Episode 67: Loraine McKay & Sue Monk

**KL**: Katie Linder  
**LM:** Loraine McKay

**SM:** Sue Monk

**KL**: You’re listening to “Research in Action”: episode sixty-seven.

[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. Check out the shows website at ecampus.oregonstate.edu/podcast to find all of these resources.

On this episode, I’m excited to welcome two guests:

Dr. Loraine McKay is a lecturer at Griffith University in Queensland, Australia, where she teaches in preservice and post graduate teacher education programs. She is currently program advisor in the Bachelor of Education program. Her teaching areas include inclusive education and literacy intervention. Loraine’s research interests align strongly with her passion for teaching. She was a classroom teacher for over twenty years in the primary education sector before leaving teaching to complete her doctoral studies. The topic for her Ph.D. focused on the sociocultural factors that influence preservice teachers’ beliefs and practice during the transition into the profession, an area of interest drawn from her role as a beginning teacher mentor and university tutor. Her current research centers on developing teacher-identity and teachers’ capacity to work with students with learning difficulties. Loraine is interested in exploring the use of arts-based practices to explore the affective dimension of teaching and engagement in learning.

Dr. Sue Monk is a lecturer in the School of Education and Professional Studies at Griffith University, Queensland, Australia. Her Ph.D., in the areas of ethnomusicology and Latin-American studies, investigated the relationship between the artist and the state in Cuba, specifically the role of the music. She works with qualitative methodologies and draws on critical interculturalism and postcolonial frameworks. In transferring her research to the education field, she currently teaches in the field of sociology of education. Her current research investigates 'funds of knowledge' (Moll et al) amongst Latin American communities in her city, specifically amongst mothers and daughters. Her book *The Politics of Differentiation in Education* was published by Routledge in October 2016.

Thanks for joining me, Loraine and Sue

**LM**: Pleasure to be here!

**SM**: Yeah, hi Katie, thank you for inviting us!

**KL**: So one of the areas I know you both have thought a lot about is just kind of the identity and experience of early career researchers. This is something you’ve written about as well, and I thought we can just start there, and talk a little bit about how you define early career researchers and who you think fits into that category. So um, Sue, you want to start us off?

**SM:** Sure. Um it’s a term well used in Australia. It usually refers to people who take an active academic position within five years of completing a Ph.D. So it’s slightly problematic as a term because the idea is, I think that it's associated with, is that you are new to the whole academic environment, where as you could have been working as a casual research assistant, or a casual teaching assistant for many years before you get an academic position. So early is pretty flexible in what we mean by early. The other problematic thing about the term is that it doesn’t necessarily give you the sense of what experience or expertise someone brings to an academic position. So you can be an early career academic at any age [Laughs], and have lots and lots of different kinds of jobs. So it’s a term that encompasses, um, you know, a range of questions that we need to think about. It is a widely used term in Australia. Loraine, do you have anything else that you want to add to that?

**LM:** One of the things we were talking about, um, how the term Early Career Researcher impacts on us, is in our particular role at the moment in our university, it helps us to access some resources that are available. So for example, we have the preference given to Early Career Researchers for positions that are writing retreats, or there are particular internal grants you can apply for as an Early Career Researcher that can support your work. Um we have large grants in Australia called ARC grants. Um I can’t think off the top of my head [Australian Research Council]. And they are quite prestigious grants and often if you have an Early Career Research role that can help with the grant. So we can, we’re sometimes used as leverage for peoples beginning grant applications. Which is quite nice in one way, but as early career researcher sometimes you can get suckered into someone else's research plan rather than keeping your own trajectory that you had in your own mind. So, we have been kind of mindful of that over that time. And as a, I came straight from, my Ph.D. was still under examination when I started my full time position at this University, but I had been working at the university for a few years before that. But I felt like I had fit in there because I was still within that post five year Ph.D. But Sue was in a different experience related to that. So we talked about your identity thing.

