

THE MONTHLY NETWORKER

FEBRUARY 2025 | VOL. 6



WORDS FROM OUR DIRECTOR

Dear Reader,

As the new academic year begins, it brings exciting opportunities to learn, grow, and improve our teaching. Every moment in the classroom is a chance to inspire students and strengthen our own practices. In this edition of The Monthly Networker, we offer ideas to help support these goals.

The recent training sessions held during the 2025 Summer Institute provided educators with fresh strategies and sparked important conversations. The enthusiasm and commitment shown during these sessions reflect a deep dedication to both personal growth and student success.

We truly appreciate the time and effort every teacher puts into developing their skills and sharing knowledge with others.

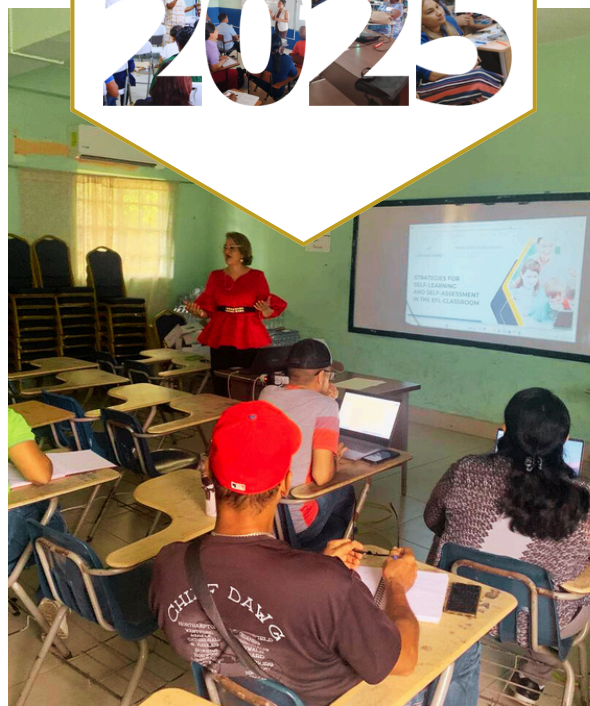
Let's start this school year with purpose, teamwork, and a strong commitment to excellence in education.

Warm regards,

Ms. Cole

SUMMER INSTITUTE

2025



LETTER FROM OUR EDITOR

Dear readers,

This month's issue of *The Monthly Networker* brings a selection of articles designed to support and inspire educators in their professional growth.

As teachers, we navigate many challenges, and staying informed about effective strategies, emerging trends, and opportunities for collaboration, helps us create meaningful learning experiences for our students.

Our feature article, *Activities that Promote Mental Health in the Classroom*, provides practical ways to foster a positive learning environment while prioritizing students' well-being. With mental health playing a critical role in academic success, integrating these strategies can make a significant impact on both student engagement and overall classroom dynamics.

We also examine the lifelong advantages of early literacy in *Why Reading from a Young Age Sets Kids Up for Success*. Encouraging strong reading habits from the start not only improves comprehension and critical thinking but also lays the foundation for future academic achievement.

In *The Importance of Online Communities in a Teacher's Philosophy*, we highlight how virtual networks provide a space for educators to exchange ideas, reflect on their practice, and shape their teaching philosophies. Whether through discussion forums, professional groups, or resource-sharing platforms, connecting with fellow educators can offer valuable insights and support.

Finally, we bring you updates on the summer training sessions, where teachers across the network engaged in professional development opportunities aimed at refining their instructional techniques. These sessions continue to be an essential part of our commitment to continuous learning and excellence in education.

We hope you find this issue both informative and inspiring. Your feedback and contributions are always welcome, and we encourage you to share your thoughts and experiences with us.

Thank you for being part of our growing community. Happy reading!

Raúl Sieiro

Editor, The Monthly Networker

NEWS & UPDATES

DNELE PARTICIPATES IN NATIONWIDE SCHOOL VOLUNTEER INITIATIVE

The National Directorate of Foreign Language Teaching (DNELE) joined the Ministry of Education's nationwide volunteer effort to improve school facilities ahead of the academic year. Minister of Education Lucy Molinar visited several schools, thanking volunteers for their dedication.

As part of this initiative, volunteers carried out essential maintenance, including cleaning hallways, classrooms, and green areas, as well as painting school interiors and exteriors. These efforts not only enhance learning environments but also foster a sense of community responsibility among students, teachers, and parents.



