

THE MONTHLY

NETWORKER

MAY 2025 | VOL.9



 **MES DE LA
ETNIA NEGRA**

BAHABA

WORDS FROM OUR DIRECTOR

Every May, Panama comes together to celebrate Black Ethnicity Month—a special time to recognize and honor the rich culture, history, and contributions of Afro-Panamanian and Afro-Caribbean communities. Their legacy is everywhere—in our music, language, traditions, and the very heart of our national identity. From their pivotal role in building the Panama Canal to shaping community life, their impact continues to inspire.

One of the most powerful, though often overlooked, contributions of the Afro-Caribbean community has been in education. Many of Panama's first English teachers were of Afro-Caribbean descent. Their passion and commitment helped lay the foundation for English language education across the country. Thanks to their work, generations of students have been able to connect with the world beyond our borders and dream bigger.

Today, English continues to be a key that opens doors—to higher education, better jobs, and new opportunities. In our globalized world, speaking English is not just a skill—it is a bridge to the future. That is why investing in English education means investing in our youth, their confidence, and their potential.

As part of our commitment to improving and expanding education, MEDUCA is proud to host the National Education Conference from June 16 to 20,

2025. This exciting event will bring together 37 expert speakers from Latin America, the UK, and the United States. Throughout the week, they' will share innovative ideas and practical strategies to strengthen teaching and learning. Some of the key topics include:

- Universal Design for Learning
- Differentiated Instruction
- Tools to Encourage and Develop Critical Thinking
- Visible Thinking Routines

This conference is more than just a professional gathering—it is a space for connection, collaboration, and inspiration. Educators, researchers, and policymakers will come together to share knowledge, learn from one another, and help shape the future of education in Panama.

So, as we celebrate Black Ethnicity Month, let's take a moment to reflect on the past and those who paved the way—and let us look ahead with hope and determination. We remain committed to building a more inclusive, innovative, and globally connected education system, where every student—no matter their background—has the chance to succeed.

Let us celebrate our heritage, believe in the power of education, and keep building a brighter future, together.

Ms. Cole

REGIONAL NEWS & UPDATES

STUDENTS COMMEMORATE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR DAY

Press Center of the Ministry of Education

On May 1st, International Labour Day, students from Cirilo José Martínez Bilingual School paid tribute to workers by dressing in professions of their choice, expressing their desire to contribute to the country's development through education.

The children used posters and short talks to share their aspirations in fields like medicine, law enforcement, teaching, business, architecture, engineering, and firefighting. Principal Martina Castillo de González highlighted that such activities aim to teach the value of work, encourage research, oral expression, and raise awareness of interpersonal relationships and adult work roles.

Teachers and parents also shared ideas on student development, the importance of work, and school-family collaboration.

International Labour Day commemorates the global labor movement and advocates for workers' rights.



REGIONAL NEWS & UPDATES

MEDUCA INTENSIFIES THE PREVENTION OF SCHOOL BULLYING*Press Center of the Ministry of Education*

With various activities, schools across the country commemorate the International Day Against School Bullying, with the aim of raising awareness and preventing a problem that affects millions of children and adolescents around the world.

The National Director of Psychoeducational Services, Veruskha Ordás, emphasized that school bullying, also known as bullying, manifests through physical, verbal, or psychological behaviors that are repeatedly directed at a student, causing negative effects on their emotional and social well-being.



The Ministry of Education is intensifying efforts for school prevention through tools like "My School Diary" and Interactive Recesses. In addition, rules, norms, boundaries, and clear goals are established in each classroom so that no form of violence, including school bullying, can occur among students.

School bullying only occurs between students at different educational levels within the system. Once detected, an investigation is carried out involving both the victim and the aggressor, initiating a series of interventions with parental involvement in the search for concrete solutions.

Psychopedagogical teams, as well as teachers, are equipped to identify and detect any inappropriate behavior that may occur in the school setting. These situations typically involve behavioral, emotional, family, or academic performance issues. What's important is that interventions take place as quickly as possible.

