

# SRV & Teacher Prep: Not Just a Course, but a Course of Action

**Thomas J. Neuville with C. Hannah Smith**

EDITOR'S NOTE: *This article describes the incorporation of the theory of SRV into a context perhaps unfamiliar to many of our readers; in this case, a university class for student teachers. This article and the practice of incorporating SRV with various human service approaches raise a number of questions which we hope to explore in future pages of this Journal. How does one balance SRV with other theories, approaches or practices? How well can SRV theory be used with other theories or practices? Does such incorporation create any tension(s)? How can these tensions be addressed constructively? What happens when SRV conflicts with another theory or common service practice? And so on.*

*I ENCOURAGE university and college professors who incorporate aspects of SRV into their teaching to submit manuscripts to this journal describing these courses and their experiences teaching them. What successes and struggles have you and your students faced with the material? How well can students relate to Social Role Valorization if they have little or no prior experience with devaluation or devalued people? What have you and your students learned? What questions have been raised? Are there aspects of SRV which students seem to have a harder time understanding? If so, which ones, and what is the misunderstanding? Have you as a teacher had to pick and choose different aspects of SRV to focus on? What have you left out? And so on.*

## Introduction

ONE CANNOT UNDERESTIMATE THE IMPORTANCE of having student teachers come to be motivated to understand and be inspired by the theory and themes of Social Role Valorization (SRV). SRV, when used as a tool for bringing in particular heightened consciousness to the student teacher, has the potential to benefit that student, that student's own future students, and countless others with whom each of these persons comes in contact. Perhaps no other student teachers benefit more from studying SRV than those pursuing coursework in special education. The potential benefits for the most vulnerable students, with whom the student teacher someday will surely have influence and impact, are untold.

I am fortunate to have the opportunity to teach a sophomore-level required course in my University's teacher preparation program titled "Psychological Aspects of Individuals with Disabilities." I say fortunate because I clearly benefit as much as, if not more than, my students as my instruction and the students' engagement with the material allows for continual exploration and application. Pedagogically, the course offers significant opportunity for lecture and participatory processing. Through this course, it is my intention to provide the student teachers with concrete tools and refined theoretical concepts unavailable elsewhere in their teacher preparation coursework and practicum.

As evidenced both by the anguish I hear expressed by colleagues who would prefer students not “bring that SRV stuff into my classroom” (after all, it complicates things), and by students, years past their graduation, reporting the importance of the course to their current teaching, the course clearly has both instigatory and impactful consequences. While the course’s future is always uncertain (perhaps due, in part, to its powerful nature), for now it continues to be made available to students.

The nature of the course, as with SRV itself, often engages the student to journey from anger to embrace, from surface understanding to a deepening, and from viewing the material as a belief system to evidence-based applicable theory. Some, many, do not make these connections and are typically blocked by immature value systems. Those who do, however, engage in a profound journey that leads them, at the conclusion of the course, to be able to answer questions such as “How, specifically, does your ability to identify the socially constructed experiences of individuals with disabilities prepare you as an educator to facilitate an empowered and unified P-12 (pre-kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade) learning community?”, to which students reply “It is important to have knowledge of the person with the disability first before learning about their disability. It is important to know about their life, study habits, and interests when creating a unified learning environment,” and “These concepts are key when facilitating an empowered and unified learning community; I am helping students build the basic skills critical for academic success, to help them take charge of their own learning.”

### Course Background

**T**HE TEACHER CANDIDATE, ACCORDING TO the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) standards, must graduate with the ability to teach *all* students. “The methods of building capacity within individual students, parents and communities are

critical to education reform and the serving of diverse students” (Vos, 2002). When I first was introduced to the course I now teach, several problematic issues exposed themselves. The course, originally written by a faculty group trained at a state institution, focused on terminologies, diagnostic characteristics, and behavioral screening tools. One might have expected this focus were it the 1960s or 70s. However, given the comprehensive and depthful information offered by Dr. Wolf Wolfensberger since that time, and to which I had been exposed, it would have been inexcusable for me not to subject the course to a comprehensive review process. After extensive revision to the course content, the course maintains a focus on psychological aspects while benefiting from current researched perspectives on the importance of social roles (Wolfensberger, 1998; Gottheil & Dubow, 2000; Hartung, 2002), disability as a social construct (Hartung, 2002; Goodley, 2001), and the need for acculturation and social integration as it applies to education (Minnes et al., 2002).

