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Emphasizing play production concept(s): Relevance and application for student directors in the University of Cape Coast

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ABSTRACT

The relevance of production concept(s) in play production(s) cannot be overemphasized as it forms the theoretical spine for any play production and it informs all the aspects of theatre production. Therefore, the apparent absence of a production concept in any production is problematic; this warrants critical examination. There is a great need to bring the issue of a production concept to student directors if they are to eventually end up as front-runners in theatre practice. Student directors and other budding directors ought to see what lies as the merits and demerits of having a production concept injected into the body of their creative work or not; they also ought to be shown the way in formulating one in the first place as well as how to apply it in their production for the best of results. This paper seeks to examine student directors' appreciation and application of production concepts for their practical projects at the University of Cape Coast. The aim is to spark a discourse with this subject matter at its core, bridging the gap between it and budding directors for their comprehension, appreciation and application of production concept(s).

KEYWORDS: Production Concept, Play Directing, Theatre Director

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INTRODUCTION

Institutions in Ghana, at the level of tertiary education, and other pseudo-tertiary institutions train prospective theatre practitioners, so much so that theatre productions in Senior High Schools and tertiary schools are rampantly common in contemporary Ghanaian times. These theatre productions are to show students the ropes of play productions and efficiently prepare them as professional theatre practitioners. In tertiary institutions, these student productions are per the students' academic requirements and for their assessments and in that occupation, of theatre production, the director is the master technician who sets the production on sail towards its final destination (Ogbonna, 2015).

The burden to ensure success in any given theatre production then befalls the tender shoulders of the budding director: if the production fails to satisfy audiences, the director is mentioned and fretted in the halls of failure and disgraced (Adeoye, 2015). It is the researchers' observation that, perhaps, the idea of having one's name accredited to the direction of a play at a young age or early stage in one's training/career can indeed be an ego booster – a testament or reminder of one's talent, ingenuity, and hard work. As a result, student directors may be

courting this destructive ego and rushing to beat a deadline and attain self or critical acclaim at the end of a production process. They do this, however, at the peril of their precious creative production work.

Student directors who find themselves in the position of a theatre director have not immediately been inducted into the Theatre Directors Hall of Fame and therefore should bask in the glory of being a member of the upper echelon class of theatre practitioners; rather, this is the time to eschew pride and show humility as well as prepare by asking questions, consulting colleagues and leaving room for improvement every step of the way (Adeoye, 2015). Where many budding theatre directors, especially the ones classified as 'Student directors' have failed, success could have been attained.

Adeoye (2015) asserts that the success or failure of the production is tantamount to the activation or deactivation of the budding director's vision informed by the 'production concept'. In other words, a well-formulated 'production concept' is the key to a production's success. A production concept is simply what the director wants to do – in transforming the play from a cold script to actuality on stage (McAffery, 1988; Wilson & Goldfarb, 1991).

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THE CONCEPT OF PRODUCTION CONCEPTS

The phrase ‘production concept’ should be no news to experienced theatre initiates; however, it could be to theatre novices to some forgivable degree. Whatever the case be, the phrase could be one whose firm comprehension and appreciation could be but a cumbersome route. To offer a solution and resolve this complexity, it is just far-sighted to employ a somewhat morphology-esque approach – break down the two-word phrases into their singular units – ‘production’ and ‘concept’. To the layman, the phrase ‘production concept’ then naturally could be restructured to become ‘concept for production’. In this sense, ‘concept’ then means ‘idea’ and ‘production’ would mean the process of making something – a product pleasing and satisfying. ‘Production concept’ thus, is literally an idea for a production.

In this sense, this ‘concept for production’ can be likened to that idea with/by which someone (a producer) plans a product or goes about producing a product. The producer, hereby going into production, has something in mind to produce and how that thing to look like once completed. The ‘concept for production’ or ‘production concept’, for the layman, is an idea that would inform/plan/guide how the product is made and what/how it will be look like when finished to meet the satisfaction of both the producer and customer.

This layman’s perspective fits perfectly in the field of business marketing (Ogunmokun & Ling-Yee, 2014). Here, the product/production concept is to ensure more than just making quality goods and services and making them affordable for customers, but also facilitating a system characterized by synergy achieved by bringing (integration of) all activities together to satisfy audiences and make profits for the firm – achieve set goals. Cut or copy and paste this marketing concept of production into the sphere of play directing business and it holds thoroughly: mirroring parallels are drawn flawlessly. The quality product/service is made to satisfy and meet customers’ (audiences) expectation becomes the production – the theatrical performance; to cite an example, a play.

