

CLIMATE CRISIS, LEGAL EDUCATION AND LAW STUDENT WELL-BEING: PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES FOR ACTION

MONICA TAYLOR*

This article addresses the impact of the climate crisis on the mental health of young people in the context of legal education. It reviews the evidence on youth mental health regarding the climate crisis and applies it to what is already known about law student well-being. Drawing on theories of learning design, the article considers a range of pedagogical strategies that law schools can use to engage students who are committed to action on climate change through law. A case study, the Climate Justice Initiative at The University of Queensland School of Law, is presented as one example of what is possible. This article emphasises the significance of a partnership approach to student engagement and contends that this may yield benefits especially in the context of climate change-related legal work. Despite the negative psychological impact of the climate crisis on law students, it concludes that there are practical activities that law schools can and should initiate to support student well-being.

I INTRODUCTION

A school-leaver who commences law in the year 2022 will have been born at some point in the early 2000s. They will have grown up alongside Greta Thunberg and may even share her birth year. They will probably have undertaken senior high school studies during the COVID-19 global pandemic, a crisis said to share commonalities and converging effects with the climate crisis.¹ This student and their generation will experience the full brunt of what is known as the ‘iron law of climate change’; that those who are the least responsible for the climate crisis will be the most impacted by its devastating effects.²

* PhD student, Queensland University of Technology, Faculty of Business and Law. Director, UQ Pro Bono Centre (2013–2020). The author wishes to sincerely thank Dr Justine Bell-James and Narelle Bedford for their comments on a previous draft, and Rose Foster for her research assistance.

¹ Editorial, ‘Climate and COVID-19: Converging Crises’ (2021) 397(10269) *The Lancet* 71.

² Roger A Pielke, ‘A Positive Path for Meeting the Global Climate Challenge’, *Yale Environment* 360 (Opinion, 18 October 2010) <https://e360.yale.edu/features/a_positive_path_for_meeting_the_global_climate_challenge>. This article intentionally uses the phrase ‘climate crisis’ to convey a sense of urgency regarding this issue. It is used interchangeably with the term ‘climate change’.

It is widely reported that young people today feel less in control of their lives now than at any other point in recent history.³ In a 2019 global poll of more than 10,000 young people aged 18 to 25 years of age climate change ranked first as the most important global issue.⁴ More than a decade ago, a survey by the Australian Childhood Foundation had already concluded that '[a] quarter of children are so troubled about the state of the world that they honestly believe it will come to an end before they get older'.⁵ Young people's preoccupation about the planet includes concern for biodiversity loss and species extinction, unprecedented levels of air and sea pollution, sea level rise, deforestation and desertification, and the increase in extreme weather events. Versed and educated in the science of global warming and climate change, this generation will be less able to enjoy life's simple pleasures such as overseas travel without having regard to the carbon impact of their choices.⁶ At a personal level, young people hold legitimate concerns about their own professional futures; what does the economic future hold for them, and what should they study?

In Australia it is estimated that up to 300,000 individuals, mostly high school students, attended the global student climate strike on 19 September 2019.⁷ Some of these students may choose to embark upon a career in the law, perhaps inspired to learn how to use the law as a tool for action on climate change. It is, after all, their generation who are now plaintiffs, nationally and internationally, in various climate litigation cases currently before the courts.⁸ As the relevance of the

³ Jean M Twenge, Liqing Zhang and Charles Im, 'It's Beyond My Control: A Cross-Temporal Meta-Analysis of Increasing Externality in Locus of Control, 1960-2002' (2004) 8(3) *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 308; Peter Gray, 'The Decline of Play and the Rise of Psychopathology in Children and Adolescents' (2011) 3(4) *American Journal of Play* 443.

⁴ Amnesty International, 'Climate Change Ranks Highest as Vital Issue of Our Time — Generation Z Survey' (Press Release, 10 December 2019) <<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/12/climate-change-ranks-highest-as-vital-issue-of-our-time/>>. Another recent large-scale study of 10,000 young people across ten countries found that 59 per cent of young people were very or extremely worried about climate change and over 50 per cent felt sad, anxious, angry, powerless, helpless, and guilty: Elizabeth Marks et al, *Young People's Voices on Climate Anxiety, Government Betrayal and Moral Injury: A Global Phenomenon* <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3918955>.

⁵ Joe Tucci, Janise Mitchell and Chris Goddard, *Children's Fears, Hopes and Heroes: Modern Childhood in Australia* (Australian Childhood Foundation, June 2007) 7.

⁶ See, eg, Mucha Mkono, 'Eco-Anxiety and the Flight Shaming Movement: Implications for Tourism' (2020) 6(3) *Journal of Tourism Futures* 223.

⁷ 'Global Climate Strike Sees "Hundreds of Thousands" of Australians Rally Across the Country', ABC News (online, 21 September 2019) <<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-09-20/school-strike-for-climate-draws-thousands-to-australian-rallies/11531612>>.

⁸ In Australia, see, eg, *Sharma by Her Litigation Representative Sister Marie Brigid Arthur v Minister for the Environment (Commonwealth)* (2021) 391 ALR 1; *Sharma by Her Litigation Representative Sister Marie Brigid Arthur v Minister for the Environment [No 2]* [2021] FCA 774; *McVeigh v Retail Employees Superannuation Pty Ltd* [2019] FCA 14; *Waratah Coal Pty Ltd v Youth Verdict Ltd* [2020] QLC 33; *Waratah Coal Pty Ltd v Youth Verdict Ltd [No 2]* [2021] QLC 4. In Colombia, see, eg, *Demanda Generaciones Futuras v Minambiente* (2018) STC4360-2018 (Colombian Supreme Court, Judge Villabona, 4 April 2018) where 25 youth plaintiffs between the ages of seven and 26 sued several bodies within the government, Colombian municipalities and corporations to enforce their claimed

climate crisis grows as a contributing factor to youth anxiety and poor mental health,⁹ but also a motivator to act, this article asks: what might law educators do to best harness students' passion for action on climate change in ways that are simultaneously protective of their mental well-being?

Part II of this article reviews the evidence on youth mental health regarding the climate crisis. Part III revisits the established evidence about the psychological well-being of law students and considers effective strategies for student engagement that are supportive of well-being. Part IV draws these threads together and discusses pedagogical strategies that law schools can use to engage students committed to action on climate change. Emphasis is given to the significance of student–staff partnerships as an approach to student engagement and a case study, the Climate Justice Initiative at The University of Queensland School of Law, is presented as one example of what is possible. Part V concludes that, despite the negative psychological impact of the climate crisis on law students, there are practical activities that law schools can and should initiate to support student well-being.

II YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH IN THE CONTEXT OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Evidence about the psychological effects of climate change on young people suggests climate change can directly and indirectly cause mental harm. Children and young people who live through extreme weather events such as bushfires, floods and drought are at risk of developing mental health issues including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, phobias, sleep and attachment disorders, and substance abuse.¹⁰ Children and young people are also more severely psychologically impacted by severe weather events than their parents or other adults.¹¹

As well as the direct impact of climate events on a young person's mental health, there is growing research about their indirect effects. A young person need not personally have to endure an extreme weather event in order to experience climate-induced psychological distress. Australian psychology scholars Searle

right to a healthy environment, life, health, food and water. In Portugal, see, eg, *Duarte Agostinho v Portugal* (European Court of Human Rights, Application No 39371/20, 9 February 2020), where six Portuguese youth filed a complaint with against 33 countries alleging that they had violated their human rights by failing to take sufficient action on climate change, and seeking an order requiring more ambitious action.

⁹ Haris Majeed and Jonathan Lee, 'The Impact of Climate Change on Youth Depression and Mental Health' (2017) 1(3) *The Lancet Planetary Health* 94–5.

¹⁰ Lisa R Fortuna, 'A Review of the Psychological Effects of Climate Change on Children: Considering Resilience, Vulnerability, and Inequity' (2020) 59(10) *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry* S38.

¹¹ Susie EL Burke, Ann V Sanson and Judith Van Hoorn, 'The Psychological Effects of Climate Change on Children' (2018) 20 *Current Psychiatry Reports* 35:1–8, 2; Jessica G Fritze et al, 'Hope, Despair and Transformation: Climate Change and the Promotion of Mental Health and Wellbeing' (2008) 2 *International Journal of Mental Health Systems* 13:1–10, 3.

and Gow found increasing concern by the Australian public about climate change and a correlative relationship between this and symptoms of depression, anxiety and stress.¹² Although their study was focused on the general population, the results reveal that climate anxiety is not an evenly distributed phenomenon. An individual is more likely to be distressed if they are female, under the age of 35 years, have a pro-environmental orientation and possess personality traits such as high levels of future anxiety¹³ — features that might also be used to describe a typical high-achieving law student.¹⁴

In what is now a burgeoning area of psychological inquiry, new terms are being coined to describe emergent forms of climate-change-related mental distress. Awareness of these new terms may assist law educators to better understand what climate distress is and how our students might experience it. It may also help us to identify strategies to engage them in ways that will help them cope. In this way, the American Psychological Association's call for mental health professionals to become climate-literate¹⁵ bears similarity to the call by the Honourable Judge Preston for legal professionals to become 'climate-conscious' in daily legal practice.¹⁶

Research about the indirect impacts of climate change on youth mental health in the Australian context is instructive. Clayton notes that it is no coincidence that much research about climate distress comes from Australian scholars where the impacts of extreme weather events including drought, coral bleaching, flooding and bushfires are already visible.¹⁷ In his influential 2005 article, Australian environmental philosopher Glenn Albrecht coined the term 'solastagia' to describe the emotional state of extreme distress that people feel in response to the loss of their home environment.¹⁸ The concept of solastagia refers to 'the specific form of melancholia connected to lack of solace and intense desolation'.¹⁹ Albrecht describes the strength of attachment to country felt by Indigenous Australians as a particular form of solastagia.²⁰ This deep attachment to place is documented as 'a living entity with a yesterday, today and tomorrow, with a consciousness, and a will toward life. Because of this richness, country is

¹² Kristina Searle and Kathryn Gow, 'Do Concerns about Climate Change Lead to Distress?' (2010) 2(4) *International Journal of Climate Change Strategies and Management* 362, 366.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Judy Allen and Paula Baron, 'Buttercup Goes to Law School: Student Wellbeing in Stressed Law Schools' (2004) 29(6) *Alternative Law Journal* 285, 287; Susan Daicoff, 'Lawyer, Know Thyself: A Review of Empirical Research on Attorney Attributes Bearing on Professionalism' (1997) 46(5) *American University Law Review* 1337, 1416.

¹⁵ Susan Clayton et al, American Psychological Association and ecoAmerica, *Mental Health and Our Changing Climate: Impacts, Implications, and Guidance* (Guide, March 2017) 55.

¹⁶ Justice Brian J Preston, 'Implementing a Climate Conscious Approach in Daily Legal Practice' (Speech, Australian and New Zealand Legal Ethics Colloquium, Monash University, 4 December 2015).

¹⁷ Susan Clayton, 'Climate Anxiety: Psychological Responses to Climate Change' (2020) 74 *Journal of Anxiety Disorders* 1, 2.

¹⁸ Glenn Albrecht, "'Solastalgia': A New Concept in Health and Identity' [2005] (3) *Philosophy Activism Nature*.

¹⁹ *Ibid* 44.

²⁰ *Ibid* 46–8.

home, and peace; nourishment for body, mind and spirit; heart's ease.²¹ A 16-year-old proud Kamilaroi woman at a Fridays for Future protest described her attachment to Country and the effect that climate change (drought) is having on her culture in these terms:

I am here on the authority of my elders. I struggle to think of one way climate change doesn't affect our culture. I have had to help collect bottled water for our family in Walgett. Many other towns in NSW are facing the same crisis. We rely on Country and these rivers are our life.²²

Similar to *solastagia*, 'ecological grief' is a term coined by Cunsolo and Ellis that refers to grief felt in relation to experienced or anticipated ecological losses, including the loss of species, eco-systems and landscapes due to acute or chronic environmental change.²³ Grief associated with the loss of the natural environment is 'disenfranchised grief' — a loss that is hidden, overlooked and largely absent in climate change narratives, policy and research.²⁴ It is also said to be 'ambiguous' because a person cannot easily articulate their feelings of loss and mourning for an anticipated future that will cease to be.²⁵ Acute and chronic ecological grief typically develops over time and is not linked to one particular event.²⁶ It is said to particularly impact children and young people who are growing up amidst 'doom and gloom' narratives.²⁷

Another recent Australian empirical study sought to untangle the different emotional responses to the climate crisis. It found anger to be an emotional driver of constructive engagement with the climate crisis, suggesting that anger may encourage engagement with solutions to climate change as distinct from other negative eco-emotions.²⁸ The authors of this study suggest that encouraging eco-anger may promote pro-climate behaviour change while preserving mental health.

