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Article

Thinking Outside the Disciplinary Box: Building Better Lawyers to Solve Wicked Problems

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Abstract

The paper aims to bridge a gap in the Australian law curriculum by presenting an interdisciplinary pedagogical approach designed to improve students' transition to post-university life. Implemented within a university pro-bono health-justice legal clinic affiliated with the University of Canberra Medical and Counselling Centre, this experiential design has a dual purpose. It not only brings together lawyers, health professionals, and students to achieve optimal outcomes for patients and clients, but also focuses on enhancing students' competencies, confidence, and interprofessional collaborative skills through three key initiatives:

- a. client interviews – engaging students in client-interview role-plays and actual client interviews to concentrate on developing essential lawyering skills;
- b. a well-being program – under the guidance of an in-house psychologist using a coaching and performance psychology framework to foster students' confidence and resilience by providing crucial support for their transition from academic to professional environments; and
- c. interprofessional teamwork immersion – providing opportunities for students to observe, reflect, and actively assist lawyers and health professionals in a real-world team environment.

This paper discusses the teaching methods used in an interdisciplinary law clinic to help students improve their competencies, confidence, and interprofessional collaborative skills. It also demonstrates that such an approach better equips students for professional environments, enhances their social justice awareness, and improves their capacity to deal with complex and wicked problems. This innovative methodology offers both professional and personal development opportunities which other law schools seeking to improve educational outcomes could easily replicate.

Keywords: Interdisciplinary Pedagogy; Performance Psychology; Well-Being

I. Introduction

Many Australian law academics consider that justice education is in crisis. Legal educators are constantly being asked to do things differently and to do more with less. Systemic change has been implemented across Australian universities, often with minimal consultation, lead

time, or support and academic positions and status have increasingly come under threat. The global pandemic not only saw the numbers of international students at Australian universities plummet,¹ but also an urgent need to quickly move legal education online, at least in the short term.² Additionally, artificial intelligence is revolutionising the legal industry by using advanced algorithms to create legal templates and provide guidance at low cost.³ Undoubtedly, legal education is undergoing, and will continue to undergo, significant change.

Menkel-Meadow's comments of 2013 are now even more pressing: '[If] the goal of the legal profession is to include solving human problems and producing both peace and justice, then we need to realign, reimagine, and innovate new methods of legal service delivery.'⁴ Her words were prophetic and highlighted the need to innovate and rethink how and what is taught in law degrees. Inspired by Menkel-Meadow's vision, the authors embarked on a journey to rethink our approach to legal education.

The purpose of this paper is to share the teaching methods used in an interdisciplinary clinic designed to help students improve their competencies, confidence, and interprofessional collaborative skills. Additionally, the paper highlights how interdisciplinary awareness and interprofessional teamwork⁵ can lead to 'new methods of legal service delivery,'⁶ inspire students to think about the sorts of problems they may aspire to solve when they graduate, and better prepare them for professional environments.

II. Background to the Interdisciplinary Clinic

In 2017, the authors established the University of Canberra Health Justice Legal Advice Clinic (the Clinic), a unique initiative aimed at redefining traditional university law school clinics.⁷ Located on-campus and integrated with the University of Canberra Medical & Counselling Centre, the Clinic facilitated a seamless collaboration between lawyers, health professionals and law students aspiring to achieve optimal outcomes for patient-clients.⁸

The Clinic was established with two main goals: to provide comprehensive services to clients⁹ through a collaboration between legal and health professionals, with support from law students,¹⁰ and to enhance the learning experiences of law students by offering access to a dedicated interdisciplinary teaching team.¹¹ The objective of the teaching team was to improve the competencies, confidence, and inter-professional teamwork (collaborative) skills of law students, allowing them to navigate complex patient-client issues within a safe and supportive environment. This hands-on experience was also intended to better prepare students for a variety of professional careers and equip them to tackle the complex and 'wicked' problems and challenges they would encounter post-university. 'Wicked' problems are defined here as those that cannot be addressed through a single, straightforward solution: as complexity arises from interdependencies, solving one aspect of a problem may create or reveal other

¹ Naaman Zhou, 'Pandemic Halves New International Student University Enrolments in Australia' *The Guardian* (online, 6 May 2021) <<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/may/06/pandemic-halves-new-international-student-university-enrolments-in-australia>>.

² Erika Smith and Ece Kaya, 'Online University Teaching at the Time of COVID-19 (2020): An Australian Perspective' (2021) 9 *Special Issue: Covid-19 Education Response to Pandemic*, 2.

³ Serhii Leleko and Roman Chupryna 'How Artificial Intelligence Transforms Legal Services in 2024', *SPD Technology* (online, 24 May 2024) <<https://spd.tech/artificial-intelligence/how-artificial-intelligence-transforms-legal-services-in-2024/>>.

⁴ Carrie Menkel-Meadow, 'Doing Good Instead of Doing Well? What Lawyers Could be Doing in a World of 'Too Many' Lawyers' (2013) 3 (3) *Onati Socio-Legal Series*, 378.

⁵ Werner Schäfke, Juan A Mayoral Diaz-Asensio and Martine Stagelund Hvidt 'Socialisation to Interdisciplinary Legal Education: An Empirical Assessment' (2018) 52 (3) *The Law Teacher*, 365.

⁶ Menkel-Meadow (n 4) 379.

⁷ The Clinic is located on-campus at the University of Canberra, in Canberra, the capital of Australia.

⁸ The University of Canberra Medical & Counselling Centre is a medical practice with 17 general medical practitioners, seven psychologists, one psychiatrist, and four registered nurses.

⁹ The clients of the Clinic are typically (but not always) patients of the University of Canberra Medical & Counselling Centre.

¹⁰ The students who participated in the Clinic were enrolled in law elective subjects: either a Law & Justice Internship or a Legal Advice Clinic unit.

¹¹ The initial teaching team consisted of three professionals: two law academics (one tenured and one sessional) who were also legal practitioners who taught/supervised at the Clinic one day per week during the semester, and a counselling psychologist employed at the University of Canberra Medical & Counselling Centre who contributed 3-4 hours per week during the semester.

issues. The wicked problem concept was first introduced by Rittel and Webber¹² who identified ten defining characteristics of such problems within the realm of social planning. The term has since been expanded to encompass challenges in other fields, with examples of 'wicked' problems including climate change, poverty, mental health, and domestic violence.

Since its inception in 2017, the Clinic has undergone three iterations, each offering unique learning experiences for students while providing a pro-bono legal service to the community. The first iteration involved an informal collaboration between the University of Canberra's Medical & Counselling Centre, the Canberra Law School, and a sole practitioner law firm. During the second iteration, from mid-2019, the Clinic operated as a partnership between Legal Aid ACT, the University of Canberra Medical & Counselling Centre, and The Canberra Law School.¹³ The research for this paper was conducted during this second iteration.¹⁴

In early 2022, the third iteration of the Clinic commenced by way of a formal partnership between the University of Canberra Medical & Counselling Centre and the sole practitioner law firm involved in the first iteration.¹⁵

Throughout all iterations, the Clinic has continued to maintain its commitment to interdisciplinary collaboration, student education, pastoral care and support, and access to justice for vulnerable patient-clients.

