

Transcripts (Clean)

Interview 1:

Annissa: What is your educational background

DeLeon: Well, 13 years teaching. I started off being a 3-year-old teacher in the Child Development Center at Texas State. I did that for 3 years and then got this position working and have been here ever since.

Annissa: Have you worked with one grade level or multiple?

DeLeon: My student teaching was in second grade. I thought I was going to go in that like second first Kinder area, but nope.

Annissa: What areas of do you normally teach?

DeLeon: My favorite would have to be literacy. I like teaching literacy the most but we have to teach everything.

Annissa: How would you characterize your student's behavior in general?

DeLeon: There's a mix in our room. We have the children who can control their bodies and are able to be safe, respectful, responsible and those who just don't have that inhibitory control yet and are working on it. So we have some Defiance here and there so we have them all, a range of behaviors.

Annissa: Do you or have you ever had a class pet?

DeLeon: Yes I have. It was a fish and they liked it a lot, but I just found I was having to bring it take it back, bring it take it back, for the holidays so I just did that one year.

Annissa: How do you feel about class pets?

DeLeon: If you like them go for it! I— in the beginning I always wanted to have a class pet but then once I saw like my class and could they handle it if it was a pet that had to be like near us like in a cage where the kids would be able to touch a lot of the times it was no so that's why that one year it was a fish.

Annissa: What was the care like?

DeLeon: I had a helper for him, and it was back then— I did my job like I changed them everyday it wasn't weekly— so every day someone would come and feed him. I did have a friend

when it was their day– and I rotated between them to help me – clean him although that was interesting too, because they would help me put him in the cup for their job. They would help him when he would come out of his cup while we would change him so we had that but I always let them help out with the pet.

Annissa: Were there ever any major issues with the pet?

DeLeon: No, not him. It was more of an issue with other classrooms like they understood the rules of you know they can watch him, you know you could draw pictures of him, but other children and other classrooms would literally get a chair and try to stand on it just so they could touch the water so that became it.

Annissa: Did your pet ever become ill?

DeLeon: No.

Annissa: What did you do for weekends with it? Did you leave it?

DeLeon: Yeah I left them the only time that I took him home was breaks

Annissa: Would you bring it back if you did not have students from other classes come in?

DeLeon: I would definitely be able to do it and I would want it – I always like wanted like the cage where they could see them like a tank but you know I mean where it's at their level. It's just hard when other children come in that aren't yours in the classroom

Annissa: How do you think your current students would react to a class pet?

DeLeon: Oh they'd be excited but it would take a lot of these are the rules to have them eventually get it.

Interview 2:

Annissa: What is your educational background?

Castro: So my education background is around 7 years. I've been working with kids really since I was 16 years old, but teaching— teaching I've been working for 7 years.

Annissa: Have you worked with multiple grade levels or just one?

Castro: I was working with high school in a life skills classroom and Elementary. So Elementary and high school

Annissa: Was it all General Education or a mix?

Castro: So no, some of it was special education and some of it was General Education but for Behavioral support. Yes

Annissa: How would you characterize your current students behavior in general?

Castro: My whole classroom I mean you know overall they're pretty— they're pretty redirectable and you know they have a lot of good skills. Like following one to two step directions. For most of them this is their first time in a school setting. I would say they are pretty redirectable at this time.

Annissa: Do you or have you ever had a class pet?

Castro: Yes. I had him at the beginning of the year, and then I left for maternity leave so I just figured I didn't want to leave the responsibility for the other staff to you know have to feed him or anything like that.

Annissa: Have you used him in a previous year?

Castro: Yes, we actually got him 2 years ago and so we used him for 2 other classes not including this one.

Annissa: And what type of pet was he?

Castro: He was a black bear hamster. He actually escaped a couple times in the classroom, but you know we got him back. So you know there comes a lot with having a— you know a class pet.

Annissa: How do you feel about class pets in general?

Castro: I love them and I think it's a great opportunity for the children to learn you know about responsibility, skills, feeding, how to treat them and take care of them, so I really enjoy them.

And they love having the opportunity to you know have a pet because not all of our students can have a pet. So it's really fun watching them interact with the pets

Annissa: Did you ever have any problems during play and inquiry with like all the other kids coming in to see the pets?

Castro: No, most of it– I mean you know hamsters are nocturnal so most of the time our little friend was always sleeping or hiding but they would all like– just sometimes they would tap on the cage but we or even our students would tell them like no don't do that you know. So they're there to peer-model but we've never really had issues with the class pet. Yeah

Annissa: What was the care like?