Goals set concerning the production would be to reach out to audiences with a message and satisfy them, bridge the gap between playwright-director thematic concerns, and obviously make good money for all to enjoy in the end, the ‘concept’ now becomes the idea for making the production actualize which is per the director’s job description: the director then brings every other theatre element and contributor together and ensure they work on the same page towards the same goal. It is a collaboration and all hands are on deck – nobody is left out in the dark of affairs. Conclusively, in this layman’s sense, the production concept is the idea for the production that will inform its overall plan, work and process achieving an overall look, feel and message.

THE THEATRE DIRECTOR AND THE PRODUCTION CONCEPT

The theatre director is the chief artist in the theatre. The director blends all the other aspects of the theatre production,

as conceived in the mind (acting, light, set, costume, properties, etc), into one whole visual and auditory entity – a piece of art that is a whole in itself (Dean & Carra, 1980; McAffery, 1988; Wilson & Goldfarb, 1991; Hodge & McLain, 2010; Ogbonna, 2015). According to Ogbonna (2015), directing is an art with which parallels can be drawn with the brain such that ‘other organs connect with the brain in order to function and be alive’ (p. 99). Therefore, just like the brain organizes the processes of the body of organisms (other organs and systems) receiving and interpreting messages and making sure everything is fine and safe for the organism inside and outside, the director is the ‘brain’ of the theatre – the master-mind – organizing the work processes and contributions of other organs of the theatre body (designers, casts, other key theatre players) to ensure the production is on due course towards actualization.

Theatre directors have a huge responsibility resting on their shoulders with a very sensitive nerve in the theatre’s anatomy – coordinating and harmonizing. “Directing is the act of taking charge, managing, conducting and controlling, leading to give guidance and supervise a performance” (Olufemi, 2012, p. 1). Adeoye (2015) and Wilson (2004) detail and assert that, a director schedules the whole production process and supervises every step of the way; he also supervises rehearsals (actors, designers, technicalities, etc.); he is an analyst and interpreter of the text to decipher its dramatic elements and communicate it with audiences; he draws out the tempo, picturization, composition and rhythm of the play, all in order to best picture the performance in mind and translate it onto the stage. These project the job description of the theatre director and we could all just immediately, via sheer empathy, feel and understand a lot is expected of the director.

Indeed, as the theatre director is at the helm of affairs in the theatrical state, the production can be seen as an orchestra with the director as the conductor. The director is the theatre’s plug’s live wire; hence, when present and plugged in, the whole system comes alive and is connected to that life-offering source (Ogbonna, 2015). It is deduced, therefore, that theatre directing is the art of unifying all the elements of theatre – actors, crew, script, stage, and audiences (Brockett, 1992). It is noteworthy that no one element can exist in isolation from the other; should that happen the theatrical circle is broken and the primordial collaborative spirit of the theatre is exorcised and theatre is non-existent (Ogbonna, 2015). Thus, everyone in the theatre has a role to play and is just as important as anyone else.

There are many activities and processes unfolding every moment in the theatre business and simultaneously clamour for togetherness, order, meaningfulness, and control. This is to give the theatre a sense of ‘direction’; hence, the ‘director’ shows up to gear the whole movement towards desired results. The director encapsulates the control, organization, and unification of the theatre. In this vein, the director needs a plan to achieve this control, organization, and unification in the theatrical work. Voila, this is where a ‘production concept’ comes into the playbook of the theatre business.

Scholars like Cohen (2000), Brockett (1992), Gillette (2000), Wilson (2004), Ogbonna (2015), Adeoye (2015), as well as

Mark and Emasealu (2018) have largely acknowledged that the production concept is a central or general or overall ‘vision’ or ‘idea’ that unifies the creations of the theatrical practitioners active and present in any given production. Cohen (2000) quoted by Olufemi (2012) emphasized directing as “developing an artistic production and providing it with a unified vision... coordinating all its components” (p. 1). The ‘unified vision’ here is the ‘production concept’ whose formation is paramount in the director’s job (Brockett, 1992).

This production concept “shapes the staging, casts and actors, works with the designers, rehearses the actors and integrates all the elements into a finished production” (Brockett, 1992, p. 308). This is the idea, plan, and vision that the director has in mind for the production at hand and will serve as a guide and that influencing, the binding force for the diverse creative contributions from all and sundry – ensuring everybody finds common ground, is on the same page and the collective goal or goals are in clear sight.

Adeoye (2015) in his, ‘The Thesis and Synthesis of Production Philosophy in the African Literary Theatre Directing’ brings a whole new approach to this discourse of production concepts in a theatrical production. In this work, Adeoye frequently uses the phrase ‘production philosophy’ rather than ‘production concept’. However, he acknowledges these two phrases are synonymous, but ‘metaphoric conceptions especially to proper theatre initiates’ can be a little dissimilar at times (p. 18). He adds further that, some other concepts/phrases can build on one another in the conceptualization of ‘production concept’.

