Episode 8: Dr. Nina Huntemann

**KL:** Katie Linder
**NH:** Nina Huntemann

**KL:** You’re listening to *Research in Action*: episode eight.

[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.

On this episode, I’m joined by Dr. Nina Huntemann, Director of Academics and Research at edX. In this role, Dr. Huntemann is leading cross-institution faculty initiatives, developing curriculum strategies and providing pedagogical expertise, managing educational policy projects, and facilitating research across edX university partners. Dr. Huntemann has over 15 years of college-level teaching, program administration, and faculty development experience. She is also a digital media studies scholar and co-director of Women in Games Boston, a professional network for women working in the digital games industry. Dr. Huntemann received her Ph.D. in communication at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Thank you for joining me, Nina. So great to have you on the show.

**NH:** Thank you for inviting me. I’m really pleased to be here.

**KL:** So I thought we could start out for folks who may not know, what is edX exactly? This is the place where you’re currently working, can you give us a brief description?

**NH:** I can. So broadly speaking edX is two things. First, edX is an online platform and MOOC provided. So edX is a software service and you can go to edx.org and if you register you’ll experience out platform. But the other thing that edX is is a not-for-profit consortium of universities, international organizations, and corporations from around the world that work in partnership to expand access to education anywhere for anyone.

**KL:** Great, thank you. So, currently at edX you are the Director of Academics and Research. What exactly does that mean?

**NH:** Wow. So I learned something really fascinating when I took this job. When you take a job that has an “and” in your title it means that you are going to have a pretty broad description. And so on the academic side, as you said in my bio a little bit, one of the things that I provide our partner universities is consultation and conversation around curriculum, both what kinds of courses make sense to put together as a MOOC and put on the platform. You know, working with what our learners are interested in, but what are the strategies for online teaching and learning that our partners are interested in. And coming up with hopefully a curriculum strategy that is not only of interest to faculty who want to sort of stretch their teaching skills, but also of course to interest to the university who wants to sort of contribute to this change in education online.

The other part of my job, the research part of my job, is really facilitating research. We don’t conduct significant internal research at edX, except for around market research. We provide a sort of support for our universities who are conducting the bulk of the research about teaching and learning. And I can talk in more detail about that as we go through our conversation. And facilitation kind of comes in lots of different ways. One, it’s sort of my job to know what’s going on at our universities around research. So I’m getting to know who the key researchers are in learning, science, and in education at all of our partner universities. We have over 90, so it’s a lot of people. Getting to know what’s on their research agenda, where they’re presenting at conferences, making collaboration possible through introducing people to each other, providing a space to disseminate their research. We have a blog, both an internal blog for our partners, but then also an outward-facing blog.

And then there’s the data piece. So, every single course on the platform when it runs collects a ton of clickstream user data. And every course team – the instructors, the instructional designers, the faculty, the online learning directors – they have access to that data for the courses they offer on the platform. And so getting that data packaged in and of itself requires some technical expertise, and part of my job is to make sure that the university, or help the university have the capacity on campus to receive their data. And then to figure out what to do with it so they can actually conduct the research and do a lot of the sort of teaching and learning improvements they’re interested in when they sort of iterate on their courses, offer the next run, and so forth.

**KL:** So I think if people who are listening know anything about MOOCs one of the things they would probably broadly associate with it is data. And we know that a lot of data is coming out of MOOC courses or massive open online courses for those who aren’t familiar with the term. What is some of the data that edX is collecting? You mentioned a little bit in your previous response, but can you give a little more detail about some of the things that are coming out of that data?

**NH:** Sure. I mean to your introductory comments, I mean, the learners every time they click on something that’s captured. Every time they open up a video how much of the video they watch, when do they stop, that’ll be captured. How many times they attempted a problem, of course how many problems they got correct, how many they didn’t, are they contributing to the discussion forums, even the text of the discussion forums are captured. So it ends up being sort of millions and millions of events in each course that can be captured. You know, our courses, even the courses that may only have 15,000 people in them, you know, you times that. Each learner times all of the things they’re doing inside of the platform it ends up being millions of data points.

Something we added recently, we’ve always been capturing what’s happening around video, but one of the things we added recently to the platform in what’s called our Insights tool is an ability for instructors to see in real-time how their students are using their videos through a really neat visualization tool we have called Insights. And so an instructor, for example, could look at anyone of their videos and see the rate of drop-off, of when do people sort of give up on the video. Also really interestingly if people re-watch, you know, if learners are re-watching the same segment over and over again there might be something to learn there. Maybe it’s not recording very well, maybe it’s a really difficult concept, or as we discovered in our early experiments with this new Insights tool maybe something funny happens and people just want to watch it over and over and over again.

