SRV Lessons Learned: A PASSING Visit to a Preschool

Marc Tumeinski

Editor's Note: *PASSING is the name of a tool for evaluating a human service along 42 dimensions of SRV (Social Role Valorization) quality according to objective, clearly-spelled out criteria. PASSING can best be learned by attending an introductory SRV workshop followed by an introductory PASSING workshop. In an introductory PASSING workshop, participants under the direction of a trained team leader typically assess two different human service programs. Programs agree voluntarily to be visited. After the assessment, often either the team leader or a report writer will write a report of the assessment(s). In an introductory PASSING workshop, reports are written primarily for the purpose of furthering the learning of the workshop participants about SRV (Wolfensberger, 1998; Osburn, 2006).*

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to share some SRV lessons from a report of an introductory PASSING assessment held in 2002.[1] The site gave permission for the team to share that report. All identifying information has been removed.

PASSING (Wolfensberger & Thomas, 2007) as a human service evaluation tool does not assess administrative or management issues, but rather focuses solely on programmatic issues. PASSING users try to step into the shoes of the people who are being served, and to examine whether service practices are good or bad from the perspective of what these people need in order to have valued roles in society. It is precisely because PASSING looks at service quality only from the perspective of the people who receive it that PASSING does not make allowance for the various reasons why service quality may be less than optimal. Put simply, the PASSING tool looks at *what* is happening for the people served, not *why*.

Overview of the Service

The service described in this article was an extended day preschool for 30 children aged 3 1/2 to 5 1/2. Two of the children in the preschool had significant intellectual and/or physical impairments. The stated goals of the program were to: provide a needed service to (working) families, give children appropriate play opportunities, and provide necessary teaching in a comfortable and safe environment where the children would feel happy and loved, and where parents would feel comfortable leaving their children. The program had made a consciously-stated decision to include a limited number of children with impairments in the program each year. The PASSING team was told that the numbers of impaired children in the program were intentionally limited to allow for the possibility of more effective teaching, and for positive role modeling from the other children without significant impairments.

A brief explanatory note is perhaps in order at this point in the article. A primary focus of SRV

and PASSING is to explore the most pressing issues in the lives of socially devalued people of all ages, including people with impairments. The PASSING tool in particular is concerned with the impact of a human service in the lives of its clients. (The PASSING tool defines human service very clearly although broadly, and is written so as to be applicable to a service for people with devalued social status, or for a combination of people, some with devalued social status and some with valued status.) That is why much of this article focuses on issues related to the children with impairments. This may be a bit misleading, as the program saw its mission as primarily being a preschool, in a sense regardless of the social status or abilities of its students. By distinguishing between the students with and without impairments, this article may appear to create a dichotomy that as far as we could tell was not in the conscious minds of the program director and teachers. This is done however for purposes of clarity and explanation in terms of understanding the service provided vis-à-vis SRV and the PASSING tool. That is also why this article will often refer to the program as a human service although the preschool personnel may not be used to thinking of it in those terms.

Description of the Children

This section of the article will describe in general all of the children attending the preschool, and also specifically the two children with significant impairments. It is important for the reader of this article to note that the first group includes the second; i.e., when this article talks about the children, it means all the children including those with significant impairments.

All of the children in the program whom the team met were living with their families. Most of the families came from the neighborhood close to the program. Almost all of the families would be considered affluent, in terms of income and possessions. The children of these families were typically accorded valued social roles such as sister, brother, daughter, son, niece, nephew, grandchild, neighborhood kid, playmate, etc.

When the team visited the preschool program, there were two children in the program with significant impairments: a little boy with cerebral palsy, and a young girl labeled with autism. The team felt very welcomed by all the children. They were curious about us, played and talked with us. Like most kids, they had a wide range of positive personal attributes, i.e., being curious, fun-loving, energetic, wanting to learn, etc.

In addition to the above facts about the children, it is also important to understand their identities and life situations at a somewhat deeper level. The following is a summary of the team's deeper understanding of the existential identities of all the children in the preschool. Note that these are general statements; of course, individual differences did exist among the children.

The first thing to know is that these were all young children, just on the edge of starting their formal school careers. Like all kids, they were growing and learning fast. They were playful, imaginative, silly, open and trusting. They were still at the age of being somewhat self-absorbed, but were learning to be with other people and kids. They wanted to please others, particularly their parents. They wanted to be recognized and noticed by others for who they were and what they were doing. These children were learning about the world and becoming more and more competent as they did so–physically, intellectually, emotionally, socially. They were full of potential for growth and learning, and were happily discovering the world and themselves. Of course, like all children, they were still dependent on their parents primarily for almost everything, and in a broader sense, they were dependent on all of the adults in their lives.

As children mostly from more affluent families, they had been provided a lot more opportunities, stability and social protection than less well-off families can typically provide their children. The team speculated that this type of family and home environment would be beneficial in some impor-

tant ways (as just mentioned), but would also have its potential downsides as well, including some children: seeing their parents less because the parents worked alot, feeling more pressure to succeed and (as they grew older) to live up to a higher standard of living, etc.

The particular children with impairments for the most part shared in almost all of the identity characteristics that we described above. At this point in their lives, they were not socially devalued to a high degree (although the team felt, and the program recognized, that they were highly vulnerable to increasing social devaluation as they grew older).

