



**Africa A+  
Schools**

Engaging Curious Minds

South Africa

# Annual Report 2022



Africa A+ Schools

1/1/2022

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## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

It is with great pleasure we present this report for our past year of activity, another big step forward for Africa A+ Schools in South Africa. The past three years have been very challenging for all of us, with restrictions on our normal way of life and, lately, price increases for basic goods, such as fuel and food, that hurt everyone, but in particular children all over the country.

Despite these challenges, A+ have grown organically as planned, and has strengthened its capabilities and resilience as an organisation throughout these tough times. Projects and activities have continued to be delivered as per the project plans, albeit with corrections in mode of communication, virtual meetings when appropriate and a general preparedness to be accommodating of needs as they arise. But it has been done!

During the past couple of years, we have not only continued with projects already started, we have also started new ones during this time. The A+ Schools model has now reached the stage where the organisation is “training the trainers”, making sure we leave a lasting impression in our project schools and that the creativity and joy that comes from following the A+ model is permeated in the areas where we conduct our work.

Something does not come from nothing. I know personally that all our team members are emotionally devoted to create better learning conditions for children all over the country and it is with great honour and humility I say; thank you for all your great efforts! Without your dedication and relentless energy and drive, A+ Schools would not be where it is!

**Thomas Petersson**

**Chairman**

## MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

A recent national report, *Thrive by Five* (2022) reinforced the need to provide quality early childhood education, because 65% of children in South Africa are not thriving! Given the high levels of poverty, this is not surprising, however it does mean that NPOs such as Africa A+, must continue to step up and inspire teachers to deliver. I am pleased to say that that is exactly what we do best. Our motto, ***Engaging curious minds***, was evident throughout the year at every workshop we delivered. We started at source, namely with the teachers, and helped them to tap into their creativity and understand how to bring out the same emotions and skills in their learners. This report describes our exciting activities and the positive responses received.

A SARAECCE e-publication available on our website entitled *Voices from the Early Childhood Care and Education Field in South Africa*, contains two chapters illustrating the work of A+ and our contribution to the field. We are excited to see what 2023 has in store as we continue to grow and engage curious minds.

**Dr Giulietta Harrison**

**Executive Director**



## THE A+ NETWORK, PROGRAMMES AND SERVICES

A+ was birthed in Oklahoma, USA, and started in South Africa in the Western Cape. At present A+ works primarily in the Eastern Cape and Western Cape. Please visit our website to learn more about our approach. <https://www.nationalaplusschools.org/>

### NATIONAL A+ SCHOOLS CONSORTIUM (NASC)

Africa A+ Schools is the first internationally accredited member of the NASC outside of the USA. It includes Oklahoma A+ Schools, North Carolina A+ Schools, Arkansas A+ Schools and Louisiana A+ Schools. Anya Morris and Dr Giulietta Harrison participated online at the NASC meetings throughout the year to share our model of A+ implementation.

### AFRICA A+ WESTERN CAPE

There is a strong A+ footprint in Cape Town. Five Africa A+ preschools that have been with Africa A+ since its inception as a pilot project in 2015, are located within the Cape Town metro.

As the five Cape Town A+ preschools have completed their three-year A+ apprenticeship, each school submits requests for A+ workshops and mentoring as they need it. In May 2022, A+ facilitated a workshop for 43 Chameleon Campus teachers in Athlone, Cape Town.



Carole Scott facilitating a workshop for the Chameleon Campus teachers.

For 2023, A+ has planned a one-day Winter Conference in Cape Town for the five A+ Western Cape preschools and facilitators. Gerard's and Fish Hoek Pre-primary have requested A+ workshops for early 2023.

## AFRICA A+ EASTERN CAPE

Africa A+ has begun its third year of working on the Kouga Windfarm Trust ECD project in collaboration with the Centre for Early Childhood Development (CECD). A+ and CECD have a productive and successful collaboration: A+ works with the principals and teachers to provide a quality early learning programme no matter the context that each ECD finds itself in, and CECD upgrades the ECD centre structures, ensures health, safety, and nutrition, provides equipment for active learning, supported with good governance.

