

English as a Second Language

for MIT Facilities Department Service Employees

My Experience as an ESL Tutor

by Henry Fingerhut

My experience as a tutor with the ESL for Service Employees program is easy enough to describe by the numbers—five years working with three students from three different countries, speaking two different native languages, with one goal of making it easier to communicate in English. But those numbers obscure the incredible effect this program has had not just for the students but for all of us involved, the fond memories and life lessons I will take with me as I leave MIT, and the relationships that made this experience a cornerstone of my time at MIT.

When a friend from my master's program shared information about the program, I was immediately excited to join, having volunteered with an elementary school lunchtime reading program organized by my previous employer. But that experience could not have prepared me for the incredible relationships I developed here. I was paired with co-tutor Nichole (see page 3 for Nichole's reflections) and student Trancito, and we began learning more about Trancito's work on campus and life at home. As she began the process of preparing her daughter for college applications, we centered our classes on the cultural, financial, and logistical considerations she would need for this milestone, working on the English skills necessary to navigate this new territory. Through this process, I realized just how influential this program is for our students, and in turn how much these relationships would shape my time at MIT. Trancito, Nichole, and I remain in touch today.

Working with Trancito, Tommy, and Jean, I have learned many unexpected lessons.

The courage and enthusiasm with which my students approached new challenges in English class inspired me in my own work. With Trancito we read "News in Levels," an educational series that provides news articles at three levels of difficulty. At level three, Trancito realized she understood articles she thought would be beyond



Henry Fingerhut (r) with student Jean Cuevas Reyes

her comfort zone. The excitement we shared was a valuable reward for the time we had spent and the trust we had built. With Jean, we began incorporating articles from *The New York Times* and NPR because of his interest in the current events surrounding the impeachment. Though he may not have understood every vocabulary word—or known all of the political figures involved—the deep discussions that ensued demonstrated that he fully understood the content, and I encouraged him to continue seeking out challenging reading material in English.

Working with Trancito, Tommy, and Jean, I have learned many unexpected lessons. Speaking with them about their daily experiences as service employees has taught me about a side of MIT to which, as graduate students, we don't typically have access. Going over the English skills that they could use to send text updates to their supervisors or interact with MIT faculty, staff, and students in their everyday work has taught me just how empowering those little details can be. As I think about my experiences trying to learn languages and how frustrating it is to be unable to communicate even a basic idea, I am in awe of the students' skills, grace, and sense of humor as they persevere every day.

The lessons I learned and support I had from my colleagues and students in the program were often exactly what I needed to make advances in my own work. I'll miss working with the ESL program at MIT, but I know I'll continue to volunteer as an ESL tutor wherever I am next!

Social Wellness and Volunteering

by Monia Doandes

There is more than meets the eye to the ESL Program, and there are surprising benefits to belonging to a passionate volunteering community. When giving, one also receives, and as we will see, a great gift is that of wellbeing.

What does it mean to be well, to feel good—what exactly is wellbeing?

Is it about physical, mental, or environmental health? Is it about what we do—the classes we take, the jobs we pick, the lifestyles we live? Does connecting with other humans improve our wellbeing?

Yes.

There are seven dimensions to wellness, interacting and intertwining on the path to the best quality of wellbeing one can build: emotional, environmental, intellectual, occupational, physical, social, and spiritual.

Social wellness is one of the most important aspects of personal wellness. Humanity has gotten where it is today thanks to the social aspects built into our brains. Hundreds of thousands of years ago, those who survived were those who interacted with their peers and belonged to a community. Today, while it is not about survival of the fittest (or most social) anymore, the benefits of socializing are still powerful: better brain function, lower risk of depression and anxiety, improved immune system, and longer life span.

One way to improve one's social wellness is through volunteering. Throughout the years, we've received many wonderful messages from our volunteer tutors in the MIT ESL Program for Service Employees about how fulfilling this has been for them—both social wellness stories and feel-good stories.

We volunteer because we want to make a difference and help the world be a better place. Particularly through the ESL Program, we become acutely aware of the challenges others face, and we get to see on a personal level how we can help to improve another human being's life. As one of our tutors puts it:

“Our influence does not stop here. We also get to hear how our students' progress helps the community as a whole, whether it be the MIT community, or the students' families and neighbors.”

“What I didn't realize is how much this program would teach me, and how much I would learn. I find that talking about students' jobs and family life broadens my understanding of the challenges they face and how English skills will help them.”

Volunteering helps us broaden our view of the world through learning about other cultures and broader aspects of our community.

“The students I have met with come from a variety of economic, social, educational, and cultural backgrounds. All have a variety of life experiences that they are so open to sharing, even if I am meeting with them for the first time.”

