

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Calling all architects, urbanists, engineers, artists, and makers to design a cost-effective, high-quality prototype for South Africa's future preschool environments.

Participants can enter as **teams of 1-3 people**



UNLOCKING QUALITY ECD



EDUCATION
AFRICA



The University of
Nottingham

ZOW ZOW

Image of Early Child Development Center - supported by a strategic partnership between the ECD and The Unlimited Child, an internationally acclaimed non-profit organisation



Image of children practicing music in existing classroom, 2024, Education Africa



*In July 2024, with support from the University of Nottingham (UK), experts in early childhood development, architectural education, and construction gathered at Education Africa in Johannesburg to explore solutions to South Africa's preschool infrastructure crisis. Inspired by innovative student-built projects from the University of Nottingham and Nelson Mandela University, and informed by NPOs like the Thušanang Trust and Umncedi, they proposed an international design competition. From this collaboration the **Beyond the Classroom Design Competition** was born.*

This competition is for a **modular, adaptable, and aspirational preschool design** appropriate to the social, environmental, and financial context of South Africa. **The Design should also be cost-effective as competition partners are seeking to construct the winning proposal In conjunction with Education Africa's - Social Architecture Project during 2026,** serving as a prototype for the cost-effective development of high-quality preschool infrastructure in the future.

Research shows the pre-school years are crucial for children's development, significantly impacting lifelong learning and socioeconomic outcomes.

However, in South Africa:

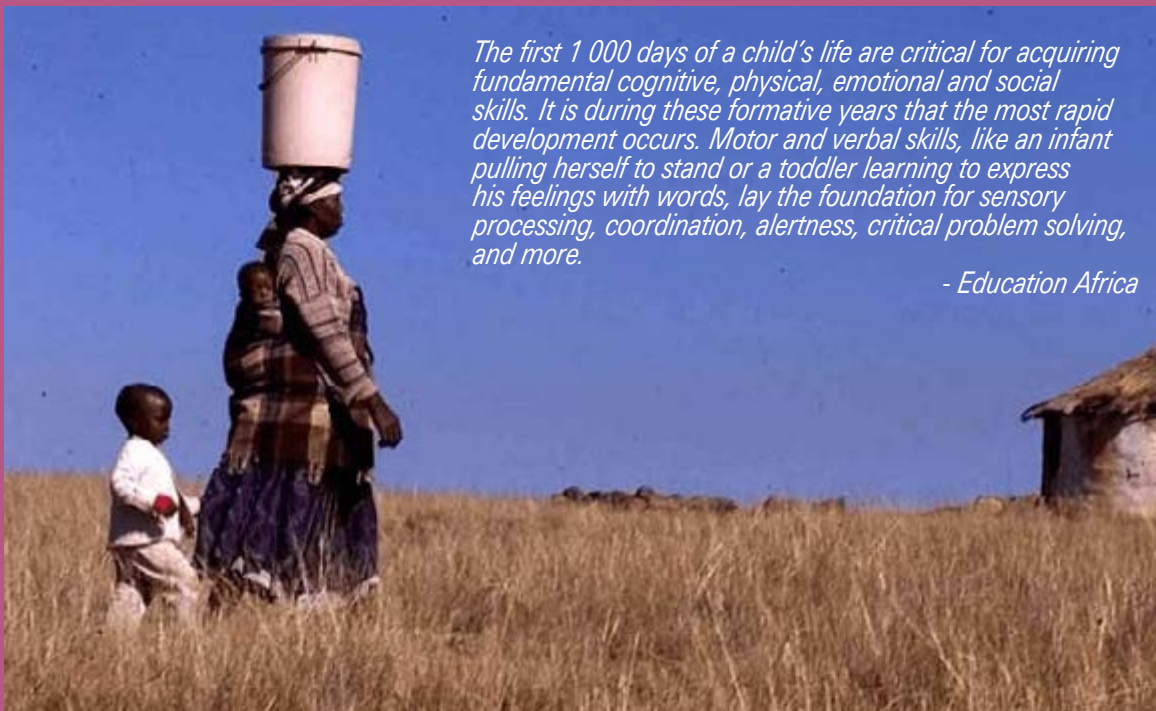
- 65% of children in Early Learning Programmes fail to meet developmental milestones by age five.
- Only 50% of children attend Early Learning Programmes, and most live below the poverty line.¹

¹ Brand, Helene. "The Alarming State of Early Childhood Development in South Africa." Grow ECD, October 19, 2023.



