



Annual Report: 2024

10th Anniversary Edition



Contents

Meet our A+ people (in alphabetical order)	1
From the Director.....	4
Impact and Reach of A+.....	5
From the Chairman.....	6
From the Treasurer	6
From the A+ Project Leaders	7
Kouga Windfarm Trust (KWT) ECD Project.....	7
Malungeni Project.....	11
Kathu Solar Park Project.....	13
<i>iZinto</i> Materials Centre	19
Looking back at challenges, and ahead to potential in 2025	20
<i>Africa A+ Schools (A+)</i> and the  of the United Nations	21
Funders, donors and collaborators.....	24

Cover photo: A+ Facilitators, Yolande Delpont and June O’Neill, with the staff of the Bambi ECD Centre in Kathu, Northern Cape.

This report was edited and compiled by James Harrison under direction of Dr Giulietta Harrison. We warmly thank all of the contributors.

Meet our A+ people (in alphabetical order)

Linda Biersteker – Member of the Board

A developmental psychologist and adult educator working in the ECD sector. Previously Research Director at the Early Learning Resource Unit. She has extensive research, training, policy and programming experience. She has developed materials in South Africa and internationally, and has published many articles and chapters. Current research interests include quality improvement systems, monitoring and evaluation tools to support effective programming for young children, the role of local and indigenous knowledge in early education, and learning from conversations with young children.



Yolande Delpont – Project Leader and Member of the Board

Yolande is a mosaic artist and a creative facilitator who has worked locally and abroad as an ECD teacher, art co-ordinator and principal. She is the founder of Ibhathane Community ECD Centre in Riebeek East as well as the Hands-On Mosaic project, including collaborative community work for public pieces. Mosaic pieces done with students can be seen at the Department of Arts, Sports and Culture in Makhanda. Yolande received a Diploma in Education from the Port Elizabeth College of Education in 1993, and a Further Diploma in Art Education in 1994 from the Cape Town College of Education.



Shayne Eastman – Financial Manager / Bookkeeper

Shayne's business is MSM Admin Solutions which provides a full bookkeeping service to A+. The business has been in existence since 2016 and provides a full range of financial/bookkeeping services to small businesses. Shayne has more than 40 years' work experience in the financial field, having worked for companies such as Investec, Deloitte & Touche, and Old Mutual Asset Managers.



Dr Giulietta Harrison – Executive Director and Member of the Board

Giulietta comes from many years of teaching in diverse early childhood settings, including as Lecturer, H.O.D. and Principal. She was Director of the Centre for Social Development at Rhodes University for 5 years, and President of SARAECE for 7 years. She is presently HOD in Foundation Phase at SANTS, a private university, in addition to her Directorship of A+. Giulietta has a passion for developing teachers, especially in Emotional Intelligence (EI). Her Masters was on promoting EI in Grade R, and her PhD on understanding how children acquire literacy in Grade 1. She has written training programmes and was part of a team that developed the Higher Certificate in ECCE. She has published extensively in books and journals. Currently she is developing a Recognition of Prior Learning programme at SANTS.



James Harrison – Fundraiser and Editor

James started his career as a teacher of Biology. He moved into research as coordinator of the first Southern African Bird Atlas Project and worked in the Avian Demography Unit at UCT for 21 years, and subsequently as a freelance environmental consultant for about 10 years. He briefly lectured to education students at Rhodes University. James has since worked as a freelance editor and now as Fundraiser and Editor for **A+**. He holds an MSc in Nature Conservation (Stell.) and an MA in Creative Writing (UCT), as well as a post-graduate diploma in education (UCT).



Arthur Knox – Web Manager

With 10 years of versatile IT and web development experience, Arthur has assisted homeowners, businesses and universities in managing diverse technical challenges, optimizing systems, and driving innovation. He is skilled in problem-solving and adaptation to evolving technologies. Arthur is committed to delivering solutions and supporting organizational growth. He has gained AWS certifications and is furthering himself in this field.



Anya Morris – Project Leader and Member of the Board

Anya was the first Executive Director of **A+** schools. She took a pilot project into NPO status in 2017. She holds an MEd from UCT and was both a teacher and Principal at various schools over many years. She worked for ELRU (Early Learning Research Unit) for seven years. She has a passion for science education in the early years, and for playful, joyful arts-based education. She has worked tirelessly for more than 10 years at **A+** to develop quality early childhood education, and is well known for her hands-on approach. Anya has presented her work at a number of conferences, contributed to many publications, as well as writing teacher training materials for a range of institutions. She has always been generous with her knowledge and has mentored many Community Facilitators and **A+** Facilitators. After completing her role as Project Leader on the Kouga project in 2025, she will retire. She will be sorely missed by her colleagues at **A+**.



Tania Nortje-Petersson – Treasurer and Member of the Board

Tania has formal education in marketing, real estate and health and wellness. She has worked in various marketing positions with companies such as Sasol and Sun International. Subsequently she moved into real estate and owned and managed a real estate company in KwaZulu-Natal before relocating to the Eastern Cape (Riebeeck East). Tania did market research on financial and insurance products in South Africa for a number of European companies. From 2011 to 2017 she was the CEO of Health Profile Institute SA, offering education on health and wellness and courses for health professionals.



June O'Neill – Project Facilitator

June specialised in Pre-Primary Studies and has over 30 years' experience as teacher and principal in a variety of pre-primary contexts in KwaZulu-Natal, Botswana and Gauteng. A study group tour to Reggio Emilia, Italy, provided the catalyst to ponder the purposes of teaching and learning. Subsequent explorations into emergent curriculum, enquiry-based learning, and a B.Ed. Honours through UNISA, ensued. June's focus shifted to working with adults as she believes that it empowers teachers to create environments for transformation in teaching and learning. Her experience of process art resonates with the arts-enriched approach of **A+**.



