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Karen M. Pillon
University of Windsor

Yayo Umetsubo
University of Toronto

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Programming

Students from other counties are often compelled to face linguistic, educational, cultural, social, economic, political, psychological differences, and diversity in a new environment while absorbing or rejecting information spoken or written in their second language. Improving their English-speaking and writing skills are not sufficient enough. Having information literacy skills helps them analyze these differences and diversity, become creative, and possibly realize their potential by thinking outside the box.

At the Leddy Library at the University of Windsor, Canada, a unique library program was launched, called the English Conversation Group (ECG) for international students in August 2013, and has been offering this service weekly ever since. When Master level international students want to use English and develop conversation skills outside of the classroom, the ECG is there to facilitate this need. Librarians can create activities, in collaboration with other academic services divisions and departments, to help students gain information-literacy skills in a safe and fun setting. By noticing the power of information literacy skills, librarians at the Leddy Library at the University of Windsor lead the ECG program and play an integral role to help international

students gain information-literacy skills outside of academic programming in an informational gathering space. Librarians also recognize the various supporting staff and stakeholders with which to connect the students. This chapter explains the operational and designing process of the ECG program, using Mezirow's transformative learning theory (1990/1991/1996/2009) and the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (2015) by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL *Framework*). The six-year practice and progress of the ECG confirms that the program can further international students' transformative learning.

Transformative/Transformational Learning Theory and Information Literacy

The transformative theory, which Jack Mezirow (1923–2014) conceived of in 1978, has been employed and expanded by himself and other scholars as transformative or transformational theories in higher education and beyond (e.g., Mezirow, 1990/1991/1996/2009; Baumgartner, 2001; Meyer, Land, & Baillie, 2010). It has also been discussed and recommended in the area of library and information science (LIS) for our professional growth (e.g., Hooper and Scharf, 2017), as well as for student academic growth (e.g., Todd, 1999; Wyss, 2005). Todd and Wyss have already made a connection between transformational learning and information literacy in the online environment. Therefore, using transformative/transformational learning theories in relation to information literacy is not new. However, the six-year practice and progress of the ECG at the Leddy Library substantiate how effectively this program has incorporated information literacy and, hence, can accelerate transformative learning.

There are strong connections between Mezirow's transformative learning theory and the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (2015) by the Association of College and Research Libraries. Mezirow (2009) defines transformative learning as the process that involves critically reflecting on our "frames of reference"—that is, "the structures of culture and language"—because they form and restrict our observation, cognition, and emotion by influencing our motives, objectives, beliefs, and expectations (p. 92). In the process, "frames of reference" can be transformed into "more inclusive, discriminating, permeable, critically reflective" (1996, p. 168) and "integrative perspective" (1990, p. 14) dispositions. Mezirow (2009) also underlines the educators' roles to help learners' critical reflection to improve their abilities and predispositions (p. 94).

The process of transformative learning corresponds to librarians' attempt to transform students from "novice learners" into "experts": information literacy skills allow students to be more inclusive and open to "others' worldviews, gender, sexual orientation, and cultural orientations" and more discriminating to different types of information created by different authorities (ACRL, 2015, p. 4). Although transformation in learning involves not only skills but also knowledge, "attitudes, values, emotions, beliefs and senses" (Jarvis, 2009, p. 25), developing information-literacy skills enables learners to enhance one's attitude toward information, examine its values and beliefs, sharpen our senses rationally, gain knowledge, not easily be swayed by emotions, and integrate it into the new reality.