The climate crisis is impacting on individual youth behaviour in ways that have likely not been observed in previous generations. Young people are expressing a desire not to have children and are seeking out options for

²¹ Deborah Bird Rose, *Nourishing Terrains: Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness* (Australian Heritage Commission, 1996) 7.

²² Philippa Collin et al, 'Australia' in Joost de Moor et al (eds), *Protest for a Future II: Composition, Mobilization and Motives of the Participants in Fridays For Future Climate Protests on 20–27 September, 2019, in 19 Cities around the World* (Report, 2020) 35, 37 <<https://osf.io/3hcxs/download>>.

²³ Ashlee Cunsolo and Neville R Ellis, 'Ecological Grief as a Mental Health Response to Climate Change-Related Loss' (2018) 8(4) *Nature Climate Change* 275; Kenneth J Doka, 'Disenfranchised Grief' (1999) 18(3) *Bereavement Care* 37, 38.

²⁴ Cunsolo and Ellis (n 23).

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid*; Clayton (n 17).

²⁸ Samantha K Stanley et al, 'From Anger to Action: Differential Impacts of Eco-Anxiety, Eco-Depression, and Eco-Anger on Climate Action and Wellbeing' (2021) 1 *The Journal of Climate Change and Health* 1, 4.

sterilisation at a young age.²⁹ The proportion of young people opting to follow a vegan diet has also increased in recent years.³⁰ New climate-associative disorders such as ‘carborexia’ are being reported. Carborexia is a behavioural trait in which a person becomes obsessed with reducing their carbon footprint to the extent that it impacts upon normal daily life.³¹ Albrecht uses the phrase ‘eco-paralysis’ to describe the paralysing impact of climate anxiety on behaviour; individuals become so overwhelmed and immobilised by the reality of climate change that they are unable to act and respond.³²

The various terms outlined above in the literature can be summarised into a short table:³³

Ecological grief	Grief felt in relation to experienced or anticipated ecological losses including the loss of species, ecosystems and landscapes due to acute or chronic environmental change.
Eco-anger	Feelings of anger or frustration about climate change.
Eco-anxiety	Anxiety experienced in response to climate change or environmental degradation.
Eco-depression	Feelings of depression and misery about climate change.
Expressive coping	Coping (e.g. with climate change) by expressing emotions, such as anger or sadness.
Solastagia	Distress caused by the painful ‘lived experience’ of environmental destruction to one’s home environment.
Carborexia	Obsessive behaviour to reduce one’s carbon footprint that impacts upon lifestyle or normal daily activities.
Eco-paralysis	The inability to meaningfully respond to climatic and ecological challenges.

As law educators, our role is not to diagnose or treat students’ climate anxiety, and nor are we responsible for helping students to resolve their mental health

²⁹ Matthew Schneider-Mayerson and Leong Kit Ling, ‘Eco-Reproductive Concerns in the Age of Climate Change’ (2020) 163(2) *Climatic Change* 1007, 1008–9.

³⁰ Cynthia Radnitz, Bonnie Beezhold and Julie DiMatteo, ‘Investigation of Lifestyle Choices of Individuals Following a Vegan Diet for Health and Ethical Reasons’ (2015) 90 *Appetite* 31, 34.

³¹ Searle and Gow (n 12) 363.

³² Glenn Albrecht, ‘Chronic Environmental Change: Emerging “Psychoterratic” Syndromes’ in Inka Weissbecker (ed), *Climate Change and Human Well-Being: Global Challenges and Opportunities* (Springer, 2011) 43.

³³ Stanley et al (n 28) 5. This table is a modified version of glossary definitions from this article including ‘eco-anger’, ‘eco-depression’ and ‘expressive coping’ For further consideration of the definitions of ‘ecological grief’ see Cunsolo and Ellis (n 23); ‘eco-anxiety’ see Pihkala Panu, ‘Anxiety and the Ecological Crisis: Analysis of Eco-Anxiety and Climate Anxiety’ (2020) 12(19) *Sustainability* 7836; ‘solastagia’ see Albrecht (n 18); ‘carborexia’ see Searle and Gow (n 12, 363); ‘eco-paralysis’ see Albrecht (n 32). The terminology in the table is not exhaustive and new terms will likely continue to emerge in this dynamic field of research.

difficulties.³⁴ However, informing ourselves of the psychological research on youth climate distress will assist us in our task of teaching and engaging law students in ways that are protective of their mental well-being.

Youth psychology research clearly points to health and well-being benefits from active involvement and engagement with action on climate change, especially reductions in anxiety and stress.³⁵ Positive psychology is recognised as a framework for strengthening the resilience and creativity of individuals and communities to work together against this common existential threat.³⁶ To move individuals from despair and hopelessness to a sense of empowerment, Searle and Gow argue that young people need to be encouraged that the future is not all bleak and that, on a personal level, much can be done through taking action and by managing the environment in a more positive way.³⁷ Bauer states that helplessness and frustration arise from feelings of being trapped and of not being able to make a difference: '[t]he way out is empowerment, action and student voice.'³⁸ Further, the degree of emotional activation is important. Anger, anxiety and depression are not all the same as they have different levels of 'activation' — that is, how much an emotion energises or inhibits action.³⁹ Thus, law students who may be passionate, angry and 'fired up' about climate change are more likely to want to translate that emotion into action, than are those who experience anxiety, grief or depression. How this corresponds with what we already know about law student well-being, and what we can and should do about it, is the focus of the next section.

III VIEW FROM THE LAW SCHOOL — STUDENT WELL-BEING

For more than a decade, significant attention has been paid to the mental health of Australian law students. A landmark study by the Brain and Mind Research Institute in 2009 found that Australian law students had higher rates of depression than the general population, and that the individualistic and competitive law school environment was a contributing factor.⁴⁰ The *Courting the Blues* study generated much-needed attention on law student well-being across

³⁴ Chi Baik et al, *Enhancing Student Mental Wellbeing: A Handbook for Academic Educators* (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, 2017) 11, 53 <https://melbourne-cshe.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/2408604/MCSHE-Student-Wellbeing-Handbook-FINAL.pdf>.

