

THE MONTHLY

NETWORKER

DECEMBER 2024 | VOL. 4



Performance of the Music Band of the Rubiano Institute in the "Ciudad de Las Estrellas" Christmas parade.

WORDS FROM OUR DIRECTOR

Dear reader,

Twenty twenty-four has been a year filled with challenges but also of successes. Over these past five months, we have made significant progress in several areas: developing a new curriculum focused on language skills, fine-tuning our standards, enhancing the after-school program, managing the network, and preparing 150 trainers for the summer institute, among other duties.

You have played a crucial role in all of this. Without you, we would not have been able to achieve most of what we have accomplished. Therefore, I want to express my gratitude for your hard work and dedication to our students and colleagues.

As we look ahead to 2025, I hope it brings us even closer to working with "Passion and excellence in all we do," as we emphasized back in September at the Ciudad de las Artes. Let us continue to move forward, transforming the teaching and learning of the English language in our country. Let us support each other and unite for our students. Let us focus on providing the support and knowledge our students need to become global citizens.

Thank you again for everything you do. I am confident that our current collaboration will lay a solid foundation for even greater initiatives in the future.

On behalf of the Directorate of Foreign Language Teaching, I wish you a restful and amazing holiday season.

Ms. Davina Cole

LETTER FROM OUR EDITOR

This month's edition of The Monthly Networker is packed with tools and strategies to enhance your teaching practice and engage your students in meaningful learning experiences.

In our feature article, *Blended Learning: An Educational Solution for Public Schools*, we explore practical strategies for combining in-person and online instruction, offering new possibilities for flexible and effective teaching. Another highlight is *Edutainment in English Instruction*, where we delve into the power of merging entertainment with education to create dynamic and memorable learning experiences.

For those looking to expand their approach to student assessments, our article *Creative Evaluations and 21st-Century Skills Projects* offers innovative methods to design assessments that promote critical thinking, collaboration, and digital literacy. These strategies aim to prepare students to thrive in a global and interconnected world. You'll also find practical tools like *Live Worksheets: A Tool for Teachers*, which simplifies lesson planning and classroom activities, helping you save time while keeping students engaged.

As always, this issue reflects our commitment to supporting you in your role as educators. It is our hope that these resources inspire and equip you to make an even greater impact in your classrooms.

Thank you for your dedication, and I wish you a joyful holiday season and a New Year filled with growth and success.

Raúl Sieiro
Editor, The Monthly Networker

INDUSTRY TRENDS

Blended Learning: An Educational Solution for Public Schools

By Prof. Quetzalide Martinez

How many times have you heard your students say their English class is boring? You're not alone. Most of us are starting to realize that the solution might lie in addressing issues such as the lack of technological tools and resources, as well as the need for trained teachers in every public school to create a blended learning environment.

To begin with, most schools in Panama lack English labs or technological tools such as interactive screens, classrooms, or even internet access. This prevents our students from being exposed to native English pronunciation through diverse activities. As a result, both teachers and learners are at a disadvantage. Teachers are confined to traditional teaching methods, and students miss out on opportunities to better understand content and structures in real-life contexts.



If every school in our country had at least one interactive classroom or lab at the elementary level, the level of English proficiency would undoubtedly increase. For example, CEBG Los Algarrobos, located in Dolega, Chiriquí, received an innovative classroom from the Terpel Foundation. This classroom came equipped with internet access, various tools, and teacher training throughout the process. Thanks to this, my English students are now exposed to approaches such as gamification, which turns learning into a game, or virtual reality, where virtual reality glasses allow students to experience the sensation of traveling around the world. Additionally, we have the opportunity to work with tablets to record and present projects, conduct research, and carry out interviews.

In the digital age, traditional teaching strategies and approaches should be replaced by methodologies tailored to our students' learning styles. The 21st century demands advanced technological skills and competencies from teachers to create successful teaching environments. These environments should combine in-person classroom activities with remote learning to enhance student-teacher interaction through dynamic techniques, tools, and resources such as online games, quizzes, and more.

In sum, blended learning, which combines face-to-face instruction with online teaching methods, could be a strategic solution to improve English proficiency at the elementary level. With dedicated teachers committed to achieving learning goals, this approach could play a vital role in making Panama a bilingual country.

