

# Transcript Interview 2: An instructor creates podcasts for social justice in the classroom

Featuring Dr. Dani Scott (DS), interviewed by Abigail Bakke (AB)

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AB Welcome to the series on Podcasting for Social Justice, prepared for the International Journal of Equity and Social Justice in Higher Education. My name is Abigail Bakke and I'm interviewing instructors and students about the role podcasting plays in teaching and learning about social justice.

In this interview, you will hear from Dr. Dani Scott, a professor and speech language pathologist who works at Minnesota State University, Mankato. Dr. Scott speaks about how she has created podcasts to connect with her students. For example, she recorded a discussion among speech language pathologists to share with incarcerated learners ([Scholars Serving Time Podcast: SLP Burning Questions](#)). She also recorded a weekly podcast to provide support and reminders to busy graduate students. Dr. Scott's interview demonstrates that instructors can create podcasts to connect with students with unique needs and situations.

We are here to chat about how you've used podcasting in your classes to support social justice. And let's start by just hearing a little bit about you and your background, especially as it relates to either podcasting or social justice.

DS Sure. So my name is Dr. Dani Scott and I am a new assistant professor here at Minnesota State University, Mankato. This is my first year teaching, so kind of wrapping up the first year, going into a second year. All of my teaching, what I was asked to do when I signed my contract for this position, is to lead our department efforts in diversity, equity and inclusion. So my department is Communication Sciences and Disorders. And I mentor our first cohort of diversity fellows as a part of our graduate program. And then I teach all of the classes that we offer in the area of diversity, equity, inclusion.

DS So there's a graduate course called Multicultural Issues. We're actually changing the name because it doesn't really reflect the current terminology or the concepts that we touch. And so we're changing the name to Culturally Responsive Practices in Speech Language Pathology. Another graduate course I teach is Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Seminar, and that course really focuses on using cultural humility to build therapeutic relationships with your clients and also developing vulnerability to facilitate those relationships.

Another graduate course is a course that I teach in the summer. It's called Diversity, Equity, Inclusion in Speech Language Pathology, educational settings. And that course I'm teaching right now. It's my first time teaching it. It's amazing, I think. We focus on DEI in educational settings, we talk about Critical Race Theory. We're talking about using an equity lens. We're talking about culturally responsive practices when it comes to assessment and misdiagnosis and disproportionality, all that great stuff. The students are required to create social justice projects where they maybe create programming for a future school district they would like to work in, or they create a social media platform that focuses on social justice and they're also required to write an SLP pedagogy statement using the framework of fugitive pedagogy or abolitionist teaching.

So those are all graduate courses. Undergraduate, I teach a course called Cultural Humility. That is probably the one that is closest to my heart. Because I think it's an introduction. A lot of undergraduates do not have experience even talking about race at all, or diversity, equity, inclusion. And so that course we are explicitly talking about race, but also how to develop cultural humility, which is characterized by lifelong learning and self reflection. So I think that class is a wonderful introduction.

And then another class that I teach is Observation of Human Communication. Now that's really a gen ed communication course, but I revamped it to make sure that we are addressing diversity, equity, inclusion as it relates to human communication because we really want people not only to be able to communicate in their work settings, but to really communicate with all walks of life wherever they are. So that's just a little bit of my background, I suppose.

AB Yeah. Basically everything you do has to do with diversity, equity, and inclusion.

DS Everything I do.

AB For listeners who aren't familiar with speech language pathology, can you explain a little bit about what that is, and how DEI connects with that or why it's important for that?

DS Absolutely. So our kind of larger umbrella, we're called Communication Sciences and Disorders. And under that umbrella, there's speech language pathology and audiology. Here we have an undergraduate audiology program, but we don't have a graduate, and so to become an audiologist, you have to have, you earn a graduate degree. And also to become a speech language pathologist, you earn a graduate degree as well. So I'm a speech language pathologist. I worked in the schools as a speech language pathologist for six years, elementary school. So all my experience is working with children.

And speech language pathologists, we work with people to diagnose, assess, and treat communication disorders and disorders of cognition and swallowing. And so if you break down speech language pathologist, the speech part really relates to how you are speaking for the most part. So it has to do with the way you produce certain sounds which is called articulation. Also your voice mechanism, so how your vocal folds are producing sound. Also the resonance of your voice, fluency of your voice, which is the rhythm and the rate and the flow of how you're speaking and all that relates to speech.

