

recognising the importance of learning from mentors.

Design and build: the legal practice course at Nottingham Law School

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4 *Nottingham Law Journal* 1, 1995, pp 75-89

In 1990 the Law Society of England and Wales decided to replace its final examination with a new course, the Legal Practice Course ("LPC"), which would include the teaching of legal skills. Of great significance was its decision to devolve much of the responsibility for professional legal education onto individual teaching institutions, which were required to design their own LPCs based on a set of predetermined objectives, apply to the Law Society for validation and deliver their own courses and assess their own students, subject to regular Law Society monitoring. This article describes the process of transformation of Nottingham Law School, in which a team of law teachers took on the job of designing and developing its own LPC.

The designers reduced the Law Society's objectives to an easily understood two-point aim, which became the theme around which the course was designed: to enable students to prepare for practice by learning (a) how to solve clients' legal problems; and (b) to adopt attitudes which encourage professionalism. They identified three basic ingredients of problem-solving ability: *knowledge* (of procedural and substantive law as well as transactional law), *relevant skills* and *attitudes*. This conceptual vocabulary enabled the designers to break down legal problem-solving into teachable parts: lectures, prescribed readings and discussions

for knowledge, and practical activities or "learning by doing" for skills. Since issues of professional ethics pervade the curriculum, these and other attitudinal objectives were to be met in a variety of ways.

However, an important realisation was that legal skills and knowledge are inextricably linked, so that one cannot learn skills without knowledge. One of the challenges was to arrange core subjects and skills in order to integrate the knowledge and skills elements, yet keep them separate so that students could transfer skills among different knowledge contexts in ways that propelled them toward the problem-solving goal.

After giving a description of the structure of the course, the authors explain how the integration of legal knowledge and skills was achieved in the design. Two principles were adopted: legal knowledge and skills should be integrated no matter what sequences the learning follows; and theory should usually be followed by practice. The core subjects provided the contexts into which the skills are integrated e.g. writing, drafting and negotiation with business and conveyancing.

Successful integration of knowledge and skills is thus mutually enhancing: skills enhance and deepen knowledge by enabling students to manipulate the knowledge for a specific purpose; and knowledge enhances skills by enabling students to practise those skills in a variety of realistic contexts. Since both knowledge and skills are necessary in solving clients' problems, the integration of knowledge and skills in a series of purposive transactions helps the curriculum to achieve its problem-solving goal.

An attempt was made to keep assessment strategies simple and to ensure that it did not dominate the course at the expense of new learning. Two devices are used: a practical exercise, being a piece of assessed course work; and a final written assessment, which aims to provide a summative assessment of a student's ability to solve clients' problems using the knowledge and skills acquired during the LPC. In addition, each student has a "narrative" assessment, compiled by tutors during the course, intended to reflect the student's attitudes towards the LPC learning experience and the development of the professional attitudes necessary for practice.

It is recognised that a concentration upon getting students through the tasks might suggest a regimented style of instruction that professional educators seek to avoid. Students may also be tempted to adhere rigidly to the prescribed criteria, using a lockstep approach rather than learning to solve clients' problems holistically as in real life. Legal education must be designed, therefore, to encourage reflection and deep approaches to learning that are compatible with learning how to solve realistic problems.

Professional legal training in the Commonwealth

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12 *J Prof L Educ* 2, pp 179-209

Professional legal training is a reasonably new phenomenon in many parts of the Commonwealth and it is only currently that it is being considered by a few states in the United States.

Only recently, with the increasing concern about the competence of lawyers, has there has been