



Dear TESOL-Ukraine members and their friends!

Welcome to the fall-winter TESOL-Ukraine Newsletter joint issue!

This issue presents:

-  Insights from EFL Classrooms, Methodology in Action
-  TESOL-Ukraine Professional Development Events
-  RELO Virtual Educator
-  TESOL-Ukraine Winter 2026 Symposium
-  TESOL-Ukraine Partnerships
-  Voices from Melta
-  TESOL-Ukraine National Convention 2026 and Newsletter

Inspire and stay inspired!
Stay strong!
Stay safe!

TESOL-Ukraine Executive Committee, March 2026

TEACHERS OF ENGLISH TO SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES IN UKRAINE

TESOL-UKRAINE NEWSLETTER

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From Challenge to Strength:

Professional Journey of Commitment and Resilience

A Message from TESOL-Ukraine President Olena Ilienکو



OLENA ILIENKO

TESOL-Ukraine President

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Dear Esteemed Members of TESOL-Ukraine,

As we inaugurate the 2025/26 academic year, I extend my warmest greetings and heartfelt gratitude to each of you for your unwavering dedication, rigorous professionalism, and active engagement in our vibrant community of English language educators. It is your passion and resilience that continue to define the strength and spirit of TESOL-Ukraine.

This fall-winter newsletter reflects upon the pivotal milestones that have marked the commencement of our professional journey this year – a season that has yielded a hoard of new academic gems and opportunities for intellectual growth. Throughout the autumn, our community convened for a series of dynamic events designed to bolster educators within Ukraine and beyond. We began with the second iteration of the Ukrainian Mentorship Program, a five-month initiative aimed at nurturing a new generation of mentors through



professional fellowship and inspiration. Additionally, our two-part online workshop series, “Explore the Power of Storytelling in ELT,” provided an enlightening exploration of how narrative can transform language acquisition, deepen emotional resonance, and strengthen students’ cognitive faculties. Members of Tesol-Ukraine have served as distinguished ambassadors of Ukrainian ELT excellence on the international stage, presenting at: the 34th IATEFL Poland International Conference (Łódź, September 2025), and the 35th TESOL-Hungary Annual International Conference “Bloom” (Siófok, October 2025).



Another highlight of the fall was the course “Fundamentals of Teaching Your Subject in English (EMI Basics).” The program helped educators strengthen course design using backward design principles, aligning learning objectives, activities, and assessments to achieve clear outcomes. Participants also conducted a needs analysis to better understand students’ linguistic and disciplinary needs, developed structured syllabi, and practiced interactive teaching strategies, including digital tools, storytelling, and higher-order questioning. The course further emphasized inclusive learning environments, academic integrity, intercultural awareness, and effective assessment and feedback practices. The course and the overall project were supported by RELO US Embassy, Kyiv. This autumn, the Conversational Club for EMI teachers was led by Nadia Awaida, a Virtual English Language Educator and Academic Director at ELS ILSC at Eckerd College, Florida, USA. Ten meetings with Nadia – discussions of the topics shared at the webinars, reflections on the course, a Group Padlet, planning actions, lectures or webinars, and practice, practice, practice both the English Language and reaching have brought to excellent results of the course participants, the majority of who are very grateful to Nadia Awaida and the group of mentors – facilitators of the course!

A hallmark of the winter season has been our enduring partnership with the Regional English Language Office (RELO). Our collective efforts were significantly enriched by the expertise of RELO Virtual Educator Lucia Shelley Maluy, whose commitment provided invaluable practical frameworks for Ukrainian educators. Furthermore, the Story Lounge



program reached a historic milestone as the first TESOL-Ukraine initiative to welcome international colleagues from AzETA (Azerbaijan) and ETAG (Georgia). This expansion transformed the project into a sophisticated platform for transnational dialogue. The program comprised two ten-week tracks: Fishing for the Best Catch: a creative writing course for educators and students, and Digging Deeper: a methodology course focused on refining ELT practices.

The successful completion of the programme was marked by a symposium held on January 13-14, 2026, which brought together two professional development courses – "The Story Lounge: Tales Voiced Together – Creative Writing for Teachers and Students" and "The Basics of ELT." This event was empowered by intellectual and educational contribution made by international guests (Dr. Jeff Fastnacht, Superintendent of Bismarck Public Schools; Amanda Meier, Learning Design and Innovation Director of Bismarck Public Schools; Karen Taylor, Founder of English Language Training; and Beth Olshansky, Director of the Center for the Advancement of Art Literacy).

We are deeply grateful to the U.S. Department of State English Language Programs, personally to Jen MacArthur, Regional English Language Officer for Ukraine, Poland, Hungary, Romania, and Moldova and to Alyona Sukhinina Assistant Attaché, for supporting us in fulfilling this unforgettable journey. The TESOL-Ukraine Virtual Educator experience reaffirms that meaningful professional development flourishes when expertise, culture, and human connection unite. It was particularly rewarding to witness former Story Lounge participants grow into a new generation of confident professionals!

As we transition into 2026, we remain committed to pedagogical innovation and life-long development. In February TESOL-Ukraine started Introduction to CELTA 2026, a preparatory course that equips pre-service and novice teachers with essential skills for learner-centered instruction. Another opportunity to develop skills is a new professional development course Smart Teaching with AI. Practical Strategies for Modern Classrooms. This cutting-edge series are designed to assist teachers in the ethical and practical integration of AI tools to optimize student engagement. Additionally, this spring TESOL-Ukraine, in



collaboration with UALTA, have developed a new 12-week online course for EFL aimed at making classroom assessment more transparent, equitable, and meaningful.

I sincerely hope that each of you has discovered enriching ways to engage, and that your professional paths have become even more diverse, dynamic, and fulfilling. Together, we continue to learn, to mentor, and to inspire!

As we look toward the spring, TESOL-Ukraine continues to connect teachers to grow, mentor, and transform their classrooms into spaces of opportunity and resilience. I am confident that 2026 will bring us even more professional gems – fresh initiatives, inspiring collaborations, and enriching opportunities that will continue to elevate our shared journey further. It is my great pleasure to warmly invite you to our upcoming Annual Convention in Kyiv in May 2026. This remarkable gathering serves as a sanctuary for enthusiastic educators to exchange innovative ideas and reinforce the professional bonds that empower our teaching community.

Together, we celebrate resilience, creativity, and the transformative power of education. I wholeheartedly welcome each of you to join us for the spring days filled with meaningful dialogue, new discoveries, and the vibrant spring spirit that defines our TESOL-Ukraine family.

Thank you for being an integral part of TESOL-Ukraine. Your dedication, creativity, and unwavering commitment to excellence are the heart of our community. Together, we will continue to inspire, offer steadfast support, and empower each other to reach new professional heights. United by our shared mission and strengthened by our collaboration, we move forward with confidence, optimism, and a deep belief in the transformative power of education.

Stay connected. Stay inspired. Stay TESOL-Ukraine.

With warmest wishes,

Olena Ilienکو

From Clues to Climaxes:
Strategies for Building Curiosity
Through Plot Unveiling in the EFL Classroom



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Storytelling has long served as a powerful instructional tool in EFL education. Beyond entertainment, storytelling creates meaningful contexts for learning vocabulary, grammar, and discourse patterns [2, 3]. Of particular pedagogical interest is the technique of **plot unveiling** – the gradual release of narrative information through a build-up of clues toward a climactic resolution. This method not only mirrors how we process events in real life, but it also triggers curiosity, critical thinking, and language engagement. This paper explores how EFL teachers can apply plot unveiling to foster learner curiosity and engagement through structured suspense, using both theoretical frameworks and classroom strategies.

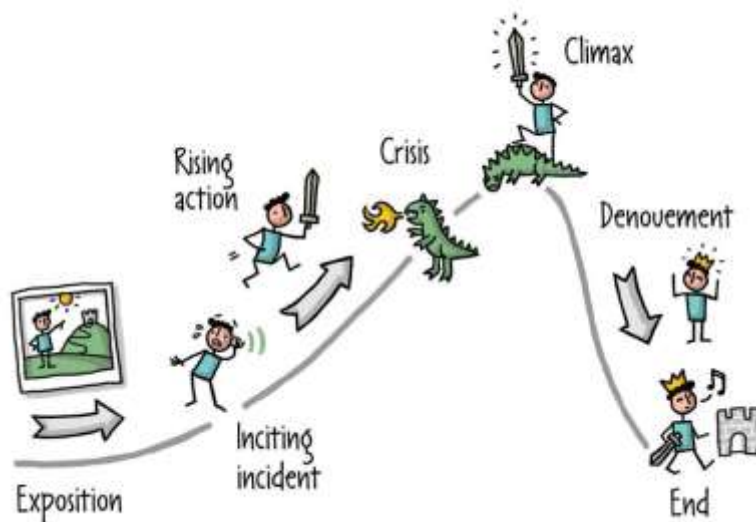
Curiosity plays a central role in motivating learners to language acquisition. George Loewenstein describes curiosity as a cognitive gap between what one knows and what one wants to know, arguing that humans are driven to close that gap [8]. When learners are curious, they become more attentive to language input and more motivated to decode meaning because curiosity activates the brain's reward system.

Anticipating the outcome of a story creates a sense of suspense, and when the outcome is enjoyable or satisfying, the brain releases dopamine – a neurotransmitter linked to reward and pleasure. This dopamine release reinforces the learning experience, making the language input more memorable and motivating learners to continue engaging. In this way, curiosity not only sharpens attention but also connects learning to the brain’s natural reward circuitry, strengthening both comprehension and retention.



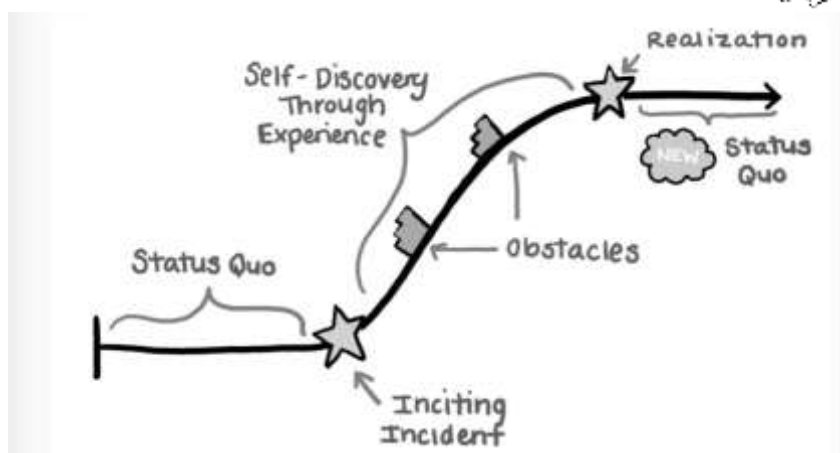
Stanley, Brooke (2028). Storytelling Boosts Learning in the College Classroom. Retrieved from: <https://www.socialsciencespace.com/2018/05/storytelling-boosts-learning-in-the-college-classroom>.

