

Edward Bunker Legco Speech

I was born with hemiplegia, a physical disability which limits the use of my right side. I grew up in Hong Kong, attending primary and secondary ESF schools; overcoming many challenges along the way, I graduated with three A Levels going on to obtain a degree in Mandarin and French from the University of Westminster in London and returned to Hong Kong to work.

I started working in an office environment, where in both instances I was asked to leave because I took more time to complete work than other staff and was a burden on the team, it is a cold reality that if you are not competitive you're out. I now teach English at a Chinese school, several parents did not want their children to be taught by a disabled teacher. It is a credit to the head teacher that she asked those parents to withdraw their children from class.

It has sometimes been a struggle from me to make ends meet. I receive a monthly \$1100 disability allowance from the government, although recently increased; it is still not enough for those who need specialized care and medication. I also have a registration card for people with disabilities, that gives half fare concessions on ferries and trams and is not recognized by other public transport operators.

That we are here today discussing disability is a sure sign that progress is being made, from the few examples I've given, there is some way to go before the gap between words and actions is fully breached.

I am a product of the ESF. I spent the majority of my primary and secondary education in its schools; attending Bradbury, Island School and South Island School.

I have hemiplegia, a mild form of physical disability that presents challenges for me to overcome in day to day living. The biggest hurdle to overcome is time. I can accomplish most things; it just takes me longer to do them than it would an able-bodied person.

I started Primary One at Bradbury; one of the main reasons for this was because it had a class for children with special needs. My parents had informed the school of my difficulties and I was assessed before enrolling. The results of this concluded that in spite of the problems I faced, it was possible for me to be integrated into a mainstream class.

So I started school. The first few months went smoothly, from what I recall, I was enjoying myself; I had made friends and had integrated well with my peers in the classroom environment. I don't know how they started, but for some reason I started to experience difficulties; they were serious enough to concern both my parents and the staff. It was clear I was struggling in class, so provision was made for me to attend the special needs unit.

I've always proved to be a bit of a headache to know what to do with. Moving me into the special needs class was the best action that could be taken to help me out. I didn't even last there one week; I was bored out of my mind. Although work was set, I didn't find it challenging enough, the staff recognized this and I rejoined the mainstream.

So, what to do with me? I was caught between two places; I was not coping with the regular class, but yet was too able to be part of the special needs unit. Once a week the special needs unit went for riding lessons at the Riding for the Disabled Association. This would give me a break from class and was beneficial exercise for me as well, so a good compromise was found and everyone was happy. Provision was also made for classroom support for me, should the need arise.

This situation worked well for four years, whenever I needed support or help, it was there for me. Something tipped the balance for me during my fourth year at Bradbury, and in spite of everybody's best efforts, I had gone into free-fall academically and was generally going to pieces. Something clearly wasn't working for me.

My parents made the decision to remove me from Bradbury and put me into Kellett School, a much smaller institution with fewer pupils per class. There was no special needs unit, but there were classroom support facilities. The change did wonders for me and I did well there until I left in P6.

I started secondary school at Island School. It was far larger in size and in population than either Bradbury or Kellett had been. There were no provisions at that time for special needs students, but there was no harm in giving it a go. I had overcome the difficulties I experienced at Bradbury.

I, unfortunately proved people wrong; within the first few weeks, I started to have difficulties. The biggest challenge was moving around from class to class, unlike primary school where I had sat at one desk all day. I had one class on the first floor and then the next one on the fourth floor. More often than not I was late to class.

Then there was Games. Getting changed with one hand, you can appreciate is time consuming. Students were expected to be changed and ready in five minutes, not unreasonable, but I was always left behind. We wrote our homework assignments in diaries, I was slower to write things down and consequently missed things and didn't do the homework.

The teachers were largely very good helping me cope with things, making reasonable allowances for me so that I could manage. The biggest problem I faced was the workload, both in class and at home. Yes, I could do the work, but it took me longer to finish. I was always trying to catch up with classroom assignments because I could never finish them in the allotted time, in the next class, new work was set, so I was never entirely on top of my work.

I lasted at Island School for two years, by which time I had completely sunk under the weight of everything and as at Bradbury, I was falling to pieces. I was taken out of Island School and put in a private school for three years, by which time I was ready to start GCSEs.

South Island School had a special needs unit. From the outset, I was affiliated with it, it would be there to fall back on should ever the need arise, but I would attend mainstream classes.

Learning from the problems I experienced at Island School, the school provided funds to equip me with a laptop computer to use in lessons to help with note taking. Provisions were also made for classroom assistance where I would have manual

problems, such as science. There was a lift, which I was permitted to use so I got to class on time, and I was allowed to change for games in a small room by myself so I could take the time I needed.

To overcome the difficulties I had writing; in both my GCSE and A level exams, provision was made to have 25% extra time to complete papers to give me the best possible chance to succeed. This was a life saver, because I never could have writing the papers in the original set time. Even with this provision, I was writing away up until the very last second.

With the assistance and support provided by the ESF, I passed my A levels and was able to go to university and obtain a degree, something which would have been otherwise impossible.

It is a great credit to the ESF that they were able to do this for me as well as students before my time and since. I am sure the provisions made for students with disabilities have only improved over time.

As an adult, I returned to Hong Kong to live. I started working in an office environment, where in both instances I was asked to leave because I took more time to complete work than other staff and was a burden on the team, it is a cold reality that if you are not competitive you're out. I now teach English at a Chinese school, several parents did not want their children to be taught by a disabled teacher. It is a credit to the head teacher that she asked those parents to withdraw their children from class.

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