

Why the Multilingual Pathway?

As an aspiring educator, I am uniquely positioned to work alongside people who are different from me. Each of these experiences is an opportunity for personal growth and learning. This 2024-25 school year I have had the chance to work with a fifth-grade student from Japan in my afterschool program in a Japanese immersion school. I will refer to this student as Maya and avoid using her actual name for confidentiality purposes. This experience with Maya has inspired me to pursue this Multilingual Learner Pathway because teachers must be knowledgeable on how to interact with, teach, and learn from students of different cultures.

Maya's first language is Japanese and she is working on learning English this school year. I do not speak Japanese, so communication with Maya was initially challenging. We worked together to develop a system of communication that both of us could understand that relies on drawing pictures and using hand gestures to clarify our ideas. Each day that I am with Maya, she teaches me a little Japanese while I help her with her English homework. From this, I have learned that there are always other ways of communicating that aren't necessarily in English. My experience with Maya has brought me new ways of thinking as she shares her funds of knowledge and expands my own. I value these learning moments and desire to learn more about how to maintain these positive interactions.

This experience has shown me that connection is possible so long as I am empathetic and patient with others and make an earnest effort to understand different points of view. Communicating with folks who have different lived experiences provides the chance to bridge gaps in the ways I move through the world, which in turn, improves my teaching praxis. By modeling positive interactions with English Language Learners or multilingual students, it is more likely to create a safe school culture that is supportive for all. This is essential because students cannot learn when they feel unsafe, whether psychologically or physically. Once, I observed a teacher who didn't put any effort into teaching and communicating with Spanish speaking students and could easily see the negative impact of this as the students were often disengaged and separate from others.

While I have had some experiences working with multilingual children, there is still a lot I want to learn to further my pedagogical knowledge and skills. I am teaching myself to communicate with Maya and help her understand our American school system and culture, but I do not know specific teaching strategies to teach students who are English Language Learners. Through this Master's in Teaching program, I aim to gain concrete strategies that effectively support multilingual learners.

Overall, my experience with Maya in the afterschool program has only furthered my drive to learn how to work with students that not only speak languages other than English, but that have identities that may be different from mine. In times like today, it's more important than ever to create supportive environments where children know they are valued and protected from the harms that may face them. By joining this program, I will gain the expertise needed to foster inclusive, engaging learning environments where all students—regardless of language background—can thrive. This experience will equip me with the knowledge and strategies to ensure every child feels valued and empowered in their education.