So, you know, we’re collecting a ton of data and we’re moving towards trying to visualize it in our Insights tool, kind of our easy to use user interface for instructors to visualize that data with some basic level reports. So, again, performance per question, how many right, how many wrong, what’s the distribution across a test or an exam in terms of, you know, correct answer and incorrect answer. You can look and see how many attempts, again this visualization. You can look at demographics, where are people saying they’re from, what’s the level of education, what’s the gender split. And again all of this and much more is available in the course data package, but for real-time sort of quick hits, quick analysis, of what’s going on in your course we turn some small portion of the data into this visual tool called Insights.

**KL:** So given that you have all this data to work from, it seems like your job could be massive in helping people to kind of navigate this data, meet each other, network with each other, collaborate, figure out what are kind of the key research questions. Can you give us a sense of what is a typical day like for you as you’re kind of navigating all of these kinds of things? What are some of the things that go into that work?

**NH:** Absolutely. So I used to think as a college professor that I had a lot of email. I had no idea how much email someone could have. I mean obviously we work online and most of my communication with faculty, with course teams, with research scientists is online. So, so much of my communication happens through email, right, so I spend a lot of time in email and I’ve had to learn very quickly how to turn one’s email inbox into a kind of get things done mode and perhaps we’ll touch upon that in a bit. But I’ve learned so much about all the different methodologies for just managing one’s email. So there’s a lot of that. I also do a lot of reading. It’s been wonderful to discover that my job still requires me to do a lot of reading about what’s happening, what the cutting-edge research is. Granted, it’s in a different field than where I came from, but I do spend a lot of time just trying to understand what folks are doing and what they’re reading.

And that’s, you know, on the research side it’s mostly around being a kind of ambassador I suppose for edX. I’ll be attending learning science conferences and getting to know the people, a lot of networking. If I’m not in email with folks, I’m in conference calls with people, finding out what their research questions are, trying to provide them with some ideas and guidance of where they might go for folks who have tried to do similar research design. And I send a lot of documentation: send links and so forth. Sort of a conduit if you will for this information. The other parts of my job that are not about research, that are more about the academics have a bit of a different work flow; still lots of email, but doing different things.

**KL:** Well we’re going to take a brief break. When we come back we’re going to hear a little bit more about how to learn new research skills at mid-career. Back in a moment.

[music]

# Segment 2:

**KL:** Nina, one of the things I didn’t mention earlier in the episode is that you and I know each other because we used to work at the same university. And I knew you as a faculty member at Suffolk University where we were both working in Boston before you moved to edX and I moved to Oregon State. And I know based on, you know, our previous relationship that your work now is quite a bit different than the work you had as a faculty member. And I’m wondering if you can talk a little bit about some of the things you’ve had to learn since taking on your new role.

**NH:** Yeah, I think one of the most significant differences is that while I’m still in the education sector I work, essentially, at a tech company. So one of the most significant and on the first day I realized transitions I was going to have to make was working, essentially, at an educational technology software company. And so specifically I had to learn what it meant to work with engineers and product teams. Specifically how projects, like platform improvements, are identified, how they’re prioritized, and then how the actual work flow occurs and how those platform improvements are implemented. You know, as an academic any project I wanted to work on was almost always isolating, it was just me; it was a solitary project. I would decide what the project was, I would evaluate the timeline, what I was going to prioritize, and put out my own sort of project management plan. But here of course I’m working with many other people. There’s 140 people at edX currently and we’re continuing to grow. And the way that projects are identified and problems are solved is a very different approach.

So I’ve had to learn agile software development and to do that I read books about it. That’s my go-to, right, when I don’t understand something the first thing I do is I read a book or I read what’s available online. And then I spent a lot of time hanging out in meetings with our engineering and product team. Asked them if I could just come and start to understand the language that they use and see how their work occurs, which was great. It was sort of using my ethnographic methodology skills that I had as a qualitative researcher to sort of understand my own colleagues. And agile development, sprinting on projects, has actually been really helpful to help me understand how to project plan my work. I also realized how absolutely inefficient my previous project management skills or approach had been as I’ve been exposed to the world of agile.

