

Does legal education build or degrade resilience?

Graham Ferris

Functions of Legal Education

An education for young people (and others) – ‘what is entailed by a student-centred approach to legal education?’

Education for legal practice – traditionally a source of social mobility; socialisation and a common culture; certification and licencing

Reproduction of law as an academic discipline – social-legal or doctrinal, theoretical or historical, tensions between PhD entry and practitioner entry into legal academia

Wellbeing is important for each of these

Support for legal governance (rule of law etc) its importance is arguable

Can we assume university education is wellbeing enhancing?

Wendy Larcomb, Sue Finch & Rachel Sore, 'Who's distressed? Not only law students: psychological distress levels in university students across diverse fields of study'

Elisa G. Lewis & Jacqueline M. Cardwell, 'A comparative study of mental health and wellbeing among UK students on professional degree programmes' (2019) 43 Journal of Further and Higher Education 1226

Elisa G. Lewis and Jacqueline M. Cardwell, 'The big five personality traits, perfectionism and their association with mental health among UK students on professional degree programmes' (2020) 8: 54 BMC Psychology

And we know legal education has a poor track record

Ferris G, *Uses of Values in Legal Education* (Intersentia 2015)

Emma Jones, *Emotions in the Law School: Transforming Legal Education Through the Passions* (Routledge 2020)

So: university legal education has a problem with wellbeing

Is wellbeing something an educational institution/programme of study should concern itself with?

Stanley Fish, *Save the World on Your Own Time*

And if so how?

Anthony T. Kronman, *Education's End: Why Our Colleges and Universities Have Given Up on the Meaning of Life*

What would it even mean?

Martha Albertson Fineman, 'The Vulnerable Subject and the Responsive State'

Vulnerability and resilience

Vulnerability is Universal

Vulnerability is Particular

We are vulnerable in the way we are because of our embodied and embedded being

Our resilience is determined by historical and contemporary social and institutional factors

The sources of such resilience, the assets that provide resilience, may be: human, physical, social, ecological, or existential

How might university enhance these assets?

Human – through classic educational aims – enhance and develop the student – also perhaps give some attention to self-care (do as I say and not as a I do? See: Liz Morrish, *Pressure Vessels: The epidemic of poor mental health among higher education staff*)

Physical – career

Social – profession, family, sport, community

Ecological – campus, housing, catering, understanding?

Existential – Meaningfulness, purpose, values

The Call of the Wild



Not that one

Bunderson JS and Thompson JA, 'The Call of the Wild: Zookeepers, callings, and the double-edged sword of deeply meaningful work' (2009) 54 *Administrative Science Quarterly* 32

“Calling” (Weber)

The double edged sword of a sense of calling (remember self-care and community).

Anthony Bradney, *Conversations, Choices and Chances: The Liberal Law School in the Twenty-first Century*

Why do well educated people with options sign up to and put up with academia?

Graham Ferris, 'Undermining resilience – how the modern UK university manufactures heightened vulnerability in legal academics' *The Law Teacher* (forthcoming)