

Students' ideas about their future work: using research approaches for curriculum development in legal studies

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Abstract

Research in higher education has clearly demonstrated that students direct their learning towards aspects of their discipline that they consider to be relevant or interesting. For students who are intending to enter specific professions, their ideas about that profession determine what that relevance may be. In the bustle of covering course content, constructing learning and assessment tasks teachers often neglect to explore variation in the ways that students expect that their studies may contribute to their futures. This paper reports on the outcomes of a research project which focused on exploring the relationships between students' understanding of learning in law and their anticipations about working as a legal professional. The research outcomes demonstrated that students with limiting ideas about professional work also focused on atomistic and technical components of their course, whilst students who had a broad idea about work were able to learn within a range of paradigms. This finding has clear implications for the development of curriculum that supports the expansion within an institutional learning framework of students' ideas about their future profession.

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to explore the relationship between students' ideas about their future work and learning, specifically the relations between law students' experience of learning in law and their perceptions of working as a legal professional. The paper builds on previous work in a variety of areas. In an earlier study in music (Reid, 2001), students' ideas about work as a professional musician were found to be strongly related to their conceptions of learning. In effect, when students understood musical work to be about performing the music correctly, or 'nailing it' – which implied an emphasis on great technical facility – then they focused their learning on the development of that facility: this was the narrowest and most limiting view. Students who anticipated that music was about creating a meaningful performance that provided some sort of cathartic experience for the listeners focused their learning on the development of personal meanings through the music: this was the broadest and most holistic view. In this situation, the teachers shared a similar range of views about professional work. The learning situation in music involved an individual encounter with teacher and student where it would be expected that a match could easily be made between teachers' and students' expectations for learning and teaching music.

Another study in design (Davies & Reid, 2001) showed that design students and teachers also have a range of ways of perceiving professional work, and that this was connected to their approach to the teaching and learning situation. In different disciplines such as statistics (Reid & Petocz, 2002) and accounting (Jebeile & Reid, 2002), the influence of student thinking about professional work was also apparent in their conceptions of learning. In a completely different field, Morgan (1999) described this relationship within the education of theologians. These previous research studies have focused on the relationships between professional work and learning in creative areas, numeric areas and social areas. The commonality between these studies was that all of the students involved as research participants were focused upon preparation for a specific profession. Each of these cases highlights the need to move learning and teaching beyond the institutionally defined curriculum towards a closer link with ideas about professional work. In this way, educators can encourage students to have a focused learning experience that moves beyond the day-to-day demands of their specific courses (Petocz & Reid, 2002).

This paper specifically focuses on the results of a funded research project involving law students' experience of institutional learning and their perceptions of work within the legal profession. These ideas show that students are looking beyond an institutional focus for their learning and are looking towards their future as a component of their learning. The nature of legal work has expanded dramatically and this expansion coupled with 'essential' content specified by professional bodies has led to an institutional curriculum that focuses predominantly on specific legal ideas which students are expected to acquire. Yet, institutional learning is moving closer and closer towards educating professionals for their future careers but without a real knowledge of how students understand those future careers. It is important to find out how law students understand what it is to be a legal professional and how they experience learning within that context in order that we can more closely align our institutional learning environments with our own professional knowledge and the needs of students as future professionals.

We know from common observation that students learn differently within any classroom and within any discipline environment, but it is the nature of that variation that enables teachers to approach their development of learning environments in a systematic way. The discernment of the variation in student learning is an important first step in being able to challenge students about their own approaches to learning, challenge ourselves with the sort of learning our teaching fosters, and focus our students' learning towards more integrated and sophisticated approaches to study and work. In the music example, the one-on-one learning situation would seem to demand a close fit