LETTER FROM OUR EDITOR

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the May issue of the Monthly Networker! As we step deeper into the school year, there's a fresh sense of momentum in the air, and this month's issue reflects just that. From classrooms to conferences, the National English Network continues to thrive with vibrant initiatives and inspiring efforts from educators and students alike.

In Regional News and Updates, we highlight how students are honoring the significance of International Labour Day and how Meduca is taking strong steps to prevent school bullying. We also feature the professional growth of teachers through the METwork Training at the Metropolitan School of Panama—proof that learning never stops, even for educators.

Our Spotlight story shines on a high school in Panama Oeste, where students explore Afro-Panamanian identity in powerful, creative ways. Cultural awareness has never felt more alive.

This month, we're thrilled to introduce Network Chronicles, a new section debuting with stories and reflections from the IATEFL Edinburgh 2025 conference. Let the global inspiration begin!

In Tips and Best Practices, discover how Los Andes Bilingual School is transforming student engagement. Meanwhile, the journey on The Road to Implementing the New Curriculum continues with exciting updates, including a new online training program empowering teachers across the country.

Be sure to check out the Resource Corner for a tool that's making classroom management simpler and more effective, and don't miss the latest happenings in Thumbs Up and trivia in Fun Fact.

Happy Reading!

Editor, The Monthly Networker

FEATURE STORY

DREAMING BIG: CELEBRATING BLACK EXCELLENCE THROUGH ART AND INSPIRATION

By Lisseth Rodriguez

Fourth-grade students from the Bilingual School Martin Luther King in San Miguelito studied the legacy of the school's namesake and explored the impact of his famous "I Have a Dream" speech.

They also discussed other prominent figures such as Barack Obama, Oprah Winfrey, and Kobe Bryant, focusing on their achievements and the inspiration they provide.

As a concluding activity, the students in 4th Grade E used images of these leaders to represent the idea that today's youth are the future generation. They created a mural to celebrate Black individuals and their significant contributions.



CULTURAL AWARENESS IN ACTION: EXPLORING AFRO-PANAMANIAN IDENTITY THROUGH STUDENT VOICES

By Héctor Mendoza, San Carlos High School

Under the guidance of Professor Héctor Mendoza, San Carlos High School's English Department carried out a speaking activity in commemoration of Afro-Panamanian Ethnicity Month. The event involved 11th-grade students from Science and Computer Science groups A through E.

The objective was to highlight the history, identity, and contributions of the Afro-descendant community in Panama, while promoting cultural appreciation and respectful dialogue. Through individual and group presentations, students explored the richness of Black culture, from ancient African kingdoms like Mali and Ghana to the influence of Afro-Antilleans in Panamanian society.

The activity emphasized how, despite centuries of injustice, Black communities preserved their identity through music, oral tradition, and resistance. Students also reflected on the impact of historical figures such as Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, Malcolm X, Harriet Tubman, and Nelson Mandela.

Special attention was given to the role of Afro-Panamanians in building the Panama Canal and shaping the nation's culture, particularly through traditions like Congo culture. The activity successfully encouraged students to speak, reflect, and learn fostering both linguistic skills and cultural understanding in a meaningful way.



NETWORK CHRONICLES

BRIDGING BORDERS THROUGH LANGUAGE: A TRANSFORMATIVE JOURNEY IN L2 EDUCATION IN SCOTLAND

By Mario Barría

In a world where global connection matters more than ever, attending an international L2 teachers' conference in Edinburgh, Scotland, was a truly life-changing experience. As an English teacher from Panama, I began this journey with clear goals and a strong desire to grow professionally, exchange ideas, and return home inspired by new teaching methods and meaningful human connections.



Learning with Purpose

Before arriving, I had four key goals:

- Explore effective global teaching strategies in elementary education.
- Develop interactive, communicative techniques to encourage real language use.
- Discover digital tools that match young learners' needs and styles.
- Learn how to build classroom environments that support holistic student growth.

The experience in Edinburgh exceeded every expectation.

