



AFRICA A+ SCHOOLS

Annual Report 2025

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Chairman's message by Thomas Petersson, Chairman of the A+ Board

We are proud to report another year of making positive impacts in South African schools in our own unique **A+** way. Despite continuing challenging times with inflationary pressure on food, fuel and other necessities, including underfunding of Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres and a shortage of trained teachers, wherever we go, **A+** contributes to creative and joyful learning experiences 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 participants.

A+ approach is gaining traction within the ECD community in South Africa. The successful outcomes of our five-year programme in the Kouga district in Eastern Cape, a collaboration between the Kouga Windfarm Community Trust, the Centre for Early Childhood Development (CECD) and **A+**, is a testament to this. We have demonstrated the value of our programmes and the value of our brand. **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 throughout the country. We continue to reflect and develop.

Educating South African children is key to building a resilient and successful future for South Africa. We thank all our donors and sponsors, our fantastic staff in the field and in our offices, our local teaching staff, and all our supporters. First and foremost, however, it is the children with their smiles and eagerness to learn who keep us going. They remind us that learning can be so much fun!



A+ is focussed primarily on teacher training, but the ultimate beneficiaries of our work are children and communities. (Photo courtesy of CECD.)

Director's message by Dr Giulietta Harrison, A+ Executive Director

Dear Partners, Supporters and Friends of A+,

2025 marked a significant milestone for A+ as we concluded a seminal five-year project, continued three ongoing initiatives, and explored new avenues for growth. The urgency of providing quality Early Childhood Development (ECD) programmes was underscored by numerous reports, including the *Thrive by Five Index 2024*, and a continuing lack of meaningful engagement by government. This reality strengthens our resolve to bring quality education to children and parents in poor rural communities where the need is greatest.

Our slogan, “*Engaging curious minds*”, remains at the heart of everything we do. We strive to enable joyful, playful teaching and learning through the arts and creativity. Over the past year, we worked intensively with teachers and parents, discovering what is possible regardless of context or resources. This direct, hands-on knowledge positioned A+ as a trusted collaborator, leading to our partnership with the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) in developing the **Ubuntu Children’s Participatory Rights Framework & Toolkit**, which will be completed and piloted in 2026.

We were honoured to contribute to a Springer publication entitled *Early Childhood Pedagogical Practices Across the World: Selected Case Studies on the Role of Teachers for Learning and Care* (Eds Wendy Boyd and Susanne Garvis, 2025).

Additionally, our collaboration with the Centre for Early Childhood Development (CECD) in the Kouga district of Eastern Cape will culminate in a learning brief, enabling us to share insights and contribute to the growing body of knowledge in the ECD sector.

This year marked our **10th Anniversary**, a time of reflection on our journey and impact. We reaffirm that creativity, arts, problem-solving, and playful learning yield the best outcomes, especially when combined with passionate A+ colleagues, enthusiastic teachers and parents, mindful collaborators, and an asset-based approach to resources. Together, we have proven that quality ECD is not only possible, but transformative.

As we look to 2026 and beyond, we do so with excitement and optimism for what the next decade holds. Thank you for your support and belief in our mission. Together, we will continue to engage curious minds and shape brighter futures.



Treasurer's message by Tania Nortje-Petersson, A+ Treasurer

Another year has gone by, and **A+** is thriving! Even though we've faced challenges in securing funding due to a shifting financial landscape and global economic issues, our dedication remains strong. Our effective approach to delivering quality education for children in our country empowers us to endure. With over a decade of experience rooted in our humble beginnings, we draw on lessons learned to tackle current and future challenges. Our organizational structure is purposefully designed to ensure that we uphold essential checks and balances across all areas, from finance to project execution.

We are immensely grateful to all our past and present partners, funders, and donors (see the list at the end of this report). Without them, and our dedicated **A+** team members, success would be out of reach. All contributors play a crucial role in supporting early childhood education, which is key not only to **A+**, but also to the future of our nation.