In general, the children with significant physical and intellectual impairments would probably have an extra hard time communicating with others and learning some things as easily as typically developing kids (although it was perhaps not so significantly different at this age), being more easily distracted, tiring more easily, not as able to focus on certain things, and having an extra hard time getting around (notice the descriptors *extra* and *more* ... since all the children were still developing, each of the children could be at times easily distracted, tired, etc.).

All children (and so all the children whom the team met, whether impaired or not) are vulnerable in the sense of: being physically smaller and weaker, not knowing a lot about the world and its dangers, and not being cherished by contemporary society as a whole in many ways. Sometimes this is true even to the point of children being 'sacrificed' in a sense for other's interests, such as parents making a life decision (about their work, where they live, their marriage, their other obligations–such as to an elder parent in need, etc.) that benefits the parents but perhaps at some expense of their children's current lives and even futures, or governments making particular financial decisions that benefit certain corporations or service sectors while taking away from primary education or children's health care, etc.

The children with significant impairments would likely be vulnerable in all these ways, but also in other ways that the non-impaired children would not be. Such extra or heightened vulnerability would potentially include a future of separate education (segregated and congregated with other children with the same or different kinds of impairments), and to education of lower quality than the typical child gets. For example, a 2000 US federal study found that every state in the US was out of compliance with at least some of the core civil rights requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act on the local level.[2] That report concludes, and the team agreed, that such noncompliance has meant that students with impairments commonly do not receive the education that the law promises, and that they truly need.

Concretely, such vulnerability has meant a qualitative difference for some other (same age and older) children with impairments similar to the ones enrolled at this preschool. For example, children with impairments typically experience such things as: no or little age-appropriate, competency-appropriate expectations for learning (including lack of schoolwork and homework); lack of an education orientation, and instead an orientation on life skills development and leisure; not graduating from high school at age 18 with a degree; poorer teaching and teachers; poorer educational materials; neglect; abuse; etc.

Given who the children were existentially, the team also spent time reflecting on and considering their needs, i.e., what all of them would likely need, particularly their most pressing needs. The team felt that all the children as a whole generally needed steadfast, committed loving family, home and school, all of which would help provide them, among other things, patient and loving guidance. They needed to play, to have friends, and to have other trustworthy adults in their lives (like extended family, teachers, coaches, etc.). They needed help developing physically, emotionally, perceptually, linguistically, intellectually and creatively. They needed others to give them good moral instruction and teaching.

They also needed, as all kids do, to be kept safe and to know they were safe, to be watched over. Often they still needed physical help with doing different things (i.e., dressing, eating, using the bathroom, chores, etc.). They needed to start learning to help others. A big part of what they needed was help getting ready for schooling, and learning to get along with other people and other kids, which would be for most of them a primary part of their lives for the next twelve years at least. All of this would help the kids to be more likely to have and to know a bright future, partly from their own life experiences and partly also from other people who believed in them enough to provide that.

Being in relationship with others is a natural and necessary part of human life, and particularly important for children in their formative years. The children needed to be in relationship roles such as friend, buddy, peer, etc. Relationships provide an anchor for children, and help them understand who they are and the world around them. For children who are vulnerable to being negatively stereotyped or set apart because of their physical and/or intellectual impairment, relationships can also bring increased social status and presence, as well as offer a measure of protection and stability.

As we have repeatedly stressed in this article, the children with impairments needed all of the above of course because they were children too. However, they also needed, to varying degrees, extra help: learning and maturing, interacting with other kids and people, making friends, being in the valued roles of student and peer, etc. Given the negative experiences of other children with similar impairments in schools, they also needed their family and other people in their lives to have a strong positive vision of who they could be, and they needed their family and other people to act on that vision. They needed their families and other people in their lives to understand the difficulties they would likely face in their school careers; in other words, to know the system and how to effectively advocate for them in it, without getting caught up in it. They needed their families and other people in their lives to plan and think long-term with their schools, communities and possibly other programs and agencies.

Major Overriding Issues

This section of the article presents the major issues to emerge from the team's analysis of service quality. These issues are strongly rooted in the team's understanding of the identities and needs of the children in the preschool. This analysis took into account both the positive features of the program, as well as its shortcomings in service quality.

Before describing the positive qualities, however, it will be helpful to first discuss a concept widely used in the PASSING tool; namely, the purview of a service, which can best be understood as its scope of responsibility in the lives of its clients. As the team understood it, the purview of this program could be narrowly, although legitimately, defined as providing a safe, nurturing, educational place for young children to be during the day. At the same time, however, the team also came to the conclusion (and believed that others would readily agree) that the preschool program was influenced by, and also potentially shaped or at least reinforced, larger societal patterns and trends affecting all or most young children in the US today (and to a greater or lesser degree, children in most developed countries). In a sense, such trends could be seen to broaden the purview of this program (or any preschool program for that matter) beyond the narrow one defined above.

