
Mentor / Mentee Relationship and the Development of Technical Theatre in Nigeria: Dexter Lyndersay and Molinta Enendu in Focus

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Abstract

Continuity and efficiency are both products of mentorship; being the relationship between a more experienced person generally referred to as mentor and the less experienced individual referred to as the mentee. The sole responsibility of a mentor is to provide support / guidance as well as valuable professional insight towards the development and success of the mentee. Therefore, this research aims at investigating how this relationship has so far contributed to the success or otherwise in the development of Technical Theatre practice in Nigeria and what should be done to strengthen the relationship for enhanced theatre practice in Nigeria. Adopting a qualitative approach, this study leans on the notions of Transformative Learning and Social Learning Theories. The paper argues that, for the sake of development, proficient and intentional mentor/mentee relationships are inevitable in the Nigeria theatre industry in particular and the creative industry in general. It emphasizes that positive and cordial mentorship remains a panacea for sustainable development in technical theatre practice. It suggests that introducing mentorship programmes into theatre curriculum could contribute to professional progression and individual development.

Keywords: Development, Mentee, Mentor, Relationship and Technical Theatre

Introductory Overview:

Continuity is the hallmark of organisational/institutional sustainability and development. Continuity in this context has to do with the consistent and sustained professional relationship between a more experienced member of an organisation or institution which is otherwise called mentor or the leader, and the less experienced one referred to as the mentee or the follower. This professional relationship is essential for growth and development within organisations/institutions, theatre practice inclusive. This clearly explains the reason behind different categories of trainings available and obtainable within the different professional areas in Nigeria as well as other climes of the world. However, in most cases, it has become absolutely difficult for mentor (the leader) and the mentee (the follower) to build and sustain supportive, effective and cordial professional relationship due to certain factors or reasons thereby leading to slow pace of development or low productivity, inefficiency, breakdown in communication and distrust. This has therefore been the statement of problem for this research endeavour which revolves around effective leadership and followership. According to Effiong and Eze-Orji, “effective leadership has been the very concern of Nigerians, who see development as being slow and not commensurate with the huge human and material resources that abound in the country” (28). In the same vein, Embu posits that, “the nature and concept of leadership in its phenomenological existence becomes elusive and changeable as one attempts to analyse it. The formulation of a universal theory of leadership is one that is

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very difficult to realise in view of the complex nature of the term” (500). It was based on this premise that the following two (2) theories were adopted for this study.

Theoretical Framework:

In scholarship, several theories abound for the discussion of mentor (leadership) and mentee (followership) relationship. However, for the purpose of appropriateness and relevance, two (2) theories are chosen for this research endeavour. They are the transformative learning and social learning theories.

Transformative Learning Theory: The transformative learning theory was propounded by Jack Mezirow. It focuses on the ideal process of influencing the change of one’s perspective and habits through supportive and transformative learning. This, according to this theory, can be done by throwing sensitive challenges to the mentee thereby encouraging critical thinking and positive reflections resulting in the positive growth of the mentee’s mindset or thoughts. In respect of the year in which Jack Mezirow propounded Transformative Learning Theory, different years have been adopted by different scholars due to the progressive nature of the development of the theory, because the progenitor of the theory continued to develop, refine and revise the theory over a good number of years with substantial or remarkable improvements. This is the brain behind the fact that while certain sources or scholars adopt 1975 being the year Mezirow conducted a study that laid the foundational groundwork for the theory, others adopt 1978 being the year Mezirow first made the proposition for the theory which is generally regarded as “Learner Centric Theory”. In a nutshell, “Jack Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory is said to be anchored specifically on, “how adults can undergo significant shift in their perspectives and worldviews through learning experiences” (valamis.com). This theory is directly significant and appropriate for this research because the issue of mentor/mentee relationship is about transformative learning towards the creation of intentional or conscious awareness with regard to the implicit assumptions and expectations of the mentee. It provides the mentee with critical thinking in respect of ways and manners to intentionally make meaning of their lives toward the development of Technical Theatre practice in particular and Performing Arts in general.