According to Ryan and Deci, intrinsic motivation – which includes curiosity – leads to deeper learning and persistence [10]. In the EFL context, suspenseful storytelling leverages this cognitive tension by creating questions that require interpretation, prediction, and reflection.



Morrison, Abigail (2019). The Five Commandment Story Formula in Action. Retrieved from: <https://brainioms.wordpress.com/2019/06/08/the-five-commandment-story-formula-in-action>.

Plot unveiling is a narrative strategy in which clues are released incrementally, drawing listeners or readers from exposition (Initial Status Quo) toward a climax (New Status Quo).



McQueen, Beth. (2020). My Outline for a Positive Change Arc Memoir. Retrieved from: <https://bethmcqueen.com/my-outline-for-a-positive-change-arc-memoir/>.

This technique stimulates prediction, inference, and engagement. Bruner argues that the human mind is inherently narrative in structure, processing meaning through sequences of events rather than isolated facts [1].

Stories that reveal information gradually challenge learners to form hypotheses and refine understanding, encouraging the active use of language to make sense of the unknown. In the classroom, suspenseful stories serve several pedagogical purposes:

- They provide **authentic listening and reading contexts** [5].
- They support **vocabulary retention** through emotional salience [6].
- They promote **discourse awareness**, such as sequencing, cohesion, and perspective [7].

Strategies for Building Suspense in the EFL Classroom:

1. **Beginning with Mystery.** Start stories with unusual or unexplained events. A sentence like *“There were muddy footprints leading into the classroom – but no one had entered”* invites immediate curiosity. Learners can be asked to predict what happened, activating vocabulary and narrative structures they already know. Such openings stimulate schema activation and create immediate narrative tension [5].
2. **Delaying Key Information.** Withholding character identity, motive, or sequence of events keeps learners listening. This requires them to attend closely to context clues such as actions, dialogue, or setting. In doing so, learners practice decoding meaning from incomplete information, a key skill in authentic language use [9].
3. **Using Foreshadowing.** Strategically planting hints prepares students for later revelations. For example, subtle statements such as *“She looked over her shoulder, but no one was there...”* build a sense of foreboding. Later, when the climax is revealed, learners can trace the logic backward, reinforcing narrative cohesion [12].
4. **Engaging Students in Prediction.** Pausing a story to ask students *“What do you think will happen next?”* encourages active processing. These discussions provide opportunities for conditional forms and



modal verbs (e.g., *might*, *could*, *must have*). As learners hypothesize and revise their ideas, they engage deeply with both meaning and form [11].

5. **Exploring Perspective.** Changing narrative point of view allows learners to engage with stories creatively and critically. Asking students to retell a scene from the perspective of a different character enhances empathy and supports grammar practice – especially with personal pronouns, verb tense, and emotional vocabulary [7].

6. **Crafting Strong Climaxes.** The climax must resolve the tension created by earlier clues. Whether it is a twist or a logical solution, the ending should be satisfying and make prior details meaningful. According to Bruner, the climax provides "narrative closure" which solidifies memory and comprehension [1]. Encouraging learners to reflect on the resolution helps reinforce the structure of effective storytelling.

Differentiating for Proficiency Levels:

- Beginner: Simple stories, visual cues, and direct comprehension checks
- Intermediate: Contextual prediction, sequencing tasks, and guided retelling
- Advanced: Literary analysis, theme exploration, and original suspense writing

By adapting narrative strategies to different levels, educators ensure that all learners benefit from the emotional and cognitive power of suspense.

Thus, suspenseful storytelling is not limited to teacher-led activities. Learners can be invited to create their own narratives using the "clues to climax" structure. Tools such as digital storytelling apps, podcast creation, or collaborative storyboards allow learners to synthesize listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in engaging, creative ways [4].

To conclude, suspense-driven storytelling, when structured through the technique of plot unveiling, transforms the EFL classroom into a space of curiosity, exploration, and linguistic discovery. By guiding learners from clues to climaxes, educators can facilitate not only language acquisition but also cognitive and emotional growth. Storytelling becomes not merely a teaching method, but an immersive experience that deepens both engagement and understanding.

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Methodology in Action:

Developing Communicative Writing Skills Through Student-Created Visuals



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Abstract. In many secondary EFL classrooms, writing instruction prioritizes grammatical accuracy and structural correctness over meaningful communication. Although linguistic precision remains important, this emphasis often leaves learners hesitant to initiate writing independently. Students may possess adequate vocabulary and grammar knowledge, yet experience difficulty when confronted with a blank page. The absence of a clear communicative context increases cognitive load and may contribute to writing anxiety, particularly among adolescent learners.

This paper presents a classroom-based approach that uses student-created visuals as a scaffold for developing communicative writing skills. Designed for learners aged 13–17, the method shifts writing instruction from form-dominated exercises to meaning-centered expression. By transferring authorship of visual content to students, the approach enhances ownership, autonomy, and emotional engagement in the writing process.

The instructional model follows a structured progression from image creation to written text. First, students produce a simple drawing representing a meaningful moment, experience, or situation. Artistic quality is deliberately de-emphasized to ensure inclusive participation. The transition from image to text unfolds through three scaffolded stages: (1) semantic



grounding through key nouns, (2) situational development through verbs and actions, and (3) interpretive enrichment through descriptive and expressive language. This structured progression allows for instructional differentiation while maintaining a communicative focus.

An interactive peer-feedback phase strengthens communicative purpose by positioning writing as shared meaning-making rather than teacher-directed production. Classroom implementation demonstrates increased engagement, greater textual coherence, and reduced writing avoidance. The approach offers a practical, adaptable model for secondary EFL contexts seeking to balance communicative principles with structured linguistic development.

The concept of communicative competence extends beyond grammatical accuracy to include sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic dimensions (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1972). Writing instruction aligned with communicative language teaching should therefore prioritize meaningful expression in context rather than isolated sentence construction. Research in second language acquisition highlights the role of affective variables in language production. Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis suggests that anxiety can inhibit output, while supportive scaffolding facilitates acquisition. From a sociocultural perspective, learning develops through guided participation within structured support (Vygotsky, 1978). The approach described here integrates these principles by reducing initial linguistic pressure and gradually increasing productive demands.

Visual tools have long been recognized as effective context-builders in language classrooms (Wright, 1989). However, most instructional materials rely on pre-generated images. Student-created visuals, by contrast, increase cognitive investment and personal relevance. As Olshansky (2008) argues, drawing provides an alternative pathway to literacy by enabling learners to externalize and organize ideas before translating them into formal language.

The model consists of four interconnected phases:



1. **Visual Generation.** Students create a simple drawing illustrating a personally meaningful moment. The emphasis remains on idea formation rather than artistic skill.
2. **Semantic Grounding.** Learners identify and list key nouns related to their visual (people, objects, settings). This stage reduces cognitive load by providing lexical anchors.
3. **Situational Development.** Students introduce verbs and actions, transforming the image into a dynamic event. Narrative structure begins to emerge.
4. **Interpretive Enrichment.** Adjectives, adverbs, and emotional vocabulary are added to convey atmosphere, perspective, and significance. Students move from describing events to interpreting them.

This gradual progression supports differentiation: emerging learners construct simple sentences, while more advanced students produce extended, cohesive texts.

Classroom Implementation. The framework was implemented in a secondary EFL classroom at the Scientific Lyceum “Polit.” One instructional sequence focused on the theme “A Moment That Changed Something” Students created drawings representing meaningful personal experiences and developed short narratives through the scaffolded stages. A structured peer-feedback component enhanced communicative purpose. Students read their texts aloud while peers responded to guided prompts such as:

- What do you see in this moment?
- What happened next?
- Why was this experience important?

This exchange repositioned writing as an interactive communicative act rather than a teacher-evaluated product. Language feedback was provided after meaning had been successfully transmitted, thereby maintaining communicative intent as the primary focus.

Classroom observations indicated: increased willingness to initiate writing, longer and more coherent texts, greater use of descriptive and reflective language, reduced signs of writing anxiety.



Pedagogical Implications. Student-created visuals serve as an effective scaffold for the development of communicative writing. The approach lowers affective barriers by separating idea generation from linguistic encoding. It supports learner autonomy and ownership, enables inclusive participation, integrates peer interaction into the writing process, and balances meaning-focused communication with structured language development. The method requires minimal materials and can be adapted to narrative, descriptive, or reflective writing tasks across proficiency levels.

Conclusion. Communicative writing instruction should enable learners to construct and share meaning rather than merely demonstrate grammatical control. By allowing students to visualize ideas before verbalizing them, teachers can reduce anxiety, increase engagement, and foster more purposeful written communication. Student-created visuals offer a practical, theoretically grounded strategy for supporting communicative competence in secondary EFL classrooms and provide a replicable model for teachers seeking to enhance writing instruction within communicative frameworks.

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TESOL-Ukraine Fall 2025: A Season of Growth, Connection, and Professional Empowerment

Autumn 2025 has once again demonstrated the strength, resilience, and forward-thinking spirit of TESOL-Ukraine. Throughout the fall season, our professional community came together in a series of dynamic events designed to support English language educators in Ukraine and beyond.

From interactive webinars and practical workshops to collaborative forums and special joint initiatives with international partners, TESOL-Ukraine created meaningful spaces for dialogue, innovation, and shared expertise. Participants explored current trends in ELT methodology, creative writing and storytelling, learner engagement strategies, and teacher well-being – all while strengthening professional networks across regions and borders.

A particularly fruitful highlight of this season was the continued collaboration with the Regional English Language Office. Our joint initiatives were greatly enriched by the inspiring contribution of the RELO Virtual Educators, whose expertise, professionalism, and commitment provided valuable international perspectives and practical insights for Ukrainian educators. This partnership once again demonstrated the power of sustained cooperation and shared vision in advancing high-quality English language teaching.

Fall 2025 has proven that even in challenging times, professional unity, academic curiosity, and mutual support remain the cornerstones of our community. As we look ahead, TESOL-Ukraine continues to inspire teachers to grow, lead, and transform their classrooms into spaces of opportunity and hope.

In the pages that follow, you will discover a digest of our fall events – reflections and insights shared by facilitators and participants, offering a multifaceted view of each initiative through the voices of those who brought these professional experiences to life.

Stay connected. Stay inspired. Stay TESOL-Ukraine.



