

# Inspiring Excellence

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# INSPIRING EXCELLENCE

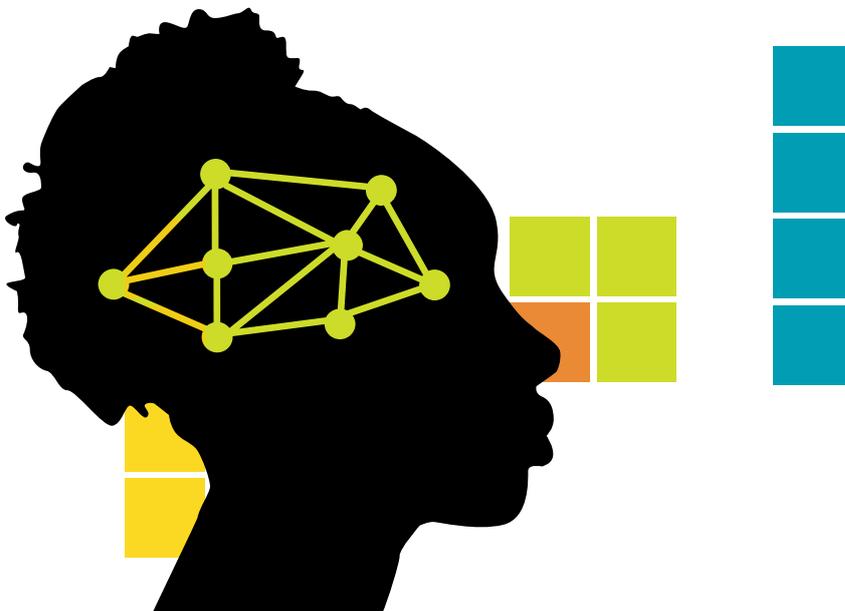
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**The Zenex Foundation honours and celebrates teachers by profiling stories of passion and achievement, sometimes against all odds.**

The 5th of October is National Teachers Day. We all have fond memories of at least one teacher we admired and respected and who contributed to our development. The Zenex Foundation honoured and celebrated teachers throughout the month of October 2016 by profiling the stories of current and former project teachers who exemplify passion, commitment and excellence in teaching to improve learner performance in their schools.

Although the Zenex Foundation focuses on mathematics, science and language education, the experiences we shared say something more universal about the state of learning and teaching in South Africa. The Foundation is active in the sector through a number of programmes and projects aimed at learner and teacher beneficiation. Our imperative was to highlight the efforts of our teachers in different, sometimes challenging environments. This celebration also acknowledged the role of teachers in the various partnerships that make our programmes and projects work.

Join us as we share the 'teacher experience' of the multi-layered education equation as we tell teachers' stories in their own words. The teachers profiled in this campaign were drawn from the five projects described on the next page.



# THE PROJECTS

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**The Zenex Foundation Literacy Project** is an innovative teacher development intervention to assist teachers in the Foundation Phase with Home Language and First Additional Language literacy teaching, aligned with the curriculum and with Assessment Policy Statements. The project seeks to understand the conditions and factors required for teachers to provide Foundation Phase learners with a sound foundation in home language and English literacy competency.

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**ISEA Project** helped in-service English teachers in the Further Education and Training Phase acquire an academic qualification, and provided ongoing support for classroom practice and some teaching resources. Classroom support continued for a year after the academic course was completed. In-class support was intended to enhance competence in delivering the curriculum in the context of the schools in which teachers were based.

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**The Zenex Foundation–ISASA Mathematics & English Project** was rolled out from 2007 to 2016 in partnership with the Independent Schools Association of Southern Africa (ISASA). Learners identified by the project are placed in ISASA-affiliated schools. The project offers economically disadvantaged black (African, Coloured and Indian) learners who show potential in Mathematics and Science with an opportunity to attend independent schools that can help them achieve quality results in Mathematics, Science and English. Learners are individually supported in their learning experiences, which include academic, leadership, social and life skills. The ultimate goal of the project is to increase the pool of black learners who qualify to pursue Mathematics and Science-related degrees and associated careers.

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**The Inkanyezi Project** facilitates entry and integration of black learners with potential from disadvantaged backgrounds into selected high quality public schools that offer quality teaching and learning in Mathematics, Science and English and have the resources and experience to support the academic experience with life skills and social skills. The project also seeks to increase the number of black learners who achieve university exemption in their National Senior Certificate examination, with good Mathematics, Science and English results. The rationale for the project is that it will provide an opportunity for these learners to follow careers in the Mathematics and Science subject streams at university level. The principle underlying the project is to provide access to learners from economically and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds.

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**TEACH South Africa** recruits TEACH SA Ambassadors – non-teaching graduates and non-graduates with 2nd year qualifications in Mathematics, Science and English – to join the teaching profession. The programme helps ambassadors acquire a one-year Post-Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) through UNISA and provides ongoing support in the form of classroom visits, resources and leadership skills. TEACH South Africa has two main aims:

1. To attract and support the most talented South African graduates in Mathematics, Science and English to teach and lead in challenging education environments for at least two years.
2. To improve learner performance in Mathematics, Science and English.



## **Nazley Jabar**

***Grade 3 Literacy, Numeracy  
and Life Orientation***

*AZ Berman Primary School  
Mitchells Plain, Western Cape*



# Making learning interesting

## **MY OWN CHILDHOOD TEACHER, MY TRUE INSPIRATION**

I have been teaching for a long time – for 22 years now – focusing on the Foundation Phase. I became a teacher because of the impression my Grade 3 teacher in primary school made on me. I wanted to be like her – just the way she was, her personality, the way she presented and how she made learning interesting. I went to school in Cape Town.

## **A GUIDING HAND THROUGH THE YEARS**

I teach a Grade 3 class which consists of an average of 40 learners. This includes a range of three to four different ability groups. This is normal.

We have isiXhosa and few English-speaking children, but most of my children have Afrikaans as their home language. The language of learning we use in the classroom is English.

What makes it interesting for me is that I have had the same group of learners from Grade 1 and so that is easy for me, because both the learners and I know each other. In fact, I already started teaching them in Grade 2, preparing them well for Grade 3.

The young ones study well. Sometimes I see them when they are grown up, and they have studied further. Today, they are doing well and they have truly made something of themselves.

## CONTINUOUS LEARNING – FOR THE CHILDREN, AND FOR ME

The Zenex Literacy Project is excellent. Even though I have been teaching for 22 years, there is such a lot that I have learnt over the past two years with Zenex.

For example, the use of stories, the importance of comprehension – a range of new things I never knew before.

I especially value the practical ideas the Zenex Programme has given me and also how to implement these ideas practically and effectively in the classroom.

I have more insight into a lot of things like phonics, combined with decoding techniques. Now I know why and what the true purpose of these techniques is in “teaching to read”. Sometimes you do things and you don’t know why. The confidence Zenex has given me about reading is very important.

