

Interview with Ceri Jones



How long have you been writing ELT materials?

I started writing ELT materials for publication in the mid 1990s. At that time manuscripts were submitted on paper and we literally cut and paste the pages together on A3 spreads before sending them by snail mail to the publishers. I was living in Italy at the time and we used to have to allow ten days for postage. It meant we always had to be well ahead of our deadlines! Now writing is so different. The internet, email, collaborative writing tools and video conferencing have completely changed the writing experience – for the better I think!

Describe your typical working day.

There is no such thing as a typical day as I share my time between teaching, writing, looking after my kids, travelling to conferences, training and keeping up with the ELT online community. But I guess during the school term a lot of days look something like this: We get up as a family at about eight and get ready to take the kids to school. Their schools are only a ten minute walk away, which is great. I come back and switch on my computer. I check my emails and settle down to whatever work is most urgent. I often work on more than one project at a time. I may also be planning for classes or correcting students' work. If I'm not teaching I'll sit at the computer until about 1.30 when it's time to go and pick the kids up from school. Most of the afternoon is taken up with activities with my kids, homework, bike rides, playing with friends, going to various after school classes. I try and snatch little pockets of time to get on with work while the kids are dancing, painting, doing karate or playing football! And I often settle down to work again for a couple of hours after the kids have gone to bed and the evening meal has been cleared away. It's a long day – but usually a very varied one, and in the evening I combine working with keeping in touch with friends and colleagues online, reading blogs and taking part in chat forums like #eltchat on twitter (workload permitting).

How did you end up in ELT?

I didn't "end up" in ELT. I "started out" in ELT – or in language teaching at least. When I left university I did a postgraduate course in secondary education, specializing in English (as a first language) and modern languages (the UK equivalent of foreign language teaching – I taught French in lower secondary). At the end of the course I decided that I wanted to work abroad and took my first job in a small school in Italy. I fell in love with teaching, travelling and Italy and stayed for ten years. The work was varied, the school was dynamic and the directors were very supportive. It was a great place to start out and I learnt an enormous amount there about both teaching and materials writing.

What would you be doing now if you were not writing?

I guess if I had made different decisions and taken different routes, I might now be working as a director of studies in a private language school, or possibly teaching in a university language unit or a teacher training department. I love teaching, and even if writing takes up most of my time at the moment, I try and make sure I have at least a few hours of teaching every week. I don't think I'd be able to write teaching materials without being in the classroom, and much as I love writing, I don't think I could dedicate myself to it 100% of the time.

What is your favourite country to visit and why?

There is no one answer to this question, except maybe the last country I visited! I love visiting new countries and going back to countries I've visited before. Every single country has something wonderful to offer, new experiences, a new angle on life. Living in the south west of Spain we love crossing the border to Portugal, only a few hours away. I love the idea of crossing a border, entering a new country, experiencing a new culture, hearing and speaking a different language. It always opens your eyes, helps you see things from a new angle. That's what I love most about travelling.

What would you do if you won the National Lottery?

I'm not sure I'd change my lifestyle that much. I think we'd probably buy a bigger home, but probably very near to where we live now. And maybe a camper van. I've always wanted to own a camper van! I guess we'd indulge more in travelling and travel further afield. I'd really like to donate a sizeable chunk to an educational charity. I'd need to think long and hard about which I'd choose. And I'd want to help friends and family if I could. Mmm ... sounds like I'd need to win a BIG jackpot!

Which animal would you most like to be?

My first answer would be a cat. I love their ease and grace. I'd like to be able to curl up in the sun and lazily flick my tail as I watch the world go by. But thinking about it a bit more, one of my favourite animals has always been the otter. Again I love their grace and their playfulness and the idea of being equally comfortable in and out of water really appeals to me.

Are you a Facebooker or a Tweeter?

Both, I guess. Facebook has changed a lot over the last year or so as far as ELT goes, and more and more groups are opening up for teachers and educators to share links and information. I still use my status updates to share news and photos with friends and family, but I've also started following groups and pages to keep in touch with what's going on in the world of ELT. But I definitely spend a lot more time on Twitter. I like the immediacy and the simplicity of Twitter. It's very accessible and very user-friendly. The teaching community on Twitter is incredibly active and very inclusive. There's a lot of sharing and discussion going on all over the world. As well as sharing teaching ideas and communicating with other teachers, I also follow newspapers and magazines. I especially like receiving image galleries from magazines like The New York Times. I also receive regular updates from TED on their latest talks and lists of the most viewed youtube clips. It's amazing the range and variety of information that you can stream to your screen as you work!

Which TV programme did you last turn off?

I watch very little TV. More and more I find my entertainment on the internet. If I do sit down to watch TV, I usually zap between channels and maybe get caught up in a documentary or a travel programme, but I very infrequently sit down and watch it to the end. What I do like watching is DVDs of my favourite TV series. I love some of the American series like The Wire or The Sopranos. I can watch those over and over!

Would you rather run a mile or swim a mile?

I would most definitely prefer to swim. I live near the sea and from the months of May to October I go swimming most days. I love the way the water washes away all the cares and worries of the day. I also love playing in the waves with my kids. I definitely revert to my inner child when I'm on the beach. It's one of my favourite places.