



Ceibal en Inglés - Educación Media
Conversation Class Program
Methodology Statement, March 2016

1. Introduction and goals

Ceibal en Inglés for Educación Media is an educational program designed for teaching oral skills to students in Secondary Education (Middle School, High School and Vocational Schools). For the program a new pedagogical model has been developed, that consists of a blend of face-to-face teaching and remote teaching in real time.

The program started in 2014 to respond to the difficulty of teaching oral skills in the foreign language classroom. The program recreates real life communication in English through the intervention of a native speaker of English and interesting topics and materials. The program is supported by the classroom teacher of English (CTE) whose work is enhanced by the telepresence of a remote teacher of English.

The goal of the Conversation Class program is to enhance oral skills in English in Uruguayan secondary schools, and reinforce the importance of collaborative teaching to strengthen English teaching in general. This is done through the use of telepresence technology and using laptops and the *Ceibal* LMS, CREA2.

Every year students between 1st and 6th grade in Secondary education receive around 30 lessons of **Conversation Class** and at the end of each year students have to present their “oral outcomes” to show and test what has been learnt.

The program includes an updated curriculum for the new pedagogy: step-by-step lesson plans closely related to the *Educación Media* syllabi, digital content provision for student laptops, and evaluation of student learning.

2. Pedagogical Model

The program design combines three modalities of language teaching, that together define the specifics of this project:

- Remote teaching: The remote teacher of English is not physically present just like in other forms of *distance teaching*. Unlike distance teaching, however, students are in a group of approximately 25 adolescents, in their own classroom, in their school, with their CTE.
- Collaborative teaching: Collaborative teaching is an approach in which two or more teachers are jointly responsible for course content, lesson activities and assessment. Remote and classroom teachers can only teach by mutual cooperation. It is essential that both teachers have read the lesson plans before the class, that they both participate actively during the remote lesson, and that they both provide feedback to each other as to their perceptions of the remote lesson.
- Blended learning: Blended learning is a form of education in which a student learns in part through online delivery of content and instruction. In the *Ceibal en Inglés* blend of teaching, the RT teaches remotely, the CTE does so face to face.

Spoken language is at the heart of classroom practice. Dialogic pedagogies (Alexander, 2004; Wells 1999, rooted in Vygotsky's work) promote interactive language as a way of moving understanding and knowledge forward. Following Bruner (1996) the program focuses on the interactive nature of learning and the way in which language requires both challenge and scaffolding by a competent language user to move forward.

Alexander (2004) suggests the following indicators for dialogic interaction. Such interaction is: collective: learning tasks are addressed together, in groups or as a class; reciprocal: teachers and children listen to each other share ideas and consider alternative viewpoints; supportive: children articulate ideas freely, helping each other to common understandings – the fear of the 'wrong answer' goes; cumulative: teachers and children build on their own and each other's ideas and chain them into a coherent line of thinking and enquiry, and purposeful: teachers plan and facilitate dialogic teaching with particular educational goals in view.

The goal of this program is the teaching of English as a foreign language with special focus on speaking during the Conversation Classes. The program aims at the acquisition of both informal language for everyday communication as well as more formal academic uses of English through the progressive integration of curricular academic content adapted to students' level and age.

3. Project Design: the weekly cycle of the conversation class

The design of the project includes one remote lesson a week, and two/three face-to-face lessons, depending whether the student is in Middle School or High School. (Middle schoolers have 4 periods of English a week, whilst High schoolers have 3).

The remote and the face-to-face lessons are understood as a cycle so that the CTE does some pre-teaching before the videoconference encounter, then the Conversation Class takes place, and after that the CTE implements practise activities indicated by the RT and the lesson plan (dialogues, presentations, role-plays, etc.)

The CTE designates one student per week to record one or two instances of the students practicing and uploads it on to CREA2 so that the RT may also participate although not being present during practice.

The Conversation Class element strictly follows the curriculum of *Educación Media*, which is thematically organized. For each theme, RTs and CTEs may find on CREA2 different lesson plans to choose and adjust according to students' needs.

