

Daniel Lamfers

Evergreen MIT Program

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### Personal Statement

My decision to apply to the Integrated Multilingual Learner Pathway is deeply rooted in my diverse experiences within educational settings, where I have been both an observer and an active participant in supporting students with unique needs. These experiences have shaped my understanding of the critical importance of specialized, empathetic, and culturally responsive education—particularly for students who face additional challenges due to language barriers or developmental disabilities.

Growing up with my mother as a teacher, I was exposed to the classroom environment from an early age. This experience gave me a unique insight into the dedication and adaptability required to meet the varying needs of students. Volunteering in classrooms throughout my school years only deepened this understanding. I witnessed firsthand how different students respond to different teaching methods and how important it is for educators to be flexible and creative in their approach. These early experiences solidified my desire to work in education, particularly in roles that allow me to support students who are often underserved by traditional educational models.

A pivotal moment in my journey was the summer of 2019 when I interned at an orphan and disabilities camp in Latvia. This experience was profoundly impactful, as it required me to teach English to children who not only came from diverse linguistic backgrounds but also faced significant personal challenges, including disabilities and the emotional toll of being orphans. Teaching in this environment demanded an elevated level of creativity, patience, and cultural sensitivity. I learned to adapt my teaching methods to meet the unique needs of each child, whether that meant using visual aids, incorporating movement into lessons, or simply being a comforting presence in a chaotic world. This experience underscored the importance of creating a supportive, inclusive learning environment where every student feels valued and capable of success.

As I look ahead to the 2024-2025 school year, I am excited to bring these experiences into my role as a para-educator in the V.O.I.C.E. program at North Thurston School District. The V.O.I.C.E. program is a unique initiative designed for 18- to 21-year-old students with developmental disabilities who require continued instruction in vocational and life skills. These students may have walked with their peers during graduation, but they do not receive their diplomas until age 21, reflecting the extended support they need as they transition into adulthood. The program emphasizes the importance of preparing these students for independent living and employment, providing them with the skills they need to succeed in the real world.

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In my role as a para-educator in the V.O.I.C.E. program, I will be working closely with students to help them navigate the challenges of adulthood. This includes everything from building resumes and seeking employment to developing social skills and establishing connections with community resources like the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and the Development Disabilities Administration (DDA). By collaborating with these agencies, we ensure that students and their families are aware of the resources available to them as they transition into adulthood, which is crucial for their long-term success.

One of the aspects of the V.O.I.C.E. program that resonates most with me is its commitment to matching students with job opportunities that align with their interests and abilities. Historically, students with disabilities have often been funneled into roles like custodial work or bagging groceries, but the V.O.I.C.E. program recognizes that these students, like their peers, have a wide range of interests and talents. Whether a student is passionate about music, horticulture, cars, or animals, the program works to find job placements that reflect those interests. This approach not only helps students develop practical skills but also fosters a sense of self-worth and independence, which is crucial as they move into adulthood.

My educational background, including my studies at Washington State and Evergreen State College, has been instrumental in shaping my teaching philosophy and reinforcing my commitment to multilingual and inclusive education. At these institutions, I was exposed to diverse perspectives and encouraged to think critically about the role of education in society. My coursework in education and social justice, combined with hands-on experiences in classrooms, helped me to develop a holistic understanding of the challenges faced by multilingual learners and the importance of culturally responsive teaching.

My teaching philosophy is grounded in the belief that every student, regardless of their background or challenges, has the potential to succeed when provided with the right support and opportunities. This belief has been shaped by my experiences in diverse educational settings, where I have seen the transformative power of empathy, cultural sensitivity, and adaptability in teaching. I am committed to creating inclusive learning environments where all students feel valued and supported. This means recognizing and celebrating the unique strengths and perspectives that multilingual learners bring to the classroom and tailoring my teaching strategies to meet their individual needs. For me, effective teaching goes beyond simply delivering content; it involves building meaningful relationships with students, understanding their personal and academic challenges, and empowering them to take ownership of their learning.

My long-term goal is to become an advocate and leader in multilingual education, where I can influence educational practices and policies that better serve students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. I envision myself working in roles that allow me to design and implement programs that not only support language acquisition but also foster a deep understanding of students' cultural identities. I aspire to contribute to a more equitable educational system where multilingual learners are provided with the resources and support they need to thrive academically and socially. I want to help bridge the gap between students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds and the broader educational community, fostering a more inclusive and globally minded approach to education.

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The Integrated Multilingual Learner Pathway offers the specialized training and knowledge I need to achieve these goals. I want to learn more about effective strategies for differentiating instruction in multilingual classrooms, where students may have varying levels of proficiency in the language of instruction. Additionally, I am interested in gaining skills in culturally responsive pedagogy, which will enable me to create lesson plans and classroom environments that respect and incorporate students' cultural backgrounds. I also hope to develop my ability to collaborate with families and communities, recognizing their vital role in supporting students' educational journeys. By pursuing this pathway, I aim to refine my ability to assess and address the unique needs of multilingual learners, ensuring that I am fully equipped to support their academic success and personal growth. The program's focus on both theoretical knowledge and practical application aligns perfectly with my desire to be both a reflective practitioner and an effective advocate for my students.

In conclusion, the Integrated Multilingual Learner Pathway through the Evergreen MIT Program represents not just the next step in my career, but a crucial opportunity to deepen my expertise and refine my approach to teaching in ways that will make a lasting impact on the lives of my students. I am excited to embrace the challenges and opportunities this program presents, knowing that it will equip me with the tools I need to be a more effective and compassionate educator, ready to meet the diverse needs of all learners.

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