A Deep Dive into Global L2 Practices

The conference brought together educators from around the world, revealing how much we share despite different contexts. I attended insightful talks, workshops, and forums covering essential L2 education topics from the evolution of English and digital learning to listening skills, grammar strategies, and teacher coaching.

Key takeaways included:

- Listening is a skill we must nurture by exposing students to different accents,

speaking speeds, and real-world audio (podcasts, interviews).

- Grammar should go beyond memorization, it must be meaningful, engaging, and connected to real-life communication through games and context-based activities.
- Teachers as coaches can empower students by fostering autonomy, encouraging risk-taking, and guiding reflection through the GROW model (Goals, Reality, Options, Way forward).
- These are just some takeaways from this wonderful experience that I am willing to share with you all.

Scotland: A Cultural and Personal Awakening

Beyond the sessions, Edinburgh itself offered a powerful education. Walking through the Royal Mile, visiting castles and bookshops, every moment added value to my journey. Most impactful, though, was connecting with fellow educators. Sharing meals and stories reminded me that teaching is a universal mission rooted in hope and transformation.

Final Thoughts: From Insight to Action

This conference was more than an academic event; it was a personal transformation. I return committed to:

- Sharing what I've learned with teachers across Panama.
- Growing as a coach and a lifelong learner.
- Contributing to a network of educators working to transform English education.

The journey doesn't end in Edinburgh, it continues every day in our classrooms.



NETWORK CHRONICLES

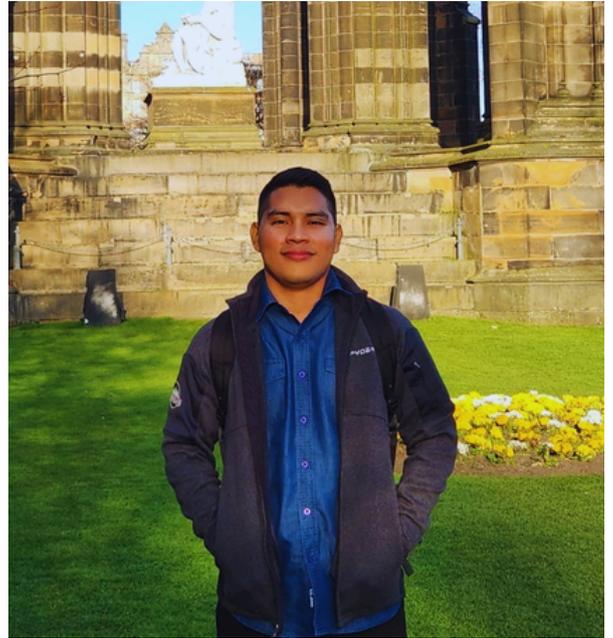
A GOOD ENOUGH TEACHER IS GOOD ENOUGH*By Leo Mojica*

The 58th IATEFL International Conference and Exhibition for English language teaching professionals took place in the beautiful city of Edinburgh. It was a milestone in my professional journey, as it was my first time attending such a significant event in the world of English teaching. I was honored to be selected as one of just ten English teachers from my country to participate. The journey was challenging, but every moment was worth it.

The conference began with an inspiring plenary session by Katherine Walter, an influential figure in ELT and former IATEFL president. Katherine reflected on the changes the profession has undergone over the past 50 years, including advances in language knowledge, shifts in teaching methodology, the rise of formative assessment, and the growing role of online resources. She also discussed the role of AI tools in teaching, highlighting both the benefits and challenges they bring.



During her talk, Katherine shared a personal story from her early days as a first-time mother. Struggling with self-doubt, she found comfort in the words of British child psychologist D.W. Winnicott: "A good enough mother is good enough." This phrase helped her embrace the process of learning and growing without



succumbing to perfectionism. She encouraged teachers to adopt the same mindset, reminding us that "a good enough teacher is good enough." In a profession marked by evolving methodologies and increasing expectations, growth, effort, and embracing both successes and failures are what truly matter.

