

# GRANTS & AWARDS: REPORTS

**Ron Belisle was nominated by a colleague. What follows is an excerpt from the nominating letter:**

Like many members of the WAESOL teaching and learning community, Ron Belisle is an educator with a passion for teaching and a heart for Multilingual English Learners. And while I am sure there are many such educators who are deserving of recognition, Ron rises to the top as one of the most incredible volunteers in the WAESOL community, giving of his time, resources, and knowledge to improve the TESOL profession for educators, and by extension, their students.

Furthermore, Ron does this work in a calm, deliberate, and cheerful manner, never asking for thanks or recognition. He is the type of individual that identifies a need, problem-solves the most workable solution available, and meets that need, all behind the scenes with few others even aware of the work he has done. Ron's selfless and often unrecognized actions go beyond all expectations, making him a truly outstanding volunteer and deserving of the 2022 WAESOL Outstanding Volunteer Award.

## My professional development journey

### Ron Belisle

*This article reviews my own professional development journey and extends a special thank you to the WAESOL Board for its ongoing commitment to professional development.*

*Keywords: conference planning committee, Intensive English Programs (IEP), professional development*

Many thanks to the WAESOL Board for selecting me to be the recipient of the 2022 WAESOL Outstanding Volunteer Award. I appreciate this honor very much. I am also incredibly grateful to WAESOL for its commitment to professional development which has continued for 47 years. Thousands have benefited over the years from the hours put in by WAESOL Board members (most of whom are volunteers) as well as the many other volunteers on conference days who hand out badges, monitor rooms, and support presenters. Without these dedicated volunteers the conference would not happen. Thank you, WAESOL!

I am a huge fan of professional development events! I think the very first professional development conference I attended was in 1991 in Spokane. It was the second Spokane Regional ESL Conference (now into its 34th year), and was held on the campus of Mukogawa Fort Wright Institute (see Image 1).

As you can see, there were only four presentations at this 1991 conference, all at the same 10:15 am. time slot. Attendees (not many of them) could only choose to attend one presentation. There were also only two publishers present. This does not sound like much of a conference compared to today's ESL conferences, but I can tell you that it was exhilarating for me and probably for most attendees. Many of us in the area in 1991 were involved in brand new or fairly new ESL programs. At the time, there were three Intensive English Programs if I recall correctly (WSU, Gonzaga, EWU) in addition to the one-year-old Mukogawa Fort Wright Institute. All of us at that 1991 conference were so honored that publishers took the time to travel to Spokane to show us their curriculum ideas. Attending that one professional presentation was inspirational for me. I felt that these presenters were the early

pioneers of our field. This small conference gave us all the opportunity to connect with colleagues in the area and learn from one another. Learning from one another is at the heart of every conference I have ever attended. I cannot stress enough the impact of learning from one another during a focused one-, two-, or even four-day professional development conference has had on me.

I am so glad that many volunteers over the years have continued to develop the Spokane Regional ESL Conference. It has grown so much with attendees from across the Northwest and beyond.

The COVID years (2021 and 2022) were online and naturally saw a fairly big drop in attendance. However, the 2022 online conference had about 150 online attendees from around the world, including attendees actually presenting from five different countries: Russia, Chile, Canada, Japan, and the US. I was so delighted that this happened.

