

# BIBAC

Building Interdisciplinary Bridges Across Cultures

---

**Peta Hanly**

St Stithians College, Pvt Bag 2, Randburg, 2125

Telephone: +27 11 577 6300

[phanly@stithian.com](mailto:phanly@stithian.com)

**Recipient of an SDF AWARD to attend the BIBAC Conference at Cambridge University, UK**

*Investigating the transformative power of the Arts in education in order to build bridges between people from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.*



## ABSTRACT

In October of 2015 I received notification that I was to be the recipient of an ISASA SDF Award to attend the BIBAC Conference (Building Inter-disciplinary Bridges across Cultures) at Cambridge University in the UK. I subsequently decided that I would submit an abstract to the conference convenors to speak on one of the conference themes:

**“The politics of what we do in intercultural and interdisciplinary spaces in terms of the entanglements of power, privilege and people.”**

My abstract was accepted and I was asked to present in a parallel session. My paper was entitled:  
*South Africa: a cultural calabash*  
*Re-imagining cultural identity through theatre*

BIBAC is an international conference which offers multiple platforms of creative expression and welcomes interdisciplinary dialogues, performative discourse and interactions among educators, researchers, practitioners, musicians, dancers, performing arts exponents, policy makers and



administrators to chart new territories in the dynamic field of interdisciplinary arts through cultures. Over twenty different countries from around the globe were represented in 2016, but I was delighted to discover that the opening performance was by a fellow African: **Chartwell Dutiro from Zimbabwe**, who played mystic mbira music. This remarkable musician introduced the delegates to his “finger piano” which was amplified by a giant gourd or calabash. This was serendipitous for me as I had employed the metaphor of a “cultural calabash” in my own talk which followed shortly after.

The point that Chartwell made about ethnomusicology is that - to Western ears - instruments like the mbira, djembe and marimba are often labelled unsophisticated. Our first keynote speaker, Prof. Liora Bresler from the University of Illinois, expanded on this and urged delegates to adopt a broader inter-cultural / inter-disciplinary understanding; to see the identities of objects, artists and creative cultures as valuable but also shifting, each having their own poetic journey. The professor spoke extensively about creating an “intercultural paradigm,” asserting that dissonance should be an invitation to explore and change perceptions rather than to diminish or judge others.

This can best be understood in an educational context by conceptualising the classroom as a musical work. Careful orchestration can allow both dissonance and resonance to occur, so that students can negotiate meaning and intercultural appreciation. By providing “interpretive zones,” we encourage students to interrogate their values, intensify their perceptions of self and others, and reflect meaningfully on their social milieu. The ultimate goal of this approach is for students to broaden their understanding of others and begin to perceive the strange as familiar, making it possible to harmonise in a rich, intercultural polyphony.

I expanded on this notion in the paper I presented at the conference, in which I reflected on the way I have used drama and the theatre-making process to build bridges between students of different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. The content of my paper will be covered in detail in the body of this report. I will also provide practical exercises that can be used in the classroom to help foster intercultural competence and build social cohesion.

During the three days that the conference spanned, delegates immersed themselves in an exciting and diverse programme of events ranging across keynote addresses, performative presentations, workshops, exhibitions, concerts and discussion panels. There was evidence of a definite zeitgeist amongst the participants. Using the arts for transformation and social sustainability was a common theme, as was the necessity of converting STEM to STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, ARTS, Mathematics). Without a doubt, BIBAC celebrated differences as a pathway to seek similarities and to promote the advancement of intercultural arts practices in education.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## PART ONE - BIBAC International Conference

<b>2<sup>nd</sup> INTERNATIONAL BIBAC CONFERENCE – 2016</b>	Page 4
Introduction	

### KEYNOTE ADDRESSES

#### **Chartwell Dutiro**

Director of the Mhararano Mbira Academy, Visiting Research Fellow Bath Spa University

#### **Liora Bresler**

Professor at the University of Illinois College of Education, Curriculum & Instruction, USA

#### **Heidi Westerlund**

Professor at the Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts Helsinki, Finland

Page 5

#### **Professor Eva Saether**

Professor in Music Education, Malmö Academy of Music, Lund University, Sweden

#### **Richard Fay**

Lecturer in Education (intercultural communication & TESOL), Manchester University

### PERFORMANCES and EXHIBITIONS

Pages 5 - 6

## PART TWO - SUMMARY OF PAPER PRESENTED AT THE BIBAC INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

INTRODUCTION	Page 7
CONTEXT	Page 8
CONCISE HISTORY of the SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION SYSTEM	Page 9
PROTEST THEATRE	
DRAMA PRACTICE	Page 12
COLLABORATIVE LEARNING	Page 15
MANAGING DIVERSITY in the CLASSROOM	Page 16
METHODOLOGY	Page 17
THE BENEFITS of this REHEARSAL PROCESS	Page 20
STICKY LEARNING: My “Aha!” Moment	
THE FINAL PRODUCT	Page 20
CONCLUSION	Page 24
BIBLIOGRAPHY	Page 25

## SDF REPORT by Peta Hanly

I shall present this report in two parts. In the first section I will cover the BIBAC International Conference. In the second part, I will outline the paper that I delivered in one of the parallel sessions.

