Episode 110: Linda Henderson

# KL: Katie Linder

# LH: Linda Henderson

# KL: You’re listening to “Research in Action”: episode one hundred and fourteen.

# [intro music]

# Segment 1:

# KL: Welcome to “Research in Action,” a weekly podcast where you can hear about topics and issues related to research in higher education from experts across a range of disciplines. I’m your host, Dr. Katie Linder, director of research at Oregon State University Ecampus. Along with every episode, we post show notes with links to resources mentioned in the episode, full transcript, and an instructor guide for incorporating the episode into your courses. Visit our website at ecampus.oregonstate.edu/podcast to find all of these resources.

On this episode, I am joined by Dr. Linda Henderson, an early years researcher in the Faculty of Education at Monash University. Her research is underpinned by a fundamental desire to contribute to the (re)making of life generating spaces and places. This work is grounded within feminist ideas whilst drawing on post-structural and post-humanist ideas, methodologies and practices.  Her work includes poetry, narrative and creativity with the aim of generating new and just imaginaries for education and society.

Linda, thank you so much for joining me on the show.

**LH:** Thank you for inviting me, Katie.

**KL**: Listeners should know Linda is up at six o’clock in the morning Australian time, on a Saturday. To record with me, so I am extra grateful [*laughs*] that you are coming on the show Linda.

I am super excited to talk with you about participatory action research. This is one of the areas I know you have engaged with quite a bit. For people who might not know what it is, let’s start with the definition. What is participatory action research?

**LH**: Um well participatory action research is effectively it is collaborative it is about researchers. And participates engaged in a form of action to research their own setting their own actions, and to reflect on that. And to bring about some form of change that will better their circumstances, their setting, their systems that they work in. So, that’s effectively what participatory action research is.

**KL**: I am wondering if we can dig into an example. Maybe from your own work? So, that people can hear a little bit more about where it might be best applied.

**LH**: Um yeah. So, how I got into it was my background is education, and I was doing my doctoral research that I stumbled into participatory action research. And I deliberately say stumbled. So I was actually at the time of starting my PhD I was still working in a school setting. Working across from different age groups three years up to 12 years of age, but mainly working with the teachers so that was my role. So, I um was engaged in doing a lot of professional development for the teachers and some things sort of came up that made me question what this thing called teacher learning was. Because I had one particular teacher who was um close to retirement that engaged in learning that was really what you could say was outside of what’s expected from someone who is retiring. When you look at research on stages and ages. She was down phase according to research, but she was winding up. And so, I sort of got into that’s how I sort of got into it. So, I wanted to research my own with in my own setting with the teachers I was working with and so I was going in as the researcher and then were my participates. So, that’s sort of where it stems from and in education in particular in Australia there is a very long history of action research being used in education. So we have a group of scholars from Decan University who are no longer there, but they were who were very heavily embedded into action research. And action research was recent very much all about policy documents so, it was a world recognized form of research for teachers. And for teachers to do research on their own actions. But it was mainly action research where individuals participated in which action research is collaborative. It’s the researcher and the participates come together.

Um so, that’s sort of the background and particularly the Ducan researchers where very much redrawing on I guess you could say a markis tradition and crititcal theories tradition. And so it was very much about that education should be for the betterment of society and those notions of a democratic society. And so it was around being able to um enable teachers to enact change that would be liberating for education, for their own practice. But also about um very much about enabling teachers to generate new theories. So, theories in action that type of background. As I said it has a long long history in education.

**KL**: I am curious if we can talk a little bit more about that collaboration piece. To what degree when you are working in this kind of mythology are you kind of collaboratively generating research questions. You know what are the pieces of the collaboration that becomes involved in the method?

**LH**: Um, well I guess that’s where um yes. That is a really good question. Um and there is a lot of critic within the research around there is a notion of collaboration within participatory action research. Um and I guess that’s where I say I sort of stumbled into par and I stumbled into the tensions that exist within participatory action research. Um so its um you know yes the researcher well depending on where you are coming from the research always has to acknowledge it is coming from a particular position of power. And how much does the researcher own and how much do the participates have control over the project or ownership of the project, or ownership of the research questions.

So, its um that’s sort of where I started to question to come up with lots of questions about this collaboration and then also issues around power and knowledge and you know those sorts of really big issues. Which lead me to reading other theories which helped me to open up this notion of collaboration. So I am happy sort of to talk about that if you want to a bit more…? Um.