Meet Our RELO Virtual Educator

Finding What I Was Not Looking For:

A Transformative Professional Journey with TESOL-Ukraine



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“I found what I was not looking for, but it became the best professional experience of my life.” These are the words that immediately surface as I reflect on my recent professional journey – and here are some key reasons why this journey has been so transformative.

While searching online for a former colleague, I unexpectedly discovered the U.S. Department of State English Language Programs and the opportunity to apply for the Virtual Educator Program. After being selected, I had the privilege of working with an extraordinary, creative, and resilient group of professors, teachers, and students in Ukraine during the Fall 2025 term. What began as a professional collaboration soon evolved into meaningful friendships and a profound intercultural exchange that enriched my teaching philosophy and professional identity. During this experience, I facilitated two ten-week courses conducted synchronously via Zoom: a creative writing course, *Fishing for the Best Catch*, and a methodology course, *Digging Deeper*, focused on English Language Teaching



(ELT) practices. Both courses attracted participants from diverse academic and professional backgrounds, including university professors, school teachers, and education students. The interdisciplinary composition of the cohorts created a dynamic learning environment in which pedagogical dialogue extended beyond theoretical knowledge into lived educational realities shaped by culture, context, and personal experience.

The creative writing course, what participants affectionately described as a “Story Lounge”, — evolved into a safe intellectual and emotional space where ideas could emerge, develop, and transform. Participants explored storytelling structures such as journaling for stress reduction, constraint-based creativity, among others. However, the most significant outcome was the recognition that trust is foundational to creativity. When learners feel psychologically safe, they are more willing to take intellectual risks, share personal narratives, and experiment with language.

Through collaborative rewriting of fairy tales, reflective journaling, and poetry documenting life experiences, participants demonstrated how cultural background and generational perspectives influence voice, tone, and point of view. These activities revealed that writing is not merely a linguistic task but a cognitive and emotional process shaped by identity. I learned that fostering trust does not simply open minds to new knowledge—it opens hearts to authentic expression.

The ELT methodology course provided a distinct professional dimension. Throughout the ten weeks, I invited guest experts from multiple educational fields to give us a close view and enriched discussions on instructional strategies such as SIOP, formative assessment, differentiation through data, project-based learning, and the CAFE literacy framework. The diversity of perspectives allowed participants to critically analyze how methodologies could be adapted within their own educational contexts.

A central theme that emerged repeatedly was the importance of reflective practice—both in the moment and after instruction. Effective educators must continuously evaluate whether students are understanding, whether engagement is authentic, and whether adjustments are necessary. We discussed the professional skill often described informally as “reading the room” recognizing when to slow down, reteach, provide additional scaffolding, or allow learners greater autonomy. Participants shared classroom scenarios

from their own institutions, which led to meaningful dialogue about flexibility, responsiveness, and culturally informed pedagogy.

Another key insight involved the relationship between planning and improvisation. While structured lesson design remains essential, expert teaching also requires adaptive decision-making. Reflection before, during, and after instruction transforms teaching from routine delivery into intentional professional practice. Many participants reported that this perspective helped them reconceptualize challenges not as failures but as opportunities for pedagogical growth.

Beyond academic outcomes, this collaboration held profound human significance. Teaching during a period of national difficulty in Ukraine highlighted the resilience of educators who remain committed to learning, innovation, and community despite external challenges. Their dedication reinforced my belief that education transcends geography; it is fundamentally relational. Professional learning communities built on respect, empathy, and shared purpose can flourish even across continents and time zones.

In conclusion, the TESOL-Ukraine Virtual Educator experience demonstrated that meaningful professional development occurs when pedagogy, culture, and human connection intersect. The writing lounge fostered trust and creative expression, while the ELT course emphasized reflective practice and instructional adaptability. Together, these experiences reaffirmed that effective education depends not only on methodology but also on relationships. I am deeply grateful to the U.S. Department of State English Language Programs, TESOL-Ukraine, and every participant who contributed to this unforgettable journey.





Empowering Educators in Crisis:

Reframing EMI Teaching through Professional Development



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This fall season, university subject teachers from various State and National Universities in Zaporizhzhia, Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, Kyiv and Sumy Oblasts have completed an online professional developmental course proposed by TESOL-Ukraine and delivered by its members for EMI university teachers. Though this fall and winter were full of numerous challenges, including multiple blackouts and shutdowns caused by Ukraine's infrastructure damages by Russian missile and drone attacks, fifty educators tried their best to take the chance to develop and strengthen their capacity to design effective courses in various subjects to be delivered in English as a Medium Instruction (EMI) at "EMI Basics" course, transformative by its nature. And they have done it well. It was Round 5, warmly hosted by Sumy State Pedagogical University named after A.S. Makarenko and Anna Podosinnikova, Head of the Department of English Philology and Linguodidactics and Vice-President of TESOL-Ukraine, and her assistant, Tetiana Dokoshenko, who coordinated the course and provided technical support.



Feedback from this cohort reveals a profound shift in the pedagogical perspective of the participants: moving away from traditional "content delivery" toward a student-centred, interactive, and emotionally and self-aware learning in a friendly classroom environment. This paper describes the EMI developmental course from the perspective of its participants, focusing on what was new for them, what provoked thought, what is transformational for them, and why.

A Shift in Paradigm: From Content to Communication

For many participants, the course was "thought-provoking" and "transformative." A recurring theme in the feedback was the realization that teaching a subject in English is not merely a linguistic challenge – translating content from Ukrainian into English, but a pedagogical one.

One participant noted that despite of their degree in philology, they face problems in planning and organizing process how to teach complex subjects like anatomy in English, but the course provided the "missing link"—the ability to structure content clearly and maintain effective interaction. As one respondent shared, their students are being trained to assist in frontline cities like Sloviansk by their medical and humanitarian efforts; and for them, EMI is not just an academic exercise but a tool for "professional service and ethical responsibility."

The "Golden" Toolbox: What Teachers Valued Most

All the respondents highlighted four core pillars of the training that they intend to implement immediately:

- **Backward Design:** Many teachers found the "Backward Design" framework (starting with learning outcomes rather than content) to be "positively provocative," forcing them to rethink how modules and courses are built.
- **Needs Analysis:** Identifying the specific linguistic and academic gaps of students at the beginning of a term/course/module was cited as a top priority for future classes.
- **Scaffolding & Storytelling:** Strategies to support student comprehension without overloading with so-called "watering down" academic rigour were highly praised.

- **Interactive Lectures:** Tools like Padlet, Mentimeter, and Blooket were identified as essential for transforming "sleeping" lectures into "engaging, dialogue-based experiences."

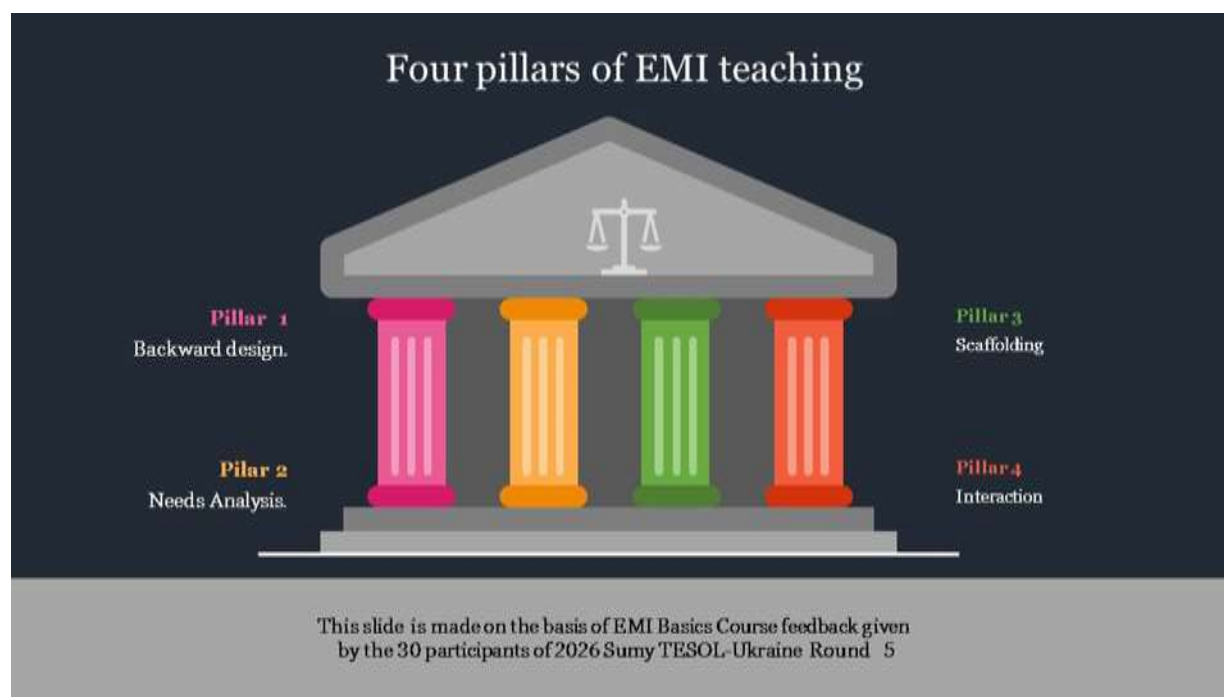


Figure 1: Four pillars of EMI teaching.

Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and Inclusion

A unique and vital aspect of this 2026 Sumy training course was the focus on the "Learning Environment and Culture." Participants emphasized the importance of Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) and creating a "safe, supportive, and motivating" teaching and learning environment. In a digital learning environment marked by instability, teachers highlighted the value of understanding "Generation Alpha" and incorporating inclusive practices to support students' mental health.

Authentic Communication: The Conversation Club

An outstanding feature of the course was the interaction with Nadia Awaida, an Academic Director at ELS-ILSC at Eckerd College, Florida, USA - a Virtual English Language Educator provided by Regional English Language Office (RELO, Kyiv) within a special Program of the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv.

The weekly meetings of the Conversation Clubs provided more than just language practice; they offered "authentic communication" and "professional reflection", being in a friendly

and supportive environment built by Nadiia. For the majority of the course participants, these meetings were like an "energising" spark in building their confidence necessary to run their own EMI classes.

