Episode 38: Dr. Katie Linder & Conference Panel

# KL: Katie Linder

# KL: You’re listening to *Research in Action*: episode thirty-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 of the *Research in Action* podcast, I’m excited to share something a little bit different with you. Recently I had the opportunity to participate in a podcasting panel at the Online Learning Consortium Accelerate Conference that took place in Orlando, Florida in November 2016. I was really thrilled to join a panel of other higher education podcasters. Let me share who you’ll hear from on this episode. The moderator for the panel is Kelvin Thompson, the co-host of *TOPcast: The Teaching Online Podcast*, who you’ve also heard from in a previous *Research in Action* episode. My co-presenters on the panel include Tom Cavanagh, the other co-host of *TOPcast: The Teaching Online Podcast*, who you’ve also heard from on *Research in Action*; Tanya Joosten, who is a co-host of Women Who Wine in Higher Education, you’ve also heard from her on Research in Action; Bonni Stachowiak, who’s the host of the Teaching in Higher Ed podcast; Jenny Quarles, who hosts Learning Lab; John Ernstberger, who hosts HigherEdScope; and of course me, the host of Research in Action. We’ll make sure to link to all of these shows in the show notes for this episode so you can check them out if you’re interested in other podcasts that are related to topics in higher education. You’ll also notice that the sound quality is a little bit different from what you might be used to in our episodes, but I think the folks recording the audio did a fantastic job, so everything should be clear for you. If you need it, there’s always a transcript with every episode, so you can check that out in the show notes. I hope you enjoy hearing the panel.

[Beginning of panel]

**Kelvin:** Gimlet Media CEO Alex Blumberg sort of declared 2015, I guess, as the year podcasting “arrived.” There’s some reasons for that. So I see this resurgence as like, man, I can’t keep up with how many new podcasts are coming out, even in our broad higher ed or teaching and learning field, let alone outside of that. So let me ask our podcasters: why do you think that is? Why? I mean some of us stopped paying attention to podcasting in about 2008, but so why has there been this resurgence, and how has that affected you personally? We can start maybe wherever you want, who wants to go first?

**KL:** I’ll start. So I would say I was doing, listening to podcasts before *Serial*, which I think was the thing that really caused a resurgence and just that narrative-based, true crime really brought a lot of people into it, and I was really intrigued by this medium of putting out a product on a regular basis that would kind of keep a conversation going and build a community around a topic. And that’s really what I wanted, especially as someone newly leading a research unit. I wanted to connect with other researchers and think about how we could build community, and I think that’s something podcasting can do. It can bring some pretty niche areas, I think research is more than niche, but it can bring people together around a topic and start to form a community of people who are asking questions and who want to be hearing from other experts, who want to be talking about all of these different things, and so that’s what really drew me to it. And when I listen to podcasts it’s the same, I’m looking for community, I’m looking for people who are talking about topics that are of interest to me, I’m wanting to learn more things, and so I think that’s that learning component is what makes it also really perfect for higher ed.

**Kelvin:** Awesome. Bonni?

**Bonni:** One of the other reasons I think it’s really growing is when we look at what’s happening in the world of television media, we see things going to more on-demand, like with Netflix, and podcasting is so on-demand. There are so many shows that I listen to, for example that play on NPR on the radio, but I never catch them at the time that they air, and I forget that they exist live, because I always access them via the podcast. So I think another big contributor is just that we can access that whenever we want, and also wherever we want. More people now in their cars are able to hook their phones up to their cars and that was a big change as well. I have a lot of people that listen to my podcast to take their dogs for walks with me, and they really do have that sense of community that Katie mentioned as well.

**Kelvin:** Anybody else on the panel who wishes to contribute to that? Tom?

**Tom:** Katie mentioned *Serial*, and I think that that was something of a phenomenon that brought people to podcasts that maybe hadn’t been there before. I think with the advent of kind of prosumer technology it’s really much easier to have a high quality, high production value podcast. As long as the content is interesting, it doesn’t sound bad anymore, right, if you produce it yourself? And I think that’s really helped to bring more people to the medium that might’ve otherwise been turned away, if the quality of the technical presentation wasn’t quite up to speed.

