

SWITLO

Natalia Kryva's story: Teachers no longer want their students to “sit in silence”

Natalia Kryva has been teaching English for more than 15 years at a primary and secondary school in the city of Mykolaiv, Lviv Oblast. For the past seven years, she has combined classroom teaching with the role of deputy head, overseeing teaching and administrative work. She set up a Teacher Activity Group (TAG) with a clear aim: to strengthen her school — above all, by changing the way colleagues communicate and work together.

Natalia noticed that Ukrainian teachers rarely have space for meaningful professional dialogue. In the staffroom, conversations often drift towards personal matters, while time for focused discussion about improving practice is hard to find. Traditional pedagogy meetings do not always meet teachers' needs and rarely foster the kind of close, honest collaboration that helps people grow. Creating a school-based TAG began to shift that. Over time, she watched colleagues become a genuine community. Teachers realised they were facing many of the same challenges, that they could speak openly and that they could find answers together. Built on trust and partnership, the format gives colleagues room to share ideas and think through difficult issues: supporting displaced students, responding



NATALIA KRYVA WITH OTHERS

to challenging behaviour, understanding how trauma affects children and addressing gender equality in the classroom.

Understanding what the community was for – and how it could help – came gradually. At first, participants were cautious and reluctant to share.

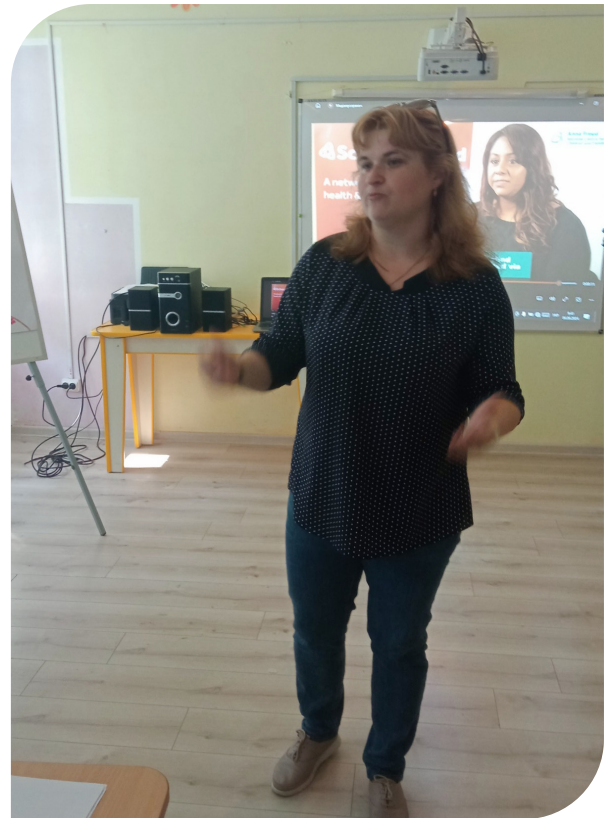
“We tend to think we’re the best and should cope alone. But in reality we all work under the same conditions, and every teacher has students who cry in class. Here we realised we’re not alone, and it became easier,” Natalia says. *“At the first meeting one teacher told me, ‘I don’t need this. I want my students to stay quiet.’ By the fifth session she said, ‘Natalia, I’ve reconsidered everything.’ I count that as a success story.”*

The most visible change has been in staff culture. Teachers have become more open and positive. The door to Natalia’s office is no longer a psychological barrier; colleagues feel comfortable asking for help.

“That is undoubtedly a good thing, though I know I can’t solve every issue. We work together more closely now and understand each other better. Even during break time, teachers talk about new techniques they’ve tried, rather than only personal matters. Students notice it too – they tell us that with one teacher they do one activity, with another they do something else. Children are adapting, and we can see progress.”

Natalia says teachers of other subjects sometimes join the sessions.

“I’m often asked – especially by early-career teachers – whether they can come along. Once, a Ukrainian language teacher joined and found it fascinating. When we held sessions on trauma and challenging behaviour, our school psychologist joined us. Although she doesn’t speak much English, we adapted, and it was remarkably productive. She works with displaced people, with families who have lost loved ones, or whose relatives are in captivity or missing. She offered invaluable, practical insights and shared her techniques. I never imagined it would interest her, yet she was always keen to come.”



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Teachers are really happy with this approach. They also say our meetings are a place where they can speak English. In lessons we often use basic vocabulary, and here we discuss methodology and psychology. At one session a colleague exclaimed, ‘My goodness – how wonderful – I can hear English!’

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In May 2024, Natalia widened the work further, proposing a series of sessions for 11 English teachers from nearby villages and small towns. At first, both the professional development centre's methodologist and the teachers themselves were lukewarm. At the first meeting they were wary and reserved – it was unfamiliar territory. In the end, they loved the format.

“We’ve already agreed that, if all goes well, we’ll meet again. I’ll introduce them to trauma-informed practice, which really caught their interest, and talk about challenging behaviour and creating safe classroom environments. It’s new for them – and they won’t find it elsewhere. And if you can reflect on your own practice as well, even better. One participant has even applied to the community leaders’ programme, so she’ll be able to support others in future,” Natalia says. “The best part was hearing the methodologist say afterwards, ‘Natalia, this is brilliant.’ I told her: you won’t understand until you try.”

Advise

At the first meeting, explain clearly what a professional community is and what it is for. Emphasise the value of collaboration and set clear expectations. Do not be discouraged – keep going. Be open with participants, give them space to speak and value every contribution.

[More about the programme.](#)