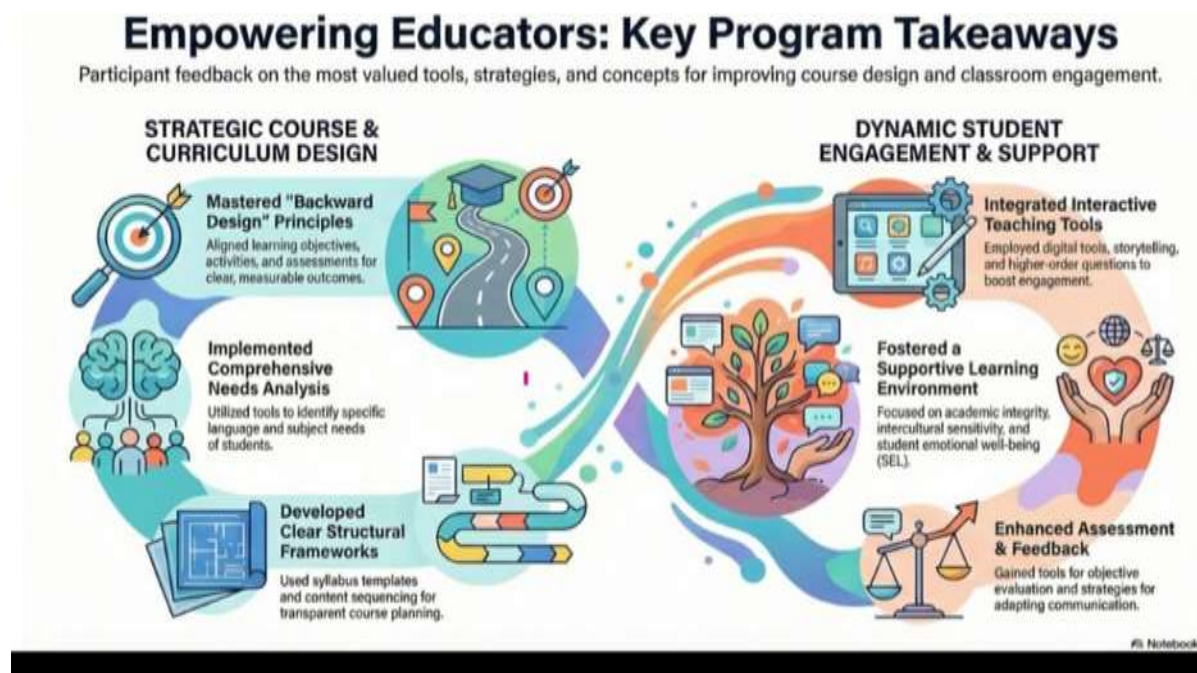


Figure 2: Key Program Takeaways – a participant’s feedback

Looking Forward: The EMI Teacher Community

The overall impression of the course was overwhelmingly "inspiring" and "empowering." While participants requested more time for peer-to-peer exchange and a "gentler" introduction for those with lower English levels, the consensus was clear: there is a strong need for continued collaboration.

The call to expand the EMI Society reflects a desire to change the educational paradigm in Ukraine. By making higher education more internationally oriented and methodologically rigorous, these educators, participants in the course, are not just teaching subjects—they are preparing a new generation of Ukrainians for international cooperation and professional excellence.

"This course was twice meaningful, as it was going on at the hardest time ever in my country. Your work is titanic... you did not give up and encouraged us to continue."



Have You Ever Stepped into a Story Lounge?

Welcome to the TESOL-Ukraine One –

A Space Where Stories Come Alive and Voices are Heard!

“Finding More than We Planned For

and Discovering Voices We Didn’t Expect:

What Happens When We Let Stories Lead ...”



LYUDMYLA HNAPOVSKA

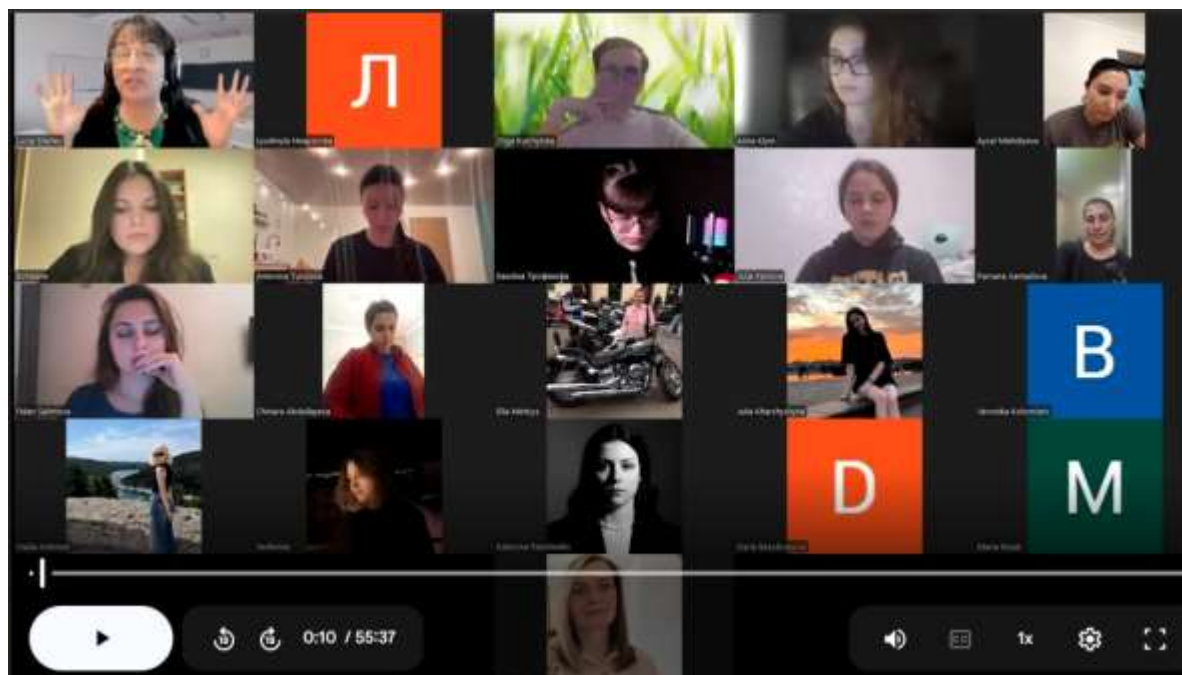
TESOL-Ukraine and RELO joint ‘*Story Lounge*’ project coordinator

Head of TESOL-Ukraine Training Center

(Sumy, Ukraine)

This ten-week professional development project marked an important milestone not only for its participants, but also for TESOL-Ukraine as an organisation committed to innovation, inclusivity, and meaningful collaboration in English language teaching. From its very conception as a joint initiative with the Regional English Language Office of the U.S. Embassy in Ukraine, “*The Story Lounge: Tales Voiced Together – Creative Writing for Teachers and Students*” project aimed to go beyond a traditional training format and become a living and dynamic collaborative environment where writing, reflection, and professional growth could unfold together. This project truly became a shared creative space where stories, voices, and professional identities could grow side by side. And a *central pillar* of the project’s success was the thoughtful framework developed in partnership with the RELO officials: Jen MacArthur, English Language Teaching Attaché and English

Language Programs Director for Ukraine, Poland, Hungary, Moldova and Romania, and Assistant Attaché Alyona Sukhinina.



At the heart of this project was a pioneering idea: *bringing teachers and students together as equal participants in a creative writing journey*. This forward-looking decision challenged conventional boundaries between teaching and learning roles, transformed the course into a shared creative journey, and redefined learning as a collaborative, intergenerational process. Within *‘The Story Lounge’*, teachers did not simply learn *about* creative writing – they wrote alongside their students, experimenting with voice, narrative form, and personal expression. This shared authorship proved to be one of the most powerful and transformative aspects of the programme.

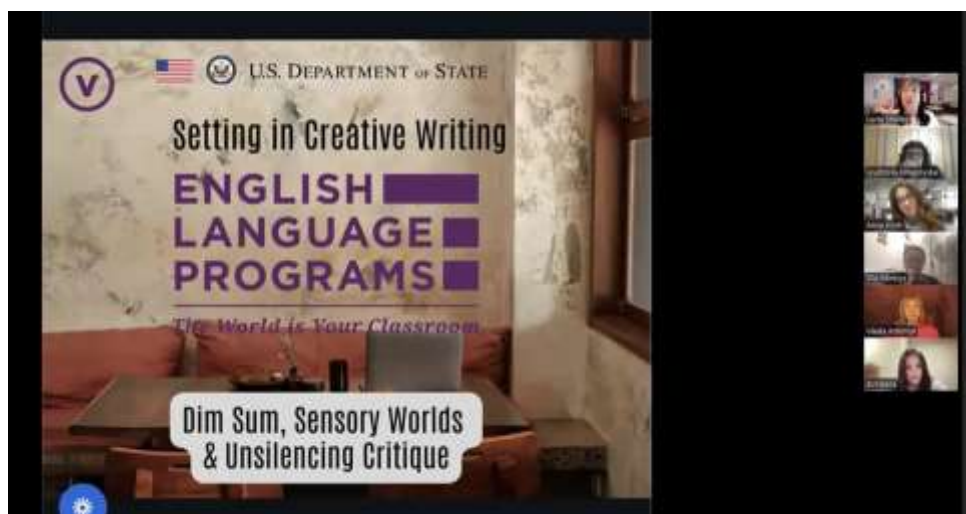
Equally significant was the fact that this programme became *the first TESOL-Ukraine professional development initiative to welcome participants from partner ELT associations abroad*. Educators joined the course from **AzETA** (Azerbaijan) and **ETAG** (Georgia), which turned the project into a meaningful space for international professional dialogue. This cross-border collaboration enriched discussions with regional perspectives, broadened methodological insights, strengthened professional ties across borders, and reinforced the idea that storytelling transcends geography and context, making the learning experience more diverse and globally informed.

The 60-hour (2 ECTS credits) project program combined four *core components*:



1: “Fishing for the Best Catch” – a series of live online workshops led by **Dr. Lucia Shelley, the RELO Virtual Educator**. This part of the project brought together pre-service teachers and their instructors from five Ukrainian universities (*Sumy State Pedagogical University, Ivan Franko Zhytomyr State University, Vasyl Stefanyk Carpathian National University (Ivano-Frankivsk), Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University (Lutsk), and Kryvyi Rih State Pedagogical University*). Over ten weeks, participants explored multiple creative genres, experimented with narrative techniques, co-authored stories, and exchanged thoughtful peer feedback. ensuring that creative writing was not only explored theoretically, but experienced as a living pedagogical practice within teacher education

Dr. Lucia Shelley, PhD, deserves special recognition: her role as RELO Virtual Educator was central to the project’s success. Her professional generosity, methodological clarity, and deep belief in creative writing as a transformative educational force shaped the intellectual and emotional core of ‘*The Story Lounge*’. Through her guidance, participants learned to connect imagination with lived experience, to experiment boldly with language and narrative, and to reflect critically on how creative writing nurtures academic, personal, and professional growth – for both teachers and learners. Her presence elevated the project from a well-designed program to a truly inspiring journey.



