

Early learning at Malungeni and surrounding ECD centres

23rd-30th March
2025



Stakeholders:

Dr Spiwo Xapile
Malungeni and surrounding district ECD teachers
Africa A+ Schools team

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*“Everything you can imagine is real”
- Pablo Picasso*

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Executive Summary

Africa A+ Schools facilitators Carole Scott and Yolande Delpont travelled to Malungeni in the Eastern Cape for Field Trip 2 of Year 2. The eight-day programme with ECD practitioners from the Malungeni and surrounding districts marked the 7th contact session of a three-year intervention programme aimed at improving the quality of Early Childhood Development (ECD) in the region. As in the past, the workshop session included visits from interested people in the community and this visit was no different. Nkululeko Somhlalo from the Masikule an NPO that offers Level 4 and 5 training for ECD practitioners and Fezeko Ncoyini from the Department of Education were key visitors. This field trip was a continuation of the themes and topics introduced in the last field trip and also included visits to new pre-schools further afield from Malungeni. The programme included the second local facilitator training, as well as check-ins at five new schools and one at a school that re-opened after having damaged infrastructure due to flooding. The A+ facilitators also led two full-day workshops for the practitioners in the Kwa Batshofule Community Centre. In addition to the teacher workshops, a Wednesday afternoon workshop for the parents and caregivers in the community was held. The purpose of the workshops was to:

- Review the Africa A+ Essentials and their importance for teaching and learning.
- Continue to explore the importance of movement in the development of young children.
- Introduce the stages of physical development of the child
- Practice how brainstorming can generate ideas for curriculum planning.
- Begin to plan implementing the brainstorming method.
- Participate in creative activities to connect with and enjoy parent/caregiver's own creativity.

All the familiar faces from previous training sessions attended the workshops, and the A+ facilitators also welcomed some new participants who have joined schools as new teachers. The total cost of the 8-day travel and the 6-day programme was R164,620.

1. Programme Activities

Date	Activities
23 rd March	TRAVEL to Malungeni from Cape Town and Riebeeck East
24 th March	On-site check in visits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● K.C.C. Academy Pre-school ● Imizamo Yetu Pre-School ● Botani Pre-school ● Vukani Pre- School ● Nomthunthoto Pre-School
25 th March	Facilitator Training <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mbangisweni Pre-School
26 th March	On site Demonstration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mbangisweni Pre-School
26 th March	Parents Workshop
27 th March	Workshop 1
28 th March	Workshop 2
30 th March	TRAVEL from Malungeni to Riebeeck East and Cape Town

The activities listed in the table above are described in detail below:

1.1. On-Site Check-In Visits:

The A+ facilitators visited some new schools during this field trip. Some of the schools have been attending the A+ workshops since the project began whilst one school was a new addition.

- **KCC Academy**

The K.C.C. Academy is a new primary school that includes a Grade R class. Some of the other classes consist of combined ages, for example, grades 1,2& 3 together. This structure relies on very creative pedagogies to meet the different needs of the learners. The Vice

Principal of the school, Nokonwaba Mapipa, has attended our workshops in the past and wanted to include two of her teachers in the training. She felt that even though A+ is geared toward early childhood, the teachers would benefit from experiencing the core principles of the A+ approach. This is relevant as the A+ approach is not a curriculum but rather a teaching approach, making it applicable regardless of age or grade. The two teachers, Neziswa Cebisa Nomquphu , the Grade R teacher and Ebob Nageri , the Grade 1,2 & 3 combined class, attended the two full-day workshops.

Photos below Clockwise L-R: KCC Academy principal and staff with A+ facilitators; gardener/singer Simpiwe Bhejile; Grade R class with their teacher; Children counting with Lego for assessment



- **Imizamo Yetu Pre-school.**

Imizamo Yetu Preschool is a short distance from Mthata located in an area with large trees. The school was initially part of the training, but has missed sessions due to staffing issues. They have recently returned to the programme. The school consists of a brick and mortar building as well as a container and has 56 children enrolled at the ECD centre. The principal Nomopelo Mtini informed us in the morning that she had to go to town to hand in her narrative and financial report, and so we met the two teachers who were managing the programme for the day. The children were playing outside when we arrived. Some were eating potato chips while climbing the large tree at the front of the building. A line of

potties alongside the fence was colour coded blue and grey for boys and pink and grey for girls. A few children were inside the container sitting on mats on the floor eating out of lunchboxes brought from home. The brick building has peeling paint and loose floor linoleum. The ceiling roof was patched and gaping in parts. The big room consisted of many coloured chairs in a row. The play area signs were stuck up on the wall behind the desk along with the other posters and regulatory paperwork. The children were allowed to run around with their snacks. There was no order to the snack time. In another room there was a bed, and boxes with papers and miscellaneous items stacked up in one corner. No play materials were visible.

