



## Letter from the President

Fall Greetings to all of you in our CELEA community! I hope your Fall semester is going well and that you are enjoying the community of your classes and the environments that surround you.

We are in a series on Daniel at Mariners Church here in Irvine, CA. In the first sermon, our pastor recounts how Daniel and other Israelites were taken from Jerusalem and trained in the foreign culture of Babylonia. They were taught the language and literature of the Babylonians and were given food and wine from the king's table. Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and the chief official had compassion on Daniel and his friends when, after eating only vegetables and water for ten days, they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the men who ate the royal food. (This may be the first documentation of the benefits of plant-based diets!) Daniel and his friends were foreigners in a strange land. They were educated about the culture they were living in, and they participated in the local community, sharing wisdom and influencing decisions. Still, they resisted nourishing themselves from what surrounded them.

Today, information and opinions constantly swirl around us through our news channels, social media, and conversations in our workplace and at home. So much of the content is perpetuating anxiety and is fueling perspectives that divide our communities into "us" and "them." This passage reminds me that just as Daniel lived in Babylon, we, as Christians live as foreigners here on earth. This is not our home. Our true home is with Christ, and our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20). We are engaged and invest our time and talents where we are, but we need to be selective about what we allow to nourish our hearts and minds. My prayer is for each of us to be blessed by the deep and comforting hope in Christ and a vision for common ground among the many existing divisions. I hope you will consider joining us at the 2024 CELT conference, where the theme of finding common ground and unity in English language teaching will be further explored.

Soli Deo gloria,  
Dana Saito-Stehberger



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“This capacity  
for empathy  
leads to a  
genuine  
encounter,  
we have to  
progress toward  
this culture of  
encounter — in  
which heart  
speaks to heart.”

POPE FRANCIS

## Letter from the Editor

Dear CELEA Family,

As we embrace the vibrant hues of Fall, our October 2023 issue of CELEA News brings forth a tapestry of insights and stories from our Christian TESOL community. In this edition, we align with the sentiments expressed in the President's letter, drawing inspiration from the biblical narrative of Daniel. Like Daniel, we navigate diverse cultures and ideologies yet remain anchored in our Christian values and educational mission.

Our features in this issue include articles by two educators who are passionately serving in the university system. Each article resonates with our commitment to developing a global community of English language educators rooted in the Christian faith.

The President's message, drawing parallels between Daniel's experience in Babylon and our journey as Christian educators, is particularly poignant. It reminds us to discern what we allow to nourish our hearts and minds. In a world where information and opinions swirl around us, it is our hope that CELEA News serves as a source of encouragement, edification, and unity.

We also spotlight upcoming events and initiatives, including calls for board nominations and article submissions. These opportunities invite your active participation and contribution to our growing network of educators shaping the future of Christian English language teaching.

As we navigate these times, let's hold fast to the comforting hope in Christ and the vision of finding common ground in our diverse community. We hope this issue not only informs but also inspires you in your teaching and faith journey.

Sincerely,

Cortnie Brooks



# Relational Language Teaching: God's Design for the Brain

BY BONNIE VIDRINE-ISBELL

Recently, I have become keenly aware of how the Holy Spirit works within the design of the brain to create human transformation. It all started during my graduate studies at the University of Washington's Institute for Learning and Brain Sciences, where I observed young children learning new languages. Patricia Kuhl, a well-known neuroscientist who served on my doctoral committee, did an experiment to see if exposing groups of little ones to new languages through three mediums—audio-only, video-only, and human connection-only—would allow the children to acquire the phonemes of a new language. The results were shocking: children who had human connection recognized the phonemes of the new language at nearly equal levels to monolingual babies in that home language culture. Even more telling was the fact that the groups of children exposed to only audio or video recognized zero phonemes of the new language. The finding led to the “social gating hypothesis,” the idea that through human interaction, our brain opens the gate to change, to learning.

We are social creatures. God designed this in His good will. But, I had never realized until this study just how fundamental to language learning was the idea of human connection. Our brains receive what Christians might call love, and what scientists might call human bonding or attachment. In these moments—when we are being delighted in, seen, listened to, enjoyed—a series of neurochemicals are released into the system that result in experiences of safety, a precursor to curiosity and learning.

The Bible says that the kingdom of God is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his garden. It grew and became a big tree, and the birds made nests in its branches (Luke 13: 18-19).

