

## A Review of the Conference - 25 years of Normalization, Social Role Valorization and Social : A Retrospective and Prospective View

held May 10-13 1994 in Ottawa (CANADA)

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Six people present at the SRV/Normalization Information Exchange (held at Stockport College, in England, July 15 and 16 1994) had attended the Ottawa conference and formed a panel to give their views on what they saw as its significant contributions. The following was first published in the CMHERA Newsletter (the voice of SRV in Britain), issue 15, January 1995. Our thanks to Paul Williams, the Director of CMHERA, for allowing this reprint.

### Conference Day One - History and Theory

The first notable point made about the opening two presentations by Bengt Nirje and Wolf Wolfensberger was their own obvious experiences in different societies. Whilst Nirje's formulation came from a post-war welfare consensus in Sweden, and indeed in Europe, Wolfensberger's had had to be carried across the Atlantic and to address the massive institutional investment and commitment in US mental health services. Thus, while Nirje could talk of "rights of ordinary citizen," this meant something very different in the US. Nevertheless, the panel noted the immense amount of cross-fertilisation in the sixties, to which both speakers had referred, and the resultant publication, in 1969, of the report "Changing Patterns in Residential Services for the Mentally Retarded" which Wolfensberger had edited, and in which Nirje produced the first written exposition of the normalization principle.

Wolfensberger had gone on to list some of the milestones that had followed that event, including the publication of his "Normalization" text in 1972, the development of PASS and PASSING, and the change in his theory and formulation, from normalization to SRV. One comment which many of the panel noted in their impressions was Wolfensberger's remark that it might have been better for SRV/Normalization if he had gone under the proverbial bus in the late seventies, just after the publication of PASS 3. This was particularly, he said, because of his developing thinking and presentation on other themes, especially the dysfunctionality of services and the prevalence of deathmaking, that had caused many people to reject SRV, as it came from the same source as views with which they did not agree.

Ultimately, the panel noted that the opening presentations had provided a good context for our own discussions, and had also put them in perspective. Opinions on the remarks by Michael Oliver, in response to the opening presentations, were more varied among the panel. Some, who had been familiar with his work, were not surprised by his presentation of a Marxist and disability rights position, which saw SRV as yet another attempt by able bodied society to impose their views and exercise their power over disabled people. Others were of the view that there were not, in fact, opposing views being expressed, but different formulations of the fact of devaluation. Certainly all agreed that it put the issue of "rights" vis-à-vis SRV at the forefront of the conference agenda, where it was to remain throughout the four days.

Commenting on the three presentations that ended day one, the panel again differed in their reactions. Burt Perrin's presentation had dwelt heavily on what he saw as the denial of rights inherent in SRV, which he contrasted with the legal rights at the root of Scandinavian normalization. Some observers had found his views of SRV naive, and based on shallow reading of PASS or PASSING manuals, whilst others agreed with his position, though remarking that a historical welfare state made a legal rights

position easier to adopt. Different views came too, on Jack Yates presentation which some saw as a beautifully simple presentation of the normalization they had learnt about in the seventies, showing how deep was the connection with SRV, and where the effects of normalization on planning and development reports in the seventies had come from. Others saw it as a child of its time (and even Jack Yates as looking like a child of the early seventies) in that things had moved on since the seventies and service development was much more complex and required much more attention to rights and to the views of the service users than this formulation gave. On Susan Thomas's presentation of SRV there was general agreement on the switch of emphasis in two areas. First, the greater emphasis on the effects of valued roles and the need for people to be placed in valued roles. Second, and particularly relevant in many UK contexts, was the increasing frequency with which both Wolfensberger and Thomas emphasised the non-directiveness of SRV. Thomas pointed out in her presentation that SRV predicted what would happen, given a set of circumstances, but that other considerations would inevitably come into a judgement about what to do about those circumstances. Reference was made to the "If this, then that" way of looking at normalization, an early version of which had appeared in the CMHERA newsletter.

### **Conference Day Two - Research, Practice and Policy**

All agreed that this day contained a much more academic series of presentations in the daytime sessions, and there was less discussion of its proceedings at the information exchange, it being particularly difficult to reproduce the mass of academic detail of some of the presentations. Some found this day at the conference somewhat off-putting because of the degree of detail, others less so. A few key points did come out for members of the panel. First, Raymond Lemay's paper on the place of role theory vis-à-vis SRV seemed to be given a certain amount of weight, particularly in placing SRV within some mainstream academic writing. Similarly Robert Flynn's two papers, using his own work collecting PASS and PASSING data, but also reviewing other studies on integration, added academic confirmation to the observed view that physical integration was much easier to achieve than social integration, and that services scored more highly on PASS and PASSING ratings to do with physical issues than they did with social ones.

