

# 2019 IMPACT REPORT

(3 of 4) Creative Learning



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# Impact Report Overview

## (3/4) CREATIVE LEARNING

2019 was filled to the brim with exciting developments at Thanda. We shared our **Creative Learning Curriculum** with different parts of the country and we were both delighted and encouraged by the positive feedback we received from our programme participants.

This is the third of four publications that make up our 2019 Impact Report and journeys through our Creative Learning Initiative. You'll get to read a little more about what the programme entails, hear from **Nosipho**, one of the facilitators of this programme, about her experience as a member of the **Creative Learning team** and more!

If you have not yet read the first two 2019 Impact Report publications: **Early Learning** and **Education**, we recommend looking there for a fuller picture of what we did in 2019 at Thanda.

If you have any questions or would like to get in contact with us, please email [info@thanda.org](mailto:info@thanda.org) or visit our website [www.thanda.org](http://www.thanda.org)

### (1 of 4) Early Learning

Through **inquiry-based learning** and **imaginative play**, our **Early Learning** Initiative gives children the foundational skills necessary for a positive start in life.

### (2 of 4) Education

Through after-school programmes, extracurricular activities, and workshops/ events, our **Education** Initiative aims to empower children and youth with **Game-changing Skills** that are necessary for becoming resilient, **lifelong learners** who understand interconnectedness, can rebel against the crowd, and take responsibility for how their actions **impact the environment** and others.

### (4 of 4) Organic Farming

Through ongoing mentoring and support, our **Organic Farming** Initiative empowers community members to sustainably improve household nutrition, strengthen self-reliance, and **build a local economy**.





**Nosipho Sithole - Creative Learning Coordinator**

Nosipho joined Thanda in the very early days, back in 2008, and has grown with the organisation in various roles. She is currently a coordinator of the Creative Learning Initiative and one of her main functions is to help with teaching Thanda's methodologies to organisations around the country.

Nosipho's own child, Asanda, attends Thanda's Siyazazi After-school programme so she has seen, first hand, the incredible power of Thanda's curriculum. At first, Asanda was shy. She'd give one word answers to questions and hated the spotlight. After a few months at Thanda, Nosipho saw her child willingly perform a dance in front of a room of people and read a book aloud for the class at the Thanda Eager Beavers Book Club.

She had completely come out of her shell and a natural performer had emerged! The apple doesn't fall far from the tree as Nosipho describes herself as a performer too. She is happiest when she is on stage and believes that this is why she has

clicked with her role so well. Essentially, she is carrying out a performance each time she meets a new group of facilitators.

She encourages role play activities where the facilitators become the children and Nosipho plays their facilitator. This really makes the material come alive, gives facilitators a sense of what the children will experience, and helps to bridge gaps between different languages and cultures. Attendees love these sessions, often feeding back with immense gratitude for all of the skills and knowledge imparted by Thanda.