These are phrases like: ‘directorial concept’, ‘production spirit’, ‘production theory’, etc (p. 18). Of these concepts, is the popular ‘directorial concept’ widely used in regular theatre parlance and interchangeably with ‘production concept’. Whatever the case, for Adeoye;

The production philosophy/concept is a creation of the director that radiates or permeates through a theatre performance. It determines the overall aesthetics of the final production. It also determines the director and designers’ choice of costumes, props, movement, acting style, type of set to use, manner of delivery/speech, characterization and the general kinetic aesthetics of the production. (p. 18).

Adeoye’s contribution is the most detailed and insightful thus far. Indeed, the concept of production is a philosophy – an idea created from the mind of the director that reflects on ideologies or mentality as an artist and is put into work in virtually every aspect of the production in order to appeal to the general audiences’ perceptions, needs, tastes, and thoughts. This ‘production philosophy’ is a sort of empirical extension of the director’s mind giving us a full visualization of what the director’s thoughts, style(s) and plans are with regards to a production – what and how he has conceived the production and how that has been actualized on stage in front of audiences.

PRODUCTION CONCEPT AND SYSTEMS THEORY

Harmonizing and coordinating all the various elements and activities of the theatre may be a burden too heavy for the director to bear alone. In the production process are present other personnel that take charge of various activities in their own capacities/departments – actors, producers, choreographers, designers, etc. (Wilson & Goldfarb, 1991; Thomas, 2014; Ogbonna, 2015). As much as these people can take charge of their own activities with their various crews, they still relate and work frequently with the director to reach the overall vision for the general production. Thomas (2014) likens the ins and outs of the business of the theatre to a system – the ‘system theory’.

This theory is a system whereby individuals (separate parts of the system) work to produce efforts or work individually; these individual efforts when collected produce a sum of efforts greater than if the individual parts were to work alone and if their individual effort is to be weighed and compared to the collective sum of work. Thomas here opines clearly that a system can do greater, as a collective in its output (production) than if it were to produce work in its various parts. In other words, work is better and greater done by all as one than if done by one person alone; hence, the theatre artists can produce something greater and more formidable than if they were to work in isolation.

Ogbonna (2015) sees the principle in this system theory as imperative to the theatre that ‘each part of the theatre is important yet none can exist in isolation’ (p. 98). Ogbonna sees the need for theatre artists to come together with their respective artistic work/contribution to the theatre and the director being the core artist (in tandem with Adeoye, 2015) is responsible for the unification of the various parts of the theatre into a whole expressive entity for the attainment a collective goal.

Therefore, it can be deduced that, should the artists of the theatre come together to work as a collective unit and not be in isolation, this creates a network of interrelationships and interdependence amongst the theatre personnel. This is not a time for any artists to be subserviently tethered to the dictates of the director or anyone else; it is a time for all to build an environment that feels like a community with a mutual understanding, cooperation, common goal(s), and mutual agreement. The inter-relationship/inter-dependency in such an environment is a ‘symbiotic relationship; hence they say: ‘theatre is a collaborative art...with a Master artiste called the Director’ (Ogbonna, 2015, p. 98). This establishes the key element of collaboration between a director and the associates and between the associates and their colleagues.

The director’s frequent collaborators include the playwright, actors, designers (set, sound, light, costume, and make-up.) and the audience’ (p. 12). In outlining the collaborative culture of the theatre, Wilson and Goldfarb (1991) ascertain that the elements of the theatre (actors, crew, designers, director, script/ playwright’s vision and work, and theatre space) “must come together and be coordinated’ (p. 12). More explicitly, they purport that the director shares the playwright’s vision (although

there is room for alterations and wild innovative artistry on the part of the director) and understands the script's content (narrative, sub-textual elements, themes, etc.). Also, the director works with the performers closely at rehearsals (line, blocking, dress and tech, and run-through rehearsals) to bring out the narrative and message through them. Moreover, the director works with the designers and rallies their design concept to be seamed into the overall production directorial concept.

Amongst theatre designers, collaboration is the order of the day. For instance, lighting technicians could be frequently seen discussing their design or lighting patterns/cues with the costumier to determine the look of the costumes under certain light and the mood the light(s) would establish in the room. Other designers collaborate with one another to share ideas, correct mistakes, see unification in designs, and even improve upon individual and collective designs. In the end, the audiences are served with the performance and the director and the collaborators take necessary cues (in terms of emotional sensibilities and over reception/reaction) from audiences for the sake of subsequent review. For theatre to gain a sense of completeness the above elements and personnel have to come together as unified by the director; without this, there is simply no theatre.

