



TESOL Board Connect: Embracing Your Passion

by [Graciela Martin](#)

From a very young age, I was fascinated with the English language and was determined to learn it. So, thanks to my parents, by the age of 7, I was taking private lessons twice a week.

I recall I would grab any chance I had to speak the language outside of class, or watch a movie that was not dubbed into Spanish. In those days, students did not have the availability of resources we all have nowadays. I still remember the excitement when I watched my first subtitled film at the movie theater. I was already a teenager then, and I was amazed to hear Robert Wagner's real voice in the 1974 movie *Towering Inferno*!

I would say that I first fell in love with the English language, and years later, with teaching.

When I reflect upon why I decided to become a teacher, I inevitably think of two great teachers I had. They knew how to make each biology and history lesson memorable. They showed passion for the subjects they taught, and that was certainly contagious. They became my role models.

So, nobody was surprised when years later I set out to become an English teacher. I studied very hard and, soon after I graduated, I started teaching in a secondary school. I had no doubt: Teaching was *my* passion, too. I found real pleasure in designing teaching materials for my classes and thinking about what might be the best way to introduce a certain vocabulary item, or to practice a given structure. I was rewarded with students' engagement and a great sense of fulfillment. I knew I had made the right choice.

In a few years' time, my career path as a classroom teacher would change to include different teacher-leadership roles that I had never before intended to pursue. When I started teaching at ICANA, the binational center in Buenos Aires, a totally new professional path unfolded in front of me. The center had a robust teacher development program, which I was soon asked to join. I really enjoyed these new roles as teacher-trainer and materials developer. I also started presenting at seminars as part of the program. I still have such vivid memories of those times! So many things learned, so many things shared!

It was through the binational center that I first heard of [ARTESOL](#), and through the affiliate that I came to know about [TESOL International Association](#).

The first TESOL Convention I attended was TESOL's 40th Annual Convention & Exhibit in Tampa in 2006. The moment I entered the convention center will always stick in my memory. I couldn't believe the size of the premises and the number of attendees. My mind was blown! The theme of the convention, "Daring to Lead!", definitely left me thinking. Teachers can be great leaders.



Argentina license plate name keychain attached to my first TESOL Convention bag.

That same year, I was invited to volunteer my time to serve at the local affiliate in Argentina. This was undoubtedly a turning point in my career. Volunteer service was a whole new experience for me, one that filled me with joy and accomplishments. I had the chance to learn so much from the leaders of the affiliate. I was impressed at how much they worked for the affiliate and also by the great admiration they felt for TESOL International Association. From that moment on, I have met amazing TESOL leaders who also share a passion for TESOL International Association, and they have definitely inspired me to serve.



TESOL 2013 in Dallas, Texas.

So here I am today, serving the association. It is in serving that I have found my other passion, one that gives me a sense of purpose beyond my regular job. It has become one of the most rewarding experiences I have had in my professional lifetime so far.

You cannot change who you are—your life story. In the same way, you cannot change what makes you happy, or what you love. If you follow and embrace your passion, you will feel that sense of accomplishment and satisfaction that will fuel you to go for more.

The passion that you put into what you do makes a difference not only to you, but also to those around you.

I am extremely grateful to have met these passionate teachers and leaders who have motivated me to become a better professional and a leader. They have helped me find my purpose in serving others: my students, other teachers, and TESOL International Association, the professional home that

gathers colleagues who love the TESOL profession, people who are passionate about English language teaching and learning.

Dare to serve! Dare to lead!

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