III. Interdisciplinary education and interdisciplinary teaching

In the contemporary world, an interdisciplinary or interprofessional approach¹⁶ to problem-solving is highly valued as governments, organizations, and individuals strive to tackle complex or 'wicked' problems. Often, addressing these issues requires drawing on expertise from various professions, a strategy long practised by the health profession.¹⁷

As Klein notes, interdisciplinarity is the 'process of answering a question, solving a problem, or addressing a topic, that is too broad or complex to be dealt with adequately by a single discipline or profession.'¹⁸

The significance of interprofessional collaboration is underscored by reports emphasising the skills essential for future workplaces, with many organisations and employers seeking individuals who engage in interdisciplinary thinking and have an ability to work in interprofessional teams. The skills required for future workplaces include problem-solving, self-management, teamwork, and technological proficiency.¹⁹ Recognising a gap between these skills and current educational practices, a recent OECD report advocated for the integration of real-world applications into learning experiences. It also emphasised the

¹² Horst Rittel and Melbin Webber, 'Dilemma in General Theory of Planning' (1973) 4(2) *Policy Sciences* 156.

¹³ Legal Aid ACT is a government-funded body which provides legal assistance to socially and economically disadvantaged people living within the Australian Capital Territory (the ACT) which is one of Australia's two jurisdictions which retain Australian Commonwealth oversight. Canberra, the capital of Australia, is in the ACT. Each of the five Australian States and two Territories has its own Legal Aid office.

¹⁴ The research was conducted over three semesters: Semester 2, 2019, Summer Semester 2019-2020, and Semester 1, 2020. The Clinic was temporarily discontinued from mid-2020 due to the onset of the global pandemic.

¹⁵ The third iteration of the Clinic commenced in February 2022.

¹⁶ In this paper, the terms *interdisciplinary* and *interprofessional collaboration* are used interchangeably, reflecting the dual engagement of students in both contexts. In educational settings, *interdisciplinary collaborative work* typically refers to the integration of different academic disciplines to address complex problems. In contrast, *interprofessional teamwork* involves professional environments with individuals from diverse professional backgrounds working collaboratively to provide services or solve complex issues. See also Elizabeth McLaney et al, 'A Framework for Interprofessional Team Collaboration in Hospital Setting: Advancing Team Competencies and Behaviours' (2022) 35 (2) *Health Manage Forum* 112.

¹⁷ Brennan Bosch and Holly Mansell, 'Interprofessional Collaboration in Health Care' (2015) 148 (4) *Canadian Pharmacy Journal* 176; and Susan Nancarrow et al, 'Ten Principles of Good Interdisciplinary Teamwork' (2013) 11 *Human Resources for Health*, 19.

¹⁸ Julie Thompson Klein, 'Mapping Interdisciplinary Studies' in Jerry Gaff (eds), *The Academy in Transition* (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 1999).

¹⁹ Kate Whiting, 'These Are the Top 10 Job Skills of Tomorrow – And How Long It Takes To Learn Them', *World Economic Forum* (World Education Forum - Education and Skills, 21 October 2020) < <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/10/top-10-work-skills-of-tomorrow-how-long-it-takes-to-learn-them/>.

importance of providing interdisciplinary and collaborative learning alongside discipline-based knowledge to meet the demands of a modern workforce.²⁰

At universities, interdisciplinary education remains a modern educational strategy.²¹ Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States have increasingly adopted interdisciplinary approaches, integrating them into courses, joint degree programs, specific subjects and research centres to prepare students for complex problem-solving in various professional environments.²² Educators have also embraced interdisciplinary approaches, incorporating cross-disciplinary expertise, co-teaching, and project-based units into electives. Some universities offer interdisciplinary elective choices, such as legal clinical programs in law schools, which collaborate with disciplines such as medicine, social work, and counselling, creating interdisciplinary teams to holistically address complex client issues.²³

Yet, the term 'interdisciplinary' is often used loosely in education, referring to a generalist education rather than specific interdisciplinary methodologies. This leads to a focus on the outcome instead of the process and often results in a superficial approach to teaching multiple disciplines without fostering a deep understanding of their interconnectedness or the intricate process of integration.²⁴

There are several reasons for this. Interdisciplinary education requires time, additional resources, specific expertise, and support from faculty and universities.²⁵ Assessing interdisciplinary learning outcomes can also be complex,²⁶ and there is a lack of teaching pedagogy for interdisciplinary approaches.²⁷

In 1999, Klein highlighted the lack of unique, interdisciplinary pedagogical approaches which are active, student-centred, and 'promote dialogue and community, higher order critical thinking, and problem-solving'.²⁸ In 2020, Bosch noted that there was still 'a lack of a unique set of pedagogies to support interdisciplinary teaching'.²⁹

It is challenging to integrate interdisciplinary approaches into the Australian law school curriculum because of its focus on legal doctrine and skills in isolation from other subjects and disciplines. There are also limited opportunities for interdisciplinary learning in law elective subjects. However, the changing professional landscape necessitates a re-evaluation of the skills required of future lawyers.

Much scholarly work focuses on the gaps in the law curriculum. In Australia, reports discuss the need for changes to legal education in light of the evolving nature of legal work, technological advancements, and disruptions in legal services.³⁰ They also highlight the additional skills and competencies required by law graduates, including interdisciplinary experiences and approaches that should be incorporated in the law curriculum.³¹

²⁰ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *The Future of Education and Skills Education 2030* (Report, 5 April 2018) <https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2018/06/the-future-of-education-and-skills_5424dd26/54ac7020-en.pdf>.

²¹ Research shows that interdisciplinary teaching has numerous educational benefits for students. In *The Oxford Handbook of Interdisciplinarity* by Robert Frodeman, Julie Klein and Robert Pacheco (Oxford University Press, 2017) various interdisciplinary competencies are discussed, including higher level of communication and collaboration, critical and creative thinking, systems thinking, synthesis and integration, flexibility and adaptability, and ethical and social awareness.

²² Lyria Bennett Moses 'The Need for Lawyers' (2018) *UNSW Law Research Paper* no. 18-46.

²³ By way of example: Co-Health Legal Clinic at Monash University (online, 20 May 2024) <<https://www.monash.edu/law/home/cle/archive/clinics/CoHealth-Monash-Legal-Assistance-Clinic>>.

²⁴ Loy Hui Chieh, 'Interdisciplinarity in Teaching: What It Is and How to Make it Work' (*Times Higher Education*, 27 April 2024) <<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/campus/interdisciplinarity-teaching-what-it-and-how-make-it-work>>.

²⁵ Greta S Bosch, 'De-Constructing Myths about Interdisciplinary: Is Now the Time to Rethink Interdisciplinarity in Legal Education?' (2020) 1(1) *European Journal of Legal Education*, 30.

²⁶ Michelle Rhodes, 'Issues and Challenges in Interdisciplinary Course and Program Transfer in BC' (*BC Council on Admission & Transfer*, January 2019) <<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED596470.pdf>>. This paper emphasises that each discipline has its own methods, theories and professional norms, thus making it difficult to integrate curriculums, particularly if academic disciplinary experts have specific or limited knowledge.

²⁷ Bosch (n 26) 37.

²⁸ Klein (n 19) 50.

²⁹ Bosch (n 26) 37.

³⁰ Council of Australian Law Deans, *Reimagining the Professional Regulation of Australian Legal Education* (Report, 21 December 2021) <https://cald.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Reimagining-KiftNakano_FINAL.pdf>.

