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FORUM

Thinking about the significance of Nelson Mandela for education

Editorial introduction

Crain Soudien

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We have arrived, almost inevitably, at the point where Nelson Mandela's significance for education needs to be scholarly discussed. In the period building up to and in the wake of his death in December 2013, it had become clear that the world had in Mandela a figure of historical significance. This significance is emphasised for many in the absence of leadership they see in relation to some of the world's most egregious and seemingly intractable conflicts and challenges. Adam and Moodley (2005), for example, in their book on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict ask, 'what would have happened in the Middle East had a Palestinian Mandela or Gandhi provided unifying moral and strategic leadership[?]' (ix). What he had accomplished in his life in facilitating the settlement of the South African question, the world's pre-eminent case-study of the Du Boisian problematic of the twentieth century – the problem of the 'colour-line' – forever positions him as one of the contemporary era's most important figures. He stands in this sense, rightly alongside of Gandhi and Martin Luther King.

But we are now in the enormously interesting situation, beyond the predictable flurry of hagiographies and romances that are now available, of having to say what this historical contribution constitutes. Fortunately, new scholarship is emerging which begins, articulately, to craft a way of entering into this new discursive space. The work of the literary theorist Elleke Boehmer (2008) is valuable for this task, as is that of Schalkwyk (2013). Both begin to separate out the personal, social and political in Mandela's thinking to surface the texture of his logics in a way that allows one to understand him much more analytically. Out of this emerge frameworks for use. Boehmer, for example, presents him as a *post-colonial humanist*.

We are now required to engage with this scholarly development around Mandela in education. and so. in this Forum. we begin the difficult task of

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