Episode 144: Kay Shattuck

# KL: Katie Linder

# KS: Kay Shattuck

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

# [intro music]

# Segment 1:

# KL: Welcome to “Research in Action,” a weekly podcast about topics and issues related to research in higher education featuring experts across a range of disciplines. I’m your host, Dr. Katie Linder, research director at Oregon State University Ecampus, a national leader in online education. Along with every episode, we post show notes with links to resources mentioned in the episode, a 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 joined by Kay Shattuck, who has worked in adult education more than 30 years, focusing on online and distance education over the past few decades. She earned her doctorate at Penn State University under the guidance of Michael G. Moore. Kay was a member of the initial group of Maryland distance educators who developed what would become Quality Matters. Her earliest involvement in 2003 was in providing a review of the research and best practices literature and being part of the committee that developed the first QM iteration of standards of quality online course design. As QM's Director of Research, she continues to provide research support and direction for new QM tools and resources for the field. Her academic affiliation is with the lifelong learning and adult education program at Penn State where she taught online for many years. She is an associate editor of The American Journal of Distance Education. Kay developed and was editor of Assuring Quality in Online Education: Practices and Processes at Teaching, Resource, and Program Levels and authored “Teaching Online:  Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?“ a review of the faculty participation literature in the upcoming 4th edition of the Handbook of Distance Education.

Thanks so much for joining me on the show today, Kay!

**KS:** Thank you for inviting me! You and I have had numerous times of getting back and forth about research – I think this is the first time we ever really talked.

**KL:** I know! We do a lot of email communication (Right?). So I’m excited to share a little bit with our listeners about your work at Quality Matters, and first for listeners who may not be familiar with Quality Matters, can you share a little bit about the organization and what it does?

**KS:** Absolutely. Quality Matters is a non-profit quality assurance program. We actually are the child of federal grant money in 2003 to 2005, when the Department of Education provided money to develop a project in which standards of course design would be developed, and a process for implementing those would be developed in such a way that it would be replicable. The grant was only for three years, we did it – uh and since then Quality Matters has become and continues to be a self-supporting, not-for-profit educational organization. Um the grant went to Maryland Online, which is a consortium of four and two year schools. So we are still in a relationship with MOL, but Quality Matters is stand alone, self-supporting.

**KL:** Wow. So I’m always interested, Kay, in kind of origin stories, and you know, how these things come to be, so it’s really interesting to hear about this grant money that started this organization, but I’m also curious how you came to work with QM. What’s the story there?

**KS:** Well, it’s – those two are sort of tied up. In the 90’s, I was working with a group of Maryland educations – I worked at a community college. Um we were working on pedagogical issues related to distance learning formats, and at the time we were all in telecourses, – the old T.V. courses - and doing a lot of professional development and establishing standards, because we were part of Maryland online, and their key work in Maryland Online was sharing courses among consortium members. So we wanted to establish a way in which faculty at a receiving institution felt a level of comfort that the course that they would be – that their students would be taking from another important course, met a quality standard, and so um – we had tinkered in, tinkered in, tinkered in. One of the colleagues, one of our colleagues at Frederick Community College in Maryland, Jurgen Hilke, came up with an idea that very much is Quality Matters right now. I mean the standards, the peer review, the needed professional developments, so um - it started out of need. We were a community of practice that had a shared history and a shared need. And while that was going on in my professional life, I was still working with some colleagues at Penn State, and so I was knee deep into the scholarly research. And so there was this blending of, I happened to have the research from the lit reviews, there was a need of over here in what became quality matters, and so it just sort of meshed together. And since 2003 I’ve been doing – I’ve been conducting and documenting the review of the literature. I am pleased to say I am no longer the only person doing that. We now contract with a couple of places – University of Toledo, and Michigan Virtual helps with K12. So, I mean, it’s a big job to try to stay on top of the literature and make some analytical sense out of it. So that’s how I got involved and still stay involved with Quality Matters.

**KL:** So I know that Quality Matters has grown over time and is doing a lot of things. Can you talk about some of the key initiatives that Quality Matters is moving forward right now? And I know there’s a ton!

