

**Transcript for FLO Friday: Where to Position Positionality in Your Work**  
**BCcampus event hosted December 8, 2023**  
**Facilitator: Bhuvinder Singh Vaid**  
**Host: Gwen Nguyen**

DR GWEN NGUYEN:

Good morning. Welcome to our Facilitating Learning Online FLO Friday. Thank you very much for choosing to be with us today. My name is Gwen. As many of you know, I'm a teaching and learning advisor with BCcampus. A few housekeeping items that I would like to go over. The very first thing is this whole session will be recorded. You're welcome to keep your camera off and feel free to rename yourself to "Participant." Live captioning has also been enabled for this session. I would like to express my special thank you to my teammate, Kelsey Kilbey, for her amazing and unwavering support behind the scenes for all events at the teaching and learning team at BCcampus.

Before we delve into the session, I'd like to begin with the territorial acknowledgment. BCcampus actually has two offices located on the unceded territories of the Tsleil-Waututh, Squamish, Musqueam, W̱SÁNEĆ and the Esquimalt and the Lekwungen-speaking people. As we respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action, we continue our journey of learning and relationship building. Personally, I'm joining everybody from my home office in Victoria, the traditional land of diverse Indigenous people. I believe that Kelsey is very close to me, even though I'm not sure exactly where. But yeah, we are in the same land today. It is a very beautiful day in Victoria. It's sunny. Yeah, it's beautiful like a rainbow. My daughter would laugh at me and say, "Well again, Mom, always beautiful like a rainbow." But it's true, because it comes from a place [inaudible]. So I'm very grateful to have the experience of living and working in this place that has four clear, beautiful seasons. And every day is actually a true journey in itself at home to me. Please feel free to share your introduction and territorial acknowledgement in the job if you wish. Usually, we share the survey link at the end of the session, but I know that some of you might have very tight schedules and might need to pop out in the middle. I invite you to participate in the short, anonymous survey. The link is in the chat, and your feedback will help us share some future professional development events at BCcampus.

Let's go back to our main topic today, Where to Position Positionality. Very often we get caught in theorizing and intellectualizing, rather than expressing other ways of knowing and understanding. However, I really believe that it's more than just a statement, the practice of positionality. Articulating your positionality or reflecting on our location, our familial history, understanding where our knowledge actually comes from and addressing some life experiences that guide our perspectives as well as our practices in our life work and our teaching roles are very critical. I'm very delighted to introduce our facilitator, Bhuvinder Singh Vaid. I actually had a chance to know Bhuvinder from his difficult inquiry regarding our offering on positionality before. And then, I had a chance to meet this fabulous person in person at Studio23. Then I did some really good research and I was so impressed with his work and his insights. His insightful

to approach to education, grounded in his work as a philosopher, a deep thinker, an education developer at Capilano University. I know that he brings a unique perspective on teaching and learning as relational practices. Bhuvinder actually explores critical educational concepts that enriches our understanding of positionality. He has a full session for us. Without further ado, I warmly welcome Bhuvinder to lead our session today. Bhuvinder, the floor is all yours now.

BHUVINDER SINGH VAID:

Thank you, everyone, for joining us. Thank you very much, Gwen. For those of you that can't tell, this is what it looks like when a brown man is blushing for those very kind words that Gwen shared. It's taken a moment to get the red out of my face and the red out of my ears. Luckily, they're covered right now, so you can't see just how red they turned. I'm going to share my screen and to start, As I've organized this session to have a bit of interaction in it. And part of that interaction is going to be taking place on an app called Menti. Some of you may know of it, some of you may not. But there's two ways to access it. The first is to go to a website, on your phone or on your computer, Menti.com and enter a code. The code is currently on the screen. Everyone can see my shared screen? The second option is just to take your phone out and point your camera at the QR code that will then on your phone, open a browser. From there, you'll actually see this screen and any of the prompts for activity or discussion will just be on your phone. Most of what we're going to do today will be either through Menti or through the Zoom chat as well as yourselves unmuting. Finally, there were materials distributed as an accessibility aid earlier today. If you're here, I'm assuming you got the email from BCcampus. If you did not, at the end of today's session, I'm going to have my email address up. Feel free to send me an email and I'll send them along. It's my facilitation guide, what I'm using to run this workshop, and I share that freely. The slides, as well as a two-page handout of the main ideas distilled down into something more manageable and useful to all of us. Let us begin.

