

Personal Statement

I grew up in a small part of Orange County called Santa Ana, but to us it's pronounced Santana. If you drive through Santana you'll see colorful murals gently painted on white walls, people whose skin resembles the richest, most beautiful brown, and you'll hear the language I've learned to cherish: Spanish. Santana is a bubble where everyone in the community speaks and breathes Spanish; the first language we learn is Spanish. As beautiful as that is, it also means we don't know any English when we get to elementary school. This creates a set of problems that aren't fixed throughout our educational journey, students are just passed along in order to fill funding quotas.

The teachers in Santana don't look like us. They don't speak like us. They don't *live* like us. They go home to their big houses and plan the curriculum for the next week. We go home to our cramped apartments and flip through our dilapidated textbook, trying to figure out what every word on our vocabulary list means. We walk into our Spanish classrooms relieved because finally we can excel at something; Spanish is the one thing we can get right. Right? We sit as we're told we actually don't know any *real* Spanish. What we've learned all our lives is the Spanish of Central America, the Spanish that people from there have changed to make their own. It's tainted Spanish, the wrong Spanish. So we sit and we learn to pronounce our s's with a "*th*" sound, learn to say "*vosotros*", and learn the *real* Spanish. Maybe if our teachers had looked, spoken, and lived like us they would've understood.

I began substituting in Texas, where MLL students weren't even bothered with. If they were native Spanish speakers they were immediately put into a Special Ed classroom where they were put in a corner, given headphones and trained to learn through a computer program. No one fought for those students or questioned the education system that was failing them. Parents were

kept out of the loop and if they had questions they never had a translator on hand to properly manage a discussion, so they were sent on their way with an empty promise and no resolution. All of the teachers at the schools I substituted at didn't look like us either.

Working for the Washington education system wasn't much different than the Texas education system. I was also a substitute for CPSD who was placed into Spanish classes once they realized I was fluent in it. I was also placed in MLL classrooms that were completely separate from the rest of the school. At one school the MLL classroom was through the copy area, in a cramped "room" where the janitor would frequently come in to grab cleaning supplies. These students were completely separated from the rest of the school for two hours every day, just zoning away on their laptops. Their teacher had a wall of translation books and dictionaries that made it at least seem like these students were looked after. But there were no decorations on the walls, no motivational posters, no signs of life in that classroom. The walls were bare and white, the only color and life in that classroom were those students.

Even though I know there are teachers out there who don't look like us, but who fight like us and fight *for* us, it isn't enough. We need more teachers whose accent is a safe place for these students, whose skin color reminds us of home, and whose Spanish floats throughout the classroom while teaching. Students need to not be in a cramped room where they feel like prisoners, separated from the rest of the world because they aren't fluent in English. This is why I want to be a part of Evergreen's Integrated Multilingual Learner Pathway MiT program. I want to be the teacher who fights for students and their language. Language is culture and culture deserves to be in the classrooms. While substituting I always used Spanish, to let students know that they didn't have to hide or assimilate while I was there. There were always a handful of children who would whip their heads towards me and get the biggest smile on their faces. It was

always bittersweet when I saw that. I was glad that I could be their safe place, but I would be gone the next day and so would their smiles. I am willing to put in extra work and hours to have **all** of my students succeed whether they're a native Spanish speaker or not. Every child deserves equal access to education and even though some may need equity, they deserve that too.