For and against: The use of a debate to address the topic of religion and spirituality in social work education

Russell Whiting[1]

Summary: This article will provide an account of research undertaken in relation to a single session on an MA in Social Work course, which featured a debate on the place of religion in social work. Research on the session was conducted through the use of two focus groups with participants and also through the use of a questionnaire completed by the whole student group immediately after the debate. Material from the research was presented in a workshop in the Seventh International Conference for Practice Learning and Field Education in Health and Social Work in York in July 2008. This article analyses excerpts from the debate itself, the focus groups and material from the questionnaire (appended).

Whilst using a debate is an interesting starting point for addressing this topic it has both advantages and disadvantages as shall be seen. The article builds on Gregory and Holloway's (2005) work on the use of debates in social work education and also draws on a broader framework for social work education published recently by colleagues at the University of Sussex (Lefevre et al., 2008). The article highlights the lack of work published concerning how the topic of religion and spirituality is addressed in social work education and offers the debate as the start of a way forward.

Keywords: religion; debate; social work education; values

1 Lecturer in Social Work and Social Care

Address for Correspondence University of Sussex, Essex House 123, Falmer, Brighton, BN1 9QQ, Email: R.Whiting@sussex.ac.uk

Introduction

The following is an extract from a debate conducted by a group of first year MA in social work students debating the motion that '*There is no place for religion in social work*'. I have not included every word spoken or given any indication of the length of the pauses before replies, some of which were lengthy. This exchange includes the most tense moments in the debate and it was the closest that any individual got to expressing their personal views (names have been changed to preserve anonymity):

> *Sharon: One of the things that we were looking at was abortion, and if you are following a very strict Catholic belief system and if you are working with somebody who is considering abortion, how do you actually come to terms with that for yourself…*
>
> *Chair: Anyone want to respond to that?*
>
> *Linda: Yeah – I think it is very important that you know what your own beliefs are and that – so say for instance that you are a social worker and you don't believe in abortion - it's important that you recognise that as part of yourself, not as an overriding rule, but that sometimes you do say that I don't think this case is for me but that could also be for somebody who is not religious but doesn't believe in abortion. That doesn't mean that they can't be a social worker – or someone you know might have different values about anything and I think that our argument is that you have to accept what your own values are that it is important to be reflective.*
>
> *Chair: So you are saying that it is possible to put your values to one side?*
>
> *Julie: But I think what you are saying is that you just pick and choose who you work with and that's not particularly a social work value… That goes back to the point about who is deserving of your time and what you are saying is you are recognising that that person is someone you would not want to work with .*
>
> *Linda: I'm not saying you wouldn't want to work with them. I'm saying that if you want them to have an objective social worker it might be in the interests of that person to have somebody who can say that they are objective…*
>
> *Sharon: My interest on that was that if you had been working with somebody for some time – you might have been working with somebody for two to three years and then it's something that happens, how would you explain that to them that you would suddenly introduce a new worker.*
>
> *Linda: With regard to abortion if you can say that every client has a right to their own values how can you then… how can you say that a social worker as*

a person doesn't have the right to hold to their values…
Penny*: Because you are not there as a person –you are there as a professional, you don't go to work for yourself. You go there for them….*
Linda*: No - I wasn't arguing that you do it for yourself but I'm saying that people aren't robots and I'm not saying that you go there to get your own beliefs across but I'm saying that everyone has got their own beliefs and values and if you accept that all service users have got that right then surely you must accept that all social workers are people as well with their own beliefs.*

It should be noted that the word 'religion' is used only once in this long section whereas the word 'values' is used repeatedly. This, I suggest, is the key to understanding what was happening in this debate. The assertions from the two students 'You are not there as a person, you are there as a professional' and 'people are not robots' get to the heart of the matter and also have a much wider application than the topic of religion.

This research was originally undertaken as a project for a Post Graduate Certificate in Higher Education (PG Cert HE) and the original proposal for this project featured three key questions:

1. How should the topic of religion and spirituality figure in social work education?
2. Can the teaching of spirituality and religion be incorporated into a single learning event [a debate]?
3. What happens when an attempt is made to incorporate this topic into a single learning event?

