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KEYNOTE ADDRESS

Professor June Bam-Hutchison

Faculty of Education, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa

Orcid: 0000-0002-7623-8205

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*Where to From Here? – The metaphorical ‘Good Wind’ as a cognitive embodiment of
‘deep listening’ in the archive*

Good morning, colleagues, and thank you to the SASHT for this honour to address you at this important conference as the keynote speaker. I have arrived here to address you today with a long journey of working in history education and historiography over a number of decades behind me.

Some of you may know that my long journey started way back when I co-authored my first book for high school teachers with fellow school teacher Pippa Visser. It was in 1995, shortly after the first democratic elections in South Africa. That book with its glossy rainbow colours cover titled *A new history for a new South Africa* (Kagiso) was published almost 30 years ago, and I would, of course, write many things differently today. I was a young history school teacher on the Cape Flats then, and Pippa was teaching at a Model C school. The book was informed by our vastly different backgrounds and experiences in South Africa, but I think that chapter 5 in our book titled ‘The things we call each other: The problem with terminology in the new history’ is still very relevant in South Africa today, as we now have to witness the shocking scourge of xenophobia and racism within our own communities. We should perhaps consider to make this chapter available again to school teachers in South Africa today. Who would have thought we would have arrived at this surprising point almost 30 years later?

From that publication, I went on to contribute to a number of books relevant to interdisciplinary scholarship in history education and historiography—notably three recent books after the #Rhodes Must Fall student campaigns in 2015 for a departure from

Eurocentric education: one, an edited volume with Lungisile Ntsebeza and Alan Zinn as editors, *Whose history counts: Decolonizing precolonial historiography* published in 2018, followed in 2021 by a second one informed by feminist historiography which I edited with Bernadette Muthien titled *Rethinking Africa: Indigenous women re-interpret southern Africa's pasts*. I then went on to publish a monograph Ausi told me: *Why Cape herstorioraphies matter in that same year*, which was joint winner of the National Institute for Human and Social Sciences (NIHSS) 2023 Best Non-fiction Monograph Award. These books were all inspired by my passion for strengthening history teaching and making it relevant to our society and the children we teach today in South Africa. One of my principles as a professionally trained school teacher is to never stop learning, even though I obtained my PhD way back more than twenty years ago.

My scholarship and way of thinking in history education have been enriched especially over recent years since working with indigenous scholars from Namibia, Ghana, Kenya, Brazil, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the UK, and the USA. My scholarship interactions with these scholars have helped me to critically trouble the disciplines and about how we think of knowledges and their validation; to ask more critical questions about whose voices and knowledges get marginalised, how such erasure impacts on society and well-being, and how we could better understand the most recent and deep pasts by 'listening deeply'. A new awakening in 'deep listening' started for me with participation with 'First Nations' professors in a sacred pipe ceremony with Native American chiefs at the opening and closing of a conference at the University of Alberta in Canada—where time was consciously, as an intention, not hurried.

This philosophical departure resonates with the theoretical understanding of time as 'enfolded'—to quote South African historian Carolyn Hamilton in theorising the refiguration of the archive, and how we should critically engage it as a site of knowledge production rather than a site for extraction of knowledge per se. Or to see time differently such as in the Aboriginal Australian scholar Miriam Ungummer-Rose's expression in understanding 'deep listening' within the 'archive'—that you can't hurry the river. Western-based knowledge production processes work on the assumption of linear time as absolute and therefore the compulsion to extract 'objectively' from the institutionally validated and governed archive rather than to practice wider 'deep listening' within communities as 'holders' of knowledge. Within our context, in isiZulu, we speak of being mindful of practising *lalela*.

Lalela in history education helps students with developing more fully the history education skills within an African context. These include conceptually understanding

indigenous languages, developing empathy, applying appropriate and relevant analyses, practicing extrapolation ('since communities know or knew this, it might be true that ...'), synthesis (bringing together and being able to explain what is known and what is not but what might be known), and judgment (being able to interpret beyond the conventional forms of 'evidence', and being able to also admit 'not knowing'). But how do we release development of these skills trapped within a western culture of knowledge production and validation based on the limitations of English as a hegemonic language and simplistic meanings? In hegemonic English and western methodologies, 'comprehension' means to 'understand the content'; empathy means to 'study others' with 'understanding of their situation or position'; 'comparison' is confined to 'identify contradictions or inconsistencies based on evidence'; 'analysis' is the compulsion to identify 'bias' in a simplistic sense based on 'evidence' in conventionally acceptable and defined 'sources'; the focus is on 'argument'; and conclusions are reached on 'evaluation of evidence' and conventionally-defined 'data'.

