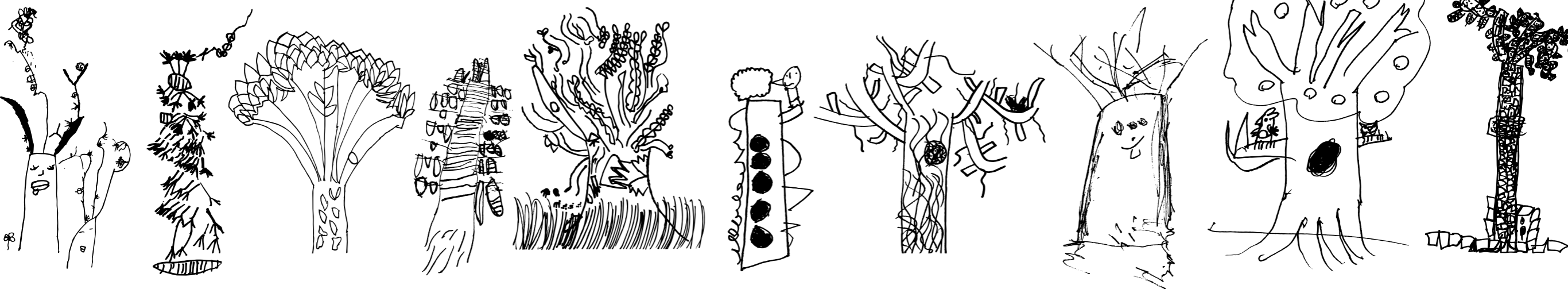




2017 at a glance



Photos by: Judy van Heerden, Agotha Clarke, Tessa Browne, Louise Erasmus



Memory traces of the year

2017 at a glance

It's hard to capture everything that happens in a year – especially when the good work, the really important work, is often happening underneath the radar, unreported, underground. Knowing that this kind of document is always incomplete – only a scratching of the surface of the multitude of conversations, moments of inspiration, breakthrough and connection that make this kind of work possible – here is our attempt at capturing the key moments of 2017, through the lens of Reggio-inspired education in South Africa.

2017 conference



3
days



2

international
speakers



5

local
speakers



285

participants

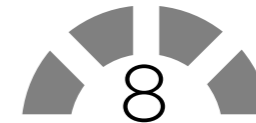
96

schools



4

universities



8

ECD forums

Over three days in June 2017, nearly 300 educators gathered in Waverley, Johannesburg to deepen their understanding of the Reggio Emilia philosophy of education; connect with other Reggio-inspired thinkers, activists and educators; and meditate on what more we can do – or do differently – to ensure a better future for children.

[Read our wrap-up report](#)

[Reflect on key conference insights](#)

As part of building up the local network of Reggio-inspired educators, a collection of schools often work on shared projects. In 2017, schools were investigating how children see the rights of trees, as a lens into their own rights. The beginnings of this collaborative project – in which six schools and one NGO participated – was showcased at the 2017 conference in Johannesburg. An unexpected (but happy) by-product of the exhibition is a WhatsApp group where educators have been influencing, encouraging and mentoring each other.

Feedback from a first-time conference attendee

“Wow – it has been a learning curve which has no end if there’s English like that. I have learnt a lot through the conference – which was my first time to such an educative approach in ECD. [There was] some Reggio approach jargon which I could not understand, but with the help of the WhatsApp group I can say the curve is getting wider and wider – I’m getting the sense of the Reggio approach. In terms of classroom arrangement, I’ve told myself there is no learning if I don’t practise what I learn ... I’ve made some improvements in allowing children to lead, think, choose on their own – availing myself through questions and help whenever they need. I cannot say I’m there but I can say I made a step ahead ... empowered by Reggio approach, and documenting all the way. To cut the long story short: I love the Reggio approach.”

Connie Mncube
Step Ahead Preschool in Kempton Park

Eye on 2018

Exciting news! We’ve just confirmed that pedagogista Paola Strozzi will be presenting at our conferences in June. Given high demand, we will be hosting two back-to-back conferences in 2018, covering the same material but held on different dates and in different parts of Johannesburg:

Johannesburg North
Reddam House Waterfall
21-22 June 2018


Johannesburg South
Nova Pioneer Ormonde
25-26 June 2018



Photo by Agotha Clarke


2017 introductory course workshops*

 17 workshops

 84 educators registered for the full introductory course in 2017, travelling in each Saturday from Soweto, Orange Farm, Sebokeng, Vosloorus, Alexandra, Kagiso and Roosevelt Park

 19 completed the full course (attending all nine workshops)

 1 participant will complete the course in January 2018

 4 participants have three (or fewer) workshops left to complete

Of all 84 participants, four have already been identified as potential future presenters and will be invited to attend further professional development to help deepen their understanding of the Reggio approach.

