

# THE MONTHLY NETWORKER

JANUARY 2025 | VOL. 5



## WORDS FROM OUR DIRECTOR

Dear Reader,

We are thrilled to announce the 2025 Summer Institute, an event designed to inspire, empower, and connect educators and learners alike. This unique gathering offers you the chance to collaborate with peers, expand your professional network, and gain valuable insights that will enrich your teaching journey.

Our carefully crafted workshops aim to provide you with the tools and strategies needed to effectively support students in developing their language skills. These sessions are not only practical but also foster meaningful connections among educators, creating a supportive community committed

to excellence in language education.

We extend our deepest gratitude to our dedicated trainers, who have been working diligently since November 16 to design an exceptional learning experience. Their expertise and passion will undoubtedly leave a lasting impact, and we are eager for you to benefit from their insights and guidance.

We look forward to welcoming you to the 2025 Summer Institute, where inspiration and innovation await!

Warm regards,

Ms. Cole

## LETTER FROM OUR EDITOR

Dear readers,

Welcome to this year's first edition of The Monthly Networker!

As always, this edition is packed with interesting information to help keep you informed and inspired. Inside, you'll find updates on ongoing projects, professional development opportunities, and insightful articles that reflect the current trends in our field. We've also highlighted stories from our colleagues across the country, offering a glimpse into how English teaching is evolving in different regions. Whether you're looking for fresh teaching strategies, expert advice, or simply a bit of motivation to start the year strong, this issue has something for everyone.

Moving forward, I want to take a moment to encourage all of you to contribute to the creation of each upcoming issue of The Monthly Networker. This newsletter thrives because of the collective knowledge, experiences, and ideas shared by teachers from across the country. Whether you have a teaching tip, a success story, or an article you want to share with your colleagues, your contributions are what make this publication truly valuable. Please keep in mind the deadlines for submissions, and take the time to share your insights. Happy reading!

Raúl Sieiro  
Editor, The Monthly Networker

With these ideas in mind, we can better understand the importance of this approach, the Action-Oriented Approach (AoA), versus a curriculum based on the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). This approach focuses on four elements: learners as social agents, tasks to accomplish, circumstances and specific environments, and fields of action.

Let's explore these four components in the teaching process. As social agents, learners actively engage in communication. Our students bring to class their backgrounds, experiences, and motivations, which allow them to learn the new language. While accomplishing tasks, they use the language as a tool for interaction, communication, and participation in society. During classes, there are tasks that need to be completed as evidence of learning. These tasks may involve solving real-life problems, engaging in conversations, expressing opinions, completing projects, or performing actions that require the use of language.

These given tasks are always framed based on circumstances and specific environments. For instance, providing readings, videos, or audio clips about environmental issues (circumstances) allows learners to gain the necessary insights. These insights help learners participate in a classroom debate (specific environment) about the importance of taking care of the environment. To effectively participate in the debate, learners determine the types of language necessary to convey their message properly and apply it. This constitutes the field of action.

The AoA complements the Communicative Approach. While the Communicative Approach involves interactive activities and real-world language use, it doesn't always require learners to perform specific tasks with defined outcomes. In contrast, the AoA goes a step further by emphasizing tasks that learners need to accomplish using the language.

In conclusion, the Action-Oriented Approach (AoA) offers a dynamic and purpose-driven framework for language learning that aligns closely with real-world application.



## INDUSTRY TRENDS

## Understanding AoA: The Action-Oriented Approach in Language Learning

*By Prof. Esperanza Díez M.*

Are you curious to know what AoA means? It stands for Action-Oriented Approach. To better understand this approach, it is important to remember some concepts introduced by Stephen Krashen. One of them is the distinction between acquisition and learning. Krashen also emphasizes another important aspect: in the process of acquiring and learning a language, language becomes a powerful instrument for participating in and shaping social interactions, relationships, and communities. In other words, language is not only a means of communication but also a tool for social action.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

## WE ARE READY FOR SUMMER TRAINING 2025!

By Claudia De Leon

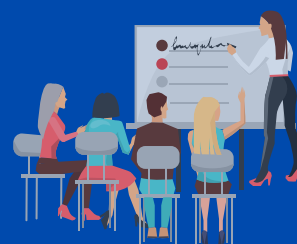
**The wait is over!** We are excited to announce our special week of training focused on English teaching techniques and methodologies, which will take place from Monday, February 17th, to Friday, February 21st, during the Summer Training 2025.

