

Law in social work education: reviewing the evidence on teaching, learning and assessment

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LAW IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION: REVIEWING THE EVIDENCE ON TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

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Abstract

This paper presents the findings from a systemic review of knowledge relating to current practice in the teaching, learning and assessment of law in social work education. The research comprised an internationally conducted systematic review of the literature, together with a survey of current education practice in the four countries of the UK. Two consultation events sought the views of a range of stakeholders, including the perspectives of service users and carers. Set in the context of debates about the relationship between law and social work practice, this paper identifies the common themes emerging from the review and offers an analysis of key findings, together with priorities for future directions in education practice.

Keywords

Law, social work, education, ethics, systematic review

Introduction

This paper presents the findings from a systematic review of knowledge relating to current practice in the teaching, learning and assessment of law in social work education. The work was commissioned by Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) as part of its research programme to support the introduction from 2003 onwards of new social work degree qualifications in the United Kingdom.

The aim of the knowledge review was to identify good education practice. This involved seeking an overview of approaches to teaching, learning and assessment; examining evidence on the effectiveness of different approaches; exploring the extent to which current education practice reflects evidence on effectiveness; and identifying how the evidence might inform the development of teaching, learning and assessment.

The review comprised two pieces of research: a systematic review of international published and unpublished literature, and a practice survey, identifying approaches taken within programmes in the four countries of the UK. The views of a wide range of stakeholders including service users, carers

and practitioners were also sought through two consultation events to discuss and advise on both aspects of the study.¹

Law in Social Work Education

The review took place within the context of longstanding debates, in the UK and beyond, about practitioners' knowledge and use of law, and the place of law in the social work curriculum. Grace and Wilkinson (1978), for example, identified practitioners' inability to verbalise the legal nature of their cases coherently, together with the ongoing concern that practice is determined by agency procedures and resources that could distort statutory requirements. Phillips (1979) was critical of social workers' dismissal of the legal basis for sound professional practice. Both the Beckford Report (1985) and the Carlile Report (1987) were sharply critical of social workers' knowledge of child care law and made recommendations for rectifying what were seen as training deficits.

Underpinning these concerns is the essentially contested nature of the relationship between social work and law, and the extent to which practice is shaped and determined by legal frameworks. The Beckford Report (1985) positioned the legal rules as social work's defining mandate, prompting Stevenson (1988) to counter with an ethical duty of care as the cornerstone of intervention. Braye and Preston-Shoot (1990), when reviewing the relationship, suggested that practitioners and managers must strike a balance between these two positions in each case.

Attention became focused on professional education following a study by Ball et al. (1988), who identified shortcomings in students' knowledge and understanding of law, and raised concerns about the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Law became the only subject for which explicit direction on teaching and assessment was provided within the rules and requirements for the professional qualification, the Diploma in Social Work (CCETSW, 1995). Guidance on curriculum content for England and Wales was issued (Ball et al, 1995), followed by a specific edition for Northern Ireland (Lavery et al, 1997). The focus on law learning sparked a process of theory building that has resulted in the delineation of social work law as a discrete area of academic and practice study. This theory building has provided a recognised body of knowledge, operating in a defined area of activity, and permeated with social work values and principles of administrative law (Preston-Shoot et al. 1998a). An increasing body of knowledge has developed around this new discipline. This includes textbooks (for example, Brammer, 2003; Brayne and Broadbent, 2002; Brayne and Carr, 2003; Johns, 2003a) and research studies on law in practice teaching (Preston-Shoot et al. 1997). It includes approaches to teaching and learning social work law (*Social Work Education* 2003, volume 22(5); Cull and Roche,

¹ The authors wish to acknowledge the contributions of all who contributed to the research, though the provision of information for the research review, participation in the practice survey, and participation in the consultations. We are grateful for the support shown to us in undertaking the project and for the wide interest in its findings.

2001; Baillie et al. 2003) and further amplification of the different elements within social work law (for example, Braye and Preston-Shoot, 1999; Preston-Shoot et al. 2001).