Thomas Petersson – Chairman of the Board

Thomas graduated with an MBA from the Stockholm School of Economics (Sweden) in 1989 and has since worked in various insurance companies as a CEO, starting in 1990. Apart from founding the travel insurance company Erika Insurance in 1995, where he was at the helm for 10 years, he has also been the CEO of Euro Accident Insurance for more than 20 years, leading it to a top position in the healthcare and accident field in Scandinavia in 2023, when he retired. He presently holds a number of board appointments in the insurance and healthcare space and enjoys his time off in the Eastern Cape with family.



Carole Scott – Project Leader and Member of the Board

Carole is an educator with over three decades of experience. She holds a Master's degree in Education (MS Ed., Hunter College, New York, NY). She is committed to enhancing ECD in her work as a Facilitator with **A+**, and as a Lecturer in Early Childhood and Bachelor of Education faculties at the Centre for Creative Education. Carole pioneered the *iZinto Materials Centre*, an **A+** project that promotes collection and curation of discarded and found materials to use as resources for sustainable and creative teaching and learning activities. Her other passions include visual arts, music, hiking, swimming, and all things food.



Dr Avitha Sooful – Member of the Board

Avi has held the position of Senior Lecturer in Fine Art at the University of Pretoria since 2015. Previously she served as HOD of Visual Arts and Design at Vaal University of Technology. Her research traces and documents artmaking and the history of apartheid. Avi is Vice President of the SA National Association for the Visual Arts and served as President for six years. She is currently Chair of the international network, Exploring Visual Cultures (EVC) which comprises art educators from Ghana, Kenya, Cameroon, Germany and RSA. This Network provides a bridge between continents. Avi is an Associate Member of UNESCO-UNITWIN Arts Education Research for Cultural Diversity and Sustainable Development.



From the Director

As we enter 2025, *Africa A+ Schools (A+)* has existed for 10 years! **A+** started as a pilot project in Cape Town aiming to improve early childhood education by harnessing the arts as key enrichments of teaching and learning. The pilot project was financially supported by Standard Bank, the Department of Economic Development & Tourism and the Craft+Design Institute, and methodologically supported by *Oklahoma A+ Schools* from the USA. The pilot project was a success and led to establishment of *Africa A+ Schools* as an NPO in 2018. We plan to mark our **10th Anniversary** with special achievements this year. (See the article near the end of this report.)

Unfortunately, the challenges facing ECE in South Africa remain stark. International benchmarks, such as PIRLS (2021) and TIMSS (2023), together with national assessments, such as the South African EC review presented in Child Gauge (2024) and Thrive by Five (2022), emphasize the realities of our youngest citizens whom we continue to neglect by not giving them the quality education they need. As a result, they are not building the foundations essential to literacy, numeracy and life skills. As a country, we are failing to meet the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4.1 (equitable, quality education for ALL) along with SDG 4.2 (early childhood care and education for ALL). Realising these goals and developing a thriving nation requires investment in Early Childhood Education. (See the article, written by James Harrison, on how **A+** contributes to the SDGs.)

A+ is committed to a profound change in the status quo. With our collaborators, the Centre for Early Childhood Development, **A+** is on the verge of completing a five-year project in the Kouga district. This, our first big project as an NPO, has been a testament to how hard work, commitment and creativity can bring profound shifts in a community's thinking and pedagogy. I would like to commend our Facilitators, Anya Morris and Yolande Delport (see their project report). They have worked tirelessly, closely and respectfully with the Kouga teachers to help them develop their thinking and embrace a creative approach to teaching. **A+** is exceptionally proud of their achievements.



A+ has completed its first year in Kathu and started the second year of training under somewhat challenging circumstances, but despite this, the Kathu teachers have embraced the **A+** way, showing positive shifts towards quality ECE. In Malungeni, it has been a relatively quiet year, but what has been achieved has been enthusiastically received with much more to come in 2025 (see Carole Scott's project report). Here I must thank Dr Spiwo Xapile of *The Platform* NPO for his endless enthusiasm and support in allowing us to bring to his community the tools of quality ECE.



Running alongside all our work is ongoing research to ensure that we monitor what we are doing and continue to find ways to meet the needs of the communities we work with. I contributed some of our work to a recent (2025) Juta publication entitled *Early Childhood Professional Development: An African Perspective*. We have also written a chapter entitled *Towards a just pedagogy: Working with*

'loose parts' to create dynamic early learning experiences for a Springer book which will come out early in 2025. In this way, we continue to share our knowledge as we build quality ECE in South Africa.

My hope for 2025 is that **A+**, together with everyone involved in ECE nationally, will continue to gain momentum in the work that we do, and strengthen our collaborative efforts. Together we can make a difference in the lives of children, parents and teachers in South Africa.

Dr Giulietta Harrison is Executive Director of **A+**.



Impact and Reach of A+

Below are summary statistics for reach of **A+** work in 2024. A few things to note:

- The statistics for **numbers of children*** reflects the children currently enrolled in participant schools. However, the number of children who will ultimately be positively affected by teacher training is much greater because trainee teachers will carry their new skills forward many years into the future.
- The statistics for **Malungeni** are relatively low because only one contact session was possible in 2024. 2025 is likely to see higher numbers.
- **Numbers of parents**** reflect attendance at parent workshops only. Many parents are unable to attend workshops for logistical reasons, and many more parents – probably a number similar to the number of children – are informally influenced through the schools and their own children.