Work from Vermont, using different measures of integration, and from Europe, using PASS, confirmed the general position. Jacques Pelletier, speaking about the European experience, added some interesting findings to do with staff performance in the most successful projects, in particular the importance of identifying with clients and the willingness to come out of the staff role. Overall, however, the panel felt that this day represented, in particular, an uneasy balance between the conference being an academic event and a more broadly based conference of interested people.

On the evening session of day two, views of the panel were divided. Some saw the presentations of SRV training and safeguarding groups as a clear statement of both their commitment and their deliberate limitation of what they did to presenting SRV and PASSING and putting on TI events (Wolfensberger's Training Institute -TI- at Syracuse University in Syracuse New York). Others saw their presentations as rather cosy and self-congratulatory, almost to the point of exclusiveness. Debate returned to the issues raised on the first day of the information exchange about an SRV movement. It was also noted here, however, that all the groups presenting at Ottawa covered a finite area of the US or Canada - non sought to be "national" groups.

### **Conference Day Three - Research, Practice and Policy**

As the program shows this day contained a large number of relatively short presentations, which ranged

from global or continent wide assessments to intensely personal statements, on the impact of normalization and SRV. From the perspective of the information exchange, the panel commented specially on the non-American experiences, especially the developments in Australia, and noted that, even including that country, the UK had perhaps the widest exposure to PASS and PASSING training outside of America, though presentations of SRV in the style of the TI were more common in Australia. This was different, however, from impact on services and peoples lives and here a much patchier picture emerged. Whilst in some states in the US and some provinces in Canada, an overwhelming impact had been forthcoming, such that one delegate could talk of a “post-SRV” stage, even in these countries there was still a wide range of human service activity totally untouched by SRV thinking. Tony Wainwright’s presentation had noted the impact in the seventies of the early ‘normalization’ foundations, and also the major impact on training of CMHERA, but he also had reminded the conference of the enormously powerful effect of broader government policies and the lack of real attitude change in the UK. So too with other European countries, where only pockets of SRV thinking contended with major professional interests. Even in Scandinavia, clear differences existed between the various countries, both in terms of the impact of SRV and whether it was SRV or the inheritance of the welfare state based normalization.

The views of people on major impacts, at country or state-wide level, were interestingly contrasted with personal views, in particular that Peter Park, the secretary of People First in Canada. His movingly told story both reminded delegates of the personal issues at the root of SRV, but also as he put it, that “without normalization I would still be in the institution.” Overall, the panel had received very individual impressions from day three, though all agreed that the mixture of the personal and the academic was more interesting than day two.

#### **Conference Day Four - The Future; Conference Synthesis**

On the last day the conference, and the two key speakers, returned to the key themes of rights, services and the place of SRV ideas within a developing service world. Wolfensberger produced his often stated views on the wider trends of our times, and linked this to a powerful defence of the position that those involved in services needed to take a moral position vis-à-vis the lives of those at risk of devaluation, including some responsibility for those lives. To some delegates, particularly those who had not heard Wolfensberger on wider issues, this came over as unduly alarmist. Some of the UK delegates were in this position, and had reported back some fairly negative reactions. To others, Wolfensberger’s analysis gave some clear indications about what work was necessary to address the trends of the times, or confirmed some of their existing attempts to do so. As with most of Wolfensberger’s presentations, there were few neutrals. Nirje returned to rights, and the welfare state, and drew on the involvement, in Sweden and elsewhere of people with disabilities in the laws that affected their lives. He hoped that consensus and development could build on the twenty five years of normalization and was distinctly more optimistic than Wolfensberger. Reaction from the floor of the conference was equally mixed, though probably more in agreement with Wolfensberger’s analysis than his solutions.

The information exchange panel were, like the delegates at the conference, divided over their reactions to the closing addresses, and to the event as a whole. Some saw the balance between the “academic conference” atmosphere and the “story-telling” tradition of the SRV world as an uneasy one, with the former tending to dominate too much in Ottawa. The corollary of this view was that such an academic conference would largely exclude service users and carers. Others felt that the event needed to happen, in more or less any form, in order to generate much more open communication between the members of the SRV “world” and that the major benefit would be the new relationships made. A third view was that it was important to re-engage SRV with academia, and that this had been achieved by the conference, whilst the “story-telling,” more informal, sort of event would continue anyway and be a highly relevant

but separate entity.

Williams, P. (1994). A Review of the Conference - 25 years of Normalization, Social Role Valorization and Social : A Retrospective and Prospective View. SRV-VRS: *The International Social Role Valorization Journal*, 1(2), 39-42.