

Role Call: Citizen Advocacy Relationships as a Source of Valued Social Roles for People With Disabilities

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Introduction

ANY ANALYSIS THAT EXPLORES the points of connection between Social Role Valorization theory (Wolfensberger, 1998) and the Citizen Advocacy scheme (Wolfensberger & Zauha, 1973; O'Brien & Wolfensberger, 1979), as this article strives to do, can suffer from the curse of plenty. That is because the relationship between Social Role Valorization (SRV) and Citizen Advocacy (CA) is a rich one, and so much of CA is informed by SRV.

Given that so many thematic SRV threads adorn the CA tapestry, potentially, quite a number of discourses could be fashioned, each of which would examine in detail just one such thread. For example, there could be fruitful discussions on the themes of interpersonal identification, or social integration, or social imagery—all in the context of the work of Citizen Advocacy. Indeed, in a previous article published in this *Journal*, I looked at how SRV-based image issues can guide the Citizen Advocacy office in considering the identity and recruitment of potential advocates (Peters, 2007).

This article is centred on, and is limited to, the exploration of the nature of CA relationships as a source of valued social roles for people who are the recipients of advocacy in such relationships.

The Concept of Citizen Advocacy, the Distinction Between its Mission & Potential Outcomes & the Relevance of the Distinction to SRV

CITIZEN ADVOCACY WAS CONCEPTUALIZED by Wolf Wolfensberger in the latter half of the 1960s. CA is a personal advocacy scheme that promotes and protects the interests of people whose wellbeing is at risk, by establishing and supporting one-to-one (or near one-to-one) unpaid, independent relationship commitments between such persons and suitable other members of the community. The Citizen Advocacy office matches a person in need of advocacy ("protégé") and a person with relevant competencies ("citizen advocate"), and provides support to the citizen advocate who represents the interests of the protégé, as if those interests were the advocate's own. The roles assumed by advocates vary with each relationship, and include those of spokesperson, protector, mentor, assistant, friend, etc. Characteristically, the class of people for whom advocates are recruited by Citizen Advocacy offices have been people with disabilities (as reflected in the title of this article), and specifically those with an intellectual disability.

Given that Citizen Advocacy was developed by Wolfensberger, it has been influenced, firstly, by the North American formulation of Normalization (Wolfensberger, 1972), and then by SRV, which superseded the Normalization principle.

Although elements of SRV are embedded in the DNA of the Citizen Advocacy scheme, a review of the nature and mission of CA can serve as a reminder that its central goal is not identical to that of SRV.

The major goal of SRV is the creation and support of valued social roles for people in their society (Osburn, 2006). In contrast, the primary mission of Citizen Advocacy is “to protect and promote the interests and welfare of specific needy people via the individual advocacy of relevantly competent other persons who engage themselves without significant conflicts of interest” (Wolfensberger & Peters, 2002/2003). Nonetheless, an intrinsic or circumstantial outcome of a Citizen Advocacy relationship may be the acquisition of valued social roles by the protégé party in the relationship. It is important, therefore, to distinguish between the mission of CA and its derivative outcomes or benefits, one of which is that the protégé can obtain one or more valued roles from or through the advocacy relationship. As Wolfensberger has argued, for a CA office to stay true to its mission, any “likely benefit of Citizen Advocacy must not be confused with its *purpose*” (original emphasis) (Wolfensberger, 2003).

An understanding of why valued social roles are a natural benefit or by-product of Citizen Advocacy can be gained by examining the role implications arising from, firstly, the way in which the CA office matches people in advocacy relationships; and secondly, the inherent characteristics of such relationships.

Consideration of Role Dynamics in the Matching Function of the Citizen Advocacy Office

IN ORDER TO BRING TOGETHER a protégé and an advocate in a way that—primarily and most importantly—benefits the protégé, a Citizen Advocacy office must strive to arrange what is commonly called a suitable match. Accordingly, the construct of a suitable match was intended to inform CA offices in their work of facilitating

suitable matches. To elucidate the role implications of a match, it is necessary to recall the first two of the six criteria that constitute a suitable match (Wolfensberger & Peters, 2002/2003):

There is ... a relevant match between the identity and capabilities of an advocate, and the identity and needs of a protégé.

There is a ... good match between the role of the protégé vis-à-vis the advocate, and the role(s) of the advocate in carrying out the advocacy function.

