

Autumn Anderson  
Teacher Interview, Placement #1  
Due: Oct. 18th

Interview with: Thomas Hawk  
Date: Sept. 18th

**1 How did you become interested in art education?**

Halfway through my sophomore year in college I realized I had more art credits than I did for my major, history. I liked art more than history. So I switched my major. I chose art education over history. But I was planning on being a teacher.

**2 When and where did you begin teaching?**

First year of teaching at a small Catholic school outside of Pittsburgh. \$10,000 a year.

**3 What was your student teaching experience like?**

First day of class, I walked in and was given the lessons for the first seven classes, and was told see you eighth period, and that the next week I had the plan and take over all the classes. That was my middle/high school placement. In my elementary she eased me in. I was teaching the whole thing by the third week, but high school I was just thrown in.

**4 What do you wish you would have learned in your teacher preparation program?**

Anything that would help me for what I am doing now, as apposed to what I did when teaching actually higher art. Hands on special education.

**5 What is the most interesting/challenging/exciting aspect of your position/school/program?**

No day is the same. Everyday is new. You never know what to expect from the students, staff, paras, one on ones, etc. There are just so many variables in this school.

**6 Why did you choose to have a student teacher?**

Never had one. Thought it would be fun. Thought I might actually be able to teach someone something.

**7 What are your hopes and vision for your classroom? For your school? For your learners?**

I hope that they get some foundational grasp of just the basics of art. And if anything just explore art. Not through the final project results but just the doing, kind of an art therapy thing for most of them. I want them to come here and for them to look forward to doing art and to enjoy art. I don't expect them to write papers on art history, I just want them to be exposed to it.

**8 What is most important to you in teaching?**

Interaction with the children. Good report with the kids.

**9 How do you want your students to remember you?**

FUN. FAIR. But I also taught them something.

**10 What do you like most about your teaching practice?**

I love the kids and I love the freedom. I do what I want. I try and if I fail, I fail. They aren't being tested on it. If they are successful we might do it a couple of times. Sometimes you find something they really like and you find ways to do it a couple of different ways. You want them to be successful. Half the time if you fail a project they don't know you failed a project.

**11 What would you like to change?**

For the love of god, if I could have five mins, three mins, or even one minute in-between classes to get stuff ready without them crossing paths. There is no time in-between classes. When I was in high school you had three or four minutes between classes.

**12 Do you know anything about the history of your school or its neighborhood?**

This used to originally be a trade or tech school. Josh Gibson one of the most famous negro league ball players attended here. He was the black Babe Ruth. Ms. Vera attended here. It got changed into a education center. WE are slowly morphing into an autism center. We have one of the largest verbal behavior programs in the state. They are starting to take tuition for students out of the city schools for the kids to come here which is making us off the record.

**13 What are some difficulties the school faces or that you face in regards to materials, space, funding, or curriculum?**

I don't really have any problems with the amount of money I get. I make due with what I have. I am pretty spoiled in that I can get whatever I want. I wouldn't mind having some art therapy training. What would make this job a million times better is if I had a para. Every other teacher has a para. Look how smooth things go when two of us are working together on the same thing. As

opposed to just when one of us is here. There are paras here for each class, but they aren't on the same level as to know what you want. It's hard. Another set of hands would be nice. We have a lot of hands but to do this all day everyday it's hard. A set of knowing hands would be nice.

**14 How do you see art education addressing some of the difficulties (special education)?**

I think one of the best things, is with the amount of people we have we can do more so than anywhere else, we can give each student one on one attention. Like that one day I observed you, you made sure you gave every student one on one attention and spent some time with each student during one part of the lesson at least. The classes are small enough you can get around to everyone. Or if you can't do it personally, everyone is getting special attention every class. Even with the larger classes with 12-15 student, even I will go up and at least physically make contact with each kid in the room, talk to them. I think that the personal interaction is the best thing about having the smaller art classes in special education .

**15 What are some of the successes that you and your learners or the school has achieved?**

STAR school. Won gingerbread contests. In all the city wide art shows. Back when there was funding, Mr. Carter used to travel around the country with chorus. WE do a musical every year. Holiday programs. Special olympics. Horseback riding. Assemblies. This is the crown jewel of Pittsburgh. Our kids get to do more than most kids. Like at the holidays there is a tree and each kids gets a gift from \$15-30. The kids get the attention they need. That is probably the best thing about our school. Every teacher knows every kid. Most every kid if they are high enough functioning know all the teachers.