In this article I am not going to attempt to answer the first question which is much too broad a topic for a single article although I shall begin by briefly introducing it. The second and third questions, with their preoccupations with the one –off aspect of the debate eventually became a distorting factor in the research as shall be seen.

Religion and spirituality in social work education

A survey of qualified social workers undertaken by Furman *et al.* (2004) revealed that almost 77% had received no input of any kind on religion

and spirituality in their social work education to date. In 2007 and 2008 I have taken sessions with post-qualifying social work students (who will have done their training not just at Sussex but in a range of different institutions) in which I have asked if they had participated in specific social work and religion sessions earlier in their social work studies and in very few cases have they been able to cite anything specific that they have studied on this topic.

This apparent absence of teaching on the topic is in marked contrast to the work that the topic of religion and spirituality in particular that is currently generating in academic social work journals in Britain. The *British Journal of Social Work* alone has published numerous articles on the topic in recent years including Bowpitt (1998; 2000), Furman *et al.* (2004), Gilligan and Furness (2006), Grey (2008) and Holloway (2007). A number of recent conferences have been held on the topic including the 2008 Practice Learning and Field Education Conference at York. There is, however, little material available currently on how best to address the topic in the university. The material that is available such as Nash (2002) and Sheridan *et al.* (1994) describes work in other countries. There is perhaps a sense in which social work education in Britain is attempting to catch up with social work practice on this topic. It should just be noted then that this is an unusual piece of work being discussed here.

Development and organisation of the session

The impetus for course content on this topic came from the student body in 2006. It is interesting in itself, that the academic momentum for this topic discussed above had reached the student group. The fact that this topic was suggested by the 2006 MA cohort but studied here in its 2007 incarnation with students who inherited it should not, however, be underestimated.

The 2006 student group originally asked for speakers on religious topics. Then they asked for a form of digest, with material on each world religion and how one might work with them. Both of these options were rejected by the tutors and an alternative proposed. That alternative was the debate. The following indicates the reasons why this alternative was offered.

The debate ran first in May 2007. The context for the students at that point is that they are on placement four days a week and they come back in to the university on intermittent Fridays for a module called 'Theory, Methods and Values in Practice'. Teaching methods include a group tutorial and occasional lectures or other forms of presentations. The session feedback at the end of year feedback indicated that the debate had gone well. It was therefore decided by the course tutors (Michelle Lefevre and myself) that we should retain the debate and indeed add another one (see below). The religion debate ran again in May 2008, for the group starting in October 2007. It is this debate that is studied here. Some small changes were introduced for the second running of the debate. The first change was the removal of the words 'or spirituality' from the motion. This was done because a number of students in the 2006 group wanted to argue the place of spirituality but not that of religion in social work. This 'spiritual but not religious' discourse is critiqued by Wong and Vinsky (2008) in a recent article. Spirituality was deliberately removed from the motion of the debate in part to see if the students might find their way to the religion-spirituality discussion without any help. They did not. The second change was that in 2007 a social work and social care text book on religion and spirituality was published (Moss, 2006) and this book contained discrete chapters for and against the place of religion. It, therefore, seemed only right that this text should form the essential reading for the module. The previous year the list of British Journal of Social Work articles cited above had been provided to students. In fact this was a better course of action and enriched that first debate. Whereas the book chapters from Moss rather spoon fed the students their material for the debate and on reflection I would not use this again and would revert back to the previous approach. It is interesting how reading matter can be too close to the topic. The third change, as has already been noted, was that this session was already established by the time this cohort started the course and it had its own page in the module handbook. The students did not ask for this session but they knew it was coming.

The structure and format for the session follows fairly closely that used by Gregory and Holloway (2005) in the only significant piece of academic writing on the use of debates in social work education in Britain. The debate was a team effort with the student group splitting into two groups in order to prepare scripts for a proposer and a seconder.

