

# Transcript

00:00:14 Speaker 1

Welcome to Conversations in Med-Aid, the people behind the research.

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Hi, everyone.

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We're back today with Tahira and Natasha.

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And before we get started, if they could just introduce themselves.

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So who are you?

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What do you do?

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Where are you based?

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Okay, so I'll just jump in.

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My name's Natasha Mooner.

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I am the head of the Writing Lab at the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Cape Town.

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And we...

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provide support and guidance and teaching and resource development around academic writing and reading, so the literacies for staff and students within a health sciences context.

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Yeah, hello everyone.

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I'm Tahira Kulam Hussain.

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So I work with researchers, scientists, clinicians, you know, and something that, you know, people

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assume, you can either do or you can't, right?

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So my specific interest is writing with authority.

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So working in the same space as Natasha, the Faculty of Health Sciences Writing Lab, I really help students and the clinicians with their voice and how to refine that on the page.

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Yeah.

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Great, thank you.

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So I guess my first question would be, why do you have a writing center for the health sciences?

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And also, how did you get into that space?

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I mean, I don't know your background.

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So, you know, how do you find yourself at the UCT Writing Center?

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So for me, I was a postgraduate student at UCT.

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I was in the science faculty doing a PhD in molecular and cell biology.

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And obviously, as a student, we're writing about our work and I entered A departmental writing competition using a sort of a critical literature review that I had written for my thesis.

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And I won.

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And it was really like a sort of a happy surprise to win.

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But the real prize turned out to be that exposed me and introduced me to the university's writing center, which I hadn't previously encountered.

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And so through that introduction, I approached the writing center.

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I became a postgraduate writing center consultant myself.

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And initially, it really was just a job that was convenient, that involved something I was good at and I enjoyed doing and I enjoyed helping other students.

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But over the three years of

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working there, it really shifted and changed the way I was thinking, particularly about writing in a science context and how little teaching I had received around that myself and how little teaching other students were receiving from people who actually understood the writing as insiders who had actually walked that journey themselves.

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And it was the director of the

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the UCT Writing Center who first suggested to me that I might consider this kind of work as a potential career path.

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And initially I dismissed that because I was very firmly set on a science career.

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I had finished my PhD.

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I had started a postdoc.

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But once I stopped working at the writing center, I really felt this massive sense of loss and particularly a sort of a loss of meaning and fulfillment.

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As much as my research was really interesting, it just didn't, it just didn't, yeah, fulfill me the same way that working with students had done.

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And so

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Around that time, the university had received some funding to establish a dedicated writing center for the health sciences because writing is so contextualized, because it's very different to write in humanities or law or science or health sciences.

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And they were looking for somebody who had a science or health sciences background, someone who understood writing center work to establish the unit and to run it.

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And so that for me was really the opportunity I was looking for, I think, to harness everything that I had gained and learned through my own training and my postgraduate years, but be able to come back to the work of literacies and working with students.

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And so.

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Yeah, we established the unit in 2015 and really it's been an ongoing bit of a passion project, I think, since then.

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I mean, already a decade in.

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Well done.

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Yes, exactly.

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It's hard to believe.

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Yeah.

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Tahira.

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Yeah, I mean, similar to Natasha.

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I mean, I started working in the writing center as well.

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I was busy with my master's in hematology.

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And a friend was

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working with someone at the writing center on their writing.

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And I've just gone along, never heard of this space and then just became familiar with it and being quite interested in this space because during my undergrad, I was always told, oh, you write so well.

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The feedback was always great.

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And you know, you get confident.

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You think, wow, I can really write well.

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And then into kind of honors, masters, that kind of trajectory continued.

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But for me, it was about, okay, why?

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What's so great about me writing well?

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What does that mean exactly?

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And I couldn't explain it.

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So for me, you know, having this element of curiosity and then my values being empowerment and wanting to know why and help others as well.

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You know, around me in the lab, of course,

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and all the kind of students that I met along the journey, I saw them struggling.

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And it's not because we can't write, we can't think, it has nothing to do with that.

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It's because nobody really taught us explicitly, you know, what does it mean to actually write in your discipline?

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What does it mean to write in the academy, right?

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You expected just to know, you know, and for me that just wasn't enough, you know.

