

# TIRF TODAY

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Promoting research  
and effective practices  
in English language  
education for the global  
knowledge economy in  
the 21st century

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## Murray to Author Online Teacher Education Research Project

TIRF is pleased to announce that Dr. Denise Murray, Professor Emerita at Macquarie University in Sydney and at San José State University in California, has been selected as the author for TIRF's forthcoming research report about online language teacher education programs.

Dr. Murray has a long history as a language teacher educator, having been the Executive Director of the Adult Migrant English Program Research Centre and of the National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research at Macquarie University from 2000-2006. Prior to her appointment at Macquarie, she was founding Chair of the Department of Linguistics and Language Development at San José State University. For seven years, she served on the Board of Directors of TESOL, including a term as President in 1996-1997.

Dr. Murray's own research interests include computer-assisted language learning; cross-cultural literacy; the use of the learners' L1 in the second language classroom; the intersection of language, society, and technology; settlement of adult immigrants; language education policy; and leadership in language education. She has published her work in seventeen books and more than 100 articles. Her book publications include *Knowledge machines: Language and information in a technological society* (1995); *Navigating to read; Reading to navigate* (2005, co-edited with P. McPherson); *What English language teachers need to know* (2011, co-authored with M. A. Christison); *Planning change, changing plans: Innovations in second language teaching* (2008); and *Leadership in English language education: Theoretical foundations and practical skills for changing times* (2008, co-edited with M. A. Christison).

When asked to comment on her selection as the author for the upcoming report about online language teacher education programs, Dr. Murray wrote the following: "I am very excited to be involved in this new TIRF project because it intersects both personal and professional experiences and interests. I have long been committed to distance learning, having started high-school teaching in the countryside in Australia, 1,200 miles from the nearest university. To finish my BA, I took classes by correspondence, involving large amounts of printed materials – and this, before the age of even photocopying!"

Dr. Murray's interest in technology began in the 1980's: "When I was doing my PhD at Stanford, I stumbled across email (observing my husband using it for his work at IBM), then in its infancy. This exposure was transformative for me. I immediately realized the potential for making distance education more effective and became involved in all issues around using technology in language education. Of course, since then, other, even more robust applications have been added to our repertoire for distance teaching. For me, the most important challenge remains: how to make education accessible to those whose physical place, available time, and other life circumstances make it impossible to attend a brick-and-mortar college? If only I were doing my BA now, how different my distance experience would be! Working on this TIRF project gives me the opportunity to explore the variety of language teacher education programs around the world using technology in different ways, so that we can get a clearer picture of what constitutes best practice for different contexts."



Dr. Denise Murray to head new research initiative for TIRF

## TIRF Board Members Discuss Language Assessment at LTRC 2011

When the [Language Testing Research Colloquium](#) convened at the University of Michigan at the end of June, three TIRF Board members were involved in presentations related to TIRF's current focus.

Nick Saville from the University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations gave a presentation co-authored with TIRF Board member Mike Milanovic. They discussed the use of a quality management (QM) approach to improve testing and to ensure that appropriate professional standards are met. The authors argued that there is convergence between the twin concepts of quality and validity. Quality management provides an appropriate basis for guaranteeing the consistency of the processes which underpin a validity argument, and provides the tools and techniques for linking theoretical concerns with the practical realities of setting up and administering assessment systems.

TIRF Board member Mary Ann Christison of the University of Utah discussed key issues related to workplace language instruction in terms of assessing both program outcomes and the language skills of the learners. These issues are related to understanding the amount and types of research available on workplace language instruction, moderating learner and employer expectations, communicating to lay persons about the complex nature of learning another language, measuring outcomes, connecting language training to worker on the job performance, and using assessment data in decision-making.

Finally, TIRF President Kathi Bailey discussed the initial findings of a survey (conducted with her colleagues Ryan Damerow and Courtney Pahl) about the roles and functions of English (and other languages) in international plurilingual organizations. The survey addresses the necessary language skills individuals must possess to be successful as competent employees and the assessment procedures and instruments used in these contexts. This research follows from an investigation published by TIRF in 2009 about the impact of English and plurilingualism in global corporations.

Dr. Jean Turner of the Monterey Institute of International Studies was the discussant for the colloquium, which was held on Saturday, June 25. TIRF grant recipients Mansoor Ali Al-Surmi, Ching-Ni Hsieh, and Cecilia Guanfang Zhao were in attendance during the presentation.



