

## Episode 1 – Danica Sims

[Episode 1 - Danica Sims \(26 March 2023\).mp3](#)

### Transcript

00:00:14 Speaker 1

Welcome to conversations and made it the people behind the research.

00:00:40 Speaker 1

Welcome to conversations in made it a podcast that explores the diverse world of health professions, education and research. Each episode dives deeper into both excellent research and recommendations for real world practise.

00:00:56 Speaker 1

I'm the people behind the research.

00:00:59 Speaker 1

We are interested in hearing the personal stories of researchers and their very journeys into the field.

00:01:06 Speaker 1

As they reflect on their challenges and successes, sharing lessons learned, we hope that our listeners are encouraged and inspired conversations and made Ed invites you to join this virtual community of practise to make connections continue your lifelong learning, and remain engaged in an ever evolving.

00:01:27 Speaker 1

Landscape of health professions. Education.

00:01:30 Speaker 1

Embark on this exciting journey with us.

00:01:42 Speaker 1

So I am Danika Sims and I am a lecturer in the Department of Education and an early career researcher at the University of Oxford. But I am originally from South Africa.

00:01:56 Speaker 1

And I'm joined by a colleague and friend, Liam.

00:02:00 Speaker 2

Yes, and I am Liam guilfoyle.

00:02:04 Speaker 2

Also a lecturer here in the department in the science education and.

00:02:11 Speaker 2

I can't remember what else I needed to say about myself, really. Oh, you said you're from South Africa, so I'm from Ireland in case anyone.

00:02:15 Speaker 1

Aye.

00:02:16

Yeah.

00:02:19 Speaker 2

Pick up from the accident.

00:02:20 Speaker 1

I was going to say I may or may not have invited Leanne because of his Irish accent, which is possibly my favourite accent. It would be nice to have him sort of intervene.

00:02:31 Speaker 1

Today. So it's not just me talking by myself for 30 minutes.

00:02:36 Speaker 2

And she's going to listen to it back over and over again. Fine. I don't mind.

00:02:41 Speaker 1

Great. So Liam, I'm going to hand over to you.

00:02:45 Speaker 2

OK. Well, I think the point of me being present here is really just to interview you, although you will be the interviewer.

00:02:52 Speaker 1

That's the idea.

00:02:52 Speaker 2

For the the remainder of the podcast, unless by some sort of popular demand, I'm requested back. I'm not sure why start a podcast?

00:03:05 Speaker 1

So there are already some really great park costs in the field of health professions education. I'm thinking of key line, which is key literature and medical education, and the papers podcast, which is sort of taken over from Key Lime. And I think medical education, the journal has also, you know, 100 episodes where they discussed research in the field.

00:03:25 Speaker 1

I'm not seeking to discuss research per say. I think they really do that really well.

00:03:31 Speaker 1

I am more interested in the people behind the research and I think as an early career researcher, someone who's sort of starting out, it can be very easy to feel like an impostor or not sort of know where your place is in the field. And so I'm hoping to speak to people who have made the transition successfully and who are willing to share their stories of their journey.

00:03:54 Speaker 1

Into the field and how they've progressed so that I can somewhat selfishly be encouraged and sort of develop a sense of belonging. And I feel like that there is.

00:04:05 Speaker 1

In need or a potential audience, whether they're sort of novice researchers or early career researchers or even people who are thinking about studying medical education or medical education research. And so I'm hoping to sort of reach those people who might want to be involved but don't feel like they belong. So how can we create this sort of?

00:04:25 Speaker 1

Safe space to explore entering new fields and making a success of it.

00:04:31 Speaker 2

Sometimes we always think that.

00:04:34 Speaker 2

From afar, everybody's journey. Everyone who's an academic or a researcher has had the same.

00:04:40 Speaker 2

Journey through that and actually there's a huge diversity of of what people experience as being their their entrance or their.

00:04:47 Speaker 2

The way they navigated to to where they are, so you want to try and unpick all of those and tell those stories and maybe let that be the thing that inspires people.

00:04:57 Speaker 1

Yeah, exactly.

00:04:58 Speaker 2

And So what was your journey into?

00:05:01 Speaker 1

The field so I am not a health professional and I think that's also contributes to my sense of perhaps not feeling like I should be in this space, but I also am aware of many non health professionals being involved and so that.

