

THE MONTHLY

NETWORKER

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WORDS FROM OUR DIRECTOR

Dear Colleagues:

As we celebrate our nation's Independence Day, we are reminded of its historical importance and the freedom that education, especially language learning, brings.

As English teachers, we help students connect with the world by teaching them a language that opens doors to new opportunities, cultures, and global participation.

English also gives students the independence to engage fully in travel, work, and personal connections.

In a country where Spanish is the official language, teaching English goes beyond grammar; it is about building bridges between cultures and communities and guiding our

students to navigate the world with confidence and independence.

When we think about the freedom our nation has achieved, we should also consider about the freedom that learning other languages gives.

Let us help our students find their freedom in learning English, and let us keep inspiring the next generation of global citizens -one word, one sentence, one conversation at a time.

¡Viva Panamá!

Best Regards,

Ms. Davina Cole

LETTER FROM OUR EDITOR

Dear Readers,

November brings us to the third edition of The Monthly Networker, and I am truly grateful for the progress we've made together. This publication has grown into something truly special, and it's all thanks to your dedication and contributions. It's a reflection of the amazing spirit of collaboration and commitment to excellence in English language teaching that each of you brings to our network.

But, of course, our journey is just beginning. Our network is only as strong as the engagement of its members, and there are still many teachers who haven't yet jumped in. The more our network grows, the stronger our collective impact on English language education becomes, so I encourage you to invite colleagues to join in and share their experiences. Every new voice adds something valuable to our community.

This month, as we reflect on our progress, we also take time to appreciate the rich cultural heritage that unites us. November, with its focus on national heritage, is a perfect moment to remember the traditions and values that connect us as educators. Our work is part of a long and proud tradition of shaping minds and fostering culture.

Looking ahead, this issue features exciting content, including a new section—*Road to Implementing a Competency-Based Curriculum*—where we will be sharing useful information to support your efforts in adopting this innovative approach. We also have upcoming webinars and workshops designed to inspire and engage you as you continue your growth as educators and leaders.

Thank you for being such an important part of this community. Together, we're building something that will continue to shape the future of English language teaching for years to come. Happy reading!

Raúl Sieiro
Editor, The Monthly Networker



NETWORK HIGHLIGHTS

ENRED: An Opportunity for Growth and Collaboration for English Teachers in Panama

By Prof. Lourdes Del R. Rodríguez

Being part of **ENRED**, the educational network supported by Panama's Ministry of Education (MEDUCA), is both a challenge and a rewarding experience for me as an English teacher. I view this network as a collaborative platform where each of us can contribute ideas and strategies, creating a space for mutual learning and growth.

ENRED connects us with colleagues across the country who face similar challenges and can offer innovative solutions. I believe that the meetings and professional development workshops organized by the network will be invaluable opportunities to stay updated on current methodologies, explore new digital tools, and enhance English teaching in our classrooms.

Contributing to national education projects is a significant career boost, allowing me to share my knowledge and actively support the advancement of education in Panama. For me, being part of a network like **ENRED** means having a greater impact on my students by accessing best practices and resources that may otherwise be difficult to find.

I envision this experience strengthening my sense of belonging and motivation, knowing that every effort, shared idea, and workshop represents a step toward more inclusive, high-quality education for my students and those of my colleagues.

THE ROAD TO IMPLEMENTING A NEW CURRICULUM

Adopting a Competency-Based Curriculum for English Language Teaching

By Prof. Raúl Sieiro

We navigate an increasingly interconnected world and the ability to communicate effectively in English is more crucial than ever. At MEDUCA's Department of Foreign Language Teaching, we are excited to announce that we are preparing to start with the implementation of a new competency-based curriculum for teaching English from kindergarten through twelfth grade. This initiative represents a significant advancement in how we prepare our students for a diverse range of opportunities.

Understanding Competency-Based Learning

A competency-based curriculum emphasizes the mastery of skills that students can apply in real-life contexts. Moving beyond traditional methods that focus on rote memorization, this approach encourages active engagement with the language, fostering students' ability to communicate confidently and effectively.

The Importance of English Language Proficiency

In Panama, English proficiency opens doors to numerous personal and professional opportunities. By implementing a competency-based curriculum, we are equipping our students with essential tools for their future—whether in further education, careers, or global citizenship.

