

“We must start with our own children”:

Reflectively Researching Intergenerational Leadership for Social Justice, Education and Sustainability

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NOTE: This paper was prepared today, 13 December 2013 for a book on ‘Intergenerational leadership and learning for sustainable development’, to be released next year at a World Conference to mark the end of the UN Decade on Education for Sustainable Development in Nagoya, Japan. The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development was borne in Johannesburg in 2002; it was an outcome of the Johannesburg Implementation Plan formulated by world leaders at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, hosted by the South African government, building on the earlier Rio Earth Summit. Nelson Mandela attended the opening of the World Summit on Sustainable Development soon after he left office as the first democratically elected President of the Republic of South Africa. He passed away a week ago today, on 5 December 2013 at the age of 95. His life story is well known. I write here about his words ‘We must start with our own children’.

This is my paper for Tata Mandela.



Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela 18 July 1918 – 5 December 2013

(seen here with Graça Machel, April 2007 at Rhodes University – just outside my office)

Today: 13 December 2013

Today is the last day that Nelson Mandela will lie in state in at the Union Buildings¹, as the country and the world bids him farewell. On Sunday he will be laid to rest at his rural home in Qunu, in the Eastern Cape Province. This extraordinary man; Father of our Nation, Son of Africa, and Global Leader has left his mark on us all. He has taught us so well the essence of intergenerational leadership for social justice, education and sustainable development, that one may think the chapters being penned here are superfluous.

On the wall in my office I have a full colour newspaper page that I found in a national newspaper soon after he became the first non-racial president of a democratic South Africa in 1994. It has his picture, his beautiful smile, and a small printed statement on it which says **“We must start with our own children”**. A few years ago, the page fell off the board, and I thought it might be time to throw it out. Instead, I took it to the printshop down the road, and I had it plastic-laminated. It made its way back into a prominent position on the wall of my office, where it still hangs today.

In this chapter I reflect on this newspaper page, the man, the president, the world statesman, his intergenerational social justice, education and sustainable development² leadership and how we might reflectively research and take forward the complex, relational topic of such leadership. Tata³ Nelson Mandela has, this week, in his passing at the venerable age of 95, inspired unprecedented global reflection on the human condition, on **leadership** and what it means for a more sustainable, socially just world. We saw Barack Obama shake the hand of Raúl Castro, we heard his plea for strength and reason, for reclaiming our collective humanity, for peace and justice; and we saw the South African people unite once again, black and white crying together, reflecting and standing in those long queues. Not to vote this time, but to bid Tata Mandela farewell as he lay in state. We saw people in cities around the world lighting candles and laying flowers in his honour,

¹ The Union Buildings are the houses of parliament of the Republic of South Africa, located in Tswane (Pretoria), South Africa. Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela (18 July 1918 – 5 December 2013), anti-apartheid revolutionary, and first president of a democratic South Africa, lay in state for three days from 11-13 December 2013, in the State Amphitheatre. They renamed the Nelson Mandela Amphitheatre for him this week.

² Here I use the term sustainable development not in its often appropriated and/or ‘sloganised’ version, but rather to reflect the essence of its meaning, which proposes that a new form of human development is required that integrates socially just economic, social and cultural practices and policies, with concern for the environment, and the well being and sustainability of all life on Earth; for the benefit of present and future generations. People Matter, but so does the Earth and its living systems on which we depend.

³ Tata is the isiXhosa word for Father. In his latter years Nelson Mandela was respectfully referred to as Tata Mandela, or Tata Madiba, in recognition of being the Father of the Nation.

and taking small moments to reflect on the meaning of his life and what he stood for. These, wherever they have been found, are poignant reflections on the state of our world, how we would like it to be, and what kind of leadership we really want.

In 1994 we stood in long queues together to vote for **freedom**. Now, as Tata Mandela passes on, he is reminding us to reflect on **leadership**. His message is not only that freedom is not possible without leadership - but also that *a special kind of leadership is needed; a leadership that can unite people for a just, democratic and sustainable world, free from exploitation, degradation and greed*. And, as is said by him on the poster in my office from so many years ago, **"We must start with our own children"**. This week I, like many, many people throughout our world, have been poignantly reflective. I have thought about leadership, about life, about the current human condition, and what it is that has given rise to the extraordinary love and respect that Tata Mandela commanded, all over the world. And I have looked at the picture on the wall in my office time and time again, finding in the person, the words and the smile a philosophy of life and a philosophy of education that expresses the spirit of intergenerational leadership for social justice, education and sustainable development.