Where to Position Positionality in Your Work. I thank BCcampus for help with this title because before, there were a lot of commas in there and question marks and so forth, and it wasn't necessarily clear. My name is Bhuvinder Singh Vaid. I am an educational developer at the Centre for Teaching Excellence at Capilano University.

I'd like to start with a land acknowledgment, but the reason I'm adding to the land acknowledgment that Gwen offered is this is another example of a positionality statement in that it's premised upon three questions. These are informed by a website from Queens, sorry, from SFU Library, called Positionality Statement and Land Acknowledgment Workshop that took place in 2019 or 2020. Where we are, which is the land acknowledgment. Who am I because of where I am? The connection to that land. What do I therefore want to offer today? Where are we? For myself, I'd like to respectfully acknowledge that our Capilano University campuses have a presence on the unceded, stolen territories of the Líl'wat, x̣m̄əθḳw̄əȳəm (Musqueam), shíshálh (Sechelt), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and Səlílwətaʔ/Selilwutlh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. Today I'm joining you from the territory of the Musqueam Nation near Granville Island, where I live from my home office.

But this then opens up, who am I because of this connection to the land? Because to simply speak out loud, a statement like that does not truly acknowledge the historical wrong that the world unceded is meant to impart. In an absolute and very real sense, I owe a debt to these territories. My family's entire economic and social mobility from the status of immigrants in the 1970s is directly tied to our purchase and sale of this unceded land to generate wealth, well-being, and in my case, future educational opportunities. Therefore I have to acknowledge my present benefit as well as all the benefits derived by others that enable my ability to work at Capilano University and our ability to be part of this FLO Friday workshop is a result of the Lílwat, Musqueam, Sechelt, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Peoples being forcibly denied their rights to this land. My debt is therefore not necessarily and only to the land, but to the people who had their rights taken away so that others such as myself could reap their benefits. The question then becomes, or the necessary question then to ask is, what do I therefore want to offer? Having recognized where I am and who I am because of where I am. My goal for today is therefore to listen with my heart and mind and to share openly, freely, and without judgment the knowledge that I have gained through my benefit from this land as a small act of ongoing reconciliation. That's one of the reasons I subscribe to as many open education resources as possible. And why I make my own materials as open and free as possible to anyone who would like them. If you are able and willing and you have not already done. So, I invite you to share in the chat where you are joining from today.

Our first activity for the day. This entire workshop is organized around a BOPPPS model for anyone who's ever taken the Instructional Skills workshop. Thank you, Alice. This is the bridge, trying to get a sense of where our common knowledge can begin.

These are wonderful. Thank you everyone for sharing. There was the option of voting on ones that you'd like, but I think I'm going to forgo that right now and just share some of the ideas that you have generated. It's a recognition of past identities, past or present identities. And place. The recognition that highlights the dynamic relationship between an individual and the different aspects of the society that they interact with. It acknowledges one's status and be that a privileged status or a disadvantaged status often generated from personal and/or social identities such as gender, culture, language, and so forth. Thank you very much for these responses. This Menti page will remain open for the next 14 days, so feel free to come back and take a look to see what more has been added. Should have pressed that.

Just to close out the bridge because there's three interlocking concepts that are worth considering. Those are positionality, the positionality statement, and intersectionality, which is the underlying, or the overarching philosophical model within which positionality and positionality statements come from. Positionality is that dynamic relationship between an individual and their various personal and social identities. Those could include gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, ability, place, etc. This is a definition derived and the one it indicates on the handout, you'll find the source, which is from the University of British Columbia. Then the positionality statement is an active reflection and communication of an individual's intersecting personal and social identities. The different ways in which gender and/or race, and

class, and/or sexuality, and/or ethnicity, and/or ability and/or place, and/or etc. interact with each other. And link to histories of privilege or exclusion. The number two is representative of the link on the handout to a wonderful website on positionality statements from, I think it's Queen's University. Finally, intersectionality is a model for explaining states of exclusion and oppression and also privilege through the dynamic interactions of social identities. That's how these three are. Intersectionality is the model. Positionality is our own or someone else's. A positionality statement is a communication of one's own privilege, one's own oppression, one's own position in a complex set of societal and/or cultural values and norms.

