

English Language Teaching in Uruguay

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ABSTRACT: Uruguay is quickly emerging as one of the most innovative countries in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) by delivering thousands of lessons weekly in public schools via interactive videoconference in a project called Ceibal en Inglés. This article provides a comprehensive look at the history of ELT practices in Uruguay that both necessitated this bold approach and provided the infrastructure to implement it nationally. Special focus is paid to the public school system with historical changes in ELT and teacher preparation. This overview article discusses the many challenges faced in ‘democratizing’ English language instruction in Uruguay and the new practices, policies, and proposals that support this new national objective.

In a special issue of the journal *World Englishes*, Friedrich and Berns (2003a:83) described South America as ‘the other forgotten continent’ (with Africa being the first). This issue covered five of the continent’s more populous countries (Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru) to help fight the ‘characterizations of South America as a uniform continental block, as culturally and linguistically monolithic’ (Friedrich & Berns 2003a:85) and established a need for more research in English Language Teaching (ELT) in South America. More than a decade later, Melina Porto (2014:4) in writing about ELT in Argentina noted that ‘while the experiences in other areas of the world regarding ELT are well-documented [and she cites several sources], the description of the situation in Latin American countries tends to be underrepresented’, echoing Friedrich and Berns’s summation focused on South America.

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This article seeks to add to the slowly growing body of research on ELT in South America with a focus on one of the South American countries most overlooked in international journals, Uruguay. Friedrich and Berns's (2003b:212, 214) selected bibliography of resources on South America only listed two articles on Uruguay, with one being published in 1942 and the other a web resource from the British Council that is no longer available. Albeit small, Uruguay is gradually gaining more international attention. *The Economist* (2013:n.p.) named Uruguay its first 'country of the year' in 2013 citing the passage of gay marriage and legalization of cannabis as contributing to the country being 'modest yet bold, liberal and fun-loving'. In terms of ELT, Uruguay is one of the boldest, countries now delivering English language instruction to several thousand public classroom groups a week through interactive videoconference in a project called Ceibal en Inglés.

Two major challenges for Uruguay to 'democratize' English language instruction have been the lack of qualified instructors and the quality of those instructors in terms of their language proficiency (Canale 2011a; Brovetto 2011a; Brovetto & Kaplan 2010). Ceibal en Inglés was introduced in 2012 as a new solution to address these challenges and geographic issues, but this project did not start in a vacuum. This article is designed to describe the history and situation of ELT in Uruguay. A literature review and interviews with multiple experts in Uruguay revealed that there is no overview article on ELT in Uruguay and many resources holding pieces to this overview are available only in Spanish and have not made their way into widely circulated peer-reviewed journals. Ceibal en Inglés will certainly gain international attention as it continues to expand in Uruguay and is poised to serve as a model for other countries seeking to address their own ELT challenges. This article will address the context in which this visionary project was developed and then discuss how Ceibal en Inglés is both the

product of the country's positive ELT and technological efforts and a response to challenges found throughout Uruguay's education and teacher preparation systems.

URUGUAY

The European conquistadors arrived in the current country of Uruguay in 1516 and the Portuguese founded the first settlement of Colonia del Sacramento in 1680 along the Río de la Plata across from modern day Buenos Aires (Bralich 1996). The capital city of Montevideo was founded in 1726 and the 'Oriental Republic of Uruguay' (the country's current official name) formed a state in 1828 with its first constitution passed in 1830 (Bralich 1996; Oroño 2011). Shortly after, from 1839 to 1852 the *Guerra Grande* (Great War) gave rise to a conflict between the Blancos ('Whites') and Colorados ('Reds'), which would continue 'in one form or another, military or political, through the second half of the century and beyond' (Whitaker 1976:50). Continued struggles and power shifts between the Blancos and Colorados for more than a century would eventually lead to a *coup d'état* in 1973 putting Uruguay under a dictatorship until 1984, beginning a new era most often referred to as 're-democratization'. In 2004, Tabaré Vázquez was elected president becoming the first candidate from the leftist *Frente Amplio* (Broad Front) to win the election, and in 2005 he became the first president not associated with either the Blancos or Colorados. During Vázquez's first presidential term he championed several new education initiatives, the most famous being Plan Ceibal (which led to Ceibal en Inglés).¹

At 68,037 square miles, Uruguay is slightly smaller than the U.S. state of Missouri with a population of 3,351,016, which is approximately 55% of Missouri's population.² Approximately half of the country's population (1.7 million) live in the capital with the other half living in the rest of the country, which is referred to as the 'interior'. Of the Spanish-speaking countries in

See the published version with correct pagination at: Kaiser, D. (2017). English language teaching in Uruguay. *World Englishes*, 36(4), 744–759. <https://doi.org/10.1111/weng.12261>

South America, Uruguay is the smallest and least populated with Paraguay having more than double its population.