As the saying goes, "If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together." This African proverb perfectly embodies our belief that, while individual efforts can yield quick results, the most meaningful and lasting achievements come from collaboration and community.



Teachers in Kouga giving off positive vibes of togetherness. (Photo courtesy of CECD.)

Our 10th Anniversary achievements by James Harrison, A+ Editor and Fundraiser

In 2025, we celebrated our 10th Anniversary! In the previous Annual Report, we committed ourselves to marking the anniversary in at least eight particular ways. This is the list that was published, with comments on how well we did on each item:

1. Gather in Kouga, Eastern Cape, to celebrate the conclusion of the five-year Kouga Windfarm Trust ECD Project. **This happened in August and was a happy occasion shared with our collaborator NPO, CECD, and the Kouga community.**
2. Produce a document on lessons learned from the Kouga project. **A+ is collaborating with CECD to produce a “learning brief” which will be published during 2026.**
3. Raise funds to launch a new three-year project, the Makana Early Education Project (MEEP), in Eastern Cape. **It was a challenging year for fundraising. We made numerous applications, but only a few paid off. We are not yet able to launch a major new project. Please note that MEEP is up on the GlobalGiving website, so check it out at www.globalgiving.org/projects/build-early-learning-in-makana-south-africa/**
4. Launch our revamped A+ website into cyberspace. **Done and dusted. Visit the A+ website and have a look: <http://www.africaaplus.org.za/>**
5. Raise funds to expand **A+ iZinto** into Eastern Cape. **No success yet, but we keep trying!**
6. Welcome at least one new member onto the **A+ Board**. **We got two! They are Augusta Brandt from Western Cape and Angi Jones from Eastern Cape. Both are steeped in ECE and are real assets to the Board. Their biographies are on the A+ website.**
7. Publish at least one item on the great work that **A+** is doing. **We got a chapter into a prestigious international book published by Springer. The chapter is based on our work in Kouga. This is a link to the book – take a look: <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-981-96-2747-9>**
8. Expand our network of **A+** supporters. **We improved our mailing lists on email and WhatsApp, but we need many more “Friends of A+”. Let us know if you would like to be on our mailing lists.**

Of course, in any given year, the greatest **A+** achievements are the training projects carried out by our team of **A+** Facilitators, namely Yolande Delport, Carole Scott and June O'Neill. Please read their project reports in this Annual Report.

The reach of the projects is summarized in a table (below). Relative to the national need for improvements in early childhood education (see the article on **A+ and Thrive by Five**, in this report), our reach may seem insignificant. However, our impact on our trainees and the children in their care is anything but insignificant – see the table on results obtained in Kouga (below). Also, with each year, our organizational profile and experience is consolidated and will continue to expand.

Measure of reach	Kathu	Malun-geni	Kouga	iZinto	Totals
Number of contact sessions in 2025	6	3	3	n.a.	12
Number of days of training in the field	47	23	18	20**	108
Number of participating ECE centres	27	25	38	33	129
Total number of children enrolled at centres	1424	1070	1323	1680***	5497
Number of teachers/students in training	119	30*	112	28	289
Number of principals in training	27	30*	38	n.a.	95
Number of parents who attended training	54	34	n.a.	n.a.	88
Number of Community Facilitators in training	8	5	7	n.a.	20

*No distinction was made between teachers and principals.

**Training of ECCE student teachers specifically using *iZinto* materials.

***Each student teacher works in a school and uses *iZinto* materials for lessons and supplies school with materials as needed.

Table outlining the impact of the training done in Kouga over a period of four years. Note that this table is based on objective annual measures of 16 criteria that covered the work that **A+** was responsible for during the project. (Table courtesy of CECD.)

Table outlining the reach of the four **A+** projects that were active during 2025. Note that, through their **289 teachers** in **129 ECD centres**, **5497 children** benefitted from our training. We are proud of those numbers.

Note that all the figures in this table are specific to the 2025 calendar year and not to the whole duration of the projects, in which case the figures would be higher.

Table I. Average performance of all ECD centres across the 16 indicators.