### The beneficiaries

A+ is currently training and supporting 38 ECD centres, 163 staff and 1434 children in the Kouga Municipality, including the Humansdorp, Oyster Bay and St Francis Bay areas. These ECD centres are divided into three cohorts: 12 ECD centres in Cohort 1 in August 2020; another 13 ECD centres in Cohort 2 in August 2021; and 13 new ECD centres in Cohort 3 in August 2022.

### A+ training

A+ completed seven field trips in 2022 to facilitate the professional development of the staff and supported on-site implementation at the 38 ECD centres.

The seven field trips included the following:

1. A+ is developing a team of nine local facilitators to sustain the 38 ECD centres' development after the end of the project in 2025. In 2022 the local facilitators' professional development programme included six three hour workshops, a one day Facilitators' Retreat, shadowing the A+ facilitators during visits to ECD centres, and co-facilitating workshops and conferences with the A+ facilitators. The purpose of developing a team of local facilitators is to support the 38 Kouga ECD centres when the five year ECD project comes to an end.



The local facilitators at the 2022 Facilitators' Retreat.



Local facilitators observing an A+ facilitator modelling teaching at an ECD centre.



Local facilitators co-facilitating at the five day Cohort 3 training in September 2022.

2. A+ is enabling ECD centres to deliver a quality early learning programme that prepares children for schooling and life regardless of the context that a community finds themselves in. This involves the development of creativity, problem-solving, critical thinking, communication and collaboration (21<sup>st</sup> Century skills) in teachers and children. A+ takes a whole school approach (all the staff from each centre are invited to participate) as successful implementation is more likely if everyone is involved. In 2022 A+ facilitated the following:

- **Five days of professional development for the 13 Cohort 3 ECD centres.** The five days introduced Cohort 3 to the A+ approach to teaching and learning.

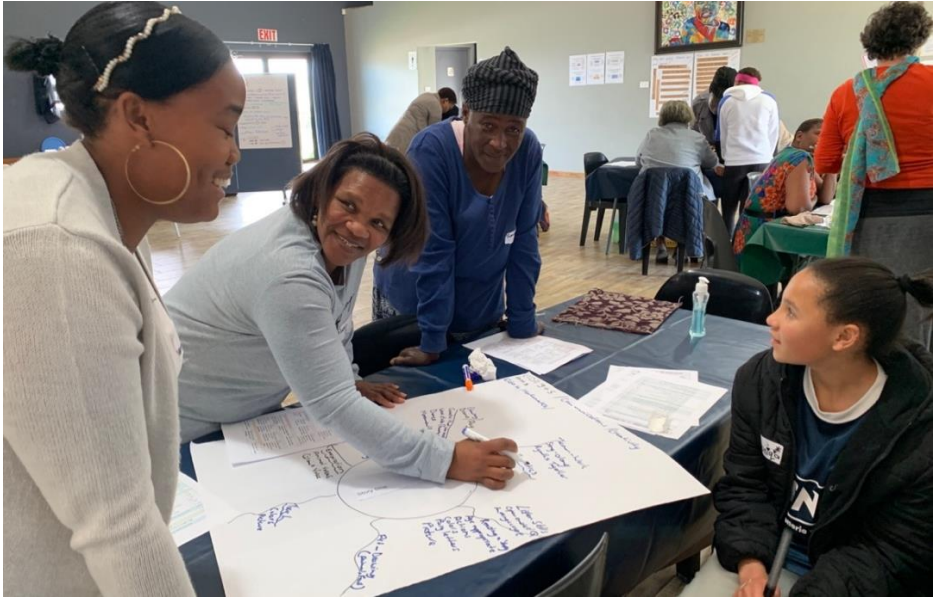


Cohort 3’s professional development.

- Two and three days of professional development for the 12 Cohort 1 and the 3 Cohorts.



Cohort 1’s professional development: 3-4 October 2022.



Cohort 1’s professional development: 3-4 October 2022.



