

FROM MIMING TO REALITY: EXPLORING THE EFFECTS OF REALTIME INTRODUCTION OF PROPS ON ACTORS DURING REHEARSALS.

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Article History

Received: 23 July 2026 | Accepted: 28 July 2026 | Published: 03 Aug 2026

DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.21769516](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21769516)

ABSTRACT

Actors-in-training often rehearse for weeks without the real objects they will use on stage. They mime cups, guns, food, and costumes to save money and avoid distraction. When the real props are introduced, it becomes difficult for the actor to adjust. This study investigates how the late introduction of props and costumes affects student actors' physical truth and timing. This is a qualitative study and the data is chiefly drawn from the 2025/2026 THA 313: PRICIPLES OF ADAPTATION play "The Frame Up", directed by Torhukerhiho Favour and Staged managed by Ojo Tobi. Using participant observation, director interviews, and focus groups with ten 300-level cast members, we tracked the shift from mimed to real objects. The study is hinged on the acting theories of Stanislavski and Meyerhold. Findings show that actors were distracted as they stared at new props and lost eye contact with the audience; there was technical failure as they could not coordinate eating while talking, handling guns, or quick costume changes. This caused line drops and missed blocking; Again, there was Emotional spill as fear from sound effects like the canon gun created real tension that broke character. The director solved these problems with early stand-ins, gradual introduction, and repeated demonstration. Boxes stood in for stools, water stood in for tea, and wooden guns were introduced two weeks before show day. Costumes arrived before dress tech to allow actors to "gauge and check changing time". Stanislavski's concept of "endowment" explains why this matters because an actor must give real value to an object, and that takes time. Meyerhold's emphasis on physical rhythm supports the need for early object work so the body can find new centers of gravity. We argue that "prop blocking" should be as formal as movement blocking. A timeline is proposed: Week 1, introduce set and stand-in props; Week 3, introduce real props with daily

repetition; Week 5, introduce full costumes and practice changes; Week 6, lock all elements. Without this, actors remain in what Stanislavski called “physical tension”, the enemy of creativity. The study also notes that certain flood lights can “daze the actor’s eyes”, so lighting must be rehearsed fully at tech. the study recommends for introduction of props and costumes for actors to be full accustomed to them and have time for adjustments if need be.

Keywords: Miming, Reality, Props, Costumes, Acting, Real-time, Rehearsals.

Introduction

During rehearsals especially in educational theatres, students mime the props. Improvisations of props often replace real props. The fear is that the real props when introduced earlier could be damaged or misplaced by the student actors, and replacing them before the production day may not be feasible because of paucity of funds. Thus imaginations and inventiveness and creativity of the actors are called to task. However, creativeness has limitation. A real cup is hot, heavy, and spills. A wooden gun has a different center of gravity than an empty hand. A tight army costume changes how you sit, breathe, and run. When the real props are introduced few days to the production or during technical rehearsal, it becomes difficult to adjust and panic and anxiety set in and full concentration becomes difficult. The actor may drop his line and the scene becomes flat or falls apart, making build up difficult.

The project was guided by three questions: a) What effects does the shift from mimed to real have on an actor-in-training?, b) How much time does the body need to make a prop or costume part of truthful behavior?, c) And what low-cost methods can schools use to give actors that time without breaking the budget?

Finding answers to the above questions necessitated this qualitative study of the 2025/2025 THA 313: PRICIPLES OF ADAPTATION play *The Frame Up*, directed by Torhukerhiho Favour and Staged managed by Ojo Tobi. Which was performed/ staged at the Department of Performing Arts Theatre Auditorium of Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology, Ikere (BOUESTI),.

The director, Torhukerhiho Favour, introduced performance elements in stages. The stage manager documented the process through observation and collected expressions from the director and ten cast members in a focus group: Oshinuga Olusegun, Ajibare Titilayo, Akinyemi John, Ogbuewu Chidera, John Sarah Ohutu, Ajisola Olalekan, Okoro Blessing, Bamidele Timilehin, Olowfila Stephen, Idowu, Itunu Soladoye. The production used several high-stakes objects: wooden guns, a canon sound effect, real food: garri, bread, coffee, army uniforms, medical bandages, phones and a map. These weren’t

background dressing. Actors had to eat while delivering exposition, fire weapons in rhythm with sound, and change costumes quickly between scenes. The stakes make this a strong test case for memory coordination and concentration.

