Chapter 1
Innovating Christian Education Research: Multidisciplinary Perspectives—An Introductory Overview

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But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. (1 Peter 3:15, NIV).

Abstract  Research in Christian education is in its infancy and there is limited published work of a good standard to consult. In order for Christian education research to mature, educators need examples of conceptual, empirical and practice-based research modelled from different disciplinary standpoints and within formal and informal educational settings. This need is addressed by the peer-reviewed edited volume Innovating Christian Education Research: Multidisciplinary Perspectives. Unusually, if not uniquely, the book’s coherence is not to be found in a single educational setting (e.g. K-12 or higher education) but rather in the carefully curated research chapters that have been meticulously collated in the hope that they may inspire new passionate research pursuits that may collectively combine to building the field of Christian education research. The book editors argue that this strategy is urgently needed for research in the field to mature. This introductory chapter to the book initially presents both project background and overview (Sect. 1.1), then introduces the book structure and chapter contents (Sect. 1.2) and finally details the work’s focus and intended contribution to field building (Sect. 1.3). The chapter also elaborates the volume’s guiding framework, which divides the book into three

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constituent parts that comprise conceptual perspectives (Part I), empirical research (Part II) and practice-informed research (Part III).

**Keywords** Christian education research · Field building · Innovation

### 1.1 Background and Overview

It has been posited that Christian education relies on holistic approaches, which conjoin theory and practice, head and heart, reason and relevance. By helping thinkers to believe and believers to think, Christian education endeavours to effect deep-seated formation and transformation at both the personal and societal levels (Stuart-Buttle & Shortt, 2018; Luetz, Dowden, & Norsworthy, 2018). In the biblical narrative, this holistic approach is perhaps best exemplified by the wisdom texts in which the pursuit of wisdom is inseparable from a rightly ordered, embodied vision of the good. Christian education is, therefore, raised as an important interdisciplinary and interdenominational vocation for lovers, thinkers and doers of God’s Word or Logos. This notion has been noted by Norsworthy, Dowden, and Luetz (2018), with reference to Smith (2016a, 2016b) and Leclercq (1992):

Christian education is a vocation for lovers as much as thinkers. In this sense, it is a life-long endeavour for all those students of life who passionately desire to learn so that they may optimally and fittingly bear the image of God for and to the world around them (p. 10).

Towards this pursuit of wisdom, Christian education raises practical and theoretical questions, including (1) What is distinctively ‘Christian’ about Christian education? (2) Is it something to do with the content, or with the quality of the learning community, or with the institutional mission, or with the pedagogical process itself—or all of these? (3) What are the biblical and theological convictions that underpin our educational theories? (4) Is there room in our institutions for diversities of theological conviction, as well as diversities of educational theory and practice? (5) Is there one Christian worldview, or many? (6) Is there one type of education which is distinctively ‘Christian’, or are there many ‘Christian educations’? (7) Can some types of Christian education be found in secular institutions as well? (8) And what is the relation between theories of Christian education and their practical implementation in our own educational institutions which are highly regulated, and therefore, ‘secular’ in many of their processes and requirements?

It was against the background of questions like these that the ACHEA Research Conference CHRISTIAN EDUCATION—REASON AND RELEVANCE was hosted by Christian Heritage College (CHC) in conjunction with member institutions of the Australian Christian Higher Education Alliance (ACHEA) and in cooperation with Associated Christian Schools (ACS). Mobilising scholars, practitioners, pastors and postgraduate students from across Australia and beyond, the interdisciplinary research conference both attracted and invited a broad range of leading-edge research contributions on both the theory and practice of Christian education. It ultimately featured research presentations, workshops, panel discussions and invited keynote
addresses that analysed, showcased and/or digested the latest developments in Christian education from a wide range of both institutional and disciplinary perspectives. In calling for papers, the aims of the conference were stated by the conference organisers as follows:

