
SRV MATTERS

Universals and their value

How to make sense of this complex world? It's easy to get bogged down in the details, which does little to help BIG problems.

Within **Professor Wolfensberger's** work, there exists the idea of Universals. These are high order phenomena, laws & principles, etc.

One example is everyone wants to belong. Others include being born, dying, experiencing suffering, hunger, play, laughter, smiles, seeing the sun rise & set, loving, being loved.

Universals flow down to influence Particularisms. Particularisms are the expression of a Universal in a particular context. Universal: Everyone wants to belong. Particularism: People in seek belonging in various ways, for example, via sporting teams, church, bookclub.

From Wolf: Levels or kinds of Universals especially relevant to Human Services

There are universals in the laws of nature, universals across cultures, and universals within a culture. There are also universals within our human service systems. These universals exist in formal paid services, in informal contexts such as within families, in specific services types eg, Mental Health, Intellectual Disability, Aging, and in Specific service professions, eg, Medicine, Social Work, Education.

Interestingly, Wolf goes on to state that the bulk of human services is always a derivative expression of the larger culture. In other words, what we see in the culture, we see in our human services. For example, distrust of welfare recipients broadly is reflected in the failure to provide funding to people with disabilities to use how they wish/need.

So, Universals exist, and if the previous statement is true, what are the benefits for those of us working in human services in getting our heads around Universals?

Wolf says that there are six specific benefits of belief in/understanding of/use of Universals

We in human services can get stuck in the detail, especially focussed on things like funding and rules. Lifting out thoughts to see the patterns, that is, the universals, gives us a more accurate perception of reality. We can gain a better perception of real - often hidden - causes of phenomena. We can better adapt to reality, that is we can address problems better. This also means we become better at deciding how to best use our time & energy in our efforts to address issues. And of course we become more able to teach others about a phenomenon. Overall then, we develop greater efficiency in learning about a particular phenomenon/problem.

We need theories/schema to make sense of the world. The opposite view from Universals is of segments, fractionates - that is, treating everything in the world as not connected. Not a serious proposition surely?

Finally, without theories/schema to make sense of the world we become subject to the Tyranny of small decisions 1968 (Kahn) and thus the Tyranny of small technologies - often seen in human services. Have you an example?



SRV Ideas: Universals, Making Sense of the Human Service World
