



### In this Issue...

Letter from the President p. 1

Editor's Note p. 2

CELT 2023 Announcement p. 3

Nothing Without Providence  
by Olga Kuznetsova pp. 4-7

Learning Along the Way  
by Hiromi Takahashi pp. 8-11

Mentorship Testimonials pp. 12-13

### Letter from the President: *Michael Westwood*

This summer, my family and I had the tremendous opportunity to visit Klaipeda, Lithuania to participate in LCC International University's Summer Language Institute. It was a glorious time. As I spent my mornings teaching primarily war-affected students and my afternoons eating ice cream and adventuring on high ropes and ziplines, I found myself wondering about my purpose. Was I doing enough? What was my role? This led me back to a question I have spent my entire career pondering: What does it mean to be a Christian English language teacher?

This is one of those intangible questions that all of us in CELEA must answer. We may serve in Christian or secular higher education, K-12, language academies, refugee support, private tutoring, missions, and more. What it looks like day-to-day to be a Christian English language teacher might vary significantly between us.

Some of us might be in environments where Christianity is embedded in the culture of our employers, where we find ourselves discussing theological concepts and praying for students. Others of us might be in neutral contexts where Christianity is respected as long as it does not cause conflict, so we choose to focus on values, build relationships, and apply spiritually-motivated dedication. Still others of us might work in environments that are openly hostile to Christianity, and we need to be even more judicious.

The manifestation of our Christian identity may vary based on context, but our relationship with God does not. What's more, we bring God with us where we go. In Matthew 5:13-16, Jesus describes his followers as salt and light. Something that struck me about those illustrations recently was that both salt and light fulfill their purposes by *what they are*. Light does not have to do anything to illuminate dark places. In the same way, salt does not need to apply a herculean effort to make food flavorful. The mere presence of salt and light is enough.

That is not to say that Christian teachers rest on their laurels. We are called to preach the gospel, pray for the sick, and offer hospitality. When the relationship between our faith and our work can be a bit murky, we focus on being available and in relationship with God. Like Peter and Andrew in Matthew 4, we remain ready to respond when He speaks. Like Mary in Luke 10, we rest in the presence of Jesus, allowing it to fill, heal, and inspire us. I hope you enjoy this newsletter, and I hope to see many of you in person at CELT 2023!



*Michael Westwood*

### CELEA Friends in Lithuania

L to R: David Broersma, Geraldine Ryan, Michael Westwood (CELEA presidents) and Robin Gingerich (active CELEA member) at LCC International University in Lithuania.

David, Geraldine, and Robin were participating in a summer intensive course for the MA TESOL program offered by LCC. Michael was participating in a summer language institute that LCC offers each summer.



Photo provided by Michael Westwood

### Volume 9 (2022) of the International Journal of Christianity & English Language Teaching has appeared!

Please visit <https://digitalcommons.biola.edu/ijc-elt/> to check it out!

Many thanks are due to outgoing editors Drs. Bradley Baurain and Michael Pasquale for all their work on it.

### CELEA's New Website

Our new website is up and running! [www.celea.wildapricot.org](http://www.celea.wildapricot.org)

### The Editor's Note

For this issue, I have been in touch with some English teachers who will stand out in my memory of the years I've had the privilege of serving CELEA: Olga Kuznetsova from St. Petersburg, Russia, and Hiromi Takahashi from Sapporo, Japan.

Corresponding over several months with the people who are going to be featured can sometimes be the most rewarding part of preparing an article. I've learned from and been encouraged by Olga and Hiromi, and I hope you are too!

*Hannah Cole*

[celeanewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:celeanewsletter@gmail.com)



***We are happy to announce that there will be two CELT 2023 conferences.***

CELT 2023 Virtual will be held online **Friday-Saturday, March 10-11, 2023 from 1-5 pm PST**, while CELT 2023 Portland will be held in **Portland, Oregon, Tuesday, March 21**, at Multnomah University just before the TESOL Convention.

