

An Interview with Daniel Xerri

Vicky Papageorgiou, ESL/EAP instructor, Metropolitan College,
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Daniel Xerri is a Lecturer in TESOL at the University of Malta. He is a member of IATEFL's Conference Committee and of TESOL International Association's Research Professional Council. Between 2015 and 2017, he was the Joint Coordinator of the IATEFL Research SIG. He holds postgraduate degrees in English and Applied Linguistics, as well as a PhD in Education from the University of York. He is the author of many publications on different areas of education and

TESOL. His most recent books are *The Image in English Language Teaching* (2017, ELT Council), and *Teacher Involvement in High-stakes Language Testing* (2018, Springer). Further details about his talks and publications can be found at: www.danielxerri.com

Vicky : Daniel, first of all, I would like to thank you for agreeing to give this interview.

Daniel : Thanks so much for inviting me to be interviewed. I'm very happy to share my thoughts and work with your readers.

Vicky : You are a very active and creative person. How do you manage such multiple interests?

Daniel : I don't sleep much and work most of the time. Joking aside, I think it's all about doing things that I'm passionate about. I'm lucky enough to be able to find the time to work on the things I'm interested in. Writing is perhaps what I enjoy doing the most in my professional and personal life. So, I consider it natural to spend a lot of time every week working on new articles and books.

Vicky : I know that your interest fields are creativity, research, CPD, etc. The fact that one of your research fields is poetry I think is fascinating. Can you tell us about using poetry as interview stimulus material?

Daniel : In my research on creativity education, I've used poetry as a means of exploring the attitudes, beliefs and practices of teachers and students. This involved

providing them with a reflexive poem that depicted a lesson scenario and asking them to comment on it. By discussing the poem, they revealed what they thought about creativity and the use of creative texts in the classroom. The poem acted as a stimulus for their thoughts and perspectives.

Vicky : I was reading another article of yours on ‘teacher versatility’ and creativity and how much you value the openness that teachers should cultivate so that they allow their practices in the classroom to be influenced by disciplines that could be even totally unrelated to language teaching. How do you think that teachers can accomplish this?

Daniel : Teachers are thinking beings and they have views on a myriad of things that might not be directly related to English language teaching. By tapping their different interests and by being open to external influences, they can enrich their teaching and enhance their students’ learning experience. The important thing is to be willing to make connections between elements and disciplines that might not seem to be explicitly connected. Language teaching is not a compartmentalized activity. It is something that can draw energy from other fields of activity. Being willing to enrich language lessons by means of one’s different interests is the first step to being more versatile as a teacher.

Vicky : Knowledge of the language or knowledge about the language? Which of these two is more important for a language teacher?

Daniel : I think they’re equally important and it would be mistaken to ignore either one. A fairly good level of language proficiency is necessary in order for a teacher to teach the target language but so is well-developed teacher language awareness. In fact, some argue that language awareness contributes to more effective teaching. Teachers – and by extension learners – benefit immensely from initiatives aimed at developing language proficiency, language awareness, together with knowledge of teaching methodology and other competences.

Vicky : There has been an increasing interest of English language teachers in research. What are the challenges of training teachers to do classroom research?

Daniel : One of the biggest challenges consists of the way research is conceptualized. Even though research can be a powerful form of professional development, the way some teachers think about research can act as an obstacle to them engaging *with* and *in* research. If teachers limit themselves to the conceptions of research foisted upon them by academia, then they are unlikely to see research as something that they could do in their own context.

Vicky : Can you talk to us about your plenary speech at our ELTA Serbia Conference?

Daniel : In my plenary, I plan to challenge traditional conceptions of research and demonstrate how teacher research is a democratic activity that belongs to all

classroom practitioners. My talk is based on a project that investigates the views of academics, teacher trainers and teacher association leaders from around the world. The people who have contributed to this project share the view that research can be an empowering activity for teachers if they are enabled to see it as an integral part of their professional identity.

Vicky : Daniel, with already over 100 publications, a very active professional life, what are your plans for the future?

Daniel : My immediate plans are to complete two books that are being published later this year, and strive to meet the deadlines for different articles and chapters that I'm currently working on. All that is on top of refurbishing the 300-year-old house that I've just moved into!

Vicky : Thank you!

Vicky Papageorgiou is an ESL/EAP instructor with approximately 20 years of experience, mainly with adult learners. She holds an MA in Education (Open University of Cyprus) and an MA in Art (Goldsmiths College, UK) and she has also been awarded a PGCE in Technology Enhanced Learning with distinction from the University of Wales Trinity Saint David . She studied in Greece, Italy and the UK but also participated in an international project for the McLuhan program in Culture and Technology for the University of Toronto, Canada. Her fields of interest are Technology enhanced learning, Art in ESL, critical thinking, Inquiry Based learning and teaching adults. She is also the website editor of the Visual Arts Circle. She currently divides her time between Thessaloniki (Greece) working as an Adjunct Lecturer at Metropolitan College and Oxford (Oxford St Clare's).