2: “Catch of the Day: Top Ideas in Action” – ten live ZOOM sessions led by TESOL-Ukraine facilitators. This part covered much broader audience of around 80 participants representing *international* academia. What made this experience especially powerful was the interaction across roles and contexts – teachers writing alongside students, and educators from different countries learning from one another’s classroom realities. This

shared creative space helped dissolve hierarchies and geographical boundaries alike, reminding us that storytelling is a universal human language.



#3: guided self-study

#4: team project work.

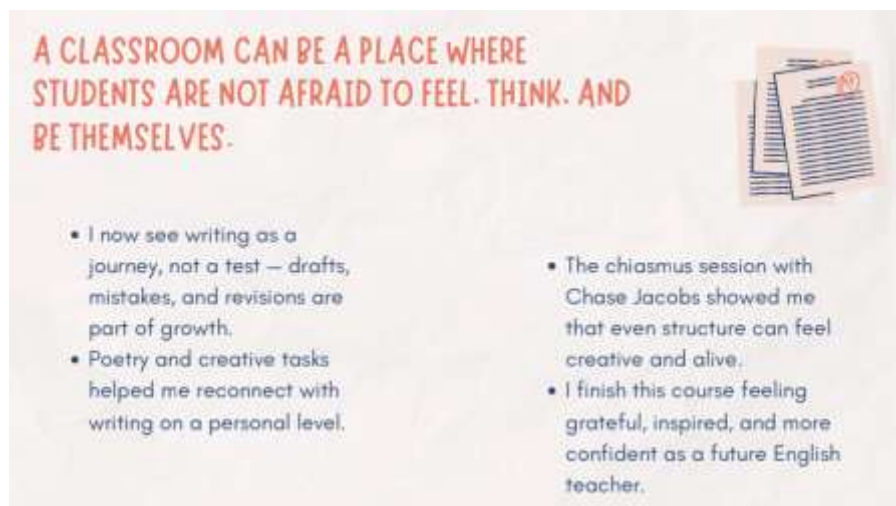
Throughout the course, participants explored diverse creative writing forms, collaborated in supportive communities, and discovered practical ways to integrate storytelling and creative writing into EFL classroom settings. As a coordinator, I was struck by how organically the project evolved. While carefully structured, it remained responsive to participants' voices and needs. Each workshop added a new dimension to participants' creative and pedagogical repertoires: story circles that fostered trust and empathy; gamified, dice-based writing that encouraged collaboration and risk-taking; first-person narratives exploring voice and identity; place-based writing rooted in lived experience; multimodal approaches that activated the senses ... Throughout, a strong emphasis was placed on practical classroom transfer, ensuring that creativity remained both inspiring and teachable:





One particularly memorable moment occurred during a collaborative task involving a teacher and her student working in the same breakout group. Initially unsure and hesitant how to navigate their familiar classroom roles, they soon found themselves co-creating characters and laughing over their choices, negotiating plot twists with genuine enthusiasm, and building on each other’s ideas. Later, the teacher reflected that she had “met her student’s voice in a completely new way,” while the student shared that writing *with* a teacher made her feel “seen as a real author.” These insights revealed a shared realisation: creative writing had allowed them to meet each other not as instructor and learner, but as fellow authors.

Another important outcome of the project was a noticeable shift in how participants perceived creative writing in ELT. It was no longer viewed as an “extra” activity, but as a powerful pedagogical tool for emotional connection and language development, capable of enhancing engagement, empathy, and learner agency.



The final wrap-up session, “*Catch of the Day: From Inspiration to Implementation*”, was both a celebration and a point of departure. Rather than signalling an end, it highlighted continuation: concrete plans, adapted lesson ideas, and renewed motivation to integrate creative writing into everyday teaching practice. It captured the spirit of the entire project. It celebrated insights gained while clearly pointing forward – to classrooms, curricula, and future collaborations. Participants left with certificates, toolkits, and practical ideas, but also with renewed confidence in their creative potential and a stronger sense of professional identity.



Looking back, this joint TESOL-Ukraine and RELO initiative reaffirmed a simple yet profound truth: when educators and learners are invited to create together, learning becomes deeper, more human, and more lasting. By opening *‘The Story Lounge’* to teachers, students, and international partners – and by embracing the vision and leadership of the RELO Office and Dr. Lucia Shelley – this project set a powerful precedent for what professional development can be when stories are truly voiced together.





**Students in the ‘Story Lounge’:
Where Even the Quietest Story Can Echo the Loudest.
*The Story Lounge: a Shared Space for Creative Writing,
Professional Growth, and International Dialogue
(A Success Story)***



VERONIKA KOLOMIETS

*Master student,
Sumy State Pedagogical University*



KATERYNA PANCHENKO

*Master student,
Sumy State Pedagogical University*

About The Story Lounge. “*The Story Lounge: Tales Voiced Together*” was a creative writing course designed for English teachers and students worldwide. It gave English language teachers, teacher educators, and those training to become teachers a real chance to discover how creative writing and storytelling can transform language learning. The course was delivered by TESOL-Ukraine as part of the U.S. Department of State’s Virtual English Language Educator Program, with support from the Regional English Language Office at the U.S. Embassy in Ukraine, represented by Jen MacArthur, English Language Teaching Attaché and English Language Programs Director for Ukraine, Poland, Hungary, Moldova, and Romania, and Assistant Attachés Alyona Sukhinina and Liliia Shylo. The TESOL-Ukraine course coordinating team included Dr. Olena Iliencko, TESOL-

Ukraine President; Dr. Hanna Podosynnikova, TESOL-Ukraine Vice President; Dr. Maryna Tsehelska, TESOL-Ukraine Vice President Emeritus; and Dr. Lyudmyla Hnapovska, Head of the TESOL-Ukraine Training Center. The course was also supported by Sumy State Pedagogical University Center for the Advancement of English Language Teaching, headed by Hanna Podosynnikova.



The three-month intensive online program brought together participants from five major Ukrainian universities, as well as educators from the United States, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. Having people from such varied professional backgrounds and teaching environments made for lively collaboration, plenty of learning from each other, and genuine cross-cultural exchange. The course responded to a real need for fresh, student-focused approaches that encourage creativity, give learners a voice, and promote authentic communication in English language classrooms. The course facilitator, PhD in Philology, Associate Professor Lyudmyla Hnapovska, provided academic oversight and ongoing support to participants throughout the course.

Course Content and Approach

The course content centered on modern approaches to creative writing and storytelling and on how to use them in schools and universities. Participants examined different story types, narrative techniques, and classroom strategies that support language development, critical thinking, and student engagement. One major focus was shifting creative writing from something students do alone to a collaborative process where teachers guide students through reflection, discussion, and building confidence.

Dr. Lucia Shelley, an American educator and certified bilingual teacher from Texas and North Dakota, led the course as a Virtual Educator for the U.S. Embassy in Ukraine. She brought her extensive teaching and research background to interactive sessions that mixed theory with practical, hands-on work. Working with speakers from TESOL-Ukraine, she demonstrated how storytelling can be integrated into English language teaching for learners of different ages and skill levels.

What really made The Story Lounge work was its interactivity. Participants worked on their own writing, gave each other feedback, and talked through innovative classroom ideas. Digital tools helped everyone collaborate and get creative, making the whole learning experience both productive and enjoyable. This meant participants didn't just improve their own writing—they also picked up practical facilitation skills they could use right away in their classrooms.



The Symposium. The successful completion of The Story Lounge was marked by a symposium held on January 13-14, 2026, which brought together two professional development courses—"The Story Lounge: Tales Voiced Together – Creative Writing for Teachers and Students" and "The Basics of ELT." During the event, the following international guests took part: Dr. Jeff Fastnacht, Superintendent of Bismarck Public Schools; Amanda Meier, Learning Design and Innovation Director of Bismarck Public

Schools; Karen Taylor, Founder of English Language Training; and Beth Olshansky, Director of the Center for the Advancement of Art Literacy. During the symposium, participants presented their professional achievements and shared what they'd learned throughout the courses. The first day covered classroom management, learner motivation, and pedagogical reflection, while the second day focused on putting contemporary methodologies into practice, including visual approaches to developing writing skills and analyzing real classroom cases.

We express our heartiest gratitude to all the organizers and participants of this highly impactful initiative for the opportunities, insights, and knowledge they shared. It was a vital vocational course that helped us develop skills that can propel us forward in our careers.

Our special thanks go to the course coordinator from Sumy State Pedagogical University, Dr. Hanna Podosynnikova, Vice President of TESOL-Ukraine, Head of the Department of English Philology and Linguodidactics, and Head of the Center for the Advancement of English Language Teaching, for the opportunity, inspiration, overall support, and encouragement.

Looking forward to joining other TESOL-Ukraine professional development courses and projects!



TESOL-Ukraine Winter 2026 Symposium Highlights

Creative Sparks, Classroom Insights, and Grasping the Baton



LYUDMYLA HNAPOVSKA

**Coordinator of TESOL-Ukraine Winter 2026 Symposium
(Sumy, Ukraine)**

The winter Symposium “*Elevating Proficiency Through Research & Practice*” (January 13–14, 2026), organized by TESOL Ukraine in close collaboration with RELO, U.S. Embassy in Ukraine, became a powerful reminder of what meaningful professional development can look like when theory, practice, and reflection come together. The symposium brought together participants from two TESOL-Ukraine Fall 2025 projects: ‘*The Story Lounge: Tales Voiced Together – Creative Writing for Teachers and Students*’ and ‘*The Basics of ELT: Digging Deeper!*’ along with a broader community of dedicated EFL instructors. This event provided a vibrant platform for educators to share experiences, exchange ideas, and reflect on the practical and creative aspects of English language teaching. Through collaborative discussions and interactive sessions, participants explored innovative approaches, deepened their understanding of pedagogy, and strengthened connections within the TESOL-Ukraine professional community.

Here is a brief digest on the events that marked the Symposium’s key milestones!

Day One (January 13, 2026): “Inside the Classroom – Managing, Motivating, Reflecting (What Works & Why)”



Day One of the Symposium set the tone for the entire event by focusing on what happens at the heart of teaching practice – the classroom itself – and, crucially, *why* certain approaches work.

The programme opened with a dynamic **SPEAK** session, an interactive format designed to engage participants from the very start. The acronym *SPEAK* guided the structure of the session – participants were invited to:

- Showcase TESOL-Ukraine projects
- *Point* to the moments that matter
- *Explain* how these moments shape ELT
- Ask for insights
- *Kick off* the next steps.