### PART ONE - BIBAC International Conference

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> INTERNATIONAL BIBAC CONFERENCE – 2016

On 28<sup>th</sup> July I flew to London via Frankfurt and then travelled on to Homerton College, Cambridge to attend the 2<sup>nd</sup> International BIBAC Conference. Having registered, delegates were welcomed to the Faculty of Education by the two conveners: Pam Burnard, Professor of Arts, Creativities and Education, and Professor Valerie Ross, Director of the Centre for Intercultural Musicology at Churchill College.



The opening performance was by Zimbabwean, **Chartwell Dutiro**: *Voices of Ancestors – Mystic Mbira Music of the Shona people of Zimbabwe*. Chartwell introduced us to his instrument, explaining how it was hand-crafted and used ceremonially by his people. He spoke about how ethnic instruments have often been referred to as “primitive” by western musicians<sup>1</sup>. He went on to point out that there is a perceived “cultural hierarchy” in which classical instrumentation and western music is valued above other forms; a point that was developed further by two other keynote speakers later in the conference.

Chartwell warned of the dangers of cultural imperialism and stated that people need to strive to “de-colonialize culture” and expand their definition and perception of the arts. He proved that mbira music can be used as a tool to engage people with commonalities that hide behind visible differences such as skin tone, by getting all of those present to raise their voices in song, joining him a Shona blessing.



Our first keynote speaker was **Liora Bresler**, Professor at the University of Illinois College of Education, Curriculum & Instruction, USA. What struck me about her address was the value she placed on travel as a means of developing cultural understanding. She pointed out that there are two types of traveller: the “tourist” and the “habitat dweller”. Obviously, the latter adopts a broader cultural understanding and is ready to be surprised and to learn from the new voices that are encountered. This notion had particular resonance for me, as I was born in the UK and at the age of 25 drove from England to Zimbabwe where I lived for over a decade before immigrating to South Africa. Because my travels were not scholastic, I never really considered their value in contributing to my own cultural identity and artistic journey, so this was a wonderfully affirming discovery. Indeed, I would go as far as to say that crossing international boundaries has given me a stronger

voice as an educator because I am passionate about creating learning environments in which cultural plurality and artistic co-creation flourish.

---

<sup>1</sup> Nettl, B (1956): *Music in Primitive Culture*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge.



Our second keynote speaker, **Heidi Westerlund** from the Sibelius Academy in Finland, introduced the concept of the Cultural Omnivore. She stressed the importance of using a multi-cultural approach to arts education as a means of promoting social cohesion in a world where migration is increasingly prevalent. She called for a reconceptualization of school practices in which teachers and learners co-construct cultural identities that are situational but encompass diversity; moving from the premise of multi-culturalism to inter-culturalism. **Samantha Dieckman** from the University of Sydney in Australia, in one of the parallel sessions, cautioned against the flattening of separate cultures into a homogenised, global culture in which the normativity of the majority (often white) culture is self-perpetuating. She emphasised the imperative of valuing local skills, knowledge and artefacts.

In her fieldwork on social sustainability, **Professor Eva Saether** (Malmö Academy of Music, Lund University, Sweden) discussed how she had been inspired by the concept of *sensuous scholarship* introduced by the American anthropologist Paul Stoller. She reflected on how educators need to include all the senses when engaging with students of the arts: “culture, society and power are continuously negotiated, renegotiated, foregrounded, backgrounded, remembered and forgotten in our relations with one another in our orientation to a greater whole” (p. 820).

Finally, **Richard Fay** from Manchester University, England, in his talk on Klezmer music, alluded to the concept of resistance identity. He noted that cultural devaluation and stigmatisation in opposition to ruling norms was a strong driving force for transformation of the social fabric. This we have seen evidence of in South African culture with the emergence of Protest Theatre during the Apartheid era which led, in part, to the subsequent political change.

The keynotes, parallel sessions and workshops, were interspersed with performances, exhibitions, demonstrations, an art installation and a book launch. Of these, my three favourites were a performance by the *Världens Band*, a concert by the Beijing Opera and a whimsical sculpture.

**The Världens Band** is a “transglobal roots fusion” band that thrilled the delegates with a vibrant mix of music from Sweden, Senegal, India, France, England, Scotland, Israel and Tunisia.



