

The AEL shares how young South Africans can be custodians of our eco-sensitive future

By [Dr Dave Pepler](#), issued by [Stone](#)

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Conservation biology is not a science, but rather a complex, multidisciplinary management system that requires individuals to navigate a highly intricate environment. People are key to conservation - we engage in it and are affected by it, which is why social science, economics, law, and politics are crucial components for solving these intricate conservation issues.

Every student at the AEL (Academy for Environmental Leadership) has the potential to make a lasting environmental impact by becoming an individual force in sustainability. This means considering their actions and asking essential questions such as, "Should I buy something imported from Italy or locally produced in Wellington, even if it costs more?" or "Should I choose to use my bicycle instead of driving?" By becoming a stable force, students also become environmental ambassadors, spreading their knowledge and influence to their neighbours, friends, and family. In turn, this gives rise to more individuals joining in the effort, forming a sustainability network.



The mindset and skills required for this endeavour involve problem-solving as an attitude rather than just a skill. Teaching young individuals to approach environmental problems with limited information helps them respond ethically and appropriately. While knowledge and skills vary across industries, the fundamental skill set for the future includes perseverance, self-directed planning, adaptability, self-discipline, and initiative. Effective communication, leadership, teamwork, collaboration, data analysis, cooperation, and environmental literacy are vital for a sustainable future.

Interdisciplinary collaboration is another essential skill that we can teach young individuals. Our students are not limited to the roles of only scientists or practitioners but can learn to form functional and creative collaborations. Students can inspire and educate others by focusing on sustainable practices and becoming environmental champions, leading to a collective effort and more significant impact.

Adaptability is a vital skill in conservation biology, which often involves making decisions with limited information. It is

necessary to react and respond to these challenges morally and scientifically. In the future, having a diverse range of micro-skills will be more valuable than specialising in one area. Therefore, young individuals should focus on developing their unique voices through reading and writing within science. Participation in internships, online learning, and community involvement can provide opportunities to develop these skills. Prospective employers often consider candidates' community contributions when evaluating their applications.

Communication skills are critical, and students at AEL learn to effectively communicate orally and in writing about the environment. They also gain knowledge of South African legislation, conservation ecology, and data collection and handling, which are essential for sustainable environmental management. Re-write, this paragraph should be much earlier in the document.



The AEL stands out as a unique Institution that equips young people with the skills to become sustainable living practitioners. By teaching students to navigate complex environments and develop their unique voices, we can help them excel in their careers and contribute to preserving our planet.

The future program at AEL may also incorporate teachings about artificial intelligence.

Students at AEL will gain an understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, the significance of character, values, and choices, and how their thoughts and words can shape their lives. The curriculum focuses on natural sciences, social sciences, and environmental legal studies, emphasising conservation and technological skills. Increasingly, industries and organisations prioritise reporting on ecological footprints, social responsibilities, governance, and the impact of investments, contributing to the green transition.

Graduates of the academic program are expected to be leaders in identifying and effectively managing threats to biodiversity, advocating for the protection of limited resources, engaging citizens, being well-rounded individuals, and being responsible adults working towards an equal future.

Career opportunities in environmental management include self-employment, freelance work, international opportunities, and office and outdoor work roles. Lifelong learning is essential for students to stay current with emerging ecological jobs, as the possibilities are limitless. The curriculum at AEL aims to prepare students for lifelong learning and environmental stewardship, enabling them to understand the importance of sustainability and ecological responsibility in their future careers.

For South Africa's youth, prioritising job opportunities in industries that spotlight the protection and responsible management of natural resources is highly recommended. By focusing on science, young adults can find jobs that benefit both the environment and the planet, even in positions that may not exist yet. Providing young adults with qualifications and internships can open doors to new careers. Ultimately, developing a diverse range of micro-skills and becoming part of a community, such as what the AEL offers, is critical for success and fulfilling careers.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr Dave Pepler is AEL's co-founder and guest lecturer.

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