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Fear and How It Inhibits Creativity in Performance Arts Education, with Special Attention to the Theatrical Design Classroom

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Abstract

This paper will address the concept, ideologies, and challenges of fear and how it inhibits the development of creativity in theatre designers, practitioners, and students. Fear comes from many sources and manifests in various ways. Understanding where these fears originate is paramount. Fear can be a result of learned behaviors and traumas, cultural or societal influence, self-induced anxieties, as well as from physiological makeup in human nature. These root fears can then give rise to fears of insufficiency and a loss of confidence. After identifying these fears, an educator can encourage and inspire students who have previously believed success to be impossible or incompatible with the field they hope to work in. Additionally, an educator (and student) may then develop skills to aid successful application of creative behaviors. The concept of fear and its relationship to creativity is central to student development through both pedagogical and professional research, specifically in the theatrical design area. To instill growth and development of teaching strategies and course content, an educator must recognize, assess, and reconfigure teaching methods to meet students with varying levels of experience. Theatrical design courses, and other theatrical courses, may benefit from this research.

Theatre design and production is a fast-paced, exciting environment. It requires philosophical contemplation, textual analysis, complex communication, and practical application of skill and technique. The world-building of a theatrical performance is a lengthy process that most audiences don't see. Where theatrical designers begin their process sometimes differs from where other artists begin. That is not to say that studio artists and theatrical designers are not holistically dissimilar. Their processes indeed have significant overlap. However, artists whose end goal is not to build worlds perhaps begin by conceptualizing the media they want to work in, using their skill level and style, and their artistic voice, then focus on a particular subject matter of their own choosing to communicate a desire, need, or belief. These artists often choose these elements because of their personal experience, their desire to express a narrative, and their desire to create change or instill commentary in the world at large (Congdon, 2019). Theatrical designers, however, are given a subject matter, a set of defined parameters, albeit to varying degrees, and are asked to create an entire world through the artistic process. Only then may a theatrical designer begin to decide which medium they wish to work in. Additionally, the medium a theatrical designer chooses will likely change at various stages of the design process. For example, a costume rendering may be executed through pencil and watercolor painting or digital programs, but the costume itself needs to exist in three-dimensional mediums. Costumes may be pulled or rented from an existing costume stock, purchased from various vendors, or created by a costume technician through flat patterning, draping, and stitching.

Both art and theatrical design begin with a desire. There must exist a need to begin, create, or problem-solve. To successfully execute a design, the art of creativity must be explored, which can be daunting. Furthermore, one who teaches theatrical design, or any studio art, encounters a unique set of challenges to overcome, whether for themselves or, in this case, for their students. Joseph Campbell is famous for writing *The Hero's Journey*, in which he describes where one's story begins with a desire to change, grow, discover, and learn (Campbell, 2008). Many questions are asked in this initial stage of contemplation. Where do you begin? With what materials or methods? What is the motivation for this task, and why is it important? These questions are not easily answered and take deep thought and consideration. It is a complex journey that takes courage to overcome fear.

Before addressing the root causes of fear and its implications, one must understand and question why one creates art. Furthermore, for theatre practitioners, why does one collaborate to make art for the purpose of storytelling? Is it because human beings want to be seen, heard, understood, and held? Is it because human beings have in them some inherent desire to share their stories? Is it perhaps through the creation of social constructs, production, and commercialism that human beings have an instinctive desire to understand themselves and the world around them to create meaning (Anderson, 2004, p. 31)? Anderson proposed this idea

to hopefully answer the question of why we make art, but a similar conjecture might apply to the question of why we tell stories. Clearly, there is a connection between visual art and the art of storytelling. Visual art consists of color, texture, value, line, depth, and composition. These components are used by designers in all theatrical design vocations to create the world in which a story is being told. The characters are also forged from these elements. These visual representations support the thematic, emotional, and historical material and collaborate to communicate the story and the themes therein.