Photos below L-R: Imizamo Yetu brick building; Children climbing the tree; Potties lined up at Imizamo Yetu; The coloured chairs lined up in rows



- **Botani Pre-School**

Botani Preschool closed for many months due to damage that the building incurred from flooding in the area. When we visited last, the ceiling had gaping holes, and the structure revealed some severe cracks. Some walls had even shifted. The building was deemed unsafe, and at the last visit, there were no children. The building has since been patched up, but much of the damage is still evident. When the A+ facilitators arrived, children were playing on a carpet on the floor. The children’s shoes were all neatly lined up at the side of the carpet. The tables and chairs were stacked to one side in a corner and the room felt open and spacious. One child was sitting with a book and “reading” to the other children. The new teacher from Botani is motivated to engage the children in activities and play. She has drawn posters on the wall and decorated the room with the children’s drawings. The teacher states that there are 40 children, but parents complain about the state of the building. Botani also has a great outdoor space, but the outside climbing equipment requires repair. Nails are visible and beams are loose.

Pictures from Left: Botani School; The carpet and spacious play space; Children’s drawings on the wall; A child reading



- **Vukani Pre-school**

Vukani pre-school is located down a steep hill away from the access road. The ECD centre is contained in one brick and mortar building surrounded by a secure fence. There is outside play equipment and toilets at the back of the property. The classroom is small, and children were drawing on the floor. The children make use of potties as the long-drops are not child-safe.



Above L-R: Vukani Pre-school from outside the fence; the daily programme on the wall at a child's height; the potties lined up for the children; The principal and the children at the entrance to the school

- **Nomthomthuto Pre-school**

Located on the far side of Ngqeleni, Nomthomthuto Pre-school sits on a hill in the village of Godini. From the school garden, the rolling hills span out as far as the eye can see. The

ECD Centre is a brick-and-mortar building with a large fenced playground. The principal, Noneka Delihlazo, also grows vegetables in the playground. Inside the ECD centre, play areas were labelled and each area had plenty of resources. Outside at the bottom of the grounds is a large toilet with a separate entrance for adults and children, also clearly labelled.

Photos from L-R: Nothomthuto Preschool entrance from the road; the playground with good play equipment; the toilets labelled for adults and children; the play areas



1.2. Workshops

Carole and Yolande facilitated the second local facilitator workshop on Tuesday, 25th, an onsite demonstration on the morning of the 26th of March, followed by a Parent

meeting/workshop at the Kwa Batshofule Community centre that afternoon. The parent meeting time was changed from Saturday to Wednesday afternoon in the hopes that attendance would be more consistent. This change was somewhat successful in that 15 parents attended the workshop. Two full-day Practitioner workshops on 27th March and 28th March 2025 were also held in the Kwa Batchofule Community centre.

Facilitator Workshop 2:

The local facilitators participated in their second workshop, which took place in the church hall at Mbangisweni Pre-school. Four of the facilitators attended, along with the two A+ facilitators and our translator and fellow A+ facilitator in training, Mzikayise Ndzuzu. One of the local facilitators had a family emergency and could not make it. The main goal of the workshop was to:

- Identify the role of an A+ facilitator
- Plan for ongoing implementation of the A+ approach
- Set up support structures for the Malungeni Practitioner
- Continue building a portfolio of evidence (PoE)
- Developing knowledge and understanding of the A+ Essentials

The main focus areas included the practitioners/facilitators' ideas around how to support the ECD community by looking first at their thoughts and feelings. Using the “Important Book” as a provocation, the facilitators thought about what was important about themselves, what they thought was important about a child they loved, and what was important about an ECD Centre. The facilitators then explored how the A+ Essentials fit into this ECD centre that they envision. The facilitators continued to learn about keeping a portfolio of evidence and how to document the work they will do.





Parent/ Caregiver Workshop:

The parent/caregiver workshop aimed to begin to gain knowledge of the basics of child development so children can be supported as they grow. The workshop highlighted the importance of play in the four domains of child development.