This verse makes me believe that human connection is like this mustard seed that grows dendrite branches of neural networks throughout the brain. Language learning is part of God's kingdom work because it is connection work, relational work. Like a big tree, an integrated brain builds larger networks that speak of God's design for his kingdom—the plan for relationship (with God, with one another, and with ourselves) to be the catalyst for transformation in the brain.

As teachers, as friends, as Christians, we can build classrooms that open the brain to language. When we pay more attention to a student's personhood than their syntax, unhealthy levels of cortisol can decrease. When we commit to listening mindfully without prejudice or distraction and offer culturally appropriate eye contact that communicates kindness and care, oxytocin can increase. When we create emotional safety and offer new, exciting concepts, student curiosity and engagement can increase along with dopamine.

The brain science of learning tells of God's wonderful works! It shouts of a God that made us to learn through love, to be motivated by connection, and to spread God's kingdom as seeds of caring interactions that open the social gate to learning.



Bonnie Vidrine-Isbell is an associate professor of English. She teaches English language rhetoric and writing. Her research blends bilingual brain studies and second language pedagogy.

# Nature's Embrace: The Healing Power of Shared Outdoor Experiences for ELLs and Refugees

BY CORTNIE BROOKS

We begin our journey through the forest, quietly walking up the hill to our destination. Each step seems to envelop us in the therapeutic embrace of nature. The value of shared experiences, particularly those beyond the confines of a traditional classroom, has been acknowledged for its potential to promote personal growth, solidify community ties, and provide healing paths for individuals with traumatic histories, such as refugees.

## The Power of Shared Experiences

Venturing outside the usual classroom environment has shown considerable benefits for learners. For English Language Learners (ELLs), outdoor adventures can introduce a robust, sensory-rich method for language acquisition. Studies have shown that meaningful social interaction is critical for language learning, and informal settings often provide a more authentic context for such interactions (Ellis, 2003). Without the constraints of a formal classroom, students can immerse themselves in genuine conversations, fostering a deeper understanding and application of the language.

## Healing through Nature: Refugees and Trauma

For many refugees, the process of resettlement is accompanied by the immense task of adjusting to a new culture, the challenge of learning a new language, and the weight of past traumas. Engaging in communal activities in natural settings can offer a unique form of solace. Kaplan's (1995) work on the restorative benefits of nature suggests that natural environments can help individuals recover from mental exhaustion and stress. For refugees who've endured traumatic experiences, such connections with nature can instill feelings of belonging and provide a platform to initiate their healing journey. Moreover, creating fresh, positive memories in these environments can counterbalance the distressing memories from their past.



The initial trepidations transformed into moments of shared laughter, camaraderie, and a collective appreciation for the world around us.



As supported by findings in psychology, establishing new, constructive memories can act as a protective shield against the adverse effects of past traumas, enhancing overall well-being.

### **Building Community and Integration**

Shared outdoor experiences provide an invaluable platform for refugees to interact with local communities. Such experiences promote mutual understanding, helping debunk stereotypes and nurturing a sense of community. Ager & Strang (2008) discussed the factors contributing to successful refugee integration and emphasized the importance of social bonds, social bridges, and social links in facilitating this process. Outdoor communal activities can act as these bridges, drawing people from different backgrounds together.

The symbolic nature of these shared outdoor journeys should also not be overlooked. For refugees, trekking through new terrains, exploring unfamiliar locales, and achieving group objectives can mirror their broader journey of hope, resilience, and renewal.

As we continued our journey through the forest, the initial trepidations transformed into moments of shared laughter, camaraderie, and a collective appreciation for the world around us. As current research indicates, these shared experiences are not just fleeting moments of joy; they're instrumental in fostering learning, healing, and community integration.

### **References**

- Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based Language Learning and Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kaplan, S. (1995). The restorative benefits of nature: Toward an integrative framework. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 15(3), 169-182.
- Ager, A., & Strang, A. (2008). Understanding integration: A conceptual framework. *Journal of refugee studies*, 21(2), 166-191.

# International Journal of Christianity & English Language Teaching

A refereed, online journal on Christianity and ELT

We're excited to announce that Dr. Icy Lee of the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University in Singapore, and Dr. Jan Dormer of Taylor University in Upland, Indiana, have agreed to co-edit the International Journal of Christianity and English Language Teaching. This is an answer to prayer, and since both are accomplished scholars who have also published in the journal, they are familiar with what is involved. We are grateful to them, and we're excited to see where they take the IJC&ELT in the future.



