mostly evangelical Christian students. The third and final subtopic involves issues of religious belief and diversity, as raised within literature on multicultural education.

The fifth and final area covered in this section is Christian and church-based education. Beginning from a foundational consideration of the interrelationships between religious beliefs and intellectual endeavors, as epitomized in the phrase “integration of faith and learning,” this section discusses the pursuit of distinctively Christian professionalism within both religious and pluralistic contexts for education in general and for TESOL in particular. Various theories and models are explored as suggestive or illustrative with reference to this book’s central research question and themes.

## Chapter Two

The second chapter, “Researching Intersections: Personal Faith and Professional Identity,” describes the methodology and research design for this qualitative study. The general purpose is to explore the influences of teachers’ personal religious beliefs on their professionalism. More specifically, the purpose of this research is to explore influences of personal religious faith on professional teacher knowledge among overseas Christian ESOL teachers in Southeast Asia. The central research question is therefore: *How do overseas Christian ESOL teachers describe putting their religious beliefs into practice in their profession?*

A qualitative and instrumental case study approach is taken toward answering this research question. The term “instrumental” applies when case studies focus on a larger issue or concern which they illustrate or illuminate (Stake, 2005). In this project, while learning about overseas Christian ESOL teachers is valuable in and of itself, the data points beyond itself to larger issues of beliefs, values, and practices (Creswell, 2013a; Duff, 2008)—here, specifically, the interactions, influences, and interrelationships between personal religious beliefs and professional teacher knowledge.

The participants in this study are overseas Christian ESOL teachers, specifically, teachers who were trained in a TESOL certificate program in a large city in Southeast Asia between 2005 and 2011. Eleven such teachers agreed to participate in this project (Figure 2-1). All names in this book are pseudonyms in order to preserve confidentiality and participants' rights.

Data were collected mainly via interviews that were digitally recorded and later transcribed. A first interview (Appendix) invited participants to make conceptual connections between their religious faith and their profession. A second interview (Appendix) invited them to identify change and growth in their thinking and actions over time on this same issue (King & Horrocks, 2010). As part of the first interview protocol but following the interview itself, participants were also asked to analyse and discuss in writing two "what would you do?" scenarios (Appendix) based on issues raised by the central research question (Creswell, 2013a, 2013b). Their answers provided additional opportunities to triangulate data as well as to substantiate and deepen main themes from the interviews.

These qualitative data were analysed both inductively and interpretively. Inductive analysis moves from individual codes to related domains to larger themes, while interpretive analysis gives more prominent place to the researcher's own impressions, interpretations, and evaluations. Both approaches are essential in the construction of instrumental case studies (Stake, 1995, 2005). A similar approach to data collection and analysis had previously been taken in a related pilot study (Baurain, 2012).

My positioning as the researcher and author of this book is important not only because the research design is qualitative but also because I, as a TESOL professional and evangelical Christian, am personally and professionally invested in the issues raised within this project. Advantages, disadvantages, tensions, and distinctiveness in this positioning are discussed. It is explicitly my hope that this book provides compelling evidence that personal religious beliefs need to be explored within the domain of professional teacher knowledge. From my perspective, therein lies part of the significance of this study.

### **Chapter Three**

The third chapter, "Emergent Themes: Professionalism, Relationality, and Witness," begins to present the study's findings. The goal is to report these findings in ways that answer the central research question without being reductionist or essentialist with regard to complex issues of pedagogy, beliefs, values, and practices. Toward this end, findings are

reported across three chapters which interrelate with one another to “tell a story”—the participants’ collective story—about personal religious beliefs and TESOL professionalism.

This chapter develops three key themes emerging from the overall data. The first theme is professionalism, that is, how participants’ personal religious beliefs affected their perceptions of what it meant to be a TESOL professional. Most, for example, spoke of their faith as a motivation for seeking to become excellent teachers. Further, they conceived of teaching not only in terms of professional motivation but also in terms of spiritual calling. That is, they tended to see teaching as a ministry in and of itself as well as integrally connected with their inner spiritual lives. This is not to say that faith and pedagogy make a seamless connection—being a Christian TESOL professional engendered particular moral and spiritual challenges. One teacher, for example, felt a tension between showing mercy or grace to her students—a generally Christian priority—and at the same time maintaining fair and equitable standards in the classroom—a generally professional priority.