DESIGN CONCEPT AND PRODUCTION CONCEPT: THE NEXUS

In as much as the director could be the 'boss' in the theatre, the intricacies thereof (to the minutest detail) do not lie dormant at the director's mercy. Adeoye (2015) and Ogbonna (2015) stress that the director, even though at the helm of affairs, should actively seek help, advice, and supportive contributions from working colleagues. In the view of Mark and Emasealu (2018), the production concept is 'the central image, metaphor or message of a production which a director wants to pass to the audience' (p. 2). Whereby Mark & Emasealu fail to include the rest of a production team (designers and other personnel) in this matter regarding a production concept, Gillette (2000) and Wilson (2004) do not. Wilson (2004) defines the production concept as that in the theatre production which is used to 'create a unified theatrical experience for the audience' (p. 147). Gillette adds that "the production concept is the central creative idea that unifies the artistic vision of the producer, director and designers...the personality, training, and prior experiences of each member will shape and colour the thoughts about the play." Ogbonna (2015) lends her voice to the issue when she alludes that:

It is the production concept that guides the directing style of the director and as much forms the totality of a unique performance style; -- actually, it is the concept that guides the cast and crew and defines the artistic limit and parameters by which the principles of the world of fiction could be applied (p. 101).

The production concept ensures clarity in their plans, work and goal(s): it details explicitly what is intended as the message, how precisely to convey it to the audiences' considering factors like

the technicalities/designs (light, sound, costume, make-up, and even set), theatre space, actors, the target audience, and even the general style of play. Also, the production concept details to what extent their collective work including other factors like approaches, designs, theories, styles, etc. that may not necessarily have any bearing in their unified vision, approach, style, design, etc. Including unnecessary or unrelated elements, styles, theories, approaches, designs, etc., would in the long run, alter the unified production's concept and/or even diffuse it. Obviously, other prime contributors to the production concept are the designers responsible for what the play looks and feels like.

Employing a production concept in production is no easy task. Its employment requires the efforts of the director, designers, producer, cast, and anyone else involved in the production coming together as a unified artistic expression (Adeoye, 2015). In the director-designer collaboration, what the designers bring to the table in formulating the overall concept for the production is the *design concept* (Wilson & Goldfarb, 1991). This 'design concept' serves as the building blocks of the overall 'production concept' akin to how the biological cells act as the building block of life – life's source's smallest units.

The design concept is the 'idea' or 'vision' that a designer has for the overall design of the production, what it will look like, feel like, and communicate to audiences. The design concept is technically the designers' version of a production concept – their design concept lays out their plans/vision to achieve the production concept through designs. Typically, in the early stages of the production process, the director recruits and meets with the designers for the production (Sloane, 2015; Thomas, 2014). Blood (2011) as cited by Ogbonna (2015) has it that, it is implied that before the first production meeting and other subsequent meetings between the director and the designers, the director already has a production concept even before actors are brought in. During the meetings, discussions about the text and performance in hand are conducted critically.

Based on several critical readings of the text, each designer (light, sound, scenery, costume and make-up) conceptualizes their designs for the production and then relay ideas to the director in subsequent meetings. The director analyzes these ideas (sketches, drawings, cues sheets, etc) and gives a word or not. Thereafter, the designers commence practical work on these ideas with their own sub-crews if available. It is noteworthy that these text readings, meetings and idea communication and discussions happen before rehearsals commence and may also continue throughout the rehearsals phase and even after the performance(s) for the sake of review and advancement of practical work (Mark & Emasealu, 2018).

These reviews and discussion here are vital for the design concept as the designers' contribution (from experience, talent, and individual orientation) to the production concept and in their director-crew inter-relationship as Adeoye (2015) further admonishes:

To arrive at a good production philosophy for a performance, there must be mutual interchangeability of ideas between

the director and crew members and between the director and the performers...director's discussions with the performers or his experience while working with them will also help him to tap abundantly from, and discover his performers' God-given theatrical potentials. (p. 15).

FORMULATING THE PRODUCTION CONCEPT

The whole production process can be categorized into three: (i) Pre-production or Preparatory stage, (ii) Production thus the rehearsals stage (including the performance(s) and (iii) post-production stage (Adeoye, 2015; Mark & Emasealu, 2018). The pre-production is the most crucial stage in the whole production process because, here, the action or inactions of the theatre director would make or break the production at hand. The director would want to keep problems that may rear their ugly heads in the prospective future at bay – this is as every theatre director seeks success.