Provinces in which A+ was active in 2024	3 provinces (Western, Eastern and Northern Cape)
Number of projects undertaken in 2024	4 projects (3 teacher-training projects, 1 teaching-materials project)
Number of ECE centres involved in training in 2024	40 in Kouga, 23 in Malungeni and 25 in Kathu.
Number of school staff trained in 2024	151 in Kouga (inclusive of 82 teachers and 40 principals), 48 in Malungeni and 128 (inclusive of 100 teachers and 25 principals) in Kathu.
Parents at special workshops in 2024 (n.a. in Kouga)	8 in Malungeni, 78 in Kathu.
Number of children impacted in 2024	Approximately 1454 in Kouga, 1100 in Malungeni and 1330 in Kathu.
TOTALS	3 provinces, 88 schools, 327 staff (teachers, principals and others), 86 parents**, 3884 children*

From the Chairman

We are proud to report another year of making positive changes in South African schools through our **A+** training methods. Despite challenging times, with inflationary pressure on food, fuel and other necessities, as well as underfunding of schools and ECD centres and a shortage of trained teachers, wherever we go, **A+** contributes to creativity and joyful learning for children, teachers and parents. When you work with people and build trust over time, positive results build on themselves and on the energy brought by all contributors.

A+ is continuing to gain more traction within the professional ECD community in South Africa and with NPO/NGOs involved in early education initiatives. This is affirmation of the value of our programmes, of our **A+** brand, and our ability to grow. **A+** works actively to strengthen its base and increase its resources to take on further projects and spread creative learning to more schools and children anywhere in the country. Apart from project-specific funding, we are broadening our funding base through new fundraising initiatives. We continue to develop in our **10th Anniversary** year!

Educating our children is key to building a more resilient and successful future. We thank all our donors and sponsors, our fantastic staff in the field and in home offices, staff of our participant schools, and everyone else who gives us moral support. But let us not forget that it is South Africa's children and their teachers that keep us going. Learning through creativity is so much fun!



Thomas Petersson is Chairman of the Board.

From the Treasurer

Another successful year for **A+**! Over the past couple of years, the organisation has gone from being a "start-up", with friends and family contributing invaluable assistance free of charge, to a stable organisation with a proven model to bring quality education to children in our country. We carry our humble beginnings with us in our future endeavours, but overall, the structure of the organisation is now robust in terms of finances, accounting, reporting and cash management. This means we can deliver projects on time, and within budget. Cash management is strict and we follow up on budgets monthly to make sure we track progress, expenses and investments closely. In our **10th Anniversary** year, it feels good to be able to say these things with confidence.

We cannot do the work we do without the support of our funders. Our funding presently comes mainly from independent power producers (IPPs), other NPOs, and from generous angel donors. We warmly thank all our funders for their contributions to **A+** and to our country's teachers and children. With you as partners, **A+** will bring more learning and joy!



Tania Nortje-Petersson is Treasurer.

From the A+ Project Leaders

During 2024, *Africa A+ Schools (A+)* ran four projects. These were at different stages in their progress. Each project has a Project Leader who is an **A+** Facilitator and is primarily responsible for planning and implementation of the project, assisted by one or two additional **A+** Facilitators. Projects include on-the-job training of a cohort of local Community Facilitators who support teachers when **A+** is not on site. Community Facilitators and participant schools remain affiliated to **A+** after projects are completed.

Kouga Windfarm Trust (KWT) ECD Project

A+ has completed four of the five years of this project. **A+** and the Centre for Early Childhood Development (CECD) work with 40 ECD centres in the Kouga District (St Francis Bay, Humansdorp and Oyster Bay areas) in Eastern Cape. **A+**'s role is pedagogical, that is, we facilitate professional development (training workshops), provide on-site and online implementation support (visits, information and phone calls), and participate in monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning (see photo).



A+ is developing a team of Community Facilitators (see photos) to train and support their local ECD centres. The workshops focus on tools for creative teaching and learning, that is, the theory of loose parts, the arts, the eight **A+** Essentials, and the aims and outcomes of the 0–4 years National Curriculum and CAPS. The Community Facilitators will ensure that the 40 Kouga ECD centres sustain their provision of a quality early education after the project is completed.



A+ believes in collaborating with parents and caregivers as they are the children’s first teachers. **A+** leadership workshops therefore include how to work effectively with parents and caregivers. For example, after noticing the junk food children were bringing to school in their lunch boxes, **A+** facilitated a leadership workshop on the importance of nutrition, brain development and the impact on children’s learning and

development. The principals then recreated the workshop for their parents, based on what they had learned. The principals also designed and made a parent poster on healthy eating which was displayed (see photo).



Art is a transformative core practice at **A+**. The arts enable participants to make connections with their feelings, beliefs, experiences,

curiosity and creativity which, in turn, inform and enrich their lives and work. Felicity Toll, one of the Community Facilitators, wrote, *“I feel I can do anything. I don’t see problems anymore, I think differently.”* Guest artists, Jono Van der Veen and Kezia Gerber, provided an expressive experience in colour theory during professional development training in October.

