

Panel Ceibal en Inglés: I spy with My Foreign Eye

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Introduction

Ceibal en Inglés specifies that children in 4th, 5th and 6th grades in Primary Education work in order to learn English three times a week for 45 minutes each session. The peculiarity of this project is that it was conceived by engineers and educators. Once engineers understood that videoconference technology was certain to provide excellent communication between students, remote teachers and classroom teachers, it was the time for educators to elaborate a project design. The design of the project indicates that a remote teacher comes into the classroom once a week to give instruction in English remotely; and two other sessions a week are led by the classroom teacher, who does not know any English, but who based on her pedagogical and didactic knowledge reviews and recycles the content instructed by the remote teacher. In order to do this, the classroom teacher uses lesson plans written in Spanish, which are found in the *Ceibal* LMS called CREA2. The children write their assignments and these are uploaded to the platform so that the remote teacher may see and correct students 'work.

At the start of the project, in July 2012 the aims were defined as follows:

- Children in Primary education would learn English
- Classroom teachers would be supported in their professional development by learning English by using an on-line course.

By the end of 2013, one and half year into the programme, and by listening attentively to all the participants in the project, administrators realized that other were the benefits it yielded. Among these, the most relevant is the fact that children almost intuitively have started to look for forms of autonomous learning. By

receiving the constant weekly support of a remote teacher, learners realize that the walls of the classroom are flexible and that knowledge exists elsewhere and may be found through the tools of computers, connectivity and English.

As a consequence learners have discovered that there is a living universe outside the classroom, a universe which has a disposition to teach, support and encourage their own learning. The universe students know through the presence of a remote teacher allows for a clear perception of interculturality, which in itself enriches one's horizons but demands seeing one's own identity as dynamic, , changeable, and always in movement. Interculturality is a space in which two cultures meet, where" meanings are translated and difference negotiated"

The United Nations Secretary-General's Global Education First Initiative (GEFI) has established education as a means to 'foster global citizenship'. According to UNESCO, there are a number of elements that contribute to foster global citizenship, these are:

- an attitude supported by an understanding of multiple levels of identity, and the potential for a 'collective identity' which transcends individual cultural, religious, ethnic or other differences;
- a deep knowledge of global issues and universal values such as justice, equality, dignity and respect;
- cognitive skills to think critically, systemically and creatively, including adopting a multiperspective approach that recognizes the different dimensions, perspectives and angles of issues;
- non-cognitive skills including social skills such as empathy and conflict resolution, communication skills and aptitudes for networking and interacting with people of different backgrounds, origins, cultures and perspectives; and behavioural capacities to act collaboratively and responsibly to find global solutions for global challenges, and to strive for the collective good.

The aim of this panel is to investigate the intercultural element of the programme, how it supports an understanding of different levels of identity, by listening to the

other, the foreigner who sees us, who sees the “I” of *Ceibal en Inglés* in a different shade.

Our belief is that an “I” discovers its own particularity when it is singled out by the gaze of the other. This gaze is interrogative because the other needs to understand hundreds of gestures, mannerism and idiosyncrasies which for the native are a given, a *natural* reason for pondering and acting, for enculturation and education.

However, if the “I” wants to fully enter the path of the Delphic command to “Know Thyself”, the gaze of the other needs to be also imperative, decisive and significant. It must de-naturalize our reality; deconstruct our assumptions and social commands to help our self-fashioning.

This is the moment for *Ceibal en Inglés* to listen carefully to some of the others in our programme with the aim of better understanding this radically innovative form of learning English.

Some of these others have worked with us from the very first stages of conception and implementation. The British Council, our partners in this endeavour, wrote lesson plans, e-courses for teachers and remote teachers, and has controlled teaching quality. But many other foreign actors have enriched and stimulated the programme. *Ceibal en Inglés* has the honour of working with institutions in Uruguay and abroad, in Argentina, in the United Kingdom, in the Philippines. Foreigners who reside in Uruguay, others who live in faraway lands, all however: they and us, remote teachers and institute coordinators, quality control managers and research professors, all interact, all need dialogue and socializing to make our aims possible: that primary school children learn English as a foreign language, that they may feel the openness of our world, the close warmth of a distanced teacher, whilst our Uruguayan classroom teachers show their amazing capacity of adapting to a highly cultural, linguistic and pedagogical challenging programme.

The presenters in this panel are:

- **Christina Alexander**, remote teacher, who will argue about the possibility of teaching English through videoconference at public schools against all odds;
- **Sheridan Hindley**, remote teacher who will discuss whether it may be

possible for a foreign and remote teacher to become part of a school community;

- **David Lind**, project manager for British Council, will narrate about his willingness to participate in the programme and how far Learn English Pathways has managed to allure classroom teachers to learn English;
- **Jon Prentice**, institute director and hence provider of remote lessons, who will show the importance of working for *Ceibal en Inglés* for the institute he manages;
- **Graham Stanley**, country manager for British Council, will depict his experience working with *Ceibal en Inglés* and el *Departamento de Segundas Lenguas y Lenguas Extranjeras de Anep*, in the common goal of evaluation.