“I now understand my own child better than before...And I am happy that my child has different art – it doesn’t look like everyone else’s art.”

Simangaliso Dube, Athlone Playschool, Parkview

“AREA taught me about how to document. Documentation teaches you a lot about the children. And I learned with AREA you don’t need to be fancy. You can just do it wherever you are with the children. If they like to be in the sandpit, then write down what they are saying about the sand and you will find out what their theories are. And when you show your colleagues your documentation about this, they learn a lot about the children – and about sand. In fact, the children are teaching us! We just need to listen.”

Nonhlanhla Biyela, Small World Playgroup and Pre-school, Roosevelt Park

“Before I was with AREA I used to do the drawing and say to the children, ‘Draw this’. Now I give them a blank paper. I used to give them a full image. I saw I was killing them. Because of being with AREA now I know – let them come to you, ask them about their pictures. The children will tell you a lot. I realise I was spoon-feeding the children. Doing the AREA course has helped me to see that the children, they can do things for themselves.”

Nthabiseng Zondi, Happy Angel Day Care, Germiston.

“Before I was just forcing my ideas into the children. Since attending AREA now we know we must allow them to ‘be’. And from listening more closely now you know ‘this child is good at that’ and ‘that child is good at this’ – you don’t compare anymore. Each child has their own creativity. I wouldn’t mind coming to AREA year after year! And the biggest thing is to listen, then you will find out what the children think. And then you can decide what to do next, from what they are saying. I learned that at AREA, that you don’t need to plan everything for the children before.”

Nonhlanhla Tshabalala, Faith Development Day Care, Germiston



Photo by Tessa Browne

Busisiwe Ramokadi (right), principal of both Inthuthuko and Boitumelo Preschools in Mofolo and Dobsonville in Soweto, completed the introductory course in 2017, and has sent all her teachers from both schools on it too. Her first big change toward a Reggio-inspired approach? To have two teachers in every class.



Eye on 2018

Given the increased demand for professional development and circles of support, we will be running two sets of introductory workshops in 2018. [Find out more](#) about what’s in store for workshop participants – or sign up for the series yourself.

* During this series of nine practical workshops, ECD practitioners are introduced to core principles of the Reggio approach, and work with a group of peers to explore the possibilities for applying these principles and philosophy in their own classroom and context.

Tiziana Filippini's visit



An inspiring encounter with a local educator brought Tiziana Filippini – an esteemed pedagoga from Reggio Emilia – back to South Africa in 2017 for a week of mentorship and professional development. Tiziana volunteered two days of her time for mentoring at one inner-city and two township schools, and the remaining time was spent working with six private schools and facilitating two workshops.

During her visit, Tiziana met with Gauteng officials from the departments of education, social development and health – at which she spoke about the Reggio approach and shared suggestions and insights on how professional development aligned to the approach could be offered to practitioners in registered ECD centres in the province. AREA, Reggio Children, the Reggio Emilia municipality, and Gauteng government structures are still in conversation about how this could happen. In the meantime, AREA has been participating in a sub-committee tasked with looking into ways the approach can be piloted in Gauteng.

Read a more detailed [overview of the visit](#), as well as a [collection of insights and advice Tiziana shared during her time](#)

“It’s vital to see children as people, not just as human beings who lack something. It is even more important to recognise the uniqueness of each child, to welcome their differences. To have just one pre-defined model for who or what a person is, means to narrow down the diversity and possibility on this planet. Each of us has 100 ways to relate to the world around us, to express ourselves, to welcome and allow the differences among us. When we speak of children and adults having 100 languages, we express an ethical point of view, not just an artistic one.”

Tiziana Filippini
– [shared during her 2017 visit to South Africa](#) –

“The professional development [with Tiziana] was meaningful and fruitful for us – both the workshop and [the visit to] Mother Goose... It was an eye-opening moment on how to reach the curriculum objectives together – without a linear process but through a process where children are actively involved and their voices are heard. I also liked it when [Tiziana] unpacked ELDAs [the early learning and development areas outlined in the [South African National Curriculum Framework for children](#) from birth to four] ... She really gave us a new way of thinking. We could link how documentation is a process of learning and how we can actually tackle the assessment checklist by government (especially in the Grade R classroom) and observation in a form of documentation. She made us realise that the process of documentation...is a mechanism for being a reflective teacher. At our school we want to start working on documentation and strengthen each other’s weaknesses.”