Uruguay is situated south of Brazil and east of Argentina and is also bordered by the Río de la Plata (the River Plate) along the south coast and the Atlantic Ocean along the east coast. The country is less diverse than other South American countries with 88% of the population categorized as white, 8% mestizo, 4% black, and the Amerindian (indigenous) population is ‘practically nonexistent’.³ Friedrich and Berns (2003a:85) claimed that all but Brazil, Suriname, and Guayana in South America has Spanish as their official language and the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency’s ‘World Factbook’ also listed Spanish as the ‘official’ language. Behares and Brovotto (2009:146) and Elizaincín (2009:58), however, noted that—similar to the United States—the country’s constitution has never named an official national language. Elizaincín (2009) included Portuguese and Italian as part of the linguistic landscape but clarified that Uruguay’s constitution has not declared any official language in the republic.

Uruguay’s 2008 *Ley General de Educación* (N° 18.437, General Education Law) now recognizes three ‘maternal languages’: the Spanish of Uruguay, the Portuguese of Uruguay, and the Sign Language of Uruguay (El Senado y la Cámara de Representantes de la República Oriental del Uruguay 2008). David Cassels Johnson (2013:10) contrasted *de jure* (by law) language policies from *de facto* (by practice) policies. Behares and Brovotto (2009:145), in discussing language policy in Uruguay, contrasted policies ‘*establecido por explicitación estatal*’ (established by governmental explicitness) and those by ‘*establecimiento “tácito”*’ (‘tacit’ establishment). In summarizing prior research, Behares and Brovotto (2009:144) noted that Uruguay has opted to approach language planning and policy by these ‘tacit’ means (i.e., *de facto* language policies). Canale (2015:19) noted that while Spanish is the *de facto* language of

Uruguay, it ‘has been the official language of instruction since the first Educational Decree Law was passed in 1877, even though a considerable part of the population at the northern border with Brazil speaks a dialect that is the result of local Spanish-Portuguese contact’ (see also Behares 2007; Behares et al. 2007; Elizaincín 2009). Hamel (2003:122-123) explained that Spanish was used in Uruguay to unify the country, assimilate diverse populations (specifically Portuguese speakers in the north and immigrants in the south), and separate the country from Brazil (see also Barrios et al. 1993; Behares 2007). This complex and contentious history of language policies has important implications especially along the Brazilian border for language policies in public schools where introducing many students’ heritage language of Portuguese into the curriculum may compete with or parallel instruction of English as a foreign language.⁴

New policies in Uruguay’s education system now seek to expand the linguistic repertoire of students as this small country currently plays a vital role in MERCOSUR (the Southern Common Market), the free-trade agreement with Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, and now also Venezuela, and as the country also seeks to participate in the global market and promote tourism (see the web page ‘Uruguay Natural’⁵). The Treaty of Asunción in 1991 set Montevideo as the permanent location for the headquarters of MERCOSUR’s Administrative Secretariat, making Uruguay a vital participant in this economic agreement. To meet regional and international needs, Uruguay’s 2008 General Law of Education called for ‘plurilinguistic education through the teaching of second and foreign languages’ (Chapter VII, Article 50.I.5, my translation). Canale (2011a:57-58, my translation) referenced the 1997 Proceedings of the Working Group on Language Policy of MERCOSUR (*Actas del Grupo de Trabajo sobre Políticas Lingüísticas del MERCOSUR*; n° 1/97) as mentioning ‘the supremacy of English in the education systems of the region as the only obligatory foreign language and the socially preferred language’. Due to these

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regional and international interests, the expansion and strengthening of English language instruction in the public school system has become an even higher priority in Uruguay.

URUGUAY'S EDUCATION SYSTEM

Lanzano (2004:8) listed Uruguay's education system as one of the oldest in South America along with Argentina and Chile. The first religious school in Uruguay was founded in 1624; exactly one century later a Jesuit school opened in Colonia (Bralich 1996:10). Free, obligatory, and secular education was made official in 1877 by the *Ley de Educación Común* (Common Education Law), famously credited to José Pedro Varela, whose portrait hangs alongside that of founding father José Gervasio Artigas in most Uruguayan public school classrooms today. The 1877 Common Education Law also established that education would be given in the 'national language' throughout Uruguay, which has since established Spanish as the *de facto* official language of public education.

During the beginning of the 20th century, public education continued to expand with 1935 marking secondary education breaking from being under the control of the country's one public university, the University of the Republic (Bralich 1996; Fernández Aguerre 2009). In 1973, under the *Ley de Educación* or *Ley Sanguinetti*, compulsory education was expanded from six years of primary school to include three years of secondary school (Mancebo 2000; Rama 2004). These additional three years of secondary school would come to be known as *Ciclo Básico* (Basic Cycle) with the passing of *Plan 86* in 1986 (Bralich 1996). In 2008, the General Education Law extended obligatory education from nine years to fourteen, including two years of initial education and six years total of secondary education after six years of primary education (Chapter II, Article 7). While fourteen years of education are now obligatory by law,

the repetition and drop-out rates have been a national concern (Fernández Aguerre 2009), with only 34% of students ages 18 to 23 completing secondary school according to data from 2011 (OECD 2016:125).