Rather than have problems hamper progress once rehearsals start, the director would want to be meticulous enough to avoid them instead of finding himself wanting and seeking solutions helter-skelter at the spur of the moment. The pre-production phase as a preparatory one marks the beginning of the theatre director's creative journey (Ogbonna, 2015); in preparing the production, the director becomes a researcher – identifying problems and offering probable solutions – becoming 'a walking and working encyclopaedia, a king and a priest, a master and a dignified messenger' (Adeoye, 2015, p. 17). Furthermore, the director must also ask critical and constant questions about the performance at hand (Langley, 1980, p. 17): 1. Why? The idea. 2. What? The artistic form it will take. 3. Where? The place where it will be expressed. 4. When? The time when it will be expressed. 5. Who? The people who will express and manage it. 6. Wherewithal? The needed resources.

These queries characterize the director's prudential conception of the production and underlying these crucial queries, is the relevance of the integration of the theatre's numerous aspects in order to reach audiences with the message and achieve desired goals. As the director nurses these thoughts in mind, solutions to these questions then become the 'production concept' – that unifier, that central idea, that common ground to guide the overall work to actualization. The difference to note, between these set of queries and a 'production concept' is that the set of queries constitutes the director's conceptualization of the whole production in its entirety (a somewhat overview); whereas, a 'production concept' unifies all these questions into one and seeks to answer them pragmatically, especially concerning itself chiefly with the performance on stage.

Typically, a production concept is formulated at the preparatory or pre-production stage (Ogbonna, 2015; Adeoye, 2015). At this point, a theatre director selects a play and thoroughly analyzes and interprets it. Thorough analysis and interpretation of a play text is paramount to the director's creativity and is a testament to the many talents of the director; in other words, a great, brilliant director is one who has honed analytical and interpretative skills

(Johnson, 2003). A performance can fail and the director would be faulted: the general perception would be that the performance's failure is as a result of dull interpretations on the part of the director towards the production (Adeoye, 2015; Ogbonna, 2015). Hence, the success of a production hinges on good analysis and interpretation of the text due to the conviction that:

When a play director strives to put up a good performance, dramatic issues of the appropriateness or otherwise of the plot, conflict, genre, language, theme and sub-themes, and character types of the play must be considered within the precinct of the text. All these must be matched with physical properties (costumes, make-up, props, lighting, set design) and artistic qualities of the performers (speech delivery, movements, tempo, rhythm, picturization, composition and so on)' (Adeoye, 2015, p. 15).

According to Ogbonna (2015), script analysis and interpretation is an art on its own and it is a salient feature of the director's job description because 'the director's interpretive art requires re-reading the play each time with a different purpose so as to determine its meaning. The form by which the interpretations and analyses can translate to a meaningful, unified and coherent performance for an audience' (p. 102).

Dean and Carra (1980) and Adeoye (2015) argue that it is the director's job to translate the cold text into a meaningful performance on stage – achievable only via thorough analysis and interpretation. Critical script analysis and interpretation then become a theoretical base for the production concept – a springboard towards the attainment of its formulation (Brockett, 1992). For Wilson (2004), a production concept ought to be in alignment with the text's interpretation because a production concept is best coined from the script's content (spirit and meaning) and is not any external scheme. Nelms (1958) as quoted by Adeoye (2015, p. 19) echoes this sentiment of Wilson stating that the "spirit in which the audience will take the performance is governed by the spirit of the production, which in turn, depends on the spirit of the script ...the spirit of the production may, on rare occasions, differ from that of the script."

The direct connection between script interpretation and the formulation of a production concept is put in clear, direct language by Ogbonna (2015, p. 100): "the directorial creative interpretation of a text for production involves the thematic emphasis, character analysis and relationships as well as all the suggestive visual and auditory images from which a production concept is realized." Indeed, Adeoye (2015) supports this notion of Ogbonna's saying that the text's elements be assessed keenly while conjuring up a production concept: 'The overall aesthetics of the performance must also be considered while formulating production philosophy' (p. 15).

With the connection between critical, thorough script analysis and the formulation of a production concept made conspicuous, the followings are guiding steps to aiding the in-need-of-help theatre director formulate one:

1. Conceive the entire production by asking the afore-listed questions pertaining to space, material, human resources (cast and crew), budget, et cetera.

