

THE DIRECTOR'S DILEMMA: BALANCING TEACHING AND SHOW-MAKING WITH ACTORS-IN-TRAINING

Segun Femi JUNAID

Department of Performing Arts
Bamidele Olumilua University of Education
Science and Technology.
Ikere-Ekiti, Ekiti State
junaidfemi1@gmail.com
+2348020610997

Emmanuel O. Iroh, Ph.D

Department of Theatre and Film Studies
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
Senior Research Fellow, Centre for Socially Engaged Theatre (C-SET),
University of Regina, Canada
eo.iroh@unizik.edu.ng
irohemmaogbo@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0009-0007-8377-8078>

Omololu Abe, Ph.D

Department of Performing Arts,
School of Humanities
College of Education
Bamidele Olumilua University of Education,
Science and Technology, IkereEkiti
Ekiti State, Nigeria
Abe.omololu@bouesti.edu.ng
Taiwoabe88@gmail.com

Olubunmi Christianah AJAYI

Department of Performing Arts,
School of Humanities
College of Education
Bamidele Olumilua University of Education,
Science and Technology, IkereEkiti
Ekiti State, Nigeria
achristianaolubunmi@gmail.com
08131292633

Abstract

The duty of a play director in an educational theatre is to teach students how to act and to ensure that play production meets acceptable standard for the audience who will watch the performance. He will strive to strike a balance to see that both teaching and rehearsals for performance get fair shares of his attention. This study looks at how directors can balance both roles when working with students actors. We used the 2025/2026 THA 313: PRICIPLES OF ADAPTATION play VENDETTA, story to stage, directed by Branco Ayomide Samuel and Staged managed by Popoola Lateefat Fadekemi as our case study. The data was derived from the director's interview, focus

group discussion with twenty 300-level cast members who watched the rehearsals from week one to the performance day. The study is hinged on the theories of Stanislavski, Meyerhold and Brecht. While Stanislavski totally agree that the actor needs relaxation and concentration, Meyerhold stresses the need for physical training to condition the human body to handle assignments. Brecht on the other hand posits that actors must recognize the role or importance of the audience and should not be afraid of them or frightened by their presence. Nonetheless, Grotowski maintained that it is more profitable to train an actor than wasting time in decorating the theatre as theatre can be poor. The data was analyzed through interviews with the director, focus groups with eight students namely, Bodun Demoyosore, Agu Gabriel, Edeth Humble, Oyekunle Israel, Adesuyi Ayomide Emmanuel, Durodola Oluwatofunmi Opeyemi, Bajo Benjamin, Adewuyi Adebukola and the notes from rehearsal. Findings show that the director constantly switched roles, sometimes he was a teacher, stopping to explain and demonstrate and at other times, he was a director, pushing for pace and polish. The main pressure points were: 1) Time vs. skill: students needed time to learn basics like body position and voice, but the production calendar was only six weeks; 2) Props vs. process: bringing real guns, food, and costumes too early slowed learning, but bringing them too late caused panic; 3) Audience vs. safety: the BOUESTI audience was critical and volatile, so the director had to prep students emotionally while still protecting their confidence. Educational theatre can do both: train the actor and honor the audience. But only if the director plans for the dilemma instead of pretending it doesn't exist.

Keywords: Director, Dilemma, Balancing, Teaching. Show-Making, Actors-In-Training

Introduction

Ask any university theatre director what the hardest part of their job is and many will say the same thing: “I’m supposed to teach and direct at the same time.” In a professional company, the director’s job is to get the best show possible. The actors are already trained but in a school, half of the cast may have never been on stage. They don’t know stage left from stage right. They mumble, freeze and treat props like museum pieces.

Yet the show still has a date. Tickets are sold. The Head of Department expects a product. Audience members are expected to come and watch the advertised production. The director is judged on the performance, not on how much the students grew. So directors get pulled in two directions. Teach too much, and your show looks like a classroom demo. Push too hard for product, and you produce anxious actors who learn nothing except stage fright.

