



AFRICA A+ SCHOOLS ANNUAL REVIEW 2019/20

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**Africa A+
Schools**

Engaging Curious Minds
South Africa

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MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Africa A+ Schools is an organization that works to bring about change in the quality of education in South Africa. This document is a review of the work *Africa A+ Schools* has done between August 2019 and November 2020.

The *A+ Schools* approach was imported from Oklahoma, USA, and initially piloted in Western Cape from 2014 to 2017 under the banner of *Africa A+ Schools*. The pilot showed that a variety of adaptations were necessary to accommodate the complex needs of South Africa's poor communities.

Subsequently, in 2018, *Africa A+ Schools* moved its headquarters to Eastern Cape and, on behalf of a corporate funder, embarked on much needed work for schools in the Kouga district (Humansdorp, Cape St Francis, Oyster Bay, Jeffreys Bay). 2019 saw *Africa A+ Schools* running a "needs analysis" to determine the specific requirements of 33 schools and to ensure that a training programme for teachers and schools would not be yet another unsustainable intervention. *A+ Schools* stands for pedagogical quality and works hand-in-hand with communities to ensure that there is a relationship of trust and a long-term shift in thinking.

2020 brought with it the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic that would markedly impact on how Early Childhood Centres operate and how A+ would do their training. Although the impact of the pandemic has been profound, A+ has risen to the challenge and has continued to deliver excellence and inspiration.

"I am very confident now that I have learned so much through the training.... This was a very good experience for me."

(Comment from teacher in training.)

Africa A+ invites you to share with us our successes and challenges as we work towards quality education by nurturing creative thinking, problem solving and an entrepreneurial mind-set.

Giulietta Harrison (PhD)
Executive Director

KOUGA PROJECT, BASELINE STUDY, 2019

In 2018, *Africa A+ Schools* was approached to assist with training in the Kouga District Municipality. This led to our putting together a joint proposal with the *Centre for Early Childhood Education* (CECD) which was submitted to the funder, *Kouga Windfarm Community Development Trust*. Phase One of the proposal was accepted, resulting in a six-week baseline study to gather data on the needs of 33 schools in five wards.

The take-home message from the needs analysis was that there was indeed a great need for training, as well as for basics such as infrastructural upgrades, safety measures, and registration with the Department of Social Development. On the training side, teachers expressed a strong desire for mentorship, curriculum application and daily programme innovation.

One of the most inspiring aspect of conducting the baseline study was to encounter ECD centres who, despite challenging circumstances, were delivering a quality programme and using their initiative to promote learning. This was particularly evident at *Haasbekkies* which is a small school that had started with nothing. *Haasbekkies* had upgraded their building through effort and donations, had a print-rich learning environment, and was using technology to connect with overseas schools once a week for interactive morning rings.



Figure 1:
Outside of
Haasbekkies
school in
Humandorp.



Figure 2: Inside Haasbakkies with its print-rich environment.

This was the only school that demonstrated the use of music and movement, had inspirational statements for children and parents, and made an effort to display their learners' work.

The baseline study provided A+ and CECD with a clear picture of the needs for a project, and was received with great enthusiasm by all the participant schools but, most importantly, began a journey of mutual trust. A detailed report was prepared and presented to the funder, resulting in acceptance of a Phase Two proposal. This second phase began in August 2020.

COVID-19

There is no doubt that the advent of a global pandemic had a massive impact on the Early Childhood sector, with many schools closing down. The schools that have remained open are struggling to put protocols in place, and to add insult to injury, many have not yet received their DSD subsidy. When it came to training, A+ followed strict protocols, including wearing masks, social distancing, sanitizing regularly and providing individual resources to prevent the spread of the disease. This has been challenging as it is both time consuming and costly; however, at all times the A+ trainers worked to ensure everyone's safety. Despite these constraints, quality training took place and was enjoyed by all.

"I am excited to be on this A+ journey. I learned a lot in 3 days. It was a good experience."

(Comment from teacher in training.)

VOLUNTARY WORK: Summer Conference

The annual *Africa A+* Summer Conference, run by Ms Anya Morris, was held on 25 January 2020 in Cape Town. The conference was attended by 57 participants from the five A+-affiliated Western Cape schools: *iThemba Pre-primary*, *Rainbow ECD Centre*, *Gerard's Educare*, *Chameleon Campus*, and *Fish Hoek Pre-primary*. These schools participated in A+'s initial pilot study and have remained associated with A+ ever since. Aziza Ebrahim, an observer at the conference said, "***I am blown away. I am just blown away. This is what teachers need; not more certificates.***"



The conference was in true A+ style: everyone got involved and worked together in imaginative and innovative ways. Behind the fun was a serious intention: If we want our teachers to nurture children's 21st century skills, then we need to make sure that teachers are in touch with and enjoying their own creative, problem-solving, critical thinking, collaboration and communication skills.