More recently, governments in all four countries of the United Kingdom have specified the inclusion of law within their requirements for the new professional qualification, the social work degree (Care Council for Wales, 2004; Department of Health, 2002; Northern Ireland Social Care Council, 2003; Scottish Executive, 2003). Knowledge of the legal rules and skills in their application are prominent in the social work subject benchmark statement (QAA, 2000), which informs all four sets of requirements, and in the National Occupational Standards (Care Council for Wales, 2004; Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, 2003; Scottish Executive, 2003; TOPSS, 2002).

Whilst some improvements appear to have taken place in terms of the range of topics taught and student satisfaction with learning (Ball et al 1995; Reith, 1998; Stanley and Manthorpe, 2001; Wallis-Jones and Lyons 2003), it remains the case that social work students and practitioners experience contact with the law and the legal system as stressful. Marsh and Triseliotis (1996) and Preston-Shoot et al. (1997) both reported worryingly high levels of lack of confidence among newly qualified and more experienced social workers, coupled with a steep decline in social work law knowledge that was not being routinely used in practice. Legal accountability which might benefit service users can be unsettling for social work practitioners (Roche, 2001), who conceptualise the law as intimidating, conflictual, and obstructive rather than empowering (Phillips, 1979; Preston-Shoot, 2000).

The challenge of teaching, learning and assessment of law in social work education is not unique to the United Kingdom. In the Australian context, social workers' legal competence and practice skills have been questioned (Swain 1999). Literature from the US demonstrates continuing concern about the place, quality and effectiveness of law teaching and assessment on social work programmes (Jankovic and Green, 1981; Lemmon, 1983; Lynch and Brawley, 1994; Kopels and Gustavsson, 1996; Madden, 2000).

It is clear that teaching law to social workers is a challenge. Despite this, there has been a limited focus until now on systematically drawing together evidence to support best practice in learning, teaching and assessment. The knowledge review reported here helps to fill this gap.

Methodology

The methodology for the review has been described in detail elsewhere (Braye and Preston-Shoot et al. 2005) and is therefore only briefly summarised here.

The research review employed systematic review methodology (SCIE, 2003).

- Literature dating back to 1967, relating to social work education and to legal education, was searched for relevant material, together with literature relating to legal education for professions allied to medicine dating back to 1990. The search was not limited to literature from any specific geographic context but was restricted to English language papers. It targeted published papers, grey literature (unpublished accounts), research reports, conference papers, and inspection and enquiry reports. Search methods included the use of general and specific electronic databases, hand-searching of academic journals, listserver archives, listserver postings of requests for information and scrutiny of relevant websites;
- Literature was included if it addressed learning, teaching or assessment of law in education for social work, law or professions allied to health. The volume of material finally selected for inclusion was:-

Initially identified	976
Selected as addressing law in education rather than law in practice	286
Finally selected as relevant to the study	117

- Quality assessment of the material selected for inclusion had to take into account that few empirical papers were identified. The quality criteria therefore had to be broad enough to include descriptive and conceptual papers which might have been excluded in systematic review methodology (Boaz et al. 2002). The quality of the material was judged against criteria derived in part from dimensions proposed by Pawson and colleagues (2003) as providing robust standards for any piece of knowledge, regardless of source;
- In depth data extraction was undertaken from which a manual analysis achieved a synthesis of the available material and enabled the identification of themes. Synthesis went beyond simple summarising or aggregation of individual papers towards the articulation of lines of argument emerging from them. As Campbell and colleagues argue (2003), such an approach offers insights for conceptual development within a particular field of study.

