

THE CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

IMPRESSION OF THE SASHT CONFERENCE PAPERS, 4-5 OCTOBER 2012

*organised by the University of Stellenbosch,
Venue: Erinvale Estate Hotel, Somerset West*

The 17th SASHT conference theme “Back to the Future? The Value of History Teaching for Tomorrow” of 2012 allowed my memories to dwindle back to 1988: The year in which the SASHT for the very first time organised a conference under the Society banner with the theme “History Education, The Road ahead”. The theme at both occasions very much overlaps, and accentuates the importance to occasionally look ahead and backwards to value ways of past thinking and doings in order to perhaps re-depart and further progress. To the SASHT conference organisers of 2012 the meaning of their catchy conference theme (also reminding others of a very successful movie trilogy first screened in 1985 and known for its high quality sound and state of the art technology) relates to if a proper understanding of the past can still contribute towards making better decisions and creating a better future for younger generations. The concern that people often tend to be so future-oriented, and then ignoring the past, became the motive for the theme of choice to be used for this conference.

At hind sight I interpreted the conference topic for myself slightly differently (and I guess that's a good sign if the choice of a theme arouses different forms of interpretations, for then you do cover a broad spectrum of understanding). I appreciated its meaning as moving ahead with efficient History teaching, not to be steered sideways as a result of some trendy ideas that may be imprinted from top down structures. Professional History teaching to me is, amongst others, to accommodate and cope with a diversity of knowledge through the reflection of diverse knowledge systems. The ability to skilfully teach any history curriculum content by means of experiences/examples ranging from the personal or the local to national level knowledge (inclusive of archival and published information) always allow learners to understand any matter or timeframe better. This way forward should be another major non-negotiable feature of teaching History, and in this regards the say

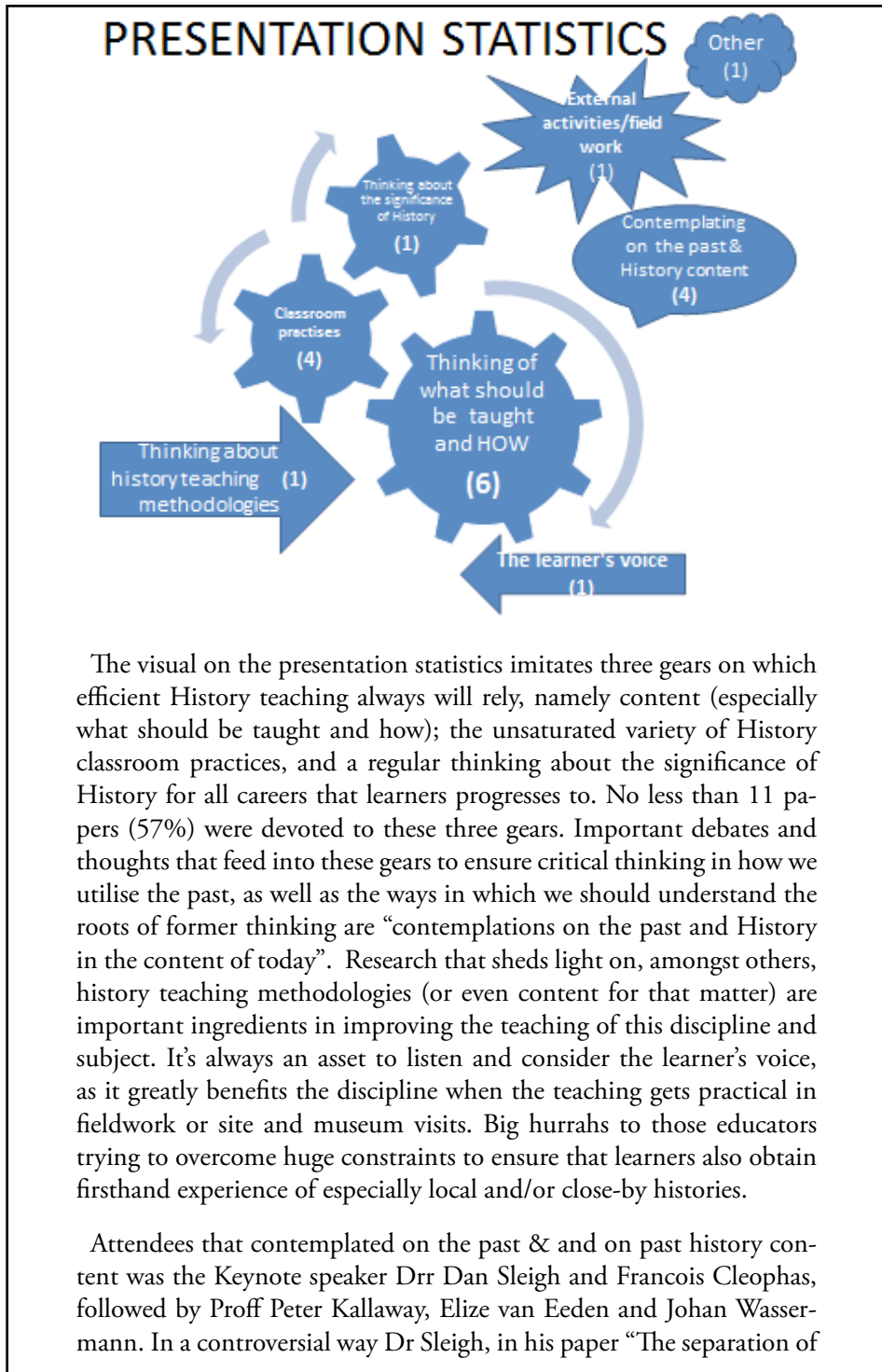
ing by Winston Churchill is so meaningful: "If we have opened up a quarrel between the past and the present, we shall find that we have lost the future". To my mind the ability to teach History efficiently can be lost if politics, whatever the nature, are allowed to steer our thoughts on how to utilise History on the past, present and the future. With these features in mind of why History, the "what abouts" of new knowledge in History research, and the how to in teaching History I broadly summarised some impressions of the papers presented at the 2012 conference.