In reference to the second criterion, it should be clear that under the rubric of the broad roles of advocate and protégé are derivative, specific roles that reflect the nature of the individual match. Those roles can be brought into sharper focus in the matching function by invoking the concepts of (a) role-person fit, as described by Lemay in regard to strategies for social integration (Lemay, 2006); and (b) role-role fit. In other words, the matching process should be conceptualized so that there is a role-person fit and a role-role fit.

Before elaborating on these role concepts, however, two points warrant mention. Firstly, it is necessary to emphasize that it is the needs of the protégé that should inform the conceptualization of the advocate and protégé roles. Secondly, it is worth noting that in any given match, a protégé may have a number of needs that require address, and therefore, the advocate and protégé can be expected to assume quite a few roles. However, for the purpose of clarity and concision, in the examples provided below, reference is made to only one or two protégé needs, and correspondingly, one or two advocate and protégé roles.

(a) Role-person fit: Suitable matching firstly dictates that there must be a fit between the characteristics of the role incumbents and the roles they are expected to fill. For example, if the role of the advocate is that of spokesperson, the person assuming that role must have the identity and competencies to meet the expectations of the role.

There would not be a good fit between the advocate's role and the advocate, if the role of spokesperson is assigned to, or assumed by, someone who cannot provide spokespersonship.

On the other hand, to use an example from the perspective of the protégé, if the protégé's need is for friendship, a relevant role for the person would be that of friend.

(b) Role-role fit: Furthermore, even if there is a role-person fit as described in the above examples, this dimension cannot be considered in isolation, given that in the context of a match, there must also be a role-role fit. That is, the roles of the incumbents in a match must complement, or otherwise "fit with," each other.

To return to the aforementioned examples, the advocate's role of spokesperson would complement the protégé's role of "represented person," if the match is one in which the protégé's need is for spokespersonship, i.e., (advocate role) spokesperson and (protégé role) represented person. Similarly, the advocate and protégé would share the role of friend, if the match is one in which the protégé's need is for friendship, i.e., (advocate role) friend and (protégé role) friend. On the other hand, the advocate's role of spokesperson would clash with the protégé's role of friend,

if the match is one in which the protégé's need is for friendship.

However, in order to establish the link between the foregoing and the outcome of valued roles for the protégé in a Citizen Advocacy match, it is necessary to take a further look at the criteria for a suitable match; specifically, the fourth criterion (Wolfensberger & Peters, 2002/2003):

At least some protégé needs or issues that are important are addressed by the match.

If a crucial determinant of a suitable match is that some important protégé needs or issues are addressed, it can be deduced that there are likely to be beneficial outcomes for the protégé. A corollary is that one of the probable beneficial outcomes of a suitable match is the gaining of valued roles by the protégé.

Typically, valued roles for the protégé are acquired in or through the match.

Firstly, a protégé may assume valued roles by virtue of being in a match, an example of which is the role of a friend, as described previously. Table 1 depicts the matching process and outcome.

Secondly, there are valued roles that are not intrinsic to a Citizen Advocacy match, but can

TABLE 1

Roles intrinsic to Citizen Advocacy match	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Role-person fit</i> Advocate role(s) and advocate Protégé role(s) and protégé • <i>Role-role fit</i> Advocate role(s) and protégé role(s) in the match Valued roles gained by the protégé in the match (e.g., friend)
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nonetheless be gained by a protégé through the match, as a result of the protégé's association with, or specific actions taken by, the advocate. For instance, the advocate may succeed in finding the protégé employment, and thereby secure for the

protégé the valued role of worker. Table 2 illustrates the matching process and outcome.

In addition to the modus operandi of the Citizen Advocacy office in matching protégés and advocates, it should be equally noted that the

TABLE 2

Roles extrinsic to Citizen Advocacy match	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Role-person fit</i> Advocate role(s) and advocate Protégé role(s) and protégé <p>(Other) valued roles gained by the protégé <i>through</i> the match, as a result of association with, or intercession by, the advocate (e.g., worker)</p>
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very nature of the resultant matches predispose towards the acquisition and retention of valued roles by the protégé party, as elaborated below.

