

ELUSIVE TENSIONS IN EVERYDAY RELATIONSHIP-BASED SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

It is hard to imagine that social work practice and education can exist without numerous tensions to be skillfully navigated and negotiated if those involved wish to be effective and true to social work values. However, in recent years a number of specific tensions have emerged, from the shadows of previous practice imperatives, which have proven elusive and divisive within the social work community. These specific tensions exist at the intersection of spirituality and faith based views about sexuality. This paper explores these tensions through three real life scenarios. The first concerns a classroom schism during the first year of a qualifying social work programme and the subsequent calls for formal action by the teaching staff. The second concerns an experienced foster couple whose application to continue to foster was rejected because of their expression of their faith based views on sexuality and how this was managed by their local authority. Finally, the third involves a social work student who was excluded from a social work programme because of his publicly expressed faith based views on sexuality and the reasoning of the High Court Appeal Judge who rejected his application to be reinstated. The paper argues that whilst formal and legal imperatives have been a critical part of each case they do not provide the social work profession with the tools needed to remain diverse but undivided. The paper explores alternative approaches to resolution.

Dr Janet Melville-Wiseman