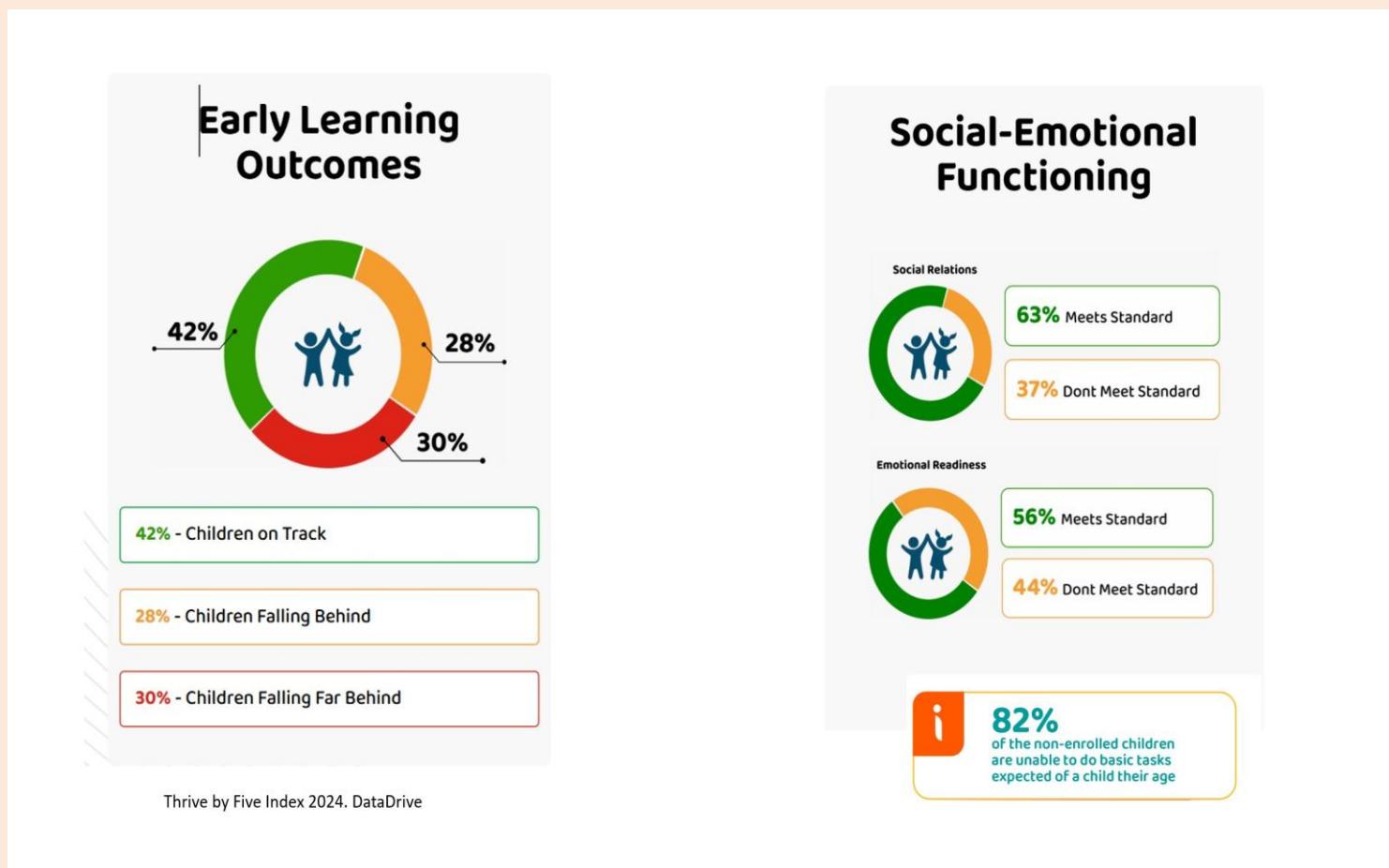
	Baseline	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Baseline to year 4 change
Climate (Children)	51,8	58,6	54,5	71,5	69,6	17,8
Valuing Children's Creativity	7,7	12,8	23,9	35,9	30,3	22,6
Infrastructure (The ECD Environment)	38,4	51,2	50,0	60,1	67,6	29,2
Curriculum (Documents)	2,4	21,3	22,8	33,3	32,3	29,9
Experiential Learning (Open-Ended Questioning)	7,1	29,5	27,8	38,6	40,4	33,2
Enriched Assessment	11,9	30,7	32,3	42,4	46,4	34,5
Curriculum (Planning)	16,7	41,0	38,1	52,9	51,5	34,8
Climate (ECD Environment)	30,7	47,4	49,0	58,1	65,6	34,9
Experiential Learning (Open-Ended Materials)	4,8	16,7	26,4	39,5	44,4	39,4
Visual Arts	11,9	28,2	36,1	49,6	52,5	40,6
Infrastructure (Daily Programme)	14,3	44,8	48,0	51,2	61,6	47,3
Experiential Learning (Concrete Objects)	4,8	21,8	41,9	48,7	54,5	49,3
Literary Arts	7,1	30,7	40,9	49,6	58,5	51,4
Infrastructure (Learning Materials)	30,9	55,1	84,2	78,7	82,7	51,2
Infrastructure (Learning Activities)	11,9	32,0	43,5	59,8	69,6	57,3
Performing Arts	4,8	22,6	42,8	75,1	87,8	83,3
Average	14,7	34,1	41,6	52,3	57,2	42,1