Mathapelo Mathibela
Mother Goose Corner Day Care Centre, Germiston



Photo by Tessa Browne

Paola Strozzi's visit

For the past few years, Gauteng and the Emilia Romagna province in Italy have been signatories to a [memorandum of understanding](#) that affirms their mutual support and dialogue in various sectors, including education. For the past four years, an Italian delegation has been sent to South Africa for the South Africa-Italy Summit in October each year. As a direct result of Gauteng's meeting with Tiziana Filippini in September 2017, the Italian delegation included (for the first time) a representative from Reggio Children, pedagoga Paola Strozzi.

Paola presented at an ECD summit hosted by Gauteng, focusing on the potential for drawing inspiration from the Reggio approach in our local ECD centres. At the same summit, Mathapelo Mathibela presented the work at Mother Goose as a case study on what is possible when Reggio inspiration takes root in a local context, and AREA participated in a panel discussion.

"We always carry Reggio Emilia in our hearts. When we speak of Italy we cannot but think of Reggio Emilia. We are linked with profound attachment and immense gratitude that is hard to put into words."

Oliver Tambo

- Quoted by Gauteng Premier David Makhura at the 2017 SA-Italy Summit



Photo by Tessa Browne

A history of friendship

2017 marked 40 years since Oliver Tambo signed the solidarity pact with Reggio Emilia in 1977 as well as 100 years since Tambo's birth. To mark the occasion, the South African government gifted a statue of Tambo to the people of Reggio Emilia. The statue was opened at the Oliver Tambo peace park in Reggio in the presence of Justice Deputy Minister John Jeffery, South African Ambassador to Italy Thembi Tambo, Dali Tambo, and political consul Makwatse Mokgethi.

In 2018, a statue of Giuseppe Soncini, a leading political figure in Reggio Emilia at the time of the solidarity pact and key to its signing, will be placed in the National Heritage Monument in Pretoria alongside statues of Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo and Walter Sisulu.

If you're interested in learning more about Reggio's history with Tambo and various resistance movements in Southern Africa (and if you have a working understanding of Italian), visit www.comune.re.it/reggioafrica. Or you can look through [photos documenting the relationship](#). All information regarding the statue is courtesy of the [Comune di Reggio nell'Emilia Facebook page](#).



Courtesy of Comune di Reggio nell'Emilia

Reggio-inspired ripples across the country



Limpopo

- AREA will be facilitating a workshop at Mitchell House in Polokwane on 15 January 2018.

KwaZulu-Natal

- Educators in KwaZulu-Natal gathered in September and November 2017 to connect with local colleagues inspired by the Reggio philosophy and dialogue about areas of interest and need. Interested to know more? Read notes from their learning circle [in September](#) and [November](#). If you'd like to get involved, contact Rachel Bowyer at rachel.bowyer@soulaction.co.za.
- Nora Saneka, principal of Clare Ellis Brown Pre-Primary in Durban for more than 20 years, published a powerful opinion piece in the *Mail&Guardian* in November 2017, titled "See a child as a citizen". [Read it for yourself](#).
- AREA will be facilitating an all-day workshop on 3 March 2018 at Penzance Primary School in Umbilo, Durban.

Northern Cape

- An all-day workshop in Upington is being planned (2018 date and venue to be confirmed)

Gauteng

- Beyond conversations about potential collaborations with the Gauteng provincial government, as well as our 2017 workshops and conferences, we've presented at two ECD summits (Gauteng and Ekurhuleni), at the ISASA New and Aspiring Heads conference, and to Gauteng Department of Education and Social Development officials. We've also been kept busy with visits to local schools to offer support and mentorship – to Mother Goose Corner Day Care (Germiston), Inthuthuko Nursery and Pre-school (Mofolo, Soweto), Step Ahead Pre-school (Kempton Park), Petunia Moon Daycare (Vosloorus), Small World Playgroup and Pre-school (Roosevelt Park), Prestige Kids Academy and Baby Day Care (Alberton) and Zakheni Early Learning Centre (Protea Glen, Soweto).
- Inspired by Mathapelo Mathibela's presentation at the 2017 conference, members of the Department of Social Development arranged to visit Mother Goose in Germiston. "The visit to Mother Goose Corner was of a particular advantage to the Department of Social Development because – [aside from] the observation that government officials could have made regarding the implementation of the Reggio approach within an African context – it provided an opportunity for Mathapelo Mathibela to share her knowledge and experience pertaining to the registration of the ECD centre, the rezoning, and other challenges she as well as other ECD centre managements encountered," said Louise Erasmus, who has been seconded as a technical advisor to the Department of Social Development's ECD programme.
- Lindi Bell, founder and director of Small World in Roosevelt Park, was interviewed on *Let's Talk* (a programme aired through local community station iTV) in October 2017 about the Reggio approach. [Watch the interview here](#).