And then the language part has to do with more so how you understand what is spoken and written, also how you express yourself and that includes written and verbally, all those things. And communication is not just verbal. So we have people, we support people who maybe they use devices, alternative and augmentative communication, to communicate, or they use gestures, or they use sign language. So we really look at communication in general.

The pathology part is where the diversity, equity, and inclusion comes from and why we have such a need for it. Even the word, if you think of the history of speech language pathology, comes from really a medical model of trying to diagnose someone using a standard of what is normal or typical speech. And usually that is based on white mainstream American English speaking.

And so our pathology part is really the part where we struggle with diversity, equity, inclusion because we aren't really always thinking about diversity in our language. We aren't inclusive of, we kind of use a lens of monolingualism and we aren't inclusive of people who speak a variety of different languages, use a variety of different dialects, have a variety of accents, all those things. And then I think the equity piece is just really thinking about what people need and actually individualizing our therapy and considering culture and how to be culturally responsive and use sustaining practices when working with our clients. So we have a lot of work to do.

DS And just a little background about our professional makeup, which I think is a really big issue, is our profession is 92% white. I believe maybe only 3 or 4% male. So the majority of speech language pathologists are white, middle-class women who are monolingual English speakers. We have definitely a need for more people who speak languages other than English, people who are racially and ethnically diverse. Also people who are gender diverse, and men and people that are not women or don't identify as women.

AB Yeah, absolutely.

DS There's a stark contrast. So when you don't have that representation, and we can work on representation and recruitment and retention, of course we have a long way to go, but the people who are currently in the profession, it's so important to consider our implicit biases, and all of those things. That's why we really need to develop using cultural humility so that we can support the people that we have now, and then hopefully we can continue to grow when it comes to representation.

AB Yeah, and I like that you emphasize it's more than just representation, but it's that work of examining implicit biases and trying to shift the profession from where it's at right now.

DS Absolutely.

AB So tell me more about your CDIS 290 course and the unique context for that.

DS Yeah, so when I found out that I could potentially have the opportunity to teach incarcerated learners at a prison, I literally jumped at it. I was like, What do I have to do? This sounds amazing. I think for a while I have wanted to engage in work with the justice system in some way. Currently I'm on a board. It's called CHAT – Life Changing Speech Therapy. They're out of Chicago and one of their big missions is communication justice, so, you know, there's a lot of issues when it comes to communication, understanding language and linguistic diversity.

Even if you think about the Trayvon Martin case and his friend who was testifying, she was a speaker of African American English and the person who actually transcribed her did not understand her. And so that had a lot to do with the outcome of the case, among other things. And so there's a lot of work that speech-language pathologists can do to support people in the justice system. So that's just kind of a place where my heart has been going for a while. So having the opportunity to teach this course, I was like, Oh, absolutely, yes.

DS And so the course is just Introduction to Communication Disorders, which is our basic intro to our profession, intro to our major course. But I really, I knew that it wasn't going to be about teaching necessarily the content, but how I was going to teach the content. And so I really was led by bell hooks' book *Teaching to Transgress* and just thinking about education as freedom because they are incarcerated. You might be incarcerated; however, in this space you are a learner. And in my opinion, I don't look at you as a prisoner. I never refer to them that way. They were just women who decided to come and learn and I wanted them to be free to learn.

And so in developing the podcast for the course, we of course couldn't have guest speakers. So I'm really big on bringing in voices other than myself in all of my classes. I don't think I've had a class where I didn't at least have one guest lecturer. And so I was like, How do we get a guest lecturer without having a guest lecturer? And so that was kind of my idea for the podcast. And also because they're incarcerated, they wouldn't necessarily have the opportunity to hear the voices of other SLPs other than me and so, in my other classes I could say, Well, reach out to an SLP, shadow an SLP do those things. That's what they do in an introductory course. But how would they get to hear an SLP's true experience?

And so that was kind of also my idea for creating a podcast for that course. So they had to write down a burning question. And then from that question, I kind of arranged them in an order that made it, maybe there would be some sort of a flow when it came to topics. And then using my social media page, @theCLDSL<sub>SLP</sub>, I literally just posted one day, and reached out to like, SLPs, are you interested? And I post a lot about the course, about things we talk about, about things we do. So a good bit of my followers had been interested in just, What are you doing? How's that going? So I mean, several people reached out to want to participate in the podcast.

But what was kind of an unexpected outcome of the podcast was that everyone who reached out was a person of color. So as I said about our profession and not having that many, there's, we call ourselves the 8%. And honestly Black [people], the 3%. Three percent of speech language pathologists are African American. And so all of the podcast participants were people of color. So in that small pool, we had bilingual therapists, we had African American therapists, we had business owners. And so I think that was just a beautiful way to bring them in, highlighting the voices that are often marginalized in our profession.

