

**REVIEW: PUBLIC LEGAL EDUCATION – THE ROLE OF LAW
SCHOOLS IN BUILDING A MORE LEGALLY LITERATE SOCIETY
(ROUTLEDGE 2021)**

*Amy L. Wallace*¹

I. Introduction

Much has been written about public legal education (“PLE”) since the emergence of the revolutionary idea that all people, not just lawyers, need to know and understand the law. In the United States, civil rights movements in the 1970s underscored the necessity of practical legal knowledge for non-lawyers. Since then, the proliferation of public legal education programs (specifically Street Law² in many countries) has been remarkable. Within this rich context, Richard Grimes’ *Public Legal Education – The Role of Law Schools in Building a More Legally Literate Society*, defines PLE as follows: PLE provides people with awareness, knowledge

¹ Amy L. Wallace is an adjunct professor of law at New York Law School. Wallace founded and teaches the Street Law experiential course at NYLS. She is a graduate of the University of Toronto (B.A. in Political Science), Georgetown University Law Center (J.D.), and Lehman College (M. Ed. – New York City Teaching Fellows Program). She is also the Advisor for Law School Programs at Street Law, Inc., a non-profit focused on law-related education based outside of Washington, D.C.

² Street Law is a public legal education methodology that was developed in the early 1970s at Georgetown University Law Center by law students and faculty. In law school-based Street Law programs, law students deliver practical legal lessons to high school students and community members through interactive, student-centered teaching strategies. It is the predominant form of PLE at law schools in the United States and is found in over forty countries. More than 100 U.S. law schools have faculty-taught or student-led Street Law programs. E.g., Amy Wallace, *A Law-Themed Charter High School Born at New York Law School Remains Indelibly Linked*, 4(1) INT’L J. OF PUB. LEGAL EDUC. 4 (2020).

Book Review

and understanding of rights and legal issues, together with the confidence and skills they need to deal with disputes and gain access to justice...(and)...recognize when they may need support...and how to go about getting it.”³ This definition recognizes that it is critical in a functioning democracy that people understand their rights and know how to exercise them. Scholars have written reports discussing the types of instruction that are most effective in delivering public legal education lessons.⁴ Studies have been conducted to measure the value of PLE programs for the high school students or community members participating in the sessions.⁵ Public legal education programs now exist on almost every continent and practical books and articles have been written detailing the groundbreaking projects taking place around the world.⁶

What differentiates Professor Grimes’ new book is that he examines public legal education explicitly with law school PLE providers in mind. While he stops short of saying law schools have an obligation to fill the gaps left by most governments to teach public legal education, he hints that law schools have a moral responsibility to teach practical legal information and skills in the community.

³ Richard Grimes, PUBLIC LEGAL EDUCATION – THE ROLE OF LAW SCHOOLS IN BUILDING A MORE LEGALLY LITERATE SOCIETY (2021).

⁴ Steven E. Finkel & Howard R. Ernst, *Civic Education in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Alternative Paths to the Development of Political Knowledge and Democratic Values*, 26 (3) POL. PSYCHOL. 333 (June 2005).

⁵ Sean Arthurs, *Street Law: Creating Tomorrow’s Citizens Today*, 19 (4) LEWIS & CLARK L. REV. 925 (2015).

⁶ David McQuoid-Mason, STREET LAW AND PUBLIC LEGAL EDUCATION (2019).

Book Review

Law schools are uniquely situated to fill this critical role.⁷ Faculty experts, resident at law schools, are equipped to explain virtually any legal issue. Law schools are filled with enthusiastic law students anxious to find a way to use their skills to benefit society. Law schools also have an obligation to provide law students with real world clinical experiences. Professor Grimes not only carefully details how law schools can engage in public legal education, he explains why they should.

Few people are as qualified as Professor Grimes to write a guide to public legal education. He is currently a Visiting Professor at Charles University in Prague and at the University of Edinburgh. The very short biography at the front of the book tells the reader that he became a solicitor in 1977 and has been teaching experiential and clinical education for twenty-five years. This biography omits that it was Professor Grimes who first introduced Street Law to the United Kingdom as a pilot project at the University of Derby in 1997.⁸ With his assistance and encouragement, Street Law programs are now found at over sixty percent of U.K. law schools.⁹ The biography also leaves out that Professor Grimes has worked on legal education projects in over fourteen regions.¹⁰ The book is written

⁷ Richard Grimes, PUBLIC LEGAL EDUCATION – THE ROLE OF LAW SCHOOLS IN BUILDING A MORE LEGALLY LITERATE SOCIETY 5-6 (2021).