Katherine's message set the tone for the rest of the conference. Many other presentations built on the themes she introduced. I left each session reminded that while teaching evolves with new tools and research, the heart of education remains constant: the relationship between teachers and learners. Our role is to guide students through the wealth of information and resources available, especially in the age of AI.

Attending my first international conference in Edinburgh was a truly enriching experience. Surrounded by passionate educators from around the world, I felt both excited and humbled. The city's historic charm served as a perfect backdrop for meaningful discussions and connections. I returned home with a renewed sense of purpose and the desire to share what I learned with others.

In the end, the conference taught me that being "good enough" as a teacher means being open to learning, adapting, and caring for our students—and that is more than enough.

NETWORK CHRONICLES

BRIDGING BORDERS THROUGH ENGLISH: MY JOURNEY IN EDINBURGH*By Lisset Fonseca R.*

Attending the 2025 IATEFL International Conference and Exhibition in the beautiful capital city of Scotland, Edinburgh was an inspiring and exciting experience that brought together English language educators from around the globe. Held in the heart of the historic and vibrant Edinburgh International Conference Centre, which offered a perfect blend of professional development, cultural immersion, and international networking.

Arrival and First Impressions

Arriving in Edinburgh was like stepping into a Harry Potter's movie. The city's cobbled streets, gothic architecture, and iconic castle perched on the hill created a magical atmosphere from the start. The conference was hosted at a modern venue with excellent facilities, conveniently located within walking distance of many local attractions, restaurants, and accommodations.

**Sessions and Workshops**

The conference covered four days and featured a dynamic program of keynote speeches, breakout sessions, and hands-on workshops. Topics ranged from innovative teaching methodologies and integrating technology in the classroom to assessment practices and supporting multilingual learners. Keynote speakers included leading voices in TESOL, linguistics, and global education policy, offering fresh perspectives and thought-provoking ideas.

Particularly memorable sessions included a workshop on using drama and storytelling to enhance language learning, a panel on inclusive classroom strategies, and a presentation on AI tools for language teachers. Attendees were encouraged to participate actively, share their own experiences, and take away practical tools to implement in their teaching contexts.

**Networking and Cultural Exchange**

One of the most rewarding aspects of the conference was the opportunity to connect with educators from diverse countries and backgrounds. From coffee breaks to evening socials, there were countless moments to engage in meaningful conversations, share teaching resources, and build lasting professional relationships. The sense of global community and shared passion for language education was deep.

Takeaways and Reflections

Leaving the conference, made me feel energized and inspired. The exchange of ideas and best practices, joined with the warm friendship of fellow educators, reaffirmed the importance and impact of English language teaching across borders. Many teachers left with renewed motivation, innovative classroom strategies, and a wider understanding of global trends in English education.

In summary, the International English Teaching Conference in Edinburgh was more than just a professional event, it was a celebration of language, learning, and global connection. It reminded us all that, no matter where we teach, we are part of a vibrant and evolving community committed to helping learners succeed through the power of English.

TIPS AND BEST PRACTICES

TEACHING STRATEGIES AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AT LOS ANDES BILINGUAL SCHOOL

By *Demetrio Vasquez Escobar*

At Los Andes Bilingual School, elementary school students are actively engaged in developing their English language skills through a variety of thoughtful teaching strategies that foster interactive and meaningful learning experiences. These approaches are rooted in best practices for bilingual education and can offer guidance for educators seeking to enhance English instruction in similar contexts.

