

You Don't Need a Degree to be Passionate About Something

Heath Kale is the Artistic Director of the Morgantown Theatre Company at the age of 26. With only having a couple of months of experience they gave him the full position in February of 2019. The director before him had known him through mutual theatre friends and with his previous work with children, that is what landed him the job. Prior to Kale landing his dream job he was working as a bartender and server.

"I was getting burned out, I was working the same job for three years," said Kale "I wanted to work with kids, so this was a perfect opportunity because working in a school just wasn't my cup of tea."

He attended school at West Virginia University and graduated with a degree in Multi-Disciplinary Studies; with that, he studied English, Women and Gender Studies and Child Development and Family Studies. His areas of study have helped him with the children he teaches.

"Child Development studies was wonderful because I learned where my kids are in their lives," said Kale. So, I can kind of make an assumption on why they do a certain thing or act a certain way because they haven't hit a certain milestone yet."

Women and Gender Studies taught him very valuable lessons as well.

"Women and Gender Studies was my most helpful," said Kale. "Because how I speak my kids, comes from that and I do not push anything on the kids, our kids are extremely open here and they are allowed to be open here."

Even though Kale does not have a degree in Theatre, that is not the most important aspect of running a theatre. It depends on the kind of person you are and how you treat people. Kale is passionate about what he does and knows he is lucky to have the job he has.

He is very dedicated to working with his children and believes that being in the theatre can help a young person discover who they are and what they want. He wants children to have a safe place to feel free to be who they are.

"I like it here because there is a much more personal aspect between the kids and myself," said Kale. "Because you have to dig a little deeper to get them to blossom a little bit."

At the Morgantown Theatre Company, they offer acting, dancing and music classes. These classes are welcomed to the general public and are advised to the children who partake in the plays. With these classes, they teach children the basics of acting, dance, and music. They give the children the confidence to go out on the stage. It is not mandatory for the children who are in the plays to take the classes because the company knows that many children are involved in other activities and sports.

"Kids these days are so busy," said Kale. "We know that not everyone can take a class but for the kids who do the plays and take the class we know they are a bit more serious about wanting to learn more."

Kale teaches all of the acting classes offered. There is an introductory class for preschool through second grade and a class for more advanced older kids. In the advanced classes, he started adding writing to the course. One year for Mother's Day they each chose a different mom to be and wrote a Mother Self Help Group as their show.

The plays put together under Kale's Direction have been sold out and have done remarkably well. They typically get around 60 children to be a part of the play.

"I don't know what I did for us to get sold out shows, because we've never had anything sold out before," said Kale.

They used to do four plays a year but now produce two plays a year to make them the best they can be. By focusing on little details, like straight arms and pointed toes in a dance sequence, perfect harmony, not missing a beat and costumes that fit the individual actor.

So much work goes into producing a play. Kale has to pick the perfect the title, script, songs, backgrounds, props, actors, dancers, musicians and so much more. Luckily, he has help from the children's parents, board member and contracted staff: music director, sound designer, light designer, and set designer.

The arts community is also a big help for Kale, they communicate and help each other. When someone needs microphones, they lend it to them, when someone needs a certain wig, they can borrow that wig. This way theatre and the arts programs do not fall apart.

"Morgantown is such a great place to find all these people with special talents, who can add something special to the show that I never even thought of," said Kale.

This also gives the children more experience to work with different people who have more experience.

Back in his hometown in Moundsville, West Virginia his best friend, the same age as him, is the director of their local theatre. She has problems with finding people to help backstage, children to join, the community showing up to support, and financial problems. With the two of them helping each other out she has been able to avoid major expenses and continue to produce plays.

The one-word Kale uses to describe the Morgantown Theatre Company, is open.

"There are so many different meanings for it and just sums us up perfectly," said Kale.

The children open up to him and feel comfortable telling him about the kind of problems they have. He always begins with "How was your day" and it can be about anything. Because of that, they feel comfortable telling him about their issues and insecurities. With the openness, they share there is a better outcome for the show because everyone trusts each other. On the stage, it is important for everyone to trust who they are acting with, so the audience gets their connection too.