

SASHT REGIONAL NEWS (2013)

During 2013 the Executive Committee of the South African Society for History Teaching (SASHT) continued with its efforts to stimulate interest in History and History teaching in the various provinces of South Africa. The SASHT currently has regional representation across South Africa except for the Eastern Cape, Northern Cape and Mpumalanga. These regional representatives are expected to organise at least one History-related regional event per year, publicise the SASHT's many activities, compile a data base of History teachers where it does not yet exist, and recruit new members for the SASHT.

Some regional representatives have clearly been very active although many of their activities were not necessarily organised under the auspices of the SASHT. Nevertheless, the Executive Committee appreciates all the hard work that has been done in promoting the historical discipline at ground level. There is, however, room for improvement, and the following issues need attention in 2014:

- We need to find willing and committed regional representatives for the Northern Cape, Eastern Cape and Mpumalanga. Members are therefore invited to provide the SASHT Executive with the names and contact details of individuals who may be interested in taking on this role.
- Current regional representatives need to provide more regular feedback to the Deputy Chairperson on their History-related activities and the state of the historical discipline in their regions. This will help the SASHT to keep abreast of developments, offer guidance and assistance where necessary, and provide the *SASHT Newsletter* with much needed copy from which readers can benefit.
- The levels of commitment among regional representatives need to be improved. We cannot rely exclusively on the Department of Basic Education to initiate outreach to History teachers in the provinces. Each SASHT regional representative should strive to arrange at least one event per year which would serve the History teaching community and strengthen the profile of the SASHT.

What follows below is a brief overview (in alphabetical order) of the activities that have been taking place in the provinces during 2013:

Eastern Cape

The Eastern Cape does not have an active SASHT regional representative and therefore no news has been received from this province.

Free State

The SASHT regional representative for the Free State, Dr Boitumelo Moreeng, reports that no History-related activities other than training offered by the Free State Education Department have been organised in the province during 2013.

There have, however, been interventions in the Lejweleputswa District of the Free State in the form of two skills training workshops for History teachers conducted by Henriëtte Lubbe of the Unisa History Department. These workshops (which took place during April and July respectively) formed part of a personal community engagement initiative which is now supported financially by the Unisa College of Human Sciences. The April workshop was sadly interrupted by trade union activity, but this did not dampen the positive attitude and commitment of the more than 20 teachers who attended the training session. The workshop was therefore offered again in July 2013.

Day 1 of the workshop focused on stress management for History teachers and was also attended by the regional subject coordinator for the Free State, Mr MP Mofokeng. Participants had their stress levels, levels of resilience (“stress fitness”), Type A/B personalities and degree of balance in their lives measured and received six stress management techniques for implementation in their working and personal lives. The session revealed an extremely high stress level among the participants, a matter that the DBE official present promised to bring to the attention of the Education authorities.

Day 2 of the programme focused on the development of writing skills, providing teachers with visual resources for use in the classroom (i.e. photographs of name changes in Pretoria) and sample assignments complete with assessment rubrics for teaching oral investigation, research skills, poster making, poster presentation and argumentative essay writing. Dee Gillespie and Joy Sewenya from Jeppe Girls High in Johannesburg are currently involved in developing another exciting sample assignment, structured around the street name photographs, which will be offered to History teachers in the Free State, and perhaps also Limpopo, for practical implementation in the classroom during 2014.

Gauteng

Siobhan Glanville reports that her main focus during 2013 was the completion of her Master’s degree despite a heavy teaching load at the University of the Witwatersrand. Consequently, she was unable to organise History-related

activities in Gauteng, and the one event that had been planned, did not materialise due to trade union action which prevented teachers from attending workshops. Nevertheless, as a staff member of the Wits School of Education, she has been involved in establishing a module for an Honours Degree in History Education that will be part of a curriculum Honours course. She is also involved in the planning of the SASHT Conference for 2014.

There were also other educators who were active in supporting History teaching in Gauteng. SASHT regional representative, Dee Gillespie, reports that all districts in the province were very busy during the year with CAPS training. This training required teachers – especially those teaching various grades – to give up a huge amount of their time. She thinks that the CAPS training has improved somewhat from 2012 but remains concerned about the huge gap that exists between different categories of teachers.