The second theme is relationality, that is, the centrality of relationships with students in how participants made connections between their teaching and their Christian faith. The fact is that a focus on relationships with students undergirded and permeated almost everything these teachers discussed relative to faith and teaching. This led them, for example, to emphasize care and respect as core values. While care and respect are mainstream professional values in TESOL and education in general, the participants described, justified, and practiced them specifically as guided to do so by their personal religious beliefs. This relational focus was seen inside the classroom in their emphasis on authentic learning (a professional, pedagogy-oriented priority) and outside the classroom in their practice of hospitality (a personal, faith-based priority). As was true with the first theme, being a Christian TESOL professional engendered particular moral and spiritual challenges in the area of relationships as well. One teacher, for example, discussed the professional, interpersonal, and cultural tensions and complexities inherent in attempting to relate to students as both a teacher and a friend.

The third theme is witness, that is, how participants saw themselves as sharing their Christian faith with their students through their teaching or in their roles as teachers. The term “sharing” indicated a multidimensional process of students becoming aware of the teacher’s religious faith and reaching an understanding of its significance and impact in the life of the teacher. For some participants, witness meant looking for opportunities to raise moral and spiritual issues with students in class. The idea was that

truly communicative language teaching engages with issues of importance to learners, rather than merely equipping them for consumerist social transactions. Other participants, however, saw this approach as shallowly opportunistic or even potentially lacking in professional integrity. They tended to see their Christian witness in more holistic terms, eschewing the delivery of religious content or dogma in favor of an ongoing enterprise of lived faith that might be transformative for both students and teachers. In addition, as was true with the first two themes, being or having a Christian witness while serving as a TESOL professional set up particular moral and spiritual tensions or challenges. The key to such challenges was often determining where the professional and pedagogical boundary lines fell in the classroom and in relationships with students. While some critics see “religious beliefs” as a marked category to be excluded from the professional realm, this study’s participants viewed them as meaningfully and inextricably interrelated.

## Chapter Four

The fourth chapter, “Taking a Closer Look: Four Case Studies,” builds four portraits of individual teachers, chosen mainly for their value as instrumental cases. That is, each of these four teachers provided particularly rich data with reference to this study’s purpose of exploring how personal religious beliefs might influence and interact with professional teacher knowledge. The first case study is of Tammy, a first-year teacher with no previous experience working in Cambodia. She identified her core teaching value as care, adding that she cares “for these students, not just for the here and now, but eternally.” She views God’s love and care for her as a model and a motivation for her professional activities. Relationships and witness were at the center of her professional and Christian identities: “Everything I’m doing is hopefully to build relationships with students in order to share not only my life but my faith as well.”

The second case study focuses on Michael, a third-year teacher working in Vietnam. He named humility as his core teaching value, and was spurred toward this value especially by his Vietnamese language study. He was a teacher of English but a learner of Vietnamese; this positioned him as a language learner among other language learners. A truly humble teacher loves that there is always more to learn, and he believed that learning about the world God has made (including language) should be pursued and practiced as a spiritually mindful activity. He saw

Christ as the best model for a Christian English teacher in this and every area.

The third case study portrays Robin, a second-year teacher working in Cambodia, who also had previous teaching experience and a graduate seminary degree. Her core professional value was fairness or justice, although she acknowledged the difficulty of living out this value in a cross-cultural context. She had experienced the challenge of doing so in a variety of areas, from specific episodes of student cheating to reconceptualizing her basic philosophy of teaching. One faith-based result had been a focus on differentiation: “As a Christian, I want to do my best. And I think, in my mind, doing my best is, at least at some level, meeting the needs of every student as much as possible.” By investing especially in lower-level students, she, like Michael, saw herself as imitating the example of Christ.