AB Yeah. This idea of podcasting came about because you were thinking about your students' contexts and your students' needs and limitations. And then with the respondents, you also are modeling inclusivity and diversity for the field.

DS Right.

AB And so you interviewed speech-language pathologists. Was it a series of episodes, interviews, was it?

DS Essentially, we had a Zoom meeting. So we met one evening. So there were eight I believe, maybe eight SLPs. And we met via Zoom and we just went one by one answering the questions. And so I would pose a question. There was about eight of them, so not every single person answered every single question, but we just kind of went with the flow. And what I love was that there was a good mix of like general questions and personal questions. So general, you know, What's the hardest population to work with? That type of thing. But then, Hey, my daughter has been struggling with her R sound and you know, at what age do you think [it would be too late for her to improve]?

And so it was so nice because when they were watching it, they could hear, Oh, that's my question. So they felt that connection, but especially the people who wrote about their personal experiences, I think it just made them feel valued and heard. Just other layers, being a parent, being a mother who is incarcerated and not having that hands-on experience with your child going through school, especially a child in special education, so you don't get to do IEP [Individualized Education Program] meetings where you get to advocate for your child and all those things. So I think, I don't even know, but maybe even having the opportunity to ask a question about your child when it came to their education, I don't even know how freeing that could have been, but it brought up a lot of conversations.

So we listened to the podcast on the last day of class, so they did like their presentations, their end of the semester presentation. And then we just sat down, we like grouped up around our little TV that they gave us. And we just listened and I paused it because they were like, Oh, that's my question, I have something else and we talked. So I think it was really engaging for them. And it was also funny because some people, it was like, Oh, I know whose question this is, I know who this is in the class who said this, because I didn't use their name. So I didn't say, This question is from so-and-so. So it was personal for them, I think. And then on the other side, the ladies, the SLPs who participated, they felt like it was very rewarding just to be able to share about their profession, was nice too. So I thought it was a beautiful experience both ways.

AB And I love how you played it in class with everybody there. So it wasn't like, Go off and listen to this thing on your own, but it was a very engaged experience and, and really kind of built on that community that it sounds like you'd been building all along.

DS Yes, and that's funny because that wasn't my original intention. I was just going to leave it as a gift. And they were like, No, it's not the same, they were like, It's not the same when you're not here because, you know, they have study sessions, but then it's just like, if someone happens to play it or turn it on. And so knowing that I would be there, we would actually listen to it, didn't like leave it to the chance of maybe they didn't get to hear it. And so I really wanted to be intentional about, let's listen to it together. If you have more questions, I want to be able to answer them for you.

AB Yeah, very cool. Like an interactive podcast in a way.

DS Mm-hmm.

AB Okay. Based on your experience, what advice do you have for other instructors interested in using podcasting to support social justice?

DS Yeah. I mean, I think if you're even thinking about it, you should do it. And I would also say, there is no right way or wrong way. You know, in another class, I actually took like a CETL [Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning] course before I started teaching because I'm like, I don't know how to teach. What am I going to do? And I took my first CETL class. And she talked about humanizing the course, like, How are you going to connect with your students? And so, I mean, podcasts can be used in so many ways.

And if you think about social justice, obviously a lot of times we're thinking about dismantling white supremacy and what is white supremacy? White supremacy at the root is disconnection. So a podcast essentially is a way to connect. It is a way to utilize technology. It's also a way to be relatable because most people in the generation of our students that we serve, they listen to podcasts and so you're being relatable. But the key is connecting and so, you know, in one class I've used them where they were first year graduate students and they were just super stressed, oh my gosh. And so I would give them self-care tips. I would review the content in class just to make sure they were getting it. So the goal of that was connection.

Even for this particular podcast that we're talking about with all of the racially and ethnically diverse SLPs. It was a way for them to connect with my students who were incarcerated that didn't have a way to connect with people outside. So I just think the connection is a big piece and if you are feeling disconnected with your students, a podcast is a great way to go, and it, it doesn't have to be a big thing. It can be something small like I'm just going to do this recording every week. I'm going to leave them some advice, some words of wisdom. You can even post simply, just post a Google Doc with, like a blank Google Doc and they can put questions anonymously, and you answer one question a week. And so that people can feel connected and feel valued and feel like their questions are being answered even if they are too shy or uncomfortable to ask the question in class. So I think there's so many ways to use it to connect.

