

Brad Uy

TABSA 2018 reflection

This reflection is dedicated to my heroes whose footsteps I follow: Princess Bernice Pauahi Bishop; my `ohana; the two critical Jims in my math pantheon; and the selfless sponsors, pioneers, and leaders of TABSA's past, present, and future.

One of our captains this year, Jim Metz, captured the tone of each of the three workshop perfectly when he stated at the closing ceremony on Friday that "On Monday, we met as colleagues. Today, we depart as friends." Indeed, that poignantly expresses the sentiment we all felt. Through the course of the workshops, all parties fully embraced the spirit of camaraderie and collaboration. This special feeling was seen in the faces, heard in the songs, and evidenced by the creative work that was done. We began as facilitators and participants, and in the end became more like brothers and sisters.

Sami summed it up perfectly as well: he attested that has never led or been to a workshop where the facilitators and teachers were so jazzed to be there to connect with, talk to, and learn from one another. To support his statement, he asked, in what workshop do people arrive and leave singing and dancing their hearts out with smiles on their faces? The atmosphere was electric over the weeks.

People from all sides were simply elated to be there. We were exuberant and inspired to collaborate and do good work. Our teachers from South Africa showed up early for sessions raring to build a mutual understanding of the material and discuss and practice alternate teaching strategies and approaches.

It was not an uncommon sight over the three weeks to have the teachers greet and end the day with song. They inspired us. The American team even burst out into spontaneous song and dance at

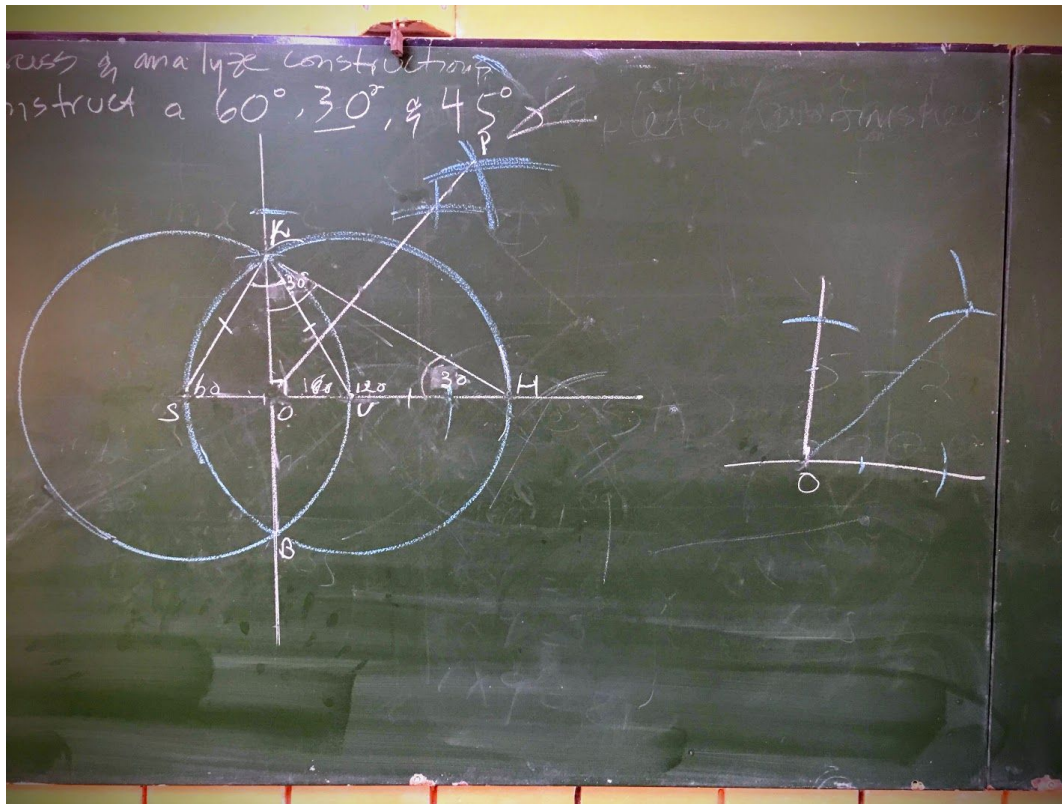
night in the week leading up to the workshops; and Thokozani led flash mobs singing “Shosholoza” to cap off every week during closing ceremony. Speaking jointly about the American team and the South African teachers, it was wonderful to behold how everyone collectively threw their hearts, minds, and bodies into the workshops. It was evident that we were all fully invested in working toward the improvement of our students and the future of our world. Everyone delivered on their promise to education with unbridled enthusiasm and commitment.