The Validation and Piloting Process

As part of our preparation, we have successfully completed a thorough validation and piloting phase. During this process, educators engaged in focused workshops and discussions to refine instructional strategies that align with our competency-based approach. Their insights have been invaluable, helping us tailor the curriculum to better meet the needs of our classrooms.

Feedback from teachers during the pilot phase has been overwhelmingly positive. Many reported that the interactive and practical elements of the curriculum have reinvigorated their teaching practices, leading to increased engagement among students.

Inspiring Changes in the Classroom

As we gear up for the full implementation, we are excited to highlight the positive changes that are anticipated in classrooms. Teachers are eager to embrace new strategies, such as project-based learning, where students tackle real-world tasks that enhance their English skills while fostering critical thinking and collaboration.

One teacher shared, "This new approach has the potential to change how I teach. I'm excited to see how my students will engage with English in ways that matter to them."

The Road Ahead

As we move toward implementation, we remain committed to ongoing evaluation and improvement. We will continue to gather feedback from teachers to ensure our approach evolves with the needs of our learners. Our goal is to create a supportive and dynamic learning environment where every student can thrive.

In conclusion, the upcoming launch of our competency-based curriculum for English language teaching marks an exciting new chapter in our educational landscape. Together, we can nurture a generation of students who are not only proficient in English but also equipped to navigate an increasingly interconnected world.

Let's welcome this journey with enthusiasm and dedication, knowing that each step we take is in service of our students' futures.



THE ROAD TO IMPLEMENTING A NEW CURRICULUM

Integrating Mediation: A New Competency in English Language Teaching

By Prof. Raúl Sieiro

Given that we are preparing for implementing our new competency-based curriculum, aligned with the Common European Framework of Reference, it is essential that we reflect on a significant addition to our teaching approach: *mediation*. This concept enriches our students' learning experiences and enhances their understanding of language as a tool for interaction. According to a recent study, "Mediation is about enabling communication and interaction across diverse contexts" (Byram & Parmenter, 2019).

What is Mediation?

Mediation in language teaching refers to the ability to facilitate understanding and interaction, including skills such as summarizing, clarifying, and guiding discussions. These skills enhance collaborative learning. The Council of Europe (2020) emphasizes that "mediation is essential for fostering cooperation and understanding" in diverse educational contexts.

Why Mediation Matters

Incorporating mediation into our curriculum is vital for promoting a dynamic and interactive learning environment. When students learn to mediate, they not only improve their language skills but also develop essential cognitive skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving. Mediation enables students to engage actively with content, facilitating deeper understanding and retention. Studies have shown that incorporating mediation strategies enhances collaborative skills and encourages students to take responsibility for their learning (Stathopoulou, 2023). By focusing on mediation, we prepare students to navigate complex discussions and express their ideas more clearly, which is essential in both academic and real-world settings.

Practical Strategies for Implementation

To integrate mediation into our teaching practices effectively, we can employ several strategies:

- **Role-Playing Activities:** Create scenarios where students act as mediators, helping to clarify viewpoints. Role-playing provides

authentic contexts for practicing language skills (Kohonen, 2021)

- **Collaborative Projects:** Encourage students to work together on tasks requiring mediation in discussions and presentations.
- **Reflective Practices:** After mediation activities, have students reflect on their experiences. Reflective practices enhance student analysis of interactions (Farrell, 2015).
- **Peer Teaching:** Implement opportunities for students to teach each other, clarifying concepts and practicing mediation skills in a supportive environment.

Moving Forward

As we implement this new competency into our curriculum, it's crucial to recognize that mediation is interconnected with all aspects of language learning. By integrating mediation, we prepare our students to communicate effectively and appreciate the dynamics of collaboration. Recent research concludes that "the goal of language education should extend to meaningful engagement with others" (Byram & Parmenter, 2019).

In conclusion, by including mediation in our English language teaching we align with our goals of fostering competent, confident communicators. Let us commit to nurturing these essential skills in our students, helping them become effective mediators and collaborative learners in our global community.

References

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FEATURE STORY

The Relevance of Incorporating Dynamic Activities When Teaching English

By Prof. Jihad Sleiman

Since beginning my English teaching career in 2011, I have recognized the importance of including dynamic activities to truly engage students in learning. While traditional methods like fill-in-the-blank exercises and rote memorization can help students pass, they often fail to foster meaningful understanding. Such approaches lead to superficial learning where students memorize content without gaining the ability to form sentences or speak with accurate grammar and pronunciation.