We hope to have wide participation in the virtual conference from people around the world. For those who will be attending TESOL 2023, CELT 2023 Portland will enable us to meet again in person! We are excited about hosting an event that brings educators into the community who are committed to following Christ and sharing His goodness through the instruction of the English language.

We appreciate your interest in sharing your expertise and experiences with others. We invite you to submit a proposal before November 27, 2023, for either of the two CELT conferences, or for both! If you can attend both virtual *and* in-person, please submit two proposals.

The theme of both conferences is **Cultivating Peace in English Language Teaching**. In a world where differences are defining relationships, it is all the more crucial that we remember God's promise of peace. The Bible reminds us that this peace is not of the world. It is a supernatural peace that comforts and relieves us of fear (John 14:27). Let's reflect on the peace that God generously gives during CELT 2023 - how peace is exchanged in classrooms, how you have experienced it, and how peace has been shared.

# Nothing Without Providence: My Journey to Teaching English in Russia

By Olga M. Kuznetsova

With years passing on, I have come to the conclusion that without Providence nothing extraordinary can happen in our life. These days, I am remembering the days of the Leningrad Siege and the Road of Life and celebrating 80 years.

At the age of seven I went to school No. 86 on Mira Street (Peace Street) in Leningrad. In the 3rd grade, English lessons were started in the school program, and I luckily took interest in the new subject. This was how it started.

I was born in Leningrad (now called St. Petersburg) in 1939 and survived the most tragic period of its history— the Siege of Leningrad, lasting nearly two and a half years (1941-1944). I stayed with my devout grandmother, Maria. She was a great believer and stayed in Leningrad during all the time of the Siege. She used to attend services held in the Knight Vladimir Cathedral.

I survived the most severe cold months of 1941-1942. When the frozen Ladoga Lake was used for evacuation, I was one of those who was evacuated from the besieged city. I was sent to my parents serving in the Far East. This Ladoga Lake way is called the Road of Life.

My dad started serving in the army soon after my birth and was sent on assignment to the Amur region (Siberian part of Russia). The living conditions at the place of my dad's service in the Army left much to be desired: a lot of hardships; not comfortable at all.

Dad did not want to leave me in Leningrad. However, my mother and his mother-in-law (my grandmother) persuaded him to leave me with his mother's mother in the city. I can understand. Nobody realized that the war would break out, and that the city would be besieged. My mother was young. Another baby was on the way, and in April 1941 she gave birth to another daughter.

All his life my dad carried the feeling of guilt that his elder daughter (me) stayed in the siege. He used to tell me, "I was against it!" I did not blame anyone. Never. Now, at my age, I am sad that my dad lived with this burden.

When the war was over, our family returned to Leningrad and I started schooling. We lived in the central part of the city, Petrograd, on Mira ("Peace") Street. There is a park quite close and I used to play there. There was a big cinema theater called Velikan ("Giant"). At the age of seven or eight, I saw a black and white trophy film, brought by the Soviet Army during WWII when they found over 6,000 films from the Third Reich Film Industry.



In Moscow, the State Film Fund sorted the tapes and selected those worthy of attention for the Soviet audience. It was something extraordinary and unusual for our people— a new world. During the period of 1948 to 1952, crowds of people waited in queues to see these foreign “trophy films.”

To my great joy, I was lucky to see the British film which impressed me greatly, “David Copperfield,” based on the novel by Charles Dickens. The fate of the unhappy boy touched my heart and reached deeply to my soul. I started thinking of the unknown country in which he was living, and of the unfamiliar language he spoke.