The practice survey methodology comprised the following:-

- A questionnaire seeking the views of educators on the aims of law teaching, their teaching, learning and assessment strategies and curriculum content. Postal responses were sought from 78 providers of social work qualifying training in England, with a return rate of 41% (32 questionnaires). The questionnaire was used as the basis for telephone interviews with educators in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Responses were received from 50% of programmes in Northern Ireland and Wales, and 67% of programmes in Scotland;
- Follow up telephone interviews with a sample of respondents in England (16 of 19 approached, representing a response rate of 84%) seeking more detailed exploration of examples of education practice given in postal responses;

- Documentary analysis of supporting materials (such as unit outlines and assessment tasks) submitted by educators;
- Focus groups with students from two programmes in England, exploring experiences of learning law, in both academic and practice contexts. A total of 27 students took part (21 women, 6 men; 22 white, 5 black participants; 10 postgraduates and 17 undergraduates);
- Focus groups with practice teachers associated with the same two programmes, exploring experiences of using the law in their own practice, and of helping students learn about the law whilst on practice placement. A total of 33 practice teachers took part (29 white, 4 black participants; 27 women, 6 men). The groups contained both experienced and new practice teachers, either agency-based (independent and statutory) or off-site practitioners, and included those supervising first and second placements;
- Inspectors from the Care Councils in the four countries provided anonymised summary reports of external assessors' comments on law teaching, learning and assessment, derived from annual programme monitoring reports;

Two consultation events sought the views of a range of stakeholders, including a wide range of service user and carer perspectives, on both aspects of the study. The events provided opportunities for the convened group to act in two very important ways. First, participants became a reference group to which the researchers presented their plans for the research and later their findings for review. Second, participants contributed their perspectives on the relationship between the law and social work, how they see social workers practising within the legal framework, and what this means for student learning.

Findings

Common themes emerged from the research review, the practice survey and the consultation events. What follows is an integrated account, exploring key questions that emerged as relevant to future directions in teaching, learning and assessing law in social work education.

What are we aiming to achieve in teaching law to social work students?

Practice is legally regulated and social work intervention is often shaped or influenced by legal rules in statute and guidance. The literature clearly emphasises that, irrespective of the setting in which they practise, social workers require familiarity with statute and guidance in order to advise and advocate effectively for clients, to fulfil their legal duties and responsibilities. Also emphasised, however, is that alongside technical knowledge of statutory frameworks practitioners must develop critical competence. By this is meant the ability to question the interface between legal rules and social issues, and to develop a questioning perspective on agency procedures and professional roles (for example, Cameron 2003; Dutt 2001; King and Trowell 1992; Madden and Wayne 2003). The literature also reminds social workers of their

social change responsibilities and of the role of legal knowledge and skills in promoting social justice (Charlesworth et al. 2000; Howe 1986). This dual emphasis on technical and critical competence has been present in the legal education literature for some time (Boon 1998), dating from an influential article by Twining (1967) who, in considering the purpose of legal education, draws a distinction between the idea of the 'plumber', or mere technician of law, and Pericles, the enlightened lawyer of integrity.

Drawing on the practice survey, it is apparent that social work programmes commonly aim to promote knowledge of legal systems and of mandates for social work provision. Equally important in the objectives for learning is that this knowledge should be applied to practice with a degree of technical competence. Some programmes identify critical analysis of the legal framework as an aim of learning, but this is less commonly articulated. Less consistent mention is made of knowledge of broader legal frameworks; promoting service users' rights; using the law to counter discrimination and support ethical practice. Sought outcomes are commonly for students to integrate legal knowledge within their practice; make legally-informed decisions; develop legal research and updating skills; and manage the dilemmas of practice. The focus is on both knowledge and skills, and on being able to use both in a partnership with the service users who experience the impact of legal decisions.

Service users and other stakeholders believe students need to combine critical thinking in relation to the law with technical knowledge and hands-on skills. They argue that we should aim for social workers to be 'plumbers plus' in relation to their knowledge and use of legal frameworks. This reflects the conclusions in the literature that educational objectives should be both critical and vocational. Qualified practitioners must be able to operate within statutory frameworks but from a critical perspective, able to question agency procedures and professional roles; they must recognise legal mandates, but manage the dilemmas and tensions this will involve (Ball et al. 1995; Preston-Shoot 2000).

What should the core content of teaching be?

