

# THE BIRTH OF EdYOU*Fest*

From an Idea to a Global Movement



Giovanni Rottura

# Who This Handbook Is For

This handbook is written for those who believe that education is, first and foremost, a human endeavour.

It is for **teachers**—whether at the beginning of their journey or many years into it—who have ever felt that professional development could be more meaningful, more inclusive, and more connected to real classrooms and real lives. If you have ever attended a training event and left inspired but alone, this story is for you.

It is for **educators and teacher trainers** who see value not only in expertise, but in dialogue; not only in excellence, but in generosity; not only in delivering content, but in building community. EdYOUFest exists because of people who are willing to share, listen, and grow together.

It is for **partners, institutions, and sponsors** who wish to understand what EdYOUFest truly is—and what it is not. This is not a conventional conference brand, nor a one-off event. It is a long-term educational ecosystem rooted in trust, participation, and shared ownership. These pages offer the context behind the choices, values, and structures that guide the project.

It is for **volunteers, local teams, and collaborators** who help bring EdYOUFest to life in different countries and cultures. This handbook explains the spirit behind the work: why schools matter, why inclusion matters, and why community is not an “extra,” but the core of everything we do.

Finally, it is for anyone curious about how a simple conversation—between colleagues, over dinner, in a city full of history—can grow into an international movement. Not through grand strategies, but through listening carefully to what educators truly need.

This handbook does not aim to persuade. It aims to explain, to invite, and to connect.

EdYOUFest belongs to those who recognise themselves in its story.

*Giovanni Rottura*

## The Birth of EdYOUFest

“ Sometimes the most powerful movements don't begin with a plan. They begin with a need.” ”

*Palermo, summer evening 2015*

Palermo doesn't whisper. It sings.



Piazza Politeama – Palermo, Sicily

That summer evening, Piazza Politeama was alive with sound—horns echoing off stone façades, laughter spilling from cafés, scooters threading their way through the crowd. Chuck and I had just parked the car and

were crossing the square when the Teatro Politeama rose in front of us, solid and theatrical, as if reminding us that art, culture, and community had always belonged in shared spaces.

We were heading to **La Posada**, a trattoria I knew well. Years earlier, during my time in Sicily, it had become a familiar stop—honest food, no pretence, deeply local. I wanted Chuck to taste not just fresh fish, but the soul of the city.

That night, though, we carried more than appetite. We carried momentum.

Chuck Sandy and Giovanni Rottura



## The Road That Led Us There



Catania, Sicily

Our journey to Palermo had nothing to do with leisure. In the days leading up to that dinner, we had crossed Sicily from west to east: **Salemi, Caltanissetta, Catania**. Three conferences. Three provinces. Three school theatres filled with teachers.

Each event followed the same simple format: a two-hour plenary led by Chuck, followed by a Q&A session that never respected the clock. Teachers stayed. They leaned forward. They challenged ideas. They asked questions rooted in real classrooms, real students, real constraints.

What struck me most was not only Chuck's ability to energise a room, but the atmosphere itself. These were not glossy hotel ballrooms or distant academic halls. These were ordinary public schools—the places where teachers lived their professional lives every day.



Salemi (TP), Sicily

By the end of that short tour, we had met nearly **700 teachers**.

And nothing about their response felt ordinary.

There was gratitude, yes—but also curiosity, urgency, and something harder to name: a sense that they had been waiting for this kind of space.

Chuck Sandy and Giovanni Rottura



## A Conversation That Changed Everything



Chuck Sandy

As we walked through Palermo that evening, Chuck said something that stayed with me.

*“It feels different here. These schools are alive. This is where teachers belong.”* He was right.

Elsewhere, conferences often felt transactional: a ticket purchased, a seat taken, a speaker elevated on a stage, and then everyone returning to separate professional silos. But in Sicily, inside those school theatres, there was no distance—no invisible wall between speaker and participant, expert and practitioner.

At La Posada, over plates of pasta and grilled swordfish, the conversation shifted.

What if this wasn't just a series of conferences?

What if it could be something else entirely?



EdYOUFest Bucharest 2024

Not an event *for* teachers, but something that *belonged* to them.

### A festival.

A space where plenary speakers could inspire—but where teachers themselves could step onto a stage, perhaps for the first time, and share their practice. A space where professional growth and human connection were inseparable. Where a session could flow naturally into a shared meal, a cultural walk, a moment of laughter.



EdYOUFest Athens 2023

That night, we didn't know we were designing EdYOUFest. But we were already imagining its heart.