This dedicated ‘Welcome’ session offered an opportunity to connect and set a shared direction for the days ahead. Participants met Symposium leaders, partners, and facilitators, aligning around a common purpose and reaffirming the value of collaboration within the TESOL-Ukraine community. The atmosphere was open and collegial, fostering a sense of belonging and mutual respect from the outset. The session featured a strong line-up of speakers whose diverse roles and perspectives enriched the discussion. **Dr. Olena Ilienکو**, *President of TESOL-Ukraine*, emphasised the importance of reflective classroom practice and community-driven professional development. **Jen MacArthur**, *Regional English Language Officer for Ukraine, Poland, Hungary, Romania, and Moldova*, highlighted the broader educational context and the role of informed pedagogy in supporting both teachers and learners.





Insights into virtual education and professional growth were shared by **Dr. Lucia Shelley, PhD, Virtual Educator, RELO, U.S. Embassy in Ukraine**, who drew attention to the impact of intentional teaching choices on learner motivation and engagement. Project-based perspectives were contributed by **Dr. Lyudmyla Hnapovska, Coordinator of 'The Story Lounge' project**, and **Dr. Olena Kuzmenko, Coordinator of 'The Basics of ELT' project**. Their contributions illustrated how targeted initiatives can translate theory into classroom-ready practice and support teachers at different stages of their professional journey.

Building on this foundation, the next session turned attention to strengthening classroom practice through the exploration of feedback and classroom management. In *"Teacher Evaluation & Classroom Management Strategies,"* **Jeff Fastnacht, Superintendent of Bismarck Public Schools**, and **Amanda Meier, Learning Design and Innovation Director**, demonstrated how reflective evaluation and purposeful feedback can support teacher growth and foster positive learning environments. Drawing on leadership and classroom experience, the speakers emphasised that effective classroom management and meaningful feedback are deeply interconnected and essential to learner engagement, particularly in EFL contexts.

The following session invited participants to experience engaging teaching tools firsthand. In *"Making It Fun!: Five Color Vowel Activities that Boost English Speaking Confidence,"* **Karen Taylor, Founder of 'English Language Training Solutions'**, demonstrated how interactive, colour-based activities can build phonological awareness while increasing learner confidence. Participants actively took part in the activities, experiencing them from a learner's perspective and reflecting on how enjoyment, structure, and low-anxiety environments contribute to effective language learning. The session sparked discussion about adaptation across age groups and teaching contexts, reinforcing the idea that rigour and fun can successfully coexist in the classroom.

The final session of Day One titled *"If I Knew Then ... (The 'Why' Behind Our Teaching: Watching, Wondering, Reflecting)"* invited participants to slow down and reflect on the deeper *"why"* roots beneath their teaching practice. Designed as an interactive and introspective workshop, the session encouraged participants to watch, wonder, and engage – reconnecting with the core motivations that first led them into the teaching profession.



Working in breakout rooms, participants shared memories, questions, and insights drawn from their own professional journeys. Through guided discussion and collaborative reflection, they explored how their beliefs about teaching had evolved over time and how these beliefs continue to shape classroom decisions today. The atmosphere was thoughtful and supportive, allowing space for both personal reflection and collective meaning-making.

A central element of the session was a collaborative writing task in which participants composed a letter to themselves on the first day of their teaching career. This activity proved especially powerful, prompting educators to articulate lessons learned, reaffirm values, and offer encouragement from the perspective of experience. For many, the task served as a reminder of their resilience, growth, and ongoing commitment to learners.

"If I Knew Then" ... *(A letter to myself on my first day teaching)*

If I knew then what I know now, I would not be afraid of making mistakes. Mistakes are part of learning, and every lesson- successful or not - helps you grow as a teacher. Every challenge is not an obstacle but a source of motivation.

I would remind myself that it does not matter how many students come to class. Work with those who are there and give them your full attention.

Do not try to be too hard on your students. Teaching is not about strict discipline but about guidance and understanding. Do not try to force respect. Respect comes with time and experience, through your attitude and approach, not through control.

Be flexible and do not be afraid to try new approaches. Teaching is an evolving process.

Trust the process. You are learning too.



As the day drew to a close, this reflective session provided a sense of coherence and purpose, bringing together the practical and conceptual strands explored earlier. Day One concluded not only with new strategies and ideas, but also with renewed motivation and a deeper awareness of the personal and professional reasons that sustain teachers in their work, which set a strong and inspiring foundation for the Day 2 that followed.

Day Two (January 14, 2026):

“The Practice Turn – When Learning Meets the Classroom (From Reflection to Resolution)”



Day Two of the Symposium marked a clear shift from reflection to action. The focus moved decisively toward application, leadership, and the translation of learning into classroom-ready practice.

The day opened with an introductory address by *Dr. Lucia Shelley, PhD, RELO Virtual Educator*. With warmth, clarity, and steady guidance, she set the direction for the day, positioning teachers not only as learners but as emerging leaders within their professional communities. Her opening remarks resonated strongly with participants, many of whom recognised her role as a guiding presence throughout their professional journey – a steady lighthouse helping both novice and experienced EFL teachers navigate from their first uncertain steps toward more confident classroom practice.

Building on this tone, Lucia led participants into the next part of the program, “*From Learners to Leaders: First Steps, Fresh Perspectives*.” This session showcased graduates of the *Basics of ELT: Digging Deeper* course, who made a confident transition from learning to leadership. Through a series of focused 20-minute presentations, the presenters explored their newly refreshed ELT toolkits, demonstrating how theory-informed reflection can be transformed into practical classroom strategies. Each presentation highlighted the “aha” moments and insights gained during the course, bringing them to life through concrete examples and classroom applications. The speakers shared not only what they had learned, but how that learning had reshaped their teaching decisions, increased their confidence, and encouraged them to take on more active professional roles. For participants, this session offered both inspiration and reassurance – clear evidence that growth in ELT is a continuous process and that meaningful leadership can begin with reflective practice and shared experience *Lucia Shelley’s article “Passing the Baton to the Next Generation of Educators” below showcases the key ideas voiced in the participants’ presentations*).

This opening segment of Day Two powerfully illustrated the Symposium’s central message: when learning is thoughtfully supported and openly shared, it naturally leads to leadership, innovation, and positive change in the classroom.



Then an insightful and inspiring session “*Picturing Writing*” led by **Beth Olshansky**, followed, inviting the Symposium community to see writing in a completely new light. Through carefully designed activities and examples, participants experienced the *Picturing Writing* approach firsthand and explored how images can unlock thinking, creativity, and meaningful communication. The session demonstrated how drawing and visual expression can serve as powerful entry points into writing, particularly for learners who may struggle to articulate ideas through words alone. Rather than positioning art as a supplementary activity, the session highlighted it as a central tool for developing language, voice, and confidence. Participants reflected on how visual thinking supports idea generation, deepens comprehension, and lowers barriers to participation for learners of all ages and proficiency levels. The approach resonated strongly with EFL teachers seeking inclusive, learner-centred strategies that nurture both creativity and academic growth. This session added a rich, imaginative dimension to Day Two, reinforcing the Symposium’s emphasis on practical innovation and reminding participants that powerful learning often begins with seeing familiar processes (such as writing) from a fresh perspective.



Beth Olshansky
 Picturing Writing Creator
 Director of the Center for the Advancement of Art-Based
 Literacy, Durham, New Hampshire USA

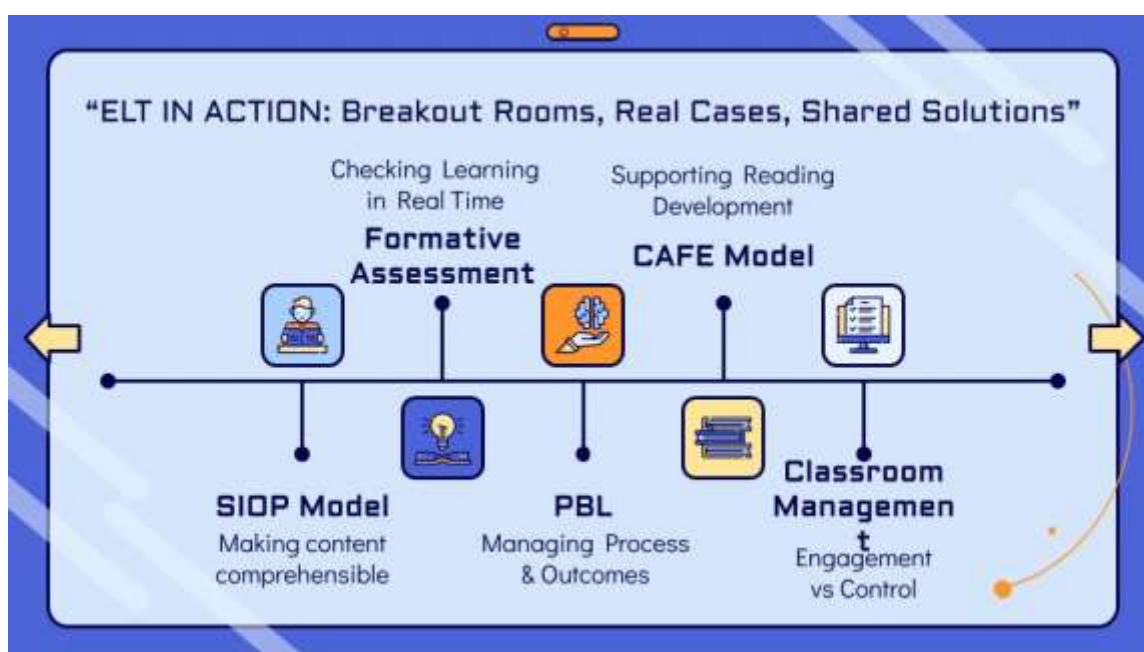


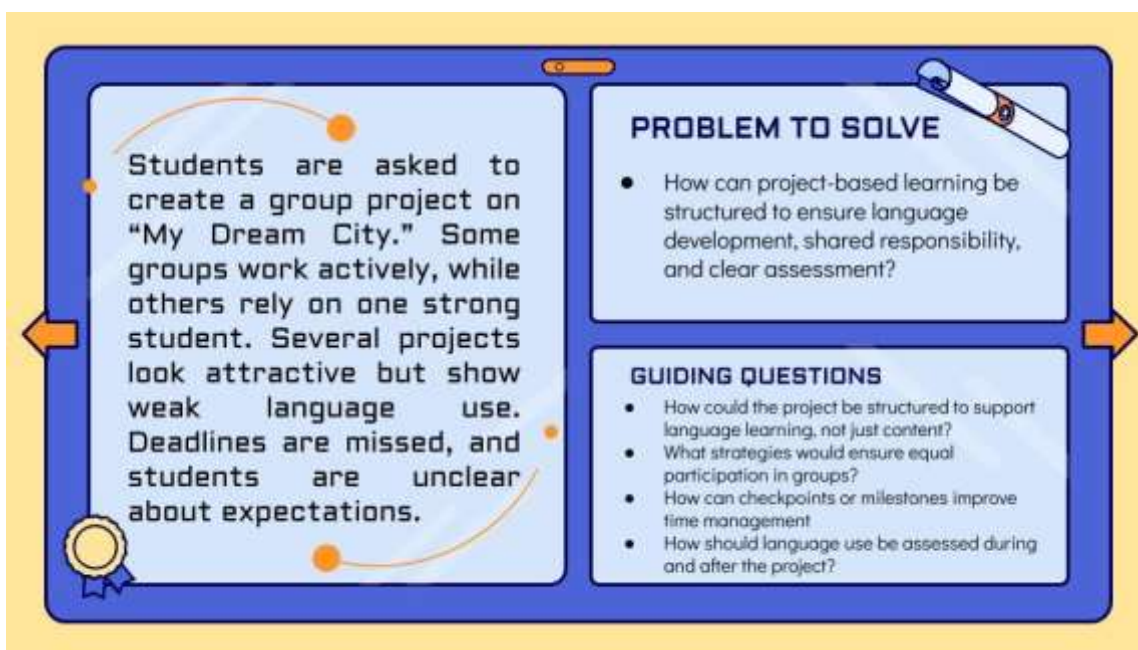
The Symposium concluded powerfully with a final **SPEAK** session titled “*ELT in Action: Breakout Rooms, Real Cases, Shared Solutions.*” Designed as a space for synthesis and collaboration, this session brought together the key ideas of Day Two and transformed them into collective problem-solving.