Characteristics of Citizen Advocacy Relationships that Predispose Towards Access to, & Retention of, Valued Roles by the Protégé Party

WHEREAS ALL RELATIONSHIPS occur in the context of roles (Armstrong, 2007), Citizen Advocacy relationships—or certain characteristics therein—can organically give rise to valued roles for the protégé party. A number of such characteristics of CA relationships can be identified.

(a) Citizen Advocacy relationships are intended to address a wide range of protégé needs via a diversity of advocacy role options, which can correspondingly yield roles to the protégé party that are valued, varied and varying.

Citizen Advocacy is an advocacy scheme that is not only individual in structure, but also individualising for the protégé in a match. After all, Citizen Advocacy relationships are typically one-to-one, or one-for-one, and are intended to be enduring. Each match arranged by the Citizen Advocacy office, therefore, is in response to the distinctive, and possibly evolving, needs of the protégé. Consistent with the Citizen Advocacy principle of Balanced Orientation to Protégé Needs, the CA office is charged with the task of facilitating matches in which a wide range of protégé needs are addressed through a diversity of advocate roles (O'Brien & Wolfensberger, 1979). That diversity of advocate roles can, in turn, elicit a concomitant variety of protégé roles, including many valued roles.

Even a small sample of valued roles gained by protégés in matches arranged by one Citizen Advocacy program (Citizen Advocacy Eastern Suburbs, in Perth, Western Australia) can be illustrative. The valued roles acquired by protégés in this

Australian program, with reference to the SRV delineation of some role domains (e.g., Wolfensberger, 1998, p. 30), include: (relationships) friend, confidante, re-connected family member; (residence, domicile) tenant, flatmate, neighbour; (economic productivity, occupation) worker, model employee, trainee; and (leisure, sports, recreation) sports fan, “fishing buddy,” community club member.

Additionally, it should be noted that the valued roles that accrue to protégés are not only varied, but will be varying over time. Given that Citizen Advocacy relationships are fluid and flexible, it is to be expected and accepted that the roles of the advocate and protégé in any given match may change in the course of its life.

The flexibility of a CA match is a function of its independence and longevity. Once a match is established, congruent with the principle of Advocate Independence, the Citizen Advocacy office supports, rather than controls, the relationship (O’Brien & Wolfensberger, 1979). The independence of a match necessarily means that it is not straitjacketed in a way that renders the roles of the advocate and protégé to be static and stagnant; for example, a friendship may eventually develop in a relationship that was strictly one of spokesmanship in its earlier phase. Therefore, the roles in a match have the potential to be kaleidoscopic, and particularly so if the match endures over a long period.

Thus, the individualising and independent nature of Citizen Advocacy relationships can generate a Rubik’s cube of changing roles for the advocate and protégé—and especially so over time—including valued roles for the protégé.

(b) The nature of Citizen Advocacy relationships provide the opportunity for the learning, rehearsal and enactment of new valued roles by the protégé party.

The Greek philosopher, Aristotle (384–322 BC), said: “What we have to learn to do, we learn by doing.” Citizen Advocacy relationships are particularly suited to serving as a form of “training ground” for the protégé to learn, practise and en-

act new valued roles. Conceivably, by forming a relationship with the advocate, a protégé acquires a particular valued role for the first time in that person’s life. An obvious example is the role of a friend: a role that is sadly elusive to many people with disabilities who have led emotionally parched lives, with few or no friends. Indeed, it may be precisely because a person has never had or been a friend that the Citizen Advocacy office chooses to match the person with an advocate who can offer friendship, and most probably address some other (practical) needs as well.

The example of the role of a friend can also underline how the nature of a CA match can be conducive to the protégé learning, rehearsing and actualising new valued roles. It is evident that certain roles are competency-contingent (Wolfensberger, 1998, p. 31). That is, in entering a role, the role incumbent must have pre-existing competencies, or acquire new competencies, to undertake the functions associated with the role. Otherwise, ongoing incumbency of the role, in any meaningful way, will be difficult. In the context of the friendship role, it is obvious that in order to have a friend, a person must learn to be a friend.

Competency acquisition to carry out new roles—whether that of a friend or some other role—can organically occur in a Citizen Advocacy relationship because of the presence of certain facilitators. One facilitator, about which reference has already been made, is individualisation. That a CA relationship is individualising for the protégé has clear implications for competency acquisition: as Thomas and Wolfensberger have stated, “people’s competencies are more likely to develop if they are treated as individuals” (Thomas & Wolfensberger, 1999, p. 147).

