INCLUSIVE CURRICULUM

Name of the project/ initiative. Date of this paper: January 2018

Personal, Religious and Cultural Traditions (BA lecture)
Ethical Concepts from Diverse Belief Systems (MSW lecture)
Nigel Elliott (2017) 'Faith, Ethics and Social Work: Framework for an introductory lecture', *Ethics and Social Welfare,* 11(1), pp. 92-99.

Which teaching sessions/modules/ courses/directorates are involved in the initiative?

 BA (Social Work) module: SW4003 Working with Ethics in Professional Practice
 Jointly taught with: BA Working with Children and Young People – Ethics module
 MSW module: SW7004 Legal, Ethical and Policy Frameworks for Social Work Practice
 Note: both lectures are provided for students in full text; the published article covers: the rationale, structure, content and evaluation of the lecture. Contact email: nigel_elliott@tiscali.co.uk.

Briefly describe the initiative and the students who have participated.

A) The initiative: acknowledging the place of religious faith and spirituality within social work practice

This lecture is part of the core first year ethics modules for qualifying social work students at BA and MSW levels. The lecture is essentially the same at both levels. In 2016, the BA social work students were joined by the BA Working with Children and Young People for this module and the lecture is now given jointly to both student groups. The new degree is a non-qualifying preparatory course for students who intend to enter this field of work and they move on to a range of different professions, including nursing, teaching, social work, youth work, counselling, etc.

The lecture addresses the contested topic of the place of religious faith and spirituality within social work practice. There is strongly held opinion within the profession that faith and spirituality have no place in social work and indeed there are religious practices, including within mainstream faiths, which are incompatible with core social work values, e.g. over sexuality and gender roles. However, many students enter social work and the caring professions through their faith and the related teaching of devoting one's life to public service and welfare. There is an intrinsic conflict in which many students of faith feel silenced by the predominant professional hostility and/or suspicion of religion and associated practices.

There is an issue here – largely hidden – of inclusivity. The lecture's response is to build from principles of good practice and follow the logic of this: faith and spirituality are important to many service users, to deny the consequences of this for how service users live their lives and failing to give service users 'voice' over their deeply held beliefs can be an act of oppression, therefore social work should be responsive to these needs and, being relationship-based, responding with sensitivity to others involves active self-awareness.

The lecture is placed within ethics modules because expressions of all faiths and of spirituality are at heart an expression of values. Therefore, this lecture takes religious moral systems seriously and explores them in depth.

These underlying principles determine the structure of the lecture and its mixture of didactic input with group exercises because self-awareness requires self-reflection and active engagement. This fits with good teaching practice with variety in the session's approach and pacing spread over either two or three hours.

The structure is clearly set out in the published article: introduction and setting out the ethical dilemma – definitions – establishing high levels of religious affiliation within the population at large – the consequence

being that what is important to many clients must be important to social workers and the task is to 'recognise this and respond in an ethical, competent and professionally bounded manner' – the place of values is now established, hence the need to explore religious value systems alongside secular and professional ethics, revealing broad overlap – the foundations are now laid to apply to practice, done through two exercises, one looking at specific professional practice situations and the other exploring through self-reflection our own faith and/or sense of spirituality – leading into the practical consequences for daily practice, particularly assessment, 'cultural competence', utilising the strength that faith and spirituality can impart and guarding against the risks that exist – concluding with a reprise of relationship-based good practice principles.

Inclusivity is engendered by: 1) giving 'voice' to different positions and respecting this; 2) drawing upon a wide range of faiths to create a real sense of comparative religious ethics and revealing continuity between these, secular and professional positions; 3) including students of many faiths by explicitly referencing such a wide range of faiths; 4) broadening out the understanding of spirituality by quoting a powerful example of secular spirituality, thereby encompassing many who otherwise may consider they have no faith; 5) but acknowledging that being a registered social worker in the UK *requires* compliance with UK professional codes, consequently conflict between different value systems must be addressed responsibly and resolved in a reasoned way by every practitioner; 6) through further reading, suggested visits and the lecture's content addressing directly two of the most contentious and distressing aspects of contemporary world events and discourses, namely anti-semitism and islamophobia. The hope is that, at the end of the lecture, the topic has been legitimised as important for social work and all students – of faith and no faith – have had an opportunity, within an atmosphere of acceptance, to reflect upon their own positions in regard to matters of faith and spirituality.

B) Participating students: the issue of cross-disciplinary teaching

The participation of BA Working with Children and Young People students on to the BA level lecture presents the issue of teaching a cross-disciplinary group because these students may progress to a whole range of professions. In fact, the social work BA ethics module was designed as a cross-disciplinary one. Initially it was a fully integrated module for BA nursing and BA social work students and this applied through planning to delivery up to and including assessment. There were joint module leaders, one from each school. For some eight years, I was the social work module leader but I did not teach the lecture on faith and spirituality, which was taught by the ecumenical chaplain, Rev. Stan Brown. Following my retirement, the joint module was split and I was invited back to teach this lecture to social workers only.