Alice, this is for you, the BOPPPS model. Our objectives for today are to reflect on the pedagogical possibilities of your positionality statement. Now, it was never a requirement that anyone had to bring a positionality statement, but I do know some of you through the MicroCourse that BCcampus is currently running on positionality statements. I do know that therefore, some of you have begun the process of crafting or revising and maybe even changing your existing positionality statements. Then I'm going to introduce and you are going to then begin to adapt a simple reflective exercise to promote student recognition of positionalities.

The genesis for today comes from a claim from Christine Harrington in an article published in 2022, "Reflect on Your Positionality to Ensure Student Success." Specifically, this particular passage was one used by Gwen and Britt during their Arts- Based Approaches to Positionality Statement session that took place at Studio23 at the beginning of November. It really struck a chord with me, because reflecting on your positionality as an instructor can be a powerful strategy for student success. Especially if you think about how your lived experiences shape what you do in the classroom. And how those actions may or may not support the success of students in your class who often have very different lived experiences. Now, the philosopher of education in me immediately stopped and said, well, hold on. How does this lead to student success? In a close reading of Harrington and in a conversation with Britt and Gwen, I started to get the sense that yes, it is a hope. Yes, it is a possible outcome. But sometimes the specific practices to get us from our positionality statement to the ability for students to succeed in our classes aren't as fleshed out as they could be. That's where the genesis for today came from,

A bit of a pre-assessment. How can a positionality statement support learning? What are your thoughts?

As these responses to the question, "How can a positionality statement support learning?" are generated and shared on the screen. I ask you to take a look at the ones that are larger and the ones that are smaller, because all of these things are taking place. The ones that are larger, multiple people in our session have shared. The ones that are smaller, are maybe just a few of us. But they all represent examples of what we hope is happening. In that way, these are aspirational that an extension of a positionality statement is that it aspires to promote the following supports for learning. There is an important distinction that we need to make. What is a positionality statement explicitly doing? What is a positionality statement implicitly doing?

What do we hope it is doing at an aspirational level? There's three considerations that need to be taken or made when thinking about our own specific positionality statement.

For this, I made a picture. What's going on with a positionality statement? The way this image is organized is, put ourselves in the middle where it says present, and our positionality statement then is an explicit communication of the instructor's present presence. Where we will name some of our visible identities, some of our invisible or silent identities. We may even speak to those identities that are absent from the learning environment that we aren't a part of as instructors, but that may be working within or through our students.

At the implicit level, we have students and we are speaking to our students. We might be speaking to past students, current students or even future students who we assume they might be. And what we are hoping, not hoping. What we are implicitly doing is allowing students to recognize similarities they might have to us as the instructor. These might be visible similarities. They might be invisible similarities until we name them. This belonging fostered by recognition of these visible and invisible student identities. That's where the belonging can be fostered.

Then there's the aspirational, our goal. And here, what we're hoping for is the student will put themselves into the middle present. And they'll be able to then begin to see, well, what are my visible identities? What are my invisible identities? And then what might be absent to my understanding? Our hope is that they're able to start making connections to invisible identities other than their own. Beginning to see that the world is not just full of themselves and their own identities; it's other invisible identities. Some of these invisible identities might be in the classroom with them. Then by extension, they begin to understand, hopefully, that some are absent, but still worth considering. Because absence is not a precursor to understanding. Sorry, is not a limitation on understanding. It's just a recognition that, well, I hadn't really recognized that there's invisible identities. Some of them might be here, some of them might be absent. It doesn't really matter. The hope is that they are able to offer or begin to develop this recognition of identities beyond themselves.

