

Pickle Street

An Educational Multimedia CD-Rom; NSW Board of Studies & Law Foundation of NSW; \$110.00 + postage and handling; 1996; Inquiries 02 9927 8178

Introduction

I spent an engrossing evening exploring the two Pickle Street CDs and was about to write an extremely enthusiastic review. My initial response was support for the new interactive approach to secondary school legal studies. I wanted to congratulate the authors Terry Libesman and Kathy Bowrey, who both have legal backgrounds and experience in innovative teaching, and the Office of the Board of Studies NSW Interactive Design Group, the Law Foundation of NSW and Peekaboo Productions who backed them. Then I started to have doubts, and I need to declare my vital statistics. I am in the 50 plus age group and qualified as a solicitor nearly 30 years ago. Although I am computer literate I suspected that what I thought was fantastic might seem 'boring' or 'un-cool' to teenagers. So I asked the legal studies classes at both St Philip's College and Centralian College in Alice Springs to try out *Pickle Street*. Both the students and their teachers thought it was great. Perhaps I am not as out of touch with the younger generation as I feared. The St Philip's College students wrote their own review of *Pickle Street* which appears in full below.

I agree with the students that one does not need to be a technological genius to use *Pickle Street*. The only aspect of the 2 CDs that required some computer skills was accessing the Law Library. It seems churlish to criticise such a minor deficiency; presumably every high school will have computer literate people around these days. It is worth accessing the Law Library. The materials are well chosen.

A word of caution. *Pickle Street* was prepared for use in NSW. While the bulk of the material is written at a sufficiently general level to be relevant throughout Australia, in some places it does reflect NSW State law. One example is in the episode on domestic violence where several courses of action are suggested to the victim: do nothing, go to a refuge, see a Chamber Magistrate, see a doctor,

go to the Department of Social Security, go to the Department of Community Services. The Northern Territory does not have a Chamber Magistrate system. Teachers will need to be alert to this problem. I hope that *Pickle Street* is such a hit that Libesman and Bowrey get funded to produce another version that can be used safely throughout Australia.

As well as the 11 episodes described by the students, there are interviews with prominent Australians ranging from High Court Justice Michael Kirby, political activist and academic Tim Anderson and Aboriginal social worker Shane Philips, to Neil Mercer of 'Face to Face'. They are asked curly questions such as to Tim Anderson 'do you think imprisonment is an effective punishment?', to Christabel Chamarette of the Greens, 'do laws reflect community values?' and to Michael Kirby 'should people obey laws they do not agree with?'. It is worth getting *Pickle Street* to hear Justice Michael Kirby's thought provoking reply. He refers to the actions of those taking part in anti Vietnam war protests leading to a change of government policy.

Pickle Street is a great achievement but no doubt even more stunning interactive learning materials will appear on the market in the not so distant future.

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Review

Pickle Street is an interactive computer program consisting of two CDs: the informative exploration-of-realistic-cases CD, and the law library.

The first CD provides information in three areas: family law, housing law and criminal law. These three areas are divided into 11 practical case scenarios, each of which raises a legal issue that can be explored by the viewer. Prior to delving into any of the episodes, however, one has the option of meeting the residents of *Pickle Street*. 'Residents'

provides a brief introduction to each character featured in the case studies, along with a general comment from each that reflects their character. Their comments adopt a range of everyday attitudes, but they do not necessarily relate to the case situation in which each is (later) involved.

The actual layout of the program is both logical and comprehensive. The 11 episodes explore legal issues such as divorce, de facto relationships, child support, car accidents, joy riding, drugs, domestic violence, strata title, paying the rent, public housing and neighbours. Each page, or screen, provides the options of hearing each character's view on their situations, reading about the issues in greater detail or visually choosing from a range of courses of action. One option is to have the character seek expert advice which then leads to a filmed interview with a lawyer or other experts in a particular field. One can retrace one's steps and explore various other avenues, without becoming lost in the confusion of a computer world made for technical geniuses.

Pickle Street is ideal for senior high school students doing legal studies. The attractive and colourful layout, used in conjunction with written, audio and visual resources makes it an enjoyable way to learn about different case scenarios and the legal processes involved in resolving each case. But this resource should not be limited to school students. The characters in *Pickle Street* represent the multicultural society of Australia and seem to be your average neighbours — with familiar and believable problems, appearances and attitudes. In this way the viewer can relate to the characters of *Pickle Street* because the program addresses legal issues that are relevant to people of many ages, races and of both sexes.

Pickle Street is also a wonderful teaching tool. The detailed explanation of each episode not only provides classes with thought-provoking questions for discussion, but also presents some useful essay topics which require further research and perhaps a visit to the law library on the second disc.