### Course Description

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF individuals with disabilities are surveyed. Environmental and socio-cultural factors are emphasized and analyzed in relation to human adjustment and social roles. Coherent educational service recommendations and whole person assessment concepts are explored. The history of services, socially constructed definitions, and characteristics of the disability movement form a basis for understanding.

### Course Objectives

- Identify the socially constructed experiences of individuals with disabilities and the resulting power structures.
- Identify the characteristics of individuals with disabilities resulting from sociological and cultural variables.
- Identify behavioral characteristics and causes brought on by the psychological and

sociological assumptions about the roles of individuals with disabilities.

- Develop capacity to use personal awareness effectively as it applies to diversity, multi-cultural collaboration, and ethics.
- Analyze, evaluate and think critically regarding the socio-political impacts on support services and individuals with disabilities.
- Prepare the student for his or her life's work.

The course objectives and assignments are based on Bloom's taxonomy and as such use two of the critical areas: (1) Cognitive (Bloom, 1956): mental skills (Knowledge); and (2) Affective (Krathwohl, Bloom & Masia, 1973): growth in feelings or emotional areas (Attitude).

The course links experience (ten hours of community service) with analysis of socio-cultural realities (use of SRV and Social Devaluation exercises).

The course discussions, readings, experiences and products call each student to engage in critical thinking by applying the themes of SRV, which have been internalized by experience, to scenarios of educational settings.

Students demonstrate, in future courses and teaching environments, a carryover of the applicability of the themes of SRV as they engage methods and implement lesson design.

### Course Assignments

THE COURSE ASSIGNMENTS EMPHASIZE the incorporation and understanding of devaluation and wounding, as well as the themes of SRV. These

assignments have evolved over time and are part of a comprehensive 30 page syllabus (a copy may be acquired by contacting the author). The assignments are founded on student analysis (see Sample Exercise 1), research regarding associated laws (see Sample Exercise 2), and teaching the material as it pertains to a specific given subject (see Sample Exercise 3). During the past two semesters, a requirement to analyze a human service environment (see Sample Exercise 1) was enhanced by adding an expectation of including the 10 Themes of SRV<sup>1</sup> (Wolfensberger, 1998), including unconsciousness; the conservatism corollary; the dynamics of interpersonal identification; the power of mindsets and expectancies; the dynamics of role circularity; symbolism and imagery use; model coherency, and relevance and potency; personal competency enhancement and the developmental model; the power of imitation; and personal social integration and valued societal participation. The addition of the integration of the 10 themes of SRV has given clarity to the project and enhanced classroom discussions. Additionally, the themes continue to play a prevalent and relevant role in subsequent courses.

The most potent coursework includes exploration of the following exercises:

*Sample Exercise 1—Social Devaluation Discovery Project* (35% of total grade). This assignment is designed to assess the impact of social devaluation on an individual, understand human needs, and create ideal environments of support that positively

**Since you are reading this journal,** why not tell someone else about it? We believe Social Role Valorization is an important tool that concerned individuals can use to address social devaluation in people's lives. As someone who shares that belief, encourage others to read and subscribe to the only journal dedicated to SRV. Information available at [http://www.srvip.org/journal\\_general.php](http://www.srvip.org/journal_general.php).

cause a more desirable future. The student volunteers a minimum of 10 hours over a minimum of 3 visits at a human service provider of the student's choice. The student assesses the environment and its impacts on the psychological and sociological experience of a person served by that provider. The student (1) demonstrates a comprehensive understanding of wounds, (2) has clearly considered the realities of a person's life experiences, and has evaluated the degree and presence of wounding experiences (according to the framework of the 18 wounding experiences of vulnerable people,<sup>2</sup> as proposed by Dr. Wolf Wolfensberger), (3) demonstrates a personal internalized comprehension, (4) demonstrates understanding of the responsibility of the service provider to respond to the individual's wounding experiences past and present, and (5) has competently and comprehensively considered, explored, and portrayed the importance of relevance, potency and model coherency, clearly combining these components for an overall assessment. The analysis of an ideal human response must make practical use of a minimum of six of the ten major recurring themes from SRV. Of these six themes, these three must be included: interpersonal identification; the power of mindsets and expectancies; and personal social integration and valued social and societal participation.