We have technology in the form of interactive smart boards, and I prepare my lesson on them. For example, if it is a phonics lesson which we’re about to have, I put all of the lesson elements onto our smart boards. The smart board allows learners to play. We sometimes play a decoding game and the children enjoy the game because it also has pictures and sounds. Each teacher has a laptop for preparing lessons and for administration.

## TEACHER CHALLENGES

As a teacher, I am faced with many challenges. Firstly, the language of teaching at our school is English, but English is not the mother tongue for many of the children at the school. It is in fact their second language. Secondly, it would be good if learners were encouraged to read a little more. Finally, parents can be challenging. While we have a good relationship with the parents at the school, I do feel that sometimes they are not playing their role to the fullest. It would be good if they would sit with their children and give them support and encourage them to practice every day. Although the children come from poor communities where many parents are unemployed, or are from single-parent households, or grow up with their grandparents (who, in most cases, really cannot help the children), or even in some cases parents take drugs, many of our school children *do* live with parents who would be able to help more.

## A SOLID FOUNDATION

We have a big school comprising 1 200 learners, with five Grade 3 classes. The good news is that all five teachers – that is, the whole Foundation Phase – are involved in the Zenex project. So, we support each other. We share ideas and good practices.

I believe that as a result of what we are doing, the Grade 1 lessons will be stronger. By the time these Grade 1s get to Grade 3, they will be stronger. They will also be fluent readers. They are already better.

Because of the project, I am learning and there are such a lot of things I am doing differently even though I have been a teacher for such a long time.



**“I believe that as a result of what we are doing, the Grade 1 lessons will be stronger and by the time these Grade 1s get to Grade 3, they will be stronger.”**



**“Even though I have been teaching for 22 years, there is such a lot that I have learnt over the past two years with Zenex.”**





## Melissa van Rensburg

*Grade 1 to 3 Literacy, Numeracy  
and Life Orientation*

*Eastville Primary School,  
Mitchells Plain, Western Cape*



# The foundation of education

## DISCOVERING THE TEACHER INSIDE

When I matriculated I wanted to be a social worker, but I felt that I needed a background in working with children so I volunteered at a local Early Childhood Development Centre that my aunt ran. I enjoyed working with children and did Level Fundamentals for Early Child Development and became a Grade R teacher. My lecturer told me she could see a teacher in me, so I decided to further my studies. I got a bursary and the rest is history.

I completed my Bachelor of Education degree in 2012. I plan to do my Honours and Masters in Education, and hope to open an Educare Centre one day. I love being in the classroom, and would like to stay in the classroom as I work my way up in the profession to become a Head of Department, for instance. However, I'm not obsessed with moving up the ranks. I mainly want to mentor my peers and build an environment where children enjoy learning.

## BUILDING FROM THE BOTTOM UP

Foundation Phase teachers play the most important role in a child's education. To take a child from not being able to read and write to actually doing these things is a huge task. It is important that we take this responsibility seriously because if you mess up in the Foundation Phase, you mess up a child's future.

My favourite teacher was Ms Napoleon, my Grade R and Grade 1 teacher in Elsies River. She was so kind – I used to stay for aftercare, as my mom worked until 5 p.m. I really enjoyed being with her. I look back at that experience and constantly ask myself what kind of teacher I am and what kind of impression I am making on my learners. Showing them love and care at this stage of their lives is just as important as teaching them.

This is my second year with the Literacy Project. Being a part of the project has improved my confidence and has helped me grow as a teacher. I find teaching language a lot simpler now, whereas initially I had difficulty teaching in an environment where learners speak different languages.

I love the group sessions where teachers work together to solve problems. This is how we are meant to work. The project has helped everybody open up and now we share freely amongst all teachers. This is important because of the challenges we face at the school. I have been teaching here for four years, and in this time we have had many burglaries. It's not just crime; one day the class was flooded and my resources were damaged. Other times we do not have electricity or our resources are stolen. We just have to live through all these challenges. Anything that supports us in our efforts is welcome.

What compounds the challenge we face, however, is the fact that parents are not involved in the education of their children. As a teacher, I also have to play the role of a parent. The social problems run deep – learners come from single-parent families, they are exposed to violence and some of them are born of mothers who are still children themselves.

## **EDUCATION AND THEN SOME ...**

I have had to take on the problems of the children. There is one learner who was always fighting others and disrupting the class. I would go home every day and think about what I could do with the learner to help him overcome his difficulties. I registered him for a workshop to assist with his behavioural problems. The educator becomes the child's de facto parent at the end of the day. We have to know our learners before we can start teaching them; we have to sort out the social problems they bring to class.

In order to be able to carry out this task as well as the mandate of educating the children, the safety of educators should be paramount and the school building has to be secured. Eastville is one of the suburbs most affected by crime in the Western Cape. Most of our funding goes to repairing damages.

There must be a connection between home and classroom. The children's guardians need to play their part. Everyone needs to understand that a child's parent truly is the child's first teacher. A love for reading and other subjects has to be cultivated at home.



**“To take a child from not being able to read and write to actually doing these things is a huge task.”**



**“We have to know our learners before we can start teaching them; we have to sort out the social problems they bring to class.”**





## Elizabeth Mbatha

**Grade 3 Literacy, Numeracy and  
Life Orientation**

*Highlands Primary School,  
Mitchells Plain, Western Cape*



# Practical experience: where teachers truly learn

## CAREER CHANGE

My teaching journey began in 2013. Until 2003 I was in the corporate world, working for one of the “Big Four” South African banks. Thirteen years ago I resigned to be a full-time mom. My husband and I decided together it would be better if I was at home to support my children. By 2009, it was becoming tough with only one income in the household, so I started looking for work but instead of taking a job, I decided to study to become a teacher.

It wasn't a new idea. I had always wanted to be a teacher and when I finished matric I was planning on going to a teacher training college. The bank was hiring at the time so I decided to start working to earn money immediately, but teaching has always been my passion.

The time was right to follow my passion.

By 2013 I had obtained a Bachelor of Education degree and I am currently in my third year of teaching.

I immediately enjoyed teaching. My first class was my guinea pig – I challenged myself to do well with them. Learner discipline seems to be getting worse because of large classes and 2015, my second year, was difficult. Learners come to school with many social issues – they are affected by drugs, gangsterism and violence in their communities. I try to create a support network in class so that learners can support each other without having to share their individual problems with other learners.

## GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS

When the Zenex Literacy Project started in 2015, it proved to be a massive help – not least because it revived my passion. The project introduced much-needed routine in class. With a solid routine in place, discipline became less of a problem.

This really changed things. When I started teaching, it honestly felt like my head was going to explode for the first three months. I had to teach and do admin – it was overwhelming because as a new teacher you only think about teaching, but very soon you are confronted with massive admin responsibilities. Studies do not afford enough practical experience.