**Kelvin:** So for online folks, how do we measure success, especially when you’re making a case to institutional leadership, or time and resources to do this, what is successful look like? Who would like to start with that? Katie?

Katie: We’re institutional, so we actually have, it was kind of a partnership of how *Research in Action* started between our research unit and our marketing team, because they were really interested in how to get Ecampus brand out, and so we kind of threw around a bunch of different ideas about what we could potentially do as a topic, and research felt very evergreen, so that was something that we focused on. I would say metrics for success are a few things. One thing to know about podcasting is there is very little data, in terms of what you get back. So if you’re hosting your audio somewhere, we use Libsyn, they give you download rates, and it is connected to an RSS feed, so you can get download rates and break it out by different, you know, pockets of where your podcast is, but that does not tell you who is listening, it just tells you who’s downloading. And we all know we will download a podcast and not listen to it immediately. We just, you know, collect them. It’s easy to collect those things on our devices. So I think that one is download rates, is to say, you know, we have this many thousands of people who are potentially listening, and I choose that metric from what is our highest downloaded episode, and I assume that that is roughly equivalent to unique listeners, but that’s a very, it’s a very noisy data point. So that’s one thing. A second thing I would say is what kind of activity do you have on social media? Research in Action is very active on Twitter, so the kinds of conversations we get through that, emails that we get from listeners saying we want this topic, or thanks for the show. We’ve heard from multiple listeners saying this is the only research podcast that is regularly publishing and consistently publishing. For every person who’s emailing or doing something with us on Twitter, there are other people listening who are not choosing to do that. We all know how much we choose to engage in different things that we enjoy. And also what I think is unique about podcasting, and I was talking to someone on this panel about this the other day, people form a relationship with you that is a little bit one-sided, because, so they feel like they don’t need to reach out to you via those mechanisms because they’re hearing you in their ear every week. So I think that it’s a really difficult argument to make just based on metrics, that would be my sense, just because there are very few metrics that you can pull from. And I would also say it’s a long term issue to build community with a podcast, it is not something that happens overnight. So we’re, we just hit a little over 300 followers on Twitter, like within the last month, but I’ve been travelling a lot and talking about the podcast, but again, those 300 people, are they listening regularly? How many people are not connected to us on Twitter that are listening? I mean all of that is a little bit of mystery.

**Kelvin:** Who else? Jenny?

**Jenny:** I would say if your aim is to help your institution, I think then you can do some things to kind of create a metric about your institution. So a few things that we did, we got some buy-in from different departments, we solicited topics from them. We would also do like little hokey things for, like, they had to look for something in the podcast to make sure they were listening, and they would maybe win a glass of wine, or something like that, you know, something that helps show our institution that we were successfully reaching our faculty. I think it, so I think it depends on your personal aims then your institution’s aims. Do I want people like you, outside, to listen to the podcast? Yeah, I absolutely do, but that wasn’t my initial priority. I was serving a need for my institution. So then that led to making it easier to see how those numbers were impacting my institution, right? So I had more people turn up to things. They were learning about things in a different way, so that was simple.

**Kelvin:** Another other comments about success? John?

**John:** I would like to add when Melissa and I started our broadcast, although I received some institutional support and she received some support from her employers, it wasn’t for anything that was institutionally related. For us, it was each an addendum to the responsibilities we already had. And so I think that defining what it means to be a success, kind of like what Jenny was saying here is where your time should be spent up front. So for us, defining success was saying we’re going to try these new things at the start, before we even start broadcasting, these are things we are going to want to ensure that we do. We want to present about this, and we want to then write about it somewhere. So our support was not measured in analytics, per se. Our support was, in a lot of ways, accomplishing this task, and I think defining what it means to be successful is probably something that would be important to your institution, be important to you, and then generate some flexibility perhaps in showing that later on when your institution comes back to you and says was this successful? Well this is how we define successful, and we met those goals.