³⁵ Fritze et al (n 11).

³⁶ *Ibid* 9.

³⁷ Searle and Gow (n 12) 374.

³⁸ Stuart R Grauer, 'Climate Change: The Thief of Childhood' (2020) 101(7) *Phi Delta Kappan* 42, 45.

³⁹ Stanley et al (n 28).

⁴⁰ Norm Kelk et al, *Courting the Blues: Attitudes Towards Depression in Australian Law Students and Lawyers*, (Monograph, Brain & Mind Research Institute, January 2009) 46 <<https://law.uq.edu.au/files/32510/Courting-the-Blues.pdf>>.

the country, including through the publication of the *Good Practice Guidelines for Law Schools* by the Council of Australian Law Deans.⁴¹

There is now solid empirical evidence that students enter law school with levels of psychological well-being that are equal to or higher than the general population, but about one third experience psychological distress by the end of their first year of study.⁴² It is also understood that the sources of law student psychological distress are complex and varied, and both structural and individual.⁴³ Structural factors include the neoliberal turn in legal education,⁴⁴ assessment styles that do not support teamwork or collaboration,⁴⁵ workplace cultures that foster bullying and harassment,⁴⁶ and the inherently adversarial nature of the profession.⁴⁷ Individual factors are said to include personality traits such as perfectionism⁴⁸ and competitiveness, which can drive unrealistic expectations of one's academic performance.⁴⁹ As Duncan and his colleagues surmise, there is 'nowhere to hide' from the reality that students experience psychological distress as a consequence of their interaction with the system of legal education.⁵⁰

Despite the identification of many factors that contribute to law student mental distress, the relative importance of climate change on this phenomenon remains as yet unexplored in the literature. Although we have evidence about the deleterious impact of climate change on youth mental health generally, we cannot

⁴¹ Council of Australian Law Deans, *Promoting Law Student Well-Being: Good Practice Guidelines for Law Schools* (Report, September 2014) <<https://cald.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Promoting-Law-Student-Well-Being-Good-Practice-Guidelines-for-Law-Schools-March-2013-and-revised-September-2014.pdf>> ('2014 Best Practice'). See also James Duffy, Rachael Field and Melinda Shirley, 'Engaging Law Students to Promote Psychological Health' (2011) 36(4) *Alternative Law Journal* 250.

⁴² The literature is vast and beyond the scope of this article to revisit: see, eg, Nigel Duncan, Rachael Field and Caroline Strevens, 'Ethical Imperatives for Legal Educators to Promote Law Student Wellbeing' (2020) 23(1-2) *Legal Ethics* 65.

⁴³ *Ibid* 77.

⁴⁴ Margaret Thornton, 'Law Student Wellbeing: A Neoliberal Conundrum' (2016) 58(2) *Australian Universities' Review* 42, 43.

⁴⁵ Wendy Larcombe et al, 'Does an Improved Experience of Law School Protect Students against Depression, Anxiety and Stress? An Empirical Study of Wellbeing and the Law School Experience of LLB and JD Students' (2013) 35(2) *Sydney Law Review* 407, 429; 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(1) *International Journal of the First Year in Higher Education* 65, 69.

⁴⁶ Law Council of Australia, *National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces* (Submission to Australian Human Rights Commission, 26 February 2019) <<https://www.lawcouncil.asn.au/publicassets/1bde0b80-d23e-e911-93fc-005056be13b5/3587%20-%20AHRC%20NISHAW%20Submission.pdf>>; Kieran Pender, *Us Too? Bullying and Sexual Harassment in the Legal Profession* (Report, 2019) 14 <<https://www.ibanet.org/bullying-and-sexual-harassment.aspx>>.

⁴⁷ Tania Sourdin, 'Not Teaching ADR in Law Schools? Implications for Law Students, Clients and the ADR Field' (2012) 23(3) *Australasian Dispute Resolution Journal* 148, 152; Rachael Field and James Duffy, 'Law Student Psychological Distress, Alternative Dispute Resolution, and Sweet-Minded, Sweet-Eyed Hope' (2012) 23(3) *Australasian Dispute Resolution Journal* 195, 197.

⁴⁸ Daicoff (n 14).

⁴⁹ Council of Australian Law Deans (n 41).

⁵⁰ Duncan, Field and Strevens (n 42) 68.

assert a direct causal link between fears and concern about climate change and the deterioration of law students' mental health. However, given what we already know about the rates of psychological distress of law students, it is fair to assume that climate distress will add to the mix of contributory, extrinsic factors. Students who already live with depression and anxiety may be more at risk from worsening symptoms brought on by anxiety over climate change. It is also conceivable that some future law students will enter law school with a heightened predisposition to adverse mental health due to unhealthy levels of concern about climate change. Much like the science about climate change itself, this article cautions against a denialist approach to this issue. As Grauer reflects, in the context of high school education:

The reality of climate change can be debated to kingdom come, but the impact it is having on our youth is undeniable, immediate, and in some cases catastrophic. Because they stand to lose the most from our action or inaction on climate change, we owe them the facts from all sides — and the opportunity to respond.⁵¹

Fortunately, the considerable body of scholarship on law student well-being extends beyond problem identification and provides a clear picture of which intervention strategies are most likely to support student well-being. A whole-of-school approach that delivers substantial reform across all facets of teaching and learning — curriculum design, assessment, and pedagogical approaches — is ultimately what is required. Larcombe describes this as '[a] comprehensive, multi-level approach to prevention and intervention ... [a]n institutionalized and sustainable approach to mental health promotion'.⁵²

Large-scale structural reform is welcome, and it is noted that many law schools are steadily implementing changes to how they teach, assess, and engage students in the light of the overwhelming evidence about law student psychological distress. This is despite genuine constraints on law schools to change their business-as-usual approach, notably curriculum overcrowding as a result of the Priestley 11. Meanwhile, the science is unequivocal that now is the critical decade for action if we are to avoid catastrophic harm to the planet, communities and individuals.⁵³ It is therefore with some urgency that law schools should recognise and respond to the impact of climate change — at the very least

⁵¹ Grauer (n 38) 44.