In this final iteration, SPEAK took on a renewed focus: participants were invited to:

- Share experiences
- Praise effective choices
- Explain why they matter
- Ask for insights
- Kindly suggest next steps.

Working in SPEAK breakout rooms, participants analysed real classroom cases drawn from authentic ELT contexts. These cases served as starting points for rich discussion, allowing teachers to pool their expertise, question assumptions, and explore multiple pathways forward. The collaborative nature of the session encouraged openness and trust. Participants shared challenges honestly, celebrated effective teaching decisions, and offered constructive suggestions grounded in both experience and reflection. Ideas generated during the discussions were not left at the level of theory; instead, they were shaped into practical, actionable steps that participants could take back to their own classrooms and professional communities.





As a closing activity, this SPEAK session captured the essence of the Symposium itself: learning rooted in real practice, strengthened through dialogue, and sustained by a supportive professional community. Day Two ended with a strong sense of shared purpose, renewed confidence, and readiness to turn insight into action.

Closing Reflections & Looking Ahead ...

The Symposium framework encouraged active listening, reflection, and forward thinking, positioning participants not as passive audience members but as contributors to a shared professional dialogue. The event brought together educators who share a deep commitment to improving teaching and learning. One of the Symposium’s greatest strengths was its speakers. Each session offered a distinct perspective while remaining grounded in real classroom experience. The presenters managed to balance conceptual clarity with practical relevance, which resonated strongly with participants’ feedback ideas, many of whom noted that the sessions helped them rethink familiar practices through a more informed and critical lens.

Equally impressive was the active engagement of “*The Basics of ELT: Digging Deeper*” course learners. Their contributions throughout the Symposium clearly reflected how much they had taken away from the Fall 2025 Zoom sessions. Whether through discussions, tasks, or shared reflections, they demonstrated growing confidence in analysing ELT practices, questioning long-held assumptions, and experimenting with new approaches.



This visible learning progress was one of the most rewarding outcomes of the event.

A particularly valuable aspect of the Symposium was the feedback culture that developed during the sessions. Feedback was not limited to evaluation; instead, it functioned as a learning tool. Comments were thoughtful, constructive, and often invited further reflection rather than providing final answers. This approach fostered an atmosphere of trust and intellectual curiosity, encouraging participants to engage deeply with both the content and each other.

Beyond individual sessions, the Symposium reinforced the importance of professional community. In a time when many educators feel isolated in their practice, the event created space for dialogue, shared challenges, and collective problem-solving. Participants were reminded that professional growth is most sustainable when supported by collaboration and ongoing conversation.

In sum, the Winter Symposium was not only a successful event but also a meaningful learning experience. It showcased the value of well-designed professional development, expert facilitation, and an engaged learning community. Most importantly, it left participants with new insights, practical tools, and a renewed sense of purpose – outcomes that will continue to influence their teaching long after the Symposium has ended.





TESOL-Ukraine Winter 2026 Symposium: More Insights

Passing the Baton to the Next Generation of Educators

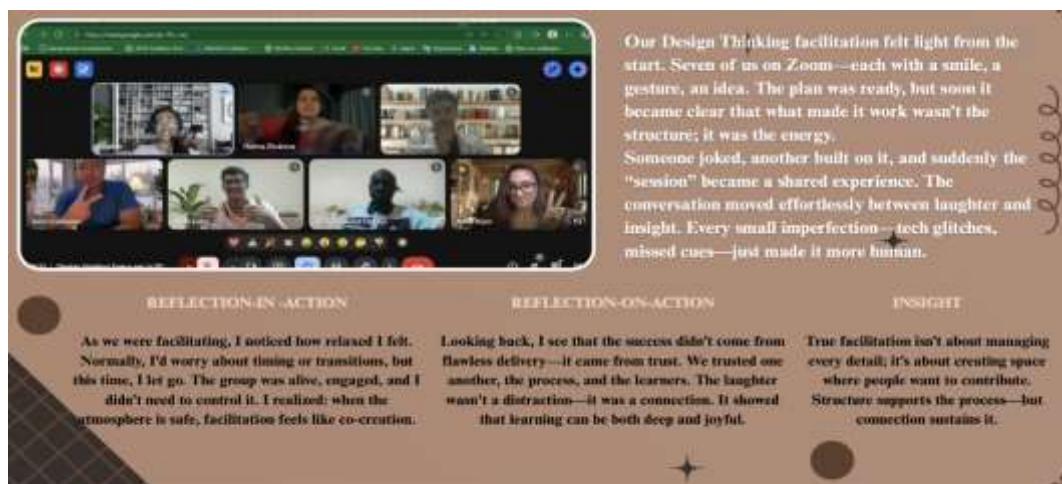


LUCIA SHELLEY, PhD

**Faculty, Central New Mexico Community College (CNM), USA
U.S. Department of State Virtual Educator — TESOL-Ukraine, Fall 2025**

Without hesitation, I can affirm that the most significant and rewarding component of the “Elevating Proficiency Through Research & Practice” Symposium, organized by TESOL Ukraine (January 13–14, 2026) and supported by Regional English Language Office of the U.S Embassy in Ukraine, was the opportunity to witness former participants from the Fall 2025 instructional cohort emerge as confident voices within the new generation of educators. These participants had completed a synchronous ten-week pedagogy-focused methodology course, ‘Digging Deeper!’, centered on English Language Teaching (ELT) practices. Observing these educators present the intellectual and pedagogical “fruits” of their learning — and articulate their professional growth — constituted a highlight of the two-day symposium, which itself offered abundant intellectual nourishment for the teaching community. Furthermore, the event provided an important forum for additional TESOL Ukraine educators to engage with the presenters’ work and explore their projects in greater depth.

I experienced profound professional pride while observing Nataliya Dyachuk's presentation on classroom management. She demonstrated how evidence-based instructional strategies could be thoughtfully adapted into an individualized pedagogical "toolkit," integrating creative writing as both a reflective and instructional medium.



Subsequently, Liza Kiselyova extended the pedagogical legacy of Beth Olshansky, the creator and developer of the Picturing Writing approach, an art-based literacy methodology that enables learners to express conceptual understanding through visual representation prior to written composition. Valeria Kizim illustrated how she successfully adapted this methodology to her online instructional context and shared authentic samples of student work. In a complementary presentation, Olha Moroz demonstrated the implementation of this approach within her elementary classroom, highlighting how students' original artwork served as a scaffold for deeper written English development. Additionally, Nazarii Nahorniuk guided participants through a project-based learning initiative in which students cultivated entrepreneurial competencies while simultaneously strengthening language proficiency.





The symposium also featured returning Fall 2025 presenters who provided advanced professional insights. Dr. Jeff Faschnatt, Superintendent of Bismarck Public Schools, and Mrs. Amanda Meier, Director of Learning Design and Innovation, delivered a session titled *Navigating Excellence: Teacher Evaluation and Classroom Management*. Their presentation emphasized the critical importance of cultivating positive classroom climates and maintaining continuous professional dialogue between educators and administrators regarding instructional effectiveness and student engagement. They also provided participants with a comprehensive overview of widely implemented instructional frameworks and evaluation systems within the United States educational context.

In addition, Beth Olshansky presented the *Picturing Writing* methodology in depth, illustrating how the progression from visual conceptualization (“picturing”) to written expression (“writing”) supports literacy development across proficiency levels. Another distinguished presenter, Karen Taylor, introduced practical analytical strategies for improving spoken English through the *Color Vowel* approach, equipping educators with actionable tools to enhance learners’ pronunciation and oral communication skills in second-language acquisition contexts.

Overall, the symposium created a collaborative intellectual space in which participants, presenters, and guest speakers collectively reflected on the importance of sustained professional dialogue with educational leadership, ongoing reflective practice, and the integration of research-based instructional strategies. Such engagement is essential for empowering educators to support learners in acquiring, refining, and ultimately mastering English as a second language.



Back from the Future

Reflecting on the 34th IATEFL Poland International Conference 19-21 September, 2025



SERHII PETRENKO

Associate Professor

Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv

(Kyiv, Ukraine)

TESOL-Ukraine International Coordinator

The 34th IATEFL Poland International Conference, held in Łódź in September 2025, really felt like a breath of fresh air for everyone involved. Hundreds of English language teachers from Poland, Ukraine, across Europe, and even farther afield, came together at the Lodz University of Technology for three days of inspiration, conversation, and real connection.



The theme this year, “**Back from the Future,**” was spot-on. It pushed us to look back at what’s worked in language teaching for years, face the messy realities we’re dealing with right now, and think honestly about where things might be heading, especially with

AI creeping into classrooms, the push for more inclusive teaching, sustainability concerns, and just keeping ourselves (and our students) from burning out, traumas and stress.

What touched many of us deeply was the warmth and solidarity shown by the conference organizers toward their Ukrainian colleagues. They offered a significantly



discounted registration fee for Ukrainian participants and generously provided a collection of teaching materials, resource packs, and ready-to-use classroom games.

The program was packed and varied in the best way. The plenaries, presentations, and workshops came in on everything from solid teaching methods and responsible AI use to diversity, teacher self-care, psychology in the classroom, CLIL, Business English, leadership, etc.

Sessions covered a rich mix of general topics, including the balance between pedagogy, methodology, and technology in teaching; responsible integration of AI in language classrooms; supporting overwhelmed students while maintaining personal boundaries and well-being; true inclusion in diverse and neurodiverse classrooms; using drama, storytelling, and the arts to boost engagement in Business English and exam preparation.

