



***Africa A+ Schools'* three-year ECE training projects: concept, approach and methods**

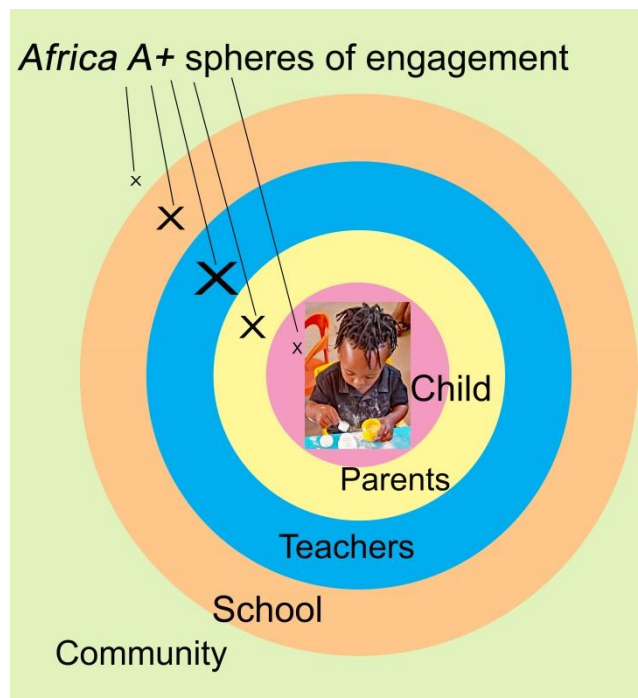
Africa A+ Schools (A+) is a registered Non-Profit Organization (NPO Registration: 220-868), established in 2014, working in the sphere of **Early Childhood Education (ECE)**. Specifically, **A+** trains teachers of children in the 1-9 years age group (nursery school to Grade 3). It is our **mission** to bring about whole-school transformations that enable delivery of *quality* early education and child-centred development.

Our concept and approach to ECE training

Ours is an **integrated, holistic approach**. The child is of central importance, and is embedded in spheres of influence. **A+** engages with all of those spheres, but places the greatest emphasis on parents, teachers and schools to achieve its mission of raising the quality of ECE.

The diagram (this page) shows the child as being the target, the very centre of importance, within expanding spheres of influence that all affect the child's development. The levels of engagement of **A+** with these five spheres of influence are shown by the relative sizes of the crosses.

The **A+** model of teacher training is unusual in that it explicitly acknowledges the **relevance of parents and the whole school**, in particular, to achieving quality early childhood education (ECE). For this reason, **A+** training programmes address the ECE needs of whole communities, and include aspects specifically aimed at parents and whole schools, including principals, all teachers, governing bodies, etcetera.



The other unusual aspect of the **A+** model is its emphasis on **sustainability**. We know from research and experience that real, long-term change in the quality of ECE needs time and sustained engagement with parents, teachers, trainee facilitators, and schools. This is why our training programmes are a minimum of three years duration, and we extend our contact with teachers even beyond those initial three years to ensure sustained improvement in their practice of ECE within their communities.

Our methods of ECE training

There are **many elements in an effective ECE training programme**. Elements which are emphasized in **A+** training are: (1) on-site training in communities, that is, *not* training at a central venue outside of the community; (2) play-based learning, in line with the National Curriculum Framework (NCF); (3) the use of the creative arts as learning activities (this is the “A plus” in our name); (4) the use of creativity to promote a problem-solving approach to play and learning; (5) the use of “loose parts” as no-cost learning materials (see below); (6) responsiveness to the needs of individual schools (which vary a lot); (7) the use of WhatsApp to maintain contact with all participant schools, teachers and community workers, both during and between contact sessions. We believe that these elements, among others, set **Africa A+ Schools** apart as a unique training organization with something special to offer.

One of the key aspects of **A+** work is the use of found materials in creative activities. We call these materials “**loose parts**” which is a term widely used in education theory. Loose parts comprise a variety of objects, from plastic recyclables and used household items, to surplus materials like old stock samples, reels, cardboard tubes, etcetera, as well as natural objects. The open-ended nature of these materials is what gives them value and makes them attractive. They are not fashioned into toys, but rather they offer opportunities for exploration and creative play. Loose parts encourage children to bring their own imagination and creativity into play activities and mini-projects. We work extensively with these materials during workshops, demonstrating their versatility as teaching resources. They are no-cost materials that the community can help schools to source. We assist schools to set up their own materials collections for teachers to use.

A typical year in a 3-year programme comprises six (minimum of four, maximum of eight) contact sessions during which two qualified and experienced **A+** Facilitators visit the relevant community for at least six days (not counting travel time). In those six days, the typical activities are:

- A series (3-5 days) of **training workshops** with teachers from participating schools. These workshops comprise hands-on, experiential training, *not* static lectures.
- One training workshop for **parents** in which they are shown, practically, what play-based learning looks like and what activities they can do with their children at home to promote creative learning.
- Training of **Community Facilitators**. About eight participant teachers are selected for their leadership potential. This cohort receives on-the-job training in how to facilitate workshops so that they can help to sustain training within their communities of practice, even without



A+ being present. These Community Facilitators are a vital element in **A+**'s model of implementation and in the sustainability of the training programme.

- **Mentoring, monitoring and evaluation.** The **A+** facilitators visit a sample of participating schools during each contact session. During these visits, teachers are mentored and the impact of the training is monitored, evaluated and recorded. This helps the teachers as well as **A+** which is constantly refining its methods to increase impact.

Our appeal for support

Our appeal is for **financial support to run training projects of at least three-years duration.** The communities in which we run our projects are mostly poor and under-resourced, therefore we cannot raise funds directly from course participants, or their schools, or the parents of their children. We need corporate social investment (CSI) to support our work as a vital contribution to upliftment of under-privileged communities in South Africa. The most advantageous circumstance, for all stakeholders, is for **A+** to have sufficient financial support for a whole 3-year work programme so that it can run smoothly, without interruption, and without constant efforts to raise funds for each contact session. (See bottom of first page for motivation of a three-year period.)

If a funder is not able to commit to a full 3-year programme of work, or would like to see proof-of-concept prior to such a commitment, **A+** does gratefully receive funding on a session-by-session basis. We are also in need of support for the running costs and administration of **Africa A+ Schools** and would be delighted to receive such discretionary funds.

We hope that this document has provided an introduction that arouses your interest in **A+** and our work. If you would like to know more about **A+**, please follow the links provided below. Should you wish to become a funder or angel donor of **A+**, we invite you to contact the Director of **Africa A+ Schools**, Doctor Giulietta Harrison (contact details below), or go to the "donate" page of our website. We would love to hear from you.

Video about Africa A+ Schools: <https://youtu.be/IWGaNrsnHXY>

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