**Kelvin:** Very creative thought.

# Segment 2:

[music]

**Kelvin:** So how do you get, how do you get listeners, and if you’ve got a ready-made community through an existing platform like Boxer or something, does that help? What, what do you guys found to be helpful in that. Who would like to tackle that? Bonni?

**Bonni:** One of the things I didn’t mention introducing myself is that my husband has a podcast that’s been around two or three years longer than mine. It’s called *Coaching for Leaders*, and it’s to a broader context than higher ed. It’s about leadership and management, and so he was the one that advised me back in 2014 that I should start a podcast about teaching and higher ed, and one of the biggest pieces of advice he had for me then, he had about a year later, was you just keep doing it. Every single week, whether you feel like it, and by the way, a week is not some magical timeframe, whatever you committed to do, you do it with that kind of frequency, and start to have a trust built up with people that they know on whatever day and whatever timeframe you say it’s going to show up. And there are weeks where I couldn’t be prouder of what’s up there, and there are weeks where I think, eh. And what’s interesting though is it’ll resonate with different people for different reasons, and it’s, we talk a lot in higher ed, at least I hear these conversations about imposter syndrome, and if that’s something that you’ve got as a podcaster, I mean you’ve got to put yourself out there. You’ve got to take that risk to be vulnerable, and that’s why I guess to the last question, too, I would also say that it is tempting for me to make it about metrics because my husband’s been out of the gate, and with his podcast a couple years longer, and now compare my metrics to his, but what he always tries to remind me is, okay, but look at where I was at the same timeframe as you, and a lot of that is just that consistency. And it is one of those things that we struggle with a lot, to know when “good enough” is. Cause I don’t know about you, but I want everything to be excellent, and it can’t always be excellent because it might be excellent to one person, and not to another, and that’s just been important for me. And again, it’s aired every single week, it’s going to be airing again next week the day before Thanksgiving, because Thanksgiving is a Thursday, of course, and just that consistency people look forward to, and you start to build your listeners. And then the other thing would be having other ways where you can engage with your community. I have a Slack channel for teaching in higher ed, and that was important to some of my listeners who have pretty big names, and they have 40 or 50 thousand followers on Twitter and don’t feel like admitting their teaching mistakes out in that public of a forum. And we have, I don’t remember how many, 100 or 200 people in the Slack channel, it’s a smaller community that can engage on a more private level, and also it’s divided up into channels so they can engage just in the specific topics that they’re interested in as well.

**Kelvin:** Anybody else want to address that, our time is beginning to wane, but anybody else want to add anything to what Bonni said?

**Tom:** I’ll add one comment. I agree with everything that Bonni said. Social media, I think maybe Katie sets the bar for us in being engaged in social media.

**Kelvin:** She doesn’t sleep.

**Tom:** [laugh] Doesn’t sleep. To kind of keep the conversation going, to kind of attract new listeners if possible to the podcast, but for us we also, UCF has, one of its five stated goals for the past 25 years has been to be a leading partnership university, so we partnered with OLC to kind of promote the podcast as a service to the community, because they didn’t have any podcasts at the time. Now *Research in Action* is also listed up there, so that they became sort of a channel that promoted it in some sense, and hopefully we were providing a service to the community to offer one more kind of way to engage with each other that maybe wasn’t there before. And that helped us internally, when you go back to the previous question, because that kind of a relationship with a leading national organization helps reputationally, I think, with UCF that’s really hard to quantify when you’re talking about success measures, but it’s something that is important to the university from a strategic standpoint.