The fourth case study portrays Neil, a somewhat more experienced teacher and teacher trainer working in Laos. Relationality and caring were central to his integrated approach to teaching and witness. He desired to get to know his students not only as English language learners but as whole persons “on campus in the classroom, on campus out of the classroom, off campus in my world, and off campus in their world.” Personally, he wanted his students to know he was “a teacher that they can come to and know cares about them.” Professionally, he wanted every student to have maximum opportunities to learn English, and had devoted extra attention to low-level learners whom others viewed as hopeless. Neil saw the personal and professional dimensions of teaching as closely overlapping and as ultimately rooted in his Christian faith.

## Chapter Five

The fifth chapter, “Making Comparisons: The Issue of Witness,” presents three issues for cross-case comparisons among all participants, centered around the critical issue of witness. This chapter adds another layer to this book’s answer to the central research question by focusing on Christian witness as the most significant or distinctive issue emerging from the instrumental case study framework and within a teacher knowledge perspective. The first issue is distinctiveness and witness, that is, what participants thought set them apart as Christian ESOL teachers from non-Christian ESOL teachers. They tended to see witness as itself distinctive, notwithstanding Chapter 1’s discussion of the ideological and persuasive nature of teaching. In terms of specific pedagogical practices framed as distinctive, these participants valued investing in lower-

proficiency or disadvantaged learners. They believed their Christian faith enabled them to have a special love for such learners that non-Christian teachers rarely share. Despite this example, most of the teachers thought that Christian distinctiveness was difficult to identify in external teaching practices and should instead be seen more as a matter of motivation, attitude, and other internal or inward-focused factors. From their perspective, this was to be expected, given that witness, teaching, and learning are holistic and relational.

The second issue is applied theology and witness, that is, how participants used Christian theological concepts to interpret or reinterpret their TESOL professionalism in terms of their spiritual lives and understandings. That is to say, these teachers made links from specific Christian beliefs to specific moral and spiritual values, habits, or ways of interacting with others, especially students. The doctrine of creation was a key example of this in at least two ways. First, the belief that God created the universe and everything in it suggested that all learning is spiritually meaningful, in that learning is then framed as a process of seeking better understandings of the world God has made. Second, the belief that people are created in the “image of God” suggested that all learners have worth and dignity and must therefore be treated with care and respect. According to the participants, Christian TESOL professionals should aspire and work toward living out these faith-based values in their pedagogy and classroom practice.

The doctrine of the Incarnation also played an important role here in at least two ways. First, the belief that God became a man in the person of Jesus Christ suggested that the Incarnation is an example and pattern to be applied in the classroom and in student relationships. Second, this example and pattern was not an abstraction but a person, that is, the study’s participants saw Jesus Christ as a master teacher whose example can be followed professionally. This was the most common theological connection or interpretation made by these teachers.

The third issue is professionalism and witness, that is, how participants framed their desire to share their Christian faith with their students in ways they viewed as professionally acceptable or consonant with their personal and professional integrity. They were aware that to be teachers who desire, however implicitly, their students to choose or convert to their religious faith, is to live with certain moral and spiritual tensions. A curricular example is first discussed—whether or not teaching holiday lessons with Christian religious content is appropriate. Considering both professional (pedagogical effectiveness) and personal (witness effectiveness) factors, participants expressed varied points of view on this issue. A skills-based

example is then discussed—how the teaching of critical thinking skills can be construed as part of teachers' Christian witness. The teachers generally argued that encouraging students to reason and draw conclusions in the language classroom is a vital part of Christian witness. How? To enable students to use language in meaningful ways is to spur them to think through what they believe and thus to promote openness to change, growth, or development in their worldviews.