*Image of Redhill School - Early Childhood Development
Center, Hubo Architects, Scape Magazine*





The first 1 000 days of a child's life are critical for acquiring fundamental cognitive, physical, emotional and social skills. It is during these formative years that the most rapid development occurs. Motor and verbal skills, like an infant pulling herself to stand or a toddler learning to express his feelings with words, lay the foundation for sensory processing, coordination, alertness, critical problem solving, and more.

- Education Africa

There are nearly 7 million children aged 0-5 years old in South Africa of which approximately two-thirds live in households that have per capita income below the poverty line and only around half attend some kind of Early Learning Programme (ELP) ².

In South Africa, **preschools are not funded centrally beyond a subsidy of 17.5 Rands/ day per child**, which is limited to days where a child is present at a registered facility. This subsidy is subject to a percentage split of 40 % staff, 40 % food and 20 % development and resources, and includes no contribution to infrastructure. Yet preschool buildings that are fit-for-purpose, secure and stimulating are fundamental to the effective provision of play-based learning that is so much needed in the early years³.

The Department of Basic Education's (DBE) 2030 Strategy for Early Childhood Development Programme's (ECD's) first priority is that every child has access to age-appropriate, affordable ECD provision. At the time of writing, only 45 % of the estimated 42-60,000 Early Learning Programs (ELP's) in South Africa were registered, with the remaining 55 % generally unregistered because the state of their facilities does not meet the minimum requirements⁴. 40 % of ELPs are run from private homes, with the average number of children enrolled being 39. The number of ECD centres is growing, in part because the Childrens Act stipulates that someone who is looking after 6 or more children is running a partial care facility. Formally and informal ECD practitioners support their communities and in turn the fees generated by ELP support thousands of women in particular.

DBE estimates that to achieve their 2030 targets of providing an additional 1.2million ELP places for 0-5 year olds an additional 115 000 new venues will be needed, which represents a huge project to design, construct and maintain facilities nationwide. The scale of the problem urgently requires innovative design thinking that can enable this provision at scale and at pace.

² Thrive by Five Index. "Data." Thrive by Five, Accessed February 19, 2025. <https://thrivebyfive.co.za/data/>.

^{3,4} Department of Basic Education, South Africa. South Africa's 2030 Strategy for Early Childhood Development Programmes.

PLAY PLAY PLAY



*Shiyala Kindergarten,
Playful on Budget by
Jiang-Yin Isabel Liu*

PLAY is fundamental to human development, as it fosters creativity, critical thinking, and social interaction. It also helps children build essential physical, emotional, and cognitive skills, yet today's children have fewer opportunities for free play than previous generations. Despite overwhelming evidence of its benefits, play remains undervalued, particularly in rapidly urbanising and under-resourced environments where safety concerns, time constraints, and shrinking green spaces limit children's access to meaningful play experiences.

ECDs, however, hold immense potential to integrate play into children's daily lives. When designed to encourage exploration and interaction, either in urban or rural settings, they can become catalysts for learning, self-discovery, experimentation and social connection. A case study from an informal settlement in South Africa demonstrated that by transforming existing semi-private areas into designated play spaces⁵, communities could develop safer and more engaging environments for children. Particularly if it involves nature-based play, which is proven to improve mental and physical well-being, but as human settlements become more urbanised, children's access to natural spaces and their connection with the environment decreases.

Prioritising play in learning and care environments strengthens social ties, reduces antisocial behaviour, and builds more resilient communities, and when play is seen as essential infrastructure, spaces become more inclusive, adaptable, and sustainable. To address the global decline in **PLAY**, we need a shift in how we design - from private homes to shared spaces and entire settlements. Thoughtful, community-driven design ensures that play isn't an afterthought but a fundamental part of daily life. By weaving play into the fabric of both urban and rural spaces, we can create places that are more connected, vibrant, and ultimately, more human.