References:

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Remote English Lessons for Uruguayan Public School Children: Against All Odds

Christina Alexander-Remote Teacher- Eureka & Oxbridge Institutes

Four years ago, the entirely new concept of being a remote teacher, teaching English to public school children via videoconferencing for the programme *Ceibal en Inglés* (CEI), was untested. Despite having many moving parts and layers that would need to function in unison in order to make the programme work, it seemed feasible. In 2013 *Ceibal en Inglés* was launched, and we future Remote Teachers (RTs) were called to the only prelaunch training that we received. It was a day full of questions and doubts. We were concerned about the lessons themselves, working tandemly with the classroom teachers (CTs), of which the majority spoke limited or no English, the videoconferencing technology, and finally, how it was all going to work together. We were experienced teachers, but none of us had ever faced anything like this before. When classes began, most of us RTs felt as if we had not a clue about what we were set to do and everyone involved in the project, as we were labelling it, was full of expectations and nerves, yet also optimistic. Little did we know that there would be many challenges, ranging from the philosophical to the physical that we would face. Three school years later, as a continuing Remote Teacher, I can attest to the fact that despite continuing physical, theoretical, political and technological challenges, *Ceibal en Inglés* has become a successful and integral part of English language instruction in Uruguayan public grade schools.

Teaching via video conference presented perhaps the biggest challenge of all- recreating a “normal” or traditional classroom. Teaching remotely does not allow one to arrange the classroom, physically organize activities such as pair and group work, or circulate and monitor the students. In addition, any feedback given in class is heard by all so any privacy is lost. Since I am always facing, in front of and in view of the class I have to be even more careful with my facial expressions and

body language-- as witnessed by the time I bent over to pick something up and I heard a shout "The teacher has fallen!." Moreover, I have to be careful about falling into the trap of teacher-centered classes with the children passively watching the class on TV. This is partially remedied by moving the camera and using its zoom feature. Also fundamental is both relying on and directing the CT but this was at times challenging as the CTs sometimes didn't initially understand the concept of pair or group work or the need to rearrange the classroom.

I have adapted to this way of teaching and remote classes are as dynamic as "normal" classes and involve the same types of activities. In addition, the need to convince the children that RTs are not robots taught me to be even more lively and expressive with my body, face and voice.

Technology also structures the classes themselves. While we have lesson plans and flashcards, and initially some mysterious Portfolio we were supposed to use, there are no textbooks for the children. The RTs main tools are a laptop and the monitor. In the end, most RTs have invested time in learning to use software to design appealing and expressive visual presentations (the Portfolio, it turned out), be it with Powerpoint or the whiteboard software ActivInspire, as one RT states, "integrating what you knew as a teacher about visual aids and learning to create slides that would allow you to give life and content [to the lessons]." An added benefit is that our created materials with expanded explanations and vocabulary can also be used by the CTs and the children. To put this all together, RTs have learned to juggle using a remote control, a laptop, software and/or a whiteboard and a camera all at the same time as interacting with the students and trying to make it look effortless. This active use of technology has added yet another dynamic factor to the classes and most RTs have found that with practice it is not as difficult as it sounds.

Videoconferencing technology is a crucial part of CEI and it allows us to connect to public schools all over Uruguay but also has its Achilles heel. When a school's videoconferencing equipment is down, for perhaps weeks at a time, there is no

alternative way to have class, and classes and momentum are lost. Despite having some of the most advanced technology available, we encounter camera and microphone problems which can be due to the equipment or the physical characteristics of the videoconferencing room itself. This causes RTs to have difficulty seeing or hearing the class. I have learned to be tenacious and adapt to equipment problems, giving class even when the microphone or camera have failed completely and children couldn't be heard or seen.

Other technological hurdles we have faced have been access to materials, which is crucial as there are no textbooks, and communication between the RT, CTs and the children. The children are expected to rely on their computers (known as *Ceibalitas* or XOs) to access materials, communicate with the class, especially the RT, and send the RTs their work. The CTs, who are being asked more and more to use and incorporate technology, need technology to coordinate classes as well as access materials. The children and the CTs, many of whom are using technology for the first time, often struggle with disadvantages which are of the utmost importance - lack of or poor internet either at the school or at home, lack of functioning computers, especially in the interior of the country, and lack of training and support. As one RT states, there is a " yawning gulf between the technology people think the schools have and the technology the schools have... There are huge swathes of kids with broken *Ceibalitas*/missing chargers/no connection, etc." In addition, we have all had to learn to use online learning platforms for material access and communication. The first year I searched for and found a functioning online learning platform and by the end of the school year I was able to share materials, receive the children's work, perform online tests and even have some of my classes participate in international exchanges in English. This type of technology was entirely new for all of us and our first baby steps paved the way for me, the CTs and the children to become more confident and mature users of both online learning platforms and technology in general. In the cases that technology has not been available, the CT and I have had to develop other resources and improvise, conforming to the situation to deliver quality education.