1. Provide research institutions, universities, ACHEA member institutions and colleague colleges, government agencies, NGOs and social enterprises from the region with an opportunity to display and present their diverse works in the field of Christian education;

2. Foster the exchange of information, ideas and experiences acquired in the pursuit of Christian education projects, especially successful initiatives and good practice examples from across the globe;

3. Present and discuss methodological approaches and experiences deriving from case studies and projects, which aim to show how Christian education may be theoretically conceptualised or practically implemented or enhanced;

4. Provide networking opportunities for delegates from diverse professional backgrounds and provide them a platform so that they can establish or refresh their connections and explore possibilities for future cooperation in areas of Christian education.

Coming from a broad range of cross-sectoral areas and disciplinary backgrounds, conference delegates included (1) career researchers at universities, colleges and research centres; (2) NGO affiliates and private sector representatives; (3) members of social enterprises or social justice movements and (4) education practitioners, historians, consultants and other people interested in the topic.

Last but not least, a further aim of the research conference was to document and disseminate a selection of some of the leading-edge research and praxis available today. To this end, arrangements were made to publish an edited peer-reviewed book with a ‘best-of’ selection of innovative Christian education research. The book you are now holding in your hand is the fruit of these extensive editorial efforts.

Most chapters included in Innovating Christian Education Research: Multidisciplinary Perspectives were first presented and discussed at the above-named conference, which was held at the iconic State Library of Queensland (SLQ) in Brisbane (31 July to 2 August 2019). The conference included research presentations by scholars affiliated with Universities and Christian Colleges and Seminaries in Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Canada, Zambia and the USA. In total, 50 contributions were presented by delegates affiliated with more than 40 institutions. Further, the research conference also featured invited keynote addresses by Prof Beth Green, Rev Dan Paterson and Dr. Shirley Hoogstra.

At this point, it is worth mentioning that the book is not a ‘conference proceeding’ but rather features only a curated selection of some of the innovative research and practice available today in the area of Christian education. Hence, shortlisting chapters necessitated a painstaking process of weighing papers for inclusion in the book, including on the basis of their degree of innovation, scholarly/scientific rigour, prospects for practical application and consistency with the editorial objectives of the book as agreed with the publishers. To this end, shortlisted papers underwent peer review by between one to four reviewers per chapter. In addition to this editor-initiated peer review process, all papers were subsequently sent out for a further
round of publisher-initiated blind peer review. This process occasioned more revisions, refinements and resubmissions, and ultimately culminated in the final line-up of 23 chapters, which this volume presents in three parts.

In synthesis, the stated aim of the book project is to make a timely contribution to building the field of Christian education. Set within a contemporary twenty-first century context, its chapter contents speak directly from and to the heart of Christian education. A ‘sneak preview’ of these contents will be outlined next.

1.2 Book Structure and Chapter Preview

The book is organised as follows. Part I features conceptual perspectives and comprises research that develops theological, philosophical and theoretical discussion of Christian education (Chaps. 2–13). This agrees with how the book is presented online at https://www.springer.com/gp/book/9789811588556. Part II encompasses empirical research that examines data to test theory, answer big questions and develop our understanding of Christian education (Chaps. 14–18). This agrees with how the book is presented online at https://www.springer.com/gp/book/9789811588556. Finally, Part III reflects on contemporary practice contexts and showcases examples of emerging research agendas in Christian education (Chaps. 19–24). This agrees with how the book is presented online at https://www.springer.com/gp/book/9789811588556.