**SM:** Yes, yes. I did, uh, a lot of research assistant work and a lot of teaching, for probably, approximately a decade before I got a permanent academic position. So, our experiences leading up to an appointment were quite different.

**KL:** That’s really interesting, I think also the point that you raise about the grants in particular, we certainly have that issue in the U.S. as well. We have a lot of newer faculty who are just not competitive for grants, so they can be pulled in in the way you’re talking about. But I think that your point about having resources just for this population is really significant because there are just reasons why, you know, it’s going to be harder for you to break in, in certain areas of academia. Just due to lack of experience or other factors. So that’s really interesting.

**LM:** One of the limitations of that name though “Early Career Researcher” is that, that’s only one part of our role, and that’s academics. Sue and I started using the term Early Career Academic, because our role involves teaching service and research, and there’s a lot of tension trying to fit those roles into full time positions. So we like the term Early Career Academic, because it encompasses more of what we do.

**SM:** Yes. It’s probably a better, um, description [Clears throat], of what we call a balanced workload. So when we, in the paperwork that we have to complete each year, it's written in the top of the paperwork that we have a balanced workload which means; 40% research, 40% teaching and 20% service work. And the reality of, I guess, the trainings in Australia, and I imagine it's not only in Australia. The reality is that the teaching component which is supposed to be 40% of our workload really takes up a lot more than that. Um and the research is dependent on a lot of variables, and some of those Loraine has explained in relation to getting called with research funds, um developing partnerships to do that research, making sure you have enough publications so you can apply for research funds. All that kind of thing. But the teaching component is certainly, in most people's cases, I think more than 40% because of the administrative component.

**KL:** Mhm, I love that you guys have broadened out that term, to be um, Early Career Academic. Because I think, it just got me thinking that we don’t really have a term for Early Career teacher that’s equivalent. I think you’re right bringing in that holistic understanding of how all those things work together. They are not separated out, and they are overlapping and competing a little bit for your time.

**Guest:** We have, at the moment are in the process of shifting from a semester system to a trimester system which is going to start next year. It is going to be an unknown feel for most of us at our university. There are other universities in Australia that have moved to a trimester system. Um but one of the issues we are thinking about and wondering about are what implications it will have for us in the turnaround of marking and getting student results uploaded and so on. So we’re wondering if that will encroach even further on the time that is supposed to be dedicated to research and service work

**KL:** Mhm, mhm. So one of the things I hear you guys saying, thinking about kind of the central questions and issues you’re dealing with as Early Career Academics is a lot around identity, and thinking about, you know, what does it mean to be in this role? And also some political challenges as well. I’m wondering if you want to elaborate on either one of those things or if there are other kinds of issues or questions that you think are part of this identity as well.

**LM:** I think very much for me when I started, my research work is about beginning teachers and preservice teachers and their transitioning into that new role.  It’s particularly an inclusive education and I really believe that it’s the preservice teachers we need to prepare to come in as beginning teachers to help progress the inclusive education movement rather than relying on this sort of top-down policy that’s happening all the time. So that’s kind of in my mind. When I started here as an Early Career Academic, I was feeling that I was getting squashed by a lot of demands on my time and what I had to do. [Pause] I had this, I think it’s called Imposter Syndrome, where I felt I had people saying “oh I’m sorry Loraine, we actually don’t have you Ph.D. and we accidentally gave you this job you don’t deserve.” I was kind of feeling that way all the time and I wonder how I thought to myself “I position myself as a beginning teacher. I am expecting my beginning teachers to go out and have a voice and make change.” And suddenly I realized I wasn’t doing that within my new role at the university, and that sort of changed the way that I approached myself as an Early Career Academic. Yes I was doing research, but I had a lot of experience with my teaching and life that I could bring along, and quite a few of us came together at the same time; we were at a writing retreat. And through the conversations, the professor that was um facilitating the discussions, he said “It seems like you would be a good group to get together.” And that’s when I thought “Yes this is what we need. This sort of likeminded people working together, not looking for people above us to fix any problem.” And then some new other stuff came and that’s how we came to have our little Early Career Academic network that we have happening here. And we don’t label who is an early career, we say “Anyone who wants to come into this group is welcome.” That way you identify yourself then. But that kind of brought us together as a group, and made us even more aware of the skills and knowledge and strengths that we bring. That collected voice has helped us to then find where we can help one another, but also how we can make better use of the supports that the university provides, and our research center particularly noticed that and actually asked us what they can do. At first they thought they could just get someone to come to our little meetings every month and we thought “No, we like that space. That’s our space to talk.” So they value added by offering a writing retreat, and we’ve had um access to um an outside person to help us with, she helped shape one of our papers and gave feedback. So that’s been really useful, but I think it was the fact that we stood up and said “This is what we need.” It was really helpful, wasn’t it? [It was] It really made me think differently about what I bring to this role.

