

The Temple University Ph.D. in Education with an Urban Education concentration is an excellent match with my background in Educational Studies and Public Policy, my research on the politics of school finance, and my five years of experience as a special educator in Philadelphia. I aim for a career in research that will deepen the understanding of ways in which school systems intensify existing inequalities. I am excited about the possibility of conducting doctoral-level research with faculty who specialize in urban education.

As an undergraduate at Trinity College, I conducted research on how representatives in Connecticut's legislature voted pertaining to school finance. I received a research grant to work with Dr. Jack Dougherty on his "Cities Suburbs and Schools" project, a research collaboration described as seeking greater understanding of "the relationship between private housing and public schooling over time in the Metropolitan Hartford region" (Dougherty, 2012). My goal was to learn more about educational inequality due to the relationship between property taxes and wealth. Through qualitative and quantitative research, I determined how representatives in Connecticut's legislature voted on school finance reform bills and why. I focused on the contrast in wealth between Hartford's urban, suburban and rural areas and how this affected education funding based on property taxes. The substantive connection between education and wealth conflicts with my perceptions of justice. Dr. Dougherty connected me with other researchers and provided me with the invaluable experience of presenting at the 2007 AERA Annual Meeting in Chicago, as part of a session on Spatial Analysis of Educational Inequality.

Working as an urban special educator in Philadelphia has given me a strong perspective through which to formulate pertinent research questions. Originating from my coursework and research at Trinity, questions about educational inequality persisted and developed as I navigated teaching in an urban school district. During my teaching career, I have consistently improved my

skills as a teacher. While teaching, I earned my Special Education Certification and Masters in Elementary Education at Chestnut Hill College. I pursued an English as a Second Language Certification at Temple University. My TESOL coursework provided me with knowledge focusing on the realities that arise with a growing ELL population in schools. For example, as part of my ESL certification coursework I wrote a literature review bringing together research on the significance of power and cultural capital in parental involvement entitled “ELL Parental Involvement: Significance, Barriers and Solutions.” Participating in Temple University’s TESOL Program exposed me to the quality and level of rigor associated with Temple’s coursework. I was very successful in the TESOL Program, earning a GPA of 4.0, and look forward to continued success in the College of Education.

Through my dual major in Educational Studies and Public Policy, my research, and my teaching experience, I have become increasingly interested in social justice as it relates to urban education. I am interested in understanding, and challenging, ways in which school systems intensify existing inequalities due to students’ background skills, both academic and social. Students come to school with different, circumstantial, levels of school readiness and cultural capital, often related to socio-economic status. Therefore, schools need to adjust their educational approaches to compensate for a lack of school readiness and adapt to varying levels of academic and social skills.

I am attracted to the Temple University Ph.D. in Education with an Urban Education concentration because of its interdisciplinary nature, urban context, and involvement in Philadelphia. I am inspired by faculty member Dr. Erin McNamara Horvat’s research and work with YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School. I find YouthBuild Philadelphia Charter School to be a model for broadening the perception of “accessible” education in an urban environment. It

would be exciting to participate in research that aims to help educational systems adjust their offerings to meet the needs of their student population. In “Schools as Sites for Transformation: Exploring the Contribution of Habitus,” Dr. Erin McNamara Horvat and James Earl Davis discuss schools as sites of transformation. They state, “In YouthBuild, the students develop a different way of seeing the world, different behavioral tendencies, and different patterns of actions. We suggest that this reformulated outlook, or habitus, alters their educational and social class trajectory” (Horvat & Davis, 2011 p. 5). This research is important because it describes how a unique educational model can transform the lives of students who did not find success through a traditional model. If education is a venue for social justice, all students, despite their different backgrounds, should leave our school systems with reasonably comparable life trajectories. However, our schools, in their present state, are intensifying the academic and social disparities that students are entering school with.

The Urban Education program’s emphasis on community-based education is also extremely important to me. For example, I am interested in Dr. Erin McNamara Horvat’s research on the role of parents in school improvement and on the creation of a strong school community in an urban setting. In addition, Dr. Novella Keith’s interest in service-learning as a means to bridge the boundaries between educational professionals and the communities they serve, parallel’s my interest in service-learning and the schools’ role in its community. I participate in the Need In Deed Service-learning framework and research inquiry group. During the 2012-13 school year I have facilitated a partnership between Need in Deed and the school where I teach in order to increase the presence of community, student voice, and service learning. I have connected my classroom and myself directly with the community and hope that other classrooms at my school can do the same through the use of service learning.

For the past five years as an urban educator, I have been affected daily by the vagaries of education policy and education reform as they grasp for social justice. I aim for a career in research that will deepen the understanding of ways in which schools are intensifying already existing inequalities. My goal is to utilize my school experience as a foundation for research questions. My research experience and my dual major in Public Policy and Educational studies has prepared me to begin research at the doctoral level.

### **Resources**

Dougherty, J. (2012, November 18). In *The Cities Suburbs and Schools Project*. Retrieved November 12, 2012, from <http://commons.trincoll.edu/cssp>

Horvat, E. M., & Davis, J. E. (2011). Schools as sites for transformation: exploring the contribution of habitus. *Youth & Society*, 43(1), 142-170.