³¹ Law Society of New South Wales, *The Future of Law and Innovation in the Profession* (Report, 2017) <<https://www.lawsociety.com.au/sites/default/files/2018-03/1272952.pdf>>.

Australian research³² and anecdotal evidence suggest that law schools are failing to adequately prepare graduates for practice and other professional careers. It demonstrates that the skills being taught are not keeping up with what is required in modern-day environments.³³ New law graduates and final-year law students have also expressed concerns about being insufficiently prepared for professional roles.³⁴

Ideally, law graduates should be well-prepared to pursue a wide range of professional careers, working across different jurisdictions, and in various professional contexts beyond traditional legal practice.³⁵ An interdisciplinary approach fosters a better understanding of the connections between law and society and allows for participation in interdisciplinary or inter-professional teams working on complex real-world problems.³⁶ Interdisciplinary education, as described by Newell, addresses complex questions, solves problems, or tackles topics that cannot be managed by a single discipline.³⁷ This method leverages insights from various disciplinary perspectives to achieve a comprehensive understanding of issues.

Research has identified essential principles for an effective interdisciplinary teaching framework. These include ensuring students are able to think critically, embrace ambiguity, recognise biases, and analyse ethical concerns.³⁸ A successful framework incorporates these principles with specific objectives, then selects the relevant disciplines; designs an integrated or co-integrated curriculum; and implements collaborative, team-based learning, problem-based learning, and role-plays. At the same time, we think interdisciplinary education should create a supportive environment where students feel safe to express ideas, ask questions, and reflect on their learning and offer assessment methods which reinforce the interdisciplinary nature of the content.³⁹

Interdisciplinary teaching pedagogy is lacking, particularly in the law school curriculum. Some elective subjects are found in the law curriculum, and some legal clinics adopt interdisciplinary approaches in their teaching and learning,⁴⁰ but these are exceptions, often dependent on resources and university and faculty support. Unfortunately, the current law curriculum is typically taught within disciplinary silos, limiting students' opportunities to engage in interdisciplinary or interprofessional teamwork.⁴¹

In the field of health education, there is an effective approach for integrating interdisciplinary teaching into the curriculum. The health disciplines utilise an interprofessional teamwork competency framework specifically designed for health professions.⁴² This framework is integrated into the teaching model and covers competencies such as understanding roles, ethical practice, conflict resolution, communication, and teamwork.⁴³

³² For example, Queensland Law Society, *The Job Readiness of Law Graduates and Entry Level Solicitors in Private Practice* (Final Report, 1 December 2022) <<https://www.qls.com.au/getattachment/d6f794fa-7f09-4010-82c2-849974fbd3a3/qls-job-readiness-report-final-1-12-22-complete-version-.pdf>>.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Stefanie Costi, 'I'm A Law Graduate, But My Uni Didn't Prepare Me For The Real World' (*Australian Financial Review*, 23 April 2023) <<https://www.afr.com/work-and-careers/education/i-m-a-law-graduate-but-my-uni-didn-t-prepare-me-for-the-real-world-20230420-p5d1wd>>.

³⁵ Research and anecdotal information suggest that less than 50% of law graduates enter traditional legal practice. See the College of Law, 'Submission in Relation to Proposed Admission Laws to the National Uniform Law Legal Services Council Admissions Committee (January 2015).

³⁶ Rittel and Webber (n 13) 156.

³⁷ William Newell, 'The State of the Field: Interdisciplinary Theory' (2013) 31 (22) *Issues in Interdisciplinary Studies* 43.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Newell (n 38) 43.

⁴⁰ Janet Weinstein et al, 'Teaching Teamwork to Law Students' (2013) 63 (1) *Journal of Legal Education* 37-39.

⁴¹ Anita Weinberg and Carol Harding 'Interdisciplinary Teaching and Collaboration in Higher Education: A Concept Whose Time Has Come' (2014) 13 (1) *Legal Education Digest*, 6.

⁴² Christie van Diggele et al, 'Interprofessional Education: Tips for Design and Implementation' 20 (2) (2020) *Peer Teacher Training in Health Professional Education* <<https://bmcomeduc.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12909-020-02286-z>> accessed 24 May 2024.

⁴³ Elizabeth McLaney, et al, 'A Framework for Interprofessional Team Collaboration in a Hospital Setting: Advancing Team Competencies and Behaviours, (2022) 35(2) *Healthcare Management Forum*, 112 <<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8873279/>>.

IV. Our interdisciplinary teaching framework and approach

When developing our interdisciplinary teaching framework for the Clinic, our primary objective was to provide students with a valuable learning experience to facilitate their transition from university to professional life. We identified three key competencies as essential for law students: legal competencies, confidence, and inter-professional teamwork (or collaborative) skills which emphasise students' understanding of their role. Our framework aimed to enhance these core skills while simultaneously fostering a safe, nurturing, and collaborative teaching environment.⁴⁴

We opted for a scaffolded teaching approach. Students honed their legal competencies both through role-playing client interviews and involvement in real-life client interactions. A dedicated well-being program was designed to strengthen students' confidence and resilience in the context of the Clinic workplace.⁴⁵ Interprofessional teamwork skills were cultivated through immersive experiences and a series of seminars from practitioners across a range of disciplines.

Below is an overview of our reasoning for adopting these three initiatives with reference to relevant literature.

(1) Role-plays

Role-play simulations are used as part of a range of experiential learning opportunities to bridge the theoretical and practical gap between legal (academic) knowledge and skills.⁴⁶ Client interviews are an integral component of a lawyer's work and are often simulated by way of a client interview role-play.⁴⁷ Through the process of undertaking a role-play client interview, students gain legal practical skills, including for example effective communication skills and the ability to deal with client issues sensitively.⁴⁸

Role-play client interviews at law schools have been shown to 'simultaneously create opportunities to delve into critical thought and reflect on the meaning and purpose of law, and ethical considerations.'⁴⁹ Other benefits include motivating students to learn,⁵⁰ promoting deep learning of the course material,⁵¹ and improving students' overall confidence,⁵² personal engagement and sense of belonging,⁵³ and well-being.⁵⁴

Rarely are client interviewing skills embedded within the core curriculum, leaving many law graduates to learn about them post-graduation. In contrast, health education, such as medical or psychological training, embeds client interviewing throughout the course, ensuring comprehensive skills development. In our view, the fragmented approach in legal education hinders many students' ability to integrate their legal knowledge and skills effectively prior to graduating.

⁴⁴ Richard Ryan and Edward Deci, *Self-Determination Theory: Basic Psychological Needs in Motivation, Development and Wellness* (New York: Guilford Press, 2017).

⁴⁵ Toon Taris and Wilmar Schaufeli, 'Individual Well-Being and Performance At Work' in Cary Cooper (eds) *Current Issues in Work and Organisational Psychology* (Routledge, 2018).

⁴⁶ Other experiential learning opportunities include internships, legal clinics, placements, work-based learning, and project-based work. David Kolb, *Experiential Learning, Experience as Source of Learning and Development* (Upper Saddle River, Prentice Hall, 1984).

⁴⁷ Jill Howieson and Shane Rogers, 'Rethinking the Lawyer-Client Interview: Taking a Relational Approach' (2019) 26(4) *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law* 659.

⁴⁸ Adrian Evans et al, *Best Practices Australian Clinical Legal Education* (Office for Learning and Teaching, September 2012) <<https://cald.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Best-Practices-Australian-Clinical-Legal-Education-Sept-2012.pdf>>.

