

Daniel Xerri: Poetry Makes Language Learning Engaging

Posted on [May 16, 2013](#) by [Slovak Chamber of English Teachers](#)

An interview with eltforum.sk speaker: Daniel Xerri

by Martina Bednáríková

Some say the supreme art of the teacher is to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge. Daniel Xerri, a speaker at the [ELTForum](#) in Bratislava this June, is convinced that a teacher not only takes a hand and opens a mind, but also touches a heart. His particular passion and means of touching the hearts of his students – and bringing out what's in their souls – is poetry.

SCET: What attracted you to the idea of poetry in ELT?

Daniel: I have always been interested in poetry and when I became a teacher I sought to use it in my teaching of language. I realized that poetry is an excellent means by which students can develop their language proficiency. Activities based on poetry can make language learning fun and engaging.

SCET: Did poetry help you improve your own English language skills? How has it influenced you as a learner? Has it changed your view on language learning and teaching in any way?

Daniel: At school I studied poetry as a genre and my teachers didn't really exploit it for language teaching purposes. However, studying poetry helped me to develop an affinity with English and its musicality. I gradually realized that language learning is far more effective when a lesson is based on something that sparks interest in the learner. Poetry can do that because it is one of the best ways of engaging the language learner at an intrinsically human level.



SCET: Are there any differences in students' and teachers' attitudes towards poetry? Which is

more beneficial from each group's perspective: studying, reading, writing...?

Daniel: Besides teaching poetry and exploiting it for language teaching purposes, I conduct a lot of research on teachers' and students' beliefs and attitudes in relation to poetry. My research shows that there exists a set of shared beliefs that influence the way teachers and students approach poetry in class. Unfortunately, these beliefs sometimes push them to see poetry as an academic genre that cannot be read for personal pleasure. Despite the fact that a substantial amount of research highlights the benefits of reading and writing poetry, teachers and students are somewhat wary of doing this because of the misconception that poetry is 'difficult'.

SCET: You are a regular speaker at ELT conferences all over the world. Based on your experience, what are the advantages of attending such an event? In what way can primary or secondary school teachers benefit from being a part of an international community?

Daniel: Conferences provide teachers with access to a forum in which ideas about ELT are discussed and questioned. Such events are a means by which teachers can learn about what their colleagues in other parts of the world are doing in the classroom and they serve as a platform from which the individual teacher can share examples of best practice. Conferences contribute to teachers' professional development and more and more teachers should be provided with an opportunity of attending regional and international conferences because in this profession we value lifelong learning. Conferences also allow teachers to network with colleagues who might not teach in their immediate context. This is highly significant since as teachers we have to avoid an insular mentality given that this will impinge on our own students' development. However, I'm aware that attending conferences can sometimes be quite expensive when one considers the costs associated with travel and accommodation. Perhaps that's why teachers should be encouraged to appreciate the contribution that social media can make to their professional development.

SCET: Tell us more about your beginnings as a teacher. Where, when and why did you start teaching English? Have you always wanted to become a teacher? And what do you like most about your job?

Daniel: To be honest, I didn't always want to become a teacher. I always wanted to study English and literature in particular, but as a student I never really expressed an interest in language teaching. However, at secondary school one of my English teachers always made time for activities in which we could talk about stuff that wasn't strictly-speaking part of the syllabus. Perhaps he wasn't the best teacher I could have had but I found it so engaging to be given the opportunity to share my interests with my peers. In my early 20s, I tried to supplement my income by working as an EFL teacher and I soon realised that I enjoyed interacting with students and helping them to talk about their interests and their lives in English. I sort of realised that teaching isn't about an expert speaker telling students how to do it, but it's a social phenomenon in which the teacher is genuinely interested in what students have to say and hence helps them to say it. Whilst doing a [PGCE](#) at university, I read Jeremy Harmer's [The Practice of English Language Teaching](#) and this taught me the basics of how to go about teaching English. Since then I've had an opportunity to read a substantial amount of literature about ELT and to contribute to it as well. However, I still feel that the most important lesson about teaching that I've ever learnt was by observing my favourite teacher interacting with my class. The privilege of engaging in this singularly human act of communication is perhaps what I value most about my job.

[Daniel Xerri](#)



Daniel Xerri will be presenting a workshop on ‘Harnessing the Power of Poetry in ELT’ on Saturday, June 8th.

[Daniel](#) holds postgraduate degrees in English and Applied Linguistics. He has been teaching English for the past ten years and is actively involved in [teacher training](#) and educational research in [Malta](#) and the UK. He regularly speaks at various international conferences and is the author of a number of publications.

Advertisements

Share this:

 Twitter

 Facebook

 Like



One blogger likes this.

Related

[Teachers don't just teach; they learn.](#)
In "Conference"

[English Teacher or ELT Professional?](#)
In "ELT"

[Rakesh Bhanot: 'Teaching is a species of friendship'](#)
In "

ELTForum.sk

"

[Teachers don't just teach; they learn.](#)

In "Conference"

[English Teacher or ELT Professional?](#)

In "ELT"

[Rakesh Bhanot: 'Teaching is a species of friendship'](#)

In "ELTForum.sk"

This entry was posted in [Conference](#), [ELT](#), [ELTForum.sk](#), [eltforum.sk 2013](#), [Interviews](#), [Main](#), [Reflections on Teaching and Learning](#), [Teacher Training](#) and tagged [Daniel Xerri](#), [ELT conference](#), [ELTForum.sk](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#).

One Response to *Daniel Xerri: Poetry Makes Language Learning Engaging*

Pingback: [Daniel Xerri: Poetry Makes Language Learning Engaging | Just Me](#)

Stop Complaining – Enjoy Teaching!

Create a free website or blog at WordPress.com.