An incredible average increase of 42 percentage points!

A+ and the Thrive by Five report by Linda Biersteker, Member of the A+ Board and co-author of the Thrive by Five Index 2024

The *Thrive by Five Index* is the most comprehensive, ongoing survey of Early Childhood Development (ECD) in South Africa. An updated report, *Thrive by Five Index 2024*, was recently published. It provides **Africa A+ Schools (A+)** with a benchmark against which to assess the relevance of its work to the current state of ECD in our country. This article summarizes what that relevance looks like in terms of delivering quality ECD.

The current ECD picture



An alarming 58% of 4-5 year-old South African children enrolled in early learning programmes (ELPs) across South Africa are “Falling Behind” or “Falling Far Behind” on skills needed to benefit from Grade R. (*Thrive by Five Index, 2024*).

Poor performance is due to a range of poverty-related adversities. Enrolment in an ELP does improve the picture, but as the *Thrive by Five Index* (2024) showed, the quality of ELPs needs improvement.

Thrive by Five showed that task orientation (the ability to concentrate, persist and be interested), followed by social and emotional functioning skills, which include initiative and willingness to try new things, were the

Access to essential services



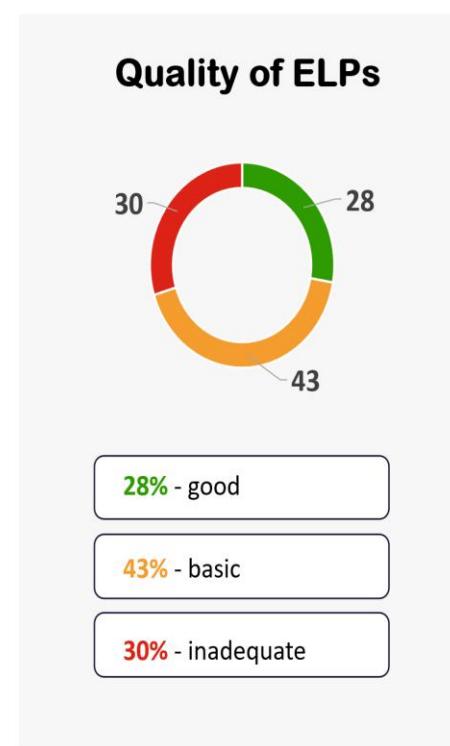
68%

of 3 – 5-year-olds
attend an early learning programme



33%

of early learning programmes
receive an ECD subsidy



strongest predictors of learning outcomes. The study showed that children in higher quality ELPs have better social and emotional functioning, but only 17% of ELPs had good ratings for teaching strategies. Research has shown that the quality of teaching strategies (that is, pedagogy) is the factor that most directly predicts learning outcomes. Interviews for *Thrive by Five* identified a concerning lack of understanding about learning through play. More than 40% of principals and teachers felt that instruction was more important for learning than play. In relation to the National Curriculum Framework, most ELPs were using it, but only half of them had access to any support materials.