Cultural differences were yet another issue we needed to face. Since the beginning of CEI, RTs have included, in addition to Uruguayans and local native-English speakers, RTs in Argentina, Colombia, UK and the Philippines. Many RTs such as I had little to no experience with the Uruguayan educational system, were new to Uruguay or had never even visited. It hasn't always been easy as different cultures and languages needed to work closely together for the benefit of the children. Language has even been a factor as an RTs way of using or lack of Spanish can affect or impede communication at times. Few students had had contact with foreigners or Uruguayan teachers from outside of their circles and it can be supposed that almost no CTs had worked closely with a foreign teacher before. However, this meeting of cultures has led to important cultural exchange as we began to learn more about each other and to understand each other's way of communicating. We have come away with a reinforced sense of our common humanity and this contact has certainly made a lasting impression on the children, the CTs and the RTs.

Beaming into classrooms throughout the entire territory of Uruguay, possibly changing location about every hour, posed yet other challenges. While Uruguay is a small country, this does not mean that it is not diverse. I quickly learned that my classes and schools were not homogeneous and that they all lived very different social realities. As some RTs asserted, "It's not the same to make reference to horses in the schools of Montevideo as in the schools of other parts of the country", "the materials are not always appropriate to the circumstances some of the kids are living in" and "how important it was to start adapting the examples to the different schools around the country." In a space of ten minutes I may have gone from teaching a small group in an rural area to a large group in a suburban area, from a mixed level group where some children attend private English classes to one which CEI was their first exposure to any foreign language, much less English. The sheer diversity of our groups can be almost overwhelming. Nevertheless, I and other RTs have become more sensitive to the students' different circumstances,

more aware of the importance of adapting ourselves to this diversity, and this has facilitated learning no matter what the socio-economic context of our students.

Finally, we had to deal with the reality of public school itself. In the beginning, some resistance to CEI was encountered from within some schools themselves. This was due to time and resources such as understaffing, the use of the school room or other resources and the alteration of the school schedule, as well as philosophical beliefs, such as the belief that English was not the appropriate language for the children to learn. However, we also found dedicated CTs who believed in and argued for the value of the program. Over time, schools have adjusted to having CEI and the programme has become a normal part of the school routine.

The role of the CT is one which is both complex and essential. The CTs are with the children day in and day out and know the children and the class dynamics well. The CTs have been asked to share their class with us, to be responsible for and take instruction on classroom management, give the B and C classes in a language that they many have little or no knowledge of, share their free time to coordinate with the RT, and more. In addition, the majority of CTs do not have experience teaching a foreign language, and are unfamiliar with the techniques used and language acquisition theories but they have learned about and adapted to them. Above all, they have been asked to learn alongside their children. Taking all of this into account, perhaps it is amazing that they come in to CEI voluntarily. One of my CTs didn't agree with the structure of CEI as she felt she was not qualified to aid in English language instruction but nonetheless she volunteered because she believed that it was best to give her students the opportunity. In the end, the CTs efforts have been vital to the success of CEI and success is also demonstrated when the CTs volunteer for yet another school year.

While many CTs have gone above and beyond to make the English classes successful, not all have. Some have treated class A as breaktime or abandoned

class management as well as, for whatever reason, not kept up with the classes B and C. In a worst-case scenario there may be anything from a complete lack of communication to even hostility between the RT and the CT. However, as one RT states, “there's only so much cajoling of a CT that you can do before damaging the relationship.” In the end, having open and two-way communication is crucial for the success of a class and the CT/RT relationship. Nevertheless, the majority of the CTs have risen to the occasion and they have shown extreme dedication by developing materials, videotaping, photographing and sharing class work, and extending learning when class A is missed. In addition, many have put in the effort to develop a peer relationship and friendship. Uruguayan teachers have demonstrated that they “have what it takes” and everyone has benefited from this. At the end of each school year I have felt proud to work with them and honored when they have requested me for the following school year.

The role of the RT as model and guide is of course of utmost importance, as well. Many RTs go far beyond what is asked of them for the benefit of their CTs and students. In addition to the points mentioned above, we must be adaptable and flexible in the face of quickly changing scenarios. We liaison between almost everyone involved: CEI, institutes, public school directors, and more. However, many RTs feel as if they don't have a voice, that what they do goes unnoticed or “whatever we give is never enough.” As one longtime RT expressed, “To me it is a daily mix of frustration and satisfaction, so odd how you become fond of children you've never met, being responsible for their learning when sometimes your hands are tied. Every year it's a new challenge.” Yet many RTs and I have been personally rewarded in a way that cannot be expressed in words by the achievements of our students and the shared accomplishments of our CTs. I continue to learn from and be inspired by my fellow RTs and recognize that these RTs have been an integral part of the success of CEI.