**Rituals of Culture:** an intercultural concert of traditional and new music with guest musicians from the National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts at Wolfson Hall, Churchill College



**Through the Eyes of a Child and a Penguin** an art installation by Nicola Ravenscroft which seeks gently to “challenge and transform human behaviour, so building creative friendships worldwide around a shared love and respect for water, our precious, yet deeply threatened, natural resource ... the life spring running through us all”







### INTRODUCTION

A calabash is a dried gourd or pumpkin shell. When filled with beans or seeds it becomes a musical instrument that has its own unique sound and, voila, the humble calabash becomes a percussion instrument.



My presentation is all about the “Cultural Calabash” that IS South Africa. That crazy mix of human beans (pun intended) that stem from a huge variety of ethnic roots: the Bantu or black African population that includes the Zulu and Xhosa tribes, the white Afrikaans, English and other European settlers; Indians and Chinese who were originally brought in as indentured labourers to work on sugar plantations; then there are the coloureds, the Khoisan and Cape Malay, the list goes on. There are eleven official languages in South Africa, so we really ARE a Rainbow Nation.

## CONTEXT

I would like to share with you some of the experiences I have had working in arts education in South Africa. My name is Peta Hanly. I am head of Dramatic Arts and Cultural Director at one of the top private schools in Africa: St Stithians College, Johannesburg.



Here is an aerial view of our campus and as you can see, it is pretty impressive: spacious grounds, fantastic skyline and brilliant resources.

The students I interact with at St Stithians are the privileged few. They are mentored and coached by exceptional teachers in music, visual arts, written word, dance and drama. They have easy access to materials, equipment and spaces that enable them to flourish creatively.

However, just a few kilometres from the school are the townships of Soweto, Tembisa and Alexandra. In South Africa, the term township refers to under-developed, over-crowded urban areas that, during Apartheid, were reserved for what was euphemistically referred to as “non-whites”. Nowadays, these townships are where low or no-income earners reside, and they are still predominantly black.





## **CONCISE HISTORY of the SOUTH AFRICAN EDUCATION SYSTEM**

South Africa is a nation with a culturally fragmented heritage. It is also one of the most financially unequal societies in the world. So if we are talking of building bridges across cultures - bearing in mind that there are so many different ones in South Africa - there is a huge amount of work to be done to untangle the legacy of power and privilege that we have inherited from the previous regime. And this is particularly evident in the educational system which, like most of the public sector in our country, is in disarray.

The historical background as to why this is the case, is that from 1953 – 1980 non-whites in South Africa received their schooling according to the Bantu Education Act. The word Bantu is actually a label that is used for over 400 different ethnic groups in sub-Saharan Africa. That's a lot of different cultures just within those of so-called "non-white" origin. And these people, who speak in a wide variety of indigenous languages and dialects, were taught, predominantly, in Afrikaans. The Act basically retarded the progress of African culture and deliberately restricted the curriculum to the most basic of functions so that the people were trained for nothing other than menial labour.

The rest of the world, of course, was not particularly impressed with the state of affairs in South Africa. As a result, the West imposed sanctions and the usual flow of theatrical imports promptly ceased. At this time, the majority of South Africans may not have been overly competent with pen and paper, but that didn't stop them from telling a good story. In fact, it created a whole new avenue for African oral tradition to traverse and with it, the evolution of a new theatrical style: **PROTEST THEATRE**



To a large extent, Protest Theatre is devised not written. The creation process itself is collaborative and accessible, even for the most poorly educated, which is exactly what appealed to its African exponents.

This process of devising drama is known as workshop theatre. It is a technique that is not dependent on literary ability, but instead starts with an idea, that is fleshed out by research and observation, expanded through play and improvisation, and then honed into a sequence to tell a story based on the original idea.

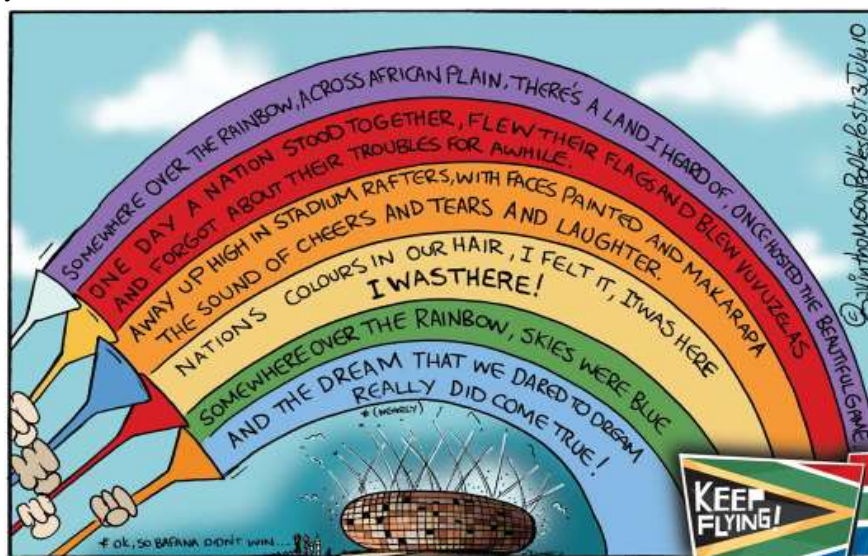
Protest Theatre was a product of its time. It exploded onto the theatre scene in South Africa in the wake of sanctions, filling the gap with fresh, potent, relevant drama that could be staged anywhere from a church hall to the local shabean.