Parents were asked:

- Why is understanding child development important to support children’s growth?
- How do we best support our children's growth and development?
- Why is play important for children’s development?

After a brief discussion around the questions, “What are children born into?” and “What do children bring into the world?” parents continued to work in groups on the follow-up activity. First, parents drew a child on a large piece of paper. Using strips of paper, parents had to allocate an area of the body to each of the four domains of child development: language development, cognitive development, social and emotional development and physical development. They then discussed how play can support these areas of development. During the final hour, parents got creative with clay. Parents looked at a slide show of some famous sculptures of mother and child figures, some realistic and some abstract. They then proceeded to express themselves through the medium of clay.

Parent Reflections:

- *“I learned how to treat children and how important children are in our lives.”*
- *“I learned about positive thinking that I may pass to the child”*
- *“I would like to learn more about art”*
- *“I would like to learn more about parenting and taking care of people in my environment”*



Practitioner Workshop 1:

This workshop aimed to build on the previous workshop, placing a focus on the importance of movement, but to “zoom in” by thinking about ways we incorporate movement in our activities. The A+ facilitators wanted to continue with planning, as it is seen as an area of importance and need. One of the local facilitators started us off in the morning with the welcome activity. This was a means for her to begin practising her new role. Participants then played a game to refresh their knowledge of the A+ Essentials and processed the

question, “How many ways can a bird move?” This question elicited some interesting responses, and practitioners were surprised by all the ways a bird can move.

The second aim was to continue practising how to create a mind map and brainstorm ideas around a theme. Practitioners had asked for more practice with this activity, and A+ facilitators demonstrated the concept using a theme of “Music”. The practitioners then used their NCF (National Curriculum Framework, 2015) guides to see which ELDA (Early Learning and Development Areas) aims they can match to an activity. A+ facilitators stressed the importance of seeing this practice as a tool to help with the planning of activities.

The final session of the day was spent with a craft activity. The practitioners used fabric, thread and stuffing to make a simple doll.

Workshop focus questions were:

- How do I plan?
- What does the NCF say about movement for young children?
- How can I create resources?
- How can I support children’s exploration?

The participants’ comments in their own words at the end of Workshop 1:

- *“It’s still challenging to me, but I will keep on trying.”*
- *“A highlight today was the way of planning.”*
- *“It is very important to me to make resources without buying.”*
- *“The movement story was fantastic.”*

Photos below L-R: Practitioners discussing the A+ Essentials; Mzi leading an energiser; Practitioners participating in the art provocation; Practitioners making their dolls.





Practitioner Workshop 2:

Workshop 2 continued with the theme of “Movement”. The aim was to have a brief overview of all four domains of child development and then to “zoom in on physical development. Practitioners worked in groups to read through the stages of physical development and underline important facts. Each group was given an age/stage of development and coloured strips of paper. After reading through their age and stage, participants had to write activities that could match their age/stage of development on the strips. Each group shared their work with the others. The second half of the morning was spent working in groups and continuing planning from the day before using the topic of “Music” In the afternoon, the practitioners participated in a process art activity. Starting with a partner and large coloured sheets of paper, one person drew the other from the torso around the arms and head. After cutting their figures out, they were guided through using a medium of their choice, chalk pastel, watercolour and black kokis, to express a time in their lives.

Workshop focus questions were:

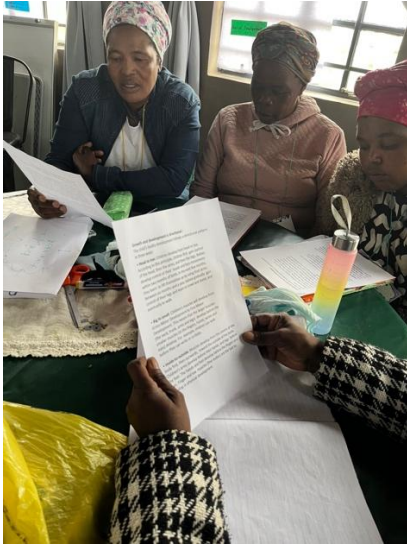
- What are the principles of physical development?
- How do the principles inform what I do with children?
- How can art make us aware of our own social and emotional development?
- How can art help us relate to children?