SUCCESS STORIES

ENHANCING PRONUNCIATION: A WEEK OF PHONETICS TRAINING*By Yamileth Urriola de Hernández*

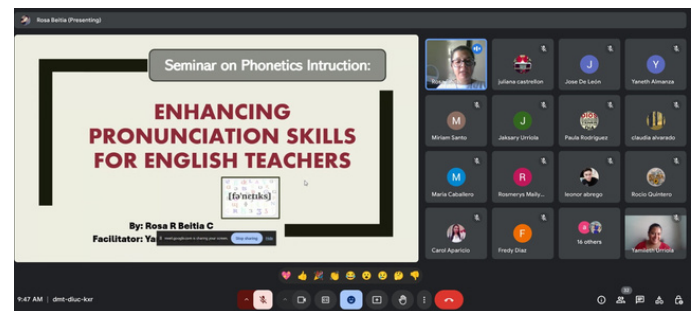
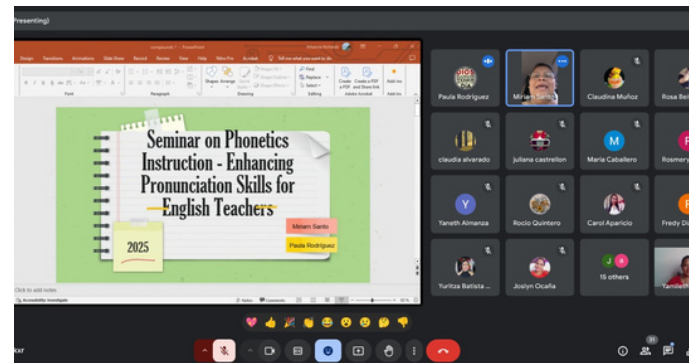
Teaching English pronunciation is a crucial aspect of language instruction, and it should not be optional for teachers since we are the language model in the classroom. Due to the importance of this language component, I worked with thirty-five English teachers during a week-long training session, focusing on phonetics and phonology to improve pronunciation accuracy. Consequently, this article reflects on the experience, challenges, and insights gained throughout the summer program.

My primary objective was to differentiate phonetics and phonology, emphasizing that phonetics involves how speech sounds are produced, while phonology focuses on how these sounds function within a language. Participants explored key concepts such as places and manner of articulation, stress, intonation, and rhythm, essential for achieving precise and accurate pronunciation.

Furthermore, the difference in vowels and consonants between the English and Spanish phonological systems was discussed and explained so participants realized why mistakes are made in the second language. It was a significant experience to distinguish sounds that do not exist in Spanish but in English. Besides, learning how to read phonetics transcriptions made sessions exciting and meaningful.

Many teachers reported challenges in teaching pronunciation due to a limited exposure to phonetic training. Common issues included difficulties with short and long vowel sounds, consonant clusters, and stress patterns. Effective techniques were discussed and practiced in sessions, including minimal pairs, phonetic transcription, and targeted drilling exercises. The training emphasized hands-on activities and online classroom strategies to integrate phonetics instruction effectively.

Teachers practiced using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) to transcribe and analyze pronunciation errors. We also explored interactive techniques, such as singing songs using the LyricsTraining app, discussing videos, and phonetic dictation and exercises to engage participants.



As a final project, participants presented in pairs exercises to explain stress, intonation, and rhythm. All the presentations and activities were uploaded to our virtual classroom, where they can be accessed and used when they want to.

Finally, another of my goals was achieved because participants recognized the importance of systematic phonetic instruction and planned to incorporate phonetic exercises into their lessons. Also, teachers highlighted the need for structured instruction training since it will be crucial for empowering educators to tackle pronunciation challenges in their classrooms.

TIPS AND BEST PRACTICES

ACTIVITIES THAT PROMOTE MENTAL HEALTH IN THE CLASSROOM

By Mixiuris Madelen Maltez

The new school year is about to begin, and students' excitement to acquire new knowledge is growing. They arrive in the classroom for the first time full of dreams and goals, but stress can often disrupt their aspirations.

This stress stems from various challenges in their family, school, personal, and social environments. These factors can negatively impact students' mental health, leading to poor academic performance, demotivation, and even dropout.



Some activities that can help promote mental health in the classroom include:

- Creating a healthy and trusting environment where students can build positive relationships with peers based on mutual respect. Post two poster boards on the wall—one light blue and one green. On the green board, students will attach sticky notes sharing things they appreciate (e.g., being supported, being listened to). On the light blue board, they will note things they dislike (e.g., destructive criticism, dishonesty).
- Encouraging students to learn about emotions so they can identify, understand, manage, and express their feelings effectively. Create a collage on a large poster board with images of faces expressing different emotions. Ask students to identify the emotions and share a personal experience that made them feel that way.



