



Game-Filled Park Is School for South African Kids



Class time at Southern Cross School, near Kruger National Park in South Africa, is an unusual scene. Teachers and pupils are not shut inside classrooms. Instead, they walk through the grass and bush, or sit in the shade of trees, joined in serious discussion.

The school has the same syllabus that is set for the country's schools by the educational authorities, but the teaching methods are totally different. Southern Cross uses nature as a teaching tool. Classes go outdoors to look for phenomena that can be used to study anything from mathematics and science to language.

Jumbo Williams, the school's headmaster, emphasizes the importance of environmental care. "When students leave school, we want them to be champions of the natural environment," Williams said. "We must make people understand the impact of what we are doing to the environment."

The preschool is set slightly apart from the rest of the school. Today, the first lesson of the day is mathematics. To practice numbers, the children visit the nearby water

trough to look at animal tracks and count how many different animals came to drink during the night. Older students might figure how much water will be used over weeks and months, based on the change in the trough's water levels in one day. "It's amazing how much math is out there," Williams says.

Language, speech, and debate classes focus on conservation issues. A recent student debate centered on whether people should give water to animals in the wild. In another example, finding a dead animal could lead to an investigation of how and why it died.

The idea for the school came from Sue Godding, who was the manager of a game lodge next to Kruger National Park. When her children reached school age, she decided to start a school that offered a top-quality education in a natural environment. Southern Cross opened in January 2002 with 40 children. More than 250 people applied for jobs as teachers. Today, enrollment is over 100.

Godding says nature-based tourism is one of South Africa's national treasures. She believes that the country needs to produce people who understand the environment and the need to preserve it. "We need leaders in all fields who, when they make an important decision, can do so with a sound knowledge of how this world is to survive," she says.

