

Africa A+ Schools

Newsletter #2

June 2026



**Africa A+
Schools**
Engaging Curious Minds
South Africa

My goodness, time has flown! This newsletter is somewhat overdue but now is a good time to reflect on where **A+** is at.

At the beginning of March, **A+** held a strategic planning meeting in Riebeek East, Eastern Cape. Thomas and Tania, our Chairman and Treasurer, were our generous hosts at their lovely compound. We had three days of presentations and discussions and lots of socialising and eating! This was actually the very first time that the Board of **A+** has had a face-to-face meeting. It was great to get to know each other better and to share ideas. We came away from the meeting with renewed enthusiasm for the goals of **A+** and a better understanding of how to achieve them.

At present, we have three active projects: training projects in Kathu, Northern Cape, and Malungeni, Eastern Cape, and the **izinto Materials Centre** in Cape Town. The Kathu project (a collaboration with the Centre for Early Childhood Development) concludes in the third quarter of this year. The Malungeni project (a collaboration with The Platform) continues to enrich the community with joyful playful teaching and learning.

A+ is at a juncture where it needs to find new funders and new projects. We are developing new projects and services, so please look out and follow us on social media. Also remember to like and share posts with your networks so that we continue to gain traction. These are links to our social media:

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/africa-a-plus-96002637a/>

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61579240614721>

https://www.instagram.com/africa_a_plus/

James Harrison – Editor

An Interview with Dr Giulietta Harrison (A+ Executive Director)

Ed: Hi Giulietta. Thank you for agreeing to this interview. Friends of **A+** need to get to know the Executive Director of the organization.

G: Sure – a pleasure. I hope I can answer all your questions!

Ed: Let's start with some background. Tell us about your career and how you got to where you are now.

G: I have always had a passion for early education, starting with graduating at UCT with a primary education degree and getting my first job at CAFDA, an NPO on the Cape Flats. It was trial by fire when I inherited a class of 50 multilingual children coming from very impoverished backgrounds. This triggered my love for



making a difference where the need was greatest. I went on to run my own preschool for 14 years, and also worked for other schools. After obtaining my Masters and PhD degrees, part time, I went into lecturing and university academe. My work at Rhodes University straddled the ivory tower of academe and the grassroots realities of working in the NGO sector. Today, I continue to wear both hats while working for a private higher education institute as an academic HoD, and for an NPO as Director of **A+**. But note that both roles are about training teachers in early education.

Ed: So you have a bags of classroom experience and also lots of academic credentials and experience. Can you give us one or two stories of highlights in your career – things that stand out for you as major learning experiences.

G: As my first teaching experience was managing a large class with no assistants, every subsequent class seemed small by comparison. I quickly learnt that the key to success with large class numbers was to engage learners in creative activities that allow for self-expression. Significantly, this is what **A+** does, with the “plus” representing “arts-enriched”. I have also learnt that it is important to take the time to observe learning and only step in when children indicate they want support. I noted this when teaching at an all-girls’ school and a group of children were acting out the story of Rapunzel. They were wanting a high tower to throw down Rapunzel’s hair and their initial decision was dangerous. I guided the children away from the initial idea, but I did not provide the solution. Instead I told them I was confident they could find a solution. After some discussion, they duly found a viable solution and went on to act out their story without being at risk.

Ed: Great storey. Do you feel that the classroom and academia combination gives you some advantages in your present work?

G: Definitely. Academe often suffers from idealism and ignores the realities of the complex South African classrooms/playrooms. Knowing the realities means that when training teachers, I always consider how what we teach is feasible in context. When writing material for training, I equally consider these situations and want to ensure that what we do meets the real-world brief.

Ed: That’s interesting. You must have developed many ideas about early childhood education (ECE). What would you say are the most important characteristics of effective ECE in South Africa? In other words, what is your current philosophy of ECE, as seen through both academic and NPO lenses?

G: There is no doubt that our teachers have to be creative, flexible and reflective. I say creative because they must be able to find solutions to problems and promote creativity in their classrooms. This means moving away from worksheets and towards experiential learning, which is very possible when done in the **A+** way. Teachers need to be flexible as they are very likely to have to adapt to lack of space, too many learners in their classrooms, lack of funds, load shedding, lack of water and little support. Being able to adapt to these conditions, makes the difference between just babysitting children and actually teaching them. Reflective because all teachers need to evaluate what they are doing, how they are

doing it, and if they are actually achieving learning. Now more than ever teachers are confronted with a massively evolving educational landscape which means their resilience, creativity, flexibility and reflectivity will make the difference between achieving effective learning or not. I think it is also important to remind teachers that looking after themselves, having goals and teaching creatively will give them quality of life.