## Chapter Six

The sixth chapter, "Going Beyond: Faith in the Classroom," discusses three key issues raised by this project's findings. Open-ended explorations of these issues aim to highlight and broaden the significance of this book's research and to suggest ways forward for future research and discussion. The first issue raised is the predominantly inward-focused nature of the findings. The term "inward-focused" indicates perceptions or connections made by this study's participants between their personal religious beliefs and their TESOL professionalism that are, strictly speaking, unobservable or unverifiable. In the end, the qualitative data gathered in this project dealt primarily with internal phenomena, often issues of motivation or self-interpretation. While the inward-focused nature of this book's findings is perhaps to be expected, given the central research question and general area of inquiry, other research methodologies that might be used in future studies hold a strong potential to enrich, deepen, or perhaps contradict the understandings presented in this study. In this sense, the inward-focused nature of these findings might be regarded as a limitation of this project.

The second issue raised for discussion in this chapter is the controversy over Christian witness in TESOL. The research findings in this book are characterized overall by a multifaceted emphasis on Christian witness, that is, by the prominence of the participants' desire to share their personal religious faith with others in the context of their professionalism. The discussion here is contextualized by, for example—as discussed in Chapter 1—the criticisms articulated by Pennycook and Coutand-Marin (2003), as well as Canagarajah's (2009) framing of Christian witness as a possible form of transformative education.

What does the data provided by this study imply with regard to this issue? First, evangelicals in particular and Christians in general should be recognized for the complexity and diversity of their thinking in this area. As seen in Chapters 3–5, the ways in which this study's participants discussed connections and interrelationships between their personal

religious beliefs and their professional roles and activities were complex, nuanced, and reflective. To them, the term “witness” indicated a holistic, intentional process in which students become aware of the teacher’s Christian faith and reach an understanding of its importance in the life of the teacher. This is quite different from the manipulative proselytizing and simplistic connections hypothesized by critics. The participants did desire their students to choose or convert to Christianity, but they raised the idea of conversion only when pressed. For the most part, the desire to persuade or convert was only implicit in the data, and tallying converts was not at all a standard by which these teachers evaluated the success or failure of their Christian witness. In addition, even among this study’s limited pool of eleven participants, various perspectives were evident regarding, for example, the appropriateness and effectiveness of including moral and spiritual topics in communicative language lessons.

A second implication of this book’s findings with regard to issues of Christian witness is that the larger context for dialogue on this issue in TESOL must include broader academic disagreements about the nature and role of religion in education. A largely secular academic world tends to assume that personal religious beliefs are private matters and do not belong in the public square, but this study’s findings demonstrate that these participants did not accept this assumption or boundary line. For them, personal religious beliefs were inextricably intertwined with professional identities, activities, and practices. As a result, ongoing dialogue in this area is best pursued not from a stance of choosing or judging between religious and non-religious perspectives (as in Varghese and Johnston, 2007, p. 27), but rather from within Wolterstorff’s (1999) framework of perspectival and cross-perspectival learning. The latter is captured in his image of communities speaking with one another across differences, with the common ground or common concern in this case being human spirituality. The theoretical foundation of teacher knowledge adopted in this study further highlights the significance of this issue (Baurain, 2012).

The third and final issue raised for discussion in this chapter is the larger issue of how beliefs are put into practice at all. This question is broadly philosophical and spiritual and assumes neither that the lines between personal and professional are clear or agreed-upon, nor that religious beliefs are merely a private concern, nor that beliefs and practices interact in only one way or in only one direction. The beliefs–practices relationship or nexus is a foundational aspect of human nature and community, in and out of the classroom, and spiritual and religious beliefs and practices are a major dimension of this relationship.

A major portion of the discussion on this third issue takes its cue from Smith (2013), who highlights the mutually influential nature of beliefs and practices. Treating neither term as monolithic, he outlines practices as “full complexes of narrative, behavior, identity, and belonging” within a community (p. 160). His point is that there are multiple “vectors” for imagining the beliefs–practices relationship, a reminder which could point the way toward additional future research and dialogue in this area within the field of TESOL and beyond.

## CHAPTER ONE

### SETTING THE STAGE: EDUCATION, LANGUAGE, AND RELIGIOUS FAITH

The research at the core of this book asks: *How do overseas Christian ESOL teachers describe putting their religious beliefs into practice in their profession?* The purpose of this project is to explore the influences of teachers' religious beliefs on various aspects of their teaching lives, including their teaching philosophies, pedagogical commitments, curricular choices, and cultivation of student relationships. Specifically, the focus is on mostly evangelical Christian teachers of ESOL who worked in secular or pluralistic higher education contexts in Southeast Asia.