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So there was this gap for me, we are brilliant scientists, top of our class, And then having this kind of discomfort with not knowing, how do you actually claim authority in the discipline, And I suppose that's what pulled me in, much like Natasha as well.

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It started out as a job, just carry on with life.

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And then

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Towards the end of my master's, I had this tough decision.

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It was this turning point for me.

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Do I continue in the lab with a PhD, doing the Western blot long hours in the evening, or do I actively pursue this interest of mine?

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Why do we write the way we write, particularly in health sciences, in biomedical sciences?

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Do I take this seriously?

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So I did do that.

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I did decide to choose to work or to rather pursue a PhD in health proficiency education.

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And I think at that time, I was probably already part of the furniture in the writing lab.

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So when the writing lab was established, I worked at the writing center, the main one, and then I moved to the writing lab as my home base.

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And yeah, I was part of the furniture.

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It wasn't just a job anymore.

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It wasn't a job anymore, you know?

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So

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Fortunately, I was able to turn that into, like Natasha said, it became a passion project and very lucky that I can continue in that space.

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Yeah, so I pursued the PhD.

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My PhD is under examination at the moment.

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And it's all about what I'm passionate about, you know, claiming authority, authorial voice development,

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bringing in my disciplinary kind of knowledge.

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Yeah.

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I'm very keen to read the outputs of that PhD.

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I think it's very much needed, and we can have another chat when those come up.

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Definitely.

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I look forward to that.

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Yeah.

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I mean, from both of you, your passion comes across very clearly, and you've mentioned sort of your ethic, your care that you're bringing to the work, and you've mentioned, you know, sort of the people, the community, you've also mentioned contextualization.

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And I can also say I was a basic scientist in a previous life.

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Not that I don't think I could do the tissue culture today, to be honest, even though I did it, hundreds of hours of it.

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And like I wasn't taught how to write.

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Even I think as a basic scientist, I sort of learned the recipe of, you know, you have that kind of set formula.

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of an article.

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But even then I was writing with others in the lab and I was sort of, at the bottom of the food chains, not contributing very much.

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And then I also transitioned into education.

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And that was, I mean, seeing a steep learning curve seems like a gross understatement.

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It was incredibly challenging and difficult.

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And I feel like what I do now is trying to get master's students to help make that shift in thinking.

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And I don't know if I'm successful in doing that, but that's sort of my goal.

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And that leads me as opposed to the work we have done together, something called Papers with Purpose.

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It's a program we've run over the last two years.

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And I do want to say well done team.

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Tahir and Natasha are the stars of the team because we actually won a Vice Chancellor's Award in Research Culture from the University of Oxford.

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So maybe describe, so what is Papers with Purpose?

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Why did we do it?

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You know, what were we hoping to achieve?

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Tahira, maybe you want to start with this because you bumped into the funding call that kind of sparked the thinking of this project.

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Sure.

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I mean, yeah, I mean, I really just keep my eye out for funding around language and writing development.

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I mean, it's not something that you regularly see all the time.

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Let's just put it out there.

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So I mean, when I was scanning and I saw this, I came across the British Academy's

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funding for international writing workshops.

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And honestly, it was like, wow, this has to be too good to be true, right?

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And one of the criteria is that you have to have a UK collaborator.

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So I did more of my homework and reached out to Nikki and we just started chatting, you know, and I suppose I think the deadline was quite tight and we said, okay, let's just

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start thinking about this.

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And I suppose that's where the collaboration started.

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And then we kind of brought in Natasha and said, okay, can we actually make this happen?

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You know, is this something that we could do?

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You know, and I suppose that's where Papers with Purpose was born.

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Yeah.

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And I think, you know, from there, we really just sort of, the project really speaks to the idea of supporting

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people as they transition into health professions education.

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So postgraduate students, early career researchers, and particularly those people that have been marginalized kind of by the systemic privileges who have, you know, not necessarily been supported in the way that they should.

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And so the project really

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looks to partner with people on this early journey.

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And I think to address the kinds of challenges that, all three of us experienced as we moved from a science context into an educational research context.

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And that is what many people face coming into health professions education, because primarily people are coming from clinical or science contexts.

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And what, we all mentioned kind of how we weren't taught to engage with writing or literacies in any kind of an explicit way within the sciences.

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And equally, if we transition across disciplines, we seldom get that kind of guidance or instruction.

