What’s in your cultural backpack?

Articulating personal & professional values on the way towards professional identity.

Dr Elizabeth Ruinard, QUT Queensland University of Technology

Legal clinical education (e.g. QUT community lawyering clinics) provides students with an enhanced sense of professional purpose & identity. Through reflective practice, students identify their values & beliefs, confront their prejudices & biases, challenge their assumptions & consider alternative perspectives. They develop their critical thinking skills through guided reflection & identify areas for personal growth & career goals. They thus unpack their cultural backpacks ...

Community-engaged pedagogy promotes a sense of social responsibility & inculcates a pro-bono ethos in law students. It ameliorates learning in law, raises the social justice awareness of law students & enhances the role of law & lawyers in society, by teaching that professional identity can serve a public good greater than oneself. A case study conducted by McNamara & Campbell (2013) revealed that community lawyering clinics could potentially have transformative impacts on law students & their professional paths.

Students thus participate in (frequently multi-disciplinary) community-engaged projects. At QUT they attend workshops on reflective practice, cultural competency, client solutions, collaborative practice & ethical obligations. The cultural values exercise, in particular, assists students to explore their key values, thereby affording them a better understanding of who they are & their potential professional fit.

For example, caring + commitment + cooperation + creativity + duty + reflective practice + critical thinking = an enhanced sense of social responsibility & improved understanding of career possibilities & likely professional identity & purpose.