This paper calls that pull “the director’s dilemma” and studies how one director handled it. Our case study is the 2025/2025 THA 313: PRICIPLES OF ADAPTATION play *VENDETTA*, story to stage, directed by Branco Ayomide Samuel and Staged managed by Popoola Lateefat Fadekemi, a production of 300-level students at Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science, and Technology, Ikere, Ekiti State. The play was part of THA 313, the first Play Adaptation Production Workshop these students ever took. Most had zero experience about adaptation and staging adapted script on stage. The director had six weeks.

Pertinent questions to be answered include: How does a director split time between pedagogy and production? What choices help students learn without killing the show? What mistakes turn the rehearsal room into either a boring class or a sweatshop? and Why BOUESTI? Bouesti is only serving as a case study because the conditions are typical in many Nigerian universities and other schools with limited budgets. The cast were true students guided in the process by the lecturers.

The audience was large, loud, and volatile but the resources were tight- wooden guns, borrowed costumes, one tech day. If a balance can be found here, it can be found elsewhere.

The dilemma isn't just local. Grotowski, who ran the Polish Laboratory Theatre, said "no matter how much theatre expands and explores its mechanical resources, it will remain technologically inferior to film". So he stripped things down and focused on the actor. That's pedagogy/ teaching. However, he still put up shows for the public. That's production. Stanislavski co-founded the Moscow Art Theatre to train actors and produce plays. He wrote books on teaching but also opened shows on deadlines. Even Meyerhold, who loved experiments, had to face audiences. So the tension is old but in schools it's sharper because the actors are graded and the performance is shown to the public. If we don't name the dilemma, directors feel guilty no matter what they do. They apologize for a weak show by saying "they're just students," or they apologize for stressed students by saying "the show must go on."

This article names it, studies it, and gives tools. We used interviews with the director, focus groups with eight students namely, Bodun Demoyosore, Agu Gabriel, Edeth Humble, Oyekunle Israel, Adesuyi Ayomide Emmanuel, Durodola Oluwatofunmi Opeyemi, Bajo Benjamin, Adewuyi Adebukola and notes from the rehearsal. We'll show where the director chose teaching over product and vice versa, and what the results were. The point isn't to pick a side. Good educational theatre does both. The point is to plan the switch so you're not switching by accident, in panic, at week 5.

Theoretical Framework

Four voices help us think about the director's double job: Stanislavski, Meyerhold, Brecht, and Grotowski.

Stanislavski: The Teacher-Director

Stanislavski's (1949) System is pedagogy/teaching first. He built exercises for relaxation, concentration, emotional memory, and "given circumstances". He said physical tension "paralyzes the duty of the body and prevents the mind from concentration". In school, students start tense. So a director must teach them how to relax before they can act. That takes time. He also stressed "scoring the role" through breaking it into bits. That's teaching. But Stanislavski was also a working director at the Moscow Art Theatre. He opened shows. He knew deadlines. So his system assumes a long rehearsal process where teaching and building the show happen together. Many school shows don't have that luxury.

Meyerhold (1969): The Trainer-Director

Meyerhold (1969) left Stanislavski because he saw a "lack of physical expressivity". He trained actors with gymnastics, boxing, and biomechanics. His rehearsals looked like sports practice. That's pedagogy/training of the body. But his goal was a product: a highly stylized, rhythmic show that could "propel emotional reactions" in the audience. So he split rehearsal into training the body, then applying it to the scene during rehearsal. For a director with beginners, this suggests separate "skill days" and "scene days".

Brecht (1964): The Director-as-Educator of Audience

Brecht (1964): didn't just train actors; he trained audiences too. His "alienation effect" keeps the crowd critical, not lost in emotion. For a school director, this is key. The Bouesti audience is already critical and loud. Brecht says: don't fight it. Use songs, narration, and direct address to

manage it. That turns a problem into a tool. It also means the director must teach actors how to “report” action, not just live it. That’s a skill, and skills need teaching time.