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And yet,

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the orientations, the thinking, the research paradigms, the methods, the ways of writing, the ways of engaging with literature, all of these things shift and are different as we move from one discipline into another.

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And so they, if we're not aware of those practices, those strategies, those knowledges and orientations, they can act as invisible barriers.

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And

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And we keep bringing our prior learning and our prior knowledge and practices that worked so well in our primary domains and trying to apply them and use them in an educational space.

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And this is often where people get stuck in their process, where they slow down, where they keep getting journal rejections because there are these invisible

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often tacit kind of variables and factors.

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And so this project was really about making those things explicit to people and then partnering with researchers on that journey.

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So not just about sharing knowledge, but around sharing, growing, developing a community of practice together over a period of time, I think.

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Yeah.

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And I think that's why this program won a research culture award, because it's so much more than just a writing workshop.

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And it's not just necessarily, yes, it's about making the technical skills explicit, but as you said, it's about that communal aspect and that partnership and creating, I guess, sort of a network or a support system.

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for early career researchers to flourish within because it can be quite isolating, never mind sort of the skills that we need to train ourselves in, but doing it alone can be even more challenging.

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And maybe just speaking about the broader context, you mentioned marginalization.

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So what do you mean by that?

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Especially I think in the field of health professions education, it's not just

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that we're not explicitly taught the sort of the skills and the social aspect of writing, but it feels like sometimes the deck is stacked against scholars and maybe, I don't want to use the term Global South, but in places outside of the, I guess, the Super 5 in the field of the Canada, the USA, the UK, Netherlands, and Australia.

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So do you want to speak a bit more about, you know, the specific challenges for an African context?

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So I mean, I think that we, there are a number of things that researchers are grappling with in our context.

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And we know that researchers are producing really incredible work, really valuable work.

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And in fact, South Africa,

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sort of does, publishes the most in terms of health professions education, across the African content.

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And yet, relative to those super 5 that you mentioned, we are sort of contributing, around 2% of the kind of the body of research literature.

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So that so we see the disparity in kind of the published literature space.

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And then we trace back what are the reasons, what are the sort of the variables that are driving that picture that we're seeing?

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And largely it relates to things like resources.

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So, the limitations or the lack of funding within our context for health professions education work.

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The issue of language, natural language, and our language diversities, and the, need for researchers to continually be working in a particular kind of academic English that is not everybody's first or even second or even sometimes third language.

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And then there are the disciplinary challenges that people experience as they sort of make transitions.

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And I think then also the working contexts of many South African universities are particularly challenging for some of the reasons I've mentioned.

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Things like resourcing mean that people's workloads are much heavier or higher than they might be in other contexts.

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And so the time available

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to invest in research, to invest and spend in writing is also often constrained.

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And these factors collectively work together to sort of create a space that makes it quite challenging to sort of be productive in terms of outputs.

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100%.

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So how do you address those challenges?

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So maybe, of course, we're not magicians.

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We can't fix inequities in global sort of knowledge hierarchies, but we tried.

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So what did Papers with Purpose end up doing?

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Do you want to share maybe a couple of the strategies?

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I mean, it was a longitudinal program, which I think is important.

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It took place over a year.

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So how did we fill that year?

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I mean,

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I mean, you've both said it, the whole point of Papers with Purpose is not just a once-off workshop.

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It's not about just, these tips and tricks, to writing a publication.

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It's much more than that, We spoke about creating a community as one of the kind of aspects.

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And the community at large in South Africa, particularly, we linked it to the South African

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South African Association of Higher Educationist Conference, you know, is a big one.

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Get people immersed into the HPE community because that's where writing actually starts.

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It's participatory.

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It's engaging with other scholars in the field.

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So we had a two-day in-person workshop, a long day, a workshop focused on different aspects of research writing, particularly around publication, you know, the landscape of

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of HPE in South Africa.

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We had the esteemed Professor Francois Silias as well.

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So, you know, it was about laying the foundation of that and then taking them through the different aspects of actually what does it mean to write, right?

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And what does it mean to write in HPE?

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You know, addressing kind of the transitions and the expectations.

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That was a starting point.

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And then that was sustained

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through the rest of the program in terms of weekly shut off and write and writer circles.

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And Tasha, I don't know if you want to talk more to the workshops before we get to the circles.

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Yes, I mean, I think, yeah, maybe just to build on what you were saying.