When interpreting meaning through "frames of reference" or "the structure of culture and language" (Mezirow, 2009, p. 92), lack of cultural and lingual experience can prevent students from construing and understanding meanings in a coherent way and guiding their future actions. While transformative learning, in relation to information literacy, can be applied to anyone, the ECG program has targeted international students who are having difficulty adapting to their "new" academic reality in an unfamiliar country using their non-native language. Navigating Canadian academics is not easy for domestic students, let alone international students, particularly those who had an undergraduate degree in their home country and who want to reside and work in Canada by finishing a master's degree program. Despite their hope to study in and immigrate to Canada, it has been our observation that some students seemed to quickly face a "disorienting dilemma" and feel a sense of anxiety, frustration, guilt, or shame through self-examination (p. 94). According to Mezirow, transformation starts through these emotional stages, and the rest of the phases below are often followed (see figure 9.1).
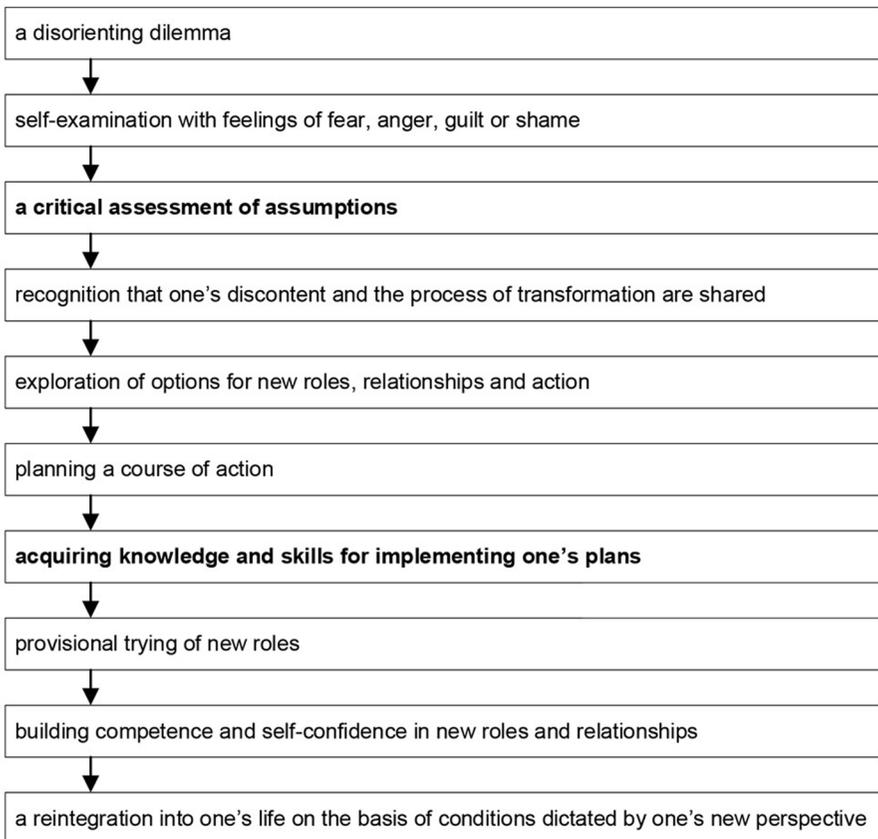

Figure 9.1.
Transformational phrases [emphasis added] listed in "An Overview on Transformative Learning" (Mezirow, 2009, p. 94).

By adopting the transformational phases, the ECG program was launched to provide activities to foster the process of transformative learning, using information literacy. Since then, it has focused on the students' critical reflection "on the source, nature and consequences of relevant assumptions" (p. 94). Before connecting the transformational phases with samples of the ECG's themes and how they feed into the ACRL *Framework*, this chapter introduces the operational process of the ECG.

Identifying a Gap that the Library Can Fill

This section contextualizes the operational process, which consists of three parts: identifying the target population and the needs of the group; utilizing the capacity, resources, and services that the library can facilitate; and making connections with the library's strategic plans.

1. Identifying the Target Population and the Needs of the Group

The library would ideally want to welcome all the students to attend all library events and activities; yet, it is vital to first identify a target population of students by analyzing the dynamics and trends in the university's enrollment numbers. The analysis includes examining challenges that the target group of students faces by conducting literature reviews and informally speaking with individual students and various academic services divisions and departments on campus.

When the English Conversation Group was launched at the Leddy Library, it was primarily targeted at international students who had an undergraduate degree in their home country and who wanted to reside and pursue a professional career in Canada by completing a master's degree program. At the University of Windsor, the number of full-time students who were master's candidates with a study permit increased from 301 to 670 between fall 2008 and fall 2012, and the majority of the students were taking a 16-month business or engineering graduate program (University of Windsor Fall Historical USIS/USER FTE 2008, p. 43; 2012, p. 45). The increase seemed to have resulted from "study and immigrate packages" promoted by recruiters (Carletti & Davison, 2012) or Ontario's Pilot International Masters Graduate Stream. Since June 14, 2010, the Ontario Immigration Nominee Program has offered an opportunity for international students to live and work permanently in Ontario without an employment offer upon the completion of a master's degree in the province (Government of Ontario, 2018). However, a master's specialized program might be too short for some international students to cope with academic and lingual challenges while absorbing and exploring differences in culture, law, and systems (e.g., health care) well enough to be ready for full-time professional work.

Understanding these circumstances have allowed the development of themes for the ECG program. The program has been envisioned as a less rigid format that would be typically experienced in a classroom and has aimed to make a connection among academics, employment, and life in Canada. In other words, the program conveys the message that academic skills are transferable in the workforce.