⁵² Wendy Larcombe, 'Towards an Integrated, Whole-School Approach to Promoting Law Student Wellbeing' in Rachel Field, James Duffy and Colin James (eds), *Promoting Law Student and Lawyer Well-Being in Australia and Beyond* (Routledge, 2016) 44, 47.

⁵³ Will Steffen and Lesley Hughes, *The Critical Decade 2013: Climate Change Science, Risks and Responses* (Climate Commission Report, June 2013) <https://web.archive.org/au/awa/20130904112329mp_/http://climatecommission.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/The-Critical-Decade-2013_Website.pdf>; Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Global Warming of 1.5°C: An IPCC Special Report on the Impacts of Global Warming of 1.5°C Above Pre-Industrial Levels and Related Global Greenhouse Gas Emission Pathways, in the Context of Strengthening the Global Response to the Threat of Climate Change, Sustainable Development, and Efforts to Eradicate Poverty* (Report, 2019) <https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/2/2019/06/SR15_Full_Report_High_Res.pdf>.

in the context of their students' mental health. Not only is there an ethical imperative on law schools to act on the knowledge they have about student well-being⁵⁴ but arguably a moral obligation for them to actively and immediately contribute to the concept of climate justice.⁵⁵ Already there are some innovative strategies being delivered in the realm of clinical legal education, and a bold move by the Faculty of Law at Bond University deserves recognition.⁵⁶ Drawing on theoretical frameworks for effective student engagement, the next part of this article addresses these and other initiatives to demonstrate what activities can be swiftly implemented.

IV PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES FOR ACTION

The youth psychology research presented in Part I of this article indicates that young people cope best when they are actively involved and engaged on climate change issues. Providing students with the opportunity to share and act on their concerns about the climate crisis can boost their self-efficacy, hopefulness and resilience, and make them feel more supported.⁵⁷ Within the context of legal education, schools and law teachers must offer ways to facilitate student engagement on climate-change-related legal issues. There are many approaches to take, each with a varying degree of time, cost, and difficulty. Importantly, to achieve the goal of positively addressing student well-being pedagogical design for *how* students engage on this issue is as important as the introduction of new content about climate change and the law.

A branch of positive psychology known as self-determination theory (SDT) is recognised as a highly effective framework for designing law curricula, assessment and pedagogical approaches that support student well-being.⁵⁸ SDT is a theory of human motivation, which suggests that poor mental health is a consequence of unmet psychological needs.⁵⁹ To maximise one's intrinsic motivation, a human being is said to require regular experiences of autonomy,

⁵⁴ Duncan, Field and Strevens (n 42).

⁵⁵ Adrian Evans, 'Greenprint for a Climate Justice Clinic: Law Schools' Most Significant Access to Justice Challenge' (2018) 25(3) *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* 7, 9.

⁵⁶ Bond University, 'Bond Launches World-First Climate Law Degree' (Media Release, 11 December 2020) <<https://bond.edu.au/news/66951/bond-launches-world-first-climate-law-degree>> ('Bond Article').

⁵⁷ Jo Abbott et al, 'Young People and the Climate Crisis' (2019) 41(6) *InPsych* 2019 <<https://www.psychology.org.au/for-members/publications/inpsych/2019/december>>.

⁵⁸ Self-determination theory emerged in the 1970s and derives from the work of positive psychology scholars Edward L Deci and Richard M Ryan: Duncan, Field and Strevens (n 42) 78–82. See, eg, Richard M Ryan and Edward L Deci, 'Self-Determination Theory and the Role of Basic Psychological Needs in Personality and the Organization of Behavior' in Oliver P John, Richard W Robins and Lawrence A Pervin (eds), *Handbook of Personality: Theory and Research* (Guilford Press, 3rd ed, 2008) 654.

⁵⁹ Deci and Ryan (n 58); CSDT, 'Theory' *Self-Determination Theory* (Encyclopedia, 31 March 2021) <<https://selfdeterminationtheory.org/theory/>>.

competence and relatedness.⁶⁰ These needs are so vital that they have been likened to a plant's need for sunlight, soil and water.⁶¹ Therefore, any strategies to engage students in legal tasks related to climate change should activate these fundamental needs:

[P]eople need to feel that they are good at what they do or at least can become good at it (competence); that they are doing what they choose and want to be doing, that is, what they enjoy or at least believe in (autonomy); and that they are relating meaningfully to others in the process, that is, connecting with the selves of other people (relatedness).⁶²

A particular form of student engagement that is gaining traction in teaching and learning circles is a Students as Partners (SaP) approach.⁶³ SaP is defined as 'a collaborative, reciprocal process through which all participants have the opportunity to contribute equally, although not necessarily in the same ways, to curricular or pedagogical conceptualisation, decision making, implementation, investigation, or analysis'.⁶⁴ Student-staff partnerships position students as active participants in learning design alongside academic and professional staff. These partnerships are said to be a relationship rather than a product, one in which everyone 'stand[s] to gain from the process of learning and working together'.⁶⁵ Reciprocity is at the heart of the relationship,⁶⁶ where qualities like trust, inter-dependence and agency are brought to the fore.⁶⁷ Healey and his colleagues clarify that '[a]ll partnership is student engagement, but not all student engagement is partnership'.⁶⁸

To illustrate how staff-student partnerships can engage the hearts and minds of students focused on climate crisis, a case study of an extracurricular project, the Climate Justice Initiative at The University of Queensland, is described below.

⁶⁰ Deci and Ryan (n 58).

⁶¹ Richard M Ryan, 'Psychological Needs and the Facilitation of Integrative Processes' (1995) 63(3) *Journal of Personality* 397, discussed in Kennon M Sheldon and Lawrence S Krieger, 'Understanding the Negative Effects of Legal Education on Law Students: A Longitudinal Test of Self-Determination Theory' (2007) 33(6) *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 883, 885.

⁶² Sheldon and Krieger (n 61) 885.

⁶³ Also referred to in the literature as 'student-staff partnerships.' These terms are used interchangeably.

⁶⁴ Alison Cook-Sather, Catherine Bovill and Peter Felten, *Engaging Students as Partners in Learning and Teaching: A Guide for Faculty* (Jossey-Bass, 2014) 6–7.

⁶⁵ Mick Healey, Abbi Flint and Kathy Harrington, *Engagement Through Partnership: Students as Partners in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education* (Report, 2014) 12 <https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/system/files/resources/engagement_through_partnership.pdf>.

⁶⁶ *Ibid* 7.