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So

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We were very intentional about positioning that intensive kind of two-day workshop as the start of our program.

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And by bringing people together physically, we were able to really start establishing relationships amongst people within the program.

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But we were also very strategic in positioning it right before the SAHI conference.

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And part of what our funding allowed was to support program participants to attend the SAHI conference.

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And for many, it was the first time they'd been able to attend SAHI.

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So we created our own small grouping, but then we also exposed them and introduced them to the much larger community.

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of health educationalists across the country.

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So I think that was really important as well, that timing and that connection between the small community within the larger community.

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And then, as you're saying, Tahira, we were able to continue meeting on a regular basis.

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So we hosted monthly online workshops and then also weekly writing spaces, which I mean, I'll let you talk about those because you really

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hold those the weekly engagements.

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Yeah, I mean, the whole idea was starting the conversation there and then helping them with the sustained writing practice.

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I think that's one of the things that's also quite at the heart of Papers with Purpose, getting participants, scholars to think about writing in a different way, to think about it as a practice.

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So I mean, the two kind of

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initiatives that we had to allow them to keep working on their papers.

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they were focused on a particular paper related to their research in HPE.

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And every week, every alternate week, we had either a shut up and write space.

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So as the name suggests, we come together, we write in that space independently, focusing on our particular papers.

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And then of course, the alternate week is a space called a writer's circle, where people would bring in their papers, their works in progress.

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I think that's an important thing.

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Their works in progress to get feedback, constructive feedback, not only from- For the whole community.

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Exactly, not only from the team, but the whole community.

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And I have to say, I mean, those spaces hold

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quite a significant space actually in the program, you know, as much as it's about providing that protective time that Natasha spoke about, you know, spaces that are really challenging to find in their kind of timetables and space.

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You know, it's one of the challenges we had.

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However, you know, it was still a very valuable space.

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You know, we got to see real work happening.

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We got to see articulation

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in real time.

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And I think for me, the biggest part of that space, not only the communal aspect, the relational aspect, but it was just a space to kind of check in.

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It's also highlighting that writing itself, as much as the pressure is there to produce, it's also emotional.

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It holds a lot of weight.

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It's also identity work.

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Yeah.

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100%.

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It's identity work.

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That's part of it.

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So we got to see that in action over the course of the program.

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And yes, not everyone was able to make the time, but I think when people were able to join, it was wonderful to kind of catch up and for people to actually say, I know I haven't been in this space with you guys, but I have been writing.

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I have been focusing.

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I've been going back to the materials that you've been sharing.

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So it was the wonderful kind of aspect of

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seeing that in motion.

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Yeah, and I think it was so important that we could hold those spaces so that participants knew that they could access them whenever they needed, because it is so hard for individuals to find and commit the time.

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So for us to kind of hold that space and protect the time for them,

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kind of really just helped us to sort of partner and meet them in the reality of the journey, which is that you won't always be able to attend or make the time.

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But when you can, we're there to hold you in that space.

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Yeah, I agree.

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I like Sasahi was my first ever educational conference I went to as a doctoral student.

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And

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I can remember thinking, oh, these people are really nice.

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It's not as scary as I thought it would be.

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I presented a poster of my ongoing work and I thought, oh, okay, this is a fantastic, warm, passionate community.

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And that sort of broke the ice.

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And I also learned a lot in the workshops.

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I know I wasn't a participant, but I learned so much about, you know, just the technical aspects of writing.

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But then again, just to echo what you've said, when I could attend the Shut Up and Writes,

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It was fantastic just seeing people and reconnecting and knowing, okay, we're all struggling with similar things.

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I see you, see me.

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Writing and research can be messy.

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We're all trying to figure out who we are as academics and researchers.

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And that just felt very comforting and sort of safe for me personally.

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And I do think I saw participants expressing similar sentiments.

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So there's so much more I could ask and I want to ask, but maybe just to move on slightly, we have been able to support, I think, around 30 early career researchers from sort of masters right through to postdoc, from the majority from South Africa, so from 11 universities, but also five African countries.

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Now, while maybe the funder was wanting sort of publications to be produced, and indeed we have had a few participants produce publications, many are still in progress.

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So maybe you could discuss...

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what sort of lessons we've learned about the program, but also what does success look like?

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So it's not just about producing, one paper per person.