At the center of CEI are the Uruguayan public school children. This programme revolves around them, their learning and their growth. If the CEI does not work for

the children, it does not work. They have been just as challenged as the adults involved in many ways. Above all, they have been asked to be respectful towards and be responsible students for another teacher who is not physically present and this can be a challenging concept for them at times. However, the children have risen to the occasion and rewarded us with their efforts and have in turn been rewarded with success. As the proverb says “It takes a whole village to raise a child” and many times our CEI classes go beyond being language lessons. The lessons can be a mix of English, self-esteem building, worldview expansion and more. I could share many anecdotes, such as the child who was so shy she could barely bring herself to say one word, yet performed her role in a play three times with three different groups in one class; the countless children whose shy smiles in response to a compliment speak volumes; the class in a neighborhood notorious for crime and violence where no child scored less than 70% on my online exams; the former student who contacted me for extra English homework because she missed her teacher from California with curly hair. I cannot explain how proud I am of my students past and present and their tangible and intangible growth and achievement.

Ceibal en Inglés is no longer a project but a programme and it has delivered on the promise: equal access to English language classes for Uruguayan public school children no matter where they are in the country. CEI is a symbiotic relationship between the children, CTs, RTs, language institutes, CEI, *Plan Ceibal*, the British Council, ANEP and Antel. We know there will be yet more challenges ahead as the program continues to expand. Improvements have been made but more can be and must be implemented in infrastructure, technology, training and support, and materials in order to build on our achievements. However, I do not see any current opportunity area that cannot be improved if we all continue with the tenacity that we have shown, always keeping the Uruguayan children’s realities and best interests in mind. I continue being a Remote Teacher out of love, and out of a belief in every child’s right to free quality education. Perhaps this vision of education as empowerment is why I am willing and able to see the many facets of

Ceibal en Inglés. It is certainly out of a belief in children and teachers that I invest blood, sweat and tears in what I do. Ultimately, we can conclude there is nothing in the least bit remote about being a Remote Teacher of English.

Remote Teaching and the School Community

Sheridan Hindley-Remote Teacher- Oxbridge Institute

Distance learning is a form of education that has been developing rapidly in many different contexts, but remote teaching in elementary schools, through *Ceibal en Inglés*, is a pioneer project in this field. Building a sense of community between teachers and students, and amongst students, is an important part of any successful educational programme, in online and face to face contexts. In a primary school context, it is referred to as the “school community”.

The school community plays an important role during this stage of formal education: the children are developing not only the skills they need for academic formation, they are developing their social skills and self-esteem. Proper structure and emotional support from their teachers, classmates, families and other community members are essential for proper development.

Becoming a part of the school community as a remote teacher is more difficult than in a face to face situation, but it is not impossible. As with all situations, it depends on the people involved: “*where there’s a will, there’s a way*”. The key in developing the kind of bonds necessary to become part of the school community is finding the best ways to maintain a fluid communication with other community members. New technology advances at an incredible rate, and every day we have more and easier ways to keep in contact with one another.

As a foreigner, I find the Uruguayan teachers to have many cultural characteristics that favor the process of a remote teacher becoming part of the community. All of the teachers I have worked with in Uruguay are highly vocational. They are dedicated, enthusiastic, hard-working, incredibly loving with their students, and the most positive group of professionals that I have come across in the country, in spite of having one of the most stressful and difficult jobs. The love and dedication that I can sense from the teachers and directors here in Uruguay I didn’t find in such high percentages in other countries where I have worked with schools, it is a

cultural aspect of this country. These are the kind of people that one can work and bond with, no matter what the circumstances.

For a remote teacher to become part of the school community, it is fundamental that she shares the same objectives with the teachers and director of the school. As stated above, the children are developing not only academic skills, they are also developing the emotional strength needed to learn and achieve their goals. The class teacher and remote teacher have to work together to create a space where the children feel they can try to speak, listen, and understand English, regardless of how well they pronounce, or how shy they are. The children also have to be supportive of each other, more advanced students have to help those with more difficulty, and all of them have to help shier students feel it is safe to try. If remote and class teacher share this goal, they will work together from both their positions to make it happen, and the joy they feel when this is achieved will no doubt bond them.

The only real difficulty involved in becoming part of the school community is the distance, and this affects the fluidity of the relationships in a number of ways. The first and most obvious reason is that it is more difficult to bond with the teachers and students through video-conferencing than in person. This is true for any kind of virtual meeting, but the video-conference classes have their particular challenges. For example, while the class and teacher see only one big remote teacher on the screen, the remote teacher has 30 or 40 people on one small screen, often with poor lighting and poor acoustics, so it can be difficult to see and hear everybody. The class is short, 45 minutes, and the classes are big. It is more difficult to communicate with children than adults through video conferencing, they are shy, embarrassed, some don't feel the communication is "real". When the class is over, the call is ended, and the remote teacher is instantly completely gone from the school.