Lalela in history education encourages a different way of doing and knowing. In the 'deep listening' circles at the University of Alberta we formed research circles in which we dialogued in a Freirean sense (all with equal voices in the circles) but within methodologies rooted in indigenous feminist orality of the past and present through dialogues on metaphors of rivers, wind, and sky. This opened up an entirely new language as opposed to the restrictive and alienating scholarly references to 'primary source', 'secondary source', and 'objectivity'. Indigenous metaphors were spoken from a different truth through different language-ing from the plural essence of marginalised and colonised peoples with their own metaphors and knowledge validation processes which fall outside the hegemonic spaces of the English language and the defined archive of 'sources' and 'data'. These circles allowed for a multiplicity of truths, interpretations, and perspectives of the entangled past, present, and future—an enfoldedness understood metaphorically, which can also be described as an ecology of knowledges. There are not 'objective truths' that have to be extracted in these circles, and hurriedly so.

In my book *Ausi Told Me* I speak therefore of seven concomitant erasures and necessary restorations in an ecology of knowledges that came with colonisation and the systemic entrenchment of western scholarship that followed—how the languages and meanings in a landscape that capture people's deeply profound understanding of change, cause, and effect have been erased (through colonisation and genocide). This process of epistemicide (colonial attempted erasures of knowledges; a process which was not entirely complete) also occurred through the economic exploitation processes that followed during brutal enslavement of African and globally displaced communities at the Cape and the migrant

labour system which followed 200 years later in South Africa. People were dislocated from their land and their ecologies that secured their survival for thousands of years. Both the resilience against the erasure attempts and their impact are ongoing, and we need to acknowledge and recognise this as history educators. It is therefore simply not good enough to teach about about forced removals in terms of apartheid and how people experienced that dislocation on a 'surface' level (such as about moving away from mixed 'race' communities, and away from transport, places of work, and the city). It should fundamentally also be about what happened to communities and the knowledge archive they were dislocated from that gave them social cohesion and ensured intergenerational well-being. What were these ancient knowledges they had and cultural rituals they practiced within those landscapes they were violently uprooted from, and how could that give us a fuller understanding of our pasts and the losses suffered? What more could our cultural archives in these dislocated landscapes tell us about our interconnectedness in the world across land and sea? How could they help us to rethink Africa and its place in the world?

I believe that we currently work largely within deficient models of scholarship in an African context. This is so because Western scholarship encourages proprietorial and silo-thinking in terms of how we perceive 'archive' and 'data'. In my work with many scholars over decades in different part of South Africa, the continent, and the world, I have encountered the often arrogant assumptions of where knowledge and its validation resides as often exclusive certainties—even if these scholars know really little about the communities they study or have little knowledge of their pasts and presents to begin with. Such dislocated approaches to research have been formidably critiqued by black South African scholars like Archie Mafeje as 'extroversion'. A prestigious scholar, Mafeje was suspiciously not taken seriously in anthropology in his own country. What Mafeje critiqued is relevant to all disciplines—by positioning the local as universal rather than the other way around (through imposition of external frameworks of analysis such as how to analyse societal change, for example). This does not imply advocating doing local history for its own sake but universalising what can come out of small, powerful local studies that trouble universal assumptions about the past. In other words, we have to negate the negation (to helpfully, in this instance, apply Marxist theory within this context). However, Marxist theory also has its own limitations and also offers a deficient scholarship model—a critique which I deliberate on briefly later.

Intellectual indigenous ceremony helps us to listen deeply below the surface, past our assumptions and compulsions to simplistically judge and evaluate 'evidence'. It commands humility, letting go of the cognitive ego and its proprietorial approach to knowledge

production processes and to not rush the metaphorical river in gaining access to deeper and more complex insights. I know this is difficult in academic institutions with their emphases on ‘research production’ within linear times, but we can try to start the process of teaching to think differently about intellectual work and processes of knowing and by centering inclusive validation methodologies. In our regular ceremonial knowledge circles at the conference, we constantly reminded ourselves of the non-hierarchical nature of knowledge, the importance of flattening knowing, and to listen in other levels and frequencies of meanings in indigenous languages and their metaphors and proverbs.