Seeking to respond to this central research question within the theoretical framework of teacher knowledge, one encounters an immediate problem: Teacher knowledge research in language education has to date not taken personal religious beliefs into serious account. There is no established thread of research on this topic. Though this creates an obvious gap, the lack of specifically applicable academic literature does not mean that the present project begins in a vacuum. Theory and research from overlapping or related areas can be explored in order to inform or illuminate the topic and central research question, thus laying a groundwork for data analysis and interpretation. The fields or areas identified here in this regard are teacher morality and values; teacher spirituality; teachers' religious beliefs in general; religious beliefs as they appear in language-related sociology of education studies; and relevant perspectives from the field-within-a-field of Christian and church-based education. Following a brief account of the teacher knowledge paradigm in TESOL and language education, this chapter inquires into each of these five domains in turn to see what each might contribute to this study.

The focus in this chapter, then, is on theory and research that suggest or reveal connections between personal religious beliefs and professional

teacher knowledge—including, to some extent, the professional behavior and practices stemming from that knowledge—and thus that might help to provide frameworks and categories for analysing and interpreting this study’s data. In summary, the main selection criterion for inclusion in this literature review is whether material is relevant to the issue of how personal religious beliefs might interact or interrelate with educators’ professional knowledge and practice, with the categories of “Christian,” “evangelical,” and “TESOL” as preferred but non-exclusive delimiters.

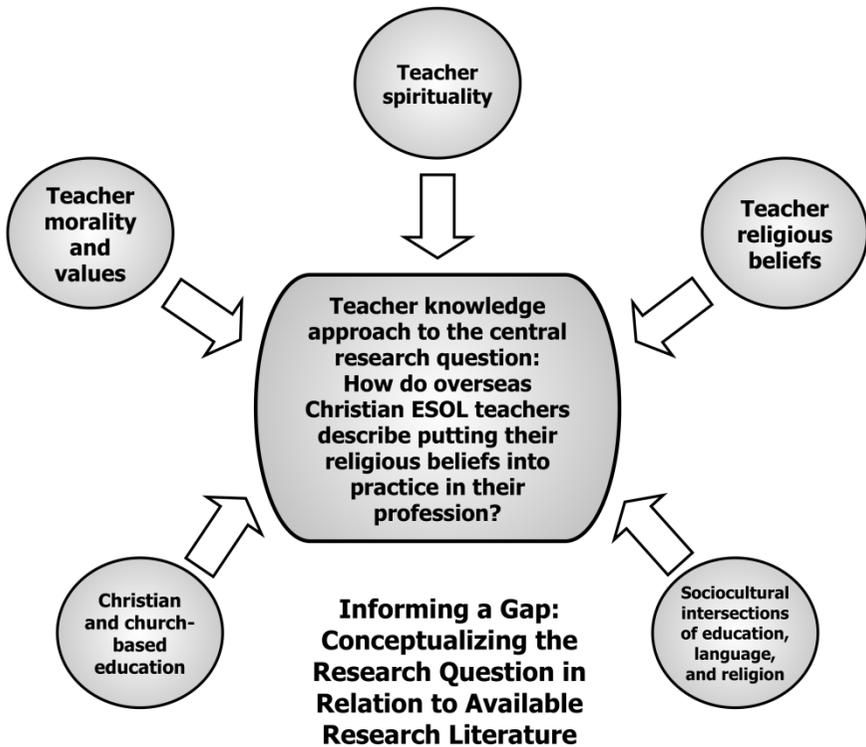
## Teacher Knowledge and Beliefs

What is “teacher knowledge”? The teacher knowledge paradigm in education can be traced back more than three decades (S. Borg, 2006). More than twenty years ago, Shulman (1986, 1987) suggested that for meaningful education reform to take place, policy and research should begin with what teachers know, understand, and decide—that is to say, how they reason about and reflect on what they do and how and why they do it. Current teacher knowledge research in language education continues to explore questions of how teachers know what they know, of how they turn what they know into classroom practice, and of what they conceive to be good teaching and why (Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, & Bransford, 2005).

