

## Interview Transcript: J Keegan 2 March 2003

**1. What is the history of your Centre?**

I established Happy Valley EE Centre in 1974 as a day visit centre. I established the Durban EE Centre on 1 April 1985 as the first of its kind in the Province. Within 6 months it was up & running after renovations & repair.

**2. How many learners/educators can you accommodate at one time?**

76 learners & 8 adults/educators.

**3. What is your staffing quota, and what are each person's duties?**

1 x educator/Head

2 x Senior Housekeeping Supervisors (Jinny: more secretary/PA; ordering of food; checking of food & Margie: leaving end of May; supervises staff & cooking supervision)

6 x cleaners + 1 (from ex-Happy Valley Centre)

**4. Why did you choose to become an educator at your Centre?**

The job was advertised in October 1984. I had just been promoted to HOD at Umbogintwini PS – I applied for the EE job – I was very keen – I enjoy the outdoors – intensely interested in the inter-relations between living and non-living things. "I love the outdoor classroom situation."

**5. Do you enjoy your work? Why/Why not?**

Absolutely – rewarding – challenge, especially in light of the transformation [of the KZNDEC] and the added challenge of Black kids. There should be an "ownership of the environment by all;" it's a challenge to get them to see this, and to appreciate the environment. Attitudes are the biggest thing.

**6. What are the main obstacles in your work?**

Too much admin work – we're financial managers; Centre managers; it annoys me that I have to be a Jack of all trades, a handyman; it wastes my time – I've just got to drop my thoughts, when I'm working on a project and to go and sort it out.

Another huge obstacle: lack of professional staff. I should have at least one Zulu-speaking teacher – preferably Black – Black schools are in the overwhelming majority in the Durban area.

[Should we be servicing Durban schools?] Yes. [Rather than schools from up-country?] No, no, no; my first allegiance is to fee-paying schools, but with help I could assist local schools.

**7. In which area, if any, do you feel a lack of knowledge or skills?**

Resource development... for educators... in the context of OBE – I wish I was better at designing learning programmes. [So you feel you need to be helping educators from your Centre?] Not just the Centre – educators in the Region. I'd workshop them at the Centre or at any other venue... such as the Durban Botanical Gardens.

**8. What are your objectives with your Centre?**

To make my Centre as accessible to a broad base of schools [sic], especially indigent schools. One way is by cross-subsidising them and also getting sponsorships from the corporate community. [Which you've done?] No, not yet. I'd like a minimum of 10 weeks per year – a whole school term – allocated to those rural, indigent schools. [But then three-quarters of your year is filled with school children that can afford your prices? You don't think that's unfair?] Not really; if we really want to make an impact on the lives of previously disadvantaged kids, then we must make an effort. I don't think there's anything immoral about it.

**9. Which activities did you choose as part of your learning programmes?**

Water – big one; marine theme – also big, being at the coast; incorporates mangroves and biodiversity in those areas. On the industrial side, there's the harbour... things like job creation (there's a ready source of labour – no shortage in the townships)... proximity to the industrial heartland of South Africa, the PWV... pollution comes into it... townships – we must look at the bigger picture – that automatically comes into it. Animal care... there are a lot of wildlife activities (the Bird Park, the Sharks Board, Sea World)... heavy emphasis on that as well. Alien vegetation and the impact that it has on the natural environment. Urban studies – urban trails – settlements – the impact of squatter camps on water, water supply...

**10. Why did you choose these activities?**

I chose marine things – a glaring example [sic] – children can do a study “in the wild.” Obvious thing to do is to study the history, the geography of the harbour. [Urban studies?] Look at how the city centre naturally develops, the layout. Take them to the top of Nedbank Building – I’ve got a worksheet with it all laid out...

**11. Why do you think that it is important to incorporate “environmental matters” into the curriculum?**

“Environment” touches on everything. Everything we do... we eat... affects the environment. It affects everything of our lives. Our demand for paper in the cities means there must be more trees planted in the rural area, more aliens; affects lives inland.