What can ceremony and ritual tell us through immersive deep listening when we let go of the cognitive and proprietorial ego? What would it mean when we listen differently with the eyes, and see with the ears? What would such liberation look like in knowledge production and research methods? What if our intellectual comfort zones are constantly troubled and disrupted, including the local and indigenous ones—but in a good way that restores ancient ecologies of knowing, looking for, and finding missing pieces of the puzzle as an ongoing questioning? Scholars like dos Santos would call this ‘cognitive justice’—and it is relevant to all forms of knowledge making processes, whether in Africa or Europe or the West.

Not long ago, we got a profound sense of the importance of sitting with epistemological discomfort when our sense of certainty around ‘sources of knowledge’ was rudely disrupted when tragedy struck at the University of Cape Town on 18 April 2021. That unforgettable devastating fire on that fateful Sunday morning that ripped through the African Studies Library and Collections, caused huge scholarly trauma to our assumed certainties of the institutional archive as the presumed safe custodian of the ‘sources’ for objectivity and validation of the people’s history—a perceived loss of the definitive site of knowledge. When natural disasters and fires unexpectedly destroy our institutional archives, our egotistical and proprietorial sense of certainties of knowledge that resides there finds itself in abysmal loss. The trouble with certainties in Western-based knowledge production is that it grooms the cognitive ego to find refuge in individual ‘knowing’ through sources and verification methods in the institutionalised governed archive. This is often the limiting nature of ‘disciplined’ knowledge and imposed silos in our research and teaching methodologies.

Yet, if we dare to allow it, we could locate our own sense of reliability and safety in ancient collective knowing within the intangible—such as recognising the existence and role of intuition, dreams, and prophecies embedded within our cultural rituals. This ‘knowing’ is central to our ancient engagement with landscape—something deeply embodied at a cellular level. And we all know it, because all humanity the world over is indigenous to land

and ecosystems, although colonialism and imperialism have violently dispossessed and displaced indigenous people from certain lands inhabited for thousands of years, creating the binary ‘indigenous’ and ‘non-indigenous’ people. In short, all humanity has feminist indigenous knowledges located within landscapes, which take us in Africa beyond the known Western Annales’ School methodology to historically understanding people and environment over the *long durée*. A new historiographical methodology therefore warrants more than the Marxist Revisionist approach. It asks of us to listen reverently into the layers and in-betweens of the dispossessed and colonised indigenous people’s long muted voices and cultural ritual identifications of reading sea, land, sky, and wind in enfolded time (not epochs). It is not simply a structural analysis of societies (or of social formations) and their enactment with the environment over time (as in understanding historical consciousness in a Hegelian sense), but it is more inclusively about bringing (in intellectually nuanced and more complex ways) the long muted voices and their many intersectionalities of class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, etc. to the surface. But in getting into the muted voices in their subdued complexities, we have to guard also against centering well-known celebrated patriarchs (indigenous and black included) within our own midst, which can be a tendency even in our stories ‘from below’ and in our various uncritical contemporary national grand narratives. These are equally problematic.

In history education, we should also acknowledge land. Indigenous scholars recognise that our universities and schools are located on sites of violence, where unspeakable colonial atrocities were committed on the very land many of these institutions occupy today. Colonial atrocities and cultural imperialism informed the establishment of the colonial universities on those very lands and their Western-based canons of history, anthropology, philosophy, science, archaeology, etc.

