

Carly Shellhammer
Thaden School
2024 TABSA reflection

My second visit to South Africa was everything I hoped it would be and more. I had thought that the summer of 2023 was the last trip for TABSA. I left Johannesburg that summer with such a heavy feeling of sadness that the wonderful friendships built with my team and the transformative experiences that occurred during the workshops would never happen again. Oh wow, when I got the text from Yunus Peer during winter break of 2023/24 asking if I was able to travel again, I shouted (while typing) a resounding YES!!! Then, I asked my family.... luckily, they all agreed.

During the first week of workshops, the math team was lucky enough to work with grade 12 learners from a few nearby schools at Tsoseletso Secondary School. I was so happy to be working with learners again this year. It certainly was a special highlight of my time with TABSA in 2023. On that note, one of the learners that attended the workshops in 2023 heard we were in town and purposefully came back to Tsoseletso Secondary School to visit us. Gosh, nothing warms a teacher's heart more than past students sharing their successes and gratitude! Here is Keke, Brittney Ellzey Mujica and I with all of the ear-to-ear smiles!



I spent some time prior to the trip preparing new materials and freshening up past materials to use with the learners as review for the matric exam at the end of the year. The students were extremely engaged, hard working, thorough, and kind. They spend their days reviewing materials, working through problems, asking questions and teaching each other. I spent my time jumping from table to table helping clarify misconceptions and teaching

little mini-lessons. When little mistakes were made consistently through a few students, we would all pause and work through the mistake together, learning from each other and making sure everyone understood the concept. The students would take time going up to the chalkboard and teaching their classmates in the most meticulous and well-spoken way. This

year, our students were mostly females which allowed us to help them build their confidence in a safe environment. I saw the most shy and reserved girls step up in front of classmates from their home school and learners they didn't go to school with to explain concepts and present answers to practice problems. I just stood back and cheered them on!



The last day or so with the learners, we would occasionally chat about the future and their hopes and dreams. So many asked if we could bring them home with us to the United States. I replied that my family would be quite surprised and I doubt they would fit in my luggage. But seriously, my hopes and dreams for them is that they have a hand in building the future of South Africa. If these kids can help build South Africa's future, then their future and the future of their country is bright.

After our week with learners, we spend the next two weeks working with our 7-9th grade math colleagues from rural schools around Bethlehem in the Free State Province. It was such a great experience working with the same TABSA math team as last year. We divided the work load, and had a fantastic time working together. South African



colleagues who attended the workshops during their winter break were so very engaged and hard working. We presented skills and standards from their CAPS curriculum that they requested. Our goals were to present materials in ways that brought math to life using hands-on activities with materials readily available in the local grocery stores, recycled from items used daily, or in the school's office supplies. We had fun counting integers with bottle caps, old pennies, or slips of paper with +/- on them. We maximized the volume of an open topped box and ate sugary



snacks out of them (the bigger the box, the more snacks you got!) while practicing tables, graphs, and features of a graph. Our time with the South African teachers was immeasurably wonderful and re-ignited my own excitement for the craft of teaching and learning.

The summer of 2024 did not disappoint. Four weeks in South Africa, experiencing winter while my family back in Arkansas was sweltering in the heat of the American South, was wonderful. Our time together went faster than I could ever imagine. My TABSA family is wonderful, caring, and strong. The South African learners and colleagues that I crossed paths with will live forever in my heart. I never felt worthy enough to impart any wisdom upon those in the workshops yet we all learned so very much from each other. I truly believe that education is an avenue that can bring freedom. The South African people are resilient, strong, kind, and wise. I am eternally grateful to the Free State department of education, my TABSA family, and the colleagues and learners I taught and who taught me. Until next time....