**12. How do you cater for different age groups at your Centre?**

It’s a question of designing different worksheets for different age groups; they’re graded according to their ages and their abilities. There’s also the range of what I’d discuss with a child, with a group like if I’m talking about marine matters and spring tides, I won’t talk too much about gravitational pull – in depth – to grades 4’s as I would to a grade 7 group. It’s scaled down to their level. [And food in your Centre?] If it’s a high school group, they get more to eat... The selection of sites is important – kids must be able to cope with a place – younger ones, not plenty of steps, etc. Can’t take little ones to a dangerous place. Are there enough ablution blocks?

**13. How do you evaluate what you do?**

I sit down with the kids at the end of a lesson and I do a consolidation. The questions that I ask the kids and the answers that I receive gives me a reasonable indication as to whether the kids have absorbed anything; understood the messages that I’ve been trying to get across, and whether there was any interest or not.

This has actually on occasions shown me that my lesson was an exercise in futility because the kids haven’t grasped my message. In these cases, the kids were from previously disadvantaged areas. In other words, I was way above them; even some of the teachers. So I realise I need to re-evaluate my methods; it’s not their fault; they’ve never had this sort of thing before.

I also rely heavily on teachers for feedback. Immediately after a lesson I ask them what they thought of it; where I could improve; if it was satisfactory. I must say, they are pretty honest: the worksheet was too long; not enough spare time; please cater for the average child; too much higher-order questioning.

I have people like Alison Brown – outstandingly good in her presentation of worksheets – she’s had a look at my things. She was happy with about 60% of it. [What was she not impressed with?] Insufficient links with the Curriculum & cross-curricular links; too much Biology; not enough English. Take the harbour: too much emphasis on Geography at the expense of Art, History, and Languages... all that comes into it.

Flip van der Berg went through all my worksheets – he had to – he translated them.

**14. How do you market your Centre?**

The most successful way has been by word of mouth. I’ve sent out fliers in the form of faxes to Natal schools that haven’t been before. At Edgewood [College of Education] we have had advocacy programmes.

**15. Why do you feel it is necessary/unnecessary to do so?**

It’s not really necessary. Not just because I’m Jeff Keegan; it’s because my Centre happens to be in Durban where there happen to be many attractions. I’m very fortunate, and I’m very conscious of that too. I actually turn people away and send them to Lyn [Britz; Manager of WESSA’s Treasure Beach EE Centre]. One could become quite complacent in such a situation; I have to guard against it. I’m not like you [K Burge @ Dundee EE Centre] and Rog [Gaisford @ Eshowe EE Centre], who have to work on it. And yet, some of my bigger groups are no longer coming – financial reasons – buses are becoming too expensive.

You might ask: is it a problem getting teachers to come with the groups these days? Are mixed race groups more difficult to discipliner on tour?

**16. Environmental Education in KwaZulu-Natal reaches so few learners each year. In what way can the Centres improve this matter?**

NEEP’s already doing something about it, capacitating the subject advisors; workshopping as many teachers as possible. We [Centres]

need to get our places on broad, financial backing to sponsor the running of workshops and for materials; assistance, both financially & in terms of manpower (they can go out to rural areas). We can do what we're already doing; cross-subsidising indigent groups.

**17. If funding were no object, in the running of your Centre, what improvements/changes would you make to it, or in its programmes?**

I'd develop the bottom property to build another block to accommodate another 60-70 kids; increase the numbers of staff, making it more representative of the demographics of the Greater Durban area; one would definitely be a Curriculum advisor & resource developer; that would be full-time; very important; I'd get my own bus & bus driver & hire it out to schools at break-even – at cost – and a Hi-Ace to take teachers on trips. Completely re-vamp my programmes - Curriculum linked programmers that will give the kids ideas to get on with.