

TLRP Meetings of Minds Fellowship

Report from Dr Michael Tedder
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My research experience in TLRP was with the project teams of two longitudinal projects: Transforming Learning Cultures in Further Education (TLC) and Learning Lives: Learning Identity and Agency in the Lifecourse. I asked Professor James Avis to become my 'Meeting of Minds' mentor because of the interest he had shown in papers and conference presentations by members of the research teams while those projects were continuing. I was aware of Professor Avis's substantial contribution to FE research and his extensive list of publications in the field. The Fellowship enabled me to visit James at Huddersfield University on two occasions, in April and in November 2008. There were additional contacts through periodic email and in conversations at conferences that we both attended.

The TLRP projects gave me valuable experience of qualitative, interview-based research and 'Learning Lives' in particular has given me an interest in the potential of life history methods within education research. The projects I had in mind for development sought to capitalise on my experience of biographical and narrative methodologies in the context of understanding the professional development of teachers in further education colleges and the learning and skills sector, parts of the education service that continue to be notoriously under-researched.

The discussions with James explored ways of researching the impact of changing regulations that frame the employment, training and professional development of teaching staff. One possibility was of an evaluation study of initial teacher training and critical examination of the way that programmes provide opportunities for trainees to achieve standards defined by Lifelong Learning UK. A second possibility was to study the impact of the requirement on all FE teachers to register with the Institute for Learning and to participate in a minimum of 30 hours of continuing professional development each year as a condition of continued registration.

We discussed the practicalities of such projects, such as possible participants, the framing of research questions and potential funders. I found particular value in our discussions of critical framings for the work. These included analysing the tensions between instrumentalism and social justice in policy making for further education and lifelong learning (Avis, 2007). There are also major questions to explore concerning understandings of 'knowledge' in the FE curriculum (Young, 2007) and how these impinge on the structure and organisation of courses, including teacher training. The discussions have informed my subsequent research work and writing (such as Lawy and Tedder, 2009) though they have yet to result directly in formal applications for research funding.

There have been other valuable indirect benefits from the Fellowship in opportunities for networking with colleagues – it's not everyday that there are opportunities for those of us in the remote south west to meet colleagues in the metropolitan north!

References

- Avis, J. (2007) *Education Policy and Social Justice*, London: Continuum.
Lawy, R. and Tedder, M. (2009) *Initial Teacher Education in the Learning and Skills Sector in the South West: ILPs, Mentors and Mentor Training*. Exeter: University of Exeter
Young, M. (2007) *Bringing Knowledge Back in: From Social Constructivism to Social Realism in the Sociology of Education*, London: Routledge