



TeachingEnglish

British Council: TeachingEnglish

A podcast series for teachers
of English



Episode 5: How can I teach online effectively?

Transcript



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Duration: 0:27:28

Chris: Hello, and welcome to Teaching English with the British Council, a podcast in which we try and provide solutions to some of the key questions being asked by English teachers around the world.

Chris: I'm your host, Chris Sowton. In each episode, we address one such question and attempt to answer it in two ways.

In the first part of each episode, we hear from a British Council project, programme or publication about something which is being done to address this issue. Across the 10 episodes of the series, we hear from teachers, trainers and researchers in a wide range of contexts, including India, Lebanon, Uruguay, and South Africa.

In the second part, a leading English expert and practitioner will provide practical solutions which you can immediately try out wherever you work. Each episode of Teaching English is accompanied by a full transcript and show notes. These show notes provide additional information, a glossary of keywords and links to relevant websites.

Chris: Welcome to episode 5 of Teaching English with the British Council in which we will try to answer the question: how can I teach online effectively? If I'd asked this question two years ago, it's likely that the question would have been irrelevant for the majority of teachers. Back in early 2020 online teaching was rare, in early 2022 however, as we entered the third year of the COVID pandemic, online or hybrid teaching, has become commonplace around the world at every level of teaching. In this episode of Teaching English, we explore some of the key features of online teaching and learning and how you can do this effectively in your context, wherever that may be.

Ceibal en Inglés is an innovative English teaching project, which uses video conferencing technology to reach 80,000 children in more than 550 primary schools across Uruguay. The programme which has been running since 2012, aims to overcome the challenge of teaching English to primary school children in Uruguay, where there is a shortage of teachers. The project matches classroom and remote teachers to deliver English lessons to pupils aged 9 to 12 years using collaborative expertise and innovative team teaching methods. The programme supports equal

access to education and helps young people to develop the skills, resilience and networks they need to better their lives.

Teacher: Children what's the weather like today in Cerro Chatto?

Students: It's sunny and warm.

Teacher: Ah, nice. And you can you ask me what the weather is like outside please?

It's cloudy and very hot. Because I'm inside the office, and inside the office, it's very cold because of the air conditioning, but outside it's hot.

Florencia: My name is Florencia Ramos, I am the academic quality manager for the remote Teaching Centre in Buenos Aires, Argentina. This is a key role because we deliver 1,300 lessons per week, from our premises to public schools in Uruguay with a team of over 100 teachers Ceibal en Inglés is a project of remote lessons that take place from different parts of Uruguay and different parts of the world such as the Philippines and Argentina to public schools Uruguay for kids in fourth, fifth and sixth grade. Uruguay hasn't got enough English teachers and some of the schools we reach are far from places where the teachers can get or teachers can go to.

Teacher: So now we're going to do a quick revision. You are going to work in pairs to ask and answer. Which is faster? The cheetah is faster than the elephant. Ok, I need one volunteer to do an example. Volunteer?

Student: Which is faster?

Teacher: The cheetah is faster than the monkey. So I will give you two minutes to practice. Ready, steady, go...

Florencia: We reach 35,000 students per week and we support 250 classroom teachers, they are the ones responsible for the monitoring and classroom management while we deliver our remote lesson. Classroom teachers and remote teachers have a key role to the success of the programme. As I said before the classroom teacher is there to monitor students participation, behaviour and does the classroom management, the classroom teacher is our eyes on the other side. And we are the ones, the experts on the language teaching, but we need from this teacher, we need from this relationship to make it a positive experience. That's why communication between both parts are key to understand on one side what's going on in a classroom environment every week and to understand if students are really making progress or not. And based on that communication, then remote teachers make the necessary adaptations to suit students' needs and level. Year by year, you see the teacher encouraged in the use of their language and also on the management of the project. The children achieve an A2 to B1 level of English when they complete their primary school and otherwise without this project this will be impossible so their relationship

between the classroom teacher and the remote teacher is key to achieve this.

Micaela: My name is Micaela Remini and I am remote teacher coordinator at the British Council for Ceibal en Inglés. I remember once I call the school, they answered but the screen was all black. And I was about to text the classroom teacher about what I thought was a problem or something. But then they heard the pirate song we learned the previous class in the background and then I saw the camera zooming out. All of a sudden I can see stage they had put up a puppet show for me about the pirate story we read. And wow, it was amazing, really, it was so memorable. And you know, that was my first year and I still remember it vividly.