In a face to face situation, there is a great deal of casual interaction that strengthens the relationships between teachers, students and families: chatting in between classes, during recess and lunch, contact with the families upon arrival

and departure, discussing school-related matters, etc. All the people involved are sharing the same physical space, sharing the weather, anticipating the same school activity, sharing some community-related event. A remote teacher has to find ways to be a part of moments outside the classroom to create these interactions that normally happen naturally.

There are many ways to try to create these bonds, some very simple and others more complicated. One very simple activity that can help build bridges between the remote teacher and the class and teacher is through class routines that involve talking about themselves and their environment. Every class can start with a “how are you” activity, that gives every student a chance to say how they feel. This is a great way to find out how they feel, as well as a great way to get them to speak. Not one of my 470 students is too embarrassed to answer this question, on camera and in front of the class. It is important to ask the teacher “how are you” as well, and for the remote teacher to share how they feel. During this activity the remote teacher can learn about any immediate situation the class is going through (they are all mad because some activity got cancelled, they are all anxious because there’s a dance that night...), and comment about it with the class.

The other class routine that brings the remote teacher closer to the children is the “what’s the weather like today?” activity. The students can tell the remote teacher what it’s like where they are, what they did that morning or the night before because of the weather (it’s hard to get out of bed when it’s cold, it was so windy a tree fell down, it’s raining where they are but it’s sunny where the remote teacher is...). These are little things that people share when they are physically close together, and talking about them while in different places helps humanize the situation.

Visiting the school is an exceptional way to build the bond between remote teacher and school community. Just one real face to face meeting makes the remote teacher “real” to the students, and vice-versa. The love and energy given by students that is so rewarding in teaching, but harder to feel through video-conferencing, is explosive the day of a visit. The contact with the teachers really

helps solidify the relationship. Meeting with the director is important for the remote teacher to get an idea of the school's project, how it works as a community, how the teachers work together, to learn what is really important to the school and how they feel about the remote teacher.

Another way to build bonds with classes is to use the LMS, CREA2, to re-live activities with them. For example the class teacher can take photos and videos of different activities with their cell phone and send them the remote teacher to post. Nowadays, as social networks show, the constant documentation of almost all activities has become an important part of everyone's life, and it is a way to keep students thinking about what they did in English class, talking about it with classmates, posting comments, keeping it in mind in general. This can help counteract the situation of the remote teacher appearing suddenly for 45 minutes and then disappearing.

Proposing project-based group activities helps promote the sense of community as well. These activities, such as making a model of a dream house, preparing little plays, etc., get the students and teacher working together in a very holistic way, there is a lot of interaction, group problem-solving, and many times the families also get involved. When these projects are presented to the remote teacher it is with great pride. When the remote teacher sees and celebrates these projects, in the moment and following up with photos, videos and comments in CREA2, it reinforces their feeling of accomplishment and brings everyone together. Although the remote teacher was not present during the preparation of the projects, she or he was in mind and participated in the first and last stages of the project.

For remote teachers to become part of the school community, it is extremely helpful for her or him to have all the English classes of a school. This way, the classes share their experiences; help each other with proposed activities, gossip about the remote teacher, etc. This foments the feeling that the English class and the remote teacher are part of the whole community; the experience is not isolated to one or two classes. If a remote teacher is lucky enough to have all the English classes of one school, she or he can create a group in CREA2 for all the classes to

share. This is a great way to build the community: the children can see how other classes work together, see how other students try to pronounce things or write things even if they have little or no language skills, etc. It also promotes a healthy sharing of creative ideas because they can see how other classes approached the same project in a different way. And, of course, the remote teacher is sharing this space with the children, teachers and directors.

Strengthening the relationship between class teachers and remote teachers is not complicated, and really depends only on the people involved. Nowadays it is very simple to keep in contact with people. I use email for more formal or instructional communication, (lesson plans, etc.), and other means for other types of communication: telephone calls for very urgent matters, and “WhatsApp” for more casual communication. It is important for the remote teacher to communicate with the class teacher using whatever means the class teacher uses most, to simplify things as much as possible for her or him. This means can be used for all kinds of communication: exchanging photos or videos, commenting whatever needs to be discussed about the classes, or even just chit-chat.

The remote teacher should make a conscious effort to contact the class teacher frequently: just little details like sending a WhatsApp after a class commenting on something that went really well, something that was funny, etc. These kind of casual interactions that happen naturally when physically together have to be done consciously, but they really help to foment the feeling that you are working together. I have spent the bus ride home from a day of classes chatting with teachers with “WhatsApp”, laughing about class things, encouraging them, chatting about things not related to academic issues, etc. After these kinds of interactions, I feel a lot closer to them during the video-conference class.

