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The education minor at Cornell has given me many opportunities through the professors and fellow students I have met and through its weight on my resume when applying for jobs. The minor has also taught me that there is more to teaching than conveying information; a teacher is an educator, a caretaker, a barrier breaker, and a motivational speaker to students. Looking back over my college experience, I am very happy that I was able to complete the minor because the courses changed my view of teaching and the educational problems we face today. My three greatest insights that I gained were that it is imperative for literacy to be involved in all subjects, for parents to be highly involved and informed about their children's success, and for standardized test scores to be a part of the evaluation of teachers.

After taking Dr. Park's course "Language, Literacy, and Schooling," I learned that it is very important to involve literary activities in all fields of study and that a literary activity is not necessarily just reading a book. A literary activity could involve reading a poem relating to a flower when learning about photosynthesis in science or reading a brief history of Pythagoras in math class when discussing the Pythagorean Theorem. Having students engage in a large variety of texts as much as possible in all of their class subjects is imperative to their future success. These various texts can include scientific articles, photographs, poems, short stories, videos, textbooks, pamphlets, documentaries, propaganda posters, and many others. Taking the time to teach students how to engage in these many different forms of text will prepare them for the real world when they may need to read a pamphlet about a medical concern or watch a documentary on a pertinent issue. Engagement in a text does not simply mean experiencing it, but also picking it apart to ensure that there is full comprehension. Dr. Park taught us multiple methods to make sure students are fully absorbing the information from the text from KWL charts, to Cornell
style notes, to the alphabet method. This insight is important to me because when I graduate I will be teaching high school math in Baltimore and before this course I never would have thought to include numerous text sets. I now see how important this is when I look at the United States’ literacy statistics according to a study done by the Department of Education and the National Institute of Literacy a year ago. The fact that 14% of the US population cannot read and 21% of US adults can only read at a fifth grade level is startling. I know that it is possible to turn these facts around, thanks to Dr. Park’s course. I plan on working towards this goal throughout my teaching career by providing students with many opportunities to improve their literary skills.

Any educator can tell you that it is important for parents to be involved in their child’s schoolwork, but I learned from the education minor and my internship this past summer that it is crucial for parents to be highly involved in not only their schoolwork, but also the school as a whole. Having parents help with their children’s homework when they get back from school is important for the students’ academic success because of the motivation and support system they are receiving at home. But for a parent to have a significant impact on their child’s education they need to be involved in the entire school. This involves attending PTA and school board meetings, being visible to the teachers and administrators, having a presence in their child’s classroom, and working to get the community involved in the schools. In “Social and Political Context of American Education” we learned that inequality is evident in every school district and the minority students have a difficult time overcoming the inequality for equal opportunities on their own. In many cases, the inequalities go unnoticed or are pushed aside. One of the best ways for minorities to combat it is through parental involvement in the schools. Parents have the ability to make significant changes in their children’s education by speaking up to the school boards and getting the community heavily involved. This is not only the case for minorities, this works for all students and their
parents. As a soon-to-be teacher (and hopefully future administrator), I plan to actively involve the parents of my students in every way possible through keeping them up to date on classroom and school issues, ways they can help out in the class (help put up posters, bring in snacks, etc.), as well as consistently notifying them of their student’s progress and ways they can help their learning at home. When parents are involved in the schools, the community as a whole becomes involved, and education becomes a top priority which is necessary for the success of the students and the community.

Teacher evaluation systems are a difficult topic to broach without sparking a full on debate, but from the knowledge I have gained through the education minor, I can confidently say that I believe student achievement must be involved in the evaluation of a teacher. This thought was first inspired when I read Michelle Rhee’s autobiography, “Radical: Fighting to Put Students First” when she drew a comparison between a teacher and a brain surgeon. She asked a politician to consider a situation where his daughter needed brain surgery and he had the choice between two surgeons; if one surgeon had a 95% success rate, the other had a 65% success rate, but had great bedside care, which surgeon would he choose? The obvious answer is the one with the higher success rate. This is a similar situation with teachers—if a teacher does a good job with their students, but only prepares 2 out of every 3 for the next grade level, who would want them to teach their child when there is a teacher down the hall with almost every one of their students prepared for the next level? This argument made sense to me; of course student achievement should not be the only factor in the teacher’s success, but it should be a larger one. In “Social and Political Context of American Education” I wrote a paper about the different policies involving teacher evaluations, which allowed me to research current systems in place, possible solutions for future systems, and different theories about what a "good/effective teacher" means. This helped me understand what I can do in my future
career to be the most effective for my students and it also gave me a better understanding of what my administrators will be looking for in my teaching. When I teach in Baltimore, I will be conscientious of students’ test scores so I can ensure they know the information, but I will still do it with care and work hard on the other sections of my evaluation as well.

All in all, the education minor was a crucial part of my Cornell education and experience. The classes I took and the topics I learned about helped prepare me to be a high quality teacher and gave me a better understanding of the current issues within the education systems. The minor itself also provided me with many worthwhile opportunities through the people I met and the internships I earned. Thanks to the education minor, I know that I will carry the 3 main learnings that I discussed in this paper as well as many other concepts that I have encountered as I continue into my working life as a teacher.