Florencia: What you need in order to implement this project in other contexts, in my opinion, are three key components. One of them is the commitment of the remote teaching experts and the organisation, for example the British Council is and the local educational context our stakeholder. The second component for me is to have the technical aspects in mind and have the connectivity required to make this happen. So it's not only about having computers but also making sure that the connectivity in school and in the places where the teachers deliver the lessons is efficient enough for a lesson to take place and flow naturally. And of course there is a third component that has to do with continuous professional development. Teachers need to be trained and guided and supported through this mode of teaching since, even though they each share is part of the face-to-face environment strategies, there are others that are completely new for this mode of teaching. I believe that remote teaching can be possible in low resource contexts. I think that the pandemic showed us that this was possible. One of the ideas the team had in 2020 was to create a kind of, some sort of guides with some of the materials we would use in the synchronous sessions with the students that would connect. And that would give students at home the possibility of carrying out similar activities that would engage them in learning without the connectivity, so they would go to the school and find them printed or they would just go and copy them, there was always someone at school waiting for them. Even though the pandemic showed that there were students without access to certain components, like the computer or any kind of device, we made it happen they were able to keep on learning.

Well after so many years in the project in this remote teaching programme, I can say that remote teaching is as effective as face to face teaching. This is a message for everyone and for pandemic teachers as well as teachers have been teaching through the pandemic that might be struggling or might feel overwhelmed about catering for students needs and having everything in their minds when teaching remotely. This is a process this is, an everyday process, in which we learn as we acquire more skills to make it happen. So there are plenty of resources available on the internet to help ourselves when planning lessons. So we are all learning through this process, and we

have to be flexible enough with ourselves and with students to make the most of it. Learning has to be the focus always and in that sense, communicating with others collaborating, working collaboratively with other teachers and looking to develop ourselves with some CPD, with some continuous professional development, is key.

Chris: And you can find out more about Ceibal en Inglés in our show notes.

Raquel Ribeiro is an English language teacher, EdTech expert, Google innovator and writer who is passionate about promoting high-quality remote teaching across the world through blogging and social media. She joins us today from Sao Paulo in Brazil. Welcome, Raquel.

Raquel: Hi, Chris.

Chris: If we could perhaps begin just by asking for your reflections on the field report we just heard about the Ceibal en Inglés programme in your neighbouring country of Uruguay.

Raquel: I first heard of the Plans Ceibal in 2013, when it was in the very beginning and I got highly motivated to get to know more because it involves mainly the rural areas in Uruguay but it also engulfs other countries such as Argentina and as you mentioned, neighbouring countries and we face pretty similar situations. And I think it has been very inspiring because it focuses on reaching out and inclusion. And what I believe is important is that it includes the students in this process. It trusts the learners who are based in faraway cities, in areas with more difficulties that they are going to reach this level, to engage in their learning process too. I personally admire this ability of keeping on, and fighting, and not giving up. Because if there is one thing we have all learned is that there is no ideal scenario for anything if we consider education.

Chris: And you say the word inclusion there, Raquel, and I think it's certainly an issue that lots of teachers face and a concern that lots of teachers have about how they make online or remote teaching inclusive. What would be some of the advice or tips that you could give teachers to do that?

Raquel: First of all, an emergency teaching situation due to the COVID 19 pandemic. And this emergency scenario was really, really stressful for everybody. But then we got to understand that the possible and available resources. I've seen that from experience and from following colleagues from all the parts of Brazil which is a huge country. And we've got lots of distant, rural areas and outskirts of the cities across the countries as

well, that the mobile was, of course, the first resource and the most popular one. We've learned that this collaboration instead of just the teacher has the answer, the teacher has all the approaches, when you open the discussion, there can be this collaboration to overcome the challenges. And the two major challenges faced and still faced in remote teaching, they have to do with internet connectivity and proper devices. So for instance, we think of a platform, famous platforms, but then let's suppose that a student's mobile is not up to the level of the demand of that specific channel of communication, of video streaming platform. So how can we overcome such problems? And I faced that personally, and there was a student, there was no way she could follow the class, and she was in another city far from our city. And one of the students had an idea, that "teacher, maybe I can connect with her via WhatsApp and then she watches the class through me?" It worked so there is inclusion in this sense. We should also consider inclusion from the perspective of students, for instance, who are blind or visually impaired, or the sort of learning disabilities or learning diversity that should be taken into consideration. And of course, the participation of the family. And when we say family, it depends on the time who can be there to assist the child or teenager or even an adult. So there are important ways to look at, but collaboration is certainly one of them. It's not teachers, students anymore. It's like okay, how can we move along, in collaboration for a common goal?

Chris: I think that's interesting. It feels like one of the things that happened, certainly in the beginning of the COVID pandemic, is that many teachers moved to a more teacher-centred transmissive model of teaching rather than perhaps a learner-centred model because they were unused to working in this way. They started lecturing, rather than teaching. What would you say to teachers? How could you make online teaching more participative? Because that seems like something that teachers sometimes find challenging to be able to do, how we can maximise the communicative aspect of our teaching.