Next week

Next week the world will of course change. We will be able to look back at this week as a truly significant week in world history. It will be memorialised as such in future history books. Some commentators and historians may reflect cynically on the week as a media phenomenon, while others will quietly hold inside them the awe of the moment and their sense of passing time and history in the making.

The news will change – other issues are starting to filter through already - and we will once again read that "the medical needs of 165 000 Sudanese children are being held 'hostage' by the warring parties in the South Kordofan and Blue Nile states"⁴; that these children have no access to basic health services, including vaccination against measles and polio. And we will read what UN officials, say about this:

It is *not right* for the different forces in conflict in those areas to hold these children as hostage, to hold *their future* as hostage for the completion of a political process ...

[stated by Martin Mogwanja, deputy executive director for operations at the UN children's fund (Unicef) after a four day visit to Sudan, my emphasis]⁵

⁴ www.news24.com/Africa/News/Sudan-children (accessed 13/12/2013)

⁵ www.news24.com/Africa/News/Sudan-children (ibid)

And of course we will agree with them that it is ‘*not right*’, nod our heads sagely, worry a little about ‘*their future*’, and be thankful that there are UN officials who are willing to travel to Sudan to monitor the situation on our behalf. We will agree with Martin Mogwanja and the quote in the newspaper that reflects him saying “**We cannot afford to forget these children**” ... “**This must be a priority for everyone**”⁶, a message so uncannily like the one of Tata Mandela on the poster in my office “**We must put our own children first**”⁷. We will carry on with what we are busy with and we will turn on our smartphones, tablets and computers, and read again and again in newspapers and online platforms that something is ‘not right’ and that so much is holding the future of the world’s children hostage.

We will somehow forget these children in Sudan and they will become another statistic, another news broadcast; after all, they are just a small portion of the millions and millions of children that we – all of us around the world - have not yet provided for. This is despite the fact that the world we live in today has more more wealth, more resources, better technology, better medical services, better knowledge of human learning and change than ever before in human history. In 2007 thousands of activist colleagues at the Ahmedabad International Conference on Environmental Education in India argued that we need a new enlightenment to redefine our notion of progress and to frame economic life in ways that are more socially just, and less ecologically destructive⁸. As the Bonn Declaration on Education for Sustainable Development stated in 2009⁹

Despite unprecedented economic growth in the 20th century, persistent poverty and inequality still affect too many people, especially those who are most vulnerable ... The challenges arise from values that have created unsustainable societies. The challenges are interlinked, and their resolution requires stronger political commitment and decisive action ... Science has provided us with a better knowledge of climate change and of the Earth’s life support systems; it has gathered significant knowledge about HIV and AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, heart diseases, and other serious health challenges. We know more about natural systems, and human impacts on them, and the ways that biodiversity supports our well-being. We *know* that current economic thinking has to change, and that there is a need to avoid unsustainable production and consumption and promote and support the emergence of ‘sustainably developed’ countries. Social science has provided

⁶ www.news24.com/Africa/News/Sudan-children (ibid)

⁷ it is serendipitous that this article on the Sudanese children was placed right next to this morning’s main news on the passing of Mandela on News 24.

⁸ UNESCO 2007. Ahmedabad Declaration and Conference Recommendations. Moving Forward from Ahmedabad ... Environmental Education in the 21st Century. Fourth International Environmental Education Conference, Ahmedabad, India. 28-28 November 2007. This document reflects the views and contributions of 1200 people from 78 countries attending the Ahmedabad Conference.

⁹ UNESCO, 2009. Bonn Declaration. UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development. 31 March – 2 April 2009, Bonn, Germany.

insight into ethical, cultural, cognitive and affective aspects of human development, as well as sociologies of change. ...

We now need to put this knowledge into action (my emphasis).

In Sudan today, and next week and in weeks, months and years to come, there will remain millions of children in desperate need of care and attention if we do not confront the issues at their root. Today there are 4.1 million children in Sudan alone that are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. There are more than 1.8 million children out of school in Sudan, and an estimated 750,000 needing treatment for severe malnutrition. This is *Today* – as Tata Mandela lies in state in Pretoria.