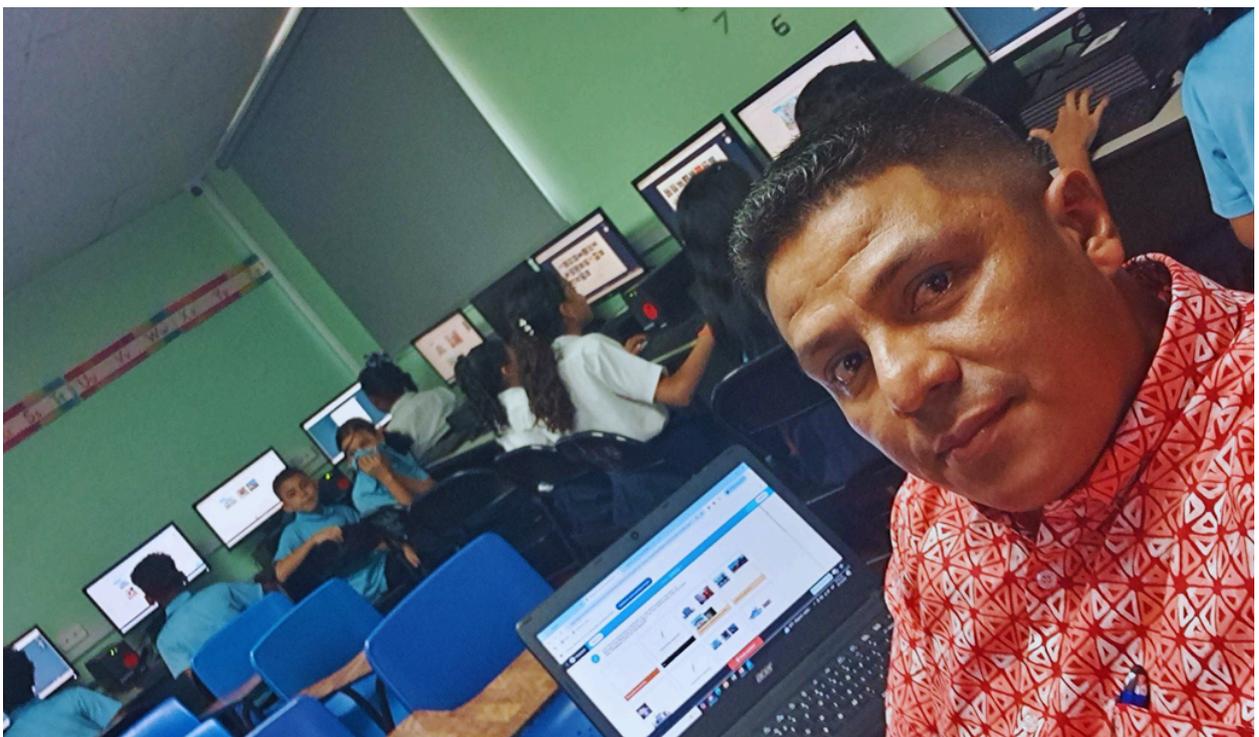
One of the key strategies implemented is the weekly use of the English Lab, where students are immersed in a language-rich environment. These sessions are carefully structured to support the development of the four essential language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Activities include interactive audio exercises, small-group discussions, vocabulary-building games, and short reading passages followed by comprehension tasks. This targeted and hands-on approach allows students to practice each skill in a focused way, reinforcing their learning through repetition and engagement.

Another effective strategy is the integration of educational technology, particularly through the use of the **Nearpod** app. This platform enables teachers to deliver interactive lessons that feature multimedia elements such as videos, live quizzes,

collaborative boards, and virtual field trips. Students are more engaged when they can interact with content in diverse ways, and **Nearpod** also provides teachers with real-time feedback, helping them to adjust instruction according to student needs. This kind of digital integration has proven to be especially valuable in promoting active learning and sustaining student interest.

These strategies are not just innovative, but they are also aligned with the school's bilingual goals, ensuring that students receive consistent, immersive English language instruction across various contexts. By combining structured practice, interactive tools, and student-centered learning environments, Los Andes Bilingual School fosters a supportive atmosphere where students are encouraged to take risks, collaborate with peers, and steadily improve their English proficiency.

Educators looking to strengthen language development and increase student engagement may find these approaches useful and adaptable to their own classrooms. The focus on consistency, interactivity, and purposeful technology use makes these practices both effective and replicable.



SPOTLIGHT SECTION

EMPOWERING EDUCATORS: ENHANCING ENGLISH TEACHING THROUGH THE MET WORK PROGRAM

By Claudia De Leon



In a remarkable display of teamwork and commitment to educational excellence, the teachers and specialists from the Metropolitan School of Panama conducted invaluable workshops for over 50 MEDUCA English educators from Panama Centro, Panama Norte, Panama Oeste, and San Miguelito.

