The principle of normalization in human services

WOLF WOLFENSBERGER

NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON MENTAL RETARDATION
THE PRINCIPLE OF
NORMALIZATION
IN HUMAN SERVICES

with additional texts by
BENGT NIRJE
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NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON
MENTAL RETARDATION

SPONSORED BY THE CANADIAN ASSOCIATION
FOR THE MENTALLY RETARDED
The underlying principles inherent in normalization have led to such recent developments as the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Mentally Retarded Persons brought into being by the International League of Societies for the Mentally Handicapped.

This book is the first one to document normalization from its origins in Scandinavian services to the mentally retarded to its implications to the field of human services. The National Institute on Mental Retardation has published this text to support the current growing interest in normalization concepts and fuller integration of the retarded into the community. This concept is currently having a major impact on the pattern of programming in a number of countries. The views expressed in this book do not necessarily reflect the Institute’s specific strategies, or those of its sponsor, the Canadian Association for the Mentally Retarded.

The publication of The principle of normalization in human services, and earlier of Mental retardation • the law • guardianship and Standards for educators of exceptional children in Canada are examples of the Institute’s recently established publishing policy to bring to the attention of a wider public new concepts, innovative programs and reports of studies by the Institute itself and by others in the field of the mentally handicapped and in human services generally.

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Director,
National Institute on Mental Retardation
November 1972
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Wolf Wolfensberger was born in Germany in 1934 and migrated to the United States in 1950. He received a doctorate in psychology and special education from George Peabody College for Teachers, and has worked as a clinician, researcher, teacher, and administrator in mental retardation. From 1964 to 1971, he was a Mental Retardation Research Scientist at the Nebraska Psychiatric Institute in Omaha, and presently is a Visiting Scholar with the National Institute on Mental Retardation in Toronto, Canada. Recent interests include systematic planning of service systems, and implementation of the normalization principle and of citizen advocacy.

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In efforts to support an adaptive, communal, regulated way of life, society has developed many institutionalized ways of rendering help, assistance, or service to its individual members. These 'helping forms' are carried out primarily by professional groups (such as counsellors, educators and trainers, therapists, psychiatrists and clinical psychologists, social workers, and to some degree ministers, physicians, and nurses) and their auxiliaries, functioning through a wide range of agencies (such as courts, employment services, hospitals, clinics, schools, treatment and training centers, sheltered workshops, prisons and reformatories, and residential homes and institutions). These professionals and agencies address themselves to many human problem areas (such as delinquency and crime, mental disorder and retardation, physical and sensory disability, social incapacity, illness, poverty, and addiction and habituation to drugs), by means of numerous activities and functions (such as case assessment, diagnosis and evaluation; correction and detention; counselling, guidance, and psychotherapy; teaching and training; supervision and consultancy).

There are many continuities of training, manpower patterns, legislation, administration, and ideology in the above professions, agencies, activities, and problem areas. After all, these professions and agencies are concerned with human service to other humans, and they almost invariably render such services via societally sanctioned roles, and via a relatively small number of helping mechanisms.

Also, many benevolent, humanistic clinicians see themselves as servants of the public, offering themselves and their services in a non-controlling fashion. They see their clients as free agents, free to accept or reject the offered services. Their self-concept – in part due to the indoctrination received during training – is frequently incompatible with action perceived as controlling, directing or dictating client behavior. Yet, here it is where so many human service workers deceive themselves, because their roles are not only almost always societally sanctioned, but in an endless array of encounters between the server and the served, the server is the interpreter of and agent for the intents of society, and wields a truly amazing amount of power and control, even if he may not consciously perceive himself as so doing.

Human services fall into a number of categories, depending on whether they must be rendered, and whether they must be accepted. Both education and unemployment benefits must be rendered, but only education must be accepted. Even in services which need not be accepted, and in which the consumer has much freedom and choice, the one who renders the service is in an exceedingly powerful situation. Although the server may lack statutory power, he often exerts other types of power, since his decisions can affect the
social, emotional, physical, and financial future of his client. Even in his
least powerful role, he exerts a great deal of what psychologists call 'stimulus
control' over his client.

Unlike education, which must be both rendered and accepted, no one is
'forced to accept' welfare payments; and even in areas as apparently non-
controlling as – let us say – high school vocational counselling, the one ren-
dering the service holds enormous stimulus control over the client who is
seen as being in a position to 'take it or leave it'. Indeed, it is not too much to
say that who will be rich or poor, healthy or sick, bright or dumb, honest or
crooked – and even born or unborn – depends in many cases, and to a
significant extent, upon the decision of human managers. The fact that this
dependency is merely frequent rather than universal, and merely substantial
rather than predominant, detracts in no way from the enormity of the
phenomenon.

In order to speak parsimoniously about the many helping forms, func-
tions, and manpower structures mentioned above, to underline their com-
monalities, and to honestly acknowledge the strong stimulus control exer-
cised by them, this book will make frequent use of the term 'human
management'. More formally, we might define this term as referring to 'entry
of individuals or agencies, acting in societally sanctioned capacities, into the
functioning spheres of individuals, families, or larger social systems in order
to maintain or change conditions with the intention of benefitting such in-
dividuals, their family or other social systems, or society in general.' The
term 'human management', it is hoped, will help to keep us humble and
perceptive of what we do and are, and of that part of our functioning that we
are often inclined to deny.

At this point, I want to state the three goals that this book is intended to
achieve: to explain, clarify, and elaborate the principle of normalization as a
system of human management; to 'translate' it from its Scandinavian origins
so as to make it fully relevant to the North American scene; and to bring the
principle to the attention of a broad range of human management disciplines.

In part A of the book, the normalization principle will be presented in its
universal nature. Part B will contain illustrative elaborations of the applica-
tion of the principle to a number of specific problem areas or issues. Since
the principle has universal application in all of the human management areas
discussed above, including even areas that interact with human management,
such as architecture, it is to be expected that additional elaborations will be
forthcoming in time. The ones presented here are intended to be primarily
illustrative. In part C, some of the strategies and mechanisms for implemen-
ting normalization will be presented.

Not all the content of this book is new; some parts are adapted from pre-
vious publications, as indicated in footnotes. Material from one previous
article (Wolfensberger, 1970c) was used in several chapters, and is not
specifically acknowledged again.

Also, some parts of the book cover topics on which I have received con-
siderable assistance from others. I am particularly indebted to Richard Kurtz
for the discussion of deviancy in chapter 2, to Linda Glenn and Kris Rogge
for work on the PASS project, which is summarized in chapter 18, and to
Helen Zauha for her work in and on citizen advocacy which is summarized
in chapter 17. George Thomas, former Director of the Nebraska Office of
Mental Retardation, gave much initial support both to the citizen advocacy movement discussed in chapter 17, and the development and use of PASS reviewed in chapter 18.

*Wolf Wolfensberger*

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