⁸ Richard Grimes, David McQuoid-Mason, Ed O'Brien, and Judy Zimmer, *Street Law and Social Justice Education*, in THE GLOBAL CLINICAL MOVEMENT – EDUCATING LAWYERS FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE (2011); Richard Grimes, *Legal Literacy, Community Empowerment and Law Schools – Some Lessons from a Working Model in the UK*, 37 LAW TEACHER 273 (2003).

⁹ Richard Grimes, PUBLIC LEGAL EDUCATION – THE ROLE OF LAW SCHOOLS IN BUILDING A MORE LEGALLY LITERATE SOCIETY 2 (2021).

¹⁰ United Kingdom, Argentina, Iran, Ireland, Nigeria, the Philippines, South Africa, Belarus, Czech Republic, Georgia, Myanmar, the Middle East, Turkey, and Viet Nam. The book contains an astonishing

Book Review

as a practical guide for law schools and organizations considering implementing Street Law or PLE programs. The PLE community is a wonderful, cooperative group of professors and practitioners who meet regularly to share ideas and lessons in a remarkably un-proprietary way. Professor Grimes' new book is a user-friendly guide that discusses all aspects of a law school-based public legal education program including templates and sample documents and is a testament to the collaborative nature of the PLE community.¹¹

II. Synopsis

The book is divided into six chapters: background; two chapters discussing delivering PLE (the first PLE generally and the second specifically addressing Street Law); incorporating PLE at a law school; evaluating PLE programs; and conclusions and a case study. The conclusions chapter contains short reflections from a number of PLE practitioners.¹²

The first chapter readily makes the case for the need for public legal education programs. Professor Grimes highlights the growth in the number of people with

anecdote where Professor Grimes arrives to deliver a training in West Africa only to discover there are 2000 participants waiting for him to conduct the training in a football stadium.

¹¹ The author would like to thank Lee Arbetman, Professor Richard Marsico, and Professor Andrew Perkins for their review of this paper.

¹² Short reflections from this author and the editor of the International Journal of Public Legal Education, Sarah Morse, together with Scott Walsh, Margaret Fisher, John Lunney, Michal Urban, Ben Perdue, Sean Arthurs, Jeff Giddings, and David McQuoid-Mason are included in the chapter "Conclusions: Don't just take my word for it."

Book Review

unresolved legal issues and unrepresented litigants as evidence of the critical importance of PLE programs. The book briefly discusses government efforts to address the lack of legal knowledge and skills in communities. Professor Grimes notes that few government efforts have led to real growth of PLE programs. Most government initiatives to date seem aspirational as opposed to attainable.

Professor Grimes also uses this chapter to outline why law schools have a vast role to play in building a more legally literate society. The book identifies many different settings (schools, prisons, community centers) that can work with a law school-based PLE program. Public legal education programs can include a large number of law students with a relatively small number of faculty supervisors. As Professor Grimes highlights in later chapters, PLE programs are an excellent complement to existing doctrinal courses and clinical offerings. Street Law and other PLE programs are usually enthusiastically welcomed by law students. Finally he identifies that PLE programs can aid law schools in fulfilling a broader commitment to the well being of society.

The second and third chapters focus on delivering public legal education programs. The second chapter addresses PLE generally and the third chapter discusses Street Law specifically. The book is well-organized and includes all the main issues and questions that arise when designing a law school-based program. Choosing an audience or a location for a PLE program is one of the first decisions

Book Review

a faculty member must make. Professor Grimes recognizes the importance of assessing the specific needs of the community and including legal issues that frequently arise for those participants. The book informs readers that programs in the U.K. and some other countries are often delivered to adults in community settings. In the United States, the vast majority of law school-based Street Law programs are paired with high school students. Topics are generally chosen in consultation with the cooperating classroom teacher based on student interest and existing school curriculum.