Hence, in our intellectual ceremony circles we dialogued regularly about the ‘good wind’ and the ‘bad wind’ in knowledge validation processes. A good wind sweeps clean and brings the cleansing rains. The bad wind causes devastation and trauma, shutting out tried and tested intergenerational knowledge which has been barred from the canons through violence that is both epistemic (institutional) and epistemological (through knowledge production processes). In the ‘shutting out’ process, marginalised voices are even barred from mourning such loss through judgmental sentiments expressed by ‘critical’ and ‘objective’ scholarship, audaciously and hurriedly naming such new endeavours as ‘subjective’ or ‘emotional’. In the indigenous intellectual ceremonious circles we therefore take care in quoting a western scholar ad nauseum (we have been conditioned to do so with endless citations of the same scholar, for example—often a white man in Europe) that

has very little knowledge and understanding of the local. We avoid repeating those ones that get reproduced in lists of accredited citations in incestuous networks of knowledge validation and journal publications of what we should know and how we should validate how and what we know. We recreate (even as women) this cognitive patriarchy over and over again without practicing ‘deep listening’. This happens decade after decade, creating a particular political economy in the disciplines. This is a form of both epistemic and epistemological violence—the bad wind that shuts out the good wind. Scholars who have been shut out of the mainstream of knowledge production about our pasts, speak and debate about knowledge production processes from a different and deeper understanding of the ecologies of knowledge. The good wind represents circles of knowledge that flatten out hierarchies of knowledge, because there have to be more voices around the fire for the story to be fuller, with more nuance, and for ‘deep listening’ to take effect. The story around the fire is ongoing, never closed, and care is taken that one voice does not dominate. Because what then is the point of finding meaning in gathering?

Modern notions of ‘objectivity’ can only capture a small fraction of our pasts because it works on the premise of ‘shutting out’ and arriving at ‘conclusions’. People the world over (wherever they found themselves—Europe included) have known for thousands of years about cause, change, continuity, discontinuity, and effect through their own everyday experiences, of what they observed in the everyday, of how they resolved problems, of what brought about conflict and peace, food security, migrations, and of why dialogue around the fire was important. They knew very well about violences and recognised them in their many forms, through their many languages, around the fires, to warn that to shut out a voice of the story of the day’s events and the interpretation thereof would cause an imbalance in how the story of the day is told more fully and remembered to the benefit of the collective. This is what one can call a cognitive embodiment of deep listening—through trance and performance, as captured in rock script. It was about telling the story with ceremony and performance, the essence of interpretation of the story curated in the smoke of the burning medicinal plants, embellished with its various truths and contradictions—which people understood. What mattered for people was not the artificially created fixities, certainties, timelines, judgment, and frontiers of those who came later to curiously observe their ritual archives at work and to name and classify them in new hegemonic European languages and systems of knowing. Their own sensibilities and sovereignties of knowing their truths, tried and tested over thousands of years, mattered more. It was this collective sensibility that knew not to abdicate to the cognitive and proprietorial ego of positioning an interpretation of a story (from the outside) as more ‘certain’ or ‘objective’ than others. For this reason,

stories of the day's events were collectively told in metaphors and proverbs, strung together in a never ending cycle in the recognition that knowledge of today, and what happened yesterday, and what will happen tomorrow is infinite and its interpretation can be performed and storied in different ways over and over again. This was the way in which natural disasters or colonial genocidal trauma and even recent atrocities such as apartheid were dealt with—it was about storying over and over again through different performative interpretations allowing the cycles of healing to blow from generation to generation as the good wind to hopefully create a new peaceful and sustainable future for all humanity.

When we listen with the heart to these story-ings in a cognitive embodiment of deep listening, we would be tempted not to easily and hurriedly consign them to romanticisation of indigenous knowledges and people or to classify them with equal haste as 'essentialist discourse'. Whilst these do certainly exist and are equally troubling, we should correspondingly take care with meaningless Western buzz words that may form part of a continuum of Western scholarly strategies of erasure that thrive on extractive methodologies that do not care to listen with respect and empathy for loss and for comprehending other ways of being in landscape and therefore knowing. We should practice humility in knowing as key to new teachings and new ways of doing. Metis mathematics scholar Florence Glanfield cites her own indigenous philosophy she was taught—that there are no greater or lesser humans, there is only the whole. The same accounts for the knowledges of all humanity. There can be no balanced ecology without humility. Trophy hunting of wildlife, for instance, depends on a destructive proprietorial ego. In the same way that some scholars in certain disciplines tend to speak with appropriation of 'my bones' when studying unethically acquired indigenous human remains in collections of museums and universities.

