

PRELIM 2

Brazil: BRAZ-TESOL Public School SIG with Wimbledon School of English

August 2022

Project background

Partnership overview		
Course overview	ETA partner	BRAZ-TESOL Public School SIG
	UKI partner	Wimbledon School of English
	Course length	6 weeks (2 blocks of 3 weeks)
	Number of groups/cohorts	2 main groups; 15 sub-groups
Participant profile	Total number of CPs	187
	Language level(s)	A2-B1; B2 – C1
	CPs' teaching context	Primary and Secondary, urban and rural
Mode of delivery	Synchronous platforms used	Zoom; Google Docs
	Synchronous session length	100 minutes
	Synchronous session frequency	Weekly
	Asynchronous workload	1-2 hrs pw
Course content	Language development focus	Classroom language – giving instructions (verbal & written), expressing opinions (strong & tentative), expressing problems, offering solutions/advice, dealing with cultural differences, talking about tendencies, how to set rules for expected behaviour, how to politely inform someone how they've broken the rules, expressing hopes and expectations for yourself and for other people.
	Methodology focus	Student-centred learning, project work, how to approach pronunciation teaching.
	Technology focus	Use of Google suite for sharing materials

Description of the partners

The Partners for this project were BRAZ-TESOL Public School SIG and Wimbledon School of English, London (WSE)

The BRAZ-TESOL Public School SIG was created in July 2012 to support English teachers working across Brazil in public schools with training and development in the English language and in English teaching methodology. One of their aims is to build a national community of practice. The main contacts for this project were Maria Valésia Silva da Silva (President of the BRAZ- TESOL Rio Grande do Sul Chapter and Leader of the BRAZTESOL Public School SIG), and MarciaZanbom Farais (Public School SIG Secretary). They also acted as mentors to other CPs throughout the course, along with other members of the SIG team.

WSE is an independently owned language school based in South-West London with a peak capacity of approximately 400 full-time students.

Academic Staff consists of 16 – 28 teachers (depending on the time of year) and 3 – 5 Academic Managers. There are (at peak) 20 non-academic administration staff.

Multiple General and Specialist courses, including a range of Teacher Training courses, are offered in-school, online, and hybrid, both to groups and to individual students. Training courses are also conducted overseas, and non-timetabled ESP courses are available on demand.

Both partners participated in PRELIM 1, on different projects.

Key features of the context

BRAZ-TESOL operates in all areas of Brazil, and has teachers in five key geographic regions: North, North-East, South, South-East, and Central. Internet connectivity was an initial concern, given that the ETA was keen for those teachers in more rural areas to be offered places first, as they had fewer CPD opportunities, but assurances were given that all CPs would be able to connect (no extra connectivity funding was requested). By the beginning of the course, a total of 187 CPs had registered (including 15 locally-based mentors), drawn equally from the different regions. The gender ratio was approximately 75:25 female/male. CPs were from both the Primary and Secondary sectors.

It should be pointed out that while a very high number of CPs registered, actual attendance was between 35 and 45 CPs.

Outline of the course and rationale

The key aim of the course was to improve CPs' confidence in using English in the classroom – this is the stated aim of the overall PRELIM project, and had been strongly agreed to by the ETA, meaning that initial course discussions were very straightforward. However, the main challenge to the WSE course designers and trainers was that the ETA wished to offer the course to a much higher number of CPs than WSE had experienced in the previous project, and indeed, in other courses offered by the school. This meant that the focus of the course changed from an online training room, with a high level of interaction between the trainer and CPs, to more of a lecture / webinar approach.

In order to maintain a high level of communication throughout the sessions, each main group was divided into sub-groups of 8-10 CPs, each led by an ETA-appointed mentor, whose role it was to lead and monitor discussions in break-out rooms. This mentor system also allowed CPs who may lack

confidence to have a conduit to the trainer. Sub-groups would for the first three weeks of the course be established according to region; for the last three weeks, when confidence is expected to be higher, the sub-groups would be mixed, giving the CPs the opportunity to share ideas and experience with colleagues from different areas of Brazil.

Asynchronous tasks were mainly reflective in tone, and the sub-group would work together using Telegram, led by the mentor, and the mentor would feed back to the trainer.

Following research conducted by the ETA into work schedules and availability of CPs, it was decided that there would be two group sessions per week: group 1 on Wednesdays at 14.00 – 15.40 (17.00 – 18.40 UK time); group 2 on Saturdays at 10.00 – 11.40 (13.00 – 14.40 UK time)

Project findings

Working in partnership

Contact between WSE and BRAZ-TESOL was established by the British Council, and initial contact took place between the partners by email and then over Zoom. Key participants in the meetings were Jo Kroussaniotakis (DOS) and Julian Oakley (ADoS) of WSE, and Maria Valésia Silva da Silva and Marcia Farais of BRAZ-TESOL. Follow up meetings involved at least one member from WSE and one from BRAZ-TESOL. Information sharing was done via email and Zoom, and a WhatsApp group was set up, which also included the course designer and trainers.

