

Alumni Spotlight: Millie Struve Whipple

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Millie Struve Whipple '13

Arts Integration Teaching Artist

Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning Through the Arts

When did you graduate and what is something you've accomplished since graduating that you are proud of?

I graduated magna cum laude in 2013 with a BFA in Theatre Education. Soon after that I was chosen to work with the New Jersey Department of Education and a team of approximately 8 drama teachers to create and write model curriculum assessments to help teachers implement the New Jersey Student Learning Standards for Theatre. I spent a year working with another elementary school drama teacher to create the model curriculum assessments for elementary school standards. It was an honor to be chosen by the Department of Education to work on something that would be helping so many other teachers so early in my career.

Could you tell us a bit about your journey since USU and how you've gotten to where you are today?

After graduation I moved to southern New Jersey to teach drama at a K-6 charter elementary school. Because of the size of the school, I taught there two days out of the week. The rest of the week I worked as an arts administrative assistant at a regional arts center, planning and managing various arts classes, programs and residencies in schools and communities. From there I moved to Northern Virginia, where I have been working as a drama teaching artist in early education classrooms. I have also directed a middle school musical production and choreographed a high school musical.

Tell us about the work you are doing now. What is a typical day like for you?

I work now as an arts integration teaching artist for Wolf Trap Institute for Early Learning Through the Arts. Through multi-week residencies, I work with early education teachers to teach them how to use drama strategies to engage students and improve learning in their specific

curriculum. A typical day includes planning sessions with teachers to customize lesson plans to meet their curriculum goals, and leading classroom sessions with their students. In one residency I got to spend my days in role as Mrs. Wishy-Washy from the book Mrs. Wishy-Washy's Farm by Joy Cowley to show teachers how to use storytelling and props to teach literacy goals. In another residency, I was leading imaginary excursions to the forests of Winter Dance by Marion Dane Bauer to teach sorting and counting. Each new day is an exciting new experience with new stories, new characters, and new discoveries.

What is one of your favorite memories from your time at USU's Department of Theatre Arts?

Some of my fondest memories of USU include assistant directing the mainstage production of A Midsummer Night's Dream, the heated discussions in Matt's classes, and all the many, many hours we all spent hanging out in the green room or the Dairy between classes and rehearsals.

How did your time at USU prepare you for your current position? Are there any specific skills, competencies, or understandings you developed at USU that you might not have otherwise developed?

When I started USU I had every intention of graduating and becoming a traditional, full time high school drama teacher. I was terrified of working with younger students. So of course, my career has been mostly working with pre-k, elementary and middle school students. Without Matt's classes Methods of Teaching Drama K-6 and Drama Across the Curriculum, I would not have had the skills or confidence to apply for an elementary teaching job or to be a teaching artist for ages 3-5. I also worked with Matt as a research assistant, and traveled to national theatre and research conferences to help him present. The things I learned at these conferences led to research projects of my own with other theatre students. We were thrown head-first into the world of research. One of these projects was a study assessing theatre methods in a high school English classroom. It was my first real time teaching outside of a methods classroom setting. I gained so much invaluable experience and knowledge not only about creating meaningful lessons, but also assessment and arts integration, both of which I would be hired to do in the future.

What advice would you offer to a potential student considering studying theatre education at USU?

Learn to love hard work. There's hard, and then there's "Matt Omasta hard". This program will push you to your

limits and beyond. This program expects the very best from you, so take advantage of every opportunity thrown your way. Get out of your comfort zone and get as much experience in every aspect of theatre that you can. It will make you a better student, it will make you a better theatre educator, and it will make you a better human being.