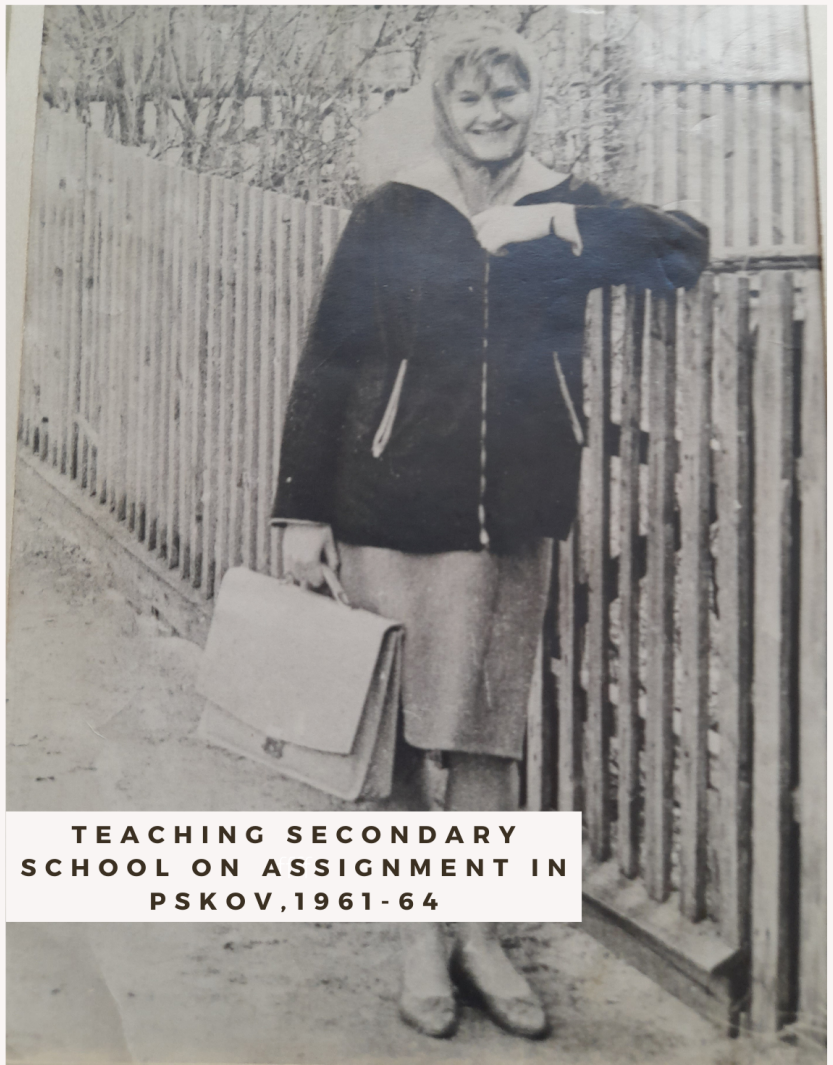
Thus, my dream to study the English language was shaped. This impression stays with me until now. Dickens became one of my life’s fellow travelers.

My dad used to be sent on assignments all over the country. During my school years our family had to move a lot and I had to change schools. Every time I had to prove in a new school that my excellent grades were not false. They were honest and I deserved them. These situations shaped and built my character.

Having finished school, I enrolled in St. Petersburg State University and graduated from the Faculty of Philology in 1961. At that time it



**UNIVERSITY GRADUATION  
ST. PETERSBURG, 1961**



**TEACHING SECONDARY  
SCHOOL ON ASSIGNMENT IN  
PSKOV, 1961 - 64**



**OLGA WITH HER  
GRANDMOTHER, MARIA**

was obligatory after graduation to work for three years on assignment somewhere in the country. I went to a secondary school in the Pskov Region, rather far from St. Petersburg.

Though the classes were overcrowded (about 40 students in a class) and the working load was 40 hours per week, it was a very productive and happy period of my life! I loved the subject, English, and I loved my students. I enjoyed delivering the necessary knowledge and stimulating my students' interest in the subject.

My professional activity during those years was highly recognized by the director. When I made up my mind to return to St. Petersburg State University to continue my studies, the director gave me an excellent letter of recommendation. It was so good that I could not show it to anyone. I used to be very modest in my younger years— strict and too critical of myself.

At the University there were teachers who did not forget me and recommended that I get a modest position to teach English in the courses offered at the University. It was a real blessing! There were opportunities in my life to grow professionally and work harder.