Students were encouraged but not forced to join the group that was arguing a different perspective to the one they held personally. This helps develop skills of argument and gives the students the experience of arguing a case to which they may not personally be committed. Certainly this is an aspect of contemporary practice that is worth attempting to approximate. After a break the students reconvened and the debate began. It was a formal debate with a proposer for the motion speaking for five minutes, an opposer for five minutes and then seconders for each side having two minutes each. After this the debate was opened up to the floor and students were encouraged at this stage to make it a genuine open debate. The excerpt quoted at length in the introduction is from this open section in the debate. There was then a vote. Gregory and Holloway got students to vote purely on the merits of argument but in this case the vote was left entirely open. The May 2008 debate was attended by 16 of the 21 students registered on the course and they voted 13 against the motion (that there is no place for religion in social work), 0 in favour of the motion with 3 abstentions.

Why hold a debate?

In order to explain why the debate was offered rather than a digest or a list of speakers it is important to consider for a moment the process of formation involved in social work education and then its particular interpretation at the University of Sussex. In their article, Gregory and Holloway (2005) briefly run through the use of debates more generally in education, and bemoan their neglect in social work education. The reasons they suggest debates are useful for social work students are all to do with the development of skills:

> Students would be given on the spot experience of developing and defending a position (as they might have to in a courts, or a case conference, for example); they would have to think through the value base for a decision or opinion and expose that value base to challenge (as might be the case in a multi-disciplinary meeting); and they would be required to reflect on dilemmas and conflicts, which the polarisation of positions in a debate highlights.'(Gregory and Holloway, 2005, p.624)

Clearly then, a debate offers more than a lecture or a digest. They provide propositional knowledge but a debate offers an opportunity for application in a situation which may not be exactly the same as a social work setting but that has some similarities to it. Gregory and Holloway (2005) cite Kolb's learning cycle and claim that a debate can be seen as providing the concrete experience element of the cycle of learning (Kolb, 1984). If the debate is a part of a series it can be argued that the other elements or stages in the cycle, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation, will also be encountered in complementary sessions that accompany the debates. In a situation of a one off debate these other elements in Kolb's cycle should be accommodated elsewhere in the curriculum.

Whilst the acquisition of skills is undoubtedly of benefit, staff in the social work department at the University of Sussex would argue that it is only one part. Colleagues (Lefevre *et al.*, 2007) have produced a model specifically for use in teaching skills in relation to communicating with children with qualifying social workers but it is clearly a model that might be considered for wider application. In this model the qualifying social worker develops their social work understanding and practice in relation to three domains - *Knowing*, *Doing* and *Being* (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1 (after Lefevre et al., 2007)
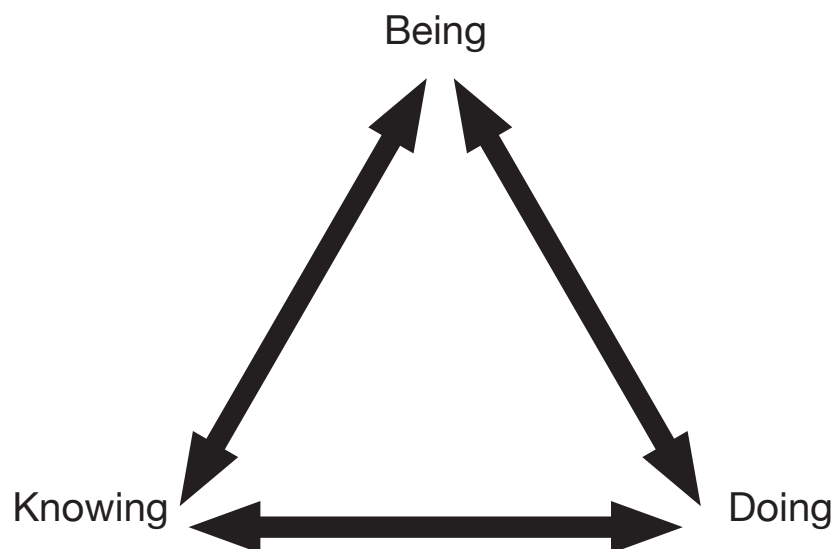
They argue that social work education is not simply a process of gathering propositional knowledge and skills but that both of these forms of knowledge need to be integrated into an individual's sense of themselves, their being. The extent to which the debate achieved this will be one of the points of analysis of the research.