⁶⁷ *Ibid* 12.

⁶⁸ *Ibid* 15.

A Extracurricular Pro Bono: Climate Justice Initiative

The Climate Justice Initiative (CJI) is an extracurricular activity coordinated by the UQ Pro Bono Centre situated within the TC Beirne School of Law. The CJI was established because one of the priorities of the Pro Bono Centre under its 2018–21 Strategic Plan was a commitment to environmental sustainability through legal work. Similar to a club or grouping, the CJI brings together law students to undertake pro bono legal work that has a connection with climate justice. Approximately 12 students are involved in the CJI at any time, although that number can fluctuate depending on the time of year.

There are three key aims of the CJI. First, to create a community of practice for students who are passionate about climate justice.⁶⁹ Second, to undertake pro bono tasks on climate-justice-related issues. This may involve research to support pro bono litigation, internal capacity building for the legal assistance sector, or law reform. The third aim is to strengthen the Pro Bono Centre's engagement on climate justice both within the University and externally with the broader legal profession. Students may apply to join the CJI once they have completed their first year of law. Having studied environmental law is preferable, but it is not a precondition to student involvement. This is because there are many climate-related legal research tasks that fall into other areas of law (administrative, criminal, planning etc) so it is not necessary for students to have prior environmental law knowledge.

Since its establishment in late 2019, students in the CJI have had the opportunity to work in collaboration with staff on a variety of climate justice tasks, including drafting environmental law reform submissions and undertaking legal research to support pro bono litigation, primarily in the area of summary criminal defence work following charges arising from climate protests in Brisbane. Students also prepared submissions to the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements and the independent review of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cth).⁷⁰ At all times since the CJI's inception, students have led the progression of the work. Students set the agenda and goals for what they want to achieve and bring their ideas to regular meetings. They participate in shared exchanges with academic and professional staff, and stakeholders, including from community legal centres and groups like Lawyers for Climate Justice Australia. Virtual and in-person

⁶⁹ Etienne Wenger, Richard A McDermott and William Snyder, *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge* (Harvard Business Review Press, 2002). Note: the authors define a community of practice as a group of people 'who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis': at 4.

⁷⁰ Rose Foster, Priam Rangiah and Cara Scarpato, Submission No NND.001.00971 to Governor-General, *Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements* (24 July 2020); Rose Foster, Lachlan Glaves and Angela Goggin, Submission No ANON-K57V-XQSB-B to Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, *Independent Review of the EBC Act* (16 April 2020).

exchanges provide the space for shared anger, despair and indignation about government inaction on climate change. In its short existence, the CJI has generated strong sentiments of belonging and social connectedness amongst participating students and staff. These feelings of mutual support and collective action reflect SDT needs for relatedness. Anecdotally, students report feeling good about applying their legal skills to something that really matters to them and about channelling their legal knowledge into projects that support the environment.⁷¹ SDT needs of competence and autonomy are exemplified through this approach.

A systematic review of empirical research on student-staff partnerships found a focus on partnership activities that are small scale, at the undergraduate level, extracurricular, and focused on teaching and learning enhancement.⁷² Pro bono activities like the CJI are therefore ideal student-staff partnerships as they allow for strong engagement outside the bounds of the formal curriculum.⁷³ Operating on a small scale supports episodic involvement by students and staff; students can dip in and out to participate when they have time. This flexible approach also means that the CJI can quickly assemble a surge workforce of student volunteers when needed, as the barriers to participation are low.

Matthews proposes five guiding heuristic principles that underpin good SaP practice. An effective staff-student partnership should aspire to: foster inclusion; nurture power-sharing relationships through dialogue and reflection; accept that it is a process with uncertain outcomes; be ethical; and be transformative.⁷⁴ A carefully designed staff-student partnership 'creates space to re-imagine expertise, particularly that of students in regards to learning, teaching and the student experience...'⁷⁵ Student expertise in the CJI is grounded in their knowledge of climate science, their familiarity with climate protesters' motivations to act and their connections with, and proximity to, the climate justice movement. Students are the experts on these issues instead of their law teachers. In this way, traditional assumptions about the identities of, and relationships between, learners and teachers are challenged and teachers learn equally if not more from the engagement process.⁷⁶ For example, in the CJI one of the academic coordinators is an environmental law scholar with expertise in environmental law. The CJI provides a levelling space for her as a coordinator to engage with students free from the more routine constraints of teaching a semester-long

⁷¹ University of Queensland School of Law, *Climate Justice Initiative* (Web Page, 31 March 2021) <<https://law.uq.edu.au/pro-bono/student-opportunities/join-pro-bono-student-roster/climate-justice-initiative>>

⁷² Lucy Mercer-Mapstone et al, 'A Systematic Literature Review of Students as Partners in Higher Education' (2017) 1(1) *International Journal for Students as Partners* 1.

⁷³ Natalie Skead and Shane L Rogers, 'Stress, Anxiety and Depression in Law Students: How Student Behaviors Affect Student Wellbeing' (2014) 40(2) *Monash University Law Review* 565.

⁷⁴ Kelly E Matthews, 'Five Propositions for Genuine Students as Partners Practice' (2017) 1(2) *International Journal for Students as Partners* 2.

⁷⁵ *Ibid* 3.

⁷⁶ *Ibid* 1.

course. Thus, the partnership can be regarded as an ‘act of resistance to the traditional, often implicit, but accepted, hierarchical structure where staff have power over students’.⁷⁷ This also goes some way towards addressing the culture of law schools,⁷⁸ where a perceived lack of understanding and approachability by lecturers is a significant cause of student psychological distress.⁷⁹

One limitation of student-staff partnerships is scalability. The potential to upscale SaP initiatives like the CJI requires a commitment to embedding that practice across an institution so that working and learning in partnership becomes part of the culture and ethos.⁸⁰ Until that is possible, CJI and other similar extracurricular approaches will likely operate nimbly on a small scale. Regardless, this case study hopefully demonstrates that it can be an effective mode of student engagement. Student pro bono activities can create rich learning synergies as students apply their classroom learning in a pro bono context.⁸¹ The benefits of pro bono include the formation of a professional identity and service to one’s community.⁸² Furthermore, at a time of curriculum overcrowding there is a deeply pragmatic reason to consider pro bono activities as a vehicle for action on climate change.