Another facilitator is interpersonal identification (Wolfensberger, 1998, pp. 118-120), which is built into the architecture of the Citizen Advocacy scheme. Central to the work of the Citizen Advocacy office is the promotion of interpersonal identification between the advocate and the protégé. For instance, *CAPE: Standards for Citizen*

Advocacy Program Evaluation, the tool used to evaluate CA programs, refers to the importance of recruiting and matching protégés of all ages, one rationale being that some people who serve as advocates are more likely to readily identify with protégés in certain age groups, including those age groups that otherwise may be ignored (O'Brien & Wolfensberger, 1979).

In terms of competency acquisition for incumbency of newly-acquired roles, being able to closely identify with the other party in the relationship is of seismic significance for the protégé and the advocate.

From the perspective of the protégé: a protégé who identifies with the advocate will be inclined to imitate the advocate, which in turn will facilitate any efforts by the advocate to model or otherwise impart competencies to the protégé that are needed to enter and keep new valued roles.

From the perspective of the advocate: an advocate who identifies with the protégé, and accordingly wants good things to happen to the person, is apt to make all sorts of allowances for the protégé, if that person is not able to immediately or optimally fulfil the expectations of a new role. In other words, it is unlikely that an advocate will withdraw from, or emotionally disinvest in, the relationship—just because the protégé may not have sufficiently acquired the skills needed for a new role, in contrast to the conditional latitude that some others may place on the relationship. Instead, an advocate who identifies with the protégé will provide that person with more time or other necessary support to carry out and carry on new roles.

(c) The freely-given nature of Citizen Advocacy relationships will encourage the incumbency of certain contributory valued roles by the protégé party, and recognition of that party's contribution.

Citizen Advocacy relationships, which are unpaid and freely-given, usually provide the opportunity for the protégé to contribute, rather than “merely” receive. Roles that enable people to make a positive contribution are valued, and

are particularly important for those classes of people who are at risk of being dismissed as unable to contribute (at least in the narrowly-defined sense of the word), because of the prism of preconceptions through which they are viewed in their culture.

To underscore how a Citizen Advocacy match easily lends itself to access of contributory roles by the protégé, it is helpful to contrast the freely-given commitment of the advocate and protégé with the paid engagement of a service provider and client.

The culture of many formal services for people with disabilities, for example, commonly habituates them to becoming passive clients. Indeed, the very nature of staff-client dynamics will typically inhibit, not encourage, a service recipient to contribute. Furthermore, depending on the type and purview of a service, the lines of demarcation of the respective roles of staff and client may be so pronounced and rigid, so as to strictly forbid any response from a client that might be perceived as crossing the line of recipient status.

In contrast, the freely-given relationship of an advocate and protégé—spared of the confected formality of the staff-client contract—tends to be transacted less unilaterally. By virtue of the sorts of roles that are inherent in a freely-given relationship, there is likely to be greater expectation, encouragement, flexibility and opportunity for both parties to contribute. For instance, the familiar role of a friend—which, by definition, must be freely-given—can only be viable in a relationship in which there is emotional give-and-take from all parties.

Of particular relevance to the discussion on the contributions of the protégé party are the complementary roles of teacher and learner within a Citizen Advocacy relationship. The observation that if we are not careful, we might end up learning—or being taught—something every day may seem humorous, but it is also grounded in truth. Yet the roles of teacher and learner (and especially the former) are not always conferred to, or recognised

in, certain classes of people, such as those with an intellectual disability.

It has been previously mentioned that interpersonal identification can facilitate the teaching or modelling of competencies by the advocate to the protégé. However, CA relationships can equally demonstrate that there can be a transposition of roles in the context of the protégé-advocate connection, so that the protégé who has been in the role of learner also assumes a teaching role vis-à-vis the advocate. As reflected in advocate testimonies (e.g., Wolfensberger, 2001), many advocates have been taught by their protégé lessons embodying high-order values such as justice, compassion, selflessness, tolerance and so on.

Even if an advocate is initially imprisoned by culturally-inculcated perceptions about the contributory capacity of the protégé, typically, any such expectations are shattered by the occurrence of some epiphanic experience when getting to know the protégé. And, in that kind of scenario, epiphany is usually followed by metamorphosis. As one advocate reflected, "I have learned so much from someone I never thought I could learn anything from" (Quotes From Citizen Advocates, 1997).