Stylistically, the fundamentals of Protest Theatre are based on simplicity of form:



- It is firmly actor-centred;
- Full of energy and very physical (making it both watchable and easy to comprehend);
- The language used is vernacular, often dancing between different dialects and tongues;
- The actor-audience relationship is close, so that the spectators don't feel distanced by forth wall, but engaged and personally affected by the action;
- It is not tech or set dependent and so can be performed just about anywhere;
- It doesn't necessarily follow particular characters or plotlines but is more episodic in structure and so easier to track;
- Episodes are linked by a burning issue or idea, which makes it compelling viewing.

Protest Theatre provided a platform for ordinary people to express their discontent about the political situation and to increase awareness of the plight of black Africans. It was a useful political tool and, I firmly believe, one that helped to bring about a peaceful transition to democracy.



**DEMOCRACY:** 1994 and Apartheid is over. “The Rainbow Nation” is born, signalling the death knell for a theatre of complaint. The period following Mandela’s appointment as president was uncomfortable for South African theatre-makers. They no longer had anything to rail against; they lost their purpose and their voice. But it wasn’t long before they rallied and theatre-makers like Lara Foot, Mike van Graan and Zakes Mda began producing drama that was surprisingly redolent of the previous era.



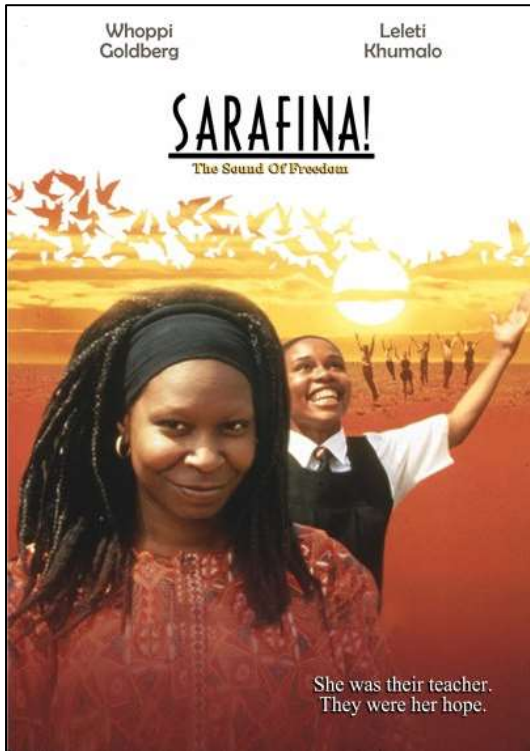
Just over twenty years into democracy, the promise of Mandela’s vision of a “Rainbow Nation,” sadly, has not come to fruition. The populace - especially the unemployed and the poor - have begun to express their discontent and disillusion with the lack of progress. This is over and above the increasingly vocal frustration at blatant squandering, corruption and fraud, on the part of those who are in power. The economic crunch is being felt by all sectors of the community. And the ripple effects are having an impact on how people feel about & behave towards each other.

This tension becomes particularly evident in the classroom when we look at plays and films from the Apartheid era. Movies like *Sarafina!* starring Whoopi Goldberg and the brilliant South African actress Lelethi Khumalo, or plays like *The Island* by Athol Fugard. This year I had the privilege of taking my students to see a revival of the Fugard classic at the Market Theatre, starring Atandwa Kani (son of John Kani, right) and Nat Ramabulana.



***The ISLAND***  
by  
Athol Fugard  
John Kani  
Winston Ntshona





## DRAMA PRACTICE

Conscious of the need to foster a sense of social responsibility in my students, I have developed a particular method of introducing them to Protest Theatre in Dramatic Arts. I start by getting them to wait outside the classroom. Then, I greet them “in character”. I am a nasty piece of work; a caricature school ma’am from the Apartheid era. I split the students into groups according to skin colour, making sure that I get some of them to squirm when I hesitate over which category they fall into.

Up until this point the students think I’m going to discriminate against the learners with darker skin, but I do a role reversal. The black students are treated with dignity and are welcomed into the classroom while the others are told, with complete lack of courtesy, to find a place on the floor and not to complain. Nervous giggles ensue and many of the learners begin to feel slightly uncomfortable.

After a brief introduction, we watch *Sarafina!* The movie never fails to move the students profoundly.