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What are other kind of qualitative or other metrics we can use to look back and think, wow, this program has been really impactful?

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Yeah.

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So I think that

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I'm pausing here because there've been a number of lessons that we've learned through this program.

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And I think that we had...

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very grand ideas of how neatly and smoothly it would run and how our theory of change around how if we provided the explicit guidance and the longitudinal support and the diverse types of support to meet people where they were at, that would

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ultimately lead to sort of actually seeing a substantive number of publication outputs.

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And as you say, we have seen some publication outputs and we've seen enormous progress with all participants towards outputs.

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But this has been a lesson in reevaluating what the writing process really looks like for

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busy clinician academics in South Africa and Africa more broadly, and also for early career researchers who are still transitioning, who are reestablishing themselves or reestablishing their identities within a new disciplinary context, and who are needing to grow and build their own sort of practices, skills, and confidence in those spaces.

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And so I think

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One of the big lessons, I think personally for me, or one of the things that I've seen is that success has its own timeline.

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And that it's, our ideas of things neatly fitting into calendar years and academic years is a very,

00:28:41 Speaker 2

perhaps, I don't know, a Western or positivist way of approaching what a journey looks like.

00:28:49 Speaker 2

And so this has been an opportunity to recognize that everyone's journey is very different and everyone's pathway and timelines are going to be different.

00:29:00 Speaker 2

And it seems that for the average clinician academic within a sort of an African context,

00:29:10 Speaker 2

It takes, a year to two years to really see a project all the way through to completion.

00:29:19 Speaker 2

And so it's been about adjusting our expectations of timelines, but also about recognizing progress as success, recognizing increasing confidence as success, recognizing establishing

00:29:38 Speaker 2

good and sustainable writing practices as success.

00:29:43 Speaker 2

Seeing people passing on what they've learned in our program to their departments and to their students and colleagues as success.

00:29:55 Speaker 2

And so I think it's both expanded, yeah, our notions of what programs like this

00:30:04 Speaker 2

look like or can look like and our notions of success around the work.

00:30:12 Speaker 3

Yeah, I mean, I think Natasha's captured it really well.

00:30:15 Speaker 3

I mean, for me, it really is about, I think the biggest thing is actually seeing where participants started with us from, where their journey began with us and where they ended up.

00:30:27 Speaker 3

We can definitely, I think for me at least, I can definitely see

00:30:31 Speaker 3

how they've built themselves around authorial confidence, being confident to be able to actually now say, you know what, I actually don't understand that.

00:30:43 Speaker 3

Coming from a space of being quiet and not being able to share.

00:30:46 Speaker 3

And I think for me, the biggest thing is the works in progress that I mentioned.

00:30:52 Speaker 3

You know, our idea, our normative kind of idea that a product equals progress.

00:30:59 Speaker 3

doesn't necessarily mean that is it for everyone.

00:31:03 Speaker 3

That's why I highlight the word works in progress, because to me, that is work.

00:31:08 Speaker 3

That is progress.

00:31:09 Speaker 3

And just the realities of our participants, and not only being clinicians as well, but these are well-established disciplinary experts in their field at the top of their careers.

00:31:27 Speaker 3

holding many, many, many different spaces.

00:31:30 Speaker 3

We had, and that's why at the Shut Up and Write sessions, for example, you know, I appreciated that space.

00:31:35 Speaker 3

We always had a bit of a check-in at the beginning.

00:31:38 Speaker 3

That's the reality of the writing journey.

00:31:40 Speaker 3

That's the reality of being an academic in South Africa and I'm sure around the world as well.

00:31:46 Speaker 3

But we had the sharing of that.

00:31:49 Speaker 3

Nikki, I think you would remember, you know, we had heartbreak.

00:31:53 Speaker 3

We had

00:31:54 Speaker 3

wins.

00:31:55 Speaker 3

We had losses.

00:31:56 Speaker 3

We had everything happening in that moment.

00:31:59 Speaker 3

And really, it wasn't because they couldn't produce a piece of paper or a publication.

00:32:07 Speaker 3

There was something that was part of the journey that needed to be worked through in order to get to that progress.

00:32:14 Speaker 3

I think that's what it highlighted to me as well.

00:32:16 Speaker 3

You know, not only is the journey different for everybody, but

00:32:20 Speaker 3

We're all, it's not that we're not capable.