In 2016, they were joined by the Working with Children and Young People students. In 2017, I amended the lecture to take this wider group into consideration, with further amendments in 2018, drawing upon previous experience of teaching on the joint module along with the rich resources of feedback and support I have received over time from colleagues and students.

On reflection, I think inclusivity for a group of students from more than one professional group profits from the following simple principles. These thoughts are based upon personal experience:

1) acknowledge the presence of both groups of students at the outset;
2) acknowledge one's own professional background; explain this will influence the range and depth of references drawn upon, but the other professions will also be referenced throughout (don't apologise for the inevitable imbalance but strive to lessen it);
3) follow through on this promise, e.g. for this BA lecture, I give equal prominence to both the NMC Code of Professional Standards and the BASW Code of Ethics in the passages on the Golden Rule and Ghandi: *shared principles*;
4) referencing cross-professional texts, e.g. Mathews' (2009) generic chapter on faith and spirituality for children in which he develops the underpinning statement 'that children recognise and express some complex spiritual ideas and have spiritual needs' and Hugman's generic text on ethics, which takes in teaching and nursing amongst other caring professions: *shared professionalism*;
5) adjust practice case studies and exercises to include the range of professions, e.g. in this case I bring in youth outreach work, a youth offending team, community nursing, teaching: *shared purposes and practice.*

There are other important ways in which integrated working can be enabled at course level but the above points are particularly relevant for a guest lecturer who may have no, or very limited, input into the culture of the course beyond the design and delivery of the session itself.

As Professor Croisdale-Appleby underlined at a recent public social work seminar at the University, the success of future health and social care provision depends upon integrated cross-professional practice; the vanguard pilots demonstrate this and the Sustainability and Transformation Plans, the flaws behind which he specified, must be made to succeed because there is no Plan B. This, he argued, requires inter-professional and service user inclusivity in a truly integrated manner.

What has been the impact? Is there any data on the effect on student performance? If it is too early for this, what are students saying about it?

There has been no formal evaluation of this lecture as a teaching session or of its outcomes in terms of student performance. In terms of what students say about it, the informal feedback I receive is encouraging. Two examples from the 2016 MSW course are given in the article: one student said the lecture is 'well formed' and another that it had helped her because, as a Christian, she had experienced hostility within work settings. This addresses directly the issue of inclusivity and one of the primary aims of the session. With the 2017 BA session I received no specific observations but one student, a Buddhist spoke to me at length in the mid-point break and clearly had felt 'included', while I was astonished by the number of students who came up to me at the end and simply said 'thank you': clearly a chord had been struck (although students are also appreciative of guest lecturers who come in to teach).

Fortunately, prompted by the production of the article, the BA module leader provided extensive and informed feedback based on her observations, student comment and knowledge of how students progress through the course and of the place of the session within it. She states the lecture provides a reflective space for both secular students and those of faith; it helps the former consider the powerful part faith plays in the lives of some service users and the impact secular assessments can have on them; the latter report it is affirming to have a lecture devoted to the issue; in parts of the curriculum faith is seen as a hindrance to professional practice and the lecture validates a spiritual life for them. The lecture provides a 'cornerstone' for subsequent discussion around boundaries, personal disclosure and the impact of beliefs upon professional practice.

How far could this be adopted elsewhere in Kingston University?

Religion and its place within society is now a highly contested subject; as the article comments, the maelstrom affecting many Muslim majority countries, with terrorist attacks beyond, imbues media and public discourse. There is a sharp rise in divisions within society, loss of tolerance, fear of the 'other', epitomised by increasing violent anti-semitism and islamophobia. Professional courses can address the issue of faith and ethics in relation to their respective professional codes and perhaps the lecture provides something of a template that can be adjusted to fit other professions. Beyond the ethically governed professions, is there a broader message around inclusivity: breaking down barriers and seeking out the historical cross-fertilisation between faiths and civilisations? There is a shared cultural heritage across natural and social sciences and the humanities stretching through history and into the present. Should such perspectives be more widely and routinely woven into higher education courses?

Professor Croisdale-Appleby in his seminar specifically applauded Kingston University and St. Georges for their inter-disciplinary approach; the earlier joint BA ethics module is one example of this. He also commented on the universities' role in professional training for new intermediate professional groups that, he argued, are required for the integration of health and social care. The Faculty now includes education. Croisdale-Appleby's message was that effective inter-professional working is critical: the two universities have deep institutional experience of this area of work, enabling them to play a significant role during this demanding period of transition in the relationship between health and social care.

Any other comments and contact for further information: References
Croisdale-Appleby, D (2017), *Integration and Transforming the Health and Social Care Workforce: or 'The Hunting of the Snark',* Dept. of Social Work and Social Care Seminar, Kingston University & St. Georges, University of London.
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Mathews, I (2009) *Social Work and Spirituality,* Exeter: Learning Matters.