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RE-IMAGINING THE ONE-SHOT: THE CASE FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

Coined by Jack Mezirow, and translated for classroom application by George Slavich and Philip Zimbardo (2012), transformational teaching seeks to increase student “mastery of key course concepts while transforming their learning-related attitudes, values, beliefs, and skills.” The Framework for Information Literacy has caused a widespread shift in how we approach instruction in librarianship as students explore newfound roles as information creators, disseminators, and evaluators. But this is only one of many steps along a journey of self-realization and discovery that they make throughout the duration of a course. Information literacy and transformational teaching share parallel goals and pedagogical methodologies which, when combined, can have a profound effect on students’ knowledge and attitudes about learning and can serve as a catalyst for positive change.

INTRODUCTION

The Framework for Information Literacy has caused a widespread shift in how we approach instruction in librarianship. While the instructional methods themselves may not have fundamentally changed, the focus seems to have arguably morphed from a point-and-click approach to a much more robust treatment of how information

is created, disseminated, and evaluated, especially in a context that is not socially or politically neutral. But while there are a growing number of examples of how to build lesson plans to address the various threshold concepts in the classroom, such as the Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) Framework for Information Literacy Toolkit, <http://acrl.libguides.com/framework/toolkit>,

librarians are still grappling with the confines of the one-shot model. This article proposes to help alleviate some of those challenges and examine the landscape of instruction from a transformational teaching perspective that focuses on classroom dynamics and relationships to situate information literacy as a stop along a journey of self-realization and discovery.

The concept of transformational teaching first surfaced as part of the work of Mezirow (2003), who discussed a journey of transformation rather than an isolated episode. He goes on to state that transformational learning “transforms problematic frames-of-reference sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning, perspectives, mindsets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change” (p. 58). King (2002) explained a progression as a four-stage process: (i) fear and uncertainty, (ii) testing and exploring, (iii) affirming and connecting, and finally (iv) new perspectives. Each of these broad stages encompasses smaller actions such as engaging in self-reflection, exploration of new habits and mindsets, and building confidence in these new roles. In addition, White and Nitkin (2014) asserted that the transition Mezirow discussed occurs through experience, critical reflection (which will be discussed in greater detail later on), as well as an element of agency where the “search for knowledge and understanding must at least in part be self-directed, which shifts the locus of learning from faculty to student” (p. 3).

Slavich and Zimbardo (2012) took transformational teaching into the classroom as a process that

“involves creating dynamic relationships between teachers, students, and a shared body of knowledge to promote student learning and personal growth” (p. 569). This sentiment is also echoed in the initial documentation about the framework, where threshold concepts “are those ideas in any discipline that are passageways or portals to enlarged understanding or ways of thinking and practicing within that discipline” (ACRL, 2017). Gersch, Lampner, and Turner (2016) made a connection that the four domains of “behavioral, affective, cognitive, and metacognitive engagement with the information ecosystem” (p. 202) encourage active participation, active emotion, active knowledge acquisition, and active reflection. In this instance, students are not merely consumers, but participants in the creation of knowledge in a digital information world characterized by collaboration and sharing. This appears to be a clear call to utilize the multi-faceted aspects of the framework to engage students in ways that tap into these four areas as they learn. It is reflective of the core element of transformational teaching, which looks at the individual complete with emotions, thoughts, fears, and aspirations in order to paint a more complete picture rather than focusing on the learning as an isolated element.

THE CHALLENGES OF THE ONE-SHOT MODEL OF INSTRUCTION

While these elements point to commonalities and linkages between information literacy, the Framework, and transformational teaching, there still appears to be a lack of acknowledgement that the structures in which these aspects reside are in and

of themselves flawed. By not examining the context in its totality, we are missing an opportunity to turn existing models on their heads and convert limitations into possibilities.

This issue is so problematic that the American Library Association (ALA) published *The One-Shot Library Instruction Survival Guide* by Buchanan and McDonough in 2014. This book is designed to address all of the major issues encountered when dealing with a single instructional event, ranging from how to collaborate with faculty in designing appropriate assignments, engaging students with hands-on activities, and assessing student learning. While having this type of information is certainly helpful, it does not address the true cause of the problem. Students cannot learn how to become information literate in one session, much less engage in the type of deep learning and inquiry that the framework hopes to achieve. The strategies that can be employed to further these goals are not only dependent on the librarian but also the faculty. In fact, McGuiness (2006) noted that faculty believe “information literacy develops gradually and intuitively, through participation in a number of different scenarios” (p. 580). Time outside the one-session model can be a commodity. Finding a way to control the learning process beyond this temporal event can be an insurmountable challenge, especially if there are no other opportunities to connect with students.