Other recent local studies of classroom quality show that ELPs where children have better ELOM (Early Learning Outcomes Measures) scores:

Support child agency by providing choices, free play, interaction to extend learning, planning, and assessment of children

- Have good management, supportive working environments, continuing professional development, and access to materials that enable practitioners to support learning.

The A+ approach: an evidence-based response to the challenge of quality

Several recent studies in South Africa and other countries highlight the importance of many aspects of the **A+** approach. Early learning and the quality of environments that support it need sustained and focused intervention to change the mindsets that underpin teaching practice. Alongside effective pedagogy, making joyful learning cost-effective is also a priority. In the table below, several of the “**A+** essentials” (on the left) are listed. These are explained in terms of their contribution to *quality* in ECD (on the right).

Some essential elements of the A+ approach	Contributions to quality in ECD
1) Engagement of whole schools and local community, partnerships.	Ensures contextual relevance and ownership, raises awareness, and draws a range of partners into an enabling environment. Builds a positive working environment, shown to promote staff retention.
2) Foster a mindset in teachers and children that embraces creativity, problem-solving, innovation, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication.	Supports child participation and agency, social and emotional skills, creativity and self-reflection.
3) Joyful learning, use of indigenous knowledge and skills, an emphasis on the arts, and the use of “loose parts”.	Focus on play and children’s interests. Promotes confidence, exploration and innovation, which develop all areas of learning. Shows how to use found materials to support learning irrespective of context.
4) An extended input (usually over a period of three years) of intensive, hands-on workshops in practical teaching methods and professional development.	Attitude and behaviour change take time to acquire and consolidate. Changing mindsets and breaking old habits allows for new ways of teaching and learning.
5) Sustained mentoring that supports teachers in effectively implementing the national curricula.	On-site support and feedback are proven to be the most effective way of supporting implementation and changing teaching practice.

Quality ECD requires a combination of efforts that are focused not only on infrastructure, nutrition and human resources, but on the pedagogy that happens within ECD centres. The need for and value of the **A+** multi-faceted approach to improving teaching and learning is confirmed by local and international evidence. The **A+** approach works to meet the early learning needs of young children and delivers the practical training and support so badly needed by the ECD workforce.

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Giese S., Pettersson Gelander G., Cook C., Carnegie T., Tredoux C., Dawes A., Biersteker L., Beukes S., Pahla Z. and Kika-Mistry J. 2025. *Thrive by Five Index 2024: National Findings*. Cape Town: DataDrive2030.

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Project report: Kouga

by Yolande Delport, **A+** Facilitator

On 7 August 2025, **A+** and the Centre for Early Childhood Development (CECD) hosted a heartfelt celebration dinner in Jeffreys Bay to honour more than 40 ECD principals who walked a transformative five-year journey with us. The growth of our Community Facilitators (CFs) shone brightly, especially in the confidence with which they now speak and lead. As CF **Felicity Toll** shared with the audience, “Now I never think I can’t do this or that... I’m not scared to try something new.”



CF Felicity Toll and principal Margaret Zietsman give a speech at the dinner.



Kouga teachers, principals and Community Facilitators at the end-of-project dinner.

Principal **Margaret Zietsman** from Twinkle Daycare has seen her leadership flourish through the **A+** training. Her centre has become a model, a place where new centres can come to learn, ask questions about registration or planning, and see high-quality educational practice in action. Alongside her, the eight Kouga CFs are now trained and well-equipped to carry the **A+** approach forward, even though the formal project has ended.