**SM:** I think one of the things for us is because we work in school of education, most of us who get a position here, have had experience teaching in schools. By contrast, schools are a lot more horizontal in their structure, and most teachers in a school collaborate; the default position is collaboration. Um and looking for ways to support each other when you're dealing with challenges in a classroom, so we’re used to doing that, and sharing knowledge, and supporting each other. And university is a much more complex system. It’s a lot more hierarchical, there are a lot more levels of um positions. So I think when you first, well for me I found when I first came to university in as an appointed position, not as a casual staff member… Getting… Becoming familiar with the structures, the hierarchy, took quite a long time. And so, when Loraine, when I heard about Loraine’s group that she began, and she invited me to come along, it was a great way to ask questions and start to find out how the structures work, what are the roles of the structures, and to ask questions in a way that you probably wouldn’t do when you’re sitting in a mixed group. Somehow you always feel you’re expected to know these kinds of things the minute you arrive. Learning all those structures seems to happen almost in parallel with learning how to teach in an academic environment. How to do research and network all at the same time. What kind of service work can you do in a university? Some of that is different from what you would have done before as an, um, you know, during your research during your Ph.D. and so on. So there’s a lot to learn, I found, taking up a position here. As Loraine said, creating a space for ourselves made it much easier to look at what we needed to share ideas and work out the kinds of support that we needed rather than being told what was available for us to um what workshops there are for us to go to.

**KL:** I think that’s such an important point. That you have to have the space to think about what you need, but you also have to have a sense of the culture so you know what you could ask for. Like what is the capacity of offering support, you know? So it’s interesting that those things have to go kind of have to happen in parallel, but it’s like a chicken or the egg. You can’t really answer what you need without asking what the possibilities are, you know, it may be kind of an interesting tension there. Um but it sounds like you are finding really interesting ways of doing that as a group. We’re going to take a brief break, when we come back we’re going to hear a little bit more about that and a little bit more about Loraine and Sue’s experiences as Early Career Academics. Back in a moment!

**Segment 2:**

**KL:** Loraine and Sue, at the end of the last segment we were talking a little bit about this group you formed to help support yourselves as Early Career Academics. It sounds like Loraine, you formed this group, and Sue, you came across it, and joined it. So I wondered if we can talk a little more about that group, and more generally about support structures that you found to be helpful with some of the challenges that came up in segment one um of being an Early Career Academic. So first for this support group, tell me a little more about it; How often is it meeting, what’s the structure, how many folks are involved? You know, just give me a little more detail.