We focused on students in educational theatre because professional actors who are mainly adults get props on day one and are able to manage them well. Again, as professionals, they have the dexterity and expertise to adjust fast. Most importantly, as amateurs, the students need to plan the handoff from mime to real to get acquainted to the props or they are set up to fail. Again inadequate facilities and funds make this inevitable. Stanislavski trained at the Moscow Art Theatre where resources were available. Meyerhold had a company of trained bodies which most university programs don't have hence they train actors and mount shows at the same time, with limited money.

However, poor timing of the props introduction cannot be blamed on poor funding or non budgetary allocation as it is solely a training issue. Leach notes that acting is a physical craft as controlled by rhythm-spatial rhythm of the actor on stage. Therefore, if the object changes, the rhythm changes but if rhythm changes late, the actor cannot re-learn in time thus leading to poor performances which may damage the actor's confidence.

To achieve the objectives of this study, Stanislavski's System, Meyerhold's physicality, and evidence from the BOUESTI rehearsal room will guide us to build a practical timeline for moving from mime to reality. The goal is to make the props to be part of or disappear into the actor's behavior, so the audience sees character, not effort.

Theoretical Framework

The study is hinged on Stanislavski's System and Meyerhold's Biomechanics, with support from Grotowski.

Stanislavski: Endowment and Given Circumstances

Stanislavski believed acting must be truthful, and truth starts in the body. "Physical tension is the greatest enemy of creativity" because it "paralyzes the duty of the body and prevents the mind from concentration". To avoid tension, actors need relaxation and mastery of "given circumstances" all the facts of the world of the play. A prop is a given circumstance. If you rehearse with an empty hand for four weeks, your brain is conditioned and your body's given circumstance is "no cup". If on the performance night, the circumstance changes to "hot, heavy cup", adjustments may become difficult and he body tenses up thus affecting the actor and concentration breaks.

Stanislavski's tool of "endowment" stipulates that actors must give real value to objects. You can't endow or value a mimed object because it has no weight, temperature, or resistance. Endowment takes repetition. The actor must enliven the props and the stage business associated with it. To achieve

this, the real prop must be in the room early enough to become familiar as you can only value what you appreciate.

Meyerhold: Biomechanics and Rhythm

Meyerhold broke from Stanislavski because he saw a “lack of physical expressivity”. His actors trained like athletes, using boxing and gymnastics to help train the actor’s body in responding fully to stimulus (Beale, 2017). Physical build up leads to physical strength needed for stage actions. (Baldwin 2018) The actor’s physical body acts as a machine for performance. He intones that actors must detect and master the use of another centre of gravity other than standing on their foot (Beale 2017).

A gun, a tray of food, or a tight costume changes your center of gravity. If you first feel that shift at dress rehearsal, your spatial rhythm is destroyed. Meyerhold’s “outside in” method says the physical leads to the emotional. So get the physical right early, and the emotion follows.

Grotowski: Poor Theatre and the Actor’s Body

Grotowski stripped theatre to “actor, undefined space and scanty or no props”. But he didn’t eliminate objects. He made the actor’s body the main tool. His actors did “physical training combined with exercises to remove psychological barrier” (Richards 1995). For students, this means the body must be ready before you add weight. So: train the body, then add the object, then rehearse the new body-object system.

Synthesized Principle

1. **The body can’t lie.** If the object is new, the body will show tension, no matter how well the line is memorized.
2. **Endowment needs time.** Two weeks is the minimum for a simple prop; complex actions like eating and talking need more.
3. **Rhythm must be reset.** Every new object requires re-blocking. Do it before tech week or you won’t have time.

These ideas predict the problems BOUESTI students reported and explain why the director’s solutions worked.