Kathy G. Short writes about literature in a similar sense. She posits that stories serve a greater purpose within the fabric of humankind. Human beings try to make sense of the world around them through their individual and shared experiences. Through these stories, “we construct meaning about ourselves and others. We...tell stories to make connections, form relationships, and create community with others” (Short, 2012, p. 9). Short continues to note that “literature is viewed...as a means of teaching comprehension or writing strategies, celebrating cultural diversity, raising issues of social justice and equity, and creating critical consciousness” (Short, 2012, p. 11).

Angela Clarke and Peter Cripps define creativity as “a transformative process of knowing, thinking and doing that embodies elements such as risk-taking, envisaging, engaging, persisting, observing, experimenting, attending to relationships...and critically reflecting” (2012, p. 114). When a student undergoes this “transformative process” it can be overwhelming; it can cause the student to doubt themselves or access those fears and anxieties previously discussed. It can be a sensitive, painful, and alarming process that takes courage. Can creativity or imagination exist in a world that has recycled and exhausted most all unique ideas? The answer might well be “yes”.

It is inevitable that artists and designers will be influenced by previous creations. Additionally, human beings possess a collective cultural memory. Humans share certain desires, dreams, and fears, but they experience them in different ways. They also all have the choice to share them or not. In Joseph Campbell’s extensive research on human mythology, he finds that most ancient cultures share similar stories. For example, most cultures have a flood story in which the world (in becoming irreparable) is swept away. This would allow for a new beginning. Most cultures also share stories of a deceitful king, an aiding priestess or goddess, and so forth. These cultures, such as the Greeks, Norse, and Mayans, did not have contact with one another, yet their stories are similar (Campbell, 2008). John Bucher reiterates this idea of the shared flood dream, or myth, in his interview with Alie Ward on her *Ologies* podcast episode “Mythology with John Bucher” (2018). Bucher and Ward discuss the prevalence of cautionary tales, with varying circumstances and characters, in various cultures. These cultures, supposedly never having come into contact with one another, share stories and

warnings. Bucher commends Campbell in this interview for recognizing “that there are these stories that exist all over the world, perhaps because people are having the same dreams, and having the same experiences” (2018).

If we all share a common goal, why are people afraid to make connections, take chances, and experiment? One must understand what fear really is before combating it. Merriam-Webster defines fear as “an unpleasant, often strong emotion caused by anticipation or awareness of danger” or “a reason for alarm” (Merriam-Webster, 2022). A dictionary definition often distills a word into its most pertinent information, but it fails to delve into the root cause of it. Fear is one the four basic human emotions that most people will experience throughout their lives. Dr. Mary Poffenroth holds a Ph. D. and M.S. in Psychology, an M. Sc. in Science Communication, and an M.S. and B. A. in Biological Sciences. Her multifaceted approach to fear helps to make her one of the foremost researchers in fear studies. She explores the psychology and biology of fear in Alie Ward’s podcast series *Ologies* in the 2018 episode entitled “Fearology”. Dr. Poffenroth suggests that there are two potential categories of fear: factual versus fictional. Before exploring these two binary categories, one must pause to consider these two terms and their implications. The two words “factual” and “fictional” are problematic because they categorize fears, which are vast and complex. Additionally, one might experience a fear that is very much real or factual, which has been previously noted as fictional. Perhaps “rational” and “irrational” can be used in their places. The implications are less extreme but still force fears into two limiting, binary categories. Nevertheless, these two categories might be useful in compartmentalizing fear and allow one to analyze it in different ways.

Dr. Poffenroth describes some fears as life-threatening and immediate, such as being attacked or physically threatened. The physical body experiences a “stress response” and shuts down all other unnecessary systems. This might include digestion, cellular regeneration, or libido. The stress response triggers sweat and increased heart rate, which is the physical body preparing to flee. Alternatively, other fears, such as the fear of not being good enough or the fear of failure, still trigger the stress response. These fears often maintain a persistent yet high-functioning level of stress. It could be described as prolonged internalized fear that also often have internal or social triggers. In Western society, fear is demonized and seen as weakness, yet fear is common to most all human beings. Dr. Poffenroth also suggests that, in Western society particularly, there is a so-called “stress badge of courage”. People compete for who is the most stressed, but it is often unidentified as fear itself. If fear is universal and if most everyone experiences it, why is it not taught to us? Historically, there has not been a healthy method in which people learn about fear or learn how to deal with it, despite it being an integral component of our emotional foundation. Finally, Dr. Poffenroth mentions that children, and even adults, seek comfort when they feel fear, if they can. Society, however, has

trained people to internalize and numb this desire with distractions, addictions, and poor coping mechanisms. Knowing this might inspire educators to begin to unravel the toxic culture that society has placed upon individuals.