SUCCESS STORIES

The Relevance of Incorporating Dynamic Activities When Teaching English

By Prof. Jihad Sleiman

Since beginning my English teaching career in 2011, I've realized the importance of using dynamic activities to fully engage students in learning. Early on, I found that traditional strategies like fill-in-the-blank exercises and rote memorization may help students pass tests but fail to foster genuine understanding. These methods often lead to surface-level learning, where students memorize content temporarily without the ability to construct meaningful sentences or use proper grammar and pronunciation.

Students need input through reading and listening, but for learning to be meaningful, it must connect to their prior knowledge and experiences, as David Ausubel's theory of meaningful learning emphasizes. Teachers must integrate new vocabulary and grammar into relatable content within a dynamic environment. Techniques like role-plays, group discussions, and problem-solving tasks encourage students to use the four language skills, work collaboratively, and engage actively with the material. This approach not only promotes meaningful learning but also fosters engagement, reducing distractions and disengagement in the classroom.

In my experience, the most effective classes provide ample opportunities for students to practice speaking. Activities like asking and answering questions, discussing vocabulary, and engaging in real-life scenarios—such as giving directions or ordering at a restaurant—make learning interactive and relevant. While these activities require extra effort in preparation, they create a supportive environment that reduces students' anxiety and builds their confidence in speaking English naturally.

For example, with twelfth-grade students, I've incorporated job-preparation activities. After discussing their career interests and researching job application processes, students create résumés, practice answering interview questions, and role-play interviews.

These activities equip them with practical skills in résumé writing, job searching, and interviewing—essential for their future careers. By connecting English learning to real-world needs, students gain both language proficiency and confidence to pursue opportunities.

In today's world, English mastery is vital, especially in professional settings. Job applicants are often evaluated on their ability to communicate effectively, not on rote knowledge. Therefore, teachers must prepare students for real-world scenarios through dynamic, meaningful activities that build their skills and confidence for success.

RESOURCE CORNER

Live Worksheets: A Tool for Teachers

By Elda Del Real



Live Worksheets is an interactive platform that allows teachers to create and use digital worksheets for students. This tool enables teachers to turn traditional printed exercises into

engaging, interactive tasks. By adding multimedia elements such as videos, audio, and links, teachers can create worksheets that support various learning styles and enhance student participation.

Teachers can either create their own worksheets or access a library of pre-made templates. The platform also allows students to complete the tasks online, with immediate feedback, making the learning process more dynamic. Teachers can track students' progress, identify areas of improvement, and adjust instruction as needed.

Live Worksheets offers an easy and accessible way for teachers to integrate technology into their classrooms without requiring advanced technical skills. Whether you're teaching in-person or remotely, it provides an efficient tool for creating interactive lessons that keep students engaged and help them learn in a more hands-on way.

Source: www.liveworksheets.com/about/teacher



CALL TO ACTION

Reflection. Rethinking Our Role as English Teachers

By Prof. Esperanza Diez

Recently, the Minister of Education, Lucy Molinar, held a virtual meeting with all teachers to discuss an important issue: the percentage of failures by subject. This is a matter that should concern all of us, especially English teachers. To our surprise, the English subject has a high failure rate. If you haven't seen the data, I encourage you to check the communication channel managed by the Foreign Language Teaching Directorate (DNELE) on TEAMS, in the "General Forum of the English Teachers Network" section, where the statistics for primary, middle, and high school levels have been published.

The questions that trouble me and invite me to reflect are: Are English teachers facilitators of knowledge or mere providers of it? Why are English teachers often associated with the phrase, "All they teach is the verb 'to be,' and they don't go beyond that"? Do teachers understand the importance of professional development in ensuring the quality of learning?

With my years of experience in the system, I am convinced that current English teachers learned how to plan lessons at some point. However, some continue to plan their lessons using methodologies from the 20th century.

For example, their activities often follow the "Present-Practice-Produce" approach, which isn't wrong but can be enhanced with modern teaching trends, such as the ECRIF framework (Encounter, Clarify, Remember, Internalize, Fluently Use). Are you familiar with this approach? If your answer is yes, good for you! This shows you are committed to staying updated as an educator. If not, I invite you to explore it further.