One of the older teachers was very helpful, but experienced teachers cannot always be with you as a mentor as they also have classes to run. The project was very useful because the workshops gave me practical experience of how to teach, such as how to run group-guided reading in class. I do this better now than I did in 2014. The project has shown how I can do things practically, whereas my studies were heavy on theory. I also have a reading corner – which I did not know about before.

## OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Many learners are being taught in a language other than their mother tongue. I learnt something from a colleague, and it really works: I test the language competency at the beginning of the year and then group learners into appropriate groups. I have used Grade 1 and 2 books for some Grade 3 learners, as well as helpful resources from the internet. I gradually move these learners onto easier Grade 3 books. We also expose children to technology – they need these skills in the 21st Century and we have computer lessons at Highlands.

Despite everything, teachers are measured on the performance of their learners, but I believe we should also be measured on more than just academic performance. People should look at the social development of learners as they become well-rounded, confident individuals. As teachers, we have a lot to do with this.

The performance of learners, especially in the early foundation grades, is dependent on a triad of factors: teachers, learners and parents. Teachers need parents to provide support but very often they don't, and the result is a greater burden on the teacher. Many of my colleagues work under very difficult circumstances, but despite the challenges, we get rewarded by watching our learners succeed.



**“I try to create a support network in class so that learners can support each other without having to share their individual problems with other learners.”**



**“The project has shown how I can do things practically, whereas my studies were heavy on theory.”**





## Cebisa Ndlazi

*English*

*Nompendulo High School  
Zwelitsha, Eastern Cape*



# A calling to read

Teaching is a calling; it's about love of the profession. I started in 1985 and have been an English teacher at Nompendulo High School ever since. The number of learners at Nompendulo High has been going down over the years. We used to have over 1 000 learners and 35 teachers. Now we only have 123 learners from Grade 8 to 12, and 13 teachers, including the principal.

Learners prefer schools in town and Nompendulo has been particularly affected by this.

I have been able to stay this long in teaching and have a passion for my work because it is a calling, but I will be retiring in a few years. I plan to start a reading club as I will have a lot of spare time!

When I passed matric I wanted to be a fashion designer, but my parents could not afford the fees. I got a bursary to join a teachers' college and so went the teaching route. I developed a deep love for teaching after I qualified as a teacher. I obtained a Secondary Teacher Diploma and went on to do a BA with Unisa. Through the Zenex Foundation Project, I was able to obtain a B Ed in English in 2011.

## THE ABCs OF PASSION

We tend to think learners do not like to read. I brought a few books from home and put them on the tables and invited learners to read. They sat on the floor and read the books. I would leave them for a while and come back to find them still engrossed in the books!

All we need to do as teachers is to model reading – if you show a love for reading, your learners will mimic you. They even came back and asked when they would have another opportunity to read, because our curriculum does not allow for sufficient reading. The time and resources allocated to reading are insufficient.

If we get reading right, we will start seeing good results overall in education. It does not matter whether children read in English or in their mother tongue, reading broadly is essential for improving education outcomes.

I do not have enough books to sustain their reading. We also cannot give learners of different grades and skill levels the same books to read. At some point, you must have grade appropriate and contextually relevant books.

## DIGITAL WAVE

Currently, the department of education is recruiting learners to do the Advanced Certificates in Teaching (ACT) programme, which takes teachers through a technology system that allows a teacher to teach from a central point. The lesson will be screened in more than one school at the same time and the teacher can engage with the learners in real time.

However, I believe nothing can beat personal contact and using books, instead of tablets. Because of technology, I find spelling mistakes are carried over from the devices to writing in class. We need to find ways of integrating technology with the old ways of teaching.

## KIDS OF TODAY

Learner discipline has worsened over the years. It's not about the numbers, but about the youth of today. You have to chase them to do work. For instance, after writing prelims this year, I immediately gave learners tasks to complete – in the exam room. I knew that I would never be able to get all of them again, once they left the exam room.

As a teacher, you have to be firm with learners. The learners assess the teachers and establish that they can get away with a lot of things with certain teachers and not with others. A teacher has to be many things to different learners. Some learners come from extremely poor backgrounds, and as a teacher I chip in here and there.

I used to be the event manager at the school and I regularly had to deal with issue of a lack of finances, especially in the build up to matric dances. I would borrow, hire, and plead for help from anyone who could assist. I even borrowed some dresses from my own daughters.

Some learners confide in you about their personal lives; you become their counsellor. My faith carries me through it all. These learners see us as role models and as such you have to do justice to your profession and give your best.

## READ, SOUTH AFRICA

I am sacrificing my September holidays to prepare to take learners to the Funda Mzantsi Championship. I have a book club with Grade 9–11 learners, and we plan to be at the championship from 3 to 6 October. We are going to George to compete in a reading and book review competition. We started attending last year and I want to make this an annual thing for the school. The championship will be screened on Morning Live on Monday, 3 October.

Teachers are never recognised for the good they do. We are forever criticised when things go badly in schools. It's not that we want recognition, but when we do get recognised, it is an affirmation that we are making a difference under very difficult circumstances.



**“If you show a love for reading, your learners will mimic you”.**



**“If we get reading right, we will start seeing good results overall in education”.**





## Manzini Zungu

**Grade 8–12 isiZulu**

**Grade 8 and 9 Mathematics**

*Kearsney College, KwaZulu-Natal*



# Paying it forward

## THE LONG ROAD TO SUCCESS

My interest in working with people was shaped by my background. I was raised in a poor family in rural KwaZulu-Natal. My father had three wives and I was born of the first wife. We lost our homestead as a result of tribal wars in our area and ended up in a monastery. The priests offered to help my mother with the education of one of her children and, although I was the fifth child, she chose me. This afforded me the opportunity to study at St Francis College, a good Catholic school.

After passing matric, I was not able to study further due to lack of funds. The Father at St Francis College offered to finance my first year of study and was certain that if I performed well I would be able to secure funding for subsequent years. At the end of my first year, I advised one of my professors that I did not have the funding to continue with my studies and he helped me secure funding for the rest of my studies.

At this stage I was registered for a BSc degree, which allowed me to do one subject outside the faculty. I chose to study isiZulu where I obtained 98%. I decided to continue to the Honours and Masters level and converted to a BSocSci.

My father wanted me to work as an administrator at Home Affairs. At that time, people from villages used to encounter many frustrations with Home Affairs when trying to get permits to go into town. Being a Home Affairs administrator meant the communities would have someone who understood and worked to serve their needs. However, I had aspirations of being a teacher since my high school years. Teaching has always been my first love.

After completing my studies, I discovered that Kearsney College had a vacancy for a teaching post. I applied and was successful.

I love working with people. Because of this passion, one of my most significant roles at Kearsney is managing community service projects. When I joined the school they had outreach programmes in the Eastern Cape and I proposed that we work with communities closer to us in KwaZulu-Natal. As such, we started working with nearby orphanages and children's homes. I was honoured to be nominated by my students as one of the Stars in Education (a television show) and I won an award.