By recognizing and defining fear, both students and educators can begin to understand it, perhaps even befriend it, and discover the world of creative opportunities both personal and professional. The key to creative success is to persevere despite fear. In other words, to proceed with courage. Fear may never be truly extinguished, but one might learn strategies to cope with and even collaborate with fear to unleash powerful creative behaviors. Kaufman and Gregoire even suggest that “risk and failure are essential components of meaningful creative achievement and, really, of any creative work” (Kaufman and Gregoire, 2016, as cited in Congdon, 2019, p. 85).

Artists and theatrical designers will often face a unique set of fears, which educators must observe, recognize, embrace, discuss, and combat. For example, the fears that artists experience mostly consist of competitive fears, or the fear that one is not unique or original in their ideas (Congdon, 2019). Additionally, fears experienced by students in a classroom setting (i.e., fear of judgment or not being liked) can be compounded by preexisting fears, or even learned fears (Ward, 2018). Furthermore, theatre is unique in that it creates an entire world from the interaction between internal, visual, and performative art. To a visual population, this world-building demonstrates a perspective they might’ve not imagined otherwise. The collaborative art of theatre and storytelling provides entertainment, stimulation of the senses, and emotional connection in unique ways that film or even studio art might not. A painting may inspire the viewer, but it is up to the viewer to interpret it. Theatre practitioners carefully choose how to deliver information and emotion to an audience to share perspectives on philosophical ideologies and contemplate what might be wrong in the world. Tom Anderson also suggests that “the ability to make, perceive, and engage others in affective understanding is key to making art, and the ability to manipulate affectively imbued symbols is the heart of artistic performance” (Anderson, 2004, p. 34). Theatrical design contributes to an ongoing cycle of unique storytelling, world-building, and emotional communication and understanding, which unifies the self and the collective.

Due to the overwhelming number of elements that contribute to theatrical storytelling, it is clear why students who are learning to create worlds are hesitant to accept the task given to them. A theatre educator’s task is to empathize with and inspire students, give them viable tools to break the process down into manageable parts, and prepare them for this feat. To overcome fear and anxiety associated with this artistic task, a student needs to learn how to use their creative functions. All human beings have some level of creativity within them; all human beings have some level of artistic capability within them. However, when students

begin to conceptualize, draw, use the elements and principles of design, or begin to understand creativity, many believe that failure is inevitable, solely because they've never done it before. An educator's response to a student's apprehension may shift depending on class climate and collective psyche but is often distilled to the sentiment: "Failure is part of the process." "Failure" is a problematic word, especially in an educational context. The educational system is in place to allow students learning experiences that they can grow from. In this sense, it may be said that "failure" is misleading word. It has many negative connotations which prevent a student from making bold choices and taking risks. An educator might find that if this word is replaced with a more constructive word, such as "challenge," "obstacle," or "learning experience," a more positive disposition can be fostered and developed. In a theatrical design course setting, failure doesn't necessarily mean a student will fail the course. An educator might attempt to reconfigure their approach to failure and assumptions from previous generations. It is widely known that educators are required to evaluate their students within the confines of academia, but the purpose of the educator is "to enrich, stimulate, and challenge students to see more, to remember more, and to put their own visual imprint on ideas" (Anderson, 2004, p. 36). Therefore, the true assessment might come from students' growth/expansion and effort in grasping concepts, techniques and their applications. Samuel D. Rocha writes in his book, *A Primer for Education & Philosophy* (2014):