between a student's expectation of learning music and the teacher's, and should result in a high quality learning environment. In reality, if a student and teacher both held limiting views, then they were both satisfied with the context, activities and outcomes of the encounter (Reid, 1997). If both had holistic views, then again a close match was possible. However, a teacher with the 'technical' view of professional work could be completely frustrating to a student who sought 'meaning', whilst a teacher with a 'meaning' focus could adapt and change the learning environment to suit a student with a 'technical' view. That research project demonstrated that even within that micro learning environment, teaching and learning could be mutually inclusive, or exclusive. However, such a micro learning environment is unusual in higher education. The outcomes of the statistics research indicated that learning environments could be deliberately shifted to take account of students' views of work and learning. In the book *Reading Statistics*, Petocz and Wood (2003) demonstrate an approach to pedagogy where statistical thinking is deliberately challenged and developed through a series of activities directed towards 'making meaning', using technical components (the focus of many other texts) as a means of complementing the making of meaning. The same approach was used in a course in regression analysis: discussion in classes encouraged students to explore their own learning and perceptions of professional work, and to contrast these with the research outcomes; the ideas were then integrated within the class activities, and supported through the focus of the tutorial laboratory sessions and with the assessment tasks (Reid & Petocz, in press). The accounting example focused on an issue of importance to professional accounting bodies. The problem was the ethical development of accountants through the use of institutional learning experiences. Jebeile deliberately intended an alignment (Biggs, 1999) between the large lecture situation, the tutorial components and the assessment tasks. The lecture was used to present a problematic professional scenario using small group discussions and questioning techniques, the tutorials were used to develop group-working skills focusing on a development of the initial scenario, and then the students worked in groups for a collaborative assessment task. However, despite the deliberate attempt at alignment, students did not see how ethics was related to their professional work or to their learning, and evaluations of their experience showed that they focused more on the pedagogical methods and the institutional requirements of their work. In this situation the exploration of their own professional understandings was not undertaken: there was simply an assumption that those students would see the importance of ethics for their future work (Jebeile & Reid, 2002).

These examples, in areas other than law, show evidence of a tripartite hierarchy (the 'Professional Entity', Petocz & Reid, 2002) that describes students' (and teachers') understanding of professional

work. Previous research (eg Prosser & Trigwell, 1999; Kember, 1997; Biggs, 1999) has established that there is a relation between students' perceptions of their learning situation and the ways in which they then go about their study. Other studies have linked this with students' ideas about their subject (eg Entwistle & Marton, 1994; Crawford *et al*, 1994; Petocz & Reid, 2001). In addition, it is apparent that students experience learning in their own domain of study in ways that may be interpreted as similar across fields of study – and at the same time in ways that are quite different. Our research has also shown that there is a relation between students' perceptions of their future work and the way they go about learning, and that this perception of work may be generic across disciplines. This relation – the Professional Entity – comprises three levels of understanding of the nature of professional work, Extrinsic Technical, Extrinsic Meaning and Intrinsic Meaning.

The Extrinsic Technical level describes a perception that professional work is constituted as a group of technical components that can be used when the work situation demands it. A characteristic of this limiting view is that professional work simply exists, and is experienced as being quite external to the individual. The Extrinsic Meaning level describes a perception that professional work is about developing the meaning inherent in discipline objects. The broadest level of the Professional Entity is the Intrinsic Meaning level. In this view, people perceive that their professional work is related to their own personal and professional being. In this article I explore how the Professional Entity is experienced in law, and how this understanding of law is related to students learning of law.

The situation of legal education

Legal education has been under reform in Australia for several years and recently Johnstone and Vignaendra (2003) have completed a commissioned report on learning outcomes and curriculum development. The report indicated that there was 'fierce competition among Australian Law schools' which has resulted in a certain amount of secrecy in the components that constitute a law degree. The report also described the change in legal education from the 1980s where LLB programs were 'aimed at school leavers' (p.1) with the implication that the accompanying teaching was focused on teaching legal rules. The subsequent change led to more focus on the teaching of legal *ideas* such as ethics or theory or gender. These are important findings for the present study as they demonstrate how institutions have focused on specific aspects of legal education – firstly as a preparation for a specific profession, and secondly as a preparation for a way of thinking. The findings of my own study challenge the efficacy of these 'changes' as many current students have clearly not noticed them!

A previous research study by Bond and LeBrun (1996) used the [now] well-established phenomenographic method to establish an outcome space describing variation in learning (Marton and Saljo, 1979) examining the nature of learning for two law students. In that paper it was found that aspects of ‘Students Conceptions of Learning’ could be related to ‘deep and surface approaches’ to learning law. A consequence of that paper was the articulation of a new way of focusing legal education, described in the book *The Quiet Revolution* (Le Brun and Johnstone, 1994) where teaching was encouraged to align with these perspectives.

