

Teaching Culturally and Linguistically Diverse International Students in Open and/or Online Learning Environments: A Research Symposium

The English Conversation Group (ECG) at the Leddy Library for International Students

Karen Pillon
Leddy Library
University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, Canada

Rong Luo
Leddy Library
University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, Canada

Roger Reka
Leddy Library
University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, Canada

Shuzhen Zhao
Leddy Library
University of Windsor, Windsor, Ontario, Canada

The English Conversation Group (ECG) at the Leddy Library has been offering virtual sessions for the first time in the program's history since the Fall 2020 semester during the COVID-19 pandemic. Using virtual teaching technology, the ECG is trying to help international students feel more comfortable with their English speaking and writing skills, as well as helping them find and learn to use the academic resources of Leddy library, such as remote access to library resources, Live Chat with information service professionals, Academic Data Center Virtual Lab, and so on, during remote learning. The ECG also invites guest speakers from other important areas on campus, such as the International Student Center and the St. Denis Centre, to talk to students about the various areas of campus life. By using flexible online teaching formats, creating small breakout groups, and encouraging students to share their distinct culture and experiences, the ECG has been successful in assisting international students to build up their confidence academically, socially, and culturally. Roughly 30 students take advantage of the weekly meetings to improve their English language skills in an informal, low-pressure environment. This initiative has garnered a great deal of positive feedback from participating students. This presentation will describe the experience of planning and facilitating the ECG virtually using Blackboard collaborate to teach international students library services, and will include discussion of the challenges, lessons learned, and best practices.

Abstract

The English Conversation Group (ECG) at the Leddy Library has been typically an in-person initiative. However, it has pivoted to offering virtual sessions for the first time in the program's history since the Fall 2020 semester, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. By using flexible, online teaching formats, creating small breakout groups, and encouraging students to share their distinct culture and experiences, the ECG has been successful in assisting international students

to interact with university life and improve their English language skills, as well as learn to use the academic resources of Leddy library. With its positive feedback, the ECG has been recognized as an important point of contact for international students who need to feel more engaged with Canadian academics and the University of Windsor. This session will explore the various ways facilitators have been able to connect with students through this medium as a pathway to fostering connections.

The English Conversation Group for International Students

International Teaching Online Symposium
June 17-18, 2021

Karen Pilon, Rong Luo, Roger Reka, Shuzhen Zhao
Leddy Library, University of Windsor
Windsor, Canada





Where do we begin?

- August 2013 – co-op student project and proposal from Yayo Umetsubo (today a Scholarly Communications and Liaison Librarian at U of T Mississauga Campus)
- *"designed to offer international students a fun time to speak about history, art, and the culture of Canada and other countries"*
- *"the classes will focus on non-academic materials, I would like to integrate the Library and its materials into each class."*

Developing the ECG

- Librarian as mentor
- Librarian as campus collaborator
- Librarian as problem solver to highlight role as educator
- What time? What day? Other programs on campus?
- Creating a safe space**
- Topics (from Library – from students)
- Communication (meet them where they are)



Inevitable transitions

- 2013-2016 (4 librarians, 1 co-op student)
- 2017 – today (librarians continue and co-op too!)
 - Mentorship element
- Connections with ISC – 2018 (co-curricular credits)
- Connections with ELIP (new mentorship opportunities)
- COVID and planning for 2020 Fall semester
 - Should we do this online?
 - Time differences



Improve access

- Platform: Blackboard Collaborate
- No registration required
- Inspiring communication and engagement

Strategies



Flexibility

- Interesting and diverse topics
- Facilitated small group discussion
- Encouraging self-learning, self-teaching, self-improvement through BB resource for those who could not attend.

Strategies



Community

- Self-enrollment in ECG
- Leveraging library social media to interact with students

Strategies



Outcomes



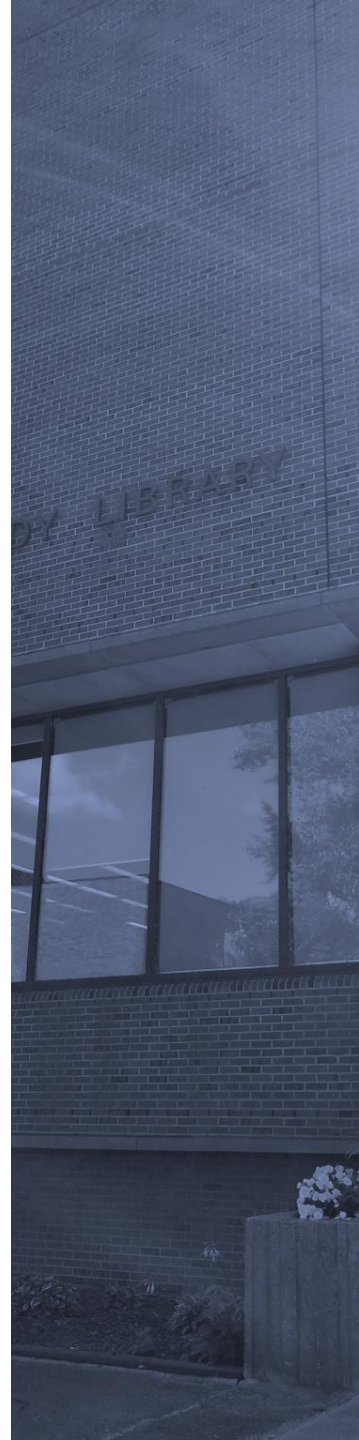
Improved
access



Better comfort



A sense of
community



Challenges



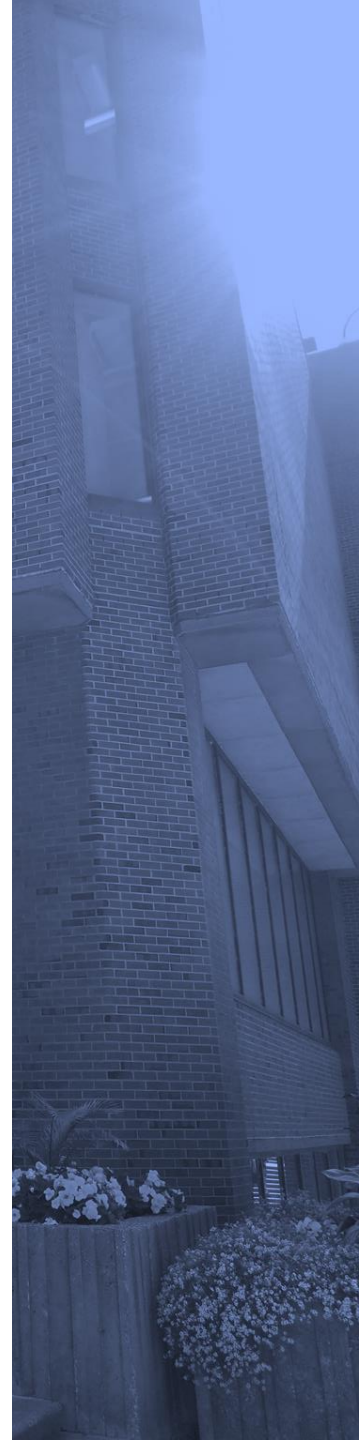
Time zones



Network
(in)stability



Keeping the
conversation
going



Conclusion

English Conversation Group is about building a community, regardless of where we are

Photo: Alyssa Black, from Flickr: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/alyssablack/15246799271>