*Sample Exercise 2—Special Education Law Project* (20% of total grade). This assignment may be completed individually or in groups. The student researches the history of Special Education Law. The student produces a paper that details the history of various educational and civil rights laws<sup>3</sup> (including the ADA - Americans with Disabilities Act, NCLB - No Child Left Behind, Oberti and Gaskin cases, and IDEA - The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), assessing the impact the laws have had on options for creating valued social roles for marginalized people. The student (1) makes a clear link between social devaluation as detailed by Wolfensberger and other texts, (2) lists the actual impact of the specific law on people

with disabilities, and (3) uses sections of the law and its intent to demonstrate an understanding of the potential positive impacts. *Initially, the law project tended to result in retellings of the laws and histories as one might easily construct after completing an internet search. After the expectation of linking the information to social devaluation was added, as well as a requirement to provide evidence of the positive impact on people with disabilities, students began to use the method of application of the themes not only in this assignment, but in subsequent assignments and their own classroom content design work as well.*

*Sample Exercise 3—Group Student Teaching Project* (30% of total grade: 15% oral; 15% written). Student teams (three to four students) prepare an oral and written presentation related to a subject provided by the instructor. These subjects are related to current topics in the education of students with disabilities (i.e., self-advocacy and self-determination, full inclusion as social justice ideology, historical perspectives on charity-pity relationships, impacts of standardized testing, belonging and valued social roles, inner work, disability culture, voices of the marginalized, right to die and death-making, issues with the concept of 'tolerance,' and uses and abuses of person-centered approaches). Each team designs a 30-minute comprehensive in-class learning experience and provides supporting evidence for their findings.

### **Course Materials**

THE REQUIRED TEXTS ARE A MIX of evidenced-based theory (Wolfensberger, 1998), practice (May & Raske, 2005), *SRV Journal* materials, and historic cultural trends (Schwartz, 1997). The texts all build on one another, allowing the student to coherently draw upon the resources available therein.

- May, G. & Raske, M., eds. (2005). *Ending disability discrimination: Strategies for social workers*. Boston, MA: Pearson, Allyn, & Bacon.

- Schwartz, D. (1997). *Who cares? Rediscovering community*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Wolfensberger, W. (1998). *A brief introduction to Social Role Valorization: A high-order concept for addressing the plight of societally devalued people, and for structuring human services* (3rd ed.). Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Training Institute for Human Service Planning, Leadership & Change Agency.
- Various. *The SRV Journal* (current year's subscription).

Many students, during the serious moments of considering the wounds, have requested that I give them the positive alternatives as well. Because

of this, I considered the wounds and simply present the extreme opposite view through something I have titled "Robustness as the Most Common Variable Toward a Contributing Person" (see Figure 1). I do not include this as a new theory or even valuable alternate theme set. Rather, I use the robustness tool to bring the students to an understanding of the power of the material by presenting a framework for contemplation through an opposing entryway. I rely on it only as supplementary material when holding a brief lecture of how one may make use of the SRV material and the 10 themes of SRV. *I apologize to my friend, Dr. Wolfensberger, for taking such joyful liberties with his material.*

**Figure 1: Robustness as the most common variable toward a contributing person**

<b>Wounds</b>	<b>Robust Alternative</b>
Relegation to low ("deviant") status	Assignment by external forces to a high social status
Rejection, perhaps by family, neighbors, community, society, service workers	Acceptance and recognition by family, neighbors, community, and society
Cast into multiple historic deviancy roles	Launched into multiple and even historic roles of distinction
Living in a state of multiple jeopardy	
Symbolic stigmatizing, "marking," "deviancy-imaging," "branding"	Warmth as a central feeling: usually by integration, belonging, and identification with a wide variety of diverse groups
Distantiation: usually via segregation and also congregation	Continual and growing desire by social groups and individuals to unite with one
Loss of control, perhaps even autonomy and freedom	Governance of one's own life: especially when a method or system of support is in place that may hinder autonomy
Physical discontinuity	Expedited understanding of technology and our physical environment
Social and relationship discontinuity	Harmony with one's neighbors and community members