The black students are emotionally assaulted by being confronted with what their predecessors had to endure while the white students are simply horrified and shamed. This is a past that – although studied academically in history – they don’t understand in a more visceral sense. Now – seated in positions of superiority and subjugation – the students begin to gain more awareness.

We take this a step further in practical classes, where we do improvised games focussing on status so that the students can experience and reflect on what they feel. These are the first steps on a five year journey during which, through drama and the study of theatre in South Africa, the students begin to explore the highly complex and emotionally-charged entanglement of power, privilege and people that is at the heart of our shared culture.



In Grade 10, my students study the iconic Protest Theatre play *Woza Albert!* which was originally workshopped by Mbongeni Ngema and Percy Mtwa under the guidance of Barney Simon.



In this recent production by Zikkazimba (below), the performers are white! But that did not detract from the biting satire of the piece or indeed, the pathos. The production stimulated lots of heated debate amongst my senior students, who then went on tour to the National Arts Festival.



In 2015, the resurgence of interest in Protest Theatre was particularly evident in the shows we saw in Grahamstown, amongst which was a powerful revival of *Born in the RSA*. I have always believed that witnessing, rather than just studying a play, can be a truly life-changing experience.

This was certainly the case for one of my students, 17 year old Sabrina Potter (pictured below), who subsequently came to me with an idea for a piece of Protest Theatre of her own that she was determined to produce and enter into an annual one act play festival held in Johannesburg: FEDA.



Sabrina's idea was to dramatize the true story of the life and death of one of her relatives, a young man called Vincent Tshabalala. Vincent was a political activist during the Apartheid era who was dedicated to school reform. In his memory, relatives and friends have established the Vincent Tshabalala Trust that sponsors bright students from impoverished homes to go to University. All the trust asks in return is that the beneficiaries go back to their communities once they have graduated and help others with their schooling. The motto of the organisation is "each one, teach one" which is also the title of the play my students created.





Now I must confess that my initial reaction was, "Why dwell on stories from the past? The era of oppression is over; why not write about something more relevant?" Then we started talking about her idea and about Vincent and about how much it meant to her to tell this story and I began to realise that, perhaps I was the one who needed to adjust my thinking, especially in the light of the protests about tertiary education in South Africa that were happening at the time. So we agreed that we would gather a team of students who were keen to work on this project.

### **COLLABORATIVE LEARNING**

Over the course of the year that it took to develop the finished product, I worked intensely with Sabrina and my team of students, not just to create theatre but to explore the deeper issues around the education system and our social environment that are at the heart of the play.

During this time there was a lot happening on tertiary campuses around the country. At the University of Cape Town protestors campaigned for the statue of Cecil John Rhodes to be removed. This led to a wider movement to "decolonise" education across South Africa. All of this occurred while my students and I were busy working on a play about the injustices of the education system 40 or 50 years ago. The irony did not go un-noticed. Especially as St Stithians could be perceived as an island of privilege in a sea of poverty and educational crisis.

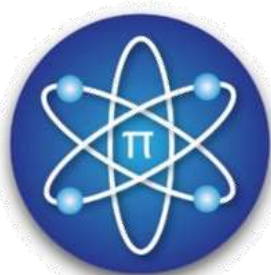


So I decided that this was an opportunity to step into a previously unexplored inter-cultural space and I approached the director of the Thandulwazi Trust, which is an educational programme run on our school campus by the St Stithians Foundation.

**THE THANDULWAZI ACADEMY** was created to address the critical issues pertaining to the teaching and learning of the core curriculum in South Africa. It has four main areas of focus:

- A teacher development programme;
- Teacher internships;
- A learner sponsorship initiative; and (the one I was interested in)
- A Saturday School for pupils from previously disadvantaged communities.

Every Saturday around about 1500 students pour onto the St Stithians campus to receive free, expert teaching from some of the top educators in the country. Now, although maths and science are the main focus of the programme, English is also on the curriculum, so I decided to sign-up and volunteer my time to teach English to the senior students.



**Thandulwazi Trust**  
**MATHS AND SCIENCE ACADEMY**

After my first Saturday of teaching upwards of fifty students per grade, I realised the enormity of my commitment, but now I find these classes are one of the highlights of my week. The added bonus was that I managed to find students from a very different socio-economic environment to participate in *Each one, Teach one*. We now had the diversity that was required to hold a truly rich inter-cultural debate and to develop a piece of theatre that was more reflective of the cultural diversity in our country. But managing the student's interactions was not always easy.



### MANAGING DIVERSITY in the CLASSROOM

The team of twelve met weekly to collaborate on the project. The photo below is a scene from the play and is not representative of the riotous atmosphere that usually prevailed when we got together! There was often conflict: especially when the Thandulwazi students arrived late or had not prepared thoroughly, or when the author focussed on the play more than the people involved.