This is an interesting point which the team is sure most if not all teachers of children are aware of. Some of these social patterns are beneficial to children; others are not. Therefore, some of these trends could potentially negatively affect the particular children and families served by this program, and so at the very least would be a concern, and possibly could affect what they try to do as a preschool. Although these larger social issues are outside the more narrowly defined purview of the program,

the team felt that they were important enough to explore further, in terms of their potential impact on the children, their families and society at large. These broader issues are explored in the later section of the article entitled *Program Issues*.

Generally Positive Qualities of the Program

However, in light of the more narrow purview described above, the team felt that the preschool was addressing many of the pressing needs of the children which they could be held accountable for. In other words, this was a good service for the children and their families, which is commendable.

The team saw a strong match between what the children needed, what the families wanted and what the preschool was providing; a match which was bound to be beneficial in significant ways for the children. One lesson that has been learned from the many PASSING assessments that have been done is that most human services, perhaps understandably on some level, try to create their own approach to addressing the needs of its (socially devalued) clients, which often turn out to be atypical and acultural, rather than building on what is known already to be effective and then adapting it. Such atypical approaches have often stemmed from unconscious negative beliefs or stereotypes which many services hold about the people they serve, i.e., that they are somehow radically different from the typical person, with no or few common needs, and so therefore cannot benefit from the same things, approaches, etc., common to socially valued people. This is clearly what happens in many special education programs and schools, where a prevailing mindset is often that children with impairments cannot learn at all like how typical children learn, and so common educational methods that have stood the test of time are dropped in favor of atypical approaches. This was not the approach taken by this program; rather, they used a typical preschool model and adapted it as necessary.

The team saw that a general strength of this preschool was that it was a very good program for all the children. It was by and large addressing its program goals of helping families, teaching children and providing play opportunities in a safe environment. The team felt that these were indeed important goals, and so, by largely addressing them, the program was benefiting the children and their families. As far as the team could tell, the children generally were safe, enjoying themselves, playing with other kids, learning and growing. This was a good setting in many important ways for all the children the team met and heard about, including the children with impairments.

To refer again to the concept of the purview of a human service program, it is well-known that all children need intense and efficient help to learn and grow, which is well within the purview or scope of responsibility of any school program. The renowned 20th century educator Maria Montessori,[3] for instance, clearly showed this by her example and writing; in fact, she showed that most children need even *more* help to learn and develop than they usually get, and at younger ages too. Without this help and direction, children will not grow to achieve as much of their potential as they could, which is always a loss for them, their families, communities and society. This lesson is even more valid for children with impairments in their physical abilities and/or abilities to learn. In other words, they typically need even more intense help and direction; without which, they are likely to be even worse off than typical kids who did not receive such help, and with which, they can make incredible strides.

The team felt that part of what made this a good preschool program was that they took advantage of these truths about teaching and learning. For example, as far as the team could determine, the staff were excellent teachers overall. The team based this judgment mainly on its classroom observations, as well as on its discussions with teachers, and the results they were achieving in terms of the children's learning. The teachers obviously tried to see each child as able and willing to learn, and worthy of their best teaching efforts. The

teachers had high expectations for the children, made the most of their time there, used good educational materials, and provided activities and opportunities that were challenging to the children.

The preschool was consciously committed to helping all the children to learn, those with and without significant impairments.[4] They often took advantage of obvious as well as subtle learning opportunities with all the children. For example, the team saw teachers actively (as well as indirectly) teaching during: activity times, class time, snack time, meals, the time when children were going home, the time when they were introduced to our team, etc.

Having excellent teachers also had another benefit: it projected a positive image message[5] about all the children, and the children with impairments more particularly, that they needed and what is more deserved good and competent teachers. Such a message is important, because it clearly (even if unconsciously) communicates high positive learning expectations to the children, their families, their teachers and visitors. Expectations are very powerful in shaping what and how much children can learn, and how others perceive and treat children.

The children needed teachers, and that is what they got; as opposed to, for example, baby sitters or nurses, which would have sent the (perhaps unconscious) message that the children did not need to (or could not) learn, or were too sick or impaired to learn. Many special education programs, for example, falter on this point when they hire teachers and aides who in essence act as baby-sitters or nurses for impaired children. This communicates very hurtful messages and sets of expectations to them, their families, teachers and society in general.

The team saw the staff being creative in their teaching approach, while also relying on the well-known, time-tested foundations of good teaching, modifying as necessary for children with a range of learning styles and even different degrees of difficulty learning. For example, the team saw the teachers use repetition of key concepts, structuring of a good learning environment, encouraging of identification between peers, a Socratic method of questions and answers, hand-over-hand modeling, etc. The teachers were conscious of using their voices well, keeping an even, respectful and pleasant tone. They turned off the lights to get children's attention, rather than raising their voices, and so on. Overall, they had generally high expectations for growth and learning for all the children, relative to their ages and different abilities.

As well, the preschool had provided a place where parents and families could feel good and safe leaving their child for the day or half-day. Part of what helped create this feeling was that parents were welcome to visit. It would also be clear very quickly to an observer that the teachers liked the children and were committed to providing a safe and comfortable environment for them. Parents trusted that their children would be well-taken care of, not come to any harm, have fun, play with other kids and learn some things as well. This is evidenced, for example, in the fact that many families sent all their children to this particular preschool, and may have done so over the course of several years as each successive child came of age, indicating a high level of trust of their services.