What has made me extremely grateful during this conference, and what I have also observed in some past SASHT conferences recently, is the passion educators expresses for practising History. The obligation to understand the past in a balanced way in order to make a difference in one's constituency was another quality of the 2012 conference. SASHT conferences are valuable in many ways. It not only provides a platform for exposing research (in History and in the education of History), but it fills a need to be refreshed in one's discipline and to be reloaded for yet another tough term in office. As we have to support our circle of expertise, we also must keep in mind that we should exercise an openness to anchor our past to our present and future dreams for History as discipline, despite its momentary distortions and its occasional exposure to deformed historical moments.

The 2012 conference at Erinvale in Somerset West was organised by the colleagues of the University of Stellenbosch, namely Prof Arend Carl, Drr Wessel Visser and Karen Horn with Ms Sally le Roux at the centre of arrangements to this very successful conference. Distance and cost will always remain contentious issues, even when cutting expenses to the bone. It is hoped that the leadership of each school in South Africa, as well as the Department of Education, will soon come to realise the intellectual and collegial value of allowing for financial support in getting educators of disciplines together at least once a year.

The SASHT conference of 2012 has produced a bulky 19 papers in only the one and a half day conference (followed by a delightful and scenic excursion to the Solms-Delta Wine Estate in Franschoek).

The major focus of the papers as presented, and their position in the education of History I have summarised as follow:



societies from their past: an under-appreciated tragedy”, reminded the audience that the past should be at the heart of our education; that local and regional histories should be considered more in history content to understand world and national problems, and that South African learners appears to be too occupied with international history. Sleigh also took the opportunity to criticise the CAPS as a design to “keep the truth from the people” and that appears to be narrow in scope, though politically correct.