**LM:** The group’s fairly fluid. We’ve been um probably around for about two years. For the first 14 months or so we would meet monthly for about an hour to an hour and a half. We made the decision fairly early on that our focus as a conversation would be about research. We do talk about teaching, but because most of us are teachers we did decided it would be about our research. We wanted to keep it fairly relaxed, um and no pressure to be there if you were busy. People seemed to prioritize coming along to that time, but we also wanted to make some purpose to it. We were very particular in wanting it to be more a solutions focused type group if we had challenges rather than just becoming the [  ] session of mine.  We actually started with a little be of an agenda, so we would have the, you know, ridiculous questions that you don’t want to ask section at the beginning, and we started to introduce the three minute theory, based on, we had a competition called three minute thesis where we had students get three minutes to promotion and competition. Universities compete against each other. So we kind of took the topic, the title from there, it’s three minute theory, so each of us will take a turn at talking about a theory that you were using in a paper, or something that you would come across, or something that you used in your Ph.D., and um that might involve introducing a paper that we would talk about. And so it became just a very easy um kind of discussion and just a really nice space to sort of think about research, and stuff you were passionate about as opposed to you know, filling in spreadsheets or boring administrative work. So yeah, that was the start of it, it’s been very relaxed. We’ve probably had nine or ten people come through, but we have a core group of just about five of us now, and in the last four months or so we haven’t been meeting as regularly because our time hasn’t been getting eaten up and that’s something that we need to address next year because we actually want to keep it going and []. But one of the things that has helped sustain our meeting, particularly for the four of us, is that our offices are right next to each other and we have a common lunch, like a boardroom table area, and we meet there, and our offices come off that space. And so we have a lot of informal conversations now, and just sort of those kinds of catch ups. The other person, who is quite a regular on Tinder, his office is elsewhere on campus and while it’s not a very big campus, it still cuts down those incidental conversations and meetings which we are finding really, really valuable. We set a whiteboard up in our area just outside the photocopy room, and we used to write questions up there. A question that you had of that research, or analysis, or what you thought, and for a couple of months people would write things there and the minute semester started and everyone was involved in their teaching we just, it showed No one was writing on that board [Mhm]. So the group kind of reminds us that we need to keep our focus on our research as well and not let the other um, I’m not saying insignificant things, but there are a lot of time wasted things that we get caught up in. So it was just a good group to remind us of that, and a great place for sharing ideas about um, you know, just hearing about what people are doing and we have three or four other new members who have joined staff so they are very keen to pick up with us after the New Year. Yeah it’s just a fluid group and it’s a very safe space where we all get on really well together. We realized there is, universities are hierarchical and often individuals after these positions moving up the ladder, and we’re aware of that, and we do have aspirations to move us through the system, but we’re also pretty grounded even after we support one another and realize we can do really well as a collaborative as well as individuals.

**SM:** I’d like to pick up on a couple of things that Loraine just mentioned. One is um the um three minute theory [I love that idea. It’s so great!]. It works well because when you’re a Ph.D. student you have to do that kind of work and you’re usually very nervous about it and worried that you haven't read enough. When you take up an academic position then you realize everybody  has their picked theory and there's so much more to learn, but when you can present just among other early career academics, there’s a lot less tension involved than having to present at a school, or a group or faculty, whatever terms people use. Where you’ve got very, very experienced uh senior professors who are mix of people, and some of those people may interject your inquiry at time to say “That works already been done.” or “Someone else has already explained the point you’ve raised and written hundreds of papers about it.” Whereas we don't have those kinds of responses in our Early Career Academic groups. So it’s a very gentle and fun way to teach about ideas that we’ve been reading and thinking about, so that’s been really good. The other thing that Loraine mentioned is having that staff room, team room, really. Um those things have been disappearing across universities for some time now as working environments keep getting refurbished and changed. There aren't too many places where staff members have a team room to use, so we found that very, very useful. And that, as Loraine was explaining facilitates those informal conversations that we had. Informal is one way of explaining it, but I guess another way of using that informal may undermine how important those conversations are, we think they’re very important, and they really kept us sane at times when we thought “Oh maybe this is all too hard.” Having those informal conversations has really helped each of us, you know, help other people. So they have really been a survival maker for us in some ways.