⁵ Activating a network of play spaces, Khayelitsha, ARUP

BUILD BUILD BUILD

A well-designed ECD centre is more than just a building, it is a space that nurtures young minds and provides a foundation for lifelong learning. However, across South Africa, many ECD facilities operate in inadequate conditions, from overcrowded backyard informal structures, or makeshift classrooms with limited resources. While efforts have been made to improve ECD infrastructure, there remains a pressing need for up-to-standard, child-centred design solutions that create safe and inclusive environments for children and caretakers.

To function legally, ECD centres must meet **the Norms and Standards for Early Childhood Development Programmes** as outlined in the **Children's Act**. This includes essential health and safety measures such as secure perimeters, emergency exits, fire prevention, proper sanitation, and access to clean drinking water. Beyond compliance, these spaces should be designed to support children's holistic development, providing room for learning, rest, play, and interaction.

Children with disabilities must also be considered through inclusive design features such as ramps, sensory-friendly zones, and adaptive play equipment. Providing varied seating arrangements, quiet spaces for neurodiverse children, and flexible learning areas that ensure that every child feels supported and included.

Key facilities should include bright, well-ventilated classrooms, safe outdoor play areas, child-friendly toilets, and comfortable napping spaces. Staff also need dedicated work and relaxation areas to create a balanced learning environment. By designing ECD centres with these considerations in mind, we can create spaces that are not only functional but also inspiring, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to thrive.

Silondikuhle School
- Port Elizabeth,
South Africa, built
by Collectif Saga





Landscape for Play is a huge colourful playground
in Madrid, Aberrent Architecture

SITE?

There is no specific site for this project, but **a typical rural development stand would measure approximately 50x50m and face a road on one or two sides.** The building needs to be versatile and able to adapt to a variety of topographical conditions.

Choose between sites 1, 2 or 3 **OR** all three to site your proposal

**CLICK HERE TO
VISIT MTHATHA**



1. Peri-Urban Settlement – Outskirts of Mthatha

Located on the fringes of Mthatha, this site sits between clusters of self-built homes and scattered formal houses. Dirt roads and informal pathways connect homes to small shops and community centers. With limited access to early learning spaces, a new ECD center could act as a safe, central hub for children, incorporating shaded outdoor areas and flexible play spaces.

THINGS TO REMEMBER:

How does your ECD - Contribute to the Civic Realm

- A considered entry sequence
- A beacon for education and community
- Edges and Frontages to include an active, accessible, and secure site boundary

**CLICK HERE TO VISIT
KWAZULU NATAL**



2. Rural Village – KwaZulu-Natal Lowlands

Set within a rural farming community, this site is surrounded by rolling fields, small homesteads, and a local church. Children often accompany parents working the land, with few dedicated learning spaces available. An ECD center here could blend with the landscape, incorporating local materials and shaded courtyards to support outdoor learning and community gatherings.

THINGS TO REMEMBER:

Adaptability

- Designs should be suitable or adaptable for hot/cold climates
- Topographical conditions may include flat, gently and steeply sloping sites.
- Materials and components should be suitable for delivery via normal road access and general construction truck.



**CLICK HERE TO
SEE LIMPOPO**

*Site sketches by Akiiki Ronald, 2nd place winner of
Future Khayelitsha NowNow Competition*

3. Small Town Edge – Semi-Formal Housing in Limpopo

At the edge of a growing small town in Limpopo, this site is surrounded by a mix of government-built homes and informal structures. While more structured than deep rural settings, many children still lack access to quality early education. A well-placed ECD center could introduce shared green spaces and safe play areas, fostering a sense of community and inclusion.

Waste as a building material,
Siondikuhle School, Collectif Saga.