Ed: Challenging stuff. How far would you say South Africa is from achieving what you have outlined? Is it practically achievable, and how?

G: I can honestly say that, through the combination of my life experience and the work of **A+**, this is definitely achievable. A teacher is a lifelong learner who needs to be open to new learning. We really have to be open to new learning now that AI (Artificial Intelligence) is a dominant part of our world. There is much that can be derived from AI that is useful, but we must never lose sight of the hands-on, experiential learning that is so key to the successful development of the young child. South Africa must get government buy-in to resolve issues like payment of teachers, availability of resources, toilets, infrastructural upgrades, access to cheap wi-fi and appropriate devices – to name but a few. We must acknowledge the realities that we can fix and then fix them and work with the spirit of Ubuntu to promote creative early learning.



Ed: Perhaps we can wrap up with your vision for **A+**. How do you see **A+** contributing to ECE in our country?

G: **A+** is ‘the missing link’. By this I mean that there is plenty of training available to teachers, but unfortunately the practical application of what they learn is lacking. **A+** promotes creativity, problem solving and the use of loose parts. These aspects are always aligned to our policies, but most importantly they are not context specific. Any teacher, regardless of context, can adopt the **A+** approach. Once they have been exposed to it, they realise the real joy of teaching and learning.

Ed: Did the recent strategic planning meeting provide inspiration for the work ahead?

G: Definitely. Working with our multi-talented **A+** Board and facilitators was a real pleasure. It confirmed that we all share the same passion and collectively we can make a difference.

Ed: Thanks for your thoughts Giulietta. We trust that **A+** will get the backing it needs to help you realise your vision.

Interview by James Harrison (**A+** Editor)

Continued on next page....

Value and Services Offered by Africa A+ Schools (A+)

We recently revised our Introductory Brochure, which can be downloaded from the **A+** website at africaaplus.org.za. The brochure includes the following text about the “**A+ value proposition**” and the services that we offer. We were pleasantly surprised to realise what long lists they make! The **A+** value proposition is:

1. Our training is highly practical and addresses theory-to-practice gaps. We provide “**The Missing Link**” to *quality* ECE!
2. Our training uses the existing curricula and is complementary to NQF Level 4, not competing.
3. We tailor our training to rural and under-resourced contexts and the needs of individual schools/ECD centres.
4. We not only train but also mentor individual teachers and principals.
5. Our training is evidence-based and aligned with research findings.
6. We provide solutions to the problem of resources for teaching and learning.
7. We emphasize sustainability by establishing communities of ECE practice.
8. We monitor and evaluate our impacts and constantly strive to improve our services.
9. We communicate our experiences both in online media and in the academic literature.
10. We believe in collaboration with other NPOs that offer services complementary to ours.



A+ ensures that trainees experience joyful learning and creativity in practice.

A comprehensive list of what we currently offer:

- **Baseline Studies** of ECE communities to assess conditions and needs, and produce an assessment report with recommendations.
- **Comprehensive A+ training courses:** at least three years of intermittent (quarterly) workshop training and mentoring for teachers, principals, parents and Community Facilitators.
- **Training of Community Facilitators:** on-the-job training for selected local educators who then sustain **A+** training and mentoring in their communities, in the long term.

- **Mentoring Services:** on-site and/or remote mentoring of teachers and principals according to a flexible schedule. Intended primarily for course participants.
- **Training of Trainers (ToT):** short courses for trainers of ECE teachers. A variety of topics are covered in a series of short courses which can be selected to suit a client's needs. Some of the topics included are: reimagining ECE curricula and classrooms using the **A+** approach; using “loose parts” as no-cost teaching resources; teaching emergent literacy and numeracy; leadership in ECE contexts; creating sustainable communities of practice.
- **Training of Teachers (ToT):** short courses, similar to the previous ToT, but adapted for teachers and principals.
- **Training of Parents (ToP):** short courses for parents, guardians and caregivers focussed primarily on play-based learning and the use of “loose parts”.
- **Consultation and Research Services:** Based on our extensive practical and academic experience, we can assist organizations working in ECE in their design of training and research programmes. We can also carry out data collection in the field, as well as analyse and write up results.

All of the above can be delivered on site in communities; however, some, such as the ToT courses, can be delivered at a central venue, if preferred. In general, we believe that on-site training is better.

We encourage potential clients and funders to consider all available options and assist **A+** in designing a programme of training that meets the specific needs of a given community and its educators.



The ultimate beneficiaries of all our services are young children!

Next page: See a photo that speaks volumes about the inspiring enthusiasm of our trainees!



Trainees in Malungeni participate in an “energizer” activity prior to a workshop. If only one could bottle that energy....



**Africa A+
Schools**

Engaging Curious Minds

South Africa