

Katrina Prow  
TEACH Observations  
Gabe Vanover, 4/22/16

1. What did this observation help you recognize about your own teaching? Did you identify with anything that happened in the class? Did this experience make you want to change or implement something new in your own classroom?

I really identified with Gabe's teaching style. I loved how interactive he was with his students. He was casual with them, asking about their underlives away from class, while also asserting an overall control of the classroom. When I write, control, I don't mean that he was domineering in any way, but his students respected him and listened, all while he was able to appear as peer or a friend. This is exactly what I aspire to do with my students as well. I want to maintain authority, while also showing my students that they can approach me about any subject at any time.

Something else that I loved about Gabe's teaching style is the way he moved around the classroom. He and his students stood up, rearranged desks, moved in and out of the room. In a literature course, this doesn't seem exactly applicable, but when teaching creative writing, I love the idea of movement. I will never forget the time an undergrad instructor took our class outside to observe the grass while reading Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. If anything, Gabe's instruction reminded me to continue to use all the space that the classroom allows.

2. In conducting this observation, what thoughts did you have about the practice of teaching and learning in general? For instance, did your observation inform your thinking about the big picture issues like classroom management or student engagement, etc.? Did you change your mind about anything or confirm beliefs you already had?

I don't think this observation changed my mind about any teaching practices I currently have, but it certainly helped confirm my beliefs toward student involvement. I appreciated how every student in Gabe's class had something to add to the experience. Gabe seemed to know everyone in the room on a personal and professional level, which added to the inclusiveness. Students couldn't hide in Gabe's class, and I don't think any of them would've wanted to, if that were an option. I love the idea of the classroom that feels like a friend's couch. I want all students to feel comfortable participating and adding to the group dynamic. Gabe's class is interactive in a way that allows for this type of "togetherness." My class now is a little too large for this to really work, but I still try to teach with that goal in mind by calling on students randomly, knowing everyone's name and major, and trying to get to know their underlives.

3. What did the instructor do particularly well?

On top of what has already been noted, I thought that the instructor was very much in control of a class that could have easily spun into chaos. Students were moving around, participating freely, going in and out of the room, moving with each other, touching each other, yelling, laughing, etc. I watched, thinking about how easily this could become a disaster if someone wasn't in charge, or paying attention to time, or the class as a whole. As noted earlier, Gabe was very much respected by his students, which showed in their ability to use the freedom given by him for the greater good of the lesson. It never felt like students were taking advantage of their freedom. Everyone was engaged from start to finish.

4. What suggestions or ideas might you share with this instructor?

I can't really think of anything specific. The only thing I thought while watching the two students perform their scene is that it might have been nice to include the rest of the students watching. While I know, from a writing workshop environment, that students learn through observing other student work, I wanted that portion of the class to be slightly more interactive with the audience. Do they ever get to give suggestions? Or do you explain to

them why your advice to those in the scene might work for their scenes? I think a little connection to the audience might be helpful for those not participating.

5. If you observed someone in a discipline different from your own, what was that experience like?

While Gabe's class is very different from mine on paper, we both come from the arts, and there are a lot of parallels in the way the class material is given to students. I particularly enjoyed his use of modeling for students, which is something I try to do through the use of sample papers and practice in writing exercises. I will often perform the first half of my writing exercises with my students, so they have an idea of what I am expecting, but they also have the freedom to complete the exercise as they see fit.

On a broader note, one of the things I wrote down during my observation was, This class is very important! I feel like Gabe's class, on a very fundamental level, is a course about human emotion and experience. When I teach literature, I try to teach it as a course in understanding the written communication of others because what is writing other than reading the experiences of those who are unlike ourselves? So to see students physically embody "the other," while seeing the connections within themselves, I felt pretty inspired. I left the class feeling jealous that the students got to participate, while I could not. To me, teaching at its core is about showing students how to recognize the similarities between themselves and the things or the people they do not understand. Gabe's course is doing this, so he is ultimately successful in his approach.