1.2.1 Part I: CONCEPTUAL—Research that Develops Theological, Philosophical and Theoretical Discussion of Christian Education

1.2.1.1 Section One—Synoptic Overview

One of the assets of the Judeo-Christian tradition upon which Christian education draws is the concept of wisdom, an embodied and holistic way of knowing within community ordered towards flourishing. Wisdom personified in the ancient texts is hard-working, rigorous, contemplative, dialogic and uncompromisingly committed to a bigger story about what is good against which actions, desires and thought are to be weighed. Christian educators, however, are also children of their own times. Prominent writers in the field such as Smith and Smith (2011), have called attention to some of the problematic ways in which Christian educators have imported assumptions from our contemporary economic, political and scientific stories without appropriate reflection and criticism. This section gathers together writers who have exhibited wisdom by drawing on theological, philosophical and theoretical approaches to bring contemporary stories about education back into conversation with the Christian story.
The chapters in this first section are grouped in the following way. Chapters 2–7 specifically engage with the question of what Christian Education should be. Another way of explaining this is that they hold out for us the goods of Christian education and the ways in which they should shape thinking and, form hospitality, sense of place, enquiry, community and vocation. Chapters 8–11 critique the neoliberal social imaginary and the consequences for education, making a case for a Christian response in policy and research. Chapters 12 and 13 deal directly with the question of how Christian education ought to respond to aggressive secularism regarded, together with hyper-individualism, as one of the features of a neo-liberal secular social imagination. The majority of these chapters address Christian higher education, but this discussion is equally important for K-12 Christian education and, Chaps. 5, 10 and 13 particularly reflect on the K-12 context.

In Chap. 2, Green uses Taylor’s concept of the social imaginary to invite Christian educators to update their conceptual language and framework. Stephens makes the case in Chap. 2 that Christian education should cultivate hospitable thinkers. In Chaps. 4 and 5, Iselin and Norsworthy consider Imago-Dei, the distinctive calling of humanity to bear the image of God, in relation to place and vocation. In Chap. 6, Beech proposes a framework for online learning that seeks to root knowledge and community in a worldview deeply formed by biblical wisdom. In Chap. 7, Konz extends the theme of how to live in community by examining the theological and pedagogical model that Bonhoeffer built for his seminary; Konz argues that Christo-ecclesial unity is a powerful counter-cultural marker of Christian education. In Chap. 7, Leopard explores how a distinctive Christian imagination might shape research methodology in education. He examines the Straussian Grounded Theory Method (SGM) and proposes a relational yet pragmatic, ethical framework for the formulation of redemptive and restorative research aims in Christian education. Chapter 7 extends the discussion by offering a critique of the neoliberal social imaginary. Austin and Perry map out just how insidious the influence can be for Christian providers located in systems of educational choice. Australia has one of the largest government funded systems of educational choice in the world and this is an important chapter for anyone not familiar with the context of Christian education in Australia or with neoliberal systems of educational choice. In Chaps. 10 and 11, Murison and Greentree offer extended reflections on the consequences of neo-liberalism and economic rationalism for the formation of graduates and the identity of Christian schools operating within the Australian system. Greentree’s literature review is part of an ongoing graduate research project and illustrates a good way to frame contemporary sources and debate. Chapters 12 and 13 by Dalziel and Benson close out this section with a very practical consideration of how Christian educators ought to respond to the challenges of aggressive secularism as they impact the science curriculum and institutional religious freedom in Christian schools and colleges.
1.2.1.2 Section One—Itemised Chapters

In Chap. 2, Green (2021, pp. 21–31) explores how Christian education might be practiced in today’s “secular time” as set against institutions like the church and universities that are “creatures of an older time”. Green posits three conceptual distinctions that might serve Christian institutions of higher education well as they reimagine their vocation: “Imagination rather than worldview, pedagogy rather than curriculum and, distinctively rather than uniquely Christian.”

In Chap. 3, Stephens (2021, pp. 33–46) extends the work of Alan Jacobs on enabling people to disagree charitably, to avoid stereotyping and caricature and to foster virtuous conversations in which people persuade rather than domineer. Building upon the insights of virtue epistemology, a theological ethic of hospitality, and consideration of the “implied reader” of Scripture, Stephens demonstrates that Christian tradition and Christian Scripture resource Christian teachers for the task of “forming students to practice both rigour and humility, conviction and charity, fidelity and open-mindedness.”