There are about 16 faculties at St. Petersburg State University. It was not easy to teach at the Schools of Economics, Sociology, Journalism, Psychology, Law, and Physics. Teaching English for specific purposes required reading a lot of scientific literature according to the curriculum for my postgraduates. Looking back, I understand that this professional activity broadened my mind and made me resilient.

My studies as the Chair of New Methods in Moscow came unexpectedly, and I jumped at this wonderful opportunity, conducted under the Gosplan, the State Planning Committee. It was an advanced, professional, intensive

six-month course of communicative methods. I had to leave my four-year-old daughter with my mother. It was a chance, and I was determined to go. It offered both theoretical classes in psychology and practical teaching. At the end of my studies, I presented my monthly intensive course for my group, based on Lozanov's theory. It was approved and was successful in developing communicative skills for the students.

Later, another opportunity arose, this time to be at the initial stage of setting up an association for English language teachers in St. Petersburg. It was a hard job to do, with little time for personal needs. The first years of the St. Petersburg English Language Association (SPELTA) were very productive— a golden period! A lot of school teachers supported the idea of setting up this Association and attended our events. I set up a Business English special interest group then.



SPELTA worked closely with the British Council, and as the co-founder, I took an active part. I received a grant under the support of the British Council and attended my first conference held abroad, the IATEFL Conference in New York. I served on the IATEFL Committee from 1996 to 1998 and had two papers published by them in 2020 and 2021.

We must go through hardships in order to introduce and cultivate new ideas. Every life is full of opportunities. We either ignore them or take advantage of them. On the way we can go through tough experiences or complicated situations. In Hebrews 12:7 we read "...endure hardship as discipline" (NIV). These are our life's lessons.

Effective living is not measured by what we accomplish but by what we overcome to accomplish it. In Ephesians 5:16 we read, "Be careful, not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity..." (NIV).

On the 9th of August this year, there was a concert held in memory of the Leningrad Siege, the 7th Symphony by Shostakovich, which he composed in the second half of 1941 during the Siege. The concert was held in St. Petersburg, but no information was given in mass media and the concert was shown on TV, late at night. A former student of mine sent me information from London. She had attended the concert devoted to Shostakovich given in the Royal Albert Hall in London the week before.

I did not invent anything. I responded to the arising opportunities, and that is why I can say for sure that I was guided by Providence. That is how I understand everything happening in my life.



Trinity Sergievo Monastery

**Olga M. Kuznetsova** is a graduate of St. Petersburg University where she studied sociology and psychology. She earned a Masters in philology of Germanic languages and has served on the UK IATEFL Committee. A dreamer with perseverance, her research interests include the psychological aspects of teaching. She enjoys good music, traveling and museums. [okuzn1@yahoo.com](mailto:okuzn1@yahoo.com)



Broken Ring Monument, Lake Ladoga

All photos provided by Olga M. Kuznetsova

# Learning Along the Way: Teaching English to Adults in Japan

By Hiromi Takahashi



Photo credit: Karissa Heslep

In 2011 I started to work for a ministry in Sapporo, Japan, called COEN. The ministry, started by American missionaries in 2007, consists of a coffee shop, a church, and an English school. The name “COEN” has a multi-layered significance:

- (1) 公園 (a Japanese word meaning "park," pronounced "koh-en"): a place where young and old can stop by, relax, and be refreshed
- (2) "COnnecting through ENGLISH": a place where people can connect through English and where professional English teaching is provided
- (3) 光 ("koh" meaning "light" in Japanese) 塩 ("en" meaning "salt" in Japanese)
- (4) “kohen” (a Hebrew word meaning “priest”): priests of God in Christ Jesus

Since I joined the ministry team as a full-time English teacher, I have taught Japanese adults aged 20 to 80. Fresh out of grad school and full of creative ideas for teaching English, I started running at full speed, burning the midnight oil while drawing up detailed lesson plans and designing communicative activities. However, my focus has gradually shifted from “doing” to “being.” I would like to share some of the things I have learned over the last 11 years, an “Ebenezer stone” (1 Samuel 7:12) in my journey as a Christian English teacher in Japan.