2. Do your play selection, read and re-read the text a number of times to get thorough analysis and interpretation of the text. This will help you get a general understanding of the story and also see the underlying messages (subtextual) – that is, for instance, ideally see what its dramatic elements (themes, setting, characters/characterization and plot) have as probable contemporary or contextual connections. Take notes of all of these.
3. Now, build a connection between step #1 and the actual performance: start to decide what it will look like. Do this by using several words, phrases, even textual references, sounds (music, songs or sound effects) or phrases to describe your thoughts or aims pertaining to what you want the play to look and feel like. Also, state or describe your overall vision for the performance -- determine what chief message you want to serve your audiences. Do not leave them out of this creative equation.
4. Begin your descriptions and write them all down. Ideally, link all your descriptions into a nice paragraph. On this note, it is worth knowing that albeit the ‘production concept’ ‘is usually one abstract or metaphoric word’, it could as well be a well-coded and crafted parable for a production. For example, if the directorial concept of Wale Ogunyemi’s *Ijaye* is “war” the directorial interpretation can be, “war as a weapon of mass destruction” (Adeoye, 2015, p. 19). This means that the ‘production concept’ could be represented in just one word (verb, adjective, noun, pioneered theatre theory, etc.) or in a sentence.
5. This is all happening at the pre-production stage of the production process. You would have a production crew already including designers and then later, your actors. Engage them! (Johnson, 2010; Sloane, 2015; Adeoye, 2015; Ogbonna, 2015).

Adeoye (2015) opines that everybody per their training, expertise, and experiences has a great deal to contribute to the production concept should the director be humble enough to collaborate with them:

To arrive at a good production philosophy for a performance, there must be mutual interchangeability of ideas between the director and the crew members and between the director and the performers...Director’s discussions with the performers or his experience while working with them will also help him to tap abundantly from, and discover his performers’ God given theatrical potentials...The formulation of production philosophy though slightly higher on the director’s side, it is not a time for him to claim stardom. It is a time for the entire theatre workers to plan ahead for the production at hand (p. 15)

Let them (designers and even actors) read the script several times, analyze and interpret the text because, as Ogbonna expatriates;

The creative reinterpretation of the text is a process that continues with the collaborative input of other artists until later in the production. It is the production concept that guides the directing style of the director and as such forms the totality of a unique performance style; - actually, it is the concept that guides the cast and crew and define the

artistic limit and parameters by which the principles of the world of fiction could be applied’ (Ogbonna, 2015, p.101)

A director should hold a number of discussions with them to brainstorm and finalize issues; try finding recurring or common ideas to morph into a final overall idea for the production – the production concept. After auditions and casting, a director meets with the cast and crew at the *production conference*. This is a time for the director to seize as an opportunity to discuss plans, most importantly including the ‘production concept’. Sloane (2015) recounts how, when directing ‘Peter Pan’ for her thesis presentation/project, she read the story several times in an in-depth, analytical manner. This was in order to seek and garner an in-depth understanding of the story’s many adaptations and wide spectrum of thematic content.

Sloane (2015) adds that this was at the beginning phase of the production process before actors were even auditioned, cast and rehearsals had even commenced. Before actors were cast, she had even told her designers to do a reading of a different adaptation of the story. From there onward, she met with them a number of times and ideas were exchanged, reviewed and shaped all stemming from her and her designers’ analysis and interpretation of the various adaptations of the story revolving around Peter Pan. They all, via ideas generated from readings of the story and individual contributions at those meetings, then ironed out a collective vision/concept for the impending production.

Johnson’s directorial work of Anton Chekov’s *The Seagull* in 2010 at the Baylor University is akin to Sloane’s creative and artistic process. For Johnson (2010):

After thorough examination of the play’s script, a director must use this research and analysis to develop a concept, or artistic vision, for the play and share this vision with their collaborators. In the pre-production phase of a play, the director includes the designers in developing their concept (p. 101).

Johnson best accentuates the importance of the script’s analysis and interpretation in the entire process of the play production. Johnson has also connected its significance to the formulation of the production concept, which ultimately involves the director’s collaborators/designers. It is noteworthy that the concept’s formulation process actively and fully involves the designers at this stage. In this process of formulation, what the designers bring to the table is the ‘Design concept’ (McAffery, 1988; Wilson & Goldfarb, 1999).

The design concept is the overall concept/idea for the production’s design constituting each designer’s individual design idea(s) after thorough analysis and interpretation of the play text/script and several meetings/talks with the director either alone or as a group with the other designers. The designers’ individual design concepts are then fused into one and later into the production concept. Metaphorically speaking, the designers’ design concepts are the building blocks of the production concept. The concept is still under formulation up to

the rehearsals stage where the director collaborates with actors as agents or embodiment of the play's interpretation and director's overall vision. Therefore, the actors are also typically consulted and they air their thoughts in terms of their interpretation of the play text which has a part in the overall production concept. Johnson used pictures and textual references to visualize her intention to use the theory of 'expressionism' – centring on the character's emotions to resonate with audiences' sensibilities – as her 'production concept'. She showed these pictures to her designers and also discussed the textual references at length and subsequently with her actors.