In Chap. 4, Iselin (2021, pp. 47–60) posits that Christian education, as person forming communities, should seek to “curate, cultivate and celebrate implacement, particularly in a contemporary age where a haunting sense of placeless-ness shapes our current generation.” By exploring principles of “place making in Christian education”, Iselin invites Christian educators to restore a theology of place within the academy by considering “how geography, location, community and neighbourhoods are actually part of a grander story of God’s sovereign purpose in and through creation.”

In Chap. 5, Norsworthy (2021, pp. 61–73) “presents a case for Christian Higher Education (CHE) which values the development of a Personal Passionate Profession.” Building on the work of LaBoskey’s notion of a Passionate Creed, Norsworthy’s concept facilitates engagement “within a particular context and vocation to be an expression of God’s redemptive work [while acting as] the mirror in which reflection about our vocation occurs so that it is gently, continually and strategically nudged toward being more intentional and strategic for the Kingdom of God.”

In Chap. 6, Beech (2021, pp. 75–88) responds to the problem that “little research or reflection has considered how to provide an online learning experience that is not only effective and transformative, but that also flows from a biblically faithful approach to education.” Beech “reviews current literature, practices and models of online learning in order to consider aspects of biblically faithful models for fostering transformative Christian online learning communities of co-allegiants discovering the truth to bring about redemptive change.”

In Chap. 7, Konz (2021, pp. 89–103) “investigates one possible means by which Christian Higher Education Providers (CHEPs) might follow after and attest to Christ: a shared commitment to Christocentric unity both within and between Christian Higher Education institutions.” Drawing on the theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Konz argues for Christian higher education providers “to embrace an intentionally Christo-ecclesial unity as a counter-cultural marker of Christian higher education.”
In Chap. 8, Leopard (2021, pp. 105–125) evaluates the history of Straussian Grounded Theory Method (GTM) as an interpretivist revision of classical GTM. Leopard’s discussion and analysis intends to “help educational researchers negotiate diverse cross-cultural situations, avoid the dead-end frivolity of secular, naturalistic assumptions and integrate the distinctively Christian elements of a vibrant, living faith into Straussian GTM and other qualitative research methodologies.”

In Chap. 9, Austin and Perry (2021, pp. 127–144) grapple with the ambiguity inherent in the terms ‘research’ and ‘scholarship’, which the authors posit “is often left to individual institutions and various interest groups to define”. Using an Australian case study, their chapter argues that “holistic understanding of both research and scholarship, and the relation between them, helps to orient institutional efforts towards positive impact and engagement for constituents and end-users.”

In Chap. 10, Murison (2021, pp. 145–157) posits that “neoliberal, economic rationalist policies of many western countries have increasingly seen education become a servant to market forces and held accountable for its contribution to economic development.” Importantly, the resultant regulatory dictates risk undermining the broader concepts of human flourishing that are foundational to Christian education. The chapter proposes embedding human flourishing in the development of graduate attributes as an appropriate and expansive strategy and response.

In Chap. 11, Greentree (2021, pp. 159–174) “explores how Australian Christian Schools wrestle with competing purposes” and the manifold “demands from various stakeholders including government, churches, parents, teachers, students, school boards, higher education providers and employers.” Using discourse analysis and an “order of worth framework to look at representations of value and purpose”, Greentree highlights “some of the foundations and purposes of Christian Schools, and how these relate to the neoliberal purposes that underpin much of current educational policy.”

In Chap. 12, Dalziel (2021, pp. 175–192) “considers issues related to secularism and pluralism, including international legal agreements and national laws on human rights issues.” Drawing attention to the “rise of a new ‘sexual fundamentalism’ in some western societies that can run counter to beliefs in religious freedom”, the chapter considers “issues of offence and harm arising from different views of sexuality and religion, and a related problem of ‘concept creep’ for definitions of harm. It concludes with a school comparison based on a different set of ethical issues (an ethically founded vegan school) as a ‘turnabout test’, and reflections on future issues for Christian education.”

