

WELCOME NOTE, CONFERENCE 2011  
YOUNG AND MODELLED BY HISTORY  
WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

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It gives me a great pleasure to stand before you and welcoming you to this Conference. South Africa today is having many young people who are evidently modeled by history. Their lives are often a mirror of lives of some of our history heroes and heroines. It sometime appears as if there is nothing new that should be written. This makes me ask what does the future hold. I will limit my comments to the knowledge that I gathered as a pupil and as a secondary school learner a while ago. These comments are characterized by my personal experience with the history subject and some of its teachers. I hold a view that says that a good teacher produces good students, and a great teacher inspires good students to become makers of history. Webster defines History as (a) a chronological record of significant events affecting a nation or institution and often including an explanation of their causes, and (b) a branch of knowledge that records and explains past events.

Based on this definition, I want to ask all of you as teachers and history professionals and practitioners:

**What and which history events are you teaching?**

Teachings have a profound influence on students in general and on young people in particular. It is even more real in students who are taught by someone they look up to or have some degree of respect for the them. Almost the entire content of the lecture gets translated into facts of life. Without fail, the lessons are emulated and lives are changed. This means that if our teachings are not seasoned and appropriate, the outcome will be immature and a problem

for society and institutions. What you see and hear from some of our young people today, whether in class or on street corners or public gatherings are as a result of most of the things that these young people have been taught or have learned from their respective historic experiences and environments. It is therefore important for every history teacher to reflect on the history we teach and its impact.

### **Who are you teaching?**

I strongly believe that every class will have two types of students or more. I will for this purposes focus on the two: the one who registers for a qualification, attends discussion classes, memorizes, writes and submits all assignments on time, cross-night for examinations and pass, most likely with distinctions and look for employment, get employed most probably for something different from what they went to school for, marry or get married, buy a car, buy a house, get children, work for the rest of their lives, go on pension, and die. This category of students believes everything that comes from our history teachers. No questions asked.

The other student is the one who listens with a view to engage with the lesson, critically analyze and provide a view, sometimes, this student will express his dissent and challenge the thinking of the lecturer. This is the kind of student who wants to acquire knowledge and most likely use it for further human development and serving others. These are mostly, students who will be agitated by a shallow and narrow minded lecturer. These are some of the students who end up dropping out because their intellectual capacity is not fully engaged in a history class.

The teacher of history should make the subject a pleasure to study and cool to understand in ways that begins to position the value of history high in young minds. It should be every history teacher's resolve to facilitate the prevalence of robust yet vibrant learning engagement in a classroom or discussion classes. Deep thinking and analytical addictions should be the features of a history class.

### **What do you wish to achieve with your teaching?**

The teacher of history in Sarafina wanted among others to contextualize the impact of the apartheid system and its ills on mankind in South Africa. She decided to see a bigger and long-term picture in a life-terminating education system. She taught history in ways that made her students see the country above their personal interests. Fear graduated into courage as a result of a relentless history teacher. The education system was later shaken because of the contributions of people like that one history teacher. Dead or alive, the teacher achieved the goals that she fearlessly stood for despite the proximity of life terminating machines. It should be clear to any teacher of history that the

subject is not for commercial gains but the preservation and sharing of events which have the capability of changing people's lives.

**What emphasis are you placing on the causes of the events you are teaching?**

As indicated in Webster's definition, teachers of history should adequately and accurately explain causes of historic events and appropriately discuss their implications on life today. Inaccurate explanations of causes of historic events can have wide ranging consequences for society and institutions. In the main, young people are the first or most affected victims of distortions. It can be deadly to expect the generation X young people to embrace weapons that were used by Shaka to fight for economic freedom today. However, the principles used in that war could be appropriated to the kind of war required today by many young people if well-explained and taught by a history teacher.

**What is in it (your teachings) for you?**

History teachers can be very powerful and influential. It is important in my view for history teachers to be ethical. Declare your interests from the onset so that your analysis is understood within context. The race of a historian or a history teacher should be History and nothing else but the subject. A minute you appear as a "black" lecturer of history to "white" students, or vice versa, you lose your objectivity before you start. It should be unethical for any of the teachers of history to be an agent of a government, unless like in the case of Saraphina where even the ants would take leave instead of being tear-gassed. A history teacher should be honest, principled and decisive.

**What is the impact of your teachings to society, especially to young people and institutions?**

Time has come that the results of a great history teacher are measured not only by throughput rates but also mirrored by the quality of lives of the students. It should be a teacher's concern to model behaviour. A history teacher should strive to create a peace maker in a tyrant; to inspire a democrat in a dictator; to develop a servant leader in an autocrat; and to foster the prevalence of intellectual revolutionaries in populists and sensationalists. Some of the history teachers opt for the easy way out, which is cheque collecting and go for high pass rates and marvel at adding job seekers on the list on unemployed graduates, while a great history teacher manufactures historians of good standing with sharp analytical minds.

**What are you using to measure the impact and success of your teachings?**

Similar to my argument on the foregoing paragraph, a history teacher,

particularly an African teacher should find some homebrew elements and use them to measure the impact of his or her teaching success. There is a lot that an *Ubuntu* measuring scale can give to humanity. Clearly the body of knowledge can be enriched by inculcating African values of care and consultation in our young leaders who are students of history. It is critical that a history teacher brings history home by using local elements of daily lives to measure learning and development success of the students of history.

**What levels of comprehension, engagement, analysis and fun is your teaching bringing to the learning platform?**

My experience with reading books is that most of the writers if not all often portrays their emotions with their work. That is why I encourage readers to always locate their personal and circumstantial aspects within the context of the writer as opposed to embracing the writings without engaging with the thoughts. It is not in God's intention to clone and infuse history makers into the students. Students should be encouraged to comprehend the subject; engage with its principles; analyze it within their current contexts; enjoy learning and make opinions and decisions which can better society and life. It should be a resolve of every history teacher to abstain from demonizing history as a subject. In addition, it is crucial that history teachers embrace technology in making the subject attractive to the younger generation and cool for consumption and use.

**How broad and relevant are your history teachings to today's life?**

Many young people who interact with me today are not interested in participating on manufacturing misery and facilitating massacres. They refuse to be used as agents of mass destruction. They love life and are looking all over for role models, coaches and mentors. The absence of these aspects is capable of driving them to consultation sessions with substances with a view that something inside them will erupt and make them great. Unless we have history teachers who stand up and say, I will package good and bad lessons of yesterday in such a way that they will make sense today and highlight the dangers and merits of their occurrences, and inspire the young generation to reason: we are bound to see with our own eyes a daylight destruction of today's generation. History should be taught in ways that can make life today more meaningful and valuable.

**Are you recreating the past in our current generations or preparing the young for a future history?**

It is important that each and every history teacher undertakes daily reflections and assessments of their contributions in young lives of students. In fact, a history teacher should have a deliberate plan of influence. One should

deliberately plan to inculcate in his or her students a sense of acknowledgement of past events and appreciation of today life and commitment to make life better tomorrow. It should be within our Spirits, minds and beings to place a human being at the centre of our history teachings: asking ourselves very difficult questions and look for life transforming answers and foster the writing of inspiring and liberating histories.

Welcome to this, the 16<sup>th</sup> annual South African Society for History Teaching Conference. Enjoy it and fellowship progressively. God bless you!