Cohort 2's professional development: 5-7 October 2022



Cohort 2's professional development: 5-7 October 2022

- Seventeen three-hour *workshops* were facilitated by A+ for Cohorts 1 and 2 in 2022. These arts-enriched workshops focused on nurturing creativity, making links with the curriculum, and enabling the participants to implement quality learning experiences at their ECD centre.
- *On-site support*: A+ visited each Cohort 1 and 2 ECD centre two or more times during 2022 to model how to facilitate children's learning. The Kouga facilitators accompanied and observed A+ in action as part of their professional development.
- A+ conducted an *on-site teaching and learning survey* at each Cohort 3 centre in September 2022 before the onset of their professional development in September.



## Monitoring and Evaluation

An initial survey at each ECD centre serves as a baseline against which progress is measured each year. Follow up teaching and learning surveys were conducted at the Cohort 1 and 2 centres in June 2022. The data was captured online and analysed by the Centre for Early Childhood Development (CECD). The final report by CECD shows that 23 of the 25 Cohort 1 and 2 centres, are making steady positive progress in implementing change.

### A+ provided online support throughout 2022

**Kouga facilitators:** A+ facilitated monthly telephone calls to individual facilitators as a way of sharing information and understanding the local context. A dedicated WhatsApp Facilitators' group has proved to be an effective platform for organising events and communicating with the local facilitators.

**ECD Centres:** WhatsApp was the most effective way of communicating with the participants via specific WhatsApp groups (Cohort 1, Cohort 2, Cohort 3, Facilitators, Grade R, and the Kouga ECD project). A+ posted info-bites (small bundles of pedagogical information) each month on WhatsApp. Illustration 1 below is an info-bite posted in August 2022; the purpose of this posting was to share ideas on what to do with the children, to affirm the ECD centres who have implemented, and to motivate others to do the same.

#### **Example (text plus illustrations): Info bite from 19 August 2022:**

Happy Friday morning everyone 😊 Here are some photos (taken at ECD centres we visited in August) that demonstrate A+ in action 🙌🌟



**Group work in action** at Masikhule. The children are sorting bottle tops according to colour.

(Example continued on next page.)



Teachers actively engaged in **teaching children through movement and play** (the natural way for children to learn).



The teacher is down at the **children's level**, taking an interest and talking to the children.



**Drawing:** something children need to do every day.



Making learning fun by using their **outdoor space for teaching**.

## New activities in 2022

**Grade R support workshops** were introduced in June 2022. Nine ECD centres have Grade R learners but there is no support from the Department of Basic Education and the Department of Social Development in terms of training and the provision of curriculum materials, hence A+ providing this type of support.

**Staff development workshops.** The high turnover of teachers at ECD centres (particularly in poorer schools where salaries are low) undermines the implementation of a quality learning programme. When A+ trained teachers leave to find better paying work, they are replaced by untrained teachers which sets the ECD centres back to entry level. A+ invited principals to a meeting on the 9<sup>th</sup> September 2022 to discuss the matter. The 18 participants attending the meeting endorsed the idea. The first workshop will be facilitated on 9th February 2023.

## Highlights from the Kouga Windfarm Trust ECD project

**Changing mind-sets** and entrenched behaviour is not easy and it takes time. We are, however, seeing a shift in the ECD centres from a 'one size fits all cookie cutter' approach to providing a stimulating and more diverse learning environment. Photos below illustrate this shift at one ECD centre:



In 2020: children sitting at tables with a worksheet.



The same school in September 2022: implementing what they have learned: joyful hands-one experiences that let children collaborate, lead, share, talk, move, imagine, explore, take initiative, create, and problem-solve.

Carole Scott has been an inspiring facilitator and driver behind the *A+ iZinto Centre in Humansdorp* which offers interesting materials for making teaching and learning meaningful and enjoyable. The ECD centres are coalescing into an ECD community that supports, collaborates and shares resources and ideas with one another.

### Challenges at the Kouga Windfarm Trust ECD project

The petrol price has increased more than expected (an unforeseen outcome of international conflict) making transport and travel costs beyond the Kouga Windfarm ECD project budget. Non-payment of government ECD subsidies impacted on the teachers' morale and delivery of their services. Gangsterism has become prevalent in Humansdorp; there has been a rise in break-ins at ECD centres and the community feels unsafe.