In Gregory and Holloway's account of their work the debates were assessed. They were running a whole module on social policy via debates and so students had an opportunity to practise debating before an assessment was made of both their debating skills and of social policy knowledge displayed. On the Sussex MA course there was one other debate, held in the first term. The format for this was the same as the religion debate although the topic was very different. It debated Relationships vs. Tasks as the social workers' starting point. This meant that by the time the students undertook the religion debate they were at least familiar with the format but their experience of debates was in no way comparable to the students that Gregory and Holloway worked with and therefore to have attempted to assess the debate itself would hardly have been appropriate. How the topic of religion and spirituality might better be incorporated into other forms of assessment on the course is an interesting subject, again not to be discussed here. It might be worth adding in this context however that the attendance at the session (16 out of 21) was the lowest for the module in the whole year. Clearly some students considered the session to be optional.

Methodological considerations and the format of the research

In studying the PG Cert HE one of the repeated messages that has been received has been about the importance of obtaining student feedback. In planning this research, I became convinced that the use of focus groups would be a particularly powerful way to research the effectiveness of a debate. Kitzinger and Farquhar (1999) have noted as well how focus groups are particularly suited to running alongside other forms of research. I had known all along that I would want to use some written feedback from the whole group, probably in the form of a questionnaire. It occurred to me quite late on in my thinking about the project that it would be good to get the focus group to draw up this

questionnaire themselves.

I had a discussion with my PG Cert HE tutor on whether I should facilitate these groups or whether I should get someone else to perform the role. In the end I decided to do that myself and there were certainly some advantages in doing that but there might well have been disadvantages (Myers and Macnaghten, 1999). For example, in the focus group transcription below I can clearly be seen leading the discussion but the interesting point is that members of the group then refuse to be led/convinced.

I recruited to the focus group by asking both my own tutor group and the other group if any members would like to volunteer to be part of a discussion. I did this about three weeks before the debate was to take place. Seven individuals volunteered of which four finally attended, two men and two women, all white. All four attended both sessions. This group were the enthusiasts for the project and for the debate itself. It is important to bear in mind that they were not a traditional focus group that observes an event and comments on it. They were participants. Not only that they were enthusiastic participants. Two members of the focus group were also formal speakers in the debate. Morgan (1997) writes about the polarizing effect of focus groups. In the pre-debate focus the students spoke about what they called a secular lobby amongst the students who frankly saw little point in the debate.

They clearly saw themselves as in the other camp although not all of them claimed a faith or a set of religious beliefs but of course one needs to treat their comments carefully.

Advice on running focus groups recommends using a technique known as 'funneling' (Morgan, 1997, p.50) whereby the focus group begins with a general discussion and moves down to the specific. I did this explicitly and openly with the pre-debate focus group by starting with a general discussion on the topic to gather their initial views. Then I asked them to do some predictive work as to how they thought the debate might go and then I asked them to brainstorm ideas and come up with questions for the questionnaire. For the post-debate focus group I followed a kind of upside down funnel pattern, starting with their impressions of the debate, moving on to get the group to look at and comment on the questionnaire returns and finally coming back to where we began the week before with a further general discussion.

Both focus groups and the debate were filmed. This has meant that I have been able to use material transcribed from the DVD produced.

However the impact of the filming process on both the focus groups and the debate should not be underestimated (Morgan, 1997, p.56). The group was particularly quiet and reticent in the debate and whilst the subject matter might have contributed to this the DVD camera would not have helped either.

It is important to appreciate that the production of the questionnaire and the questionnaire itself (appended) was an important part of the research. It was produced by the focus group at the end of the first focus group session and later checked and approved by them before being distributed to the whole group. There was some discussion in the first focus group session about how best to do this and in particular whether the group would benefit from more time to complete what is quite a detailed questionnaire. My own view was that it was better to get the group to complete the questionnaire on the day.

It is essential to note that researching anything changes it. This was the only single session that these students experienced during this year that had its own focus groups. It was filmed and there were questionnaires so obviously it was clear I was very interested in it. In addition the aspect of it that I was particularly interested in was singularity. Therefore in the weeks preceding the debate when students asked questions such as 'what do you mean by religion in the debate' I replied – 'that is up to you to decide.' This was inadequate and must have been frustrating for the students but it kept the session singular or a real one -off. In regard to the matter of attendance all 11 of my tutees attended but only five out of 10 from the other group. Clearly despite all my efforts to keep it singular and keep myself out of the debate as an observer I had clearly managed to convince my tutor group that this session was important to me.