In the literature there is an emphasis on both knowledge *for* practice and knowledge *in* practice. The former (for example, Braye and Preston-Shoot 1997; Gangoli and Solanki 1998) includes the functions of law in society and how legal rules are used in response to social issues. The latter (for example, Blyth et al 1995; Kopels and Gustavsson 1996) focuses on substantive law about particular user groups and practice issues, making explicit the relevant primary and secondary legislation, policy and practice guidance, and case law. There appears to be a consensus over the core content of the law curriculum for social workers, but there is divergence in the literature relating to the degree to which some, more specialist, client-group law should be covered in qualifying education.

The balanced focus advocated in the literature also requires an emphasis on skills *for* practice and skills *in* practice. The former embraces arguing cases and fighting decisions, policy analysis and advocacy, and researching legal issues to inform decision-making (Jankovic and Green 1981; Madden 2000; Madden and Wayne 2003; Miller 1980; Preston-Shoot et al. 1997). The latter covers core social work skills, such as recording, advocacy, report writing and problem-solving (Henderson et al. 2002; Lynch and Brawley 1994). The literature indicates that integration of knowledge and skills requires teaching and learning to focus not just on substantive law but also on the contexts where decision-making will be required (Eadie and Ward 1995). Students are thought to need an appreciation of how legal rules can impact on, inform, but also empower their decision-making.

In practice, a common core of knowledge is included by most programmes, focusing upon legal systems and structures, plus community care, child care and mental health legislation. Criminal justice is frequently excluded in England and Wales, but is included in Scotland and Northern Ireland, this probably a reflection of different legal and organisational systems. Other common exclusions are legislation relating to housing, healthcare and employment. Lack of timetable space is one reason for exclusion, and in this context programmes sometimes make a deliberate decision to concentrate on depth rather than breadth. Others prefer to be inclusive, because this 'maps the territory' of the broad relevant framework, enabling students to know the breadth of the field.

A key concern is to ensure that students are able to draw on and integrate a range of mandates to meet the complexity of people's lives. Service users in particular emphasised that students must learn to integrate their knowledge about different aspects of legislation (for example child care, mental health and community care) to enable them to respond to the complexity of people's lived experience, because "*families don't fall into boxes*". Service users also pointed out that they might emphasise different aspects of the curriculum for inclusion. Complaints procedures, for example, would be seen as an important aspect of the legal framework, with which practitioners should be familiar if they are to promote service users' rights. Service users want practitioners who are skilled in advocating for rights and challenging practices that are not lawful.

How should we approach the interface between law, rights and ethics?

The literature is beginning to recognise the increasing centrality of ethical issues in the regulation of practice, and the increasing impact of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms on decision-making by social work agencies. Several writers explicitly link law and ethics or law and values in both practice and education for social work (Dickson 1997; Roche 1997; Preston-Shoot et al. 2001; Stevenson 1988), mirroring renewed interest within legal education (Rhode 1992; Webb 1998; 2000).

In practice, many programmes indicate that there is a strong values component to their law teaching, but it is not uncommon for law and social work values to be presented as oppositional. The potential of law to oppress through curtailing liberty or restricting autonomy, for example, receives attention, with perhaps less emphasis on using law to promote rights and social justice by challenging oppression. All programmes indicate they include coverage of anti-discriminatory legislation (predominantly relating to race, gender and disability) and of the Human Rights Act, although the depth and intensity of this coverage is variable.

There is a clear invitation from service users for practitioners to work alongside them to ensure that law is used proactively to uphold people's rights. Human rights and citizenship are deemed to be key principles to be observed when applying the law.

How should the curriculum be organised?

One key debate in the literature is whether law teaching should be organised around discrete modules and/or integrated alongside other learning. Some research casts doubt on integrated models of curriculum design, suggesting that this results in lack of depth (Finley and Goldstein 1991; Madden 2000; Swain 1999). However, discrete modules must avoid divorcing knowledge of the legal rules from the social work context in which they might be applied. The literature provides examples of curriculum design where law teaching is discrete (Jankovic and Green 1981; Sheehan and Ryan, 2004) or integrated (Bogolub 1998; Gustavsson and Kopels 1996; Ward and Hogg 1993) or a combination of the two, together with limited discussion on the timing of teaching of the academic law curriculum in relation to practice learning opportunities.