- Developing self-care skills to prevent mental exhaustion. Draw a traffic light and post it on the wall. At the start of each class, have students indicate their mental state using the traffic light colors (Green: Motivated, Yellow: Neutral, Red: Stressed). If a student selects red, introduce a short activity or game to help reduce stress levels.
- Promoting self-reflection by encouraging students to set clear learning goals and evaluate their progress. Create a classroom mural where students write three goals they aim to achieve during the school year. When they feel discouraged, they can refer to the mural to identify obstacles and stay motivated. Foster a classroom atmosphere that encourages open and positive dialogue between classmates and the teacher.
- Fostering empathy and self-awareness to promote tolerance and appreciation for others. Set up a "kindness mailbox" where students can write positive notes highlighting a classmate's strengths or special qualities. At the end of the week, the teacher distributes the messages to their recipients.

As teachers committed to the integral education of our students, we must implement classroom activities that contribute positively to mental health so that the teaching-learning process is more effective.

EDUCATIONAL INSIGHTS

WHY READING FROM A YOUNG AGE SETS KIDS UP FOR SUCCESS*By Elda Del Real*

Encouraging children to read from an early age is one of the most effective ways to ensure their academic success and personal growth. The benefits of fostering a love for reading extend beyond simply improving literacy skills; it lays the foundation for a lifelong love of learning and curiosity.

Firstly, reading helps children develop crucial language skills. By exposing them to new vocabulary, sentence structures, and diverse writing styles, reading enhances both their speaking and writing abilities. The more children read, the more words they encounter, which expands their ability to express themselves clearly and effectively. This is especially important as they progress through school and are expected to articulate ideas and communicate in increasingly complex ways.

In addition to improving language skills, reading stimulates cognitive development. Books introduce children to new concepts, ideas, and cultures that broaden their understanding of the world. This early exposure helps children develop critical thinking skills as they analyze plot twists, character motivations, and the consequences of actions within the stories they read. These cognitive skills are transferable to many areas of life, helping children solve problems, make informed decisions, and think creatively.



Reading also promotes emotional and social growth. Through stories, children learn to understand and empathize with characters who may be different from themselves. These experiences help children develop emotional intelligence, which is essential for building healthy relationships with others.

Moreover, reading provides a safe space for children to explore their own emotions, which can lead to improved self-awareness and emotional resilience.



One of the most significant reasons to encourage reading is its role in building a strong foundation for academic achievement. Children who read regularly from a young age are more likely to succeed in school, as reading improves their concentration, attention span, and comprehension skills. It also helps children perform better on tests, particularly in subjects that require critical reading and writing, such as language arts and social studies.

Encouraging children to read early sets them up for success. It builds the skills they need to grow academically, emotionally, and socially. When parents and educators foster a love for reading, they equip children to become lifelong learners who can adapt and thrive in a changing world.

References

1. Child Mind Institute. (n.d.). *Why is it important to read to your child?* Retrieved from <https://childmind.org/article/why-is-it-important-to-read-to-your-child/>
2. HealthyChildren.org. (n.d.). *10 tips to help your child fall in love with reading.* Retrieved from <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/school/Pages/10-Tips-to-Help-Your-Child-Fall-in-Love-with-Reading.aspx>

INDUSTRY TRENDS

THE IMPORTANCE OF ONLINE COMMUNITIES IN BUILDING A TEACHER'S PHILOSOPHY

By Professor Jihad Sleiman

In today's interconnected world, non-native English speakers working in Teaching English as a Foreign Language can greatly benefit from joining educational Facebook pages such as ELT Buzz. These platforms provide invaluable resources, support networks, and inspiration for English educators navigating the challenges of teaching in heterogeneous classrooms. For educators in Panama, such groups bridge the gap between theory and practice by offering practical advice, lesson plans, and strategies that are globally recognized and can be locally adapted. In my experience, belonging to these types of communities ensures that we, as English teachers, stay updated on the latest trends in language instruction while nurturing our professional growth.

ELT Buzz, in particular, is a treasure for English teachers seeking innovative ideas to make their classrooms dynamic and engaging. By offering a variety of resources, ranging from teaching tips to creative lesson plans and materials, the platform equips educators to tackle usual challenges with a fresh perspective. For example, the "A to Z of Classroom Success" framework shared by ELT Buzz encourages us to adopt best practices that enhance both our teaching style and our students' learning experiences. This collaborative space empowers English educators to continuously grow professionally and enables them to deliver lessons that are both meaningful and unforgettable.