As mentioned previously, the program had made a conscious decision and commitment to focus on what the team identified as personal social integration and valued social participation of children with impairments (Wolfensberger, 1998, 122-124). SRV describes personal social integration and valued social participation as adaptive participation by a socially devalued person in a culturally normative quantity of contacts, interactions and relationships, with ordinary citizens, in typical activities, and in socially valued physical and social settings. Efforts along this line are likely to have a number of benefits for the devalued person. This concept is applicable of course to children with impairments in preschool (Sherwin, 2001). The question becomes what are typical and

even valued preschool settings, activities and relationships for children, and then how can children with impairments be supported in these.

Even though they may not have used SRV language or thought about it in those terms, this program purposefully and carefully tried to help the children with significant impairments to be students in the preschool program, i.e., to be in the preschool student role. (Social roles are another very important concept in SRV and PASSING. Roles are very influential in shaping people's lives, as well as other's expectations of the person in the role. A young child in the student role, for example, is expected to be able to learn and to get along with other students and teachers, and so is given plentiful learning and play opportunities, which helps them to learn more and more, which then reinforces the original expectations, and so on.) The children with impairments were carefully included when, for example, the whole class played games, worked on art projects, did chores, cared for plants they were growing as Mother's Day gifts, etc. Staff expected them to belong, to be engaged and to participate. They gave them extra help when they needed to do so, i.e., hand-over-hand help, extra encouragement, more specific directions, etc.

Supporting integration of children with significant physical and/or intellectual impairments is a relatively rare step for a preschool program, and deserves commendation. For example, studies by the US Department of Education (and others) consistently show that children who are significantly intellectually impaired spend most of their time either in a separate school or facility, or outside a regular education class.[6] This is problematic for these children on many levels. In terms of teaching and learning specifically, it essentially gives up on the time-tested methods of learning through role-modeling and imitation of more competent, socially valued peers.

More particularly, and equally commendable, was that the team heard and saw that this program was careful about limiting the number of students with impairments in the preschool, to help ensure proper learning, role modeling and integration. It is well known that for proper role modeling of valued and adaptive behaviors, one thing that helps is to have a lot of good role models surrounding the learner. This preschool had struck a fine balance in this area, with a very small number of children with impairments and a much larger number of children who could act as good role models for them in terms of learning. The size and makeup of the classes also helped each child feel safe and comfortable, able to learn and to meet new children, particularly for the children without impairments to meet children who were different from themselves in potentially significant and negatively perceived ways.

The size and makeup of the classes also helped make it easier for the teachers to teach and to support the integration and participation of the children with impairments in the classes. For example, because there were only a few children who might need alot of extra teaching help at any one time, the teachers were able to accomplish this. If there were many more children with significant impairments in the class, it would have been much more difficult and at some point impossible for the teachers to give each student the help they needed. This is even more rare than the decision to use an integration model in school. Larger numbers of children with impairments in the class, as is common in many special education programs and schools in the US today (and we believe to a greater or lesser degree in other developed countries), would have made teaching and learning at the preschool much more difficult.

The grouping of the children also led to a positive image projection for the children with specific impairments. Because the children with impairments were in classes mostly composed of children without significant impairments and with typical social status, those positive images and higher statuses tended to (even unconsciously) transfer or rub off onto the children with impairments. This is a well-know dynamic in sociology and psychol-

ogy. Part of the problem with most segregated and congregated special education programs and classrooms is that they (unconsciously) set the children up in these classes to more likely be seen by others as different in a negative way, or as more like their own kind (i.e., other impaired children) than as children first and foremost. This kind of negative imaging and stereotyping further keeps many impaired children from ever being helped to learn and reach their individual potential, i.e., because they are seen largely by others as just one of the group of 'those kids,' who all basically have the same level of incompetence. This program did not fall into this trap.

On the contrary, the children with impairments whom the team met were more likely to be seen by their families, other families, other teachers, visitors and society in general as more like regular kids who could learn rather than as needy kids who could not learn, because of where they spent the day (i.e., at a typical preschool), who they spent it with (i.e., mostly with typical kids and teachers), and what they did all day (i.e., played games, ate lunch, did classroom chores, etc.).

The program made strong efforts so that these children were less likely to stand out in a negative way from the other students, but that each student was seen as unique in a positive way. The development and expression of individuality (including of personality, talents, abilities, beliefs, preferences, etc.) is seen in North America as a highly desirable trait, and is also potentially highly competency- and imagery-enhancing. Its beneficial development often starts at a young age. At this preschool, examples of the children's art work were hung around the classrooms. The team felt that the teachers knew each of the children fairly well (i.e., what they liked and did not like, what they were really good at, what they needed to learn, etc.). The teachers and director spoke positively, respectfully and honestly about each child, as a good teacher would. Without such help, children cannot be expected and encouraged to develop a healthy individuality for themselves. Unfortunately, many contemporary special education services for children with impairments all too commonly display a lack of sufficient potent and relevant help to significantly impaired children around this issue.