Findings and discussion

The research project produced a great deal of material including three DVDs that have been partially transcribed and 14 questionnaire returns (from 16 debate participants). It is, therefore, not possible to consider all of the findings in this paper. I have, instead, chosen a selection of the most significant data to emerge that can be grouped together according to themes. The themes looked at here are *applicability* and *safety*.

The focus group put the question on placements at the head of the questionnaire. Clearly their placement experience was to the forefront of their minds and this question and its prominence is revealing. It is a reminder that the session took place when students were for the most part out on placement and most of them by this stage were more than half way through their first placements. I suggest this timing has an impact on the debate in that the students are perhaps more focussed on application than theoretical niceties at this stage. This can clearly be seen in the discussion transcribed in the introduction. Overleaf are the replies to that first question in the questionnaire:

The breadth of responses to this question can be seen particularly in that some considered it in relation to the people they were working with and others in terms of the ethos of their organisation. The three answers in the negative are perhaps the most intriguing. Elsewhere (Whiting, 2008) I have written about all the 'unsaids' in relation to secularism in social work in Britain. There is not space to consider that here but the strength of feeling for an explicitly secular position amongst a section of this group was reported in the focus group. An explicitly held secular position has an impact on practice as will an explicitly held religious position. Put most simply – if a subject is not important to you, you will not ask about it and so it will not become part of your work. As Trevithick (2006, p.118) comments:

> As professional social workers it can be our choice of words and the gestures, meaning and understanding that accompany the words we use that enable relationships to be formed and work to be done.

A worker in so many small ways will show to a person whether they are comfortable or uncomfortable discussing a particular topic. I am certainly not implying here that a social worker who conceives of themselves as secular is in any sense inferior to a religiously-minded worker. The point here is the deeper one about the relationship between the worker's perception of themselves and the work they do with others and it is in this respect that the topic of religion can be a helpful one to workers because normally they know where they stand with it. The student who responded that religion was an integral part of her placement might be interpreted as saying that religion is an integral part of her own being and she sees her placement through her own experience. But reticence for good reason on this topic might also be

Have you encountered issues of religion on your placement? If so, how?

1. Not to a large degree. I have asked people about their religious beliefs in assessments. Other beliefs (not specifically religious) have been important.

2. Yes, in terms of service ethos. For example I am on placement within a substance misuse service and many clients have strong reactions about AA/NA/CA for their initial basis on religious values.

3. Only that some clients express their psychosis in very strong religious ways.

4. Yes, I have been given a case with a girl who is from Jamaica and is having difficulty with culture and religion.

5. All the time. During assessments I ask, as part of the form filling, about religious beliefs. Religion is an integral part of my placement.

6. Yes, thinking of the needs of a child placed in foster care.

7. People discussing the impact of their of their religion (or families' religion) on their situation

8. Yes, a client wanted to know if I believed in God.

9. Yes. Working with a young service user who holds different religious views to her parents.

10. No

11. Yes -one lady was Muslim and missed culture, religion – another lady took communion in the care home.

12. Yes –discussing workers' own views – how they may use religion/ prayer as a way of coping with the stress of the job.

13. No

14. No

considered to be effective 'use of the self' as shall be seen now in relation to the topic of safety.

Another important theme that can be seen arising from the questionnaire that the students drew up is the preoccupation with safety (third question). A particular feature of the pre-debate focus group

discussion was the view that to discuss religion was a dangerous topic, in the sense that it left you vulnerable and individuals might be hurt. The focus group correctly predicted that individuals would be reluctant to speak about their own faith and they saw the debate as potentially a safer setting, because it was more formal, than, for example, an open facilitated or unfacilitated discussion on the topic. Opposite are the responses to the question on safety:

Do you feel that the session was safe enough for you to express your views on religion?

1. Yes, although it was more a discussion about social work values than religion as such which was different as I think there was more of a consensus.