Dee promoted the SASHT at the said CAPS training sessions and shares the following personal observations of these training interventions:

- History is frequently used as a personal “political soap box”. The “Nationalism” topic in Grade 11, for example, appears to be giving some teachers great energy to air their views, thereby emphasising differences rather than commonalities and widening the gap between racial groups which is cause for concern.
- The CAPS approach in History, namely working one’s way through a text book from cover to cover without real debate and reflection, needs to be addressed. Most text books covering the Middle East conflict, for example, are slanted towards the plight of the Palestinians. She feels that learners need to be exposed to alternative thinking.
- CAPS exam requirements remain a concern and the marking load in big history groups is rather daunting.
- There seems to be a tendency towards over assessing. She asks: “How much exam evidence does one need to separate the A and G learners?”
- In Dee’s district (District 9) there is great concern about the level of sophistication of questions. She asks: “Is a question such as ‘Critically evaluate the contribution that Nelson Mandela has made to a democratic South Africa’ [from a CAPS document handed out during the training] really appropriate for Grade 4?”
- Teachers seem to be implementing suggestions blindly without considering what their learners can cope with. In the Grade 7 – 9 meeting it was suggested that Grade 7’s should be writing essays of seven paragraphs in length, yet this is not stipulated in national documents. Moreover, learners arriving in Grade 8 at the school where Dee teaches can hardly write a sentence, let alone a properly constructed essay. Most teachers at the particular workshop did not question the instruction and probably returned to their schools to demand seven- paragraph

essays (two to three pages) from their Grade 7 learners. She finds this uncritical approach very worrying and asks: “How can we teach learners to question laws and stand up for basic human rights when we follow like sheep?”

KwaZulu-Natal

The numerous activities and tasks relating to the hosting of the 27th annual conference of the SASHT (27 – 28 September 2013) at Maritzburg College were the key focus of SASHT-related activities in the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Midlands for the year.

Conference organisers Mathew Marwick and Simon Haw had four key aims:

- to attract more attendees than previous SASHT conferences.
- to keep attendance costs low.
- to provide greater opportunities for social interaction among delegates.
- to elicit enough papers and workshops for two streams of presentations per day.

Planning for the conference began in earnest in early 2013, with the building up of a substantial database of e-mail addresses from various sources and the composition of the marketing material for the conference. Simon Haw was tasked with organising all the presentations and workshops. He did an excellent job in arranging 37 presentations and two guest speakers, with Prof Jonathan Jansen of the University of the Free State providing the conference finale on the Saturday afternoon.

In the end all four of the conference objectives were achieved.

- More than 120 delegates attended the conference.
- The two-day attendance fee of R675 was substantially lower than in previous years, and the over-night package of R1 350 provided good value for money.
- The welcome braai for overnight guests on the Thursday night was attended by about 55 people, as was the cocktail party on the Friday night.
- Such was the supply of papers and workshops that two streams of presentations could be provided, made up in the main of short 20-minute slots.

Looking ahead, the SASHT regional representative for KZN Midlands, Mathew Marwick, anticipates that the successful SASHT Quiz of 2012 will be repeated in 2014.

Limpopo

Jake Manenzhe reports from Limpopo that the Provincial Executive Committee of the Society for History Teaching in Limpopo spent four months organising a one-day provincial History conference on “Curriculum change and the importance of Social Sciences”. Despite the Limpopo Department of Education being under administration and therefore unable to provide any financial assistance, the conference proved to be successful and attracted the attendance of around 150 delegates including both History teachers and education officials.

As the conference took place on Women’s Day (9 August), two female educators, Ms J Monakhisi and Ms G Senwamadi were appointed as programme directors. The vote of thanks was also rendered by a lady, Ms TD Mashishi. Moreover, in what seems to have been a real team effort, organising committee members and curriculum advisors worked together on the day of the conference to ensure a smooth registration process.

Jake’s paper, titled “Curriculum transition into CAPS”, highlighted the importance of change as an aspect of growth. He took the attendees along the path that Curriculum 2005, the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) and the Revised NCS travelled until the introduction of CAPS. The emphasis was on the NCS and CAPS not as new, unrelated curricula, but on the NCS as a product of reviewing in order to strengthen and streamline Curriculum 2005, and CAPS as a strategy to re-package the NCS so that content and assessment are well delineated according to themes.

On the day of the conference, eight teachers who had achieved excellent Grade 12 results in the 2012 final examination were awarded with certificates as tokens of appreciation. Vivlia Book Publishing also kindly donated four boxes with Grade 12 books which will be distributed to deserving schools upon the discretion of the Conference Organising Committee.

