

The House of Representatives Committee on Education and
Employment'
Parliament House,
Canberra. ACT.

Submission: Re long term effects of work place bullying.

In 1997 I was a Senior teacher (ST1) at MLC School, ,
NSW. I taught English, and had been a staff member since 1989. I
came to this position after a successful teaching and administrative
career in which I held senior positions in high achieving
independent schools and the SA Education Department.

I was then aged 59.

I had received a note from the acting Head of the English
department, to attend a meeting with two of the
three designated Heads of School, and
, during the last period of Friday 9.5.97. I expected a routine
discussion meeting, and had no reason to think otherwise as I had
been teaching for 35 years and had never experienced any
“disciplinary” measures.

(In two previous schools I had held positions senior to that of
those present, sixteen years as Head of Department in English,
and nine as Head of Girls in a coeducational school.)

I was quickly made aware that there was a very hostile tone in the
meeting directed at me.

I was told that girls had complained about me. I said that I had not
received any complaint from anyone and I was not aware of any
made to . She remained silent.

I asked which girls and at what year level, so I could discuss any
difficulties or problems with them in order to help. (of the 126 I was
teaching.)

said in sneering tone, “Oh, we can’t tell you that. You
might take it out on them.” (the inference being that I was
vindictive and unfair in my dealings with students, not at all true.)
I commented that it would be impossible to solve the problem if I
didn’t know who had complained or what about.

I was then falsely accused of a whole set of misrepresented
claims, all deliberately out of context or in ignorance of the English
curriculum. made no attempt to correct this.

Some examples:

~That girls “got the teacher off the subject to distract the class.”

There was however lesson progression by discussion, according to the lesson outline which was in their programme. Discussion of issues raised and literary techniques to convey these is standard basic English teaching methodology. The teacher decides what the “subject” is. The responses are the students’ “engagement with the text.” I would be listening to their responses and contributions to discussion and clarifying or responding to their ideas, as they did to each other.

~That I spent time in class talking about my private life and not getting on with the lesson.

My post graduate academic study and practice has been in the areas of creative writing and of intelligence , also leadership. I have had published a series of creative writing, texts for secondary students, and a novel for young adults, now an eBook.

I have taught creative writing for teens in many venues including the NSW Writers’ Centre, , and for Gifted and Talented groups, including for students at MLC G&T programmes. When teaching students how to write their own stories, of course I illustrated by telling short anecdotes showing how we live our stories daily and observe life. This was represented as twisted , self-referential and unpleasant. In assembly Biblical stories and parables are the medium of advancing Christian teaching at MLC.

~That I had noisy classes . But some classes involve group discussions, oral presentation of written work, debates, work on computers and reading parts in plays. I pointed out that neither of these women could truthfully say that they had heard a disorderly class of mine, and I always had the door open unless it was very cold. said that was because when girls saw her coming they fell silent out of respect for her. (I asked how they could see her through a length of brick wall, and she said ”The girls always know I’m there.”

I had realised that there was another agenda, but couldn’t see what I should do. There was no protocol in place then for conduct of a performance review, and the one proviso in operation was that a member of the IEU chapter should be present at any disciplinary meeting. This had been avoided by not notifying me that I was to be subjected to accusations of poor performance. (All school records of across the board tests show my classes performing better than expected for their graded norm , as classes were streamed)

I was in tears with anger and a sense of injustice. There was much more demeaning accusation, but I took care to state clearly that I

was most unhappy with the conduct and content of it. I realised that I was being set up, but had no idea why nothing had been said to me by any girls about any problems they might be experiencing.

The meeting ended with me being told that henceforth I was to present to _____ a lesson plan for every lesson and have it approved before entering any classroom to teach. I was therefore being professionally humiliated by such requirements which an underperforming totally inexperienced teacher might encounter as a last position before dismissal. An impossible position for a teacher of my seniority and expertise, used to guiding other teachers in teaching programmes and practice, lecturing, publishing and conducting workshops.... In fact 35 years of setting standards and recognition for expertise.

I was in an impossible position, professionally and financially as a sole income family with responsibilities and not having planned retirement for three more years. I had little superannuation to back me up.

On the way home in a distraught state and in shock, I had a heart attack in peak hour traffic, and was not able subsequently to return to full time teaching.

I am now 74 years of age, and solely dependent on the Age Pension, with serious chronic illness as an outcome of this event. I went to Court, through the IEU, but received only a couple of thousand dollars, as the school denied wrong doing.

An explanation: _____ said to another staff member, "We're reducing the average age of our staff. Girls want young teachers, and we've got too many older ones sitting on the top salary levels. We make them feel that they're not doing the job, humiliate them until they leave."

[Similar treatment was given to the Head of History, _____, but she obtained employment at another School.]

ILLNESS AND HEALTH PROBLEMS .

Coronary artery disease:

As a result of the severe angina attack, I was referred to the Cardiac Unit at the _____ Hospital, Sydney, and then to Dr _____, Cardiologist.

I am now under the care of Cardiologist
Adelaide, for coronary artery disease.

Over the period September 2007 to the present, I have had angioplasty and three operations to put in place four coronary artery stents.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder/ Anxiety Depression.

Immediately after the events detailed above, I began to feel extremely unwell, unable to express my feelings of horror, confusion, dread and betrayal. I visited my GP thinking this must be symptomatic of a panic attack, but was given a medical certificate for five weeks stress leave and referrals. I attended a scheduled test colonoscopy and was told I had a small group of ulcers from taking Voltaren for arthritis, but the reflux would calm down with soothing medication. (This test was arranged before the interview, and had been referred to in a vulgar set of asides by _____ and _____ in the meeting, in an obviously demeaning way. This was the only health condition I had when the meeting took place

My depression became more severe, but I conscientiously completed a lesson program for a replacement teacher and also marked an entire across the board test and wrote a critique. This was exacting and arduous, hours and hours of marking. I was losing sight of where my professional responsibilities ended. I thought as they were paying my sick leave I was obliged to carry out duties.

I was sent to _____, a Psychiatrist, for treatment for anxiety depression, which became chronic. I ceased taking anxiety medication a couple of years later.

Since that time PT SD takes the form of school nightmares where I can't find a timetable and haven't been given one, or I'm in the school and not meant to be there, or I can't find a staff room, or a class is rioting and I can't find them, or whole sets of exam papers haven't been marked and I'm supposed to give them back, or I'm running late for a senior class and searching for it, or I have to sit for year 12 exams again and wear a uniform, or start University again. The first of these anxiety dreams occurred a few days after the meeting and though less frequent, are still occurring.

In January, 2000, I woke up blind in my left eye. I began seeing Dr _____, an eye specialist. I now see _____, a glaucoma specialist, and this is caused by

aneurisms due to not being diagnosed early enough as having developed Diabetes.

Type 2 diabetes requires permanent medication, and developed during this highly stressful set of circumstances, but wasn't detected. Retinal detachment resulted, and I now can't read due to impaired vision, a tragedy for a lover of books and avid reader. I cannot recognise faces or see paintings or photographs, or cook or choose attractive clothes in shops. My quality of life is greatly diminished. I can't drive myself more than a few streets away, and have had many falls on uneven paths or paving.

All of the above developed as consequences of the bullying ending my teaching career. I have tried very hard to do part time work, but never enough income can result in any financial security commensurate with my 35 years of full time work and expertise.

I have hard copy records of the statements and correspondence relating to the event, if anyone would like to know more. The women concerned said it never happened/ was an amicable meeting.