

Developmental Drama

(A 12-part series on the basics of Developmental Drama to help students, teachers, and institutions)

Article 5 – The Vision That Guides: Direction in Developmental Drama

A ship needs a captain and a play needs a director. Direction is the compass that gives a production its purpose. It is the vision that turns scattered moments into a meaningful journey. In Developmental Drama, direction is less about imposing ideas and more about guiding discovery: helping students find the true spark in themselves.

What Direction Means in Developmental Drama

When Vaz Dramatics Academy worked with St. Paul's, we understood that a director's role went far beyond telling actors where to stand. The director imagines the world of the play and invites everyone — actors, stage managers, teachers, and technicians — to build that world together. And to make the stage breathe, the very first role of the director is to decide the directorial design.

The Directorial Design

The directorial design of a play helps us understand if the play design is musical, realistic or symbolic. The process of direction begins only after the design is fixed. The director selects the design by keeping a lot of factors in mind. One of them is the grade level to which the students belong. For example, for Class I, the Developmental Drama syllabus is Action Song. While for Class V students, the Developmental Drama syllabus is poetry performance. Knowing the number of students, aids making the choice as the number of students largely impacts the play design.

Furthermore, the theme also influences the process of deciding the story. For example, the play *Lyra the Nightingale* was designed for the Class VII theme - Real Intelligence vs Artificial Intelligence. The directorial design here was real bird vs artificial bird. The way the director would portray this, is both a challenge and an opportunity. Since Developmental Drama is very unique, the director has to be very choosy while picking the story.



Director using levels as part of stage design

Goals of Direction

It is good to know the goal of Developmental Drama before beginning. The purpose of the play maybe:

1. Audience building for other classes
2. Demonstration as a part of Science Exhibition

3. Play as a part of Annual Day
4. Presented as a part of Thematic Programme
5. Showcasing for parents

THE THREE PHASES

The director looks at any performance in three phases: Pre-production, Production and Post-production

1. Pre-production

This phase includes all the preparations for the play – writing the script, ideation, visualization and conceptualization. Apart from the script, the director may also create the director's script, which provides all details and stage directions. This acts as the prepared outline of the play. This too, depends on the psychology of students for, it is a well-known fact that the junior students (such as Class V) are much more excited than the senior ones (say, Class IX).

2. Production

Just like clay has to be moulded before use, we too, need to be shaped collectively in mind, body, and voice before we begin our tasks. These are done through warm up activities and games.

A student in Developmental Drama is expected to take up two responsibilities: the first, being an active performer, and the second, managing the lighting and the sound, designing the set or working with costumes and more.

The production process also brings in scene work which means completing the entire play, scene wise, without getting into minute details so as to get a clear outline of the play. Another important aspect is run-throughs, where the director does not interfere in the performance. The team is allowed to fall and learn from the mistakes. Suggestions are given at the end of the run-throughs. Specific weak scenes can be worked on during this time. After this, the director withdraws as we take the lead.

3. Post-production

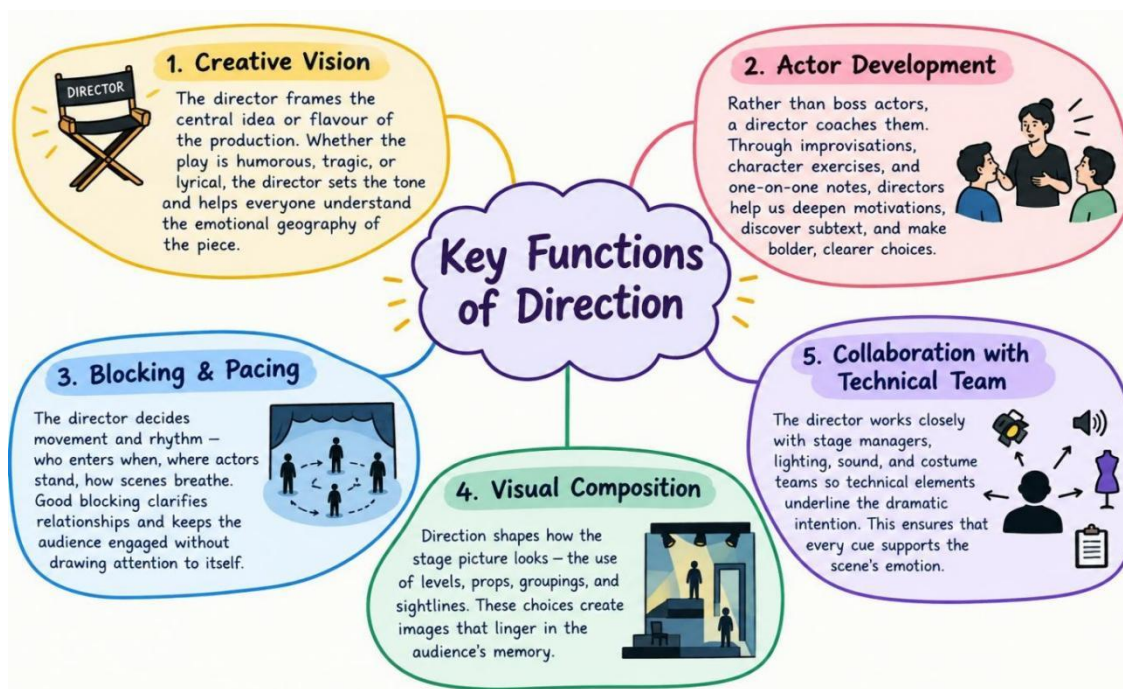
The final stage includes work-in-progress performance, viewed only by the key people and required suggestions are incorporated.

The first performance is for the junior class. This helps us gain confidence. By doing so, we don't just build the students who are performing, but also the audience. Inspired by their performance, the junior classes too, are encouraged to enter Developmental Drama.

The second performance is for a senior batch, which could lead to critical appreciation. At this stage, the director becomes the cheerleader and the one to encourage our performance. The class teacher, a co-director till now, takes over as the coach. The third show is presented to a junior batch again, and this process continues to go on.

When we are internally bored, the teacher/coach energizes them with games/activities without over-rehearsing or under-rehearsing the play. Two examples would be, having live rehearsals or two-minute shows (also known as speed-throughs).

We stop at the tenth show meant for our parents. This stage is also for us to learn to adapt to the venues, as a change in venue would mean a change in the acoustics, voice acting and the stage space.



Chorus work as a design idea

Direction as Leadership and Teaching

Ms. Soundharya from Vaz Dramatics Academy reminded us, “*A director’s job is not to create actors who copy you, but to create actors who think.*” In Developmental Drama, direction becomes a teaching practice. Directors model curiosity, attentive listening, and the courage to take creative risks. They help us grow not only as performers but as thinkers and collaborators. The director might begin by being the most important person of the play, but eventually withdraws, leaving behind only the fragrance of the experience.

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