

I am a “non-traditional” college student and **I am** an immigrant. I have an embodied experience of how my complex identity has been seen as an asset and when it hasn’t and had to violently assimilate in order to protect my integrity. Despite data from the census¹, and other official sources, that indicate that the composition of the population of the US is vastly multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual—diverse—we are still seen as the exception, far away from the norm (even when native peoples and nations have been in this land from time immemorial). I want to be an educator that is responsive to this rich and abundant reality, and that uplifts the education and history of the many, for the many, for us all—including our non-human relatives.

In June of 2017 I started a year of AmeriCorps service at a school in deep East Oakland, in a historically marginalized neighborhood. Esperanza Elementary (with a bilingual SP/EN program) served primarily latinx students and shared campus with a school that served a vastly multi-racial and multicultural community. The school staff and teachers were multilingual and created an atmosphere of care and commitment—there was a good flow of communication with parents and students, and their identities were uplifted with culturally relevant celebrations and foods in the community garden. However, this was far from an ideal scenario, communities of color are in a constant struggle, and it wasn’t the exception here. In the morning I assisted a kindergarten classroom and in the afternoon I led the after school program for the 4th grade students. In Ms. Russell’s classroom, I worked with small groups and was able to witness and recognize (the range of) students’ capacities, which catapulted most of them to a more confident academic pathway—I met them where they were at and I valued it. Oh the other hand, the after-school program was challenging, classroom management was the biggest issue. Now I am able to recognize that a culturally responsive curriculum, to talk about cultivating self-efficacy and resilience, would have been more effective than the wide mindfulness and social justice themes I brought—a matter of seeing themselves as agents.

My time in Oakland was deeply formative for how it made me feel a part of the envisioning and praxis of “*un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos*”² as the zapatistas would say. This was a big reason that made me move to Olympia and enrolled in Evergreen. I wanted to get tools to better read and affect my context and how history is being made. I want to foster a classroom environment which can foster this too.

In Olympia-Lacey, I have been able to be involved in a variety of classroom settings. Furthermore, I witnessed a big influx of multilingual learners to a school community that is just building the capacity for them—which reinforced my commitment to be competent in practices that address these needs. I don’t want the non-native English speakers in a classroom to have to work harder, to get distracted more often, and to get pushed into fitting the model minority narrative or end up falling through the cracks. These past months have taught me that a teacher that has a foundation on multilingual learning, is a real matter of equity.

¹ United States Census Bureau. “Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the United States: 2010 Census and 2020 Census.”

² A world in which many worlds can exist.