This event will feature a group of English teachers who have been prepared to deliver the sessions. This year's training will cover a range of relevant and impactful themes.

## How to Register

Don't miss out on this incredible opportunity! Subscribe now to participate in the Summer Training by visiting the following link:

<https://www.educapanama.edu.pa/?q=capacitaciones-de-verano-2025>



TOPIC	DAY
The Role of the Teacher as an Agent of Change for the Promotion of Mental Health in the School.	Monday, February 17
Digital Tools to Enhance Students Capabilities	Tuesday, February 18
Strategies for Self-Learning and Self-Assessment in the EFL classroom	Wednesday, February 19
Understanding Motivation in ESL Teaching. Exploring Key Factors in Student Engagement, Interdisciplinary Evaluations	Thursday, February 20
Introduction to Competency-Based Lesson Planning	Friday, February 21

These topics were carefully selected based on suggestions gathered during the launch of the English Teacher Network, ensuring that the training addresses the real needs and interests of our educators.

## Training Materials &amp; Preparation

**To enhance your learning experience, the DNELE confirms that all training presentations will be made available to English Network members one day before each session so you can download the material.**

We strongly encourage you all to review the materials in advance, in case the school doesn't have internet connection and bring your personal devices to actively engage in practical exercises during the training sessions.

## To register, follow these simple steps:

1. Select the "Redes Educativas" option.
2. Choose your region.
3. All English teachers should select the **Premedia/Media/Prof y Tec.** option to access the training groups for English educators—even if they currently teach at preschool or elementary levels.

## Spread the Word

We also encourage you to invite fellow educators to join the English Network, as this is our primary communication channel for all Summer Training updates. Let's build a stronger community of English teachers together!

**We look forward to seeing you at the Summer Training 2025!**



## SUCCESS STORIES

## My Effective Teaching Practices

By Yamileth Urriola

With 23 years of experience as an EFL teacher, I've developed methods to meet my students' diverse needs. My approach includes using songs, games, technology, and inclusive practices to create a supportive and engaging learning environment.

Songs play a key role in my lessons, helping students improve pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar through repetition. Tracks like "Unstoppable" by Sia and "What a Feeling" by Irene Cara teach both language and positive messages.

I prioritize completing tasks in class to avoid homework. This provides immediate feedback, ensures equal participation, and reduces the burden on students lacking home support. I also incorporate games and technology, such as interactive worksheets and language learning apps, to make lessons more engaging.

To support special needs students, I adapt materials, simplify instructions, and offer one-on-one assistance. Collaboration is encouraged to foster an inclusive classroom environment.

My teaching philosophy is built on respect and care, creating a space where students feel valued and motivated. This approach helps them develop language skills, become independent learners, and grow personally.

In summary, my practices focus on creativity, inclusivity, and a genuine commitment to student success.



## Teaching from the Bottom of My Heart

By Albanys Nuñez

Teaching is one of the most beautiful journeys we can be a part of because, during this process, we, as teachers, have the ability to impact our students and their families in ways that are more meaningful than we can imagine.

Over the years, I've realized that teaching is not just about transmitting subject knowledge; it's much more than that. It's about sharing ourselves with our students. It's the art that comes from our soul, connecting with their inner being.

One of the first things I suggest we do to connect with our students is to offer them a warm welcome at the beginning of the year, accompanied by beautiful school and classroom decorations that help them feel they are a part of it. We can repeat this gesture at the start of each quarter as well.