Reggio-inspired ripples across the country

Eastern Cape

- Thethiwe Ntsatha, principal of Lamplighters Children Ministries Day Care in Sterkspruit, on the border between Lesotho, the Free State and Eastern Cape – who attended her first conference in 2017 – has booked herself on our introductory workshop series, and is bussing to Johannesburg every Saturday of the nine-part course. She dreams of visiting Reggio Emilia to see the schools in action and has begun raising funds to do this.
- In August 2017, Reggio enthusiasts Lindi Bell of the Small World Playgroup and Pre-school in Johannesburg and Joanne Peers of Pinelands Primary School in Cape Town were keynote speakers at the Wonder of Learning seminar in Port Elizabeth. Lindi spoke about children's rights and Joanne presented on making thinking visible. This seminar, an initiative of the Seed House Foundation, was organised by Tricia Daniel of Blue Umbrellas School in Walmer, Port Elizabeth.
- In October 2017, Pinkie Motlanyane of Lesedi la Krete Anglican Primary School in Orange Farm and Tessa Browne from AREA joined Tricia Daniel and Hannah Bayley from Blue Umbrellas in Port Elizabeth for a day-long workshop at NMMU with local educators from Port Elizabeth and the Manyano Community Schools Network. Since then AREA has had multiple requests for follow-up workshops in the region.
- Through the Durban learning circle, we recently heard of a scout group run by Grahamstown student Anna Talbot – who attended the AREA conference in 2015 – that's inspired by the principles of the Reggio approach. Find out more in this [short YouTube profile](#).

Western Cape

- In March 2017, AREA completed the last of four workshops with after-care practitioners from the Amy Biehl Foundation in Cape Town.
 - At the same time, AREA ran an introductory workshop on the principles of the Reggio approach for teachers of Somerset College Pre-Preparatory. They will be hosting a mini-conference with a strong focus on the Reggio approach in Somerset West in March 2018. AREA will be presenting, as will Debbie Cloete of Stone House in Elliot, Lindi Bell from Small World, Catherine Collingwood – formerly of Small World, now recently relocated to the Western Cape – and Mathapelo Mathibela from Mother Goose.
 - A group of Reggio-inspired educators in and around Cape Town have started gathering for professional inspiration and mutual edification. For more information and to be part of the next gathering, contact June O'Neill on junoneill61@gmail.com.
 - During the Gauteng ECD Summit and OR Tambo centenary celebrations in October, AREA first met Annalisa Contrafatto and Andrea Couvert, Italian volunteers who work in Samora Machel, Cape Town. Through their work, they recently came into contact with Mzi Tsoga and Nokubonga Mepeni who are hoping to establish a 24-hour creche to serve the high percentage of shift workers in security and nursing professions who live in the area. Thanks to the generosity of the Italian embassy, Mzi and Nokubonga were both able to visit Reggio Emilia in August 2017. If you'd like to know more about the collaboration and trip abroad, [read on](#).
- AREA will be facilitating a two-day workshop for pre-primary and foundation phase teachers at Oakhill School, Knysna on 19-20 March 2018.

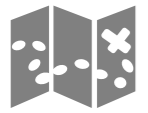


Eye on 2018

Professor Benjamin Mardell, a principal investigator at Harvard Graduate School of Education's Project Zero – who has just kickstarted a two-year research project on the pedagogy of play in South African classrooms – will be volunteering his time on 1 September 2018 to offer a morning of professional development to AREA members and collaborators in Johannesburg. Mark your calendars!