2. Yes

3. Yes

4. Yes

5. I felt that my group were up for a discussion but expressing my own views in front of the whole group might have been tricky.

6. Yes, largely because it wasn't necessary for me to express my religious beliefs.

7. Question didn't allow for this ...different issue to this.

8. Yes, but only because I am an atheist. Not sure if a fundamentalist Christian would have felt the same

9. Yes

10. Yes

11. Not fully

12. Yes, although no-one expressed own views – maybe not relevant to the debate

13. Yes

14. Yes but I would have felt less comfortable if I had an extreme view.

It is of particular note that in response to this question a number of

students reveal what they think the debate is about – that it is about social work values or that it was an opportunity for them to express social work values. Rather bizarrely there appeared to be some consensus that it was not about religion but it was an opportunity to express tolerance, for example. This is less surprising when one notes that the module that these students are taking is called 'Theories, Methods and Values in Practice'. An interesting question is would the session have been richer and of more benefit to the students if they had spoken more openly about their own positions. Here we are not especially helped by Lefevre's Knowing, Being and Doing model because being reticent may be a form of doing or not doing that is entirely appropriate to the social work role. It is not necessary as a social worker to be constantly telling your own story. It may however be necessary at points to give an account of your own beliefs.

A reluctance to talk on this topic is not at all unusual. Caroline Humphry argues (in another paper in this issue) that students inhabit various forms of closets in regard to speaking about their own faith on a social work course. This chimes with the reluctance to speak on this topic that was so clearly to the fore in the debate. It is difficult to get across in any meaningful ways the awkwardness, the pregnant pauses and the silences that marked the debate and, I would argue, are as important as anything that was said.

In the following excerpt from the Post Debate Focus group I provided students with a narrative, that in part explains this reticence:

Russell: The choice that people are making to either not participate or be very cautious in the way they participate you could perceive that as a positive thing that people are working out that they may have strong views one way or another in terms of religion but publicly they are not going to express those —so the debate serves a function in that way and you could relate that to saying in the social work relationship in work with individuals your own views are going to be withheld to a certain extent —so the withholding of views today conceivably could be seen an appropriate and a right way to do it although it is probably less satisfying than a more full throated argument or debate

Lorraine: Yeah I'm not sure…

Angus: But it is about safety as well, I was saying a lot of things that I didn't agree with but I still felt quite safe saying them, that I knew I wasn't being judged that you knew it was a debate but some people couldn't get past that.

Laura: But definitely in this group as a whole we have not talked about it and

it's been a huge load on my mind is this and I haven't talked about it at all.
Russell: *Do you want to talk about it? Do you think it is appropriate to talk about it on a social work course?*
Laura: *No, well, I think it is such a personal thing how would I bring it up. I haven't felt that I wanted to or needed to. No, No, there was one time, there was one time when someone said that they didn't like a client and I think I might of … well it got a bit heated very quickly. … and I said well but fundamentally people are good.*
Russell: *So, you know, your fundamental position would be that all people are good in and of themselves.*
Laura: *Innate*

What is particularly interesting about this is the group's partial rejection of my narrative explaining reticence and I would argue that they reject it precisely because they are showing an understanding, or several of them are showing an understanding, of the importance of involving themselves in their work and if their religion is an important aspect of themselves then this somehow needs to find a place. They are integrating their knowing and doing with their being and accomplishing the conjoining of the personal and the professional.

Conclusion

Many of the students undertaking this piece of work saw it as a positive and successful experience. For many of them it gave them a framework to discuss a topic that they might otherwise have found difficult to raise. For others they were able to express what they considered appropriate social work values on this topic (tolerance mainly).

Debates polarise. That is their nature. Whether religion is then a suitable topic for such polarisation is another question. This particular debate did polarise but the polarisation was peculiar. It was covered over with an anaesthetic of apparently agreed values. For me as module convener and as researcher I had a series of difficulties and frustrations with it to do with the my perception that the session did not in fact thoroughly integrate knowing, doing and being. The doing –the skills aspect - was probably the most effective and fruitful but a great deal was left unsaid as people were very carefully self censuring. That does

not mean that they were not working through those other areas as well as the subsequent focus group discussion showed.

