



Daniel Xerri: Teachers Associations provide educators with a professional home. There is far more THAT unites us than divides us.

An Interview with Daniel Xerri

1 Could you tell us something about your current job? How long have you been teaching? Which challenge in your job do you find most interesting?

I'm currently a Lecturer in TESOL at the University of Malta. My job involves enabling postgraduate students to critically engage with a variety of theoretical and practical issues in TESOL. I also teach reflective writing to undergraduate students and help them to improve their English language proficiency. Prior to my university post, I taught English in secondary schools for 10 years. The challenge I've always been fascinated by in my teaching career is that of enhancing students' cognitive and affective engagement.

2 What is your motto in teaching?

A quote that I keep in mind when teaching is from Steve Jobs' commencement address at Stanford University in 2005. He told students, "Don't be trapped by dogma — which is living with the results of other people's thinking." I'd like to believe that through my teaching I'm managing to help students to develop critical and creative ways of thinking. As the American artist Barbara Januszkiewicz points out, that kind of thinking is what inspires change.

3 Do you bring TODAY and NOW into the classroom? How?

Yes, I seek to do so by using authentic resources based on current affairs or topical issues. I feel that it's important to enable students to relate to the topics we focus on in class and to have an opportunity to discuss the issues that we're facing as the citizens of both a nation and the global human community.

4 What is your favourite poem and why?

Choosing a favourite poem is difficult given that there are so many that I absolutely adore. However, if pressed to choose one, right now I'd probably say 'The Thought Fox' by Ted Hughes (<https://www.poetryarchive.org/poem/thought-fox>). This self-reflexive poem reminds me of the beauty of inspiration and of the overwhelming power of new ideas as soon as they burrow into your head.

5 What are the topics you most enjoy writing about?

I write about a broad range of topics in TESOL and education (<https://www.danielxerri.com/publications.html>); however, I particularly enjoy researching and writing about creative aspects of language teaching and learning. Many of my publications focus on how young people's creativity education can be fostered. I also enjoy writing about teacher development, especially ways of enabling teachers to research their own practices and contexts.

6 What are your future publication plans?

I'm currently co-editing a book on teaching English for the development of 21st century skills. This should be coming out in the first half of 2019. I'm also working on a number of articles based on my creativity research, and chapters on teacher research.

7 Why are Teachers Associations important? Is it important to attend different conferences?

Teacher Associations provide educators with a professional home. The sense of community that teachers experience when they join a TA is immensely valuable and it is nurtured by the networking and learning opportunities that conferences organised by TAs offer. When teachers have the means to attend conferences in different countries, they realise that in spite of any political and cultural barriers the international teaching community makes them feel welcome and at home. Most teachers seem to recognise the truth of the idea that there is far more that unites us than divides us.

8 What is your message for the 600 HUPE members?

I feel HUPE members are extremely lucky to form part of such a well-organised TA. I admire the huge sense of commitment that the association's leadership and membership has to teacher development. I've heard many good things about the HUPE Conference and I hope to be able to attend in the near future.

9 You've given plenary talks at a number of TA conferences. What makes a good plenary?

I believe a plenary should be a means by which a speaker challenges the audience to think deeply about a particular topic. While being underpinned by a solid understanding of theory, research and practice, a plenary should go beyond the sharing of practical classroom tips. A good plenary provides teachers with an opportunity to develop their thinking about a topic and its relationship to praxis. It respects teachers as thinking beings.

10 How do you unwind, knowing that our job is one of the most stressful ones?

I've always enjoyed swimming and trekking, but for more than a year I've been going for a run three or four times a week. Running has become such an important means for me to relax, take care of my health, and reflect on the things that matter to me that I've even written an article about it. Those interested in knowing more about how physical exercise can be a form of professional support can find the article in the January 2019 issue of *Modern English Teacher*.