These little children are not alone, there are far too many like them. In 2012 alone the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) had to provide assistance to children in what they term “challenging countries”, helping a staggering 29.5 million children to get registered at birth in some 80 countries; providing life saving treatment to more than 1.9 million children under 5 for acute malnutrition; and providing medicines and non-food items to more than 1.4 million children affected by the Syrian conflicts¹⁰. And we can maybe read this and think *‘is that not just what one can expect from ‘challenging countries’?’* since this is the kind of reasoning that has become normalised in our society today. And as we do this, we often fail to recognise the problem in our own backyards; failing also to see that this is a global problem, affecting children everywhere, not only in ‘challenging countries’. Why, is it for example, that there are 16.4 million poor children in America (the richest nation on earth), with 7.4 million of them living in extreme poverty? The Children’s Defense Fund in the USA states tellingly that:

Millions of children are living hopeless, poverty and violence stricken lives in the war zones of our cities; in the educational deserts of our rural areas; in the moral deserts of our corrosive culture that saturates them with violent, materialistic, and individualistic messages; and in *the leadership deserts of our political and economic life where greed and self interest trump the common good over and over...* Homeless shelters, child hunger and child suffering have become normalised in the richest nation on earth. It’s time to reset our moral compass and redefine how we measure success.¹¹ (my emphasis)

In South Africa’s Eastern Cape Province today, in the same province where Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela will be laid to rest on Sunday, more than 70% of children

¹⁰ www.unicef.org/publications/files/UNICEF_Annual_report (accessed 13/12/2013)

¹¹ Children’s Defense Fund. 2012. The State of America’s Children Handbook. www.childrendefense.org/child-research-data/soac-2012-handbook.pdf (accessed 13/12/2013)

continue to live in poverty¹². The Eastern Cape Province is home to 6.7 million people¹³, with 87.6% being black Africans. It has recently been described as one of the poorest provinces in the country. Half of the population (3.3 million people) are under the age of 20. There are ten times more young people than elderly people in the province¹⁴. In this same province we have had recent corruption scandals where government officials and others syphoned off for themselves the funding meant for school feeding schemes, school textbooks and school infrastructure; with the Provincial Department of Education being placed under administration by the National Department of Education. Of the 304,900 learners who commenced schooling in Grade 1 in 2000, only 70,249 (23%) completed Grade 12 in 2011. In addition, national figures show that over 100,000 of those who started school dropped out by Grade 3¹⁵. A study on education in rural areas commissioned by the Nelson Mandela Foundation found that of those who remain in school, many, perhaps even a majority, are not understanding what their teachers are saying and teaching¹⁶ due to language barriers and poor quality education, leading to extremely poor school leaving outcomes for those who do complete. Few get into university, and most young people are and remain unemployed.

This is clearly not a sustainable scenario, and it is clear that children are not being put first, despite the fact that the Eastern Cape Education Department states on its website that “The Department of Education, Eastern Cape, is committed to providing quality education for sustainable development”. This situation is exacerbated by teacher unions in the province remaining locked in various political battles, with teaching often unattended and inadequately accounted for, and a general loss of commitment to public education, as those who can afford it (the educated elite – including teachers and union members) take their children to fee-paying or private schools, weakening the public education system further¹⁷.

¹² Makiwane, M. & Chimere-Dan, D. (Eds) 2011. *The People Matter: Poverty, Population Dynamics and Policy*. Research and Population Unit. Eastern Cape Department of Social Development. (www.hsrc.ac.za)

¹³ 2010 figures, Makiwane, M. & Chimere-Dan, D. 2011. *The People Matter: Poverty, Population Dynamics and Policy*. (www.hsrc.ac.za)

¹⁴ Makiwane, M. & Chimere-Dan, D. (Eds) 2011. (ibid)

¹⁵ Department of Basic Education, Education Information Management System data. 2012 (tracking a cohort of children that started school 11 years ago, and that did or did not finish).

¹⁶ Nelson Mandela Foundation. 2005. *Emerging Voices. A Report on Education in South African Rural Communities*. www.hsrcpress.ac.za

¹⁷ Enver Motala and Salim Vally, two of South Africa's foremost critical educational researchers and leaders, are currently producing a book that argues strongly that there is a need to re-instate commitment to public education. They argue that “Nowhere is there an example of a country with high educational outcomes where the provision of basic education has been in private hands”. They argue vehemently against the upsurge of interest in charter and private schools, suggesting that this cannot be a good solution to the educational crisis in South Africa a) because it turns education into a commodity, and b) it deepens social inequality and stratification amongst the citizenry, and c) it engenders values of competitiveness and individualism as the overarching values in society. Good quality public education is essential for a strong democracy. Commitment to it must be reclaimed in South African society, even

Reporting on the near complete administrative collapse and systemic disintegration of the school system in the Eastern Cape Education Department in court in May 2013, Education Head Mthunywa Ngonzo said that there was now a “considerable improvement in leadership” which was likely to lead to a resolution of the “true underlying problems” that led to civil society litigation against his Department¹⁸. However it is likely that only genuine and strong critical, distributed and transformative educational leadership will lead to real social and educational change, given the complexity and deeply rooted nature of the current problems.