Students need receptive skills like reading and listening for input, but to make this learning meaningful, it must be relatable and comprehensible. As educational psychologist David Ausubel highlighted, students achieve meaningful learning when new information connects to their prior knowledge. Therefore, teachers must design activities that connect vocabulary and grammar with content students can relate to. Techniques like role-plays, discussions, and problem-solving tasks encourage students to actively engage, using all four language skills while interacting with their peers. This approach not only deepens learning but also reduces distraction and disengagement in the classroom.

In my experience, classes are most effective when students get plenty of opportunities to use English orally. Activities such as asking and answering questions, discussing vocabulary, and participating in topic-based conversations make learning interactive. Teachers can also create real-life scenarios, such as giving directions or ordering at a restaurant, to provide authentic language contexts. Implementing these activities can be demanding, requiring extra preparation and classroom management skills, but the benefits are worth it. Dynamic classrooms help students speak more naturally, lower their anxiety, and build confidence over time.

For example, with my twelfth-grade students, I often incorporate job interview preparation. We discuss job interests, qualifications, and common interview questions, then work on writing résumés and practicing interview responses. This activity builds students' confidence, equips them with real-life skills, and shows them how English can serve their personal and professional aspirations.

Ultimately, in today's world, English proficiency is essential, especially for Panamanians entering professional fields. Job applicants are often assessed on their ability to communicate effectively, not just on test scores. Responsible teachers prepare students for real-world situations by creating dynamic, engaging classrooms that prepare them for meaningful communication and success in English.

RESOURCE CORNER

Discovering the Benefits of Quizizz in English Education

By Elda Del Real



Engaging students in learning is challenging, but Quizizz offers a fun solution for English classes. This interactive platform turns traditional assessments into games, allowing students to compete or work at their own pace, which boosts motivation.

Quizizz provides immediate feedback, helping students identify areas for improvement. Teachers can create custom quizzes or use a library of content, tailoring instruction to meet diverse needs and reinforce skills like vocabulary and grammar.

The platform also supports teamwork through group activities and gives educators detailed reports to track progress and adapt teaching strategies. By using Quizizz, English classes become more interactive, promoting deeper understanding and a positive learning environment.

Source: <https://quizizz.com/>

MEETING OUR TEAM

SIRIA RODRIGUEZ*English Supervisor, Herrera Province*

As the English Supervisor for Herrera, I have devoted my career to improving English education at all levels. Over the years, I've led numerous professional development programs for English teachers, including workshops, seminars, and training sessions that focus on enhancing teaching methods, refining pedagogical skills, and building a strong, collaborative community among educators.



A major accomplishment has been designing textbooks that address the specific needs of students in remote areas. These materials, crafted to be relevant and engaging, provide crucial support for teachers—especially those with limited English knowledge—and enable students to pursue self-guided learning.

My teaching philosophy is rooted in the belief that all students have the potential to learn a new language. I strive to create a learning environment that is both dynamic and inclusive, fostering curiosity, confidence, and a lifelong love of learning. I emphasize active participation, critical thinking, and real-world applications of English.

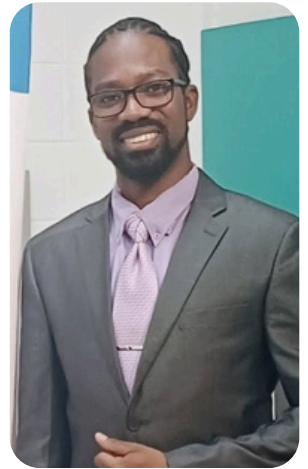
One of my most memorable experiences was launching a province-wide English proficiency program, which brought together teachers, students, and parents to improve English standards. Seeing the program's positive impact on student engagement and performance was incredibly rewarding and reinforced my commitment to supporting English education.



PROFILE OF THE MONTH

NETHANEEL BOONY

Since joining C.E.F.I.B. China in Las Garzas in 2017, I have focused on helping students reach their potential while supporting my department with effective leadership strategies. My teaching career began in 2016, and over the years, I have sought opportunities to refine my skills and share knowledge with others. These experiences have shaped my approach to teaching and allowed me to make meaningful contributions to education.