In Chap. 13, Benson (2021, pp. 193–219) explores the question: “If revelation and reason are positioned as polar opposites, is religion irrelevant to the study of science?” Grappling with issues such as “methodological atheism” and “secularist indoctrination”, the chapter argues for “appropriate multidisciplinarity” that incorporates sacred texts in secular middle-school science: “Scriptures in Science can illuminate foundational cosmologies that awaken wonder and warrant investigation of the natural world.”
1.2.2 Part II: EMPIRICAL—Research that Examines Data to Test Theory, Answer Big Questions and Develop Our Understanding of Christian Education

1.2.2.1 Section Two—Synoptic Overview

The Wisdom tradition texts of the Bible place as much emphasis, if not more, on our practice, as they do about the ways we think. Practical wisdom does not eschew conceptual knowledge but takes into account the ways in which practice may form it. This is the first of two sections in the book in which authors investigate many of the theological, philosophical and theoretical themes presented in section one through real-world engagement with educational research and practice. The individual contributions of the chapters stand in their own right, but together this collection offers two important examples for educators interested in bringing Christian formation and educational practice together. First, section two gathers together empirical research in which authors demonstrate how to design data collection, analysis and reflection guided by Christian practices. Almost all of the chapters are case studies, all are qualitative and all are concerned with expanding learning, being and doing in real educational settings. This leads to the second contribution of this collection; the use of empirical research to bring contemporary stories about education into conversation with the Christian story.

The chapters do this as follows; Chap. 14 by Gowan and Minor Bridges investigates teacher perceptions of holistic student formation in a Christian higher education setting in Australia. A particular emphasis of this chapter is the tension between different models of Christian education practice imported by the teachers and the diversity of a student body which includes international students from other faith backgrounds. Chapter 15, by Tucker and Luetz is a rare example of research set in the context of informal adult education; it analyses a pilot education programme bringing art therapy to maximum security prisons in Australia. A strength of this chapter is that it brings together rigorous analysis using both psychological instruments and New Testament exegeses. Chapter 16, by Butcher and Norsworthy also focuses on how engagement with biblical text might reshape professional learning; it is a case study of staff development at a tertiary Christian education provider in New Zealand. In Chap. 17, Kemp also develops the theme of the Christian story as a formational educational narrative, but this time the focus is on student formation through a case study of curriculum design. Chapter 18 moves the discussion of distinctively Christian formation into leadership practices; Chapman presents findings from her MA research into training requirements for entry-level ministry-ready Pentecostal leaders. All of these chapters share in common a commitment to use empirical research to reshape practices of Christian education in ways which challenge the narrow stories of utility and reductionism which they find in the western educational context.
In Chap. 14, Gowan and Miner Bridges (2021, pp. 223–240) use “Excelsia College as a case study of the challenge of building a distinctively Christian higher education institution, especially in the context of the increasing secular nature of higher education in Australia, the diminishing Christian student market and challenges brought about by the growth in international student enrolments.” Using interviews, the qualitative study scrutinises staff perceptions “in light of psychological theory and Trinitarian theology.”

In Chap. 15, Tucker and Luetz (2021, pp. 241–271) take a fresh look at prison ministry in the context of contemporary incarceration and recidivism in Australia. Given the high illiteracy rates within prisons where only a few inmates can read, art therapy is highlighted as an effective communication tool and therapeutic practice. “The analysis presented in this chapter synthesises lessons learned from developing and implementing the ‘Change the Design of Your Life’ art therapy programme in Queensland prisons. Experiences and lessons gathered in this chapter will be useful for educators, policymakers, practitioners and chaplains serving the cause of social prison ministry in Australia and beyond.” The pilot study is underpinned and supplemented by New Testament perspectives.