Social Learning Theory:

Social Learning Theory is another closely related theory to the discussion on mentor/mentee relationship. This theory was propounded by Albert Bandura. *Positive Psychology* reveal that Albert Bandura, a Canadian American Psychologist, is renowned for his Social Learning Theory (later evolved into Social Cognitive Theory), which he proposed in 1977. The theory emphasises that learning can occur through observation, imitation and modelling of others’ behaviour, rather than solely through direct experience. Albert Bandura’s Social Learning Theory (SLT) suggests that we learn by observing and imitating the behaviour of others. It is relevant for this study because seasoned mentors are expected to serve not only as leaders, but also as role models and demonstrate attitudes, skills as well as behaviours worthy of emulation by the mentee and this is what William Dexter Lindesay and Molinta Luke Ojukwu Enendu stand for when it comes to the development of Technical Theatre in Nigeria.

The Mentor-Mentee Concept

Mentor is a word that has to do with a person that is more experienced than the person he/she is mentoring otherwise known as mentee. Geddes and Grosset explain that a mentor is an

“adviser, counsellor, guide, instructor, monitor” (627). A mentee on the other hand refers to a person that is being mentored. While a mentor is more experienced and knowledgeable, a mentee is less experienced. A mentor is the one who guides, advises and supports the mentee in their professional engagement. It therefore behoves on the mentor to provide guidance and valuable insights to the mentee in furtherance of actualisation of the organisational or institutional goals or objectives.

Furthermore, some of the outstanding characteristics of a mentee are that he/she is less experienced, always motivated and receptive to feedback; he/she is also opened to learning and stands the chance of benefiting from personal growth and skill development as well as career advancement. It is obvious that mentor/mentee relationship culminates or cascades to sustainable development in Technical Theatre practice in Nigeria.

The Place of Mentor/Mentee in Technical Theatre Practice

Theatre practice is a collaborative profession, so also is Technical Theatre, hence, the place of mentor/mentee relationship is very crucial. As discussed earlier, it is the responsibility of a mentor to guide the mentee in order to gain valuable insights in furtherance of achieving professional goals or objectives in our chosen profession of Technical Theatre practice. This is so because technical theatre thrives in the ambience of continuity. For an in-depth knowledge of the place of mentor/mentee relationship in Technical Theatre practice, it is pertinent to have a review of the concept and scope of Technical Theatre practice.

The Concept of Technical Theatre:

Technical Theatre is the live wire of theatre practice. It is regarded as the powerhouse where all the technical elements are coordinated. Sharing his standpoint, Chidiebere Ekweariri, a Nigerian technical theatre practitioner asserts that “the technical theatre unit is responsible for the organisation and coordination of the technical element of production and interpreting them into a unified and synthesised stage production. The technical theatre unit is basically concerned with translating the theatrical designer’s work into stage reality” (13). He adds that “the head of the technical theatre unit is the Technical Director (TD) who coordinates and supervises every step of production preparation process. He is responsible to the director, the chief interpreter if a stage production” (13). This supposes that the technical director functions with the aids of his technicians who use a variety of techniques, tools, and materials in working with diverse media.

Adding to Etweariri’s standpoint, Jacob adds that, “though theatre practice in the real sense of the word has its origin traced to human creation, technical theatre practice is a recent development” (79). He adds that technical theatre is “regarded as a recent phenomenon because, at its inception, the director and the stage manager were in charge of virtually every aspect of theatrical performance including scenery, lighting, sound and costumes” (79). It should be noted here that the above technical theatre elements are what most professionals in the area of technical theatre refer to as technical aids. According to Ododo:

Technical aids are elements used in theatrical presentations mainly to give depth and meaning to the artistic execution. Such aids may be deployed manually, technologically, electronically or mechanically, examples being stage set and property, lighting, sound effects, costume and makeup. They are scenographic enhancing additives. Though essentially visual elements, when meaningfully handled with the oral aspects of theatre production, technical aids, tend to enrich the understanding of the audience besides their aesthetic values. (11)

Technical theatre or technical aids as discussed above are not static but dynamic. It continues to evolve according to the development or advancement in modern technology; hence Iwu submits that, “theatrical design in Nigeria has grown over the years” (150). Right from its inception up to contemporary practice, technical theatre has been classified into different areas or divisions ranging between four (4) to six (6) divisions according to the scholar’s perspective. Ekweariri narrates that there are basically five sub-divisions of the technical theatre unit, and they are:

1. The scenery unit comprising the scene technician, master carpenter, building crew, scenic artist, paint crew, stage carpenter, grips and fly operators.
2. The property unit with the property master and technician, the construction crew, the acquisition crew, the property chief and crew, props handlers, hand props crew and set dressers.
3. The lighting unit is made up of the lighting technician, the master electrician, the hanging, rigging and focusing crew, the control board operators, follow spot operators, floor electricians and lighting crew.
4. The sound unit is headed by the sound technician, supported by the recording crew, the set up crew and the sound board operator.
5. The costume and makeup unit comprising the costume technicians, the construction crew (tailors), dryers, wigmakers, seamstress, mask maker, shoe marker, wardrobe chief, hairstylist, dressers, costume crew, make-up technicians and crew. (13-14).