## 1. Be flexible.

When I started to teach, I made every effort to stick to lesson plans and be in control. I would get uncomfortable with unexpected elements. Over the years I have learned to trust God and relax in Him. Now I immediately ask Him for direction and wisdom for every surprise.



Unlike young students, adults often bring to class news items to discuss or personal stories to share. A typical phrase like, “How are you today?” can sometimes elicit sagas of the students’ lives. I could dismiss their contributions as irrelevant to the lesson plan, but I have learned to appreciate their effort and eagerness. They may have worked for hours with a dictionary and eraser (most still use notebooks and pencils) to prepare their story or opinion. Their work is a precious expression of their heart.



Photo credit: Hiromi Takahashi

## 2. Be patient and kind.

It is embarrassing to admit, but it took years to realize that what is easy for me is not necessarily easy for others. I started to learn English at age 12 and have always enjoyed using it. To say things like “Thank you. You, too!” is not difficult. For adult beginners, however, real-life spoken English is very foreign to their tongue and ears. Though they studied English in high school, they never had the opportunity to use it until they signed up for my classes!

I was also ignorant of the age-related weakening of eyesight, hearing, motor skills, and memory,

until I turned 50 and started to experience it firsthand. Learning a foreign language is such a daunting task now! Looking back, I wish I had had more compassion and understanding toward older students. I am sorry that I overwhelmed them. I used to impatiently think, “Why is it so hard for them to do such a simple task?” Now I sing hallelujah from the bottom of my heart when the students successfully respond to “Have a nice day!” by saying “Thank you...uh...you...TOO!” with a smile.

## 3. Be a cheerleader.

Some time ago, I complimented a student in her 60s for her well-written assignment. She replied, “I’m so happy to hear that, Hiromi! You don’t get compliments when you have reached a certain age. So, thank you!” As I saw her leaving the classroom almost dancing for joy, I thought, “If what she said is true, how sad it is!”

I made a resolution: if older students rarely receive compliments or words of encouragement, I will open my eyes wider to find in them whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and commendable (Philippians 4:8)— that is, the beauty of the Creator— and lavish on them as many sincere compliments as I can. I’m often asked by adult students to correct mistakes in their speech. I correct errors that may cause misunderstanding, but I do it sparingly and with gentleness and prayer so that students will not be obsessed with mistakes and get discouraged.

## 4. Be a bridge.

My last name, Takahashi, is one of the most common names in Japan, and it means “high bridge.” It was my late husband’s family name, but it took on a new meaning when I found myself serving as a bridge for other Japanese learners of English. They look for teachers who can help them understand English grammar.

Over the years, people have heard by word of mouth and taken grammar lessons from me because I understand which grammar items are challenging for Japanese learners.

I have long regarded my status as a non-native English-speaking teacher (NNEST) as a stigma. Many times I have asked the Lord to remove this “thorn” (2 Corinthians 12:7). Now I see how God has put together all things He has given me, even this “thorn,” to use me as a bridge for others to walk from where they are to where they want to be – from the Japanese-speaking world to the English-speaking world. My prayer is that God would also use me as a bridge for Japanese people to walk from this dark world over to the kingdom of light (John 8:12).

### 5. Be humble.

Another thing I have learned by teaching adult students at COEN is that I am not God. With an MA TESOL and ten-plus years of teaching experience, there are still many things I do not know about how English works and how humans learn a second language. In my early years, I thought that I should be able to answer all my students’ questions and address all their problems. In other words, I was full of pride. I used to feel insecure when I worked with seasoned, advanced students. They have typically taken classes from native English speakers or spent time overseas. They are highly motivated and always look for resources to improve their English. In class, they reach for their smartphones to look for answers to grammar questions I cannot explain clearly on the spot.