### Looking ahead

A+ looks forward to another productive year in 2023 collaborating with the Centre for Early Childhood Development on the Kouga Windfarm ECD Trust project. In 2023 A+ will be doing another seven field trips taking us midway into Year 4 of the five year Kouga Windfarm Trust ECD project. We are expecting and looking forward to each ECD centre implementing a better quality early learning programme and environment with the support of the local facilitators who will be taking a greater role in facilitating workshops, modelling teaching, and encouraging implementation.

The most satisfying aspect of the Kouga Windfarm Trust ECD project is the beneficiaries' enthusiasm and engagement. The following written comments are in the participants' own words:

- *I have learned so many things that I never could have thought of.* (Nicolette)
- *Jy kom leeg en jy gaan weg altyd vol.* (You come empty and you always go away full.) (Natashia)
- *My critical thinking evolved and expanded.* (Carla)
- *I have built more confidence and, I like myself* (Vemoline)
- *It gave me the spirit that I can be a teacher to the children and loving one another. I am a better person.* (Noludwe)
- *There is a lot I have learnt because when starting here I didn't know a thing.* (Nomqgibelo)

**Anya Morris**  
**Programme Director at Africa A+ Schools**  
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## TRAINING IN MALUNGENI, EASTERN CAPE

After two successful workshops in Malungeni in 2021, Dr Xapile requested that Africa A+ submit a proposal for a three-year plan that would include schools in and around the Malungeni area. The proposal included four visits for the first year. Dr Xapile secured funding for the first two visits with the balance to be funded in 2023.

During the first visit a baseline study was conducted at five Malungeni schools:

- Libhongo Pre-School.
- Ngqeleni Village Pre-School
- Botani Pre-School
- Mtengwane Preschool
- Mdeni Preschool.

The plan was to use the five schools as “facilitator schools”, with A+ trainers using these schools as sites for teaching demonstrations. (Instead of training individual facilitators in the larger community, five local schools were used as facilitating schools and the teachers from the wider community visited these schools to view modelling of lessons.) Teachers were invited to view the demonstrations at any of the five schools closest to their school. The workshops were conducted over two full days and comprised of 30 participants from Malungeni and the wider community. The project incorporated a parent/family component and families were invited to participate in a workshop on the Saturday. All of the family workshops were well attended.



Children at Nqeleni Preschool waiting for breakfast, and children at Mtengwane Preschool during outside play.

During the second visit in May 2022, the A+ facilitators visited the five schools to demonstrate lessons and work with staff. A core group of teachers from the surrounding area arrived to observe and participate. From this group of teachers, the A+ trainers were able to identify other schools and staff who had a strong desire to be part of the core. Their enthusiasm was

evident through the questions they asked, the desire to have their schools included in the onsite demos. One principal brought all her teachers to the on-site modelling!

A “Teachers of Malungeni” WhatsApp group was formed to serve as a supportive platform for principals and teachers to share the implementation of the material learned during workshops and also for A+ facilitators to keep in touch with messages of support. For example, during on-site demonstrations and workshops, A+ facilitators stressed the importance of children moving their bodies to build core muscle strength (many sat in chairs with heavy coats for long periods and were visibly cold from not moving). A few weeks later teachers began posting images of their children being active outside, sitting on the floor (instead of chairs) with a teacher for a story etc. all examples of work A+ facilitators had demonstrated.

Unfortunately, we were unable to complete the final two visits for the year due to lack of funding however, A+ facilitators continue to keep in touch with the teachers via WhatsApp and we are actively seeking further funding in 2023 to continue this valuable project.

## Highlights

- The teacher enthusiasm and desire to learn more about early childhood.
- The participation in all the workshops that included physical movement activities and games, despite some personal physical health challenges.
- The role of music and singing in the community.
- The warm and welcoming wider community of Malungeni.

## Challenges

- Geographical terrain challenges when traveling by vehicle to the school. Many roads are difficult to traverse once off the main road.
- Some of the schools have no plumbing at all.
- Getting the schools registered.
- Language barriers.