**KL:** You know, one of the themes I hear you guys talking about is this idea of um, exposure. Exposure to ideas, exposure to other people’s experiences, where you realize it's not just you. You know, before you thought it was just you and you’re realizing it’s not. You know, the imposter syndrome and things like that. But also with the three minute theory, i think one of the challenges at times is you can get a little mired on practices and then you’re not exposed to what other people are doing and different disciplines or even in your own discipline. That’s actually, you know, a big theme of the podcast, is to expose people to different kinds of things and what people are doing. So I think that’s really interesting and it sounds like maybe that wasn’t planned as part of this group, but it’s certainly been a side effect of getting people together and having regular discussions and also kind of the structure that you’ve put in the group.

**Guest:** I think it really strengthens your knowledge too. I’ve learned by talking with other people, it’s such an important part of learning, but being able to verbalize some ideas that are in your head really strengthens and consolidates your own understanding. So, that’s an important part of learning for me, you know, being able to even go back and talk about theories that you used in your thesis. I have colleagues picking up on some of that just now, and talking to her it’s like “Oh that’s right, yes I do know that.” And then making stronger links of what you already know.

**KL:** Mhm, and well also this theme of the learning doesn’t end when you get your degree, you know or when you get your terminal degree it doesn’t meant that things are over. Um, that you have to really be pursuing this. One of the things I really like about hearing about this group is that you are actively pursuing this, it’s not something that just kind of randomly came together. You wanted to structure something, or seek out something that would help you, um and you find it, so I think that’s really wonderful. I’m wondering if there’s other support structures that you found as Early Career Academics, in addition to this group, that you think are important for people to know about or even for administrators to be aware of that they should be thinking about creating spaces. And I think your physical space you talked about these may be one of those things, but are there other things that come to mind?

**SM:** Um well I think, I can't remember whether Loraine mentioned it or not already, but when we came together to do a symposium presentation at a conference. We were invited by one of the places here to do that as a collective, so there were four of us who presented at a conference as Early Career Academics, and we all talked different slangs to that. And I think preparing for that really gave us a strong voice and it made us feel like we were really ready, that we did have something to contribute, and that I think was quite a supporting way of more senior academics providing a space for us to say what were our concerns, what were our challenges, what were our themes that we wanted to raise. We found that really useful, and as a result of that we had written a couple of papers that had been accepted for publication as well, so that was something that was very supportive that came initially from a more senior member of staff, a more senior in academics. That was important [MH, MH]. And she set it up intentionally for us to explore our own experiences, and how to facilitate conversations, and introduced us to different people’s perspectives for us to, you know, different ways we could look at what our experiences were like. You know, helping us to make meaning of what those experiences were. Which was really significant.  One of the things I think we’re ready to do is um look into our other school, we’re a school of education and professional studies, but we have a psychology department and we have a criminology department on our campus, and we’re sort of toying with the idea of putting out the list to see if there are people from other areas, early career people, who might feel less supported or lonely or just think they have something to contribute and want to come along. So next year we might look at expanding across into other schools to see what we can learn in that area. And you know, if anybody is listening from another part of the world and wanted to Skype in at any time that would be exciting [That would be great!]

**LM:** Yeah I think it’s just about letting people know that you don’t have to be there at all, it’s better to work with other people

**KL:** Well Loraine and Sue I feel like you’ve just given an abundance of tips and strategies of what people can do when they’re just starting out. This has been so helpful. I want to thank you both for taking the time to come on the show and share about your experiences as Early Career Academics. Thank you!

**LM/SM:** Thank you so much for inviting us!

**KL:** Thanks also to our listeners for joining us this week on Research in Action. I’m Katie Linder, and we’ll be back next week with another new episode.

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).