This knowledge was not provided to me through MEDUCA's training sessions, but I clearly understand that professional development involves updating knowledge, expanding skills, fostering motivation and inspiration, and being part of academic networks. For this reason, I applaud the initiative of establishing networks. In our case, as English teachers, we have a wonderful opportunity to turn the English network into a dream space for continuous professional growth, a key element in improving outcomes.

Would you like to learn more about the ECRIF framework? I'd love to share more about it in the appropriate setting on TEAMS in the Educational Forum in the English Teachers Network. If we combine our meaningful classroom experiences to improve our students' communicative skills, we can make a difference.

Looking forward to your thoughts in the network.

TIPS & BEST PRACTICES

Edutainment in English Instruction*By Prof. Yamileth Urriola de Hernández*

Edutainment, a combination of education and entertainment, has been defined by many authors as an innovative and pedagogical approach to language teaching to engage learners through meaningful learning experiences. Kumar (2016) describes edutainment as "a hybrid form of education and entertainment aimed at making learning an enjoyable experience." Similarly, Lee and Hammer (2011) define it as an educational strategy where fun activities and objectives intersect to keep learners engaged in learning. According to Filgona et al. (2020), edutainment makes learning enjoyable by blending educational content with entertaining elements such as games, videos, and interactive activities to boost students' intrinsic motivation and create a fun, immersive learning experience where students feel more comfortable experimenting with language and concepts. The teacher plays a facilitator role by guiding and encouraging participation. Additionally, the teacher helps students make connections and often assumes a more animated or creative role (Caldwell, 2018).

Gee (2013) explains that in a hybrid approach, assessment, feedback, and reflection are crucial to ensure that students enjoy the learning process and see concrete progress in their language skills. Assessment is a continuous and informal process that considers learners' progress, understanding, and engagement and emphasizes learning through doing rather than formal exams or quizzes. On the other hand, feedback gives students constructive responses that guide their learning to enhance understanding, correct misconceptions, and encourage further exploration. Immediate positive feedback keeps students interested and motivated because they see their progress, while constructive feedback allows students to make adjustments in real-time, helping them develop self-monitoring skills and take ownership of their learning journey.

Moreover, reflection is how learners think critically about their experiences, actions, and outcomes within engaging, entertainment-based activities.

Reflection allows learners to assess what they have learned, understand their progress, and consider ways to improve. Reflection in this context is often informal and can include journaling, group discussions, or self-assessment. Reflection helps students identify their strengths and areas for improvement, fostering personal growth and encouraging learning ownership (Kumar, 2016).

Edutainment is a pedagogical approach to maximizing learning through significant and enjoyable experiences. When planning English classes, teachers must help learners build language skills while becoming more self-directed and reflective learners. It keeps them motivated and actively involved in language development.

Sources: Caldwell, J. (2018). *Media in learning: Exploring the role of edutainment in contemporary education*. Learning Press.

Filgona, J., & Sakiyo, J., & Gwany, D., & Okoronka, A. (2020). *Motivation in Learning*. *Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies*. 10. 16-37. 10.9734/AJESS/2020/v10i430273.

Gee, J. P. (2013). *Games for learning: The potential of edutainment in the digital age*. Digital Education Publishers.

Kumar, V. (2016). *Edutainment: Entertainment and education combined for an effective learning experience*. New Age Publishers.

Lee, J., & Hammer, J. (2011). *Gamification in education: What, how, why bother?* *Educational Technology and Society*, 15(3), 98-105.



Creative evaluations and 21st Century Skills Projects.

By Carlyn M. Smith J.

What is the purpose of an evaluation? As teachers we need to evaluate our students constantly, to assess if they are understanding the different topics: what students know, how much they know, and what they can do with that knowledge. Evaluating is an ongoing process that needs to be done throughout the lesson. A good evaluation helps us to determine if we need to adjust our lessons and continue with the same topic or if the student already acquired the desired competence and move on.