What the participants said at the end of workshop 2:

- *“I was challenged by the weekly planning but now I’m okay.”*
- *“I will improve the climate at my school by letting the activities be enjoyable.”*

- *“Let children do some things on their own instead of telling them what to do.”*
- *“I will give children a chance to think for themselves.”*
- *“To plan every day makes it easier to teach. You plan according to their ages.”*
- *“I should have many songs and rhymes and give children a chance to explore.”*

Photos below left to right: Practitioners discussing the ages and stages of physical development; Matching their age/stage to activities; Practitioners tracing bodies for process art activity; Practitioners exploring feelings and ages/stages of one's own life through colour



1.3. General:

The Africa A+ facilitators are always enthusiastic and excited to return to Malungeni and conduct the workshops; however, field trip 2 for 2025 saw some of the practitioners not well and suffering from flu-like symptoms which had many of them wearing masks.

Since Field Trip 1 was only a month earlier, A+ facilitators were able to continue with the themes they had started last month. This added a sense of continuity and allowed the facilitators to go a little deeper into the concepts.

The new Batshofule building that is under construction near the main community hall is almost complete and will be a home for Africa A+ iZinto and other Workshop materials. The facilitators look forward to moving into it soon. The permaculture garden is growing strong and cared for by a local gardener.

Photos below left to right: Potjie pot cooking for lunch; The new building viewed from the perma-culture garden



2. Expenditure

The proposal budget and the actual expenditure were as follows:

Item	Proposed	Actual cost
Facilitation (two facilitators) includes prior planning, facilitation,	R57 750	R57 750
Community Facilitator Support	R10 500	R10 500
1) Travel: Car Hire Petrol Costs 2) Travel Cape Town – East London return 3) Travel Gauteng to Mthata	R8 000 R6 000 R9 250	R5 873.97 R2 366.87 R4 485 R8 000
Stipend for Local Facilitators	R30 000	R30 000

Travel per diem for 2 facilitators @ R530 each for 2 days	R1 120	R1 120
PPE for COVID protocols (hand sanitisers, paper towel, masks, etc) top up	R 200	R 131.97
Workshop resources	R4100	R3 934.38
Full day catering for 30 participants + 2 facilitators @ R120 pp x 2 days	R7 680	R7 680
Half-day catering for parent workshop @30 participants	R1 800	R1 800
Malungeni Homestead (accommodation) Food for 2 facilitators	R9 100 R1 920	R9 100 R1 920
Strategic Support	R6 000	R6 000
Administration fee	R5 000	R5 000
Web Management	R4 000	R4 000
Data for 2 facilitators	R1 000	R1000
Translation	R1 200	R1 200
TOTAL	R164 620	R 163 110

3. Programme Highlights

Some highlights included:

- Visiting schools for the first time that have been a part of the project since the start of the 3-year intervention
- Visiting a new school with older children and having the opportunity to work with the teachers
- The incredible ability of the principals and teachers to continue to do the work of caring for children every day despite the infrastructural challenges
- The dynamic presence of Mzikayise Ndzuzo, who accompanied us on our site visits, facilitated some energisers and helped with translation.
- The continued level of commitment from principals and teachers who travel long distances to attend the workshops
- The beauty of this part of South Africa and the stunning vistas the A+ facilitators encountered on route to ECD Centres
- The tolerance of the participants to engage with the activities no matter how challenging
- The enthusiasm of the workshop participants to go beyond their comfort zones when exploring creative projects

- The enthusiasm of the local facilitators to begin taking on their new roles and practicing what it means to facilitate
- The integrity of the participants' reflections after workshops
- The food prepared by local cooks with some vegetables grown and donated by the community
- The community's offering of housing to the participants attending from afar

The Malungeni community welcomes Africa A+ at every visit. While the A+ facilitators are setting up the hall, visitors pop in to say hello. An elderly friend named “Tata”, who struggles to speak and has a physical disability, visits us for every workshop and participates in many of the activities. He is welcomed by all the practitioners and is an “honourary practitioner” at this stage.

Once again, Dr Xapile arranged for the A+ facilitators to have Mzikayise Ndzuzo to accompany us on our site visits and be present during the workshops. Mzi (as he is known) is quickly grasping the A+ approach, making him a delightful and useful colleague. His active engagement in the program suggests he will become an excellent facilitator as his skills grow.

Dr Xapile met with the local facilitators to offer support and hear from them about their new roles. He also addressed the group of practitioners and was present for most of the 2 day workshops.