**Kelvin:** Excellent.

**KL:** About audience, I think it’s really important to know pockets that can be helped by your show. So we were thinking with *Research*, you know, Ph.D. students, people who are teaching research methods that might want to use this as OER in their classrooms, and that led us to create instructor guides for every episode that have learning outcomes and guided questions of students who are listening. And we just started to get a sense of these little pockets of people in these niche areas, and we promoted through those pockets. So we found the hashtags for those groups, and when episodes come out that might be especially relevant to them, we let them know. So it’s not just a blanket, you know, we want everybody and anybody coming to listen, which is great, but we understand that this is a show that’s not for everyone. Not everybody’s interested in this, and I think when you can target very specific people, you can make sure it’s really tailored to them, both in the content you’re producing and how you’re promoting it out via social media or other channels.

**Tom:** I’ll add one more thing, sorry. I agree that we recognize that our target audience is probably capped, right? There are only so many instructional designers working in higher education online learning, if that’s our kind of core target. We’re not going to get 100,000 listeners, and so I think it’s unrealistic for us to expect that. So kind of have a realistic sense, and be happy if you can really serve those listeners in a really quality way. I mean, it’s the title of this session, A Long Tail. We’re kind of out there on the end, where there are really people who appreciate what each podcast is offering, but maybe there aren’t a million people that appreciate it.

**Kelvin:** So somebody pull back the curtain, maybe a couple of somebodies, and give us a little sense of the production process. What does it look like? [booming voice] Pay no attention to that team behind the curtain. What is that, is it a solo effort? A group? How hard is it? That kind of stuff. Anyone want to comment? Jenny?

**Jenny:** I’ll start. I have a feeling it’s very different for each of us.

**Kelvin:** I think that’s true.

**Jenny:** We plan, we do two planning sessions and we would plan eight episodes at a time in that session, again thinking we’re on a 15-week schedule. One episode either ends up being a bonus or gets cut. So we do that twice in a semester, and then we’ll do research. Like many of you guys we have learning outcomes, guiding questions for each episode, and then we have show notes that we post, where we link people to journal articles, or research, or other key background documents that might help them understand or enter into the conversation, but when it comes to recording it was all us. Like Mac, one of the fancy, you know we Googled “best podcasting microphone,” and figured out how much money we had left where we could buy the microphone. We’re lucky enough that our college has a radio station, and there were times where booths weren’t being used, and so we would go in there to do recording and we would record as much as we could in the time that we were given. And then my co-hosts were both former because we had passed the reins onto other staff, but we would edit. You know, he would do the initial edits, I would listen, kind of give it the thumbs up, and then we would always, because it’s such a public-facing thing, we always ran it by, we’re on the academic side of the house even though we do instructional technology, so we’re not under IT, so we kind of run it by the provost’s office [laugh] just to make sure that there wasn’t anything that they were, you know, that they would red flag, and there never was. So that’s what it looked like, and we would release it. We would have an eighth ready to go, just like Bonni said, just to make sure we never had a lapse. If we were going to release, we had something ready to go.

**Kelvin:** Anybody else? Especially somebody who has maybe a contrasting process in some way.

[laugh]

**KL:** Just to, a quick mention to the solo show I do out of my home, I have a two-part Q&A that talks exactly about this, so if you’re interested in just how do you kind of pull together, and certainly I had experience from my institutional capacity. I ended up buying the same microphone we use at OSU, just because I was used to it, I knew how it worked. I use Libsyn, which we use at OSU, so I had some sense of kind of the background, but I mean I recorded in a closet, it’s lined with foam. I created, you know, an intro outro, I have a template that I use. I plug it in, I do very little editing, I do most things in one take. I can do an episode, start to finish, in about 45 minutes including show notes, so it’s doable. It’s very doable, but those two episodes are short, and kind of walk through the process of the content of those episodes, but also the production of those episodes if anyone is interested.

**Kelvin:** Good resource. I’m curious about Tanya and John, your processes on this.

**Tanya:** I was just going to give you a complete opposite view. I had this red power button on my laptop and then woo! We’re live and recording.