⁴⁹ Julie Turner, Alison Bone and Jeanette Ashton, 'Reasons Why Law Students Should Have Access to Learning Law Through a Skills-Based Approach' (2018) 52 (1) *The Law Teacher* 4.

⁵⁰ Cleo Cherryholmes 'Some Current Research on Effectiveness of Educational Simulations: Implications for Alternative Strategies' (1966) 10 *American Behavioural Scientist* 4-7.

⁵¹ Ben Waters, 'A Part to Play: The Value of Role-Play Simulation in Undergraduate Legal Education' (2016) 50 *The Law Teacher*; and Jane Mikkelsen, Marit Reime and Anette Harris, 'Nursing Students' Learning of Managing Cross-Infections: Scenario-Based Simulation Training Versus Research Groups' (2008) 28 *Nurse Education Today*.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Riette Du Plessis, *Clinical Legal Education: Law Clinic Design and Assessment Tools* (Juta, 2016) 47.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

(2) Well-being

Research shows that law students at university often experience high levels of psychological distress, which negatively impacts their well-being.⁵⁵ This distress may be caused by factors such as the law curriculum,⁵⁶ law students' perfectionist type personalities,⁵⁷ the emphasis on thinking like a lawyer,⁵⁸ and the significant workload and culture in law schools.⁵⁹

In Australia, there is an increasing emphasis on wellness within the legal profession⁶⁰ and legal education system,⁶¹ with many stakeholders committed to 'making wellness core business.'⁶² Australian law schools are actively contributing to the understanding and practice of promoting the well-being of law students⁶³ through various approaches. These include applying a range of theoretical perspectives, such as socio-legal, psychological and ethical lenses⁶⁴, conducting empirical research that informs the teaching of well-being education,⁶⁵ and implementing specific teaching and educational strategies.⁶⁶

Significant efforts have been undertaken by law schools and academics to assist law students to improve their resilience, confidence and overall well-being, particularly focusing on first-year law students. However, there has been limited support for students in later years who face different challenges as they transition out of university.⁶⁷

⁵⁵ See for example, International Bar Association, *Mental Wellbeing in the Legal Profession (A Global Study, October 2021)* <<https://www.ibanet.org/document?id=IBA-report-Mental-Wellbeing-in-the-Legal-Profession-A-Global-Study>>.

⁵⁶ Molly Townes O'Brien, Stephen Tang and Kath Hall, 'No Time to Lose: Negative Impact on Law Student Wellbeing May Begin in Law School in Year One' (2011) 2 (2) *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education*; and Lloyd England 'Buttercup Sues Her Law School – Tertiary Legal Education Providers Liability in the Tort of Negligence not to Cause Pure Mental Harm: Breach of Duty' (National Wellness Forum, 8 November 2022).

⁵⁷ Susan Daicoff, 'Lawyer, Know Thyself: A Review of Empirical Research on Attorney Attributes Bearing on Professionalism' (1997) 46 *The American University Law Review*.

⁵⁸ Rachael Field, *Stimulating Strategic Change in Legal Education to Address High Levels of Psychological Distress in Law Students* (Final Report, ALTC Fellowship, 2014); Elizabeth Mertz, *The Language of Law School: Learning to 'Think Like a Lawyer'* (Oxford University Press, and Stephen Halpern, 'On the Politics and Pathology of Legal Education' (1982) *Journal of Legal Studies Education* 32, 383.

⁵⁹ Margaret Thornton 'Law Student Wellbeing: A Neoliberal Conundrum' (2016) 58 (2) *Australian Universities Review* 42.

⁶⁰ See for example, Victorian Legal Services Board + Commissioner, *VLSB + C Lawyer Wellbeing Project* (2019) <<https://lsbc.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-08/Lawyer%20Wellbeing%20report.pdf>>; and Norm Kelk, et al, 'Court the Blues: Attitudes Towards Depression Law Students and Lawyers' (*Report, Brain and Mind Institute, University of Sydney, 2009*).

⁶¹ *Ibid*.

⁶² The phrase 'making wellness core business' originates from Adiva Sifris and Judith Marychurch's book, *Wellness for Law: Making Wellness Core Business* (LexisNexis, 2019). By way of example, the work of the Law Council of Australia in this area includes significant resources for lawyers under the heading *Mental Health and Well-being in the Legal Profession Information* <<https://www.lawcouncil.asn.au/policy-agenda/advancing-the-profession/mental-health-and-well-being-in-the-legal-profession>>.

⁶³ See for example Anna Huggins, 'Autonomy Supportive Curriculum Design: A Salient Factor in Promoting Law Student's Well-being' (2012) 35(3) *UNSW Law Journal* 684; Helen Stallman, 'Embedding Resilience within the Tertiary Curriculum: A Feasibility Research' (2011) 30(2) *Higher Education Research and Development* 121; and Nigel Duncan, Caroline Strevens and Rachael Field, 'Resilience and Student Well-being in Higher Education: A Theoretical Basis for Establishing Law School Responsibilities for Helping our Students to Thrive' (2020) 1 (1) *European Journal of Legal Education*.

⁶⁴ Caroline Strevens and Rachael Field *Educating for Well-Being in Law: Positive Professional Identifies and Practice* (eds) (Routledge, 2020).

⁶⁵ See for example Rachael Field, James Duffy and Anna Huggins, 'Teaching Independent Learning Skills in the First Year: A Positive Psychological Strategy for Promoting Law Student Well-Being' (2015) 8 (2) *Journal of Learning Design* 2; Rachael Field, James Duffy, Anna Huggins, 'Supporting Transition to Law School and Student Well-Being: The Role of Professional Legal Identity' (2013) *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education*, 4; and Anna Huggins 'The Threshold Learning Outcome on Self-Management for the Bachelor of Laws Degree: A Proposed Focus for Teaching Strategies in the First Year Law Curriculum' (2011) 2(2) *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education*.

⁶⁶ See for example Huggins (n 64); Duncan et al; (n 64); Sally Kift, Karen Nelson and John Clarke, 'Transition Pedagogy: A Third Generation Approach to FYE: A Case Research of Policy and Practice for the Higher Education Sector' (2010) 1 (1) *The International Journal of First Year in Higher Education*; Colin James, 'Balance and Context: Law Student Well-Being and Lessons from Positive Psychology' in Rachael Field, James Duffy and Anna Huggins (eds), *Promoting Law Student and Lawyer Well-being in Australia and Beyond* (Ashgate, 2015); Rachael Field and Sally Kift, 'Addressing the High Levels of Psychological Distress in Law Students through Intentional Assessment and Feedback Design in the First Year Law Curriculum' (2010) 1 *The International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education* 65; and Wendy Larcombe and Ian Malkin, 'The JD First Year Experience: Design Issues and Strategies' (2011) 1 *Legal Education Review*.

⁶⁷ Sally Kift et al, Office for Learning and Teaching, Australia Government, *Curriculum Renewal in Legal Education: Final Report* (Report, 2013); and Des Butler et al, 'Embodying Life-Long Learning: Transition and Capstone Experiences' (2017) 1 *Oxford Review of Education* 5.