And of course, to talk about issues that are difficult and a lot of social justice issues can be uncomfortable to talk about. I mean, especially talking about race can be really challenging. And so sometimes engaging in those conversations can be beneficial when there is, when you're using technology and giving people time to process and really think.

And then I would say my last thing is, I think it shows students that there is no one way to raise your voice. And so if you're a teacher and you're like, We're going to have a podcast, I mean, that sounds so fancy. But in all actuality, any student, anyone can have a podcast, you don't have to be famous. You don't have to have the thumbnails and the professional photos. You can literally raise your voice. As simple as recording a Zoom meeting. I think it just shows students that you can start where you are to get involved in social justice activism. And it doesn't have to be, you know, advanced. They don't have to be advanced. They can start exactly where they are.

AB Do you think you would expand to having students create podcasts as part of an assignment?

DS Oh, absolutely. I would love to do that. I think because I'm so freshly out of school that I'm like, Is this too much for them? But I would love, I would love to see that. And I'm sure maybe my graduate students with their workload, I'm not sure, but I could see the undergraduate students really enjoying that, especially because undergraduate classes are so big and it's kind of hard to get to know people. I think that would be really nice to do. So. Yes, I would love to.



AB Mm-hmm. That personal, you know, you're hearing someone's voice. That's so much different than like as an instructor typing out your weekly e-mail. And I'm poking fun at myself because that's what I do. But I hadn't thought to just verbalize that and maybe offer that as, you know, here's a different way to access this content. And just to clarify, so this larger course where you answered questions weekly, was that an online course or was it?

DS No, it was, it was in-person, but it was in person twice a week, but it was only 50 minutes. It was like two months in before I ever even finished a lecture when I was supposed to. I was like, I have so much to say, we don't have enough time. And so I felt that there needed to be a moment where I could like slow down a little bit and so I would kind of review what we talked about. I know we went really fast, but I really want to reiterate this topic because it's so important. And then that's kind of how we started.

And I would also remind them about their assignments, not to say we had a lot of assignments, but because it was their first [semester] of graduate school, I think they benefited from those reminders. And then I would close with advice, answering one advice question. There was even a time where they wanted to know about preparing for their internships. And I couldn't answer that because I haven't been on an internship in years. So I got another class to answer the questions to give them advice. And then I went over that for them.

And then I would close with some sort of like self-care going into the weekend because I always posted it on Friday. So it gave them a kind of synopsis of this is what you need to pay attention to when you're reading the chapter this weekend. This is what you need to focus on when you're doing your work, and then make sure you take care of yourself and give them some sort of like affirmation or quote to close.

AB That would be so nice to get that from an instructor, and just the recognition, like I'm a grad student. I'm working really hard.

DS Yeah.

AB How did students respond to that? Did you get quite a bit of engagement with that, like with the anonymous questions?

DS I mean, I got enough anonymous questions for, like in the beginning to cover the rest of the year. So that was good. You know, it's funny because I barely knew how to use MediaSpace when I was making them. So I didn't even know how to check like how many people viewed it and I wouldn't say the whole class viewed it. It was probably only a handful of people every week. I didn't really know how it was impacting people until I got my end of the semester feedback and someone's like, You really should make this into a real podcast because it's so good and I'm like, Really? And so I kind of didn't know until the end.

But I would like to do it again and I would like to actually invite students to be on the podcast. So it's not just me talking at them, but also maybe one or two students a week just sharing how they experience the material or something like that. The only issue is coordinating my schedule because that means we all have to have the same schedule and that was like giving me anxiety. But I want to find a way to do that because I think that would be another layer of increasing the engagement.

AB It occurs to me too that, you know, your student said you should make this a real podcast. I mean, well, in a sense it is a real podcast, right? It's real in the context of your class and it allows that, that really close customization to what this group of students need and what they're asking for. And so I think that's a great way to think about the different options for podcasts, is you can keep it at a class level and that can be hugely valuable. And at the same time, maybe you broaden the audience and there's still material that's super useful there for students.

DS Yes.

AB That covers the questions I had. Anything else you wanted to add?

DS I don't think so.

AB Your classes sound amazing.

DS Thank you.

AB And I love that you have incorporated podcasting in more than one way, in more than one class. So glad to hear that that's had good results and curious to hear what changes you make in the future.

DS Thank you. Thank you so much.

## References

- hooks, b. (2014). *Teaching to Transgress*. Routledge.
- “Quick, bouncy, happy, bright melody,” by AlmightyPsyche [Audio], retrieved from <https://freesound.org/people/AlmightyPsyche/sounds/561030/>, used under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).