Students...are often unmotivated except by a sense of entrapment, a feeling that they must go to school and get good grades in order to get a respectable job, good reviews and promotions, a pay raise for having an advanced degree, so on and so forth—the alienation that comes from fleeing alienation, from trying to avoid disappointing family and friends. (p. 36)

A formal education contributes to the development of practical skills and techniques, communication methods, and social fluidity. It is important to assess the level of skill and communication students currently possess and assist them in growing rather than demanding all students adhere to a rigid set of rules and regulations. That is not to say that students can avoid learning techniques to communicate their creative ideas. In a theatrical design classroom, it is imperative that students grasp methods of research, then communicate their ideas visually and verbally, as well as various other communication methods. However, without knowing a student's current capabilities, skills, or the fears they are currently experiencing, a mentor cannot guide them appropriately. Additionally, an educator must approach each student and course with diversity, equity, and inclusion in mind. Only then can educators begin to help students overcome obstacles to make meaningful progress. With this in mind, fear and its complexities must be understood to unleash student potential. Lisa Congdon, author of *Find Your Artistic Voice*, suggests that fear in artists is a blessing and a

course. She suggests that fear can be a motivational tool. Sometimes fear can be felt, but it may propel an artist, or any human being, to overcome challenges. Some people even seek fear out in an effort to feel elation or accomplishment (2019).

Fear and anxiety are closely related. Both can inhibit thought processes, cognitive behaviors, and the ability to communicate (all of which are essential to the creative process). Many educators see the threat that fear of failure places on their students, but often misunderstand and avoid this threat. Some even discount the existence of fear and direct students to ignore it without discussing its origins or implications. It is important to note that this tendency in educators themselves stem from fear. They may feel a “perceived threat of failure” (Bledsoe and Baskin, 2014, p. 33) they prepare a course, when they walk into a classroom, or when they begin instruction. Furthermore, educators may also feel the effects of the imposter phenomenon, formerly referred to as the imposter syndrome. It is important to avoid the term “syndrome” since it is not a medical diagnosis. Jaruwat Sakulku and James Alexander suggest that some individuals may “experience intense feeling that their achievements are undeserved and worry that they are likely to be exposed as fraud” (Sakulku & Alexander, 2011, p. 75). They also note that an estimated 70% of all people will experience at least one episode of this phenomenon in their lives (Gravois, 2007, as cited in Sakulku & Alexander, 2011). Even if an individual achieves success, those experiencing this phenomenon will deny their abilities and fear they truly are not capable of the tasks they’ve achieved. Many individuals will also deflect the validity of their own findings by offering conditionals. For example, they might suggest that they couldn’t have done the task without certain conditions in place. They also might feel they have not done the task to the highest possible standard, which is a form of perfectionism. Students and educators will likely both feel these feelings, as suggested in the case studies presented by Sakulku and Alexander (2011).

If educators can be aware of this phenomenon in themselves, as well as their students, they begin to be open about its existence, and possibly generate trust and communication about it in the classroom, which breaks down the barriers blocking creative behavior. In his article *Why and How We Make Art, with Implications for Art Education* (2004), Tom Anderson believes:

Teachers who are sensitive to this fear...can remind their students that the primary difference between an artist and a non-artist is not talent or ideas. It is that the non-artist allowed [their] self-doubt to reign and then quit... To expect perfection is to invite paralysis. (p. 37)

He also suggests that “the fear or alarm response...kills curiosity and inhibits exploration and learning” (p. 26). This response, commonly known as the fight-or-flight response, is ingrained

into all human beings and activates when a perceived threat is sensed. In more contemporary situations, the fight-or-flight response has shifted in form from our ancient predecessors. Regardless of any safety measures that an educational institution or creative profession has, it does not guarantee safety, and anyone may still feel this fight-or-flight response from trauma-related factors, fear of failure, fear of being judged, and fear of not being accepted or liked. Bledsoe and Baskin suggest fear may also prevail because “each student holds a mental template of classroom environments made up of incidents both positive and negative from earlier occurrences in school and other life experiences” (Bledsoe & Baskin, 2014, p. 33). Additionally, many targeted groups of people experience a higher level of persistent internal fear. This kind of fear lies very close to the surface and may be triggered more frequently in an individual with this affiliation.