Castro: For our students– in general you know maintaining a clean cage, changing the water, feeding it, and taking it out. You know I try my best to take it out everyday but its hard and so that kind of comes with a challenge because you know hamsters need exercise and sometimes the wheel would get stuck if he used it so I'm not sure if he was getting enough exercise but other than that it's pretty good unless they get sick. Which thank goodness he never got sick. He's pretty easy.

Annissa: Did the students help either clean the cage or feed them?

Castro: Yes, we have class jobs. So the zoologist would ensure he had water and sometimes when it came time to clean his cage they would help me with that. I would like– I would handle like the dirty you know make sure I threw all the bedding away so that they didn't touch that. They would just really help me put the new bedding in it so yeah.

Annissa: Were there any major issues you experienced while having the pet?

Castro: Yes when he escaped. So not this year but last year he escaped a couple times and one of those times was during– right before spring break so that was a big issue. I had to go buy one of those rodent catchers like the ones that don't hurt them. And well I let Mr Frank know, the custodian staff, that our little friend was in the room and set the trap and then I was able to come over spring break to see if he – if we got him and we did. And so thank goodness we did because I don't know what would have happened if we did not. But he had his favorite hiding spots so I knew where he could be.

Annissa: Did he escape during the class day or after school?

Castro: No, not during class it was towards the end of the day. If I wasn't monitoring like– after we fed him if I didn't remember– which typically I would forget to close the cage like– cuz there were sometimes during like dismissal where we would come real quick and feed him and then leave the cage open and then I'd get distracted with like behaviors or dismissal and I leave and

he would escape and other situations his little fun tubing would pop off and so then that's how he was able to escape those other times cuz he escaped twice– or three times in the year.

Annissa: What did you do with your pet during breaks and weekends?

Castro: I have to take him home. Yeah so like during spring break I would have to take them home but he was you know– that's why I had to ask if I could come check. But yeah during long breaks like Christmas I had to take him home and during the weekends he stays– he stays here. Yeah I just make sure he has enough food but you know hamsters hoard food so they are ok. Just for the weekend.

Annissa: How do your students get to interact with your pet?

Castro: I will take him out and put him in the his little ball and sometimes before I put him in the ball I'd get them in a circle and have them like if they want to do soft pets they can use a finger to pet him on his head or back. So they would really enjoy that and when we were done we would put him in his exercise ball so he could get exercise.

Annissa: Did you ever use him to calm down a student?

Castro: Yes, we had a student who would get really really upset but he enjoyed the pet, so it was like a reinforcer for him. Last year we would say, "Hey friend I know your feeling this way. Let's go talk to Roosevelt" and he would go and he'd talk to him or he'll get him out and pet him and put him back and we would say "okay we're all done".

Annissa: Overall, how do you feel about class pets?

Castro: I can use last year as an example because this year we didn't really get to have him for a long time but I think that Roosevelt impacted those students with behavior like in a positive way cuz they were able to go to him when they're feeling sad or angry and get to talk to him about how they're feeling. Yeah. In a positive way, yes. So it would help with de-escalating certain behaviors like for maybe even being proactive if we know that a student would get a certain way in certain situations or even transitions. It got to a point where he got to work for taking out Roosevelt, so that helped with his behavior.

Fieldnotes (Clean)



Mrs. Merrell's Biomedical Sciences classroom.

Snake tank located about four feet from classroom door. All students pass by tank upon entering/exiting the classroom.

Directly above the tank is "Forensic Investigation" bulletin board.

Observer sat in the back right corner with a view of all students and away from snake tank.



Tank had a blue sticky-note taped to it made by a student that read, "Chleo is a Harry Styles LOVER ♡!"

Another student stuck her tardy pass sticker to the tank.

On the back side of the tank was a cutout image of Harry Styles taped to the tank by a student.



Above the tank is the "Forensic Investigation" bulletin board. While there were items relevant to the class subject, there was also a bust of Harry Styles with an image of Chleo draped around his shoulders. A student had taken an actual photo of Chleo and photoshopped it onto Styles.

“Chleo” is the name of the classroom pet. She is a three foot long ball python. Her tank is located about four feet from the classroom door, where anyone entering or exiting the room will pass. The habitat is a dark, approximately 60 gallon glass tank with a heavy wire mesh lid. The bedding is a cedar mulch, and a large water dish and a tree bark-type hide were on top of the substrate. Chleo stayed curled up in the tree bark hide throughout the class period.