**KS:** Yeah. Let me just – I think – especially wearing a research hat, some of the most exciting ones are… This is the third year that we have published in partnership with edge adventure, the CHLOE Report, and CHLOE stands for the Changing Landscape of Online Education. It’s a national survey of Chief Online Officers, and there’s probably no body that has that title, but I’m attempting to find people who are fulfilling that role, trying to get a sense of management, strategic planning – that’s in the third year. And it’s interesting because, and we’ll probably talk about this later, one of the things that I’ve been known to get on a soap box is research takes so much time. Deliberate planning and time. And the CHLOE is already in its third year, and yet still taking baby steps – yet producing invaluable pieces and information, that in fact is used to improve the study for next year. So Ron Legon, represents Quality Matters, and in partnership with Eduventure – that’s exciting. And the report is available online. We can give you that. Um we’re also from a quality, from a research perspective, doing lit reviews and mapping that literature and research to – in attempts to correlated standards or annotations related to the existing Quality Matters standards, which are in the rubric, but these correlations would be to educational media, and we’re looking at online course delivery matching teaching implications mapped to the Quality Matters design standards. For example, and this one – is so easy to see, but a course might – would meet standards if in fact the student was alerted to the feedback response time from the instructor. It would meet standards, if that is made available information to the students. So obviously, what is the teaching implication for that? The teaching implication cannot be ignored. I mean it’s not part of the design, but – the implication would be, ‘is that happening?’ You know, what is the – instructor’s plan for actually doing that? So we’re trying to – and they would not be standards. We’re looking at correlations to map just as little triggers to help instructors in their teaching implications, and when people are making selections on educational media, because that’s – I mean, you’re an expert in that, but that’s wild and crazy everywhere. Uh so, and we’re doing some exciting things with the K12 world – um working on the K12 national standards for online courses, teaching, and programs. So – they’re just a few exciting things that we’re doing – and doing international… I could go on.

**KL:** I’m sure there’s so many things. Well and we will be sure to link to the various resources and projects in the show notes for people who want to follow up. I know also the QM does host regular conference. Can you talk a little bit more about that and how it relates to the research work you’re doing?

**KS:** We just finished the tenth annual – can’t believe it, tenth annual, national conference – uh it was in St. Louis this year. There’s lots of information on our website, and I can send the appropriate link, but people can locate presentations there. I just this this morning, again listened to a recording that’s available of Dr. Mark Milliron, who was the key note, and he of course, is one of the experts on using analytics. I mean, there was so much good information out there already, and just using analytics to help us improve our own online teaching and learning courses. So the conference is a place when people in the QM community, because it’s called QM connect more so than conference – maybe it is conference, but it’s QM connect – because there’s such sharing at these conferences – idea generation. I mean, a keynote sort of does what keynotes do – sets everybody off into the conversation, but there’s sharing. And over the years we’re happy to say there’s been some partnerships developed, you know, California – the state of California is doing and collecting some data over here that sounds very much like some data that’s being collected in Ohio, and Minnesota is collecting data that can be related. So getting those people in the same room and getting them talking, is something that we are so excited about that comes from the conference.

**KL:** I think this is a definite kind of area for growth with online education, as we’re collecting more data, as we have more analytics, we don’t always know what everyone else is up to a their institutions.

**KS:** Absolutely, yeah. And – because it is so – it’s so challenging even within your own institution to get through – um. This probably doesn’t happen in any institution you know of, but I think that some institutions maybe have some protected silos of information, and that’s even within the institution you’re trying to conduct your study. And getting through that – um. The real challenges of doing research, and sometimes when you talk to these other [*indiscernible*] have figured out how to do that, and so sharing those ideas certainly helps.

**KL:** Well I think this is a nice kick-off, Kay, into learning a little more about the work Quality Matters. We’re going to take a brief break, and then we’re going to talk a little bit more with Kay about her directing research for this organization. Back in a moment.

The “Research in Action Podcast” is just one of many projects we work on here at the Oregon State University Ecampus Research Unit. A project that I am particularly excited about is our OSU Ecampus Research Fellows program, which funds research for Oregon State faculty that is actionable, impacts student learning online, and encourages the development of a robust research pipeline on online teaching and learning at OSU. Recently, our first cohort released a series of white papers on methods and design for distance education research. See the whitepapers at ecampus.oregonstate.edu/white-papers.

# Segment 2:

**KL:** Kay, I’m always very curious about what it looks like to do research for an organization like yours. What is a typical day like for you as the Director of Research for Quality Matters?

