

Reflections on TABSA 2018
Jami Muranaka

Home Away From Home

We arrived at Tsosetso High School in Bloemfontein on the morning of Sunday, June 24 to set up our classrooms for the next three weeks.



The first thing I noticed were the amount of desks and chairs in each classroom – 25 double desks and 50 chairs all lined up in straight rows facing the front of the classroom. Wow. The next thing I noticed was the condition of the desks and chairs. Every wooden desktop had long crevices gauged into it, probably by students who were bored. They were very difficult to write on because of the bumpy texture. The plastic chairs were also in pretty bad shape, many of them cracked and some of them were barely hanging on to their metal frame. Last but not least, I noticed the chalkboard. It looked as though it hadn't been cleaned in years. Other than the chairs and desks, the room was empty. There was no teacher's desk, no bookshelves, no storage cabinets, no school supplies, no posters on the walls – just a sterile space for learners to enter and exit every 30 minutes. I couldn't stop thinking about how the teachers were able to teach in these conditions, let alone how the students could learn in these conditions. It was definitely an eye-opener, and I'm glad I saw the classrooms that way so I had some background on where our teachers were coming from. We quickly transformed each room into collaborative spaces with desk pods so that teachers could work in teams. We also attempted to brighten the rooms with colorful posters. With just a few modifications, the rooms perked up and felt more like home – after all, they would be our homes for the next three weeks.

Blessed Mornings

On Monday, June 25, teachers began arriving around 8:00am, and we began our workshop at 8:30. We began by asking if anyone wanted to lead us in song and prayer. After a few seconds of silence, a female colleague stood and began to sing. Everyone else in the room followed suit. I was amazed that, although these colleagues had never met before, their worship songs united them as one and they could each participate in harmonious song together to lift their day up to

God in gratitude and humility. This continued each and every day of the workshops, and it was something I looked forward to each morning.

One Team



One of the highlights of my experience was working with the 2018 TABSA team. I had met only a few of the team members prior to the trip, and was a bit nervous to be spending a month with people I didn't know. My fears were completely dissipated, however, from the moment we all met for dinner that first evening in Johannesburg. We immediately bonded and couldn't get enough of just hanging out and finding out more about each other. The weekend retreat prior to beginning our workshops was an amazing experience of planning, relaxation, talking story, and even dancing together. For the

next three weeks, we literally had each other's backs, and although we had some low points (someone falling down the stairs and injuring her back, several with stomach illness), everyone chipped in to help and pick up the slack. I was amazed at how everyone cared for and looked after each other. When someone needed something, a teammate was there to help. No drama, just love and humility. I will never forget this team – my TABSA family, and although we are spread across the world, I know we will be forever friends.

Different But the Same



During the second week of workshops, we had an Afrikaner join in on the fun. His name was Johann, and he was the only white colleague I would have the opportunity to work with during my three weeks at Tsoseletso High. Yunus noticed Johann right away, and quietly told me not to be surprised if he didn't show up for the rest of the week. But he did, and as the week went on, he seemed to get along just fine with his group of colleagues and participated fully in all of our activities. I did notice, however, that he never sang along during our morning prayer time and I wondered if it was because he wasn't a Christian. On Friday during morning prayer time on our final day, Johann quickly stood and addressed the group. It was quite a surprise, but even more surprising was what he said. "I just wanted to let you all know that listening to you all sing every morning made

my day. Your singing is absolutely beautiful. We have prayed all week in Sesotho, so may I kindly ask if I can pray in Afrikaans today." All of the other colleagues emphatically replied "Yes!" so Johann went ahead and lifted up a prayer in Afrikaans. All of this gave me "chicken skin" to say the least. This was a real life example of a white man completely fitting in with a group of black colleagues. No one cared that his skin color was different – they treated him as one and the same. At the end of the day, as we were saying our goodbyes, Johann again asked to speak on behalf of the group. He thanked Carol and me for providing them with new ideas for their classrooms, and left us in tears with his thoughtful words. I will never forget this gentle and kind man, who showed up half an hour early each day, eager to learn whatever the day had to offer him.

Mahalo nui loa



In Hawaii, we use the phrase “mahalo nui loa” to say “thank you very much.” I would like to thank everyone who made TABSA 2018 possible. This was a once-in-a-lifetime, life-changing experience that I will be forever grateful for. I learned so much from the South African colleagues, who taught me to be thankful for what God has blessed me with, to welcome challenges with strength and hope, and to live life with passion and love. Thank you Yunus and Jim for inviting me to be a part of this team. Thanks also to the 2018 TABSA team who welcomed me with open arms and

offered their love and encouragement throughout our time together.