4. Technological Component – Videoconference communication

The program requires a technological solution to make more effective and widespread use of teachers who are available to teach but who are not physically located in the Uruguayan schools. The videoconference is a call done via internet in real time. The equipment installed in each school have a codec, an UPS, a camera, a microphone and loudspeakers, and a television set with a large screen. For the call to be established, both parties (the remote teacher and the group) have to use compatible videoconference equipment. Connectivity is through fibre optic cables. The call can be made independently of the geographic distance, whether within Uruguay or from abroad.

The videoconference equipment allows for audio and video communication; both parties can hear and see each other in real time, with excellent quality of sound and image. The camera which is part of the equipment allows viewers to regulate the perspective from a broad, general vision of the whole class, to more specific images of a particular student or a small group of students.

Videoconference equipment permits “file sharing”: by connecting a standard computer to the codec, participants on one side may show the other side audio, video (images, documents, songs, films). When sharing files, the equipment allows a choice of different layout options. For example, the RT's image or the shared content can be minimized or maximized.

Students' and Teachers' laptops

In Uruguayan schools all secondary school students and teachers have laptops. Students and teachers participating in *Ceibal en Inglés* are expected to use the laptops provided by Plan Ceibal during English lessons. By using their laptops students and teachers access online and digital materials (songs, templates, and reading comprehension activities), most useful for in-class lessons and for doing revision work.

CREA2 - Plan Ceibal Platform

CREA2, the Learning Management System used by *Plan Ceibal* enables classroom teachers, students and remote teachers to have access to different materials (lesson plans, online activities, digital materials) and to communicate with each other during and in between classes.

There are two main parts to CREA2:

Lesson Plans and Materials. The classroom teachers and remote teachers can communicate with each other and find the lesson plans and associated materials in CREA2. *Ceibal en Inglés* lesson plans are only provided in digital format. Rubrics and guidelines to implement the oral evaluations: "oral outcomes" are also available on the LMS.

Aulas Virtuales. In this space, the classroom teachers, remote teachers and students are able to interact through internal mail or forums, hence the RT may be present, although in absence, and see what and how students are practicing the speaking activities that have been set.

5. Teachers: Remote Teachers (RT) and Classroom Teachers of English (CTE)

There are two professionals involved in the teaching process: both are professional teachers of English as a second language. The remote teacher in this program must be a native speaker of English. The appeal of the RT is that she brings the vividness of the language to the classroom and the sharpness of the culture provided by a native who has lived and experienced the foreign culture as a natural given. For the students, the native RT provides a chance of a real communicative situation when presenting their work to her, as it is possible that RTs do not speak any Spanish. In this sense, the presence of a native RT becomes simply meaningful for both parties.

The CTE provides her wide knowledge of the students and the teaching environment, as well as being the bridge between the two cultures and the two languages. The fact that she is a professional teacher of English makes the whole learning context more powerful, and gears stimulation. The program works best when these two very robust professionals work collaboratively. Thus, periodic coordination between the two professionals is paramount for the success of the project in each classroom.

The CTE is the warrant that the syllabus will be covered, the evaluator of her students, the link between the native speaker and the adolescents, the enabler of the educational experience, who organizes and regulates the pace and rhythm in which content will be delivered by the RT.

Due to her key role, the CTE chooses to be part of the program with her students, with the approval of the *Educación Media* supervisors. CTEs attend a one day Orientation Course, where the main elements of the program are explained to her. Additional support is provided by a 12-hour online course for the CTEs who join the program.

The CTE who enters the program commits to the following components: a) to be present and actively participate during the 45-minute of the remote lesson, taught once a week by the RT through videoconference, b) to support the work of the RT before, during and after the remote lesson has taken place, and c) to continue her instruction in English should her level request so.

RTs are highly motivated professionals with an interest in innovation in education. Some teachers work from Uruguay; others from other countries. All RTs are trained through an online course especially designed for RTs and CTEs working for this program. Apart from the online training course, RTs also have a one-day orientation course (face-to-face or remotely).