Kouga CFs (top L to bot. R): **Petronella Ruiters, Natasha Visagie, Elsie Vermaak, Nomonde Siqwengana, Felicity Toll and Ntombomzi Ndamse.** **Marlyn Dyantyi** not present.

The WhatsApp network, started during COVID-19 to keep training going remotely, has grown into a vibrant community hub. It has strengthened relationships between ECD principals, **A+** Facilitators, CFs, and CECD. The ECD centres continue to share their successes, updates, and information from the DoE, keeping the community connected and informed. Principal **Aletta Korkee** of Little Angels Daycare expressed it beautifully. Before the project, principals felt isolated, "like islands". Many did not even know colleagues working in the same area, let alone those in KwaNomzamo, Sea Vista or Oyster Bay. "Now everyone knows each other", she said with pride, "We are truly an ECD family."

At **A+**, relationships come first, because they need to last. The connections built through this project do not end here. We are confident that the Kouga ECD community and **A+** will meet again and strengthen the collegiality built over five years of joyful work. Our sincere thanks and salutations go to **Kouga Windfarm Community Development Trust** for recognising and supporting the vital role that strong ECD leadership plays in building thriving communities. We encourage you to continue supporting this important work.



Kouga Community Facilitators run a workshop for teachers.



Jessica Blom (CECD) and Anya Morris (**A+**) present a certificate to principal Nomathemba from *Arise and Shine* ECD centre.

Project report: Malungeni by Carole Scott, A+ Facilitator

The **Malungeni** community energized us with their continued passion for the project. The commitment shown by all participants had never been stronger, with many original participants, some well into their 70s, still enthusiastically involved.

2025 was defined by community collaboration and exciting teacher training. **Strong community support** was evident during every visit. From offers of accommodation for distant attendees, to volunteers to help with setup, to delicious meals cooked by local chefs (and featuring community-donated vegetables), and wonderful resources created by local crafters.



Mzi comforts a child.

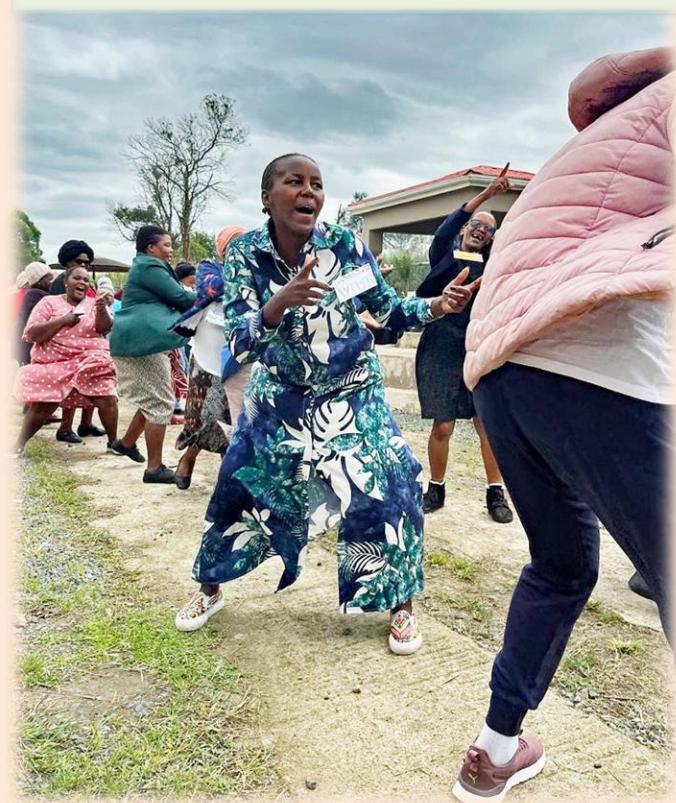
We were grateful to be accompanied by **Mzikayise Ndzozo (Mzi)**, a staunch ECD advocate with international experience. Mzi provided an essential security service and helped with translation. He quickly absorbed the pedagogic language of **A+**, and even led highly successful energiser activities. He is an invaluable asset and we look forward to working with him again while he continues his training as a Community Facilitator.