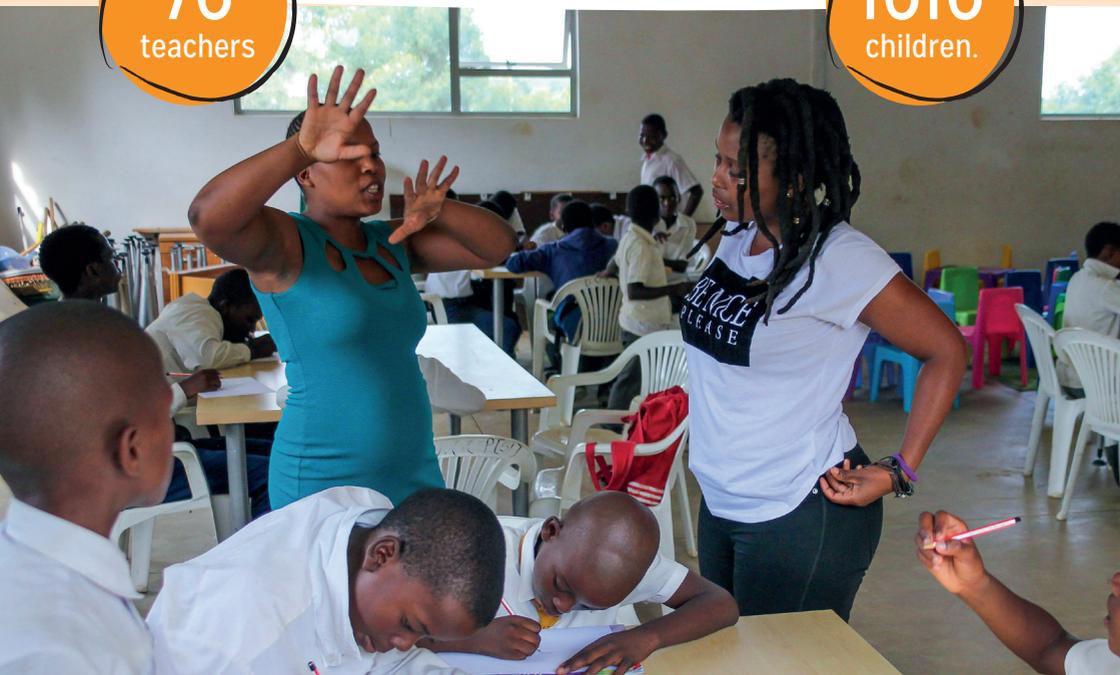
This is where Nosipho finds her sense of purpose as she knows that her reach extends further than the room she is in. Each facilitator she works with has access to a whole class of children and the lessons and skills she teaches are carried through to them too. "Everyone has a reason to be alive," says Nosipho, "and I think my reason is to touch as many lives as I can in a positive way."

In 2019, we had the opportunity to take our Creative Learning Curriculum to various organisations in KwaZulu Natal and to several groups in the Eastern Cape too.

76  
teachers

and facilitators were trained through our Creative Learning Training, reaching over

1616  
children.

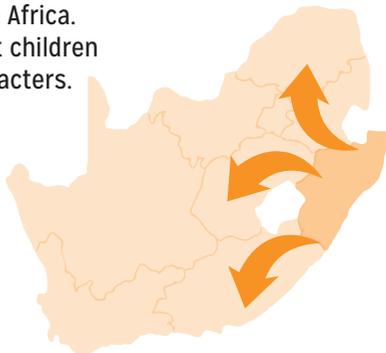


## OVERVIEW

Our Creative Learning Curriculum has two core programmes. The first involves training local school teachers on how to use art as a teaching tool for experiential learning, as well as training them to lead Creative Arts sessions in their own classrooms.

In the second, Siyebelana Creative Learning Programme, we take the methodologies that have proven successful at Thanda and package them to be taught to facilitators and teachers in communities throughout South Africa. We also share our story-based curricula so that children everywhere can learn through stories and characters.

We believe in spreading the importance of our **Five Game Changing Skills** as far and wide as possible to help children reach their full potential.



# FACILITATOR FEEDBACK

While all organisations we worked with in 2019 stated that they were already engaging in storytelling before we arrived, the facilitators that participated in our trainings found Thanda's focus on storybooks quite revolutionary. Specifically, how storybooks can be used to discuss a wide range of topics and subjects, while also providing engaging learning experiences for children.



*Andisiwe, Mdumbi Facilitator*

Andisiwe's After-school class at Transcape in Mdumbi really took to using books as a guide for learning. She felt that Thanda's focus on books was very useful: *"By reading the stories, it is important to understand the deeper meaning of stories... we learned so much from Thanda."*

For her, she felt the stories were having a profound impact on her learners' desire to read for enjoyment: *"I studied a lot about motivating kids about story reading. My kids never took story reading seriously. I gained that in a story reading you not only reading but you get a lesson. There are some other things you can get on a story like life skills...You can get more skills on story reading."*

Ayanda runs Jabulani's Zithudlala programme and shared his feelings when discussing the behaviour management aspect of the training: *"It helped me a lot on behaviour because I am working with kids and they behave differently. Now I know how to handle them. I sit them down and talk to them. It makes it easy for me to even notice the kids if there is something wrong (a problem and will have a chat with that child)."*



