

## SWITLO

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**Alina Revko’s story: “I want other teachers to have real instructional support – to hear colleagues’ perspectives, discover new approaches, and feel connected.”**

**Alina Revko** teaches English at a school in Kozarovychi, Kyiv Oblast – a village that, like her own, spent many months under occupation. After university, she taught for eleven years, then burned out and moved into another field. The break was long, but when the full-scale invasion began, Alina returned to the classroom.

In 2024, Alina set up her first professional teacher community through SWITLO (Skills and Well-being in Teacher Learning Opportunities). By spring 2025, at colleagues’ request – including teachers of other subjects – she launched a second one.

When she returned to school in 2022, the challenges were immediate and stark.

*“So much had changed. I felt like I didn’t know how to teach anymore. I had gaps, and I had endless questions. The courses available in our hromada didn’t give me answers, and there was no instructional support. Then I took a British Council teacher development course and thought: this is exactly what I need.”*

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**I realised I needed to be where I truly belong,” she says. “Travelling to Kyiv wasn’t safe, so I joined a small school – and found a wonderful place to work and grow.**

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Later, she joined Teaching and Learning in Difficult Times. The experience of occupation had left its mark on everyone – teachers and students alike.

*“People were on edge. They could react to any word,” she remembers. “My first ‘gift’ from a little student wasn’t flowers – it was a piece of shrapnel from a bullet, a ‘treasure’ he wanted to share. Many children cried in lessons and only calmed down when I let them sit on my lap.”*

The course helped her process her own experience, too.

*“Fifty-six days of occupation changed my worldview. You grow a tougher shell. But once you understand yourself, it’s easier to understand others – and to connect with children. I learned what to do when things are hard, and how I can help my students.”*

What pushed Alina to join SWITLO was the reality in her community: there were no pedagogical groups, and no professional support. Teachers were left alone with their problems.

*“When I heard about the programme, I felt this was exactly what we were missing. I don’t want other teachers to be in the position I was in. I want them to have teaching support, to hear colleagues’ voices, learn new trends, and have a safe space to talk.”*

In February 2024, she convened her first community of practice. Ten English teachers – from every school in the hromada (a local community, an administrative unit in Ukraine) – joined. It was the first English subject network there in five years.

*“I was so nervous,” she admits. “Would I manage? Could I be that little firefly that helps others light up? But it went brilliantly.”*

At first, the most experienced teachers spoke the most. But by the second meeting, younger colleagues began sharing their own practice, and veteran teachers were openly embracing fresh ideas. One session in particular stayed with Alina: the third meeting, focused on social-emotional learning. *“One teacher who had been silent until then*

*said, ‘I might make plenty of mistakes, but I want to share my view. I think it matters too.’ From that moment, she took part in every session – and her English improved before our eyes, step by step, from A2 to B1.”*

In spring 2025, after teachers of other subjects asked for something similar, Alina launched a second community – bringing together five teachers of chemistry, biology, and mathematics.

*“Word travelled fast. Someone heard about our meetings and said, ‘We don’t have anything like this!’ I said, ‘Then let’s make it happen!’ The key is to show that nothing is impossible.”*

Because meetings are held in English, Alina used AI to adapt the resources for colleagues.

Both groups voiced similar needs: how to motivate students, recognise trauma early, give constructive feedback, and build trust. Only the subject-specific focus differed. With the second group, Alina dedicated two sessions to formative assessment.

*“We English teachers often get information straight from the source – including from the British Council – so we can trust its quality,” she explains. “Teachers of other subjects often rely on Ukrainian translations, which can be awkward or unclear. We worked through it together and realised it’s actually very straightforward.”*

Social-emotional learning proved especially powerful. Participants explored practical ways to build trust, offer feedback, and assess without judgment.

*“One teacher with twenty years’ experience told us about a student she simply couldn’t reach. The girl refused to work and was rude. We explored options together. At the next meeting, the teacher came back and said, ‘I tried this and that – this worked better.’ Now the girl is engaging beautifully. She even said, ‘Thank you for finally hearing me.’”*

Gender equality was just as relevant. *“We still hear things like ‘boys don’t cry’,*

only boys in the workshop, girls don't play football. We teach around these messages without questioning them. In our discussions, it became clear how urgent the issue still is," Alina says.

She notes that younger colleagues often adapt faster, while it can be harder for those with more years in the profession. "But we've understood that children are individuals."

"I don't divide students by gender anymore – and they notice," she adds. "You're the only one who doesn't split us into girls and boys. If you scold, it's everyone; if you praise, it's everyone. Not only girls are good and boys are bad."

Alina says the community helps solve very practical problems. A new English teacher struggled with lesson planning – but with advice from more experienced colleagues, he found his footing.

"After our meeting, I analysed everything and started planning much better lessons. Even the deputy head noticed my progress," he later shared. With the group's support, a primary teacher also learned strategies to keep students engaged throughout the entire lesson.

Alina has brought the logic of the community meetings into her own classroom as well. She ran a small experiment: one class worked using the "meeting" format, another followed a traditional approach. By the end of the year, the difference was clear. The first class performed noticeably better, and overall learning efficiency improved.

"Now I have evidence that this methodology works with children," she says. "Students feel heard. They know their opinions matter. My job isn't only to teach and leave – it's to share my experience so they can make it their own."

Her colleagues have changed, too. The fear of making mistakes – and the instinct to position oneself as the authority – has softened.

Teachers have become more open to



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learning, more willing to step back from old systems and try new approaches. Competition has faded.

*“We recognise everyone’s strengths. If something isn’t my area, I pass on the number of a colleague who can help better,” Alina says. “We’ve become a real community of like-minded people – ready to suggest, spark an idea, or lend a hand. That’s support: the push you need to move forward.”*

Professionally, Alina now thinks in terms of “before” and “after” SWITLO.

*“Through constant practice and preparing for sessions, I moved from B2 to C1. I feel more confident. I know where to find information and how to apply it,” she reflects. “I’ve also let go of the belief that only my view is right. Even in my personal life, I’ve learned to pause and respect other people’s boundaries.”*

For Alina, SWITLO has built trust among teachers.

*“If a teacher listens only to themselves, that’s not a good teacher. When you truly hear others, you start to hear everyone,” she says. “SWITLO brought us together, made us feel needed, and supported us through difficult times. Those who joined have even seen their students’ outcomes improve. One small change created a butterfly effect – leading to another, and another, and another.”*

She plans to keep growing her communities.



**At first, I thought I would always need the British Council’s support to continue. Now I understand the core support is the teachers themselves – their questions and their needs. For me, SWITLO is the light in their eyes and their desire to learn. And as long as I’m in Ukraine, living in this place, we’ll keep doing this work together**

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[More about the programme.](#)