**KL**: I think we should dig in! I would love to hear what you are learning about this. Because I think that some people might not be really understanding what those tensions are. I guess one question I would have is one of the tensions whether or not there can be true collaboration because of the power dynamic? Like what are some of the things that we can maybe unpack here.

**LH**: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, this is where I started to read within the feminist critics. So, participatory action research and particularly well if you go back looking at the history of this form of research it started to be critiqued particularly by women of color. Who would traditional have the maya researchers go into certain content and take pictures for participatory action research. And of course there was a lot of questions around whose project is it. Is it the researchers or why are we truly hearing the voices of those involve. And of course when that came up lots of notions of silencing particularly of women’s voices and then from there you start to look at um issues of gender. And then of course who’s holding the power? Whose knowledge is being generated? Is it coming from a white male perspective? That this notion of knowledge generation. Then also um around who is making the truth claims coming out of the research. There is lots of critic in relation to that. Um there is particularly um so in education of course a lot of it came about because education is so heavily girded with scientific research you know who holds a lot of power in education and passion in fact its gaining in power again. Um and so we start to go well then these are all patrician structures that are being taken into so called collaborative research.

Um and so we start to think about well what can we actual to about it whose language is being heard whose voices are being heard. Who isn’t being heard and those types of things. So there is lots of critic around it in terms of the emancipated project and who is actual being liberated here. And who is eventually owning that knowledge.

**KL**: I mean this sounds like such a rich mythology. I am curious Linda what original drew you to this. I mean you said you kind of fell into it, but obviously you kept going. But what is it about it that kind of draws you in?

**LH**: Um look you know initial it was it was the collaboration nature of it. That is sort of how I had always worked with teachers in terms of when I ever did do professional development teaching. I was always very aware that it wasn’t about me passing knowledge on to teachers. That it was about us coming together to collaborate to generate knowledge and to generate new knowledge that they could then apply within their own classrooms etc. With their own practices

Um so I have always been highly aware of um the knowledge that teachers hold, but also in terms of um within education. There is a tendency to treat teachers as empty vesicles just as though children have also been treated as empty vesicles. And we just go in and we skill them up, we equip them with certain skills then we send them off. And I have always resisted that type of notion of learning. Um, and so that is what drew me to it. Is the nature of collaboration between the researcher and the participates, but as I said when I started my research it um. I was then confronted really with this notion of collaboration. Um because I went in and commenced my research and the three teachers who I worked with who were part of my doctoral disorientation. Um they basically threw the project up into the air and did their own thing and sent it off into all sorts of spaces. There is research going on what’s going on I don’t know how to bring this back. So I was struggling with that notion of I got these three teachers going off in all these directions I wasn’t playing and as a researcher what am I doing how am I going to rein it in. Do I want to rein it in? Is it my job to rein it in? Or? All those really hard questions. And as a doctoral student you are always worried you might not be doing it right. So I was really grappling with a lot of that stuff and um also adding to that is I happened that three teachers happened to be who were my participates where early charter school teachers within a school setting. So, um they were feeling isolated from their colleagues who they referred to as school teachers. So early charter school in Australia is birth to five years of age. And then we have compulsory schooling from five to 18 years of age. So they were the early childhood teachers with in this school setting. And they were you know feeling isolated and that became the focus of their project. And that wasn’t our intent, but it became very much a political project for them. But also because I was embedded in the school I was becoming a part of their politics and I was having to navigate the politics of being a researcher, but also being an insider and having information on how they were feeling. How do I deal with this knowledge as a researcher. So, so many questions that I was coming up with that were really confronting around what it this participatory action research? And how collaborative is it? And who owns it? And whose voice is it going to be heard through? And what sort of knowledge do I actually produce at the end of this. So, it was lots and lots of questions.

**KL**: Okay so I have just one more kind of question here before we shift into our next segment. Um I am curious how you collected data in setting like this. Um I would imagine some of our listeners are thinking the same thing. Like it’s complicated, its complex, it’s changing. Like what are some of the methods you are using to collect the data in a way that other people will see it as valid and rigorous.