*Jabulani, CLC Training*

Funeka from Bulungula Incubator was inspired by the activities and simplicity of some of the materials and resources used. *"I'm learning a lot from this workshop. It also encourages us to value the so-called waste material. There is a lot that comes out from waste material. For instance, we had an activity with bottle caps, you don't buy them, you buy the drink and get the bottle cap but you use it again. It's a way of recycling, and it's a teaching resource. There is a lot we have identified from the bottle cap activity like teaching children how to count, to sort different shapes and sizes... that's the basis of maths."*

# - Working Together

## Dibi and Thanda

A local school, Dibi Primary, ran into a challenge in 2019 as there were not enough teachers available for children enrolled at that school. Thanda stepped in with Mandisa and Nokubonga, and they have since reflected on their experiences. They each experienced some challenges but also some great highlights, which they've shared with us here:



*Mandisa Msimango,  
After-school Facilitator*

**Mandisa** taught life skills, social sciences, isiZulu and creative arts to Grades 4 - 7. One of her favourite parts about her year at Dibi was the barriers she was able to break down. She chatted to the kids inside and out of the classroom and flipped the traditional view of intimidating teacher and intimidated student on its head. She got on their level and came to understand the barriers to learning that they were experiencing. This gave her insight on how to approach the lessons and which methods and activities would resonate best with the students. Because of this, she was able to get through to them much more easily and made the classroom experience more enjoyable.



*Nokubonga Shozi,  
After-school Facilitator*

**Nokubonga** taught Grade 2 at Dibi. Her highlight of the year was spending the whole day with the kids. Spending a full day with the learners allowed her to easily identify those who needed extra help and gave her ample time to give them the extra attention they required. One group of kids couldn't write at the beginning of the year, even though they were in grade two. Nokubonga took care to spend extra time with these students throughout the day, encouraging them and guiding their progress. By end of the year, they could write their own names as well as basic words in their home language.

# THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

The year 2019 was a great year for thought leadership at Thanda. Taking a rare chance to step back from the myriad happenings that take place at Thanda every day, we had the opportunity to document some of the philosophical ideas, and deeper thematic concepts, that underpin our many initiatives. This process culminated in the publication of a series of White Papers, each of which explores a topic central to who we are as an organisation, as well as what we do and why we do it.

These papers, by their nature, are not quick reads. They do not fit into neat summaries. Rather, they delve deeply into some of the big questions in life, in society, and in education. Here, we provide a taste of what you can expect from these papers, partly to give you an idea of what we have been working on, and mostly in the hope that you are inspired to read them in full. You can find them in full on our website's [Education Portal](#).



# A Summary of our White Paper "On Play"



When was the last time you did something because it made you happy? Not because someone asked you to or because someone was expecting you to, but simply because doing it, whatever it was, produced a feeling of joy in yourself. Whatever it was, if it no purpose other than bringing joy to the people involved, you were likely in what can be referred to as a state of play.

In this White Paper, we examine multiple aspects of play – from brain flexibility in rats to how the greatest scientists, philosophers, and innovators of all time were, at their core, quite playful. For example, we learn about how Sir Isaac Newton's brilliance was founded on play and how Charles Darwin's ground breaking theories emerged from observing various animal species for fun, while many people considered him crazy.

The paper then explores how play's utility is far from limited to scientists and lab rats and that it is essential in all of our lives. Importantly, play can be anything. What makes something playful is not what we do, but the psychological state in which we are in doing it.

Common examples of "play" in our lives tend to be team sports, but are any of the most traditional sports actually playful? When we take a deeper look, sports like soccer, basketball and rugby are heavily structured by an authority, they have a set of narrowly defined purposes, and repetition and consistency are often much more important than creativity or play.

This is not to say that team sports don't teach us valuable skills like teamwork and communication, just that their value is limited and often require a level of conformity. Real play, though, is that which you do with no goal in mind, but which as a result, encourages your brain to expand and develop new connections, benefiting your wellbeing and building self-esteem in ways no directed skill ever could.

