

Hornby Educational Trust

Developing context-appropriate teaching practices for primary schools in Entre Ríos, Argentina

2022-2023 Teacher Association Project Report

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Hornby Teacher Association Projects

Project Overview

| | |
|-------------------------|--|
| Title | Developing context-appropriate teaching practices for primary schools in Entre Ríos, Argentina |
| Country | Argentina |
| Dates of project | 2022-2023 |

1. Background and rationale

What are the main issues in your English teaching and learning context? How did these issues influence your choice of project? Were there also other important contextual factors to consider?

Although English as a foreign language is a compulsory curricular subject in most secondary schools in the province of Entre Ríos (Argentina), this is not the case of primary schools.

A survey conducted by the local MoE has established that out of the 1302 primary schools in the jurisdiction, 76% are in rural areas. Access to these schools is often difficult due to contextual factors such as distance, poor road quality, absence of adequate transportation, and so on. Moreover, in many of these institutions, learners of different ages and levels are taught together since the schools are very small in terms of the number of students and teachers that attend. In this scenario, English as a foreign language is taught in 247 primary schools around the province, generally as a single weekly 40-minute workshop, starting in the second cycle (Grades 4-6).

The characteristics that many of our primary schools possess frequently mean that not many graduate teachers choose to work in the level. To be more specific, out of the 196 teachers in our primary schools (CGE, November 2022) only 49 are graduate teachers (25%). The rest are what the jurisdictional MoE considers 'idóneos', that is, usually very young, non-graduate teachers who possess a teaching license granted by the MoE itself but who have mainly learnt English in private language schools, where they develop their linguistic knowledge mostly but where mastery of other areas of teachers' professional development (pedagogical expertise, the understanding of learners and curriculum, assessment, reflective practices and so on) are not addressed.

As a direct consequence of the above, TEFL in our schools tends to focus heavily on grammar and vocabulary as presented in published materials. The national curricular guidelines (NAP LE, 2012), however, state that the main goal of foreign language teaching is to develop young learners' ability to use English in meaningful interactions, which should be achieved through the integrated development of: a) the four-macro skills, b) language-awareness, and c) intercultural competence. In addition, the documents suggest the implementation of learner-centredness, CLT or TBLL, interdisciplinarity, and formative assessment. Thus, there often exists a mismatch between what the official documents demand of teachers and what these latter can do given their limited pedagogical content knowledge to implement the pedagogy or methodology suggested, which also requires teachers to adjust their existing practices and beliefs to the expected ones, or to acquire new ones altogether.

Both the local MoE and APIER – our TA – have organized and run different instances of professional development programmes for primary teachers. However, these are generally one-off events that often prove insufficient to cater for the diverse challenges that implementation of the curricular guidelines poses for the different teaching contexts. Additionally, to our knowledge, there has been no formal instance of assessment of teachers' overall proficiency in the language itself. Thus, the overall aim of these professional development workshops is to help non-graduate practising English teachers to understand and develop the skills required to successfully implement the national and jurisdictional curricular guidelines so that these are further contextualized to meet the needs of their own classrooms.

To ensure that this is indeed helpful and individualized, the number of participants will be limited to 20 teachers, and we will start by recruiting those in Paraná (state capital) and neighbouring cities. Given this limitation, to select participants we will conduct a baseline survey to gather first-hand information to serve as a point of reference about what teachers already know and what they might lack, need and/or want in the light of their classroom realities. It is expected that this will also help us identify and highlight those areas or variables that the project might make an impact on. Also, through the implementation of these workshops, we hope to provide participants not only with the theoretical background that as ToTs we might offer, but also with practical classroom applications and strategies that might help them solve their classroom problems and better implement the suggested curricular guidelines, while raising their motivation and awareness of the benefits of collaborative teaching and sustained professional development.

This project also intends to establish a closer connection between the work of teachers at primary schools and the work of teachers at the initial level of secondary schools (Year 1 mainly), which might pave the way for future strategies of TPD at both levels. This might include implementation of other support systems such as the establishment of mailing lists, discussion groups, or online support networks to discuss (similar) problems and find possible solutions through collaboration. We hope that the joint efforts of a ToT, both a primary and a secondary school referent, and a student teacher, together with the help of our TA and the local MoE might help achieve our purpose.

