Introducing Ben Hicks

Ben has always loved patterns. This grew from a childhood growing up around the natural beauty of Norfolk Island, the south coast of NSW and Darwin, to obsessively creating music and a steadily expanding appreciation of the abstract world of mathematics. He spent a decade as a high school teacher across three continents, puzzling over the multitude of ways that minds can learn and how educational systems try to support and regulate this at scale.

During Ben’s time at Oxley College in NSW he had the privilege of developing and deploying Learning Analytics systems on the ground. The necessity of translating the results of analysis into something meaningful for teaching staff highlighted the challenges inherent in this process. Helping teaching staff to understand and implement best practice according to research and theory further emphasised this complexity and led Ben to his first real encounter with the varying level of concordance between analysis or research and the experiences of a practitioner. Ben left teaching to work more exclusively in Learning Analytics, to explore student trace data and develop systems for student support and retention at Charles Sturt University. The occasional tension between the analysis and the practitioner continued to beg the question: *how does this occur?*

This underlying question forms the basis for Ben’s PhD research and he hopes to leverage the tools of abstract mathematics to help shed light on the problem.