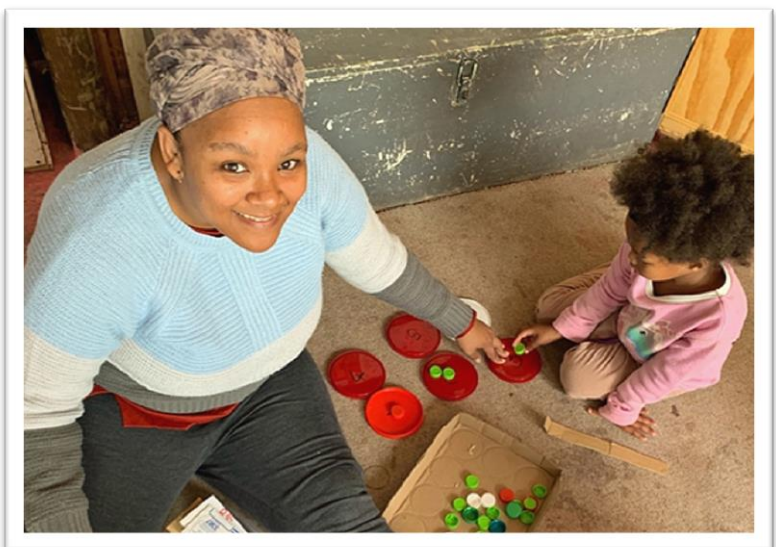


The arts are not used in isolation; there is a purpose behind each art experience. For example, at a workshop on toddlers, **A+** used clay modelling as a provocation to get principals and teachers thinking in new and positive ways about toddlers and their developmental needs (see photo).



Highlights of 2024:

- ❖ A+ is delighted with the noticeable change in attitude and engagement at the Kouga ECD centres. There is more respect, interest, choice and stimulation for children. Activities are more experiential, and when teachers use loose parts (recyclable, found and discarded materials), they increase opportunities for creativity and provide new ways to learn (see photos).
- ❖ Kouga preschools now know and support each other. They work collaboratively instead of competing.
- ❖ The Community Facilitators in training have grown in confidence and skills. They mentor the 40 ECD centres in thoughtful and enterprising ways. For example, Marlyn Dyantyi takes 'her' principals for a one-on-one coffee date where the challenges of running an ECD centre are shared (see photo).
- ❖ The Community Facilitators can now plan (see photo) and facilitate 3-hour mini-workshops for the ECD centres in their area. The mini-workshops are collaborative, budget friendly and accessible to participants who can all walk to the venue.

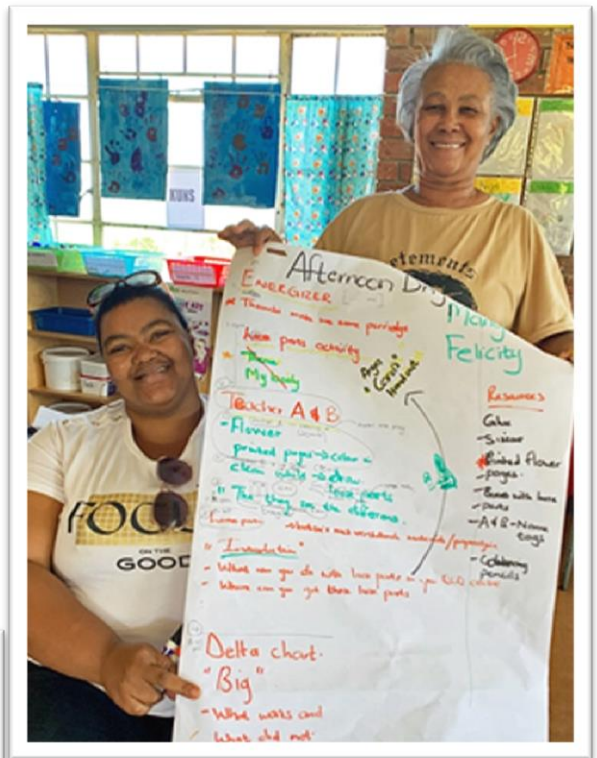


Challenges in 2024:

The biggest challenge is the high turnover of teachers. Most of the Kouga ECD centres serve poor communities and the teachers' salaries depend on what parents and caregivers can pay. When teachers cannot earn a living wage, they leave as soon as a better paying job is available, for example, domestic work. A+ has adjusted its programme in response to this challenge by running leadership workshops that enable principals to plan and facilitate staff development at their centres.

The five-year Kouga Windfarm Trust ECD Project ends in July 2025. Three contact sessions are planned for 2025: the first two will focus on implementation and enabling principals to facilitate staff development to offset teacher turnover, and the third will be final surveys at each ECD centre to measure change.

We look forward to the final six months knowing that a quality early-learning programme is available to the children of Kouga.



Anya Morris is Project Leader, assisted by Yolande Delpont, Facilitator.



Malungeni Project

The Malungeni Project was initiated by Dr Spiwo Xapile and began officially in October 2021. Dr Xapile saw the need for strengthening ECD centres in his community and surrounding areas. 2024 was *Africa A+ Schools' (A+)* second year working in the community. Malungeni is in the rural Ngqeleni District of the Eastern Cape. It is surrounded by rolling hills scattered with homesteads, farm animals and small farms growing mainly maize, spinach and pumpkin. The nearest small town is Ngqeleni. Some of the ECD centres in the area accept children as young as 3 months up to 5 years of age, and some from 2-5 years. Most of the principals have an NQF Level 4 qualification.



A+ planned a three-year intervention with four visits per year, but due to lack of funding we completed only one contact session in 2024, in October. Despite constraints on the number of sessions we have been able to do per year, enthusiasm for the training among teachers of Malungeni remains strong.

Malungeni preschools provide good care for their young children, but function with minimal direction or understanding of the fundamental principles of quality teaching. A lack of resources adds to their problems. We have continued working with loose parts¹ which consistently amaze the participants because of the possibilities they offer.

