

At the age of 54 I was signed onto the Disability Support Pension for spondylolisthesis of the spine plus being hard-of-hearing. I decided to do some tertiary studies and I commenced in 1992 at Ithaca TAFE on a special course to enter university. The TAFE course catered for disabled people and I was able to secure reasonable passes to enter Griffith University in 1993 to study for a BA in Australian & Comparative Studies. The University like TAFE gave me great assistance to enable me to do reasonably well despite my disabilities. I had note-takers, special arrangements for exams where I could use a typewriter as handwriting aggravated my neck and back condition. I even had a special high backed chair. I passed my BA in four years, I had been slowed up by some back pains, I then passed a Graduate Certificate in Adult Education and then the Graduate Diploma in Secondary Studies and I became a registered teacher.

As I had carried out my practical teaching work in a private boys' college and at a TAFE catering for Grade 11 & 12 I was required by Education Queensland to carry out a special practical lesson plan. I had finished seven years of continuous study and I had been used to being assisted with problems caused by my disabilities. Unfortunately, no help was forthcoming from Education Queensland, I was sent to Caboolture High School and found no consideration was being made for my disabilities. No chair to sit in, the room was darkened so I could not hear very well because being hard of hearing I need to face the speaker. The male and female teachers did not seem very cooperative and I gathered they regarded the task as unnecessary. They were unwilling to discuss my lesson plan, based on Orwell's works. They also seemed unable to comprehend how a hard of hearing person could manage in a class and they could not understand how it was that I was required to be tested! Arty teacher who trains in a state school. does not have to go through this rigmarole. The two teachers said the lesson plan was no good and dismissed me as a failure. Seven years of study dismissed in under twenty minutes with no consideration for my handicapped condition. The lesson plan had been rated by a Ph.D as a Credit and when I tried to reason with these two people I was abruptly, left standing. Amazingly, these two teachers failed my prac test completely.

The rating system operates on four levels, T1 is the ultimate rating all teachers aspire to. T2 & T3 are reasonably good but T4 is only really suitable for relief teaching. In my case, I was rated nothing. Naturally I appealed and I saw two ladies in Education Queensland's head office and after I expressed my disappointment and distress I was rated a T4. I soon found out what that meant. One is listed as a relief teacher by Education

Queensland but a T4 rarely ever gets work, In five years I have only been placed in one secondary school! I had hoped to have worked in the adult education area to supplement my pension. With a T4 this became impossible because adult education has an enormous attraction to secondary teachers and the requirements are high. The only solution appeared to get some teaching experience and hope the rating could be improved. As I was 61 I found Education Queensland was not interested in giving any help to me and I had to go around to secondary schools and virtually beg at the schools' offices for work! Virtually none was forth-coming, when it did, I found little consideration for my disabilities at all. I still had to do playground duties and even sports too.

In the meantime I began to do some voluntary one to one tutoring at a high school in the enrichment studies area. I also did some private tutoring and some marking of primary school annual test papers. I then made a foolish decision to try to work as a relief teacher in the primary area despite the fact I had never been in a primary school since 1949 when I was a child. The result was shattering, I could not keep any order, the noise was head splitting and other teachers complained. On the football field I found it hard to keep up with the youngsters and got knocked down on one occasion and my glasses broken.

A private agency encouraged me to apply for a grant of \$7,000 to teach migrants English and Australian history with a segment on law. No money was forthcoming from the Qld State Government and I had wasted hours of my time working out a set of lessons for nothing! I have now enrolled in law at QUT on a very light schedule at present.

What is distressing me is the fact that at no time has any consideration been given to me by Education Queensland. I even attended an Open Cabinet Meeting at Michelton in 1999 to ask for some assistance, none was given. At present huge amounts of money are being paid out to older teachers and the press has referred to them as "duds". In my opinion this is making it even more difficult for senior citizens who do want to do something to earn a few dollars to supplement a pension. The aged teacher is being virtually demonised!

The tutoring work is affected by a tutors school experience. My handicaps (which have got somewhat worse) cannot cope with teaching in large classes but I could have been used I feel in other areas. The Federal Government has made a decision to encourage more disabled people to enter the workforce with the last Budget. If my experience is anything to go by, they will not find much help in Education Queensland.

Officially Education Queensland lists teachers for supply work, in reality, a lot of the work is farmed out to retired teachers. Teachers who are only a T4 rating get little chance to work to get up to a T1 because they get little chance of being hired. The only way to get experience is to go into the primary area via agencies and many secondary teachers are not trained for this area.