2. Project objectives

It is expected that upon completion, the workshops will have enabled teachers to:

1. improve the effectiveness of their professional practice by developing their existing skills while developing new ones.
2. reflect upon, discuss, and evaluate their current professional practice, articulating and developing their personal theories.
3. experiment with and evaluate new teaching methods, materials, and other resources suitable for their teaching contexts.
4. develop more informed, principled decision-making skills.
5. work collaboratively, co-operating with other participants in the educational system and in their TA.

Evaluation

1. Project objectives

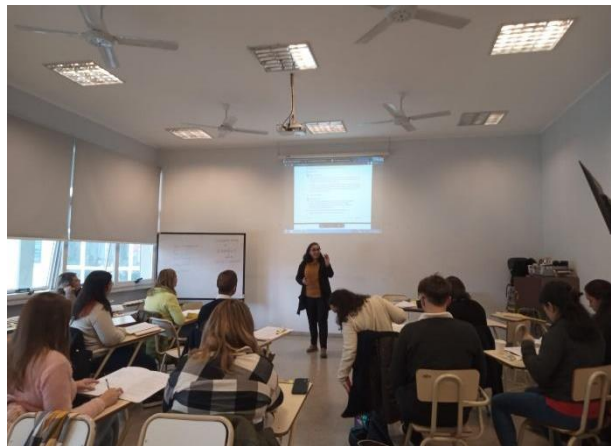
To what extent do you feel your objectives were met? If they were not met, or only partially met, can you explain why?

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4. develop more informed, principled decision-making skills.
5. work collaboratively, co-operating with other participants in the educational system and in their TA.

All in all, we are very satisfied with the outcomes of this project. The main purpose was to help primary school teachers in the area of Paraná to revisit their classroom practices with a view to adjusting them to the local needs of their own classroom contexts, in the light of the curricular guidelines for the level. As well as this, it was our purpose to foster communication and bonding among the participants, so that they could share and describe their work at school in order to improve them. All this was achieved. The final number of participants was much lower than expected (49 teachers expressed their interest in the workshops, 35 enrolled, 16 joined Workshop #1, but only 14 completed the 5 workshops); however, their work and their

responses to the tasks set (see the next section, please) all indicate a high level of satisfaction with the task proposed and a sense of fulfilment with the work done.



As regards the purpose of establishing a closer link between primary school teachers and both the local MoE and our TA, it must be said that – although we worked hand in hand with the ministry of education foreign languages delegate, unfortunately, for reasons unknown to me, getting our TA involved was not that successful. We got the support of the Committee both to submit the project proposal and their consent to conduct the workshops. Still, there was no further participation in any of our meetings, even though they were invited to introduce and discuss the goals and work of the Association with the workshop participants. Thus, even though we are very satisfied with the work we carried out and the outcomes, we feel a bit disappointed that one of the main objectives, namely establishing links of cooperation between primary school teachers and APIER was not altogether successful.

As a plus point, I would like to express my satisfaction at being able to establish an academic and professional link with the authorities of the *Facultad de Trabajo Social* (at the *Universidad Nacional de Entre Ríos*), an unforeseen source of help and collaboration, which proved very positive for all of those involved in this project.

2. Project impact

What was the impact of your project on:

- a) your Association(s) / Institution(s)?
- b) the people involved in your project?
- c) the wider community?

What evidence do you have to demonstrate this?

We, the project team, feel that this initiative was successfully designed and implemented. We managed to implement the different project stages successfully, including teacher assessment. Overall, the project has had a very positive impact and has resulted in a number of interesting outcomes on the part of the attendees, as might be observed from three main sources:

- a) the teachers' own productions in the final assessment task;
- b) the teachers' brief reflective pieces upon the whole initiative, and
- c) the teachers' answers to a short survey we conducted at the end of the project.

Firstly, teachers' responses to the final assessment task show a clear understanding of the whole purpose of the workshops and a genuine willingness to put suggestions into practice. Teachers acknowledge the need they have to stop and think about their daily practices and the reasons behind their pedagogic decisions. Most importantly, they stress the need to have regular professional development sessions that might help them understand the work that is expected of them and implement changes. It is important to bear in mind that most of the participants were not graduate teachers.

Here are some examples of how teachers interacted with the contents of the workshops introducing minimal changes to their lesson plans.