In Malungeni, on-site demonstrations are managed with a “fishbowl” approach where teachers from surrounding areas are invited to observe a lesson. After the lesson, the teachers discuss what

¹ Loose parts refer to found, natural and recycled materials. They are collected, curated and presented for enquiry, creative projects and as teaching and learning resources. They can be sourced at no cost and used in many different ways in the classroom.

they observed with the **A+** Facilitators. This experiential learning is popular with the participants and they often travel from far to observe the **A+** Facilitators demonstrate the **A+** way at a school. A highlight was being able to demonstrate teaching using loose parts around the theme of “sound”. After listening to a story called, “Shhhh, Baby is Sleeping”, a collection of everyday materials and found objects were put in a suitcase for children to explore the concept of sound. The children were asked, “What sounds can you make?”. They were delighted to experiment with banging, blowing, tapping or scraping with the various materials. At another school housed in a rondawel, the teacher had adopted what she had learned about setting up the room from a previous workshop and created stations for play with loose parts, building with found boxes, sand and painting.

Another highlight of the year was the parent workshop where the focus was on learning through play. Many parents brought their children along. It was wonderful to see the parents play with the loose parts themselves and then play with their children. Parents were able to see for themselves the value of using these materials and how this type of play supports problem-solving, critical thinking and creativity. Teachers have expressed the need to understand these teaching methods in the context of the NCF 0-4 curriculum and would like more opportunities to workshop these aspects.



One of the challenges faced by the **A+** Facilitators is the difficulty navigating rough rural roads which become even worse after wet weather. Another big challenge is the time between contact sessions which slows the pace of effective progress. We use WhatsApp to check in, share ideas and offer support, but this is no match for workshops and physical interaction with teachers. Language is another challenge, but using a translator is an effective solution. This allows teachers to ask questions in their home language, and the Facilitators are confident that valuable information is not lost.

Dates for four contact sessions in 2025 have been set. Funding for two of these has been secured from Arm in Arm in Africa, an American NPO that has provided support for several years. Our grateful thanks go to them. Prospects for acquiring additional funds to see the project through to completion are also looking good, and a prospective funder will visit us in the field in February.

In 2025, we intend to visit more participant schools to offer on-site support and demonstrations. A major focus will be effective planning and use of loose parts within the official curriculum. Empowering teachers to use their community to help with equipment and supplies will be addressed, as will helping teachers organise their materials through playful sorting activities and good classroom layout.

We look forward to 2025!



Carole Scott is Project Leader and Facilitator,
assisted by **Yolande Delpont**, Facilitator.



The Kathu Solar Park project is a collaboration between the Centre for Early Childhood Development (CECD) and *Africa A+ Schools (A+)*. The participants are from 25 Early Childhood Education (ECE) centres in Kathu, Kuruman, Olifantshoek and Deben, which are mostly rural and semi-urban areas. The ECE centres are divided into two cohorts. **A+** training uses a whole-school approach and includes all 128 staff who work with children (only one cohort in photo). The qualifications of the participants range from none to NQF Level 5.

The Kathu Solar Park project (KSP) recommenced in 2024 with online calls to the principals of twelve Cohort 1 ECE centres. The calls took place in January and February, in preparation for the first field trip which took place on 8–17 March 2024. The calls provide an intimate one-on-one session with principals and valuable information on the context of their centres. The calls are one of the methods **A+** uses to inform the content for training workshops. The principals are forthcoming during these calls as to what their challenges are and what they need.

Online sessions were held with each of the eight Kathu Community Facilitators. Here the calls provide a safe space to connect and talk about personal heartbreak and celebrations, professional highlights and challenges. Support of the ECE centres is the focus during these conversations, as well as the Facilitators' reports that are submitted bi-weekly. Each conversation is summarised and stored in a digital folder for each of the ECE centres and Community Facilitators, which makes

following their progress easy. The Community Facilitators are being trained in the **A+** approach and will continue with implementation once the project has been completed.

The 3-year project commenced in 2023, and 2024 saw the Community Facilitators demonstrating the **A+** approach for the first time. The demonstrations took place in Olifantshoek, Kuruman, Kathu and Deben. ECE teachers from each area were invited to observe and reflect during the demonstrations. These on-site sessions allowed educators to make connections between practice and theory. The National Curriculum Framework came to life because links to it were made throughout.

Here are some of the written comments of teachers who attended the demonstrations. The question was: "What will you implement from today's demonstration to support your ECD Centre in the **A+** approach?"

- Dikagiso Motlonye: "I would like to implement how to communicate with children and teachers."
- Pule Sempe: "Different materials that excite children. Big paper for all the children to draw on during art time – I've realised the children like it. Take time with children."
- Patricia Hotsele: "I'm gonna give children activity to create their own stuff."
- Ephraim Mothobi: "Implement a new way of teaching I've learned from this training."
- Daphney Goanathebe: "Love the art part, would definitely use it. It was exciting and the kids loved it."

The **A+** team loved Community Facilitator Kelebonye Mashishi's epiphanous moment. She related how before she would give children pictures to copy, but now she had learnt to ask children to draw their own pictures instead. She experienced and witnessed the rich capabilities of children during the session. (The **A+** in *Africa A+ Schools*, stands for arts-enriched. Every training workshop promotes knowledge of art and art practice. Here facilitator Kelebonye applies knowledge of line to draw a portrait before she ventures into loose parts to interpret her drawing.)