00:32:22 Speaker 3

They're not capable of doing anything of that sort.

00:32:25 Speaker 3

It's just the reality of where they're at right now.

00:32:28 Speaker 3

And I think to be able to share that journey with them, to hold space to, I think you said it quite nicely, Nikki.

00:32:35 Speaker 3

I see you.

00:32:36 Speaker 3

I understand.

00:32:37 Speaker 3

I know that we can get this done.

00:32:39 Speaker 3

You have been making progress, but right now you're in a space where progress can't happen because something is blocking that.

00:32:47 Speaker 3

So I think it's about the realities of that.

00:32:50 Speaker 2

And I think it speaks to how our program is also a way for the system or a way that we as the sort of the academic institutions take responsibility for supporting and enabling

resilience rather than expecting people to navigate these challenges and recover from challenges and find out and know what to do on their own.

00:33:16 Speaker 2

We recognize that

00:33:18 Speaker 2

for any kind of success and for success in all of its different forms, including ultimately the publications.

00:33:25 Speaker 3

Definitely.

00:33:26 Speaker 2

But for any of that to actually come to fruition, we need to create the kind of supportive environment that allows someone to sustain and persevere through those challenges

00:33:41 Speaker 2

because they have the support and the guidance and the structures around them that allow them to do that so that they can come out successfully on the other side.

00:33:50 Speaker 2

And so I think this program is also a way for universities to take responsibility.

00:33:58 Speaker 2

for their role in enabling the people.

00:34:03 Speaker 1

I mean, that answers my next question, which was, I was going to say, this speaks to why research culture.

00:34:08 Speaker 1

It's not just about offering the workshop or sort of giving people the skills or trying to protect time for them.

00:34:15 Speaker 1

It's about seeing them as a full human being who's juggling many different things.

00:34:18 Speaker 1

And I mean, to be honest, institutions don't really recognize that.

00:34:23 Speaker 1

Or, you know, there's a lot of work to do in this space.

00:34:26 Speaker 1

And so you've given institutions, I think,

00:34:28 Speaker 1

a lot to think about.

00:34:29 Speaker 1

And also, I think individuals as myself, I mean, I'm to be very quick to criticize systems and structures, and I love doing that.

00:34:36 Speaker 1

But I'm also part of that system and structure, and I can uphold it and reproduce it.

00:34:41 Speaker 1

And so I think that's why I've really loved, in a very small way, trying to be part of the team to try and, you know, we can't maybe, you know, fix the funding or workload structure in African higher education or wherever we're based.

00:34:55 Speaker 1

but we can make the time to try and see another person, care for them, invest in their future.

00:35:01 Speaker 1

I think not being so individualistic, which can be a real temptation in academia, like my career, my timeline, and saying,

00:35:09 Speaker 1

No, this is for the collective good, it's for the discipline, it's for sort of democratizing the field.

00:35:13 Speaker 1

But I've loved even just seeing people on LinkedIn post, you know, they're doing this conference presentation or this talk and that confidence and that joy, I'm like, yay.

00:35:22 Speaker 1

It makes me, it really refills my own tank and it's like, oh, this is why I'm doing it.

00:35:27 Speaker 1

So I think we've all just gained so much from being a part of the program, even though, you know, it wasn't intended for us.

00:35:33 Speaker 1

It has been, yes, it's been tough on top of our own workloads.

00:35:37 Speaker 1

but it's been sort of immensely rewarding.

00:35:42 Speaker 2

Very much.

00:35:44 Speaker 3

And that's part of the community building.

00:35:46 Speaker 3

We're part of the community.

00:35:47 Speaker 3

It's no different for us.

00:35:49 Speaker 3

We've walked some part of the journey.

00:35:52 Speaker 3

We're still walking it.

00:35:53 Speaker 3

And I think that's the best part.

00:35:57 Speaker 1

Maybe to end the interview, what is one piece of advice you could give to early career researchers or those who are shifting disciplines into health professions education?

00:36:08 Speaker 1

How can they try and develop their own sort of writer identity or a sustainable writing practice or becoming part of the community, sort of a take home for our listeners?

00:36:26 Speaker 2

I would say, there are a few things that I always sort of that I think of as the big kind of cogs or sort of turning points for me around that.