IMPLEMENTING A PRODUCTION CONCEPT

The best way to implement a production concept is by actively and fully involving your entire team – crew members, technicians, designers, and casts just like they were involved in the formulation phase (Johnson, 2010; Thomas, 2014; Sloane, 2015; Ogbonna, 2015; Mark & Emasealu, 2018). Given the collaborative and communal nature of the theatre; thus, the artistic vision of the director ought to include the collaborators' conceptions/ideas too at all costs which births the overall vision of the production (Wilson & Goldfarb, 1991). Involving the team in the concept's implementation, most importantly, needs and employs effective and clear communication in the 'system' or production team (Thomas, 2014). Doing this, it is said what the unifying vision (system's goal) is to the agents/collaborators who will subsequently pass it to audiences.

Johnson (2010) met with her designers in the pre-production phase of her work and clearly stated and explained what her concept for the production is using textual references, 'visual words, images, and colours' (p. 101). Teamwork is simply the most essential part of the successful implementation of a production concept. This is most true and holds a lot of benefits for the production, as Johnson (2010) attests: '...through their teamwork, the director and designers translate these conceptual ideas into physical realities' (p. 101). The inclusion of team members in seeking their thoughts and ideas is the best thing to do in reshaping and reviewing the production concept the production team is working with. This happens throughout all the production process phases – pre-production through to post-production nights/performances (Mark & Emasealu, 2018).

Typically, the rehearsals phase would kick start the implementation of the production concept. Serving as a sort of precedent to this is the *production conference*, where usually the production concept is mentioned and explained; however, that is not ideal enough to ascertain the implementation and actualization of a production concept (Mark & Emasealu, 2018). This is because the collaborators are human and not infallible perfectly enough to steer clear of any mistakes or failures or shortcomings in the production's prospective future. To secure a successful implementation of the production concept, there ought to be several other subsequent meetings (either exclusively with some members of the team or just together as a complete group) where extensive discussions concerning the production concept will be held. Even after the performance(s),

the production concept as manifested can be put under scrutiny and re-assessed or shaped for better manifestation moving forward should that same performance or any other follow.

The constant reviewing of the production concept (which is abstract) would help structure things the best way and help translate them on stage as a physical reality. Doing this also helps to correct mistakes, find out new things about the concept you might have previously missed, brainstorm on what could be improved or done better, research to shape the concept better, and even what elements could be removed from the conceptualization. The director is strenuously admonished to review the production concept when gravely necessary (Adeoye, 2015). This should be together with the directors' collaborators. The director should not be reluctant or stubborn or autocratic or lazy not to do so; rather the director should continue honing theoretical skills through research. The implementation of a production concept could prove to be a very tedious, frustrating time for the director. However, he/she should not give up hope but work with determination as directors come, metaphorically, in different shapes and sizes.

Several factors could hamper the smooth implementation of a production concept for the student theatre director including students (including the director) availability as there are other academic engagements to commit to – this could see actors or designers miss key meetings like the production conference and key moments in the rehearsals stage. Also, poor theatre house facilities that can see rehearsals cancelled, rescheduled or become futile; insufficient funds for costumes, props, equipment, etc., can also challenge the concept's implementation, among numerous other things.

It is noteworthy, for the student director, that it is not just enough to severally mention your production concept to your team and discuss it at length during meetings and rehearsals. The student director must supervise the work in progress with a keen eye at any point in time – whether or not reviews have happened and constructive suggestions have been made (McAffery, 1988). Once work on the production commences, the director meets with the actors at rehearsal. Also, the director ideally and frequently meets with the designers at separate meetings either one-on-one and/or as a collective unit. The director can also meet with designers at regular rehearsals or could wait until the dress and tech rehearsals. At these meetings and/or rehearsals, the director sees or is shown the progress of work by the actors and the designers in the form of scene performances or run-throughs, sketches, drawings, pictures, dress and tech rehearsals, and costume parades or exhibitions, cue sheets, etc. He/she, as per her jurisdiction as chief co-ordinator and harmonizer, makes suggestions and has the final say. He/she, as per her artistic license, adds to the work or removes elements of it as he/she deems necessary and of critical relevance to the production. In doing this, however, the director should be objective and the best listener regarding the designer's vision and expertise; rather than be autocratic. According to Wilson & Goldfarb (1991), the director's supervision of the designers' work is to ensure that the director and the production team members are all on the same page and work is actually

being done according to the generally-agreed style, techniques, and overall vision of the production. As the production concept is constantly reviewed, supervision should be done as much as possible in order for no one to cross the limits and parameters stated by the director and the collaborators which could result in a deviation (Ogbonna, 2015). In cases where there is indeed a deviation of any sort, it is never too late for the director to make the necessary and critical corrections to get everybody back on the same page (Sloane, 2015).