[laughs]

**Tanya:** So you can make it as simple or as complex as you want it to be. The five of us jump in a Google Hangout, YouTube Live, which used to be Hangouts Live, it’s now YouTube Live. You literally push a button that says “On Air,” and next thing you know you’re on air, and so it’s great. It goes until you hit that red button again, and it automatically records it and shoots it into your YouTube channel. So it’s really like, you could walk out of here right now and go in the hall and start. Beyond that you obviously have to build your community, but just to give you, I don’t have a special microphone. We all have laptops, that’s it. We don’t even wear headsets, we don’t have microphones. Literally we just have a Google account and a YouTube, which is your YouTube account where you hit the red button. Just to give you another side.

**Kelvin:** And you do have wine.

Tanya: And bring your wine, or whatever you choose to drink. I was detoxing last month. I just had tea.

**Kelvin:** I saw that.

[laugh]

**Kelvin:** John, see I think you’re both similar and quite different from Tanya’s perspective.

**John:** Yeah, you know the thing that makes the production aspect difficult for Melissa and myself is that we live 300 miles apart, but we’re trying to be visually present in the broadcast at the same time. And because we just became a part of what is the Periscope Producer Network, until now there was never this facility for doing some kind of a nice production with feeding both of our video and audio in, you know, intelligently. So there was this multilayer, you know, internet in between multiple times, different volume levels. And so we kind of ended up building this process that lives on a Google Doc, and where we start brainstorming, and there’s always this, there’s this continuous Google chat thing that happens where we’re refining. And by the time we’re ready to actually go into the show, we have a script with check boxes, we make sure everything happens, you know, where everyone’s TV or whatever they’re using is at this number that we have experimented with, because we’re just nerdy like that.

[audience laugh]

**John:** And we actually end up doing this private Periscope broadcast right beforehand, and then we both listen to it to make sure the audio’s okay, because episodes two and three are basically sound disasters. And so they’re transcribed now, to kind of combat that, but we went through this process and kind of created this ongoing list that’s growing, that involves multiple steps, meeting up, talking and hashing out the details, and working out the kinks of the broadcast itself. And then whenever that’s done, that goes to YouTube, so we can add those transcripts to it, and push it out a little bit more effectively.

**Kelvin:** Excellent.

# Segment 3:

[music]

**Kelvin:** We’re going to do sudden death, lightning round here as we go down the home stretch, but I’ve got 80 podcasts subscribed on my phone, I counted a while ago.

[laughter]

**Kelvin:** 80 podcasts. So, you know, so I’m like what am I in the mood for, you know? Some I come back to less frequently, some I come back, man, next episode is out. I was listening to *Reply All* from Gimlet on the way in this morning, because it just dropped last night, or early in the wee hours this morning. So, so here’s what I’m asking for our panel. So think about this, so I’m vamping for a second while you can put your ideas together, if there was one tip that you were going to offer to our newbie, soon-to-start podcasters, our neophytes here, what would that one tip be for success, and if you were going to make one recommendation for a podcast to listen to. Doesn’t have to be higher ed, doesn’t have to be technology, anything, could be decadent, I don’t know, the room’s closed, no one’s listening online, there not going to hear this ever again, it can be whatever you want to say. So one tip and, this is kind of like Bonni’s idea, one recommendation for a podcast. Okay, so Tanya, you look like you’re poised and ready to take it.

**Tanya:** Yes, this is my only tip: choose something that you are passionate about and be authentic. That’s all, that’s all I have to say.

**Kelvin:** That is awesome, anything that you would recommend to listen to?

**Tanya:** I don’t listen to podcasts.

[loud laughter]

**Kelvin:** I love it!

**Tanya:** Sorry, I’m going to start now.

**Kelvin:** Well there you go! We’re going to hold you to that. Tom?

**Tom:** So alright, so yeah, authenticity is really important, but I would say something that we learned, because when we started planning, we had really ambitious goals.