00:36:41 Speaker 2

So I think coming into a new discipline, particularly moving from a, if you're moving out of a science or a health sciences space and you're moving into a social sciences space like education,

00:36:56 Speaker 2

I think you need to step back from that and engage with some of the kind of the foundational elements around the research space.

00:37:03 Speaker 2

So thinking about things like, what is my orientation to knowledge and to truth?

00:37:09 Speaker 2

Those may seem like very big philosophical questions, but they're incredibly important foundational shifts.

00:37:18 Speaker 2

And I think if we're not aware of that when we make these kinds of transitions, that's when we can really get stuck with the invisible barriers and just replicating the way things have worked for us before.

00:37:31 Speaker 2

So I think being intentional that you are shifting, you know, orientations towards research, that's important.

00:37:42 Speaker 2

But when it, and then when it comes to the writing practice, you know, there I think

00:37:48 Speaker 2

It's very much about building and sustaining a journey that is going to allow you to learn and to grow.

00:37:58 Speaker 2

And so I think I always think of it a little bit like going to the gym.

00:38:04 Speaker 2

I think sometimes people think that writing requires motivation, but actually it requires discipline.

00:38:11 Speaker 2

Yes, sometimes you will feel motivated, but not always.

00:38:14 Speaker 2

And when life gets busy, we have to be disciplined about still creating the time and the space to invest in our

00:38:26 Speaker 2

academic strength and health, which I think is something that comes out of our work and our engagement with research.

00:38:32 Speaker 2

So for me, it's about really just recognizing the writing as important and valuable and doing what you can to commit to it in a very

00:38:46 Speaker 2

sort of sustainable and ongoing way.

00:38:49 Speaker 2

It's not always dramatic.

00:38:50 Speaker 2

It's not always sexy.

00:38:51 Speaker 2

It's not always, you know, bells and whistles.

00:38:55 Speaker 2

It's sometimes just the monotonous showing up day after day, week after week that allows you to suddenly step back and go, wow, look at how far I have traveled.

00:39:08 Speaker 1

Yeah.

00:39:10 Speaker 3

Nice, I mean, a couple of things with me as well, but maybe related to

00:39:15 Speaker 3

This idea of, the fact that you are acquiring or developing another identity, one in the HPE or as an educator, for me, the first thing is quite practical drawing on what you've said, Natasha, that it's about, you know, not writing in isolation.

00:39:33 Speaker 3

So if we're taking the gym analogy, you know, don't go to the gym alone.

00:39:37 Speaker 3

You know, if you need a partner, accountability partner, your partner in crime, you know, let's not write in isolation.

00:39:43 Speaker 3

And I think

00:39:44 Speaker 3

Create those, whatever you want to call it, shut up and write spaces for yourself and others.

00:39:50 Speaker 3

Bring people in, that's what people need sometimes.

00:39:54 Speaker 3

And writing's not a solitary thing.

00:39:56 Speaker 3

We know that, right?

00:39:59 Speaker 3

But I think how we've been maybe socialized or how it's been normalized that, you know, you should, you're meant to do it on your own, you know, solitary behind the door, late at night, whatever it is, right?

00:40:11 Speaker 3

It's not that.

00:40:13 Speaker 3

I think writing, as we know, develops through participation with others.

00:40:18 Speaker 3

Getting feedback, sharing it, being vulnerable, I think, is quite a challenging thing.

00:40:25 Speaker 3

It's uncomfortable.

00:40:28 Speaker 3

But once you establish that space with your people, your critical friends, you know, you will see that you develop alongside with them and your ideas as well get polished as you move along with them.

00:40:42 Speaker 3

The other thing for me is the deeper thing is that, with vulnerability and linking to confidence, especially as kind of African scholars, is, being confident in your contribution.

00:40:58 Speaker 3

Your voice is your contribution, and often what I see is that we take a step back because it doesn't fit necessarily

00:41:07 Speaker 3

I don't know if you want to call it the big five, the Western kind of thinking, oh no, I don't have something to contribute.

00:41:14 Speaker 3

And contribution comes from having the confidence to say, I do have something to contribute.

00:41:19 Speaker 3

It may not be expressed in the way that is accessible to you, but this is the way that I want to express it.

00:41:30 Speaker 3

And that's where kind of authenticity comes in for me.

00:41:32 Speaker 3

So the big thing.