Grotowski (1968): The Poor Theatre Director

Grotowski said theatre is just “actor, undefined space and scanty or no props”. He removed everything except the actor-audience relationship. For a director with no budget, this is permission: you can teach first, add stuff later. But Grotowski still performed for the public. His actors did “intense exploration of the relationship between the actors and the audience”. So even in poor theatre, product matters.

Synthesis: Two-Track Rehearsal

Together, these voices suggest a model:

1. Pedagogy Track: Relaxation, voice, body, endowment, rhythm. Slow, repetitive, safe. Based on Stanislavski and Meyerhold.
2. Production Track: Blocking, props, costumes, lights, audience rhythm. Faster, integrative. Based on Brecht and deadlines.

The director’s job is to schedule both and know which hat they’re wearing each day. If you mix them without plan, students get confused. They think every note is a grade, or they think every rehearsal is a run-through. Clarity helps.

Analysis

The BOUESTI process shows the director switching tracks almost daily.

Weeks 1-3: Heavy Pedagogy Track

The director said, “I was grappling with helping the students to master their lines... they have barely learnt to keep body positions”. So he delayed props, costumes, and lights. He started with set stand-ins such as boxes, benches “so that they can get the actions and the blockings”. This is Stanislavski: get the given circumstances stable before adding complexity.

He also used demonstration: “I have to get on stage and repeatedly to show them how to apply the elements”. That’s teaching. Students confirmed this helped: they were “learning to move on stage” for the first time in an adaptation play. Though the show looked empty for three weeks which may warrant an outside observer might panic, but the director accepted it because skill was the goal.

Week 4-5: Blended Track

Real props entered “two weeks to production” and brought problems, distraction, fear of the gun sound, trouble eating and talking. The director shifted to “patience and demonstration”. He was still teaching, but now inside a run. He noted, “it could also be counterproductive... to slow them down”. So he balanced: do the scene, then stop and teach, then do it again.

Costumes came “a few days to dress tech” with new issues and challenges as students “grabbed their phone and started snapping” instead of working. The director did a “thorough costume rehearsal where they wore the costume and we even made adjustment... till they got use to the application”. That’s pedagogy inside production.

Week 6: Heavy Production Track

Lights “did not come until dress tech”. The director knew “when these elements come, it will change their attitude”. He shifted to product: pace, cues, spacing. He still did pedagogy by pre-warning them that “the audience in the school is very critical and volatile... just hold on and pause”. He taught a specific skill for show night. He also managed logistics pedagogy: “costume to come in not on the day of dress tech... to gauge and check your changing time”. That’s teaching stagecraft, not just acting.

Result

Students said they “got used to the elements” and were “highly motivated by the audience”. No “casualty” happened because “we really worked out everything to details”. The director avoided “emotional constipation” by mixing tracks. When he stayed too long in pedagogy, the show lagged and when he pushed too fast to product, actors “got carried away” or “frightened”. The balance was the fix. Three challenges /Red flags were observed:

1. Teaching-only Week 3 and actors still miming everything. Danger: no time for muscle memory.
2. Product-only: New costume on show day caused delay. Danger: logistics break art.
3. Switching without naming: Students didn’t know if a note was a lesson or a command. Confusion followed.

Discussion

The director’s dilemma is real, but it’s manageable with structure. We propose a “Two-Track, One-Calendar” plan for a 6-week educational production.

Track 1: Pedagogy Days: Mon/Wed

Goals: skill, relaxation, endowment. No full runs. Work bits. Use stand-ins. Stanislavski rules. Meyerhold exercises. Stop and repeat. Students know: “Today we learn, not perform.”

Track 2: Production Days: Tue/Thu/Sat

Goals: integration, pace, elements. Runs with whatever elements are ready. Brecht rules: add audience stand-ins week 4. Students know: “Today we build the show.”

Friday: Assessment and notes. Director says which hat they wore and why. This stops guilt and confusion.