Another obstacle is that many students believe they are incapable of learning certain techniques or behaviors. Students feel they possess a finite amount of information and do not have the capacity to grow or expand their knowledge or skills. It is important that students feel that they already contribute some value to the world in which they live. Many people, or students, don’t feel they possess intrinsic value. Many students, including those who have experienced trauma previously or those who are neurodivergent, may approach new content with a fixed mindset, which Bledsoe and Baskin describe. A student with a “fixed mindset believe[s] that they possess a ‘certain amount of intelligence, a certain personality, and a certain moral character,’ which limits their capacity to learn new information” (Dweck, 2006, as cited in Bledsoe & Baskin, 2014, p. 35).

Many educators are not licensed therapists or psychologists, but it is important that they understand the complexity of these fears and anxieties to curate a classroom culture that is trauma-informed and supportive. Providing a nurturing environment for students to feel safe and secure allows them freedom to explore their thoughts and capabilities. Furthermore, understanding individual student fears as well as collective classroom fears can also inform instructional methods. For example, if a student or group of students are all experiencing fears related to sexism, an educator can discuss this issue in the course, while relating it to course content. I taught Costume Design in the Fall of 2022, immediately following the Summer in which the abortion ban debate resurfaced. My course primarily consisted of female-identifying students, so it was beneficial to choose course content that not only addressed student fears but also served as a vehicle to explore design concepts. I decided to have students design *Intimate Apparel* by Lynn Nottage. They also had a choice to design *Lysistrata* or *Medea*. These texts allowed us to discuss female bodily autonomy while creating interest and passion for the design elements. This example shows that an educator can address student fears by modifying the course while still teaching the required content. Most people possess a unique approach to subjects, including storytelling. Everyone perceives

stories differently. Some people can easily create images in their minds by using their imagination or the “mind’s eye”, either consciously or subconsciously. When people read a story or a play without seeing it on stage first, they may begin to visualize the world, including the characters, colors, emotions, textures, and details. One’s ability to visualize, like most things, falls on a spectrum. Some individuals experience a hyperactive imagination, scientifically known as hyperphantasia (Zeman, et. al, 2015, as cited in Giulio, 2015). However, there are some individuals who experience aphantasia, which is defined as “the inability to form mental images of real or imaginary people, places, or things” (Giulio, 2021). Knowing that all people experience different levels of imaginative capabilities is vital in curating appropriate teaching methods. For theatrical design educators, it is important to understand that not all students have this capability. A student may or may not need visual research, such as paintings or photographs, to conjure inspiration.

Being creative often means taking risks, assessing the success of that risk taken, then taking more risks, until eventually, you become satisfied with the product. In art and design, there will always be more to revise, but perfection should not be the goal. The perfection motivation is old-fashioned and debatably obsolete. It does not exist, and even if it does, it would be subjective. Allan Mallinger, M.D., describes perfection as a myth in his article “The Myth of Perfection: Perfectionism in the Obsessive Personality” (2009). He outlines the dangers of the perfectionism myth and suggests that a perfectionist will strive to “perform with flawless competence, make the right choice or decision, excel in everything that counts and never be found wrong about anything.” He adds that perfectionists often believe they should be “above criticism in every important personal attribute, including values, attitudes and opinions [which] guarantee fail-safe protection against failure, criticism, rejection and humiliation” (p. 109). He suggests that maintaining this ideology is dangerous to a person’s mental health. It can cause unrealistic expectations, a superhero complex, procrastination, feelings of guilt, doubt, anxiety, and depression. The reality is, “no matter how bright, capable, circumspect or diligent a person is, occasional errors, poor choices and outright failures are inevitable. Nor can anyone always be the best, the smartest, the most knowledgeable” (p. 109). Perfectionism can create unrealistic expectations in an artist or designer on a different level. It is widely noted that visual art is subjective and depends on the viewer’s perspective. If a creative person identifies as a perfectionist, their ability to complete an assignment on time will be difficult since perfectionists tend to procrastinate and obsess over countless revisions.

