

Report for ESERA Early Career Researcher Travel Award 2023

Recipient: Dr Eleanor S Armstrong,
Department of Teaching and Learning, Stockholm University, Sweden.

Host: Dr Amnah Khan,
Department of Physics, New York University Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

Visit: September 11th-15th, 2023

To the ESERA President's Travel Award Committee, Board of Directors, and Early Career Researcher Travel Award Committee,

Thank you for granting me the ESERA Early Career Researcher Travel Award 2023 which contributed to supporting the research collaboration between myself and Dr. Khan, on a pilot study of the international geographies of science identities, and in particular how students build science identities in Muslim-majority countries such as the UAE. As a result of receiving this Award, I was able to visit Dr Khan at NYU Abu Dhabi, in Abu Dhabi, for a week to collect our pilot data through in person interviews with physics students; and learn more about the local context of the Department, University, and city to inform our data analysis. In this way, the Award made possible a really interesting and enriching moment of travel for me to a part of the world I have never been to before. The Award also gave Dr Khan and I, as ECR scholars, a chance to demonstrate our research independence through conceptualising, designing, developing, and executing our own research agenda. Securing seed funding, such as this Award, for projects is an invaluable way of demonstrating the feasibility of this research and the community recognition of the importance of the work that we are undertaking. In my report, I will describe how we completed the visit programme proposed in my application through (1) the pilot data collection we undertook, and (2) the chance the Award gave us to further and plan our ongoing collaborative practice.

In the first instance this trip gave us the opportunity to collect the data for our research. As part of our two-way knowledge transfer these interviews (and the associated preparation of Ethical Approval for the research) acted as a moment for us to share knowledge of the context, concerns that we should look to capture in our data that emerge from existing scholarship, interview techniques, and data collection practices. This collaborative work has been an invaluable part of the research. This is particularly visible in how it opened space within our research collaboration for novel insights and within our interviews to elicit detailed and rich qualitative data for the questions we are hoping to answer in this research project.

In addition, my trip gave us the invaluable opportunity to plan further work together. Working collaboratively across time-zones means that this opportunity was a unique space for us to think expansively and over an extended period of time together. In addition, this was my first visit to a country in the Gulf, and provided me with invaluable contextual knowledge about the city, the surroundings, and the global orientation of the university and its campus. We took the opportunity to visit cultural landmarks and museums, local restaurants, and social meeting spots that students described in their interviews; which enriched the visit and helped me understand features of the interviews we conducted.

As we described in our application to the fund, this Award was to conduct pilot research. This work has been extremely successful as we now have both good data to base our anticipated outcomes (papers, conference presentations, informal dissemination) upon; and we have a robust understanding of the logistical frameworks of both research institutions that we work within to take further steps in this project. To support this research project, Dr Khan and I had also received support from the *NYU Abu Dhabi Fund for Inclusion and Innovation (2022-23)*, which allowed us to also work together in Sweden for a week in October 2023. Dr Khan and I participated in a workshop for Physics Educators 'Another Physics is Possible,' began our data analysis, and planned out the paper(s) that we will produce from this initial pilot data. This, along with my visit to the UAE, consolidated our commitment to two-way knowledge transfer practice that continues to be essential to the project's success by both of us visiting the other. We had initially intended to undertake my visit to the UAE in Spring 2023, however, the visit was delayed to Autumn 2023 for logistical reasons. This means we have not yet written larger grant applications that we anticipated when we wrote the application. However, this work, along with our writing up of the research findings, are ongoing into 2024. We look forward to continuing this project.

Once again, many thanks for selecting me for the Award. This has been an invaluable addition to my research programme this year, and facilitated our work on this invaluable pilot study of science education research.



Eleanor S. Armstrong