I used to be intimidated and felt inadequate. Gradually, however, God has humbled me and enabled me to see these students as partners on an English-learning journey. Now I ask them to tell me what they have learned from other teachers or websites. I can say, “I’m sorry, I don’t

know. I’ll check on that and get back to you. Would you let me know if you find the answer?” That does not mean I have given up on my professional development, but acknowledging my weaknesses before the students has set me free from the burden of acting as if I were omniscient. “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves” (Philippians 2:3, ESV).



Photo credit: Hiromi Takahashi

### 6. Be prayerful.

I worked hard in my early years and spent hours creating extra materials and activities that would cater to different students’ needs. I purchased a number of books on TESOL and second language acquisition to be better equipped. Looking back, those hours were well-spent, but now I put more energy and time into prayer because I believe prayer makes an everlasting difference.

Jesus said, “Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it” (John 14:13-14, ESV). In Japan, where

Christians make up less than one percent of the population, I wonder how many people have ever been lifted up by name into the presence of God through prayer. That drives me to intercede for my students week after week. Teaching English definitely does people good, but praying for their everlasting life is even better.

### 7. Be thankful for everything.

As I have grown older, I have become more aware that it is the grace of God that enables me to be who I am and do what I'm doing. Seeing, hearing, breathing, eating, speaking, writing, thinking, feeling, walking, going to sleep and waking up again— none of this would be possible apart from God. The same is true for each student I work with. Christ Jesus “upholds the universe by the word of his power” (Hebrews 1:3, ESV).

If I find myself standing on my feet in the classroom to teach, it is by the grace of God. If I find everyone in the classroom alive and well, it is by the grace of God. If I am able to hold a dry erase marker to write the letter *a* on the board, it is by the grace of God. How can I live without giving thanks to Him, even for a nanosecond?

### 8. Be sorrowful yet hopeful.

Japan is quickly aging, outpacing other countries. The majority of COEN's students are retirees with time and money. As I listen to them tell me about hobbies, travel, food, and other activities, I am filled with sorrow behind my smiling face. When I hear them say that learning English makes their life meaningful and that connecting with people through English gives them a passion for life, my heart sinks. Why? Because I know these “good things” will not save them from death. My students are hardworking and eager to learn— dream students for every English teacher! However, I know that their time on earth is limited; they are perishing apart from God.

Teaching English is a powerful ministry tool in Japan, and I am deeply grateful to God for it. At the same time, my sorrow is becoming stronger year after year, as I see these aging students devoting themselves to learning English as if it could keep them staying young and alive forever... Yet I have hope in Christ. He has brought these precious people to COEN. I will therefore continue to cry out in prayer, saying, “Lord Jesus, have mercy on these people you have brought to my classroom today. Please open their eyes to see you, the Risen Savior!” I look forward to the day when, in heaven, I will be singing praises to the Lord, along with all (yes, all!) the students I have taught at COEN.

COEN began with these two mottos: Life Changing Connections and *hitasura* (只管, a simple conduit). “May God Himself let His love flow through us as we simply serve Him as a conduit. May He use us to connect with people and change their lives for His glory”—the prayers of the original ministry team have been richly answered over the years. As I keep going on this journey, may God keep me learning along the way. May I always be an English teacher who walks in Christ Jesus — the Way — and who works out of love for Him and out of His love for the students she teaches. *Soli Deo gloria*. Amen.

\*An earlier, extended version of this article appeared in the *TESOL Times*, published by the Biola University School of Education.

**Hiromi Takahashi** is an English teacher at COEN (<https://cafecoен.com/>) in Sapporo, Japan. After completing an MA TESOL at Biola University, La Mirada, California, USA, she has taught English to Japanese adults at COEN for 11 years. [tsuruchan0520@gmail.com](mailto:tsuruchan0520@gmail.com)



# celea

## Mentorship Program

### Testimonials

---

What does the word “mentor” make you think of? Perhaps a beloved teacher, a wise church leader, or an experienced friend. If you are familiar with the business world, you might think of the growing emphasis on mentorship in that sphere. How about mentorship for Christian English language teachers? Maybe that’s not what came to mind. However, a group of CELEA members asked the question of what such a program might look like. The CELEA Mentorship Program was launched in September 2021 with 18 participants and is now in its fourth session.