It was an honour to meet with members of **Arm in Arm in Africa** (an American NPO), who have generously funded much of our work, and gave us the opportunity to share our vision in person. We were excited to host Ongeziwe Nxokwana from **DG Murray Trust**, who joined our activities and participated fully. And we were thrilled to receive a generous donation from **Book Dash** – 2000 books were distributed to children and teachers.

We successfully completed initial training of our **Community Facilitators (CFs)**. This team of five talented educators, now supported by a stipend, is already conducting site visits and connecting with local ECD centres, thereby significantly expanding the reach of **A+**.

The dedication of the **principals and teachers** is inspiring. They travel long distances and display perseverance through challenging activities and difficult conditions. Their enthusiasm to step beyond their comfort zones, explore new concepts, and showcase their creative energy (culminating in the "Sound Suits" activity) were highlights of every workshop.

An "energizer" dance before a workshop epitomizes the dynamic enthusiasm of Malungeni teachers.



A+ Senior Facilitators, Yolande Delpot and Carole Scott, with a representative from DG Murray Trust, Ongeziwe Nxokwana.

Teacher with her decorated picture frame.



Teachers showed integrity in their reflections and demonstrated a clear understanding of complex terms like “climate” and “collaboration” in their feedback. The new influx of younger, energetic staff, alongside the seasoned veterans, is driving innovation and passion across **25 ECD centres, potentially impacting 1070 children** in the local area.

The Malungeni community, under the dedicated guidance of Dr Spiwo Xapile and his wife Zethu of **The Platform** (a local NPO), consistently welcomes **A+** with open arms, making every visit an engaging and fulfilling experience. The spirit of **ubuntu** is alive and well in Malungeni, with creative teaching and community collaboration being keys to a thriving future.

Malungeni teachers gathered to review their artworks.

Malungeni child playing at “dress-up”.

Children and teacher in a “morning ring”.



Project report: Kathu by Yolande Delport and June O'Neill, **A+** Facilitators

January 2025 marked the midpoint of the 3-year Kathu Solar Park (KSP) Project, in partnership with **Africa A+ Schools (A+)** and the Centre for Early Childhood Development (CECD).



Children admiring their artworks.

Planning using idea-generating techniques began to bear fruit as the year progressed. Conversations indicated a mind-shift towards children's participation in their own learning, as well as greater insight into the multi-faceted role of the teacher in using different types of play in early education.

Creativity lies at the heart of **A+** training. The workshops during 2025 once again confirmed that creativity is in all of us, as was apparent in the enjoyment of teachers and parents as they engaged in creative workshop activities.

While we observed many improvements during our **monitoring and evaluation visits** to classrooms, most teachers still appeared uncertain about creative teaching. The question that arose for us as **A+** Facilitators was, how could we help teachers to make the connection between their personal creativity and creativity in their roles as teachers?

The attributes of **play** provided the framework for inquiry into the role of the teacher in a play-based approach to early education. Connecting the ideas of physical movement and brain development highlighted the relevance of various art forms and the relationship between songs, dance, physical exercise and children's learning.



Parents absorbed in a sculpture activity.

Two **parent skills-development workshops** were held during the year. One, in Kuruman, introduced the idea of parents as a child's first teachers. In this workshop, ideas that children develop holistically and that learning can be fun were explored. Parents connected with their own creativity through music, performance and sculpture.

The second parent workshop took place in Deben. It offered an introduction to the importance of **play** and its role in children's development. It investigated the roles of parents and caregivers in supporting children's play, as well as simple materials that can support play.

Both workshops were well attended. Parents engaged and gave positive feedback that indicated that they had begun to appreciate the importance of play in their children's education.

2025 marked some firsts. One of the principals requested an opportunity to present an **on-site demonstration** with her staff, for comment and critique by the **A+** Facilitators, to bring their own teaching more in line with the **A+** approach. We were greatly encouraged by what we saw and heard. This example set the tone for increased **collaboration** among neighbouring centres as they recognised how much they could learn from each other.