There are traditional evaluations which are frequently used by teachers of different subjects: true or false, fill in the blanks, match, multiple choice questions. All these methodologies have pros and cons. Some benefits of the traditional evaluations are that they are practical, easy to apply and grade, fast and necessary. On the other hand, they foster memorization, and they usually consider the most basic skills from Bloom's Taxonomy. As teachers, and English teachers we **MUST** continue to use them, but we **MUST GO ONE STEP FURTHER.**

The common question a student and parent ask is: "How is this information going to help me in the future? Why is this important?" And they are right in asking the question. As teachers, we should prepare our lessons and evaluations, in a way that students find our class helpful, useful and valuable. What is the point of filling the blanks with the correct form of the verb to be if the student can't articulate a sentence describing who he or she is, how are they feeling or what is their parent's job, for example? Project Based Learning and Task Based Learning are pedagogical approaches that encourage the student to answer a probing question. While searching for the answer to that question, students will develop a set of skills and knowledge that are essential to be successful in the 21st century. These skills are critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, listening, speaking, problem solving, growth mindset, leadership, among others.

What kind of projects can we assign as part of our evaluation process? **Debates, letters, experiments, simulations, videos, magazines, blogs, videoblogs, stories, websites and many more.**



The purpose of learning English is to be able to communicate with others while speaking or writing. Assess the level of competence of your students with a project in which they must speak or write using the linguistic competencies (grammar and vocabulary) seen in class, in addition to the pragmatic competences and sociolinguistic competences.

These projects are helpful to evaluate your students' competences at the end of a scenario or theme. When you are planning the project, make sure to list all the previous knowledge and abilities students will need to execute the project. These abilities will become your learning objectives throughout the development of the scenario and/or theme. How long should it take to develop one scenario and the 21st century skills project? It may be a different time frame for each group. Remember that acquiring a language depends on many factors as the previous knowledge and experience of the students, the motivation and engagement the student may have to learn, the methodology used by the teacher, etc. In my experience, I usually spend two or three classes focused on the same learning objective but providing different tasks to obtain the same result. After most of your students have achieved the basic competence, move to the next learning objective. It may take two or three weeks to develop all the competences and then it may take one additional week to complete the project. I know time is frequently a concern, but don't let time restrictions determine what your students can learn. Remember that sometimes, less is more. Work towards helping your students acquire knowledge and skills that will be helpful for them in their daily lives.

NEWS & UPDATES

Final Training Session in Preparation for the 2025 Summer Institute

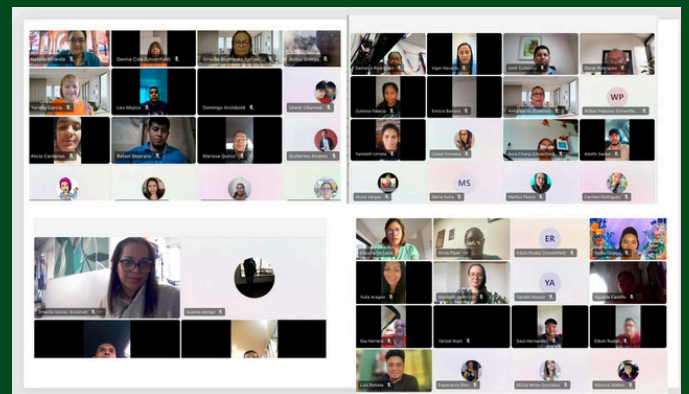
Over 150 English teachers from across the country participated in the final Teachers' Training session, held both in-person and virtually. This session marks the last phase of preparation for the 2025 Summer Institute, where teachers will share their knowledge and strategies with colleagues in upcoming seminars.



The training focused on developing skills to manage emotional challenges in the classroom and support students at risk. This session aimed to equip teachers with the tools they need to address the emotional and mental well-being of their students, fostering a supportive and empathetic learning environment.



Throughout the month, teachers participated in various training sessions covering topics such as digital tools for classroom engagement, assessment strategies, and the teacher's role as a change agent. These sessions provided valuable insights and practical skills, helping teachers improve their teaching practices and better support their students, ensuring they are well-prepared for the 2025 Summer Institute.



Below is a summary of the training dates and topics that will guide teachers in strengthening the educational community.

Date	Topic
Monday, February 17	Developing Socio-Emotional skills in students
Tuesday, February 18	Digital tools to enhance Students Capabilities
Wednesday, February 19	Self-Learning and Self-Assessment: strategies for Teachers and Students
Thursday, February 20	Strategies to motivate and engage Students/Evaluation
Friday, February 21	Lesson Planning for Competency-based Curriculum and AOA

MEETING OUR TEAM

NILKA LUNA

English Supervisor, Panama Centro

Teaching English is not just a profession; it is a journey that shapes educators. An English teacher's career is filled with challenges, rewards, and opportunities for growth. During my early years teaching primary students, I faced many challenges but never strayed from my goal. I loved teaching and constantly sought ways to innovate in my classes. I connected with Alfred Mercier's words: "What we learn with pleasure, we never forget."



