versal cognitive competence': the assumption that normal, ordinary and unbiased people are able to assess information presented and come to much the same conclusion.

Modern commentators have shown that these assumptions about objectivity, rationality and universal cognitive competence are profoundly flawed. First, there is the recognition that each of us carries along our own set of beliefs, values, standards, sense of acceptable behaviours and customs. However, much of our cultural perspective is not obvious to us. We may become aware that others have a set of cultural practices, when those practices or beliefs differ from our own. However, we may continue to regard our own perspective as normal or neutral or better, and that other perspective as different or even wrong. Recognising the importance of pre-existing narrative structures challenges the rationalist assumption of objective knowledge and 'normal' inferences based on a 'universally' available stock of knowledge about the common course of events.

Part of the project for the author's evidence class is one of self-analysis: getting the students to look inside themselves and to see that they are equipped with a whole set of personal and cultural beliefs they many not be aware of, but which profoundly influence the way they think about the world around them and the people in it, and to see that others have beliefs which may be very different, but seem just as completely 'natural' and self evident to them.

The requirement that evidence at trial be given orally by a witness who is physically present rests, in part, on the belief that observation of demeanour is essential to assessing the credibility of the witness. Misperceptions of demeanour and erroneous judgments of credibility are not mere misunderstanding, nor are they simply random errors which any system will inevitably have. These differences reflect and reinforce systematic social disadvantage and distinctions imposed by our society upon men and women.

Thus in this way an attempt is made throughout the course to imbed issues of difference into the basic concepts of the course and the fundamental nature of reasoning about facts. There is also a lecture and a workshop specifically on gender and race, which also considers some aspects of sexuality and class.

The final step in the treatment of issues of race and gender in the evidence class is to ensure that these ideas are assessed, so they will drive student learning. The assessment problems are drafted with care, to avoid raising personal emotional difficulties for students.

Student evaluations of the course were generally favourable. There was very strong agreement that the subject was challenging and difficult, with a fairly heavy workload, and was presented at a fast pace. At the same time, there was substantial agreement that the assessment was fair, that they understood the subject matter and that they had a positive attitude to the subject. There was a strong view that the aims of the topic were implemented, which suggests that the basic focus on facts and reasoning from facts were accepted. Taking these finding together suggests that the students were willing to accept and even be enthusiastic about a subject which is both doctrinally difficult and which deals in a serious way with issues of diversity.

Because issues of race, gender and diversity are considered to be central to the fundamental evidentiary concepts of relevance and proof, they are raised from the very beginning of the evidence course and are re-emphasised in different ways throughout the semester. In this way, the issues are not marginalised and do not take time away from aspects of doctrine which we must cover.

Teaching family law as feminist critique of law

A Parashar

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Feminist ideas are not adequately addressed in the majority of legal education. While the research journals and books about feminist thought have become a common feature of legal literature, it is not yet the practice to convey these ideas to law students in a systematic manner. In legal education in Australia, feminist critiques are at best considered the special interests of some academics (usually women) and it is left up to them to teach about feminist theories of law. For the most part, law courses include an eclectic choice of feminist literature with no, or very little effort at explaining the significance of feminist critiques in the context of other (mainstream) legal literature. A systematic engagement with feminist critiques in legal education can enable law students to question the very foundation of mainstream knowledge.

Legal education has long suffered the tension between the claims of what is proper for training for a profession and the education or training of scholars in the academy. In keeping with the professional connection of legal education, a persistent stream of thought is that effective learning in the profession amounts to good lawyering skills. In this view, the students ought to learn the technical aspects of law, and the scope of legal education should focus primarily on teaching legal doctrine.

Historically, legal education, even in the universities, has focused on legal doctrine available by the study of casebooks. Systematic attempts at presenting law programs with specifically interdisciplinary bases have not proliferated.

The distinction between professional training versus liberal education is misleading, meaningless and a red herring. Legal education understood as a compromise between theory and vocational practice is based on a misconceived idea that one cannot simultaneously learn the theory of law and learn to practise law, or that attempting to do so is counterproductive. There are at least two counter arguments against restricting the focus of legal education to merely professional training: that not every one will become a solicitor, and that even practising lawyers need a wider education.