**Tanya:** No way, UCF? Had ambitious goals?

[laughter]

**Tom:** [laugh] We were going to have this whole produced thing, we were going to have guests, we were going to have segments with musical intros, stuff. And it quickly became apparent that mostly me, I couldn’t support that from my schedule. So we kind of backed off, what could we actually do and produce on a consistent basis, because that consistency is really critical. And it came down sort of to the conversation that we have over coffee, and then we occasionally bring in guests, or we’ll go out and interview guests. So I think, make sure you scope into something that you can do comfortably on a consistent basis. And podcasts that I’ve been listening to recently, I’ve got a bunch on my phone too, that I kind of bounce around between, but I’ve been a big fan of the Gimlet podcasts, and recently just finished the first season of *Heavyweight*. If you haven’t listened to that, they’re really good, and they’re kind of devastating from an emotional standpoint, so I highly recommend *Heavyweight*.

**Kelvin:** Excellent. Why don’t we just keep going down the line, if that’s okay with everybody? Katie?

**KL:** The recommendation that I would give is that there, there is, just the knowledge that there is a difference between being prepared to do a show and knowing everything about the topic of your show. So I certainly do not know everything about research, and listeners tell me they actually really like that, because I ask questions that admit a little bit of vulnerability, and I think that’s a key component of what makes the show accessible to people. In terms of what I listen to, I have a ton on my phone that I can’t keep up with, but the ones I’m constantly trying to keep up with are *Happier*, Gretchen Rubin’s podcast, which is very timely if you need some happiness, and I would also say the other one, I’m going to slip another one in there too, is an entrepreneurial podcast called *Being Boss*, about creative entrepreneurship, which I’ve found to be really fascinating, and they’re producing regularly, and they also train folks on how to do podcasts as well, so they have some great resources.

**Kelvin:** Excellent, we’re halfway through the panel, and our time is waning, so not to put any pressure on the final three, but good recommendations. Make it great!

**Bonni:** I’m going to start with a podcast to listen to, and that is Mike Wesch’s *Life 101*. And here’s the great news, he’s only produced one episode so you don’t have a big commitment to make there. He went after the vein of the *This American Life* podcast, and if you have not heard their show, it is very much in a storytelling format. And he tells the stories of our students, and it is such an emotional episode to listen to, just in terms of having greater empathy for our students, and that would actually be my recommendation to you as well. He’s invited us to contribute to future episodes, and rather than having a podcast and having the kind of commitment we’ve talked about that one takes, just think about a story that you have to tell, and tap into his audience. His YouTube videos have been watched more than 20 million times, he’s got a lot of eyeballs and a lot of ears, and go look at the show topics that he’s invited people to contribute to, and go get with your students. Tell a story together! I think that’d be a good way to get started with all of this.

**Kelvin:** Awesome. Jenny?

**Jenny:** Partner with someone. Have a colleague, or a friend, or whoever to partner with. It’s so fun to do it with another person and be able to plan, and also be excited and also have the disasters together, which I’m sure you can agree. Yeah. Recommendations? I’ve a general one, I love all the How Stuff Works podcasts, they’re all awesome, but personally *The Longest Shortest Time* is about parenting as well, and it’s amazing so check it out.

**Kelvin:** Awesome. And last but not least, John Ernstberger.

**John:** I would totally say to not take yourself too seriously.

**Kelvin:** What?

[laughter]

**John:** Yeah, exactly. I mean, when something breaks on the show, laugh it off, laugh at yourself. You know, we get to look at ourselves afterwards, so it’s like oh dear lord, did I look like that today? And you just have fun and keep doing it. The podcast that I would recommend, I don’t even know it’s still being produced or not, but it’s the one that started me listening, that got me started listening to podcasts is, was Stanford’s *Entrepreneurship Corner*. And I still don’t know if it’s in continuation, but after listening to some of those episodes, especially the founder of Twitter, I just felt like I could do anything. And so if you need that boost of, you know, struggling a little bit, figuring it out and get this cool thing moving, that’s what I would totally do.

**Kelvin:** Well that is excellent.

[outro music]

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