2. Utilizing the Library's Capacity, Resources, and Services

While librarians who are available can take turns and act as facilitators in the program, having guest facilitators outside of the library was the preferred idea. Campus partners in our programming would have ripple effects across campus and would allow the students to experience other services that they did not know existed. So far, the facilitators for each session come from a variety of backgrounds, ranging from academic to non-academic service employees on campus. Our partners in the past have been involved with the international student centre, writing centre, centre for teaching and learning, graduate student society, academic integrity office, and the research office, along with discipline-specific areas, such as History. As librarians know various divisions and departments on campus through their academic activities and committee service work, the network allows librarians to link the needs of students to various campus services. Consequently, the ECG offers students who attend regularly the added advantage of getting to know various professionals who are internal and external to the campus. Simultaneously, these students have the benefit of creating stronger relationships with librarians and recognize them as valuable resources. In addition, the collaborations across campus services can foster new relationships and strengthen the program itself.

Another way to build capacity for this type of program is to bring in co-op students from the Master of Library & Information Science program and allow them to facilitate a session. A successful approach has been to encourage these co-op students to build weekly sessions by incorporating the ACRL *Framework*. Co-op students who aspire to work in academic libraries also need to develop teaching and presentation skills. A program such as the ECG gives them an opportunity to explore various ways to integrate information literacy into themes and to forge relationships with other departments on campus.

The consistency of the location inside the library is also crucial to the program, along with how the space is considered. At the Leddy Library, a room with moveable chairs, each of which has a table, allows flexibility in the room for different activities. This is important since the session typically switches from group activities to one-on-one activities, big discussions, and student presentations. Therefore, a room that can easily transform into the proper learning space with moveable furniture is an asset.

The available room that was used is located far from the entrance of the library; yet, using the same location and promoting the ECG through social media have helped students to frequently attend. Staff were informed at the various information desks to know when and where the program was happening so that if students did not know where the room was, they could ask and get the right directions. Since the program was launched, many students have asked about the location. This has prompted adding a calendar of events to the library homepage so that front-line staff can quickly look up where programming is held and better serve students in general.

3. Making Connections with the Library's Strategic Plans

In order to obtain continuous support from the library, it is also important to connect the program to the library's strategic plan. In 2013, the Leddy Library was transitioning from a research-only space to a more collaborative and student-focused space. The ECG has fulfilled four of the five strategic directions (1, 2, 4, and 5) listed in the *Leddy Library Strategic Plan (2012-2017)*:

Direction 1: Enable an inviting and successful library experience (pp. 2–3).

Direction 2: Expand upon the library's role as a hub for research and learning activities (p. 4).

Direction 3: Take a leadership role in scholarly communication (p. 5).

Direction 4: Support a culture of lifelong learning, skills development, and customer service excellence for all library personnel (p. 6).

Direction 5: Tell our story (p. 7).

The ECG was able to successfully place itself in each direction by the nature of its role, by providing weekly learning activities (Direction 2) that enhance their library experience (Direction 1) and acting as a cultural hub for lifelong learning (Direction 4). The ECG has fostered connections between the library as learning communities and the people (the librarians and staff) who can tell our story to students (Direction 5). "Tell our story" would include sharing our services, resources, and knowledge capacity with the students so that they can widen their understanding about what occurs at the library and, more importantly, what the library can do for them.

Creating Themes for the Program

The ECG's objectives and the themes (or topics) were chosen to provide cultural and lingual experience in Canadian settings. While weekly themes are less formal, they have been designed to help students acquire knowledge and skills for implementing their plans, which correspond to one of the aforementioned transformation phases (figure 9.1).

Librarians send out surveys at the beginning of each semester to have a better understanding of what students *genuinely* want to know and to gauge what is deemed important knowledge. Students can rate the different themes, and then the librarians figure out how to deliver content with internal and external campus and community partners. The weekly theme is shared with the international students ahead of time. This allows them to come prepared with questions relating to the weekly theme. In turn, facilitators come with a presentation dealing with the theme and invite discussion from the group. Here are samples of the ECG Program themes:

- Share your experiences of living in Canada
  - Dating and relationships
  - Etiquette in social situations
  - Holiday celebrations (e.g., Easter, Halloween, and Chinese New Year)
  - Sports and games
  - Playing board games/card games
  - Practicing job interviews
  - New Canadians' Centre of Excellence visit
  - A visit and information from the public library
  - Canadian history
- Talking about our cultural backgrounds
  - Speed chatting
  - Small group conversations on various topics
  - Giving a presentation to the group on a topic of your choice