**KL:** That’s incredible. I think what’s so interesting is sometimes as mid-career researchers we figure out we need a whole new skill set. And I think that that’s actually, it can be a very interesting transition in your professional life to experience that. But it sounds like you’ve been using your previous skills, in particular you mentioned your ethnographic research skills, to really apply it to this new role. I’m wondering, you know, as an experienced researcher are there other things you’ve done to go about learning more about the skills that you needed, you mentioned reading; are there other pieces that you’ve brought from your previous role or just kind of all new things you’ve realized you needed to do?

**NH:** Yeah, so very early on in graduate school I actually did a lot of statistical analysis for some of my early research projects. And I came to a fork in a road, so to speak, of whether or not I was going to do mostly quantitative research or go in the qualitative direction, and then I ended up going more qualitative. But what I found in this job is I’ve returned to these really early roots in graduate school, particularly around statistical analysis. A lot of the collateral that I create, whether it’s a slide deck when we go visit a partner or internal reporting, has relied upon some very old Excel spreadsheet skills and I’ve had to brush up on those since so much has changed since. You know, I didn’t really create a lot of numbers-based and spreadsheet-based materials at Suffolk in my research there. I think the only spreadsheets I ever used honestly were my grade book. So there’s been a lot more of that.

So what’s incredible, it’s a wonderful synergy, is that edX is an education company and our partners are top-tiered universities from around the world and we have courses in so many things. And this is going to sound like a pitch, but I’m speaking honestly and sincerely, I take our courses when I need something. In particular, like right now, I’m in a data science series offered by Columbia University because I need to understand more about data science. I mean that’s at the heart of what our learning scientists and education researchers are dealing with now. Their area of research has moved into data science, right. It’s been dealing with large, big data sets. And so in order to understand some of their paying points and how you even ask research questions in a different way when you’re dealing with data at this massive scale I realized I really need to understand the kind of underlying principles and skill sets of data science. And that’s been fascinating, again, taking our own courses. So I took an Introduction to R course from Microsoft to learn, you know, R, which is a sort of really popular statistical tool.

And I also lean heavily on our chief scientists here at edX. His name is Piotr Mitros and he’s an MIT researcher in learning science. And he also programmed the prototype of the edX platform and so he has such deep knowledge of how the platform works. And he’s also very tapped into the research community. So if I am literally reading a journal article that I don’t understand I just turn to him, right. He’s become a kind of mentor and advisor through this new field. Almost like I’m getting a second PhD and he’s my, you know, PhD advisor. It’s been really great to learn from him and be able to turn to him for just questions and things I don’t understand. So, yeah, I think I’ve approached it very much like the way I approached my graduate work: read what I needed to do, take courses in what I need to do, and then just do mini projects to sort of experiment with the new skills that I’m learning.

**KL:** I think that you’ve offered some really good, concrete suggestions here. Particularly you’ve mentioned the idea of having a mentor you can kind of talk with you about some of these things. I think that when you’re learning a new skill set it can feel very isolating and also kind of vulnerable because it’s hard to admit at mid-career there’s this whole body of stuff that you just don’t know about. Maybe, as in your experience, you visited it when you were in grad school, but have been away from it for quite some time in terms of the quantitative skills. So I think that that idea of having a mentor is key, but also it means that you have to admit to someone else that you’re looking into this other skill set. Which I would imagine can also be kind of a difficult thing to do and to really open up and tell other people that there is an area that you don’t know.

**NH:** Yeah and I think even more so on that when I go to, when I visit our campuses because I travel quite a bit in my job, and I stand in front of faculty many of those faculty are very knowledgeable about teaching at scale and have conducted research, you know, with all this learner data. The first thing I say and I put it out there and my heart skips a beat every time I do it is I say, “First and foremost I am not a learning scientist.” You know, I really want to put that upfront so that we kind of level set on expectations and what I think that allows me to do is one I get this secret out, so I don’t feel like an imposter. You know, instead of trying to hide it or fake my way through, I get the secret out. Like, I actually don’t have, you know, much experience at all teaching MOOCs – I’ve only done it once – and I am not a learning scientist. So, that helps me feel actually much calmer, better, less anxious than I’m going to “found out.” So I highly recommend doing that: admit what you don’t know. And then from there because I am and sincerely I am curious and I need to learn from these people, I show a lot of enthusiasm. And, you know, I know this from going to conferences and having to network in my previous job that if you are showing genuine enthusiasm, people will teach you. They will offer to help you understand. And so that’s been really important.