Thirteen Cohort Two ECE centres attended the **A+** Spring Institute. The training covered five full days during the first week of September, subsequent to a baseline survey of each of the centres in the previous week. During the training, teachers delved into what is important regarding ourselves, for children and the ECE centres, before discussing what is important for **A+**. Each ECE centre received an **A+** file and each participant a hardcover book that they decorated to symbolise what is important for them about teaching young children.

Collaboration is one of the **A+** essentials and the participants explored what is needed to build an effective team (see photos). The participants enjoyed hands-on activities that demonstrated two different teaching approaches and drew conclusions for best practice. An introduction to



the NCF (National Curriculum Framework) as a guide to support what we do with young children every day, was positively received.



Here are examples of written reflections from the 5-day training:

- Isabella du Rand: “Today I enjoyed the presentation of the facilitators. Making new friends. Learning more about the importance of art and got a chance to learn the importance of **A+**.”
- Jeanett from Ya Rona DayCare: “Today I enjoyed the way the facilitators taught and made us understand everything. They were very welcoming.”
- Famieda from Kabouterland: “I am inspired by the trusting game. I like the way we work in groups and also the way we get along with each other.”
- Isabella from Lisa’s Bumble Bees: “I am thinking differently about the difference between presenting and facilitation. I now know the difference between them.”
- Boikokobetso from Bambi confirmed: “Am inspired by myself. I was not believing in myself. But this training – it did something on me.”

Participants offered the following written suggestions and ideas:

- Constanation from Simba Kleurterliefies: “My ideas and suggestions are that you must give more training because I take a lot from you.”
- Joyce from Mpepe Thari Daycare: “My ideas and suggestions are to teach all the ECD practitioners about **A+**.”
- Kelebonye from Ya-Rona Child Daycare: “I am going to do the following at my centre: drawing and stop copying. Share the ideas with the staff and parents, especially the ones we can save money on it so that we can participate in recycling.”



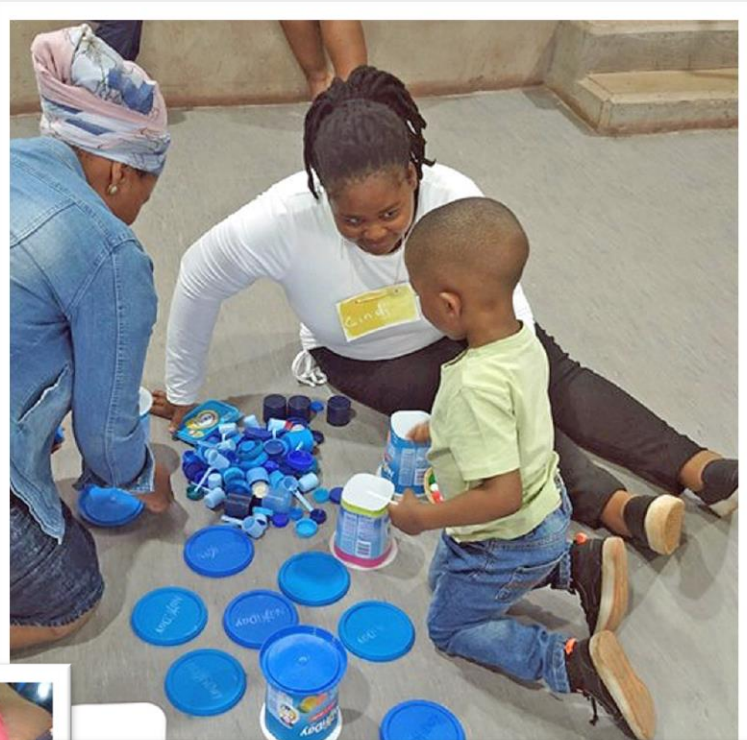
Day five focussed the participants on what changes they want to see at their centres in 2025. They enjoyed a magnificent workshop with visiting guest artists who offered insights into self/ego through movement and performance, and how we can bring objects to life in puppetry and storytelling (see photos of group with artists and teachers bringing objects to life). They showed how the ego can influence our pedagogical and leadership practice.



Participants wrote on their highlights:

- Constanation from Simba Kleuterlyfies: "Today with the artists it was really inspiring me the things they learn and show us about ourselves."
- Boikokobetso from Bambi: "The highlight was so amazing. It was only five days but it's like I have been here for months. Am very rich in mind because of **A+**."
- Juliana (facilitator): "...how art can be so creative. It can be anything that you put your mind to."
- Magrietha from Simba Kleuterliefies: "Do more creative and art with my children instead of colouring the whole day. Discuss with my colleagues what I've learned."
- Lene from Reatlegile: "Kids should choose their activity."

Two parent-training workshops took place in November 2024. Parents were introduced to the importance of play through playing themselves in collaboration with others and using "loose parts". (See photo. Notice how the parents participate with their children and listen carefully to them.). The creativity observed was astounding. Despite low attendance numbers, the workshops were very well received.





Loose Parts theory and practice is embedded in the **A+** approach, allowing for expression of children’s ideas, creativity, collaboration and problem solving, during on-site demonstrations, teacher and parent training.



Comments from Kathu parents:

- Olorato Dikolanyane (from Magobe Pre-school): “Today, I learned that playing with friends helps children build key social skills, like listening and problem solving. Playing is a great way to help a child learn while having fun.”
- Jolene Redelinghuys (from Cherubs KO Sentrum): “I will provide the school with more open-ended material for the children to play with.”
- In response to how I can support my child's ECD centre, Kegomoditswe Kilelo said: “You can give the loose parts to your child’s centre. To pay my school fees for my child.”