Teacher knowledge approaches have led to numerous studies of teacher cognition and classroom decision-making, but others see this perspective as insufficient. Nesper (1987), for example, argues for the inclusion of “beliefs” in teacher knowledge. More attention needs to be paid to the “structures and functions of teachers’ beliefs” about themselves, their students, their schools, and their subject matter (p. 317). In other words, as researchers encounter interconnections and interrelationships that complicate a linear, cause-and-effect view of teaching and learning, the circle of what counts as relevant knowledge widens:

[I]f we are interested in *why* teachers organize and run classrooms as they do we must pay much more attention to the goals they pursue (which may be multiple, conflicting, and not at all related to optimizing student learning) and to their subjective interpretations of classroom processes.  
(p. 325)

Researchers have thus often found teacher knowledge to be a “messy construct” (Pajares, 1992). Pajares (1992), reporting on others’ scattered efforts to delineate distinctions among teacher knowledge, understanding, thinking, beliefs, cognition, perspectives, and other terms, complains of



*Fig. 1-1. Research question.*

“definitional problems, poor conceptualizations, and differing understandings of beliefs and belief structures” (p. 307). Arguing that consistency and precision are required to make sense of teacher knowledge research, he synthesizes a research-based, consensus list of sixteen assumptions about “beliefs” with which educational inquiry must begin (pp. 324–326). As examples:

- (1) Beliefs are formed early and tend to self-perpetuate, persevering even against contradictions caused by reason, time, schooling, or experience.
- (4) Knowledge and beliefs are inextricably intertwined, but the potent affective, evaluative, and episodic nature of beliefs makes them a filter through which new phenomena are interpreted.

(7) Beliefs are prioritized according to their connections or relationship to other beliefs or other cognitive and affective structures. Apparent inconsistencies may be explained by exploring the functional connections and centrality of the beliefs.

(15) Beliefs must be inferred, and this inference must take into account the congruence among individuals' belief statements, the intentionality to behave in a predisposed manner, and the behavior related to the belief in question.

Given this background, how might personal religious beliefs relate to professional pedagogical beliefs? Two decades ago, morality-in-education theorist Sockett (1992) commented, "We do not know the extent to which teachers are more or less influenced by their religious persuasions when they teach" (cited in Campbell, 2008, p. 362). Today, the fact is that we are little closer to knowing—yet with debates over religion's role in the public square persisting and expanding, this issue remains more vital than ever. The field of teacher knowledge or teacher beliefs appears to be a natural location for exploring this issue, yet the literature reflects scant interest in doing so. Instead, "beliefs" regularly features in the literature as a large term narrowly constructed. The beliefs theorized, researched, and discussed are beliefs about technique, methodology, curriculum, student motivation, classroom management, professional development, and other vocation-specific concerns. In a recent commentary in *Teachers College Record*, for example, Haberman (2011) spotlights teacher knowledge as a powerful variable in education. He describes teachers' beliefs as "deeply held commitments which they act upon" and "deep-seated ideas that define a person as a human being with a heart and soul as well as a mind" (para. 2). From this starting point, he goes on to compare the beliefs of "star teachers" with those of "quitter/failures." His conclusion, based on more than 5,000 teacher interviews over 53 years, is that "star teachers" share twelve main beliefs. These are sorted into six categories:

- beliefs about the environment of the school
- beliefs about whom they should teach
- beliefs about what and how to teach
- beliefs about how to deal with students
- beliefs about how to trouble shoot problems
- basic beliefs about what makes for school success and the importance of that success

Despite the inclusive, personal-sounding definition of “beliefs,” these six categories and the twelve beliefs are explained in tightly and all-but-exclusively professional terms.