More widely in South Africa today, 800 000 children are employed as child labour, many of whom are also raped and abused. Across the country, most children still receive a very poor quality education, despite massive increases in educational expenditure. In 2009, 68 332 cases of rape (affecting women and children most severely) were reported to the South African Police Services (SAPS)¹⁹. SAPS statistics suggest that someone is raped every 35 seconds, but according to the National Institute for Crime Prevention and Rehabilitation only one in 20 rape cases are reported to the SAPS. Naidoo (2013), a researcher at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in the Eastern Cape Province, reports in *The South African Medical Journal* that “schoolteachers are the most common child rapists and are responsible for 33% of rapes of minors”.

Mandela’s legacy was indeed great as he broke through many barriers on his and our road to freedom, but as we can see here, true freedom for South Africa’s children is still to emerge. As strong as the Mandela legacy is, it has not (yet) been able to address the depth of change required, or the many root causes of the problems that create the ills afflicting our schools and society today. Perhaps one of the mistakes that we have made is to “leave too much to the leaders”. It seems so clear to me today, as our dearly beloved Tata Mandela lies in state and as we are bidding him farewell, that we cannot leave the responsibility for social change to iconic (or any other) leaders, however much they may do for us. Democracy must mean that we share the responsibility of leadership. New forms of transformative leadership spread across the entire education and training system, and in society more broadly, are needed. We need real social change leaders on every street corner; in all of our schools, classrooms, community structures and households. But their leadership

when things seem at their most hopeless. Vally, S & Motala, E. October 1, 2013. Privatisation of Schools vs the Public Good. Mail and Guardian online. www.mg.co/article/2013-10-01.

¹⁸ Carlisle, A. May 17, 2013 in News, Politics. Ngonzo describes education collapse. Dispatch Online. www.dispatch.co.za/news (accessed 13/12/2013)

¹⁹ Naidoo, K. 2013. Rape in South Africa – a call to action. *The South African Medical Journal*. Vol 103, no. 4 (2013): 210-211, mar. 2013. ISSN 2078-5135

must be underpinned by a particular concept of 'progress' that encompasses a strong commitment to social justice, sustainability, the public good, and the well being of children and their futures. Such leadership could have the power, with the support of the broader society, to turn our growing knowledge of the world and its people into the actions that matter.

While the scenario described above may seem disappointing given the value and potency of the Mandela legacy, it is important not to see South Africa as an 'exception'; the problem of a lack of adequate commitment to the public good and to the well-being of children and their futures and of the natural and social worlds that they are to inhabit is not only a South African problem. The problems and their root causes are both local and global.

Worldwide 168 million children are still subjected to child labour. This has declined by a third since 2000, from 246 million. While this is good news, the rate of decline is "still not enough to reach the goal of eliminating the worst forms of child labour by 2016"²⁰. The World Report on Violence Against Children²¹ concludes that violence against children happens everywhere, in every country and every society and across all social groups. It reported in 2006 that over 100 countries in the world children in schools still suffered the reality or threat of State-authorised, legalised beating.

UNICEF²² suggests that child labour or child violence cannot be addressed in isolation, **the full range of children's vulnerabilities should be taken into account, through combining our efforts at promoting real social change.** Addressing the full scope of children's vulnerabilities must be done at the level of 'root causes', and responses must involve *interconnected actions* that support families; improve the quality of education; prevent violence in homes and schools; address poverty and inequality; and challenge the cultural acceptance of child labour so that "children everywhere can enjoy the kind of childhood parents everywhere aspire to provide"²³. It must also involve addressing the causes and consequences of climate change and environmental degradation, as these create new contexts of risk for children, as is so clearly pointed out by UNICEF again:

Children will bear the brunt of the impact of climate change because of their increased risk of health problems, malnutrition and migration ... In the 10 countries that are most vulnerable to climate change related droughts, floods

²⁰ III Global Conference on Child Labour. Childlabour2013.org

²¹ Violence Against Children. United Nations Secretary General's study. 2006. www.unicef.org/violencestudy/reports.html.