Secondly, we must show genuine interest in their realities, dreams, likes, dislikes, feelings, and struggles. One thing that helps me a lot with this is asking them a few simple questions at the beginning of the school year and writing their answers in my notebook. These questions are: Who do you live with? If they don't live in a nuclear family, I ask follow-up questions about their mother, father, and often hear many different, and sometimes difficult, real-life stories. Where do your parents work? If some of them are not working, I know I need to be prepared to support them with school supplies, food, and copies. Where do you live? This is particularly important to me, as I am mindful of whether they might be late or tired and if they are unable to afford a school bus. Do you have brothers or sisters? How many? Are they older or younger than you?

I refer back to my notebook when students show different behaviors, as it often signals that something may be happening in their lives, and I might be able to offer support.

What I've mentioned so far is just our starting point, leading us to the next step. Every single Monday, before we sing the National Anthem, I make it a point to personally greet each student with a warm, fraternal hug.

## SUCCESS STORIES

Some of them are not ready for this because they say their families do not hug them, and they do not know how to do it.

During counseling or a few minutes before our class, I ask them about what they did over the weekend and how they are feeling. If they are not ready to talk about their emotions, I show them some options from the emotions wheel so they can express more than just "good" or "bad."

I understand how hard it can be for us to talk about our feelings. That's why I am very interested in helping them get familiar with all the emotions we can feel, because that way it will be easier for them to manage their own. When we identify an emotion, we practice some techniques to help us manage it.

For example, counting, drinking water, mindfulness, drawing, grounding, finding a safe place, and so on.



After that, we are ready to warm up for the lesson of the day by playing fun games or listening to songs they suggest to me. One of the games we really enjoy is the removable hula hoop adapted to the topic.

For example, on each part of it, I write a verb, a subject, and a complement, and they must put them together to complete the sentence correctly.

We can also use it to review the days of the week, months of the year, numbers, and so on.

It is also very meaningful to give them a warm farewell at the end of the quarters and the school year, especially when we celebrate their birthdays, achievements, and holidays.



Finally, if we as teachers want to be successful in the teaching and learning process, we must ensure that our students feel that we really care about them and understand how they feel about things. Remember, students are our best partners in crime to carry out this journey successfully.



If God were to ask me about the occupation of my dreams, I would say "teacher" because teaching is what I want to do as long as He allows me to. And for that reason, what I love most about teaching is to love.



## TIPS AND BEST PRACTICES



## THE SWEET TRUTH: HOW SUGAR AFFECTS STUDENTS' BRAINS AND CLASSROOM PERFORMANCE

By María Del Pilar Guerra

### Sugar and the Brain: A Disruptive Duo

Sugar triggers a dopamine release in the brain, the same “feel-good” chemical associated with reward and pleasure. This is why sugary foods often lead to cravings. However, excessive sugar intake can disrupt brain function over time. Studies have shown that diets high in sugar reduce the production of brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), a protein essential for learning and memory. Low BDNF levels may impair a child’s ability to focus, retain information, and process new concepts in the classroom.

### The Classroom Connection

The effects of sugar on cognitive function manifest clearly in the classroom. Teachers often notice:

- Short attention spans: Children may struggle to concentrate or follow instructions.
- Hyperactivity followed by fatigue: The energy “high” from sugar is quickly followed by a crash, leaving children lethargic and unfocused.
- Behavioral challenges: Irritability and

impulsiveness are common, making it harder for children to manage emotions and interact positively with peers.

These challenges not only affect individual learning but can also disrupt the overall classroom environment.

A study conducted by the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA) demonstrated that diets high in fructose can slow down brain function, impairing memory and learning. This suggests that children consuming excessive sugar may struggle with retaining information and concentrating during lessons.

Moreover, the Universidad Católica de Murcia found a direct correlation between food addiction, particularly to sugary beverages, and decreased academic performance. This highlights the importance of monitoring children’s sugar intake to support their cognitive development and academic success.

In summary, limiting sugar consumption is crucial for children’s brain health and learning capabilities. Encouraging a balanced diet rich in nutrients can help enhance their cognitive functions and overall performance in school.