Supervision of the public schools falls under the Administración Nacional de Educación Pública (ANEP), the National Administration of Public Education. Then there are four autonomous councils that oversee various aspects of the Uruguayan public school system. The Consejo de Educación Inicial y Primaria (CEIP) is responsible for initial and primary education. The Consejo de Educación Secundaria (CES) oversees secondary education, which is divided in two ‘cycles’: *ciclo básico* for the first three years with common classes and *bachillerato* for the last three years offering diversified tracks of study. The Consejo de Educación Técnico Profesional (CETP) administers the Universidades del Trabajo del Uruguay (UTUs), which are the technical or trade school option for secondary education. Finally, the Consejo de Formación de Educación (CFE) manages teacher preparation (*formación docente*). These include the Institutos Normales (II.NN.) and the Institutos de Formación Docente (IFDs) to prepare teachers for primary schools, the Instituto de Profesores Artigas (IPA) and the Centros Regionales de Profesores (CERPs) to prepare teachers for secondary schools, and the Instituto Normal de Enseñanza Técnica (INET) to prepare teachers for the technical schools (teacher training will be addressed in more detail in a future section). An additional council, the Consejo Directivo Central (CODICEN), is responsible for general oversight of public education and education policy. In 2006, CODICEN established the *Comisión de Políticas Lingüísticas en la Educación Pública* (Commission of Language Policies in Public Education, commonly referred to as ‘*Políticas Lingüísticas*’) to address language policies in the public school system (see Behares et

al. 2007 for four initial documents from this commission that include their guiding recommendations). Table 1 charts the public school system of Uruguay.

Table 1. The public school system in Uruguay under the supervision of ANEP-CODICEN (Note that the secondary schools in Uruguay use grades 1-6 to designate grades 7-12)

Level	General Age of Students	Supervisory Council in CODICEN
Initial Education (2 years)	4-5 years old	CEIP
Primary School (grades 1-6)	6-11 years old	CEIP
Secondary School <i>Ciclo Básico</i> (grades 1-3)	12-14 years old	CES
Secondary School <i>Bachillerato</i> (grades 4-6)	15-17 years old or older	CES
Technical Schools (UTUs)	12-17 or older	CETP
II.NN., IFDs, IPA, CERPs, and INET	18 or older	CFE

In addition to the public schools, Uruguay has numerous private schools. According to data representing 2011, private schools accounted for 16% of primary school enrollments while they accounted for 15.6% of secondary school enrollments (OECD 2016:121). Canale (2015:21) noted that ‘private teaching is to date associated with middle and upper classes’. At the university level the University of the Republic (founded in 1849) held a monopoly in Uruguay until the first private university (the Catholic University of Uruguay) opened its doors in 1984. Today there are four private universities and nine higher education institutes, in addition to other institutions of higher education, such as those for teacher preparation and military education (Oddone & Perera 2004). The University of the Republic (UdelaR) accounts for 80.7% of enrollments at the tertiary level (based on data from 2011), which is slightly less than at the

primary and secondary levels (OECD 2016:121). In 2014 Uruguay introduced a new public education option at the tertiary level, the Universidad Tecnológica (UTECH), or Technical University of Uruguay, with new regional branches called Institutos Tecnológicos Regionales (ITRs), or Regional Technical Institutes planned for Rivera, Durazno, and Frey Bentos (Río Negro) (Redacción 180 2016).

ENGLISH IN THE URUGUAYAN SCHOOL SYSTEM

Canale (2011a:56) discussed the history of foreign language instruction in the secondary schools in the 19th century noting that in 1854 students could choose between Latin, English, and French and that in 1886 the options changed to German, English, and French, with French being the most popular. La Paz Barbarich (2012) traced the history of foreign language instruction in Uruguay's public secondary schools from 1941 through 2003 through a series of education policies (for a complete set of these plans as organized by *Políticas Lingüísticas* see Behares et al. 2007:158–184).

In 1941 secondary school students in their first three years took three years of French and in their third year also took English (La Paz Barbarich 2012). Beginning in 1976, students could choose between French or English until 1993 when English became obligatory during the first three years (La Paz Barbarich 2012). Beginning in 1996, English became the only foreign language option in the public secondary schools and other languages were moved to Centros de Lenguas Extranjeras (CLEs), or foreign language centers, also under the supervision of CES (La Paz Barbarich 2012). In the last three years of secondary school, French, English, and Italian were foreign language options from 1941 through 1996 when English became the only required foreign language for all six years of secondary school (La Paz Barbarich 2012).

In the public schools at the primary level, English was introduced much later. Canale (2011a) cited plans beginning in 1993 to introduce English in the public primary schools. One challenge of introducing foreign language into the primary schools is that most of these schools are categorized as ‘common schools’, in which students only attend four hours a day, from 8 AM to noon or from 1 PM to 5 PM. CEIP has instituted several ‘complete day’ (*tiempo completo*) and ‘extended day’ (*tiempo extendido*) schools (205 and 44 schools, respectively), with 6.5- and 7-hour school days, respectively, into approximately 12% of the schools (Presidencia de la República 2015). With the additional hours, introducing English into the curriculum has been easier. CEIP created the Department of Second and Foreign Languages in 2008 with the goal of universalizing second language instruction (English or Portuguese) into schools with longer class days (CEIP 2014). An initiative from 2012 reached full implementation in all ‘complete day’ and ‘extended day’ schools by 2014. At present, public school children in these longer school day programs may receive up to seven years of English language instruction between their initial education and sixth grade of primary school. Data from a 2016 evaluative report on English language instruction in fourth through sixth grade quantified the coverage of English language instruction in 2015. Eighty-seven percent of fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade students (106,105 students) received English classes, with 77,068 students (73%) participating in Ceibal en Inglés while the other 29,037 (27%) received their instruction through Department of Second and Foreign Languages (Plan Ceibal et al. 2016a:2).