There are several ways to connect with the “Research in Action” podcast. Visit the website to post a comment about a specific episode, suggest a future guest, or ask a question that could be featured in a future episode. Email us at riapodcast@oregonstate.edu. You can also offer feedback about “Research in Action” episodes or share research-related resources by contacting the Research in Action podcast via Twitter @RIA\_podcast. Finally, you can call the Research in Action voicemail line at 541-737-1111 to ask a question or leave a comment. If you listen to the podcast via iTunes, please consider leaving us a review.

The “Research in Action” podcast is a resource funded by Oregon State University Ecampus – ranked one of the nation’s best providers of online education with more than 50 degree programs and over 1,000 classes online. Learn more about Ecampus by visiting ecampus.oregonstate.edu. This podcast is produced by the phenomenal Ecampus Multimedia team.

“Research in Action” transcripts are sometimes created on a rush deadline and accuracy may vary. Please be aware that the authoritative record of the “Research in Action” podcast is the audio.

**Bonus Clip #1:**

**KL:** In this first bonus clip for Episode 67 of the “Research in Action” podcast, Dr. Loraine McKay and Dr. Sue Monk share about their experience going through multiple rounds of revision on a recent journal article – take a listen.

**KL:** So Loraine and Sue, the way that I met you, digitally, and then came to invite you on the show, is as our listeners may know I am the Associate Editor of the International Journal for Academic Development, and the both of you had submitted a paper there. We went multiple rounds of revision on this paper about Early Career Academics experiences and I thought you just had some really important things to say and just wanted to make sure that you had a platform to talk about some of these issues. Um I thought it might be interesting for listeners to hear about some of your experiences going through that multiple rounds of revision on your paper, which eventually will come out, and when we can eventually link to it in the show notes, I’m not sure what our timeline is for exactly when it’s coming out in the journal. But it was an interesting process for sure to go through it, and I’m glad you had the patience to work through it with me and our reviewers on that. Do you kind of want to speak a little but about that experience?

**LM:** Well Sue mentioned earlier that one of the professors had brought us together for a concert presentation and I think that’s where the paper originated [That’s right]. And Sue was leader throughout that particular paper. The feedback, we did multiple rounds of feedback, and Katie, it was your personal touch in your emails that were encouraging for us to keep going, and we felt much supported through the process. And the reviewer comments were so constructive and enthusiastic that we couldn’t, it sustained us through that entire process that can be very challenging.

**SM:** Yeah and I think um previously, I know I had an experiences where I submitted an article and I got some feedback that was passed on to me without any of the extra encouragement that you provided, you know, Katie, in the process. When I read through review comments before it was a little bit harder and more to the point, and I understand that, but sometimes it’s difficult to know where it’s going to lead and whether or not people really do think you have an idea that’s worth pursuing. I think emails are not the same as conversations that you have with each other, but I mean we’re doing this podcast now, but we’re also using the video where we can see each other’s faces [Yeah]. Loraine and I like that sort of thing, the human contact is something that really helps the thinking get flowing and really helps in the editing process it really helps you expand your ideas and it find the nuance in the arguments. But in email exchanges when you get the reviewers feedback, you miss all of that. So you’re personal comments in the emails backwards and forwards were really helpful in keeping us going and seeing this process through to completion.

**LM:** It sustained our energy. It sustained our energy and enthusiasm. And one reviewer with the comment; “I can’t wait to see this in print.” It was just so exciting for us [It was]! We held on to that all the way through.

**KL:** I think I’m so glad you’re able to share and talk about this! I’ve also been through this process on the other side of being a writer and going through multiple rounds of revision and it is hard to stay sustained. I think you’re bringing up a really important point which is, and I see this a lot actually in reviewer comments of reviewers just offering kindness. You know just even saying “I know this might be difficult to hear.” or “I realize this might not be what you wanted to hear, but I think this will make the paper better.” You know so please take this in a way it is to be intended, you know, which is helpful. But I have also seen reviewer comments that are you know, less kind, in terms in how the remount their responses. I think you’re really pointing to something we don’t also think about as reviewers which is there are little things that we can say, that are really motivating to people who need that extra boost to get through a longer review process, so thank you for sharing that. I think that’s so important.

