



ENGLISH AS A
SECOND LANGUAGE
FOR MIT'S SERVICE EMPLOYEES

English As A Second Language Program

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A Teacher — and a Learner

MARY MULLOWNEY

It began with daffodils. I was “Daffodil Coordinator” for MIT’s Dept. of Ocean Engineering when the Women’s League sent me an announcement about the program in 2009. I had volunteered for more than five years in Literacy Volunteers in New York City and had taught for two summers in a program in Newark N.J., so I was drawn to participating. What I didn’t realize is how much this program would teach **me**, and how much I would learn.

I started as a substitute and then was matched to my first student in 2011. Since then, I have worked with eight students, some as a substitute and some long-term. When I first started, ESL volunteers worked with two students at a time and I am glad that we now work one-to-one.

I learned from my students why they were in the program, how they used their improved skills in English, and how committed they were to their roles at MIT. My



Photo: Barbara Smith

Mary Mallowney has been an ESL tutor since 2011.

students ranged from one who never attended one day of school to another who had a college degree and was working on English vocabulary to pass technical licensing exams. Whether small steps, such as learning to write a check, or major projects, such as preparing for the citizenship exam (if that student and I took the exam she

would score better than me!), I saw my students’ commitment to learning and improving, and that made me want to be a better tutor.

Understanding How Students Feel

I tutor one day a week right after work and have co-taught with

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Facilities Supervisors Talk the Talk and Walk the Walk: Supporting MIT’s ESL Program

INTERVIEW BY LAURA MALI-ASTRUE

In addition to many hardworking instructor volunteers, the ESL for Service Employees Program relies on the support of managers and supervisors in the Facilities Department to deliver ESL tutoring to MIT employees. Through their department, these supervisors allow ESL students two hours of release time per week to meet with tutors during their scheduled shift. In addition, they work with the ESL Program Coordinators to identify

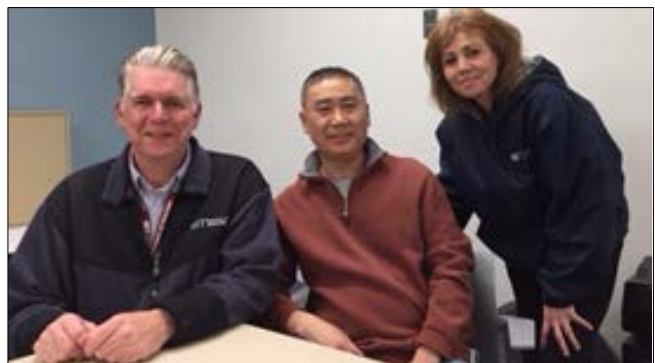


Photo: LAURA MALI-ASTRUE

From left to right: Thomas Hardy, Tommy Wong, Maria Caetano

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A Teacher — and a Learner

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“I feel more committed to MIT—this great Institute of learning—because I am honored to teach in the ESL program and I have connected with my wonderful students and other community members. I see my students in the hallways and we always smile at each other. Being part of the ESL program adds warmth to my daily life as an Administrative Assistant”.

Lauren Plummer and Carol Orme-Johnson. I have learned so much from my co-teachers. To strengthen my teaching skills, I've taken almost every course offered for tutors in the ESL program. I also consult with my sister, who teaches remedial reading, and I now have a small library of books I use from the program and what I bought on my own. I have far to go.

Being a native English speaker, I had to learn how challenging it is not speaking the common language. When I went by myself to a wedding in India last year, I did not know any Bengali, whether written or spoken. I was terrified. Last year, I went to a Portuguese store in Somerville. Everyone there was speaking Portuguese, labels were in Portuguese, and I was lost. I

only recognized prices and products that had photos on them. Many of my students speak Portuguese. *This is how my students must have felt when they first came here!* I have so much admiration for them.

Listening is the most important skill I use in teaching. I also use storytelling and write down my students' stories in their own words so they can read and enjoy them. I use magazines for discussions and improving vocabulary. 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.

There are small moments of joy, such as when I help a student order a bracelet with her children's names that she can now read, or when I promised

another student—who didn't think anyone would go to the ceremony when she becomes a citizen—that I would be there for her.

I feel more committed to MIT—this great Institute of learning—because I am honored to teach in the ESL program and I have connected with my wonderful students and other community members. I see my students in the hallways and we always smile at each other. Being part of the ESL program adds warmth to my daily life as an Administrative Assistant at MIT.

Mary Mullooney is an Administrative Assistant in the Department of Mechanical Engineering.

Facilities Supervisors Talk about Their Support of the ESL Program

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new students, and to track their progress.

Thomas Hardy came to MIT as a Custodial Supervisor with the night shift in 2011. He became an evening Senior Supervisor in 2013, and in June 2015 was promoted to Assistant Custodial Manager. Maria Caetano also came to MIT as a member of the night shift in August of 2008, and since 2012, has been the Day Custodial Supervisor.

Both Tom and Maria have shown a long-standing interest in the needs of workers whose first language is not English. Before coming to MIT, Tom worked with ESL Program coordinators at the Boston Medical Center, where employees from Latin American countries, Haiti and Cape Verde had opportunities for conversational training similar to MIT's program. Maria spent 14 years at Lahey North hospital in Peabody. Because her non-English speaking employees were not able to

attend the ESL program at Lahey, Burlington, she started an ESL program during their pre-shift meetings where staff could learn important safety and job-related vocabulary.