The highlights of the day were three elective workshops:

Workshop 1, *iZinto*, sent participants on a treasure hunt. Using their creativity and teaching knowledge, the participants created artworks and learning activities for children from the 'treasure' (loose recyclable items).



Workshop 2, *Bob the Builder*, engaged participants in creative engineering (design, balance, material strength, weight, height). The participants used sucker sticks, pegs and clips, as well as their imaginations and problem-solving skills.



Workshop 3, *Squish and Squash*.

Participants took ordinary playdough and made it into an extraordinary teaching tool.



After lunch, the five participants planned how to apply the A+ approach in their schools.

KOUGA PROJECT, PHASE TWO, 2020

The second phase of the *Kouga Windfarm Community Development* project began in August 2020, and saw three dedicated field trips from the A+ team (Ms Anya Morris & Ms Yolande Delport) and two from CECD during the remaining months of 2020. The first trip was about sharing information with the community and stakeholders. The second took on the training and selection of 10 novice facilitators who will help to sustain the work of A+ beyond the lifespan of the funded project.

Within days of training, the novice facilitators had gone into their classrooms and started implement what they had learnt, gleefully posting pictures on the WhatsApp group of the activities they were trying out. There is no greater compliment to our dedicated trainers, than to see their participants eager to implement ideas in their classrooms.

The third trip included a teaching-and-learning survey and five days of professional development for all the staff of the 15 schools in the year-one cohort. The survey created a baseline for monitoring and evaluation that tracks the progress and development of each school during the five-year project.



Figure 3: A facilitator experimenting with mosaic.

iZINTO AFRICA: repurposing materials for creative teaching and learning

Africa A+ Schools has incorporated the start-up organization, *iZinto Africa*, as part of our NPO as their work is complementary to ours. *iZinto* aims to set up systems for collection and storing of industrial and household recyclables, off-cuts, scraps and discarded materials in key areas in South Africa. These depots allow teachers to access materials for their classrooms. *iZinto* works closely with teachers to show how materials support various types of learning and development, and how to incorporate materials into classroom life. *iZinto* also trains teachers in guiding reflection discussions with children; models language and responses to children's work for teachers; and shows how documentation can support assessment and curriculum development. Teachers are able to replenish their stocks either through the mobile unit or by visiting an *iZinto* warehouse.

iZinto Africa is grounded in the idea that loose parts, or materials that are open-ended in potential, can be offered for provocation, research and inquiry. **“In any environment, both the degree of inventiveness and creativity, and the possibility of discovery are directly proportional to number and kinds of variables in it.”** (Nicholson S. 1972. *Theory of Loose Parts: An important principle for design methodology*). Use of scraps, off-cuts and discarded items, as well as household recyclables, is essentially a sustainable practice that weaves green initiatives into the learning process. These once discarded items can be 're-viewed' or 're-seen', and through active engagement and play, children problem solve, think critically and work collaboratively.



THE WAY FORWARD

Africa A+ Schools is a dynamic organization that continues to drive quality education and grow. The ECD project in Kouga District Municipality will continue for the next four years. However, the A+ approach has the advantage of being suited not only to ECD education, but also to programmes in higher grades. With this in mind, we are presently putting out proposals to build quality education from the ground up, and hopefully all the way to Matric.

We look forward to sharing more of our work with you in our next review.

THANK YOU!

Africa A+ Schools thanks our funders, especially *Kouga Windfarm Community Development Trust*, for providing the means to implement the A+ way and improve the quality of education in South Africa. To our collaborators, *CECD* and *iZinto*, for adding to the suite of tools in our tool box, we say a big THANK YOU. We thank key individuals, including Peter Williams from *Reporting Solutions* for his financial advice, Richard Barnett for his logistic support of *iZinto*, and Prof. Eric Atmore of the *Centre for Early Childhood Development* for his mentorship. We thank our Board for their guidance and our colleagues, particularly Anya Morris and Yolande Delport, for their dedication to making a difference. Lastly we thank the communities we work with and the many people who, despite a pandemic and multiple challenges associated with poverty, turned up for training, adopted a positive attitude, and continued to provide a strong foundation for learning.