The suggested options for mitigating these factors have been written about extensively: offer extra credit to students who meet with the librarian outside of class; build in pre- and post- and/or rubric-based assessment measures to determine how

well students achieve specific learning outcomes; partner with a few faculty who are willing to think beyond the one-time approach; and either provide the opportunity for multiple sessions (which is also difficult to scale) or allow leeway for some type of online content in a flipped environment. Stevens (2007) stated that “the Standards acknowledge that neither librarians nor subject faculty are well equipped to meet [information literacy] objectives on their own” (p. 255). Where that partnership is lacking, it can spell disaster for even the most well-intentioned instruction. Bowles-Terry and Donovan (2016) frame a way for librarians to take control over their instructional environment and build a “culture where librarians are equal partners in the educational mission rather than support staff” (p. 140).

TRANSFORMATIONAL TEACHING AS A FRAME FOR PEDAGOGY

Before suggesting applications to the one-shot model, we must first understand how transformational teaching makes a difference in the classroom. By developing a shared blueprint for success, the instructor is in fact acting as an agent of change and becoming the facilitator needed in order for students to apply these components in a way that will position them to master course content, think differently about their learning processes, and develop strong relationships with the instructor, the librarian, and their peers. Slavich and Zimbardo (2012) highlight six ways in which this approach works:

- *Establishing a shared vision for the course that aims to describe what the class, students, and*

teacher hope to accomplish over the course of the semester. This serves to motivate students to work towards their envisioned goals and their broader future. Moreover, they mention that part of this vision-setting process involves discussing with students what key concepts and skills they will learn as part of the course, serving as further reinforcement of content and collective action.

- *Providing modeling and mastery experiences involves a high degree of persistent engagement and practice with the course content.* In addition, the implementation of these activities also helps at a more meta-level, where students are working together to confront difficult challenges and learn from the instructor how to deal with them. In other words, the instructor's attitude towards the content and the issues presented can make as much of a difference as his/her teaching habits and approaches. They can shape students' own thoughts and beliefs about their ability to learn and ultimately succeed in the course.
- *Intellectually challenging and encouraging students seems like an obvious way to help shape their learning, but it must be done in a way that is framed "in terms of students' current level of understanding and by presenting problems that are of appropriate difficulty"* (p. 586). An interesting point made here by Slavich and Zimbardo is that, along with these more structural tools, instructors can also provide support for students' "differences, needs, and welfare" (p. 586) such as allowing partner or group tests in order to remove anxiety and

increase their level of confidence, which is crucial for a positive learning experience.

- *Personalizing attention and feedback is a hallmark of best pedagogical practices in general, but have a specially punctuated meaning when applied within the context of transformational teaching.* Not only does this approach allow for a faculty member (and the librarian) to determine what prior knowledge students may have about a particular topic, but they can also use this information to ascertain what resources the students might need in order to increase their understanding in that area. Instructors therefore help students "identify specific attitudes, beliefs, and ways of thinking about or approaching problems that can become individualized targets for critical reflection and transformation" (p. 587).
- *Creating experiential lessons help students to "reshape their understanding of a core concept through experience, develop self-confidence and self-efficacy by applying their capabilities to achieve success... and enhance attitudes and beliefs about learning by experiencing ideas as relevant and meaningful"* (p. 591). Here too the case for information literacy seems to be overwhelming. Although writing a paper may not be a classic example of experiential learning, developing an infographic or similar type of assignment should help students delve into the details of a particular topic. With the help of a librarian, students can develop the confidence necessary to apply towards future endeavors across classes

or perhaps even in their daily lives as consumers and creators of information. If the assignment in question is seen in this light by both faculty and librarian, it can serve a tremendously useful purpose in transcending the boundaries of the course itself.

- *Promoting ample opportunities for pre-flection and reflection is a final and key component of transformational teaching and information literacy.* According to the authors, pre-flection and reflection not only facilitate students' mastery of key concepts, but also "play a critical role in enhancing students' skills and strategies for discovery" (p. 592). This is a significant tenant of information literacy. It can serve as a bridge in developing students' ability to think about what they learned in terms of their research skills, habits, and attitudes, and what additional questions they may have as a way to continue the conversation with the librarian beyond the one-time session. Even more important, however, is the intent of that reflection. In his book, *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood: A Guide to Transformational and Emancipatory Learning*, Mezirow (1990) posits that:

"We very commonly check our prior learning to confirm that we have correctly proceeded to solve problems, but becoming critically aware of our own presuppositions involves challenging our established and habitual patterns of expectation, the meaning perspectives

with which we have made sense out of our encounters with the world, others, and ourselves" (p. 12).