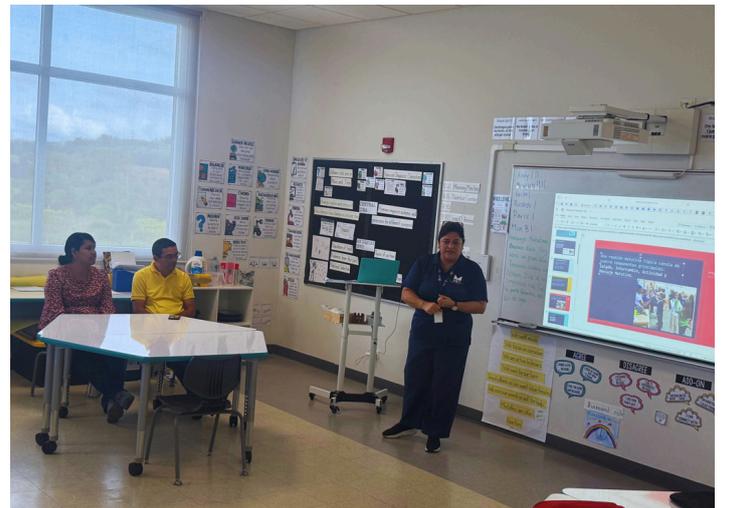
The workshops covered essential topics, including socio-emotional skills in early childhood, universal design for learning, group control and management strategies, and the impact of attention on learning.

These educators are part of the transformative MET Work program, which was launched in 2013 to empower MEDUCA teachers and enhance their professional development.

During her speech, the National Director of Foreign Language Teaching, Professor Davina Cole, expressed gratitude to the Metropolitan School of Panama for its continued commitment to the professional growth of public-school English language educators in Panama.

She noted that the knowledge, ideas, and passion shared during the workshops will undoubtedly have a lasting impact on students.

As part of the partnership with MEDUCA, MET specialists will also participate in the upcoming **National Conference of English Language Teachers**, enabling teachers from other regions to access their expertise.

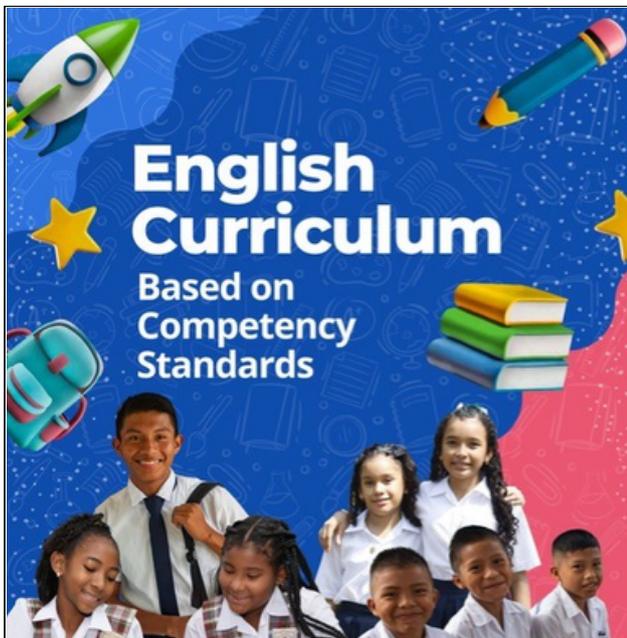


THE ROAD TO IMPLEMENTING A NEW CURRICULUM

EMPOWERING ENGLISH TEACHERS: NEW ONLINE TRAINING LAUNCHES TO ENHANCE COMPETENCY-BASED CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION

By Claudia De León

The National Directorate of Foreign Language Teaching is introducing a comprehensive online training program designed to equip English teachers across all educational levels with the skills needed to effectively implement the new competency-based curriculum. Through a series of flexible, thematic virtual courses, this initiative aims to strengthen professional development by providing practical tools and strategies that promote student-centered, real-world language learning aligned with 21st-century educational standards.