At the same time, Keys and Orr (1996) explored the relationships between legal theory and learning with a group of 12 students. The commonalities of the students’ interview statements were described using three discrete outcomes:

The purpose of learning legal theory: (1) understanding (2) critical analysis (3) facilitating change (4) broadening outlooks (5) instrumental/practical value.

The relationship between legal theory and “law”: (1) theory is the law (2) they are two parts of the same whole (3) they are different – theory follows and critically analyses law (4) they are different – theory precedes and brings about the law (5) they are quite distinct – the law is rules, theory is explanatory knowledge – theory/praxis dichotomy.

What is legal theory?: (1) a coherent framework (2) questioning/critical analysis (3) a personal/individual activity (4) a potentially transformative (social) activity (5) “pure” or unpractised knowledge (6) speculation.

A further, unexpected, outcome was added during the course of the analysis.

Where does legal theory come from? (1) experts such as writers/thinkers/academics/judges (2) oneself (3) powerful individuals/groups.

These outcomes show general themes that emerged from a small group about students’ understanding of essentially four different topic areas. These issues are important to teachers of law and to legal practitioners, but they all focus on the complexities of specific aspects of the law curriculum. No attempt was made to describe the ways in which these categories may have been related to each other, demonstrating the usual compartmentalised approach taken to legal education. Further, these categories described students’ experiences from the perspective of a single subject. The research outcomes reported in this article do not include definitions of specific legal ideas, but rather the qualitatively different ways in which students understand learning law and the profession of law. Kift (2002) approaches the problem from a modelling perspective where

professional and personal attitudes are a focus of her teaching with early year law students. Here we make a link between the focus of students' learning in relation to their perceptions of what it is to be a lawyer. That there *is* a link, and that this link is so obviously strong, is very important for educators to know in order to help students and professionals challenge what is valued and laboured upon with the intention of conceptual change in learning and work.

The scope of this study

This research used a phenomenographic methodology. This methodology is appropriate for investigating people's understanding of the world around them. It results in the hierarchical description of the variation between people's experience or understanding of a phenomenon. As the focus of my investigation is on the different ways in which *students* understand learning and working in law, phenomenography is an ideal approach. This method uses in-depth interviews as its main method for data collection: Penfold's (1997) study of factors contributing to Indigenous students' experience of learning law used interviews to explore the *students'* experience in much the same way. Additionally, this study extends the early work of Le Brun and Johnstone (1996) who used outcomes from Marton and Saljo's research (1979) to compare with her own students, and goes beyond the work of Keys and Orr (1996) who used the phenomenographic approach to explore different legal concepts.

Each student interview aimed at enabling the participant to describe the extent of his/her experience and understanding of the phenomenon, in this case *learning in law and perception of professional legal work*. In order to explore the range of experiences within the law student population, early-year and fourth-year law students were invited to participate. At the conclusion of the data collection stage, 33 students had participated in the study: each interview transcript comprised 17–35 pages, and resulted in a total of over 200,000 words. The analysis focused on the meaning that is found within the transcripts rather than hunting for evidence of predefined categories. In this sense phenomenographic analysis is interpretive and emergent. Thus, categories describing the students' conceptions of law were developed on the basis of the range of qualitatively different responses observed in the transcripts. (This is not the same as Keys and Orr's analysis that outlined the commonalities between the responses.) Marton and Trigwell (2000, p.386) suggest that: "*Experiencing a situation in a certain way amounts to discovering certain critical features and attending to them at the same time. Different ways of experiencing the same situation originate from differences in what critical features are discerned and attended to at the same time.*" The

analysis of the interviews teased out the critical aspects of variation described by the students. This form of analysis results in the identification of ‘Categories of Description’ that detail the essence of the category, and how each category is qualitatively different from the others. In the section that follows, I describe the main findings of the study in terms of the *critical variation* in the experience of learning law.

Categories describing students’ experience of learning law

Acquisitive

1. Learning law is about acquiring a qualification.
2. Learning law is about acquiring legal tools.
3. Learning law is about acquiring the context of legal tools.

