

Zoe Settle - Teaching Philosophy

My goal is to give my students skills to be engaged citizens of the world. Today, we know more about each other than humans ever have. With this knowledge comes a responsibility to recognize and respect what is unique about the people we are in community with. A theater education is vital to becoming a well-rounded human being. As an educator, I aim to champion each student for the individual they are, the person they are becoming, and the unique perspective they bring to our classroom community.

It is my belief that the theater classroom is where you learn how to be a human. As one of my favorite professors used to say, the theater is where we go to feel. While learning to perform and tell stories, students are learning how to connect and communicate. How to emote and process feelings, how to recognize those feelings in others, and how to find common ground. I want my students to feel safe and comfortable in the playground that is my classroom. I hope to arm them with the tools to be a good leader, collaborator, creative problem solver, and confident speaker. In my work, I emphasize that we are all learning together. Every day, students are given opportunities to be bold, to try new things, and to fail.

One of my core beliefs is that failure is not a bad word. When I first began teaching, leading after school enrichment classes, I was taken aback by the students' overwhelming need to do things "the right way". The first rule I established for my students is that there are no mistakes in art. There isn't one "right way" to do something, and you can't copy your way into a masterpiece. When I meet a group of new students, I work to ease the anxieties and insecurities that jump out in other disciplines. As a student, one of the best things I ever heard from an educator was a quote by Samuel Beckett: "ever tried, ever failed. No matter. Try again, fail again, fail better,". My class is a judgement-free environment where you get to explore, to try, and try again.

Students learn best by feeling supported and having all the tools to accomplish their work. I feel that stress comes into educational spaces when students feel they don't have all the information or the understanding to find success. Other times, creativity is

stunted by the looming knowledge of their work receiving a grade or value judgement. A large part of this comes from crowded classrooms and a lack of time for individual attention. In the theater classroom, my focus is the student: the whole student.

I am a firm believer and practitioner of culturally responsive education. I work to see and accept my students for who they are and what they bring to the table. I am not going to teach to the "lowest common denominator". The reality is not every student is going to need the same thing from me, and they will all have different gains they take from theater. It is my responsibility as an educator to meet these students, these individuals, where they are.

I put these beliefs into practice by listening to my students, by tailoring lessons to their interests, by finding ways to present new ideas through familiar pathways, and by offering different options for learning. I am a big supporter of giving students autonomy over their learning, often preparing lessons with choices baked in, so that my class has a say in what their education looks like. In turn, this is giving them more of a stake in the lesson, which drives more positive engagement. Much to the chagrin of students when they first hear it, group learning is a cornerstone of my work. I can only authentically present my own perspective, but in the realm of theater, there are a myriad of other viewpoints to inspect. I encourage collaboration and student-led activities, which results in a more well-rounded experience for everyone involved.

I am in my seventh year of theater education. In this time, my work has taken me to every corner of a large and diverse metroplex. I have had the pleasure to work with students in elementary school up to college, as well as adults and senior citizens. What I have concluded is that you don't need infinite resources to create or teach theater. Theater can happen in any room, any space, where people are joining together from a genuine place to create something new.