Many modern adults tend to strive for rigidity, for control, for a world so unchanging and unsurprising that it requires no mental flexibility. The reality is that the world is changing every second of every day. The best way to cope with constant change is to let go of any expectations that we are supposed to know everything about the world around us, and allow ourselves to play.

# A Summary of our White Paper "On Tension"



"Tension is the great integrity" - Richard Buckminster Fuller.

The ability to navigate tension is an essential, yet often severely underdeveloped, skill.

In our modern world, where we are being bombarded by information from all sides, the ability to be able to parse the tension between what we are told and what reality reflects, is key.

We simply cannot afford to take all messages we receive at face value. We need this skill when we see advertisements for junk foods or alcohol featuring skinny, healthy, and successful looking people. Unfortunately, this skill is not as prolific in adults as one might hope but, importantly, the potential for developing it is in our hands, and there are many ways in which we can develop it.

Children's books, such as *This Is Not My Hat* by Jon Klassen, can be used to expose children to situations where what is being presented does not accurately reflect what is going on. Through training these skills in children, they will be much better prepared to develop into adults who can, and are willing to, accurately weigh for themselves the information they take in.

Art has huge potential for cultivating our ability to navigate tension. We look to Chinese artist and activist Ai Weiwei's photographic works, whose worth comes not from technical quality or compositional beauty, but from their ability to unearth tension, calling it to the viewer's attention and demanding they address it. Through Ai Weiwei's work we also see that, when tensions are brought to light, people tend first to react negatively to those who expose tension, not to the tension itself for existing in the first place.

Looking to Dr Martin Luther King, Jr's ability to openly face and navigate racial tensions in the 1960s in America, we find evidence that forcing people to navigate tension is one of the best ways to bring about the sort of change that can better humanity.

Importantly, in all tension, from daily tensions to those that challenge one's core beliefs and the fabric of society, there is fertile soil for growth. Tension, and the potential for resolving that tension, is what motivates us to overcome obstacles and better ourselves. Tension pushes us to change and while so many humans are afraid of change, change is a requisite for growth.

Cultivating this skill not only produces better, more capable individuals, but improves the world that we all live in.



# A Summary of our White Paper "On Wonder"

An important space exists between what is true and what is a lie. There are many names to describe this type of space— art, fiction, the suspension of disbelief, imagination, wonder— the list goes on. The act of entering that space, exploring and immersing oneself in it, is a skill. Put more complexly, it is the ability to see beyond the binary, to step outside of standard paradigms that shape our understandings, and gain perspective on the world around us. It is in that space that novel ideas are born and innovation takes root.

This skill comes most naturally to children, yet the importance of this skill is far from limited to children. As we grow up and become aware of the vast complexity of the world, adults often begin to pick and choose the truths we believe. If a truth doesn't suit our lifestyle or purpose, we tend to ignore or suppress it - relegate it to "lies".

Children's books have incredible power, and can reach well beyond their intended audience. They are amongst the most accessible ways for anyone to enter this "space between." Unlike most literature targeted at adults, kids' books meet readers at their level. Their function is to convey truth, or at least truthfulness, in a way that will be easily understood in as few words as possible, often using totally fictitious characters and worlds. This is the polar opposite of what we might associate with traditionally prestigious books.



Author Oliver Jeffers only refers to these books as picture books, refusing to call them children's books, because while they might be directed at children, it is not only children who can benefit from this concise wisdom. Dr Seuss' iconic book *The Lorax*, addresses issues of the environment and human greed in such a simple way, it is accessible to children but may be uncomfortable to adults who have started to be selective about their truths. While many people publish impact studies or peer-reviewed research papers or launch media campaigns against this sort of behaviour, no one need look further than *The Lorax* to understand exactly what is going on in the world today.

On top of helping us reflect on the world we live in, kids' books can also teach us vital life skills. These range from basic reading comprehension or phonics literacy to much deeper, more complex emotional skills. The job at hand is to tap into the potential of children's books, realize the power they possess, and use it to better ourselves and the world we live in.



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