Being a teacher is something I’ve always wanted to be since I was a kid. My older brother is a math teacher at Choate Rosemary Hall, a boarding school in Connecticut, and I want to follow in his footsteps to become a teacher myself. During my four years at Cornell, I was able to gain many insights into the education field through courses and experiences. Three insights in particular stand out for having shaped me into a more successful teacher, and I hope sharing these will help others understand the constantly changing field of teaching.

The first insight that I gained was how to teach with another person. During my first three years at Cornell, I always worked in education fields that required independent teaching. I worked as a tutor, a peer mentor, and a teaching assistant. As a tutor I worked one-on-one with students to help them with math concerns. As a peer mentor, I worked with younger students and helped them with any school or personal problems. As a teaching assistant, I led-teach certain classes, and on other class days, helped answer questions that students had. The common theme between these three positions is that I was the one controlling how I taught and interacted with the students.

However, this year as a senior I worked with a co-teacher at Dewitt Middle School. Teaching at Dewitt was a fieldwork component of one of my classes for the minor. The person I worked with is also a senior and for the first time in my teaching experience, I was in an uncomfortable position. I have a dominant personality, so I was used to being in control of everything I did regarding lesson
plans and helping students. Teaching at Dewitt thus opened my eyes to a new side of teaching. I worked with my partner weekly to teach students about story writing and we had to share power in the classroom. It was a new insight for me because before this experience I disliked working with others and having to share the classroom. Working at Dewitt taught me the benefits of lead-teaching with someone else. I not only learned how to compromise with my co-teacher, but I also picked up on some things from her that helped improve my teaching. Fusing her strengths with my strengths increased our positive influence on the students.

The second insight I gained from my education experiences at Cornell was also from my teaching experience at Dewitt. Throughout my education studying, all of my classes talked about all-inclusive teaching and catering to students’ needs. We talked about the power of teacher-student relationships and trying to give students the attention they need to succeed. I always thought that if you were passionate and excited to teach, you could help all students. However, I had a huge wake up call when teaching at Dewitt. For the first time in my teaching career, I had a special needs student. I thought from all of my readings and discussions in education classes that it would be easy to engage all of the students, but that was not the case at Dewitt. I tried many times to interact with the special needs student, but she would tend to not respond. At first, I thought I wasn’t putting in enough effort, but as the weeks went on and I tried to amplify my effort, the results were still negative. I gained the insight that although you should always try to engage all of your students, sometimes you won’t be able to because of matters that are out of your control.
The last insight I gained from my education experiences at Cornell was when I took a course called SOC 2710: Social and Political Contexts of American Education. It was a course on the formation of the education system, the policies that are associated with education, and other major issues like public schools vs. charter schools. This course opened my eyes to a side of education I never knew. One of the major themes regarding teacher issues is that people say teachers need to stand apart from the curriculum and stop teaching to the test. However, I learned from this course that it’s not that simple. Sure it’s easy to say in class that the best way to help students learn is not through assessment, but there are some policies that teachers can’t get away from. The most famous issue regarding education is whether or not the Common Core standards should be implemented. I didn’t realize that although it was to help students with critical thinking, it was a type of assessment. This made me realize that although we are trying to stray away from teaching to the test, we still need assessments in education to see where students are with the material we are teaching them.

In conclusion, during my four years at Cornell I learned so much through the education minor. In particular, I learned that teaching with others can further enhance the classroom, that sometimes no matter what you try you might not be able to reach a student on certain days but you always have to persist, and that although assessments have a negative association with them, you need to use them to monitor students and because they are part of educational policy. You never fully understand education concepts and theories until you step into a classroom and
experience it “hands-on”. The education minor helped me become a better teacher and prepare me for full-time teaching after graduation.