Rather than simply describe the program and present the benefits of participation, the CELEA Mentorship Committee decided to share participant comments and reflections. Following are testimonials of people who have served as either a mentor or mentee.

---

*“I’ve been a mentor for two sessions, with two different mentees. The first session was challenging for me, because my mentee had a very different teaching context than mine. I wasn’t sure how beneficial our meetings were for her. However, in the middle of the session she had some major life changes and challenges, and our sessions turned into more of a ‘Safe Zone’ for her where she could share things with me that she couldn’t with anyone else. I felt like God used me in a way that fit His plan and not mine. My second mentee and I are both in Europe and using English as outreach. I really appreciated the fact that we could brainstorm and bounce ideas off of each other, in a way that spilled over into my teaching. I appreciate this program because it opens up our eyes to what teaching is like in other places, allowing us to be more flexible and creative. Mentees and mentors mutually benefit.”*



– Kathryn Smelser

*“I’ve been participating in the CELEA Mentoring program for the past several months and have really benefited from the connection. The Mentor and I have found a lot of mutuality and support for each other in our conversations. We end up being a sounding board to each other in our professional lives and, sometimes, just the stuff of life. Having shared experiences of living in other countries is not something that can be processed with just anyone, so we’ve appreciated that. Though committing for one cycle, we were happy to continue meeting monthly, which has been a great blessing for both of us! I’m happy this program is in place and would encourage others to participate. The more people involved, the richer the experience will be for all!”*



– Daniel McCleary

“CELEA Mentorship is like no other mentor-mentee program one can delve into. The difference of CELEA Mentorship from the rest, if there are programs like this offered by other organizations, is the fact that it has a personal touch. Being a mentee gave me an opportunity to be molded by a more seasoned English teacher, through which learning really transpired. I am always excited to meet my mentor inside our virtual room because I get a chance to practice more of my English speaking skills, plus I learn more approaches and strategies in teaching English to my students. My CELEA Mentorship experience has become my comfort zone and a breath of fresh air. That is why I always look forward to my scheduled meeting with Ma'am Katy Smelser, my mentor and prayer partner. My mentor is concerned not just with my academic skill but even with my emotional and spiritual well-being. There are instances that my mentor played the role of a counselor, listening patiently and empathically to the outburst of emotions I have had and later offered prayers to console me from my disappointments. If I am asked to recommend the program to my colleagues, without a doubt the answer is a resounding YES!”



– Lorelie Valdez

“I have been involved in the CELEA Mentorship program as a mentor for 3 sessions, all with the original mentee I was matched with. We stayed with the same goal for the first two sessions and chose a different one for the third session. At first we focused mostly on professional development, but then the majority of our times together were more focused on sharing life, challenges, Biblical encouragement and prayer. We are from different cultures so it has also been enriching to broaden our worldview through our interactions. I’ve found the mentorship process to be mutually beneficial and encouraging. I highly recommend it!”



– Debbie Nelson

“I am very blessed with the mentorship program led by CELEA. I could be listened to by the expert educators matched by the CELEA family. I could grow in my faith and academic achievement through the mentoring program. I strongly recommend others for this program so that they can be benefitted and blessed respectively. Glory to God!”



– Prakash Chandra Giri

Applications for the next mentorship session will be accepted until December 1<sup>st</sup>. The spring session will begin on January 1<sup>st</sup>. If you would like more information about the Mentorship Program or would like to sign up, visit <https://celeamentorship.weebly.com/>. Additional questions can be sent to [CELEAmentorship@gmail.com](mailto:CELEAmentorship@gmail.com).

**Joshua Detherage** teaches ESL and graduate TESOL courses at Campbellsville University. He is a member of the CELEA Mentorship Committee and has participated in the program as a mentor to five teachers in three countries. [jwdetherage@campbellsville.edu](mailto:jwdetherage@campbellsville.edu)