Thomas Hardy (**TH**), Maria Caetano (**MC**), and Tommy Wong (**TW**), a long-time ESL student in the program, met with the ESL Program Coordinator Laura Mali-Astrue (**LMA**) to talk about how the program fits with the work of the Facilities Department.

LMA: You came here in 2008. This program got started in 2009. Were you part of that in the beginning?

MC: I was just giving information to the staff, because I worked nights (Editor's note: The program initially included only day shift workers)

LMA: You mentioned a couple of immediate, short-term benefits: being able to respond to emergency situations.

TH: There have been custodians that initially had little conversational ability, but after attending ESL are able to communicate more and more as they continue to attend classes.

MC: A perfect example is Tommy (Wong). When I first came here, he struggled, but I think there has been a big improvement. Now, Tommy opens up, he's not afraid or shy to talk back to us in English. That was one thing that I noticed when I first started working with Tommy.

TW: Much better!

MC: He would never even say “much better” back then! And his confidence is much greater now.

TW: Especially on the phone. Before, I never call. I come to the office.

MC: If he was in Building 1, he would walk all the way down here to find out what I wanted.

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Facilities Supervisors Talk the Talk and Walk the Walk

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TW: Sometimes I don't understand. I come down to ask. Not easy to talk. But right now, I can.

MC: Now I can just call him and say 'Tommy, I need you to go there,' and he'll say 'no problem' and that's it. Before he wasn't comfortable, so I think that's a big improvement.

LMA: Does this program affect your hiring or retention of employees? Is this an advantage?

TH: I think it is. ESL participants have learned, for example, how to apply to job postings. This empowers them to advance their careers here at MIT. An example might be If Tommy wanted to apply and advance to becoming a machine operator through his tutoring in the ESL program.

MC: When they come in, they

don't know. They are able now to understand. Most of them understand job postings, emergency response, etc.

TH: Working with the ESL team, we have been able to highlight some specific topics for training. These include filling out vacation requests, reading signs for better understanding, filling out repair order sheets, and reading department-wide emergency pages on their pagers.

LMA: How do you decide who gets to participate in the program?

TH: It is voluntary and no students are denied access to the program. We continuously inform the custodians at monthly team meetings and inquire if students would like to return for the next semester or if there are any new students. The ESL team works hard to

coordinate and match students with tutors with the three shifts of custodians in Custodial Services.

MC: I think it's great that the ESL program helps with preparation for GED and the citizenship test...

TH: ... and the hoisting licensing. For students who want to take the hoisting license test, the program coordinators have worked with the tutors and students to understand the required material and knowledge needed to pass the certification testing.

MC: These are all to benefits our employees, so, that's all positive to me.

Laura Mali-Astrue has been an ESL tutor since 2013 and a volunteer coordinator for the past year.

"Working with the ESL team, we have been able to highlight some specific topics for training. These include filling out vacation requests, reading signs for better understanding, filling out repair order sheets, and reading department-wide emergency pages on their pagers."

Meet Francisco Rodrigues

BY KRISTIN LUND



Photo: Winnie H. Ho

Pictured: Francisco Rodrigues

Originally from El Salvador, Francisco Rodrigues has been a member of the MIT Facilities' custodial team since 2012. He began

participating in the ESL Program soon after joining MIT.

To date, more than 50 Facilities employees have participated in the program.

Rodrigues – who earned a certificate from the Institute of Inspection, Cleaning, and Restoration before coming to the U.S. – is particularly interested in improving his spoken English and his pronunciation of specialized technical terminology. "The ESL Program has good teachers who have helped me with this," he says. "I bring technical material to them, and they work with me on specific terms that I need to be able to say. Learning English is about more than reading and taking tests, it's also about speaking the language. I would recommend the ESL Program to others – and I would spend more than two hours each week on this if I could!"

Kristin Lund is a writer in MIT's Facilities Department.

English as a Second Language

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Nancy Kelly, Coordinator
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Upcoming ESL Semesters



Custodian Marcelo DaSilva, Aditi Sarangi, MBA '16, and custodian Jose Amado.

Spring Semester

February 13 – May 13, 2017

Fall Semester

September 25 – December 15, 2017

If you would like to volunteer,
please email:
esl-admins@mit.edu.

The MIT English as a Second Language Program for Service Employees, founded in 2009, seeks to help service employees improve their English skills to be more productive in their jobs.

The program provides one hour of teaching or one-on-one tutoring twice a week during the employees' work shifts — day, evening, or night — and follows MIT's academic calendar with an additional short summer session. Along with improving speaking, reading, and writing skills, classes may also prepare students for licensing exams related to their jobs (e.g., a hoisting license) the U.S. Citizenship test, and Adult Diploma Program (ADP).

MIT staff, faculty, students, and friends of the MIT community volunteer to teach in this growing service endeavor that richly rewards teachers as well as students.

The ESL program is always seeking either regular and/or substitute volunteers (an ESL background is not necessary). To volunteer or learn more, please contact.

esl-admins@mit.edu.

We're on the Web!
hrweb.mit.edu/esl