Read more about [Project Zero's Pedagogy of Play research](#)

Strengthening ties with Reggio Emilia



14th trip to Reggio
(since idea of
AREA was first
birthed in 2008)



6th international study tour

- In April 2017, our 6th international study group – made up of six participants including AREA board member Des Hugo – set off to Reggio Emilia. The next AREA tour to participate in the Reggio Children International Study Group is scheduled for 14-21 April 2018.
- In February each year, a founding board member of AREA is required to visit Reggio Emilia for a meeting of the [Reggio Children International Network](#). This gathering of representatives from 34 member countries is a time of shared dialogue, professional development and an opportunity to develop relationships with like-minded educators in other countries, to share challenges and successes, to learn from each other, to offer mutual support. Many of our international conference speakers have been identified through these gatherings, and have returned to South Africa to volunteer their time. The most recent example was Harold Göthson from the Reggio Emilia Institute in Sweden, who first visited South Africa for our conference in 2012, and volunteered to return in 2017, both to share his learnings at the conference, and to work with Sifiso Thobakale and children and staff at the Zakheni Early Learning Centre in Soweto. Since then, Sifiso has been improving and renovating her school with a view to transforming it into a centre of Reggio inspiration that can provide professional development and support for local educators in Soweto.
- Through our international partners in Australia, we were able to offer local Reggio-inspired educators the opportunity to join an [in-depth study tour focused on the culture of the atelier](#). Our local network doesn't currently have the member numbers to offer intensive study tours to Reggio – so our trips tend to take place during the international study tour, which is by-and-large for first-time Reggio visitors. While no local educators were able to raise the funds in good time, this is an opportunity we hope to be able to offer again.
- Every infant-toddler centre and preschool in Reggio Emilia has a Community Early Childhood Council made up of parents, educators, pedagogists and other community members. These councils help ensure participation in and co-responsibility for the schools according to the values set out in the [Charter of the City and Childhood Councils](#). Each year, members of the Reggio Children International Network are invited to develop closer relationships with various schools in Reggio Emilia by communicating with members of the schools' city childhood councils. AREA was recently invited to be a member of the Anna Frank Preschool City Childhood Council and will visit the school to meet staff and parents during the Reggio Children International Network meeting in February 2018.



Photo by Judy van Heerden

“In April 2017 one of my life-long dreams became true when I set foot in Reggio Emilia to join 450 delegates from 38 countries for the International Study Group at the Loris Malaguzzi International Centre.

“During this week, I gained so much knowledge of and insight into the renowned Reggio Emilia approach and enjoyed wonderful experiences of all kinds...

“Personally, I am most grateful for opportunities to visit two infant-toddler centres, as well as one preschool, and the wonderful school at the international centre.... To me it was an eye-opener to see the teachers and children in action, to be inspired by all the proposals (provocations), and to see various ways of doing documentation.

“I am forever thankful that I had the opportunity and means to embark on this enriching adventure. I will forever treasure the experience.”

Judy van Heerden
Lecturer in the Department of Early Childhood Education,
University of Pretoria

Thank you

To the people of Reggio

For your vision, your passion, the constant reminder that there is a different way to be walked. What you have shaped together over the years continues to be an aspiration, an example of how we might do better for and with our children, with each other.

To everyone at [Reggio Children](#), the [Reggio Children Foundation](#) and the [Istituzione](#) – particularly presidents Claudia Giudici, Carla Rinaldi and Nando Rinaldi – thank you for your time, your guidance, your patience and support. To our 2017 teachers and pedagogiste from Reggio – Marina Castagnetti, Tiziana Filippini, Paola Strozzi – we’ve been proud to host you, inspired to be taught by you, and moved to have had the opportunity to get to know you better.

To our funders and partners

Our work – particularly our workshops – wouldn’t be possible without the generous support of Albert Wessels Trust. Thank you for investing in our work and our mission.

We are also incredibly grateful for the support from [Nova Pioneer](#), who have opened their Ormonde and Midrand campuses to us – for free – for our workshops and offices. And while the start to 2017 marked the end of a chapter, we wouldn’t be where we are today without the support of [St Mary’s](#), who housed us and supported us for eight years, since the informal founding of AREA in 2011.

Expanding our reach and impact would not have been possible without the continued support of the [HIP Alliance](#) – Maurizio Mariano, you’ve been one of our staunchest supporters from the very beginning. Thank you for always believing in us.

And to new and potential collaborators in Gauteng – particularly Premier David Makhura (for his vision and passion) and members of GPEDU Phumelele Tloubatla (Director: ECD) and Nosipho Matshoba (Deputy Director: Pre-Grade R Programmes).