²² UNICEF, III Global Conference on Child Labour. Childlabour2013.org

²³ Violence Against Children. United Nations Secretary General's study. 2006. www.unicef.org/violencestudy/reports.html.

and increased extremities of weather phenomenon, including Bangladesh, India and the Phillipines, there are 620 million children under 18 ... Unicef estimates that 25 million more children will suffer malnourishment because of climate change, with a further 100 million suffering food insecurity ... In heatwaves, likely to grow more intense and frequent under climate change, babies and small children are more likely to die or suffer heatstroke because they find it difficult to regulate their body heat²⁴.

It is no surprise that Tata Mandela spent so much time in his later years championing an integrated approach to children's well-being. Without attending to these issues, today, next week and into the future, our societies cannot ever become sustainable, and we cannot claim to have provided intergenerational leadership for social justice, education and sustainability in any real sense.

Next year

Next year (when this book is published) we will remember the late Nelson Mandela as a man with great moral integrity and internal strength, with a strong sense of justice and an indelible legacy. We will remember him as a man who was moved to action; action that has contributed positively to the lives of many, many children and people the world over. Many more places and events around the world will be named after Nelson Mandela, and we will celebrate this.

But, will we have improved our own capacities for intergenerational leadership for social justice, education and sustainable development? Will we have been moved to action, and will our actions have counted for anything in the lives of children in our own backyards? Will we have put our own children first? Not just here in the Eastern Cape in South Africa where I live and where Tata Mandela will be at rest, but everywhere.

Between Today and the Future

So how do we set out a research, education and action plan for our research centres, our universities, schools, teacher education institutions and family and community environments. What does a research, education and action agenda look like that 'puts our own children first'?

It would seem that the research, education and action plans that we have currently; from the highest levels of the United Nations, from national governments and local

²⁴ Harvey, F. September 23, 2013. Children will bear brunt of climate change impact, new study says. The Guardian. www.theguardian.com/environment

governments, and in our research institutions and faculties of education need to be reviewed reflectively and critically, as they continue to fail – not only us, but, more importantly, the world’s children.

Central to this as outlined above, is the question of leadership. We need distributed, transformative leadership for social justice, education and sustainable development; leadership that bridges the intergenerational divide and that is premised on commitment to the public good and the well-being of children and the planet and all its people. How to achieve this should to be our primary research and practice question. It is indeed an enormous challenge.

We need multiple generations of people of Tata Mandela’s character and strength to put the smallest children first, and we need all of our teachers, education unionists, parents, academics, education managers and students to work on a social agenda that puts our children first, to free our children from physical and emotional abuse, neglect and the debilitating lifelong impacts of poor quality education. Children in our schools must never be raped by their schoolteachers, and children the world over must not be subjected to the ills of poverty, to violence, child labour, and poor quality education. They must not be left to bear the brunt of climate change, food insecurity and a deteriorating environment. We have enough knowledge and resources to prevent this, what we appear to lack is the leadership and political will, despite the kind of rhetoric that we find so often, exemplified by the Eastern Cape Department of Education website, and scores of other documents, visions and missions in our education systems that mark out the territory, but fail to occupy it. These are research questions, but they are importantly *also and at the same time*, questions of practice and action.

It is shameful that the UNICEF annual budget is in the region of just \$4,000 million per annum (based on 2011/2012 figures²⁵), while global military spending was no less than a staggering \$1.75 trillion (2.5% of global GDP) in the same year. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) reports that the US and Europe are cutting military spending slightly, while China and Russia are pushing up their military spending, but that overall military spending remains at ‘near peak’²⁶. What this shows is that while we *can* afford to pay for a militaristic world for our children to grow up into, *we apparently cannot pay for their well-being*. We leave UNICEF to spend valuable time running small-scale fundraising campaigns, whilst

²⁵ UNICEF Annual Report 2012. www.unicef.org

²⁶ SIPRI Yearbook 2013. www.sipri.org

this time should be given to working with children²⁷. We pay for the fighting and senseless destruction of war, and then we send UN officials from UNICEF in to ‘mop up’ and save the children²⁸ once we have used the expensive military equipment to create the devastation in which they must grow up, as the story in today’s newspaper from Sudan so clearly illustrates. It is Tata Mandela that reminded us so often that the strength of a society is reflected in the way it treats its children.

