

## **SUMMER 2018 - TABSA REFLECTIONS**

Marisol Fisher

I have never been more humbled or proud of being a teacher than I have this summer. I've developed a much deeper understanding and appreciation of what teachers do on a global scale. I have learned that no matter where you teach, a private school or a public school, a rural school or a city school, a run-down school or a state-of-the-art school, a regular school or a school for students with special needs... or whether your students are rich or poor, clean or dirty, black or white, smart or challenged, rowdy or quiet.... all educators are responding to a calling, a vocation, a pull that comes from deep inside. Something within their hearts moves educators; something much bigger than a paycheck, something much bigger than a Math concept or a Science fact. Larger voices call educators to their professions everywhere around the world. I have been forever inspired by all the educators I met this summer - from remote areas in South Africa, to inner-city schools in Panama, to private schools in the USA. Thank you for leaving such a deep impression on me.

This summer I had the privilege of spending four weeks in South Africa, mostly in Bloemfontein, teaching South African teachers from the region. The experience has been life changing and in many ways and has given me much more than I have given South Africa.

### **My Team**

"I am about to spend four weeks in South Africa and don't know anyone in my team. What if they are not friendly and I just don't like it?" I asked myself over and over the two weeks prior to leaving the comfort of my home. I arrived in Johannesburg on Wednesday June 20, and by the end of that day, after meeting my teammates, all my fears and doubts had gone away.

Our team consisted of 17 educators from the USA. Yunus Peer handpicked 17 caring and professional people who ended up becoming family from the moment I met them. These people were not only phenomenal educators, but such caring human beings. We were a team that looked after each other and assured everyone's well-being and safety. Together, we cared for each other, traveled, laughed, sang, dined, met many different people, and made it our mission to make a difference in the education of South Africa.

Yunus Peer, our leader, made our safety and comfort his number one priority. He worked relentlessly with SA district administrators to make sure over 350 SA teachers could attend the workshops. He truly has been an incredible inspiration and role model for me.

### **My Colleagues from South Africa**

We started every morning singing and praying. The singing was led by anyone and everyone in the group, with such beautiful voices. The prayer had so much sentiment, you could feel its power and influence. We spent the day sharing Math and Science lessons we had prepared at their request. What I found so fascinating was the teacher's openness and willingness to accept what we were presenting to them. They were so respectful and worked hard to understand and do what we were asking of them. My favorite part was when they would come to the board and show us all a new way of solving a problem. Or when they raised their hands and say "Marisol, I don't understand how you got this...." I can still feel the power of their smile and words.

These colleagues worked hard to understand new ways to teach a concept, were resilient and passionate about their students, and were such fun to be around. By the end of each week, we

had all become friends, many exchanging personal information and even creating group chats so that they could get in touch with each other about teaching their learners. They were an inspiration to all of us and have made me more aware of the kind of teacher that I am and that I want to be, even after 20 years of experience.

### **Personal Experience and Inspiration**

TABSA has given me much more than I will ever be able to give. It has given me a clear vision of my future role in the world as I approach retirement from teaching. It has inspired me to continue to help others to become better educators and I have found myself being more patient and caring towards my coworkers and my new students this year.

I have started the process of developing a similar program in my country of Panama. I have a vision to start a program in this small country and perhaps expand it to Central and South America. It is a huge undertaking, but my vision is clear. I am blessed to have seen the power of what it means to educate other educators. I am forever grateful and inspired by Yunus, whom I wish to model. The journey ahead will not be easy – but “a journey of thousand miles begins with a single step. “