Some university programs have used performance psychology frameworks to assist students in identifying skill gaps and have then worked to address the gap.⁶⁸ These interventions have been shown to have a positive impact on students and improve their overall performance within the classroom environment.⁶⁹

Traditionally, performance psychology has been used to enhance athletic performance and well-being.⁷⁰ Factors such as motivation, self-confidence, competitive anxiety, cohesion, and the development of sport-specific psychometrics have been explored, along with psychological interventions such as imagery, relaxation, and goal setting to enhance athletes' performance.⁷¹

(3) Cultivating interdisciplinary, interprofessional teams

Understanding interprofessional teamwork requires an appreciation of the distinct theoretical frameworks that differentiate two types of teamwork: traditional teamwork⁷² and interdisciplinary teamwork.⁷³ Traditional teamwork follows a more uniform structure, centred on discipline-specific objectives, and is characterized by similar communication styles. Interdisciplinary teamwork is inherently diverse, targeting broader and more complex goals. This type of teamwork demands a more nuanced communication strategy to integrate varied professional perspectives and expertise. It requires a deep comprehension of each professional's unique roles and responsibilities, areas of expertise, and the scope of the issue or project at hand.⁷⁴

Interprofessional framework competencies, especially those designed for health professionals, assist us in understanding these nuances. These competencies underscore the importance of seamless integration of diverse professional insights, fostering collaboration that transcends traditional disciplinary boundaries.⁷⁵ These interprofessional frameworks are being used in education to assist health students in understanding the competencies required to work in interprofessional teams.

Understanding one's role and responsibilities is crucial in the context of interprofessional teams. In practice, interprofessional teams challenge traditional professional boundaries. All individuals need to understand their role, scope, and expertise to facilitate effective collaboration. In the context of healthcare, clarity of role responsibilities is essential to improving patient care and interprofessional success.⁷⁶

In this context, our goal was that students be autonomous and competent to participate effectively in interprofessional teams. It was also important to create a nurturing and supportive environment.⁷⁷ The project on which this research is based is therefore underpinned by the theoretical framework of self-determination theory. This approach allowed students to reflect on their professional needs with psychological support, thereby promoting both competence and autonomy. In addition, by learning about, observing, and participating in interprofessional teams, students developed effective collaboration skills, ultimately leading to optimal client outcomes.

⁶⁸ See James B Barker et al, 'Using Sport and Performance Psychology in the Management of Change', (2016) 16 (1) *Journal of Change Management*; and Akiho Suzuki, Stephanie Pitts 'Toward Effective Performance Psychology Interventions in Tertiary Music Education: An Exploration of Students' Experiences, Attitudes, and Preferences (2023) 52 (4) *Psychology of Music*.

⁶⁹ Rainer Martens, Damon Burton, Robin Vealey, L. A Bump, and Tom Greer Smith, 'Development and Validation of the Competitive State Anxiety Inventory-2 (CSAI-2)' in Rainer Martens, Robin Vealey, Damien Burton (eds) *Competitive Anxiety in Sport, Human Kinetics*, (Champaign, 1990).

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Barker, et al (n 69) 40.

⁷² Diggele et al (n 43). In response to the need for promoting interprofessional teamwork in health disciplines, universities are increasingly adopting these frameworks to support students' learning.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Nancarrow et al (n 18) 19.

⁷⁶ Callie Bittner, 'The Importance of Role Clarity for Development of Interprofessional Teams' (2018) 49 (8) *Journal of Continuing Education Nursing* <<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30053304/>>.

⁷⁷ Ryan and Deci (n 45) 23.

V. Rationale and context for the Interdisciplinary Teaching Project

Between 2019 and 2020, we undertook a research project to evaluate our interdisciplinary teaching framework and approach. We were inspired by the collaborative model utilised in healthcare environments, particularly at the University of Canberra Medical & Counselling Centre. This model emphasises interdisciplinary teamwork to provide support to patients, and these principles served as the basis for the educational, teaching, and well-being initiatives at the Clinic.

The primary goal of the project was to address a gap in the law curriculum by introducing and evaluating an interdisciplinary teaching method. This method aims to assist students in enhancing their transition from university to professional environments by fostering interprofessional teamwork skills which are crucial in modern workplaces. Additionally, this approach is intended to bolster students' legal competence and confidence.

The interdisciplinary teaching method included three initiatives: role-play client interviews; a well-being program; and interprofessional teamwork immersion (with accompanying seminars).

(1) Role-play client interviews: Enhancing skills

Students participated in two role-play client interviews: one at the beginning of the semester and another at the end. The initial interview served as a baseline assessment of the students' skill levels, while the concluding interview evaluated their progress. Each role-play involved three participants: the student lawyer, a fictitious client, and an observer. The students faced these interviews without prior preparation, simulating a real-life experience.

The aim of the role-play client interviews was to simulate real-life scenarios, incorporating legal issues and requiring input from other professionals. It was designed to help students develop interdisciplinary awareness and reflect on the role of lawyers. The role-play was based on four interdisciplinary principles tailored to the client interview. It required students to think critically, recognise biases, tackle ambiguity, and appreciate ethical concerns.⁷⁸

Following the initial interviews, students received immediate feedback based on a rubric evaluating their interview conduct and client assistance. This feedback highlighted their strengths, areas needing improvement, and strategies for skill enhancement.

At the end of the role-play client interviews, a seminar was held with legal and health professionals to highlight how combining legal and health perspectives could enhance client outcomes.

(2) Well-being program: Enhancing student confidence, resilience and professionalism

Psychological assessments were conducted at the beginning of the semester to establish a baseline for students' well-being, with personalized feedback sessions provided by a psychologist. These assessments included the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale;⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Vincent Kavaloski 'Interdisciplinary Education and Humanistic Aspiration: A Critical Reflection' (1979) in J. Kockelmans (eds), *Interdisciplinarity and Higher Education* (University Park, 1979) 224-244. William Newell 'Interdisciplinary Curriculum Development' (1990) 8 *Issues in Integrative Studies*. Michael Field et al, 'Assessing Interdisciplinary Learning' (1994) 58 *New Directions in Teaching and Learning* 69. Allan Repko, 'Assessing Interdisciplinary Learning Outcomes' (2008) *Academic Exchange Quarterly* 51. Deborah Vess and Sherry Linkon, 'Navigating the Interdisciplinary Archipelago: The Scholarship of Interdisciplinary Teaching and Learning' in Mary Huber and Sherwyn Morreale (eds), *Disciplinary Styles in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: Exploring Common Ground* (Routledge, 2002) 87.

⁷⁹ The Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) is a tool that measures individuals' psychological resilience or their ability to thrive. See CD-RISC, 'Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale' (Web Page, 23 June 2023) <<http://www.connordavidson-resiliencescale.com>>

Emotional and Social Competence Inventory;⁸⁰ VIA Character Strengths and Weaknesses;⁸¹ and DASS – Measure of Depression, Anxiety and Stress.⁸²

The well-being program was designed, delivered, and evaluated by the in-house psychologist⁸³ with a view to building students' confidence and resilience within a professional framework. The program employed two primary approaches:

- Group sessions led by the psychologist which encouraged students to reflect on their values, biases, insights, and challenges experienced in the clinic, discussing and debriefing these with fellow students. Discussions focussed on transitioning from student to professional, while maintaining their well-being in both their professional and personal lives.
- One-on-one personalised coaching sessions reviewed students' individual psychological profiles, and the identified skills gap observed in the role-play client interviews. A performance psychology framework⁸⁴ was used to help students optimize their skills by addressing barriers that limited or distorted their performance. For example, if a student needed to be more confident or more assertive, the psychologist would explore what was limiting confidence or preventing assertiveness and why there was a deficit. The goal was to shift, change, and grow students' mindsets to help them become professionals by identifying and overcoming these barriers.