We look forward to continuing this valuable work and serving the teachers in the Malungeni area.



**Carole Scott**  
**Materials Director**

## A+ IZINTO

A+ sees value in the concept of 'loose parts', meaning that we train our teachers to make use of recyclable materials when teaching and learning. With this in mind we have worked hard to provide access to exciting and stimulating recyclable materials to enable creative learning and teaching.

### Humansdorp

At the beginning of 2022, A+ iZinto prepared the centre to begin showcasing the materials collected from businesses and offering them to the school in the Kouga project. In March, we had an official opening and invited all the school principals from the Africa A+ Kouga project as well as members of the BIDC, who manage all the funding from the Kouga windfarm.

Visitors participated in art activities that demonstrated the A+ approach to teaching and learning. The concept behind the A+ iZinto centre and what A+ hopes to achieve during the project was discussed and the visitors were invited to ask questions and share any insights. At the end of the day, principals were able to select and take materials back with them. The St Francis Chronicle ran a brief story about the event that included some photographs.



Principals participating in an art activity using cardboard, paper towel rolls and eggboxes and paint set up by A+iZinto. Principals choosing materials to take back their schools.

Many local businesses such as the Woodlands Dairy, Meikles Hardware, Norton's Flooring, Kouga Kitchens and Elton's Upholstery hold materials for the A+ iZinto centre until trainers collect them when they are in Humansdorp.

### Highlights at the Centre:

- Some workshops were held during the year in the centre.
- Teachers gathered materials for their schools because they were already at the centre for a workshop.
- A+ facilitators could use many of the materials collected and stored for the A+ workshops held at The Victory 4All Hall.



- During workshops held at the centre, A+ trainers could demonstrate ways to set up activities using materials and have teachers try the activities out. For example, a table set up exploring the concept of light and shadow using materials and torches.

## Challenges at the Centre

- The centre is an old warehouse and so gets very dusty. It is also extremely hot in the summer and is therefore not conducive to hosting workshops during the summer months.
- The centre is closed when A+ workshops are not being held.
- The local representative is busy with her own school and there isn't funding to support a fulltime local person to manage the space.

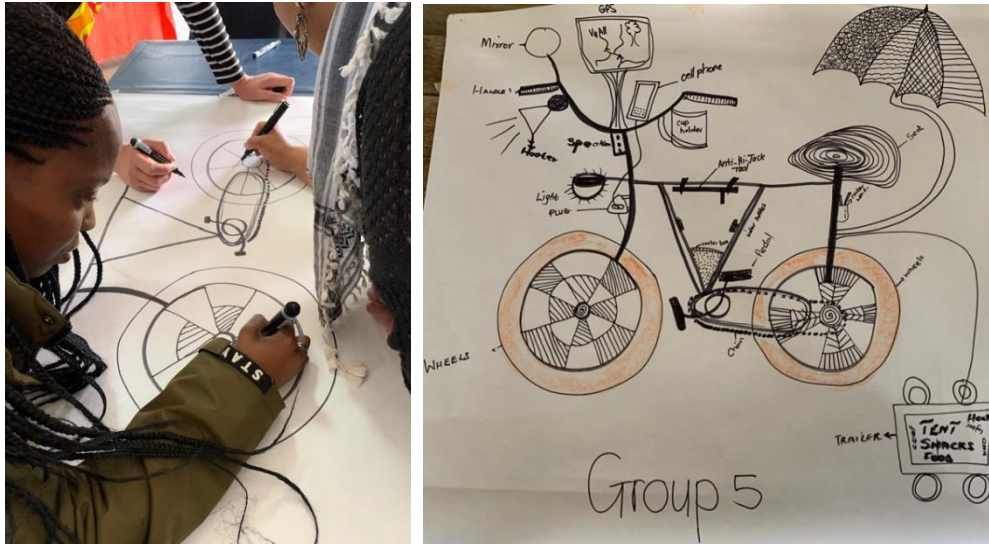
To ensure the sustainability of A+ iZinto and value of working with materials for teaching and learning, a shift in the way materials were accessed by teachers was needed. A plan to collaborate with Robin Thompson, the woodshop teacher and carpenter at Victory 4 All was established. The A+iZinto materials director and Robin Thompson designed an inexpensive wood crate that could fit in a smallish space but could hold an array of different materials. The wood for the crate was sourced from donated pallets. This would allow teachers to house materials in the context of their own classrooms. On-site modelling of how to set up and store the materials and how they can be used for teaching and learning is ongoing.

