My name is Elizabeth Gossett and I am a senior graduating from the School of Industrial and Labor Relations with business and education minors in May 2018. Through my pursuit of the Education minor, I have taken the courses titled The Art of Teaching, America’s Promise: The Social and Political Context of American Education, Engaging Youth in Learning and The Intergroup Dialogue Project. These courses and the fieldwork associated with them have allowed me to grow and develop within and outside of the classroom. As I am a hands-on learner, the most impactful learning experiences were through fieldwork. My first fieldwork experience was through The Art of Teaching course in which I was a teaching assistant in a Head Start program preschool classroom at Enfield Elementary School. The Intergroup Dialogue Project and America’s Promise: The Social and Political Context of American Education raised my cultural awareness and strengthened my understanding of my identities regarding my race, religion, socio-economic status and gender. I plan to pursue a life-long career within education and I hope to utilize many of the learning insights I have gained through the education minor to become a more informed and adaptable teacher.

**Insight #1: Taking a student’s background into account such as family structure or socio-economic status while using specific teaching styles will enrich a student’s ability to learn and grow.**

**Enfield Elementary School Preschool Teacher’s Aide Fieldwork Experience**

I volunteered as a student-aide in Ms. Ciferri’s preschool classroom at Enfield Elementary School. The classroom contained mostly students from low-income homes where many students lived in poverty. Some physical struggles they faced included hunger and harsh
living conditions where it was difficult for them to get a good night’s sleep. Mental troubles included being surrounded by grieving parents struggling to make a living. Ms. Ciferri, the head teacher, explained to me that these daily challenges can take a toll on the well-being of the students and affected their ability to fully engage in learning activities. Ms. Ciferri created a culture in her classroom that helped foster an environment that would optimize learning for her students. She created reasonable expectations for the students considering they were sometimes hungry or tired, making it difficult for them to fully engage in learning activities.

Ms. Ciferri had a teaching style and created an environment to fit the needs of the students based on their home-life and ability to participate in the classroom. Although she maintained a certain threshold of expectations for the students, she was very flexible and understanding of her students’ home circumstances. Delpit’s paper reflecting on the Culture of Power explains that it is important to understand that some students may need to be explicitly told the rules of the culture while some may already understand those rules from learning them at home (Delpit, 2008). I want to acknowledge that as a member of the culture of power, it is important to be aware that some students may need to be given explicit guidance in order to succeed. Being aware of the students’ personal circumstances will allow me to see which students need more explicit guidance.

Reflection:

Ms. Ciferri taught me the importance of gaining an understanding of students’ personal background and circumstances to gauge and set appropriate expectations. Whatever classroom situation I step into in the future, I plan to ensure to take the time to get to know my students on a personal level and conduct research and become more involved in community events to become aware of the circumstances in that culture and community. This includes understanding the
cultural background and socio-economic status of both the students and faculty I will be working with. This will help me to be able to develop the most effective curriculum and teaching methods possible. Moreover, I want to ensure that all other teachers’ and students’ voices who may not be a part of the culture of power are heard. This will help ensure a communal growth towards success among the students and staff as everyone will be equipped with the social knowledge necessary to be a part of the culture of power.

**Insight #2: It is important to engage students in activities within the community to promote and extend learning and growth outside of the classroom. This helps students understand that not all learning takes place in school and is academically based. Activities outside of school can involve self-growth and creativity.**

