

Dale College Teachers
Interviewer: Elizabeth Lowe

Elizabeth: My name is Elizabeth, um, today is August 21st, I believe...

Butch: That's right.

Teacher 2: It is (chuckles).

E: And we're just gonna be talking about the education system here and what we're doing is we're gonna bring back this video and review it and also compare it to our education system in the States. Um, so, how long have you both been teaching for?

B: I've been here 33 years, in teaching here at Dale.

T2: I've been here 31 years.

E: Both at Dale.

T2: No, no. 20 years here and 10 years at a girl's high school.

E: A girl's high school?

T2: Hmm.

E: In...

T2: Eudneck, near Port Elizabeth.

E: Umm, and what do you both teach?

B: We're qualified both to teach geography, and I also teach natural science and life science which is your, it was biology before, and it changed to natural science for grade 8 and 9's. And then 10, 11, and 12 is called natural science, ah life science, the life sciences. Sort of pure physics in it, we just do life sciences of the human body physiology.

E: Okay.

B: Anatomy.

E: So that's biology, correct?

T2: At the moment, geography, otherwise I did psychology and Xhosa.

E: So I...

T2: But at the moment, just teaching geography and then the social sciences in grade 8 and 9.

E: Okay, and from what we've heard most students don't take geography? Or...

T2: No, smaller classes. Um, Matric there are 25, grade 11 there are 26, and grade 10 there are 25.

E: Okay.

T2: So, There are smaller classes, yeah.

E: Yeah, and is um, geography very popular here at school?

T2: Numbers would indicate not as popular but there's also criteria from subject choices.

E: Okay.

T2: A lot of them would prefer to do the life sciences and that's a clash of the time tables, so that excludes some.

B: Comes from your irredution in your teacher numbers for pupils. When I first came here, 42 government paid teachers. We're down to what, 14?

T2: 15.

B: 15.

E: Wow.

B: That stipulation by the government.

E: And since what year? I'm sorry.

T2: It's over the years.

B: '94 -'95.

E: '94.

B: '94, since the new government. They felt that we should have more pupils per teacher and there's a lot of things, I'd say...

E: And why do you think...

B: A lot of problems that make it now. Cause now you can't get your subject choice, when in the past you could do geography and life sciences, and uh, cause we'd have a number of teachers that could do it. Now, the shortage of teachers, you're restricted in how many subjects you can offer at the different level, which is so... Some would like to do geography and biology, but it clashes, so it becomes a problem.

T2: We're both government employed but half our staff are paid by the school.

E: Okay. And what changes have you seen since '94? That being one of them.

B: There is a...

Both: (Laughing)

E: Specifically in the curriculum.

B: All your, like your, physical education has fallen away. They felt that wasn't necessary...

T2: The practical subjects.

B: The practical subjects: woodwork, metalwork.

T2: They're gone, so it's more academic than practical.

B: But then you're encouraged, you want to have those subjects, that's what they should be learning but they've taken it away. And now given them academic subjects, and that's a problem, the biggest problem I think.

T2: It affects your non-academic candidates because in the past they could do the woodwork, metalwork, and they could actually leave school and start work.

B: A trade.

T2: They could go into their own business, they'd be qualified enough for that, but that's all fallen away. And it's now more academically orientated. Umm, some of the other changes, I think are in the standard of what is being presented. It's very watered down compared to what it used to be prior to '94. Umm, I think the grades 10's and 11's of years gone by were probably capable of grade 12 work now. To such an extent, I'm not sure it actually qualifies them for university.

E: So the curriculum is...

T2: Now that's a vicious statement, but I don't believe they're ready for university by the time they leave school.

E: The curriculum set up currently, that does not prepare them for university?

B: Yeah, I think at first they decided, they water it down to make it easier for them to get there but the university has kept their standards and said, "No!, We're not gonna lower our standards." Now they're hitting a wall 'cause they're coming across and uh, but they changed the syllabus so much, trying to work it around, but it's gone around in a circle and it's coming back to where we used to be, what we used to teach. There's now, you could take an old book and compare it to the new book, and it's exactly the same now. But it went through changes to get to that point, until they realized, the old system was good. It functioned correctly and that was uh, now we're getting back to that, but it's the students, getting them to study and work is a problem.