For students to access creative behaviors, a teacher should also assess how they foster both convergent and divergent learning methods. Each teacher may also currently exhibit a proclivity towards one more than the other, as Kaycheng Soh describes (2017). She suggests that convergent-focused educators “ensure that students learn what is prescribed by the curriculum so as to fulfill the cultural transmission or re-creation function of education” (p.

59). Even in the theatrical design classroom, some convergence is necessary in the curriculum for students to learn techniques and methods. The theatrical design course may be prescribed in some ways. Each student might be given a set of projects and deadlines. Each student may view and participate in demonstrations, read/analyze plays, use various resources to access visual research, and present their findings through presentations. Inversely, it can be a challenge for creative behaviors to flourish if an educator imposes a rigid form of convergence. Divergent instruction has its benefits, especially in the theatrical design classroom, where unique ideas and concepts are often explored. J.P. Guilford first coined these terms in his 1957 article "Creative Abilities in the Arts" in *Psychological Review*. He describes divergent thinking as "going off in different directions," which can contribute to better scores on standardized tests. He suggests this type of thinking provides "the most obvious indications of creativity" (p. 112).

There are several ideologies that might be considered in cultivating a classroom culture that promotes creative behaviors which can help combat fears and anxieties of many different kinds. Soh outlines nine important ecological classroom conditions, based on Arthur J. Cropley's findings, that provide a basis to nurture creative behaviors: independence, integration, motivation, judgment, flexibility, evaluation, question, opportunities, and frustration (Soh, 2017).

First, students can benefit from operating independently in some of their classroom tasks. They might produce work by exploring concepts and ideas on their own and then provide evidence of this independence. Second, students might also benefit from sharing their ideas openly with the entire class through group discussion with the teacher as moderator. This type of integration can result in effective, creative communication. Next, if students are encouraged, and therefore motivated, to gain an understanding of basic knowledge and skills in the craft, they might diverge from traditional ways of thinking and comprehension. This kind of divergence may avoid creative stagnation. Students sometimes struggle to find motivation on their own, so it is beneficial for the educator to help foster this sense of motivation by perhaps being passionate about the course content, assignments, and sharing ideas related to purpose and process. Soh suggests that "motivating students to master factual knowledge, so that they have a solid base for divergent thinking is necessary as a launching pad for creative work. It is a common misconception that to be creative is to be able to come up with something from nothing" (Soh, 2017, p. 61). This continual recycling of information, images, methods, products, and so forth, is a result of the progression of human history. Therefore, a creative may benefit from understanding these methods and practices, which can assist in producing divergent, and therefore creative, work. For example, when a student takes a course that covers art or fashion history, they gain perspective on what humankind has previously produced in the world. Knowing a basis on which to diverge from allows creative

ways of understanding and thinking. Cropley suggests that “it is the deviation from what already exists that yields the surprise. In a certain sense, it is thus not the product itself that defines its own creativity but its effects on the people in the particular setting: the contrast of the novelty with the constraints of the external world” (Boden, 1994, as cited in Cropley, 2006, p. 126).

Additionally, if an educator listens openly and responds graciously to student comments, students can potentially feel respected, which Soh refers to as judgement. She suggests that educators might practice patience and withhold “judgement [of] students’ ideas until they have been...clearly formulated” which “provide[s] opportunities for students to reflect and thereby become more independent” (Soh, 2017, p. 61). Educators might also benefit from being flexible in changing course content based on student learning outcomes, the rate of learning and comprehension, student interests, student goals, or fears and apprehensions, as previously mentioned by choosing *Lysistrata* or *Medea*. Next, a student can also benefit from being encouraged to answer their own questions, if possible, before offering correction or evaluation by an educator. An educator who supports and encourages students to answer their own questions and self-evaluate can possibly develop trust between student and mentor, as well as trust within the students themselves. Next, a student will develop courage and trust if their questions are treated as valuable. Soh suggests that if a student has their questions overlooked or treated with disrespect, it will have a detrimental effect on student confidence.