The book outlines in detail a number of interactive teaching strategies for face-to-face PLE instruction including cases studies, mock trials, and moot courts. These strategies are carefully outlined for new programs unfamiliar with student-centered teaching. Professor Grimes also discusses a form of PLE, which is relatively unknown to U.S. law schools – hard copy pamphlets, leaflets, and posters. This form of PLE, although very different from the traditional Street Law model known to most U.S. law schools, is very interesting. Professor Grimes discusses circumstances in parts of the world where holding face-to-face classes may not be possible or safe but that printed materials can be used to teach people about their rights. Some American law schools are located in wealthy neighborhoods and faculty and law student leaders are not able to physically reach the communities that would most benefit from PLE programs. Other law schools

Book Review

are located in remote regions and have similar problems. Those schools could work on hard copy materials that could be sent to and posted in underserved communities. The law student instructors practice different skills when preparing written materials rather than when facilitating interactive sessions but both skill sets are beneficial for the law students and the community members. The growth of virtual/online instruction has allowed law students to reach community members beyond their geographic area but hard copy materials could still be helpful in communities without reliable access to internet or technology.

Finally Professor Grimes discusses virtual PLE sessions. This form of delivery became the norm during the global pandemic¹³ and he identifies that some programs may choose to remain online or develop a hybrid program that offers both in-person and virtual instruction. Technology has enabled some programs to reach far more people than before. Online programs have also aided people with disabilities who may face challenges in attending in-person meetings. In the U.S., many information sessions and “know your rights” meetings for adults may choose to remain virtual. In contrast, many programs working with children and young adults are likely to return to in-person instruction.

¹³ Amy Wallace, *Classroom to Cyberspace: Preserving Street Law's Interactive and Student-Centered Focus During Distance Learning*, 27(4) INT'L J. OF CLINICAL LEGAL EDUC. 83 (2020); Amy Wallace, *Cyberspace Back to the Classroom: Taking Lessons Learned from Teaching Street Law During the Pandemic Back to In-Person Instruction*, INT'L J. OF CLINICAL LEGAL EDUC. (forthcoming).

Book Review

Chapter Three is devoted to Street Law. Professor Grimes discusses the history and methodology of the program that was founded at Georgetown University Law Center fifty years ago. This chapter also contains a detailed and practical program handbook. This thorough template walks the reader step-by-step through the process of creating a program and supervising the law student participants. Although Professor Grimes previously published this handbook,¹⁴ the guide is particularly useful in conjunction with the comprehensive discussion of PLE in this book. American programs may note that the handbook addresses indemnity insurance. Because most U.S. programs discuss the law and legal issues in generalities and do not give advice on specific legal problems, insurance is not required. If U.S. law students offer legal advice during a Street Law session, they could be in violation of strict rules prohibiting the unauthorized practice of law because they have not yet been admitted to the bar.

Next Professor Grimes turns his attention to incorporating PLE into the law school. Again, this chapter provides a thorough blueprint for any faculty member looking to start a PLE program at their law school. He acknowledges that individual schools have their own policies and procedures in place for approving these types of projects. The book includes a discussion of learning outcomes or things instructors want participants to be able to “do” at the end of a session. While it is

¹⁴ Richard Grimes, *Sample Handbook for Street Law Clinic*, 4(1) INT’L J. OF PUB. LEGAL EDUC. 4 (2020).

Book Review

common to teach law students the importance of including thoughtfully constructed learning outcomes in a lesson plan, Professor Grimes also highlights the importance of learning outcomes for the seminars conducted by law faculty for the law student instructors. Throughout the book, he considers how to maximize the benefits for both the law student instructors and the community participants.

Evaluating PLE programs is addressed in the next chapter. Professor Grimes identifies the challenges for effective evaluation of PLE programs. Measuring changes in behavior including civic engagement and the effective exercise of rights requires costly long-term studies. He discusses the value of anecdotal evaluations that provide a “snapshot in time” and he references some recent studies. Professor Grimes cites to the accepted draft of a study Ben Perdue and I prepared. We asked law students who had participated in a Street Law program what benefits, if any, they derived from their involvement in their program. We studied responses from almost seventy law student participants from twenty law schools in six countries.¹⁵ The participants overwhelmingly responded that they benefitted personally and professionally from participating in their Street Law program and although only a snapshot of those law students in that moment, one hundred percent of the

¹⁵ *Preparing Lawyers for Practice: Developing Cultural Competency, Communication Skills, and Content Knowledge through Street Law Programs*, 70(2) J. OF LEGAL EDUC. (Winter 2020) (forthcoming).

Book Review

respondents answered positively about their experience and stated that they believe they developed critical lawyering skills from their PLE experience.