Those who argue for legal education to focus primarily on skills training unfortunately conceptualise training very narrowly and, therefore, do not even serve well the interests of the profession. For someone to be only a competent practitioner (and nothing more) it is still necessary to have critical judgment and the capacity to analyse and relate one's own position to others' opinions.

Adequate legal education can only ever be achieved through an interdisciplinary study of law, and deep learning in law must be interpreted to mean that students learn how legal knowledge is constructed and defined in the wider context of society.

Disagreements about the exact shape of the interdisciplinary study of law do not detract from the fact that major challenges to the doctrinal focus of legal analyses have been presented by the critical legal studies, feminist and other interdisciplinary movements. These critiques in various forms challenge the claim that law is autonomous, objective, neutral or principled.

A feminist critique of family law is the absolute minimum required in any family law course. The argument that other perspectives, say for example, economic analysis or alternative dispute resolution methods or historical perspectives, to name a few, are equally legitimate organising foci, misses the point that feminist perspectives challenge the gender neutrality of all knowledge. Once the partial perspective of legal knowledge is exposed, it should no longer be possible for anyone to ignore it as otherwise it amounts to maintaining an oppressive *status quo*.

The understanding of family law as soft law or an optional subject is the starting point for the organisation of the subject. This is, of course, in plain contradiction to the immediate relevance of family law to every one's life, unparalleled in any other area of law. Family law as private or personal law has existed on the fringes of legal curricula for a long time. And in keeping with this 'optional' status, the content of what is taught in family law is considered relatively unimportant.

The students are asked to assess the scope and content of the area designated family law. They are presented with various explanations of the nature of family law and expected to form their own opinions. The students thus develop their capacities for critical thinking and realise their own agency in legitimising ideas about the core and optional classification of various areas of law.

The aim of good law teaching is not merely to generate the ability to reproduce quantities of information but must be to bring about a change in the students' understanding of law. Such a change can be effected only by an interdisciplinary study of law. There are two formal objectives to such a unit: to learn how to access and apply legal rules dealing with family relations and to understand the nature of legal regulation and its function. The course begins with a collection of extracts, including feminist critiques of the family in various non-law disciplines.

Students are expected to make judgments about the fairness of sexual division of roles in contemporary society in their future roles as family law practitioners (and judges). To enable them to make these judgments they must be exposed to much more than technical interpretations present in earlier judgments of courts (precedents). If they are not to make entirely subjective decisions they must know about sociological, historical and economic literature on family structures. But more importantly as lawyers they must work out why and how this information forms the bases of their judgments. The interconnections between the law, society and economy are the stuff of legal scholarship but not necessarily of the legal curricula. The aim is to make it possible for students to take responsibility for the views they hold and defend their choices as conducive to creating a just social system.

The course on family law is organised as a set of reading materials which demonstrate the cultural and historical specificity of various family structures and the changing nature of families. Students are familiarised with the critiques of family presented by Marxists, feminists, critical race theorists, historians and post-structuralists. The idea is to enable students to examine how various theories manage to justify hierarchies.

The students are encouraged to make a connection between interdisciplinary studies and the construction of legal knowledge. But it is important to focus on the wider issues of how needs and entitlements are constructed differently for men and women, and further complicated by their race and class membership.

In keeping with the philosophy of education explained here, there is no reliance upon lectures. The seminar discussion in the class is initiated by the lecturer but primarily the students are expected to talk to each other and explore the ideas presented in the readings. The content of the curriculum and the method of delivery are intimately connected so far as a questioning of legal doctrine is possible only if the teacher does not act as the expert transmitter of knowledge but gets the students to develop a questioning attitude and the capacity to analyse.

INSTITUTIONS & ORGANISATIONS

The law school mission statement: a survival guide for the twenty-first century
G T Butler
50 *J Legal Educ* 2, 2000, pp 240-270

A mission statement is a statement of the fundamental reason for an organisation's existence. It tells something about the organisation's strengths, its public image and its core values. It may also give a sense of confidence in the organisation's stability and its ability to achieve its objectives, and a sense of its uniqueness. A vision statement presents a mental image of what the organisation would like to become. In practice both statements are referred to generically as mission statements. Both offer opportunities to motivate an organisation.

Examining law school catalogues, one sees that most schools address the