Sample task 1 – Redesigning a coursebook activity to incorporate an element of the curricular guidelines (Interculturality)

As regards the cultural aspect involved, there is no inclusion of context-specific animals, due to the fact that the book being used was produced to cater for the learning needs of a public too general. However, I do find an amazing opportunity to adapt these activities and enrich my students' view of the world through the inclusion of our country's culture. In order to achieve this, I would still work on the first activity as planned by the textbook; but, before moving on, I would ask my students to think of more animals existing in Argentina which we can describe together. By doing this, I would be asking my students to think of their own culture through the means of the language they are learning. Describing animals which do exist in the geographical region we live in will further engage them, given that what they are describing animals which are possible to see right outside the classroom with their own words.¶

Sample task2 – Redesigning a lesson sequence (“secuencias didácticas”+ language practices)

LESSON PLAN

| | | |
|------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|
| Subject: English | Class: 2 nd grade | Age: 7-8 years-old |
| Level: Beginner | Type: Presentation | Duration: 40 minutes |
| Topic: My toys ¶ | | |

Objective(s): By the end of the lesson, students should be able to: ¶

- demonstrate their understanding of new lexical items (toys) by associating the names of the toys with the corresponding/respective pictures. ¶
- identify and demonstrate understanding of the new language point "have got" (affirmative and negative forms) by associating the possession of toys in someone's room with affirmative sentences. ¶

Language practices: ¶

- Look and say. ¶
- Look at the charts and match the toys to the characters. ¶

Context: First, the teacher will set the context by showing students a short video from the movie Toy Story 3 and asking questions. Then, she will use real toys with their names on them to teach new vocabulary. In the first part of the presentation stage, Lastly, she will use a poster of Andy's room with some toys so as to link the vocabulary previously presented to the language point "have got". ¶

Subject matter: - Toys ¶

- Have got (affirmative and negative forms). ¶

Culture: Rasti blocks (similar to LEGO, but they come from a national company). ¶

¶====Section Break (Continuus)====

Sample task 3 – Designing a project for young learners (Moving away from coursebooks “The travelling notebook”)



_____ / /

Hello! I'm Miss Nadina. I'm 30 years old. Today it's sunny and windy. It's a beautiful day. This is my grandfather's farm. It's very big.

(PHOTO/DRAWING)

There are four black dogs. There are chickens and hens. There is a big brown horse and a pig. There isn't a rabbit. There aren't ducks. My favourite animal is the horse. It's got a long tail, small black eyes and long legs. What's your favourite animal?

Thanks for reading.
Tell me about your farm!

WRITE ABOUT YOU AND YOUR FARM. INCLUDE:

Secondly, as part of the final assessment, we decided to include a short reflective task, asking teachers to elaborate on the assignment itself and on the workshops' impact on their current practices. In all cases, the answers to this prompt are very positive and encouraging. Here are a couple of examples of what teachers claim.

Teacher #1

Reflection:

When I received the invitation to enroll in the workshop I didn't doubt it. It was a nice experience in which I learnt a lot and reinforced my knowledge about didactics. There should be more meetings like this, so as to share teachers' experiences and learn from each other. Hope to see you all again!

Teacher #2

Reflection: To conclude, I think that re-designing activities in order to fit our needs to teach certain topics may seem something really obvious but it is not. We get used to follow the books and workbooks as they come, and we sometimes forget we can adjust them to our student's needs. This is a great opportunity for improve our teaching strategies... Let us do it more often!

Teacher #3

When I had to decide which task I was going to do, I decided to do a lesson plan. Before starting the final work and after attending all the course lessons I assumed it was going to be an easy task. However, as soon as I begin the final work, I realized it was much more difficult than I thought. ¶

As I am an English-Spanish translator, there a lot of knowledge as regards didactics that I need to learn, specially how to organize a class in an effective way. When a colleague shared the flyer as regards this workshop and considering I am teaching at primary school I immediately enroll in it. It was a great opportunity to learn more about education and most importantly how to develop a well design class. These workshops have been very enriching. I have the opportunity to understand the political issues as regards language learning as well as different strategies, to plan well organized classes, keeping in mind all the language skills, and the group

Finally, the answers to the survey we shared after we complete the five workshops show:

- teachers' satisfaction for having attended and completed the workshops (100%).
- teachers' appreciation of the topics and materials they were presented with (100%).
- teachers' strong desire to attend similar events in the future (100%).

In addition to the above, in the same survey, four teachers have expressed their willingness to participate in interviews to provide further feedback on the workshops and to participate in further similar instances of TPD, which would give me and my team colleagues an opportunity to plan a follow-up activity in which to deepen and broaden the contents covered in this project.