**KS:** Um the typical day for me is always involved somehow with tracking targeted research projects, because I highlighted just a few, and I’ll say something else about one that’s an emphasis this year. Um tracking those – working with research colleagues. We have eight research colleagues who are brilliantly involved with us. Each bring their own skills, and working with those folks, because Quality Matters does not have access to data that is needed to make statements and provide evidence of student learning. We do not have access - or – to um – members data; student data. We have access to our relationship with them. So what we have to do is – we’re not conducting that research as much as we’re providing tools so that member institutions can successful and – successfully have valid studies, so they can get their own data and their own user-owned analysis. You know, we love it when we can help people – or groups of people partner up, like I mentioned Ohio, and California, and Minnesota. But they all do their own data collection and analysis, but they can share some of those large – pieces of results. Um so what Quality Matters does is helps to provide tools, incentives with the incentive being – being a resource, because we – I mean, we read a lot, and see what’s going on out there, and trying to sort of marry different groups who could support one another. So I did a lot of scanning and deep reading, and we’re always involved in doing some kind of a – a lit review. Right now, we’re interested in online management, leadership, and policy, because, I mean – in the whole – that’s one of the gaps in the whole research. Not just Quality Matters, but the whole online education research. Um – that level of research is the most challenged some of it’s because the research doesn’t really impact their day. Their day is working with an individual student, and that’s where their focus is, which is where it should be, but the larger studies we still need to move toward. Um we’d respond a lot to research questions. A lot of doctoral and grad students find us and say, “I would like to do this” and we, since we have read a lot of studies, and know what’s happened, we suggest variables, especially compound variables, because, you know – there the challenges that a student may not know of and get tripped on down the line, or maybe won’t get, worse, won’t get tripped on, and has this study that really is not a valid one. So we work with students with that. Um, and we work with Deb Adair and the directors. There’s always something going on.

**KL:** So, Kay, it sounds like you’re constantly juggling lots of projects, lots of people, lots of relationships, lots of communications. Are there tips or strategies you have that are working for you in terms of managing all of these projects, keeping them moving forward? I’m just curious, you know, how you’re kind of managing it on the project management side to make sure that all of it kind of keeps going.

**KS:** For me, it’s seeing the big picture. You know, as long as I keep the big picture, because everything is connected, you know? Everything - I can see connections uh – in everything. Uh my Myers-Briggs INTJ is showing, but I can – I can see and sense those broader connections, and that helps in my mind line up and prioritize these little steps that are – need to move along, sometimes on a daily basis, but on a weekly or a monthly basis.

**KL:** Mhm. So, Kay, I want to dig in a little bit to some of the research questions you’re tackling right now. Can you offer us a couple of examples of some of the things that you’re really digging into in this role?

**KS:** As – the caveat is, Quality Matters investigates only the data that we have (Mhm). You know, that we have – we do that. Um we are, and this isn’t – this is a broad research question. The question we put out at the last conference in 2017 is, what’s academic rigor? Everybody has an opinion of what academic rigor, but what is academic rigor? And from – from whose view point? And so in the 2017 – QM connect, we had a panel and started some of that conversation from faculty – you know, faculty might have one perspective, and not all faculty would agree nor would all students. But then we also have those people working in academic centers, who make judgements on what is academic rigor, by awarding or not awarding transfer credit. They have a perspective. And then we have - the folks who are looking at alternate forms of education. How do – so. This whole question about, ‘what is academic rigor?’ – and we have a white paper series coming out this – well, I guess this year’s almost over – coming out next year already - white paper series tackling that question. Um the big research project that we are focused on is – providing a model for institutions to find evidence of their implementation of Quality Matters, because when people say, “Well we have Quality Matters at our institution, let’s see if it’s improving retention.” Well first of all, what do you mean by implementation? Does that mean that everybody has a copy of the rubric? Does it mean you have a – system of professional development? Does it mean the courses are designed to meet standard? Does it mean that they go through informal and formal reviews? That they’re certified? So we are working on – and actually we’re starting to prepare a paper. We have a model, and valid – trying to validate it. Um that’s a big – a huge undertaking for us, because there’s the theoretical approach of change management, and then there’s the – the nitty-gritty uniqueness of each institution within their culture – how does their culture impact the implementation of QM? So that’s one of the tools we hope to provide in the next year, so people have some kind of marker – so that people can start comparing apples to apples when they talk in terms of, “We’ve implemented QM” so we have a better understanding of what that means. Our – our personal focus on – for research – is having more conversation in the next year on learning outcomes, and that’s been our conversation for – since 2003. But learning outcomes are – if we are going to talk about it, and we do need to find evidence, let’s get back to – we need to have some pre-post testing of students, you know? Unless someone’s randomizing students and testing, and if they are, I’ll give them my personal phone number to call and tell me how they’re doing it. Randomizing large groups of students – you know – this is education. So how do you know that learning happens? Grades? Yeah, we say that’s the easy way, but I hear horror stories of people even trying to get grades. So even if they’re not the best measurement, even gaining access is hard, but let’s find out where the student was, and then where the student – before the course, and then after the course, or the lesson. Um we’re focusing on helping people better understand confounding variables. I mean, QM from the beginning of time, was focused on validating instructional design, principles, and strategies. As – as a part of the larger quality assurance pie, it was never, never presented as a stand-alone, and so when – when you’re trying to explore any impact of QM, somehow there has to be some tension to these possible confounding variables. Students, um – teaching, instructional support or institutional support. When I was listening to Mark Milliron - he was talking about some of the data they’re getting. Just the impact of the LMS - the way students individually interact with it. So it’s not – it’s not to say that there isn’t possible – that it isn’t possible to have a good study that is – can be validated, but we cannot fall into a reductionist fallacy of over simplifying, and pretending that these things – you know, that it’s all, “if I apply the standards, this will happen.” We have to talk about, at least acknowledge, what we can and cannot control for. So we’re going to have – actually, we’re looking to have a webinar on pre-post testing just to remind people if you’re going to measure learning, you have to know what happened, what the condition was before. So there’s some of the – the things we’re tackling right now.