I worked with diverse levels and schools, private and public, but never compromised on quality. I believe education is a cornerstone of a fulfilling teaching career, making it deeply rewarding. Supervisors should aim for students to see English as more than just another subject. Teaching should be dynamic, interactive, and foster participation, creativity, and curiosity.

As Martin Luther King said, "I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted..." My dream is for Panama's English teaching paradigm to shift, incorporating CALL (Computer-Assisted Language Learning) into every classroom to improve outcomes through apps, videos, and online platforms.

The beauty of teaching lies in creating a space where students feel safe to make mistakes, share ideas, and build confidence. Resilience and adaptability should be our goals.

The ideal teacher is patient, flexible, and innovative, capable of adapting to every student's needs. English teachers play a key role in providing high-quality education, inspiring the next generation to reach their potential in an interconnected world through dedication, innovation, and personal growth.

PROFILE OF THE MONTH

JIHAD SLEIMAN



My name is Jihad Sleiman, and my passion for teaching drives everything I do. I've had the privilege of working in diverse educational settings, starting in the Ngäbe-Buglé Reservation Area, where I taught students from pre-K to 12th grade. Currently, I teach 7th, 8th, and 12th grades at Félix Olivares Contreras High

School, where I strive to make a meaningful impact on my students' learning experiences.

In my classroom, I focus on helping students communicate effectively in English while fostering their independence as learners. I believe that learning doesn't stop at the classroom door, so I work to create an environment where students feel motivated to build habits that support their English development in their everyday lives.

I've also been an active member of the English Network, where I regularly share the activities I've done with my students. Being part of this network has been a rewarding experience—it's not only allowed me to collaborate with other teachers but also inspired me with fresh ideas and approaches. The exchange of ideas within the network has strengthened my teaching and created opportunities for my students to engage with innovative, student-centered practices.

Collaboration is another key aspect of my work. At Félix Olivares Contreras, I was part of a team effort that led to success in the José Manuel Hurtado Order competition in Chiriquí province. Moments like these remind me of the power of working together to achieve a shared goal.

Teaching is more than a job for me; it's a way to empower students to reach their potential and to build skills that will benefit them far beyond the classroom.



THUMBS UP

Teacher Training Highlights

At the DNELE, we're preparing for the Summer Institute with training on digital tools and self-assessment, helping teachers gain the skills to inspire and lead their peers.

HIGHLIGHTS

Thanksgiving Party at Divala Bilingual School

By Prof. Quetzalirys López

More than just a celebration, it's important to emphasize that we don't just teach a language; we teach its culture.

We celebrated with various activities, including My First Thanksgiving Book, created by 4th graders. This book features stories and activities, such as an acrostic they created, story sequencing, and sentences based on images from a video they observed.



Sixth graders presented a gallery walk, showcasing the research and information they compiled, creatively illustrated by each student.

The event concluded with each group presenting their creative projects, sharing a toast, reinforcing unity, acknowledging everyone's efforts, and highlighting the values of gratitude for the blessings they receive daily.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Ministry of Education (Meduca) honored outstanding educators during the 65th edition of the Manuel José Hurtado Order. This prestigious award, given annually, recognizes teachers and educational institutions that excel in improving education quality. The ceremony celebrated 16 educators and institutions chosen for their dedication, innovation, and contribution to education. Meduca emphasized the crucial role of teachers in driving social change and improving the nation's education system, highlighting their commitment to future generations. This event, which coincided with Manuel José Hurtado's birthday, reinforces the country's dedication to educational excellence.



FUN FACT

Jingle Bells wasn't originally a Christmas song! It was written in 1857 by James Lord Pierpont and was intended to be a Thanksgiving tune. The song became so popular during Christmas that it eventually got associated with the holiday season.



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
- **DNELE Office: 524-9832**





*Inspiring
EXCELLENCE
in every
lesson!*