

Pearl Tottenham  
Evergreen MiT Personal Statement

My interest in the Evergreen Masters in Teaching program is rooted in my love of learning, the joy that I've already experienced learning at Evergreen, and a strong belief that the best place for children to learn is in an inclusive classroom that values the learning needs of all students.

Something that stuck out to me about the description of the Masters in Teaching program on the Evergreen website was the term "teacher-activists". The connection between activism and learning is one of the first things that drew me to working with children. My first experience working in a learning space was an internship at Rain City Rock Camp (RCRC) in Seattle, which was originally called Rain City Rock Camp for Girls, until 2014 when they began to prioritize the inclusion of trans and non-binary youth. RCRC was never just a music camp, it was always a music and activism camp. As a 13 year old camper I felt able to open up and confidently explore the joy of learning something new in a space that felt safe and empowering, which led me to participate in their summer intern program from ages 15-18, and continue on as a volunteer for years after. The thing that made RCRC such a life changing experience for so many young people (including myself), was the open conversations about activism and biases that led them to treat themselves and each other with unconditional respect, growing into more socially conscious people in just one week. I have never seen another space where young people felt so free to express themselves to the fullest, and I strongly believe that the openness of the learners in the space was made possible by the foundation of intersectional feminism, anti-racism, and lgbtq+ allyship.

I am very interested in the multilingual learner pathway, as I am excited by anything that will enrich the learning experience of children while also helping them to build community with one another. Creating a classroom that is inclusive of the needs of

english language learners not only allows for equitable learning opportunities for all students, but also contributes to the social inclusion of students with language barriers between them and their peers, and teaches english speaking students the value of communicating effectively with people whose experiences are different than their own.

While I have done some work in public schools, and plenty of work in summer and after school youth programs outside of schools, the majority of my work in schools has been at Fiddlehead Montessori in Anacortes. When I was hired as a music teacher, I was also asked if I would like to be added to the substitute list. I said yes, hoping to fill out my work schedule as I was trying to scrape together a full time work week out of three part time music teaching jobs. When I began subbing, I was surprised at how much I loved classroom work. I felt more connected to my students than ever before, and I found so much joy in guiding children to moments of discovery. I felt lucky to be a part of a school that prioritized diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in its classrooms, which made a notable impact on the social and emotional skills of the students. I still feel so grateful for the time I've spent there, but I also feel conflicted working for a private school when the vast majority of families cannot afford to pay tuition for an elementary education.

Many people in my life have commented that I am choosing a scary time to pursue a career in public education. With the federal department of education in a perilous position, and DEI under attack in schools (and all other sectors) they aren't wrong. However, I feel that for the same reasons, it is more important than ever that our public schools have teachers who remain personally committed to DEI in the classroom. Evergreen's focus on justice in the classroom is why I believe that Evergreen's MiT program is the right place for me to do this important learning.