**Enfield Elementary School Preschool Teacher’s Aide Fieldwork Experience**

Throughout my fieldwork experience at Enfield Elementary School, I learned that there are many ways to expand students everyday experience in the classroom to introduce new people, ideas and experiences. During the last week of my fieldwork, the students took a fieldtrip to the Herbert F. Johnson Museum at Cornell University. This fieldtrip wasn’t an academic setting, however, the fieldtrip showed students that learning can take place in other settings outside of the classroom. The head teacher put a lot of preparation into how she introduced the students to the staff at the museum. The week prior to the fieldtrip, an employee from the museum came in to explain to the students what they would be doing at the museum and to show them some of the artwork before they arrived. The head teacher showed a photo of the museum to the class and showed them pictures of the entire process of their field trip from bus to exit. The following week after the field trip, the employee came back to the classroom to conduct a follow-up art project with the students to reflect upon what they had learned at the museum. This showed me that introducing pre-school students to new people, places and experiences is an
Dougherty’s paper discusses the barriers to strengthen early learning for early childhood education students. Dougherty states that learning about other people and communities should be started as early as possible (Dougherty, 2014). The head teacher introduced the students to the surrounding community through inviting people with different backgrounds into the classroom and taking the students on a trip to the museum. The fieldtrip showed the students that learning doesn’t necessarily need to take place within the classroom. This, to me, exemplified the idea of life-long learning and encourages children to explore and learn from new environments.

**Reflection:**

Bringing in new people and ideas is a wonderful way to expand students’ horizons and knowledge. I noticed the following week after the fieldtrip that the students showed far more interest in reading time and the books they were reading as they were related to their fieldtrip experience at the Johnson Museum. Having the Johnson Museum employees come into the classroom proved to be a great way to stimulate the students academically and get them excited about learning and artwork. While there are tremendous benefits to be gained within a classroom setting, the ability to introduce these students to experiences outside their comfort zone fostered critical thinking and creativity. As a future teacher, I want to implement this concept into my classroom and I want to encourage my students to seek out learning experiences once they leave my classroom.

**Insight #3:** Developing and implementing equitable forms of activity and evaluation in an academic setting will promote greater equity among students.

*Intergroup Dialogue Project Collaborative Learning Project Experience*
For the Collaborative Learning Project, my team’s topic explored women’s representation on Engineering Project teams at Cornell. As the current leadership representation is heavily men, engineering teams have made significant changes to their recruitment process to increase the number of women on engineering project teams and in leadership positions in the past year. We interviewed target group members (women) and agent group members (men). Through our interviews, one specific learning outcome that my Collaborative Learning Project team discovered is when experience is weighted as a part of the recruitment process, women are less likely to match men with experience within workshops, labs and hands-on building and to be recruited. This may reflect that before college men are more likely to be pushed to participate in these activities. Thus, Engineering Project Teams began weighting candidates expressed eagerness to learn as a recruitment criteria instead of the experience requirement. The results showed that women’s representation grew from 1 out of 11 project team leads to 3 out of 11 women slated to become project team leads in the 2018 year. This was attributed to changing the recruitment process to become gender-equitable.

**Reflection:**

Participating in the Intergroup Dialogue Project and in the Collaborative Learning Project allowed me to gain greater insight into the inequalities that exist within educational settings. I learned that inequalities are entrenched in systems and structures causing structural discrimination against minority groups, such as women on Engineering Project Teams. I learned through the Intergroup Dialogue Project and my specific project about women’s representation and leadership in engineering project Teams, activities offered to men over women can be normalized and naturalized. The differing qualification of the experience requirement is just one example of structural discrimination. For my future thought and action, I hope to join
organizations that work to promote gender-equity like Girls INC. Girls INC is an organization that partners with schools and local organizations and uses mentorship and research based programming to empower and inspire girls to be ‘strong, smart and bold.’ The organization works to combat gender discrimination from an early age and in educational settings.

Conclusion:

Through the education minor courses, I have gained a practical understanding of classroom management, increased my cultural awareness and am inspired to continue working within the education system whether it is as teacher or through education policy and reform. Most of all, I have learned that there is not one correct way to approach a teaching situation. Through my fieldwork experiences, I learned that all students are different, with unique backgrounds, strengths, and learning styles. I also learned that engaging in the surrounding community can be an important element that can be brought into the classroom to promote learning. Working with children in an early childhood education program under the poverty line provoked a passion in me as I felt I learned how to connect with the children and their families to make a positive impact in their lives. I look forward to utilizing the skills and knowledge that I’ve acquired through the education minor in my career in teaching.