Any feelings a remote teacher has about their class should be communicated to the teacher. As mentioned earlier, Uruguayan teachers are incredibly dedicated and love their students, so anything the remote teacher has to say regarding the class is relevant to them. Whether it is just to communicate positive observations about a class, or doubts regarding motivation or performance, it will show the

teacher that the remote teacher cares about the class. The class teacher also knows the children far better than the remote teacher, and can definitely help the remote teacher think of the proper strategy to solve whatever problems might arise with a class.

For example, I wrote to a teacher recently about how proud and impressed I was with the progress her class was making. She had been worried about some of the children at the beginning of the year, but even these students are progressing. Her response to my email started with the words “*Estoy muy orgullosa de **mis** niños*” They are **her** children, and she wants to hear anything I have to say about them.

Finally, I would like to share a recent experience with a class teacher to showcase that it is possible for a remote teacher to be part of a school community. During a video-conference class, after congratulating a student on her work, she told me that she does her best because I am a good teacher. Naturally, I was moved by her comment, and that night sent a mail to the teacher telling her so. Her prompt response was the following:

“...Sabes que trabajamos con las presentaciones antes de la video conferencia y yo les conté que a mi no me gustaba inglés y que mis padres siempre quisieron, a pesar del esfuerzo económico que ello implicaba, mandarme a clases particulares y yo nunca quise... Ahí fue cuando ellos comentaron que a ellos tampoco les gustaba inglés pero que contigo es mucho más entretenido y dinámico y que los hace muy felices y se ponen ansiosos para que llegue el día. Creo que eso se ve en la clase, aunque quizá tú no puedas interpretarlo porque no los conoces a fondo y a veces pareciera que no están prestando atención por el murmullo, que ayer (María) presentara su casa (que no era de ella sino de una compañera de otra clase pero como ella no podía hacerla, por problemas familiares que exceden a la escuela y que no vienen al caso, la pidió para hacer su presentación) significa mucho más de lo que se puede ver en una video conferencia”.

Que (Juan), a último momento me pidiera por favor que rápidamente lo ayudara a subir su trabajo a CREA para que tú lo vieras y cuando vio que ya no daba el tiempo me dijera "entonces puedo hacer una maqueta para la semana que viene"...

Son cosas que son largas de contar, y que no siempre se da, pero se ven grandes avances en esta clase, se ven muchos progresos y eso sólo logra quien logra motivar a sus alumnos... Cuando hablo de alumnos me incluyo, soy una más... Y ellos se sorprenden de cómo he avanzado...

Te queremos Sheridan, para nosotros sos muy valiosa!!! Así que te mando en nombre mío y de mis alumnos, un gran...(thank you)."

The following week, (Juan), the boy mentioned in the mail, very excitedly presented his project, the teacher and the whole class supporting him wholeheartedly. It was a very emotional moment. That night, chatting with the teacher by "WhatsApp", she told me that that day had been a milestone in her career. (Juan) is a boy who had very low self-esteem at the beginning of the school year, he referred to himself as "useless", and he didn't have the confidence to try anything. Through the support of the school community and family, he is finally starting to feel that he is capable of learning. He managed to do his project, in spite of his house being flooded the week before. His mother, who apparently didn't have faith in him at the beginning of the year, got involved and helped him, proud of her son for doing work for English class.

The teacher believes, as I do, that the first building block is to help each child discover his or her own strength: from that point anything is possible. The teacher finished our conversation telling me that "*Los chicos se sienten seguros, y eso es lo más grande(...)Tu eres parte!! Siento que estamos en consonancia y eso fortalece a los chicos!! (...)* Tu les llegas..." She made it very clear to me that I am

part of the school community. It wasn't just a milestone in her career; it was, without a doubt, a milestone in mine.

Back to School for Classroom Teachers

David Lind, M.Ed
Project Manager, British Council Uruguay

In April 2014 I had been working in ELT for 24 years. At the time, I was using interactive whiteboards (IWBs) and LMS portals with young learners, and specialised smartphone apps for sharing information with parents so that they could keep tabs on their children's progress. I was working in an ultramodern teaching centre in the heart of a European capital, with a computer hooked up to a projector and an IWB in every room. Furthermore, whenever I wanted, I scheduled lessons in a spacious and comfortable media centre, which was equipped with computers and a broad selection of state-of-the-art online and offline learning resources. Needless to say, I was quite convinced that I was surfing atop the crest of innovation in ELT. Then something happened which would disturb this smugness and force me to change the way I think about innovation.

Of course I am referring to the day I stumbled across a job advert with the British Council for a project called *Ceibal en Inglés*. Very soon my sense of complacency about how innovative I was as a teacher would be challenged. Innovation, as it happens, was about much more than IWBs and smartphone apps. The first thing that caught my eye about the advert was the term "remote teaching". I wondered to myself, "is this another distance learning programme?" As I read on, I started to realise that *Ceibal en Inglés* was different to any kind of English teaching I had ever encountered. It seemed to combine elements of distance learning, team teaching, and face-to-face learning in a way which defies any of these labels. When I joined the project in May 2014 and observed my first lesson at a state school in downtown Montevideo I can only describe the experience as thoroughly satisfying, especially from the perspective of the affective needs of the young learners in the room. This is a story which repeats itself through the testimonies of first-time visitors to the programme, who are unfailingly surprised by the immediacy and closeness of what is supposed to be "remote" teaching. One recent visitor, and a speaker at this conference, described a lesson she observed in the following

manner: “This class with the students hundreds of miles away had all the warmth of a F2F class” (Todeva, 2015).