00:05:15 Speaker 1

Is a voice and a space for all of us. And so, as you can hear, I'm from South Africa and I did all my studying at the University of Cape Town and I did my sort of undergraduate and basic and biomedical sciences. So human Physiology and genetics. And then I did postgraduate study honours and masters in medical cell biology.

00:05:37 Speaker 1

Where I was doing Cancer Research and during the sort of aims of my masters and something called fees must fall and roads must fall. Student podcast erupted at the University of Cape Town.

00:05:52 Speaker 1

And if you sort of aren't super familiar with South African history, we were colonised by first the Dutch and then the British. And so Cecil John Rhodes, he was a British coloniser and there was basically a statue of Rhodes on the University of Cape Town campus. It was sort of at the heart.

00:06:13 Speaker 1

Were the centre of upper campus and so students rightly took offence to its presence and we've sort of seen this also in the UK and parts of the US where people call for the removal of these offensive stats.

00:06:25 Speaker 1

Issues and it really was sort of I think the first time I was deeply confronted with the idea of, like, coloniality and white supremacy and sort of my potential complicit. You know, how I might be reproducing it or being involved in it unconsciously. And while it always being.

00:06:46 Speaker 1

Curious and sort of interested in education as a post grad, I was involved in something called problem based learning in the medical school for a couple of years.

00:06:56 Speaker 1

I had no sort of formal educational background or experience, and so as my masters came to a close, I was really interested in being part of the solution or, you know, playing a small part in hopefully transforming education in South Africa. And so that led me to.

00:07:17 Speaker 1

Apply and enrol for a PhD in Health Sciences, education or health professions, education. And so I think.

00:07:26 Speaker 1

It's it comes from.

00:07:28 Speaker 1

A deep sense of sort of caring and wanting to affect change and being an agent of change and transforming systems and structures that really sort of drives me to stay involved in education, health, professions, education, which is a really complex field.

00:07:47 Speaker 2

So clearly education was the driver. And why did you?

00:07:56 Speaker 2

Specifically, pick.

00:07:58 Speaker 2

Health professions education, because arguably, some of those things that you were seeing were in the higher education sector more broadly.

00:08:06 Speaker 2

UM or education even further than that?

00:08:09 Speaker 2

So.

00:08:10 Speaker 2

You could perhaps have done a PhD in any education subfield why health professions education.

00:08:19 Speaker 1

Again, I think my journey hasn't been linear or straightforward. A lot of it has been unplanned and sort of almost responding to sort of contextual challenges or opportunities that have arisen. So coming from a science background, Health Sciences.

00:08:38 Speaker 1

Education was somewhat of a natural fit. You know, sort of combined the.

00:08:43 Speaker 1

Of both roles in terms of my love of sort of science, but then also bringing in the social sciences and education. So you know, in hindsight, I could say it was a perfect marriage, but it wasn't particularly sort of intentional. Initially. I actually wrote a research proposal on teacher training.

00:09:02 Speaker 1

And continued professional development in South Africa because I thought sort of a top down approach.

00:09:06 Speaker 1

Rich for transforming higher education wouldn't be the most strategic option, I thought like a sort of grassroots ground up approach in terms of helping transform basic education would be more strategic and it was accepted at the University of Oxford and the Department of Education for a default. I just didn't get the funding to come to do that. So sort of.

00:09:26 Speaker 1

Doing a PhD At the University of Cape Town was almost sort of my backup plan, but in hindsight I am very thankful for the opportunities and being able to do all my training and stuff that's differently informed.

00:09:39 Speaker 1

My sort of world view as a researcher and my research agenda in terms of sort of adopting critical perspectives on my work, whether it's writing on assessment or online education or faculty development, or qualitative research methodologies, I sort of like to bring in a critical framing based on my experiences.

00:10:00 Speaker 1

In South Africa.

00:10:01 Speaker 1

Care. But in terms of health professions, education specifically, I think.

00:10:05 Speaker 1

It's a really.

00:10:07 Speaker 1

Powerful field to be involved in because you are not just sort of wanting to improve education, practise and outcomes, but that has implications for healthcare practise and outcomes. So it feels like I'm sort of kidding two birds with one staying.