The main drawback of *Pickle Street* is that the program is limited to three areas of law, although the material covered is extremely thorough, informative

and interesting. In addition the *Pickle Street* theme song and the introductory jingles to the 11 episodes sound painfully similar to the beginning of daytime soap operas.

System requirements are fairly basic: a multimedia 486 IBM PC or compatible with MS Windows, 8 megabytes of RAM, 256 colour video, sound blaster or compatible sound card and a dual speed CD rom drive. If run on the

Macintosh, the minimum requirements are an operating system of 7.1 or higher, 8 megabytes of RAM, a 256 colour video and dual speed CD rom drive.

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whether judicial review extends to cover government contracting, and emerging new principles of judicial review. One topical issue discussed in this last section is the impact of human rights on judicial review. Chapter 8, which provides an overview of the scope and duty of procedural fairness, follows close behind chapter 3 in its presentation of ideas.

A third strength of the work is its referencing to other materials. Just as the text is well footnoted with cases, so too it is well footnoted with journal articles and books by past and present commentators, as well as with reports by various bodies. One set of reports, for example, which the authors incorporate well into their discussions of statutory and judicial developments are those of the Administrative Review Council. Chapters 3 and 8 again lead the way, with many references to Australian, English and North American materials. However, the other chapters of the book, which deal with the substantial components of administrative law, also cite helpful specialist works where appropriate.

The back cover of Aronson and Dyer's text promotes the book as one in which the authors have drawn on a wealth of legislation, reports and other literature to provide both a highly detailed exposition of the subject and an exploration of its underlying principles and theories. Sometimes one is disappointed to find that what lies between the covers does not quite live up to the blurb. However, this is not the case here. *Judicial Review of Administrative Action* is a leading work in its field. It is highly recommended to practitioners who need to locate their clients' complaints within existing administrative actions, to advocates who need to both know specific cases and understand general themes, and to students who wish to research issues and explore ideas.

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Judicial Review of Administrative Action

by Mark Aronson and Bruce Dyer; LBC Information Services, 1996; 1022 pp; \$115.00 softcover, \$145.00 hardcover.

Administrative law, write Aronson and Dyer in their first chapter, represents an important institutional component in the attempt to achieve a just society. Not only is it an important component, it is also a fascinating one, rich in issues and connections. Control of government power by the courts involves considerations of the balance of power between Parliament, the executive and the judiciary, as well as of ideals such as fairness, accountability, participation and openness. What standards are required by the concept of procedural fairness? Who should have standing to challenge administrative decisions? Should decision makers be required to give reasons for their decisions? On what grounds and to what degree should courts be able to review administrative action?

Control of government power by the courts also has links with changing conceptions of the state. There is a current trend for government to downsize, privatise and contract out. An important question arising from this trend is the extent to which the courts can control the exercise of public powers by private bodies.

One difficult issue facing any author setting out to write a book on administrative law is where to draw the line. Administrative law is not just about judicial review. It is also about freedom of information legislation, privacy legislation, ombudsman review and administrative tribunals. An even broader vision might include chapters on decision-making theory, rule making, public administration, regulation and a sociological consideration of the impact and effect of administrative law on society. Of course, no work could adequately discuss all these topics. The authors have recognised this and have limited their book to the core of administrative law — judicial review of administrative action. While narrower in

breadth than some competing administrative law texts, the result of their efforts is a well-structured work.

One strength of *Judicial Review of Administrative Action* lies in its detail. Each chapter contains a comprehensive explanation of principles and leading cases. Provision of detail is particularly useful in a field of law which continues to face change and in which many issues remain unsettled. Aronson and Dyer's work has space to accommodate and explain these competing views. In addition, the footnoting of cases is extensive, providing quick access to relevant authorities for those who need to pursue issues further.

A second strength of the book is that it is not just a statement of the law. It is also a work rich in ideas. The most exciting chapter from this perspective is chapter 3 which considers the scope and nature of judicial review. The chapter explores the limits of power which judicial review exists to enforce, the source of the courts' power to engage in judicial review, the relationship between judicial review and parliamentary sovereignty, whether judicial review extends to the exercise of powers by regulatory or non-statutory bodies, the extent to which administrative guidelines, codes of practice and explanatory circulars may be reviewed,

Talk of the Devil: Repressed Memory & the Ritual Abuse Witch-Hunt

by Richard Guillatt; Text Publishing, Melbourne, 1996; 296 pp; \$16.95 softcover.

This book addresses two crucial questions. First, is there such a thing as a 'repressed memory'? Second, are children in Australia being ritually abused

by satanists? The questions are important because in a number of cases in Australia people have been tried, and sometimes convicted, on charges aris-