Course aims were established very quickly, and this was achieved chiefly by the fact that both the UKI and ETA had a clear understanding of the principles behind the overall project, and that the ETA was very open about what was expected and what the unique requirements of Brazilian teachers were. From the very beginning the WSE team understood the wide geographic scope of the CPs, and that there would be a much higher number of CPs than WSE were used to. BRAZ-TESOL's clarity of understanding of the aims and of their own teachers' requirements made course design straightforward. The ETA was very keen to take responsibility for recruitment and testing (using WSE-provided tests), and to take on mentoring duties throughout the course, meaning that WSE trainers would be able to focus on delivering the course. The ETA's role in recruiting and testing meant that it was able to provide WSE with a breakdown of levels and requirements.

BRAZ-TESOL showed consistent enthusiasm for the project, and this made PRELIM 2 a very rewarding project to work on for all parties.

Working within the CoP

As with PRELIM 1, WSE was given the opportunity to work alongside other providers all tasked with providing similar courses, although in very different contexts. Again, providers faced a range of challenges, whether in terms of managing expectations, speed of information, technical issues, partner

support, or CP numbers. Advice from NILE, as well as the opportunity to compare notes with other providers, was very useful. As one of the providers for whom this was not a new experience, a level of understanding was already there; however, the shared experience and openness to giving and receiving ideas was extremely valuable. It was also very satisfying to be able to reassure the less PRELIM experienced UKIs that their problems were in no way unique. In the group meetings, Google docs were frequently used, which for some was a new experience. This experience would echo that of our CPs, some of whom would also be using Google docs for the first time.

Working with the CPs

Course participants were on the whole enthusiastic about the course and engaged with the course content. The majority of CPs reported that they benefited from the experience of being able to practise English. Not all participants were able to attend every session, particularly the Wednesday sessions, owing to work pressure and time constraints. Brazilian teachers must be among some of the busiest and most committed teachers in the world, with many of them working at more than one institution and their ability to manage a busy schedule should be commended.

It was apparent that there was a wide variety of confidence levels among the CPs and those with the lowest confidence in communicating in English would appear to be those with the fewest opportunities to converse in English. We as first language English teaching professionals in English-speaking countries need to be more aware of the challenges our overseas colleagues often face in their own contexts, particularly in relation to being able to practise using the language in natural day-to-day contexts, accessing suitable and realistic materials and, at times, persuading their learners of the potential need for being able to become a competent user of English.

Designing/delivering the course

There are a lot of variables that need to be taken into account when designing and delivering a course such as this. These include:

- Being conscious of CP internet connectivity not always being to the standard of the UK and making allowances for this.
- The need to design materials that work both on a laptop and smartphone screen – particular attention needs to be paid to text size for the latter. We at WSE are more used to the majority of our online students using laptops or tablets rather than smartphones.
- The need to keep slide and handout sharing as simple as possible, keeping in mind that not all course participants may be as familiar as the trainers are with the software being used for this.

Although the course seemed somewhat daunting to deliver to the trainer who did not design it, it quickly became apparent to him that hosting/curating discussions with his group would be straightforward and enjoyable.

Course outcomes

The course seems to have achieved its aims in helping the CPs gain more confidence in using English in a classroom setting, and this was reported by CPs in their post-course survey. They also

reported that they found the topics to be engaging, although one CP seemed to suggest that any future course should focus on different topics.

CPs additionally reported the interaction with each other to be particularly useful, both to enable them to practise their English but also in giving them the opportunity to share their teaching experience with colleagues from other regions of Brazil.

There were very few areas of the course that CPs reported as being not enjoyable or not useful. Comments in this area focussed on the length of the course (too short), the amount of time for discussion (sometimes too short), and time/day not being convenient.

Course tutors found the course relatively straightforward to administer. As there was quite a wide range of abilities in English and confidence in using it among the CPs, it was sometimes a little challenging to keep the content relevant to all CPs, however, both course tutors reported that there were a core group of CPs in both the Wednesday and Saturday sessions who participated fully in the sessions, while some others seemed to dip in and out of it when it was convenient for them.

Comments from Martin (course tutor):

“There was a reasonable aim (to enable the CPs to teach more confidently in English) which I think was achieved. Other outcomes emerged during the course - CPs are keen to discuss their pedagogical experiences with peers and are interested in colloquial expressions and phonology. So, some time was spent on these areas, to the benefit (hopefully) of the participants.”

Emergent learning

It might be of benefit to begin future training courses such as this with a shorter workshop devoted to the technology on the course in order to reduce time lost to dealing with the technology issues. This would also allow CPs to meet one another before the course properly starts and to break the ice somewhat.

It may also be beneficial to emphasise the international nature of the English language through the materials we use, such as using audio of non-L1 speakers of English, to help encourage CPs to move away from the notion that they need contact with “native speakers” of English to become better users of English.