A “whatsapp” group helped with organising logistics, but even that proved ineffective when some of the poorer learners did not have access to data or a phone 24/7 like the Saints students. So we had to develop a strategy to ensure that relationships remained positive and understanding and acceptance became mandatory. We adopted a few simple protocols:

**STOP** avoiding conflict. Don’t push integration where it isn’t natural.

*The students were encouraged to express their feelings by talking in the first person rather than accusing each other. They spoke openly if they had a problem and voiced their expectations.*

**START** focussing on our similarities and comprehending that the success of the project is dependent on each and every one involved so any contribution, however small, is appreciated. Adopt a spirit of empathy and understanding with a “win-win” mentality. Be honest and authentic. *We found that being able to admit errors was important, but equally that most difficulties arose when expectations were taken for granted rather than clarified. For example, the starting time of a rehearsal was not approximate so anyone who knew they were going to arrive late needed to notify the group, or if you had not had time to learn lines due to other commitments, say so.*

**CONTINUE** to be excited about the project. Listen actively. Agree to disagree if necessary.

*Having a shared vision and goal was critical to ensuring the success of the project. Showing respect, even if there was a fundamental disagreement, was also non-negotiable.*

### **METHODOLOGY**

Establishing certain protocols for interaction and agreeing to focus on achieving the goal of producing *Each one, Teach one* in time for the festival was pivotal to the success of this project. Having said that, it wasn’t all about the play. It was more about creating an inter-cultural space (a “third space”, as it were) where the students could interact and build relationships.

Most important was structuring rehearsal sessions to ensure time for personal interaction as well as a planned activity that contributed to the development of the play. These included things like practical explorations of hegemony using theatre games or making cell phone videos of improvised interviews with the play’s characters. Here are some examples:



#### **TAKING POWER<sup>2</sup>**

*This game focuses on the implications of power relations. Divide into groups of 3 – 4, each group has 5 chairs and a bottle of water. A volunteer silently arranges the chairs and bottle so that one chair is the most powerful object in relation to the others. The group then analyses and interprets the formation. Different interpretations are encouraged. Someone else repeats the activity. After a few versions, one person from the group places themselves in the most powerful position in relation to the other objects. The group again “reads” the image. One by one, each person joins in and attempts to place themselves in the most powerful position.*

**DISCUSS:** what must a person do to have power over others.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.utexas.edu>>



### JOIN ME, MY NEIGHBOUR<sup>3</sup>

*This game is about diversity and commonality.*

One person stands out and says, "Join me my neighbour if you..." and then refers to a personal characteristic such as "...have brown eyes," "...prefer dark to milk chocolate," "...have been to see a circus," (an identifying characteristic, preference, opinion, experience that he/she may have in common with others in the room). Those who share the characteristic join the individual; separating those present into two groups. Another person takes a turn and another.

As the game progresses more contentious issues are raised such as "... join me, my neighbour if you believe that abortion is ALWAYS wrong," "... join me, my neighbour if you think the death penalty should be reintroduced." This challenges those involved to interrogate their own value system, whether they follow the crowd or stand up for their beliefs.

**DISCUSS:** feeling vulnerable and exposed, herd mentality, isolation and identity.

### PERSON TO PERSON<sup>4</sup>

*This game allows the participants the opportunity to consider the extent to which social interaction is regulated by normative behavioural codes.*

Divide into groups of 4 - 5. Educator instructs participants to connect body parts on each other in a sequential way without communicating verbally, for example join hand to knee, elbow to shoulder, head to chest etc. Multiple connections are suggested.

**DISCUSS:** how participants negotiated actions without talking, who drove the interactions and why, how the different connections made them feel.

### BODY IMAGE: OVERPOWERING YOUR PARTNER<sup>4</sup>

*This exercise requires reflection on our responses to immediate manifestations of power.*

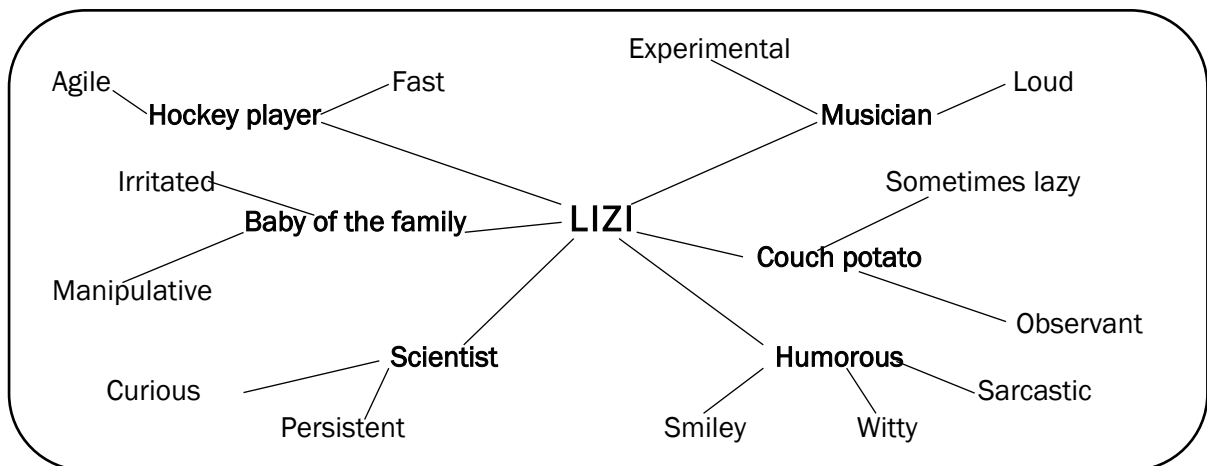
Divide into pairs. Construct a tableau to convey partner A is being overpowered. Partner B responds by undoing the effect of the previous move and/or exerts increasing power. Repeat.