Discursive

4. Learning law is about critiquing the law.

Reflective

5. Learning law is about constituting a reflective and engaged idea of law.

The first three categories all describe an *acquisitive* orientation to learning. (Here I describe the categories without giving the supporting quotes which are reported in Reid *et al.* 2003).

1. Learning law is about acquiring a qualification. Students in this category want to gain the LLB degree. They see this qualification as bringing with it a status, admission to a prestigious profession and an excellent standard of living.

2. Learning law is about acquiring legal tools. Students in this category view the study of law as an apprenticeship which prepares them for practice in their chosen field. They wish to become familiar with the laws and regulations and to acquire basic research, communication and advocacy skills which will assist them in their profession.

3. Learning law is about acquiring the context of legal tools. Students in this category seek to acquire legal tools (as in the category above) but within a contextual framework. They find the contextual framework allows them to place the laws within a theoretical, political or historical setting. Such an approach provides the student with a clearer picture of the origins of the particular law, the workings of the current laws and the possible avenues for reform.

Category 4 is qualitatively different from the previous categories as the learning orientation shifts from being *acquisitive* to being *discursive*.

4. Learning law is about critiquing the law. Students in this category rely significantly on the contextual framework to question the underlying basis of existing laws and the values inherently embraced therein. They learn by actively critiquing the law and often see themselves as a ‘change agent’ whereby they can empower individuals or groups.

Category 5 is qualitatively different from the others as it describes an orientation to learning that is *reflective*.

5. Learning law is about constituting a reflective and engaged idea of law. Students in this category see legal education as a life-long learning process, creating a space where they can develop a constant reflective relationship with the law. Their learning intentions are often broad, allowing them to carry this framework to their professional life.

These categories show a range of qualitatively different ways of thinking about learning in law. The implications of these ways of thinking are huge. Students who espouse the most limited – acquisitive – views approach their learning in an instrumental fashion. They attribute highest relevance to the structure of legal rules and situations and then actively, and usually effectively, commit these rules to memory. There is also a worrying factor here. The limiting views also contain the intention to acquire social status and excellent remuneration. This intention is *active*, leading students to seek social and work situations that will lead to status and remuneration. The discursive category shows a qualitative difference, where students see themselves as effecting change through the system. They will also study the rules and contexts required, but see the usefulness of such rules as a means of facilitating the empowerment of community members. Finally, there are a few students who espouse the notion that learning in law enables them personally to instigate change and to be open to change through reflection and critique. These categories are an important finding for teachers of law as they imply that approaches to teaching should include spaces where students’ personal ideals are challenged, and that it is possibly more important to do this early to enable a more holistic approach to learning take place.

Students’ understanding of law as a profession

Now, I will look at the manner in which law students understand what it is to be a legal professional. The broad idea of the Professional Entity is seen as students describe the extrinsic technical view as ‘content’, the extrinsic meaning view as ‘sociological’ and the intrinsic meaning view as ‘personal’. Here I have included illustrative quotes to support the categories, as they give a very clear insight to the reader just how these law students perceive their future profession.

Content View [Extrinsic Technical] – Law is a collection of rules and regulations: Law is understood as a collection of rules and regulations that define social action. Students with this view may seek to increase their understanding of law by accumulating rules relating to specific legal contexts, applying the rules to certain ‘real’ experiences, examine the historical context of the rules, or find examples of how the rules change a situation. Here are a couple of quotes from Ashley’s (pseudonym) transcript:

Ashley: I think law is like kind of like rules, regulations.

Ashley: To me rules and regulations are the black and white bits of the law, more the “this is a case, this is the principle to follow, just follow it”, type of rules and regulations. I look at it from that perspective, just as in the general rules that you will follow, like if you are given a hypothetical situation, the rules and regulations are the ones that “that’s that, that’s the rule and that’s the precedent” type of thing.

These quotes demonstrate the idea that law is comprised of rules. When students have this idea about the nature of law, then their learning is focused on the acquisition of such facts. The quotes also demonstrate a sort of helplessness as the student indicates that there are simply such a lot of rules to learn and that it must be done. Sarah’s quotes also show this view of law but recognise that the institution is, in part, to blame for it. Sarah has difficulty in connecting her studies with her ideas about work, which are also nebulous.