The classrooms were generally comfortable and child-friendly, making learning and peer relationship-development more likely. Because of this, parents would also be likely to feel better about their children spending the day there. The furniture was the right size, toys and games were within easy reach, etc. The preschool had a wide range and variety of good classroom materials and playthings that were appropriate for children, fun and educational (e.g., puzzles, a child-height sandbox, construction-type toys, etc.). They were of high quality, there were enough for all the students, they were well kept, and were easily accessible and usable by all the children. There was also a range of materials to meet different children's needs and interests. The program director was conscious of getting the best materials possible, even when that meant paying a higher cost and perhaps waiting a little longer to save enough money to purchase them. All of this added to the learning and fun of the children. It also was beneficial to their image and status in the eyes of others, in the sense that it portrayed the children as wanting and deserving such nice surroundings and nice things.

Unlike many special education classrooms and special education schools, this setting looked very nice and well kept inside and out, and it looked like a preschool, not a human service program. This setting projected an image message about all the children, including of course the children with impairments, that they needed and deserved a nice preschool to go to. This kind of image message projection is very influential in shaping how others (i.e., in this case, teachers, parents, other children) perceive and treat people they meet in that particular setting.[7] Again, it is worth emphasizing that this and other strengths of the program clearly stemmed from the fact that the program was providing a good preschool for each child, regardless of ability.

The children with impairments were in significant ways benefiting from the services provided by the preschool, and from being in a preschool with children without significant impairments. As well, on reflection, the team recognized that the children without impairments were also benefiting from the experience of being in an integrated preschool with a carefully planned number of well-supported children with impairments. The team felt that this was important to emphasize in this report, as this is a point not commonly recognized in many academic and research discussions of integration, or at best is glossed over. The more typical children (and perhaps indirectly their families) were learning through experience to be more welcoming of people who are typically perceived negatively and with low expectations by society. The children were learning to see Jane or John first, rather than the cerebral palsied girl or the autistic boy. This is a good thing.

They were learning to be in relationship with people different from themselves, and so to be more well-rounded individuals and hopefully gentler, kinder people. They would therefore hopefully be more likely as adults to be open, less judgmental, more compassionate, etc. Some would be better at recognizing the gifts and the personhood of people with impairments. Some would be more open to being friends, co-workers, neighbors, peers, family members, etc. of people with impairments. Over time, as they matured, the team believed that some would have a good chance of being better than many people in society are today at crafting even more integrated life opportunities for physically and intellectually impaired people. In the long run, such positive integrative experiences are a necessary step in building stronger, more closely knit, more welcoming and better adapted communities and societies for people with impairments.

As well, the children without impairments were benefiting from being able to experience and appreciate the gifts and contributions of the children with significant impairments (e.g., Mary is a lot of fun to play games with, John likes the same stories I do, etc.). These are examples of the kind of things that many adults (and children) never get to learn about children and adults with impairments, because they do not often share physical and social environments together.

Overall, the team felt that the preschool addressed many pressing needs for many of the children served, both with and without impairments: teaching, learning, maturing, caring, relationships, positive experiences, to be seen as belonging, positive vision and high expectations for their growth and learning.

Program Issues

As indicated above, the preschool had some less immediate but still important areas for possible improvement in terms of service quality. The team identified three such areas. The first area was related to the quality of the service for the children with impairments in the program. The second was related to the educational future of the children with significant impairments. The third area (as mentioned earlier) concerned some broader social issues outside the narrow purview of the program, and was related to the needs of all the children in the preschool on the one hand, and to the needs of their families, communities and society on the other. These three areas are described below.

First, the team felt that the service could and should improve on trying to build more depthful, mutual and respectful relationships (consistent with their age) between the typically developing children and the children with significant impairments. This was certainly a need of the children with impairments, as described above. The preschool also recognized this as something which they could do better at. A lack of needed relationships would certainly be likely to negatively affect the children with impairments to some degree (for example, in terms of their potentially diminished: social and educational learning, current and future relationships, etc.), and the other students and their families (in terms of their current and

future ability to be more understanding, open and welcoming to people different from themselves; their missing out on the gifts of the children with impairments, etc.).

To be clear, the program was consciously working on this and did have some success with it, so the team's understanding of this issue is more about what else could be done rather than about a lack of any effort at all on the part of the program. In many ways, this is always the hard work of integration. The preschool had many of the preconditions in place for good integration, i.e., the physical presence of kids with impairments in manageable numbers, available classroom roles for impaired students, positive expectations on the part of the teachers, openness on the part of the other students, etc.

Perhaps what was needed could include: one or at most two more teachers and/or aides, even part-time (although there is a balance to be struck here, where too many adults in a classroom can actually inhibit children's learning and interactions); more brainstorming/conversations about specific children with impairments done by the teachers as a team on this issue; learning more about communication styles and approaches for children with difficulty communicating; visiting other successfully integrated preschool programs to share and learn what approaches they use; learning about and trying to implement the concept of valued social roles as it applies to relationship building, etc.

What stands over and above all of the recommended possibilities mentioned in the paragraph above though is the need for the preschool teachers to consciously cultivate and to reinforce a mindset (or a consistently patterned way of believing and thinking) among themselves that each individual student in the class (particularly the children with impairments) is valued, belongs, can enjoy and have mutual relationships with other children, and has something to offer to others. In some important ways, this mindset did exist already at the preschool program. However, when it comes to building relationships between young students with and without impairments, such a mindset must be crystal clear, explicit, well-thought out, sufficiently depthful not shallow, thoroughly embraced and continually reinforced, plus be backed up by teachers with the skills necessary to translate this mindset into concrete action on a daily even hourly basis in the classroom.