It is pertinent to note that among the five (5) different sub-divisions of technical theatre practice explained above, the role of scene designer comes first because no matter the genre of production, the performer must have an intentionally arranged space to perform their acts and this corroborates the position of Jacob who insists that “scene designers consider it an important requirement of duty and professionalism to depict the locale of the setting of the storyline imagined at any given moments. As cultural activity, theatre performances often rely on the coloration of the real or imagined environment in determining the texture, creative statement and social import of the artistry” (141). Ekpe and Wekpe add that “the designing aspects in such activity therefore remain strongly significant for consideration in theatre business because such aspects add to inform, teach and illuminate the imagined audience on the realities of the world or society imagined in the play” (127).

In all the five (5) sub-divisions of technical theatre practice discussed above, the Technical Director (TD) and his crew members in different nomenclatures are beneficiaries of one form of training and education or the other and this is where the issue of mentor/mentee relationship becomes inevitable because these are highly skilled areas that require guidance, support as well as valuable insights of a mentor toward helping the mentees to realise the full

potentials of their goals in furtherance of the development of technical theatre practice in Nigeria.

Development as a Concept

Development is a concept that is highly associate with metamorphoses, transformation and improvement. Development is highly related with changes and as described by Bassey, “when examining such changes, it is always important to make a distinction between the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophical forms” (94). Development has to do with advancement through acquisition of current information because, as exemplified by Gyuse, “the wisest man on earth will remain ignorant on a particular subject matter if he is not furnished with information concerning it (178). Consequently, the concept of development has to do with progression and improvement in different ramifications. Although there are various aspects or types of development, in this research endeavour, the discussion centres solely around professional development which is anchored around advancement of career, skill as well as expertise which leads to increased productivity and opportunities.

Development as a word in technical theatre practice has such progressive synonyms as “disentanglement, exhibition, unfolding, unravelling, growth, increase, maturation, maturing, evolution, progression, elaboration, expansion and explication” (Geddes and Grosset, 556). The above assertion is perhaps the brain behind Ekpe’s assertion that development is the process of gradually becoming bigger, better, stronger or more advanced. Therefore, earnest Mentor/Mentee relationship is a catalyst to sustainable development in Technical Theatre Practice in Nigeria.

The Personalities of William Dexter Lyndersay and Molinta Enendu

The duo of William Dexter Lyndersay and Luke Ojukwu Enendu constitute a paradigm of Mentor/Mentee relationship. The two were brought in contact by sheer providence when Kingsley William Dexter Lyndersay visited Nigeria. Brief examination of the personalities of these two great men add depth to this research endeavour.

Dexter Kingsley William Lyndersay

Kingsley William Dexter Lyndersay is, arguably a well-known name when it comes to the practice of technical theatre in Nigeria. According to Jacob, Kingsley William Dexter Lyndersay “occupies a prominent position when discussing the issue of technical theatre practice in Nigeria” (35). By origin, Lyndersay was not a Nigerian, but from Trinidad and Tabago; “born on 15th of April 1957 in the capital city of Trinidad and Tobago called Port of Spain, a twin Island in the Caribbean Country of West Indies” (Jacob 35).