Peter Kallaway continued on the CAPS by critically assessing its merits and shortcomings in more depth. As it is a meritorious discussion, keen readers should follow his arguments in the published version (see *Yesterday&Today* Journal, 7, July 2012). Elize van Eeden took wider strides by looking at what South African History educators could learn from a broader international audience; what was learned from past national reports on the status of History and why history educators still grapple with the significance of History. In turn Francois Cleophas shared very interesting research on the historical relatedness of churches in the past with schools. The impact and influence of 19th century missionary British Empire schools like the Zonnebloem School, was the focal point of his discussion. The paper by Johan Wassermann concluded the open debate contemplations by remarking that an appreciation for what others has done should always be considered in teaching and that formal education do not yet properly prepare teachers for their future task as educators of History. Pieter Warnich informed the attendees more about research in History teaching methodologies by concentrating on learner-centred education. Role play and the value of excursions in most schools were said to be limited to absent while lecturing apparently remain the most powerful methodology. Like Wasserman, Warnich also remarked that a lack in the feasible preparation of History educators is a concern that featured in research.

Thoughts on the WHAT and the HOW of History teaching by six presenters provided valuable food for thought on History and Africa, History and local/regional history as well as History and oral memories. The paper of Dr Helen Ludlow exposed excellent engagement in how to teach African history via the topic: “What’s the fuss about chocolate? Ghana, cocoa, nationalism and globalization”. In turn a plea for more efficient and comprehensive African history was raised by Wits student Mr Ntokozo Sibiyi. Dr Karen Horn’s paper on “Oral history in the classroom: Linking historical research and history education”

also sparked keen interest as it was related to the personal memories of former South-African soldiers participating in the Second World War. Though the HOW to of incorporating valuable oral memories in History classroom practices and in particular sections of History curricula still require the attention of practitioners of History, some efforts were made by especially Ludlow and also Horn to stimulate some thinking in this direction. The fascination of oral memories further featured in the papers of Prof Arend Carl, titled “War remembrances of an ex-prisoner of war and the relevance for History: Some personal reflections” and Dr Raymond van Diemel’s “The controversy around Apartheid – challenges and opportunities for the History Teacher”. A dream combination effort between higher education and further education was personified in the value of local history presentation by Prof. Harold Herman and Mr David Sayer in the paper “The Coachman’s Cottage Museum as custodian of local history of schools and communities of the Helderberg region”. In South Africa we do not have a culture yet to properly utilise and display our local histories in and through education. Perhaps the SASHT should consider developing a Popular History e-Journal covering local history on its current website.

Four papers representing refreshed ideas for classroom practices on familiar themes were that of Dr Susan Bester (on “Collecting and organising the multimedia components for the development of educational DVDs and multimedia clips for grade 10 History: The French Revolution – some practical guidelines”); Another Wits student Ms Claudia Smith (on “Visual Literacy in History Teaching: Photographs as Opinions, not Reality”); Nokuzula Bikwana (on “Holocaust education can still play a big role in helping South Africans memorialise their past history as a way of paving the future”) and Mr Craig Divis, as exchange student of the USA, currently hosted at the Free State University, that did a capturing presentation on “The Rainbow Resistance: Creatively Teaching the Struggle to Today’s Learners”. As always, with the required passion and exemplary of many years of experience, Mr Simon Haw shows all on ways of making History significant and enjoyable in “Thinking about the value of History teaching: Blowing your own trumpet”. In many ways the sparking presentation of Mr Ryan Andreas on how History can come to life in a multidisciplinary learning environment through the well-developed activities at the Babanango Environmental Centre in KwaZulu Natal, created well-deserved interest. The Centre’s offerings to History students, teachers and educators should not be ignored.

Two worthy presentations that should actually be featuring at each conference in future, are the panel discussion on History in action (Mr Barry Firth's educator-learner team) and the value of Emotional Intelligence in teaching History so efficiently presented by the SASHT's Vice Chair, Ms Henriette Lubbe. The voice of the learners should be heard more than often. Furthermore an openness towards improving ways of managing learners, your subject input and your educational input among those of others in your immediate environment are points of focus which were covered.

It's the task of all educators of History to take the conference focus and discussions back to their constituencies and to mobilise fellow colleagues to do their bit in uplifting and empowering History as discipline and as school subject. It's heartening to hear and to experience firsthand what is done. More could be done. I would like then to conclude by urging each educator of History to return their attention to value the true meaning of teaching History, by not allowing side-issues to blur their view on WHY and HOW we do and apply history research and teach and think about History. Historians and history educators, let's believe in our ability to make a difference because South Africans (and the world alike) cannot do without History.