3. Sharing with a wider audience

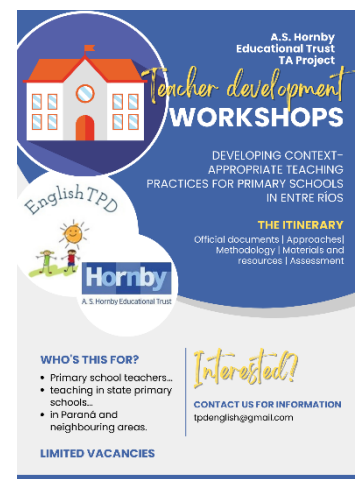
Who did you share information about the project with? Why, when, and how did you do this?

What reactions did you get?

Do you have any further plans for sharing more widely?

Putting the project into practice involved a series of activities that took place between mid-March 2023 and May 2024, as I write this final report. The first activities involved team meetings to plan the organisation of the workshops and the dissemination of the activities. Initially, the team included five members which by the end of the projects was reduced to only three.

We designed a number of flyers to share the information of the forthcoming workshops, published them on social networks and distributed them by mailing lists. We asked our colleague followers on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter to share the information with their followers. We also printed some copies to distribute and pin on bulletin boards in neighbouring schools. Since the start of the workshops was much delayed, we provided the basic information little by little, first inviting teachers to participate and then informing about dates, venue and contents of the workshops. We firstly asked interested



teachers to send us an email and later implemented a baseline survey to recruit those who matched the intended audience.

Responses came in immediately, with over 40 people asking about our project. By July we had no more vacancies since we had planned to keep it small.

Reactions towards the initiative were always very encouraging.

4. Overall reflections

As a result of planning, implementing, and disseminating the project, what did you learn about:

- a) organising / managing a project?
- b) the strengths / weaknesses and future needs of your TA(s) /Institution(s) and / or working context?

Would you do anything differently next time?

Would you like to suggest anything to another TA planning to undertake a similar project?

Organising the workshops seemed quite easy at beginning: our purpose and objectives were very clear, we could think of the possible target group easily, and we had a team of people that included a teacher educator, a person involved in primary school initiatives, a secondary school teacher, a couple of advanced IELTE students and a member of APIER, our TA. Mapping out the contents of the five sessions was also quite straightforward since we were well-aware of the characteristics and needs of primary school teachers in our state.

However, as time went by two main circumstances affected the development of the planned activities: a) time – the project was delayed due to payment issues; and b) the fact that in the end only 3 team members could contribute to the organization and implementation of the project. I believe that next time this is something I would do differently if I had the chance: making sure that the people involved do have time availability.

Also, the workshops were intended for non-graduate teachers since English lessons in primary schools here are mostly in the hands of “idóneos”, who are in need of proper training and development. Still, many graduate teachers were interested in joining us. I believe next time I would be readier to accept their participation. In retrospect, I think they might have contributed greatly to the sessions by providing their views and sharing their teaching expertise from the perspective of a graduate and (in some cases) experienced teacher.

5. Next steps

How do(es) your TA(s) or Institution(s) plan to continue and / or build on what has been achieved through this project? Why? How might you begin?

Once this report is finished and the final handout (including teachers' final work) is ready, we will further distribute this material with both the participating teachers, their schools, and the wider local primary school community, as well as with APIER. Unfortunately, we have not yet been able to complete these last tasks.

We also intend to write an article on the whole experience and submit it for publication, possibly in AJAL, the Argentinian Journal of Applied Linguistics, or a similar periodical.

Another possible follow-up involves working in collaboration with the Primary School Department at the jurisdictional MoE to develop context-appropriate materials and professional development instances for teachers in local state schools. In this sense, back in December 2023 I was invited by the newly-appointed head of the Department to join them in order to collaborate in the initial stages of the design of curricular guidelines for the level. Unfortunately, due to budget restrictions this was not possible in the end. Still, I have faith that our experience with the Hornby Trust Project might help me find other ways to help practising teachers improve their practices.

Permissions

This report is primarily for the Hornby Trustees and British Council internal review and records. However, we do want to promote your hard work and would like to share what you have done with other Hornby awardees and publicly via the Internet.

- Can you please tick here if you give your permission to share your report?
- Please tick here if you would like your project to be considered for presentation at the 2025 IATEFL conference (the Hornby Trust will select from reports submitted and will support one team member from each of these projects to attend the conference).

Please indicate who would give the presentation if selected:

María Alejandra Soto (Name of presenter)

Name

María Alejandra Soto

Date

4th May 2024

Appendices

Appendix 1: Expenditure

Were there any **significant differences** from your planned budget? By significant we mean you spent far more than planned, or you were given a donation from a partner that was not expected, for example.