Such a consciously-held positive mindset would do much to help the preschool program and the teachers to brainstorm, for example, how to: bring different children together (i.e., to work on a common art project or puzzle, to have lunch together, etc.); look for and nurture seeds of relationships between children with and without impairments when they arise; grow a culture and an atmosphere of community and mutuality within the classes; etc. This is a very exciting prospect for most teachers, as it is what they are naturally inclined towards already for their students. What is required though, given the needs and vulnerabilities of children with impairments, is extra consciousness and work on the part of the teachers, above and beyond what is typically required of most teachers. Just one small concrete illustration of what might be done very directly to build such a classroom culture could include, for example, the teachers encouraging different parents to invite particular children over to their homes to visit their own children after school (this encouragement could be given both to parents of children with impairments and to parents of children without impairments).

All of this would certainly be a challenge for the program, given some children who have a particular difficulty in communicating and interacting with others. The team realized that not all the children with impairments at the preschool currently or in the future would be able to experience and/or reciprocate relationships in the same way as other children. They can be helped somewhat to learn this; at the same time, the more typical children in the class are the ones who in many ways will also have to change, and to learn about

what it means to be in relationship with someone who does not talk, or make eye contact, or learn the same way as they do, etc. This kind of environment of course is the responsibility of the teachers to help teach and create in the classes.

Second, the team felt that the preschool program was not providing the level of strong encouragement, assistance and when necessary advocacy within an educational context which most of the families of children with significant impairments truly needed; for example, for the children with impairments to (continue to) be included in classroom activities when they left the program and went on to school, and particularly to (continue to) receive relevant and challenging educational opportunities. We learned from the service that often many of the children with impairments were ending up in more segregated educational settings after leaving the preschool. Given the state of so-called special education services in general, this was a concern for the team, especially given the positive strides which this program had clearly made.

The children without impairments and with typical social status and abilities could in a sense take it for granted that they could go to school basically wherever they and/or their parents wanted. Not so for the children with significant impairments. They needed extra help and support on many levels from many people if they were to be able to do so. (The team believed that to do so would be a struggle from start to finish, require much effort from many people, and still in all honesty be rife with disappointments and setbacks.)

Given their heightened vulnerability to ending up in educational settings where they would not really be expected to learn and develop to their full potential, they needed their parents and other people in their lives who would go the extra mile and bend over backwards to support them to do so. Providing effective advocacy is probably one of the more difficult services to offer to needy people of any age in human services. (This is a complex issue, so this article will devote a good amount of space to discussing it. The issue will be described in its broadest context, and then related to this program specifically.)

Parents obviously would be the first line of direction-setting and advocacy for their children with significant impairments. Parents naturally have the primary legal and moral standing in their children's lives. They are the ones who will most likely be there in the long run for their children. A pressing question for this program then was how could they as a preschool support, encourage and advise the parents in their dealings with schools, particularly when it comes to advocacy for the children's education. There are a number of ways (pre)schools can help to do this. For example, the preschool could: ask the parents of the students with impairments what schools they are thinking of sending their children to; encourage parents towards particular teachers, principals, classes or schools which the program knows are good at integration; introduce the parents of their current students to parents of older (impaired) students who have already been through more of the school system with their children, and who could offer to them needed advice and encouragement; teach families about the various possibilities and benefits of school integration, etc. (Only if the parents are unable or unwilling to provide needed direction and advocacy for their own children with impairments should the preschool consider stepping in and doing it themselves, as best they can.)

The team realized that this preschool program did not necessarily have the legal authority or standing to advocate for these children in the public schools, especially beyond the first grade. (After first grade obviously, their new teachers would have much more standing than the preschool would.) However, the team was told that the program did already have some involvement with different public and private schools in the area, which could open the door to potential advocacy roles. As well, the staff did have firsthand knowledge of the children and how they could be

helped to learn in a typical educational setting for their ages, which did give them the moral standing or authority to help represent them and advocate for their needs.

The team was fully aware of the enormity of the obstacles which would face any service (not to mention family) trying to address these assistance and advocacy needs for the children with significant impairments. Such a service would likely face at least the following difficulties: the overwhelming degree of negative stereotypes and low expectations held by society at large and schools in particular towards children with intellectual impairments, especially as they aged; financial constraints; school policies which largely mitigated addressing many of these needs; the likely resistance of at least some schools to such advocacy efforts, perhaps especially when they are coming from a preschool, which in the US educational structure is normatively outside of the formal school system; and the likely fearfulness and/or resistance of at least some families to pushing schools to address these issues (i.e., perhaps due to families' own low expectations for their child, their lack of knowledge of what is possible and/or available, their sense of isolation in the face of education and school professionals, their fear of being rejected by schools, etc.).