00:41:34 Speaker 3

Being true to who you are, don't write in isolation, bring your people in, draw on one another.

00:41:42 Speaker 3

It's a journey.

00:41:42 Speaker 3

And I think that lends itself to us in the African context and thinking about Ubuntu as like a philosophy that kind of ties us in together.

00:41:52 Speaker 3

100%.

00:41:54 Speaker 3

Maybe the last one just to say that, you know, yeah, tying to authenticity, you know,

00:42:02 Speaker 3

We don't need to erase ourselves.

00:42:05 Speaker 3

What I loved about the sharpen right spaces and the works in progress is that the first draft was absolutely messy, the way it should be.

00:42:17 Speaker 3

It's not even in English.

00:42:18 Speaker 3

It's not even what it's supposed to sound like perfect academic prose, but that's the beauty of it.

00:42:26 Speaker 3

That's the beauty of the writing process.

00:42:29 Speaker 3

building your credibility as a researcher, not only in education, but in different fields.

00:42:35 Speaker 3

Yeah, I mean, that's the exciting part.

00:42:38 Speaker 3

And that's kind of where...

00:42:41 Speaker 3

I want to be.

00:42:42 Speaker 3

That's the spaces that we find exciting because that's what progress means.

00:42:46 Speaker 3

That's where credibility is built.

00:42:48 Speaker 3

Yeah.

00:42:48 Speaker 1

No, I agree wholeheartedly.

00:42:50 Speaker 1

And maybe just to continue the gym metaphor, not to hopefully break it, but you don't go to the gym once and see results.

00:42:57 Speaker 1

Like unfortunately, it's day and day out.

00:42:58 Speaker 1

And even like, I like to lift heavy.

00:43:01 Speaker 1

And when I go for like a new PR, like a new weight, and I'm scared, my husband's like, you can do it.

00:43:06 Speaker 1

Like you've you've done it, you know, step by step.

00:43:08 Speaker 1

It's a it's a process.

00:43:09 Speaker 1

You know, I might plateau.

00:43:11 Speaker 1

for a year in my lifts.

00:43:12 Speaker 1

But then, eventually you take the next step.

00:43:15 Speaker 1

You gain the confidence, the self-belief.

00:43:17 Speaker 1

My husband's there behind me spotting me saying, like, you can do this, Nikki.

00:43:19 Speaker 1

I know you can.

00:43:20 Speaker 1

And then when you do it, you're like, wow, I did it.

00:43:23 Speaker 1

I can do it again.

00:43:24 Speaker 1

And it might take a while.

00:43:26 Speaker 1

But again, I think if we're adopting that long-term perspective, that identity, academia is a journey of lifelong learning and development, then there's no rush.

00:43:35 Speaker 1

Like, let's be gracious and patient with ourselves while pushing ourselves to progress.

00:43:40 Speaker 1

in whatever way that looks like, but trust the process, trust the journey.

00:43:45 Speaker 1

Just add time, that's often the magic ingredient, along with good habits that we're developing and community and support.

00:43:51 Speaker 1

But I'm very excited to see not just, you know, how the writing center or the writing lab develops and its impact, but also how Peps with Purpose, where our participants might find themselves in five years, 10 years, 15 years.

00:44:04 Speaker 1

It's really beautiful to see their development in a potential community growing around them.

00:44:12 Speaker 3

Definitely.

00:44:12 Speaker 1

Thank you so much, Tahira and Natasha, for your time.

00:44:15 Speaker 1

I've really enjoyed that.

00:44:16 Speaker 1

And hopefully we'll be hearing more from the both of you in terms of sort of PhD publications and also more from the Papers with Purpose team.

00:44:24 Speaker 1

Thank you.

00:44:25 Speaker 2

Thanks, Nikki.

00:44:26 Speaker 2

It's been really lovely working with you on this project and super nice to be able to just be in conversation with you and Tahira today and talk about the work.

00:44:37 Speaker 2

So thank you for inviting us.

00:44:39 Speaker 1

Thanks for including me.

00:44:41 Speaker 3

Thanks, Nikki.

00:44:47 Speaker 1

I am Danika Sims, your host and producer.

00:44:50 Speaker 1

Thank you for joining Conversations in MedEd.

00:44:54 Speaker 1

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00:45:05 Speaker 1

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00:45:22 Speaker 1

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