Sarah: I don’t necessarily think I have my own learning aims, they are sort of shaped by the way the course is run itself, so I don’t think there’s, that you have your own personal learning aims because you can’t really have that.

Sarah: Sometimes I see it as a waste of time. But I like understanding the reasoning and the purpose behind it all, I just wonder sometimes whether employers know whether, I don’t know, sometimes I don’t see the purpose, I don’t see what it’s giving me that I can use, Like use in the future or in an employment situation.

Jason’s quote that follows shows an alarmingly candid view of legal work, that it is about a large salary package and it is this that keeps him motivated.

Jason: Um, doing five years at Uni and then getting a nice big salary at the end of it, hopefully. [Interviewer: Yeah?] Seriously um, I think it has two sides to it, a technical side which you’re learning the elements of certain things, you’re learning the construction, how you would apply law in a kind of practical sense in the real world, but also it, it kind of reaches into the humanities as well, especially at this uni I’ve found. There’s a lot of emphasis on the kind of social issues surrounding law as well as kind of the, your basic elements of it, like how you would advise a kind of client and the kind of issues that you’d advise them on. Yeah, I think that’s how I see it at the moment.

Jason: *My ideal job would require not too much legal research, I wouldn't want to be in the role of constantly looking up criminal legal textbook and searching rules for legal technicalities and things like that, I'd more like to emphasise working with clients, kind of discussing legal issues, like simple legal issues with them, more kind of advocacy I think, rather than working as a paralegal kind of position where you're kind of, it's not that I don't like doing research, I think it's just, the more rewarding part of the job is just dealing with clients and then imparting on them the knowledge that you know and it's, it's not fun having to go "I'll just have to get back to you on this legal rule, just go away, I'll look this up and come back", I think it would be better as kind of a lawyer to know your area really well and just be able to tell them straight up what kind of issues that they face.*

Jason sees that legal professionals should 'know your area really well and just be able to tell them straight up'. The content view includes the idea that law is a high status job where legal professionals 'know' the answers and that it is their job to tell. This is intriguing as students who espouse this theory also depend on their teachers to deliver that information in an easily accessible package.

Finally, the content view contains the belief that law is about the regulation of society.

Tereza: *Well law is everything basically, its um, just knowing law is knowing everything that goes around in the country, everything, we live in a society where everything is done, is regulated by law, everything is done by order, and just knowing that is um, gives you that greater advantage over, I guess being a law student or being a lawyer you have that advantage over everybody else, because you know all the bits and pieces and all the um, well hopefully I will know a lot of the regulations.*

Tereza: *See again I think of law and I think of order, I think of law and I think of putting things in order, putting, I think of looking at something from the top and I think of like a box and you have all these, you know, lines between and you know you can't go straight, you have to turn right and then you have to turn left and that is how I think of law, and it should be that way because otherwise people would be bumping into each other, like that's why you have traffic lights, that's why, you know you go by what's order, law is order, law is putting society in order, law is making sure that we all live in a better society, we go about our own things in harmony, then again, law can also be seen as controlling us.*

Sociological View [Extrinsic Meaning] – Law is a dynamic system: Law is considered to be a dynamic system which can be used to maintain the status quo, that can change society or be changed by it, and that can provide a framework to create equality and provide justice.

Charbel: *I think law impacts on many areas of like, you know economic, it's... I see it myself more in a social way, but it impacts on economic, commercial, government, um it really impacts in our every day lives, so in a way I think that a law degree is really imperative. I mean it's so important just in terms of property transactions and insurance, and it's sort of like a general knowledge course in a way, so, but for myself personally I see it as a social thing, achieving justice for people.*

Charbel: *To learn more about these social issues, to, I guess to gain an understanding of life. Also to learn, you know, things about the commercial aspects of law and just to gain a general understanding of it.*

Saskia: *Regardless of whether you are a lawyer or not a lawyer, is that it is everywhere, it's even in the things that we don't notice, like daylight saving, nobody thinks of that as being a law, but it is, that is just the law interfering with normal life.*

Saskia: *Law is like it's own little world which is kind of removed from the rest of reality, which can be good and can be bad I think.*