In Chap. 16, Butcher and Norsworthy (2021, pp. 273–288) present a case study on how Bethlehem Tertiary Institute (BTI) in New Zealand used the books of Nehemiah, Ephesians and 1 Peter to frame a way of forming a community of staff to outwork its vision to be a faithful expression of the Kingdom of God on earth. Drawing on scripture, the characteristics of humility, hope and hospitality were identified as formational. BTI now uses the phrase “I work better because I work with you”, analogous to the Maori proverb “Nā tō rourou, nā taku rourou ka ora ai te iwi—with your basket and my basket, the people will flourish.”

In Chap. 17, Kemp (2021, pp. 289–303) sheds light on how this private Year 7–13 Presbyterian school is able to design its own Christian education (CE) curriculum without the pressure of assessment from an external body. Kemp describes the dynamic process of review and innovative implementation of new content and relevant pedagogy and explores a theoretical imaginairum of narrative. The curriculum is conceptualised by three intertwined narratives (the students’, the institution’s historical, and the biblical narrative) [and] is illustrated using three unique lessons from years 9, 11, and 12.”

In Chap. 18, Chapman (2021, pp. 305–330) explores the type of leadership training required to produce ‘entry-level, ministry-ready pentecostal leaders’ in the context of the International Network of Churches (INC) in Australia. Employing qualitative approaches, the research investigates the observations and experiences of 17 active and seasoned ministry leaders to probe key characteristics and competencies of leaders-in-training. The findings reveal key characteristics, competencies and skills deemed essential in ministry-relevant leadership training.
Part III: PRACTICE—Research that Reflects on Contemporary Practice Contexts and Showcases Opportunities for Future Christian Education Inquiry

Section Three—Synoptic Overview

The practices of wisdom exemplified in the ancient texts of the Old Testament are holistic. They expect understanding to be formed in habits of heart and mind and action. They assume that human beings are bound in relationship to the transcendent, to the natural world and to each other and they reflect on this interdependence. This may well be why they have endured amid very different philosophical imaginations. Holistic practices of wisdom also hold out a helpful corrective to the contemporary preoccupation with the self. By reflecting on practice and context, the chapters in section three of this collection expand and challenge our educational imagination to consider our relationships with sacred text, the natural world, sexuality, culture and those who are differently abled. Importantly, they also probe timely opportunities for future research.

In Chap. 19, Patterson opens the conversation up with a practical discussion of how to tell the Christian story in ways that engage with a new cultural world formed by the secular technologies and philosophies explored in section one of the collection. Buxton, Luetz, Shaw address in Chap. 20 the lack of attention given to creation care and the natural world in Christian education. They reclaim the pedagogies of embodied learning which were familiar, as they note, to the ancient Hebrews, the early church and indigenous societies. In Chap. 21, Robinson, Stirling and Barendse argue that holistic sexual education is needed as a part of Christian education. Their chapter reflects on a programme designed to help high school students in Australia, to think critically about pregnancy and abortion. In Chap. 22, Nelson and Luetz review the emerging literature regarding inter-cultural competency and suggest that in Christian education settings true unity in Christ should allow for cultural differences to live together in loving harmony with each other. This aim is both timely and timeless as racial inequity remains a ubiquitous contemporary crisis. By charting opportunities for future research on immersive educational experiences with, and importantly, in other countries and cultures, the authors seek to engender and propagate more inter-culturally sympathetic human behaviours. In Chap. 23, Gosbell examines the practices of Universal Design for Learning in Christian higher education, particularly seminary education. Gosbell also contends that Christian education should be a place where diversity is welcomed and the chapter reflects on the ways in which a universal design pedagogy would benefit all students, not just those differently abled. Chapter 24, concludes the collection with a courageous reflection on sexual addiction. Seyed Aghamiri and Luetz also argue that Christian education is a context in which practices of wellness, happiness and community can be re-formed to benefit the flourishing of society.
1.2.3.2 Section Three—Itemised Chapters