During the pandemic, I embraced virtual platforms to train colleagues nationwide, adapting to new challenges and fostering collaboration in a rapidly changing environment. This year, I was honored to be part of the English curriculum transformation team, participating in validation and piloting processes to create a more effective and adaptable teaching model that benefits both educators and students.

As Coordinator of the National Teachers Network of Central Panama, I work closely with peers to encourage professional development and collaboration. I believe in the power of critical thinking as a teaching methodology, tailoring lessons to meet individual student needs and promoting active learning that helps students engage meaningfully with the material.

Beyond my work in the classroom, I am committed to mentoring fellow educators. Through training programs and collaborative projects, I have supported colleagues in developing innovative strategies for language instruction. Lifelong learning remains central to my work, and I strive to create an environment where continuous growth is encouraged.

I take great pride in contributing to a dynamic and inclusive educational community. By empowering students and colleagues, I aim to leave a lasting impact that strengthens teaching practices and inspires others to pursue excellence in education.





TIPS & BEST PRACTICES

Critical Readers in the EFL Classroom

By Prof. Esperanza Diez

Critical, creative, problem-solving, collaborative, and communicative are competencies that characterize the soft skills demanded by 21st-century societies. Educating individuals with these skills requires a learning path in which cognitive, attitudinal, and procedural knowledge are essential. Two goals should frame this learning path: skills to generate information and skills to guide behavior. However, how can this be achieved? Bloom's taxonomy is an excellent tool for this purpose. Facilitators have often used Bloom's taxonomy to formulate learning objectives and scaffold lessons for meaningful learning. Nevertheless, each category in this taxonomy also aims to develop critical reading. Critical reading refers to the ability to have a clear and rational understanding of an idea and to make logical connections among ideas, which guide one to reflect on whether that knowledge is true or false. In other words, when there is critical reading, the reader constantly reflects on "reality," achieving metacognition. Surjosuseno and Watts (1999) concluded that Bloom's taxonomy helps develop critical reading in EFL classes. I agree with this perspective for two reasons.

To be a critical reader implies moving from lower-order thinking stages to higher-order thinking stages. This process requires the use of scaffolding in planning. Scaffolding creates a learning path that moves from superficial to complex. Bloom's taxonomy builds a strong base for this purpose. This hierarchical structure allows for connecting new knowledge with prior knowledge and experimenting with different levels of complexity of that new knowledge in various scenarios, which demand remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. By experimenting with these processes, learners can clearly understand what the writer is trying to communicate and reach their own conclusions.

Another reason is that Bloom's Taxonomy is not just for planning; it is also helpful for formulating questions that guide learners to be critical readers. When the facilitator uses the taxonomy to formulate questions about a topic, it creates the right conditions for critical readers who can read, reflect, and draw new conclusions applicable to future events.

Readers should be developed from the beginning levels because it is essential to challenge learners to think critically.

Source: Surjosuseno, T. T. and Watts, V. (1999). Using Bloom's Taxonomy to teach critical reading in English as a foreign language classes. *Queensland Journal of Educational Research*, 15(2), 227-244.
<http://education.curtin.edu.au/iier/qjer/qjer15/surjosuseno.html>

UPCOMING EVENTS

The Summer Institute for Education Excellence

By Claudia De León

English teaching plays a crucial role in shaping global citizens and creating opportunities for students in an interconnected world. As educators, we have the responsibility to equip learners with the language skills they need to succeed academically, professionally, and socially.

The upcoming Summer Institute for English Teachers is designed to fulfill this mission—providing a transformative experience that empowers teachers with innovative strategies, practical tools, and collaborative insights to strengthen English education across the public schools.

This event is a unique opportunity to advance the skills and techniques of English educators.

Empowering Educators Through Expert-Led Training

Based on valuable feedback from the National English Teachers' Network, each workshop is designed to be relevant and directly applicable to real classroom scenarios.

The initiative began with a series of virtual training sessions for selected teacher trainers, guided by specialists from various educational fields. Participants are focusing on topics that address key educational needs, such as:

- Development of social-emotional skills
- Digital tools to engage students
- Strategies for student motivation and participation
- Self-evaluation methods for teachers and students
- Lesson planning aligned with competency-based curriculum

Training Highlights for February 2024

Date	Topic
Monday, February 17	Developing socio-emotional skills
Tuesday, February 18	Digital tools to enhance student engagement
Wednesday, February 19	Strategies for student motivation and engagement
Thursday, February 20	Motivation and engagement techniques
Friday, February 21	Competency-based lesson planning

Shaping the Future of English Education Together

The Summer Institute highlights a commitment to improving English teaching in Panama. With a strong academic network and a focus on collaboration, it aims to create a brighter future for English education.