Course Structure

The courses are designed for English teachers at the preschool, elementary, middle, and high school levels and are organized into two key professional development tracks:

1. Core courses focusing on curriculum-based planning and action-oriented teaching, covering:

- Foundations of the curriculum and level-specific standards.
- Planning with competencies and SMART objectives.
- Designing action-oriented lessons.
- Integrating 21st-century projects with digital skills.

2. Specialized courses addressing strategic topics such as:

- Differentiated instruction for multigrade and multilevel classrooms.
- Educational leadership with an emphasis on curriculum implementation, instructional alignment, and teacher support.

Each course is structured into thematic units featuring practical lessons, enabling teachers to directly apply the concepts in their daily planning and to empower students as active social agents in real-world language use.

The courses will be uploaded to MEDUCA's Portal Educativo, ensuring centralized and flexible access for teachers across all regions. To support a smooth onboarding experience, step-by-step instructions on how to register, access, and navigate the courses **will be shared through the English Teachers Network**. This platform will also serve as a space for ongoing communication, peer exchange, and updates related to the training.

With this initiative, the National Directorate of Foreign Language Teaching reaffirms its commitment to the continuous professional growth of English teachers and the effective implementation of the new competency-based curriculum. By promoting innovative, inclusive, and student-centered methodologies, these courses aim to equip teachers with practical tools to inspire real-world language use and foster lifelong learning in their classrooms.

All English teachers are encouraged to stay tuned for the official registration announcement and access guidelines, **which will be shared via the English Teachers Network**.



THE ROAD TO IMPLEMENTING A NEW CURRICULUM

BUILDING THE FOUNDATION: INDUCTION INTO THE NEW CURRICULUM CONTINUES**LOS SANTOS**

In Los Santos, the rollout of the new English curriculum began with a series of orientation sessions tailored to local teaching contexts. Led by the regional English Coordination team, these meetings introduced the main features of the curriculum and highlighted shifts in teaching focus.

Rather than just reviewing content, the sessions encouraged active discussion on how to approach classroom instruction differently—emphasizing learner interaction, and real-world use of language.

This early groundwork has helped lay the path for a more confident and consistent implementation of the curriculum in schools across Los Santos.

**HERRERA**

The English Coordination team in Herrera has led a series of well-received training sessions to support the induction of teachers into the new English curriculum. These sessions, conducted across all academic levels and supervisory zones, have been positively embraced by instructors, who have found them informative and helpful.

The induction process has included practical, hands-on guidance on implementing thematic, context-based learning projects. It has also focused on helping teachers align their classroom practices with the curriculum's emphasis on fostering communication and integrated language skills.

Collaboration with experienced pedagogical trainers has played a significant role in helping teachers adapt to new instructional approaches. One such approach includes the integration of mediation as a central strategy for supporting language development and enhancing student engagement.

This coordinated effort is designed to ensure that educators are confident and well-equipped to effectively deliver the new curriculum, contributing to a consistent, high-quality educational experience across the region.



MEET OUR TEAM

RIGOBERTO MC FARLANE*English Regional Supervisor for Colon*

Many educators recall their first classroom experience. Mine transformed into a lifelong calling. I began my career as a librarian at a private school, where I spent six months happily working behind the scenes.

Then, one day, everything changed. I was suddenly asked to take over a class of eighth graders. I froze. Literally. I stood in front of them, overwhelmed, and excused myself. In the restroom, I stared into the mirror and had a deep moment of reflection. I told myself: You can do this. I returned to the classroom determined only to discover I had paper towel stuck to my forehead! The students giggled, and so did I. That moment of shared laughter was the unexpected beginning of my teaching journey.

That experience helped me realize just how fulfilling teaching could be. I knew I needed to grow academically to give my students the best version of myself. Balancing work, study, and family was a challenge, but it taught me discipline, resilience, and purpose.