T2: You kind of compare it I suppose, in the old days if you wanted to go to university in South Africa, you were basically accepted. If you wanted to go to university overseas, some of the universities you'd write an entrance exam, many of them you'd be accepted. Now you write an entrance exam to go to a South African university.

B: Yeah.

E: Only South African university?

T2: Even South African universities.

B: English or maths, you'd have to go in there and your first week you'd be writing those tests to see if you're capable of being at varsity.

E: So what...

B: So it's an introduction, sort of, "Hey! Let's see if you got the abilities to work," because they don't trust the system, the education system today.

E: So now, what curriculum is set up to help students in other fields if they do not go to a university? Are there any?

T2: There are, there are private colleges that do accept students and umm, they can do courses which will also qualify them but uh, they're not necessary as well as what a university would. So, there is a variety of courses available to them after school, going from the basic colleges through to colleges that do actually provide degrees etc., as well. But we're a private institution. So they're filling a gap that used to be filled by government.

B: Yeah, you might've found that, just thinking about my wife cause she was in the electric business, IC's were electrical, one of the top electrical companies before Hend, and then my youngest daughter went to university to do structural engineering. And now, these young students from the varsity, take down the road, varsity, are coming out of there, in two years to do... go on to these businesses and travel around with them to see what can, and they're finding that "wow!" these chaps are gonna electrocute themselves. They know nothing just about, you know, they... that's what they gotta be careful about. And you get, like my daughter spent four years to get her degree and these are spending two or three years, and they're going into business, getting those jobs and they're a danger to themselves, if you're not careful. And then we look at them and say, "wow!", your online businesses here, you gotta really get these people into those businesses.

T2: I think one has to be very careful about which institution you're choosing to study at. Some of them are flyer by nights, they disappear very quickly, because what they're offering isn't of value. Others, different story. So there is the choice between the formal universities and some of these other colleges.

E: So teaching here, what do you do to help prepare the kids for...?

T2: A number of the institutions are actually invited to the college to address the matrics, um to give them an idea of what they're actually offering. And most of them will offer advisors to (inaudible) for that. So even though they might not encourage to have to come to my university, they give a broader background, as well as what they offer. And that also helps. Then in the life orientation program, um they also ask and they do give them a lot of advice.

E: Alright, and what is umm, both of you individually, what is your teaching style? Like your, do you give lectures more or

B: (Exhales deeply)

T2: I think it varies according to the group. But the junior guys, you're feeding them a lot more, with the senior guys I tend to almost opt towards lecturing in order to prepare them for what they're going to face. Umm, so weakest learners you would actually give a little bit more help and the more mature ones you try to encourage them to work on their own. So it varies according to the classes.

B: You get those four teacher styles, learning styles, pupil four learning styles (chuckles). You try and put that into practice, it's very difficult. It's a lot of spoon feeding much of the time and then trying to, mainly encouragement to get on with the work. You've got the good pupils, who work hard, that's what you see. You sit in a class with boys, getting 95, 96, 97 percent, even matric, then you're sitting with boys who are failing and you just look at them, more of the same in class but the ones there, they're enthusiastic and working, others not interested. And, but they gotta be there, they'll be there.

E: And have you used the same books, the same textbooks for a number of years?

T2: Yes, I have. Yeah, but you don't only use one book. The learners have got one book, but a lot of what you give comes from various sources.

B: They, yeah, they...

E: You use online sources?

B: No. Our exam chaps will tell you, "Use as many books as you can," to show them, like I've got a library of books in my room and we use the different ones but they have one book. And then you can say, they say (inaudible), I say but yeah, but all other books. The exams are taken

E: That one book?

B: Then we don't sit there, they're taken away from here, so you've gotta look at the other books and see what they possibly, would be given.

E: So that one text...

B: And give them examples from there.

T2: No, there are basically eight accepted textbooks.

E: Accepted textbooks? Okay.