While this is going on, the richest 1% of the American population now own 37% of the country’s total wealth, which stands at a record high of \$77.3 trillion. The middle classes are ‘squeezed’, and the poor, overwhelmingly blacks and Hispanics (collectively soon to be a majority in the USA), are getting poorer; showing an inexorable increase in inequality, with the Gini Coefficient growing from 0.834 to 0.865²⁹ (in one year, 2009). And this is in the richest nation on earth. These patterns of inequality are mirrored across the globe, with few countries achieving high levels of *equality and equity*. This is despite growing incomes and increased wealth. We see the pattern repeated in the continuing massive gaps that exist between developed and developing nations, although the 2013 Human Development Report shows an emerging shift in power and global dynamics, and greater increases in human development in the global south, as measured by the human development index (HDI). It states however, that “*it is neither desirable nor sustainable if the increases in the HDI are accompanied by rising inequalities in income, unsustainable patterns of consumption, high military spending and low social cohesion*”.³⁰ The root causes of gross inequality are critical elements of the ‘root cause’ data for any research agenda that ‘puts children first’. Each one of us must aim to be the kind of critical educational leader and researcher who can see through the many myths that surround and support current understandings and interpretations of development and growth, and who can dig deeply into the structural patterns that are not only holding massive inequalities in place, but are actually amplifying them.

UNICEF has given us some guidance for our research and practice agenda: we should look for integrated approaches, and we should work together. Critical

²⁷ This comment does not denigrate the work of UNICEF in any way, it simply shows the gigantic lack of political will, the scale of the false messages we are led to believe (i.e. that we have inadequate funding to take care of our children, feed them well, clothe them, and offer them healthy, happy lives with full access to quality education). It shows the gigantic scale of the **social unintelligence and moral decay** of our era. We should stop voting governments into power that perpetuate these myths and these practices.

²⁸ Again, this comment is not denigrating the work of UNICEF in any way, it is rather to make a point about how priorities are set in society.

²⁹ Wolff, E. 2010. Recent Trends in Household Wealth in the United States: Rising Debt and the Middle Class Squeeze – an Update to 2007. Working Paper no. 589. Levy Economics Institute of Bard College. <http://www.levyinstitute.org>

³⁰ UNDP. 2013 Human Development Report. www.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2013

theorists give guidance on critiquing the status quo and asking the difficult questions about that which has become normalised. Social theory gives guidance on how to change social practices, while contemporary educational theory provides clear guidance on how to improve learner participation in learning, and the quality of learning and learning outcomes. We know now that learning and change is not just a technical process, but a deeply embedded socio-cultural process, with material and cultural antecedents that shape endless possibilities. At their best these should, through careful and sensitive support and nurturing, equip children to optimise their potential; helping them to succeed against the odds. The fact that sometimes the poorest schools achieve high academic results show that this is indeed possible. There are some schools like this in the Eastern Cape Province but they are too few.

These are not new ideas, research processes or practices, but if combined, can provide a strong research agenda for 'putting children first'. Why, is it though, that it seems to be so inordinately difficult to conceptualise and implement an integrated, coherent research and practice agenda with these key issues in mind? This itself may be an equally important research and practice question, for the achievement of real intergenerational leadership for social justice, education and sustainable development.

One of the reasons may be that the dominant socio-economic system that has come to prevail in the form of neo-liberal capitalism appears to value fragmentation more than relationality, specialisation more than integration, individualism more than collective action, and privatisation and commodification more than the public good.

And so, ourselves divided by this divisive logic, we unwittingly teach educational psychology separately from educational sociology, and we don't relate these subjects to real world actions that put our children first. We have few actions to show for our social critiques (except perhaps an abiding cynicism) because social critique is generally restricted to the realm of ideas, seldom translated into practice. We teach science methods separately from technology methods (and even moreso from sociology methods), and we fail to relate these adequately to each other, and to how science and technology needs to be put to use in the interests of our children and their health and well-being in our varied societal contexts. Science and technology appear to be seen to serve primarily the dominant corporate interest in profit, and are increasingly prioritised over humanities. We see environmental issues as separate from social issues. We consider poor rural people as being separate from the globally mobile elite, and sometimes suggest that rural people have no interest in global issues, whilst their lives are so shaped by these. We still, in South Africa

today, have political and academic leaders, managers and colleagues who refer to others as ‘those people’ or ‘the blacks’ or ‘the whites’, failing to see that we are all interrelated human beings, living in a social-ecological system in which our lives are interdependent. And we have politicians who focus on the short term election cycle rather than the long term benefits that they can bring to society, not seeing that the short term is the reflexive foundation and platform for the long term, and that their short-termism profoundly affects the futures of the children for whom they are responsible.