Recommendations from *Políticas Lingüísticas* in 2007 (Behares et al. 2007) and the 2008 General Education Law, which seeks to ‘democratize’ foreign language in primary schools and promote a ‘plurilinguistic’ society (Brovetto 2011a; Canale 2009), supported the expansion of English in the primary schools. These efforts became national policy in 2008 when CODICEN

decided that English would be the first second language introduced universally into the primary schools (Brovetto 2011a). While CEIP found ways to integrate English (or Portuguese) into all of the primary schools with longer school days, introducing English into the common schools with only a four-hour school day would be a unique challenge, which will be discussed later in this article.

Canale (2015) also traced private instruction of English in Uruguay to members of the middle and upper classes starting in the early 19th century, along with the foundation of numerous private institutes and schools starting in the mid-19th century. Today, many private English institutes have opened branches and franchises throughout the country. These include 4D Content English; International House London Institute; Eureka, the Learning Center; Oxbridge Institute; The Binational Center, Alianza Cultural Uruguay-Estados Unidos; Instituto Cultural Anglo-Uruguayo; Dickens; Focus - Inglés Empresarial (Business English); and Berlitz Uruguay. In addition to private institutes serving children and adults, there are private schools with a stronger focus on English language instruction, such as the British Schools, the Anglo School, and the Uruguayan American School. The extensive access to English language instruction to the middle and upper classes through private schools or private English lessons, the expectation that all students learn English in secondary school, and the increasing global and economic expectations for English knowledge made expansion of English in the primary-level public schools a difficult but necessary challenge to face. Canale (2009:6, my translation) in writing about initiatives to expand English in Uruguay's public schools specifically connects this 'vast tradition of teaching English in private institutions' to this 'general agreement about the utility of [English], which is founded in arguments of technical and socioeconomic benefits'. This expansion of English language instruction in the public schools—which was further

supported by the 2008 General Education Law and ANEP-CODICEN's policies—and the expansion of Plan Ceibal in providing laptops to school children together contribute to Uruguay's efforts to democratize, in essence providing resources and opportunities to all students studying in the public sector that were previously more limited to the private sector.

The literature review conducted for this article found no articles that focus on English at the tertiary level, but institutions' websites and publicly available documents provide some information on these offerings and expectations. In the public sector, course requirements at the University of the Republic (UdelaR) are based on a student's major. Some majors include coursework on reading comprehension in English and technical English. The Instituto Nacional de Empleo y Formación Profesional (INEFOP) offers three level of English through UdelaR sites in three cities with the goal of reaching the 'independent user' level (Facultad de Humanidades y Ciencias de la Educación 2014), which would correspond to B1 or B2 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), which is the scale used by the majority of institutes in Uruguay (Achugar et al. 2016:11). All students at the state-run teacher colleges for preparation to teach in the secondary schools (the IPA and CERPs, discussed below) must now take an English course in their fourth year of studies (regardless their field) in a requirement dating back to Plan 1997 CERP (CFE 2016:5-6). The curriculum for the new Technical University of Uruguay (UTEC) also requires English for all students with exit level proficiencies based on entrance scores and length of academic program (UTEC 2016).

In the private sector, the University ORT Uruguay offers two cycles of English, the first of which aims for B1- or B2-level proficiency while the second is designed to prepare students to 'handle the language fluently and confidently in diverse situations' (Universidad ORT Uruguay 2016, my translation). The Catholic University of Uruguay in 2005 began requiring students to

demonstrate English proficiency equivalent to the Preliminary English Test (PET), which would correspond to B1 on the CEFR (Universidad Católica del Uruguay 2016). The same document listed offerings through their Centro de Idiomas (Language Center) in conversation; language expansion; a First Certificate of English (FCE) (Cambridge exam) prep; and workshops in legal, business, and medical English. Only the University of Montevideo listed programs focused on the English language: a degree in translation and interpretation (Spanish-English), a primary bilingual teacher education certificate, and a secondary teacher education certificate in English (Universidad de Montevideo 2014). This brief survey of tertiary education shows that the expectations of English proficiency and the opportunities to study it focus more on reaching B1 or B2 proficiency. In fact, none of the reviewed documents specified a level of C1 or above on the CEFR (with the exception of the English teacher training programs, which will be addressed later).

A new initiative from ANEP starting in 2013 began to send students from the public primary schools to sit for Cambridge exams to certify their level of English (Políticas Lingüísticas 2016a). In 2015 approximately 2200 primary school students sat for the Young Learners of English (YLE) Cambridge Exam for the levels ‘Starters’ and ‘Movers’, which correspond to A1 on the CEFR (Políticas Lingüísticas 2016a). At the secondary level (CES and UTU), students and teachers may also sit for Cambridge exams. In 2015, 362 students and 19 English teachers in the secondary school system received certificates to acknowledge their proficiency level (Políticas Lingüísticas 2016b). In a media release on this assessment initiative, Laura Motta of ANEP-CODICEN spoke in favor of students receiving internationally recognized certificates affirming their contribution to promoting a plurilinguistic society (cited in Políticas Lingüísticas 2016a).

