EssayEdge

Graduate Statement of Purpose

I wish to pursue a Ph.D. degree in Applied Cognition and Development at the University of Georgia to facilitate my career of becoming a researcher in educational psychology. My interest lies in investigating and improving learning and teaching strategies. I believe that my passion for education, my training in Chinese and American research environments, and my deep reflections in educational research will make me a strong candidate for the Ph.D. program, and excel as a doctoral student and beyond.

I was appealed to educational psychology in many aspects: first, the research topics of educational psychology are what I always contemplated during my learning and teaching. When I worked as a tutor, I consciously thought how I could do a better job explaining a math problem and why biology which seemed so interesting to me would be so boring to some others. Second, I was fascinated by the research in this field, which not only revealed the answers to my questions but also provided a comprehensive and rigorous view of it. While reviewing research to find the reason for the in-class silence of Chinese students, I found that there were scholars who studied from the deficit, surplus as well as neutral models. I gained a deep understanding of this phenomenon by integrating these diverse perspectives and divided the factors into four categories including culture, lecturer, student and the environment. Each category involved two to six sub-factors. For example, the lecture factors were interaction strategy, allocations of turns, waiting time and incentives. Based on such systematical and scientific findings, comes the third reason for my interest in this field that these findings are so meaningful and valuable to improve the practices in various educational settings.

I experienced how research findings could guide instructions in real-world classes. When I worked as a student teacher in Beijing No.7 Middle School, some teachers were troubled and asked me for help because there were students who did not take an active part in class. Guided by research indicating that self-monitoring can promote students' involvement in class, I made the students record their speaking times in every class and organized them to share their feelings doing this task. The teachers and I felt delighted to see that more students participated and were confident to share their opinions after the intervention. From this type of work, I experienced how scientific work could facilitate learning and even change the atmosphere of a class. I also realized that I had found my place in the scientific community: contributing my intelligence to scientific exploration, and producing reliable findings, thus being able to generate valuable thoughts to share with the world.

To get in touch with the world edge research, I joined in the project advised by professors from the University of Michigan which inspired my thinking about the future direction of educational psychology. It was a project exploring how first impressions and instructional quality impacted students' learning and evaluations with the help of teaching videos and joysticks. Using the joysticks, we were able to collect participant's rating for teaching quality and learning engagement constantly throughout the lecture. These data revealed some intriguing patterns of the learning which could not be gained in other experiments. For example, the pattern of the curves reflected what we called information overload. When a graph with lots of information and terms was presented, we saw a negative rating of the level of engagement and instructor. These findings enlightened me in three aspects: First, I think subtle factors such as the information load and content complexity are what educational researchers should work on to improve teaching and learning. Second, it is promising to make great progress in educational research with modern technology. The joystick, eye tracker and inventive applications for smartphones will help us conduct meaningful research. This reflection also motivated me to assist a project analyzing mindless reading by tracking participants' eye movement. Plus, with the popularity of on-line courses as well as the increasing research on multimedia learning, I think it is time to figure out what we can do to make full use of the modern technology and the tools helpful for education.

As I went deeper in educational psychology, I could not wait to initiate my own project in it. Thus I conducted a research guided by Prof. Ru-de Liu studying the hypothesis generated from my reflection of students' learning experience and previous relevant research. This rigorous work guiding significance in practice demonstrated the mediating effect of resilience in the relationship between perfectionism and academic burnout and won the second prize in the competitive competition of Students' Academic and Scientific Works. Meanwhile, in the lab under the supervision of Prof. Liu, I touched over 20 projects ranging from cognition abilities such as math flexibility to interventions in case studies. Some are cutting-edge research published in peer review journals while some are conducted by primary or middle school teachers and closely related to the real-world education. I offered to share my insights, coordinate experiments and analyze data in different studies. The challenging and rewarding experience in all these projects not only advanced my research skills but also enabled me to see my competence in organizing tasks and solving problems, endowing me with the confidence to succeed in graduate studies.

I am interested in Applied Cognition and Development program at the University of Georgia because it emphasizes on research. The goal of ACD program aligns perfectly with my research interests: investigating learning and teaching process and applying research findings into practice. Moreover, ACD has highly distinguished scholars who share my interests. Among these preeminent faculty members, I am particularly keen on collaborating with Professor Logan Fiorella. His research focuses on learning strategies and instructional methods. In line with his research, I am concerned with how to choose effective strategies in the learning process as well as how to present information in ways that help people understand. I hope to develop research in these areas especially after I joined the research using teaching videos and took some on-line courses.

One of my research plans is closely relevant to the studies conducted by Professor XXX recently. I intend to compare the outcomes of students who learn with generative drawing strategy or not and take two individual factors - spatial ability and spontaneous strategy use frequency – into account. The findings of the research will contribute to generative learning theory and guide the strategy use in instruction. I believe that my work will be refined as I learn more about the topics. What I will do in your program will be very important for me to help educational development and reform in China once I graduate with my Ph.D. degree. I am ready and eager for the opportunity to work with your faculty in advancing my interests and career in educational psychology.