The issue then is how do we operationalize that aspiration? Because the positionality statement by itself does not ensure that students begin to develop this recognition skill. We can ask the following questions about our positionality statement. For ourselves, what invisible, personal or social identity am I explicitly naming? Then how can my students recognize this invisible identity amongst each other? Because the positionality statement is asking them to recognize it between themselves and the instructor. But how do we provide an invitation or a promotion of their ability to see it amongst each other? What other invisible or absent identity might be present amongst the past, current, or future students in the class? Have we considered what's absent in our positionality statement? Because just because it's absent in our thinking doesn't mean it is not present in our classrooms. Then finally, this is meant to be an iterative process as we are thinking about our positionality statement. Return to question 2 and 3 above as needed. These questions are on the handout under number four as a way of thinking about a first step

to operationalizing or pedagogizing. I know that's not a word, our aspirational goals for our positionality statement.

I'd like to give you one example that I've been working on for a couple of years of an operationalized activity that starts with my recognition of what is invisible that I'm making explicitly visible now in my positionality statement. But now I recognize there's more work that I need to do with my students to foster their ability to recognize something similar. This is an activity, it's a thought experiment I utilize in some of my English and Philosophy classes. For this thought experiment, I'm going to ask you to close your eyes and follow the prompts that I offer.

Imagine yourself at a time during your youth when you felt completely content. That contentment might be because you were happy, you felt safe, you had achieved.

Now imagine yourself as who you are today. Draw a line between that youth and who you are today in your mind.

Think back to some of the important experiences, which took place between that youth and today that are along that line you've drawn in your mind and which have contributed to how you see yourself today.

Focus on one such important experience. Try to remember that experience and how it made you feel and what you did with that experience going forward.

Now imagine if that youth, that individual in that experience was physically or cognitively challenged. They're blind or they're deaf or they have mobility issues, perhaps they're autistic. But change one characteristic of that youth, of that individual.

How does that change that experience? How might that have changed the trajectory from that experience to who you are today? Put another way, would you still have gotten to where you are today if that one characteristic was changed?

Last step for this. You're welcome to open your eyes. In Zoom, there's the option of raising your hand. Do you end up in the same place as where you are today? If your answer is no, raise your hand. If your answer is yes, do nothing. Reviewing the participants, how many of you have raised your hands? Please lower your hands.

That's the entire thought experiment activity. But here's the question I have for you. This is our post-assessment. That was for you, Alice. What is represented when someone raises or does not raise their hand? in this last activity? Put another way, what learning or not learning has taken place by their raising of their hand?

Thank you everyone for sharing those comments. There's one, well there's many I'd love to spend time with. But there's one I'd ask you all to consider a bit more deeply. "Allows for action

within learning, triggering a response or non-response." Both are indeed actions. As Rosemary indicates, "Are we not making assumptions about why people did or did not raise their hands?" Yes, we are making assumptions right now based upon a pedagogical activity that had two possible avenues for students to give feedback toward. But I would want to be as generous as possible with our assumptions. Raising of a hand indicates that some type of recognition may have taken place. The non-raising of the hand could also be indicative of some type of recognition of taking place of difference or lack of difference or of one's own privilege or one's own social factors that have may be contributed to the teacher now giving a very explicit pedagogical example, which I've already thought about because I've already lived. And in that way, perhaps fostering some of that belonging that we are explicitly and implicitly hoping for with the positionality statement. Rosemary, does that address your question or your concern?

ROSEMARY:

It's still subjective because we're assigning meaning to that activity. Whether someone raises or does not raise their hand, it's subjective for each one of us as to why that may or may not be occurring. We are each individually assigning meaning to that action, or we're collectively agreeing on what that meaning might be.

BHUVINDER:

I would agree. Is there another feedback channel we could then offer or have students engage in, in regard to what they recognized? And it could take the form, if you raised your hand, why? It could take the form of some type of formative feedback where they just write it on a small cue card. If you did not raise your hand, why? And that leads to a possible further exploration of what the activity is meant to try to deliver, which is the beginning of this recognition ability of difference, of different social or personal identities.