It is not only UNICEF and education and social theorists who are providing advice and guidance towards a differently constituted ontological research and practice project that ‘puts children first’. Many of today’s leading contemporary philosophers and sociologists such as Badiou, Žižek, Barad, Bhaskar, Spivak, Latour and many others are suggesting the same thing. They are promoting stronger commitments to relationality, criticality and integration: of the social and natural sciences; the social and the material; the social and the ecological; and the historically disjunct practices that continue to fail children everywhere. Most importantly, they are arguing strongly for these socially transformative processes to embrace a strong conception of the public good. And by integration they don’t mean conflation. They mean relational, dialectical emergence, and after Bhaskar³¹, a dialectical emergence that is socio-historically, socio-materially and critically oriented and transformative at the praxis level. Bhaskar calls this the ‘pulse of freedom’. The research and practice challenge is at the same time epistemological and ontological and it has profound implications for pedagogy, curriculum, co-learning and what and how we teach and learn; and for the forms of leadership we conceptualise and practice, as Tata Mandela knew so well. Exploring these implications further deepens the research and practice agenda for ‘putting children first’ as Ingrid Schudel’s recent PhD shows³². It shows that such pulses of freedom are possible in our schools and classrooms, amongst the youngest children in the poorest province of our country. It also shows that there are teachers that care and that *fundisa* (teaching) for change is possible³³.

Refusing to accept the rape of and violence towards children in our schools, homes and elsewhere, and understanding the social pathologies that have created such a context; making sure that children don’t go hungry; understanding the plight of

³¹ Bhaskar, R. 1993. *Dialectic: The Pulse of Freedom*. London. Routledge.

³² Schudel, I. (2012). *Examining emergent active learning processes as transformative praxis: The case of the Schools and Sustainability professional development programme*. Unpublished Doctor of Philosophy thesis. Grahamstown, Rhodes University. Available on www.ru.ac.za/library/ or <http://eprints.ru.ac.za>

³³ see www.fundisaforchange.co.za Fundisa for Change is a ‘flagship’ programme of the Rhodes University Environmental Learning Research Centre.

mothers and parents who are also subjected to the reductionism and divisive logic of our times; and providing quality education at all times for all people are just four simple agendas for action that can *demonstrate* 'putting our own children first'. They are achievable at any level if we give them adequate attention and if we co-learn our way into making them happen in practice.

Providing children with an education that links human and ecological systems together is not just a 'nice to have' as some still appear to believe; it is essential for future well-being of people on Earth. This is being clearly communicated to us by scientists all over the world, as discussed at the most recent World Science Forum held in Rio de Janeiro at the end of November 2013³⁴, and in the 2013 World Social Science Report released shortly before that³⁵. Such an education is necessary whether you are rural and poor, or urban and wealthy, whether you are Chinese, South African or American. Local social scientists working in the Eastern Cape recognise that there is a need to critically engage with the relationship between environmental constraints on socio-economic development in contexts of poverty³⁶, showing that such education has its contextual nuances and priorities; there is no 'one size fits all'; it must be worked out in context, but draw on what is known elsewhere. Educational theorists have long been making the point that there is a need to broaden our educational thinking beyond the limited and outdated boundaries of 19th and 20th century educational approaches and practices. This is after all, what the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development was meant to be all about. Gender, social justice and environmental activists and educators have also long been making the point that schools and communities need to be safe spaces for women, for children, for everyone, and that values (and ethics) do matter. Social justice is not separate from environmental justice, they are part of the same socially transformative project.

Leadership theorists³⁷ are also trying to 'pave the way' or 'point us in new directions' in our research and practice. General leadership theory identifies four main schools of leadership: the trait/style leadership school (which focusses on the approaches and characteristics of individual leaders); the situational/contextual school (which focusses on how the external environment shapes leadership action); the contingency or interactionist school (which focusses on the interaction between the individual leader and his/her framing context); and the transformational leadership

³⁴ www.wssf2013.org

³⁵ UNESCO/ISSC. 2013. World Social Science Report. Changing Global Environments. www.oecd-library.org

³⁶ Makiwane, M. & Chimere-Dan, D. 2010 (ibid).