Humility is also about appreciating lifelong learning; that we are always becoming, always relational, never complete—drawing on the theories of Freire and others. The bad wind in the canons and disciplines came with the selfish agendas of mercantilism, colonialism, slavery, genocide, imperialism, and capitalism—with the patriarchal structural reproduction of archival erasure in its many forms. We can restore our ecologies to collective benefit through humility and pedagogical cleansing and through rethinking our research methods and how we view and validate knowledge, and where it resides as we constantly travel between the present, back to the past, and towards an imaginable future. When we travel our knowledges in entangled senses of time and cultural archives, we embrace new concepts such as 'relationality'—a different way of doing and knowing about how we are infinitely interconnected.

What then could practising *Ubuntu* really mean for teachers in classrooms beyond being an overused buzz word and rhetoric for patriotic sporting events or just for ‘freedom’ national commemorations? What would it mean when we think of its existence in the vast infinite spaces of everyday knowledge making outside in fauna, flora, ecosystems, languages, in our ritual archives, and our everyday weaving of getting our students to make sense of our collective and interconnected present? The importance of stressing our relationality is becoming increasingly relevant in these dangerous times in South Africa and the world—children dying of war, conflict, hunger, displacement, the devastating impact of femicide, racist tribalisation, and xenophobia. The list is endless. When the women marched to the Union Buildings in 1956, those were 20 000 interconnected archives of intergenerational feminist knowledges of deep time marching. When femicide is committed, profound epistemicide and what I call feminism-cide is committed. The same violences occur when xenophobic acts are committed.

How do these atrocities connect to the canons and disciplines, to the metaphorical bad wind of knowing? In our teaching, are we constructing the nation state as an unproblematic given through an ‘area studies’ approach? One example is the cartographies of xenophobia—how in our methods in our disciplines and teaching we unknowingly entrench the artificially created frontiers which promote reactionary tribal histories, that do not help us to get into the complexities of local histories of migrations, entangled shared ritual, and linguistic archives of refugees, for example. Related to this ‘bad wind of knowing’ are the pervasive Eurocentric and Western ways of creating and understanding knowledge which are informed by what dos Santos terms ‘ignorant ignorance’, which I would argue is rooted in ‘shutting out’ methods of ‘under the nose’ knowledge. We would hardly understand ancient indigenous methods, for example, about understanding and witnessing rising sea levels in the practice of indigenous elders when they push sea shells found far inland against the children’s ears to understand how close the sea once was, or the knowledge they carry when they speak in their indigenous languages of mountains once rising out of seas, and warn around the fire galleys that the sea levels will rise again as was seen before by their ancestors. There are many examples the world over where indigenous knowledge of landscape, environmental sustainability, and climate change has been ignored outright by the structurally powerful as ‘myth’ because the knowledge is expressed as ‘prophecies’—leading to devastating floods and other natural disasters that could have been avoided.

We therefore also need to talk about the political economy of history education—beyond Marxist rhetoric and its pedagogical limitations, beyond conventional oral history which starts out with a set of pre-determined questions based on what was found in the

colonial archive. This is not good enough. We have to revisit the how that is left out in our assumed scholarly rigorous methodologies. The problem is that such methodologies can still teach to reproduce the hierarchal egotistical 'knowledge trap'—whose knowledges count, whose philosophies count, whose ways of doing count, whose interpretations count.

There is a lot unsaid about interpretation in ceremony, such as the voices of women who have been left out of how we interpret the long past. Much has been focused on oral histories on apartheid which are still hugely unfinished work, and so many archives have already been lost as there has not been an investment in South Africa to do the healing storying, now long overdue. Generations with untold stories are dying daily and with them the storying of the performative psyche of survival around the fire. For example, the 1976 and 1985/6 education uprising generations are already in their 50s and 60s, yet their storying of indigenous psychic survival against apartheid remains untold. They knew about the reading of the seasons, the herbs and rituals that would give them resilience. It is this storying of the psychic survival through indigenous knowing that we have not succeeded to integrate into our methodologies of knowing and interpretation of the present and past. We have therefore inherited pedagogical frameworks that position and centre diminished interpretations and truths in the canons—the bad wind, storying of people and their pasts as devoid of ritual, of archive and therefore limited only to understanding ideological persuasions that drove their political agency. Most of these ideologies, except perhaps for Black Consciousness, can be traced to intellectual formations during the French Revolutions and Industrial Revolutions in Europe. So, through our Eurocentric methodologies for validation, we got to know and produce very little of the *long durée* in Africa and its place in the world. Our oral histories are often also confined to narratives of the recent past within linear time (of the experience and impact of apartheid, for example, confined only to the 1950s onward, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission from the 1960s and so on). Deficient knowledge production models and pedagogies lead to errors in judgement and misguided interpretations of the past and its relation to the present.

