International Journal of Education & the Arts

Editorial: Issues in Teaching Theatre Design

Carly Holzwarth, Guest Editor
Bucknell University, United States of America

The title, *Issues in Teaching Theatre Design*, may elicit ideas of an edition full of solutions to the problems theatre design educators are currently facing; however, this special edition of IJEA is less interested in finding solutions and more invested in the questions, ideas, experimentations, theorizations, and research of theatre design educators. Primarily focused on theatre design education in the wake of 2020 and its subsequent years of global unrest and trauma, which teachers and students moved together through with vulnerability, this special edition originated from deep conversations I was having with my students and fellow educators in the classroom, design studios, and national conferences. How were students and teachers co-creating the next wave of theatre design curriculum and pedagogy? How are the values of this new generation of college students questioning and pushing back against some design traditions that many of us design educators were taught? What does it look like to completely overhaul a discipline's theoretical framework?

This collection of essays, reflections, and case studies showcases how educators take on these questions and others in their teaching and design practices. My intention in guest editing this special edition is to encourage other theatre design educators to continue sharing their experiences within scholarly mediums such as academic journals in addition to exhibitions of arts-based research, which are more traditionally associated with theatre designers. Moreover, to see theatre design education theorized and researched beyond the dominant skills-based literature that is readily available to students and teachers.

This special edition is divided into two sections. I chose this particular curation with the original call for papers in mind, which intentionally sought two types of contributions: ones that focused on pedagogical impulses and theoretical explorations and others that laid out praxis-based case studies and reflections as guides for bringing theory to the design classroom through real-world examples. Each section takes on multiple design specializations, winding from the general or interdisciplinary design classroom to costume design, costume production, scenic design, scenography, and lighting design.

Section One

The first section of this special issue examines the psychology of a theatre design classroom regarding students and teachers and how they pedagogically collide. In the first piece, Austin M. Rausch examines the impulses surrounding the design classroom. Particularly the desires and fears associated with taking creative risks and the critical building of social connections as part of the design process. Rausch takes care in examining the balance of student needs and the necessary discomfort in design classrooms in crafting his piece about the impacts of fear.

In the second essay in Section One, Jeremy M. Bernardoni explores what happens when a costume design course is built and taught centered on specific theoretical frameworks. In his essay, Bernardoni uses social psychological theories of dress, which are, perhaps, more commonly leveraged in adjacent fields of study from costume design, to examine the impacts on student comprehension. Beyond understanding costume design principles and the field, Bernardoni discusses the effects of such theoretical frameworks in a costume design course in broadening students' conceptualization of costume design and creating the potential for them to make connections across other fields.

In the following essay, Christina Thanasoula does not examine theoretical frameworks for teaching design like Bernardoni's piece but instead looks at educational paradigms and approaches as a way to rethink and reimagine lighting design curriculum. Thanasoula combines autobiographical reflection, theory, and a review of literature from the field of lighting design in her argument for a constructionist educational approach in the lighting design classroom. With a focus on 'learning to be' a lighting designer, Thanasoula examines what educational approaches potentially align strongest with professional lighting designers' sense of being in the field. Thanasoula concludes that a fluid curriculum influenced by adult learning theory creates a foundation for educators to be creative with their curriculum by leveraging their lived experiences as designers and instructors.

The last essay in Section One by Lindsay Webster and Rana Esfandiary identifies a common curricular gap in student designer education between the unrealized project of the classroom and the realized project of a season design and considers what a curricular bridge between these two established instructional methods might look like. Webster and Esfandiary examine

scenography as it manifests in formal and informal educational settings and theorize how practical parameters for students bridge the gap between unrealized and realized projects and maintain exploration and experimentation for students instead of hampering them. Moreover, they found that through their case studies on parameters, sustainability was integrated into the design process as a critical consideration. In a field that has moved toward sustainable practices over the last few years, training young designers to see sustainability as an integral part of the design process and not a cumbersome reality check in a realized project is worth exploring further.

