

cus on identifying legal issues and applying the relevant law rather than ascertaining and meeting the client's needs and goals. The difficulty that this creates over time is that the students see legal problem solving not from the point of view of providing the resolution of a dispute for a particular client but from the point of view of an *objective* application of law. The structure of a law school and the needs of a modular curriculum work against the creation of a well integrated teaching and learning process which places law in its context and not as its *raison d'être*.

By adopting a client-centred approach to legal education much else falls into place. It will give context and relevance to students' learning, greater emphasis to ethical rules and professional values by its focus on the relationship between lawyer and client and a better understanding of the practice of law, while preparing students for the change of focus to which they must adjust when moving from law school to 'work'.

RESEARCH

REVIEW ARTICLE

A social profile of new law students

J Goldring & S Vignaendra
Centre for Legal Education, 1997
207pp.

This report contains a description of an extremely interesting study of the social profile of first year law students entering 15 law schools in 1996 in the Australian Capital Territory and the States of New South and Victoria, Australia. Two similar preceding studies, each spaced 10 years apart, had been conducted in 1986 and 1976. Although these studies taken together enable a picture to be assembled about changes in the socio-economic profile of entering law students over two

decades, technically they of course do not constitute a longitudinal study because they are concerned with three separate bodies of students and not the same cohort group.

The aims of the survey were three-fold: 1. to draw the social profile of the 1996 entering law students; 2. to determine whether the opening of newer, and regional, law schools had had an impact on the socio-demographic profile of the first year law student population; and 3. to establish whether any changes to the profile had occurred over the 20 years by making comparisons with the two prior studies.

The data were gathered by administering a questionnaire at all participating law schools, which was distributed at the first meeting of the class for the year. 2035 replies were obtained from a total of 3347 new students, yielding an overall response rate of 61%, although the range for different law schools was as high as 91% and as low as 6% - perhaps a reflection of the level of co-operation displayed by the individual schools or the preponderance of part-time students who were difficult to access.

Naturally the data tend to be treated descriptively, that is, they are predominantly shown as frequencies and percentages and graphs are liberally used to assist the reader's comprehension. However, chi-square analysis is also used where significant differences have been reported, in order to test the gap between expected and obtained frequencies to establish whether the differences may have been attributable to chance.

Of course, in a brief review it is next to impossible to give an account of the results other than at a fairly superficial level. The wide sweep of the study is revealed in the excellent executive summary, which categorises

the findings as follows: the typical first-year respondent; gender differences; differences according to age and mode of study; older / newer law school differences; regional / city law school differences; the changes over the last 20 years as revealed by the three studies (with respect to women respondents; part-time / external study respondents; younger and older respondents; those taking combined degrees and those holding other degrees; last school attended; parents' incomes and occupational status).

What has emerged from the results is the finding that most students still come from relatively affluent, well-educated middle-class backgrounds as had been the case with both the earlier studies. Seventeen characteristics were identified as belonging to the typical first-year law student but it was clear that the group was by no means a homogeneous one, because these attributes tended to describe the younger full-time respondents and not the older part-time ones. Women were significantly more likely than men to come from affluent backgrounds and a milieu of higher education, as well as having closer links to the law.

The total picture of the socio-economic status of first year students seems to have changed little over the 20 year period. However, on closer inspection, it appeared that the newer and the regional law schools were admitting a significantly greater proportion of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and therefore their student body was less 'typical', while the older and metropolitan law schools were absorbing relatively fewer of this group - hardly a surprising result, one might have thought. Hence, the emergence of new and regional law schools seems to have gone some way toward limiting the trend for the study of law to be confined almost exclusively to the more afflu-

ent groups from higher status backgrounds.

This is a very carefully designed and conducted survey, made all the more valuable because the existence of the data from two well-spaced earlier studies enables trends in the makeup of the socio-economic status of entering law students to be pinpointed. Assuming that these students jump all the intervening hurdles in their path and graduate, because of their numbers they will emerge as a significant proportion of tomorrow's legal profession. Understanding the future composition of the profession and its implications for the delivery of legal services are matters of critical importance to the law societies, government and the community at large. Large-scale empirical studies such as this one aid that process of understanding. Moreover, it is apparent that the methodology is readily adapted to the needs of researchers in other jurisdictions with the need to explore similar issues.

Editor

SKILLS

REVIEW ARTICLE

Teaching lawyers' skills

J Webb & C Maughan (eds)

Butterworths, 1996

(foreword by Prof A Sherr)

439pp. (+ introduction pp. i-xxviii)

This book is a considerable *tour de force* — an invaluable addition to the scant literature on legal skills training and its educational underpinnings. It is a timely collection of fourteen important essays contributed by a stable of leading theoreticians and practitioners of legal skills training who, with one exception, come from the U.K. The editors have taken the papers and woven them together into three salient themes: 1. educational

theory and the research into student learning; 2. various models for skills education and how they have been used to design and deliver skills-based courses for both academic and professional programs; and 3. issues of assessment and evaluation in skills courses.

As they point out in their introduction, some seven years after the publication of the landmark book, *Learning lawyers' skills* by Gold, Mackie and Twining (1989), the editors considered that the developments in the skills movement over the intervening period justified the appearance of another book. Interestingly, they have chosen to look at skills from the other side of the teaching / learning dynamic and this change of emphasis is reflected in the book's title, *Teaching lawyers' skills*. Their aims in producing the book, which they contend have been fourfold, are worth repeating: 1. to illustrate how the skills debate has developed since the late 1980s, particularly at the initial stage, with an emphasis away from the relatively behavioural, outcomes-led models of the legal practice courses to increasingly holistic and reflective approaches; 2. to provide practical guidance on the development of skills in a variety of legal education contexts; 3. given the broader base of experience of skills teaching in the UK, to reflect on issues of delivering applied skills courses at both the initial and vocational stages of legal education; and 4. to reflect on a variety of course design, assessment and evaluation issues.

The two papers in Part 1 examine the role of learning theory in legal education generally, not specifically with application to the teaching of legal skills. Tribe stresses the importance of learning theory as a means to a greater understanding of the processes involved in student learning with a

view to enhancing teaching quality. In what is necessarily a short essay her coverage of this very wide field in educational psychology must be somewhat superficial but she has some important points to make about maximising active student participation, learning objectives and the curriculum implications of different student learning styles. She also discusses the importance of building on existing knowledge through experiential learning techniques, as well as the consequences of the learning models for the assessment and evaluation of students. Webb, on the other hand, focuses more on the epistemological failings of what he calls the traditional 'hit and miss' approach to legal education which lacks a basis in educational theory. The three preferred alternatives he offers are the outcomes / competence, capability and holistic approaches, upon the last of which he expounds in detail. The SWOT analysis with which he concludes his essay is a very potent argument for developing a sound theoretical grounding for legal skills-based learning.

Part 2 of the book contains eight papers presenting a variety of the learning models and teaching methods used in skills training, which seek to bridge the academic / vocational education divide. The nexus is the critical importance of experiential learning, as opposed to the inculcation of propositional knowledge, and the role both of holistic approaches and of reflection. Maughan endeavours to change the focus from directive teaching to self-directed student learning by offering a guide to assist skills teachers to make use of experiential learning techniques. Boon's paper concentrates on what he calls the transformative functions of skills teaching in the initial stage, manifested in two ways: the move away from a curriculum based on the trans-