So what could our new African philosophy of history teaching be through a cognitive embodiment of deep listening? Knowledge of the past and its impact on how we understand and empathise the present and imaginable future can be undeniably emotional, and why not? We are human after all. Watch the dramatic emotional and egotistical response from the Eurocentric male historian when challenged on his interpretation of where indigenous people 'belong' and why he is so certain about what he knows about indigenous people. Or the male Eurocentric archaeologist who dismisses people's knowledge of an excavation site or claims to human remains as belonging to an inclusive collective, rather than a DNA-

defined ‘source community’, or who claims to know more about menstruation cycles of women in thousands of years old rock scripts. Or the one who compulsively dismisses the ongoing presence of *long durée* knowing in assumed ‘non-indigenous’ spaces. Such dismissive approaches to indigenous knowing are trapped in the bad whirlwind—their knowledge production processes become irrelevant to the lived realities of the majority and remain trapped in journals on library shelves for the purposes to merely attract funding for the reproduction of self-centered knowledge.

We can trace the origins of the colonial racist attitude to such knowing in the colonial archive of early travel writers describing ‘the savage’ and their ‘pagan ways of knowing.’ Are we still trapped in those frameworks, even through our historical materialist leftist and liberal interpretations of the past? Is this not the knowledge and archives of the majority, of the unemployed, of the working classes, the oppressed, and all their intersectionalities (gender, race, etc.) of the world?

When we teach and listen with the heart focused on the good wind, a whole new world of knowledge wonderment could open up, of infinite (not trapped) knowing. When we commit to bringing about cognitive justice in how we do research or how we teach, then a multitude of vectors of non-violence in multidimensional and intersectional forms open up, because we are taking the necessary risk to imagine a possible future of hope. What is the method of our listening that we teach? Are we teaching to work with silences, and to listen to silences, and not to haste the river? Can we teach to sit—with necessary discomfort—with the silences and to avoid hastening to extract and mine ‘data’ off peoples?

This brings me to the next issue. How do we approach data? The fire galley on the Cape Flats, for example, can be defined as a ‘data space’, a living archive. In the capitalist and neoliberal educational institutions we approach data with the ego, not for collective benefit—and we universalise knowledge from the standpoint of the ego. In addition, we do this violence through the hegemonic language of English with its further layers of deficiencies, and further positioning the knowledge within private property paradigms of the neoliberal universities. What possibilities will open up in our teaching if we redefine data spaces and archive, and approach interpretations thereof differently? How could knowledges, comprehension, and interpretations be expanded? What new meanings and relevance could this new approach to ‘data’ and ‘archive’ bring to the children we teach?

Our ritual archives (as theorised by Nigerian historian Falola) and their proverbs allow for innovative and new interpretations of our past to create more sustainable futures. *Ka mua ka muri*— as Maori scholar Tracy McIntosh explains— ‘we walk back into the future’, which links to the familiar *Sankofa* bird metaphor from Ghana in the Twi language

meaning 'go back and fetch'. Who are the children whom we teach? With which totems and ritual archives do they sit silently muted with their intergenerational archives in our classrooms? How could we work with what they are integrally part of every day—dreams, visions, prophecies, telepathy; those metaphysical aspects of knowing with the heart that the bad wind has so speedily swept to the dustbin of history?

The generations of the 1976 uprising will tell you that the August frogs fall no more in their dozens from the winter skies on the Cape Flats—that confidently predicted that Spring was on its way and that the berries will follow soon to quench our thirst in the relentless heat of the impending hot summer. We have lost our way of knowing these stories of our shared changing landscape. If we care to listen respectfully and deeply to these vanishing frequencies in nature, we'll notice the silently fading croak of the frog and be able to safely and accurately predict the destructive things to come and know from deep tried and tested wisdom how to avoid it. In the old Teachers League of South Africa (TLSA), saying that I come from as a young aspirant teacher in the 1980s and early 1990s, let us always be reminded to live for our children. Where to from here?