B Climate and Environmental Justice-Themed Law Clinics

The use of clinical teaching methods is said to be a premier form of learning and teaching about the law.⁸³ Clinics are especially important for the development of students’ practical legal skills and their professional identity as future lawyers. Clinics develop students’ emotional intelligence by exposing them to people and clients whose lives are less privileged than their own.⁸⁴ They also introduce students to notions of justice and power, and their role as future lawyers in supporting the resolution of their clients’ legal problems.⁸⁵ Teaching students how to meaningfully reflect on their actions and experiences is an essential

⁷⁷ Ibid 6 (emphasis omitted).

⁷⁸ Larcombe et al (n 45) 429.

⁷⁹ Larcombe et al (n 45) 429.

⁸⁰ Healey, Flint and Harrington (n 65) 26.

⁸¹ Monica Taylor and Clare Cappa, ‘Student Pro Bono and its Role in Contemporary Australian Law Schools’ (2016) 41(2) *Alternative Law Journal* 121, 122.

⁸² Ibid; John Corker, ‘The Importance of Inculcating the “Pro Bono Ethos” in Law Students, and the Opportunities to Do it Better’ (2020) 30(1) *Legal Education Review* 1, 10; Tracey Booth, ‘Student Pro Bono: Developing a Public Service Ethos in the Contemporary Australian Law School’ (2004) 29(6) *Alternative Law Journal* 280.

⁸³ Adrian Evans et al, *Australian Clinical Legal Education: Designing and Operating a Best Practice Clinical Program in an Australian Law School* (Australian National University Press, 2017).

⁸⁴ Colin James, ‘Seeing Things as We Are — Emotional Intelligence and Clinical Legal Education’ (2005) 8 *International Journal of Clinical Legal Education* 123, 129; Ross Hyams, ‘Nurturing Multiple Intelligences through Clinical Legal Education’ (2011) 15 *University of Western Sydney Law Review* 80, 89.

⁸⁵ Evans et al (n 83); Heather Douglas and Monica Taylor, ‘Understanding the Power of Law: Engaging Students in Criminal Law Casework’ (2014) 24(1) *Legal Education Review* 29, 33.

feature of clinics. Reflective practice is built into clinic activities through assessment tasks, regular opportunities for supervisor and peer feedback, and debriefing. Being taught this professional skill at law school encourages an awareness of the importance of reflection throughout one's professional life.⁸⁶ Fostering a habit of reflective practice is an SDT-informed approach that supports student well-being.⁸⁷ The overarching positive impact of law clinics on students' mental well-being is implicitly asserted throughout the clinical legal education literature; however it is noted that some studies point to the need for caution.⁸⁸

Law clinics have been a vehicle through which to engage students in environmental law issues since the 1970s.⁸⁹ The most recent edition of the national guide to Clinical Legal Education courses at Australian universities reveals environmental or climate law-related clinical offerings at eight separate law schools.⁹⁰ These include the Land and Environment Court Clinic run by the University of Western Australia, which seeks to develop students' understanding of procedural justice in an environmental law context.⁹¹ The recently established Climate Justice Law Clinic at Monash University supports law students to use their legal skills to address climate change mitigation action.⁹² Students in this clinic advise climate activists, non-governmental organisations and citizens to use legal tools in their fight for climate justice.⁹³ A sustainability business clinic at Melbourne Law School teaches students about new concepts of environmentalism.⁹⁴ Yet another interesting clinic is a three-way collaboration between the Macquarie Law School, Queensland University of Technology and the University of the South Pacific in Vanuatu. This clinic exposes students to the impacts of climate change and adaptation through a two-week, immersive in-

⁸⁶ See Donald Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (Basic Books, 1983).

⁸⁷ Duncan, Field and Strevens (n 42) 85.

⁸⁸ Monica Taylor and Tamara Walsh, 'Perceptions of Competence and Well-being in Clinical Legal Education' (2018) 3(1) *Australian Journal of Clinical Education* 1, 2; Kate Seear, 'Do Law Clinics Need Trigger Warnings?: Philosophical, Pedagogical and Practical Concerns' (2019) 29(1) *Legal Education Review* 1, 13.

⁸⁹ Brad Jessup and Claire Carroll, 'The Sustainability Business Clinic: Australian Clinical Legal Education for a "New Environmentalism" and New Environmental Law' (2017) 34(6) *Environmental and Planning Law Journal* 542, 554; Hope Babcock, 'Environmental Justice Clinics: Visible Models of Justice' (1995) 14(1) *Stanford Environmental Law Journal* 3, 15.

⁹⁰ 'Kingsford Legal Centre Clinical Legal Education Guide: Your Guide to CLE Courses Offered by Australian Universities in 2019/20' *Kingsford Legal Centre* (Guide, 14 March 2021) <<https://www.klc.unsw.edu.au/sites/default/files/documents/2924%20CLE%20guide-WEB.pdf>>. Note: It must be said that CLE offerings come and go and there may be more or less depending on university resources, and student and stakeholder interest.

⁹¹ Judith Preston and Shannon Peters, 'Collaborative Environmental Justice — the Land and Environment Court Clinic' (2020) 48(1) *University of Western Australia Law Review* 295, 307.

⁹² Monash University Faculty of Law, *The Climate Justice Clinic* (Web Page, 14 March 2021) <<https://www.monash.edu/law/home/cle/clinics/The-Climate-Justice-Clinic>>. See Evans (n 55).

⁹³ Monash University Faculty of Law (n 92).

⁹⁴ Jessup and Carroll (n 89).

country field trip.⁹⁵ These innovative courses reveal that Australian law schools are already engaging law students in environment and climate-change-related legal work. International examples point to students becoming involved in legal responses to climate disasters such as Hurricanes Katrina, Hugo, Harvey and Maria.⁹⁶ The literature on poverty and disasters in the United States is unequivocal that poor communities are more vulnerable to disasters because of where they live, their social exclusion and their reduced ability to cope, adapt and recover.⁹⁷ To the best of the author's knowledge, disaster law clinics do not yet feature in the Australian clinical legal education landscape. This is despite growing awareness also in Australia of the social impact of disasters on vulnerable population groups, and the need for local communities to prepare for the rise in frequency and severity of extreme weather events.⁹⁸ Disaster law clinics could arguably form part of the next wave of clinical legal education in Australia. Such clinics would not only facilitate rich learning for students about the expanding concept of social justice through the lens of climate, but they would also deliver a myriad of practical legal tasks, as described by US clinicians:

In addition to the physical devastation that natural disasters cause, they also produce an onslaught of legal problems that require expertise from legal professionals. The range of legal issues that arise after a natural disaster are vast and compound problems particularly for marginalized and vulnerable populations. Once the immediate threat of danger clears, urgent needs for legal advice arise; for example, whether a tenant must pay rent on a now-uninhabitable apartment, whether someone qualifies for government assistance, or what to do if the natural disaster destroys legal documents that prove title, citizenship, ownership, or identity.⁹⁹

There are important ways for law schools to assist communities and individuals at all stages of the disaster cycle — mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.¹⁰⁰ This is an area of potential future growth for Australian clinical legal education, and law schools should be encouraged and supported to develop new clinic offerings.