LANGUAGE TEACHING TRAINING IN URUGUAY

In the private sector, schools and institutes recruit native speakers of English, hire proficient English speakers trained to teach English, or train new English teachers through their own teacher training programs. This process is similar to many other countries and is based on market needs.

In Uruguay, the state supports teacher-training programs to prepare English teachers for the public schools. Primary school teacher candidates may attend the Institutos Normales, which date back to the 1880s (Bralich 1996:207; Mancebo 1998:1). Secondary school teacher candidates may attend the Instituto de Profesores Artigas (IPA), which were not instituted until 1949 (Bralich 1996:110). Teacher training remained centralized in Uruguay for several decades forcing all teacher candidates to travel to the capital to complete their programs. The formation of twenty-two different Institutos de Formación Docente (IFDs) by 1977 provided opportunities throughout the country for teacher candidates to pursue programs to prepare them to teach in the primary schools (Mancebo 1998:1). Secondary education teacher training underwent a similar decentralization beginning with a new reform in 1996 leading to the opening of six Centros Regionales de Profesores (CERPs), the first two of which graduated candidates in 1999 and the last of which opened in 2002 (Rama 2004:25; Viera Duarte 2013:5). In 2003 a new modality option was added for students in the interior called *modalidad semipresencial*, which allows students to complete most portions online with some classes and final exams done in person (Buquet 2005:59).

The program in teaching English is one of seventeen specialty tracks offered in the IPA and now also available in the CERPs (Comisión de Políticas Lingüísticas 2013:17). In 2008 a

new law and plan worked toward providing consistency in the programs of the IPA and CERPs. To address the new need in primary schools, a new track was proposed in 2009 and implemented in 2010 for the Institutos Normales and IFDs to prepare primary school English teachers (Comisión de Políticas Lingüísticas 2013:17; Teijeira 2012:351). A July 2016 report from CFE notes that students need a minimum of B2 on the CEFR to gain entrance to any one of the English teacher training programs (IPA, CERP, IFD, or *semipresencial*) with an expected exit proficiency of C2 (Achugar et al. 2016:11). The same report compiled results from 52 graduates on the exit proficiencies using the Oxford Placement Test (OPT), which were 6% achieving C2, 41% C1, 39% B2, and 14% B1 (Achugar et al. 2016:11). Entrance results on the OPT from 2015 and 2016 were also reported showing that 57% and 54% of applicants, respectively, did not meet the B2 minimum requirement (Achugar et al. 2016:13). These data demonstrate a challenge both in recruiting qualified teacher candidates and graduating English teachers with higher levels of proficiency. To address these challenges Achugar et al. (2016:19) proposed a new track for applicants with B1 level and that the expected exit level be adjusted to C1.

In addition to language proficiency level, certification requirements to teach in the public schools also pose a challenge because the public secondary schools do not require completion of one of CFE's programs. Reports from ANEP have revealed that English has the least number of certified teachers with the percentage being as low as 33% according to data from a 2007 census (Cardozo Gaibisso 2012; Canale 2011a). The lack of certified teachers for the secondary schools requires CES to hire uncertified instructors to fill more than half of the English teaching force. Even at the primary level where teachers are required to be certified by CFE, CEIP had to lower their requirements of C1 proficiency to B2 or First Certificate of English in a 2016 open call for English teachers (ANEP-CEIP 2016). This is alarming when considering that B2 is the level

required to gain entrance to an English teacher-training program. The paucity of qualified English instructors for the public schools and the 2008 goal to universalize and strengthen the instruction of English would require a new and ambitious plan. This plan is Ceibal en Inglés.

CEIBAL EN INGLÉS

Two years before the Uruguayan government mandated the expansion of foreign language instruction into the primary schools, president Tabaré Vázquez (during his first non-consecutive term) announced another ambitious plan in 2006. Plan Ceibal (piloted in 2007) seeks to address the ‘digital divide’ (*brecha digital*). Rivoir Cabrera (2009:305, my translation) noted that *Plan de Conectividad Educativa de Informática Básica para el Aprendizaje en Línea* (Ceibal), which essentially means the Plan for Basic Online Education, ‘has no precedent at a global level, in that it deals with a public policy of consistent universal character in issuing a laptop to each child and teacher in all of the public schools in the country’. Plan Ceibal is based on MIT’s One Laptop per Child (OLPC) program and has succeeded in distributing laptops, called XOs or ‘ceibalitas’, to all public school students and teachers.

Also known as the ‘\$100 laptop project’, this international project has received the support of the U.N. Development Program (Dervis 2006). Martínez, Díaz, and Alonso (2009:12) summarized the quick timeline from 2007 to 2009 as bringing 341,259 laptops to primary school students and 6000 to secondary school students, with 95% having access to the Internet from their classrooms. Current public school teachers and students in the state teacher preparation schools also receive laptops. Antel, Uruguay’s telecommunications company, has also been a primary partner in the program supplying free Wi-Fi access in connected public schools and in

numerous public plazas throughout cities in the country. Finally, videoconference equipment was also installed into each public school building throughout the country.