In Chap. 19, Paterson (2021, pp. 333–349) explores avenues for communicating the Christian story in the midst of “the questions and challenges introduced by our unique cultural moment.” Paterson, who is a speaker for Ravi Zacharias International Ministries, posits that when making significant decisions, “the social science literature bears out a complex relationship between facts and feelings as to how people form resilient faith.” In short, Paterson’s discourse analyses “the relationship between the attractive ‘what’ of the Christian story and the compelling ‘why’ in giving reasons for our hope.”

In Chap. 20, Buxton, Luetz, and Shaw (2021, pp. 351–376) address the need for educational strategies to increase awareness of—and active participation in—creation care initiatives to address the environmental challenges now confronting God’s good but groaning creation. Following a two-pronged rationale for creation care based on the scientific biophysical imperative and the biblical/theological mandate to value and care for the natural world, the authors offer a brief survey of seminary syllabi that demonstrate progress in educating for creation care. The final part of the chapter presents embodied pedagogical approaches as a means to the above stated end.

In Chap. 21, Robinson, Stirling, and Barendse (2021, pp. 377–393) present a mixed methods case study outlining the inception, development, implementation and outcomes of a youth education programme titled Perspectives, which engages students in conversations about abortion issues. Following the development by Brisbane pregnancy support centre Priceless House, Perspectives has been piloted and run for five years in two Christian co-educational schools with Grade 10–12 students. Recent surveys of Australian students in Grades 10–12 showed that around half are sexually active, and therefore, face a possible risk of unintended pregnancy. This makes Perspectives a timely complement to conventional sex education.

In Chap. 22, Nelson and Luetz (2021, pp. 395–422) expound the significance of research into intercultural competence (IC) as a “new kind of literacy”, which the authors argue has never been in higher demand. The discourse features a comprehensive review of the literature that exposes critical knowledge gaps and identifies fertile opportunities for future research among high school students, both in Australia and beyond. The discussion draws on the established tradition of theological interpretation, and on the authors’ personal international and inter-cultural background and experiences, both of which underpin the paper in areas of introduction/rationale and conclusion/outlook. A postscript reflects on the prospects for nurturing inter-cultural competency in a COVID-19 world.

In Chap. 23, Gosbell (2021, pp. 423–442) explores Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a framework for teaching and learning that gives all students equal access to education. While typically considered specifically for students with disabilities and learning difficulties, the benefits of UDL approaches are also beneficial to other stakeholder groups. In the final section, Gosbell gives a “theological rationale for why the inclusion of students with disability should be a priority for theological education” and provides examples of practical classroom application.
In Chap. 24, Seyed Aghamiri and Luetz (2021, pp. 443–468) cast the research spotlight on sexual addiction (SA) and hypersexual disorder (HD) as contemporary phenomena that the public remains poorly educated about. The analysis digested in this chapter converges around the finding that Christian education (CE) stakeholders have not yet had the intrepidity to meaningfully confront this issue. The treatise rests on a comprehensive literature study, which the authors have supplemented with corresponding critical analysis. The synthesis suggests that religious/spiritual beliefs strongly impinge on both SA/HD aetiology and recovery prospects. Charting pertinent perspectives, challenges and opportunities, the authors argue for more thematicisation of SA/HD within CE environments so that understanding of SA/HD can be mainstreamed and normalised—rather than moralised—for the greater good of both sufferers and society.