Against this background, I have been asked to say some words about the ways in which the British Council, through a suite of blended-learning optional courses, supports the classroom teachers in their own endeavours to improve their knowledge of English. There is always something exciting about “going back to school” for adults, and even though they carry out their work in schools, teachers are often too busy to find time for formal study themselves. This presents a challenge for a programme which seeks to provide the best possible development opportunities for classroom teachers in their role as facilitators, or better still, as English teachers in their own right.

Contrary to the conventional wisdom in some ELT circles, research suggests it is not extrinsic factors but rather internal motivators such as self-esteem which provide the most powerful drivers for adult learning (Knowles, Holton, and Swanson, 1998, pp.64-69). Bearing this in mind, the British Council has sought to make the learning experience an enjoyable one for all classroom teachers who wish to further their knowledge of English outside the context of the lessons designed for their students. The British Council provides them with the opportunity to study the language on their own through the Learn English Pathways (LEP) online resource, a self-access course through which they develop their English skills with the help of an e-moderator, who guides them through a series of activities designed to boost awareness and confidence with the language.

At the time this paper was written, approximately a third of the 3,000 some-odd classroom teachers involved in the programme were enrolled in either a British Council LEP course or in a similar course developed especially to address the needs of advanced learners and absolute beginners not catered for by the LEP suite. For many of these classroom teachers this is their first time doing a formal online modular course, and several take the time to reflect on and share their

learning experience through the course forums. Here is one testimony from a teacher on the programme, translated into English (real name is not used to guarantee anonymity):

“I devoted more time to reviewing each module every day, in order to reinforce what I had learned. I felt reassured when I did the end-of-module test. Now I’m ready for the next module!” - Lourdes

This type of reflective learning and sharing has affective benefits for the classroom teachers, helping to build bonds with their peers and serving to boost their self-esteem as they acquire both English and digital literacy skills.

What has emerged from the context of these courses, and the hundreds of classroom teachers enrolled in them, is an entirely new class of English teaching professionals. Nowhere else in the world can the “English teacher” be said to reside in two individuals simultaneously. This, more than the technology itself, is what makes the programme enduringly innovative.

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A Reflection on the *Ceibal en Inglés* Programme

Jon Prentice-Owner/Director -Eureka

Abstract

Eureka is a training institute based in Montevideo, Uruguay and is involved in the *Ceibal en Inglés* project, which provides remote English teachers to schools across the country. This paper aims to provide a perspective on the primary school aspect of the *Ceibal en Inglés* project from the point of view of an English language institute, to outline the advantages for the institute and to summarise the challenges due to the project's complexity, taking into account the benefits from being involved in such a landmark programme.

Introduction

Eureka was founded with the aim of helping clients reach their goals and, whenever possible, contributing to the social and economic success of Uruguay. Eureka is a training institute based in Montevideo, Uruguay, providing personalized training primarily in languages and language-related services, but also in finance, presentations, interviews and general business.

Eureka currently employs two administration staff and over twenty native-speaking teachers who provide a wide range of high quality English classes both privately and in-company. Moreover, Eureka is involved in the *Ceibal en Inglés* project and provides remote teachers for primary and secondary schools, as well as for Language Development classes for secondary school teachers and for the Young Learner test. The latest audio-visual equipment is used to provide classes across the country to children studying in the public school system as part of the national *Plan Ceibal* project.

Aim

This paper aims to provide a perspective on the primary school aspect of the *Ceibal en Inglés* project from the point of view of a language institute providing

remote teachers to the programme, and to discuss the benefits and challenges associated with the programme.

Background

Eureka became involved in the *Ceibal en Inglés* project in 2013, the first full year for the programme. The overarching goal of *Plan Ceibal* is:

“It is the duty not only of the government, but of Uruguayan society as a whole, to create the conditions for all children in our country, above all the poorest, to have the same opportunities as children who have financial support. In Uruguay... not only is it important to be equal before the law, but also to be equal in life.” (Tabaré Vazquez, 2007)

The *Ceibal en Inglés* project extends this to English and this overarching aim of the programme is closely aligned with Eureka’s aspirations and aims. Since the institute was founded in 2004, Jon Prentice, Eureka’s Director, has run the institute with the aim of helping students reach their potential goals and, whenever possible, contributing to Uruguay’s social and economic success. This has been demonstrated in many forms, such as by working closely with Non-Governmental Organisations and through giving hardship scholarships.