In practice, law is delivered predominantly through discrete modules of teaching, early in the programme. This learning is usually expanded upon later by law content integrated within other subject modules. Student contact hours dedicated to law vary between 20 and 105. Averages are similar across both undergraduate and postgraduate provision, with the exception of postgraduate programmes with no discrete law teaching, where average 'law' hours are lower. Educators believe discrete modules have the advantage of identifying and controlling the distinctive law content of students' learning, but they challenge their stamina and perseverance. In contrast, integrated teaching is believed to facilitate links with the practical application of law in professional roles.

A further issue is one of the timing of law teaching in relation to practice placements. The literature indicates a view that knowledge of the legal system should precede the first placement, and that knowledge of substantive legal frameworks should precede contact with service users. In practice, educators reported that students achieve greater understanding of law if it is taught after a period of practice learning.

Service users were surprised at what they considered to be a low number of hours dedicated to students' law learning, and believed the teaching hours allocated to law should reflect the importance of this subject in the lives of service users. Law should be integrated throughout the programme, rather than be taught just in one year, and should be linked with skills in working with people, rather than seen as isolated knowledge.

What methods of teaching and learning should be used?

The literature describes a range of methods used in teaching and learning law, but less often evaluates the outcome of these methods. Positive student evaluations are achieved for methods that encourage active involvement and deeper learning, and e-learning is reported as well received by students (Oliver and Huxley 1985; 1986; Johns 2003b; Sarnoff 2003). However, detail of data collection in such studies is often patchy and more rigorous, outcome-focused research designs are rare. More common are descriptive and theory-building conceptual accounts, for example of using case studies (Braye and Preston-Shoot 1991), problem-based learning (Braye et al. 2003; Ridley 1994), interactive learning (Debreceiova and Kolikova 2003; Endeshaw 2002), reflective learning (Bailey 2004; Hinett 2002; Parkinson and Thompson 1998) and ecological or decision-making approaches to law learning. The key question of what makes knowledge stick finds little clear response in the literature, whilst it is clear that knowledge can be lost or clouded by other concerns within the practice environment.

In practice, lectures, combined with group exercises, are the most commonly used method, but extensive use is also made of seminars and guided independent research, and to a lesser extent of skills workshops and e-learning. Students are reported as being very anxious about the law, and a key concern of teachers is to allay students' fears, to make learning more manageable and to ensure it has a strong practice focus. Case study approaches are very common. The use of virtual learning environments is likely to increase, with significant work being undertaken to develop their use in law learning. Problem-based learning is popular with both educators and students, and is increasingly used alongside taught content to encourage students to become active learners. Students appreciate a combination of approaches, including lectures.

Who should teach?

The literature here ranges from unequivocal recommendations that lawyers must be involved (Ball et al. 1998; Eadie and Ward 1995), through examples of joint teaching by legal and social work academics (Forgey and Colarossi 2003; Stevenson 1988), to the paramount need of ensuring that whoever facilitates learning and teaching has knowledge and empathic understanding of both law and social work (for example, Lemmon, 1983; Terry, 1977). A careful use of guest speakers is encouraged (Dickens 2004) but there is limited outcome focused research on what combination best facilitates social work law learning.

In practice, a wide range of staff contributes to law teaching, with an emphasis on ensuring that teaching by lawyers seeks ways of engaging social work students with the discipline and addresses the application of law in professional practice. Service users and other stakeholders believe both lawyers and social work staff have important perspectives to contribute to law teaching.