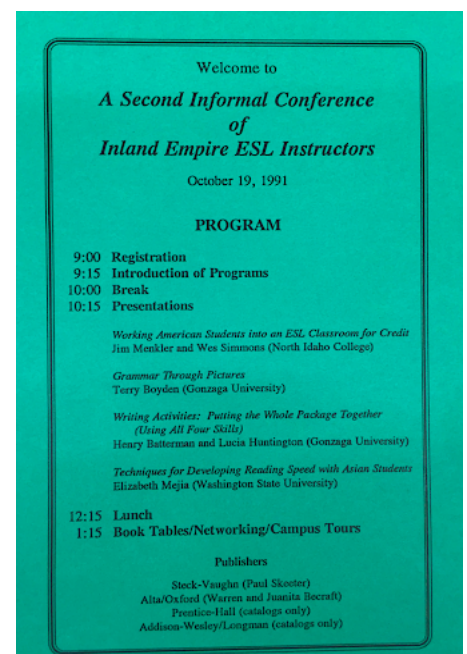


Image 1: Program for the first conference

From the beginning, professional development conferences energized and inspired me! I would go back to the classroom with new ideas, new perspectives, and I became a better teacher. That first one in 1991 hooked me, and I made it a priority to attend more and more over the years. Since 1991, I have attended 62 professional ESL development conferences: 12 TESOL Conferences, 13 WAESOL Conferences, 31 Spokane Regional ESL Conferences as well as two Tri-TESOL Conferences, two TESL Canada Conferences, one ORTESOL Conference, and one JALT Conference (in Hiroshima). Attending conferences also inspired me to start submitting proposals to present, mostly on technology topics which were usually accepted, first at the Spokane Regional ESL Conference in the early 90s, then at most of the other conferences over the years I attended with the exception of the JALT Conference in 1996.

I observed early on that there are three different ways conference attendees can participate. One is as an attendee, sitting in on presentations, visiting and interacting with publishers/exhibitors, listening to keynote addresses, making new or renewing existing professional connections—all of which are so important. The second is as a presenter. The presenter experiences all the activities of the attendee, but he or she also presents a workshop (or two). The presenter shares with conference attendees valuable insights and experiences, which are so vital to keeping our profession healthy and vibrant. The third kind of participation is as a conference planner. These people, often volunteers, work in the background and plan the conference months, or in some cases, years in advance. WAESOL has volunteer board members who all work together with the Executive Director to organize the annual conference. The Spokane Regional ESL Conference has an Advisory Committee of several volunteer teachers who

organize the conference. Hats off to all of them for their hard work.

Starting in 1998, I began this journey of serving with conference planning teams working on 29 different conferences over the years throughout the Northwest and Canada, chairing/co-chairing 22 of them. One of my favorite conferences was the 2011 Tri-TESOL Conference, a two-day event in Seattle with 873 attendees, three fabulous keynote speakers, 215 workshops, and the combined energy of three associations: ORTESOL, BCTEAL, and WAESOL. It was an honor to work with the servant leaders from each of the three associations to put together this conference and watch it unfold.

Why all this volunteering? First, I believe strongly in professional development, improving myself as a teacher, learning new techniques, new ideas, (especially, in my case, ideas around the use of technology as a tool for learning or for organizing), together in community with other teachers. Secondly, as a follower of Christ, I strive to apply the command to “love your neighbor” by helping my colleagues with opportunities for all of us to improve our teaching skills in order to elevate our profession. This in turn helps our students, which is the goal of all instruction. My background and keen interest in information technology management and my ability to work with people has helped me serve in this capacity. I have felt at times, even in the midst of sometimes harried and flustered conference planning and execution, that this is my niche, my calling, or as they say, my knack. I will always cherish the connections and friendships I made in these situations.

So reader, please consider serving your colleagues by volunteering as a [WAESOL board member](#) or for the [Spokane Regional ESL Conference](#), or in other professional development contexts. We need each other, and our students need us to be the best we can be.

#### Postscript

*Many thanks to Mukogawa US Campus for sponsoring me at the many professional development conferences I have attended. In addition, I would also like to thank WAESOL for sponsoring me at TESOL conferences while serving as the WAESOL/TESOL Liaison.*

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*Any current WAESOL member may nominate a deserving volunteer in the ESL community. The nominee themselves need not be a WAESOL member and should work/reside in Washington state or in a nearby community. The nominating essay will be published in the WAESOL Educator and/or on the WAESOL website.*

[Find out more](#) and [nominate a deserving volunteer](#) on our website.

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**RON BELISLE** has been on the faculty at Mukogawa US Campus in Spokane since its inception in 1990. He has also taught at both the public high school and university level in Japan as well as in adjunct positions at Washington State University in Pullman, Gonzaga University, Kansas State University, and Moody Bible Institute. He served as the 2011 and 2013 WAESOL President, chaired the 2011 Tri-TESOL Conference (ORTESOL, WAESOL, BCTEAL), fifteen Spokane Regional ESL Conferences and co-chaired 5 WAESOL Conferences. Since the early '90s, Ron has been a frequent presenter at state, regional, and international TESOL conferences on practical solutions related to technology in education and administration. You may contact him at [ronbelisle@gmail.com](mailto:ronbelisle@gmail.com).