Another first was the **Kathu Facilitators' Conference**. The Community Facilitators' (CFs) were required, as part of their training, to plan and present the conference for the Cohort 1 group of teachers. This task required intense collaboration among the group. In their post-conference reflections, the CFs delighted in their personal growth and the growth of the team's support of one another. This was a living testament to the power of experiential learning and one of 2025's brightest highlights.



Playing outside with large loose parts that cost nothing.



A+ Facilitator, June O'Neill (far right), leads a discussion with teachers.



Humble circumstances, but a stimulating ECD environment.

Project report: A+ iZinto

by Carole Scott, A+ Facilitator

It has been a good year for the **Africa A+ iZinto Materials Centre**. As we wrap up our 2025 activities, we take pride in how our "loose parts" pedagogy continues to spark imagination in under-resourced communities and among the next generation of educators.

From our main hub at the Centre for Creative Education (CCE) to our satellite centres in Malungeni and Riebeek East, the **A+ iZinto** mission is thriving. The Kouga project was concluded after five successful years, but its legacy lives on. Teachers there have kept their own curated classroom collections, making sure that open-ended play remains an integral part of their children's learning.



A creative student activity at CCE.



This year, students helped **A+ iZinto** to become a laboratory for teacher education:

- Student leadership: CCE students formed a dedicated committee to manage, curate, and loan out materials, and even distributing resources to local schools during their teaching practice.
- Collaborative learning: At Rhodes University, A+ Facilitator, Yolande Delport, led an inspiring workshop with Foundation Phase students, exploring how discarded items can become powerful tools for inquiry-based learning.



Loose parts come in many shapes, sizes and materials.



Loose parts can be large and can be used for outside play too.

One of our brightest highlights was a workshop in Malungeni, inspired by artist Nick Cave. Teachers transformed shells, bottle tops, wire, and tins into magnificent “sound suits”. By designing, planning, and parading these wearable artworks, our educators experienced firsthand how “junk” can be reimagined as 21st-century teaching resources. The question, “Can we do this activity with children?” resulted in a resounding “Yes!”

“What can these materials become?” This simple question drives our pedagogy which is focussed on creativity and problem solving. Whether it is building a shelter or exploring the textures of recycled plastic, the **A+ iZinto** materials remain free, abundant, open-ended and brimming with endless potential.

We look toward to a new year in which **A+ iZinto** will continue to show that, with a little curiosity and imagination, the most humble discarded items can unlock a world of learning.



Students learn to use loose parts creatively.



A Malungeni teacher sports her “sound suit”.

Our funders, donors and collaborators

Africa A+ Schools (A+) enjoys moral, professional and financial support from collaborators, funders and donors. We express our sincere thanks and appreciation to them all!

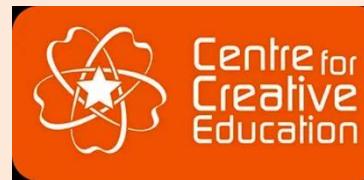
Collaborators:

- ❖ Centre for Early Childhood Development (CECD; collaborator on the Kouga and Kathu projects)
- ❖ The Platform (collaborator on the Malungeni project)
- ❖ Centre for Creative Education (CCE; collaborator on the **A+ iZinto Materials Centre**)



Funders:

- ❖ D.G. Murray Trust (support for the Malungeni project)
- ❖ Kathu Solar Park (support for the Kathu project, Northern Cape)
- ❖ Kouga Windfarm Community Development Trust (Kouga project, Eastern Cape)
- ❖ Arm in Arm in Africa (USA; support for Malungeni project).



Donors:

- ❖ Anonymous Angel Donors
- ❖ Donors through GlobalGiving (mainly the Malungeni project).



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://africaplus.org.za/>

You can also make a donation (once-off or repeat) through our page on GlobalGiving at [Donate to Africa A+ Schools](#).