## THE ROAD TO IMPLEMENTING A NEW CURRICULUM

**Practical Training in Competency-Based Lesson Planning***By Claudia De Leon*

As part of a new initiative to transform education in Panama, the upcoming Summer Training program will offer a pivotal session focused on lesson planning within a competency-based curriculum.

Taking place across various educational regions, this session aims to equip English teachers with a comprehensive understanding of the core components of such a curriculum.

**Key Elements of the New Curriculum**

The session will explore essential elements of the new curriculum, including the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), standards, competencies, learning scenarios, and themes.

Also, educators will engage in interactive activities that deepen their understanding of how these components contribute to an action-oriented approach to teaching.

This practical framework bridges theory and practice, allowing educators to immediately relate their learning to their own teaching environments.

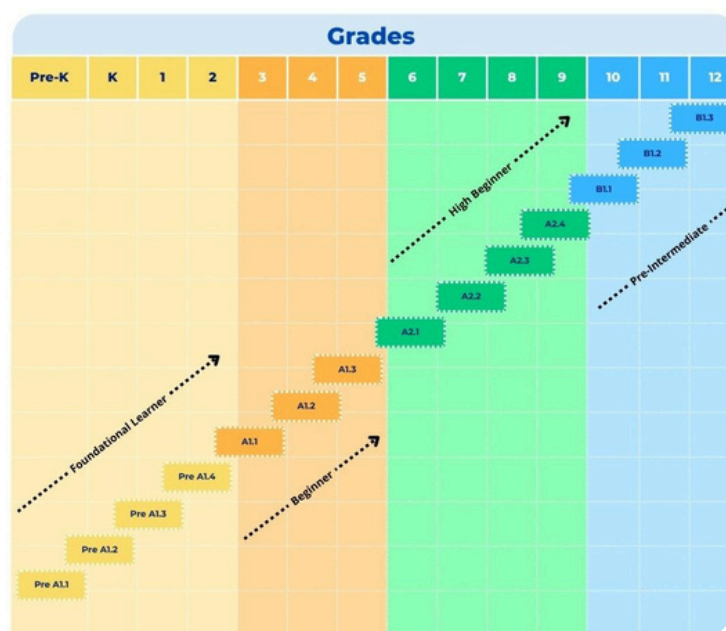
**Hands-On Learning and Collaboration**

A key tool during the session will be the Theme Lesson Planner, designed to help teachers organize and structure their daily lesson plans.

Throughout the seminar, participants will collaborate, share ideas, and build upon each other's experiences, enhancing their ability to create cohesive, effective lesson sequences tailored to meet their students' needs.

The seminar will also highlight the importance of connecting classroom instruction to real-world scenarios. By focusing on competency development tied to practical contexts, educators can significantly improve student outcomes and better prepare them for life beyond the classroom.

A key focus of this training will be on communicative competencies and their integration into the curriculum. Teachers will explore linguistic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic skills that students will develop through their lessons. This approach enhances learning and prepares students for real-world communication

**Proficiency Bands for the English Curriculum based on Competency Standards**

During the session, teacher will gain valuable insights into the progression of English language proficiency at different grade levels.

**Join Us for This Transformative Opportunity**

On February 21, 2025, join us for this invaluable opportunity to enhance your teaching practices and contribute to student success in Panama's evolving educational landscape.

This session marks the first step in providing educators with the knowledge and confidence needed to embrace a competency-based curriculum, laying the foundation for further training and professional growth.



## REGIONAL SHOWCASE

## Transforming Education in Bocas del Toro: Enhancing Teaching Methods and Empowering Student Learning.



At Berta López School, Teachers Melissa Ortega and María Suira exemplify dedication to educational excellence. Melissa Ortega stands out for her strong passion for implementing new, student-centered methodologies that make learning more effective, while María Suira demonstrates remarkable determination in refining her teaching methods to enhance outcomes for her students and contribute to the broader educational community. Together, they embody a commitment to innovation and progress in education.