In summary, the *Ceibal en Inglés* work stream incorporates Eureka’s aspirations whilst also offering a viable business opportunity.

Project Initiation and Growth

Given that the project was in its start-up stage when Eureka first became involved, the process has been a learning curve for all parties. Initially, Eureka provided just two rooms (Teaching Points, TPs) at its premises to the remote teaching of the *Ceibal en Inglés* programme. Since then, due to the project’s rapid expansion, Eureka provides nine TPs, and in 2015 the institute carries out 250 weekly *Ceibal en Inglés* lessons.

The main challenges in the rapid expansion were infrastructure and quality. Eureka has invested considerably in creating new space, strengthening administrative support and implementing significant recruitment, training and quality programmes.

Complexity of Project

The nature of the project and the position which the institute holds within the project inherently create complexity. Figure 1 depicts the many partners and stakeholder involved in the project.

Eureka manages the Remote Teachers (RTs) directly and these RTs liaise directly with the primary school Classroom Teachers (CTs) to jointly plan and tailor weekly lessons A according to students' needs and go over the supplementary lessons B and C to help the classroom teacher with vocabulary and grammar points, which are given solely by the CT to reinforce the learning goals of the main class.

There is an ongoing dialogue between the institute's administration staff and the primary schools to arrange and reschedule lessons. *Plan Ceibal* and *Primaria* work closely together to provide support and assistance to the institutes, schools and CTs and the British Council has a quality assurance role.

There have inevitably been difficulties due to the complexity of the project with so many stakeholders involved, but this is natural within a project so large. The majority of these challenges have been solved through working closely together towards the overall aim of the project and with mature and constructive dialogues between all parties.

One interesting and very positive development which has emerged from the project is that the Uruguayan institutes providing RTs for the project have started working closely together in a spirit of cooperation and shared goals. This has allowed a support network to develop outside of the normal relationship of competitors and has meant that institutes are able to work together to cover classes and share teachers and materials, meaning that the service provided for primary schools by the Uruguayan institutes is more consistent and of a higher standard.

Benefits to Institute

Eureka primarily measures the benefits of the project against its initial goals – to provide knowledge to children in a framework of equity. The *Ceibal en Inglés* programme certainly achieves this goal, offering the institute the opportunity to be involved in a social mobility and development project which benefits Uruguay on a wider scale.

Ceibal en Inglés now accounts for 250 classes per week at Eureka and makes up a large proportion of the daytime teaching in Eureka's main location. The challenging and rewarding work on the project has led to greater growth, development and job satisfaction of management, teaching and support staff and of the institute as a whole.

Conclusions and Summary

As with any large project, there have been initial difficulties in being involved in the *Ceibal en Inglés* programme. However, the overall benefits of the programme to the institute and our teachers – including the sense of being involved in such a landmark and worthwhile project, ongoing development and job satisfaction – far outweigh the challenges.



Figure 1

Adaptive Assessment of English Language in Uruguayan Primary Schools

Graham Stanley-Country Manager-British Council

The British Council was selected by Plan Ceibal to be project managers on the *Plan Ceibal en Ingles* project in 2012 and a successful pilot (Banegas, 2013) was followed by expansion phases providing English for pupils of 4th, 5th and 6th grades of public schools across Uruguay (Brovetto, 2015; Stanley, 2015). After the pilot, the British Council worked in partnership with Plan Ceibal on a comprehensive evaluation project to collect evidence of the students' progress (Plan Ceibal, 2014). This project impact test was given to all students studying English on the programme (c. 7,700), in order to show the progress made between July 2013, when they were first tested, and November 2013, when they were retested. The test included 40 multiple choice questions and evaluated grammar and vocabulary, with an open question evaluating writing.

As Brovetto (2015) states, the results of the test were 'consistent and robust' and showed 'significant progress in all grades (4th, 5th & 6th) and all social groups.' Particularly interesting to note is that the data showed 'the programme not only is not increasing social differences in educational achievement, but could help to reduce them' (Brovetto, 2015).

More recently, the British Council Uruguay has been working with *Departamento de Segundas Lenguas y Lenguas Extranjeras del CEIP, Plan Ceibal en Inglés, División de Investigación, Evaluación y Estadística de ANEP* and *Departamento de Monitoreo y Evaluación de Plan Ceibal* on the first adaptive assessment in Uruguay. This has involved the testing of all 4th, 5th & 6th grade public primary school students studying English in Uruguay, either with an English teacher physically in the classroom (*Segundas Lenguas* programme) or via video-conferencing (*Plan Ceibal* programme).

The first adaptive English test was given to students in December 2014 and the results (*Departamento de Segundas Lenguas et al, 2015*) showed that children in both programmes are making similar progress, and that the more exposure to English the children have, the better the level of English.

In 2015, the brief of the adaptive test was expanded to include listening and this will once again be administered to all primary students of 4th, 5th & 6th grade studying English, including 80,000 students now studying with a remote teacher.

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