(3) Cultivating and working in interprofessional teams

The seminars focused on three aspects: debriefing sessions with the interprofessional team; the theory of teamwork and interprofessional teamwork competencies; and guest speakers sharing real-life scenarios and their work with other professionals.

At the end of the Clinic day, or at other convenient times, a debriefing session took place with an interprofessional team to analyse and address the various challenges encountered. These sessions often involved discussions about balancing legal issues and patient welfare. For example, they examined cases within the Clinic, where a medical practitioner issued long-term medical certificates to a client facing criminal charges. This practice allowed students to observe and reflect on how interdisciplinary work facilitates cross-pollination of ideas, promotes critical thinking, and encourages synergy among team members.⁸⁵

The seminars focused on exploring the differences between teamwork and interprofessional teamwork and then delved into interprofessional frameworks and

⁸⁰ The Emotional and Social Competence Inventory is a survey that measures individuals' emotional and social intelligence, through measuring 12 competencies. See Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence 'Emotional and Social Competency Inventory' (Web Page, 23 June 2023) <https://www.eiconsortium.org/measures/eci_360.html>.

⁸¹ The Values in Action (VIA) character strengths are the set of natural abilities that individuals possess. The VIA assessment is a self-report questionnaire that measures individual strengths. See Institute on Character, VIA Character Strengths and Weaknesses (Web Page, 23 June 2023) <<https://www.viacharacter.org/character-strengths>>.

⁸² The Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS -21) is a 21 item self-reporting questionnaire that measures individuals' levels of depression, anxiety and stress. See Psychology Foundation of Australia 'Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scales (DASS)' (Web Page, 23 June 2023) <<http://www2.psy.unsw.edu.au/dass/>>.

⁸³ The psychologist on the teaching team was an expert in performance psychology and had previously worked with the Australian Olympic team. She applied this practical approach with athletes to enhance their performance, making her highly knowledgeable about the practical applications of the framework.

⁸⁴ Initially used to improve performance in sports, the principles of performance psychology have been used in various professions to enhance performance. See Judy Van Raalte and Britton Brewer, *Exploring Sport and Exercise Psychology* (American Psychological Association, 2019). Performance psychology draws from various theories and approaches, including cognitive behaviour techniques, positive psychology and mindfulness practices. It aims to enhance individuals' resilience, self-regulation, and overall well-being, improving performance outcomes. See Stewart Cotterill, *Performance Psychology: Theory and Practice* (Routledge, 2017).

⁸⁵ National Academy of Engineering, and Institute of Medicine 'Facilitating Interdisciplinary Research' (The National Academies Press, 2005) <<https://doi.org/10.17226/11153>>.

competencies. The main focus was to understand the differences between teams⁸⁶ (which are more homogenous and focus on specific discipline goals and similar communication styles) and interprofessional teams⁸⁷ (which are heterogeneous and focus on broader, multifaceted goals with different communication styles).

The seminars emphasised the importance of understanding these differences. In practice, interprofessional teams challenge traditional professional boundaries, and it is therefore important to understand your role, the scope of the problem, and the expertise you bring to the interprofessional team to facilitate effective collaboration. For example, in the context of healthcare, clarity of role responsibilities is essential to improving patient care and interprofessional success. In the seminars, we emphasized the importance of role clarification – understanding your role, your expertise, and the scope of the problem that the interprofessional team is trying to address.⁸⁸

Finally, a series of guest speakers talked about real-life scenarios underscoring the critical importance of effective interprofessional teamwork in legal and health contexts, which provided practical insights into navigating complex client issues, emphasising the synergy required between legal and medical professionals for optimal outcomes.

VI. Research Aim, Methodology and Approach

(1) Research aim

The aim of the research project was to evaluate the interdisciplinary teaching methods used the second 2019-2020 iteration of the Clinic and to consider the extent to which it supported students in transitioning to professional roles.

(2) Methodology

We conducted a small-scale research project with students who participated in the Clinic over three semesters during 2019 and 2020 (semester 2, 2019; summer semester 2020; and semester 1, 2020). A total of 20 law students participated in the research, of whom 60% (n=12) were female and 40% (n=8) were male. Among the participants, 85% (n=17) were Bachelor of Laws (LLB) students, and 5% (n=3) were Juris Doctor students. The students involved were in their final or penultimate year of studies and were enrolled in the University of Canberra legal clinic or law and justice internship units. Prior ethical approval was obtained, and all students were informed about the purpose of the research, that participation was optional, and that any information collected would be anonymous.⁸⁹ All 20 students agreed to participate in the research.

(3) Research approach

The research employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating focus groups and survey instruments to gain a comprehensive understanding of students' experiences within the Clinic and their perceptions of the interdisciplinary teaching approach.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Bruce Tuckman and Mary Ann Jensen, 'Stages of Small Group Development' (1977) 419 *Group and Organisational Studies*. Weinstein et al (n 41).

⁸⁷ Nancarrow et al (n 18) 19.

⁸⁸ Bittner (n 77) 78.

⁸⁹ HREC (No.2123)

⁹⁰ This research can be appropriately characterized as action research. It systematically identifies a problem, develops and plans a series of interventions, implements these interventions, and subsequently observes, evaluates, and reflects on the outcomes. See Lin Norton, *Action Research in Teaching and Learning: A Practical Guide to Conducting Pedagogical Research in Universities* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2018)

<https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/1942578/Chapter_5_-_Where_do_you_start_a_pedagogical_action_research_study.pdf>; and Martyn Denscombe, *The Good Research Guide for Small-Scale Social Research Projects* (Maidenhead, Open University Press, 2007).

To capture students' subjective perspectives and experiences,⁹¹ focus group sessions were conducted at the end of each semester for approximately 60 minutes each. These sessions aimed to explore whether students felt better prepared for professional roles having completed the module, and to understand the factors influencing their views.⁹² Data from the focus groups was collected, transcribed, and analysed using a comparative thematic approach to uncover patterns and themes, thereby seeking to understand the 'complexities, nuances and contextual factors that shape their views'.⁹³

To gather more detailed and insightful written responses from students, we asked them to fill out a survey. Our goal was to uncover students' individual experiences and reflections. We collected and analysed the survey data using a comparative thematic approach to identify patterns and themes. The findings were illustrated using quotes from student participants representative of their views.⁹⁴ To ensure the reliability and validity of the data, the survey questions were aligned with the research objectives and administered in person, with clear instructions provided to the students.⁹⁵

The mixed-methods approach sought to comprehensively explore students' subjective viewpoints and experiences of the Clinic setting and of the interdisciplinary teaching method. By integrating qualitative data from focus groups and surveys, the research aimed to unravel complex perspectives not fully captured by each process alone.⁹⁶

VII. Findings

(1) Themes arising from focus group sessions

The focus group sessions revealed several key themes based on three questions asked of student participants:

Question 1: Do you now have enough knowledge and skills to transition to a professional career?