**KL:** So Kay, I’m always interested to hear from other researchers in his area. What are some of the gaps in research and online education that you think might need more attention. Obviously you’re tackling some of them, there may be other gaps that you’re not going to tackle, but that you see in the field. What are some of those things?

**KS:** Well – and I’m not the only one who sees – and I think I made some reference maybe in the previous segment, we need to continue to push for what’s been called ‘meso-leveled research’ that would be management, organizational, cost benefit, leadership, administration, technology. We tend to stay in micro-level research questions, which are teaching and learning, and that’s fine – I mean, we want to encourage a reflective practitioner. Absolutely study your own – own course for improvement, absolutely. A reflective practitioner – I mean, could there be anything better? We want to, and because there is a gap in moving to the broader questions - as I just said, the management, organizational - and I say that not just wearing my Quality Matters hat, but in reading and being involved in the field for quite a while. And I’m also wearing another – if I wear another hat, I’m – an associate editor for the American Journal of Distance Education. You know the – the person I work with, and I have for decades, has been waving this flag for years. Michael Moore has been saying, “We have got to have more study on these larger issues.” If online education and distance education is going to improve, yes it can improve one course – one instructor improving their own course at a time, but what’s the next level? That’s a huge gap for me – uh and others for a topic area. Another gap for me that I see, and again not alone am I seeing this, um – sometimes I – there must be a feeling of I have to produce a study, and many times – and we read this with what’s submitted for publication consideration – it’s obvious that there has been very little, if any, lit review. I mean, sometimes, I think it’s the same study being done over, and over, and over, and over! And – we direct people to the literature, because if we’re going to move ahead we need to build on research, not just do the same study over and over. And we see – not the same study, but the same topical questions – we see that in our lit review, because we do – we have a research library that I’ll send everybody to then. But in the lit reviews that we do, I stopped years ago documenting every study that had anything to do with interaction and engagement, um – because many of them are the same study. But that’s – I understand that, because that’s where it happens, and that’s where we as reflective instructors want to improve, um but in spending all the time on the same question, and a lot of the times it’s obvious that the person who is designing this study – whoever write this article, was completely unaware of what’s already been done. So keeping – I think if anybody is interested in research, you have to read, you have to do an extensive lit review. I mean, and they can, you know – they can be time consuming. You have to have a theoretical framework, you know – none of this is new to us. It’s just that we have to remind ourselves if we are hoping for the field to move forward, we have to be mindful and strategic, or there will continue to be too many gaps.

**KL:** Well, Kay, I want to thank you so much for coming on the show, sharing your experience, giving us a glimpse into what it looks like to be a research director for Quality Matters. Thank you so much for your time today!

**KS:** Thank you very much!

**KL:** Thanks also to our listeners for 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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