

I first participated in Teachers Across Borders – Southern Africa in 2015, a year in which we spent a week working with teachers in Mpumalanga in South Africa and two weeks working with Trainers of Teachers (teachers who were to run workshops for other colleagues). One of my proudest moments as an educator is when Nthoko emailed me a few months later to say that he had presented to his colleagues on directed numbers using materials we had used during the TABSA workshops. In fact, I still have a screenshot of that email saved under “Favorites” on my phone. My memories of that summer are so vivid and I can still picture where he was standing when one of our colleagues said in the closing ceremonies that teaching requires the faith of a farmer – we work with the *hope* that our efforts are planting the seeds of future progress, knowing that we may not see the fruits of the labor. Facilitating workshops for TABSA requires a similar faith as we do not often see participants from previous years again.

This year, we were lucky to return to Bloemfontein, where we spent a week doing workshops in Further Education and Training (grades 10-12) last year. Since we were doing Senior Phase (grades 7-9) this year, I did not expect to see anyone from the previous year but was thrilled to see some familiar faces. The connections we make with colleagues half-way across the world is one of my favorite parts of this work. Tshediso shared that he had not been able to contribute much to the TABSA discussions last year because he was new to teaching Grade 12 but now four of his Grade 12 students were in the top 10 in Winter School! I was humbled when he said that he was so inspired by our passion for mathematics that he is pursuing post-graduation Honors in Mathematics. I am very cognizant of how much easier it was for me to pursue my education than it is for him, and I am in awe of his commitment to improvement.

Using a similar model to the one we used in Swaziland, we spent some time in Bloemfontein training subject advisers so that they could go run their own workshops. We each spent two days working intensely with a small group of educators before coming together so that each group could lead a short session on their topics. The conversations I had with our colleagues about how teachers conceptualize different aspects of mathematics and how to address those challenges during their sessions gave me insight into the materials. We sat together with the material I had prepared for the topic and collaboratively improved it for their sessions. I will use those insights in my own classrooms and, as I did after Swaziland, I will implement their modifications into the workshops I do both in Southern Africa and domestically. This model of empowering teachers to cascade our work through their districts feels impactful. I was so proud to see my group facilitate conversations with the rest of our colleagues at the end of the week about how to address the challenges students have with Financial Maths. I have the faith of a farmer that they will expertly run workshops of their own in the coming years.