**16 How do you see the potential of art education helping to meet their needs?**

Hands-on. Motor skills. Coordination. Even little things for pre-vocational skills which will help them when their job is to stuff envelopes and match things. Everything is based on them moving on after school and being independent or semi-independent. Life skills.

**17 If you could have an artist work with students on a project to better the school/community what would it be? (i.e. mural, sculpture garden, school logo, art gallery space, after school art program for school and community, painted stage backdrop, special events signage, mosaics etc.)**

Mural across the street along the wall in the playground. I don't know what but I want to do a mural the length of that. But it always gets vandalized. (Of

what?) That's a bridge you cross when you find out you can do a mural. Probably of kids at play or the neighborhood.

**18 Is there anything else that you would like to share that might help me better understand you, the school, or the local community?**

This school isn't like a community school. It's the whole district. If they can't take them in regular school they take them here. I think if I were a head of a school or student teaching program, I think every student teacher should do a placement like this for at least two weeks. Just so you know you are going to have kids like this mainstreamed into your classrooms. You see it all here. Like how many things did you see here that you thought you would never see. (A lot.) And what you have been here three weeks? Alright, nothing has even really happened yet. Do you know what I mean? You see things here. You hear things here. It's horrible but some kids are locked in a closet till morning, and even if it's not a closet it's a room with a lock on the outside, and come out in the morning. So kids they don't get bathed until they come here. They get bathed here because nobody takes care of them at home.

I asked the questions to Tom that were provided. I knew a majority of the answers before we began because I conducted the interview during the fourth week of classes, but fifth week of being around him. I am very lucky to have a mentor that will talk openly to me and wants me to really see what our school is all about. I have seen things in my short time that I never thought I would ever see at a school. But this school stole my heart. I love it so much that I am picking up a minor because I feel like I can really help students like this. There are good and bad days at our school, but it is really all about the students and giving them the undivided attention that they need and deserve. These kids home lives I am slowly learning about and it breaks my heart, so it is our duty to create a fun learning environment and make school (especially the art room) a fun and engaging place where they want to come.

Tom has been teaching for over ten years, and really had to get himself to where he is today. His school dropped art education partway through his education so he had to find student teaching placements on his own. He works in a special needs school, but has no special needs training or art therapy training. This is the one thing he wishes he did differently. He also wishes he had a para-professional to work with all day everyday that actually knew the projects and could help. I do agree that when I am teaching myself, I find that even with four students some classes, I still am doing everything because the aids just don't know what to do, and with such limited time you want to make sure the students get something out of the class.

He has never had a student teacher before and he really wanted to teach someone something. I do have to say I have learned a lot in my short time, but I do not think I would personally have been as successful in this placement without prior training in Hort Woods. The one-on-one time is very important in a school like this. It isn't just about working with the students, but also multiple other adults with opinions and

because they work with the kids day in and day out, most of the time what they says goes. It is a disappointment though when they are not supportive and say their kids can't do anything, but I have made it my mission to prove them wrong even if I end up having to go around the room one-on-one to every student and do everything. It also is hard to balance paras ripping the materials away from the students before even giving them a chance to explore the materials. This is something that Tom has trained me in figuring out.

I don't think I could of been paired with a better co-op teacher because he has taken me in like a member of his family. We talk, share food, he has gotten to know my parents and home life, I have learned about his daughters and wife (they even make art for me), we teach each other new art processes and project ideas, etc. Everyday is a new day at Conroy, just like everyday in the art room is a new day. There is just so much to learn in eight weeks. During our lunch breaks, Tom and other faculty have helped me figure out how to continue my education and gain experience with special needs. The entire school is very supportive of me and is like one big family.

Talking to Tom in this interview I did learn more about him, but to be honest, I know so much about him and Conroy because everyone is very willing to share information. Everyone is shocked at how well I adjusted to this school, because they flat out say that this is a hard job. Hopefully everyone is learning as much from me as I am them.