**KL:** You’ve just heard a bonus clip for Episode 67 of the “Research in Action” podcast, Dr. Loraine McKay and Dr. Sue Monk sharing about their experience going through multiple rounds of revision on a recent journal article – thanks for listening!

**Bonus Clip #2:**

**KL:** In this second bonus clip for Episode 67 of the “Research in Action” podcast, Dr. Loraine McKay and Dr. Sue Monk share about their experience going through multiple rounds of revision on a recent journal article – take a listen.

**KL:** So I’m curious, I mean you guys have mentioned several things already about the experiences of early career academics that other people just might not be aware of, but I’m wondering if there are specific things that you think people don’t really know or that they don’t understand about what it means to be an early career academic. This may seem like a weird question because most people in academia have been at some point an early career academic, but it may have been some time ago, things have changed, technologies have changed, expectations have changed, so I think it’s still an important question to ask. What are the kinds of things you wish people knew about this? Or gaps that you think people have in their understanding about early career academics.

**SM:** I have one in particular that was a surprise for me at the beginning, and it took me a little while to realize how many people went through the same concern, and that is that even though Loraine, as well as myself, we come from teaching backgrounds. We know that teaching structuring; lesson plans, building relationships with students. All of those kinds of things, but teaching in an academic institution, with the kinds of constraints that are part of a tertiary institution, it’s a very, very, very different teaching environment. So one of the ways that a mass education institution like a university, how it’s accountable, is to collect student feedback. We have a system of um anonymous student feedback at the end of semester where they’ll comment on the course and the teaching itself. Now when we’re dealing with hundreds and hundreds of students in a course, the anonymity is not always necessarily helpful because we know as teachers, from our many years of teaching, that building relationships is really important and usually in our cases in school has been a face to face kind of environment. We’ve been moving more and more towards online teaching where it’s really difficult. There are more challenges in developing that relationship with your students. Um you can be online, but um in a group, when you’ve got a group online, in that teaching environment, sometimes you don’t know if the students are really there or if they’ve gone off to make a cup of coffee and then they’ll come back and just listen in, or they won’t always post comments in the discussion board online. So there’s a lot more challenges in building that relationship with students, and getting accurate student feedback in what’s been happening in our courses I think is a lot more challenging in a tertiary environment than it is in a school. I mean, Loraine and I would feel a lot more comfortable in a school context, how you assess that kind of relationship, how you assess student learning, how you build those relationships long term. But the quick turnaround time in a tertiary institution makes it much more challenging. So dealing with the ways we have to be accountable, and the comments that we can get from time to time, I think, I certainly wasn’t prepared for that, and I’ve had many, many discussions with other academics who have said similar things. Sometimes you can get a brutal comment here or there from a student who you may have had very little interaction with, and you don’t know where the comments actually come from, but because it’s anonymous you have no way of following that up. You don’t get any support on how to deal with those comments, so I felt that’s something that I wish I had known about when I first started teaching.

