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Conference Report: English for the Future.

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Conference Report
British Council Policy Dialogues: "English for the Future"
Cartagena, Colombia, October 1-3 2012

by *Maríel Amez*

The **Policy Dialogues** were defined by the organisers as “a forum for the discussion of opportunities, challenges and choices facing policy-makers and educators in the area of English Language Teaching across Latin America”. During three days, about 150 participants from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Guatemala, Mexico, Spain, Venezuela and the UK worked together at two breathtaking venues: Santa Teresa Hotel and The Naval Museum. The sessions included the following plenary lectures, which cast light on the latest trends and developments on the topics addressed.

- ❖ Simon Borg *English and Teacher Education*
- ❖ Michael Carrier *English and New Technologies*
- ❖ Janet Enever *English in the Early Years*
- ❖ Charles Fadel *21st century skills*
- ❖ David Graddol *English in the Future*
- ❖ John Knagg *Improving English Learning in National Education Systems Worldwide: The British Council Experience*

The three main themes around which concurrent sessions were organised were **English and New Technologies**, **English and Teacher Education** and **English in the Early Years**. For each of these areas one initial workshop was held, followed by three parallel dialogues on different subthemes. These dialogues brought together one academic, one practitioner and one policy-maker presenting for about 20 minutes each, followed by about one hour of round-table discussion among the three presenters and participants (usually about 40 people), moderated by a British Council member of staff.

There were five Argentinean delegates: **Claudia Ferradas**, who acted as moderator for the theme English in the Early Years; and acting as presenters **Cristina Banfi** and **Leonor Corradi** (English in the Early Years), **Lucía Quiroga** (English and Teacher Education) and myself (English and New Technologies). In my presentation, on the subtheme **Teacher Development**, I tried to highlight Argentinean initiatives, particularly the positive impact of new technologies on the work of teacher associations in general and APRIR in particular, as well as networking among FAAPI affiliates. The presentation can be viewed at <http://tinyurl.com/9I56lmg> and my own photo collection at <http://tinyurl.com/9bjyk6b>

Scribes recorded the key points, questions and recommendations and all sessions were videotaped so as to be used as the central input for the proceedings.

In the closing Plenary Dialogue Peter Brown (British Council Venezuela) and Eric Klug (British Council Brazil) announced that in the short term an online forum would be set up to continue discussing the issues raised, in preparation for **2013**, when the Dialogues will be held in **Brazil** under the theme ***English for Social Transformation***.

Personally, I found the event most enlightening, as it enabled me to learn about experiences around English teaching and learning in other countries, to interact with other participants, identify their realities and the challenges they face, and to plant the seeds for future networking. I am forever grateful to the British Council for this extraordinary opportunity.