Raquel: For emergency teaching, lecturing was the first attempt and was the safest ground. But teaching has been evolving, not only language teaching, but also all sorts of subjects. It has been evolving and the role which teachers play as well, to mentor and collaborate rather than: I have all the knowledge and you just listen and watch and copy. So what I have observed and I believe that my fellow teacher colleagues as well, as we overcome this first barrier, okay, can my students attend? Have we overcome these difficulties here? How can we have this process in a more collaborative way? And then I suggest using not only the chart because somehow it's difficult to keep track of it after the class, but using a parallel resource, which is mobile friendly. So for instance, it could be a data document such as for instance, Google Docs, and it's there what happened during the class, or another platform such as even WhatsApp although it's difficult to organise, so this is not my go to suggestion. There is Google Classroom which is also there are many free features. And these can reach out to students during class because it works like social media, and they can post the comments and links

and suggestions and react. So this is more interactive, and make use of the breakout rooms in a way to engage and to promote a safer environment for students who are more reserved and who don't really feel comfortable speaking in front of a huge group.

Chris: And I guess there's also face to face components which can be brought into remote teaching as well that students can for example, you know, show other students around their house for example, or they can introduce them to their pets or there are drawings that can be done and then displayed in a class situation. So there are face to face components which can also be brought into the online situation.

Raquel: Yeah, I'd like to suggest, for example, that there are things that the online teaching like you mentioned, pets, or for instance, your favourite outfit, because for instance, rather than okay, I'm going to show you my wardrobe, I can bring that piece of clothing and show because it's also a way to preserve the students environment. Okay, I want to show this, but there are all elements of classes such as, for instance, pen, pencil and paper for dictation. So instead of having everything on the screen, and projecting and preparing PowerPoints that are amazing, it's more productive and cognitively more challenging in a positive way that the students get to copy the questions for a conversation, for instance. And then they check this together, and instead of teacher providing the answers, okay, check your answers here, they can collaboratively choose some of them and okay your type here in this digital document and use offline resources too. Okay, and I think this also brings about, Chris, concern related to the cameras, students who are feeling uncomfortable, and would rather follow with the cameras off and this was an issue, or sometimes they felt confident to open the cameras or sometimes using an avatar or a photo. This was also very much related to, to the emotional context. People were going through like having family members with COVID admitted to hospitals or even more complicated than that. I believe that giving voice, especially to the shy students, to the ones who don't feel confident looking at the camera is important. And messaging is a way to go, a way to type, those are opportunities because it's like the student says look, I'm here too and when you go to a smaller group such as a breakout room you could, for instance, ask and suggest okay, how about you answer this question when we go back to our whole classroom environment, would you, would you like that? Can I call you? And then it gives the students time to say okay, I can do that, is this right teacher? So they feel more confident?

Chris: Yeah, I mean, I think you were saying Raquel, it's almost just having that honest conversation with your students, you know, it's saying that we're all in a difficult situation, we're all trying to work out what the best way through is for all of us. And I think it's important for students to realise as well that if the whole class is camera off and is not on the chat it's also very difficult for you as a teacher, and I think that's a really important point for teachers to, to recognise. But also, I agree, we can't we don't

necessarily want to force people to put their cameras on but I think we can maybe talk to our students and say, look, it's important for me to know that you're present that you're there as well.

Raquel: Exactly. And this goes for communication and genuine interest. And this key point you mentioned Chris, I need to know that you are here and taking part. So the students usually, this is usually well-received and even if they do not open the camera, they speak in the microphone, and they type and we can see okay, I'm glad you could take part and contribute.

Chris: And it links back to a previous point you were saying about agency where your students solved an issue for you by using WhatsApp and so on. So you know, we need to see the young people they do have agency they do know stuff, certainly about technology, you know, they may know a lot more than we do, so let's bring them into that process and allow them to do that. Perhaps one final question, Raquel, is what would you say to teachers who think that remote learning, online learning, is a lesser form of education in comparison to face to face learning?

Raquel: It is hard but to talk to each other, because by exchanging ideas, we overcome this difficulty or that difficulty. And personally, there is no ideal scenario because even before the pandemic, we would have issues related to class, to behaviour, number of students in classes, students concentration and a lack of concentration during classes, or parents involvement in their teaching. So there will always be issues and there is learning in difficulties, and there is learning even in failure. And schools and directors, coordinators need to support the teachers this way. So they understand I don't have to be perfect. I need to plan. I need to try it out and learn lessons from the adversities. And then the second time I try, and the third time I try, the students will be more confident and things are going to flow because there's a natural curve of learning for everything. And there is a natural curve of learning for dealing with technology, with remote teaching, and this evolution of evolve teaching too

Chris: Raquel, thank you very much for your time today.

Raquel: Thank you very much.

Chris: Whatever happens next in the COVID pandemic, it is clear that in many parts of the world online teaching is going to remain a core feature of education systems. As teachers, it's important that we not only acknowledge this, but embrace it. When done well, online teaching can be an effective way to teach language, and it can help to reduce inequality in the classroom.

Thank you for listening to this episode of Teaching English with the British Council. We hope you enjoyed it. Please do like, subscribe and review. And please remember to download the show notes and transcript. Join us next time for Episode Six where we will try to answer the question: How can I teach effectively in challenging contexts? Until then, goodbye.