- *Collaboration, connections, and interprofessional teamwork:* In discussion, students noted that the Clinic fostered collaborations and friendships, which were less common during regular academic studies. All students reported that interprofessional teamwork was particularly beneficial, offering nuanced and rewarding ways to address problems beyond the discipline of law. This realisation was profoundly rewarding as students saw the potential for diverse career paths utilising their law degrees.
- *Interdisciplinary learning and soft skills:* Students praised the interdisciplinary approach to holistic problem-solving, emphasising its importance in viewing issues from different perspectives and considering alternatives to the traditional legal education approach. This approach was described by one student participant as '*transformative*' and '*eye-opening*'.⁹⁷ Students also said it was empowering to be able to apply soft skills, such as active listening, which are not emphasised in the law curriculum, but which they know are important.
- *Practical knowledge gaps:* Students highlighted the limited hands-on experience and real-world scenarios in their law curriculum. They emphasised the need for more practical exposure to complement their academic learning. Additionally, many students

⁹¹ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, 'Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology' (2006) 3 *Qualitative Research in Psychology*; and Lorelli S Nowell et al, 'Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria' (2017) 16(1) *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*.

⁹² Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Sage Publications, 5th ed, 2017).

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Angela O'Donnell, *The International Handbook of Collaborative Learning* (Routledge, 2013).

⁹⁵ Earl Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research* (Cengage Learning, 2016).

⁹⁶ Braun and Clarke (n 105) 17. Nowell et al (n 105) 256.

⁹⁷ Student participant no. 16.

noted, with disappointment, that prior to their Clinic experience they had not participated in a client interview and had limited advocacy experience.

Question 2: Has the well-being program assisted you?

- *Building confidence and empowerment:* Students said that the well-being program was valuable in boosting students' confidence, making them feel empowered both personally and professionally. Despite the challenging performance psychology framework, students found it extremely beneficial for identifying skills gaps, focusing on root causes.
- *Supportive and nurturing environment:* Students reported feeling nurtured and supported and appreciated being able to debrief and interact with peers and professionals. The performance psychological framework was highlighted as especially helpful in improving students' skills and building their confidence. Students enjoyed collaborating, considering a holistic approach to helping clients rather than simply finding legal problems and going to court. This approach differed from their law curriculum and was seen as a valuable addition to their education.

Question 3: As you near the end of your degree, what are the concerns or pressure points you expect to face?

- The discussion revealed a diverse array of topics concerning students' futures, including finding a job, managing debt, apprehensions about transitioning from university to the workplace, coping with job stress associated with legal roles, supporting their families, and the evolving landscape of legal work over the next decade.
- Overall, the students enjoyed the Clinic experience, which significantly boosted their confidence and feeling that they could more easily transition to professional roles. Importantly, students enjoyed collaborating and working out how to solve problems. One student said that she enjoyed *'thinking outside the box [about] options that were not just bound by legal services, to make a significant difference to someone. This was transformative.'*⁹⁸

(2) Survey findings

The survey aimed to uncover the reasons behind students feeling that they were prepared for professional roles, and their elevated understanding of a lawyer's role from their unique perspective.⁹⁹

The survey encompassed four closed questions, each followed by an open-ended question designed to elicit detailed written responses on specific topics. Additionally, a fifth question with various components addressed students' overall experience in the Clinic. The survey instrument was distributed to students at the end of each of the three semesters, covered by the project and was completed and returned in one process. In total, 20 students responded to the survey instrument over the three semesters. Our objective was to delve into students' opinions, experiences and reflections¹⁰⁰, encouraging them to contemplate deeply the role of a lawyer within an interdisciplinary Clinic setting.¹⁰¹

Below follows a consideration of the survey questions and the responses provided by the participating students.

1. Objective – Thinking Outside the Legal Framework

⁹⁸ Student participant no. 12.

⁹⁹ Denscombe (n 104) 165. O'Donnell (n 108) 54.

¹⁰⁰ Babbie (n 109) 22.

¹⁰¹ Julie Klein, *Interdisciplinarity: History, Theory and Practice*, (Wayne State University Press, 2010); and Allen Repko, Rick Szostak and Michelle Buchberger, *Introduction to Interdisciplinary Studies* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

- a. *The Clinic, through the first role-play and second role-play client interview provided you with opportunity to think critically outside the legal framework. Do you:*
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neither Agree/Nor disagree
 - Strongly disagree
- b. *Did you notice any improvement in your skills level, confidence or anything else?*

Responses:

100% (n=20) of students strongly agreed that their skills in critical thinking outside the legal framework had improved. In free text comments, 85% (n=3) of students stated that their confidence had improved in conducting client interviews, distinguishing the legal issue from the problem, and realizing that not all problems have legal solutions. Fifteen percent of students did not answer this question.

2. *Objective: Implicit Bias – The importance of understanding yourself, to be a better problem solver for your client*
- a. *The first and second role play provided you with the opportunity to identify potential biases, assumptions and preconceived ideas during interactions. Do you:*
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neither Agree/Nor disagree
 - Strongly disagree
- b. *We understand that role play client interviews are often not enjoyed by students but putting that aside, did you believe that your experience of the roles had any impact on your client interview/style/techniques?*

Responses:

85% (n=17) of students strongly agreed that they understood how implicit bias could impact the client interview, while 15% (n=3) agreed. All students indicated in their free text responses that the role-play allowed them to explore the true nature of a lawyer's work in terms of the role and its boundaries. Respondents emphasized that they had learned the significance of soft skills such as effective listening, building rapport, and communicating.

3. *Objective – People often present with complex problems with ambiguous information. Within this context it is important for legal practitioners to have role clarity, so that they know what their role is.*
- a. *The first and second role play client interview provided you with opportunity to consider the complexity of problems along with ambiguous information by the client. Did you understand your role?*
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neither Agree/Nor disagree
 - Strongly disagree
- b. *If you consider that you assisted your client during the role-plays, please tell us about it.*

Responses:

100% (n=20) of all students stated that the role-play client interviews helped them understand the lawyer's role in a client interview. Three quarters (n=15) of the students who responded to the question indicated that they did not know how to assist a client if the problem they presented with was not legal. However, after participating in the Clinic, they felt more confident about their capabilities, the role and boundaries of a lawyer, and how collaborating with other professionals could aid clients. 25% (n=5) of students did not respond to this question.

4. Objective: Ethical and professional issues arise in legal practice and extend beyond the professional requirements of a legal practitioner. It is important to know how to handle these situations.

a. Did you understand and appreciate the ethical and professional issues that you had to deal with in assisting your client in the first and second role-play client interview?

- Yes
- No
- Not Sure

b. Can you explain your answer in more detail?

Responses:

85% (n=17) of students strongly agreed that they understood how ethical issues can arise in role-play client interviews, while 15% (n=3) agreed.

75% (n=15) of students found navigating ethical and professional issues difficult. However, they also felt that they gained more confidence in knowing how to approach these issues.

Question 5.

a. Did participating in this Clinic provide you with better insight into interdisciplinary practice and interprofessional teamwork?

b. How confident do you feel about managing people and complex problems in a legal environment?

c. Overall, do you feel you have a better understanding of the role of a lawyer and if so why?

d. Please describe your overall experience and value in participating in the Clinic.

Responding to the final series of free text questions, 85% (n=17) of students reported that the Clinic environment enabled them to understand how interdisciplinary practice and interprofessional teamwork can solve complex problems.

75% (n=15) of students said that it was invaluable to learn how to assist clients who not only had legal issues, but multifaceted problems. Additionally, all students emphasised the critical importance of comprehending the role of a lawyer and maintaining professional boundaries.