## BECOMING A MENTOR

My favourite teacher at St Francis College was Mr Ngcobo, my isiZulu teacher. The learners were all black children and Mr Ngcobo was the only black teacher; the others were white, mainly nuns. He was very approachable and assisted us when we went to him for support.

Mr Ngcobo's influence on my life shaped my role as a mentor to learners at Kearsney College. A high-fee school like Kearsney can be alienating for some learners, especially those with scholarships and bursaries who come from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The ISASA Mathematics & English Project, funded by Zenex, needed someone to guide the learners participating in the project and support them beyond the academic programmes. I was happy to volunteer for this worthy undertaking. It gives me pleasure to help all the learners, not just those involved in the project. It is important for learners to relate to their mentors and it helps if they feel their mentor is someone who has 'walked in their shoes'.

Mentoring is not only about academics. Young people need support adapting, especially when they move from schools where they were the top learners and then find themselves at the bottom of the class in terms of performance. I have advised many such learners that growth is gradual and that they will see an improvement with each passing year at the school. One of the learners on the programme went on to become dux scholar.

## MEMORY LANE

In the first group of learners, there was a scholarship recipient who struggled with adjusting to the school environment. I acted as mediator between the funder and the learner's parents and explained to them that although they could not pay the fees, they had the responsibility of helping to make the opportunity and new experience work for their child.

The parents, who did not have a car, would ask their child to walk some distance in front of them down the driveway to the school buildings so his peers would not see that he was with them. They felt this would protect their child. After observing this and speaking to the learner and his parents, we agreed that I could transport the learner to and from the school.

## PERSONAL GROWTH

I have learnt a great deal from being part of the ISASA Mathematics & English Project and have grown immensely as a person. Through Zenex, I travelled in an aeroplane for the first time and got to be at a Zenex event with the Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga.

It is incorrect to assume there are no challenges in well-resourced schools. The challenges are different. Language and pronunciation can be a barrier. When you teach in a school where white learners are in the majority, it might be a challenge for some of these learners to engage with a black teacher. However, people come to respect you as a professional.

I dream of opening a school one day with the same ethos as Kearsney, which is more accessible to economically disadvantaged learners. I love teaching – some people have said I should be a headmaster, but I do not want to be in the office. I love the classroom with learners in front of me. It brings me great joy.



**“I have advised many such learners that growth is gradual and that they will see an improvement with each passing year at the school.”**



**“It is incorrect to assume that there are no challenges in well-resourced schools.”**





## Takalani Siala

**Grade 8 – 12 Mathematics**

*Dominican Convent  
Belgravia, Johannesburg*



# The magic of teaching

## THE ROAD TO THE CLASSROOM

I wanted to be a pilot when I was in high school. I had a few bursary offers when I completed Grade 12, but the teaching bursary was the most lucrative. It included a stipend, which meant that I could start helping at home in Limpopo while studying. So I took the bursary.

But as you grow, your priorities change – it was no longer about money. I had been chasing money long enough, and it had become bigger than that. I have no regrets about taking the teaching bursary because I fell in love with teaching from the start. I realised that I wanted to make a difference in young people's lives. I started as a teacher after obtaining my BEd. That was in 2006, while doing Honours part time.

When I started, I gave myself five years of teaching. Now every year feels like my first year in teaching and I have no timeline because I enjoy being in class. I think I love teaching so much because I teach Grade 8 – it is always interesting to watch them grow and flourish as learners. Five years goes by so quickly!

Learners tend to stay in contact for the first year after they leave school but after that their lives take on new directions and priorities. And that is fine – it is not as if they do not appreciate their teachers.

## THE DEEP END AND ITS REWARDS

When I started as a teacher in 2006, I joined Sekolo sa Borokgo, a low-fee independent school in Randburg, Johannesburg – one of the longstanding Zenex partners in the project. I was a mentor in the project and provided overall support to the learners. I was thrown into the deep end, as I was young and could not say no! I had to ensure that project-supported learners passed all their subjects and if they were failing any subject, I had to mediate between the relevant teacher and the learner to find out where the challenges were and how we could improve the learner's performance.

This made my experience of teaching different from the start. I got to understand the whole spectrum of challenges facing learners and teachers. It changed how I saw teaching from the outset as it was not just about seeing the learner from the perspective of the subject I taught.

I learnt how to provide overall support to learners from being part of the project. However, I support all learners equally, not just the project learners. The project showed me the value of having a one-on-one relationship with learners. You cannot support learners if you do not know them as human beings. You need to know their background and communicate with them about matters beyond what you teach.

The school recognised my passion early on and made me a grade coordinator. This role enabled me to collaborate with my colleagues to find ways to support all our learners – it was not just about supporting the project learners.

There are few things more rewarding than seeing the spark in learners' eyes when you show them that you believe in them. Not many people understand how fulfilling this is.

Then, obviously, it is rewarding seeing the results of the project. Being part of the project has been a great motivator for me – seeing how much people are investing in learners to help them realise their potential. You cannot underestimate your role as teacher in making sure that potential is realised.

## **BUILDING DREAMS**

As a teacher, you are shaping people's lives. If you have only one learner who comes to school looking forward to being taught, you must rise to the occasion for that learner. If you come unprepared you are crushing that learner's dream. If I only make a difference in one learner's life, I will have succeeded.

My mathematics teacher in high school was the one teacher who stood out in my schooling days. He was always prepared for class. We could see through the teachers: we could see who just came to class because they had to and those who were committed to their craft. This had a real impact on me as a teacher.

Teaching is not always easy. Sometimes there is resistance from learners. Some learners do not want to open up and don't want anybody to know anything about them. If I just went to class to teach mathematics this wouldn't frustrate me. However, I try to understand my learners as people, and as such I take on a lot as a teacher.

That being said, nothing is more fulfilling than being a teacher. Zenex supported a learner who came from an extremely poor background. The learner went on to become dux scholar at Dominican Convent. This was just magic – I celebrated this learner's success. This girl spoke openly about her life and background, and she made it clear that she came to school to do well so she could lift herself and her family out of poverty. She was so focused, she put me to shame – I was not that focused as a learner. Learners such as these inspire you.



**“it was no longer about the money . . I realised that I wanted to make a difference in young people's lives”**



**“There are a few things more rewarding than seeing the spark in learners' eyes when you show them that you believe in them”.**





## Nonkululeko Mabhida

*Grade 8–12 Physical Science*

*Ogwini Comprehensive Technical  
High School, Umlazi, KwaZulu-Natal*



# The pursuit of positive difference

## THE DAY TEACHING CHOSE ME

I wanted to go into engineering. I had done a diploma in Electrical Engineering and was working on Design in Engineering when I needed part-time work because of financial constraints. It was then that I found part-time work at Ogwini as a science teacher in 2008. Although this work enabled me to pay my fees and obtain my qualification, you could say that teaching chose me!

It just felt right, and life was more stable. We started seeing real improvements in the performance of learners in science and that's when I made the decision to stay and make a real positive difference in learners' lives.

