

Samantha Holmes

Personal Essay

MIT 2025-26 Cohort Application

Throughout my experience as a para-educator at Nisqually Middle School I have gained invaluable insights into the diverse needs of multilingual learners and observed the profound impact that individualized instruction as well as an inclusive and culturally responsive approach to learning can have on students. Nisqually Middle School has a minority enrollment of 58% with only 24% of enrolled students being white. 18% of enrolled students are Hispanic/Latino, 47% Alaskan or American Native, 5% Asian, and 5.6% two or more races. English is the second language for several of the students that I support at Nisqually. I have the opportunity to support and encourage them to build their skills and confidence in reading and writing in a non-native language. I believe that it is vital for educators to cultivate inclusive environments where every student feels respected and supported in their language development while also celebrating linguistic diversity and a sense of belonging.

It wasn't long after I began working as a para-educator that I came to understand the importance of differentiated instruction and the significant impact it can have on students' engagement and achievement. The students that I get to work with learn, process and achieve at varying academic levels. I have learned through direct observation that if the material is irrelevant, uninteresting, or too difficult for a student, behaviors such as disassociating or being disruptive often ensue. Although, as a para-educator, my hands are often tied regarding offering appropriate material for students, I have seen the stark difference in students' performance when they are interested in the material and it is in their range of accomplishment.

For multilingual learners, offering culturally relevant pedagogy not only helps multilingual learners thrive but enriches the entire classroom community by fostering an environment where every student feels empowered and validated in their identity. Culturally diverse curricula ensures that all students feel represented which boosts engagement and motivation in a learning environment. I have attended several professional development workshops and trainings that have exposed me to innovative and inclusive methodologies that I am eager to incorporate in my future classroom. I believe that joining the Multilingual Learner Pathway Program will deepen my knowledge and enhance the skills I have gained in effectively supporting multilingual learners in the diverse world we live in.

Through these experiences, I have recognized the crucial role that educators play in bridging linguistic divides and fostering academic success for all students. I am committed to becoming an advocate for multilingual learners, ensuring that they receive the resources and support necessary to thrive in an educational environment. The Multilingual Learner Pathway program aligns perfectly with my aspirations, providing a comprehensive framework to develop my understanding of language acquisition, cultural competence, and inclusive teaching practices.

My observations while working at a diverse middle school have not only shaped my understanding of the myriad different needs in an educational setting, but they have also inspired my decision to pursue the Multilingual Learner Pathway. These experiences have deepened my commitment to promoting equitable education and fostering language skills in all students. Applying to the Integrated

Multilingual Learner Pathway feels like a natural progression, as it aligns with my passion for supporting diverse learners and developing effective teaching practices that celebrate linguistic and cultural diversity.