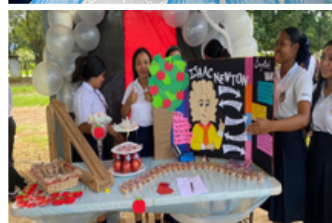
We encourage all participating teachers to register for the national training. Complete the form here: <https://forms.office.com/r/i01exCn1hz>.



THUMBS UP

A Fun Language Activity at Jesús María Pla High School

The English Department at Jesus María Pla High School in Chiriquí organized a vibrant activity where 10th, 11th, and 12th graders created interactive stands to help younger students practice English. The initiative was fun, engaging, and widely enjoyed. It aimed to encourage students to use English naturally and confidently. Kudos to teachers Yaneth Navarro, Emelyn Atencio, Wizmarlin Rodríguez, Johana Hernández, and Anaday Atencio for their outstanding effort!



SUCCESS STORIES

Formador de Formadores Program Wraps Up: New Trainers set to Lead the Way

By Prof. Raúl Sieiro

On November 21st, the Formador de Formadores program concluded with a special ceremony at the COOPEVE Convention Center in Santiago de Veraguas. Teachers who completed the program were celebrated for their hard work and dedication. Having earned their certificates, they are now prepared to train and mentor fellow educators across the country.



A Day of Celebration and Achievement

The event was a moment of pride, with participants being recognized for their hard work and commitment to improving education. DNELE Director Davina Cole, along with representatives from various regions, attended to congratulate the new trainers. The program has equipped them with the skills to support and guide other English teachers, helping improve language teaching nationwide.



Formador de Formadores: An In-Depth Program

In the first phase of the in-person training of the Trainer of Trainers Program, teachers received 15 hours of training led by renowned international experts who covered innovative teaching methodologies, such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics), both adapted to English teaching. The following phases included 24 hours of synchronous online

training through virtual workshops and 55 hours of asynchronous training, allowing teachers to progress at their own pace. Additionally, the mentorship and classroom support phase offered direct observation and personalized feedback on their teaching practices, promoting a continuous, collaborative learning environment. Finally, in the development of an educational project, teachers created practical solutions for their classrooms.

Next Step: The Summer Institute

Now that they've officially finished the program, the Formadores de Formadores are ready for their first big challenge: leading the 2025 Summer Institute, an upcoming nationwide program designed to help English teachers level up their skills. During the institute, the new trainers will guide teachers from across the country, offering support, sharing best practices, and helping everyone sharpen their teaching techniques.



New Trainers Set to Lead the Way

This ceremony marks an exciting step forward for English language teaching in our country. The new formadores will play a key role in improving how English is taught in classrooms, and their work at the Summer Institute is just the beginning. Their passion and expertise will help make sure that English teachers continue to get the support and training they need to succeed.

We're excited for the future and look forward to seeing how these new trainers will impact education across the country. Their journey as mentors and leaders is just beginning, and we can't wait to see the difference they'll make.



FUN FACT

Did you know that the real Panama hat isn't what you think? The show's true star is the 'sombbrero pintao', a beautifully handwoven masterpiece from the province of Coclé, just southwest of Panama City. Unlike the more famous Panama hat, the 'pintao' boasts intricate dark patterns woven into its natural fibers, giving it a unique and artistic touch. The process is an art form, with skilled hands using plants like bellota, chonta, chisna, junco, and pita to bring the design to life. Each hat is a stunning fusion of tradition and craftsmanship, making it a true gem of Panama's cultural heritage!



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This November, our dedicated teachers across Panama worked tirelessly to prepare their students for the patriotic celebrations. Your commitment, creativity, and passion for education are what make these events truly special.

Unfortunately, many planned events had to be canceled due to severe weather. While we couldn't witness the fruits of your hard work this time, we want to acknowledge the effort you put into preparing your students. We hope this setback won't discourage you from future participation, and we look forward to celebrating your continued dedication to our students.

Most importantly, we hope that you, your colleagues, and your families are safe and well.



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*Inspiring
EXCELLENCE
in every
lesson!*