Mpumalanga and Northern Cape

The SASHT still needs to appoint regional representatives for these provinces.

North West Province

Pieter Warnich reports that the Department of Basic Education requested the Unit of Open Distance Learning at North-West University to present History workshops for Grades 4, 5 and 6 teachers in the townships and rural schools of the Klerksdorp, Rustenburg and Vryburg districts. These workshops adopted a multimedia approach and focused on the CAPS themes for Grades 4 to 6. The teachers who attended the workshops were encouraged to integrate multimedia into their lessons and received video clips and assessment material for use in the classroom. They were also provided with resource materials such

as photographs and maps that covered all the Grades 4, 5 and 6 CAPS topics. Apart from the participants who were most appreciative, the Department of Basic Education officials were very happy with the outcome of the workshops, all of which prove that the workshops were a great success.

Western Cape

Barry Firth reports from the Western Cape that two successful History dialogues were held between high schools in the area where he teaches. These dialogues took the same form as the panel discussion held at the SASHT conference of 2012 and are set to inspire similar dialogues in 2014.

Barry finds it quite challenging to spread the SASHT brand in the Western Cape. Teachers apparently view participation in SASHT activities as additional labour and effort on top of the demands placed on them by CAPS. It would appear that unless individuals have an academic interest to pursue History, they find it difficult to justify the extra time, effort and financial outlay in becoming involved in the SASHT. On two occasions Barry invited the Curriculum Advisor (History) for the Western Cape Education Department (South) in an attempt to bridge the divide between officialdom and History teachers. He argues that the SASHT needs to involve more officials and policy makers from the various provincial departments of education and invite them to actively participate in future SASHT conferences which are the showcase of the Society – in other words, focus more on a targeted membership that would really strengthen the SASHT, or as he puts it: ‘We want the lions, not the monkeys’.

Barry also had the opportunity to address the PGCE students at the University of Cape Town where he encouraged prospective History teachers to join the SASHT. He regards universities and teacher training institutions as the ideal growth nodes for future membership, seeing that schools are not naturally inclined to seek professional association with organisations such as the Van Riebeeck Society, the SASHT or Shikaya.

According to Barry, History teaching faces severe challenges in the Western Cape, the most important of which are the demands of CAPS. Although CAPS succeeds in sequencing and demarcating the knowledge areas more clearly, it remains uncertain whether learners with weak reading backgrounds will cope with the demands.

Another challenge is the lack of younger teachers joining the profession which casts doubt on the potential for future growth for the SASHT. Barry argues that Education schools at Universities must groom and channel students to join institutions such as SASHT. He also thinks that individual efforts are negligible and pleads for a biennial conference between institutions in each region which will create an opportunity for students, teachers and officials (DBE and unions) of that area to address local challenges to History

and History curriculum delivery.

Last but not least, Barry argues that for regions to be effective, clear goals and a means to achieve them need to be identified.

Another SASHT regional representative in the Western Cape, Lindinxiwa Mahlasela, is well placed to promote the image of the SASHT via the many activities of the Iziko Museum in Cape Town where he works. This museum's Education and Public Programmes Department has four main objectives:

- Teacher enrichment sessions which seek to enhance the knowledge of museum and school-based educators through curator or expert-led guided tours, workshops and seminars.
- The development of worksheets that are aligned with the national curriculum, often in collaboration with other museum and school-based educators. One example would be the lesson plans and worksheets which Iziko staff designed for schools, demonstrating how heritage institutions can support local history, a theme for Grade 4.
- Enriching and enabling museum programmes, for example social history guided tours, lessons and programmes reaching approximately 7000 learners and students every three months. Prominent events during 2013 included those that marked the Natives Land Act centenary; the Le Vaillant exhibition at the South African Museum which was used to teach the French Revolution as a Grade 8 topic; the "African Story of the Mother City" exhibition at the Slave Lodge which involved guided tours, educator workshops and worksheets that encouraged educators and learners to engage in oral research; the "OR Tambo: The Modest Revolutionary" exhibition; and a variety of events that promoted local history and oral history.
- Various community-based outreach initiatives and public programmes on public holidays, all aimed at promoting history and heritage.

We look forward to an equally if not more active 2014.

Henriëtte Lubbe

Deputy Chairperson: SASHT