

# 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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### TIRF Representation at TESOL Symposium in Beijing

In July, TIRF Trustees, Jun Liu, David Nunan, and Donald Freeman, attended the TESOL Symposium in Beijing as workshop leaders and plenary speakers, along with TESOL President Christine Coombe and Executive Director Rosa Aronson.

The symposium was held at Beijing Normal University. Its theme was "Sustainable Teacher Development through Innovative Teaching and Research." Presentations were given in areas such as language policy, teacher development, English language teaching (ELT), and research.

In his plenary, Freeman discussed the tension between global, national, regional, and local influences in addressing the question of what constitutes professional knowledge. He described a framework for ELT that accommodates the range of potentially conflicting interests.

Nunan framed his talk around the issue of whether TESOL actually constitutes a profession. He discussed the criteria of being a profession as including advanced and ongoing levels of training, a theoretical and empirical knowledge base, developing standards of practice, and carrying out advocacy initiatives. During the talk, Nunan described the work of TIRF in enhancing the professionalism of language education.

Liu spoke on teaching English in China. He pointed out that while there are many challenges in ELT, there are also numerous opportunities for innovation and creativity. He outlined some of the changes that he predicts the profession will experience as Chinese children reach higher levels of English proficiency at younger ages.

**Editor's note:** TIRF Trustees pay for their own conference travel expenses.

### TIRF Trustees Meet With His Excellency, Sheikh Nahayan



Dick Tucker, Sheikh Nahayan,  
and Yehia El-Ezabi in Abu-Dhabi

This past June, Trustee Dick Tucker and Trustee Emeritus Yehia El-Ezabi met with His Excellency, Sheikh Nahayan bin Mubarak Al Nahayan, the United Arab Emirates' Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research. During their meeting, the Trustees thanked the Sheikh for his support of the Sheikh Nahayan Fellowships over the past three years.

Tucker and El-Ezabi presented the Sheikh with a plaque from TIRF, in recognition of his foresight and dedication to research. They stressed the need for and the importance of the work that Sheikh Nahayan has supported, and gave him a summary report about the nine Sheikh Nahayan Fellows and the progress each has made. Many of those Fellows who have completed their doctoral work are now contributing to language education in Palestine, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE.

The Sheikh Nahayan Fellowships were created to help support the teaching and learning of English in the Arab world, as well as to build a network of scholars. Last year, TIRF awarded three doctoral grants in the third year of the Sheikh Nahayan Fellowships. Since the grants were first awarded in 2008, five recipients have completed their doctorates while four more are expected to finish over the next year. Awardees have made a positive impact on English language instruction in Arabic-speaking countries, and their scholarly activities have complemented the purposes of the Fellowships very well.

### Reference Lists Updated

One type of resource on TIRF's website consists of reference lists on a wide range of topics in language teaching and applied linguistics research. These reference lists are available as free downloadable Word documents at <http://www.tirfonline.org/resources/references/>

"Our intent in sharing these reference lists is to support the work of teachers and scholars around the world," said TIRF President, Kathi Bailey. "We appreciate the help of scholars such as Ros Mitchell and Manuel Jiménez Raya, who have recently contributed greatly to the reference list project."

Several of these reference lists have been updated over the past month. TIRF welcomes contributions from any scholars who would like to add to the existing reference lists or contribute an entirely new list. Word documents in current APA format should be submitted to [info@tirfonline.org](mailto:info@tirfonline.org) and contributions will be acknowledged both on the website and by a formal letter of thanks.



Jun Liu, David Nunan, and  
Donald Freeman in Beijing

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**Kathleen Bailey,  
Chair of TIRF**

**TIRF Grant Recipients Give Presentations at LTRC**

Three TIRF grant recipients gave presentations at the Language Testing Research Colloquium at the University of Michigan in June, and two TIRF Trustees attended their presentations.

Mr. Mansoor Al-Surmi, one of the 2010 Sheikh Nahayan Fellows, talked about “Balancing Practicality and Construct Representativeness for IEP Speaking Tests.” Mr. Al-Surmi is a doctoral candidate at Northern Arizona University.