It is uncommon for service users and carers to be involved in law teaching, but a number of programmes report plans to explore greater participation. Service users suggest they have a wealth of experience to contribute, and wish to work alongside educators and practice teachers to ensure that students understand and learn from their perspectives. It is seen as essential that students' perspectives are broadened to include awareness of the impact of law in service users' lives. Where they are involved, service user perspectives have the potential to permeate the materials and processes used in learning.

How should students' law learning be assessed?

The key theme to emerge from the literature on assessment is alignment. It is believed that methods of assessment should mirror the types of activities and judgements required of social workers in practice (Bone and Hinett 2002; Preston-Shoot 1993; Ridley 1994; Woodcock 1988). Case studies, extended scenarios, oral assessment and project work are all described as offering alignment (Bailey 2004; Braye and Preston-Shoot 1991; Eadie and Ward 1995; Henderson et al. 2002; Preston-Shoot et al. 1998d). So too is student involvement in self and peer assessment of both knowledge and contribution to group analysis of case material (for example, Bone and Hinett 2002; Braye et al. 2003; Forgey and Colarossi 2003). The literature contains student evaluations of assessment methods (for example, Henderson et al. 2002) and, less frequently, detailed evaluations (for example Oliver and Huxley 1986; 1988) of the effectiveness of different methods in assessing knowledge. Missing is research to investigate the most effective means of enabling students to retain knowledge learned. There is a small literature on the timing of assessment, more conceptual than empirical (Preston-Shoot 1993; Bone and Hinett 2002).

In practice, law learning is most commonly assessed through coursework, but examinations also figure in a significant minority of programmes, and it is relatively common to find both methods being used. In both, case studies commonly feature, educators believing that these allow students to demonstrate they can apply the law to practice. In terms of assessment criteria, all programmes assess students' legal knowledge and their ability to apply it to practice scenarios. Some are also looking for critical analysis and integration with social work values.

How does law figure in the practice curriculum?

The practice curriculum is under-theorised in the literature, despite the acknowledgement that student learning is heavily dependent on reinforcement in the practice arena (Campbell et al. 2001; Sheehan and Ryan, 2004). Some work has been done towards presenting an outline practice curriculum (Ball et al. 1995; Lancashire Polytechnic 1991; Preston-Shoot 2000), together with theorising on the learning processes involved (Braye 1993). Research studies have demonstrated that practice teachers are apprehensive about their competence to facilitate student learning of law and concerned about their own knowledge of the legal rules (Eadie and Ward 1995; Preston-Shoot et al. 1997; 1998c; Terry 1977). Agency support appears crucial in facilitating this aspect of practice teaching and assessment. The literature links core social work skills and competences with different elements of legal knowledge and skills. It distinguishes between interim and final competence, and offers examples of teaching and assessment methods. There is an emerging concern with preparing students with knowledge and skills to maintain practice that is both lawful and ethical.

In practice, only a minority of programmes set any law-related learning objectives for students on placement. In practice, there is an emphasis in the academic curriculum on teaching and learning methods that make explicit the application of law in practice. However, it is common to expect in general terms that practice teachers will help students be aware of the legal context for their casework, and written placement assignments commonly require case study accounts to locate practice within a legal context. There are concerns, however, about how consistently students experience the law in placement agencies, and students are not satisfied with this aspect of their learning experience. Students and practice teachers report that the transition of law learning to the practice context of the placement agency is problematic for many students, who often struggle to translate their academic understandings of the law into practice. Equally, knowledge can be eroded by a procedural emphasis in agency practice. Practice teachers nevertheless see there being ample opportunity to develop law learning, and encourage students to use the law proactively to challenge poor agency practice.

Service users believe it is important that programmes take responsibility for the quality of students' practice learning opportunities related to law. Placements represent a real opportunity to get to grips with the law in practice and learn how to negotiate the challenges that practice presents. Accurate guidance on the law in practice is believed to be essential, because the law does not provide crystal-clear rules, it has to be interpreted. Service users emphasise that the law gives people rights, and it gives social workers discretion, and students need to learn to be accountable for how they use this, because of its potential to make a difference.

How can we connect law and social work more effectively?