The expansive infrastructure laid by Plan Ceibal made Ceibal en Inglés possible. Alexander (2015:7) described the project Ceibal en Inglés as ‘a symbiotic relationship between the children, [classroom teachers], [remote teachers], language institutes, [Ceibal en Inglés], Plan Ceibal, the British Council, ANEP and Antel’. Ceibal en Inglés uses remote teachers to deliver English language lessons via interactive videoconference using a unique pedagogical model that combines remote teaching, collaborative teaching, and blended learning (Plan Ceibal 2014:2; Plan Ceibal 2016:2). From its pilot in 2012 through the 2014 school year (the Uruguayan school year runs from March through December), the project focused only on grades 4 through 6 of the primary schools. A remote teacher delivers one 45-minute English lesson through videoconference and the classroom teacher expands on those topics during two more 45-minute classes (Plan Ceibal 2014). Remote teachers are either employed by the British Council in one of their remote teaching centers in Montevideo (Uruguay), Buenos Aires and Córdoba (Argentina), London (England), and Cebu (The Philippines) or through a contract with one of ten private language institutes in Uruguay (listed earlier). The curriculum, which was developed by the British Council and Ceibal en Inglés, is divided into three levels. For each level there are a total of thirty weeks of lesson plans, which are provided to classroom teachers in both English and Spanish. Remote and face-to-face instruction is supplemented by CREA 2, a Schoology online learning management system where students, remote teachers, and classroom teachers may share materials, submit and rate assignments, and participate in an online community. The curriculum was designed to focus on ‘the life of the students’ in level one and later incorporate

‘academic content related to the official primary school curriculum’ in levels two and three (Plan Ceibal 2014:3).

In 2015 Ceibal en Inglés expanded into the secondary schools in all six grade levels. While the primary school program is designed to provide English language instruction in schools that do not have access to a face-to-face English instructor, the secondary school program (called ‘Conversation Classes’) uses native-speaking remote teachers ‘to enhance oral skills in English in Uruguayan secondary schools, and reinforce the importance of collaborative teaching to strengthen English teaching in general’ (Plan Ceibal 2016:1). Only native speakers are used in this optional program ‘[to bring] the vividness of the language to the classroom and the sharpness of the culture’ through their personal experiences (Plan Ceibal 2016:4). When an English teacher opts into the project, a Conversation Class is scheduled weekly during one of her four regularly scheduled English periods (or one of the three periods for groups in the final three years, or *bachillerato*). English teachers participate in these classes through collaborative teaching. Because the secondary school English language curriculum is organized around thematic units, a curriculum team developed a series of lesson plans for the Conversation Classes based on these thematic units. In 2016 the Conversation Classes were also made available in the UTUs. With this expansion into the UTUs, remote English language teaching through Ceibal en Inglés is now available in a total of nine years of public school instruction across Uruguay’s public school system (the final three years of primary school and all six years of both secondary and technical schools).

Ceibal en Inglés has expanded quickly in its first five years. Table 2 presents data provided by Plan Ceibal of class groups served in these programs. According to data provided, as of 2016 the primary school and secondary school programs (excluding the UTUs) provide

remote classes to all 19 of the governmental departments of Uruguay. These data show how quickly Uruguay has been able to use strong language policies and partnerships to democratize English language instruction while strengthening the quality of instruction.

Table 2. Data on the expansion of Ceibal en Inglés (based on data provided by Plan Ceibal).

Level	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Primary Schools (<i>escuelas</i>) (only grades 4-6)	48 groups (pilot phase)	500 groups at beginning of year, which expanded to 1000	Approx. 2000 groups	Approx. 3300 groups	Approx. 3500 groups (with 3172 classroom teachers)
Secondary Schools (<i>liceos</i>)		1 group (pre-pilot)	59 groups	344 groups	610 groups
Secondary Technical Schools (UTUs)					87 groups

THE ROLE OF ENGLISH IN URUGUAY

Scholars writing about ELT in Uruguay have acknowledged the legacy of imperialism (Brovetto 2011b; La Paz Barbarich 2012; Canale 2015) and the role of globalization (Canale & Pugliese 2011a; Canale 2011b; Brovetto 2015) yet these same authors also highlighted benefits associated with English. Brovetto (2011b:87-88) discussed the social prestige and the opportunities in education and employment associated with English. Canale and Pugliese (2011a:49) noted associations of English to socioeconomic advancement, technology, and a future global culture. In analyzing the discourse of English in Uruguay, Canale (2011a:69, my translation) described an ‘emphasis on the language as a commodity that is highly valued and fundamental for the future of students’.

