

Narrative-based learning is nothing new: it has been utilised as an effective approach to learning in many disciplines. In law, it is the basis of the 'law and literature' field of study in which connections are drawn between legal theory and literature. In a limited sense, it is also used in the short problem-type questions commonly used by law schools in small group tutorials to enable students to discuss the application of legal principles and rules in the context of fact scenarios.

Narrative-centred learning environments leverage the cognitive and instructional power of stories.

Such environments have significant potential for enhancing students' learning experiences, potentially reinforcing learning objectives and ingraining subject matter.

When students are engaged in a task for which a story offers appropriate advice, they are more likely to understand the point of the story and make useful connections between information contained in the story and their prior memory structures.

*Second Life* machinima adds an exciting new dimension to a narrative-centred approach to learning. A virtual environment like *Second Life* borrows assumptions from real life. Virtual characters can contribute to a larger narrative context which has the potential to establish solid links with pedagogical subject matter, thereby supporting assimilation of new concepts in young learners.

The experiential learning environment plays a significant role in engaging students. Research suggests that simulations enhance learning because greater engagement means improved attention spans. This in turn results in accelerated absorption of key learning outcomes and longer retention. The use of machinima and narrative-centred learning environments is also inclusive of a range of student learning styles and teaching strategies, providing students with the opportunity to visualise ideas and concepts.

## BOOK REVIEW **Glanville Williams: Learning the Law**

A T H Smith

Sweet & Maxwell; Thomson Reuters, 2010, 273 pp

I still have a copy of the original first edition of this book published in 1945 passed to me when I commenced studying law in 1955 by my brother, also a lawyer. As explained in the Preface by Professor A.T.H. Smith, the editor of the 14<sup>th</sup> edition of this book, when it was first published in 1945 it was alone and unique in the United Kingdom for offering advice to potential law students, current law students and to those looking for a career in law. Now of course, in a time when there are many such type of books, I believe it is of interest to readers of the *Digest* to discover whether there are still qualities in the revised text which enable *Learning the Law* to be regarded to have stood the test of time and still be the premier book of choice for those intending to enter into a career in law.

A word of caution for the Australian reader: as the book is published in the United Kingdom, it obviously focuses on the law of England and Wales where it is necessary to refer to a principal legal system. However the factual information of this kind is still of value to anyone studying law outside the English legal jurisdiction, and Chapter 12, relating to legal research, refers to the various Commonwealth jurisdictions and contains helpful information for the Australian student in respect of recommended Australian texts and the value of accessing [www.austlii.edu.au](http://www.austlii.edu.au) when wishing to secure electronic information relating to Australian case law, legislation, journals and the law generally.

Unlike many legal books, the Preface is a worthwhile starting point for the reader. Like his predecessor Glanville Williams, Professor Smith is a law academic of great distinction who from his own teaching experience is aware of the demands of law students. His salutary advice regarding university legal examinations will strike a note with any law academic:

Legal exams taken in university seem particularly prone to two special problems; a failure to read the question carefully on the part of the examinee, and (possibly in consequence) a tendency on the part of the examinee to answer the question as though it were same question as was to be found in previous years' examinations.

The book also incorporates Smith's Preface to the previous edition where he points out that the audiences that Glanville Williams had in mind were those who had already decided to study law and so his objective was to make the book relevant to first year students and beyond, so that it would serve as manual that would accompany them throughout their studies and into their legal career.

It is interesting to note that throughout its various editions, successive editors, including the present one, have as far as possible managed to retain 11 of the 12 original chapter headings – the

12<sup>th</sup>, *Common Law and Equity* has been incorporated/subsumed into the opening *Divisions of Law* chapter. Obviously changes and developments in the law have necessitated considerable revision and reorganisation of the text and the addition of some extra chapters, but despite these important changes the work remains essentially the same. The current editor's aim is still that of providing a text which is both informative and encouraging to the law student.

If one is selective as regards those elements of the text to which law students should be directed when undertaking their preliminary studies, it would be to start with Chapter 2 entitled *The Mechanism of Scholarship*. In this chapter the author gives practical advice with regard to *Navigating the Law Library*. Despite the fact that the majority of law materials are now available in electronic form, the fact that it is still necessary for the law student to be able to access these materials is often overlooked. Whilst law reports, statutes and periodicals are available in electronic form for example the potential lawyer still needs to know the basic structure of the law reports or how to interpret a statute. There is of course a clear link between the advice in Chapter 2 and Chapter 12 *Legal Research*. In the latter there are again nuggets of valuable information often overlooked in today's lecture theatre or seminar room. George III may be condemned as history but the quote attributed to him: '... that lawyers do not know much more law than other people, but they know better where to find it' – is as true today as it was in the 18<sup>th</sup> century! There is also a helpful explanation of 'legal research' in that it has two rather different senses. 'It can be used to refer to the task of ascertaining the precise state of the law on a particular point' – and there is a useful reference to the Joint Statement of the Bar and the Law Society on the foundations of legal knowledge – but it also: 'denotes the sort of work undertaken by lawyers (often, but not exclusively academic lawyers) who wish to explore at greater length some of the implications of the state of the law'. This chapter explains its purpose is to assist the reader to gain a more intimate knowledge of the law library and its online resources and also to guide the first steps of the research worker.

When reading the text the general effect is one of great care and competence in the advice offered to the reader whether it is as the best way to work through problems, answer essay questions or how to prepare for examinations. In this respect there is much helpful advice as to details which are often overlooked such as the spelling of 'homicide' or 'consensus', and avoiding the commonest grammatical error of the split infinitive.

Chapter 11 *Moots, Mock Trials and Competitions* is also invaluable to those law students studying externally, or in law schools where practical advice on how to conduct themselves in such simulated court exercises is not forthcoming.

The overall impression is that *Learning the Law* is as relevant as it was when it was first published in 1945. There is hardly any need to say more than that this latest edition maintains the high standards of its predecessors. This reviewer is confident that in the hands of its current editor it still has a long and useful life and yet more editions before it.

Emeritus Professor David Barker AM  
Editor

### **Survive and Thrive: Foundations Skills for Your First Year at University**

M Muller and D Nulty

Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, 219 pp

There have now been many books on tertiary student lifestyle, so it is important when reviewing Muller and Nulty's text to consider what makes it different from other books on this topic. In the past there was a time when only a select few went to university and for these it was a matter of continuing a trend set by other members of their family before them. This meant there was already plenty of personal advice as to how they might plan their studies and follow the family tradition particularly where they were attending the same university and in respect of the Oxbridge or Ivy League Universities, even the same college. As we are being constantly reminded, tertiary education is big business today with thousands of students undertaking a university education so that the majority of them are unable to rely on the experiences of family or friends who in the past might have preceded them.

There is also the problem that, because of the high number of university admissions, the days of one-on-one tutorials and students having the benefit of advice from a personal tutor have long disappeared, other than in the most prestigious of universities.

### **BOOK REVIEW**