## WALKING THE EXTRA MILE WITH INKANYEZI

I had a realisation early on that learners make it in education through the support of others. When I was a learner, I went through a very difficult period. When I was in Grade 5, my parents went through a divorce and it was very difficult for me. Later, my dad passed away. However, I had teachers who believed in me and supported me and I was able to stick it out through the hard times.

So, I have always gone the extra mile as a teacher and I felt that the Inkanyezi project could add to building my resume personally, as well as add the extra support learners needed. I also managed the process of starting a science club at the school.

I felt we could benefit from the extra help and support from the project and share it more widely with colleagues from neighbouring schools. The sharing can be culturally and academically enriching for learners and teachers alike.

In the project you hear from experts how to deal with a range of aspects of teaching. The workshops were not only linked to subject content, but also touched on broader issues such as neuroscience where we looked at how the mind works. Having an understanding of such matters helps you understand how best to support learners, as it gives you a broad overview of various factors that all interlink with teaching.

## TOOLS OF THE TRADE

The presentation on neuroscience was very enlightening and inspiring for me. But there were also other fascinating workshops all aimed at giving us the tools necessary to be the best possible teachers. We had a workshop on various methods to hold learners' attention, as well as activities designed to assist in enhancing memory.

This made me realise we may think better resourced schools have an advantage over poorer schools, but we are actually dealing with similar learners. Learners in wealthy schools may come from families with money, but these parents may seldom be around to support their children. So what I took out of this was that successful teaching is more about how we as teachers support our learners in class, rather than about resources and money.

## PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

The project is demanding, and because of this I am now studying project management. This will help me in the short term and also allow me to create or manage similar projects in the future. I was also able to use my engineering skills in the Science Club and wove science into everyday experiences.

Through the Inkanyezi project, I have been able to share experiences with my peers – even older, more experienced teachers. In my interactions with colleagues, I don't go in with the attitude of "I know better", but rather "I want to learn from you", and then I share some of what I learned through the project and elsewhere.

I am passionate about developing teachers. Because of this I do not see myself teaching in the classroom for very long. I feel I want to be out of the classroom in order to develop teachers. Helping a range of teachers will allow a greater reach to learners who need it most. It is only through having good teachers that we can achieve excellent learner performance broadly.



**“The sharing can be culturally and academically enriching for learners and teachers equally.”**



**“It is only through having good teachers that we can achieve excellent learner performance broadly.”**





### **Bilal Mohamed**

*Grade 10, 11 and 12  
Physical Science*

*Ridge Park College, KwaZulu-Natal*



# Live to learn

I am incredibly fortunate to have been part of the Zenex Inkanyezi Project since its inception at Ridge Park College in 2009. The project involves tutoring learners selected by Zenex. We do the tutoring on Saturdays and after school. It all depends on the needs of the learners. I am very proud that Zenex has afforded me the opportunity of presenting at teacher workshops. The cherry on the cake was presenting at the South African Basic Education Conference in 2014 in Gauteng!

## **FINDING OUR FEET**

When Zenex arrived at the school to present the project, I had no idea what it was all about, but saw it as an opportunity to climb on board with something that truly matters. After all these years, I still have a burning passion for teaching and it was inspiring to know there was an opportunity to give back. I jumped at the opportunity.

I've always maintained that I'm a learner first. We, as teachers, still need to do so much learning. The educator workshops were invigorating and a tremendous learning opportunity. After 25 years of teaching it is easy to get into a rut, into a routine of monotony with no passion, but this project was a catalyst to get back into the groove and I loved it. I still love it. If I am still around in ten years, I would want to be part of this project.

It was difficult to get the new programme going at first because the learners saw it as extra lessons. They saw it simply as reinforcement and not something strategic. And so it was a gradual but very rewarding process of making them realise they were receiving more than just tutoring; that the skills they were receiving would not only equip them for their schooling, but stay with them long after school and into adult life.

As time passed they started warming to the project, but this presented a new difficulty. What we were doing with the Zenex project was not being continued or supported by other teachers.

## **BUILDING BRIDGES**

We were fortunate though. We have an internal staff-development programme at our school on Friday afternoons and it was in a number of these sessions that we were given the opportunity to

present to the other staff. At times there was a sense of “I am not part of the project, so why should I do that kind of thing?” But to me it was definitely worthwhile and many teachers have benefited in that they have been using what we shared with them. I also use the opportunity to talk to colleagues and share information in casual settings.

For the programme to work, there must be commitment. Part of this is a time commitment. Sometimes there is reluctance when you ask a teacher to come in and do extra work after school or on a Saturday.

Commitment comes from passion. Passion will mean you receive reward from the gift you give to learners. It is a personal thing, but I think if you have a passion for teaching, for educating, watching the clock doesn't matter – we were working six-day weeks regularly. And this commitment came with other rewards, too. It allowed us to interact with other, similarly passionate people who we would otherwise not have met. It was wonderful to share with them and develop bonds, and we are still in contact.



**“There has to be a commitment and that commitment will come from passion.”**

## THE ROAD TO CHALK BOARD

I love teaching. However, the road to teaching started as a purely financial decision. I received a bursary to go into teaching and so that is what I did. Once I was there I realised this was wonderful and I could not see myself doing anything else!

It is incredibly rewarding to see learners' progress. When you bump into a former student and see where they are and how they have progressed, and that you played a part in their journey, it is just so wonderfully rewarding!

I cannot see myself doing anything else but if I changed what I was doing now, I'd go teach at primary school level to get a sense of how different it is at that phase. I think primary school needs the best teachers. In high school we often say that the children coming up from primary school are not well-prepared. I would like to work in a primary school to see what I could offer, but also what I could learn.

## SELF-REGULATION

Despite all the technology available, there is a frightening struggle with mathematics and even basic English. Some learners have to overcome immense struggles. For instance, two parents working full-time is different from when I was a child. When I was a child I would get home and know my mom would be there to meet me. Most children now never experience that. The family and social environment has changed so much and that has had an impact on education and the learning environment.

And so, for the Zenex project, you want to get your learners to the point where they become self-regulating. In other words, if I am not at school today, what do my learners do? Is it a free lesson? Are they totally dependent on me or can they do work on their own? The vision is to create self-regulated learners.



**“I needed to come to the realisation that I don't know everything there is to know about teaching. I needed to get back into the habit of learning”.**

## LEARNING TO LEARN

I am eternally grateful that this opportunity presented itself because there is definitely going to be a long-lasting effect. For instance, even though the Zenex project had selected learners, others benefitted too. At our school, we tried not to differentiate too much between the Zenex–Inkanyezi group and the rest. Because of this, I think the others benefitted even if they don't know it. I share skills with my other learners as well as in my classroom environment. I tell them what I learnt at Saturday workshops.

I needed to come to the realisation that I don't know everything there is to know about teaching. I needed to get back into the habit of learning and the impact has been wonderful.