00:10:22 Speaker 1

And I think the health.

00:10:24 Speaker 1

Care professions. You know, there should be care and compassion and love for your your patients and sort of a a service aspect. And I think if I'm motivated by care and compassion for people, then being in health professions, education is sort of a good fit and not just professionally, but personally.

00:10:44 Speaker 2

I think.

00:10:46 Speaker 2

Maybe this is episode one starting a spin out already, but uh uh, it's this idea of different journeys into a field.

00:10:56 Speaker 2

Is.

00:10:58 Speaker 2

Very similar in in teacher education and and it's interesting to hear that you could have been equally telling the same story.

00:11:07 Speaker 1

Yeah.

00:11:08 Speaker 2

Being in teacher education and but but I think there are so many different career trajectories through education into educational research.

00:11:19 Speaker 2

Which involves some element of the practise of those things, or, you know, deep study and thought in a particular area of.

00:11:29 Speaker 2

That aspect of education.

00:11:32 Speaker 2

So.

00:11:33 Speaker 2

Whether or not it becomes a spin out, or whether or not we start to explore different trajectories in academia more broadly, I think that would be really interesting.

00:11:43 Speaker 2

But for you?

00:11:45 Speaker 2

I think.

00:11:45 Speaker 2

It's.

00:11:48 Speaker 2

What's also interesting is.

00:11:51 Speaker 2

How you've?

00:11:53 Speaker 2

Effect effectively being flexible in the opportunities that have come about. And I think that's also particularly something interesting when.

00:12:05 Speaker 2

You are an early career researcher or a postdoc trying to figure out what that next step is that you know you've tried particular routes and then pivoted.

00:12:15 Speaker 2

You went about other other routes and.

00:12:19 Speaker 2

So there's probably a lesson in that as well. I think about the level of flexibility and open mindedness to the different fields and possibilities or as well as capitalising on the experiences that you have had. You talked a little bit about problem based learning and engaging.

00:12:35 Speaker 2

That in uh in your postgrad studies?

00:12:38 Speaker 2

I don't know how much that played a role in the fact that that's such a key part of health professions education that made you choose that.

00:12:47 Speaker 1

Definitely. So it's very interesting when you engage with students in a somewhat informal setting and they lower their guard and they're very open and honest with how they learn or don't learn. I can remember almost all my students joking that they never study Embryology because, you know, it only counts 5% in their end of year.

00:13:08 Speaker 1

Exam so that's too difficult. They're just going to skip it and you know, study.

00:13:12 Speaker 1

Buyer Kim or not to me or whatever else it might be, so really there I was a bit curious in terms of what motivates student learning and learning behaviours and you know, somewhat coincidentally, my PhD topic. While I was interested in teacher development. And I'm interested in faculty development and sort of continued professional.

00:13:32 Speaker 1

Development and learning my PhD focused on assessment in medical education and looking at the assessors or the clinician educators who.

00:13:42 Speaker 1

Conceptualised design, implement and sort of evaluate their assessment practises and the ultimate goal would be to sort of think about assessment professionalisation in terms of supporting their developments to enhance assessment design and its learning effects and so on. But.

00:13:59 Speaker 1

I think while also like health professions, education is that flexibility and variety and sort of diversity that you mentioned. I think one of the chips on my shoulder is that because I don't come from a humanities or social sciences background.

00:14:13 Speaker 1

And I often feel like I don't know what I'm talking about when it comes to educational theory or research. And I was sort of first exposed to things like that during my PhD where I didn't have any prior sort of knowledge. I shared with my students. Now that I didn't know what a paradigm was, I've never heard the word.

00:14:34 Speaker 1



Paradigm. I didn't know what the methodology was.

00:14:37 Speaker 1

And and so the learning curve was really steep and a lot of the time I felt very overwhelmed and confused and and stressed and not sort of understanding the language or the discourse and new ways of thinking and practising. And again, that sort of empathy that that shared lived experiences, which I think many of my Masters students.

00:14:57 Speaker 1

Are currently going through. I really feel deep empathy for them, and that's also why I think I wanted to start this this podcast. But what I like about the field is it does feel more relaxed compared to.