On educational attainment and his movement to Nigeria, Jacob explains that K. W. Dexter Lyndersay attended Tranquility Boys’ Intermediate and Queens Royal College in Port of Spain for his Post Primary Education before proceeding to Kenneth Sawyer Goodman School of Dram. Dexter went further and obtained a Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) from the Art Institute of Chicago before proceeding to the famous Yale University of Drama, United Sates of America and bagged his Master of Fine Arts (MFA). Dexter was trained under a famous theatre practitioner called Stanley Mccandles and specialised in the area of stage management, lighting and scenography. “Lyndersay came to Nigeria as an outcome of a letter written by Geoffrey Axworthy, the then Director of School of Drama, University of Ibadan to the Dean

of Yale University Graduate School of Drama in 1965 asking for a recommendation for one of the year's graduates for a job as a Technical Director at University of Ibadan" (Jacob 97). As an outcome of the above correspondence, Oni narrates that Dexter "was offered an appointment and the letter of offer of appointment was received by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago where Dexter was hitherto working, he was allowed to be seconded to the University of Ibadan under Commonwealth arrangement" (173). Above exposition provides background info on how Lyndersay arrived in Nigeria came to be associated with technical theatre practice in the country.

Luke Ojukwu Molinta Enendu

Luke Ojukwu Molinta Enendu is one of the founding fathers of technical theatre practice in Nigeria. He is a Nigerian of Anambra State extraction. According to Andrew-Essien "the man we simply call Professor Enendu was born Luke Ojukwu Molinta Enendu at Umueze Ikenga, Adazi Ani, Anocha L.G.A, Anambra State. The circumstances of his birth brought a lot of jubilation" (1). He adds that, growing up with his father, Enendu "was informally educated in Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and Traditional Philosophy" (2). In his detailed explication, Andrew-Essien posits that Enendu "began formal education when he enrolled in the kindergarten class. At the end of that school year, he performed creditably and received prizes and praises from the school and from family" (3). Andrew-Essien adds that "Enendu maintained trend of excellence throughout his formative academic years in primary school. And his secondary education began in Basden Memorial School, Isulo. He later changed to Agulun Grammar School. However, his secondary school education was interrupted by the civil war" (3). After the Nigerian Civil War that disrupted his secondary education, Enendu returned "to Agulu Grammar School to complete his secondary school education, taking the West African School Certificate Examination and then proceeded to St. Paul's College, Awka for the Teachers Grade Two Certificate Course, graduating as the best student" (3). Interestingly, Enendu "taught briefly at Primary School, Awka before he was admitted into the Diploma programme of Theatre Arts, University of Ibadan. On completion of the Diploma programme in 1976, he was offered a direct entry admission into the Degree Programme based on his excellent performance" (Andrew-Essien 4)

Andrew Essien further explains that, after his first-degree programme at the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Ibadan, Enendu enrolled for a Master of Fine Arts (MFA) programme at the University of Calabar where he solidified his relationship with Dexter Lyndersay who by that time was stationed at the University of Calabar. Enendu also acquired a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in 2001. Aside the University of Calabar, Enendu has worked and designed for: Department of Theatre Arts, University of Uyo; Benue State University; Nnamdi Azikiwe University; Kogi State University; Imo State University; Madonna University; Evangel University, Ebonyi State and Odumegwu Ojukwu University amongst many others. He has so far won several awards and supervised so many undergraduate and postgraduate students thereby creating a continuum for mentor/mentee relationships.

How Molinta Enendu met Dexter Lyndersay:

When Enendu gained admission through direct entry into the degree programme of the University of Ibadan, divine providence brought him in context with Lyndersay and he did not hesitate to grasp the opportunity for a robust mentor-mentee relationship. Andrew-Essien explains that:

At Ibadan, Enendu was taught by some of the best scholars and renewed professionals in theatre studies in Nigeria at the time. Zulu Sofola (African Theatre and playwrighting), Joel Adedeji (Theatre History and speech Arts), Dapo Adelugba, Biodun Jeifo (Dramatic Literature and Criticism), Bode Soyande, Sola Arisade (a German trained Scenographer). But the man that gave a definite direction to Molinta Enendu's career in theatre studies was Dexter K. W. Lyndersay, the Grand Master of Theatre Design and Technology in Nigeria. (3-4)

The above explanation marked the contact point between Lyndersay (the mentor) and Enendu (the Mentee) and this connection grew stronger with time. At the end of his studies for a degree programme at the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Ibadan, Enendu emerged as the best all-round graduating student in 1979 and was posted to Sokoto State Council for Arts and Culture for the mandatory National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) assignment. On completion of the one-year NYSC programme, Enendu was offered appointment as a Senior Technical Officer in Theatre Design and Technology at the University of Calabar. A position that was initiated by Lyndersay who nurtured the new Department of Theatre Arts, University of Calabar. According to Andrew-Essien, "Lyndersay who had earlier seen in Molinta Enendu the potential of technical Apostleship invited him and made everything possible to engage him in Calabar" (10). This marked the point of solidification of the relationship where the duo grew in bound and breath as mentor and mentee in furtherance of the development of technical theatre practice in Nigeria.