And I think the other thing I’ll say is that because I did build a career in a different field I have the confidence that I certainly did not have as a graduate student and I had to build over time. I have the confidence that I didn’t have when I was early career about how you go about finding out what you need to know and also telling people you don’t know something, right.

**KL:** Yeah, you’ve made this excellent point about leveraging the skills you have to figure out the skills you don’t and to make sure that you’re being honest about it with people. I think that’s a really key important thing. I know in this job I’m currently in one of the things I was very clear about coming in is that I’m not a statistician and I was qualitatively trained, as you were, and wanting to make sure that people knew that and that the expectations were clear about what I could and couldn’t do and the areas where I would eventually need to have some assistance. So I think that’s really interesting and I appreciate your honesty about your experience.

We’re going to take another brief break. When we come back we’re going to talk a little bit about working while traveling and how to be effective as a researcher when you’re on the road.

[music]

# Segment 3:

**KL:** You know, one of the things I find really interesting about your transition into this work is I know you are traveling significantly more than you were previously and I know that you’re having to do a lot of work while you’re doing that. So we’d love to hear more about your productivity strategies. Before we jump into that though I’d love to hear more about some of the specific projects you’re working on for edX so that we can get kind of a sense of what are some of the kinds of things you’re taking with you on the road. So, can you start by just telling us a little bit about those projects first?

**NH:** Absolutely, and I’m going to focus on just sort of the research projects that I’m working on. As I mentioned earlier, I’ve got the whole academic side, but we’d need like another hour if we wanted to get into that. So, in terms of research there are a couple things, a couple of projects, that are happening right now with our partners that I’m really excited about.

One is this mindset intervention. The idea here is that we know there are certain courses that have a very high engagement drop-off rate right after the first quiz. Not surprisingly these are very technical courses from MIT. So one of the things that actually our chief scientist thought he wanted to experiment with was a mindset intervention. So right before the quiz opens sending some subset of students, so it’s an A-B test, sending you know set A an intervention that says, “This upcoming quiz proves to be difficult. A lot of students who are encountering this information for the first time are going to find the information challenging, but we highly encourage you to stick with it because what we see is that there’s great improvement with students who sort of stay with the program.” And this is all true; we know this for those students who do persevere. There’s a significant, significant learning occurs. And so, you know, we’re currently working on that in one course that just completed. We’re going to take a look at what that data looks like and we’re going to try to expand it to a few other courses we’ve identified that after the first assessment we see significant drop-off and see if Carol Dweck’s mindset philosophy can work in MOOCs in a very low-touch way. Doesn’t require much, it can just be an email or just a pop-up message.

Another one is personalized assignments versus generalized assignments. This is something that our colleagues at the University of British Columbia have done in a course and again are going to look to expand it. It’s another fairly simple A-B test where one set of students got a prompt on a piece of writing that was asking them to draw from their own personal experience to answer the question, and it had to do about environmental destruction. And the other set was asked to just respond in a general way or were given a prompt that was very general, not to pull upon their own personal experience. And so this was to see whether or not there was greater learner engagement and also whether or not there was a sense that the course was more useful or more effective or more interesting, you know, more applicable to one’s life just based on that one difference.

**KL:** Those sound fascinating. I love how even in the world of MOOCs, which seems ginormous and just huge in terms of the amount of data that’s collected and the different kinds of directions that research can go, there are these very kind of granular questions and relatively small interventions that are happening to see if they make a difference in learner experience.

**NH:** Yeah, there’s so many opportunities to do very small tweaks and see huge change.

**KL:** So as you’re working on these projects and you’re traveling extensively, I’m wondering, you know, first of all can we talk about what are some of the challenges for you with having a relatively heavy travel schedule? First of all, kind of what percentage of the time are you traveling for your work?

**NH:** So on paper my job requires 30% travel and of course anybody out there who travels for work knows you have your ebb and flows when it comes to travel. And not surprisingly since most of the places I’m going are university campuses; say for our partners down under, my travel hits the same academic schedule. So it picks up in the fall, gets quiet you know December, January, and picks back up again in February. And I haven’t been here for a summer yet, but I’m told that summer is also a very quiet time. So it’s 30%, but not evenly distributed.

You know and personally, of course, it requires a lot of life adjustments with my partner and our small puppy. But thankfully all things that are very manageable with our network of friends and so forth. But work-wise I had to learn quickly of what I was capable of doing in a plane and in an airport lounge and what I wasn’t. In my previous job I always took grading with me, right; so student papers, exams, that was the kind of level of work that I could do while crunched in a plane or waiting to board a plane.