T2: Now it depends on the examiner as to which he or she is going to use, is using, the bulk of the questions will come from that particular book, which becomes a problem when you get to the marking centers because umm, the end of your matric exams are all marked provincially, according to a national memo. And there's been national training, which filters down. So before you actually start your marking, you have to train your markers. So you're training your markers for a day or two days, depending until you are happy that they are actually marking correctly. Now, the memorandum is based to a large extent on whichever book the examiner is using, however there is argument around all that's in the other textbook, which is not used by the examiner. So it's kind of a, a little bit of a gray area in some cases.

B: It's frustrating 'cause you've been, we both go away to mark the matrics marks out, and you see the loaf's got the right answer from a different book and now these guys are saying they're not accepting that answer.

T2: And it has to be accepted from the examiner and then he or she has to get that out to the other centers, the other provinces. So, it's a bit of a mission. It's a lot of fighting, (both laugh)

E: So as a teacher, what would you, if you could recommend something, what would you recommend to change the curriculum here?

T2: Wow... (Laughs)

B: I'd say, I know the standards like England, we hear the guys come here and there was this youngsters, he's got three subjects that he's going through and when I left South Africa to go to what Rhodesia, went to join the Police Force there, and I spent 7 years in the Police Force there. Then my wife I married there and she did their standards which was A-Levels, O-Levels, where they choose, they only had four subjects, their choice of subjects, what to do. To me, that's ideal for here. Rather have four that you wanna do instead of here, you have compulsory to do seven. Seven subjects and they're not interested in some of the subject but they have to do the subjects and then they're carrying that one and not achieving in that one and you can't discourage them to...

E: And they're not using it either.

B: Yeah. So there's one of your problems. We need, to me, cut down to like four, if we could and then you're now doing what you probably would want to do and those what you're gonna do when you leave school. Much easier, you like it, you enjoy it, you'll do it. But these guys trying to get somebody to study something he's not interested in, but it comes in, it's the only subject you can take, it becomes a problem.

T2: I think I would say, as well, the level of content needs to be improved. After you're at university, you're not learning basics. You've done the basics maybe in your first year but you need to progress to the kind of research and all there is to it. And I think we need to prepare our students for that. Now I'd say the level of what is presented needs to be raised. That in turn will also mean that teacher training would also have to be raised to that level. I think if we could raise our level of what we presented, it would go a long way to improve society as a whole.

E: Do both of you still go through teacher training? Or is there...

T2: Teachers...

B: We're on going courses, these ongoing programs...

T2: It's more seminars and that kind of thing

B: Yeah, you attend those and they require you to do 10. They hope you can do 10, then you can get to increase in salary sort of things. It blends towards good doing well and accepting but umm... once you finish university, you've done your teacher training, you're out and though you don't go back. I did go back to university after

that and found courses at university: botany 101 and zoology. You go and do those again. You can, but it's YOU volunteering to do it.

T2: It depends on the individual teacher. If they would like to, they can. The opportunities are there. Many don't.

B: In the past, you used to get a salary increase if you passed, you know, got a higher degree. Now, they don't gotta do that anymore. They just give you a "well-done", which is, you know, discouraging.

E: So you mentioned having, possibly lowering to four courses? What would you suggest those four courses be, or would you have the students choose those courses?

B: Yeah, no, choose.

T2: Choose.

E: A choice?

B: Yeah, give them a choice and less... that's what I feel.

T2: Just to give an example: when you look at our languages we offer English, Afrikaans, and Xhosa. Is it really necessary to have two languages? Majority of the guys don't want to do the Xhosa because it's complex. It's quite a difficult language.

B: It's their home language.

T2: It's their home language, they actually want to shy away from it.

B: It's difficult.

T2: But they can't speak Afrikaans because they don't hear it. So why are we actually doing it. Have one official language, give them the choice of the two or three, but allow them to do one. Um, now you're down one subject already. So, have the variety, allow them to make the choice and to actually do what they want to do relating to their future careers.

E: And um, you mentioned you teach a little bit of history courses, right?

T2: History is offered...

E: At school?

T2: We don't actually teach it.

B: History is a choice.

T2: Yeah.

E: And what um exactly, why did it stop? Was there a purpose to the stopping?

T2: No, no, we still offer it.

E: As a class?

B: We still offer it.

E: So 10th, I'm right on this, you stop at 9th grade?