- How to do research using the Leddy library
  - Writing centre presentation
  - Plagiarism and academic integrity
  - Learning new vocabulary

The underpinning concept for the ECG program has rested on information literacy, including *knowledge practices* and *dispositions* in the ACRL *Framework*. *Knowledge practices* show examples of how "learners can increase their understanding of …information literacy concepts" and *dispositions* describe how "to address the affective, attitudinal, or valuing dimension of learning" (ACRL, 2015, p. 2). *Knowledge practices* and *dispositions* contribute to both academic and non-academic themes and engage the student to think critically, participate in discourse (while practicing English!) and reflect on their own assumptions.

To illustrate, for the theme "Dating and relationships (in Canada)," the campus nurse participated and discussed sexually transmitted diseases and sexual health in general. This gave the international students the opportunity to become more aware of the medical services offered to them on campus, connecting the *dispositions* seen in the frame Searching as Strategic Exploration to "seek guidance from experts, such as librarians, researchers, and professionals" (ACRL, 2015, p. 9). The theme also promotes the Authority is Constructed and Contextual frame as "information resources reflect their creators' expertise and credibility, and are evaluated based on the information need and the context in which the information will be used" (p. 4). As one can surmise, using the ACRL *Framework* in this way can shape how librarians relate and develop particular topics used in the sessions, even if they deal with non-academic issues. Themes like this could offer the students the space to critically reflect on their own assumptions and expectations of the services and resource persons around the campus and make room for new ideas and opportunities that may challenge their previous knowledge.

External community agencies were invited, such as individuals who work with new Canadians in order to help students obtain an Ontario driver's license. In this case, the focus was on a *knowledge practice*, specifically under the frame Searching as Strategic Exploration; it can encourage students to explore how to "identify interested parties, such as scholars, organizations, governments, and industries, which might produce information about a topic and determine how to access that information" (ACRL, 2015, p. 9). Themes like this would allow students to understand how governments and organizations move information and make it accessible in a new, understandable way.

While the activities connect the ACRL *Framework* to the theme each week, as with all of our sessions, the format is easy and relaxed so that students feel comfortable asking questions and hearing their own voice. The types of questions that students have asked librarians indicate that the ECG has provided a safe space that encourages many international students to speak openly. At the beginning of the term, students try to build relationships with and show respect to their professors but are not sure how to proceed. Therefore, when they come to the ECG, they ask questions such as, "When I meet my teacher, do I shake their hand?" and "When the teacher walks into the class, why doesn't anyone stand up?" Once students feel more comfortable in the ECG

meetings, the questions change to more private and culturally related questions such as, "In my culture, we kiss on both cheeks when we meet someone. What do we do in Canada?" and more personal questions such as, "If I take a Canadian girl out on a date, what is the custom around paying for the meal?" As the term progresses, the questions change as their experiences become more academically nuanced; for example, if the professor discusses plagiarism and the importance of citation, the students will come to the ECG and ask, "Why is copyright such a big deal in Canada?" Students come to the ECG expecting to practice their English; yet, as the term moves forward, they see this program as a place where they can ask any question. Many questions are not those that are typically discussed in class or outside of class. However, when international students are given the proper space to do so, they feel comfortable raising these issues and asking these questions.

Figuratively speaking, this space has offered regular attendants an opportunity to critically assess their assumptions through "communicative learning …by participating freely and fully in an informed continuing discourse" (Mezirow, 2009, p. 94). It has also offered an opportunity to explore "options for new roles, relationships and action" and develop "competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships," which are listed on the aforementioned transformation phases and process (Mezirow, 2009, p. 94; see figure 9.1). Furthermore, the physical space itself has fostered the communicative learning as the students sit in groups or in a large circle and the facilitators sit with them. A whiteboard and screen with an internet connection are available so that both facilitators and students could go up to the board and write or use websites to explain a concept.

In addition, the importance of developing a trusted relationship between librarians and students cannot be undervalued. As trust builds and students feel more comfortable asking more academic questions and telling their friends about the ECG, librarians are able to make a lasting impact on the students' lives and are well positioned to assist outside of the program.

The ECG Program along with the ACRL *Framework*

When the program was first launched in August 2013, our weekly themes made reference to *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* (2000) by the American Library Association as well as *Evaluating Information—Applying the CRAAP (Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose) Test* (2010) by Meriam Library at California State University, Chico.

