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### **Students' Views on Professional Education & Practice**

The paper discusses the impact of legal education [which is a first degree in Australia] upon emergent professional identities and awareness amongst student populations of the ways in which their exposure to professional education impacts upon

[i] Their understanding of legal practice and what is involved in reaching that goal and

[ii] The motivations that encouraged them to pursue law as a career.

Initially, the research considers the views of students entering the degree and comparing their views at the end of their first year. A questionnaire will be supplemented by randomly selected interviews.

The project is not merely interested in considering cognitive skills and the way in which those are perceived by students to develop over the course of their first year. It is also concerned with examining the role of affective factors on their perception of legal education and practice. There is some evidence, mostly American, indicating that law students suffer significantly more adverse emotional effects when compared with students enrolled in other tertiary programmes. Those consequences have been attributed to the nature of legal education and its tendency to treat students in term similar to Freire's 'banking concept': a tendency exacerbated in the context of an educational regime increasingly subject to the requirements of managerialism and neo-liberalism.

There are significant implications attending to the way in which students view their professional identities in terms of the way in which they interact in professional practice. A student's self-perception of herself as a lawyer plays a fundamental role in shaping the way in which they will construct legal problems and legal solutions. It will also impact upon the way in which they view their professional roles in the context of their role in, and contribution to, the requirements of a socially just and democratic society.

The paper is conceived as part of a much wider project dealing with the issue of the construction, management and reproduction of professional identities, including the way in which legal academics view their role. There is little work done on this topic, and part of the project's focus is to engage in a form of consciousness raising respecting the complex dynamic informing the teacher-student relationship – typically ignored in a transmission model that depends in part on presuming rather than inquiring into the nature of student attitudes – and to foster a greater degree of participation in the learning process by students in order to encourage future lawyers to adopt a less hierarchical and technocratic of their role as effective problem-solvers.

Analogous comments can be made, to varying degrees respecting most disciplines and the manner in which the student-teacher relationship is conceived impacts upon the way in which students come to understand their future professional roles. So, while focused on law, the paper hopes to engage the interests of other attendees by indicating possible parallels and suggesting comparative research in different educational environments and cultures.