## When the Name Found Us

Even the name had not yet arrived—but it was close.

As we spoke, certain words kept resurfacing: *education*, *community*, *teachers*. And one word, repeated almost unconsciously: **you**.

Because teachers were not an audience to be spoken at.

They were the centre. The reason. The voice.

At some point, the idea aligned itself with surprising clarity:

**Educational Festival. With YOU—teachers—always in the middle.**



EdYOUFest Tokyo 2025

**a) Education**  
**b) YOU** = **EdYOUFest.**  
**c) Festival**



It wasn't a branding decision. It was a belief made visible. Remove you, and the entire idea falls apart. The name itself carried a promise: this would never be a top-down event. It would be built *with* teachers, not merely *for* them.

From that moment on, every decision would be guided by a simple question:

***Does this keep teachers at the centre?***

## Why a Festival, not a Conference



EdYOUFest Athens 2023

Festivals celebrate. They invite participation. They belong to people.

In English Language Teaching, what was missing was not knowledge, but **connection**. Teachers often worked in isolation, behind closed classroom doors. Professional development existed, but it was frequently hierarchical, expensive,

or inaccessible. Many teachers felt like consumers of expertise rather than contributors to it.

We wanted to break that pattern.

What if teachers could come together as equals—not only to receive, but to give? To present, to collaborate, to feel recognised?

That was the heartbeat of what we imagined in Palermo.

### A Necessary Moment

Looking back, the timing was no accident.

Teaching was already under pressure. Burnout, low pay, lack of recognition, and rapid global changes—from economic instability to the early waves of digital transformation—were reshaping classrooms everywhere.

And yet, what we saw in Sicily was hope.

Teachers were eager for a space where their voices mattered. EdYOUFest, still unnamed in spirit, was a response to that need. It was never only about professional training. It was about dignity, belonging, and community.



EdYOUFest Athens 2023

## Seeds of What Would Become EdYOUFest

That dinner planted the ideas that would later define the festival's DNA:

- **Schools, not hotels** – keeping events rooted in real educational spaces.
- **Stages for everyone** – giving every teacher the chance to speak, not only the “big names.”
- **Excellence with inclusion** – global thought leaders alongside everyday practitioners.
- **Community as curriculum** – meals, walks, and shared experiences woven into the programme, not added as extras.



EdYOUFest Bucharest 2024

We didn't yet know what form this vision would take. But we knew what we didn't want: sterile, transactional events that inspired briefly and then disappeared.

We wanted something human. Alive. Unforgettable.

“ *EdYOUFest was never invented.  
It was discovered –  
by the people who needed it most.* ”

# From Idea to a Global Movement:

## The EdYOUFest Journey

What began as a conversation in Palermo soon became a journey across borders, cultures, and classrooms. Year after year, EdYOUFest grew—not by expanding its size alone, but by deepening its sense of purpose and community.

### 2015 – Genoa, Italy: The Beginning



The very first EdYOUFest gathering took place in September 2015 in Genoa, Italy. It brought together a group of internationally recognised trainers with a shared goal: to explore new ways of learning, sharing, and connecting within the ELT community.

Over three days of presentations, group work, discussions, and social moments, a unique atmosphere emerged—one that felt both innovative and deeply human. By the end of the event, EdYOUFest had taken

its first tangible form.

### 2016 – Palermo, Sicily: The First Public Event

In 2016, EdYOUFest held its first public edition at **La Baia del Corallo** in Palermo, Sicily. Teachers took part in a rich programme of workshops, alongside evening events filled with music, laughter, and shared experiences.

The success of this edition set the tone for what EdYOUFest would



become: joyful learning, genuine connection, and a growing sense of belonging. It also marked EdYOUFest's first real presence on social media, extending the community beyond the event itself.

### 2017 – Paris, France: Growing Beyond Borders



The following year, EdYOUFest moved to the French countryside near Paris. With participants arriving from an increasing number of countries, the festival confirmed its international vocation and strengthened its identity as a truly global experience.

### 2018 – Millfield, United Kingdom: A New Level

In 2018, EdYOUFest reached an important milestone. Hosted at **Millfield School** in the United Kingdom—thanks to the support of **Enterprises**—the event marked a significant step forward in scale and structure.

The programme featured three plenary sessions, twelve workshops, seventy-five participants, five business sponsors, and nine new partners. It was a turning point that raised standards of professionalism and preserving the spirit at the heart of EdYOUFest.