**LH**: Yeah look I started off with and I would often start off with an interview. Where we had a pre interview and the purpose behind that was to sort of establish were the teachers are at um in terms of where they are wanting to go where they see themselves at this point in time. In terms of their learning and where they want to take their learning. So it’s sort of a little bit you could think of it like a baseline to start with. Um and then from there a lot of it is around generating um so through a set of meetings. Um generating a set of questions that might be guiding the meeting or goals or angels for that meeting. Um and you may have some material that you may want to work with in terms of the teachers got some material they want to work with. In terms of generating the um action and the planning for action. And so there is some work that is done prior to those on going meetings you would have and then within the meetings then of course there is a normal thing of recording, audio recording. Record, transcribe, analyze. Um field notes as well as a collection of other anecdotally work samples that the teachers might want to share. So, this arrange of different there is a lot of data that you can collect, yes. And there is a lot of managing of that data and how you go about analyzing it all.

**KL:** Right absolutely. Okay so let’s take a brief break. When we come back we will hear a little bit more from Linda about how she is also feminist methodology into this work.

Back in a moment!

[Music plays in background]

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# Segment 2:

**KL:** Linda I know another really important part of your work and your research methodology and design is feminist methodologies. I would love to hear what that means to you. Particularly as it relates to PAR and how you are working with participatory action research.

**LH**: Um, yes that’s a good question Katie. Um I guess feminist researcher and feminist theories for me is very much around I have always been conscious of um notions of gender and how women are positioned in society. But also as I said from my own education background. I also have been very aware of how women are positioned in education and particularly within the early childhood field. Which is my specialty. Um the highly feminized nature of the work force and some of the tensions that exist around that in turn of how women are positioned. As um you know they work because they love children and its their natural instinct. And I always questioned that and that’s not why we as women enter education, you know. We often have a very strong political agendas in terms of our understanding and the purpose of education and why we work with particularly young children. And um I guess that sort of started my thinking about feminist research.

And then in relation to PAR as I said I was having all these tensions in terms of what does this notion of collaboration mean and who am I the researcher. And who am I to decide what knowledge these teachers are generating. And so I started to very much read a lot of the feminist work um that started to really allow me to I guess think outside of what I would call um what we are all born up into humanist language. Um you know and start to question this notion of who am I? Who am I as a researcher? And who am I to hold this power over these teachers to decide what this knowledge is and how there project should go. And so, I was starting to work with you know some of the, I guess some of the well-known feminists people, you know Judith Butler, Patty Lather, Betty St. Pierre—those types of—Chrissy Readon—you know, those types of people. To enable me to start to ask different questions and to also give me a language to actual start to raise questions about power. Because it is a very male dominated research participatory action research and action research. So to start to raise questions I needed a language in order to speak back to it. And to um argue my case I guess. In terms of well actually I am arguing these things in notion to PAR and here’s why I am. And here’s my grounding for doing that. Does that make sense to think about? And the other thing I also started to read around education is um Patricia Clough and Zembylas. They talk a lot about the highly effective um and intense nature of teachers work. Which is often not recognizedwithin the professional teacher life. Which again is very much male dominated. And so I was becoming very aware of the three teachers I was working with their highly effective nature of their learning. It was highly, highly intensive and emotional work they were doing. And um I also needed a language to start to work with that type of data as well. There was a need there was a I think they both developed alongside each other. You know my ability to critic PAR grow as I became more embedded in the feminists readings I was doing.

**KL**: So, I am curious especially when thinking about kind of analyzing all of this complicated data that we talked about in segment 1. [**LH:** Yeah] What are some of the questions you might ask about that data from a feminist theory perspective? You know like you’ve mentioned questions of power. Um are there other kinds of things you would be kind of looking out for when you have that lens and you are looking for that kind of data that you are gathering.

**LH**: Um look yes. And I think um I need to acknowledge I think I guess the two people who really influenced the way I started to think differently. Well three actually. About my data. Um so I was reading Betty St. Peria’s work on um she works with this notion of figurations drawing on and retires work. And I was also reading one of Patti Lacey work and her book on women with HIV. She used angels in her text. And so, those two strategies that Betty and Patti where using for me showed an ability to work with data in ways that enable you to think and move differently.

And so, um my biggest gift in terms of how I started to work with my data. I started out with watching questions. You know so you know what learning at that age is doing, what is it that they are changing and I heard from what questions to have questions. And that was my first biggest shift and so my overarching question was: How are these three teachers enacting learning within a school setting? So I deliberately um added how these three charter teachers enacted in leaning in a school setting. And I deliberately did that because I was positioning them as early childhood teacher’s women within a school setting who were being um basically discriminated against. Um, and also how they are positioned within the context of a school when there is big visions between early childhood and school. And again with their systemically they are not recognized as legitimate teachers. When we…in a school setting. So, I was looking at the politics of the relationship between early childhood and school. So historically there is a big divide between the two, and so I was able to start looking at the history and how that was positioning them as women. How that has positioned them within the profession um, and also to enable me to start looking at how they are positioned as women within this school setting. Which is highly dominated by male patriotic systems.