The team also recognized that while it is true that parents have authority and control over their children and rightly so, the preschool, its director and teachers had very high expectations for all the children, as well as experience teaching children with impairments, which is (unfortunately) rare for teachers of impaired children. These factors in a sense gave the teachers a form of authority, albeit different from the parents. These experiences and expectations held by the teachers were worth sharing, in advocating for the children, and also as a way hopefully of being a good role model for other educational programs, principals, teachers, even families, etc. If neither the families nor the teachers try to advocate for these children in terms of their education, it is unlikely anyone else will, or at least that anyone else could do so as well as the families and teachers could, particularly in partnership, given their experiences and knowledge. Despite all these difficulties, the team felt that trying to address this need for educational advocacy would still be a valid effort on the part of the service, even if it was only partly successful for some children, and could still bear fruit for at least some of the impaired children served, not to mention their families, other children in different schools, the service workers (i.e., teachers) themselves, and society in general.

Third, a broader issue which the team struggled with related to balancing the needs of individual children with the needs of their families and of society. The team truly did struggle with this point; it is an emotionally painful and contentious topic in many circles. We appreciate the struggles and the compromises which many families with school-age children face in our contemporary society. To be clear, the team felt that this was not necessarily a pressing program issue as much a societal one perhaps. However, the team felt that it was something which the program should be aware of (and perhaps already was). In fact, they may not be able to do anything else about it, except be aware of it.

As mentioned previously in this article, all children are potentially vulnerable in many ways. One particular vulnerability is that children are vulnerable to having their needs sacrificed for others' needs. The team has seen, and others have written and talked about extensively, the larger forces which are at work in our society that tend to draw children away from their families, making it possible (and even seem desirable) that families not do things with their children that historically have been within the province of parents. This includes such things as teaching children, raising them, watching them during the day, helping them with homework, feeding them breakfast, etc. The role of preschools and particularly day-cares is one arena where we see this potential conflict playing out more and more in our society, to the poten-

tial detriment of children, families and eventually society. (Obviously, this is more of a risk in situations where children go four or five days a week, especially full days, to a preschool/day-care, versus only one or two days, or only half-days.) In our society, children at younger and younger ages are more and more entering day-care and preschool programs. Often, this is due to economic pressure on families where both parents must work to survive. If other family (e.g., grandparents) or friends are not available to help, as is quite likely today, then day-care/preschool is quite often the option chosen. State and federal governments often set up conditions which in a sense force families to work and subsequently to be separated from child-rearing during the day. Governments may do this for economic reasons, for example, or for values-based reasons. The roots of this type of pressure lie clearly on the societal level. These realities point out some of the terrible dilemmas which many families, including single-parent ones, face.

However, we must also recognize other potential motivations and values at stake in this issue. For example, for some families, the underlying motives are not primarily economic survival per se, but rather the desire to acquire and/or maintain a high(er) standard of living which drives both parents to work, and necessitates placing their child/children in day-care/preschool. Whatever the source or motivation, however, whether government or parental, whether economic or values-based, the children often do pay the biggest costs, particularly over the long run.

The team recognized of course that what is good for parents or even for families as a whole is often good directly or indirectly for the children as well. At the same time, this is not always so, especially in the long-run. Sometimes what is best for the children may in the short- or even long-run cause difficulty for the parents. For example, it may be better for children for their parents to stay home and raise them, even if that means living at a lower economic standard or giving up job satisfaction. In the long-run, such close parental upbringing is often what most children most need, if there has to be a choice between the two. The consequences of the fact that many or most children are not now getting this are obvious, ominous and tragic.

To relate this issue to this program and to preschool/day-care in general, a question was raised in the minds of some team members of whether in some ways this preschool was satisfying the needs of some parents more than their children's needs, particularly given the overall higher economic status which most of the families using this particular program enjoyed. Was it really better for some parents to have a place they could safely leave their children during the day three or more days a week than it was in the long-run for the children to be able to be primarily cared for by their parents, no matter how nice a place the preschool was (and this program was a good preschool, as described above)? This does not mean that parents who make these decisions are necessarily bad parents; they may also be to greater or lesser degrees confused, desperate, conflicted, ill-informed, mis-informed, isolated, short-sighted, inexperienced, immature, etc.

In the issues described above, empty rhetoric abounds as to how early placement is actually better for children, and so forth. But in reality, the potential for children to lose out and to be hurt in different ways by not growing up and spending their days with their parents and families is incredibly high.[8] For example, throughout much of the history of many different cultures, young children primarily learned from their parents, siblings, grandparents and extended family, more than through any outside schooling. When this is not the case, the question is raised of how well the socially-acceptable substitutes (i.e., preschool, day-care) really work. Many teachers themselves have commented on this issue, that they are being expected to teach children things and address needs that in the past families were responsible for, and that do not seem to have a place in our schools.

The point is not that there may not be some benefits to younger children being in day-care/

preschool, but do the benefits outweigh the drawbacks? As written above, this issue related to the balance between the needs of children, parents, families and society. This article is not the forum to discuss this issue in the length and at the depth it deserves, but hopefully the issue at stake is at least clear. It is hopefully also clear how it is connected to this program, which by its existence, among all the other good things it does, facilitates some families (in this case, mostly well-off families) placing their children in day-care/preschool, and so accelerates those societal forces mentioned above.