While there are several published peer-reviewed sociolinguistic profiles on larger South American countries such as Argentina (Friedrich 2003; Maersk Nielsen 2003), Brazil (Friedrich 2000; Friedrich 2002), and Colombia (Velez-Rendon 2003), research into the functions of English and the attitudes of learners in Uruguay appear limited to a few studies more recently published in Spanish. Using discourse analysis to examine Uruguayan print media between 2006 and 2009, Canale and Pugliese (2011b:23, my translation) identified two common images used by the media to describe English, that of an ‘immanent threat to other languages’ and a ‘healthy biological organism’. López (2013:46, my translation) conducted a survey of 169 Spanish speakers living in Montevideo and found three reasons they frequently provided for needing English in the future in Uruguay: ‘English as an instrumental language, English as an international or universal language, [and] English as a means to personal satisfaction’.

Canale, Pugliese, and Ruel (2013) used a verbal-guise technique to study the ability of 141 secondary- and tertiary-level students in Montevideo to identify and judge the ‘correctness’ of standard British (RP), general American (GA), Australian (AUS), and Indian English (IND). Their results found that GA and RP were the most recognizable (64.6% and 63.8% identifying correctly, respectively), followed by IND (54.1%) and AUS (8.0%). While IND was fairly identifiable, respondents categorized this accent as an ‘incorrect’ model of English (75.1%) in contrast to categorizing RP, GA, and AUS all as ‘correct’ models (87.9%, 75.7%, and 77.6%, respectively). Their results show that these students both identify and value RP and GA varieties of English more, which is consistent with the varieties in highest circulation in Uruguay’s English instruction (Canale, Pugliese & Ruel 2013).

Official documents and reports from various Uruguayan education councils also make explicit the benefits of English for its nation’s students. *Políticas Lingüísticas* cited

instrumental, cognitive, and attitudinal (or identity-based) reasons for including foreign language instruction in the public school curriculum (Behares et al. 2007:51). They further justified English as the obligatory foreign language for the following reasons:

English is one of most extensive languages of communication at the international level, in the widest and most diverse professional, cultural, and disciplinary fields, at least in the Western world. On the other hand, English is the language that is the most studied as a foreign language in the world, it is the language most present in scientific production and on the Internet, and also is the language in which most scientific and cultural material is produced. (Behares et al. 2007:52, my translation)

The official curriculum for initial and primary education justified the teaching of English in the primary schools for the following reason:

In the contemporary international context, English has a substantive relevance in that it is a language of international communication, the most learned foreign language, and the one in which the greatest amount of knowledge is produced. [It is the language] most frequently [used] to access scientific and cultural material. Therefore, the insertion of English into school facilitates the access of a multitude of contemporary cultures that speak this language. (ANEP-CEIP 2009:55–56, my translation)

And in the newest report from CFE on preparing English teachers, Achugar et al. (2016:17, my translation) noted that teaching and learning English ‘are necessary competencies to function in a globalizing world where the information and contact with people from other cultures are common’.

CONCLUSION

For this ‘bold and liberal’ country, addressing both the digital divide and the English divide has been a high priority. Historically, access to instruction leading to higher proficiency levels of English (C1 or C2 on the CEFR) has been reserved for those who could attend private bilingual schools and/or attend English classes at private institutes. While new public policies seek to provide more equitable opportunities to develop the technological and linguistic skills desired in the 21st century, Uruguay currently lacks the number of instructors that can provide students the kind of English base needed to develop more advanced skills such as reading scientific texts and using English for international communication. Ceibal en Inglés has helped universalize English language instruction in the public schools at the primary level by developing crucial partnerships both within Uruguay and abroad. This program has provided hundreds of new employment opportunities in ELT not only in newly created remote teaching centers in four different countries but also from many of Uruguay’s private institutes where graduates of private schools and programs now also serve the needs of public school children.

A 2016 evaluative report conducted collaboratively by Plan Ceibal, CEIP, CODICEN, and the British Council compared data on the English language knowledge achieved by students in both the interactive videoconference and face-to-face programs. Results from this 2015 study indicated ‘significant interannual improvement in all sociocultural contexts’ in both instructional modalities (Plan Ceibal et al. 2016b:8). Data show a slight advantage to students in the three-year Ceibal en Inglés program compared to those with up to seven years of exposure through the face-to-face program in vocabulary, reading, and grammar and in listening, while those in the face-to-face program show a slight advantage in writing skills. Although the data comparing each of the five proficiency levels (A0, A1-, A1+, A2-, and A2+ on the CEFR) show small

differences (between 0% and 7%), the data strongly suggest that primary school students can achieve equal, if not better, English proficiency with only three years of instruction in the interactive videoconference program than with up to seven years of exposure in the face-to-face program (Plan Ceibal et al. 2016a:8). This study clearly demonstrates that Ceibal en Inglés can deliver an effective foreign language program in less time through centralized lesson plans and instruction shared by remote teachers and classroom instructors. Language planners seeking to expand and strengthen English language instruction in their countries may want to consider the possibilities of interactive videoconference as employed by Uruguay's Ceibal en Inglés.

At the secondary level, current instruction in English is being supplemented with Ceibal en Inglés's conversation classes conducted by native speakers, which strengthens the oral language skills of not only the students but also of public school teachers. As more students leave primary school with a strong base in English the secondary schools will be able to offer an updated English curriculum that builds upon that language base to prepare students for tertiary education and the workforce where reading technical texts and holding sustained conversations in English is becoming increasingly valued. Adjustments to teacher preparation curriculums are already being made to further support these changes. Time will tell if changes being made in the primary and secondary schools will result in changes at the tertiary level, especially at the public universities.