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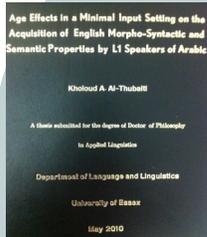
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Kathleen Bailey,  
Chair of TIRF

## Sheikh Nahayan Fellow Explores Early EFL Instruction



Dr. Kholoud Abdullah Al-Thubaiti was awarded the Sheikh Nahayan Fellowship in 2009. She completed her doctorate at the University of Essex in the UK, and is now an Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics in the Department of English Language at the Umm Al-Qura University in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where she has been appointed the deputy chair for the department. Her specialty is second language acquisition.

**TIRF:** *Dr. Al-Thubaiti, can you please provide some background information about your doctoral dissertation?*

**Dr. Al-Thubaiti:** My research focused on explaining the phenomenon of selective fossilization in L2 grammars. For my doctoral dissertation, I explored the impact of starting age in an EFL context (with minimal exposure to English input) as a non-linguistic factor. I evaluated the long-term effects on proficiency of starting English in the elementary and middle school level in Saudi Arabia. Unlike previous studies on the same topic which have looked at proficiency in a general, rather diffuse way, I conducted a detailed investigation on five morpho-syntactic and semantic properties known to be problematic for Arabic L2 speakers of English: verb phrase ellipsis, the use of 'resumptive' pronouns, adverb placement, the contrast in meaning between progressive/habitual forms, and preterite/present perfect forms. My findings consistently show no observable differences in L2 performance due to starting age of L2 learning, but rather due to property type.

**TIRF:** *What were some of the salient findings related to your research?*

**Dr. Al-Thubaiti:** The findings from my research suggest that an early start in a minimal input setting does not offer the same beneficial effects on later

competence that has been found in studies of L2 learners exposed to English in naturalistic settings. The first and most important implication of these findings is not to over-predict the outcome of early EFL instruction. Age alone is not enough to guarantee success. It has to be supported with the optimal quality and amount of input to create a significant environment for L2 exposure. In order for age effects to emerge, it is suggested that the hours of foreign language teaching during elementary school need to be increased from 90 minutes (two classes) per week to perhaps five classes each of 45 minutes (almost four hours) per week. Whether such an increase would prove significant is still an empirical question for future research.

**TIRF:** *What plans do you have for future research? How will your research be connected to pedagogy in the language classroom?*

**Dr. Al-Thubaiti:** Having explored a maturational-based account for selective fossilization, I am now conducting research that explores a property-based account from a generative theoretical framework. I am exploring the extent to which properties at the syntax/discourse interface (e.g., temporal perfect) are more vulnerable than properties at the syntax-semantics interface (e.g., progressive aspect). This research has important implications for pedagogy as it helps to identify learnable grammatical properties and the appropriate timing for introducing them in the curriculum.

**TIRF:** *What courses are you now teaching? What aspect of teaching do you wish to focus on in the future in your classroom?*

**Dr. Al-Thubaiti:** I am currently teaching undergraduate courses in linguistics, such as introduction to language, second language acquisition, and writing in EFL. My teaching philosophy is to extend knowledge by promoting creative thinking and stimulating critical questions like *Why? How? What if?* The aspect of teaching I enjoy the most is the blossoming of 'independent' critical thinkers who don't just reproduce what teachers say.

## 2011 TESOL Qatar Conference — Registration Now Open

Registration for the 2011 TESOL Qatar Conference, *Research Into Practice*, will be held in Doha, October 1-3. Early registration is now open. You may find more information about the conference by [clicking here](#).

## Report from the Chair — TIRF's Early Adolescence

As my inspiration for this month's Chair's report, I take the following quote from the environmentalist, Aldo Leopold: "In June, as many as a dozen species may burst their buds on a single day. No man can heed all of these anniversaries; no man can ignore all of them." What struck me about this quote was the comment about anniversaries, paired with the comment on so many species blooming this month. (Again, I ask the tolerance of our readers in the Southern Hemisphere.)

I remember very well the summer of June 1998, when the TESOL Board of Directors met in Virginia to decide upon several

important issues, some of which had serious budget implications for the association. The Association Advancement Committee (AAC) had worked for several years to try to determine the feasibility of starting a foundation dedicated to raising money for research in our field. The committee members – Jim Alatis, Ed Anthony, Russ Campbell, Jodi Crandall, Rick Jenks, Joan Morley, and Dick Tucker – had concluded that such a foundation was viable and important. The TESOL Board, impressed by the committee's work and persuasive testimony from Richard Boyum, the Board liaison to the AAC, voted to start TIRF and set aside

the seed money with which to do so.

So this June, TIRF entered its early adolescence. And, like all adolescents, the foundation is growing and trying new things. I hope you will heed this particular anniversary, to borrow a phrase from Leopold, and help provide TIRF with the funding we need to move our work to the next level. To that end, our next newsletter will feature information about our first summer fundraising drive, which will help build TIRF's infrastructure.

*Kathi Bailey*