THINKERS & POINTERS

PROGRAMME REQUIREMENTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 40 children between 0 - 5 yrs. • Separation of children of different ages (0-18mths, 18mths-3yrs, 3-5yrs) • External, shaded spaces suitable for play and learning • Food storage and preparation area • Sick Bay • Secure envelope (requirement for registering a facility as an ECD) • Adequate space and ventilation • Guttering and water tank - water to feed from tanks to sinks (1 per class and in kitchen) • Secure storage for toys and learning resources • Secure storage for documentation • Refuse storage • Universal Access • Toilet facilities will be provided as freestanding blocks within the site, at a distance from the preschool. • Electrical to DB board to connect to "municipal supply" or solar panel
PLANS SHOULD BE SUITABLE FOR THE FOLLOWING REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Emergency action plan 2. Approved building plans 3. Health and Safety certificate 4. Suitable for Structural Certification
ACCOMODATION SCHEDULE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 Classrooms of 30-40m² • 1 x Kitchen of 10 m² • 1 x Sick Bay 10 m² • Built-in storage (cupboards and shelving) and furniture.
TARGET BUILD COST	ZAR 470 000 (inclusive of materials and labour)

SUBMISSION LAYOUT

ENTRY

594mm

420mm

PANEL A

Show your vision of a scalable, adaptable, and aspirational ECD design - your **Classroom of Tomorrow** proposal saved as an A2 PDF portrait.



300 WORD DESCRIPTION

Describe your proposal with a Project title and 300 words description, in Arial 10 font saved as an A4 PDF

Submission Criteria:

- Two A2 portraits in 1 PDF file format.
- One A4 portrait description of project.
- file sizes below 10MB
- File names (A2): Team number_panels
- File names (A4): Team number_text
- File names (A4): Team number_excel

PANEL B

Show developed plans, sections, elevations, technical details and important design elements of your ECD proposal saved as an A2 PDF



BUILDING EXCEL

Fill in the provided excel sheet with your project specifications for the proposed building materials for different areas of your proposal

- (e.g. BTC35_panels)
- (e.g. BTC35_text)
- (e.g. BTC35_excel)



HOW SUBMISSIONS ARE EVALUATED

The success of competition entries will be evaluated based on its clarity and interpretation of the brief with **an emphasis on the scalable, modular and aspirational aspects of the design.**

Entries should be visually expressive, with few clear, concise drawings and supporting visual evidence. Participants should follow the format presented in the Submission Layout. In terms of visualizing one's ideas, sketches, renders, digital drawings, paintings, photoshop, and any other artistic mediums are welcome. The judges will assess the entries based on their ability to meet the brief's requirements.

PRIZES

1st

R30 000

2nd

R15 000

3rd

R 5 000

Image of New Rest valley Creche,
2023, The Maak



A WORD FROM OUR PARTNER



As a project partner, Education Africa is proud to support this competition, as we believe that social architecture has the power to transform communities and make real change happen. Over the past 20 years, we have collaborated with various of educational institutions to build preschools, ensuring that young children have access to quality learning environments. We hope this competition inspires bold, innovative solutions that reimagine spaces for inclusivity, and social impact – especially for those who need it most: children. We look forward to seeing creative ideas that challenge norms and contribute to building a better future for all.



STUDIO8FOLD



DG
MT

TIMELINE

Registration opens:
Registration & Submission deadline:
Winners announcement:

Mar 19, 2025
Jul 31, 2025 at 24:00 CAT
Aug 30, 2025

SUBMISSION

1. **Additional Information:** Each competition entry should have a project description, maximum 300 word count, font Arial, size 10, to be submitted on upload portal.
2. **Registration:** Participants must register for the competition submission on the official NowNow website (www.nownowcompetition.com) before submitting any entries. This ensures that the participant's submission will be considered valid and eligible for evaluation.
3. **How to submit:** find the submission upload link on the NowNow website (www.nownowcompetition.com). Once on the website, participants should select the relevant competition by clicking on it and clicking submit.
4. **Disclaimer:** Participants should not include any personal information that could give away their identity or risk disqualification. Participants are to place their supplied competition code on each submitted panel in the bottom right corner, ensuring that it is clearly visible.

Image of PLAYSCAPE Childrens Community Center, 2024, Fangfang Tieng



DO's & DONT's

- Participants may submit only one entry.
- Entries must be original and not previously published.
- The competition organizers reserve the right to use the winning designs for promotional and marketing purposes.
- Additional FAQ's can be found on our website (www.nownowcompetition.com). If you still haven't found what you are looking for please contact us at info@nownowcompetition.com