GWEN:

I also think it is very important to foster a sense of generous listening and openness at the beginning of this activity and to properly say that there's nothing right or wrong with raising your hand or not, right at the beginning. It's just an activity. Then we provide the rationale of the activity. And I think it is very important at the beginning of this to let the students know that there's nothing right or wrong with their actions regarding this experiment. This is my personal talk about this, but I leave it to the room if there's any other offerings related to how can we encourage this activity in the way that we don't make assumptions? Are we encouraged not making assumptions among the students with this activity?

BHUVINDER:

I love that observation. It's true that as soon as the facilitator does make an assertion of some sort, it does move us to non-objective experience. My question to that is, is there such a thing as an objective experience when we are talking about intersectionality and positionality? I come from a very radical relational philosophy background, which would argue that there's no such thing as objective. It's just something we tell ourselves to make ourselves feel better.

PARTICIPANT: I would agree as well.

BHUVINDER: Rosemary, I saw your hand go up.

ROSEMARY:

I feel that we have to be careful about the concept of privilege, even going back to the thought experiment, even though an individual may not have had or have a cognitive challenge, doesn't mean that we can assign a label of privilege to them. We don't know what people's life experiences are, whether they are cognitively challenged or not. I personally feel very uncomfortable about using that term, privilege. I get quite a strong reaction when people make assumptions about me based on any kind of criteria whatsoever. And one thing that I try very hard to do in my own practice is not make assumptions about other people and their life experiences.

BHUVINDER: There's two things happening here. One is the consideration of any type of pedagogical tool or strategy we might use to try to facilitate greater recognition of the other or other experiences. The other is then the power or authority or privilege of the instructor guiding learners on this path. They are interwoven. For me, I go back to, well, what's my objective? What is my explicit, implicit, and aspirational goal for sharing my positionality statement? Is it just for myself? Look what I've done. It becomes a type of virtue signaling to others in that I've thought about and reflected upon my positionality and my privilege. Or is it in itself meant as a pedagogical learning tool for students to begin to see, wow, there's so many other things and other invisible identities taking place. And it's nice to see the teacher recognizing some of them and then the teacher helping me to begin to recognize some of them as well. For myself, any time I'm having a conversation or a consult with a colleague, and they talk about their positionality statement, I assume it's number two. It's not that virtue signaling to others about, look what a good person I am. Look how woke I am. No, it's because they are trying to envision a space where in the future their students will be able to recognize. As one philosopher wrote, "The world is not just for people like myself. It's made up of all kinds of different people. The ability to see those differences and those other people and then work with them in whatever context or setting is the goal of higher education," so goes Jeremy Waldron in 2002, a political philosopher in the United States, I've taken that as a mantra for myself in that this type of work is really not for ourselves. It's a tool that we offer our students so they can begin to see that there's so much difference in this world. And for us to thrive as a community, we have to be able to see difference and then work with, accept and work with difference. Rosemary, I would love to chat more about this. Are you feeling comfortable for us to continue?

ROSEMARY: Oh, absolutely.

BHUVINDER:

Okay. I'm going to do my best to wrap this up so then we have time to talk as a group.



There were certain decisions I made about when I asked you to imagine the differences that you as a youth might have had. The ones I focused on were physical and/or cognitive ability, drawing a little bit upon my own experience of having some physical and cognitive issues growing up, and also as an adult. But we could have gone cognitively challenged, dyslexia, neurodiverse, developmental. All three are ones that I have experienced at some points in my life and therefore might be ones that I want students to consider. A different gender, different sexuality, different culture, different skin colour, different language speaker, Indigenous. There are different ways that this activity can be altered to tie to some invisible identity that perhaps we have considered in our positionality statement. That we now want to try to envision a way for our students to begin considering it as well.

But the question that I have for all of you is why change only one characteristic at a time in this activity? This is a very important question to consider because I only changed one in my instructions to you. Any thoughts on why I did that? Thank you. I'm not sure everybody saw that comment on Mentimeter. "It could be overwhelming." It would be overwhelming to change multiple. And it's easier to envision if we're only doing one characteristic at a time.