CONCLUSION

The advantages that production concepts give theatre productions know no bounds; the disadvantages thereof are nothing any director wants to associate with. Any theatre production has high prospects of both success and failure; it is always the responsibility of the director to ensure that the former is the production's outcome (Ogbonna, 2015). For Adeoye (2015), 'the failure and lack of good production philosophy (concept) in play directing is...responsible for bad and artistically unsatisfactory performances' (p. 13). He posits that:

A good and well-formulated production philosophy will give theatre performances clear-cut artistic, intellectual, dramaturgical, theatrical and ideological directions. Production philosophy allows a performance to satisfy the feelings of the audience, conforms to the playwright's intention/thematic concerns and activates the theatre director's vision. However, if a production fails, the director has either failed to formulate a good production philosophy or refused to carry out his formulated production philosophy to the letter during the process of production articulation (p. 14).

This simply means that the production concept helps give the production a sense of direction: in the sense that, a goal is set to be achieved by the end of this production and the production serves as a guide towards how to attain that goal. This goal could be the message intended for the audiences as exemplified by the themes and aesthetics embodied by the performers. The production concept serves as a theoretical base for the director. It becomes a reservoir of ideas, styles, and approaches for the performance that the director chooses. The theoretical work helps the director gather information about the theatre that marks an academic distinction between the student director and other acclaimed directors and that could serve as an aura of intellectualism surrounding learning directors' artistic work. The production concept helps everyone be on the same page as they can digest the text and understand its intricacies, especially from the playwright's viewpoint.

These thematic concerns, that help hinge the production concept in place, are resolved giving an integral, mutual understanding amongst everyone. Finally, a production concept, if assessed and identified by the critical audiences, will serve as a gateway into the director's mind which permeates all aspects of the performance spectrum. To have no production, therefore, bears the mark of mediocre – the seal of a 'wannabe' director

– and your production can not stand the test of theatrical criticism and 'those directors whose direct or indirect roles led to the killing of production philosophy in play directing are the ones who are not helping theatre practice in Africa to grow...' (Adeoye, 2015, p. 15).

Agreeing with the above, Ogbonna (2015) opines that the failure of a production can and would be traced back to the director's dull interpretations – the same interpretations that have helped birth the production concept chiefly. In light of this, Adeoye (2015) adds that, when a performance/production fails, audiences and critics tend to ask questions about the performance regarding to what genre is the play, what theories were used in it, what actually is the directorial concept for it, what was attempted, etc. These are questions from disappointed, unsatisfied audience members confused and even disillusioned regarding the poor show they have just seen. This results from a lack of production concept in the production exhibiting the director's poor skills in expressing an artistic sensibility, achieving aesthetic clarity, and ultimately satisfying consumers of the production. In drawing out more merits of a production concept, Mark & Emasealu (2018) are of the view that the production concept expresses the experimental, creative spirit of the theatre director giving him a unique brand and adding a touch/feel of dynamism to the whole culture of theatre for promotion. For them, the production concept sparks the innovative spirit of directors that would see new trends, theories, styles, techniques, etc. ushered into the art.

In further detailing a production concept's merits, Ogbonna (2015) opines that, the production concept is that idea that ignites the production into life – it invokes the creativity of chiefly the director, but as well as everybody involved in the production process and the mission/vision of conveying a message/content to the audience. It is stressed again that the theatre is a sphere of a number of simultaneous activities – designers, casts, producers, other personnel and the director working all at the same time. Thus, for Ogbonna, there is a need to ensure cohesion/unification so that all personnel are onboard the same ship captained by the director and on a steady course to attain set goals. This course has its bearing in the production concept that directs everything to an artistic destination – bring the production to audiences). Therefore, for her, the production concept is that element of unification (from the unifier, the director) that primarily harmonizes the director and the production associates' work input in the production.

Also, the production concept ensures clarity in their plans, work and goal(s): it details explicitly what is intended as the message, how precisely to convey it to the audiences' considering factors like the technicalities/designs (light, sound, costume, make-up, and even set), theatre space, actors, the target audience, and even the general style of play. Furthermore, the production concept details to what extent their collective work would go so as to avoid moving out of focus/context by including other factors like approaches, designs, theories, styles, etc. that may not necessarily have any bearing in their unified vision, approach, style, design, etc. Including unnecessary or unrelated elements, styles, theories, approaches, designs, etc., would in

the long run, alter the unified production's concept and/or even diffuse it.

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