**LM**: I think one of the challenges, and I don’t think it’s an early career academic challenge, I think possibly all academics face it. Is just the ongoing nature that nothing ever seems to be finished and then you never get to that finish point, and then the next thing starts? I find it just soul destroying when I’m planning through trying to get the marks done and I’m trying sort of to try to get some papers in, and then next semesters courses just pop up on my website. They’re just reminding me that that’s the next thing to do, and I find it really challenging not to have that space to think. There’s no, I loved my Ph.D. experience. I’d wait everyday it was like my job, I used to sit and think and write, and it was just, it was stressful at times, but I loved that space to sit and think. Here it’s just so intense, and students just remind me enough, “Hey Loraine, I hope you’re enjoying your holiday!” they’re not even in semester, and you’re in meltdown mode. It’s just that balancing of all parts of the job. The ongoing nature. Everybody knows about the perish attitude that there’s this pressure to publish, and the latest one, um I think it was the Prime Minister said that academics have to learn to collaborate or they’ll crumble. Um and so, collaboration takes time and it’s great, but it does take time and we need the space for that. We’ve actually added one that said “well you have to get funds or you’ll fumble. Because there’s always this push to get money and getting grants. It takes you a long time to write these grants. They get knocked back in no time. You know, I think people just don’t understand, um all jobs are stressful these days I get that. In this particular situation people think we just sit and contemplate our emails, or they think we’re on holiday because we’re not teaching in front of classrooms. Depends on who the person is thinking about. I think the intensity of the job, I don’t think people get that, or the fact that you don’t just produce something on that day. It can take 2 years to get a journal article out, and that was the big learning curve for me.

**SM**: I think, yes, I think that’s right. The other thing that came to mind is I think I wasn’t quite prepared for how proactive I needed to be in working towards find a community, a nurturing our community of colleagues. Loraine forming the group was the perfect thing to do, because I think it’s very easy to feel on your own as a new academic. I think it must be like it’s similar to students leaving school with their hands held most of the time, and they show up to their first course with 700 other students and they can disappear into the wall paper. I think an early career academic can do that too if they don’t have a support group around them, and I didn’t know how proactive you had to be to make sure that happens, so our group has worked well to fill that space.

**LM**: I think part of it is believing in yourself as someone who known as the guru researcher that you have got things to contribute. We have to remind ourselves we have these strong teaching backgrounds, and we are good at building relationships with our students, and we bring strengths there, and feeling that it’s okay to ask for help. One of the things I just didn’t mention before, One of the really great things that happened to me was that I got some feedback on a paper and I was trying to work through how I would do that, and I went to a professor on staff who I know is really busy, and I asked her for a bit of advice, and her response to me was almost like I had done her a favor. That I had asked to help me. She said “You know so many people had helped me when I was early career and starting out… it’s just so great that I can give back.” So finding the right people, and then I felt comfortable going back and asking her again, and she’s been quite instrumental with a couple of us trying to get papers up or getting mixed into what we’re doing. So getting that confidence and believing in yourself that you have something to contribute. One of the ways I did that which adds to the question you asked earlier of other support available, is it’s not compulsory at our university, although it is at some other universities, but when you start, some universities expect you to get a certificate in higher education, and at our university it’s an option. At our university I took up that option. It was four courses, I did it over four semesters, and that was fantastic. I got to talk to other lecturers about my teaching and research, and my teaching and research are very closely aligned. I just happened to have landed, that worked out really nicely, and so that actually helped me with how I was looking at students and so that graduate certificate as an option which the university funded for me to do was really helpful in linking my teaching and my research together as well. So at some universities it’s compulsory, but not here.

SM: There’s one other thing that I’d like to raise just in terms of support finding out how the place works. I volunteered to become a Union Delegate in our school. The union that covers university workers here is called the National Tertiary Education union. Um Unionism has been under attack in Australia for many years, and so it’s considered by many people to be a scary thing to raise your hand and say that you’re a union member, or attend your meetings, or any kinds of those Things. So I’ve found that becoming a delegate in the school, it gave me access to find out what kinds of things are part of the enterprise bargaining arrangement that we function in our university. What is working, what is not working, where the inconsistencies happen and so on. So I found that one way of growing confidence of how to say no to some things, or how to stand up to people who are breaking the enterprise bargaining agreements that are supposed to be an overarching framework for the work we do. When that breaks down I that found another way of finding some support of how to navigate difficult challenges when they arise.

**KL:** You’ve just heard a bonus clip for Episode 67 of the “Research in Action” podcast, Dr. Loraine McKay and Dr. Sue Monk sharing about their experience going through multiple rounds of revision on a recent journal article – thanks for listening!