100% (n=20) of students reported that they valued the approach used in performance psychology to improve their skills. This approach, they said, significantly helped them address and refine their skills. Students reported that the one-on-one coaching sessions and group activities provided a secure and supportive environment, fostering confidence in their practical legal abilities and facilitating their transition to future professional roles.

70% (n=14) of students felt that there was insufficient attention and guidance given on addressing interprofessional conflict, and how that would impact on clients.¹⁰²

VIII. Discussion and teaching team observations

(1) Role-play client interviews and real-client interviews

Students highlighted the benefits of Clinic participation, including improved collaboration, emotional support, interdisciplinary learning, and skills empowerment. They also highlighted that throughout their law degree they had had limited exposure to practical skills and real-life scenarios. They saw this as a problem.

The teaching team observed that students' legal competency skills had improved significantly: it is likely attributable to their participation in a legal clinic program, which inherently supports skills development through practical experience.

(2) Well-being program

Students reported that they found the performance psychology framework particularly rewarding, despite its challenges, and that they would use it beyond university, reporting that it allowed them to identify skills gaps (based on the role-play client interviews) and to work with the psychologist to improve specific skills.

Students reported that the whole well-being program was instrumental in boosting their confidence and personal growth.

The psychologist evaluated 20 students who willingly completed psychological assessments as part of the clinic module. The evaluations revealed a significant prevalence of elevated stress levels, anxiety, and general unwellness among a substantial portion of the student group (75%, n=15), with a smaller portion exhibiting moderate to high levels of these conditions (25%, n=5). Although students did not complete the psychological assessments at the end of the semester, the psychologist observed through group sessions and one-on-one coaching sessions that students appeared more confident in dealing with interprofessional team members and were optimistic about their future. This observation seems to reflect the students' own observations relating to their confidence and growth.

(3) Interdisciplinary and interprofessional teamwork

Student participants reported that they had gained significant insight from participating in an interprofessional team. One participant said, *'It was a new way of applying legal knowledge and skills, but in a way that wasn't about just identifying a legal problem and going to court, but about helping the client holistically and working together'*.¹⁰³

The teaching team observed all students were highly engaged, which was evident through active participation in clinic work, interdisciplinary activities, and discussions. They also showed a strong commitment to learning from and working with professionals from various fields.

Through the survey, students acknowledged that their awareness of the complexity of problems had improved significantly. They understood that problems are rarely one-dimensional and may require input from other disciplines or professionals. Importantly, the survey revealed that student participants identified that role-play client interviews helped them understand the role of a lawyer and their boundaries in dealing with clients and their complex problems.

¹⁰² In the third iteration of the Clinic, a component of the seminars addresses interprofessional conflict through examples and includes student discussions on how to resolve interprofessional conflict in teams.

¹⁰³ Student participant no. 17.

The following statements from student participants provide a valuable insight into the benefits of being involved in the Clinic for students:

'For perhaps the first time in my undergraduate degree, I was confronted with the emotional, health and mental strains of legal clients. The value of this unit to me has been immense'.¹⁰⁴

'As a final year law student, I have felt inadequate underprepared and as an imposter when faced with my future career. This unit has alleviated many of these failings'.¹⁰⁵

Overall, the research uncovered that students highly valued the opportunity to develop their legal practice skills, the provision of a supportive environment, and the chance to forge collaborative connections with peers, professionals, and teachers. They also highly rated input from the in-house psychologist to enhance their professional well-being. Most importantly, the research, through students' views and reflections, showed that students felt empowered to transition from university to professional careers.

Students highly rated a holistic approach to client problem-solving, which gave them a better understanding of the value that lawyers can bring in addressing real human issues. One student participant's comment, *'Now I know what lawyers do'*¹⁰⁶, resonated with other student participants.

IX. Potential for adaptation and implementation

Although the three initiatives detailed in this article were time-consuming and resource-intensive, students reported, and we observed, that they provided significant benefits to students.

The initiatives discussed in this paper can be adapted and implemented by educational institutions. For example, in the field of law, the role-play client interview, a crucial aspect of traditional legal work, proved to be effective in identifying students' strengths and areas needing improvement, and in helping them develop their skills. By using a baseline, students and the teaching team could see how much the students had improved from the beginning to the end of the semester. Similarly, the performance psychology framework could be used by academics to identify students' skill gaps at the beginning of the semester and then scaffold learning to improve those skills. Ideally, a psychologist would develop such a program, but educators could utilise a less comprehensive performance psychology technique to deliver this themselves. Additionally, the interprofessional competency framework used by health professionals could be adapted for the discipline of law and used as a template for interdisciplinary teams to work on real-world projects.

X. Limitations

The limitations of this project include the potential for inconsistency in results due to different observers being present in the first and second role-play client interviews; the lack of psychological instruments completed at the end of the semester; and the potential need for survey questions to be simplified, as this may have been the reason for some students not completing all the surveys.

From a practical perspective, the interprofessional teamwork immersion did not address strategies for resolving conflict in the team, especially when balancing legal and patient care. Although this issue did not arise in the Clinic, some guidance, strategies, and

¹⁰⁴ Student participant no. 9.

¹⁰⁵ Student participant no. 5.

¹⁰⁶ Student participant no. 12.

information to students about tension and conflict that can arise in an interprofessional team would have been beneficial.

Additionally, the small size of the student group raises questions about the research findings' general applicability to law students.¹⁰⁷ Whilst the findings cannot be generalised across the law student population as a whole, the focus groups and survey reveal through students' experiences and reflections that they value teaching that improves their legal competency, confidence, and interprofessional skills in dealing with real-life scenarios. Students also reflected, and we observed, that their competency, confidence and interprofessional skills were enhanced by being involved in the Clinic.

There is no doubt that this research paper and previous studies have highlighted the improvement of students' practical skills in a legal Clinic setting.¹⁰⁸ Further, this research, along with other research, shows the importance of creating a positive culture to enhance students' education in law school environments.¹⁰⁹ The present research stands out by incorporating performance psychology techniques facilitated by a psychologist to boost students' confidence and skills. This approach not only aids in their immediate professional development but also equips them with tools that can be applied to other aspects of their lives and future careers.

Furthermore, the research integrates interprofessional teamwork using an interprofessional health framework¹¹⁰ tailored for law students. This framework allows students to deeply engage with the role of a lawyer and understand their value in an interprofessional team. This interdisciplinary approach fosters a holistic view of legal practice, urging students to recognise the broader impact of their work within diverse professional settings.

XI. Conclusion

In summary, based on student feedback and our observations, three key teaching initiatives have improved students' legal competency, confidence, and interprofessional collaborative skills. These enhancements aim to better prepare students for post-university life, including legal practice and diverse careers.

Our overarching goal was to inspire students to think beyond conventional career paths and consider the broader possibilities of what they can achieve with a law degree. Through the Clinic, we encouraged students to explore new ways of legal and human problem-solving,¹¹¹ with the aspiration of inspiring them to rethink and redefine what it means to be a future lawyer.

¹⁰⁷ Denscombe (n 92) 178.

¹⁰⁸ Evans et al (n 49) 21.

¹⁰⁹ Huggins (n 64); Duncan et al (n 64).

¹¹⁰ Nancarrow et al (n 18) 19.

¹¹¹ Menkel-Meadow (n 4) 379.