T2: Uh, no.

B: You get uh... At grade 8 and 9, you do 9 subjects. So the chaps can have a say, "well, we're getting a bit of each to see what it's like." Now maybe I'm, let me see, and I'm the head of grade 9. The end of grade 9, they now have to do their subject choice for grade 10. We give them a choice and they go down the choices. And they're gonna choose one from each group. As I said, sometimes geography and life sciences are in the same group, and it becomes a problem. We haven't got teachers here to do it. If we had more teachers, then they could split it and make it into a choice. But they have, they get their choice but they end up having to do seven subjects. What are you gonna do with Life Orientation? To me it's a waste,

T2: Yeah.

B: 'Cause everyone has to do life orientation, it's basic stuff but the government expects you to do that. Now you take that, and in the past you didn't have to do it. There's a waste of time, you got a lesson which could be spent on doing something that they want to do, fewer subjects, more expressive you know, get really stuck into it.

T2: We see grade 8 and 9, one of the subjects is social sciences. Now, that's a combination of history and geography. What we do is we actually split it; the history person does the history component, the geography person does the geography component. If you have a geography person teaching history, you can see there will be an influence towards the geography, or the other way around.

B: Yeah.

T2: So we get away from that,

B: 'Cause we do...

T2: They do social science, but we split it. So they're actually doing both subjects in grade 8 and 9, as well. Um, and then just, instead of doing six periods of social science, they'll do three of history and three of geography. And then by the time they get to grade 10, they'll then either choose the history, the geography, or the life science, or whichever subject, depending on the time table and then the groups of subjects are slotted into the time table. That's also a limiting factor, if there are more staffers as Butch was saying, well then you could have your subjects in more than one grouping, which would widen it up.

B: That's how it happened in the past, but that was good. I enjoyed that.

E: So why do you believe it's difficult to get students to pay attention to the materials?

T2: Basic discipline. If you look at the family structures, um how many of the families are child-headed families? Parents are either deceased or parents are away with whatever work activities, and you have a kid who's twelve or thirteen having to run the home. It's too exhausting to actually think about what he's doing in class.

B: Yeah.

T2: The other side is that there are a number of parents who cannot control their own kids. Now if they can't control their kids, what is the discipline like at home, that filters into the school system.

B: Especially if it's a male, 'cause a male, he has sort of dominant [sic]. And the thing at home, the parents, the mother, they'll dominate. Especially if they're over 18, 16,17,18, then they're controlling the home. And the mother's sitting back, and the grandparents are looking after the kids when the parents are out working, somewhere.

T2: And that's also a part of the whole...

B: The culture.

T2: The HIV/AIDS Pandemic and a lot of the parents are deceased, grandparents are looking after them or they're looking after themselves. It's a huge impact.

B: It's a...One big problem is entitlement, the males, it's a lot of "let pass on", entitled, they feel they're entitled to get what they want. Some says, "I'm not gonna do that, my dad's gonna get me a job. I'm gonna get a job in the government or they feel males are entitled. Poor girls have to work hard, but they certainly, our girls' school; they work very hard and they achieve much better than our boys. But our boys, very entitled. They believe that very strongly, which is sad.

E: So what are your goals as a teacher, um for your personal...

B: I'm excited, I'm retiring! (Both laugh)

T2: He's re-tired, and I'm very tired.
(Everyone laughs)

B: They've retired me 'cause I've reached the age of retirement, so the last month; June. But now I'm government paid, I'm on a pension, but the government, governing body's gonna keep me on at school because short, teacher shortage.

E: Yeah.

B: To get teachers...

T2: To get quality teachers, put it that way.

E: Are students interested in teaching? Like teaching as a profession.

T2: Yes, there are few, very limited, the problem I don't think is getting qualified as a teacher. In South Africa, you want to get into a government school, um you have to then apply for the post, which is advertised in a government gazette. Those are not, um, very often forthcoming. So...

B: Yeah.

T2: You find that, even though they're qualified as a teacher, my daughter's gone through that, she's now been teaching for three years, she's in a small private school in Port Elizabeth, because she cannot get into a teaching post. Now, that's a contradiction because there's a shortage of teachers.

