

## Director's Corner: Parents-as-Directors

Last Father's Day, Dave Sanders, from Parentmap.com, wrote, "Parenting, for me, is one of the few things I can think of that can be placed in the front half of an analogy, and you can fill in the blank with just about anything.

***Being a parent is like \_\_\_\_\_.***

Try it. Working construction. Gardening. Being a garbage collector. Teaching. Being an attorney. Zoo keeping. It seems like no matter what word(s) you put in that blank, it is justifiable." (<https://www.parentmap.com/article/fathers-day-new-dad-essay>)



For the next few months, I will use diverse roles from the **Theatre Arts** to "fill in the blank" in Sanders' analogy. In our preparation for the whole school unit, we have begun investigating the roles of many different professionals involved in dramatic productions, from the director, to the playwright, to the set, costume, and lighting designers, to the stage manager, etc. As in the theatre, collaboration is the key to parenting, and we value the contributions of our partners, extended families, educators, medical professionals, etc. At the same time, it behooves each parent to consider adopting a variety of roles to best fit the unique situations, developmental stages, and temperaments of his or her children.

Let's consider first the role of "Director", one with which – at least in the school context – I am very familiar. ***How is being a parent like being a director?*** According to the American Association of Community Theatre (<https://www.aact.org/director>), "it is the director who sets the vision for the production for everyone involved". The director's vision impacts choices of script interpretation, casting, sets, costumes, lighting, props, music, and so on, and the synergy between all these elements is key to creating a production that is a unified whole. Similarly, the complex interplay of family life and child-rearing works best if common goals and priorities help frame the decisions to be made about the day to day details of life at home, at school, and in the community. There are so many options for activities, media, purchases, etc., that one important parenting role is to wisely choose based on both quality and quantity. My sense is that the best Parents-as-Directors know when to say "enough" so that everyone in the family has both time and space for quality engagement and constructive interactions in pursuit of the family goals.



Directors also have the responsibility of helping each of the production team members to both be and contribute his or her best to the overall creative process. So it is with parenting, regardless of the number of parents and children in the family. Effective directors and parents start with understanding themselves and how to nurture their own growth while they are looking for ways to build on the strengths of everyone involved to help them stretch to their full potential. In concrete terms, Parents-as-Directors listen to each family member and observe what engages, energizes, and enlivens them so as to maximize those conditions and minimize less effective ones. Parents may be surprised at how interested and innovative children can be when offered important roles as helpers in the family and as participants in problem solving and planning. At the same time, all directors have the ultimate responsibility for the success of any production, and there are clearly some decisions that are the director's alone. That said, in my role as director, I value the input of my administrative team and other lab school directors when it feels pretty lonely at the top, so I encourage parents to seek others with common parenting goals for support throughout the production process. I'd be honored to consult with you if you would ever find that helpful.