Teacher knowledge, then, is broadly conceptualized but narrowly theorized and researched. The fact is, however, that in teachers’ lived experience personal and professional beliefs interact and interrelate in numerous “messy” ways. Categorical separations are artificial. The result is a woefully thin account of the rich and multidimensional ways in which personal beliefs are a vital part of professional teacher knowledge. Though political or sociocultural beliefs might at times be seen as part of teacher knowledge (Kelchtermans, 2009), religious beliefs are for the most part omitted, perhaps because they are often assumed by academics to be private or nonacademic matters. Yet the significance of personal religious beliefs can by no means be assumed to be so limited—there are numerous indicators that the boundaries and categories are permeable. Given the foundational nature of many religious beliefs, it would in fact be more reasonable to assume a wider and deeper influence. This study hopes to establish that personal religious beliefs can or might be significant dimensions of the teacher knowledge base and of professional identity and development in TESOL and language education.

To accomplish this, this book intends to demonstrate that current prevailing notions of “teacher beliefs” or “teacher knowledge” in TESOL and language education should be expanded to include personal religious beliefs, in part because they already fit the area of inquiry the field has defined for itself. S. Borg (2003), for example, explains teacher knowledge as “the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching—what teachers know, believe, and think. . . . [T]eachers are active, thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex, practically-oriented, personalised, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs” (p. 81; see also S. Borg, 2006, 2011; Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Tsui, 2003, especially chapter four). Personal religious beliefs are demonstrably part of these “networks,” as they find their way into how teachers know what they know and why they do what they do as teachers (Hartwick, 2015a, 2015b; White, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2014). Elements of personal faith might affect classroom decision-making, relationships with students, professional identity and development, and overall pedagogy. Such beliefs are thus potential dimensions of the “complex, practically-oriented, personalised, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs” on which teachers draw. An expansion in this area of the research nexus among personal and professional beliefs is overdue.

In TESOL and language education, the teacher knowledge paradigm has been effectively represented and promoted in the work of Freeman (1994; 1996a; 1996b; 1996c; 2000; 2001; 2002; Freeman & Graves, 2004; Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Freeman & Richards, 1996). Freeman and Johnson's 1998 article in *TESOL Quarterly* is generally regarded as a watershed. They recognize that

teachers are not empty vessels waiting to be filled with theoretical and pedagogical skills; they are individuals who enter teacher education programs with prior experiences, personal values, and beliefs that inform their knowledge about teaching and shape what they do in their classrooms. (p. 401)

They therefore argue for broadening the teacher knowledge base in TESOL and language education to include more in-depth and nuanced considerations of context, person, and process, yet curiously they manage to do so without mentioning spirituality or religion as possible domains of human belief and experience.

Tellingly, the weighty, two-volume *International Handbook of the Religious, Moral and Spiritual Dimensions in Education* (de Souza, Durka, Engebretson, Jackson, & McGrady, 2006a, 2006b) contains nothing that can properly be called teacher knowledge research. Throughout the TESOL and language education teacher knowledge literature, in fact, doors to exploring the interactions between professionalism and personal religious beliefs are consistently left unopened: Richards and Lockhart (1994) spend a chapter on teacher beliefs as part of reflective teaching, but these are limited to beliefs about language, learning, teaching, curriculum, and the classroom. Woods (1996) constructs a model of teacher beliefs, assumptions, and knowledge, but these are limited to matters of pedagogy, linguistics, and cognitive psychology. Gebhard and Oprandy (1999) speak of formulating "connecting questions, that is questions that connect our professional teacher persona with our personal, out-of-school selves" (p. 16), but the examples provided are limited to processes, such as learning to play a musical instrument, that can be linearly related to the classroom. Tsui (2003), who articulates a commitment to a holistic view of professional expertise, and who did her research at a Protestant school in Hong Kong, nonetheless ventures few insights about the roles of personal religious beliefs within her study. Johnson (2006), tracing the "sociocultural turn" in language education, renews the focus on context, person, and process (Freeman & Johnson, 1998; see also Johnson, 1994), and goes so far as to contend that language teachers should strive to be "transformative intellectuals" who operate in self-aware ways from and to ideologies that