00:15:11 Speaker 1

Other educational fields, I think we sort of apply educational theory and while of course we're very rigorous and we have standards for quality and I'm sort of very stringent and fighting for recognition in terms of qualitative research being just as rigorous as quantitative approaches, it does feel like a space where you can.

00:15:32 Speaker 1

Be a little bit more relaxed in the use of educational theory. Yes, you need to declare your paradigms and your methodology and related to theory, but it does feel like a space. It's a lot more free and open to people sort of learning and developing and growing and that's why I like to be in it I think.

00:15:50 Speaker 1

If I can make it sort of less threatening, that would be a great outcome.

00:15:56 Speaker 1

Of this podcast, where people can feel like there's space to learn and grow and share, sort of their vulnerabilities. I mean, I think why I'm very nervous about starting this podcast is it's one thing to sort of fail in private. It's another thing to put yourself out there and perhaps as a millennial to over share, as I think we can be prone to do.

00:16:17 Speaker 1

And open yourself up to potential criticism and judgement. But again, I think if we don't.

00:16:23 Speaker 1

Open the doors and sort of reveal what's behind the curtain. Then the field sort of stays quite homogeneous. I mean one to to be diverse, I mean one to get people involved in educational research, we want them to be evidence based and theoretically grounded. And if we don't sort of have the the room to let them struggle and figure it out, then we're never going to grow the field.

00:16:44 Speaker 2

Absolutely. And I think there's a lot of interesting elements to what you're saying there about the boundaries between disciplines and the fact that each of us having different journeys on.

00:16:56 Speaker 2

That.

00:16:57 Speaker 2

Sort of stand a little bit differently on that boundary between these disciplines between, uhm, coming from perhaps natural sciences into social sciences, educational science or educational theory.

00:17:12 Speaker 2

And so on one side the.

00:17:15 Speaker 2

The podcast and and sharing those experiences is a way to.

00:17:22 Speaker 2

One maybe help navigate those boundaries by.

00:17:26 Speaker 2

Illuminating the paths across them and two is to normalise the fact that we come with different profiles and perhaps exposing that vulnerability is also about being very.

00:17:40 Speaker 2

Intellectually honest about where your strengths are in your profile and where you're comfortably operating, but you don't necessarily see as your strength. And I think that would lead.

00:17:52 Speaker 2

To.

00:17:53 Speaker 2

An awful lot more productive.

00:17:55 Speaker 2

Research projects or debates, even.

00:17:58 Speaker 2

If people were not taking a pretentious view that, uh.

00:18:03 Speaker 2

Because I'm in a field, I must be seen as expert in all elements and aspects of that field.

00:18:12 Speaker 2

Because it strikes me that if you are trying to hide that rather than being open about it, you tend to avoid that debate and or close down that debate somehow superficially rather than saying.

00:18:24 Speaker 2

OK, maybe I'm wrong in that area, or maybe there's something you can offer me, or maybe we can learn together through this discussion.

00:18:32 Speaker 2

And so I think.

00:18:34 Speaker 2

I would wholeheartedly agree with you that we need to be more open and transparent and to some extent vulnerable, but I think the vulnerability changes.

00:18:45 Speaker 2

If everybody buys into that notion, it's not really a vulnerability anymore. If we just see that as being intellectually honest, I think, which would be my idealistic hope, I think.

00:18:55 Speaker 1

Yeah, I really like that because I think as you mentioned my, I've sort of hopped around in higher education. I was sort of doing some research associate work at the University of Cape Town.

00:19:06 Speaker 1

His PhD.

00:19:07 Speaker 1

Then the pandemic hit, and so I was employed at another university and sort of part-time roles, and I juggled multiple part-time roles over the the past couple of years. And then I joined Oxford last year, and I think one of my fears was it's Oxford has a reputation, and I think I had misconceptions.

00:19:27 Speaker 1

And I was very much pleasantly surprised when I joined and I found the Department of Education to be so warm and welcoming, and I feel like, you know, I haven't even been here a year, but already I think there's been a space where I feel like I can have a voice and be honest and vulnerable.

00:19:46 Speaker 1

Whereas.

00:19:48 Speaker 1

I think you know back in South Africa, I think because employment was so vicarious.

