

MORE REALLY USEFUL EXPERIENCE AND ADVICE TO DRAW ON IN LEGAL EDUCATION RESEARCH METHODOLOGY!

Although not designed in any way to complement or follow on from LERN's highly successful Symposium on 'Perspectives on legal Education Research' held on 23rd September 2015 at IALS the launch of the Special Edition of *Journal of Law and Society* entitled *Legal Life Writing: Marginalised Subjects and Sources* certainly highlighted the value of one particular type of research. Two of our LERN contributors- David Sugarman and Rosemary Auchmuty, have made powerful contributions to this Special Edition. Both had extolled the value of historical sources, including biography and other narratives at the LERN event, highlighting the consequences of the traditional neglect of some topics and some people from our understanding of law and legal education. At the launch of the Special Edition on 20th October 2015 at LSE this energy and new agenda was again keenly promoted. For example, Rosemary spoke passionately about the neglect of women in traditional accounts of key people in the law, the legal profession and legal education

The Special Edition, which is published as Volume 42(1) of the Journal is readily available to researchers and should certainly be read. The collection of eight articles was edited by Linda Mulcahy and David Sugarman. The contributors to the debate at the LSE generally recognised that using biographical and similar material was not uncontroversial nor, indeed, always easy to do. Some question whether law academics should be engaging in this type of work; others regret the lack of accepted methodology and yet others wonder how you balance the narrative with critique. There were other practical issues raised, such as how do you assess, if at all, the reliability of sources, how do you relate biographical investigations etc to theory. It has to be said, that most in the room simply saw this method as one that breathed a lot of life into research but particularly to give those unable to do so or ignored by traditional analyses, a Voice and to bring them into core discourses.

A particularly valuable part of the debate concerned the value of this approach to research into legal education. A number of general points were made that researching this way is generally fun, human and allowed marginal 'players' to go centre stage, such as the struggle of women to access legal education , become teachers of it as well as entering the legal profession. David Sugarman, when summing up, said that he thought legal education research was often impersonal. There is an urgent need, he argued, to inject broader and more varied approaches to understanding legal education. He urged that these approaches provide interesting and challenging opportunities for teaching and for student participation. Indeed, this was a view shared by many earlier contributors who had characterised much of traditional research as geared only to elites. Indeed, one contributor urged a more radical approach to 'acceptable' sources and extolled the value of tabloid coverage of law, lawyers and others!

Patricia Leighton, October 2015