Quality managers have been designated to make sure all RTs comply with the requirements of the program. Their lessons are observed either from their teaching point, from the school, or remotely through videoconference equipment.

The greatest challenge for the remote teacher of English in this program is to find a way to connect with her students. Unlike other forms of distance learning, which allow for people to establish communication when they find the right time to do so, or that only engage a few people per connecting time, the remote teaching done in this program has the vividness of being in the moment facing around 25 students accompanied by a CTE at their own school. The RT then encounters similar challenges of face-to-face teaching, but does not have the same tools available, because she is not physically present in the classroom. Thus, the relationship between students and their

RT is mediated by the technology and the CTE, who not only is responsible for the classroom management during the videoconference lesson, but is the main link between the students and English language learning.

It is essential for the right implementation of this program that the remote teacher who accepts the responsibility to work for *Ceibal en Inglés*, remains at her post throughout the school year, so that a stable teacher-students and teacher-teacher relationship is established. Only through trust built over time, can the main elements of the communicative approach be safely preserved.

The responsibilities of the RT are: a) teach the conversation class, b) weekly coordination with CTE by email to organize the order of lesson plans, c) visit the *Aula Virtual* to see what students have uploaded and acknowledge students' work by clicking on the "like" button.

Teamwork and collaboration are the bases of the program.

The first aim of coordination is to establish a bond of trust between the two teachers. The CTE needs to be certain that the RT will appear on the screen at the pre-established time with her class well planned and organized; and the RT needs to trust that the CTE will be actively participating in the remote lesson, that she will make sure students have had some clarification of vocabulary, structures, etc. before the lesson, and that she will encourage and support practice of the oral activities set by the RT after the lesson.

The elements of coordination are:

- CTE informs RT about her group: number of students, level of English, any special difficulties in the group.
- CTE communicates to the RT the order in which she is planning to implement the syllabus, so that both professionals may begin to organize lesson plans for the videoconference lessons, and the RT may begin preparation of those chosen lesson plans for that particular group.
- CTE informs RT about her school and the specifics of the social context of the group she teaches.
- RT explains what she will do in her remote class, what aspects of each lesson plan she will cover.
- Negotiation of certain aspects such as who of the two professionals will be in charge of using the camera for zooming in and out, when will a chosen student be uploading students' practice to CREA2, etc.

- Negotiation about how to make the best use of those children who are more shy and self-conscious to speak publicly.
- In general, RTs lead the use of technology in this program and help CTEs in their process of appropriation of the LMS and the VC technology.

6. Assessment and evaluation

Formative assessment of the learner's progress is carried out on a regular basis, by both teachers as students practice and rehearse their oral productions first as just practice for the CTE, and later as they present to the RT in an instance of real communication with an addressee who may not speak any Spanish.

The assessment during the year serves several different purposes. Primarily, it gives the two teachers an indication of how the students are doing and lets them adjust the pace and/or revise relevant material as required.

The end-of-year test consists of an oral presentation known as "oral outcome" that follows the assessment regulations established by *Inspección de Inglés Educación Media*. During the oral outcome, both professionals are highly engaged and participative, and although the responsibility to evaluate lies on the CTE, the RT provides feedback in terms of whether communication has been established, as well as accuracy and fluency. Results are to be sent to *Ceibal en Inglés* for analysis and evaluation of the program. This evaluation is integrated to the whole summative assessment done by the CTE for each of her students.

7. Professional Development for CTEs: Language Development Course

Classroom teachers of English participating in the Conversation Class may also improve their level of English by joining a component of *Ceibal en Inglés-Educación Media*, called **Language Development Course (LDC)**. This component invites CTEs to work on their English language proficiency starting from their actual level and taking individual or small group lessons with a more proficient teacher.

CTEs take a placement test and receive approximately 30 distance lessons at the end of which they sit for the *Aptis* test and therefore are able to certify their knowledge and present evidence of their progress.

The LDC program includes:

- Online assessment of CTEs' level of English (*Aptis* test 1, placement test)
- Individual or small group distant face-to-face encounters once a week for a whole year
- *Aptis* test 2 (certification)