Dr. Icy Lee



Dr. Jan Dormer

## About the Journal

As an international publication, the IJC&ELT recognizes that there are diverse Christian traditions and perspectives worldwide and, therefore, welcomes articles and reviews that deal with and address different Christian traditions and their connections to English language teaching. As a publication of the Christian English Language Educators Association (CELEA), the main readership, however, is CELEA members, who come from and bring a range of Christian perspectives to their work in ELT.

[Read the latest  
IJC&ELT volume  
here](#)

## Call for Submissions

The International Journal of Christian Education and English Language Teaching (IJC&ELT) invites educators, researchers, and practitioners to submit their proposals.

We welcome innovative and insightful research that intersects Christian education and English language teaching.

Please follow our submission guidelines, which are available [here](#). Submissions should be sent to [ijcelt.editors@gmail.com](mailto:ijcelt.editors@gmail.com). We look forward to your valuable contributions!

# Announcements & Events

## Panel Discussion

### “Considerations for Implementing a Short-Term, Community-Based English Program Abroad”

Monday, December 4 from 6-7:30 pm (ET)

Learn to: 1) Identify the key components of a successful short-term, community-based EFL program. 2) Examine the potential of international, community-based initiatives. 3) Evaluate your community-based programs in light of the case study. This free webinar and online networking event is sponsored by the TESOL Ministry and CELEA Community-based ESL Group.

[Register here](#)



THE CHRISTIAN ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATORS ASSOCIATION'S  
**MENTORSHIP PROGRAM**  
BE A MENTOR OR GET A MENTOR

A way for Christ-following teachers of English around the world to build each other up as they grow, learn, and develop together.

[Apply here](#)

APPLY BY  
DECEMBER 1  
TO JOIN THE  
SPRING SESSION

celea

The poster features a light blue background with geometric shapes in teal, orange, and blue. At the bottom, there is an illustration of a woman and a man in professional attire, with a circular arrow icon above them. The CELEA logo is in the bottom left corner.

## CELEA'S First Brown Bag Meet Up

### "Trauma-Informed Pedagogy: Practicing the Principles in the Language Classroom"

I was happy for the opportunity to lead a Brown Bag webinar on the topic of trauma-informed pedagogy in the language classroom. In the past few years, as we have experienced the COVID-19 pandemic and a war in our region that has affected many of our students at LCC, I have learned a little about this topic and want to learn more. The principles of providing a safe, empowering, and connected classroom, which are meant to help students affected by trauma, are principles that will benefit all of our students. From the ideas shared during the discussion, it's clear that many English language teachers already apply these principles in their classroom practices. Thanks to everyone who participated and shared such good ideas; may we use them to love and serve our students even more effectively.

Gretchen Ketner  
PRIME and SLI Director  
& Assistant Professor at  
LCC International  
University



[Watch the webinar here](#)

# Call for Board Nominations

We are seeking nominations for the Board of Directors, specifically for the roles of Secretary and Treasurer. We invite passionate professionals in TESOL with a vision for Christian education to help guide our organization's future. Nominees should be committed to excellence in teaching, scholarship, and service. If you or someone you know embodies these qualities, please consider submitting a nomination. Your involvement can make a significant impact in advancing Christian principles in TESOL education. Nominate today and be a part of shaping CELEA's journey!

[Nomination form](#)

**CHRISTIANS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING CONFERENCE 2024**

**CALL FOR PROPOSALS**

**DEADLINE: DEC 1**

Conference of Christians in English Language Teaching

**Virtual Conference MAR 8-9 | 2024**

**Tampa, FL Conference MAR 20 | 2024**

conferencecelt.weebly.com

**2024 CELT CONFERENCE PROPOSAL SUBMISSION**

# Stevick Award Nomination

The Earl W. Stevick Award honors the life work of Dr. Stevick (1923-2013), who inspired the Christian English language teaching community through his legacy of mentoring others, insightful scholarship, and exemplary service to the profession.

Among us, outstanding Christian English language teachers faithfully use their God-given gifts to bless others. Together, let's recognize and celebrate the tremendous effort and talent poured into our Christian English Language Teaching community.

Reflect on your wonderful colleagues who are making an impact on students and teachers of English in the areas of mentoring, scholarship, and service.

Nominations must be submitted by **January 15**. The winner of the Stevick Award will receive a plaque with an appropriate inscription and a monetary award of \$300. The award will be given at the CELT VIRTUAL Conference.

If you have any questions about this nomination process, please email us at [askcelea@gmail.com](mailto:askcelea@gmail.com).

[Nomination form](#)