The "A to Z of Classroom Success" personifies the essence of an English teacher's philosophy by prioritizing student-centered learning, creativity, and adaptability. Key principles such as "Bring real-world examples into your classroom" and "Empathize equally, be fair" emphasize the importance of creating an inclusive environment where every student feels valued. In addition, concepts like "Recycle and revise" and "Question all grammar rules" highlight the need for continuous reflection and adaptation in teaching methods and strategies. These ideas remind me that effective teaching not only requires mastery of content but also the ability to inspire and connect with students.

As a non-native English teacher in Panama, I deeply align with this philosophy. For that reason, I try as much as possible to incorporate real-world examples and foster virtual cross-cultural exchanges that enable me to narrow the gap between my students' local context and the global nature of the English language. Principles like "Leave the classroom happy" and "Welcome your students" remind me to create a positive and nurturing atmosphere that motivates learners. At the same time, "Understand your students" serves as a guiding light that motivates me to tailor lessons to my students' unique needs and aspirations.

In conclusion, my ongoing journey as a non-native English speaker working as a teacher of this important language is one of continuous growth and self-improvement. And that is why I utilize platforms such as ELT Buzz, which not only provide me with practical tools but also inspire me to embrace philosophies that prioritize inclusivity, creativity, and versatility. By engaging with these communities, English teachers can enhance their own skills while making a positive, lasting impact on their students' learning experiences. The "A to Z of Classroom Success" is more than just a list; it is a model for cultivating an inspiring and transformative educational experience.

A TO Z OF CLASSROOM SUCCESS

Some ideas to inspire teachers

Animate yourself/your learners your material.	Opinions are more than, "it depends"
Bring real-world examples into your classroom.	Prepare plan Bs, Cs and Ds
Contextualize, conceptualize, clarify.	Question all grammar rules
Develop recognition of and recording of collocations.	Recycle and revise
Empathize equally. Be fair.	Silence should not be artificially filled
Foster cross-cultural exchanges	Test – Teach – Test. Test – Teach – Test
Group learners with imagination and variety	Understand your students
Help students to manage & help themselves	Vary. Your intros. Your interactions and feedback
Include the excluded	Welcome your students.
Justify unpopular classroom decisions	eXtra enthusiasm Monday mornings
Keep the students on their toes	You are a different teacher than you were before.
Leave the classroom happy.	Zig-zagging is often more interesting than a straight path
Motivate intrinsically	
Nodding is not proof of comprehension	



Reference:
<https://www.facebook.com/share/1D11maac9h/>

MEET OUR TEAM

ANITA BARRÍA*English Regional Coordinator for Panama Oeste*

Since becoming an English Coordinator, I have enjoyed working with teachers at all levels, from elementary to high school. This role allows me to teach and learn from colleagues while empowering teachers to be creative, active, and motivated in their lessons. However, this work is a team effort. We collaborate and share ideas through activities like the English Festival, meetings, and peer observations.

I work closely with English Supervisors to train and support teachers in implementing meaningful, student-centered changes. We also identify talented educators who inspire others by leading model classes and workshops, both in-person and online. I've had the opportunity to train teachers within my region and beyond.

During the pandemic, a major challenge was the lack of technological knowledge among teachers. As Coordinators, we adapted by searching for and sharing resources to support educators across regions. Today, technology continues to play a key role in enhancing teaching and communication.

I strongly believe in fostering a learning community where collaboration allows us to grow and improve. Our English Network has become a valuable space where teachers feel comfortable asking questions, sharing knowledge, and learning from one another.

PROFILE OF THE MONTH

EMITZA DEL CARMEN BARRERA

Emitza Del Carmen Barrera, is a passionate English educator with 25 years of experience. She is currently working at Escuela Octavio López Pascal in Boquete, Chiriquí, and holds a Bachelor of Arts in English Education. Her childhood dream of teaching became a reality, and she has dedicated her life to shaping students with passion and care.

Growing up in a bilingual school with international teachers, Emitza developed a deep love for language and learning. She believes teaching is one of the most important professions, as it empowers students to broaden their perspectives and build confidence.

Her philosophy centers on creating a supportive and engaging learning environment where students can succeed at their own pace. She incorporates interactive methods such as songs, games, and real-life scenarios to make English learning meaningful.

Beyond the classroom, she promotes language learning through cultural events, conversation workshops, and English clubs. Collaboration with colleagues is essential to her, as she values sharing ideas and improving teaching practices.

For Emitza, teaching is more than a job it's a vocation. She continues to inspire students, enrich her community, and grow alongside fellow educators with passion and dedication.

