



When it comes to examples of outstanding commitments to a greener future, we often turn to the international community for eco role models.

No doubt there are many lessons that can be learnt from beyond our borders, but we sometimes don't give enough credit to what is being done right here on our very own doorstep. Alexis Schaffler discovers how a small primary school in the leafy suburbs of Pretoria is leading the way to a greener future.



Leading the way

Anton van Wouw Primary School

Anton van Wouw Primary School, in the leafy suburb of Nieuw Muckleneuk in Pretoria, has won an eco-school award for their participation in the WESSA/WWF Eco-Schools Program over the last four years. In 2009 it also became the international eco-school of the year in recognition of achieving its fifth consecutive eco-school award.

When we visited Anton van Wouw primary, we were truly impressed by the range and quality of green initiatives. The inclusion of all learners and parents in these projects also revealed an environmental ethic running right through the school - reminding us that sustainability is about integration and learning at all levels of society.

Eco-Committee

As part of their school profile, Anton van Wouw has elected an eco-committee, comprising a dedicated group of teachers and parents. This eco-committee is headed by Mrs Cornia Sadie, the school's art teacher, and Professor Riana, a devoted green parent at Anton van Wouw. The eco-committee includes some 11 green portfolios, managed by parents and staff. The recycling portfolio is by far the largest, and reflects the impressive progress that the school has made with waste collection and separation. Garden maintenance and landscaping, land guidance and a governing body overseeing the committee are but some of the other eco-portfolios integrated into the school's environmental policy.



Reusing & recycling resources

The recycling project at Anton van Wouw is probably the most well-known eco-project at the school. It is so successful that every Friday morning, in the early hours between 6:45 and 7:30, the influx of local businesses and surrounding communities that bring their waste to the school for sorting and recycling causes a traffic jam in the area. The school has colour-coded bins placed across the grounds. The Grade 4 & 5s are responsible for handling the separation of collected waste, as well as ensuring that the colour-coded bins are correctly used. To ensure that waste separation also happens at home, the school has encouraged each learner's household to have three bins for plastic, paper and cans by arranging for a discount agreement on waste separation bins at Builder's Warehouse. The eco-committee estimates that about 40% of learners' families currently recycle plastic, paper, tins and glass weekly. The success of Anton van Wouw's recycling drive has meant that the school is now setting up a formal 'recycling-drive-through' system (similar to a take away drive-through but with a view to consume less).



⇒ 'Eco-code' & the 5 themes

So many organisations appear to be green on the surface, but are less so when it comes to green integrity. That's why we were truly impressed when we heard that Anton van Wouw has its own environmental policy, otherwise known to pupils as the 'eco-code'. The eco-code spells out how sustainability is integrated into the curriculum and what actions are to be followed to achieve its status as an eco-school. Anton van Wouw has gone one step further, by choosing five eco-themes to guide the environmental policy at the school. These are resources, biodiversity, local and global issues, community and heritage, and a healthy lifestyle. The eco-committee uses these five themes to assess the

school's progress and transform sustainability ideas into tangible goals for the learners. To incorporate the five eco-themes into school activity as well as into the curriculum, there is a wide range of projects. Each project is allocated to a specific grade which is responsible for its success.

After engaging with some of the students and seeing the eco-projects running at Anton van Wouw, it became clear that the entire school's identity is centred around the five eco-themes. Everything from break, learning time, extramural activities and outreach programs represent one or more of the themes. The eco-themes are also simple in terms of getting back to life's basics and made us think of how we all go about our own living and doing.

Growing & giving

The veggie patch at Anton van Wouw looks like it is professionally maintained and the veggies look as if they've been pumped with growth-hormones. But the only thing used on these veggies is the organic earthworm fertiliser (worm tea) derived from the school's own earthworm farm. The Grade 5s are responsible for the veggie garden, and each student is allocated a 1m³ x 1m³ section to look after for the academic year. The commitment is self-evident – the yields are incredible, with cabbage and lettuce heads twice the size you'll find in shops. The Grade 5s take home what veggies they can use for home dinners, but the bulk are taken to a shelter to feed hungry street children. We were impressed to see that the school's eco-identity extends far beyond its immediate environment. This integration is also evident in the way the school has made provision for including the costs of the veggie seeds in the Grade 5 curriculum budget.



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Magazine? Eco-Schools are schools that have chosen to commit to improving environmental learning, management and action-taking at their schools on a yearly basis through registering with the

WESSA/WWF Eco-Schools Program. At least 75% of all participating schools are under-resourced and are often located in remote areas like the Mozambique border, the Wildcoast, far Northern cape

Diverse living

On the ecological side, the school has been divided into different biomes and green spaces with the view to attracting a diverse range of species such as butterflies and birds that are often threatened in cities today. All alien trees on the property have been removed to ensure that indigenous fauna and flora can flourish, and also reduce water consumption – the school's water bill has dropped by 25% due to reduced irrigation demand on the grounds. A crucial part of the biodiversity strategy at Anton van Wouw is that each and every student is responsible for an indigenous biome or green space. For instance, the Grade 2s are in charge of weeding their tropical garden and the Grade 3s maintain the school's garden beds. All students are involved in bi-annual propagation and planting programs where they are taught about the characteristics, growing conditions and the care of the particular species for which they are responsible.



Leading the way for others

Anton van Wouw is now seen by local and international schools, business communities and organisations as a blueprint for other eco-schools and projects everywhere. The eco-committee is now consulting to other schools as well as businesses who want to know more on how to roll out environmental strategies such as how to set up recycling drop-off sites. As a result, Anton van Wouw has a weekly radio spot giving advice on all things green – they also offer on-site training on any of their eco-projects. Anton van Wouw reminds us that going green is about commitment at an individual level. The changes they have made have been home-grown and small, but combined they are contributing to a system-wide transformation. **SG**



Footprints, handprints & blueprints

When it comes to reducing their carbon footprint, Anton van Wouw's strategy is to get the small things right first. As Riana Stone, one of the directors of the eco-committee told us, 'It is better to start with one project, do it well and get it off the ground than to focus on too many grand ideas.' It is also important that learners understand the positive impact of even the smallest of projects. The school has learnt that it is important to quantify this impact for students, to make it tangible and real. For example, each grade is taught how much carbon they are saving by recycling – ask any of the school's pupils and they'll tell you.



where access to environmental resource materials are often extremely limited due to the lack of libraries and schools having funds to start their own. Why not give a meaningful give to schools that are already

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