

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Community and Mental Handicap
Educational and Research Association,
2 Eastbourne Road,
Trowbridge, Wiltshire. BA14 7HN

1st October, 1994.

Dear Editor,

Robin Jackson's tirade against Wolfensberger in the July 1994 issue of the Journal is strong on innuendo but weak on facts. It is difficult to avoid accusing critics of 'clumsy misinterpretation or wilful misrepresentation' if it is true!

Just one example that Wolfensberger and people like myself are constantly complaining about is Jackson's quotation of Mesibov as saying that normalisation 'conveys a value system which portrays people with a handicap as an undesirable group'. Normalisation fundamentally sees handicapped people as desirable, but it points out that they are not **desired**. The intention is to provide a detailed set of guidelines for bridging this gap, not in a prescriptive way, but in a way that clearly identifies the problem and predicts certain consequences of particular conditions or actions.

Jackson produces no evidence whatsoever that Wolfensberger 'promotes the normalisation principle as a moral crusade'. In fact, Wolfensberger has in recent years been at pains to present social role valorisation as an empirically-based theory, taught through a mixture of didactic logic, extensive illustrations from the experiences and circumstances

of real people, and practical evaluations of real services. Most people would see this as the exact opposite of a 'moral crusade'!

Wolfensberger does, separately, teach a moral framework of coherent anti-violence and personal commitment to vulnerable people. Even this he teaches in a very logical, patient fashion in his workshops.

There is no evidence of lack of empathy or lack of concern for choice and rights. Wolfensberger was also the creator of the concept of citizen advocacy. He is a long-term volunteer worker with homeless people in his home city of Syracuse, New York. In Britain, his ideas have been largely propagated by such people as myself, Alan Tyne, Graham Harper, John O'Brien, all of us heavily involved in parallel support for the self-advocacy movement of people with learning difficulties.

If Robin Jackson wants segregated provision retained, let him argue for it on its merits, not through a convoluted attack on a good man.

Yours sincerely

Paul Williams
Director

Dr. R. Jackson answers . . .

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16th October, 1994

Dear Editor,

It is a little difficult to know how to respond to William's rather incoherently expressed letter. Like most apologists for Wolfensberger's views, Williams rushes to interpret any kind of criticism of Wolfensberger as signifying that the critic must be a *segregationist*. This is a revealing assertion coming as it does from the Director of a 'charitable' organisation which spends a great deal of its time in attacking those who unthinkingly label and categorise others.

My views on this issue are very simple and I hope sufficiently simple for Williams to understand. I believe that there should be a wide spectrum of provision for children, young people and adults with learning disabilities. I also believe that people with learning disabilities have the right to choose from a range of options - including segregated (used in a non-pejorative sense) provision. To hold such a view makes me neither an integrationist nor a segregationist. Nothing is more pointless than the mindless incantation of the mantra: "Integration good, segregation bad".

Williams makes great play with the fact that Wolfensberger in his work attaches particular importance to discussing the experiences and circumstances of

real people and the practical evaluation of *real* services. The implication here is that critics of Wolfensberger have no knowledge of this *real* world. For what it's worth, my views on what constitute appropriate provision and practice for people with learning disabilities arise from working with, and listening to, people with learning disabilities, their parents and their carers - a strategy that even Wolfensberger, I imagine, would commend.

However the problem with propagandists, like Williams, is that they are no longer able to listen to others. Sadly, they have been deafened by the din of dogma.

Yours sincerely,

Robin Jackson