TC's & C's

1. The competition is open to individuals from all backgrounds, including students, architects, designers, urbanists, engineers, artists, makers, activists, or anyone with an interest in design and architecture. Participants must be at least 18 years old.
2. Entrants may choose to participate individually or as part of a team. Teams can include individuals of various nationalities and age groups, provided all members are at least 18 years old.
3. Entrants must comply with all deadlines, procedures, fees, and submission requirements prior to the competition deadline. The NowNow Competition takes no responsibility for any technical issues or website malfunctions.
4. All relevant information can be downloaded from the NowNow Competition website. Any additional competition-related materials or documentation will be sent to entrants within 2-3 working days of their successful registration. To access and use this content, entrants must pay the registration fee, which provides them with a unique identification code. The registration fee, as outlined in the competition schedule, remains the same regardless of team size.
5. Paying a single fee grants the participant or team a personal identification code for the submission of one project. To submit additional projects, entrants must pay an additional fee for each extra submission code.
6. Accepted payment methods include Pystack, PayPal, and bank transfer.
7. Prizes are awarded regardless of team size. The NowNow Competition covers all bank commissions associated with prize payments. However, any fees charged by the winner's bank or currency exchange fees are the winner's responsibility. Prizes will be granted after the winner's identity is verified and upon their signing of a self-declaration confirming full acceptance of the competition's Terms and Conditions.
8. The jury is composed of independent and impartial experts. Their decision is based solely on the competition's evaluation criteria and is final, with no grounds for challenge. Participants agree not to dispute the jury's decision or evaluation. If any jury member withdraws, the NowNow Competition will replace

- them with equally qualified and impartial individuals.
9. The NowNow Competition assumes no responsibility for any potential shortcomings in project execution. It is important to note that the jury's evaluation and the awarding of a prize should not be interpreted as an assessment of the project's adequacy or technical feasibility.
10. The NowNow Competition is not obligated to provide participants with explanations regarding its decisions or results.
11. Participants are prohibited from publishing their submitted materials before the official announcement of the winners.
12. Under no circumstances are participants permitted to make inquiries to the jury regarding the competition.
13. Any team or individual found in violation of the Terms and Conditions during or after the competition may have their rewards, publications, or any other outcomes revoked at any time.
14. Prizes are disbursed via bank transfer or PayPal. To receive the prize, whether as an individual or a legal entity, the winner must complete a declaration acknowledging receipt. As a result, requesting an invoice is not possible.
15. The submission of projects and/or winning the competition does not create any form of professional commitment or relationship between the participants and the NowNow Competition.
16. The NowNow Competition reserves the right to modify the competition's dates, jury composition, or project submission methods. Any changes will be communicated through the NowNow Competition's media channels at least 48 hours before the submission deadline via email.
17. These Terms and Conditions do not constitute a public offer.
18. By registering on the NowNow Competition's website, participants fully and unconditionally accept all the Terms and Conditions of the competition, without exception.
19. The NowNow Competition reserves the right to modify the Terms and Conditions and any other rules without prior notice. Additionally, special rules specific to individual competitions may override these Terms and Conditions and other general rules.

20. The NowNow Competition operates in English by default. Translations may be requested upon special request.

Ineligibility Rules

1. Any blatant infringement of the NowNow competitions Terms and Conditions.
2. Submitting material, content, or information relevant to the competition through a method other than the one specified in the submission requirements.
3. Submitting material after the submission deadline has passed.
4. Naming a file in a manner that deviates from the specifications outlined in the submission requirements.
5. Submitting panels that include any reference to the identity of entrants (e.g., name, office, university).
6. Submitting layouts that include text not written in English.
7. Submitting any material that does not align with the competition principles or is deemed incomplete.
8. Submitting a project that significantly deviates from the overarching goals, brief or purposes of the competition.
9. Entrants who have a familial connection within the second degree or a direct professional relationship with any jury member at the time of the competition and/or within the two preceding years.
10. Submitting a project that is neither new nor original, and not the result of the entrants' intellectual effort, meaning it does not belong to them.
11. The NowNow Competition evaluates projects solely based on technical and objective criteria. Projects that do not meet the specified requirements or fall under the outlined cases will be automatically rejected. Disqualified projects will not be considered or evaluated by the jury, and entrants or teams will not receive any refund.
12. By agreeing to the Terms and Conditions, entrants explicitly confirm that they do not meet any of the stated eligibility criteria.

**NOW
NOW**