Saskia: *Um, it's dynamic and it's, it's problem solving thinking at its best I think because you have got to think on your feet, and it's the fact that you are probably never really doing the same thing, because the people, there's always going to be a different component in the case, because if there wasn't then it would be just decided by a precedent and you wouldn't even bother taking it that far, it would just be a huge waste of money. But honestly if something is dead set, set in concrete, which it very rarely is because no two situations are ever exactly the same there wouldn't really be any point.*

These two students' quotes demonstrate the sociological view of law, where law is a component of society and can be changed by society. They recognise that law regulates what they do as individuals and that their role as legal professionals is to facilitate societal regulation.

Paul: *I think we have law for two main reasons, I think, the first is to um to regulate or to prescribe a certain type of behaviour that society considers valuable, in all aspects, in day to day relations between people and also in commercial dealing, and the second reason I think is also to serve a purpose as well, law facilitates other things, which could be a range of other things whether it's commercial dealings or it facilitates the type of society that we want to achieve. So it has a dual role in not only prescribing the type of society that we want but also helping to achieve that type of society, so I guess it's constitutive as well as um facilitative.*

Leonie: *I can't imagine myself having my own practice, being the big boss, I can't imagine myself being a barrister, probably a solicitor, I don't know, private or public firm, I can't imagine myself as an academic, um yeah, probably a solicitor in a firm, maybe DPP or, I don't know, just something that would keep myself interested and on my toes. But I can also see myself using my legal knowledge not directly but through social policy or like um another government department or like market research or something with like, I'm not sure.*

Personal View [Intrinsic Meaning] – Law is an extension of self: In this view, law is considered to be a way of thinking and living. Rules and systems are used to inform a personal reflective stance whereby the person can have a distinct, intrinsic and ethically consistent approach to law.

Saskia: *And I think with law, at least if you are doing, if you put effort into learning and if you are interested in learning, you'll start to think in a different way, and it is not actually something that you can switch on and switch off for example, I've done, it changes what you value.*

Elaine: *Um, I think it's um about tradition, I think it's about philosophy, I think it's about regulating, um and it's about maintaining the status quo, but it's also about innovative things and changing, changing society, and interacting with market forces in society and it's part of the whole of society. So when I say it's all pervasive, it's um, it's also about hierarchies as well, it's about judges and judicial wisdom and about leaders, and about judges and about what statements they make to society and interaction with government and legislation and the constitution I suppose, it's about citizenship, it's about everything, it's a lot of stuff, quite a lot of stuff. It's very complex, so what it's about is every aspect of life in a way, so that's why it's such a wonderful thing to study.*

Elaine: *If you really wanted to be able to interact with law and actually to be a good professional person you need to know more than just okay "what's in the book, what do I need to know", you need to be a better person in yourself, and you can only do that if you have time to reflect and to look at the theory, to have the theory as the overarching, like a symphony, interpret the different theory, and draw from it then your own conclusions.*

Liz: *In an ideological sense, someone who uses their knowledge of the law to, to make resolution of disputes or processes that need to happen, happen in a smooth way, with the least trauma and antagonism to people, and who can do so competently, kind of important, with an awareness of what the outcome or what affect their actions have, on people, and on society more generally.*

Paul: *Well I think its based on that responsibility which lawyers have, we have been very fortunate to get the training and education which they do get, which we do get, and I think that you can use that education in a number of ways, not just to serve commercial ends, but to serve personal and other ends as well and particularly from, well from a lot of subjects which you study at uni, particularly Criminal Law I guess, you get a good understanding of the type of things which people go through and the type, and the role which lawyers can play in people's lives, it can be a very significant one, and it's a lot different to serving a commercial client where you won't often see the fruits of your labour as such if you are just facilitating a merger, whereas if you are helping someone get off a criminal charge, you can see the difference that it makes to their day to day life, and I think that seeing both those aspects is very fulfilling. So that's why I'd like to do it, to get a different experience and to see the difference which you can make in a person's life.*