The focus for A+iZinto moving forward would be on supporting teachers in the development of their own iZinto centres in the context of their schools. Specifically, how they could gather, store and use materials creatively in their own classrooms.



Teachers browsing and choosing materials from the A+ iZinto Materials centre in Humansdorp after a workshop.

In October, during a workshop, teachers worked in groups to design an imaginary bicycle. After drawing their designs on a very large sheet of paper, each group received a wooden crate housing a variety of materials. The groups were invited to build their bicycles using the materials in the wooden crate. The groups each received a crate that contained different materials with no two crates being alike, to ensure individual creativity.



Teachers working together on their design for a fantastic bicycle, and the completed drawing.



Crate with materials for building a bicycle; teachers building their bicycles, and Group 4 posing with their bicycle.

## Cape Town

In July 2022, A+ iZinto moved from the Securistore storage unit where materials were stacked and stored, to a space in the old Muizenberg Post Office building. The Muizenberg space offered more room for storing and displaying materials and also offered room for hosting workshops in the Western Cape.



A+iZinto in Muizenberg, Cape Town.

In July, A+iZinto was invited to participate in a workshop during the “Plastic Free Mzansi” week at the artist Heath Nash’s studio in Guguletu. The idea was to share the work of A+iZinto and to work with beach plastic to re-envision it in creative ways. A+iZinto received a lot of positive feedback about the idea of using materials in schools. Participants particularly liked the concept of a mobile system where the materials are packed into the crates and brought to schools so that those schools that are unable to visit the centre would still benefit. This is a concept that we are looking to develop further.

A+ iZinto hosted a workshop on the use of materials in early learning with the 4<sup>th</sup> year students from the Centre for Creative Education (CCE) in September. A+ iZinto also took materials to the EITZ gallery in Cape Town and hosted workshops with the Level 4 ECC (Early Childhood and Care) students from CCE as well as the Grade 7’s from the Zenzeleni School in Khayalitsha. In both workshops, students worked in groups to select the materials of their choice and then collaborated in building a structure using the materials. After the building was completed each group shared a story about their structure. This type of activity stimulating oral language production and involving creative problem solving.



Zenzeleni Learners collaborating on a structure. Level 4 ECCE Students choosing materials to work with for an activity.

A+ iZinto is planning on hosting more workshops in the space and is also brainstorming ways of distributing materials to schools. One idea is to charge a minimal fee per bag, or charge for specific items if teachers come to the centre to collect. The other idea is to use the storage crate for transporting, distributing and storing materials in schools. In conjunction with receiving materials, most of the schools would benefit from workshops that have the teachers engage in and practice the creative use of the materials. We are reaching out to independent schools that offer the Reggio Emilia approach as well as local public schools to recommend workshops and share our vision. We are also seeking partnerships with local artists that are interested in the work of A+iZinto.

Discussions are underway with Aaniyah Martin (known also as Contemporary Strandloper) the director of the Beach Co-op, an NPO that does beach clean ups in Cape Town. She plans to partner with us to showcase her PhD thesis that includes her work on a “Hydro-rug”- a series of patches stitched with found beach plastic. The beach plastic is collected along the False Bay

shore from a series of walks along the coastline. Once collected the pieces are cleaned and sorted for use. Members of the community are invited to sew the plastic into the patches. As people (both adults and children) stitch, stories are told and retold of past and present and future. Partnering with artists and academics supports the A+iZinto model as it strives to bring the potential of materials into the teaching and learning spaces while at the same time encouraging sustainable practices, problem solving and creative thinking.

