

Autumn Anderson  
Classroom Observation

Date: 8.27.2013

School: Pittsburgh Conroy

Teacher: Mr. Carter

Subject/Grade: Music Teacher, class RM 109; period 1 (8:50-9:40am)

**1. How many students are in the classroom? Gender, ethnicity, age, grade level.**

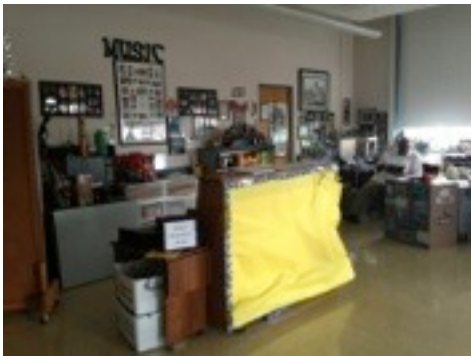
All the students in this particular class were African-American with one girl and seven boys. They were in the age ranges of and 8-12 grade classroom. Some students were absent for this class. This class is a higher functioning class.

**2. How is the classroom environment arranged?**

The music room when you walk in has instruments upfront to the left, continued by the teachers desk, opposite of the room is a stacked bleacher set-up to create a few elevated rows with chairs, then continued to a desk area for music and CDs. It is a very open environment which is good for the class because the music room also functions for chorus and instrument practices, and dance lessons.

**3. Describe what else you see in the classroom environment - what kinds of supplies, storage, sinks, images on the wall, and so forth are available?**

There are all sorts of instruments, lots of music appropriate posters and images all over the room. There is a large piano, drums, a container of ping-pong balls, etc. The images on the wall were very interesting to some students to the point where they were fixated on one image most of the class. There were also so fans which came in handy when it got hot after dancing all class.



#### **4. Provide a detailed account of the lesson that you are observing. What is being taught in the lesson? What activities went particularly well?**

This was the second day of school, but the first time of the week that Mr. Carter was teaching this group of students. With some familiar faces along with some new ones Mr. Carter explained what the class was about and some different opportunities for the students to get involved with the school and community through different outlets like urban ballroom, African dancing, African drum lines, chorus, musicals, etc. This particular class Mr. Carter introduced two new line dances the students could learn along with playing two songs for a particular student, and one song for me specifically.

The two line dances that we learned were to the songs Funky Good Time and Blurred Lines. Mr. Carter introduced the dances one at a time. The first dance he showed the move and I was the only volunteer to try it the second time with him, along with an aid to the class. The second dance he introduced and the second time some students participated along with an aid and myself. Next he played Gangnam Style and Thriller for one student that he knew would get up and dance because this student has watched the YouTube videos for the music videos thousands of times till he got the entire dances down. Next he played the Wobble which my co-op told him I knew how to dance to. So he had some kids come up but I knew a different version that I ended up teaching the students and Mr. Carter which turned into a huge dance party where almost everyone participated and ended up cheering and clapping me on. As a new teacher this opportunity to participate in this class during my planning period welcomed me into the school in a new way that I didn't think was possible. The next morning all the kids from that class when they saw me knew my name, said hello, and some even told me I had good dance moves and could really break it down. Usually I can be quite shy, but I told myself during this experience that I need to loosen up and make a fool of myself. I can already see how being in that mind-set can open the doors to reaching the students on a new level because they see me more as a peer than this official teaching figure.

These line dances and dances are taught to the students because each morning during the morning assembly they have the students go onto the stage to dance and sing. Also the school frequently hosts school dances and other events around Pittsburgh that the students are able to attend.

During the lesson just seeing the students genuinely having fun was very important. Seeing them cheer on one another laughing and clapping with huge smiles was something that words cannot describe. Knowing that most of these kids have had people continually give up on them and label them, in this classroom environment they are each individually important, cared about, and their interests taken into consideration.

One thing that didn't go well was when the one student talked back to Mr. Carter but to me being new, I saw it as a bad event. To Mr. Carter and the other faculty in the room it was an everyday occurrence that just gets brushed off because acknowledging every outburst I am finding leads to more problems than actually teaching a lesson. The students (especially the new ones) really like to push the limits of the teachers. I took away that some things are going to happen, but you are the example in the classroom as the teacher. Students that continually interrupt or ask questions or get handsy all have a point as the teacher you need to find to acknowledge or ignore.

This school is an entirely new experience to me that has dramatically opened my eyes but for the better because everyday I am falling in love with my school and students and realizing that what I thought I might want to do the rest of my life can still change. I love working with special needs students and I never thought I would ever say that. They melt your heart. I have had so many moments in such a short time. From being punched by a student the first day within the first five minutes of that class to having that student hug me two days later and want me to sit next to her. Having my co-op tell me that he has seen me work with students that never do work, or open up to me when he has rarely have them open up to him is one of the best feelings in the world.

#### **5. Describe how the students were involved with the lesson and learning?**

The students were shy at first but quickly opened up. Mr. Carter knew how to get them involved without pressuring them. Especially Richard, he knew exactly what songs to play in order for him to get up and dance. Shea being the only girl in class that particular day was instantly drawn to come up and dance when she saw me dancing which also took the pressure off of her. The one boy in the back of the room was new to school and really was fixated on the poster of Michael Jackson in the back of the room. So Mr. Carter told him he can't have that one but if he is good throughout the year he would hook him up with a poster of his own. Another boy, J.J. has another side to him because he thinks he is a transformer and likes the Black Panther. Mr. Carter also made a deal that he told the student, he talked to his main teachers and if he upholds a certain level that once a month they can watch a Black Panther movie that he specifically bought over the summer for J.J..