To our international colleagues

To Harold Göthson – there was simply no saying no to your offer to return to South Africa and volunteer your time. You’ve given so much of yourself. Thank you to you and the [Reggio Emilia Institute](#) in Sweden for your incredible generosity.

This year has brought with it an unexpected windfall from the Pacific: REANZ – [Reggio Emilia Aotearoa New Zealand](#) – recently gifted 3000 Australian dollars to help increase access to AREA workshops by offering reduced rates to teachers in need of financial assistance. To our friends in New Zealand, for keeping us in your minds and hearts, *kia ora!*

To our colleagues and friends abroad, fellow network members, and particularly individuals from NAREA ([North American Reggio Emilia Alliance](#)), REANZ ([Reggio Emilia Aotearoa New Zealand](#)), REAIE ([Reggio Emilia Australia Information Exchange](#)) and the Danish network [Det Danske Reggio Emilia Netværk](#) – for being only an email away, a friendly ear, a source of sage advice, thank you!

To our board

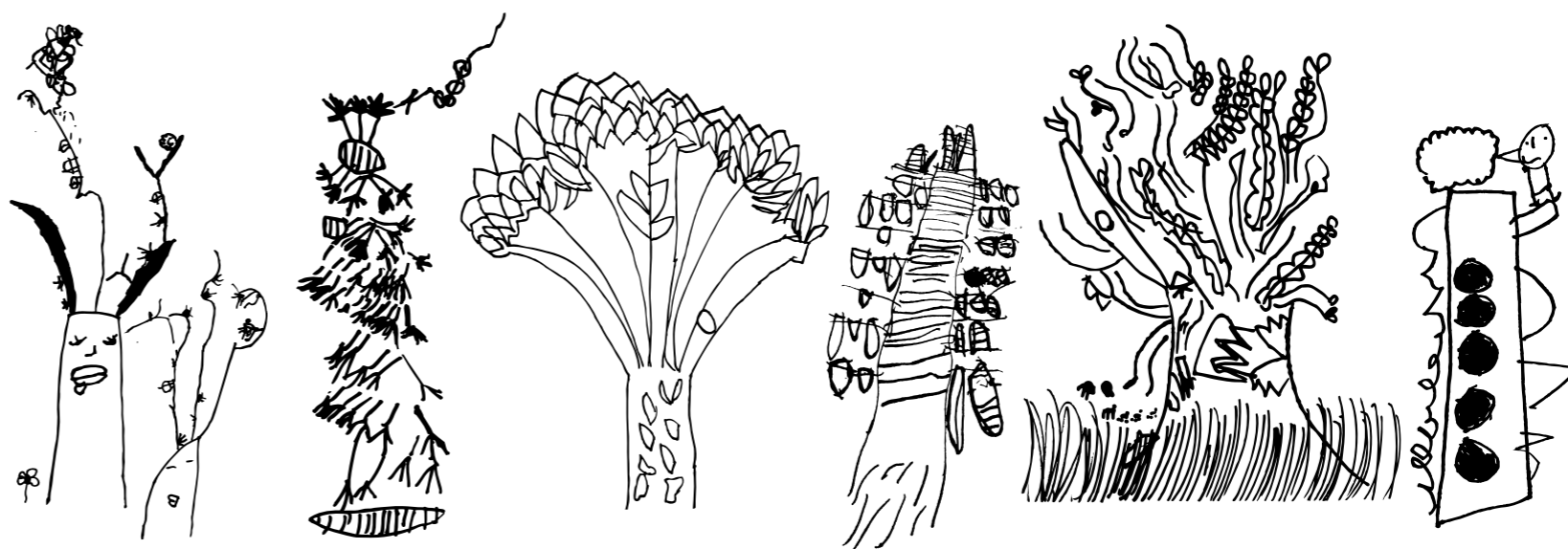
Our [board of directors](#) give so much of themselves to sustain AREA’s work. Des Hugo, Tessa Browne, Thandi Chaane, Bev Evangelides, Peter Lee, Maurizio Mariano, Sifiso Thobakale – without your time, interest and expertise, we would surely be the poorer. Thank you!

To our workshop presenters and facilitators

Your generous sharing of your documentation of children’s learning, your own experiences and understanding of the Reggio approach has enriched so many, thank you!

To our members and collaborators

To all those who – through their work, their passion, their very ways of being and working in the world – sustain and grow the vision of children as citizens with rights not just needs, who invest in the future of South Africa, thank you. You’re our reason for being, our hope for the future.



“All of this is a great forest...”