This incredible social dynamic, which is hard to believe and describe--I don't remember any other year being so exuberant--partly explains why this year was so smooth and enjoyable for me. I felt very much at ease and present in the moment. More so than in years past. One contributing factor was that the town was familiar. We spent a whole week running workshops in Bloemfontein last year in the exact same location. There was also the fact that we stayed in one town for the duration of the project this year which was unusual; I think this contributed to a sense of stability and a feeling of home. Of course, the TABSA admin team always does a great job attending to our needs, so that's a big constant help. Whatever it was, my experience was light and magical this year. Facilitating this year became less like conveying math content, and more like getting to know others through the common, beautiful language of mathematics. I got to know more people personally. I worked intensely with a remarkable cohort of four brilliant educators, Gogela, Kgosi, Mosese, and Mosia, prepping them to present and run their own mini workshop the last three days.



It was genuinely rewarding to elevate the confidence and understanding of Kgosi. On the first day, he grappled with congruence and similarity concepts and asked the group to clear something up. Unfortunately, we were down to our last 2 minutes on the clock. I let everyone go, and asked if I could go over some ideas with him for a few minutes. He graciously and selflessly accepted. I spent some additional time with him discussing the topics. I thanked him for staying late and going above and beyond for his learners--we both scored a win that day. This story has a happy ending, for by the very next day, he came back determined and jovial as ever. That morning, he proudly told me he reviewed and grasped the terms and even shared his knowledge with his roommate. Later that day, when the group was stumped on a geometric proof, he proved to be a real star by contributing critical insights. It was Kgosi who provided the breakthrough idea which earned him the admiration of his peers. When I pointed out his brilliance, he beamed and everyone nodded admiringly at him. That is what TABSA is about: extending opportunity and empowering all of our friends who come as much as we can. It's a tremendous honor, and immensely gratifying to have this chance, this gift really to make a difference in the world. We all played our role in supporting the revolution of the mind in South Africa and beyond.

I truly learned so much from my African colleagues this year. One such interaction and subsequent discovery inspired Jim to write a paper which he will submit on the local teacher's and my behalf (what a gift to the world Jim is). Khubos as he is called (his real name is Joseph Makhubo) not only taught me a new way to construct a 30° angle, but a 45° angle as well, which I never would have imagined was possible. Jim and I were truly amazed at the innovative process and sheer math intuition Khubos displayed. Here's a photo of Mr. Makhubo's construction which started us down our path of radical, illuminating discovery.



The problem Khubos posed truly stretched and helped to synthesize my understanding of Geometry. Teachers pointed out things I had never seen in constructions before, and opened my eyes to different justifications for why certain constructions are valid. And quite ingeniously, adroitly, and elegantly, another colleague Motsamai pointed out a way to create a 60° angle by folding paper, which I had never realized. It was another eye-opening, successful set of workshops.

In a nutshell, the project this year is about **gratitude**, **sacrifice**, and **fulfillment**--on both sides of the border. One of the most touching moments emotionally for me was during the closing ceremony of week 2. Our work there and the subsequent gesture by our colleagues epitomized gratitude, sacrifice, and fulfillment. I was so overwhelmed emotionally when our South African friends presented us with gifts. On the outside, the gifts may have appeared small. But they were invaluable to me, because I know they came from the kindness of their hearts and were given with deep meaning and gratitude. The customized mugs sport the Teachers Across Borders logo--where did they find that? we marvelled. On the other side is the South African flag. In the middle reads a quote from Nelson Mandela: "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

They were grateful as were we for everyone's sacrifice. I was grateful for the chance to serve and I was grateful to them for giving their all to be there, many traveling hours to attend the workshop. What an honor. My heart overflowed with a sense of ultimate peace and self-fulfillment for all the work we had done. The feeling of service and sacrifice was so gratifying.

As the project drew to a close, multiple teammates tapped me and voiced, "Now I understand what makes you want to come back each and every year. I get it." The feeling for me is the same every year. It doesn't get old. Case in point--Jim has been coming back for 14 years. That warm fuzzy feeling of service doesn't wear out, but is constantly renewed. It's the gift of giving and receiving these unique experiences that keeps me coming back year after year.