Note any costs below that exceeded the original budget by £200 (below this amount does not need including). Please also tell us what caused these changes in the *Reflection* section below the two tables.

a. local funding

| Description | Breakdown | Total cost | Final cost |
|---|-----------|---|------------|
| Venue for workshops | | Free (ideally since this is very expensive) | £0 |
| Technological devices (Laptops, projectors, etc.) | | Free | £0 |
| Certificates | | ARG \$3,500 £20 | £20 |
| Totals: | | 20 GBP | |

b. Hornby funding

| Description | Breakdown | Total cost | Final cost |
|--|--|-----------------------|---|
| Commuting and travel-related expenses (bus fares for participants) | Around ARG \$6,000 per head (estimated 20 participants) | ARG \$120,000 £700 | These two items suffered a significant increase in the course of the workshops. However, we could cope since fewer participants required travel expenses. |
| Commuting and travel related expense (fuel) | ARG \$138 (1 ltr) (estimated 141 ltr) | ARG \$19,458 £114 | |

| | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| Stationery and office supplies | 3 reams of paper ARG \$1,480 each | ARG \$4,000 £24 | |
| Stationery and office supplies | 2 Toner cartridges ARG \$3,500 each | ARG \$7,000 £45 | |
| Set of handouts for participants | ARG \$250 per head | \$5,000 £30 | |
| Publication of teachers' work (to disseminate their work in the sessions) | ARG \$1430 per booklet | \$35,750 £210 | |
| Welcome token for teachers | ARG \$800 per head | \$16,000 £95 | |
| Thank you token for schools | (cleaning products) | ARG \$6825 £40 | |
| Catering (coffee breaks) | Around ARG \$3500 per head (ARG \$700 per person per session) | ARG \$87,500 £515 | |
| Materials for teacher educators. Book: Vale, D. with A. Feunteun. Teaching children English. CUP. | | ARG \$6,864 (+ taxes) £40,51 (Book Depository) | Book Depository close down in the course of the project. We bought a number of older books locally at about the same cost. |
| Materials for teacher educators. Subscription to IATEFL | Individual subscription | ARG \$ 3,975 (This amount was originally miscalculated. The cost of joining IATFL is much more expensive in Argentine pesos!) £73 | |
| Totals: | | 1836 GBP | |

Reflections:

There were no significant differences from our original budget and the final one. Despite the fact that some items increased exponentially across time (e.g. transportation and petrol), we could manage to save on these expenses given that we had fewer participants as time went by. We used that extra money in other expenses which turned out to be higher due to the ever-increasing inflation and currency rates (e.g. stationary, printing, and the cost of published materials). Other than this, the budget allocated by Hornby was spent as planned and was *more than enough*.

We had no other source of income apart from this.

Thanks a lot!

Appendix 2: Planned activity

Review your planned activity below and then reflection on any changes that were needed and explain why these were necessary.

| Dates | Description of activities | Duration |
|-------------------|--|--|
| March | Recruiting associates, creating a database and notifying participants Obtaining the necessary permissions and attending to other admin requirements Booking venue(s) Conducting needs analysis Designing session plans and gathering materials Activating social media accounts and promotion of the activity | Whole month |
| April - September | Workshops 1 to 5 It is expected that these workshops will respond to those issues raised in the needs analysis stage. Some of the possible topics for the different sessions might include: W1: an overview of the main curricular guidelines and suggested methodology for the level W2: an analysis of teachers' current practices in their situated contexts W3: planning lesson sequences for primary school learners W4: selecting and designing materials for the level and elaboration of a didactic sequence W5: presenting teachers' work | 4 hours each (from practice to theory, and from theory to practice) |
| October | Workshops and project evaluation | Whole month |

Reflections:

Please share your thoughts here:

As stated before, the implementation of the project was delayed due to payment-related issues. Instead of starting in March, we started planning the sessions in May and recruiting participants in June. By July we were ready to begin. However, since in Entre Ríos we have a winter break in July, for practical reasons we decided to start in August and to hold two meetings in August, two in September and one in

October. We agreed on this with the participants and stuck to this schedule. Another change that we had to introduce involved shortening the sessions from 4 to 3 hours. This was due to the fact that the venue was unavailable otherwise.



The rest of the activities ran on schedule. We managed to cover all the contents we planned. What was delayed due to professional, academic and personal matters was giving feedback on their productions to the teachers (which was completed by the beginning of this year) and the elaboration of this report.