³⁷ Shields, C. 2009. Transformative Leadership: A Call for Difficult Dialogue and Courageous Action in Racialised Contexts. ISEA, 37 (3): 53-68.

school (which focusses on the role of leadership in changing deeply embedded structures and mechanisms that constrain change towards the public good). This last is the form of leadership that appears to be most needed in our schools, in our province and country, and in societies around the world, but we appear still to have inadequate depths of analysis and insight to guide such an agenda. Shields (2009) does say, however, that such leadership requires moral courage and dialogue. Tata Mandela demonstrated this in his lifetime.

Fullan (2004) has theorised forms of transformational leadership from a cultural and systems orientation, and suggests that “intellectual ingenuity and new levels of commitment will be the core drivers to achieve system transformation” in future, especially in educational contexts. Here Fullan recognises the relational dynamics of leadership, but also collective commitment to changed practices. Emirbayer (1997) explains that there are two ontological positions on the world. The first is that the world consists of substances (static elements) and the second is that the world is made of dynamic and unfolding relations. He calls these substantialist and relational (transactional) perspectives respectively. We seem to need more relational ontological research and practice questions for intergenerational leadership for social justice, education and sustainability to develop and flourish.

The Future

In general parlance we might easily be able to describe ‘a leader’ as someone who crafts a vision and inspires people to act collectively to make it happen, responding to whatever changes and challenges arise along the way. Such a definition, however, lacks both a specific focus and a sense of values, and it can just as well describe the ‘leaders’ who continue to dedicate their national budgets to military spending when they could put children first instead, or those who style themselves as leaders but who practice corruption, racism and greed. How might then, an intergenerational leader who shows commitment to social justice and sustainability differ from this definition? Polly Courtice³⁸ suggests that a sustainability leader is **“someone who inspires and supports action towards a better world.”** Tata Mandela was such a leader. Barack Obama at Tata Mandela’s memorial service reminded us that being such a leader is not easy, and that leaders too have their struggles. They never act alone; they too are constrained by the social structures and systems of their times and contexts. But as Tata Mandela showed us in his lifetime, they also have powerful forms of agency that can be deployed in the interests of society, the environment, the public good, and our children.

³⁸ Polly Courtice, Director of the Cambridge Programme for Sustainability Leadership (cited off the website, www.cpsl.cam.ac.uk). Accessed April 2012.

As this paper has shown, without ongoing striving for **this kind of transformative leadership** at all levels of our society and in all of our institutions, children's futures will remain in peril, and we will continue to fail in attempts to provide intergenerational leadership for social justice, education and sustainability, and we will continue to fail our children. As the Bonn Declaration stated almost five years ago now, we have the knowedge to act, but we now need to act. As this paper has shown, we have adequate leadership theory, social theory, examples of practice and we have had the example of one of the greatest global leaders – born in the province where I live - to show us how we can do this.

We need to define our research and practice agendas with renewed clarity and commitment. We need to do this carefully, critically and collectively; and produce meaningful knowledge for co-learning and action that will make a real difference in the lives of our children. We must put the philosophy of Tata Mandela's words "**We must put our own children first**" into practice; here – and everywhere.

Hamba Kahle Tata Madiba. Enkosi Kakhulu³⁹.

*You went to prison the year before I was born. I saw your picture in public on a poster in London for the first time when I was 20 years old. I watched you walk out of prison when I was 25 years old as I was starting my own PhD. I saw and met you in person the first time in the year I became a Professor of Education six years ago, shortly before your 90th birthday at the graduation ceremony of your wife Graça Machel who obtained an honorary doctorate for her lifetime work in 'putting children first'. It was at this same graduation, in your presence, that I graduated three outstanding PhD scholars who, like you, were once African children from rural areas, and who today are intergenerational leaders for social justice, education and sustainable development in the southern African region, making their contributions locally, nationally and globally. I noticed your smile as they, and others, walked across the stage to collect their hard won degrees. I thought about your words on the poster in my office "**We should put our own children first**".*

You put our future first, even before we were born. When we were children in troubled times we did not even know that you had done this for us. It is our turn to take forward the leadership example that you provided us.

This paper is my paper for you, and for us all.

Phumla ngoxolo. Tata welizwe, nkokheli yehlabathi⁴⁰

³⁹ Go well, Tata Madiba. Thank you.

⁴⁰ Rest in peace. Father of the Nation, and Global Leader.