I can’t write while traveling and I know that about myself. So as I started this job that continued to be true, right. I can’t do any deep, conceptual, and thoughtful or argumentation writing. So I do what I did before. I read; reading works well for me. Reading and taking notes and highlighting is easy to do. And I draft emails because that inbox is a bit overwhelming. So I do a lot of email drafting. And, of course, one of the things that I’ve also had to learn, and this is such a logistics problem, but when you work for an online company and your services are online and almost all of your communication with people is, you know, online I have had to adjust for when Wi-Fi is available and when it isn’t available. So I spend, if I’m going on a trip for a couple of days I will make sure that I block off in my schedule what I call download time. And that’s literally grabbing all of the things that I am going to read – you know PDFs, articles, what have you – and making sure that I have copies on the hard drive of the laptop I’m bringing because I have ended up dead in the water with nothing to do because the internet on the plane wasn’t working. So I make sure I think ahead of time to gather up those materials.

**KL:** What a great tip to have download time in your calendar. I mean, I think that’s really great.

**NH:** It’s part of packing. It’s literally become part of my packing routine that that’s, you know, you pack the toiletries and you do download time. Yeah, and the same thing with emails, you know, you just make sure that you have the emails. And it’s easy these days with just email clients, they’ll keep a local copy so that’s not so much of a problem. And it’s really satisfying – it’s going to sound, maybe it’s going to sound a little silly – but drafting a bunch of emails and then landing and once you have Wi-Fi sending them all off. It feels really great, right; you get to, all these to-dos get checked off as soon as you get to the hotel and are able to get back online. And that helps because as I travel, you know, the emails keep coming and so I feel my anxiety increase when the inbox number increases. So the best thing I can do for myself in terms of like returning to work without that post-travel onslaught is just try and keep the flow moving.

**KL:** I think that’s such an important point and you also talked about, which I think is really crucial, knowing what kind of personally you can and cannot get done while traveling. And not trying to pretend that you’re going to be able to do something that you’re not actually going to do and then just feel guilty about it later. If you know that you’re not an airplane writer, you’re not an airplane writer. And find something else that will be productive for you. And I know several people too who decide not to work on planes and that’s their time to read a novel, you know, or whatever as they’re traveling for work. But I have found that too, that reading is actually the easiest thing for me to do on a plane. I am less digital than you and bring a stack of papers usually with me that I’ve built up in my office over time and then I take them with me when I travel. But, yeah, I mean I think that’s such an important point that we’re all very different and just because someone else can compose an article on an airplane, doesn’t mean that you’re going to be able to do the same.

**NH:** Oh and don’t get me wrong, I am absolutely envious of those that can write on a plane.

**KL:** I think we all must be. Anyone who can be that productive, you know, on a plane or in an airport lounge is obviously going to have the jealousy of many academics.

**NH:** Yeah. But I’m glad that I did learn that in my previous career and it wasn’t a sort of lesson I had to learn again. I sort of knew going in that I wouldn’t be able to do it, so I didn’t get disappointed by that failing.

**KL:** Well and I think what you said too about kind of keeping up with the flow of emails. That is always my downfall when traveling, especially if I have an out of office message, is it gives me the kind of leeway to not keep up and that’s always a huge challenge when you come back. I feel like actually one of the hardest things about travel is the readjustment period when you come back home. So anything you can do to ease that transition obviously would be helpful and email traffic is definitely one of those things.

**NH:** And you know, Katie, I would say that I think the out of office message is more for you than it is for the person receiving it. I do think people use the out of office to kind of let them off the hook, deservedly so when you’re traveling, right. Not so much for the person receiving it, but almost like permission. “Well I’ve told people I’m not going to respond so I guess I don’t have to.”

**KL:** Well it definitely makes you feel better.

**NH:** It does make you feel better, and I don’t use it for exactly that reason. I need the little bit of pressure of, “No you haven’t told anybody that you’re not going to be able to respond.” So you need to keep to your 48 hour, depending on the email, it’s 2 days or a week depending on the email as best I can. And I’ll say right off the bat to anyone listening, “I am not 100% on target with the 2 day, 48 hour, or the week rule.” I have certainly let things slip, but that’s my general goal.

**KL:** Well what a great rationale for not using the out of office message. I think that’s a great additional tip for folks who might need that extra motivation.

I want to thank you so much Nina for taking the time to talk to us about your work at edX and your transition to being a different kind of researcher than you previously were and what it’s taken to get there. So thanks so much.