Much work remains to be done. The experience of researching for this project and presenting the material at conferences has convinced me that there is an emerging consensus that the topic of religion and spritituality should be addressed in social work education but no consensus on how to do that. Some exploratory work needs to be done on how the topic is being addressed and I would be eager for colleagues in social work education to contact me with their views on a debate as a way of addressing this topic but also for a discussion on how they themselves address the topic. The tentative application of Lefevre *et al.*'s conceptions of an integrated approach for this single session has hopefully demonstrated as well how this approach might be considered in relation to other aspects of the curriculum.

References

Bowpitt, G. (1998) Evangelical Christianity, Secular Humanism, and the genesis of British social work. *British Journal of Social Work* 28, 5, 675-693

Bowpitt, G. (2000) Working with creative creatures: Towards a Christian paradigm for social work theory, with some practical implications. *British Journal of Social Work* 30, 3, 349-364

Furman, L.D., Benson, P.W., Grimwood, C., and Canda, E. (2004) Religion and spirituality in social work education and direct practice at the Millennium: A Survey of UK Social Workers. *British Journal of Social Workers* 34, 6, 767-792

Gilligan, P. and Furness, S. (2006) The Role of religion and spirituality in social work practice: views and experiences of social workers and students. *British Journal of Social Work* 36, 5, 617- 637

Gray, M. (2008) Viewing spirituality in social work through the lens of contemporary social theory. *British Journal of Social Work* 38, 175-196

Gregory, M and Holloway, M (2005) The debate as a pedagogic tool in social policy for social work students. *Social Work Education,* 24, 6,617-637

Holloway, M. (2007) Spiritual Need And The Core Business Of Social Work. *British Journal of Social Work,* 37, 2, 265-281

Kitzinger, J. and Farquhar, C. (1999) The analytical potential of 'sensitive moments' in service user discussions. in R.S. Barbour and J.Kitzinger (Eds.) *Developing Focus Group Research*. London: Sage

Kolb D.A. (1984) *Experiential Learning: Experience as a source of learning and development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall

Lefevre, M., Tanner, K., and Luckock, B. (2008) Developing social work students' communication skills with children and young people: A model for the qualifying level curriculum. *Child and Family Social Work*, 13, 1, 166-176

Moss, B., (2006) *Religion and Spirituality.* Lyme Regis: Russell House

Morgan, D.L., (1997) *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research.* London: Sage

Myer, G. and Macnaghten, P (1999) Can focus groups be analysed as talk? In R.S. Barbour and J.Kitzinger (Eds.*) Developing Focus Group Research*. London: Sage

Nash, M. (2002) Spirituality and social work in a culturally appropriate curriculum. in M. Nash and B. Stewart (Eds.) *Spirituality and Social Care, Contributing to Personal and Community Well-Being.* London: Jessica Kingsley

Sheridan, M.J., Wilmer, C.M., and Atcheson, L. (1994) Inclusion of content on religion and spirituality in the social work curriculum: A study of faculty views. *Journal of Social Work Education,* 30, 3, 363-376

Whiting, R. (2008) No room for religion or spirituality or cooking tips: Exploring practical atheism as an unspoken consensus in the development of social work values in England. *Ethics and Social Welfare* 2, 1, 67-83

Wong, Y.K.,R. and Vinsky, J., (2008) Speaking from the margins: A Critical reflection on the 'spiritual-but-not-religious' discourse in social work. *British Journal of Social Work*, Advance Access published on March 28, 2008

Appendix:

MA Theories Methods and Values Religion Debate May 2008 Feedback Questionnaire

Have you encountered issues of religion on your placement? If so, how? Do you consider that a session on religion and social work is necessary on the course?

Do you feel that the session was safe enough for you to express your views on religion?

Were you in the For or Against preparation group?

Which way did you vote?

Have your views or perceptions on religion in social work changed in any way following this session?

Did you find the preparatory material useful?

What do you think was the effect on the group of structuring this session as a debate?

Would you have preferred that this topic be taught differently? If so, do you have ideas on how the topic might be better covered?

What do you think about the timing of this session. Might it have been better earlier/later in the course?

Would you like more/further coverage of this topic?