'You're such a friendly group of people!' Reflections on the 7th Australian Clinical Legal Education Conference

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From July 9 to 11 2003, clinical legal education teachers and supporters from around the globe gathered at Caloundra on the Sunshine Coast of Queensland for the 7th Australian Clinical Legal Education Conference. The Law School of Griffith University hosted the conference. While the objectivity of this conference report is open to question (I was the principal organiser), the program worked very well. Almost without exception, participants commented on the friendly nature of the group and the value of the sessions they attended.

The title of the conference was *Strengthening Links Between Learning, Service, Research and Practice*. Conference sessions were designed to encourage participants to more clearly articulate these links and to identify how the tensions between educational objectives, scholarship and community service can be as healthy as possible rather than problematic.

We welcomed the strongest international contingent at any Australian clinical conference which added greatly to the discussions. Professor Hugh Brayne (University of Sunderland), Virginia Grainer (Victoria University of Wellington), Professor Minna Kotkin (Brooklyn University), Professor Ved Kumari (Delhi University), Fred Rooney (City University of New York) and Professor Liz Ryan Cole (Vermont Law School) all either presented sessions or participated in panel discussions. Pepe Clarke, a former Griffith Law graduate, also made a presentation on behalf of the Centre of Human Rights and Environment, Argentina and Ted Hill (University of the South Pacific, Vanuatu) also joined us. While contexts vary, there are clearly strong common threads binding together the work of clinical legal educators.

Conference participants heard two outstanding keynote presentations. Simon Rice, well known to many international clinicians from his time as Director of Kingsford Legal Centre, spoke of the genesis of clinical legal education as an 'add-on' – "more a back verandah than a new wing – to the Langdellian castle of legal education method". Simon suggested that as advocates for clinical legal

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education, we "will forever be defensive, propping up the verandah on the back of the castle" if we "cannot establish the core legitimacy of clinical method within the law school's own reason for being".

The second keynote paper, presented by Judith Dickson from La Trobe, explored the role of clinic in linking law & justice. She challenged us to question our practices and emphasised the importance of looking outside our own programs and our own discipline and to collaborate as we reflect on our work and practices. Judith expressed her strongly held view "that the only legitimate purpose for the continuance of clinical legal education programs in Australian law schools is the integration of law and justice into the legal education curriculum. The role of clinic in legal education therefore is to be the means by which students and academics make the link between law and justice *in practice*."

The friendly environment of the conference tended to foster rather than stifle active discussion of the issues raised in the sessions. Conference sessions addressed issues including future directions for clinics and clinicians, different models of clinic teaching, international developments in clinical teaching and learning, how clinical experiences influence students and teachers and the capacity of clinics to meet particular student and community needs.

The future directions session included an interactive display of the technology used to deliver one of the Griffith clinics and a discussion session on (the lack of) career paths for clinicians with input from Minna Kotkin and Hugh Brayne. There were also 3 presentations on developments in linking clinics and *pro bono* service providers, including a detailed paper from Les McCrimmon (Sydney). A session on different clinical methods saw a range of contributions from experienced clinicians designed with the aim of informing less experienced teachers.

Two extended workshops were conducted on the second morning. Adrian Evans (Monash) and Kieran Tranter (Griffith) put participants on the spot in a series of hypothetical scenarios designed to explore the values clinic teachers bring to their work. A supervision skills workshop identified the range of student-focussed and client-focussed purposes people seek to achieve through their supervision. The tensions between serving the best interests of clients and students were very clear here.

Australian clinical law programs have been very effective in serving a range of communities. The delivery of community services has tended to receive greater priority than the development of research opportunities. The conference provided the opportunity for presenters to receive feedback on work-in-progress and to identify issues ripe for further research and writing. A session on fostering the involvement of indigenous students in clinical programs has led to work exploring links between indigenous and clinic-based ways of learning.

Griffith Law School also ran 2 post-conference events. On July 14, 30 people attended a 4-hour workshop on Developing Human Rights Agendas Through Clinical Programs. The workshop considered how community organisations and interested individuals can work with law schools towards the development of stronger community understanding of the importance of the law in fostering respect for human rights.

The workshop focussed on efforts designed to protect and extend the human rights of refugees in Australia. Anna Copeland (Murdoch) and Kirsten Hagon (Refugee Advice, Information and Legal Service) provided a range of suggestions for how law schools can best work with other

organisations committed to supporting refugees. Anna's account of her experiences working with refugees at the Murdoch clinic and Kirsten's overview of working with a wide range of community organisations combined very effectively.

On July 15, Hugh Brayne and Fred Rooney spoke at a seminar, *Pro Bono Service Delivery: International Developments*, providing quite different perspectives on the potential for increased *pro bono* legal service contributions. Fred outlined the 'low bono' network of local lawyers supported by the City University of New York while Hugh expressed concerns at the ability of small English law firms to make significant *pro bono* contributions.

Organising the conference, workshop and seminar involved a great deal of work but was particularly useful for the Griffith clinical program, informing the development of our strategic plan for 2004–2007. The strong and supportive Australian clinical network was reinforced by the experiences shared and contacts made and important international links were also developed. Monash Law School will host the next Australian clinical conference, probably in 2005.

Announcement

Second Conference of the International Journal of Clinical Legal Education 14th and 15th July 2004, Edinburgh, UK.

The second IJCLE conference is taking place in Edinburgh this year (14th and 15th July) with the usual wide range of speakers from all the major clinical jurisditions. The theme of this year's conference – Clinical Education: Who Benefits? – is proving broad enough to encompass papers on the teaching of lawyering skills to our students, the sustainability of clinics, and reviews of clinical education in jurisdictions as diverse as South Africa and the South Pacific. Details of the conference are up on the conference website: http://northumbria.ac.uk/sd/academic/law/conferences/cleconf/.

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