Descriptive notes of class period 3B

Monday, April 3. 1:07 - 2:37. Ms. Merrell’s Biomedical Science Class at Johnson High School, Buda, TX.

22 tenth grade students: 16 female/6 male

Students sat in mixed groups of: 7, 3, 2, 4, 5, 1

Our observer arrived in Ms. Merrell’s classroom about ten minutes before class started, while four students were finishing lunch in the room. These students were curious about why a “stranger” was in the room, to which Ms. Merrell let them know interactions with the classroom pet were going to be observed. The students (all female) were eager to let our observer know about Chleo. They described Chleo’s behavior - primarily that she was quiet and stayed hidden until it was time to eat. One student knew Chleo had been fed last Thursday and did not expect Chleo to be ready to eat yet. Ms. Merrell let the student know Chleo would be receiving a small mouse later that afternoon.

The lunch group left for their class when the bell rang, and our observer took a seat in the back right corner of the classroom opposite of the classroom pet’s tank. This allowed the observer to see any possible interactions of students entering or exiting the room. Students trickled into the classroom until the tardy bell rang. None of the students seemed to pay any attention to Chleo upon entering the room. No students inquired about our observer, so there was no discussion about Chleo.

During Ms. Merrell’s lesson students participated in a lab at their desks. When the lab was finished, students had to throw away used materials in the trash can located next to the tank. One female student stopped at Chleo’s tank to observe the snake. She asked Ms. Merrell if Chleo was ok without a heat lamp. Apparently the bulb had burned out, so Ms. Merrell let the student know Chleo also had a heating pad under the tank.

At the end of the class period, Ms. Merrell announced they needed to complete our Google survey about their class pet. This concerned one female student, who exclaimed, “Are ‘they’ trying to take Chleo away?” Although this student had not otherwise expressed interest in the

snake, she definitely was concerned about the possibility of losing the class pet. Two other female students added that they really liked having a class pet. Our observer asked these two students if any of their other teachers had class pets. They indicated that another science teacher kept a fish. They indicated having a class pet made the class “feel nice.”

Students exited the classroom at the bell. No students were observed acknowledging the class pet on the way out of the room.

Descriptive notes of class period 4B

Monday, April 3. 2:43 - 4:10. Ms. Merrell’s Biomedical Science Class at Johnson High School, Buda, TX.

24 ninth grade students: 19 female/5 male

Students sat in mixed groups of: 3, 4, 4, 4, 4, 4, 1

Observer continued to sit in the far back right corner. As students entered the classroom, no students were observed paying attention to Chleo. Ms. Merrell began her class by letting students know what was going to be discussed in class, and added that Chleo would be fed mid-way through class. Several of the students were interested in helping to feed Chleo. A few other students started discussing what snakes eat, which was off topic for the forensic unit students were starting.

At 3:10, about 25 minutes into the class period, Ms. Merrell indicated it was time to feed Chleo because the students were on-task and being quiet. One female student was excited about feeding Chleo and jumped up out of her chair to help Ms. Merrell. About half the class glanced up momentarily to watch what was going on at the snake tank, but returned to their desk work. One male student watched intently as Ms. Merrell and the female student fed Chleo a small mouse from a large pair of tweezers. As soon as the tank lid was removed, Chleo became very active. She came out of her hide immediately and wound her head up towards the top of the tank. She immediately took the small mouse and began swallowing it. Another male student noted, “She must have been hungry. She ate that fast!”

The female student who helped feed the snake started talking about the “fun” things she and another student in the class have done with Chleo. They take videos of the snake, especially when she’s being fed. Students also play music for Chleo, and decided “Chleo loves Harry Styles’s music.” After class, our observer had a chance to ask this student about the Harry Styles decoration on Chleo’s tank. This student taped the “Chleo loves Harry Styles” note to the tank. She told our observer that another student took a picture of Chleo when she was stretched out in

the tank. The student “is really good at Photoshop” and created an edited photo of Harry Styles with Chleo draped across his shoulders. Johnson High School offers a graphics design class where students learn how to use Photoshop. The student worked on the photo in that class, printed it, and put it on the bulletin board in Ms. Merrell’s class. She also printed the image of Harry Styles that is taped to the back of the tank. The student said, “it helped give Chleo some personality.”