00:19:53 Speaker 1

And you know, there wasn't always fantastic resourcing, so I might not have the opportunities. But here I feel like I've been given space to explore and to make mistakes and hopefully I don't mind sharing mistakes if you learn and grow. So it's not just sort of continuously making mistakes and never developing, it's sort of.

00:20:14 Speaker 1

Open that. Yes, I've made many mistakes, but there's been.

00:20:17 Speaker 1

Sort of grace to grow and to explore, and that's been quite freeing. And so while I feel sort of very nervous putting myself out there, I think you know, perhaps we need also change the perception of academia even at a place like Oxford, where it's sort of steeped in tradition. And yes, it has a fantastic reputation. But we do really want to welcome.

00:20:38 Speaker 1

Diverse students and diverse collaborations, and as you say, sort of changed the narrative of what academia is, especially health professions. Education. I think the field has really exploded.

00:20:50 Speaker 1

And it's gone global and I just also want to create now that I'm in a position of sort of power and privilege to share the space. And so I'm really hoping to invite people from across the world to share their stories and their different stories and journeys into the field so that we can learn from each other. I think, you know, being.

00:21:10 Speaker 1

And it says in the global N which they dominate the field places like the UK, the US, Netherlands, Australia, Canada and they really do produce excellent research. But at the same time.

00:21:21 Speaker 1

It's been a bit strange for me when you know students or academics mentioned things and we're really doing it in South Africa or we're leading the way in certain areas. And so I'm sure that there are many excellent examples of research that we can amplify from these marginalised places. And so I'm hoping that.

00:21:41 Speaker 1

I can share the space with others and sort of bring those diverse experiences and perspectives to a global stage.

00:21:49 Speaker 2

Well, let's hope it goes viral podcast, and then it will be a global stage.

00:21:55 Speaker 1

I might be a bit old for for viral as a I feel like an older millennial.

00:22:01 Speaker 2

Well.

00:22:03 Speaker 2

Is there anything else you want to add before we conclude it? I think we have a really good sense of what the podcast is and what your story at least a glimpse into your story, though I think that will come out more as you, you people and compare your story with theirs and.

00:22:17 Speaker 2

So on any final closing comments.

00:22:21 Speaker 1

If listeners have any guests, they would like to hear from, whether it's a colleague or someone in the field, or sort of a past student who you think has a valuable story to share, please do get in contact with me. I think, you know, we're starting something new we have.

00:22:38 Speaker 1

The vision, but we're open always to learning and changing and evolving. So I really want this to be a space for the community and to develop.

00:22:47 Speaker 1

Connections across the globe. And so if you have someone who you would recommend, please do let me know. I think the contact details should be in the podcast show notes.

00:22:59 Speaker 2

And of course, if you're interested in the teacher education spin out, you can send in your Germans, yeah.

00:23:05 Speaker 2

Or just a.

00:23:07 Speaker 2

We can do a crossover episode. Don't know what that would look like.

00:23:09 Speaker 1

Yes, I definitely. I definitely want to also have sort of student sound bites with graduates. So obviously it would be helpful to hear from people who have made the transition. But many of our students are sort of in the transition period and I think they also have valuable lessons to share.

00:23:26 Speaker 1

There. And so I'm hoping that as our graduate pool grows, I can sort of nab some of them to share their experiences and advice for people considering making the jump into education.

00:23:38 Speaker 2

I can see this \*\*\*\*\*. It's going to be great.

00:23:42 Speaker 1

Hope so. So thanks Liam for very generously interviewing me. I appreciate.

00:23:49 Speaker 2

It it was great fun.

00:23:52 Speaker 1

Thanks. Thanks for listening.

00:23:58 Speaker 1

Are you passionate about education? Are you interested in conducting educational research? Are you considering obtaining a formal qualification and health professions education?

00:24:10 Speaker 1

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00:24:21 Speaker 1

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00:24:32 Speaker 1

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00:24:38 Speaker 1

Notes.

00:24:49 Speaker 1

I am Danika Simms, your host and producer. Thank you for joining conversations in Madrid.

00:24:56 Speaker 1

Hit subscribe and leave a review.

00:24:58 Speaker 1

I'd love to hear from listeners. So if you have any comments or questions or recommended guests, please get in contact with me.

00:25:07 Speaker 1

Contact details can be found in the show notes.