Photos below left to right: Community members helping set up the catering for workshops; Practitioners helping with clean up after lunch; Yolande Delpont, Mzikayise Ndzuzo and Carole Scott; Dr Xapile addressing the practitioners





4. Programme Challenges

A+ facilitators changed the Saturday parent workshop to a Wednesday afternoon to see if participation would improve. Saturdays proved challenging because families had other commitments, like funerals to attend, and this affected attendance. Hosting the workshop on Wednesday afternoon proved somewhat better, but we find that parents still do not arrive on time. We have always held parent workshops in Malungeni, but are considering branching out and hosting them in different areas.

The infrastructure needs at most of the ECD centres are dire. Many of the same issues still pertain to the structures, such as leaky and broken roofs, mould in the ceiling and on walls, peeling paint and in some cases, peeling linoleum floor coverings. In addition, there is a lack of shelving and space to house materials for the children, and often, things are piled on top of a table in a corner. Practitioners can't implement what they are learning when they do not have the space to do it. The size of a container classroom relative to the number of children the ECD serves is generally a problem as most of the centres range between 30-60 children. In some cases, there may be two containers, but one might serve as a storage space. Outdoor space and outdoor play equipment are not always maintained. At some centres, the equipment showed exposed nails and loose planks. The temperature in the area can swing from cold and rainy to swelteringly hot and humid. Containers do not offer children enough space to move around or to participate in the daily routines of running a classroom. Most of the schools could use some awning or covered outside space that children can use no matter the weather.

Many of the schools do not have toilets and rely on the use of buckets or potties. These are often placed at the end of the school grounds and dumped into the outhouse later. In some cases, children did not even use the buckets but were using the side of a building. Children need safe and clean toilets.

The role of the ECD centre in a rural setting is seen by many as a place where their children can be cared for. Many parents will bring their infants even though they are home. There is

a belief that children will be “educated”. Many principals complain that they are not paid and are still expected to feed children in their care.

There are leadership challenges in some communities and, therefore, a lack of collaboration between the ECD centres and the community at large. There is a gap between the expectations of a community around the service an ECD centre provides and what the school can realistically do given all the constraints. The connection between the quality of the child’s experience in an ECD centre and the role of the community needs to be strengthened through leadership around the common good.

Nutrition is also a concern, and at some schools, children are eating commercial packets of chips for snacks and or lunch. While some schools have signed up for nutrition programmes, not all schools participate, and some children rely on what parents send to school for them to eat. Again, the connection between school, good nutrition, and the role of the parents is inconsistent.

Most of the schools lack basic art materials like paper, paintbrushes, paint, and drawing materials. A+ continues to offer working with what the schools do indeed have, but basic art supplies would go a long way to support the creative projects A+ aspires to.

5. Online Support

A+ Facilitators continue to check in with the Malungeni practitioners on a WhatsApp group. Practitioners love to share their community of practice by posting examples of art activities, movement games, or storytelling activities. A new WhatsApp group has been formed that includes the five local facilitators. The five local facilitators will receive a lot of support from A+ facilitators, who are available to answer questions to support their growth as they move forward in the facilitation process of supporting the local ECD centres.

6. Recommendations

- An in-depth look at the infrastructure of the ECD Centres. How can we expect practitioners to implement the activities and routines when, in reality, the infrastructure is inadequate and unsafe?
- An in-depth look at outside play spaces and play equipment. Children need safe outside spaces to play and explore. These spaces need to be maintained.
- An in-depth look at infrastructure as it relates to basic resources for inside classrooms like shelving and storage space as well as basic art supplies like paper, paint and crayons.
- In in-depth look at the toilets. Safe toilets need to be provided for all ECD Centres to teach healthy life habits.
- To continue to have Mzikayise Ndzuzo join our Malungeni visits as he is proving to be a valuable asset to Africa A+ Schools.
- Continue to create a community of practice supported by the local facilitators.

Dr Xapile is committed to improving the lives of the Malungeni community and surrounding areas from the ground up. Whether he is talking about nutrition and food sustainability through the permaculture garden, or the protection of land through sustainable practices like the concept of reusable nappies, early childhood development or community leadership, Dr Xapile is always asking “what can I do? and, more importantly, “what can we do?” He works on bringing people together, whatever their role, because he believes in the power of relationships to get things done. He is a great listener and believes that in talking, people often answer their own questions. Malungeni lives “inclusion”, evidenced by the welcoming of all who participate in life here. As A+ facilitators have said before, the spirit of ubuntu lives in this community. It is an honour to work with the community of Malungeni.



“ Commitment is an act, not a word” Jean- Paul Sartre