## Busi Sishi

*Agricultural Sciences*

*Ogwini Comprehensive High School,  
Umlazi, KwaZulu-Natal*



# Taking education personally

I started with the Zenex–Inkanyezi Project in 2009. I had no idea what the project was about – we were advised that the school would be part of a project. There was an appeal for coordinators, so I applied. Here in the township we never had projects such as these. It has been a fantastic learning curve. At the beginning I had never worked with a budget. Here there were huge amounts of money and I was responsible for how this money was spent. The way I saw it then was that this job needed an accountant or business manager. How could I do this? I am grateful to Wendy Heard who took me under her wing and taught me the basics of budgeting. I learnt how to track costs and expenditure, as well as track the project. It was a lot of admin work and entailed a lot of commitment, not to mention the reports. It started out as a daunting task, but I managed to do it and I have not looked back.

### **READY, STEADY, GO**

We looked through the document that said Zenex wanted to make a difference in schools, especially with Mathematics, Science and English. In my experience, learners struggle with Mathematics and Science. However, I found this is more a case of them having an attitude problem – a little bit like a mental block – when it comes to Mathematics and Science.

We have 70, 80, 90 learners in a class and we had to choose 10 learners who would have one teacher focusing exclusively on them. In a school of 3 100 learners, that kind of individual attention is a luxury. It was quite difficult to sort a group of more than 80 into 10 who needed help. Nevertheless, we did it and we started remedial work, extra lessons and extension work. On the weekends educators focused on problem areas and really zoned in and helped these learners.

## CASCADING EFFECT

With this kind of individual attention, learners gained a lot as they were able to engage with the tutors on their areas of difficulty. It made a huge difference. You could immediately see the performance of these learners improve. However, the reason I believe so strongly in this project is the difference it has made in the learners who were *not* part of the project. The Inkanyezi group would come in on Saturdays and learn, then pass on that information to their colleagues in other classrooms. The information spread among the learners and that made a difference. I am very proud of having been a part of this.

## AN EQUATION OF LOVE

During this project, something happened that was a real awakening for me. In 2011, my study group had a learner who was going through a very difficult time at home. One day, we got a message that his grandparent was removing him from the school. I was so upset. I thought how can they let this learner lose such a golden opportunity? The grandparent would not budge and was taking the child to go and live in the rural areas. I decided to find this child's grandparent and state my case.

I have never had a problem walking around the township in high heels but where I had to go meet this child's grandparent was a different story. We had to park the car at the end of a hill and do the rest by foot. Loose stones and rocks, we made our way down.

In the beginning the grandparent was firm. I found out that this boy was going through a very difficult time – his mother and father were embroiled in a big fight and the grandparent wanted to take the child out of that environment. Nevertheless, I made my case and fortunately got through to the grandparent.

This taught me something. When you work with children, sooner or later they become yours, almost like a biological child. You always want the best for them, you protect them and help them. I realised that this is what I was doing here. Fortunately, with the project's support we were able to help this boy. It was satisfying.

The project has taught me a lot. It is impossible to describe everything. I learnt so much more than how to budget, how to plan projects and how to write reports. I learnt about the children and I learnt about myself. And the learners – not only did they learn about Mathematics, Science and English, they also gained invaluable life skills. They learnt study skills, intellectual skills and interpersonal skills. Everyone gained something.



**“The reason I believe so strongly in this project is the difference it has made in the learners who were not part of the project”.**



**“When you work with children, sooner or later they become yours, almost like a biological child”.**





## Themba Moyake

**Grade 11 and 12 English**

*Mpilisweni Secondary School,  
Katlehong, Gauteng*



# Living my destiny

## STARTING POINT

I have a post-graduate degree in African Literature. My undergraduate majors were in African Literature and Political Studies and I did my Masters in Literature. I wanted to teach after the experience of working at an NGO and teaching for eight years, so I enrolled for a Post-Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) at UNISA. They wanted me to do basic courses in language again so I did *Teach English as a Foreign Language* (TEFL), a Cambridge University-accredited course through the international House Language Lab in Johannesburg, and was then able to register for the PGCE through UNISA.

Teach South Africa provides training to graduates to prepare them for the teaching assignment and provides ongoing mentoring support to the graduates while they are in the schools. The graduates fill vacant posts in Mathematics, Science or English and are paid a salary (as an unqualified teacher) by the relevant provincial education department. We need more ambassadors in the programme as they do very well – perhaps it has something to do with their existing qualifications, even though they do not have professional teaching qualifications.

I think Teach SA is a very important project; on the ground there are so many gaps in teaching. Interestingly, a recent study suggested that having a teaching qualification does not necessarily make one a good, quality teacher. I think the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is very limited in how they look at qualifications; there are internationally recognised teaching qualifications that are not recognised locally and Teach SA ambassadors have degrees whose value and relevance in the teaching fraternity usually allows them to rise rapidly in the ranks – even to the rank of Head of Department – in their respective schools.

## OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

I am teaching English as a First Additional Language (FAL) to Grade 11 and 12 learners in Katlehong and I am incredibly excited and inspired. I am finding that my TEFL/ Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (CELTA) qualification is helping me, because it is about teaching English to people who learn it as a second language. I have also taught English Home Language for eight years in Soweto through

an NGO called Mphatlalatsane Educational Project. In spite of all of this, I do not have the recognised qualification to teach locally.

Unlike most ambassadors, I had experience in the classroom before joining Teach SA. The day-to-day challenges I encounter when teaching at the FET level include dealing with basic things such as grammar and vocabulary, which are not processed adequately by the learners. Learners have many difficulties because they are undeservedly progressed into higher grades. This and other social ills that plague the economies of the disenfranchised affect our ability as teachers to effect positive change. Even though I have lots of experience, I still find it difficult to accomplish some goals.

I am currently writing a proposal to set up a language lab at the school because I feel there have been years of miseducation that need 21st-century teaching methodologies for adequate redress. For learners to appreciate learning any language they need to hear, listen and speak. I hope the language lab will help. We need a culture where we introduce audio books, pronunciation and model speaking sessions to help learners develop their literacy levels and we need to encourage teachers across the curriculum to teach in standard English. Within the framework of other critical language debates around the country, I have found that students want to debate African ethnicity and embrace African languages at the expense of English. One student once quipped: "I am Xhosa and I am proud of my language, why do I need to learn English?"

My learners' backgrounds vary ethnically, but I look forward to showing them how multilingualism can place them in positions of opportunity. I want to expand their perspective and I plan to continue exposing them to competitions such as the English Olympiad (which I started in 2015) to enrich their learning experiences. I try to design exciting lessons using the smart board but the miseducation most learners have been exposed to in past years proves to be a stumbling block – it is not something that can be changed overnight. Generally, there is not much effort from the learners. We need to guard against this culture of academic apathy.

Installing technology at schools as government policy is good but I think the details of implementation have not been thought through well. Maintenance, insurance and sustainable use of the technological facilities has not been consistently overseen and is usually not introduced with an implementable standard ICT policy. This makes me concerned about how long the technology will be available to students and teachers.