**Carole Scott**  
**Materials Director**



## AFRICA A+ SCHOOLS' ART AND CREATIVITY IN 2022

*"Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain artist once he or she grows up" - Pablo Picasso*

This quote was our inspiration and motivation to immerse our practitioners from Cohort 1, 2 and 3 schools in their own creative journey. Throughout the year our aim was for our teachers of young children to rediscover the joy, curiosity and wonder that can be brought about by creative processes.



A process art activity exploring the line element of art.

The challenges we faced were the lack of creative confidence of our practitioners, the fear of being judged and not getting it right together with time constraints.

*"I am scared people will laugh at what I made." "No time for being creative." "I can't draw - not sure what the end will be." "Ek dink ek is soms bang om nuwe dinge te probeer" (I am sometimes scared to try new things.)*

The above were responses from practitioners to the question: *What stops you from being creative?*

Thus, our initial task was to build our practitioners' creative confidence. Our approach regarding activities was process art driven whereby no product was expected and participants were immersed in the actual process, discovering new possibilities of material, exploring colour mixing and experiencing the joy of creating. Joy is essential in learning as it opens the mind to possibility thinking and the confidence to explore in the absence of fear and the pressure of getting something right.



The same process art approach demonstrated during on-site visits at the Kouga ECD centre embracing cross-curriculum teaching to encourage holistic learning.

Drawing, Play, and Stories are the primary fuel that ignites creativity.

Drawing is a fear factor for participants due to representational expectations of academic art teaching and absence of belief in the democratic right to be artistic or creative.

We therefore create fun activities that leave little room for control of expectations but still allow the opportunity for skill and knowledge building of art as well as linking experiences to the Curriculum document to emphasise that creative art activities can be employed to reach its aims.



Demonstrating a drawing that is non-threatening and explorative in use of different textured surfaces as well as investigating the transparent qualities of materials.

We believe that the process by which an artist creates his/her work and the creative process itself, are valuable and meaningful means through which to create meaningful learning experiences for young children. Local artists from Gqeberha, St Francis and Jefferys Bay are invited to share their expertise with the ECD staff and local facilitators in elective workshops during the Spring Conferences and Summer Institute (5-day training). The artists are from different practices which includes ceramics, music, movement as well as mental health and the benefits of art making. The last mentioned was extraordinarily successful and in high demand during the Spring Conference. We therefore invited Kezia Gerber for a second workshop. Her rapport with the participants was excellent.



Cohort 2 enjoying a ceramic experience with local artist, Sharon Welman during the Spring Conference.



Smiley faces are proof of the wellbeing that art and creative processes can bring about. Artist Kezia Gerber and owner of Dare to Imagine Studio in Jeffreys Bay with Cohort 2 participants during the Spring Conference.

Collaboration is key in building creative confidence and children's natural inclination during their learning process.



Photographs 10 and 11 planned activities to encourage collaboration between Cohort 1 participants and Photo 12 Activity prepared for onsite visit at a Cohort 2 ECD Centre that embraces children's natural curiosity and inclination to work collaboratively

## Malungeni

Field trips to Malungeni a village situated in rural Transkei, during February and March, brought about the privilege to meet and work with the leadership and staff of 30 preschools in the area. The thirst for knowledge and immense pleasure experienced in creativity and working with materials was so inspirational we did not want to stop! In this case confidence in creativity was more present but the allowance for creative learning spaces was being curtailed by teaching young children in a school-like manner. On-site demos were essential to emphasize what we need to do to bring about creativity as an enabler of independent thinking, problem solving and building of self-esteem in learning settings. Below are examples of the impact of art on learning in Malungeni.



Examples of different play stations children can choose from and how to set up an activity for play.





A Malungeni principal's first painting experience.



*"Art has the role in education of helping children become themselves instead of more like everyone else."* – Sydney Gurewitz Clements

**Yolande Delport**  
**Creative Facilitator**





**Africa A+  
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## DONORS

We would like to thank all our funders for their ongoing support which enables us to pursue our valuable work.

- **Kouga Wind Farm Community Development Trust**
- **The Platform for the Construction of Preferred Futures**
- **Mr and Mrs Petersson**
- **GoFundMe**
- **Arms in Africa**
- **Angel donors**

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