

Book Review

To be published in June 2017 issue of *AMESA Journal Learning and Teaching Mathematics*

Mathematical Thinking in the Lower Secondary Classroom. Edited by Christine Hopkins, Ingrid Mostert & Julia Anghileri. Cambridge University Press, 2016. ISBN: 978-1-316-50362-1 (paperback)

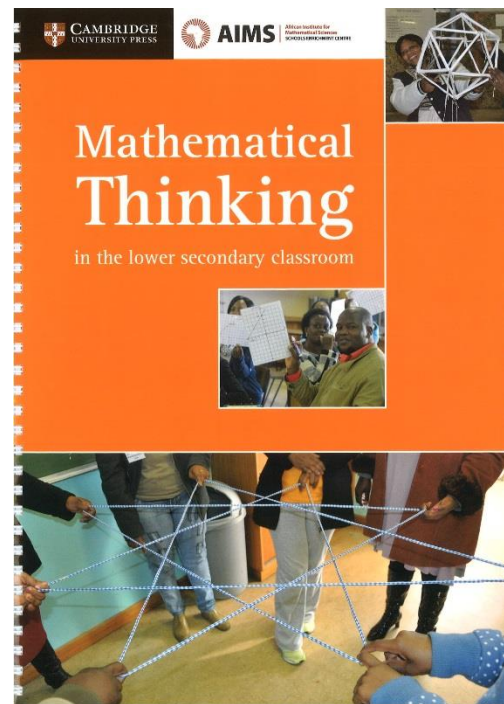
Reviewed by Duncan Samson

Mathematical Thinking in the Lower Secondary Classroom is the joint output of a team of lecturers and teacher trainers from around the world who teach courses in South Africa under the auspices of AIMSSEC, the African Institute for Mathematical Sciences Schools Enrichment Centre. The ideas presented in the book were originally developed for AIMSSEC's flagship Mathematical Thinking course – a 10 day residential course for educators who want to think more deeply about the way learners learn.

The activities described in the book draw on ideas of best practice from around the globe – Europe, USA, India, Australia, New Zealand and Africa – the result being a collection of rich activities that exemplify ways of teaching and learning that are universally relevant. The style of teaching embodied by the book is one of active participation, encouraging learning through problem solving and guided reinvention.

The purpose of *Mathematical Thinking in the Lower Secondary Classroom* is to support teachers in developing a deep understanding of the mathematics they teach, and in developing more effective ways of teaching. The book is structured to encourage professional development through collaboration, exploration, discussion and reflection. The book provides detailed guidance that should enable teachers to run their own teacher development workshops without the need of an expert leader. The underlying philosophy of the book is that teachers who are themselves learners are better equipped to help their students to be successful.

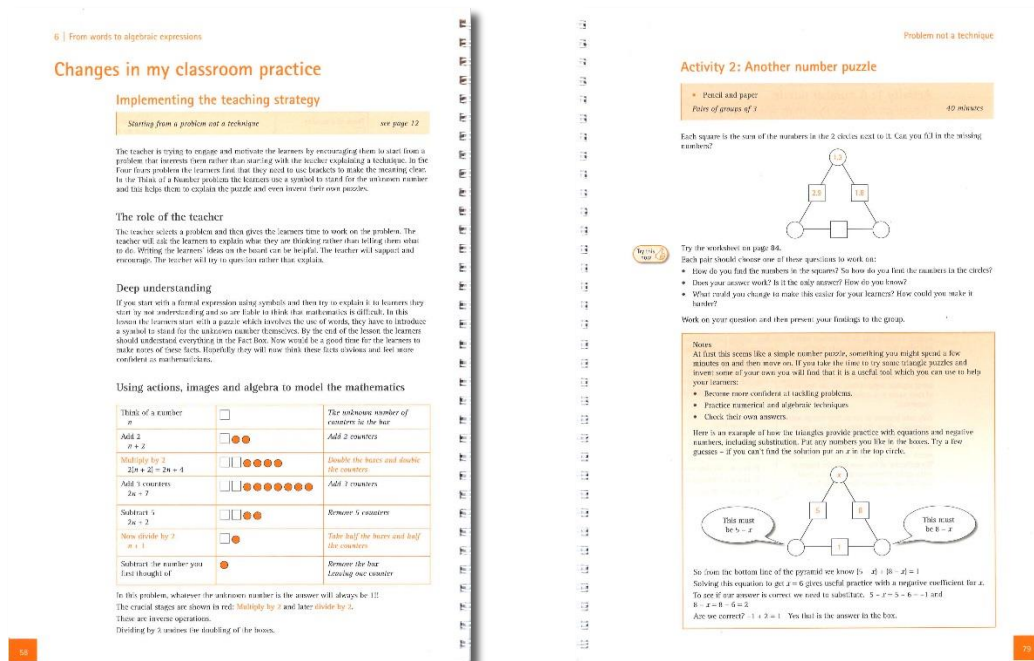
Each of the 20 chapters in the book presents an idea that can be used as the basis of a teacher-driven workshop. Each chapter is split into three parts – (i) *Workshop Activities for Teachers*, (ii) *Classroom Activities for Learners* and (iii) *Changes in my classroom practice*. The first part provides activities that the workshop participants should engage with, explore and discuss. The second part provides classroom activities that teachers can utilise in the planning and preparation of their lessons. The third part focuses on particular teaching strategies that complement the various activities – these include focusing on practical, hands-on and visual learning styles, the benefit of starting from a problem rather than a technique, as well as practical suggestions regarding questioning, classroom discussion, and getting feedback from learners.



Upon completion of the workshop each teacher then carries out the planned classroom activities with their own learners. A useful follow-up is then to begin the next professional development session with a discussion and critical reflection on the combined experiences of the group. This could perhaps be used to refine and extend the classroom activities. Importantly, having a formal follow-up develops the important habit of becoming a reflective as well as reflexive educator.

The authors of *Mathematical Thinking in the Lower Secondary Classroom* have extensive experience of teaching in developing countries around the globe. As such, one of the hallmarks of the book is the promotion of ideas that make use of readily available and cost-free resources.

While the primary idea of the book is to promote and support collaborative teacher-run workshops through the development of communities of practice, it is still an extremely useful book to delve into as an individual. Whether a fledgling teacher new to the profession or an established practitioner with years of experience, every mathematics educator is sure to find something of value in this useful book.



While I was working through *Mathematical Thinking in the Lower Secondary Classroom* I was serendipitously preparing my own Grade 8 workbook for the upcoming term. I found some of the ideas in the book pertaining to the introduction of algebra particularly useful, and I have adapted and developed some of these into what I hope will be a meaningful first glimpse for my Grade 8s into the value of algebra as a mathematical idea.

In addition to *Mathematical Thinking in the Lower Secondary Classroom*, aimed specifically at Senior Phase teachers, companion volumes for FET teachers (*Mathematical Thinking in the Upper Secondary Classroom*), for Intermediate Phase teachers (*Mathematical Thinking in the Upper Primary Classroom*) and Foundation Phase teachers (*Mathematical Thinking in the Lower Primary Classroom*) are in preparation.

For further information about AIMSSEC and its various activities visit <http://www.aimssec.ac.za>. Follow the Professional Development link for information about the various courses offered by AIMSSEC, or follow the Resources link for learning activities, interactive mathematical challenges, forums for teachers to exchange ideas, as well as selected further reading.