

## Julia Alivertis: Being Taught By Students

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May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2014

ELTforumsk

<http://eltforumsk2014.wordpress.com/tag/tesol-greece>



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An interview by Martina Bednarikova

The goal of true education is not knowledge, but intelligence and character. 1899942\_487695134675584\_161498707\_n Julia Alivertis, mother of three and one of the presenters at this June's ELT Forum, does not limit her students as far as the learning process is concerned, for she knows an investment in knowledge pays the best interest. Anyway, to teach our students the most important lessons we have to show them how to learn and change above all else.

Slovak Chamber of English Teachers (SCET): What are your main teaching cornerstones? What do you believe in as a teacher? How would you define yourself (as a teacher)?

Julia Alivertis (JA): What I could think of as my teaching cornerstones are my 'three R's': Respect for the learner, Responsibility on the part of the educator, Reflection on the teaching/learning experience. I feel that these are the principles that have also mainly defined me as a teacher.

SCET: What does an ordinary workday of a mother of 3 kids look like?

JA: The workday of a mother of three kids is usually very long and often continues into the night, because it's not an 'either/or' situation. You have to be a full-time mother as you have to be a full-time teacher, otherwise you will fail in one of the two roles, if not in both. Luckily, language teaching and motherhood can be complementary in many ways. Your children are your students in the sense that they learn everything from you in the early years- from their mother tongue to important life lessons- and your students are children who need guidance and support throughout

the process of mutual learning; I truly believe that we are taught a lot by our kids, whether at school or at home.

SCET: You are a Disabled Access Friendly Campaign Ambassador. Tell us the story behind your involvement. How did you become an ambassador? What duties and responsibilities do you have and what do you like about your work there?

JA: I got involved in the DAF Campaign because I believe in the cause. It's more an honour than a responsibility and everyone involved in the campaign are doing their best to raise awareness in the ELT classroom by spreading the word, using inspirational lesson plans, trying to sensitize students about such important issues. It is up to us educators to help our students become better future citizens of the world.

SCET: You have co-organized two TESOL Greece events in your hometown. Why did you decide to be a part of the organizing team? Can you tell us what your role was and what you liked about it?

JA: TESOL Greece is a very active teachers' organization and holds almost one event every month, most of which take place in Athens. We thought it would be a good idea to host an event in Preveza, which is a beautiful sea-side town in Western Greece, and give the opportunity to more people from this area to participate, as well as to people from other places to visit this part of Greece. I was one of the two local people in the organizing team and we had to get in touch with lots of people trying to create an event that would combine Professional Development with a Cultural Tour and an opportunity to enjoy the natural beauty of the location; however, as you know such events are always the result of teamwork; we had a lot of help and support from the TG board, the local authorities and the local community; I liked the way we all worked together and the fact that both events were very successful was very rewarding. Having been involved in this twice I feel enriched and happy to be doing it again in October for a third time.

SCET: Why do you consider art to be the right learning tool for both language learners and future English teachers? In what way was art beneficial for your own language learning?

JA: Art is a language in itself; it's a universal language that most people start 'reading' and 'writing' before any other. It's a language that addresses the mind and the soul simultaneously and each one finds a different way to decode it. As a learning tool, it is thought-provoking, it can arouse a variety of feelings, it can generate discussions and, as there are more than one interpretation, it can never be disappointing. It can be used to introduce serious issues, or for fun and enjoyment. It increases visual literacy and makes students more culturally aware. Art has been equally beneficial to me as a teacher and a learner, because it offered me new ways to express feelings and ideas, but also companionship and

solace.

SCET: You have prepared a presentation “Listen to Your Eyes” together with Jeffrey Doonan. What kind of preparation has gone into it?

JA: A lot of brainstorming, a lot of surprising moments, fun and laughter, but also IMG\_4691 more patience than we both thought we had. Living in different countries and having different schedules can make collaborations a real challenge, but what I really enjoyed were the moments of illumination whenever we realized how differently we perceived art! The way we shared our views and the long discussions we had were one of the most fulfilling experiences the preparation of this presentation could offer me. The workshop is the outcome of mutual respect between two very dedicated teachers and their very different perspectives. I hope those who attend our presentation will share these feelings, listen to their eyes and invite their students into the world of Art.

SCET: Where do you get motivation and energy? What is guaranteed to keep you afloat when you feel like sinking?

JA: Teaching is a very rewarding experience and it is self-motivating in that sense; it is a very challenging and sensitive profession and it takes a lot of effort and versatility; therefore, the more you experiment with techniques and explore approaches in order to teach effectively, the more motivated you become because you learn more about yourself in the process. As regards energy, the classroom has always been a great source; now that I’m not a classroom teacher anymore, I find it more difficult to maintain the levels of energy I used to have in a classroom. I do have one thing, though, that is guaranteed to keep me afloat: the sea. I live by the sea and I make a point of going for a hike on the beach and a quick swim almost every day. It helps me find balance, replenish energy and stay in control.

Julia Alivertis has been a teacher of English for more than 25 years and a part-time teacher trainer for state school teachers, while raising 3 children and keeping active in many extra-curricular activities, such as having co-organised the two TESOL Greece International events in Preveza, Greece, where she lives. She has spoken at many international ELT Conferences and is a Disabled Access Friendly Campaign Ambassadors. She enjoys reading, walks on the beach and a good swim.