Um, so there was that. Then I also started to work with um I also started to work with this notion of affect. And so I started to and that was drawn and I drew few much from moving to Betty St. Pierre. I moved into reading Deleuze [*indiscernible*] that’s how I sort of got into reading post humanist feminist post humanist type work. So I started to work with the concept of affect. And started to analyze my data by actually using um this notion of intensive reading of the data. Rather than trying to trying to just categorize it and mastesize it I started to read it to see what was happening in terms of the affect. Where were the hot spots in terms of their learning. So that was sort of drawing on very much drawing on Maggie MacLure work in terms of looking for hot spots within data. Um what were these affective moments that actual generated change.

**KL**: Okay so it sounds like your, I mean this is fascinating to hear the pathways here Linda. Like you are a real student of feminist methodology. In the sense of you find something then it moves you into something else and then you follow that down another pathway and it moves you into something else. I am wondering how your views of and maybe use of feminist methods have changed over time based on this.

You have talked about how you have kind of been working new things into your process. Are there things that you have come to leave behind or is it just kind of your evolving as you go along?

**LH**: Um, no look I, in terms of my feminist approaches in terms of analyzing data. There is not things that I sort of leave behind now. I think it is a process of building of um continually um questioning and developing my understandings of what it is that I am doing. So, I guess it’s a very much have drawn on um thinking about how to work with data in ways that enables me to look across multiple sources of data. So, as I am post PhD um I very much look at um using multiple texts to inform my analysis. I may have a piece of data I am working with, but I will also draw in other texts to actually produce a type of analysis. So using multiple texts to actual start to analyze a piece of data to bring in multiple different resources to that data. So, it’s not just my it’s to disrupt my own understandings and my own positioning as the researcher. To trouble that constantly by using other texts so that’s multi layering of texts. I guess that’s sort of where I developed um post PhD that this type of work. So, it’s not leaving behind but I guess developing more and just continually reading and yeah. Making it more…I don’t know what the word is [laughs]. Um I was going to use legitimate, but that’s not the word I want [laughs]. Um, yes.

**KL**: It sounds like a form of deepening. Deepening your knowledge.

**LH**: Yes, and continually deconstructing my own knowledge and troubling it. So, yes.

**KL**: So I am curious if you have any go-to resources for people who might be interested in deepening their own knowledge on feminist mythology.

 You have mentioned serval people here which we will defiantly link to in the show notes. Um are their particular pieces or um others that you think are particularly impact full, and you think would be useful for people to start with?

**LH**: Um, well look there is so much out there [*laughs*]. But um look there is as I said there is key people who have informed my research. Um so Betty St. Pierre was one of my big influences from my earlier days, and I still read her work. And she’s a very much a go-to person for me so as I said that. Her paper on figurations was a key text for me for earlier on, and I continually read her work. Um you know and she has done is doing a lot of work in terms of the post qualitative um positioning of education of sorry of research. So, she is a key person. Patty Lather is another key person that I draw on.

Um so there’s my two I guess my two main influences. And then around I also read a lot of material feminist materialist research. So, Claire Colebrook is another real key person that I like. I have gained a lot from in terms of being able to think so clearly. Claire Colebrook’s work is very powerful in terms of um helping to position it within a feminist um stand point. She is a real key person that I draw on. Um, Maggie MacLure is another key person I draw on. Roman Davis is another one. Um so there is some real…it’s only a small group, but there is some there is some key people that I really go-to, yes.

**KL**: Well we can link to some pieces in the show notes. I know that um St. Pierre wrote a piece on post structuralism and it was the only way that I could understand what it was. Um she is a very clear writer and I appreciate that very much. And I actually studied under Patty when I was at Ohio State. I took a course from her on, so she is also someone who breaks things down in a way that really do makes sense. So, we will link to some of these pieces in the show notes as well.

What’s next for you in terms of feminists methodology? You seem like you are always kind of looking for the new thing that new connection, um a new theory that can help you figure out your work. Even further is there any direction you plan on moving next?

