

## Conference Report: The 37th South African Society for History Teaching (SASHT) Conference 03–04 October 2023

**Venue:** University of Johannesburg

**Organisers:** Professor Johan Wassermann (University of Pretoria), Dr Raymond Fru (Sol Plaatje University), Dr Valencia Mabalane (University of Johannesburg) and Mr Aidan Lawrence (University of Pretoria)

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The 37th South African Society for History Teaching (SASHT) conference welcomed delegates from across South Africa and international institutions from 03–04 October 2023. Most of the representatives, specialising in history education or history research, were placed in sub-categories based on the abstracts presented at the beginning of the year. They worked as a collective within these subgroups to impart their specific knowledge to academically hungry audiences. The theme of this year's conference posed the question, "*History Education, where are we going?*" This theme is vital, especially with the promise of a new history curriculum being in the works. The categories that the conference used to group the delegates were as follows:

- the history curriculum and its purpose within the history classroom
- four poster presentations touched on historical consciousness, controversial issues, and sports history
- challenges with teaching history
- the history teachers, both in-service teachers and preservice teachers
- second-order historical concepts
- controversial issues

The conference was attended by 70 attendees, from preservice teachers to curriculum designers, postgraduate students, university lecturers, and historical researchers across South Africa and the globe. With this tremendous turnout, 41 presentations took place over the two-day conference.

The keynote address presented by Professor June Bam of the University of Johannesburg, who opened the conference, was nothing less than robust. Professor Bam spoke about the

multiple silences in South African History, emphasising the silence of women and the marginalised communities within South Africa that have almost no presence in school history.

During the parallel sessions across the two days, papers were delivered focusing on one of the elements mentioned above, which allowed the presenters twenty minutes each to present and ten minutes for any questions that may have emerged during the presentation of the paper. The posters and presentations allowed for lively discussions and questions of clarity to be asked by all who attended the session of their choice. This allowed for a mutual learning environment for the audience and the presenters themselves, as insight was given from multiple perspectives as the audience ranged from preservice teachers to historical researchers in academia.

*“My experience at the SASHT conference as a Teacher in Training was genuinely enriching. Initially, being surrounded by experienced academics and educators of such calibre felt daunting. However, by the end of the conference, I was assured of the value and place teachers in training held at the meeting, especially as invaluable contributors. One of my highlights was a particularly enthralling presentation, now among my top 3 personal favourites from the conference. This presentation was delivered by a panel of JGF fellows and proved the remarkable talent from which the education sector benefits, thanks to JGF’s support.*

*I had a fascinating personal conversation with Prof. Jansen during the conference. We discussed a master’s presentation focusing on Novice teachers and their handling of controversial topics. I contributed to our discussion by suggesting that examining experienced teachers’ ability to teach controversial issues effectively is equally important. I also questioned what their presence, or sometimes lack of transformation, means for the educational change of Historical Consciousness in the broader teaching of History. In summary, it is clear that JGF undoubtedly adds value wherever they are involved. #iJGFYethu.” - Siphesihle Tlisane’s reflection as a PGCE student*

The conference went well, given that the conference organisers were located in three universities in South Africa. The success of this conference was due to the dynamic personalities between the organising partners and the assistance provided by Dr Valencia Mabalanes’ final-year students, who assisted with the registration of the delegates and the general tasks required at a conference of this magnitude. The social aspects of the meeting were successful as the representatives ranged from former SASHT members and new

representatives who attended their first conference. This allowed networking channels to be established and older tracks to be reopened.