Conclusion

Overall, this was a highly instructive service for the PASSING team to visit and analyze from an SRV perspective. We were very thankful to the children and teachers at the program for this opportunity. It powerfully illustrated many of the themes taught in SRV and made them concrete. Visiting a service which scored positively on the PASSING scale also made this a beneficial learning opportunity. Our visit and analysis of this service also raised a number of extra-SRV questions worthy of reflection and discussion. Both these points show once again the power of the introductory PASSING workshop and the PASSING tool in teaching about SRV specifically and human service broadly. As the originator of SRV, Professor Wolf Wolfensberger, has pointed out, "the most detailed exposition of SRV is not found in print, but at SRV training courses (from introductory to advanced levels)" (Wolfensberger, 2000, 122).

Thanks to Joe Osburn and Darcy Elks for their assistance on the original PASSING report.

See Discussion Questions on Page 54

Endnotes

1. Note that this article is based on a PASSING assessment during which the 2nd version of the PASSING tool was used. See Wolfensberger, W. & Thomas, S. (1983). *PASSING (Program analysis of service systems' implementation of Normalization goals): Normalization criteria and ratings manual* (2nd ed.). Toronto: National Institute on Mental Retardation. However, the 3rd version (2007) is the most current one.

2. For more on the heightened vulnerability of children with significant impairments in the US educational system, see: National Council on Disability. (2008). *The No Child Left Behind Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: A progress report*. Washington, DC; National Council on Disability. (2004). *Improving educational outcomes for students with disabilities.* Washington, DC; President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education. (2002). *A new era: Revitalizing special education for children and their families.* Washington, DC; National Council on Disability. (2000). *Back to school on civil rights*. Washington, DC.

3. Montessori was a prolific writer, and many of her writings are still available today. Just one example is her book entitled *The Absorbent Mind* published in 1949.

4. For more on competency enhancement, see Wolfensberger, 1998, pp. 108-111; Wolfensberger & Thomas, 1983, pp. 339-507.

5. For more on image enhancement, see Wolfensberger, 1998, pp. 104-105; Wolfensberger & Thomas, 1983, pp. 31-337.

6. E.g., the resources listed above in endnote # 2.

7. See endnote # 5, or for example, Knapp, M. (1972). *Nonverbal communication in human interaction.* New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

8. See for example, Bennett, W. (2001). *The broken hearth.* New York: Doubleday, for one discussion of this pressing issue.

References

Osburn, J. (2006). An overview of Social Role Valorization theory. *The SRV Journal, 1*(1), 4–13.

Sherwin, J. (2001). Classrooms, camps and canteens: Dilemmas of social integration in schools. *SRV/VRS: The International Social Role Valorization Journal/La revue internationale de la Valorisation des Rôles Sociaux, 4*(1&2), 29-39

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 Agentry.

Wolfensberger, W. (2000). A brief overview of Social Role Valorization. *Mental Retardation, 38*(2).

Wolfensberger, W. & Thomas, S. (2007). *PASSING: A tool for analyzing service quality according to Social Role Valorization criteria. Ratings manual.* (3rd rev.ed.). Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Training Institute for Human Service Planning, Leadership & Change Agentry.

Marc Tumeinski is a trainer for the SRV Implementation Project in Worcester, MA (US) & editor of The SRV Journal.

The citation for this article is
Tumeinski, M. (2010). SRV lessons learned: A PASSING visit to a preschool. *The SRV Journal, 5*(1), 21-35.

Learning to Teach Social Role Valorization (SRV)

Social Role Valorization, when well applied, has potential to help societally devalued people to gain greater access to the good things of life and to be spared at least some of the negative effects of social devaluation. This is one of the reasons why it is important for people to learn to teach SRV, so that its ideas and strategies are known and available to the right people in the right places who can apply it well. Unless people continue to learn to be SRV trainers, the teaching and dissemination of SRV will cease. Many SRV trainers for example could teach lots of people how to **implement** SRV, but not how to **teach** it to others. At a certain point there might be implementation of aspects of SRV, but the knowledge of SRV itself might not be passed on to others, such as the next generation of human service workers. Teaching about SRV, and learning to teach SRV, can be done in many ways, depending in part on one's abilities, interests, resources and so on.

The North American SRV Safeguarding, Training & Development Council has developed a specific model for teaching people to competently do two things: (a) teach Social Role Valorization; and (b) teach other people to teach SRV. People who can do the former, the Council calls "SRV trainers." Those who can do the latter, the Council calls "trainers-of-trainers" of SRV. The Council named this a "Trainer Formation Model," i.e., a model for forming or developing SRV trainers and trainers-of-SRV trainers. A description of the Trainer Formation Model is available if you are interested (http://www.srvip.org/about_mission.php); also see the article referenced below.

To find out more about studying SRV and learning to teach it, please contact Jo Massarelli at *The SRV Implementation Project*, 74 Elm Street, Worcester, MA 01609 USA; 508.752.3670; jo@srvip.org. She will be able to help you or to put you in touch with someone more local to your geographic area who can be of help.

Resource
SRV Development, Training & Safeguarding Council (2006). A Brief Overview of the North American SRV Council's Trainer Formation Model (November 2005). *The SRV Journal 1*(1), 58-62.