**DISCUSS:** How easy was it to shift power, did you feel intimidated, what have you learnt about power dynamics?

### IDENTITY THEFT

#### Instructions

On a blank piece of paper, create a diagram that represents your identity and self (see example).



1. You are given 10 sticky labels. On each write a different word/phrase that you believe defines your identity. Be as honest as possible.
2. Stick labels to the front of your shirt.
3. Walk around the room reading each other's labels.

<sup>3</sup> Source: Juan Gabriel Gómez Albarello - Illinois Wesleyan University

<sup>4</sup> Source: Juan Gabriel Gómez Albarello - Illinois Wesleyan University

4. Go to someone and select a label that is completely different to any you have on your shirt. Remove all your labels and place the single selected label on your shirt.
5. Divide into groups of 3 – 5.
6. Improvise a short scene based on a familiar situation in which you each perform your selected identity and ONLY that identity (ie waiting for the bus, eating a meal etc)
7. DISCUSS

These planned activities were followed by unstructured interaction time during which the learners could chat, listen to music, teach each other new dance moves or share video clips. Food was also important: a shared pizza or mac'n'cheese brought in by one of the parents turned into a time of great bonding. On a fundamental level, the students were often surprised more by what they had in common than what separated them: exam stress, home pressures, sibling rivalry or friendship issues, concerns about the future. Having time to discuss all these things helped them to connect. There was lots of laughter, some anger, disagreements and debates, but interestingly the most fruitful ideas and exciting suggestions usually came out of these sessions.

### **THE BENEFITS of this REHEARSAL PROCESS**

Many rehearsal sessions were held on the journey to creating *Each one, Teach one*. Although we began with a script, it turned out that the written dialogue was really just a springboard for the collaborative process. By using workshop theatre techniques, interaction and improvisation, choral work and the new element of projected film recording, the play finally began to take shape.

The benefit of this process is that transformative learning took place, as each and every student contributed intellectually, emotionally and practically towards the play in many different ways on many different levels. Sharing this creative experience facilitated “sticky” learning because the process was multi-dimensional:

#### **1. PSYCHOLOGICAL STIMULATION**

Intellectually the students had to gain insight into the actual experiences of the characters so an understanding of the historical, social and legal context was required. This was enhanced by listening to the testimonies of activists (friends and family of Vincent Tshabalala) who had lived during the Apartheid era. Through observation and interaction, the students progressed to:

#### **2. BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION**

Participating in theatre games that made the students feel what it was like to be a victim or oppressor, putting them in simulations where they felt isolated or vulnerable and getting them to act out certain emotional traits, encouraged them to be more aware of their body language, gestures and actions. These drama activities forced the students to FEEL not just to think.

#### **3. CONVICTION**

The combination of intellectual understanding, emotional engagement, personal experience and shared activity leads to transformation. By going through these steps, each of the students gained a deep and powerful conviction that they have a personal responsibility to effect change.

I also experienced a number of epiphanies during the course of collaborating with the group. On a personal level, I discovered that I had been culturally insensitive in the way I had been behaving towards certain students. To explain further, I need to elucidate with an anecdote:

#### **STICKY LEARNING: My “Aha!” Moment**

One day we were rehearsing a scene from the play between a Headmaster and two students. The student playing the Head was running late so, not wanting to waste time, I stood in for a bit.

My character, the Head, had to dismiss the first student and, improvising, I added a line:

HEAD You can go now Thandisiwe. Thandi, look at me when I'm talking to you!

Immediately the black kids started muttering, so I asked what the problem was and learnt something that changed my perception of my black students profoundly. They said that, in African culture, it is considered disrespectful to look an authority figure in the eyes.

Now, I can't tell you how many times I have regaled black students for not looking me in the eyes when they speak to me. So, when I heard this I just groaned. I had experienced sticky learning first hand. As teachers, we really are life-long learners!