Special attention should be given to the last two conditions that Soh explores, based on Cropley’s findings: opportunities and frustration. Soh describes the importance of “offering students opportunities to work with a wide variety of materials and under many different conditions” (Soh, 2017, p. 62). In the theatrical design classroom, this condition is highly valuable. When seeking visual research as inspiration for design work, a student should be encouraged to seek unconventional as well as traditional sources. They might also benefit from exploring different methods or media in rendering. This could perhaps be through traditional pencil drawing and watercolor painting, but it also could be through collage, abstract painting, and digital rendering. Various methods should be encouraged and explored for a creative student to find their own preference and mode of inspiration. An educator must be flexible in allowing students to ask questions and explore their own means of execution within reason.

The last condition outlines the importance of frustration in the creative process, which is directly related to the earlier discussion of failure. Creativity is difficult and isn’t necessarily a logical behavior or method. When a student encounters challenges or realizes they need to practice more and perhaps that they’ve made some mistakes, it can be discouraging. By creating a classroom culture that supports and encourages these moments of growth, educators

may notice further development of skill, trust, and confidence. Humans learn by testing boundaries, learning what works and what doesn't work, by practicing desired skills, and by being given the opportunity to do so. Creative behaviors can be seen in a student who continues to explore different methods and who perseveres through frustration. This condition, when viewed through a constructive lens, can be essential to the creative process. If educators recognize that students enter classrooms with unique backgrounds, experiences, preconceptions, and fears, they can begin to develop best practices to support them with empathy. If a student feels safe to explore, make mistakes, learn from those mistakes, and ask questions without being made to feel inferior, they can unlock unique creative behaviors and ways of thinking (Bledsoe & Baskin, 2014). Furthermore, if educators recognize that it takes time for students to feel comfortable, and if they remain patient, a student may show their true potential. When placed in a competitive atmosphere with peers, it is an opportunity for an educator to address it constructively. If students and educators can learn to take "a benign attitude to error in a culture where error is considered failure" (Clarke & Cripps, 2012, p. 123), creative divergence and inspiration will flow.

Theatrical designers, storytellers, and artists of all kinds should remember their purpose. Remembering the importance of art and creativity offers reassurance when fulfilling artistic purpose. Congdon suggests that "most artists are so busy simply attempting to produce satisfying work or make a living that they forget that, ultimately, they are making work to communicate their own version of the truth" (Congdon, 2019, p. 12). Even Tom Anderson suggests that studio "art should tell a story, indicate what is valued, cement social beliefs, or perform some other obvious extrinsic function beyond looking good for its own sake" (Anderson, 2004, p. 32). Theatrical designers are unique storytellers. They do not just tell stories; they share them. Sharing stories may indicate a deeper level of understanding and inclusion. Simply telling stories may indicate a one-sided experience. By sharing stories, theatrical designers and storytellers can create "empathy, not genius. Compassion, not erudition" (Rocha, 2014, p. 43). This has been, and may continue to be, one of the most passionate yet elusive goals of the theatre artist. Motivating students towards this goal is essential in understanding fear and where it comes from. When fear is addressed, accepted, and understood, an educator or student is taking the first step in unlocking creative freedom.

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About the Author

Austin M. Rausch is an Assistant Professor of Theatre in Costume Design at Purdue University Fort Wayne. Austin has an MFA in Costume Design from The Pennsylvania State University (2019) and a BA in Costume Design from St. Edward's University (2012) in Austin, Texas. Prior to practicing Costume Design, Austin was a performer and has continued to find connection and passion in many interdisciplinary theatre practices. Austin has worked for the Los Angeles Opera Company, California School for the Arts – San Gabriel Valley, and Bigfork Summer Playhouse, among several others. Currently in his tenure at Purdue University Fort Wayne, Austin is committed to expanding his pedagogy in design as well as acting and directing. He recently directed his first production and is currently working on expanding pedagogies that connect all theatre artists through the idea of fear, obstacle, empathy, and connection.

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