

Director's Corner: Parents-as-Stage Managers

In recent months, I have suggested that parents have a multi-faceted role in the theatre of family life. Like directors, they define the developmental vision; like set designers, they create the home atmosphere as the stage for family interactions; like playwrights, they craft the domestic story for their children's foundational years. This month, I consider the role of "Stage Manager". ***How is being a parent like being a stage manager?*** According to the American Association of Community Theatre (<https://www.aact.org/stage-manager>), a stage manager's roles include documenting "decisions about blocking and notes for the actors, keeping track of logistical and scheduling details and communicating what goes on in rehearsals to the rest of the team".



You've probably heard that it takes a village to raise a child, but proponents of this African proverb rarely discuss the importance of communication and coordination among partners within the community throughout the developmental journey. In the theatre, the stage manager is responsible for these essential elements, including "scheduling and running rehearsals, communicating the director's wishes to designers and crafts people, coordinating the work of the stage crew, calling cues and possibly actors' entrances during performance", etc. Regarding communication, parents need to share their vision of a child's development with the community partners, such as educators, medical professionals, caregivers, and coaches so that together they can support the child's growth in a consistent manner. For example, parents of bilingual children may want to stress different languages in different settings or encourage the children to utilize both languages in all settings, depending on the conversation partners. As a parent of an only child, I sought to involve my daughter in child care, church, and other community settings where she could interact with the same cohort of children varying in age to develop deep relationships with them, similar to the interactions that children with siblings would develop naturally at home.

The most important element of coordination involves scheduling the rehearsals, which in the family context is, simply, living. Parents-as-Stage Managers need to be good at multi-tasking and problem solving so they can coordinate a "smooth and efficient plan" for the timing of the myriad set changes, props, cues, etc. that happen in a given day or week. They need diverse resources, such as snacks, activities, band-aids, and duct tape, so they are ready for whatever challenges arise. Moreover, stage managers need an attitude of calm, both within themselves and to influence those around them when chaos erupts. A sense of humor and a song go a long way when facing unexpected delays, detours, etc.



As you approach the transition from the school year to the summer, remember that the family's story is the heart of the matter on the child's journey toward maturity. When planning your summer activities and schedule, prioritize the possibilities to select those that best fit your Parent-as-Director vision, set the stage with elements that fit the children's interests and ability levels so they are challenged to grow, and manage the script and schedule aiming for consistency and clear communication. As events unfold and the best laid plans must change, use your stage-manager presence to help everyone navigate the circumstances with a sense of calm and good humor. Then reflect on each day's stories so you can weave the memories into a family narrative you'll want to share for years to come. Warm regards and best wishes for a summer that's a smashing success!