While working to make the world—and MIT—a better place, we expand our connections and knowledge. Several tutors commented on this:

“Tutoring has been both intellectually challenging and personally rewarding. ESL tutoring has enabled me to connect my interests in science, education, and foreign language with an opportunity to volunteer and connect with other people in the MIT community. It has been very fulfilling to work on such challenging concepts with such committed students.”

“I really feel I'm contributing to making MIT a more diverse and inclusive place to work.”

“I feel more committed to MIT because I am honored to teach in the ESL program, and I have connected with my wonderful students and other community members.”

As one can see from our tutors' own words, volunteerism is a wonderful way to improve one's social wellness, and is a very fulfilling endeavor on the path to our personal wellbeing.

I am grateful to belong to such a wonderful community of volunteers, and grateful to all of you for making the ESL Program for Service Employees the wonderful community that it is.

Ice Breakers and Conversation Starters

Cut along the lines and fold into little squares with the writing inside. Let students pick a question from the pile of squares and enjoy their stories!



Time freezes for everyone but you for one day. What do you do?	You free a genie who grants you three wishes. What wishes do you make?
You win a lifetime supply of all the money you need, for anything you want to do. How do you spend your days?	You win an all-inclusive vacation to any place of your choosing. Where do you go?
What was your favorite toy or game when you were a child?	What is the best pair of shoes you have ever owned? Why were they so good?
What kinds of food do you usually eat on your favorite holiday?	Tell me about the most beautiful place you have been.
Tell me about your favorite movie/TV show.	What are some of your favorite clothes?

My ESL Experience

by Nichole Valois

My experience with MIT's ESL Program for Service Employees has been wonderful, because it allowed me to get to know two very special people by spending an hour with them each week.

I did not have any ESL teaching experience when I first learned about the program by attending the 2014 Women's League Fall Reception. Nancy Kelly and others supported me the whole way by first allowing me to observe a tutoring session, and then by co-tutoring. My co-tutor, Henry, made every session enjoyable and positive while helping Trancito improve her communication skills. It has been great experience and real privilege for me.

Upcoming Semester

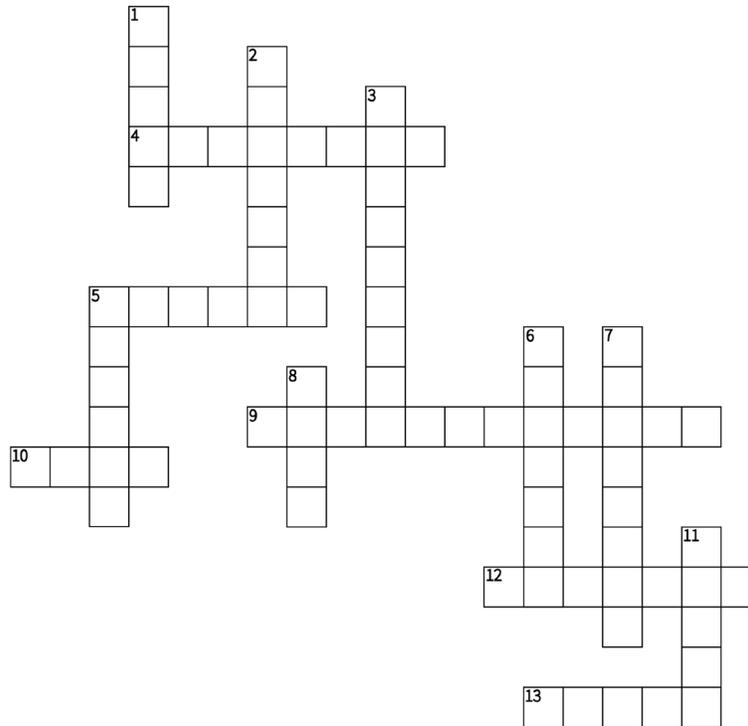
Spring Session runs from February 18—May 15, 2020

If you or someone you know is interested in volunteering, please email: esl-admins@mit.edu.

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All About Adjectives

Complete the crossword puzzle below



- lively funny happy special jealous quick friendly hard working tall strange cheerful calm lonely
- surprised

Across

- 4. to be happy and pleasant
- 5. energetic, excited
- 9. responsible, industrious
- 10. not anxious, settled
- 12. envious, desire what someone else has
- 13. full of glee, joyful

Down

- 1. moving fast or doing something in a short time
- 2. unique
- 3. reaction to something we don't expect
- 5. to feel left out, alone
- 6. weird, unusual
- 7. kind, likeable
- 8. opposite of short
- 11. to act silly; make people laugh

Created using the Crossword Maker on TheTeachersCorner.net

The ESL Program for MIT Service Employees seeks to help service employees improve their English communication skills in order to be more productive in their jobs and to build their confidence and morale.

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