To see a teacher that devoted to his students needs and interests on such a personal level is something that I have never experienced before.

#### **6. What did you enjoy about the lesson?**

I really enjoyed the personal touches Mr. Cater presented to the students, including me. I am new to the school but the school is really just one big family and I have been welcomed into it with open arms which is another thing I never really heard of. The school is so small that everyone knows everyone. In such a short time I have learned so much about students, faculty, and myself as a teacher.

#### **7. What did you feel was the predominant teaching philosophy of the teacher or the school in which you observed? How does this fit with some of the trends and teaching philosophies that you have experienced in your courses at Penn State?**

The teaching philosophy of the school is to demonstrate respect to self and others. But the teacher's really take it upon themselves to be a positive influence in the lives of these students and you can see that genuine love throughout the day wherever you walk in the school. Sure because it is an all special-needs school there are ups and downs, but these small set-backs are outweighed by the good events and laughable/teachable moments.

I know that when I taught Saturday School with my teaching partner in the High School classroom, Nicole, we took it upon ourselves to incorporate our students interests into the projects, bring in examples that were specific for each student, and

really get to know them. Since this is my first placement and it is still early in the placement I know I will learn more, but I know for a fact there there will not be this sense of personableness in my next placement. The school is basically a 1:1 ratio of teacher/aid to student. This allows for many hands and voices to be heard to even reach the students that are non-verbal. I never foresaw myself teaching special needs solely but my eyes have been opened. This has not only happened in the art room, but throughout the school in the morning auditorium assembly, morning bus duty, morning lunchroom duty, afternoon bus duty, students visiting the art room on lunch breaks, and also visiting the music room on this one particular morning.

That time on Tuesday's is a planning period and my co-op and I have already discussed me continuing to visit that class because it was such a fun time for not only myself but for the students.

## Observation Reflection:

Student teaching in the Fall semester is one of the best decisions that I could of planned for myself. Having the opportunity to see how a teacher sets up the classroom, many other duties to fulfill daily, along with how that first day/week of classes works will be something that I will carry with me throughout my own career. On the second day of classes I observed the first period of music class with Mr. Carter and room 109 students. There are only eight students in the class. This class is considered to be the highest functioning class at Pittsburgh Conroy, which is an all special needs school. The class had Mr. Carter leading, one girl student, seven boy students, two classroom aids, and then myself and my co-op observing during our planning period.

Mr. Carter's classroom is set-up so that when you walk in the walls are surrounded with all types of musical inspirations, musical instruments, and a wide open floor plan because the music room is not just for music class. The students learn about dance, practice for the school musical, have choir practice, drum line practice, and much more. There is a layered bleacher style student sitting area that the students and faculty sat in during class. While taking role, Mr. Carter introduced what the class was about, what they would be doing for the day, while also dealing with classroom management. One student got off task and Mr. Carter addressed the situation and then continued. The school is like one big family and there is definitely a reward system in place for the students. One boy was fixated on a Michael Jackson poster and wanted Mr. Carter's, but Mr. Carter told him if he was good he would hook him up with one of his own. He also called another student to the front of the room and made a deal with him,

that if he was good in all of his classes they could watch the students favorite movie that he found over the summer.

The two line dances that we learned were to the songs Funky Good Time and Blurred Lines. Mr. Carter introduced the dances one at a time. The first dance he showed the move and I was the only volunteer to try it the second time with him, along with a aid to the class. He then introduced the second dance and the second time around some students participated along with and aid and myself. Next he played Gangnam Style and Thriller for one student that he knew would get up and dance because this particular student watched the YouTube music videos thousands of times till he got the entire dances down. Next he played the Wobble which my co-op told him I knew how to dance to. He had some kids come up, but I knew a different version. I ended up teaching the students and Mr. Carter which turned into a huge dance party where almost everyone participated and ended up cheering and clapping me on. As a new teacher this opportunity to participate in this class during my planning period welcomed me into the school in a new way that I didn't think was possible. The next morning all the kids from that class knew my name when they saw me, they said hello, and some even told me I had good dance moves and could really break it down. Usually I can be quite shy, but I told myself during this experience that I need to loosen up and allow myself to get out of my comfort zone. I can already see how being in that mind-set can open the doors to reaching the students on a new level because they see me more as a peer than this official teaching figure.

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I really enjoyed the personal touches Mr. Cater presented to the students, including me. I am new to the school but the school is really just one big family and I have been welcomed into it with open arms. The school is so small that everyone knows everyone. In such a short time I have learned so much about the students, the faculty, and myself as a teacher. The teaching philosophy of the school is to demonstrate respect to self and others. But the teacher's really take it upon themselves to be a positive influence in the lives of these students and you can see that genuine love throughout the day wherever you walk within the school. Because Pittsburgh Conroy is an all special-needs school there are ups and downs, but these small setbacks are outweighed by the good events and laughable/teachable moments.

This small moment in time, just fifty minutes of my second day of teaching, opened my eyes to so much that I then tried to carry into my other classes. I never saw myself working with special needs, but after one week, I cannot get enough. Sure there are some students you are just happy they can make marks on a paper. However, there is such a wide range of abilities, you get the personal one-on-one time, the ability to brighten a child's day, and the feeling you are making a difference in their life, even

when they have difficulty communicating with you, as their teacher. Seeing a teacher like Mr. Carter try really hard to make each class and moment with the students personal is something that was amazing to witness firsthand.