Over the years, I have earned a bachelor's degree, several masters, and I am now a PhD candidate. Still, no academic achievement compares to the joy of witnessing my students grow intellectually, emotionally, and professionally. I teach with full transparency, aiming for them to one day surpass me.

This path began over two decades ago, with a group of eighth graders who unknowingly gave me the courage to step into my true purpose. They were more than students they were my heroes.

PROFILE OF THE MONTH

LIRIETT HERRERA*English Teacher at Colegio Secundario Gatuncillo*

My name is Liriett Herrera, and my journey with the English language began with one of my greatest passions: music. Growing up in the vibrant 1980s, I fell in love with English-language songs. Without

instant translation tools, I had to listen closely and truly engage with the lyrics

My teaching path began over 40 years ago when I started tutoring Asian neighbors who attended a bilingual school. That experience lit a spark in me. After taking time to raise my three wonderful children, I pursued my dream of becoming an English teacher and specialized in English Linguistics.

In 2015, I had the honor of representing Panama in the SUSI program (Study of the U.S. Institutes for Secondary Educators), and in 2019, I completed a diploma from the University of Cambridge, earning Level 3 in the Teaching Knowledge Test and receiving a meritorious grade in CELTS.

Currently, I teach English to Tourism Bachelor students at Colegio Secundario Gatuncillo. Alongside the subject coordinator, I'm helping lead a project that aims to graduate bilingual professionals—a key contribution to Panama's growing tourism industry.

Beyond the classroom, I continue to enjoy music, making friends, and learning every day. I'm also passionate about integrating technology into English instruction and encouraging my fellow teachers to grow with me. I believe that staying curious and adaptable is essential in an ever-changing educational landscape. For me, teaching isn't just a job — it's a joyful commitment to empowering others through language.

RESOURCE CORNER

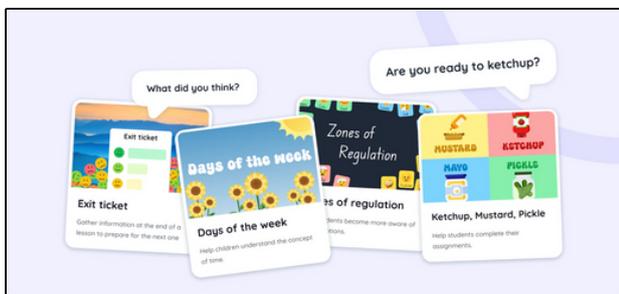
ORGANIZE AND ENGAGE: TRY CLASSROOMSCREEN

By María del Pilar Guerra

If you're looking for an easy-to-use tool to enhance classroom management and student engagement, *Classroomscreen* is well worth exploring. This web-based app offers a clean, user-friendly interface packed with helpful tools called widgets—no downloads, logins, or payments required.



The free version includes tools such as a timer, noise level monitor, random name selector, traffic light system, and QR code generator, among others. These features are designed to support transitions, promote independence, and keep students focused with minimal teacher redirection. For example, the traffic light can be used to visually signal noise expectations, while the random name picker ensures fair participation during discussions.



Because it runs directly in your browser, *Classroomscreen* can be projected from any device and used immediately—making it ideal for both in-person and hybrid learning environments. There's no setup required for students, and everything is contained on one screen for maximum clarity.

In short, *Classroomscreen* is a practical, accessible tool that can make classroom routines smoother and more engaging—all without costing a cent.

Explore the free version at:
www.classroomscreen.com

Retrieved and adapted from:
<https://tesl-ej.org/wordpress/issues/volume14/ej54/ej54m3/>



Panamanian English teachers are getting creative with Liveworksheets, a digital tool that turns traditional exercises into interactive online activities. Whether it's grammar, vocabulary, or listening practice, students can complete tasks from any device with instant feedback! Thumbs up to the teachers who are integrating technology to personalize learning and keep students engaged, inside and outside the classroom!



Did you know the headwrap once doubled as a silent protest? Back in the day, Afro-descendant women wore headwraps not just for style, but to hold on to their African roots when expressing their culture was off-limits. Today, it's still a bold nod to heritage and let's be honest, it looks amazing too! 😊

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