Another long-term consideration is the sustainability of a project like Ceibal en Inglés. In his opening keynote address at the first conference (*encuentro*) on this project in September 2016, Plan Ceibal president Miguel Brechner cited that Plan Ceibal only costs \$100 (USD) per year per student and is already delivering more than 100 simultaneous videoconference English lessons per hour during regular classroom hours. While the cost per student is economic,

schools, teachers, and students often face technical issues due to the frequent use of laptops and videoconference equipment often resulting in damage or an even more frequent issue—dead laptop batteries in classrooms with no easy access power outlets.

While Ceibal en Inglés has been developed to address the lack of quality English teachers in Uruguay, changes throughout all levels of education are certain to produce more qualified English teachers capable of and seeking to teach English in the classroom. These decisions will be most complex in the primary schools. Many future primary school teachers may feel comfortable teaching English as they would any other subject, more schools may hire dedicated English teachers to provide scheduled English lessons (which is already supported by the Department of Second and Foreign Language), or remote teachers may be used as a supplement to English instruction as currently done in the secondary schools. Along with negotiating teaching contracts, the English language curriculum will also need further negotiation to coordinate the efforts of Plan Ceibal working with the British Council, CEIP's Department of Second and Foreign Languages, and the English programs of CES and CETP at the secondary level.

A new initiative in the public schools has its eyes set on the future, 'Plan Nacional de Educación: 2010-2030' (Martinis et al. 2010). The goal for foreign languages in this plan is to have students graduating from secondary schools by 2030 proficient in three languages (*El Observador* 2016), which is inline with the 2007 recommendations from *Políticas Lingüísticas* (Behares et al. 2007) and the 2008 General Education Law, which both promote a 'plurilinguistic society'. Laura Motta of ANEP-CODICEN outlined this process for graduates of secondary school in the obligatory subject of English: 'today we have some students reaching B1. From here to 2020 we will work on everyone reaching this level. The second decade we will

concentrate on everyone reaching level B2' (as cited in *El Observador* 2016, my translation). Strengthening English language instruction at all levels will be necessary to achieve this goal.

With Ceibal en Inglés, Uruguay has taken a large challenge and converted it into an innovative solution that may provide new ELT possibilities to dozens of other countries seeking to expand English instruction in their public schools. The project also demonstrates how solutions found to address challenges in one area (here primary education) may be adapted to address challenges in other areas (such as in the secondary schools). This new type of instruction is slowly changing the entire landscape of ELT in Uruguay, but is also posed to influence English language instruction throughout the world. This new remote teaching model of language instruction will no doubt be met with skepticism and resistance, but today in Uruguay public school children see learning English from a teacher videoconferencing in from the Philippines as normal as many North Americans find receiving technical support from someone talking to them on the phone from India.

NOTES

1. Tabaré Vázquez served as president of Uruguay from 2005 through 2010 and was elected for a second five-year term in 2015. Uruguay allows a maximum of two non-consecutive terms. The only other president to serve two terms was Julio María Sanguinetti of the Colorado (Red) Party (1985-1990 and 1995-2000).
2. The most recent population statistics on Uruguay came from the Central Intelligence Agency's 'The World Factbook' at https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/print_uy.html. (19 February, 2017.)
3. The most recent demographics on Uruguay also came from the CIA's 'World Factbook'.

See the published version with correct pagination at: Kaiser, D. (2017). English language teaching in Uruguay. *World Englishes*, 36(4), 744–759. <https://doi.org/10.1111/weng.12261>

4. Documents from CEIP often use both the terms ‘Segunda Lengua’ (Second Language) and ‘Lengua Extranjera’ (Foreign Language) to discuss language programs (which only cover English and Portuguese) in acknowledgment that Portuguese is not a ‘foreign’ language for many Uruguayans, though it may be for others. (For more on the special role of the Portuguese language and Portuguese language instruction in Uruguay see Barrios et al. 1993; Barrios 1996; Behares 2007; Behares et al. 2007; Behares & Brovetto 2009; Elizaincín 2009.)
5. See the website ‘Uruguay Natural’ from the Ministerio de Turismo at <http://www.turismo.gub.uy/index.php/en/>. (26 October, 2016.)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Onsite research in Uruguay was supported by a Faculty Research Grant in 2015 provided by Webster University and a Fulbright U.S. Scholars Grant in 2016 by the Fulbright Commission of Uruguay. Additional support and access to numerous documents were provided by staff at Plan Ceibal and by members from various councils in ANEP, including CODICEN, CEIP, CES, and CFE. Numerous scholars in Uruguay were also extremely helpful in locating and accessing additional sources, reviewing drafts of this manuscript, and clarifying many topics. These scholars include Germán Canale, Aldo Rodríguez, Gabriel Díaz Maggioli, David Lind, Silvia Laborde, Julie Pelto, Claudia Brovetto, Gabriela Kaplan, and Cecilia Marconi.

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See the published version with correct pagination at: Kaiser, D. (2017). English language teaching in Uruguay. *World Englishes*, 36(4), 744–759. <https://doi.org/10.1111/weng.12261>

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