⁹⁵ Paul Govind et al, 'Seeds of Change: Applying Transformative Learning and Thinking in Relation to Students Responding to Climate Change Challenges' in Walter Leal Filho, Mark Mifsud and Paul Pace (eds), *Handbook of Lifelong Learning for Sustainable Development* (Springer International Publishing, 2018) 359.

⁹⁶ Jeffrey R Baker et al, 'In Times of Chaos: Creating Blueprints for Law School Responses to Natural Disasters' (2020) 80(2) *Louisiana Law Review* 421, 439.

⁹⁷ Alice Fothergill and Lori A Peek, 'Poverty and Disasters in the United States: A Review of Recent Sociological Findings' (2004) 32(1) *Natural Hazards* 89, 90.

⁹⁸ See, eg, Queensland Families & Communities Association, *Queensland Neighborhood Centres Strategy for Bushfire Resilience* (Web Page, 25 March 2021) <<https://www.qfca.org.au/bushfire-project>>; Collaboration 4 Inclusion, *Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness Toolkit* (Web Page, 4 April 2021) <<https://collaborating4inclusion.org/pcep/>>.

⁹⁹ Baker et al (n 96) 423.

¹⁰⁰ National Resilience Taskforce, *National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework* (Report, 2018) <<https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/emergency/files/national-disaster-risk-reduction-framework.pdf>>.

While the educational and engagement benefits of clinical legal education are clear, there are some key constraints to this model of student engagement. The cost to law schools of running law clinics relative to conventional lecture or seminar-style teaching to larger numbers of students makes it an expensive prospect for a law school to fund.¹⁰¹ Law clinics are usually available to students as an elective, which typically involves some form of graded or non-graded assessment (usually reflective journals) and a close student-lawyer supervisory ratio. This course scaffolding necessitates careful planning, and it can take some time for new clinics to be established. This contrasts with pro bono initiatives, which generally have a lower threshold for supervision and no requirement for assessment. However, notwithstanding these constraints, clinics are a beneficial model for engaging students on climate-change-related legal work. Law schools with active clinic programs are well-placed to grow existing offerings and seek out new ways to partner with the legal assistance sector in this space. In particular, disaster law clinics are a likely growth area and ought to be trialled by Australian law schools.

C Embedding Climate Change Content throughout the Law Curriculum

A comprehensive but time-consuming strategy is to embed climate change content across the law curriculum. This approach is similar to other calls to embed certain approaches throughout the LLB pathway. Calls to ‘Indigenise’ the curriculum,¹⁰² prioritise social justice perspectives,¹⁰³ embed an ethics approach,¹⁰⁴ and increase the orientation on dispute resolution,¹⁰⁵ are all examples of perspective transformation within the study of law that have circulated for many years.

Described as a ‘world first’, Bond University in Queensland, Australia, recently launched a climate law degree for its undergraduate students wanting to ‘fix the system from the inside.’¹⁰⁶ Students enrolled in the LLB will have the option of completing a specialisation, major or double major in climate law. According to the Executive Dean of Law at Bond University, Nick James, the degree will give students ‘the tools they need to lead legal, social and political

¹⁰¹ Jessup and Carroll (n 89) 557; Peter A Joy, ‘The Cost of Clinical Legal Education’ (2012) 32(2) *Boston College Journal of Law & Social Justice* 309, 321.

¹⁰² Heather Douglas, ‘Indigenous Legal Education: Towards Indigenisation’ (2005) 6(8) *Indigenous Law Bulletin* 12, 13.

¹⁰³ Tamara Walsh, ‘Putting Justice Back into Legal Education’ (2007) 17 (1–2) *Legal Education Review* 119, 122.

¹⁰⁴ See generally Michael Robertson et al (eds), *The Ethics Project in Legal Education* (Routledge, 2011).

¹⁰⁵ Kathy Mack, ‘Integrating Procedure, ADR and Skills: New Teaching and Learning for New Dispute Resolution Processes’ (1998) 9(1) *Legal Education Review* 83, 91.

¹⁰⁶ Bond University (n 56).

reform'.¹⁰⁷ It remains to be seen whether this exciting development will prompt other schools to take up the challenge to reconfigure their LLB offerings to comprehensively address climate change now and into the future. One qualification to embedding climate (or indeed any other) perspective across the degree is that its impact on student well-being will be undermined if SDT-informed approaches are not integrated within the new program. Traditional curriculum, assessment and pedagogical approaches that are unsupportive of student well-being will not give students what they need to regularly experience autonomy, competence and relatedness.

V CONCLUSION

Student psychological distress about the climate crisis has the potential to contribute to their negative mental outlook while at law school. Law schools that understand the contributory role of climate change as a factor in student distress will be better placed to support their student body. Despite the ongoing psychological impact that the climate crisis will have on youth mental health, this article shows that there a range of practical strategies that law schools can initiate to support student well-being. Extracurricular pro bono initiatives, clinical legal education and embedded climate change perspectives across the degree are all examples of what is possible.

As legal educators, there is an obligation upon us to become climate literate and to understand how this phenomenon is affecting our students. For many years, the Australian legal academy has grappled with the issue of student well-being and we already have the tools to design learning activities to alleviate the problem of law student psychological distress. Authentically engaging with our students as partners, and working alongside them to craft opportunities for their engagement in addressing climate change, is crucial. We must strive to find the space within the curriculum (and, if not, then through pro bono initiatives) to help spark their motivation and passion to act. Doing so will not only attenuate the distress they may feel but will also, hopefully, open up career paths that involve a long-term professional commitment to climate justice.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.