**NH:** Oh well thank you so much for having me. It’s been an invigorating mid-career change and I recommend anybody go through it.

**KL:** That’s so great. Well thank you so much and thank you also to our listeners joining us for this week’s episode of *Research in Action*. I’m Katie Linder and we’ll be back next week with a new episode.

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Show notes with information regarding topics discussed in each episode, as well as the transcript for each episode, can be found at the *Research in Action* website at [ecampus.oregonstate.edu/podcast](http://www.ecampus.oregonstate.edu/podcast%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank).

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# Bonus Clip:

[music]

**KL:** In this bonus clip for episode 8 of *Research in Action* Dr. Nina Huntemann shares about her experiences as an organizer of Women in Games Boston.

You know one of the things I know you’re involved in and that you’re very passionate about is Women in Games Boston. Can you tell us a little bit about that organization?

**NH:** Oh I’d be happy to! So, Women in Games Boston was started by a friend of mine, Courtney Stanton, several years ago – 5 or more now that I think about it – to provide a place to support women and their allies who are working in the game industry. And one of the reasons why there sort of is a need for a professional support network for women working in the games industry is because there aren’t a lot of women working in the games industry. There’s more now than there had been previously, but women game designers were fairly far and few between and programmers as well, even artists were fairly rare. And so there was a need to have a community of women who had an experience that was very unlike their colleagues, their male colleagues, in this industry. And of course as I’m sure many listeners whether they’re gamers or not are aware of, there’s also been moments and pockets of the video game culture and industry that have been outright hostile to women. So, you know, thankfully our community hasn’t experienced a lot of that first hand. Some have, but most have not. But it’s more a place to sort of be professionally in this industry together.

**KL:** So I’m wondering what about your work or experience has led you to be involved with Women in Games Boston.

**NH:** So in my previous job as a professor at Suffolk University my research was mostly about digital gaming, the video game and computer game industry, both those who work in it and then also the content produced – the games that are produced. And so I found my way to this group because I was looking for research communities, right, I was, sorry, I was looking for communities to include in my research. Research subjects I suppose. And that’s how I met Courtney originally. And then I just became involved in going every week. I guess, you know, from an ethnographer’s point of view I went native, like I joined the group. I continued to go after my research project that had brought me there was over and I got to know the women and men who were regular participants. I presented some of my research. It’s a monthly meet up where someone usually presents something: life experience, some mentorship content, some ideas about the job market, or research in gaming like I did.

And then when Courtney decided to leave she put out the call for who would like to direct it and myself and a couple of other colleagues or peers stepped up so we could direct it together. And so I continued to or I moved into this role of being a director of it and it was interesting because I never saw myself as part of the community because I didn’t work in the industry. And so I felt maybe it wasn’t legitimate for me to be here and particularly for me to direct the group. But in talking with Courtney and talking with folks who had been going for a long time, they felt actually that my connection inside of the education sector was really a value to add to the group. And, in fact, that’s been the case. Many of my colleagues who teach locally are often looking for someone to come in and talk about what it means to work in the games industry and I’ve got this network now. So I get women in the group I get them speaking gigs. A lot of my colleagues have since started up labs, have started up game companies. And so in some ways very much like the facilitation I suppose I do for edX I’ve sort of leaned on my facilitator and collaborator skills to provide value to the group. And it’s been really fulfilling.

**KL:** I think it’s so fascinating how you just never know where your research will lead, what kinds of communities it will bring you into, what kinds of professional development opportunities it will give you, and it sounds like this community has been such an incredible thing for you. I know that when you switched roles and you joined your work with edX you were making a lot of decisions about what to keep in your life, what to leave behind. Trying to clear space for this important role you were taking on. And this was one of those areas that you kept. Can you talk a little bit about why?

**NH:** Yeah. There were several factors, but there’s one I really want to hone in on because I think it’s something that has been so important to me. It’s because the community is local and it’s face-to-face. So much of my work and so much of my professional network is online. I’ll see people at conferences, but otherwise it’s through Skype and email. I wanted and needed a local community of people I actually met face-to-face once a month or more. It has been, that’s what was so, one of the key reasons why I kept it. Not only because I really cherish the community for what I learned from them and felt that I was able to provide value, but I wanted, I would say needed, face-to-face interaction in my professional life. And it’s been, it’s really provided that for me.

**KL:** That’s really wonderful. Well thank you so much for sharing about some of your experience working with Women in Games Boston, Nina.

**NH:** You’re welcome, it’s my pleasure.

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