When assessing PLE programs, Professor Grimes emphasizes that it is important to evaluate all three components of a project: benefits to society, benefits to the law student instructors; and benefits to the law school or institution. The third prong is the most neglected part in terms of studies done to date and this area is ripe for investigation as this information would be persuasive for a law school considering whether to implement a PLE program.

The final two chapters of the book are devoted to conclusions and a case study. The conclusions section contains reflections from ten public legal education practitioners.¹⁶ The case study includes all the documentation and completed forms and templates for the PLE program at North Yorkshire Law School. This appendix will help new programs visualize a PLE program from inception to completion.

This thorough PLE textbook will be helpful for any faculty member starting a program at their law school. The requirements set forth in Professor Grimes' guide indicate that most if not all U.K. Street Law or PLE programs are faculty taught. That is not true of Street Law programs in the United States. Over half of the

¹⁶ Short reflections from this author, and Sarah Morse, editor of the *International Journal for Public Legal Education*, are included in this section. Also included are reflections from Scott Walsh, Margaret Fisher, John Lunney, Michal Urban, Ben Perdue, Sean Arthurs, Jeff Giddings, and David McQuoid-Mason.

Book Review

approximately one hundred programs at U.S. law schools are led by law students. Many of the programs are run through a Street Law student group and others are the community service project of an affinity group like a Black Law Students Association chapter. Many of these groups have minimal faculty supervision and would find it difficult to meet the benchmarks set forth in Professor Grimes' text. Faculty-led programs have greater longevity, reliability, and guidance and for those reasons we hope that some U.S. law schools see the value of the work being done in student-led programs and decide to convert them to credit-bearing courses.

III. Looking Forward

I cannot end this review without acknowledging this important question alluded to by Professor Grimes in the first chapter - why is it that local, state, and national governments are not being held responsible for providing access to PLE? Should it not be the duty of the government to educate its citizens and residents on the laws that govern them? Professor Grimes briefly discusses efforts by governments to support PLE and he acknowledges that governments ought to do more but the focus of this book is the role of law schools. Further study is required to examine actions and failures to act by government leaders. The rapid development of public legal education programs in Uzbekistan may be a good case study.

Book Review

Uzbekistan's PLE journey began when one law school, Tashkent State University of Law (TSUL), began working with Street Law, Inc. in 2018.¹⁷ In January 2019, Uzbekistan's President Shavkat Mirziyoyev issued a decree declaring the importance of public legal education programs.¹⁸ Street Law, Inc., together with an American law firm partner, and the Uzbekistan Minister of Justice worked with the law school to develop a program that could be replicated throughout the country. In 2020-2021 TSUL and all fourteen law colleges had active Street Law programs and over five hundred student instructors worked with 131 schools reaching over eight thousand students.¹⁹ This meteoric progress is indicative of the amazing things law schools can accomplish with government support. It is remarkable that the government of this opening democracy has embraced PLE in ways the governments of many longstanding democracies have not.

The social justice movements of the last few years, including women's rights, racial justice, environmental protection, and LGBTQ rights have underscored the necessity of public legal education. Every person needs to understand their rights and how to exercise them. But the question remains – who is equipped to assume the responsibility for public legal education? This book makes a strong case that

¹⁷ "Street Law Program at Tashkent State University, Uzbekistan Enters Third Year," November 10, 2020, Street Law, Inc. <https://www.streetlaw.org/articles/street-law-at-tashkent-state-university-uzbekistan> (accessed Oct. 4 2021).

¹⁸ Decree – *On the Radical Improvement of the System for Raising Legal Awareness and Legal Culture in Society*, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Jan. 9, 2019. <https://lex.uz/docs/4149770>.

¹⁹ Email from Botirjon Kosimov, Senior Lecturer, Tashkent State University of Law, Oct. 7, 2021.

Book Review

law schools are best-suited to fill the gaps left in addressing PLE. Law schools have on-site faculty experts often excited to contribute to social justice. Law schools also have an overabundance of law students who need practical real world clinical experience. Public legal education programs provide law students with the opportunity to study substantive legal topics while developing public speaking skills and the ability to break down legal concepts for non-lawyers. The high school students and program participants gain access to enthusiastic, knowledgeable members of the legal community. Law schools secure rigorous, practical, clinical/experiential programs that law school students enjoy. Law school-based public legal education programs are the definition of a “win-win-win” scenario and this book by Richard Grimes is a wonderfully thorough roadmap for any interested law school, faculty member or law student.