At IPT El Silencio, a significant milestone in the pre-piloting phase of the new English curriculum was achieved through the collaboration of Mr. Jaime Morales, who served as the pre-piloter. His remarkable dedication to exploring and testing innovative strategies highlighted his unwavering commitment to advancing education and fostering meaningful progress in the classroom.



At Almirante High School, Teacher Marissa Quiroz plays a key role in advancing instructional practices. Her enthusiasm for driving meaningful change within the school is truly inspiring and showcases her dedication to educational excellence.

The dedicated efforts of these educators in Bocas del Toro highlight the transformative power of passion and perseverance in education. Teachers like Mr. Morales Jaime, Marissa Quiroz, Melissa Ortega, and María Suira are not only improving English instruction but also setting an inspiring example for their communities. Their commitment to innovation and student-centered learning reflects the profound impact that dedicated educators can have, paving the way for a brighter future in education across the region.





## REGIONAL SHOWCASE

## Training Session for English Trainers from Panamá Centro and San Miguelito

A highly productive training session was held for English trainers of trainers from the regions of Panamá Centro and San Miguelito. The session, organized by Supervisors Nilka Luna and Clara Clark, was supported by Quality Leadership University and aimed to prepare trainers for the upcoming 2025 Summer Institute. The event focused on the essential content that will be covered on the last day of the third week of training, specifically designed to equip trainers with the knowledge and skills they need to effectively support their colleagues in the introduction of the new curriculum based on competencies.



Ms. Monica León, from Quality Leadership University, led the session, delivering in-depth instruction on the key components of the curriculum that will be rolled out soon. Her comprehensive approach reinforced the core principles and methodologies that will be pivotal in the successful training of teachers during the upcoming institute. More than 20 trainers attended the session, all of whom will play a critical role in training their fellow teachers.



The event received an overwhelmingly positive response from the participants, who appreciated both the informative nature of the session and the collaborative environment that was fostered. Special thanks were given to the regional authorities, Ph. Mireya Pino and Magister Liliana Quintero, whose generous support ensured that the atmosphere was welcoming and conducive to learning. Their commitment to the event's success was evident and deeply valued by all attendees.



The trainers left the session feeling energized and motivated, armed with new techniques and strategies that will be invaluable as they move forward in preparing their colleagues for introducing the new curriculum. This collaborative effort, which brings together local and regional authorities, academic leaders, and dedicated trainers, is designed to enhance the quality of English instruction across both regions. It is a significant step toward ensuring that trainers are well-prepared to introduce the new curriculum effectively, ultimately benefiting both educators and students in the years to come.

## MEET OUR TEAM

**CLARA CLARK***English Supervisor for San Miguelito Region*

With over two decades of experience in education, I have dedicated my career to empowering students and educators while fostering growth and development. As the English Supervisor for the San Miguelito region, I am committed to creating meaningful learning experiences tailored to our community's diverse needs. By leveraging technology, my team crafts dynamic lessons that accommodate various learning styles, ensuring every student has the opportunity to thrive.

I lead a sociolinguistic study in five schools, exploring the effects of two innovative vocabulary acquisition strategies for students with special needs. This research reflects my dedication to inclusive, forward-thinking education, equipping all learners with the tools for success.

Throughout my career, I have faced challenges with resilience, prioritizing collaboration and continuous improvement. These efforts have significantly impacted students, teachers, and the broader school environment, fostering a culture of adaptability and shared success.

Beyond my professional work, I find joy in reading and listening to soul-enriching music, which inspires my creativity and nurtures my spirit. Looking ahead, I aim to adopt educational strategies that meet global demands and continue uplifting our community through transformative teaching practices.

## PROFILE OF THE MONTH

**MITZY M. MARÍN M**

**Mitzy M. Marín M.** is a dedicated English teacher with 22 years of experience at Pedro Pablo Sánchez Secondary School, where she also served as the coordinator of the English Department. Her career has spanned various institutions in Panama, including locations in the Indigenous Region of Nürum and Panama City. Mitzy has worked in public and private schools, universities, and national programs, standing out for her commitment to education.