During the lesson, at 3:27, Ms. Merrell was discussing toxins with her class. She noted that snakes like Chleo produce toxins, which she taught were naturally occurring poisons. Ms. Merrell clarified that Chleo, being a ball python, did not produce toxins, but other snakes do. She differentiated between naturally occurring toxins and toxicants, which are man-made.

For the remainder of the class, students completed a lab at their desks. No students were observed interacting with Chleo for the remainder of the class. At dismissal, students left without acknowledging Chleo, but one female student did take time to observe Chleo, who was back in her hide.

Reflective notes

Meanings

- I think the most significant thing I observed was the fact that students had personalized Chleo’s habitat and tried to give the snake a “personality.” It seemed Chleo was an avenue for these students to take some ownership of their classroom and demonstrate their own skills and personalities. This instance demonstrated how the classroom pet was involved in cross-content learning. The student used her skills and tools from her Graphics Design class to photoshop the photo of Chleo onto Harry Styles, and print it to put on the tank.
- Chleo became a teaching tool when she was directly involved in the lesson when Ms. Merrell was explaining toxins versus toxicants. The class pet became a relevant, tangible example related to the forensic science unit the class was learning.
- Chleo had been abandoned at a previous school and left in that science classroom. This indicates a negative issue involving classroom pets - they do not vanish at the end of a school year. Ms. Merrell took over the classroom with the snake during her first year of teaching. When she accepted a new job at Johnson High School, she was told to take the snake with her because it did not belong to anyone at the school. She acquired Chleo in that manner, but has found her students enjoy having a class pet.
- A student in period 3B exclaimed, “Are ‘they’ trying to take Chleo away?” when she realized I was there to observe the pet when the teacher presented them with the class pet survey. I assumed the student meant “they” referred to administration. This could indicate this student was used to punitive punishment. Chleo could be important to the student because the student

sees the class pet as a positive addition to her school day, when she may otherwise be used to being restricted.

- Ms. Merrell indicated the snake could be fed in 4B when the students were behaving - working quietly. This was a form of classroom management. Students were rewarded for their good behavior by giving them the privilege of feeding Chleo.
- Students who engage with Chleo could be positively motivated to attend class because they care to check on the snake's wellbeing. The snake also gave these students something outside themselves to be concerned about.

Methods

- A behavior log could have been useful to note if any behaviors changed in relation to interactions with Chleo. Although student interactions with Chleo did not appear to impact any behavior (i.e., there did not appear to be additional student engagement in class, etc.), a behavior log would give a precise indication of this.

Problems

- The students should complete the survey after the observer is gone, perhaps during the following class period. This would probably keep the students from seeing an association between the observer and the topic of the survey. As one student indicated concern that Chleo was possibly going to be "taken away," it might prevent undue stress on the students by separating the observation from the survey.
- Letting students in 3B know what the observation was about (even though it was after the fact) could potentially influence the observation in 4B. If 3B students talked to 4B students prior to class, 4B behaviors could change in response.

Frame of Mind

I was not expecting to see much interaction with the classroom pet in this instance because it was a snake. I am personally rather terrified of snakes. My daughter has her own ball python and I have strong negative reactions to it. While many students ignored the snake, none had overt negative reactions to it. It was even more surprising to see students who were mildly positive towards Chleo, and very interesting to see students who actively interacted with the snake.

Coding List

- Cage
- Tank
- Literacy
- Science
- Classroom
- Interactions
- Behavioral support
- Class pet escaping
- Students more likely to follow directions with the addition of class pet
- Taking care of pet- cleaning, feeding
- Emotional support
- Pet hiding in habitat
- Student utilizing photoshop skills to decorate pet

Transcripts (Coded)

- Escaping class pets
- Behavioral support
- Would take the class pet home during breaks
- Helpers to feed the animals
- Emotional support
- Pet remained hidden in habitat
- Teachers form educational/academic connections with class pet
- Personalizing toys for class pet
- Teachers knowing potential hiding spots
- Securing enough food for pets during weekends

Fieldnotes (Coded)

- Snake tank
- Students feeding snake and interacting with each other
- Students describe the fun things they have done with Chleo
- Personalized habitat
- Tried to give Chleo a personality
- Students eager to describe Chleo (snake) to observer
- Teacher included the snake in her lesson by discussing toxins
- Students play music for Chleo (Harry Styles)
- Students showed signs of distress about potentially losing their class pet
- Positive interactions were made