

# Observation/Volunteer Reflection

Molly Porter - MiT applicant

My volunteer and observation hours have imparted a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of teaching. I conducted my observations remotely because COVID-19 restrictions did not allow me to be in the classrooms in-person. One unanticipated benefit of virtual observation was that it allowed me to sit in on classes in two different settings. I chose to split my hours between a third grade classroom at Margaret Brent Elementary and Middle School in Baltimore, MD and a third grade dual language classroom at Evergreen Elementary in Shelton, WA. My volunteer hours were in person with fifth graders at an after school program in Baltimore through an organization called the Village Learning Place.

Although I would have preferred to do in-person observation, I am grateful to have had such varied experiences during what has been a challenging and dynamic period for educators. Being able to see how teachers managed their classrooms during the pandemic helped me gain an understanding of what remote learning feels like and allowed me to reflect on whether this career was something I wanted to pursue under these unpredictable circumstances. It was apparent that students will be affected by their pandemic experiences, in different ways, for years to come. Participating in remote observation has better prepared me to help students overcome the lasting effects of the pandemic and for the possibility of remote learning in the future.

Spending time with the fifth graders while volunteering at VLP was a great experience. It reinforced how much I enjoy being around young people. I was able to assist with their activities (often STEM related) and to get to know them one-on-one. I was struck by how quick minded and curious children of this age group are.

Observing educators at both VLP and in the public schools cover reading, math and science gave me a sense of what it is like to follow a curriculum and the pace of learning in a classroom. I was given insight into the challenges they face in providing appropriate instruction for all students. It was particularly valuable to see how they conducted classes with English Language Learners and students with varying academic abilities. I appreciated the dual language model at Evergreen Elementary as an inclusive approach to a diverse student body.

For most of my adult life I have anticipated becoming a teacher. While I have known that I want to work with children for years, I have been less certain of the structure of teaching a curriculum. Through both observation and volunteering I was able to gain a sense of what day-to-day instruction looks like. Having this exposure has given me a realistic idea of what managing a classroom would be like and has affirmed my decision to move forward with a teaching career.