### **THE FINAL PRODUCT**

*Each one, Teach one* was a long time in the making, but eventually - after lots of engaging practical activities, improvisation sessions, heated debates, revelations and reflection - we workshopped a play.

*Each one, teach one* is a powerful piece of ensemble theatre. It challenges the audience to explore the uncomfortable similarities between the past hegemony and present political realities in South Africa. And it serves as a stark reminder of the price some have to pay for education.

The comradery that developed amongst the cast during the course of the year was significant. It wasn't without its ups and downs, but the experience has been enriching for everyone involved.

On the following pages are some photos of my students performing in the play at the FEDA Festival where, it turns out, Nat Ramabulana (from *The Island* revival that I mentioned earlier) was adjudicating.. He sung the praises of the play saying that it had the perfect storyline. I think he was being a bit generous there, but what he said next was not hyperbole. "It was really emotional, you captured the story so well that the people of Alex (that's Alexandra Township) should be proud of you."



PHOTOGRAPHS of the PRODUCTION



Fortunately, a journalist from *Greater Alex Today* got hold of the story and a review of the play (overleaf) appeared in the local press. Furthermore, beneficiaries and the Chair of the trust, plus members of the Tshabalala family, attended performances. It really was incredibly moving to witness their response.



# Vincent Tshabalala play evokes emotions

*The life of Vincent Tshabalala relived on stage*



**His Spirit Lives: Actors together with some beneficiaries of Tshabalala Education Trust**

Pic: Ramatamo Wa Matamong

**RAMATAMO WA MATAMONG**  
ramatamos@greateralextoday.co.za

DURING the Festival of Excellence in the Dramatic Arts held recently at the Johannesburg Fringe Theatre, a group of learners from St Stithians College performed a magnificent piece depicting the life of the late Vincent Tshabalala, the anti-apartheid martyr, former MK Soldier, Cosas leader and a learner at Minerva High. They showed

how he died in 1985 during a fierce battle with the apartheid security forces.

Reviewing the play, a renowned stage and television actor, Nat Ramabulana said the play was flawless with a perfect story line. This demonstrated the amount of work actors put during their rehearsals and extreme respect to the person of Tshabalala's magnitude.

"You've captured the story so

well that I've got no doubt that the family and the community of Alexandra should be proud of you," he said, "It was really emotional, especially the part where they showed his corpse. I was the person to be called by the police to come and identify him," said Hymie Tshabalala, Vincent's elder brother.

One of Tshabalala's childhood friends, Zwelibanzi Ndlovu was also watching and said the play triggered a lot of memories. "It brought a lot of sad memories but at the same time I'm excited that his story has been told. It is through his sacrifices that we are here today," he said.

His former teacher, Jan Ndlovu said Vincent was also his friend while the young actor, Ephraim Ozabor who played Vincent said the play made him to reflect on himself, his role in the society and the legacy he would like to leave to mankind.

In his honour, Tshabalala's friends such as Paul Mashatile, Dipuo Mvelase, Connie Bapela, Louis Seeco, Pam Mallela, Sizakele Nkosi Malobane and Mxolisi Zwane came together to open an Education Trust in his name, which has since in its 10 years establishment has benefited over 100 students and graduates from Alexandra.

We performed as part of the theatrical line-up in the Saana Africa Festival which is a pan-African inter-cultural arts festival that hosts performers from all over the continent.



We also did a special performance for the Thandulwazi Academy Saturday school students, which was great as they got to see their friends on stage performing in a play that really spoke to them personally about the value of education. This photo shows them as they watch the play.



### CONCLUSION

For me, this exercise was not about reviving Protest Theatre or even telling Vincent's story – compelling though it is. This process was about getting my students to engage fully with the current reality in South Africa; not just see it through a single, privileged lens but to really get to know and appreciate the difficulties many young people have getting access to quality education (including their new friends from Thandulwazi).

The process was about exploring inter-cultural spaces that would enable the students to deconstruct, discuss, play with, reframe and reimagine their cultural identity. In the words of the director of the British National Theatre, Rufus Norris, we were:

*“Using the arts as a crucible in which we come to understand who we are as individuals, communities and a nation.”*

A crucible, yes. But in our case, a South African calabash!







## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

### **REFERENCES**

Nettl, B (1956): Music in Primitive Culture. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, USA.  
Stoller, P (1997): Sensuous Scholarship. University of Pennsylvania Press, USA.  
National Senior Certificate: Dramatic Arts – ESIT – Part A 2012 and 2015  
Greater Alex Today 18/05/2016 – page 3, Ramatamo Wa Matamong

### **PHOTOGRAPHIC**

<http://durban.getitonline.co.za/events/event/annual-african-cultural-calabash-concert/#.V9FMM1t951s>

### **ONLINE RESOURCES**

<https://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/events/conferences/bibac2016>