There is evidence in the literature of strained relations between lawyers and social workers (Ehrlich and Ehrlich 1979; Miller 1980; Preston-Shoot et al. 1998b; Schottland 1968). There is evidence that students approach law

learning with apprehension and a lack of confidence, related to images of authority, lack of familiarity with procedures and language, consciousness of the level of responsibility held in the legal arena and fear of lacking credibility (Jankovic and Green 1981; Lynch and Brawley 1994; Marsh and Triseliotis 1996; Madden 2000; Miller 1980; Preston-Shoot 2000). They struggle to see law as a source of empowerment, either for themselves or for service users (Deweese and Roche 2001; Preston-Shoot 2001).

Service users endorse this from their own experience, indicating their perception of social workers' discomfort in legal arenas such as courts, and their disappointment that practitioners are not able to engage more proactively with lawyers as allies in the task of promoting rights. It is thought vital that lawyers and social workers make better connections in practice, rather than social workers remaining excluded from legal debates and negotiations.

The US literature nevertheless contains reports of successful joint working between legal and social work practitioners (Ehrlich and Ehrlich 1979; Forgey and Colarossi 2003; Madden 2000; Weil 1982). Some writers identify a practice or role continuum, at different points along which law or social work will be more influential in contributing to decision-making. Others explore commonality of approaches and skills used by legal and social work practitioners (Barker 1989; Charlesworth et al. 2000; Forgey and Colarossi 2003; Katkin 1974; White 2002). Published accounts of law and social work students learning together are few, (see for example Homer 1992; Sklar and Torczyner 1991) despite the increasing policy emphasis on inter-agency and inter-professional collaboration, with papers offering descriptive and conceptual accounts rather than evaluated outcomes.

Service users believe it is important for practitioners to see law as a positive element of their practice, rather than as something to be afraid of, or defended against. The task of education is not seen as being to train lawyers, but to establish law as a positive element of a social work practice that has service users at the core (Wilson and James 1989), a lens through which to view and at times interrogate practice.

Conclusion

The majority of the literature offers descriptive and conceptual accounts of learning, teaching and assessment of law in social work education, and presents practice wisdom rather than research-based evidence of inputs and outcomes. Empirical evidence on the effectiveness of different approaches is limited. In education practice, learning, teaching and assessment appear well aligned, in that educators have a clear rationale for the ways in which they attempt to link approaches to sought outcomes. What is lacking, however, is clear research evidence for the effectiveness of different approaches in achieving learning outcomes.

Law appears to lend itself to multi-faceted approaches, and no strong emphasis on one best way emerges. Law teaching is relevant to the roles that

social workers carry out, with a focus on practice application, but the curriculum varies between programmes beyond a relatively small common core. Where educators succeed in engaging students' interest and effort, the rewards in terms of students' experienced learning outcomes are high. Some students, however, experience critical analysis, ethical issues and application of the law as an ongoing difficulty.

A number of priorities for educators emerge from this knowledge review. First, it is clear that law in practice learning remains a major challenge and there cannot be full alignment of goals, methods and outcomes until the neglect of law as a component of practice learning is addressed. Linked to this is the importance of ensuring students have skills in developing their own legal knowledge and the motivation to do so, if the gains of learning are not to be eroded.

Second, service users and carers have a key contribution to make. Progress here is slow, given the emphasis that has been placed upon participation in the new social work degrees in the UK, and the participatory developments occurring in other aspects of the curriculum. Evidence from a handful of programme indicates that permeation of service user perspectives within law teaching can be achieved, and this is a challenge for the majority of programmes now to address.

Third, it is important that theory-building in respect of law in social work education now moves beyond delineating the field of study to research more systematically what enables students to acquire and to retain knowledge of the legal rules and skills in practising social work law. This is a vital development if practitioners are to retain an informed and appropriately critical perspective on legal frameworks for practice, and rise to the challenge issued by the service users in this study, who considered that "*Sound use of law can be another step on the way to getting things right for people.*"

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