The title of the presentation by Dr. Cecilia Guanfang Zhao, a 2009 recipient of a Doctoral Dissertation Grant, was “Assessing Authorial Voice Strength in L2 Argumentative Writing.” Dr. Zhao completed her PhD at New York University and is now teaching at Shanghai International Studies University.

Dr. Ching-Ni Hsieh, the 2010 winner of the Russell N. Campbell Doctoral Dissertation Grant, discussed “ESL Teachers’ Versus American Undergraduates’ Judgments of Oral Proficiency, Accentedness and Comprehensibility.” Dr. Hsieh completed her graduate work at Michigan State University and is now working for the Cambridge Michigan Language Assessments team.



**Mary Ann Christison, Cecilia Guanfang Zhao, Mansoor Al-Surmi, Ching-Ni Hsieh, and Kathi Bailey at LTRC 2011**

Congratulations to all three of these young professionals for their outstanding work!

**Report from the Chair — Philanthropy and the Story of Stone Soup**

There is an old European folktale that is often told around the bonfire at summer camp. It starts out with three soldiers returning from the war. One night, they pitched their tent near a small village. The soldiers had no food, but they built a fire and put a cauldron of water over the flames. Then they each began to search the ground around their campsite, looking for rocks.

The soldiers looked and looked, picking up one rock and then another, discarding most of the rocks on the basis of some criteria known only to them. A crowd began to gather and the curious villagers watched this process for some time, until each soldier had finally found a small rock that suited his purpose. Then the soldiers returned to their campfire, washed the three smooth stones, and put them into the simmering water.

A little boy asked the soldiers, “Why did you do that?”

One of the soldiers told him, “We are making stone soup for our supper.”

The little boy looked dubious. “Stone soup doesn’t sound very tasty,” he said.

“Oh, it is!” replied the first soldier. “But,” he added, “it’d be much better if we had a carrot to add to it.” The little boy ran home and asked his mother for a carrot, which she gave him. He returned to the campsite and gave the carrot to the soldiers, who promptly added it to their soup.

“This will be very nice soup,” said the second soldier, “but it would be even better if we had an onion to put in it.” A young woman in the crowd said that she had an extra onion, and she gave it to the soldiers, who added it to the soup as well.

“This will be wonderful soup,” said the third soldier. “If only we had a potato!”

“I was a soldier myself once upon a time,” said an old man in the crowd. “I can spare a potato for your soup.”

This process continued until the soldiers had a huge pot of savory soup, full of vegetables, chicken, and herbs. They offered to share their soup with the villagers, and their generous gesture caused more villagers to bring bread, fruit, and wine to share.

Finally, the soup was gone and all that remained in the bottom of the pot were the three small stones. The villagers went home, happy and full, and the soldiers slept well in their tent that night.

Now there are two ways to look at this story. One is to say that the soldiers tricked the people of the village into giving them food. However, another is to say that the soldiers started with nothing except water, three rocks, and persistence. But by encouraging the generosity of others, they were able to produce a nourishing meal, which they shared with both their benefactors and the other people who had been watching them cook.

Running a small foundation without an endowment is a lot like making stone soup. You start with the basics and hope that interested people will contribute whatever they can.

And that idea leads me to the point of sharing this story with you: TIRF has launched its first mid-year fundraising drive. Please can you contribute? Even small donations help us to sustain TIRF’s programs. We can’t exactly use carrots, onions, or potatoes, but I can promise you that any donations will be wisely spent and greatly appreciated.

To sweeten the pot, for this fundraising effort, an anonymous donor has pledged to contribute \$100 for every contribution of \$50 or more from first-time donors during the months of August and September. With this incentive, we can multiply new donors’ gifts, just as the soldiers and villagers created their fabulous feast by sharing their resources

**Editor’s note:** Please visit [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stone\\_soup](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stone_soup) for more information about the Stone Soup story.

*Kathi Bailey*