Throughout her career, she has participated in the review of the English curriculum alongside MEDUCA and has collaborated on educational exchange programs with the U.S. Department of State. Her focus on educational research includes the acquisition of English as a second language and the integration of technology in the classroom. Additionally, she has served as an international judge in the World Robotics Olympiad.

Mitzy faces challenges with resilience, learning from each experience. Her impact on students and colleagues is remarkable, fostering a collaborative learning environment. Outside the classroom, she is interested in research and writing, collaborating with researchers from Latin America and Asia. Her future goals include continuing to innovate in education and contributing to academic development in Panama.



## RESOURCE CORNER

## Digital Content Creation Tools: Canva for Education

By Elda Del Real

Canva for Education is an accessible and user-friendly tool that empowers both teachers and students to craft visually engaging digital materials. This platform allows users to design presentations, posters, and other creative projects with ease, encouraging collaboration and innovative thinking in classrooms.

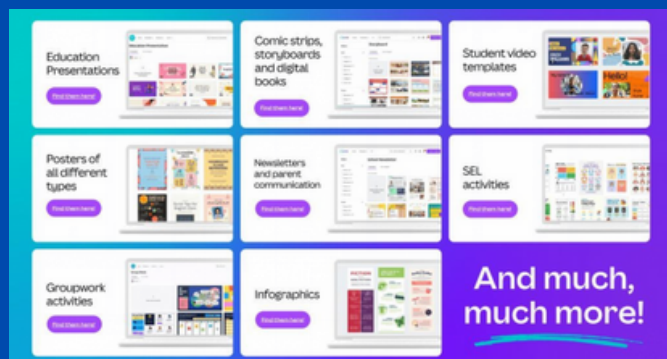
### Benefits of Canva for Education

Canva offers templates and design options that make presentations and digital content captivating, helping students better communicate their ideas. Students can design multimedia projects or digital posters that showcase their understanding, fostering hands-on and imaginative approaches to learning. Educators can use Canva to create materials that improve engagement, such as visually clear slides for lessons or informative posters for school events.

### How to Use Canva for Education

Assign tasks where students create a digital poster or presentation to demonstrate what they've learned. For example, students studying environmental topics can create posters highlighting ways to reduce pollution. Use Canva to design lesson visuals, handouts, or class announcements that are easy to read and visually appealing. Pair students in groups to create content together, such as infographics summarizing key concepts or group projects.

With Canva for Education, classrooms can shift from traditional methods to approaches that emphasize creativity and clear communication, making lessons more interactive and engaging.



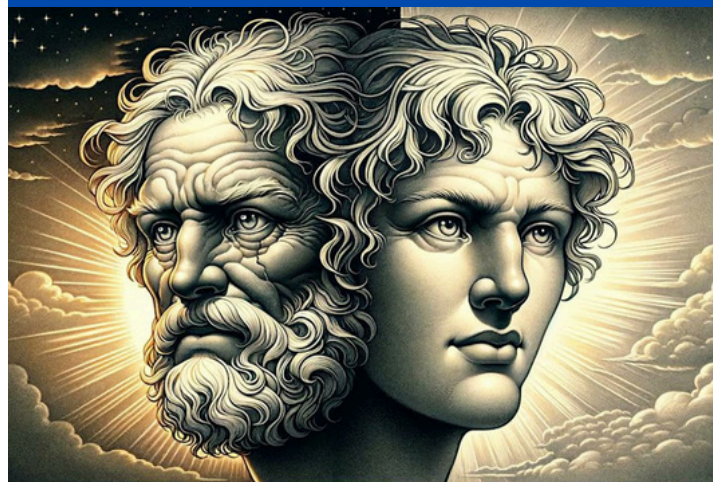
## THUMBS UP

We're excited to share that 1,278 of our 5,559 members (23%) are actively engaging in the National English Teachers Network on Teams! It's amazing to see such participation and collaboration. Let's keep growing together!



## FUN FACT

January is named after **Janus**, the Roman god of beginnings, transitions, and doorways. Janus is often depicted with two faces—one looking to the past and the other to the future—making him the perfect symbol for the first month of the year!



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