USING TRANSFORMATIONAL TEACHING TO RE-ENVISION THE ONE-SHOT

Let's image for a moment a tripartite schema where the students, librarian, and the instructor inhabit the instructional space where the information literacy instruction will be delivered as a one-time event. Rather than approaching the element of transformation as needing to occur within that instructional space, let's think about what would be necessary in order for instruction to become a catalyst for transformational action rather than transformation per se. In this case, the focus would be on applying transformational teaching in a way that situates responsibility of learning as a shared experience that reinforces and highlights student agency within information literacy instruction. The focus for transformational teaching resides more in how the pedagogy is delivered within the context of the one-shot model rather than in attempting to apply the framework in a content-driven way. As with any type of one-shot, collaboration with faculty is still essential to ensure success, but the role of the students in this process becomes much more transparent and purposeful.

Following this outline, Slavich and Zimbardo's six core areas can be adapted for the one-shot information literacy session. To start, instead of asking students to talk about their shared goals for the course, librarians can ask them what success looks

like for the assignment in question from their perspective. What do they already know? Can they identify any existing biases they have about their topic and the issues? This does not have to necessarily be related to race or politics, but could even extend as far as preference for a type of resource over another such as library databases versus Google. Taking a minute to do this at the beginning of class using polling software (such as Mentimeter or Kahoot) to keep responses anonymous will give librarians a good sense of what the students hope to accomplish so that they, in turn, can target their instruction in a much more focused manner. Alternatively, they can write responses on a card as they come into the class and repeat the exercise again at the end of the session to see if those goals were in fact achieved or if they were at least on their way to feeling more prepared for the assignment than they previously were.

Slavich and Zimbardo (2012) neatly outline all of the tools available to instructors to deliver the experiential and collaborative learning experience that characterizes transformational teaching, including role-playing, think-pair-share, debating topics, or playing a game. All of these approaches call for a high level of interaction both among students but also with the librarian and instructor. They definitely require a flexible, activity-oriented mindset for the entire cohort. In addition, the library literature is very robust in this area with the development of lesson plans and ideas. Baker (2016) provides specific examples of different tools librarians can utilize to accomplish this work, ranging from the relatively simple, both in terms

of time and cost, such as EDPuzzle, to more robust versions, such as Articulate Storyline.

Taking this one step further, librarians can also ask students what types of activities they would like to try as a way to increase buy-in and still help meet instructional goals. For example, if a think-pair-share activity may work well for a particular concept, librarians can think of a couple of variants on that theme so that pairs can alter the activity to suit their needs. This may seem like a small detail to consider, but it may go a long way towards making students feel like they have a voice in how the work is structured. This may increase their level of engagement with the content and each other as well. This does require more work on the part of the librarian in terms of having several options to showcase based on how things are going, and it also requires the librarian to relinquish more control to the students and take on the role of consultant rather than instructor.

This next set of concepts requires the librarian to take a step back during the session and determine what students need at key points of the class to increase understanding and offer either simpler or more complex solutions based on how things are progressing. Wang (2017) discusses the notion that assessment for the one-shot should not be about measuring library or information skills because they require time to develop, but should instead center on research readiness. This is a combination of affective feelings, cognitive thoughts, physical actions, previous experience, and following-up. It is in many ways much more complex and difficult to measure than whether or not a student

understands how to find a call number, for example. This approach touches on many of the same aspects as transformational teaching regarding student thoughts, habits, and emotions surrounding the research process. It helps to lessen the burden on the librarian so that the focus is not on having students retain specifics covered during the session, which can vary, but rather on their level of preparation to begin the work needed in order to successfully complete the assignment.

Another important element of transformational teaching is on-the-spot assessment. It is vital for the librarian to check the “temperature” every so often to ascertain if the session is achieving its intended purpose. Much like the active learning that must remain flexible to shifts in direction and depth as the session goes along, so must understanding and attitudes towards the content presented be gauged. Again, this requires the librarian to have a general roadmap of the session that can change direction as needed, especially if during the course of this micro-assessment it becomes clear that students are struggling. A quick red/green flag or happy/sad face can accomplish this evaluation, as can polling software, if there is concern that students will not want to admit they are lost. Kraft and Williams (2016) discuss how something as seemingly superficial as a selfie and Twitter hashtags can not only enhance “traditional” library activities (in this case assessment), but also allow for greater variation in their application. Being able to quickly determine students’ understanding can minimize confusion after the session is over, especially if that

one session is the only opportunity the librarian has to engage with that class. In addition, having a collective set of these evaluations can provide a broader picture for the librarian, so that if the same pain points are present along the way regardless of the class, it may signal that a change in instruction or some other element is necessary.