In 2015, the Association of College & Research Libraries adopted a document entitled the *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (ACRL *Framework*). This framework posits, "Students have a greater role and responsibility in creating new knowledge, in understanding the contours and the changing dynamics of the world of information, and in using information, data, and scholarship ethically" (p. 2). In turn, "librarians have a greater responsibility in identifying core ideas within their own knowledge domain that can extend learning for students, in creating a new cohesive curriculum

for information literacy, and in collaborating more extensively with faculty" (p. 2). In all, there are six frames that complete the *Framework*. They are: Authority Is Constructed and Contextual, Information Creation as a Process, Information Has Value, Research as Inquiry, Scholarship as Conversation, and Searching as Strategic Exploration" (pp. 4–9). When putting together the ECG program, the librarians asked themselves particular questions related to the *Framework*, for example:

Information Creation as a Process:

- How can students best create "new" knowledge if they do not yet know what that new knowledge could be?
- How can the ECG assist students in forming new knowledge about the Canadian academic experience so that they can have a larger context of experiences and knowledge to draw from?
- How can students best learn how the research process occurs in the Canadian context, and how can they avoid the common pitfalls (e.g., plagiarism) that have been previously associated with international students (e.g., Divan, Bowman, & Seabourne, 2015; Gunnarsson, Kulesza, & Pettersson, 2014)?

Research as Inquiry:

- How can ECG show students how to think critically about issues that matter to them and, in turn, issues that matter to the academe?
- How can students ask questions through the ECG so that they learn and transfer those skills into asking questions through the research process?
- How can asking questions and critical thinking link into an informal process to teach students to analyze issues in a deeper way?

Using the ACRL *Framework* is beneficial as a catalyst to design the critical-thinking narrative, whether teaching students about plagiarism or how to practice answering questions for a job interview. Some examples connecting the weekly theme, the ACRL *Framework*, and the learning examples/activities are shared below:

Table 9.1.
Examples of themes in relation to the ACRL Framework

Theme	ACRL Framework	Questions to ask ourselves as instructors	Learning examples
Giving a presentation to the group on a topic of your choice	Scholarship as Conversation	How can we empower students by giving them the tools to engage in their classes and realize the power of their own voice?	• Presentation around how to engage in class—asking questions • Practice using your voice—two-minute presentation to the group on a subject of your choice • Q & A on your topic

Theme	ACRL Framework	Questions to ask ourselves as instructors	Learning examples
Writing Centre presentation: Why is English so weird?	Searching as Strategic Exploration	How can the ECG contribute to expanding both conversational and research language of students so that they are able to use the proper words when researching?	• Session on keywords and how to use them • Discussion about what are the difficulties when searching/writing with new ways to overcome the challenge • Presentation by a campus partner (Writing Centre) for a session on English and its rules • Q and A on English language

The practical examples above show how the academic concepts of the ACRL *Framework* can be integrated into relaxed and friendly settings through various activities. The six-year practice at Leddy Library ascertains that it is possible to make these students' needs and librarians' aspirations connect to foster these skills through learning communities. Hence, our goals have been met: students are learning to use English, they are engaging in the Canadian academic narrative, and they are challenged to think differently about new ways of knowing and doing. Transformative learning has taken place.

Conclusion

Information literacy skills enable enhancement of one's attitude toward information, examine its values and beliefs, sharpen our senses rationally, gain knowledge, and not be emotionally reactive. Mezirow notes that through the process of transformative learning, learners can "become more critically reflective of our own assumptions and those of others, to seek validation of our transformative insights through more freely and fully participating in discourse and to follow through on our decision to act upon a transformed insight" (2009, p. 94). The ECG has been intentionally developed to make its regular participants find themselves in this way. As time continues, the ECG and other comparable programs will be able to give students research strategies and new skill sets to deal with the experiences. Positioning the library and its librarians as a supportive entity alongside the traditional academic system has always been paramount. Creating strong relationships with international students so that they can count on a solid source of information will always continue to motivate us.

Lastly, it is worth noting that developing the program has created a momentum for the facilitators and instructors to learn broader and deeper perspectives from international students and their cultures. In other words, there has also been transformative

learning among the facilitators. Co-op students, particularly, who have continued to be involved in this program have had a transformative learning experience with the support from other librarians. According to Spooner, Flowers, Lambert, and Algozzine (2008), "teaching is more than knowledge of the content area and planning and delivering instruction. It involves reteaching, providing multiple meaningful activities for diverse groups of students" (p. 268). While it takes time and practice to hone teaching skills and to ground them within the pillars of information literacy, the ECG program provides a great opportunity to do so.

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