(d) The freely-given nature of Citizen Advocacy relationships can confer value or valued relational roles to, and reinforce certain other valued roles of, the protégé party.

Certain relational roles are only valued and viable if they are freely-given. At the risk of being repetitive, examples of valued relational roles for the protégé in a Citizen Advocacy relationship include those of friend and family member (the latter role being one which is most obviously obtained when the advocate formally adopts a protégé who is a child or an adolescent).

Furthermore, a protégé who is perceived to hold valued roles arising from a freely-given relationship is more likely to be valued as a person by third-party observers. Thus, as explained in SRV, the valuation of the role(s) can lead to the valuation of the role incumbent, even though addressing the valuation of the person, *per se*, transcends the social sci-

ence-based boundaries of SRV theory (Thomas & Wolfensberger, 1999, pp. 141-142). For the protégé in a CA match, Wolfensberger states, "people are more willing to extend positive valuation and respect to a person if they see that other people have entered freely and voluntarily into a relationship with the person, and therefore must see the person as valuable" (Wolfensberger, 1995).

Another important implication of having a freely-given relational role is that it can reinforce certain other valued roles of the role incumbent. Consider the following two contrasting examples involving efforts to socially integrate a person who has a disability.

In the first scenario, a person with the disability receives support from a paid worker to become a member of a (regular) community club of some sort. Given that situation, there may be a competition of roles for the person whose integration is sought. That is, the (typically devalued) role of client of a disability-service worker may compete or clash with the (valued) role of potential or new club member—at least in the eyes of other club members who will ultimately transact the integration. In that kind of role competition, the client role, with all its negative connotations, may be so powerful that it will impede or preclude the possibility of other members to see and accept the person in the role of a valued and participating fellow member of the club. (The reader is invited to think of similar integrative efforts in which the obvious presence of paid support to a person with a disability, whose social integration is to be transacted, results in the client role of the person eclipsing any valued roles associated with the integration.)

The second scenario, on the other hand, is one in which an established member of the community club, who is a citizen advocate, seamlessly introduces the protégé (with whom the advocate already has a relationship) into the club and naturally supports that person in the newly-entered role of club member. In the process, it is likely that the protégé's valued role of friend or associate

will reinforce or facilitate—rather than militate against—entry to the valued role of club member.

Conclusion

IT IS CLEAR that a melange of valued roles, with all its attendant benefits, can be procured and preserved for the protégé party in and through Citizen Advocacy relationships. Nonetheless, a broader examination of the implications of valued roles vis-à-vis the need for advocacy can only yield a good-news, bad-news coda. Unfortunately, the good news is in lower-case, and the bad news is in upper-case, so to speak.

In regard to the good news implication, firstly, it is helpful to recall the SRV-derived deductive reasoning of “if this, then that” (Thomas & Wolfensberger, 1999, pp. 156-157). According to SRV, all other things being equal, people in valued roles will be treated well, and people in devalued roles will be treated badly. Therefore, if people in valued roles are apt to be treated well or less poorly, then it can be deduced that, on the balance of probabilities, the need for advocacy for them will not be as great as for those in roles that are not as valued. In other words, there is an inverse relationship between incumbency of valued roles and the need for advocacy. To recast another insight of SRV, it can be said that: the greater the number of valued roles (and the lesser the number of devalued roles) a person occupies, and/or the more valued (or less devalued) any of these roles are, and/or the more the valued roles are enlarged and visible, the lower will be the probability of the need for advocacy for that person.

Logically, then, the above deduction constitutes good news from the perspective of Citizen Advocacy, given that a critical mass of valued roles gained by a protégé can serve as something of a protective armour for that person, as well as provide access to the “good things of life” (Wolfensberger, Thomas & Caruso, 1996).

As for the bad news, it must be understood in the context of the axiom that there is no utopia,

and it is of little help to surrender to consoling illusions and quixotism about the world in which we live. On the contrary, it is crucial to accept the reality that in light of the nature of human beings, the Age of Aquarius will never arrive, and devaluation will never go out of fashion. Consequently and compellingly, some people will always need advocacy, including Citizen Advocacy. ☙

SEE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON PAGE 61

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Invitation to Write Book, Film & Article Reviews

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