

How has your experience and observations in K-12 classrooms informed your decision to apply to the Integrated Multilingual Learner Pathway?

Throughout my career in education, I have seen that great teaching, and therefore great learning, is made possible by high quality connections between educators and students. That connection, in turn, is made possible by good communication. Since our students are often still building the foundations of great communication skills, the responsibility of ensuring good communication is on the educator. Supporting our students in expressing and advocating for their needs is fundamental in opening the door to the learning and skill-building that they come to school to do. I believe that the multilingual learner pathway of Evergreen's Masters in Teaching program will help me continue to expand my skills in connecting and communicating with students despite barriers of all kinds, including language and communication challenges.

Over time and in every educational setting I have worked in, it has been more and more apparent that all behavior is communication, and beyond that, all behavior is an effort to meet a need. I have worked with many students whose true needs could be difficult to identify for various reasons including differences in ability, fluency in English, or even simply lack of familiarity with group or school settings and norms. As an educator, I find great fulfillment in successfully identifying and meeting the true needs of students both to facilitate learning and to address challenging behavior. Recently I worked with a student who infrequently used verbal language and relied largely on other methods of communication, including an AAC device. Some months into the school year, he started to have very difficult drop-offs at school and would be inconsolable, sometimes for up to an hour. I recognized that while he was safe and receiving much of the attention and support he needed from his teachers, he also needed to be able to express his feelings on his own terms- he felt sad, and he missed his parents upon being dropped off. I talked with him through his AAC device, helped him discuss his sad feelings, and showed him how to say "I miss Papa." This felt like a breakthrough- I could see that he felt understood, and relieved by an ability to communicate clearly with us about his experience. He said "I miss Papa" many times every morning, and also throughout the day for many months. This was a success for me, as an educator who strives to support students in expressing themselves authentically. I believe it strengthened the connection between myself and that student, and contributed to his ability to accept help from me in other difficult moments.

Even for students who begin school already fluent in spoken English, there is much to learn about how to be at school, even before any lessons take place. For our students who are learning English on top of that, there are many additional challenges to understanding, being understood, and building that strong connection that underpins great teaching. At Evergreen, I hope to continue learning new strategies and building the skills I need to meet each student where they are with communication, to make them feel seen and heard, and to build their love of learning along the way.