The relations between the Professional Entity and learning law

The diagram below shows the relations between students' ideas about learning in law and of professional work. If a student expects that law constitutes a collection of rules and regulations, then their learning is directed towards the acquisition of those rules with the outcome of gaining a qualification or the tools required for different legal situations. There is a very clear qualitative difference between the content view of law and the sociological. In that milieu, law is conceived of as a dynamic system. Thus, learning is directed towards becoming part of that system through a close examination of the rules in specific contexts, or by directing their attention towards a critique of the system. When students hold the extrinsic technical or the extrinsic meaning view of

professional work, described in the context of law as the content or sociological views, they are expressing an orientation to work that is *beyond themselves*. In this sense, whilst students have an idea that they are a part of a system (complex as it may be), they do not relate to it intrinsically and thus have the option of standing aloof. However, the (relatively few) students who describe the intrinsic meaning, or personal, view of law have the option of being a part of the dynamic legal system, contributing to legal practice and discourse from a reflective and engaged stance. It is important to note, that of the 33 students involved in this study, only five talked about law from this ethical personal stance. These students indicated that their learning was mediated at time by the institutional situations that demanded their progress down the hierarchy. In those situations the learning context, including assessment tasks, afforded only the acquisition or critique of rules. Conversely, students who express the extrinsic and acquisitive views of work and learning, are not able to move towards the holistic views as they are simply unaware that they exist.

Professional Entity		Learning Law			
		Acquisitive		Discursive	Reflective
Extrinsic Technical	Content View: Law is a collection of rules and regulations	Learning is about acquiring a qualification			
		Learning is about acquiring legal tools			
Extrinsic Meaning	Sociological View: Law is a dynamic system		Learning is about acquiring the context of legal tools	Learning is about critiquing the law	
Intrinsic Meaning	Personal View: Law is an extension of self				Learning is about constituting a reflective and engaged idea of Law

Saskia’s transcript contained evidence of all of the categories described. In the previous section you will notice that her words have been used as part of the illustration of the Sociological and Personal views of the Professional Entity. The categories of learning in law and the Entity are hierarchical in nature where the more holistic categories are inclusive of the others. Saskia’s transcript was one of the five that demonstrated the inclusive and holistic character of the broader categories. This is an important idea as students who are able to express this broader level are also the students who have

the choice to move between ideas as the learning situation demands (see Prosser and Trigwell, 1999). These categories describe the essence of variation between different ways of experiencing learning in law and perception of professional work. It is not my intention, nor is it useful, to categorise each *student* as the transcripts only represent a specific space in time for the student. One would hope that students' views would be enhanced through their lived experience within and without the institutional context. Having said that, the categories are contiguous and the transcripts show strong evidence that the acquisitive views of learning sit well within a technical view of law, and at the most holistic level, the Intrinsic Meaning (personal) view of professional work situates the reflective approach to learning.

Conclusions

The outcomes of this research project imply strongly that further change for the preparation of legal professionals is required. Whilst many teachers focus on improving the learning situation through careful sequencing and planning of topics, materials and interactions, it seems important to re-adjust that focus towards enabling students to broaden their views of the profession. It is important to integrate students' conceptions of learning in the subject of law with their ideas about their future work as legal professionals. Limiting views of work are related to limiting views of learning, and thus educators need to use curriculum to achieve a better focus on the potential of a work situation instead of a primary focus on isolated content components. Thinking about curriculum change for the development of future legal professionals demands systematic professional development opportunities for teachers of law. Whilst this article has focused on student understanding of learning in law and the profession of law, there is an implied need to help academics rethink their institutional role for student learning. Simply put, we need to work out how best to provide classroom opportunities for students to challenge their conceptions of both learning and law, to confront limiting conceptions in an effort to foster the more inclusive, and emphasise a personal engagement. Keys and Orr (1996) described students' understanding of where legal theory comes from and those findings – although in a different order – seem to support the idea that the legal profession is constituted as law by other professionals (such as Judges), as a social system (by other powerful people), and as something that an individual can participate in. While this article is focused on a study in law the outcomes would seem to be relevant in other professional areas. The previous studies described in the introduction lend support to the notion that the Professional Entity is an important component of students' study and, whilst the flavour of the Professional Entity changes with each discipline, the general idea is robust. These research studies suggest that it is

important to help students link their learning with work, and that this link would be most effective if students come to engage at the highest levels... what a challenge!

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