Developing alternative assignments and ways to engage with the subject matter may seem impossible to do, especially when faced with an assignment to write a 5–10 page paper on a generic topic using 3–5 library resources. Here too, there may be an opportunity to have students create an infographic, add comments to a video on Voice Thread, or use a photo voice method as part of class activities. This can be a great way to apply some of the concepts that Meyers (2008) mentions, by creating a safe environment where different perspectives can be presented, encouraging students to think about their beliefs and biases, posing real-world problems, and encouraging action-oriented solutions. By providing these purposeful opportunities, even with limited time, librarians can still include issues of social justice as a way to have students work on a sample “real-world” problem, and model not only the information-related strategies they would need to research the topic, but also think about the broader context in which this problem operates as it relates to the overall subject of the course. This approach can further pieces of the framework that deal with questions of authority, information as process, and research as inquiry rather than method. Another way to view this strategy is from the

perspective of a mini construct, providing students with an outline for how they would tackle their own topic using the problem presented during class as a guide and engaging in some experiential learning, even if through a much scaled-down version.

The final step in this sequence is that of post-reflection and assessment. As mentioned previously, Wang's (2017) focus is on ensuring that students feel prepared for the research that lies ahead more so than acquiring specific library-related skills. Wang presents specific questions designed to get at some of these more intangible elements, such as "how challenging is your class assignment?" and "who are you most likely to ask for help?" (p. 629). Wang also argues that providing a pre/post assessment of this model can help chart a course for instruction, thus reinforcing both skill-based, as well as cognitive and affective states, via a three-pronged approach where students: "access disciplinary research literature, use appropriate search strategies, and effectively find and retrieve relevant and significant resources"; are "advised about the common problems they will encounter and strategies and resources to handle those problems"; and realize that a "one-shot session is not an isolated or stand-alone episode but a floating event to transfer students' previous library experience and skills to their present needs and escort them into the next research stage" (p. 627).

This statement encapsulates both the standpoint of the Framework for Information Literacy with its associated knowledge practices and dispositions, and the ultimate goal of transformational

teaching, which is to not only promote learning but also individual growth. Both the framework and transformational teaching contain a combination of skills and knowledge as well as all of the thoughts, emotions, and habits associated with an individual. Both also very much place students at the center of the process as active creators and agents whereby they collaborate with their instructor, the librarian, and each other to make meaning of these constructs, but ultimately express them in ways that are completely unique to their personal and academic aspirations, values, and circumstances. By getting a holistic view of how the class feels about their upcoming research path, librarians can help make the case with the faculty member for added sessions, individual consultations with students, or some other form of intervention. Too often assessment results do not get shared back with the faculty, which renders any meaningful follow-up all but impossible. This may leave students confused about what to do next, librarians frustrated because they have no further opportunity to help students, and faculty unaware of the challenges their students are facing. One way to think about this is to apply what Nilson (2014) refers to as wrappers, which are:

"activities and assignments that direct students' attention to self-regulation before, during, or after regular course components. Their purpose is to heighten students' conscious awareness of their learning process: what they are and are not understanding or retaining, how they are or are not learning, what they are deeming important,

how they are tackling and proceeding with an assignment... how much confidence they may have in their knowledge and skills, how much they may be overestimating their knowledge and skills” (p. 13).

A final aspect that this type of assessment can uncover is how implicit and, depending on the assignment and topic in question, explicit bias has changed as a result of the instruction session. It also functions when thinking about issues of whose voice is deemed authoritative and why, what type of value is placed over information and by whom, and who is being excluded from the scholarly conversation within the currently complex information landscape. There are two main ways in which this can be accomplished, one indirect, the other by developing questions that are similar to those discussed by Wang. Starting with the latter, questions such as “How did your awareness about the credibility of web-based sources of information regarding your topic change as a result of this session?” or “How do you think the paper/project you’re creating for this class could be utilized by others? And how do you think they could or should give credit to your work?”

By providing a way for students to express themselves and their thoughts in their own way, librarians can establish whether or not these biases still exist and to what extent. It might also help students better articulate how they perceive these alterations have occurred. A more indirect, albeit more difficult to effectuate, method is to include

this type of reflection as part of the assignment itself so that these ideas are integrated within the disciplinary discourse and are not perceived as an external process that only applies when thinking about information or only has a library emphasis. Here, the librarian has yet another opportunity to collaborate with the faculty member to create something that will help students get outside their own perspective and provide a way to engage with them beyond the one-shot time in class, delivering a more individualized level of feedback that makes for a transformational learning experience. For example, this might take the form of an alternate annotated bibliography where students not only discuss how the resource supports their paper or project, but also the process they went through and challenges they encountered in finding the information. This may influence them to think about who wrote it and why and what they learned about themselves as researchers as a result of this process.

Transformational teaching helps to pivot the issues we all face within a one-shot environment and offer a way to think differently about how we teach and interact with students. Transformational teaching combines psychology with motivation, collaboration with deep reflection, and requires a high degree of introspection on the part of both students and instructors. Developing a flexible outline of the course, allowing students as much freedom as possible, and reinforcing the development of their voice as creators and agents within the information world will hopefully not only make the one-shot approach more meaningful, but result in

a richer learning experience for students and open new avenues for collaboration with faculty.

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