Lyndersay / Enendu and the Development of Technical Theatre in Nigeria

Technical Theatre is the live wire or the powerhouse of theatre practice irrespective of the setting. Therefore, "the importance of stage design can never be over-emphasised in the present-day theatrical development. Without technical components, theatre will appear bare, and audience are not always the same" (Agboola 75), this standpoint is also share by Ekpe and Okoronkwor as they emphasize that the technical elements of the theatre help give life to script interpretation and actions. For the Technical unit to thrive, the personnel of the unit need to be up and doing. It is based on this understanding that Ekweariri postulates that, "the staff of the technical unit are highly professionals and artisans capable of working with wood, metal, foam, canvas, fabrics, iron, colour in paint and light, sound waves and vibrations, paper, explosives, plastics, glass, fibre glass, etc" (16). The above is a clear testimony of the vast scope of technical theatre as a distinct area of theatre arts.

For all the professionals and artisans to work collaboratively in furtherance of the realisation of the identified production objectives, there is great need for intentional guidance, support and counselling. These are within the scope of mentor/mentee relationship. When there is cordial relationship between mentor and mentee in Technical Theatre practice, there is bound to be sustainable development, which will return lead to efficiency, effectiveness and higher productivity.

However, the current trend in Nigeria seems to be different from the ideal situation. The younger ones seem to be disinterested with technical theatre as an area of specialisation, thereby creating limitations to effective mentor/mentee relationship. Above all, due to the hard-economic realities in Nigeria, the cost of procuring the requisite materials, tools and equipment for performances are beyond reach, thereby inflicting negative impact on the quality of theatrical performances in Nigeria. The world is fast embracing digitalisation in all ramifications, but the situation in Nigeria seems to be on the reverse gear and this suggests

why Ododo, a renowned technical theatre practitioner laments that “while we are supposed to be building on the historical aids and scenic design practice on the contemporary Nigerian stage of today, especially in this era of advanced technology and digitalisation, the essential utilitarian integral place of those technical aids and scenic designs is gradually being underutilised and eroded on our theatre stage” (1-2). This implies that the mentor/mentee relationship as well as the utilisation of the essential technical aids by technical theatre practitioners in Nigeria is on the decline compared with the Lyndersay - Enendu era. Relatively, Betiang submits that “digitisation, being a technocratic problem/issue created by globalisation, with its spread of so-called modernity, civilisation and marched of technology. . . introduces digital divide. The new digital technologies are unable to realise the hope of economic redemption for the poorest countries and above all, the poorest regions of the world” (411).

However, hope abound, considering that theatre practice remains a problem-solving activity and technical theatre as a unit is relevant to the profession, thus defining the need for improved performance in the practice field. Mentor/Mentee relationship is situated as a contributory factor to continuity and development of technical theatre in particular and theatre practice in general within Nigeria and beyond.

Conclusion

Technical Theatre practice in Nigeria as well as other climes of the world has been established to be dynamic and not static. And this is the reason why theatrical design has grown over the years. What keeps the fire burning are the proficiency of the personnel and the functionality as well as the sophistication of the tools and equipment. However, in spite of the level of sophistication of the tools and equipment, the actualisation of identified production objectives depends to a larger extent on the professional mastery by the personnel involved and the tenets of the mastery is wholesomely embedded in the gamut of mentor/mentee relationship. Summarily, this paper suggests that, for the actualization of desired development of technical theatre practice in Nigeria, mentor/mentee relationship requires intentional encouragement as could be cited in the Lyndersay – Enendu relationship.

Additionally, it becomes pertinent to observe that because of the technical requirements of the field, such as climbing of catwalk; undergoing frequent mechanical and electrical maintenance; involvement in measurement and mathematical calculations; working with carpentry processes, the unit is arguably unattractive to the young generation thus impeding on the mentor/mentee relationship. In addressing this challenge, the paper suggests the introduction of policies that require those seeking employment into the profession to provide evidence of having undergone mentorship. Also, the field can be made attractive to the younger generation through institution of grants and scholarship for further studies and trainings.

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