Analysis

The BOUESTI rehearsal process shows a clear pattern of disruption and recovery as real objects were introduced.

Phase 1: Miming, Weeks 1-3

The director improvised props stand-ins from day one so that actors can be familiar with them. “We had whatever little a table, a chair or even if we have to pick a box to represent a stool”. Actors could lean and sit, so blocking was solid. Props were mimed as hands became Guns, food became air and

gestures were bandages. With this, actors focused on the rehearsals, mastering their lines and blockings and movements. However, it created a challenge of what Stanislavski would call false given circumstances as muscle memory was being built for the wrong object. The body learned to move without weight.

Phase 2: Real props, Week 4-5

Real props were introduced Two weeks before the performance ushering in real items. Again, more challenges cropped up. Dialogue delivery became affected as the actors paid attention to the props instead looking up towards the audience. Their focus now shifted from looking at their fellow actor to deliver their lines to the object (new costume) thus breaking communication. Furthermore, there was technical conflict of eating and talking (delivering the lines) at the same time. This set us back as the actors took a break to learn the act of doing them simultaneously to avoid either spilling the food or dropping the lines. Thirdly, the shock that came with the sound effect of the gun frightened the cast at the earlier stage such that they were anticipating it and has to pause to close their ears or prepare for the sound.

To forestall this, the director was forced to repeat the actions more often till they got used to it. In many instances, the director had to demonstrate the usage of some of the props and even counseled the actors on how to get acquainted with the props. The key word is patience and tolerance. However, they were able to adjust and the new props no longer produce tension before the performance day. This is in line with the admonishment of Meyerhold who advised directors to “train the body until the new stimulus produces no tension” (Baldwin 1993, Beale 2017).

Phase 3: Costumes, Late Week 5

The introduction of real costumes a few days to dress and technical rehearsal created fresh challenges. The actors turned rehearsal into photo sessions, arbitrarily snapping pictures and admiring their costumes. This caused behavioural change and Stanislavsky’s endowment (Sawoski nd). Some of the costumes did not fit properly on the actors and needed to be amended. This caused stoppage of the rehearsal as they need to be re-measured. Again, it prevented blocking and rehearsing the exact changing time to allow the director to calculate the length of the play which must include all changing time for props and scenes.

Phase 4: Lights and final integration, Tech Week

The actors did not use light for rehearsal until the dress and technical rehearsal. The rays of the light on the eyes of the actors disrupted concentration as most of them were shielding their eyes with their hands as they have not adapted to the rays of the light. To solve this, the director scheduled extra rehearsal with light. He initially reduced the intensity of the light and increased it as the gradually got accustomed to it.

Positive Findings: From the above, it is evident that most important factor arising from the above is the time for the introduction of the props. It was observed that the actor get accustomed to any props introduced as time goes by. The initial excitement is gradually overcome as they frequently use the newly introduced props. They become familiar with it and it turn from new to old through everyday use on stage. The set design and costume served as motivations and encouragement to act well reminding them to give their best but must be introduced early-timing.

Discussion

The data supports a “graduated reality” model for educational theatre. You can’t afford real everything on day one, and you can’t afford fake everything until show day. You need steps.

Why two weeks?

The BOUESTI director found that props introduced at week 4 of a 6-week process were “just two weeks to production” and that was enough to “overcome” problems. Less than that, and actors were still “grappling” on show day. More than that, and you waste early rehearsals where lines and blocking aren’t set. Two weeks gives 10-12 rehearsals, which is enough for muscle memory but not so long that perishables rot or budgets explode.

The Role of Improvisations

The use of stand ins to replace real object is decisive pending the introduction of real objects thus making Grotowski’s poor theatre and given circumstances fairly accurate. It will further make the switch or change to real object less tasking and cheaper especially in an educational theatre where most productions are sponsored by the student.