## **READ, READ AND READ!**

I hope to get learners to read a lot more. Because they have a few genres of literature prescribed they are exposed to a diverse range of narratives.

On a personal level, my list of favourite authors is extensive. If I were to choose a favourite writer perhaps I'd settle with Yevgeny Yevtushenko, a Russian author that made an early impression on me. I appreciate Caribbean writers for how they use English. Writers such as Earl Lovelace and VS Naipaul, Beryl Gilroy and Marlon James. In South Africa, Can Temba is my favourite by far. I also dabble in some Japanese writers. Writers like Haruki Murakami, Kenzaburo Oe and recently, Yasunari Kawabata. I like these authors because of how they use language – simply magical. I like lending books to learners as we do not have an extensively functional library at the school.

I will stay in teaching because I think of it as my destiny. Eventually, I would like see myself teaching at universities and I think that all these experiences will add richness to my journey. It is great – from time to time – to get an email from former and current students who tell me that I have had a positive impact on their lives. I love it. I also enjoy assisting them with university applications. Essentially, I like to be of service and I am never able to say no when asked for help. This is my Achilles heel because I end up getting sidetracked trying to play the role of Superman.

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**“I am finding that learners need to hear, listen and speak, and so I am hoping the language lab, audio books, pronunciation and model speaking sessions will assist learners.”**

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**“I will stay in teaching because I think of it as my destiny. Eventually, I would like see myself teaching at university, and all these experiences will add richness to my journey.”**





## Elekanyani Madia

*Grade 10–12 Mathematics*

*Winile Secondary School,  
Katlehong, Gauteng*



# Adding passion, multiplying results

I joined the Teach SA project because of my passion for teaching. I would have been a teacher even if I had not joined the Teach SA project. This passion goes back to my student days when I joined the PUTCO project and was teaching on Saturdays.

At university I became a mathematics tutor because I was very good at it – my mathematics grade was as high as 98%. A fourth year student who needed my help inspired me to pursue this career. She was having difficulty with something I thought was really simple for a fourth year. It was then that I realised that I should apply for a PGCE and become a permanent teacher.

I am very excited about teaching.

I am a Teach SA ambassador. This project is part of the Zenex Foundation, and recruits Mathematics, Science, English and Technology graduates who then commit to teaching in disadvantaged public schools for two years.

### IN THE TRENCHES

I love teaching mathematics even though it does have challenges. The subject is very important and learners are hungry to learn. I teach grades 11 and 12. There are those who cope, but many struggle with the subject because of gaps in their foundation in lower grades. My grade 11 learners are coping better because I started with them in grade 10 – so they have a stronger foundation. Needless to say, I am looking forward to my grade 12 class in 2017. I think they are going to excel.

The school is in a township which means it has the usual challenges associated with a poorer community. Those who appear successful are the gangsters and drug dealers. These people sell

dagga and when learners look at them they don't see a better life or option. I think COSAS could do more in terms of supporting teachers with the shared goal of a better education.

People are trying, though. There is a new principal at the school and he is trying his best to turn things around – for instance, he takes strong action if teachers are not in class.

The environment is not the same as when I went to school. I was also at a township school that was situated in a very poor community – we did not pay fees. This school is around shacks and some learners live alone in these shacks. I do my best to support these learners. We need to convince learners about the value of learning, and this must tie in with general social work. For instance, one of my learners is pregnant and this doesn't stand out as abnormal here.

## **BUILDING FOUNDATIONS**

Despite being in a poor community, I think the school is fairly well equipped. It has a smartboard and a computer lab. I have attended the ICT committees, and feel there is a need for support for the teachers in afternoon workshops because despite a phobia of technology, most teachers really are interested in the advantages of using technology.

The project mentor is really a hands-on person. When I have problems or when I have achieved something, I am able to share with him.

I am the only FET mathematics teacher at my school. The others are mathematics literacy teachers. Through this project, we have created a supportive community of our own. We discuss challenges and work on solutions – now that I am in my second year, I am used to the workshops and, when sitting at a table with mathematics teachers, I learn and grow as a teacher.

I constantly try and improve myself so that I can become an excellent teacher. Even mathematics teachers know very little! So, when I come across a topic in CAPS that I did not do at school or university I have to study it. My PCGE geometry lecturer assists me with prep. This year I went to the Teach SA workshops again, the second time around, just to focus on geometry. I spend time watching videos and browsing YouTube and pick up new and different ways of engaging with learners. It all helps me become a better teacher.

Teaching is not just a job, it is a passion. As teachers we can make our teaching far more interesting when we know our content very well. Then we are able to find exciting and fun ways to teach the learners. I love my job.



**“I love teaching maths even though it does have challenges. The subject is very important and learners are hungry to learn.”**



**I constantly try and improve myself so that I can become an excellent teacher. Even maths teachers know very little!”**





## **Belinda Ncube**

***Grade 8 Mathematics  
Grade 11 and 12 Physical Science***

*Mapetla High School, Soweto,  
Gauteng*



# Changing perceptions

## **ANSWERING THE CALL**

Teaching chose me. It is a calling. I had always considered teaching, but when the time came to study I chose to do a BSc in Environmental Science, which I completed in 2014. As I was approaching the end of my studies, I started looking around at various options for 2015 and I found the TEACH SA project. The project allows me an opportunity to experience teaching for two years with various options and support mechanisms included.

I decided then that I would take up the opportunity to give back to the community. I started teaching in the middle of 2015. You cannot go into teaching for money – you must have passion and a desire to uplift learners.

After a year in teaching it has been challenging, but also fulfilling. I have received positive feedback from learners about how I have changed their perceptions of Mathematics and Physical Science.

It is important to me that I am able to change perceptions about a subject. When I was at school my favourite teacher was my Biology teacher. He made the subject seem so easy and interesting. He showed deep passion for Biology, and I ended up loving the subject.

## **THE VALUE OF SUPPORT**

One of the things that adds to fulfilment in the job is when you are able to improve learners' performance. I was able to do this for Grade 12 Physical Science. It wasn't easy. When I started in June 2015, I was thrown into the deep end. I was given Grade 12 learners who had not had a Physical Science teacher for three months.

I won't lie, at some point I considered giving up, but then I remembered why I chose to go into teaching. The project helped me go the extra mile. I started offering extra classes which turned out to be very popular, with a huge response from the learners.

An enthusiastic learner is half the battle won. At the end of the year the Physical Science pass rate had improved from 52 per cent to 64 per cent! It was a huge affirmation for me.

The project has had a positive impact on my teaching experience. We did two weeks of training that covered elements of the Post-Graduate Diploma in Education, such as assessment, preparing files and the code of conduct. The programme coordinators did well to cover crucial aspects of classroom practice in a short space of time before we started teaching. However, it did not end there. We also receive classroom visits and mentorship support and have a WhatsApp group where the Ambassadors share their experiences.

