

TLRP Meeting of Minds Fellowship - Report

Mentee - Dr R. Watkins, The Stirling Institute of Education*

Mentor - Professor H. Daniels, University of Bath.

At the time of application, I had made a recent career change from lecturing in geology to focus more on human sciences, particularly education. This change was partly facilitated by completing a Masters programme in Educational Research whilst being a full-time lecturer in 'The Stirling Institute of Education'. During this time I was also fortunate enough to participate in an ESRC - TLRP project as an associate researcher. I had the opportunity to observe and participate in fieldwork, preliminary data analysis, writing and conference presentation.

As the next stage in developing a research profile in education, I then identified the need to gain funding and experience as a principal investigator of a research project. This was when I applied to the MoM scheme with the aim of developing aspects of my Masters research through an application for an ESRC small grant. The MoM scheme appealed to me as it provided a framework and focus within which to develop a grant application whilst receiving feedback and support from a senior academic. The intention was that the period of mentoring would facilitate discussions on actor network theory, activity theory and human-computer interaction and to particularly concentrate on writing tightly focused research questions. Professor Harry Daniels (University of Bath) kindly agreed to act as my mentor.

Initial communication was via e-mail and this was then followed by a successful visit to Bath University. This was a productive meeting where I was able to discuss potential research questions and possible theoretical approaches. One of the most useful aspects of the visit was the concentrated period of time spent narrowing down the focus for a grant application. Professor Daniels also provided some additional resources which were invaluable in offering some alternative perspectives to the issues I was proposing. Leading on from this meeting a draft grant application was developed and key stakeholders were informally approached to gauge interest in the project. The next stage would have been to receive feedback on the detailed research proposal. However, due to re-structuring and subsequent changes in my role and remit, the project was then postponed indefinitely.

The MoM Fellowship was an important component in providing a framework for developing the research questions and theoretical background for the grant application. Although a grant application was not ultimately submitted, I still feel that the Meeting of Minds was a very positive experience which contributed to my development as a researcher. The opportunity to meet with an experienced mentor who brought a different perspective to my initial ideas, prompted me to review my initial thoughts and proposals. This enabled me to then go on to develop a more tightly focused research bid. I would encourage other early-career researchers to consider applying to this scheme as the dialogue with an experienced researcher is invaluable in prompting reflection upon your own research practices and development.

*Now based in the Centre for Academic Practice and Learning, University of Stirling.