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Later that same year, EdYOUFest launched a new website and established a formal committee of six members, supported by twelve Fellows and a growing network of volunteers. The organisational foundations of the project were now firmly in place.

## 2019 – Millfield Returns and the First Event Fund

In 2019, EdYOUFest returned to Millfield and introduced its first **event fund**, created to support teachers who might otherwise have been unable to attend.

This initiative reflected one of EdYOUFest core values: inclusion. It reinforced the belief that professional development should be accessible, and that opportunity should never be limited by circumstance.



## 2020–2021 – The Online Transition

When the global pandemic disrupted travel and in-person events, EdYOUFest adapted.

In 2020 and 2021, the festival transitioned online, delivering a two-week digital programme that kept teachers connected during an unprecedented period of uncertainty. Despite the physical distance, the sense of community remained strong—perhaps stronger than ever.

## 2022 – Trapani, Sicily: Back Together Again



In 2022, EdYOUFest returned to in-person events in Trapani, Sicily, introducing a hybrid format that blended face-to-face and online participation.

This edition marked a joyful reunion. Teachers from across the world came together once again to learn, reconnect, and celebrate education in shared spaces.

### 2023 – Athens, Greece: A Global Celebration

The 2023 edition took place in Athens, Greece, welcoming more than two hundred teachers alongside multiple sponsors and partners.

It was a vibrant celebration of diversity, creativity, and professional growth—an event that reaffirmed EdYOUFest’s reputation as a thriving and inclusive international community.



### 2024 – Bucharest, Romania: A New Chapter

In 2024, EdYOUFest arrived in Bucharest, opening a new chapter in its ongoing journey.

Building on the successes of previous years, the event showcased an increasingly global network of educators and marked another step in EdYOUFest evolution—from a single annual festival to a series of interconnected experiences.



## 2025 – Tokyo and Malta: A Historic Year



EdYOUFest Tokyo 2025

The year 2025 marked a historic milestone: for the first time, EdYOUFest hosted two international conferences in the same year. The journey began in Tokyo, Japan, where EdYOUFest made its Asian debut with an inspiring and truly global gathering of educators. Later that year, the community came together again in Malta, further extending its presence across the Mediterranean.

Together, these two events made 2025 one of the most memorable and impactful years in the EdYOUFest story.



EdYOUFest Malta 2025

## 2026 A Structured worldwide Ecosystem for Teacher Development

### Project Overview

**EdYOUFest 2026** is a multi-layered, international professional development ecosystem designed to support English language teachers through **events, digital training, content production, and community-building activities.**



### Core Activities – 2026

#### 1. In-Person & Hybrid Events

**8 International Conferences**

**1 EdYOUFest Retreat**

*(focused on mentoring, reflection, and leadership development)*

#### 2. Online Professional Development

**8 EdYOUWebinars**

**1 EdYOUmarathon**

*(intensive online training programme with 9 webinars)*

#### 3. Knowledge Production & Dissemination

**24 EdYOUblog Articles**

*(peer-driven professional reflection and best practices)*

**6 EdYOUmagazine Issues**

*(curated, themed publications featuring international contributors)*

#### 4. Communities & Inclusion

**2 Active International Communities**

**EdYOUAfrica and EdYOUKyiv**

These communities support **access, inclusion, and professional dialogue** in regions where international training opportunities are often limited.

#### 5. Access & Sustainability

**EDYOUCARD – Main Membership Card**

The **EDYOUCARD** ensures:

affordable access to training

continuity beyond single events

long-term engagement within the EdYOUFest network

# 11 Years of EdYOUfest

A Journey of Learning, Friendship, and Inspiration



## Core Activities – 2026

### 1 In-Person & Hybrid Events

- 9 International Conferences
- 1 EdYOUFest Retreat  
(focused on mentoring, reflection and leadership development)

### 2 Online Professional Development

- 8 EdYOUWebinars
- 1 EdYOUmarathon  
(intensive online training programme with 9 webinars)

### 3 Knowledge Production & Dissemination

- 24 EdYOUblog Articles  
(peer-driven professional reflection and best practices)
- 6 EdYOUmagazine Issues  
(curated, themed publications featuring international contributors)

### 4 Communities & Inclusion

- 2 Active International Communities
  - EdYOUAfrica
  - EdYOUKyiv

These communities support access, inclusion, and professional dialogue in regions where international training opportunities are often limited.

### 5 Access & Sustainability

- EDYUOCARD – Main Membership Card
- affordable access to training
- continuity beyond single events
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#### EDYUOCARD – Main Membership Card