Obviously, it's not all plain sailing. Completing the curriculum is the biggest challenge; because there is a lot to cover I have initiated extra lessons with learners. Grade 11s and 12s respond well to extra classes as there is a sense of urgency to pass in the final years of school, whereas the Grade 8 learners have not been too keen on extra work.

## DIGITAL WAVE

Smartboards, laptops and projectors are useful in class. We do not have to spend time writing because we can show slides and play videos – this has eased some of the time burden for teachers.

Our school is part of the Gauteng Education Department's tablet initiative. We have found that the technology has worked well for us. We can even transfer question papers via Bluetooth to the tablets.

There were challenges using the technology at first – learners would start doing other things on the tablets such as playing games, listening to music and watching video clips instead of following lessons. I have since adopted a strategy of asking them to put their tablets away when I teach, in order to avoid any distractions.

## HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships with older, more experienced teachers is a mixed bag. Sometimes I find I cannot raise matters with them as it comes across as if I think I know better. Some may not accept the opinions of younger teachers, and are not as receptive to technology, but many older teachers are trying to move with the times.

When it comes to the classroom, learners can sense if a teacher really cares. I speak to them about their lives, their goals and their ambitions, and they open up. They become motivated when they see that someone really cares for them and has their best interests at heart.

Recently, a Grade 8 learner, who will be moving to another school in 2017, told me that she will remember me because she understands Mathematics and has come to enjoy the subject. She said I was responsible for the progress she has made. That was incredibly fulfilling to hear.



**“It is important to me that I am able to change perceptions about a subject.”**



**“When it comes to the classroom, learners can sense if a teacher really cares.”**





## **Tiisetso Rabolao**

***Grade 8 Mathematics  
Grade 9 Natural Science***

*Moditela Middle School,  
Hammanskraal, Gauteng*



# Teaching in South Africa

## **TO TEACH OR NOT TO TEACH?**

I have a BSc in Geology, which I obtained in 2013. Initially I did not want to be a teacher, which is why I did not do a Bachelor's degree in Education. However, I tutored students throughout university and I started to enjoy teaching. That's why I applied to be part of the TEACH South Africa programme, and was selected in 2014.

I underwent training for two weeks at the end of 2014 and started teaching in 2015. I enjoy working with young people. To educate them is not just about academics, it is about life in general and what they should expect from life after school.

Teaching has been very challenging. No one and nothing can prepare you for the challenges you will face in class, especially with the learners' performance in mathematics and their perceptions of the subject. Problems with mathematics start right at the beginning with perceptions of the subject being difficult and for "intelligent" learners only. As a result, most learners have not understood the basics of the subject at all: some cannot add, multiply or divide without a calculator in Grade 8.

Some learners pretend to understand when you teach. It is only when you mark that you realise the extent of the problem. Then you realise you have to start with the basics before you can even think about starting with the curriculum.

I struggled in my first year of teaching in 2015 and decided this year that I would dedicate the beginning of the academic year to doing the basics. It was a lot easier when they got some of the basics right and learners have been performing much better this year.

## BECOMING AN AMBASSADOR

Over and above the two-week training before we start in schools, TEACH South Africa provides ongoing support in the form of classroom visits and coaching and materials and tools to enhance learning and make teaching easier.

We register for the two-year Post-Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) as part of the programme. I began my PGCE studies halfway into my second year of teaching. I will complete it in June 2017. It delves deeper into teaching methodology, and covers aspects such as the curriculum and how to prepare lesson plans. However, it is up to the individual to adapt and implement it in the real world because when you are in the classroom, you learn that reality is sometimes different from theory.

## REAL-LIFE IMPACT OF TEACHERS

Learners become attached to teachers. They come to me even when I do not teach them. Some even come to me with their personal problems, so even if you do not teach them, you can still have an impact on their lives.

So many parents do not have any interest in their children's education. When I call them to discuss their children's progress, I often get a sense that they are not interested. But even if parents do not care, I strive to have a positive impact on the learners. I have realised that if the teacher shows they care about the development of the child, the child will push harder to live up to the teacher's expectations.

It is difficult to motivate learners in tough times, where learners may look at their peers who may have completed matric but are jobless. I tell my learners they must always have a qualification on the ready and that when economic conditions turn, they will have to be ready to grab the opportunities that arise. I also tell them that education is the key to changing their current circumstances, and that they should never give up on getting a good education and post-school qualifications.

My science teacher in high school was my favourite teacher. She was strict and never had favourites. She treated us as equals, irrespective of our race and our abilities. I went to a mixed race school and was an average learner who scored 50 to 60 per cent in most of my subjects. She motivated me and always explained that no one is stupid and that if I just added more time and effort into my studies, I could achieve 70 or 80 per cent. As a result, I improved with every grade and did a lot better than many other learners in matric. I realised then what motivating and believing in learners can do for them, and as such, I adopt the same approach with my learners.



**“I realised that if the teacher shows that they care about the development of the child, the child will push harder to live up to the teachers' expectations.”**

*... continued overleaf*





## DIGITAL WAVE

I believe the old teaching methods work better – you know, the chalkboard and red pen! I want to sit down with a learner and explain things, rather than referring them to an electronic device. That way I can suss out whether they understand and need more help or not. Now we have to use technology – our school is one of the schools that received tablets from the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE). The tablets are helpful in terms of demonstrating experiments we cannot do in class because we do not have the apparatus to do practical experiments. They see these experiments on the tablets and then relate better when you teach.

A good thing about the GDE tablets is that they only have the programmes needed for the subjects we teach, so learners will not be distracted by other information on the device. For instance, they cannot access the internet and cannot play games. So it helps in holding the attention of up to 50 learners in a class.

## BACK TO THE FUTURE

Our school has been adopted by UNISA and we have been working closely with BEd students from UNISA over the past two years. We have attended seminars for mathematics teachers and are encouraged to study and not to stagnate as teachers.

I plan to complete the PGCE then go on to do Honours and Masters in mathematics education. I plan to be either an academic, lecturing in university, or to be involved in curriculum development. I am passionate about changing the curriculum, as I realise certain things were developed with good intentions but do not work in class.

## DELIVERING UNDER PRESSURE

Older teachers have been frustrated by continuous changes in the system. They have had to constantly grow themselves academically and technologically and are struggling to keep up with the pressure. We have lots of teachers resigning or going to teach at primary school level.

It is because of the pressure for results. If learners fail, the officials and the public are of the view that you have failed as a teacher. In general, few people stand up for teachers as everything is about the learners and their results. Teachers can become demotivated and we have to realise that only motivated teachers can motivate learners.

Being in the classroom for the past year and half has opened my eyes to the realities of teaching in South Africa. Teaching can be frustrating and emotionally draining. The inequalities are huge – which I see now, having been educated at a better resourced school. But the rewards are fulfilling. In the end, I want my legacy to be that I developed well-rounded learners with a good education, knowledge and skills.



**“Being in the classroom for the past year and half has opened my eyes to the realities of teaching in South Africa.”**



# ZENÉX

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