

# Leadership in Action: Joan Johnston Nelson

As we all know, 2020 has been a challenging year for us all and WAESOL has been no exception. Many board members rose to the occasion and we thank them all! We would like to thank one person in particular: Dr. Joan Johnston Nelson, WAESOL Executive Director, who has been central to the success of WAESOL. In the difficult transition to a virtual conference, Joan didn't blink an eye; she strategized and planned with the WAESOL president and worked with their WAESOL team to make our first virtual conference a success. True to being an educator who finds solutions while celebrating the voices of the scholarly community, Joan embraced the diversity of her team and spent hours learning about online tools, formatting the schedule, and troubleshooting issues that arose. Masterfully, she created a colorful online schedule with themes, allocated 9 sequential and concurrent Zoom rooms, and managed a staff to bring together and assist language teaching professionals, publishers, and students throughout Washington and beyond. She accomplished this with a calm grace while her leadership allowed us to connect at a time when connection was both especially necessary and fulfilling.

Joan's leadership has been a mainstay of WAESOL and the Spokane Regional Conference for years, so it's no surprise that she would tackle the challenge of the online conference with as much adroitness and poise as she did. However, it is important to note just how great a feat it was to not only transfer the conference to an online platform but to spearhead a successful venture that allowed for networking and professional development.

Joan is a woman of quiet leadership. She is steady, strong, and consistently serving diverse populations. Her career has spanned varied contexts and populations. She has been engaged in English language teaching since 1986. Since her first experience teaching in Taiwan, she has taught in a wide variety of teaching situations at all levels from kindergarten through adult literacy, workplace literacy, and academic English. Joan is an advocate, teacher trainer, and consultant, as well as a frequent presenter at local, state, national and international conferences. She has spent a full and dedicated career working with students in K-12 schools and community colleges, advocating for immigrant and refugee students in her role at the Washington Office of Superintendent for Public Instruction, teaching courses on Immigrant and Refugee Perspectives at Gonzaga and Whitworth Universities, supervising the Summer Language Program in Spokane for K-12 multilingual learners, conducting doctoral research

on working with immigrant and refugee students, and serving as an instructional coach and a private consultant across the state of Washington to support multilingual students in public schools. Combined with her higher education degrees, her certification list includes certification in ESL, secondary foci in English, math, and traffic safety. This has allowed her to teach in elementary, secondary, college, and university settings providing specialized training which blended both personal experience and knowledge. She is a requested trainer in school districts and the OSPI office in the state of Washington where she was hired to review EL programs. Joan's passion for language extends into the realities of the Native American residential schools and she has worked on stronger re-entry programs for local Native American students into adult literacy programs as well as language preservation efforts and advocacy.

Though much about Joan is behind-the-scenes in organizational and curricular endeavors, her footprint is evident throughout the state. As a first time WAESOL Board member recently reported, "I learned she also is cultivating and mentoring other teachers who assist Native American and ESL populations through scholarship and collegial success only after I joined the Board and I had known her for a long time."

This tribute to Dr. Joan Johnston Nelson is one that represents a culmination of thoughts from a variety of current and past WAESOL Board members. She is valued and appreciated for her commitment to our community, for her untiring drive for excellence and attention to due diligence to provide quality services for English learners and their teachers in the state of Washington. Joan represents someone who decided long ago to get into the game and make a difference, and we believe that difference will be felt for years to come. We are proud and grateful for her presence as the WAESOL Executive Director. •

