

## **How has your experience and observations in K-12 classrooms informed your decision to apply to the Integrated Multilingual Learner Pathway?**

When I was fourteen, I volunteered as a Counselor in Training at my local YMCA summer camp. It was an activity born out of necessity – my mother and all my siblings worked, and my mom didn't want me alone at home all summer break. I remember my reluctance to surrender my free time to supervising younger kids and aiding adult counselors, and my surprise when I discovered I liked it. The counselors were generally young adults in college working towards being educators, or pediatric healthcare workers, and were very supportive; they encouraged me to take initiative when it came to group activities and games, and I found myself searching for new things to keep the younger kids preoccupied. Leading word games and rounds of mushroom tag was fun, but I really enjoyed the community circles that I got to guide. Having the kids take turns listening and sharing, practicing patience and understanding with one and another, felt magical to my adolescent self.

That summer was revelatory to me: I saw the impact leading with empathy could have, how it encouraged kids to work together and communicate their needs and wants without apprehension, and it planted the seed of want. I wanted to encourage an environment that was kind, to aid children in being thoughtful of one another, as I wanted to be to them.

My experiences after that summer only affirmed my decision. My older sister became a single mom when she was only sixteen, and I ended up spending a lot of time supporting her and her two kids. Her first son had his father to shoulder most parental responsibilities so I only occasionally watched my nephew, but her daughter, born right after that summer, did not. With my niece's grandmother working long hours, her mother working on and off, and her uncles gallivanting off to live their own independent lives, I ended up spending a lot of time with her. When I got my license, I became the one dropping and picking up my niece from daycare, and nothing compounds the stress of a toddler refusing to get dressed like a highschool math teacher that hates tardiness and refuses to humor any explanations. I spent more time with her than I did with any extracurriculars, or even with my friends. Still, if I could, I wouldn't change a thing about our time together. She's nine now, the coolest kid in the world, and I am so proud of her.

My high school experience was a little different because of life circumstances. That is common enough – my knowledge of other kids with familial and work responsibilities that ate into their academic time soothed the sting of the unfairness of it all. I had some sympathetic teachers, and I'm thankful for every extension and redo I was granted. In their position, I plan to do the same. I want to teach because I believe it can be transformative. Life was not easy growing up, but I enjoyed a lot of my time at school. Many teachers nurtured my love of reading, encouraged my curiosity of the world and taught essential life skills. Now, I want to pay that kindness forward.

It is likely a cliché thing to claim, especially for those pursuing a career in education, but I love learning. Genuinely, truly, I want to have as much of an understanding of everything as possible. I prefer to read nonfiction, and I watch documentaries to decompress. When I go to museums and zoos, if I get the chance to talk to an employee, I like to pick their brain. I'm looking forward

to going back to university because I really loved my college experience. Learning is a lifelong pursuit that's never over, and I think that's incredible.

When I graduated high school and started classes at Tacoma Community College, I wanted to be an English teacher. Reading brought me joy, as did creative writing, and I wanted to encourage other people to read; I figured almost everyone could find something they'd like, from graphic novels to romantic comedies, if persuaded well enough. Personally, I hated reading as a kid. In early elementary I was regularly taken out of class to do speech therapy, and I fell behind when it came to reading and writing; I failed every spelling test in second grade, which I remember still because we had them every Friday, and they were peer graded. It was frustrating that I was behind, so I denounced English as a subject. Then, my third-grade teacher introduced me to scary stories. I was enchanted. She didn't care I was only reading short stories, she was happy I was practicing reading at all. Somehow she convinced me *Harry Potter* became a horror series – which, by book five she was sort of right – and I started reading long-form content. After *Harry Potter* came *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, then *The Hunger Games*. Reading became fun, and while I still struggle with spelling sometimes, I love the art of writing. I figured I could do for others what Mrs. Cicerio had done for me.

At TCC, however, it wasn't my English classes that snagged my interest, but my history classes. A regional history class, taught by Professor Jepsen, was extremely engaging. For whatever reason I hadn't learned about the labor struggles in the Pacific Northwest before then, or the 1885 Chinese Expulsion of Tacoma. He assigned *Nisei Daughter* by Monica Stone, and I learned I loved memoirs. Later, through subsequent history classes, I'd discover my love for academic history papers and the fun of analyzing primary sources. I had known for a long time my affinity for stories, but it hadn't occurred to me until college that history is made up of stories we tell ourselves and each other about how things came to be. I took classes on religious wars and ancient civilizations, on the golden age of piracy and the origins of the ongoing Israeli–Palestinian conflict. There hasn't been a dull topic. At work, my favorite conversations to have are about the history of red wolves and their struggle to exist; I speak of the history of their conservation to whoever is interested, and the captive audiences of children I tour around the zoo. History is so important to me now, and I'm thankful I found my passion – now, I want to share it.

I volunteered in a high school. I worked at an early learning center. I currently work at Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium in their education department, and I've just recently joined the roster of substitute teachers working in the Puyallup school district. Everyone I've met has an interest in something. Every something has a history, a story about how it came to be. I want to nurture that flame of interest into an uncontrollable inferno for every student I can. I offer knowledge, and zeal, and understanding. I know intimately that life is tumultuous sometimes, especially in adolescence. And I know that education is so enriching to life, even when other things grab our attention. I will do my best to bring my all when working with students, because I believe the world would be a better place if we all tried our best to understand it a little more.