Section Two

The second section of this special edition includes shorter case studies and informative reflections from theatre design educators reimagining design curricula in their classrooms. The first piece in this section by Amanda Petefish-Schrag is a thoughtful reflection on a puppetry course the author taught in one of the semesters on the backdrop of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Petefish-Schrag brings an almost notes from the field approach to her piece about the complexity of teaching design amongst amid the trauma and fear of the world students were and continue to inhabit. The piece considers the 'impossibility' of teaching, creating an opening for authentic connection and engagement with students that feels profound and worthy of serving as a guide forward for the mentality of design educators. As Petefish-Schrag notes, she does not offer solutions but, perhaps, more questions. These questions guide us all in rethinking the theatre design curriculum.

The next piece in the second section by Anastasia Goodwin centers on costume educators sharing their experiences on the topic that seems to be on everyone's radar in the costume field: de-centering the West in costume curriculum. Goodwin provides context for her topic of inquiry and why hearing from actual educators provides a gauge for where the field is in practice with de-centering the West in the curriculum and where changes are beginning to manifest. Responses from Goodwin's interviews with costume educators highlight both progress and hurdles and underscore how even university-supported paradigm shifts need more interrogation and intention at the implementation phase. Overall, this piece provides other design educators with a touchstone of the experience of, in some cases, overhauling curriculum or pedagogy to achieve a specific goal.

Alyssa Ridder also authors the next piece within the costume field, but with a focus on costume drafting as it pertains to accessibility and technology. Ridder, who has championed digital garment simulation and drafting since its earliest phases within the costume field, breaks down the pedagogical impulses and theoretical underpinnings of using CLO's pattern drafting software when teaching costume technician students to pattern draft. Ridder takes on the knee-jerk tendencies to create binaries between the digital and the analog, particularly in

costuming, and paints a picture of a non-hierarchical view of the tools costume technicians use. Ridder reflects on her experience with her students in teaching and learning across these tools and the potential implications integrating digital pattern drafting may have on the costume classroom.

In the next piece, Michael Schweikardt questions and examines the implications of place for projects within the scenic design classroom. Specifically, Schweikardt takes inspiration from Richard M. Isackes's 2008 essay *On the Pedagogy of Theatre Stage Design: A Critique of Practice* and asks his students to dwell on the idea of the performance space as part of their scenic design projects. For example, Schweikardt asks his students to research the theatre spaces they intend to design sets in for their projects to understand the greater context in which their art would exist. Schweikardt provides a concrete curricular example of implementing ideas of place and stewardship into a paper project and reflects on its impact on student work and outcomes.

The last piece of Section Two and the last piece in this special edition is a case study on collaboration and research within an intercultural context to build cultural competency within the design process for students. Author Aly Renee Amidei discusses what she refers to as the *Darkroom Project*, which takes on visual styles research and design with a social justice lens. Focusing on building culturally competent designer work, Amidei lays out the context of this project and the learning outcomes for her students. Amidei argues the importance of building critical visual literacy as skills that are imperative in practicing culturally competent design and how to potentially build a curriculum around these ideas through her explanation of the Darkroom Project.

Conclusion

As the guest editor of this special edition of *IJEA* and as a researcher on costume design pedagogy, I found myself taking inspiration from each piece, even though many were outside my area of expertise. I hope other theatre design educators share a similar experience by exploring how each specialization is tackling issues in teaching theatre design in theory and practice. A cross-pollination of ideas, questions, pedagogy, and curriculum strengthens potential innovations within our field, which is firmly rooted in collaborative work. I thank each author for sharing their research and reflections for this special edition.

About the Guest Editor

Carly Holzwarth is a costume designer, arts educator, Assistant Professor of Costume Design and History, and C. Graydon and Mary E. Rogers Faculty Fellow at Bucknell University. She

holds an MFA in Costume Design and is currently a Ph.D. candidate in Art Education at The Pennsylvania State University. Her research is focused on ethical costume pedagogies and the ways in which costume design and production are taught in varying contexts. She is currently working on research on the costume fitting room and its pedagogy of collaboration and feltness. This research considers intimacy and care between teachers, students, and materials within the fitting room as a learning space. Her work as a costume designer has been seen across the US and abroad, including but not limited to The National Black Theatre, Edinburgh Theatre Festival, The John F. Kennedy Centre, and The Adelaide Fringe Festival.