Costumes as Special Props

Most often, costumes are amended to fit into the body of the actor wearing it. if it is introduced late, it will create tension and disorientate and disorganize the actor and rehearsal respectively. The BOUESTI delay occurred because “the police man’s trousers are tight” and makeup couldn’t be applied. Introduction of the costume early in week 5 or 6 would have given ample time for amendment and given them time to rehearse with them after their introduction and possible amendments. This will make them to regain balance and confidence (Leach nd). So it is advisable that costumes be introduced 7days before the opening day and used in at least 4 runs before the opening day.

Lighting and the Eye

Light is very important in production and should be introduced early for proper adjustment to the rays of the light by the actors. Pickering notes Greek actors needed “loud voices” because “the mask hid facial expression” (Pickering, 1981). Today, light hides the actor from themselves. If you can’t see, you can’t endow.

Proposed Timeline for 6-Week Student Show

Week	Element to Add	Reason	Notes
1	Set pieces and stand-in props	Establish spatial rhythm	Use boxes, tape, rehearsal cubes
2-3	Continue stand-ins, finalize lines/blocking	Avoid overload	Director focuses on “mastering lines”
4	Real props introduced Begin endowment	muscle memory	10+ reps before tech
5	Costumes + partial lights	Test changing time, dazing	3 full runs in costume
6	Full lights, sound, audience sim	Lock rhythm, practice freeze	Invite test audience

As earlier stated, most productions in an educational theatre are sponsored by the students. Therefore, the cost of production can be drastically reduced through hiring of props, and regulating the use of lights to save expenditure. This will make actors to get acquainted with the props, concentrate and interpret their lines. While

For departments: Budget for “rehearsal props” separate from “show props”. A wooden gun used for 3 weeks saves a tech-week meltdown. Write it into the syllabus.

For actors: Ask for your objects. If you’re eating on stage, ask for bread in week 4. Your performance depends on it. As the director said, “actors should get use to the stage businesses”.

Conclusion

The use of improvised or stand ins ensures that rehearsals take off early but there is need to master the real props early enough to get used to them before the performance day. The BOUESTI *The Frame Up* experiment clearly shows the effect of changing from improvised to real props. Adjustments by the actors will slow rehearsals and sometimes disorganize it but they adjust with time and get used to them

The disorganization may pile up pressure on the actors building tension and making them to stutter and stumble, thereby stalling creativity. To avert this, new props must be introduced early enough to let tension dissolve and balance the body rhythm and centers of gravity. When we introduce real props (new objects) we change the rhythm. They need time to adjust so it is advised to early before the dress and technical rehearsal to give time to readjust.

Directors are advised to constantly remind the school authorities of the need early release of fund to sort out prop. While actors are to subtly remind the director of the need for real time introducing of real props to enhance their creativity. Early mastering and acclimatization of the props will make for a better interpretation of roles being portrayed. This is pivot of this work which has successfully argued the need to go from miming to reality to present a real and true to life performance on stage.

Recommendations

The study hereby recommends these guidelines to assist the director, student actor to maximize their potentials. The three guidelines include:

There is need to rehearse with real objects than wasting time in rehearsing the scene without real props. Blocking is movement through space while prop blocking is movement with weight and they need time. Therefore, a minimum of two weeks rehearsal should be held after real-prop is introduced for students. Secondly, costumes should be introduced early to give room for amendments and adjustments and for the excitements about the new costume to die down while lights should be introduced early for easy acclimatization and adjustments by the actors.

For educational theatre, these rules are survival tools. We are training actors, not just putting on shows. If a student's first experience of a gun is the sound on opening night, we've taught them to fear, not to act. If their first meal on stage is real and hot and they've never practiced, we've taught them to survive, not to create.

Article Publication Details

This article is published in the [International Journal of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities Studies](#), ISSN XXXX-XXXX (Online). In Volume 1 Issue 1 (July – Aug) 2026

The journal is published and managed by [IRPG](#).

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Acknowledgements

We sincerely thank the editors and the reviewers for their valuable suggestions on this paper.

Funding

The authors declare that no funding was received for this work.

Data availability

No datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

The author(s) declare that it is not applicable.

Consent for publication

The author(s) declare that this is not applicable.

Competing interests

The author(s) declare that they have no competing interests.

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