The **A+** team’s objective for 2025 is to support the ECE educators, no matter the context they find themselves in, in creating a climate for teaching and learning that is welcoming, that inspires connections between everyone and invites exploration, wonder and curiosity. It is a privilege to be part of this journey and to witness resilient women and men who are committed to creating spaces for young children that are caring, stimulating and meaningful. We express our sincere gratitude to Kathu Solar Park for creating this and opportunity.

Yolande Delport is Project Leader and Facilitator, assisted by June O’Neill, Facilitator.



A key aspect of **A+** work is harnessing the creative potential of found objects. The education community refers to these materials as “loose parts”. They comprise a variety of items, from plastic recyclables, old keys and tins, to discarded materials like old flooring samples, large reels, cardboard tubes, and natural objects such as stones and shells, etcetera. The open-ended nature of these materials is what makes them attractive. They are not fashioned into a specific toy, but rather offer opportunities for exploration and play in creative ways. Children can insert their own imagination into such play.

We work extensively with loose parts during workshops, demonstrating their versatility as resources. They are generally available at no cost and communities can help to source them. Furthermore, use of loose parts is clearly a contribution toward environmentally sustainable reuse and recycling. Educational value is extracted from materials which would normally be sent to landfill.

The *iZinto Materials Centre* originated in Cape Town in a storage facility that was funded by Richard Burnett, a Rotary member who was supportive of the work of **A+**. A second facility was then started in Humansdorp (Kouga district, Eastern Cape) that also received funding from an angel donor. It was here that training workshops could incorporate the concept of loose parts as the space was large enough to host workshops, and teachers were able to see how the materials were organised and kept. Later it was decided to rather help teachers to create mini materials centres at their own schools so that loose parts could easily be incorporated into classroom activities.

In Cape Town, the *iZinto Materials Centre* now operates out of a garage at the Centre for Creative Education (CCE), a teachers’ college in Plumstead. It is offered as a space to curate materials at no cost and, in turn, CCE students learn about loose parts as part of coursework at the college. Running **A+** workshops from this central location benefits CCE and local schools.

The potential to take the **A+** *iZinto* concept and set of teaching practices further requires a consistent source of funding and an expanded approach. **A+**’s medium-term vision for *iZinto* is to create a mobile depot in the form of a large branded van. Such a van would be fitted with shelving and boxes to house a good selection of loose parts and other training materials. The van would be based in Eastern Cape and would be driven by **A+** Facilitators into local communities that have demonstrated enthusiasm for **A+** training. Workshops would be run at local ECD centres, out of the van. We believe that such a mobile extension of *iZinto* is workable. It would allow **A+** to reach a wider audience than it can through its three-year projects alone, and it would raise the visibility of **A+** and its approach in the broader educational community. *Should you be interested in funding such a project, please contact us.*

We continue to work hard to convert our dreams into realities!

Carole Scott is Project Leader for *iZinto*



Looking back at challenges, and ahead to potential in 2025

2024, although a good year for **A+**, was not without its challenges. Among other initiatives, we started a partnership with GlobalGiving, an international crowd-funding platform for NPOs. Through them we started to raise funds for a new project, especially on Giving Tuesday (3 December 2024). However, this type of fundraising is a “slow burn”.

This year, 2025, we celebrate our **10th Anniversary!** We intend to mark it in at least eight particular ways:

1. **Gather in Kouga**, Eastern Cape, to celebrate the conclusion of the five-year Kouga Windfarm Trust ECD Project. This was our first big project since becoming an NPO and was highly successful.
2. **Produce a document on lessons learned** from the Kouga project. **A+** makes a point of doing monitoring and evaluation so that we can learn from both our successes and our failures. Fortunately, in Kouga there have been many more successes than failures.
3. **Raise funds to launch a new three-year project**, the **Makana Early Education Project (MEEP)**, in Eastern Cape. MEEP is up on the GlobalGiving website, so check it out at www.globalgiving.org/projects/build-early-learning-in-makana-south-africa/ We also have another exciting new project on the drawing board, but it is too early to give out details yet.
4. **Launch our revamped A+ website** into cyberspace. It will look good and have lots of information organized in a user-friendly fashion.
5. **Raise funds to expand iZinto** into Eastern Cape. Currently **iZinto** operates in Cape Town, but we want it and its great teaching methods to have much wider reach, especially in Eastern Cape. (See previous chapter in this report.)
6. **Welcome at least one new member onto the A+ Board**. The Board provides invaluable oversight and guidance, so the more professional input we can get, the better.
7. **Publish at least one item** on the great work that **A+** is doing. The world of academic education needs to be able to draw from our experience and expertise.
8. **Expand our network of A+ supporters**. We will do this in a variety of ways where we have visibility and contacts.

We look forward to reporting back on all of our achievements in 2025!

James Harrison is Fundraiser and Editor for **A+**.



Africa A+ Schools (A+) and the United Nations



of the

Africa A+ Schools (A+) is a registered non-profit organization (NPO Registration No. 220-868) working in the field of early childhood education since 2014. **A+** focuses on community upliftment through promotion of quality education in the preschool and foundation phases (ages 1-9 years).

A+ has reflected on how its work aligns with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as defined by the United Nations (UN). The SDGs are intended to guide the development of nations in such a way as to benefit all peoples, economies and the planetary environment.

We have concluded that **the work of A+ does indeed align well with most of the SDGs**, and is irrelevant to a few. We believe that **A+** helps to drive the SDGs in the South African communities where it works. **A+** is certainly not in conflict with any of the 17 SDGs, but the alignment is naturally stronger and more direct with some SDGs than with others. Below we highlight the goals to which we believe **A+** makes a substantive contribution.