E: Yeah.

T2: But if they're not gonna advertise the post, you can't apply for it, so you can't get it. The, the reason given is finance.

B: Now, you see...

T2: So...

B: The government...

T2: It's quite a difficult situation.

B: Is not seeing education as a priority. And then they're, cause now they don't wanna fund it. When we, when I came across here in 1983, '82 on teacher training, there were four of us together, came out on our prac-teaching here, all four of us got

a job, from the headmaster of rugby, "we want you here", we started on the first of January the next year, all on government. And I say, we had 42 government paid teachers, we're down to 15 now. That's a requirement. We lose numbers, we lose one of those government paid teachers...

E: Now education is not a priority.

B: You see, it's not a priority. And that's the problem. Yeah.

T2: And the other...

B: And the youngsters, they can't get jobs, so where are they going? They're going overseas. I know of seven teachers that were teaching here, are in England teaching at one school.

E: They just...

B: They were all at Dale College here.

T2: Yeah, the other thing that the school does, as well, is that we do offer to our matrics, if any of them are interested in teaching, um we do offer training at the school. Let them do through UNISA, the South African University, by correspondence, but they're gaining practical experience here at the same time. Umm, we get to take at least one every year. Uh, currently we have the one fellow, next year the head boy is probably gonna join us, um so they're getting both, so they're training, getting paid, and they're also assisting the school in sports catch and that kind of thing, and from their second year they'll start teaching junior grades and filter into the system.

B: We had a youngster who did a year, like the second training, then he was so successful, he got a bursury to go varsity, and now he's finishing this year and he's coming back to us now as a teacher.

E: That's nice.

B and T2: Yeah.

B; But, he'll be governing body paid, not by the government. To try and get them onto government salaries, that's the, the hard part.

T2: Now, could you imagine the finance that is going to pay 15 teachers, serving like 8 ground staff, etc. whatever the school could be doing with that money?

E: It's true.

T2: Interesting though. (Laughs)

E: Are, Do you have any personal goals for you, yourself, or your students moving forward?

T2: I think that anybody's involved in teaching, their main priority is getting matrics to pass.

E: Hmm

T2: Umm, so my goal is to continue with 100% pass rate in matric. I'm one of the fortunate ones whose never had a failure in matric. Umm, I do believe in miracles and I pray hard.

(Everyone laughs)

T2: This year it's going to be a mission, um but that seems to be one of the main goals. And certainly I think in teaching, you're more you know, it's not just, classroom activity, you are also involved in the personal growth of your students. And I do try to take a keen interest in that side. And of course, if I can be of assistance to any of the boys who are in need of assistance, well then that's fantastic.

E: And there are after school programs for homework and...

T2: Umm, not only that but in their personal development, in their personal development, as well. And none of these youngsters are safe, you have a child run home, um where'll they go for advice. Where do they go if they are needing things? And I believe that teachers can play a role in that. Umm, so just in the personal development and growth of them as an individual. When they can't get it anywhere else, well there must be someone and I do like to be involved in that side of it, as well.

E: That's awesome. Well, I don't think we, do you have any questions for us?

T2: (Laughs)

B: (Laughs) I think we understand where you're coming from, where you've been.

E: Yeah, I...

B: What you're gonna go through,

T2: yeah.

E: Well, I...

B: 'Cause we've been there, done that. We got the t-shirt, as one would say.

E: Yeah, we're very interested in, in everything you guys are doing. Umm, anyways, umm, we, we'll be, we have been recording this, so we would like to ask you if you would umm be willing to, uh, have us use this as our research.

T2: For research purposes only, (everyone laughs)

E: And we might be developing a website as well, so we will be sending you all of the information from the video.

B: Don't want something to get wasted for.

T2: Obviously besides everything etc., ummm anonymity is one of the priorities...

E: Yes.

T2: As far as this sort of thing is concerned. Then it's no problem.

E: Hmm.

(Teachers chuckle)

E: You can add your restrictions on there.

B: Nooo.

E: We'd like you to sign.

T2: So...

E: Right at the top.

T2: Do you want names and everything first?

E: Yeah. And leave space for your colleague.

