

TABSA Reflection 2018

Jim Metz

Fast and Passionate seems to aptly describe the 2018 TABSA workshops. The time sure passed quickly as the team was busy from dawn to dusk. The South African teachers were truly exceptional in their style, attitude and receptiveness. On one crisp Thursday morning we heard singing coming from the direction of the busses and were amazed to see a principal leading a group of teachers in a beautiful song as they danced their way to the classrooms. The singing and dancing continued for two more songs before we began the day's activities in maths and science. What a wonderful way to start the day. How can one not have fun with such an enthusiastic start? Throughout the weeks the workshop participants showed their curiosity, interest and remarkable thirst for understanding. They eagerly shared their ideas as we worked together as one team. They are our colleagues indeed and we all learned so much from each other. It is truly difficult to describe the magic that happens in the workshops, but a look at some of the photos may give you a glimpse into this miracle. Mahalo to Yunus for making this happen. His yearlong efforts included numerous frustrations and setbacks, but the eventual roaring success of the project is a fitting testament to his tenacity and dedication. The support staff of Laurie, Owen and Thokozani helped things move smoothly, allowing the TABSA teachers to totally focus on their tasks in the workshops. The TABSA team was truly professional and I am honored to have been a member of this team.

It was a wonderful year of reunions. Yunus Chamda, my friend from my first time in South Africa in 2003 and one of the founders of TABSA, treated the team to lunch just before the workshops started. On our last evening in Bloemfontein, the entire team was honored to meet the Deputy Minister of Basic Education, Mr. Enver Surty, whom I first met in 2004. Later that evening I visited Dr. Razvi and Firdoz Ahmed, who have also supported our efforts from the start and who have hosted me several times over the past 15 years. Of course I enjoyed my time with Thokozani, who has been a constant over my many years, both as a friend and an assistant administrator. He did so much to make the experience joyful for everyone.

As part of the project we visited Thaba Nchu to give students donated laptops. The students were so appreciative. I hope the donors understand what an impact their gifts will have. These students will do well. Before going there we visited a government-supported school for the blind and deaf. I was deeply touched by a young blind girl who, in answer to my question about what she was studying, excitedly announced that she was going to be an economist. I know she will, and a good one at that. May she be the Andrea Bocelli of economics.

Before returning to Johannesburg for our return flight, we spent the weekend near a nature reserve. On our last evening a group of us took a spectacular star trek, viewing the southern skies with Scorpio above in the Milky Way and the Southern Cross just above the horizon. It was quite a rare and exceptional experience to be in the center of the half-dome of the stars, lying on the road, looking up. High lights.

It has been a year since Yunus's mother Ameena left us to get a better view of things, but her guiding spirit was apparent throughout our time in South Africa. She is the inspiration for TABSA and a supporter from the start. We could also feel the joyful spirit of our dear, late friend Tenzin, who was part of our 2014 team. TABSA has touched the lives of many and, like the proverbial ripples in a pond, will continue to do so long after that initial touch.