This work is important because it:

1. **Protects concentration:** Stanislavski said tension kills creativity. By separating “learn” days from “do” days, students relax because expectations are clear.
2. **Builds rhythm:** Meyerhold said acting is rhythm. Production days build scene rhythm; pedagogy days build body rhythm.
3. **Manages the crowd:** Brecht said use the audience. By week 4, add noise. Teach the “freeze” “just hold on and pause” as a skill, not a panic move.
4. **Respects poverty:** Grotowski said you don’t need stuff to start. Pedagogy days are poor theatre. Production days add what you have, when you have it.

Evidence from BOUESTI

When the director used stand-ins early, students learned blocking. When he added real props at week 4, they had two weeks to adjust and “overcome it”. When he pre-warned about audience, they

used the crowd as “motivation”. When he missed a step because costume was introduced late, delays happened.

However, directors are advised to collapse the routines and not to skip any process if they have a shorter time of may be 4 weeks for rehearsal and production. The following may serve as a guide for collapsing the routines:

Week 1: Pedagogy and stand-ins.

Week 2: Real props and pedagogy.

Week 3: Costumes and production.

Week 4: Lights and audience

You’ll lose depth, but you keep balance.

Director must bear in mind his dual duty as both teacher and director/service provider. On pedagogy days, you’re Stanislavski. On production days, you’re the director /service provider who needs the show to open. Name it out loud. “Today I’m your teacher. Tomorrow I’m your director.” Students relax when roles are clear.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is clear that the director of actors-in-training lives in two worlds. In one, there’s no deadline and every mistake is a lesson. In the other, there’s a curtain at 7pm and every mistake is public. Pretending that those worlds are the same will impinge on the director’s reputation after production lapses and failure and breaks the students pride and impede learning. The 2025/2025 THA 313: PRICIPLES OF ADAPTATION play *VENDETTA*, story to stage, directed by Branco Ayomide Samuel and Staged managed by Popoola Lateefat Fadekemi shows a way through. Ayomide didn’t choose between teaching and showing. He scheduled both. He used boxes in week one so students could learn to stand. He used real bread in week four so they could learn to eat and talk. He used the freeze in week six so they could learn to survive a loud crowd. Each choice matched the track he was on that day. The director’s solutions were practical as he used stand-ins for props early, demonstrated actions repeatedly, pre-warned actors about crowd behavior, and scheduled “learning days” separate from “rehearsal days”.

Recommendations

The study recommends that since directors are also teachers, they must strive to set rules to guide the rehearsal process to make it easier to manage. The following are suggested rules director/teacher may follow:

1. **Name the Track.** They must set clear outlines or activities for the day to avoid clashes. At the start of every rehearsal, he is obliged to choose whether to teach/pedagogy or to rehearse for production. He may want to place it on the notice board for everyone to see and follow. For instance when they see “Tomorrow is pedagogy” or “Tomorrow is production”, they know in advance what to do, the kind of dress to wear for the day and where to go to. Stanislavski needs safety; deadlines need speed. Students can’t guess which you want.
2. **Build the body before the show.** Exercises are important for the actor. Meyerhold was right when he intoned that the body leads. If the costume changes your center of gravity, give the body a week to learn. If the gun is loud, let the ears adjust. Two weeks with the real thing beats two months of miming.

3. **Rehearse the Room.** We must take the audience into consideration when preparing for a production. Brecht was right when he submitted that the audience is in the play. Understanding the nature and composition of your audience helps in preparing to meet them with your play. If your crowd is loud, train for loud. If they're quiet, train for silence. The "hold on and pause" is a skill like a cross upstage. Teach it.

Furthermore, directors in educational theatre must set self appraisal rubrics and ensure that students' learn and grow from their productions as well as communicate the message and must understand that the director is juggling between pedagogy and training. On pedagogy days, ask questions. On production days, take notes and move. You're learning a job, and the job has deadlines.

Lastly, educational theatre is the only place where process and product are both required. In the professional world you get fired for bad process or bad product. In school you get a grade for both. So we need directors who can teach while they deliver, and deliver while they teach.

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