BEHIND THE SCENES-2025 SUMMER INSTITUTE

EMPOWERING EDUCATORS: THE INSPIRING JOURNEY OF TRAINERS*By Claudia De León*

The third week of training for the 2025 Summer Institute was a remarkable experience for a dedicated team of trainers committed to enhancing their skills to benefit their fellow English teachers. Among these inspiring individuals were Oreste Rodríguez and Wheslly Morales, two educators from San Miguelito who openly shared their transformative journeys and vision for the future.

A Journey of Growth and Commitment

Oreste Rodríguez, an English teacher at C.E.B.G. Estado de Israel, revealed that his motivation to become a trainer stems from a deep desire to enrich the education system and empower others, preparing them for paths of ongoing professional development.

He emphasized the importance of perseverance and a positive attitude in facing the challenge of being trained, stating, "My message to teachers is simple: with perseverance and attitude, you can conquer any challenge. Whether you've been teaching for five years or sixty, there is always something new and exciting to learn."

**Inspired by the Eagerness of Trainees to Learn**

Wheslly, who works at C.E.B.G. Jose Domingo Espinar, described her role as a facilitator as a long-standing dream come true. Regarding the training, she shared that she felt energized by the enthusiasm shown by her trainees, noting to incorporate technology into their teaching methods.

"I am thrilled with my group. The drive to learn and the joy of applying new knowledge are palpable among my colleagues. This year, the atmosphere is electrifying, and I absolutely love it. Witnessing such enthusiasm and commitment to professional growth is incredibly refreshing."

**Looking Ahead: A Vision for the Future**

Orestes and Wheslly view their roles as trainers not just as positions but as a commitment to lifelong growth. Oreste aspires to foster a vibrant culture of continuous learning among educators, while Wheslly is eager to continue her professional development in the training sector. The experiences of these trainers reflect the essence of lifelong learning and highlight the impact that dedicated educators have on shaping the future of teaching. Their passion and commitment serve as a testament to the importance of continuous professional development in education. As they continue their journey, they not only enhance their own skills but also empower countless others to do the same.





SUMMER INSTITUTE



SHOWCASE

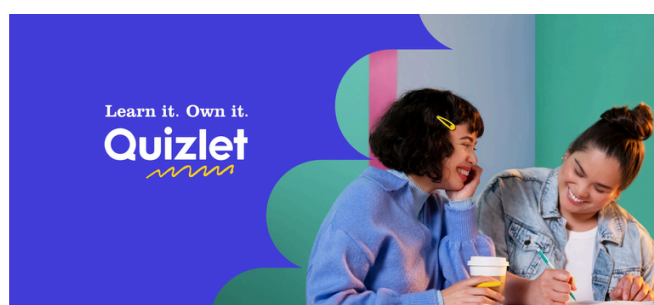


RESOURCE CORNER

QUIZLET: A SIMPLE TOOL TO BOOST VOCABULARY AND GRAMMAR PRACTICE

By Elda Del Real

Quizlet ([Quizlet.com](https://www.quizlet.com)) is a free online platform that helps students practice vocabulary and grammar through digital flashcards, quizzes, and games. It's an easy-to-use tool that supports independent learning and engages students in a fun, interactive way.



How It Works

Teachers can create custom study sets or use millions of ready-made flashcards. Quizlet offers different learning modes:

- Learn – Guides students through practice sessions.
- Flashcards – Helps with memorization.
- Write & Spell – Reinforces spelling and recall.
- Test – Generates quizzes automatically.
- Match & Gravity – Timed games for engagement.

Why Use Quizlet?

- Saves time – No need to create materials from scratch.
- Improves retention – Uses spaced repetition for better learning.
- Encourages independent study – Students can practice anytime.
- Engages all learners – Interactive activities keep students motivated.

Quizlet is free, but Quizlet Plus offers extra features like offline access and progress tracking. Try it in your classroom to make learning more effective and enjoyable!



THUMBS UP

A thumbs up to all the teachers who participated in the summer training sessions! Your dedication to continuous learning strengthens your skills and enriches your students' education. Investing in your growth is investing in their success; keep up the great work!



FUN FACT

The first official Carnival in Panama was inaugurated in 1910 by José Agustín Arango, who was then the Mayor of Panama City. He played a key role in organizing the event, setting the stage for what would become one of the country's most iconic celebrations.



Contact Us:

- **Raúl Sieiro** (National English Teachers Network Coordinator): raul.sieiro@meduca.gob.pa
- **Elda Del Real** (National English Teachers Network Technical Assistant): elda.delreal@meduca.gob.pa
- **María Del Pilar Guerra** (The Monthly Networker Editing Assistant): maria.guerra@meduca.gob.pa
- **Angela Distin** (The Monthly Networker Editing Assistant): angela.distin@meduca.gob.pa
- **DNELE Office: 524-9832**