GWEN:

Just one comment. We have a small community of practice for the positionality in our team at work. And then we refer to those invisible identities as the blind spots. When you navigate on the road, for example, usually we think about driving. We navigate the road as a very personal experience. But actually even when we drive by ourselves, when we navigate the road, we are with other people even though there's no others on the road at the same with us. I think the activities you start with one to help realize maybe one small blind spot somewhere. And then it's actually something that can impact the whole trajectory of our work or life experiences.

BHUVINDER:

Thank you very much, Gwen. I love how Linda and well, just about all of you, have indicated the ripple effect. One change can have profound effects on someone's lived experience. That's really why we change one characteristic at a time. And also knowing some of our students, they are experts at rationalizing things back to normal. If you've ever had a conversation... you've had conversations with students where they say, "Well, what about this? But what about this?" If they change enough variables, we get the same outcome. By contracting this exercise down to one variable, it becomes exceedingly difficult to still rationalize the same outcome.

So thank you everyone. Alice, this is for you, the "S" in BOPPPS. Summarizing today and an invitation to continue. Today's workshop was actually organized around a series of more complex, or ever complex questions.

Who are we? Who am I because of where I am? What is a positionality statement? How can a positionality statement support learning? What's going on at the explicit, implicit, and aspirational level of a positionality statement? How do we operationalize aspiration? What is one example of this operationalization? What does learning look like in this activity? Or what

could it look like in this activity? Why is this activity seemingly so simplistic? That's how this entire workshop was organized. Series of questions that each and every one of you, if you were interested, could take one of these questions and just go off on your own or in your own respective institution and continue this work and continue these conversations.

There were some potential outcomes and here's what you've actually achieved I'm hoping. You further developed definitions for positionality, positionality statements, and intersectionality, and how the three are interconnected. Developed a nuanced model for the multiple potential learnings from positionality statements. Because there are different ways in which your positionality statement can lead to different types of learning. You've analyzed parts of your positionality statement for the invisible identities that you recognize. You've begun to extend your positionality statement to the absent identities it could recognize. You've practiced one such absent and or invisible identity extension activity. Finally, you discussed what participation and reflection might look like in this activity. And how that in and of itself could be a worthwhile activity for students and learners. I would love the opportunity to continue these conversations with any and all of you. This is my email address, I believe it's also on the slide.

You have one last activity to do as a close. This is called a waterfall chat. For this, we're going to use the Zoom chat. Do not press Enter until I ask you to do so. That's the most important instruction. Do not press Enter until I ask you to do so. I'm going to ask you to write one sentence in the Zoom chat using one of the following prompts about today's workshop. Those prompts are something you appreciated, something that surprised you, some question that is still lingering. Pick one and write one sentence in the Zoom chat. Do not press Enter. I'm going to give you about a minute to do this. Then I will ask you to do the last step. Okay. Last instruction. On the count of three, so you can follow my fingers, press Enter to share your sentence. Read what others have written. 1, 2, 3. And I thank you for your participation today. For those able, I'll be staying online to continue conversations, but also I welcome your emails. Please take a moment to read what others have written in the chat before you go. Thank you, Gwen.

GWEN:

Thank you, Bhuvinder. Thanks very much, everyone, for being with us until now. I know that in one session we cannot answer all questions and as Bhuvinder said, It's mainly right now like a hope, but I put a coat in our chat. Hope is like a road in the country. It only comes into existence when we start walking. The reason why we call this the practice of positionality is because we believe that the more we do it, the more the students do it, then something will come from it. Then we never know. Those aspirational talks about the student success might come into existence today or tomorrow. When you do the practice, more and more things will come into existence. But thanks again, Bhuvinder, for leading us through the session. In January, we have another FLO Friday on Navigating Authenticity and Anonymity in Our Online Identity. Please stay tuned with us. I believe that Kelsey popped the link for our event in the chat as well, but yeah, all the resources and the recording will be available on our site. You're welcome to reach us or Bhuvinder if you have any questions. Thanks again and have a great Friday.