

TABSA 2024 Reflection

I helped facilitate the TABSA workshops last year in 2023 and was completely blown away and thought my experience couldn't get any better. Well, I was wrong. This year was even better than the last. It was an honor to work with such talented and passionate people; people who really want to make a difference in the world that will last for generations to come. Thank you to everyone involved behind the scenes both in the US and in South Africa for making TABSA 24' a reality.

My experience this year was different in many ways. To start, I felt a lot more comfortable and confident. Last year included a lot of "firsts" for me including my first time outside the US away from my wife and daughter, my first time facilitating a workshop and contributing to a math workbook, and my first time trying so many new foods like the staple malva pudding! Although my colleagues might disagree, this unfamiliarity led to me being a little timid or reserved, even doubting my skill sets at times and questioning whether I was the right person for the monumental task at hand. This year however, I was fully aware of what was expected of me and driven to fulfill the mission and purpose of TABSA. My confidence in front of my colleagues is at an all time high, and I continue to grow as a professional who adopted the philosophy of leading from the back.

The name game in which we all introduce ourselves using an adjective (or some other descriptor) alongside our names was a big hit. I dubbed myself "Extra Extra Erick" and it stuck with me for the duration of the trip. This get-to-know-you activity went so well, my colleagues and I repeated it each week. It was important to break the ice early and the game really fostered community as we all learned a little about each other. There were colleagues who kept it simple and others who were more creative. Some descriptors include beautiful, blessed, MC^2 , and mother of three, just to name a few. This alone really allowed us to connect with one another and to connect in a deeper, more intimate way as we moved forward.

The TABSA team this year welcomed some new faces in science and robotics, but the core of the math team was the same minus the incomparable Jim Metz, although Jim was there in spirit as he was often quoted in our nightly debriefs and even asked for by name from some returning TABSA participants. On the science team we had new and returning members who brought the "magic" of learning to all who observed their dynamic teaching styles. Robotics was introduced and "took the gold." While we all did great, I think it is extremely important to highlight the success of this pilot. Especially, since the role of technology is intricately woven into the fight for human

freedom world-wide in addition to the skill sets of design thinking and problem solving. It was awe inspiring watching my colleagues collaborate to develop and create applicable technologies with the use of micro bits to solve problems relevant to important areas of life and development including irrigation, transportation, and safety just to name a few. To hear things like “we are going to change South Africa” was just phenomenal.

As I continue to reflect on my second TABSA experience, I feel as if the mission and philosophy of the program really started to take root in my own heart and mind; empowerment is the name of the game. Time and time again we were reminded that we are guides on the side and not sages on the stage. Each week we were tasked with identifying participants we thought could lead their very own “mini TABSA” workshop at their local school upon their return. I am proud to report that we met this challenge with great success. We facilitated and encouraged communication between participants so that they could continue to lean on each other after the workshop.

For the first time, the Foundation Phase was made a priority whereas in the past the focus has been primarily on teachers of the senior phase and preparation for the Matric exam. The response was phenomenal and appreciated by all who were in attendance. When I took the time to personally observe what was going on in foundation phase workshops, I witnessed them playing games and having fun like they themselves were children again. We also focused, for the second time in TABSA history, on students in their senior phase but specifically empowering the female students. The black woman is often ranked at the bottom of the socioeconomic ladder and often discouraged from pursuing higher education in the STEM fields. This is divisive and nonsense, so TABSA set out to change the narrative and empower these female students to pursue their dreams and interest in such fields. The students were so grateful they even came back on their day off asking for more. I must also mention the brief but critical history lesson on the significance of Youth Day that was given to the students in attendance by our director Yunus Peer. It was shocking to learn that even with a country as young as 30 years old, there were still many youths who did not know the significance of such a historic event.

Some of my biggest takeaways include the idea that experiential learning has its place in every classroom; it's just a matter of how to do it effectively given the individual circumstances that pertain to each class and curriculum. One quote that really resonated with me goes as follows: “If you tell me, I will forget it; if you show me, I may remember; if you let me do it, then I will never forget.” True leadership involves empowering others to lead as well. You must be of like mind and spirit to be successful at endeavors like these, and I am grateful to my colleagues both from the US and SA for

being on this journey with me in like mind and spirit. Nelson Mandela said, "Education is the greatest weapon to change the world."

In closing, if given the opportunity to participate in TABSA for a third time, I will not hesitate to answer the call. It is better to give than to receive; I received so much by just showing up and being my authentic self. New friendships, new insights, and new ways to teach and learn just to name a few. Education is truly a lifelong journey that I will continue to enjoy through all the ups and downs that come along with it. It's always been about the journey for me personally, and I encourage everyone on their personal journeys to enjoy the ride. Take advantage of every opportunity in front of you and put your all into everything you do and the reward will be exponentially worth it. Thank you, TABSA for this amazing chapter in my life.