Poverty (SDG 1) is a phenomenon that is exacerbated by low levels of education. South Africa faces serious challenges in the quality of education offered to its children. By working to upgrade the standards of pedagogy in early-education classrooms, **A+** creates a sound educational foundation for higher grades to build on, thereby broadening opportunities for young people and their gainful employment, to escape the grip of poverty.



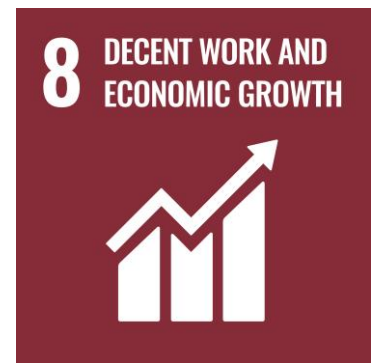
Quality Education (SDG 4) is exactly what **A+** promotes. We do this by training teachers, principals, parents and Community Facilitators in pedagogical techniques of play-based teaching and learning, especially by using all of the **arts** to achieve joyful and creative learning.



Gender Equality (SDG 5), although not a specific target of **A+**, is indirectly addressed by the fact that the great majority of trainees in **A+** programmes are **women**. By strengthening the skills of teachers, principals and parents, it is largely women who are being up-skilled and empowered. This is positive for poor communities in which women generally do not enjoy equal status with men.



Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8) is relevant to preschool education because this is one of the few sectors in which women from underprivileged communities can achieve professional status. **A+** specifically targets preschools because their teachers are frequently under-qualified and inexperienced. Through **A+** training, these teachers not only become more skilled and effective, but also improve their career prospects and potential to sustain income.



Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (SDG 9) may seem very remote from early childhood education. However, the **A+** approach to pedagogy strongly emphasizes creativity, problem-solving and critical thinking. These learned attributes are all key to entrepreneurship which, in turn, is key to innovation and the development of industry. **A+** operates from a conviction (supported by research) that acquisition of these key skills begins at an early age.



Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10) is highly relevant in South Africa which has extreme levels of social and economic inequality. As explained under SDG 8 (above), **A+** training enhances the professionalism and efficacy of its trainees, regardless of socioeconomic status, thereby helping to shrink the gap between more and less privileged communities and their respective levels of education.



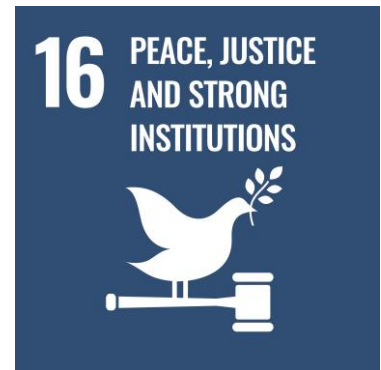
Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12) finds expression in the **A+** emphasis on the use of cast-off, natural and recyclable materials as educational resources. In other words, **A+** makes extensive use of no-cost, readily available materials in its teaching and learning activities. In this way, an awareness of the value and potential of such materials is promoted and the need for new, expensive and wasteful resources is reduced.



A+ frequently draws themes from nature in its creative, arts-based teaching and learning activities, thereby promoting an awareness of nature, flora and fauna. This naturally leads teachers and children to greater appreciation of, and desire to preserve, our natural heritage (SDGs 14 & 15).



A+ has a conviction that schools are among the most important **institutions** in society. We work to strengthen schools by adopting a “whole-school” approach to training. This means that all members of staff are included in workshops and stakeholder meetings to foster inclusivity and the development of an institutional culture of quality education. Functional schools can undoubtedly contribute to **peace and justice** in communities.



A+ regularly partners with other organizations in its community projects. By entering into **partnerships**, a wider range of services can be offered to schools. For example, while A+ focuses on teacher training, partner organizations can assist schools with feeding schemes, infrastructural development and administrative protocols. Such combinations of expertise and resources make significant upgrades of schools possible.



Taking the above into account, we believe that *Africa A+ Schools* can proudly claim to be making a contribution to South Africa’s achievement of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals. It is our intention to continue to deliver on these worthy objectives up to 2030, and beyond.

Acknowledgement: *Africa A+ Schools* acknowledges the United Nations as the source of the icons and SDGs used in this document.

Disclaimer: The use of the SDGs and their icons in this document does not imply endorsement by the United Nations of *Africa A+ Schools*, its products or services, or of its planned activities.

James Harrison, November 2024

Funders, donors and collaborators

Africa A+ Schools (A+) enjoys moral, professional and financial support from many collaborators, funders and donors. We wish to express our sincere thanks and appreciation to all of those listed below:

Collaborators:

- ❖ Centre for Early Childhood Development
- ❖ The Platform, through Dr Spiwo Xapile
- ❖ Centre for Creative Education
- ❖ Grow ECD

Funders:

- ❖ Kouga Windfarm Community Trust
- ❖ D.G. Murray Trust
- ❖ Kathu Solar Park
- ❖ The Platform
- ❖ Arm in Arm in Africa

Donors:

- ❖ Paul Steenkamp
- ❖ Jonny Sachar
- ❖ Arthur Knox
- ❖ Anonymous Angel Donors
- ❖ Donors through GlobalGiving

If you are interested in supporting the work of **A+**, please get in touch with the Executive Director, Dr Giulietta Harrison, at 072 959 8895 or harrisongiulietta@gmail.com. More details about our fundraising are available on the Donate page of our website at <https://africaaplus.org.za/>