**LH**: Um, well at the moment I am getting into at the moment I got an um me and two other colleagues of mine have just been awarded a AIC discovery grant. Looking at leadership so, um a part of that actually involves a policy analysis across Australia and UK context. So, I am starting to moving into policy analysis. In terms of thinking about how I bring a feminist reading into policy analyses. So, I am starting to think about that. Um, and I have started to looking at Eileen Honan she has done a lot of work around this in terms of using rhizoanalysis to policy analysis. So this is sort of my this has just started this year. Um so it’s a three year AIC, a three year project. Um so that’s my big project at the moment.

**KL**: Linda, I can’t wait to see where this goes. It’s been fascinating to talk with you about your work with PAR and with feminist methodologies. Thank you so much for taking time to come on the show.

**LH**: Thank you for inviting me Katie!

**KL**: Thanks also to our listeners for joining us for this week’s episode of Research in action. I am Katie Linder and we will be back next week with a new episode.

[Music plays]

# Show notes with links to resources mentioned in the episode, a full transcript, and an instructor’s guide for incorporating the episode into your courses, can be found at the show’s website at [ecampus.oregonstate.edu/podcast](http://www.ecampus.oregonstate.edu/podcast).

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# Bonus Clip:

**KL:** In this bonus clip for episode one-fourteen of the research in action podcast. Dr. Linda Henderson shares about her upcoming research projects take a listen.

Linda I know that um since your PhD work and even in some of your PhD work you have been pushing boundaries on methodologies and really thinking a lot about that. Can you tell us a little bit more?

**LH**: Um yeah sure. So in my PhD’s I talked about I did use a I used a interview method that was quite different in terms of the way I went about it. It was called talking stones um and from that I then had to conceptualize what an interview was. So that was during my PhD so I started to travel some of those positioning’s that we take as researchers when we interview people. And I challenged that and then I guess my other way of actually how I have gone post PhD. I have made some beautiful connections with um with one examiner. As well as some other um collaborators out there so Eileen Honan was one of my examiners and I collaborated strongly with her sense. And so we have done a lot of work around um so part of my work is looking at teachers work. So naturally I am also interested in my own work as an academic. Um and the work of academics, but particularly female academics in terms of how we are positioned in the university. Um so you know sort of naturally leads on from that work. Looking at teachers work um and so we have done a lot of work around writing collaborative writing. But in terms of thinking about shifts differently. In terms of these are my words these are our words, but actually thinking it in terms of assemblage. Um so Eileen Honan, Sarah Loch, and myself have done a lot of work around that. Um and I can give you some references for that um later. Um up to put on your website.

Um and through that I also made connections with the women who write so I believe you have a segment with the women who write [**KL:** Yeah we did have Ali Black come on the show so we can link to that in the show notes] yes so um I have done a lot of work with Ali Black and the women who write as well. So, we have been doing um a lot of narrative type work um and autoethnography type work. Where we are actually looking at our who we are as women within academia. Um how we navigate the spaces of academia which are quite patriarchal, um and as our university become more and more um aligned with globalization we are pushed into quantifying ourselves more and more. Um we have done a lot of work around there. So currently Ali Black, myself and um Susan Jarvis are actually just putting forward a book. Um that’s drawing on the concept of motherhood and thinking about motherhood in a very broad perspective. In terms of endogenous perspective and thinking about it in terms of how do we as women work and how to women who have those challenges and complex lives, they are not just mothers. But how do we go about navigating those spaces of academia.

Um so yeah we have done a lot of work around um that type of stuff. We have also looked at um you know the feminist type theories in terms of positioning that work as well. Um so we have drawn on a lot of um concepts around what does it mean to actually navigate the personal and the private. The personal and the professional life in terms of grief in terms of as I said motherhood is one concept we are working with at the moment. Um Sarah and I have written an article called *Writing Stories of Loss* so that was dealing with um grief and how do we manage and how do we navigate those spaces. So, yeah it’s been really it’s a whole another side to me I guess in terms of my research. Um and it’s a side I actually see myself as sort of pushing my methodology forward all the time. So, it’s my real experimental side that pushes my methodology and keeps me thinking in terms of not just my methodology, but also in my theories that I draw on. So it really keeps that side of me moving forward post my PhD and I can see how it really has extended my post PhD work.

**KL:** Well we will link to these citations in the show notes for people who want to follow up. And also, I will link to an episode we recently did on autoethnography as well in case people want to take a listen to that. Uh thanks for sharing so much about your work, Linda!

**LH**: Thank you! Thanks for having me. Thanks, Katie.

**KL**: You have just heard a bonus clip from episode one fourteen of the Research in Action podcast with Dr. Linda Henderson sharing about her upcoming research projects. Thanks for listening!

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