The Language School is the division of The University of Texas at San Antonio’s Department of Bicultural-Bilingual Studies. The department’s interdisciplinary focus includes bilingual and second-language teaching, Mexican-American studies, multiculturalism, migration, transnationalism, and ethnic studies. My position will involve conducting research and teaching courses at the graduate and undergraduate levels for the TESOL cohort.

1. What were the main findings of your study?

My study investigated the analyst and teacher domains of teacher language awareness (TLA) among preservice K-12 educators of English language learners (ELLs). I found that, overall, the teachers’ degree of TLA before directed coursework in L2 methodology was low, but improved with treatment in the form of a course that adopted a deliberate, explicit approach to the development of TLA. In addition to quantitative analyses, I conducted focus group interviews with participants to determine how their attitudes, perceptions, and experiences might have influenced their TLA development. The results suggest that deliberate approaches to developing knowledge about language are necessary for K-12 mainstream teachers. Results also imply that teacher educators may need to adopt an explicit approach to developing TLA in L2 methods classes, in order to help preservice teachers integrate TLA as a critical component of their pedagogical content knowledge.

2. What did you learn about doing research in the process of completing your dissertation?

I learned that research is incredibly dynamic — part of what makes it so interesting to me! Looking back upon my initial study design, I marvel at how much it evolved from start to finish. In the future, I will continually remind myself of the cognitive flexibility and creativity that quality research requires.

3. Where are you currently working and what does your position involve?

This month, I started working as an Assistant Professor in The University of Texas at San Antonio’s Department of Bicultural-Bilingual Studies. The department’s interdisciplinary focus includes bilingual and second-language teaching, Mexican-American studies, multiculturalism, migration, transnationalism, and ethnic studies. My position will involve conducting research and teaching courses at the graduate and undergraduate levels for the TESOL cohort.

4. What plans do you have for future research and how did your dissertation influence them?

My dissertation is the foundation for my future research program, which will continue to focus on teacher language awareness. Currently, I am analyzing data in response to the question of how TLA influences the activities that teachers design for ELLs during lesson planning phases. I am also collaborating with a colleague in New York to examine how teacher supervisors’ TLA manifests in their feedback to preservice teachers.

5. What did receiving the TIRF Doctoral Dissertation Grant mean to you?

The TIRF Doctoral Dissertation Grant was a very important professional milestone for me. What became more important than the funding itself was the recognition of my research by a community of established scholars and educators — it gave me great confidence and motivated me to produce a worthwhile dissertation. I have made excellent networking connections via TIRF, and I am sure they will be invaluable to me as I begin my career in higher education.

6. What advice would you give people who are just beginning their doctoral research?

I would say, “Find the balance.” With this statement I mean, try to find the balance between carefully designing your research but not taking forever, and between selecting a topic that truly interests you and choosing one that is needed in the field. Balance must also be found between narrowing your topic and producing enough information to contribute to the knowledge base, and between conducting research in general and not letting it overwhelm you. Easier said than done, however.

7. What would you say to someone who is considering donating to TIRF?

I would strongly encourage professionals in our field to donate to TIRF! Dissertation grants and other types of funding are highly competitive and hard to come by, and PhD students in linguistics and TESOL-type fields are often competing with many other disciplines in the humanities. Receiving a grant directly from specialists in our field both assists with the costs of research, and also denotes recognition from scholars who have deep levels of expertise and interest in grantees’ doctoral research foci that align with TIRF’s priorities.

The conference, themed “ELT Going through Changes,” is a one-day event that will feature Dawn Wink as the plenary speaker. For more information on her session, please click here. For information about registration, please click, or write to didomas@icda.edu.do. The presenter’s proposal form can be downloaded by visiting this link. A preview of the conference may be downloaded by clicking here.
ETS Announces Jacqueline Ross TOEFL Dissertation Award Competition

The TOEFL Program at ETS is now accepting applications for the 2014 Jacqueline Ross TOEFL Dissertation Award. The award recognizes doctoral dissertation research that makes a significant and original contribution to knowledge about second or foreign language tests and testing and/or the use and development of such tests and testing. The award consists of US $2,500 and round-trip economy airfare, paid expenses, and hotel accommodations for three nights at the Language Testing Research Colloquium, where the award is presented.

To be considered for the award (1) the candidate’s institution must have accepted the dissertation within three years before the date of the award application; (2) the research must have been completed as part of your upcoming courses, I want to tell you about some potentially helpful resources from TIRF.

One set of resources that will be of use to you, your students, and your colleagues is TIRF’s collection of reference lists. There are over 115 reference lists on topics of current interest stored as free, downloadable Word documents. There are also links to several professional organizations around the world, as well as slidecasts about TIRF presentations on a variety of topics.

In addition, you can find links to a number of journals in our field that may be outlets for you and your graduate students to consider as possible publication opportunities. The journals are sortable by various tags related to the focus and scope of the journal (e.g., for program administrators, teachers, researchers, etc.). Many of the smaller international publications are actively seeking contributions.

If you are teaching research methods courses, you and your students will find TIRF’s annotated bibliography about research methods, classroom research, and action research to be useful. You can also access the training provided by the US National Institutes of Health about protecting human research participants.

Finally, you can find a link to some free software about “R” – for computing statistics and creating graphics using statistical data. The Guide for Doing Statistics in Second Language Research Using R can be found by clicking here.

Please share this information with your students, your colleagues, and with people in other organizations. And if you are starting a new term, I wish you every success with the coming semester.

Kathleen Bailey, Chair of TIRF