

ESERA Early Career Research Travel Grants 2025



Recipient: Lorena Rojas-Aviles, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile.

Hosts: Dra Betzabé Torres-Olave, University of Leeds, UK; Professor Justin Dillon, IOE-University College London, UK.

"It's essential for our lives to be connected through these places of synergy, collaboration, and the creation of networks of solidarity." - bell hooks

Dear ESERA Board,

This report aims to share my experience and reflections on my research internship in the United Kingdom, conducted under the supervision of Dr Betzabé Torres-Olave at the University of Leeds and Professor Justin Dillon at IOE-University College London, between June and August. At the same time, I hope that my narrative may serve as guidance for those interested in applying for the Early Career Research Travel Grants.

To this end, I have structured this document by first contextualising who I am and what my research is about, followed by a narrative that articulates the application process, the internship experiences, and a final reflection that emerges from this formative experience.



I am Lorena Rojas-Aviles, a Chilean woman and chemistry teacher. I grew up in Pirque, a rural commune located on the outskirts of Santiago, Chile. Pirque is situated in the foothills of the mountains, crossed by the Maipo River, a region of vineyards, farmers, artists, and poets. These lived experiences in a context marked by socio-environmental tensions have profoundly shaped my research interests.

I am currently developing my doctoral research at Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. My doctoral research is situated within critical pedagogies and explores how solidary collaboration amongst Chilean science teachers constructs identities and transformative relational agency oriented towards justice.

In the process of constructing my research, I came across a study by Dr Betzabé and Professor Justin on Chilean physics teacher educators who participated in self-organised teacher communities, spaces for cultivating hope and resisting the hegemonic cultures of science and the neoliberal cultures of Chilean educational institutions. This study resonated with my interest in making visible spaces of teacher collaboration as sites for resistance and transformation oriented towards social justice. Subsequently, at the ESERA Conference 2023, Cappadocia, Türkiye, I had the opportunity to meet Dr Betzabé and learn about her work; moreover, we began some collaborative activities.

During the development of my doctoral research, I began to utilise theoretical frameworks of teacher identity and agency, and to approach teacher collaboration from a critical pedagogical perspective. This posed a challenge because the scholarly community that employs these theoretical approaches was located in other latitudes and languages different from my own. Therefore, ESERA Travel Grants-2025 emerged as an opportunity to visit Dr Betzabé Torres-Olave and Professor Justin Dillon, who generously accepted my internship request and work programme.



One week before the start of the internship, I took the opportunity to participate in the ESERA 2025 Summer School at the University of Almería, Spain. On this occasion, Professor Justin, along with Dr Eliza Rybska, served as the mentors of my group; I had the privilege of receiving valuable feedback on my doctoral research. Additionally, I was able to learn about the research of other early-career researchers from different nationalities and forge friendship networks across various countries.

The primary purpose of the internship was to strengthen my theoretical framework, analyse data, and advance the draft of a scholarly article.

In the first part of the internship, I was working at the University of Leeds alongside Dr Betzabé Torres. We worked on the initial draft of my article and the theoretical framework. Furthermore, I had the opportunity to attend seminars and workshops related to science education and share experiences with some students who were developing their doctoral studies on climate change.



In the second part of the internship, I was working at IOE-University College London alongside Professor Justin Dillon. During this time, I worked on data analysis and writing the results section of the article. Moreover, I had the opportunity to meet and share



experiences with a broader community of researchers, doctoral students, and master's students in science education who work with Professor Justin, contributing to enriching conversations and reflections that enhanced my research and formation as a science education researcher.



Both Dr Betzabé Torres and Professor Justin Dillon were very generous in providing me with spaces and opportunities to dialogue and learn from them, and, in the case of Professor Justin, also with his doctoral students and colleagues. I am grateful to everyone for making

this research stay a welcoming and stimulating experience, both culturally and intellectually; it was a tremendous formative experience in both professional and personal dimensions.

During my stay in both cities in the United Kingdom, I was also able to learn, marvel at, and enjoy British history, art, and culture; furthermore, I discovered beautiful places and met people who created wonderful memories.

Another essential purpose of the internship was to strengthen my skills in the English language, as my first language is Spanish. Therefore, the United Kingdom provided me with the experience of immersion in British culture, the opportunity to challenge myself academically by presenting my research project, sharing my ideas, and engaging in dialogue in English, a fundamental activity for my development as a researcher.

Upon completing my research internship, I finished with the initial draft of a scholarly article. Additionally, I presented this work-in-progress at the ESERA Conference 2025 in Copenhagen, Denmark, and at the XII International Congress on Research in Science Education in Valencia, Spain. These instances allowed me to discuss and enrich the progress of the paper with the specialised scholarly community.



Upon returning to my country and having time to look back and reflect on what I experienced and learnt, I can say that it was an enriching and transformative experience at a crucial moment in my doctoral formation. I feel profound gratitude towards all the people with whom I was able to share; they made this journey unforgettable, especially Dr Betzabé and Professor Justin. Finally, I thank ESERA for making these valuable formative spaces possible and for building a community that transcends borders and continents. To early-career researchers, I encourage you to participate and become part of the great ESERA community.

Sincerely,

Lorena Rojas-Avilez

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