

Stacee Willis – Teaching Philosophy

I consider myself a true lover of learning; I have multiple degrees in both theatre and business, and I intend to earn more. However, I also deeply understand that some students, perhaps most students, may not have a love for learning like I do. With that in mind, I approach my courses from the student's perspective. I want my course to be valuable, but also relatable. I want to challenge my students, but not overwhelm them. I want my classroom to be an environment where students feel safe to try things and fail without it hurting their ego or their grade. Theater has been a lifelong love of mine, but I also recognize that not everyone, in fact, most everyone does not feel that way. Some students may not like plays, or they may dislike musicals; I respect that and encourage those discussions. What I strive for in my courses is an appreciation of the effort, time, labor, and love that goes into pursuing theater as a career.

My classroom is an open forum with me as the guide. I am one source of knowledge, but I am not the only source of knowledge. Theatre is a subject that has an incredible number of facets, not one practitioner could ever know everything about each of them. I enjoy guiding my students through the basics and letting them decide what they want to dive deeper into. I ask probing questions and encourage dialogue in my classroom. I very rarely put up a presentation and lecture, in fact some of my most successful assignments include the students creating their own presentations on various theatrical disciplines, such as costume or set design. They present to the class, and I task them with keeping us engaged; many students complain about the mundaneness of their other General Education courses and proclaim that theatre is their escape. I revel in being their escape because theatre has always been just that for me.

Success is something I don't necessarily measure by how well a student does on a quiz or a paper. Grades reflect student's attendance, effort and demonstration of learning/understanding the material. I make my expectations very clear, and I do not throw surprises at my students. My students are young adults, and they deserve the same respect that I expect from them. I have a traditional approach to assessments with a bit of a twist. I retest my students on many of the same items throughout the semester. I choose roughly ten items that I want my students to leave my classroom with and hopefully remember for the rest of their lives. Many of my students have no interest in becoming theatre practitioners; they are simply there as a General Education requirement, and I understand and appreciate that. However, a basic knowledge of the arts elevates a person's intellectual level and conversational skills. That is my goal, that my students could have a casual conversation paired with a deep appreciation of theatre for the rest of their lives.