What made it even better was the mix of speakers. Big names in ELT, including Hugh Dellar, Nik Peachey, Ben Goldstein, Russell Stannard, Chris Roland, Christopher Graham, Claudia Molnár, George Kokolas, Grzegorz Śpiewak, Rob Howard, Ramon Schindler, and others, brought fresh, thought-

provoking ideas.



I was lucky enough to contribute in two ways. First, I gave a plenary called **“Rising Together – Teaching with Hope and Strength,”** joined online by my wonderful colleagues Lyudmyla Hnapovska and Hanna Podosinnikova. We talked about how Ukrainian teachers have kept going during the war, through



professional development, strong communities like TESOL-Ukraine (with their conventions, mentoring, webinars, and joint projects), and simply supporting each other. I also ran a professional development workshop, “**Reflections on Advancement, Barriers, and Change,**” where we flipped the script on CPD. Instead of seeing it as another box to tick, we treated it as something you can shape for yourself: finding good mentors, collaborating across borders, getting involved in conferences, sharing your own research or ideas, and building networks online.



One of the highlights was simply reconnecting with people. I got to spend time with colleagues from Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, friends from TESOL-Ukraine, **Jean Kirshenmann** from Hawai‘i TESOL, **Elizabeth Basok**, a Virtual Educator in Ukraine, a Peace Corps Ukraine Volunteer, and an English Language Fellow in Poland, **Malgorzata Durygin** from Florida International University, and people from many international groups. At events like this, the usual walls between institutions just disappear, and you end up in genuine, collaborative conversations.

And honestly, some of the best moments happened outside the rooms: chatting in hallways, grabbing coffee, swapping ideas about using AI thoughtfully, surviving tricky classroom dynamics, bringing drama into English classes, or making lessons more inclusive.



Events like this one show us that we build not just better techniques, but stronger resilience and a clearer sense of why we do this important work.



Walking away from Łódź, I felt genuinely recharged and optimistic. The future of English language teaching is in good hands as long as we keep learning from each other, working together, and rising as a community.



Planting EFL Ideas to Bloom with TESOL-Hungary
*Reflections on the 35th TESOL-Hungary Annual International
Conference, 3-5 October 2025*



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The 35th TESOL-Hungary Annual International Conference “Bloom” took place from 3 to 5 October 2025 in the picturesque town of Siófok, Hungary. This event also marked the 35th anniversary of TESOL-Hungary (tesol-hungary.org), an organization dedicated to the professional development of English language teachers across Hungary and beyond. The conference theme, “Bloom,” symbolized growth, inspiration, and collaboration within the international teaching community. It reflected the shared mission to create learning environments in which both teachers and students can flourish.

The metaphor of blooming was visible throughout the conference program: inspiring workshops, thought-provoking presentations, and dynamic discussions encouraged participants to plant ideas rooted in their professional experience, and nurture them collectively. The atmosphere was collegial and supportive, allowing exchanges from various countries and educational contexts.



Serhii Petrenko, TESOL-Ukraine International Coordinator, and **Oksana Chugai**, TESOL-Ukraine Newsletter Editor, represented TESOL-Ukraine as speakers at the conference, contributing to the vibrant international dialogue.

Four distinguished plenary speakers delivered plenary sessions and workshops:

Jon Hird, teacher, teacher trainer, and writer based in Oxford, UK, who frequently gives talks and workshops in the UK and overseas, known for his recent publication, *Spoken Grammar* (Pavilion ELT Publishing House). His sessions emphasized the importance of authentic spoken language and raising teachers' awareness of grammar as it naturally occurs in communication.

Piotr Steinbrich, lecturer at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland, shared insights from his extensive international teacher-training experience, focusing on communicative competence and professional growth. He's participated in numerous ELT professional events across Europe, South America, the Middle East, and Asia.

Eva Illes, an expert in English as a lingua franca (ELF), who has a wide range of teaching experience in Hungary and the UK, including adult, secondary, and higher education. Her current research interests are CLIL, teaching grammar and translation, and teacher education.



Luis Javier Penton Herrera, the 2024 TESOL Teacher of the Year, university professor in Warsaw, Poland, Fulbright and English Language Specialist with the U.S. Department of State, delivered powerful sessions on social-emotional learning (SEL), which

plays a key role in supporting students and teachers, and sustaining teacher well-being.

The talks and workshops explored a wide range of EFL issues: students’ cultural diversity and willingness to communicate, teaching diverse learners, using flashcards, games, videos, music and songs to boost engagement, AI and ChatGPT, teacher professional development, adult education, storytelling, well-being and self-care, assessment and exam preparation, resilience and creativity, to name just a few.

It was important for **Oksana Chugai** to share the presentation “**Teaching English to STEM Educators Applying Principles of Adult Learning**” as foreign language proficiency among STEM educators is crucial. English courses help them access resources, adopt new technologies, collaborate internationally, and inspire students.



As adult learners, teachers value practical, immediately applicable skills and self-directed learning driven by internal motivation. This study examines Ukrainian STEM educators’ experiences in learning English, focusing on their language proficiency, professional growth, confidence, and use of technology. It highlights challenges faced, coping strategies, and emphasizes the importance of integrating English training into professional development, aligning with adult learning principles for effective outcomes.



Serhii Petrenko’s session, co-presented online with **Hanna Podosynnikova** and **Lyudmyla Hnapovska**, “**Rising Together – Teaching with Hope and Strength**,” explored how Ukrainian educators have developed resilience, optimism, and professional growth during wartime through continuing professional development and mentorship support. Drawing on TESOL-Ukraine initiatives, including annual conventions,

collaborative workshops and webinars on storytelling, creative writing, and positive influence at work, mentorship program, and storytelling contests, the presenters shared powerful testimonies from Ukrainian teachers who continue working under extraordinary circumstances.

Besides formal sessions, the TESOL-Hungary Organizing Committee arranged special raffles with prizes from TESOL-Hungary, sponsors, and exhibitors, as well as social events that included board games, live music, and informal networking opportunities. These activities strengthened professional bonds, and created a welcoming atmosphere where participants could exchange ideas in relaxed settings.



To conclude, the 35th TESOL-Hungary Annual International Conference “Bloom” was not only a professional event, but a celebration of growth, inspiration, and connection among educators committed to EFL teaching. This event planted the seeds for a bright future in language education.

The materials of the Programme of the 35th TESOL-Hungary Annual International Conference “Bloom”, 3-5 October, 2025, Siófok, Hungary, have been used in this article.



TESOL-Ukraine Partnership with Melta: *Munich English Language Teachers Association*



The Munich English Language Teachers Association (Melta) provides a forum for professional development, information exchange and social contact for teachers of English at schools and universities in Southern Germany and Central Europe. It is affiliated with the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL) and has especially close ties to the six other English teachers' associations in Germany.

In the months ahead, Melta will also be joining forces with TESOL-Ukraine to organize webinars, exchange teaching ideas and encourage cross-border dialogue. Effective immediately, members of TESOL-Ukraine may utilize the resources posted on the Melta website at www.melta.de and attend Melta-sponsored webinars. They may also receive copies of the Melta News, which is published three times a year and contains a wide range of ideas for classroom activities, book reviews and reports on educational projects worldwide.

To order your electronic copy of Melta News, just send an e-mail to info@melta.de. To find out about upcoming events sponsored by Melta and other Melta associates, check the Events page on the Melta website. Registration is easy. Again, all you have to do is send an e-mail to info@melta.de. The folks at Melta will be delighted to welcome you.



Fall 2025 – Winter 2026

TESOL-UKRAINE NEWSLETTER



Save the Date: The 2026 TESOL-Ukraine National Convention

Resilience. Innovation. Community.

Dear Colleagues and ELT Professionals,

Mark your calendars! We are thrilled to announce that the TESOL-Ukraine National Convention 2026 is officially scheduled for this coming May. As we navigate a transforming educational landscape, this year's gathering is more than just a conference—it is a vital space for us to reconnect, share our "fresilience," and build stronger Professional Communities of Practice.

📅 Event At-A-Glance Theme: (F)resilience and Growth: Building Professional Communities of Practice **Dates:** May 22 – 24, 2026

Location: Kyiv National Linguistics University (Hybrid options to be confirmed)

✨ Why Attend? Whether you are an experienced educator or a student teacher, this convention offers a unique platform to:

- Exchange Innovative Practices: Discover new methodologies tailored for the digital and hybrid classroom.
- Network with Experts: Engage with international speakers, US Department of State English Language Fellows, and peers from across Ukraine.
- Professional Recognition: Earn a Certificate of Completion and the opportunity to have your research published in the 2026 Electronic Book of Papers.

✉ Registration Details Stay tuned! Full registration links, early-bird rates, and the official Call for Papers will be sent to your inbox in the coming weeks.

Make sure your TESOL-Ukraine Membership is active for 2026 to ensure priority registration and access to exclusive member-only discounts.

"In the face of challenge, we don't just adapt—we grow together."



TESOL-Ukraine NEWSLETTER:

Call for Submissions

It's a great professional development opportunity! *TESOL-Ukraine Newsletter* invites you to submit articles on various subjects related to the professional life of English teachers and TESOL-Ukraine activities in your area.

Dear TESOL-Ukraine members,

On this page, we highlight the main rules for submissions to the TESOL-Ukraine Newsletter. Following the requirements, you will easily choose the field and format for your article. You will save time and effort while preparing it and ensure the best possible result, thereby increasing its chances of being accepted for publication in either the TESOL-Ukraine Newsletter or any other TESOL International journal.

The Editorial Board may suggest that the author send the material for the partner's TESOL-Hawaii Newsletter. You are always welcome in your articles to share research-based practices and to report on practice at all levels and in all contexts that are grounded in theory and have immediate relevance to practitioners.

The main requirements for the material submitted:

1. The submission must be original and not a revision or restatement of research in the field.
2. The submission must not have been previously published or be under consideration for publication elsewhere.
3. Authors may use British or American spelling, but they must be consistent.
4. The authors should submit manuscripts electronically to the Editorial Board of the TESOL-Ukraine Newsletter. Submissions should be in Microsoft Word or a compatible program. Please submit figures, graphs, and other graphics in a standard format (e.g., JPEG or Excel). Tables should be created in Microsoft Word or a compatible program.



5. Authors who want to submit video or music files should contact OChugai@meta.ua for further information.

6. All quoted materials must be cited in the text and the following reference list.

7. All the submissions should be addressed to OChugai@meta.ua.

The Editorial Board will be thankful to both the authors of the new rubrics and those of the traditional sections of the TESOL-Ukraine Newsletter.

Editorial Board

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