Loss of natural/freely-given relationships and substitution of artificial/paid ones	Paid relationships based on stewardship: the paid person is accountable for outcomes in the individual's life, without acting to define that person's life purpose, control the actions of the person's environment, or caretaking of the individual (where caretaking carries the assumption of fundamental incompetence)
Deindividuation	Celebrations of who the individual is with understanding of the importance of oneself (of one's soul) and of the world
Involuntary material poverty	Control of financial resources both earned and entitled
Impoverishment of experience, especially that of the typical, valued world	Immersion in experiences, opportunities and learning which are generally highly valued
Exclusion from knowledge of/participation in higher-order value systems	Inclusion in (knowledge of and participation in) higher-order value systems that give meaning to life and provide community
Having one's life wasted	Having a flourishing life which is marked by growth, prosperity, success, and thriving—on multiple levels in multiple realms
Brutalization, death-making	Being the receiver of all that is humane; being imaged as alluring or captivating, so much so that people have thoughts of renewal, regeneration and 'lifemaking'
Awareness of being a source of anguish to those who love one	Being a core of solace and inspiration, a 'heart-ener' to people who love one
Awareness of being an alien in the valued world; personal insecurity, perhaps dislike of oneself	Appreciation of one's role and contribution in the world

As mentioned earlier in this article, clearly not every student is able to internalize the material. Overall, however, I do believe even a willingness to grasp for understanding of the material is valuable. Additionally, while there are clearly some students who glimpse the implication of the power of the material, the systems they are entering have years of practice and multiple strategies to convince them that what they see or are caused to ponder is simply an ideal, but not based in realistic possibility. Because of this, as part of the coursework, I ask each student to construct an

ideal school environment founded specifically on the 10 themes of SRV. This sharpens the student's focus and benefits their design. While students often continue to believe in the perfectibility of structures and systems, especially special education models, they clearly have a new level of consciousness about the forces at work. Given these limitations, the course content is continuously under review and revised, as deemed appropriate, in an effort to ever more fully provide the students with tools and resources of value to their journey. For example, the current 'Call for Papers' issued

by *The SRV Journal* (see page 4) will be followed with an effort to collect papers addressing each of the 10 themes of SRV. These papers will become a bound resource for classroom assignments, the intention of which is to provide further potential for deepening understanding on the part of the student of the concepts presented and explored.

### Concluding Thoughts

THERE HAVE BEEN A FEW SURPRISES throughout this journey. Surprisingly, colleagues report that students have pulled out the Wolfensberger text and their research paper and presented them as evidence counter to what the professor teaches. Even more surprising, the professor occasionally reports that the student has persuaded him or her. The other significant surprise is the amount of work the students are willing to engage in and submit. They are willing and eager to meet the high expectations placed upon them. They produce two research papers (one of 25 pages and one of 40 pages), one group subject paper (10 pages), and design and deliver a lesson relevant to course material. Colleagues report this level of expectation to be masters' level work and yet the students predominantly report highly positive experiences such as the student who expressed, "This course provided a very applicable understanding of special education. I appreciated that we not only learned about special education within the school system, but we also learned about the foundational problems of discrimination and devalorization. The class, along with the group work and community service, got me more interested in the personal aspects of special education, rather than just the disorders, laws, or systems. Having knowledge of socially constructed experiences will be a great advantage to me not only when working with people with disabilities, but in simply being a member of society."

While the course content will continue to be reviewed and modified as needed, I am confident the changes that have been implemented, specifically the integration of SRV theory and themes,

will make all the difference in the impact our future teachers have in the lives of students, particularly those most vulnerable.

### ENDNOTES

1. Further exploration of these themes may be achieved through attendance at an introductory or advanced Social Role Valorization workshop. Information on these workshops is available at [www.socialrolevalorization.com](http://www.socialrolevalorization.com).

2. Please see Figure 1, the reciprocity table on robustness, included in this article. The left-most column of the table reflects the 18 wounds as proposed by Dr. Wolf Wolfensberger. Further exploration of these wounds may be achieved through attendance at an introductory or advanced Social Role Valorization workshop, as well as reading Wolfensberger, 1998. Information on these workshops and other SRV resources is available at [www.socialrolevalorization.com](http://www.socialrolevalorization.com).

3. US educational civil rights laws relevant to students with disabilities, including:

ADA – The Americans with Disabilities Act was enacted in 1990 and is a wide-ranging civil rights law that prohibits discrimination based on disability. Disability is defined as "a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity."

NCLB – The No Child Left Behind Act, enacted in 2001, aimed at improving the performance of schools in the United States and is based on the theory of standards-based education (the theory that high expectations and measurable goals will improve outcomes for students).

IDEA – The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act was enacted in 2004 and governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to children with disabilities.

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THOMAS NEUVILLE, PHD, is an Associate Professor of Education at Millersville University in Pennsylvania, US. He has more than twenty-five years experience in community and organizational development. C. HANNAH SMITH is a community member whose life is enriched by personal relationships with vulnerable people. She credits Social Role Valorization as a powerful framework which influences how she parents her children.

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