



Building Interdisciplinary Bridges Across Cultures

## Petrina Hanly

### Abstract

South Africa is a nation with a divisive past; black and white separated both by Apartheid laws and clashing cultures. Historically, Protest Theatre played a pivotal part in helping the disempowered express and understand their plight. Plays like "Woza Albert!" and "Born in the RSA" were influential in bringing about a peaceful transition to democracy. Now, more than twenty years on, it is easy to believe that this style of drama has become obsolete. So when one of my students approached me saying she had written a play about a young freedom fighter, my first thought was, "Why dwell on stories from the past? The era of oppression is over; surely you can write about something more relevant?" Then I read her work. "Each one, teach one" is based on the true story of the life and death of Vincent Tshabalala. Vincent was a political activist during Apartheid who was dedicated to school reform. The play is a beautiful piece of ensemble theatre that serves as a stark reminder of the price some have to pay for education. It weaves the styles of Protest, Poor, Epic, workshop and physical theatre into a powerful pastiche that refers back to the time of segregation but also challenges the audience to explore the uncomfortable similarities between the past and present political regimes. In order to cross-examine these parallels more fully, my students and I are now expanding this work by interspersing the live performance with filmed sequences. The new film clips portray mini-narratives based on the recent experiences of under-graduates students from diverse back-grounds representing both the private and public sectors, to create an expanded multi-media version of the stage play "Each one, teach one," the effectiveness of which I propose to reveal in this presentation.

### Bio

Petrina Hanly is a Cultural Director and Head of Dramatic Arts at the largest independent school in South Africa: St Stithians College. She was born and educated in England where she attained a BA in English Literature from London University. She spent over a decade in Zimbabwe raising a family and teaching in a rural school in the village of Chegutu. She emigrated to South Africa and settled on a farm in the foothills of the Drakensburg Mountains. In 2008 she relocated to the urban jungle of Johannesburg. She has three passions in life: her family, teaching and the arts. She is a qualified dance instructor and choreographer, an enthusiastic double bass player, author of a play, a musical and several children's books, a seasoned director and producer, an avid reader and frequent theatre-goer.