Staff at HQ give one advice such as demand to see the principal, that is impossible with people like me. I had to wait at the enquiry counter to get my name listed for work and once I even got charged 20c for a photocopy of my details. HQ staff told me to talk about my disabilities at schools, it did not work, all I got was one recipient's history of back trouble! I was not surprised to read that some mothers of disabled children have found discrimination applying in schools. In over 20 schools I found that there was little expression of empathy for disabled children or adults come to that.

I feel that some consideration should have been given to me by Education Queensland to help me overcome the disabilities problem. For example, I do voluntary in the enrichment area and as I am one to one I have found this successful. I am now in my fifth year in the enrichment area. Because I was not really given a fair rating test I have had enormous stress. The Department would not offer me any assistance or any work so I was forced to seek work virtually door to door at schools. As this did not work too well then I was forced to enter an area completely foreign to me, the primary school area where relief teachers are used more than secondary schools use relief staff. My idea was to try and work up to a higher rating to see if I could obtain work in the adult education area but to get rated higher means working for 50 days and usually at one school.

In July of 2002 I wrote to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission in Sydney and asked them to take up a case for me against Education Queensland for discrimination. At first they seemed quite keen and one officer even promised to mediate on my behalf with Education Queensland. The Commission wrote to Education Queensland on my behalf and Education Queensland replied but did ask the Delegate to the President of the Commission to mediate in my case. I was somewhat surprised when I received a letter from the Commission terminating my case! I tried to ring them, normally a most difficult operation, they are often engaged or have recording machines operating and usually do not call back. However, after anybody has a case terminated the Commission does not answer any letters or faxes etc. This I feel is most

unfair. I asked Welfare Rights for help and they told me that The Human Rights Commission has a habit of terminating cases which they feel are a bit weak and where there are costs involved.

Education Queensland offered to mediate with the Commission on my behalf Welfare Rights pointed out that this would have entailed sending somebody to Brisbane and it would have meant them staying overnight in a hotel. They claimed that my case is not alone. What is annoying is the fact that the offer was made to mediate and was completely ignored. I have tried to complain to the Federal Ombudsman about the way the Human Rights Commission is conducting its treatment of disabled people, however, the Ombudsman has no jurisdiction in that area.

I have written to the Federal Attorney General asking what one can do in a situation where one is unfairly treated by The Human Rights Commission. By a coincidence, the Commission sent me a letter asking for my comments on what I thought about the way my case was handled by them. I wrote back to say I feel they have behaved poorly. Welfare Rights pointed out that I was foolish to go to them in the first place, I should have applied to the Commission in Brisbane.

The situation now is that I have to see Legal Aid for advice about taking my discrimination case to the Federal Magistrates Court. I rang the Court but they seemed unable to tell me what costs are involved. I cannot afford legal help so I would have to conduct my own case. Not easy when one is deaf.

Without help from the universities I would never have graduated. To place disabled people into a very competitive workplace means there must be help given. Education Queensland has been under criticism for not doing much for disabled students, but as far as disabled teachers go, there is very little help. Yet they are an record asking for disabled people to become teachers!

I pointed out to The Human Rights Commission that I feel it is grossly unfair to ask people to write down their cases. Lawyers have to conduct lengthy interviews using open, closed, leading and T-funnel questions to get the story. In the case of the Human Rights Commission, there is no chance of rebutting their decision. In my case I could see they had failed to fully comprehend my complaint.

Many people are unable to write down the full details of a case. Official bodies can hire lawyers to write their replies to allegations made. The Commission makes a decision and then refuses to allow any argument to try and reason with them. I think this is manifestly unjust.

Because I tried to teach and ignore my handicaps I was subject to great stress. At one school I was pelted with plastic bottles by a Grade 11 class and I was powerless to get help. I couldn't remember where the office was and nobody even told me there was phone! Relief teachers are just handed a bunch of papers and left to soldier on! When I embarked on this odyssey of study I was hoping I could supplement my pension but I am afraid I faced offhanded and unjust treatment at the hands of Education Queensland.

I found some hostility that a man of 61 should be a fresh graduate. I was told over the telephone by Education Queensland that they do not assist people find work. That is untrue, they do place teachers and a few even get permission to start teaching before the semester ends. So I feel there is different standards operating and there seems to be no mechanism for any teacher with disabilities to work in any area than dealing with other disabled students. So deaf teachers teach deaf children etc etc. With the policies of inclusion the handicapped children are now involved more and more with children without disabilities.

It is not right that I should have been rated as nil when a Ph.D had rated me a Credit for my lesson plan. The unfair rating caused me to suffer further discrimination because the two women at head office were afraid to contradict an earlier decision except offer the lowest rating, a T4.

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