

Transcript for Lightning Session 104e: Behnoosh Khoramrooz (November 1, 2023)
104e Studio23 Day 1
Presenter: Behnoosh Khoramrooz

BEHNOOSH KHORAMROOZ:

Hi, my name is Behnoosh and my slides are getting fixed. I'm going to start with an introduction. Somehow, similar to Melissa. I'm here to be a student's voice. So thanks to BCcampus, I'm having this opportunity to share a student point of view with you. I'm a grad student, still a grad student, in educational psychology in the University of Victoria. When I say still, because I'm going to have the graduation ceremony in two weeks. [Applause] Thank you so much.

During my journey at the University of Victoria, I've had the privilege of wearing different hats. I've been a graduate student and also I had the chance to work as a sessional instructor, lab instructor, and TA. I had the opportunity to assist instructors and staff with using technology. I've been involved in some projects mostly dedicated to motivation, students' experience, and to be more specific, sense of belonging.

But if I want to talk about my positionality, I should mention that I'm an Iranian woman. You might have heard about Iranian women during the last year with the words "woman, life, freedom." In Iran I pursued another master in psychology. I worked for a while as a journalist and content manager in different media businesses. Then because of my interest in improving people's experiences, I can say, I followed user experience research in education. And that is why I started my second master in educational psychology at UVic. I started my program in 2020, which was the year of pandemic, as you know. I had to stay in Iran because there was no flight, no in-person class, so the first year was in Iran. And part of the experiences I want to share here with you goes back to that time.

I'm going to share three experiences about my facing with new alternative assignments, because this event is somehow about using new methods. Using new methods in teaching, let's say. I wanted to share it from a student's perspective. The first one, I was in the first semester participating in the classes with a huge time difference at 3:00/4:00 am, and I was the only international student in the class, I can say. It was a new university, different language, different online system. I had a course in which we had a new type of assignment. The assignment was itself so new and I didn't have any experience about it. I had no friends still in the university, so I didn't have the peer support and based on, I can say, cultural differences. It wasn't easy for me at that time to reach out to the instructor. Finally, I gathered all my courage and emailed the instructor. The reply was a simple link to the instructions on the LMS, which I already had and was unhelpful, but I didn't dare to ask further. Eventually, I found a solution for that. But what happened, what was my experience was that everybody else had three weeks for the assignments. I had only three days because it took me a long time to figure out what was it about. But probably not my instructor and none of my classmates felt it. They didn't

know I was struggling with it, and when I received an A+ for that, probably the instructor didn't even think about it that I might have such a struggle.

The second experience I want to share with you was in the second semester. I was still in Iran, but this time we were a group including three international students from different countries. This time, again, we had a new type of assignment in the class, and the instructor was so excited about it, emphasizing on being creative, being creative. But in all of our groups, group meetings with my groupmates, it was always one of the topics of the talk. Do you know what they expect of us? Could you find any sample? What we felt was probably the other groups who weren't, maybe, international students didn't have these questions. We weren't sure, but the thing was that what we all experienced was probably, it is something familiar in this educational system that we are not familiar with. Now that I'm working more on belonging, I can say those are the times that really students struggle with belongingness because they are not sure the struggle they are facing is the one that's about them or that's about everyone else. I want to invite everybody who are having a class, thinking of the students and groups in their class. Do you think there might be some students who do not say anything about it to you, but they are having such a struggle?

The last experience I want to share with you was when I started working as a sessional instructor. At the time I tried to use what I learned already as a student in my class. I had a different assignment. This time, I tried to provide students with a safe space in which they could share their group assignments. I know there are some concerns about cheating or about comparison, but at least in that class, we had the opportunity for students to choose their own topics. All the projects were unique, so there was no cheating or copying or anything like that. They had the privilege of being able to enhance their work and enhance their grade. In my meetings with students, I've heard a lot from them that when I saw the other groups' projects, we realized how to improve ours and they weren't feeling lost. At least that's what I heard from them.

As a conclusion, I want to highlight some differences that might be so simple, but I think it's good to think about firstly instructors do have a deep understanding and strong knowledge about the course and the content they are teaching. Students do not have it. The second one is that normally instructors are the former successful students. They already have high level learning skills. They know how to solve the problems, they know how to search, they know how to communicate with others, they know how to seek help. But many of the students might not have those skills. Third one I want to talk about is when instructors decide to try something new, decide to use a new application, decide to add something to their design. They participate in conferences, they participate in workshops, they talk about it together. They watch videos, share ideas, and get themselves familiar with the new method that they are going to use in their class. They get so, sometimes, I can say, excited about it, but it is sometimes really, really new to the student based on their previous experiences, especially. They need time to get familiarized themselves to the new method, to the new expectation, and to the new application or whatever is new in the class. The culture and language itself can be sometimes a barrier in

the experiences I've shared. We really weren't that comfortable. I am not comfortable in that communication. But in the first year, we weren't comfortable reaching out to the instructor and asking about those assignments. The language itself can be a barrier for the students whose first language is not English. Sometimes this is a challenge. They might think, probably the instructor mentioned it, but I didn't get it, so they do not reach out to the instructor. Finally, I know instructors do not like it, but sometimes students are not as interested as the instructor in the topic. It makes it difficult for them to get engaged, and I think that's one of the points that we should consider.

I want to thank you all. I know it's the end of the day and thank you for joining me here. Here's my email and QR code to my LinkedIn. I'd be more than happy to be connected with you. And if you cannot scan the QR code, if you just search my name on LinkedIn, my profile should look like this and you can find me. Thank you so much.