

Dr. Phil Gunter by Katie Holzworth



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Table of Contents

1. Education
2. Career Beginnings
3. Learning Experiences
4. Personal Life and Greatest Influences
5. Research
6. Today
7. Publications
8. References

Dr. Phil Gunter is an internationally recognized scholar and Professor of Special Education. He has published over 50 articles in peer-reviewed journals and presented at numerous national and international conferences. Dr. Phil Gunter currently serves as a professor in the [Dewar College of Education](#) as well as Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at [Valdosta State University](#) in Valdosta, Georgia.

Education

- [Tennessee Technological University](#)
B.S. Health and Physical Education – 1972
- Tennessee Technological University
M.A. Health and Physical Education – 1973
M.A. Special Education – 1979
- [West Georgia College](#)

Ed.S. (Specialist in Education) Special Education – 1981

- [Vanderbilt University, Peabody College](#)

Ph.D. Special Education – 1984

Dissertation: *An empirical and social validation of response covariation in the reduction of aberrant behavior of an autistic boy.*

Career Beginnings

Dr. Gunter explains that he “entered the field of special education quite by accident.” While pursuing his Master’s degree in Health and Physical Education, Gunter was approached by a man in his program. This man had cerebral palsy and asked Gunter to teach him to swim. Gunter agreed and was fascinated to learn about kinesthetic perception from the perspective of a specific disability. After teaching this man how to swim, the man asked Gunter to assist in teaching an entire group of children with disabilities to swim. Gunter began working with these 30 students who had a variety of disabilities and was “hooked.” He quickly enrolled in courses that were part of a brand new major at Tennessee Technological University: Special Education (Gunter, 2008).

Learning Experiences

Dr. Gunter has taught students with special needs in both academic subjects and Adaptive Physical Education. He has worked with students who have varying needs, including students with behavioral disorders, mental retardation, and other mental health disorders and cognitive deficits. Gunter later gained employment as the director of a county’s Special Education Center. After these experiences, Gunter again entered

the realm of academia as a Ph.D. candidate and graduate fellow at [Peabody College at Vanderbilt University](#) in Tennessee (P. Gunter, personal communication, October 4, 2010).

After receiving his Ph.D. in Special Education, Gunter served as the Coordinator and then Assistant Director for exceptional student education in Ft. Myers, Florida. In August of 1991 Gunter re-entered higher education, this time as an Assistant Scientist in the Bureau of Child Research at the [University of Kansas](#). Two years later Gunter was appointed Associate Professor and Head of the Department of Special Education and Communication Disorders at [Valdosta State University](#) in Georgia, where he remains as a professor today. In 2003, Gunter was named Dean of the Dewar College of Education and in 2010 he became the Interim Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at Valdosta State (P. Gunter, personal communication, October 4, 2010).

Personal Life and Greatest Influences

Dr. Gunter was born in McMinnville, Tennessee, which is about 50 miles away from Nashville. Gunter is a self-proclaimed “home fixer-upper,” and he enjoys playing racquetball as well. He and his wife live in the country with their family, which consists of four dogs and six cats (P. Gunter, personal communication, October 11, 2010).

Dr. Gunter credits his students (in elementary, high school, and collegiate settings) as his greatest influences because they have helped him identify and address his weaknesses. Floyd Dennis, [Richard Shores](#), and Jim Fox were Dr. Gunter’s mentors while he attended Vanderbilt, and Paul Alberto of [Georgia State](#) introduced him to

Applied Behavioral Analysis. Gunter is also thankful for the assistance of “Betsy,” the special education director for [Lee County Schools in Florida](#), and F.D. Toth, a retired education dean at [Valdosta State](#). Toth allowed him to test his beliefs and knowledge in real classroom settings and use this information to create superior special education teacher preparation programs. [Dr. Ken Denny](#) and Dr. Julie Lee are two of Dr. Gunter’s most influential colleagues and they have assisted Gunter in identifying the next direction that he wishes to pursue with his work (P. Gunter, personal communication, October 11, 2010).

Research

Gunter has studied children’s behavior motivations in classrooms to determine teaching approaches, which increase the occurrence of positive behaviors and decrease the occurrence of negative ones (Shores et al., 1993). Throughout his career as a special educator and professor of special education, Gunter has remained committed to performing practical research that can be applied in classrooms and ensuring that such research is accessible (Gunter & Brady, 1984).

Today

In addition to continued service as a professor in the College of Education, Dr. Gunter is acting as Interim Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs at [Valdosta State University](#). Gunter reports that he absolutely loves serving in this new capacity, largely due to the fact that he is working under University President Dr. Patrick Schloss, who is also a famed special education professor and scholar (P. Gunter, personal communication, October 4, 2010).

Publications (Selected)

- Gunter, P. L. (2001). Data-based decision-making to ensure positive outcomes for children/youth with challenging behaviors. (pp. 49-52). In L. M. Bullock & R. A. Gable (Eds), *Addressing social, academic, and behavioral needs within inclusive and alternative settings*. Reston, VA: Council for Exceptional Children.
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- Gunter, P. L., & Reed, T. M. (1996). Self-evaluation of instruction: A protocol for functional assessment of teaching behavior. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 31*, 225-230.
- Gunter, P. L., & Reed, T. M. (1997). Academic instruction of children with emotional and behavioral disorders using scripted lessons. *Preventing School Failure, 42*, 33-37.
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