1.3 Book Focus and Intended Contribution

In synthesis, the book aims to progress and innovate conceptual, empirical and practice-informed research agendas to build the field of Christian education research. In short, Innovating Christian Education Research: Multidisciplinary Perspectives:

1. Includes comprehensive theologically informed case studies that offer insights into a range of K-12 and higher education contexts;
2. Advances theoretical discourses and programmatic perspectives to shape Christian formation, information and transformation;
3. Explores the relevance and applicability of Christian education to real-world praxis contexts, including in prison ministry, sexual addiction counselling, workplace practices, learning disabilities, intercultural competence, pregnancy perspectives and environmental sustainability, among others;
4. Develops timely research proposals and explores opportunities for future research, including in areas of conventional and unconventional curricula and leading-edge pedagogies;
5. Asks questions and grapples with ethical questions facing different Christian education stakeholder groups, including teachers, students, researchers and diverse communities of practice.

By probing these and other timely issues and questions through multidisciplinary research and scholarship, Christian education is shown to be progressively reliant on holistic approaches which conjoin theory and practice, head and heart, reason and relevance. By helping thinkers to believe and believers to think, this book seeks to stimulate constructive dialogue about what it means to be distinctively Christian and relevant today. In this sense, Christian education is reformulated in this volume as an important interdisciplinary and interdenominational vocation for lecturers, researchers and scholars, professionals and practitioners alike.
With chapter contents intentionally solicited and focused around the title *Innovating Christian Education Research: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, the book purposely occupies unconventional research space and thereby aims to make its unique contribution to field building.

Research in Christian Education is in its infancy and there is limited published work of a good standard to consult. In order for Christian education research to mature, educators need examples of conceptual, empirical and practice-based research modelled from different disciplinary standpoints and within formal and informal educational settings. The coherence of this book is not to be found in choosing an educational setting (e.g. K-12 or higher education) but in selecting examples of research approaches (empirical, conceptual and practice-based) that will inspire others to passionately pursue research while raising the quality of their own work in response. The editors argue that this strategy is urgently needed for research in the field to mature. The process of working with some first authors and aspiring academics to construct chapters that contribute to this way is an important feature of this collection. This is also a significant part of the rationale for the book and should be noted as a defining feature of the volume’s intent. If this collection becomes a benchmark for future conferences, then the book would achieve an important outcome in relation to field building.

Moreover, the title *Innovating Christian Education Research: Multidisciplinary Perspectives* also insinuates that processes of innovation and field building are very much ongoing/continuing rather than complete/attained, wherefore the verb ‘Innovating’ seemed to be more appropriate (to lead the title) than the adjective ‘innovative’ in relation to ‘Christian Education Research’. Furthermore, the subtitle ‘Multidisciplinary Perspectives’ expressly insinuates breadth and diversity of disciplinary approaches and perspectives, which also forms an integral part of this project’s intent. Importantly, this subtitle reflects that venturing into uncharted and unconventional research terrain through multidisciplinary research approaches is deliberate rather than coincidental or eclectic to the book’s stated aims. The editors hope that the book’s forward-facing outlook will secure its relevance as a useful resource for many years to come.

In concluding this introductory chapter, the editors hope that the book will appeal to a broad and diverse readership of graduate and postgraduate students, scholars, teachers, change leaders, school administrators, theologians, career academics and education practitioners who will derive encouragement from its fresh, appealing, challenging and forward-looking invitation to progress Christian education research by daring to venture courageously into uncharted research spaces with the intention to pioneer and to innovate.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the diverse range of authors, both for their willingness to share their expertise and experiences, and for their willingness to revise, refine and improve their chapters to rise up to the manifold reviewer requirements. At this juncture, a special note of thanks also goes to all those anonymous peer reviewers who have given generously of their time and expertise but who cannot be individually identified and thanked by name.
With a line-up of 23 chapters as rich in novelty, diversity, relevancy and originality as you are now holding in your hands—and with three diverse parts promising a broad range of conceptual, empirical and practice-informed research dimensions, it is our joy and privilege to present to you *Innovating Christian Education Research: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. We hope that you will enjoy a delightful and perhaps even delectable time of reading, rumination, reflection, inspiration, imagination and—most importantly—research *motivation* to keep innovating!

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