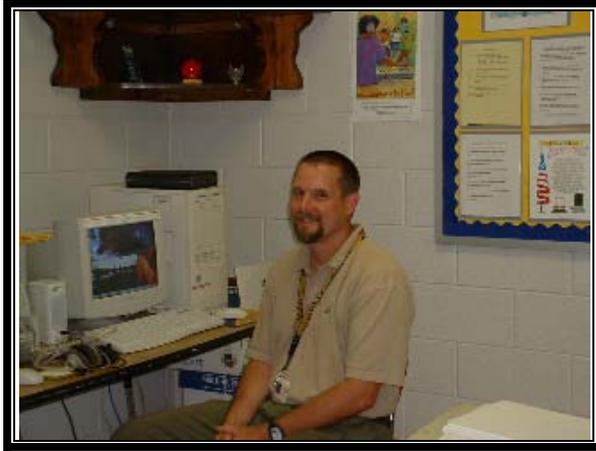


A Behavior Disorder Teacher



Mr. Terry Keenan
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What were your preparations for the teaching field? What was your teaching experience?

I have both a BS and a Master's degree from WVU in Special Education with a K-12 permanent certificate in behavior disorders. I student taught at Suncrest Elementary in Morgantown. I, then, spent a year at North Marion High School. The following year, I began teaching on the Adolescent Psych Unit at Chestnut Ridge Hospital in Morgantown and was there for 2.5 years. We then moved to this area and I have been at Hurricane Middle School for 12 years.

Was there any single event or experience that motivated you to become a teacher?

Although there hasn't been one event that motivated me towards teaching, I have always been able to relate to kids who have behavioral difficulties. I was a counselor at Camp Horseshoe one summer where disadvantaged youth were sent. The Director and some of the older camp managers were having some difficulty with one particular kid and I was able to work successfully with him. I realized then that this could be a direction I could go towards, but it wasn't until years later that I decided to do this for a living.

What is your perception of what a teacher does?

A teacher wears many hats. You not only become a facilitator of knowledge, but a surrogate father, a role model, a disciplinarian, a friend etc. My kids, especially, look for a setting of structure and stability where they know exactly what to expect and is expected of them.

Do you support the concepts of competency testing and merit pay for teachers?

I have yet to see any good way to measure competency. Test taking isn't the answer and monitoring is too subjective. I definitely believe that good teachers should be rewarded, but assessing this is difficult because everyone has or should have different teaching styles and therefore should be looked at on an individual basis.

Do you belong to a professional teachers' organization?

I have been a member of the AFT (American Federation of Teachers) for around 10 years. I previously belonged to the Council for Exceptional Children, and I serve on the county's committee for reviewing state exceptional educational policies.

What are your philosophy and theory of education?

I believe that education is critical to the growth and development of any nation. Therefore I have always thought that it is just as important to reach those students who struggle in school as it is to further develop the skills of those who are "good" students. I believe that each child is unique and that sometimes reaching kids who are struggling means understanding their different learning styles. It takes patience to instill in kids who have had behavior and learning difficulties that they can be successful if they choose to do so.

What are your perceptions of the influence your theory of education has had on your concepts of the role of a teacher and your way of organizing instructions, methods of teaching, relating to parents, and managing a classroom?

My classroom is and will always be structured so that the kids I work with can feel comfortable in knowing what to expect. It may be the only consistent place they have. I teach all three subjects to 3 different grade levels so I try to keep the classroom as organized as possible. Everything can be checked fairly quickly so that they get feedback on how they are doing. The kids also become more familiar with me because of the extra time we spend together. I deal with not only questions about subject matter but also regarding their daily lives. I have set a good example for them and try to make sure they understand that learning good socialization skills is just as important as learning spelling, math etc. I try to keep parents involved as much as they will let us. Most of the time the kids we get are so troubled that the parents have either given up or don't care or both. They are so used to hearing negatives from the school about their children that they avoid interactions with us. I send home a weekly progress report that is based on a point system in which the kids can earn points for how their behavior has been. In addition we use their student planners and encourage phone calls when needed. We spend a great deal of time beginning with new kids trying to turn around the way they have thought and acted in order to get them to realize that there is a better way to do things. Once they have experienced some success they will generally begin to work harder than they ever had.

What do you see as the major obstacles to teachers helping their students identify and reach their individual potential?

Most of the obstacles that I face are in changing the way parents, teachers and kids themselves view their education and its importance. Essentially I am the last chance these kids have to either make it through school or drop out. Educators that have had the kids are frustrated and fed up and so are the parents and the kids just don't care or think they can't be successful. Reshaping the way kids think is hard enough, but it is especially difficult to change the way the parents view their kids or school and also the way other educators view them.

In what way do you think technology has affected the role of teachers?

Technology can be a tremendous asset to any classroom given that teachers are trained in how to best utilize it. It allows a lot of different learning styles to be best addressed, for instance if you have a very visual learner, they are very captivated by live video feeds, internet instruction, power point, and even video tapes. I look forward to having the capability to incorporate these tools. Other types of technology that have aided my particular population of students have been devices such as spell checks and lap top computers.

What education training and skills development recommendations would you advise to best prepare for teaching in the future?

In the future, I believe that teachers will serve both resources and guides to their students. With new technology I think students will have the opportunity to see and visit other countries, classrooms, museums, libraries etc. New teachers will need to be well grounded in not only computer technology but also customs and cultures of various parts of the world. Imagine discussing world culture with students from these countries via satellite hookups. We may have "home schooling" with certified teachers in this manner.

How much of your own money do you spend on average for job related materials, training and /or support of your students?

As far as money I spend, I haven't really kept track but I know that whenever my kids have needed supplies, clothing, or provided with incentives, I have always done that.

What do you do to maintain your certification, knowledge of subject area and /or skills required to do this job?

Each year, teachers in our county are required to pick up 18 hours of continuing education training. A variety of courses are covered ranging from cultural diversity among students, technology enhancement, classroom management, and courses designed to help teachers deal with violence in schools, just to name a few. On top of this you can receive pay raises for every 15 hours of college coursework you complete. At this time, I have a Master's degree with +45 hours. I currently teach a course to county teachers involving dealing with crisis situations in the classroom. Therefore I am required to keep up this training once every year. The state encourages teachers to continue with training courses during the summer by offering incentives such as tuition reimbursement, travel and lodging expenses, extra pay, and providing textbooks at no charge.

What other information do you think I need to know about teaching?

If you are serious about teaching it has to be understood that the pay isn't very good, the kids can be frustrating to deal with at times, but the rewards of seeing someone such as yourself, going on to become successful and happy in life are immeasurable.

Interviewed by Jacinda Ann Thomas for a College 101 assignment on 05/02.