Journeying into the Everyday: Fostering the Application of Social Role Valorisation

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Editor's Note: *This article takes up the question of implementing SRV, with an eye towards helping devalued people to have greater access to the good things of life, by exploring the guidelines for applying SRV measures (e.g., Wolfensberger, 1998, 82-95). I encourage our readers to reflect on this article in terms of their local area as well as their own experiences, & to submit examples of implementation to the Journal.*

Introduction

This paper concerns itself with the application of the theory of Social Role Valorisation (SRV), and will be of relevance to those people who have attended an introductory workshop and the PASSING practicum. It describes the elements of a 'thinking framework' to assist someone to take the many concepts that they were exposed to during these workshops and to use them with and for a devalued person towards achieving a better life.[1] While there is a considerable amount of theoretical material available, there is little published material on applying SRV. This paper seeks to make a contribution to application in a small way by utilising key SRV themes and the 'if this, then that' way of understanding SRV (Wolfensberger, 1995).

Many participants report being better informed, inspired, and challenged after attending a Social Role Valorisation (SRV) theory workshop. Participants also report participation at the PASSING practicum as a transformational experience. Shevellar et al (2012), however, note four patterns. Despite the richness and helpfulness of SRV as a theory, the majority of participants in theory workshops neither go on to do the practicum, nor do they join local networks. It could be speculated that few have the important learning conversations that are necessary after a workshop to embed the theory in practice. Secondly, those in organisational leadership roles rank few in workshops. A low consciousness of matters that would be facilitative of the implementation of SRV is therefore more likely. Examples include coherent organisational values and attention to non-programmatic matters, such as the use of buildings or recruitment practices. The authors also note that, despite good intent, there has been little progress in engaging implementers of SRV by national safeguarding groups, like the Australian and New Zealand SRV Group. Finally, the authors note that the broader societal context sees a return to policies and practices that deeply devalue people who have negatively valued characteristics.

Let us turn to the article title. The word 'fostering' indicates that this paper will explore habits of thinking that will assist in the application of SRV.

The 'everyday' in the title refers to two contexts. First of all, 'everyday' refers to a vision of people with a devalued status experiencing the everyday lifestyles that people with a valued status take for granted. It refers to what is commonly referred to as a typical life, a life of richness and meaning

or 'a good life.'[1] Secondly, 'everyday' refers to a practical application of the theory each and every day. This requires an integration of personal values with each of the concepts within SRV theory. It requires translating these values and ideas into a thinking framework that guides conscious competence in application.

Thus 'journeying into the everyday' is both a reference to the types of lifestyles that SRV implementers are trying to create with and for devalued people, as well as a reference to the necessary habits of thinking and practice in those who are applying SRV.

Journeying into the everyday also requires the un-learning of thinking and practice. Of particular detriment is thinking that has been shaped by negative historical ways of responding to the needs of devalued people and/or which is shaped by non-programmatic matters, such as what the funder says is possible, what the staff are willing to do, having a building to fill, etc.

What is the Journey?

The paper uses the metaphor of SRV implementers as travellers in order to explore a key question: what habits of thinking are necessary to apply the many SRV ideas in order to make a difference in the lives of an individual and to journey into the 'everyday'? It answers the question by describing: the probable needs of those who are trying to implement SRV, a thinking framework, pitfalls, and additional helpful endeavours.

The journey is one of consciously and thoughtfully assisting devalued people to be their authentic selves beyond their negatively valued characteristics and the low expectations that are tied like weights to their souls.

The journey also assumes that implementers can be helped to move from a theoretical understanding of SRV to applying the theory. There are only a few publications (such as by Better Practice Project, 2011; Kendrick, 2009; Ramsey, 2007; O'Brien, 2006; Sherwin, 2011) and a few workshops that assist people to apply SRV around, to and with individuals. This paper seeks to add to these 'travellers' aids.'

Who are the Travellers who Journey into the Everyday?

Those who are on the journey to apply SRV might be family members or devalued people themselves. They are more likely to be those with some sort of vocational certification who have participated in SRV workshops as a form of work-related training and who are working in technocratic environments. This means that an application of SRV has to compete in environments that are bureaucratised, with a heavy emphasis on standardisation, accountability requirements, paperwork, and an aversion to risk. The traveller themselves might be seen as a mere cog in a large human service wheel. It is also possible that the managers of the service might view service recipients as customers or commodities. They might have very little consciousness of the historical treatment of devalued people, including the patterns of rejection, segregation, and congregation as the dominant features of traditional service responses. It is also true that a minority of the travellers could be operating in smaller environments where there is a leaning towards individualised arrangements.

Within this context, the likely needs of a traveller trying to apply SRV everyday include:

i. a 'thinking framework' with regard to SRV application. This refers to a mental model and rhythm of thinking about how to enable someone to get a better life[1]

ii. fortitude, courage and passion in applying the theory

iii. an expanding and deepening knowledge of the theory and its nuances

iv. a cultural environment that is permissive and nurturing of the application of SRV, including facilitative processes used in planning, recruitment, supervision of staff; an absence of risk aversion; acknowledgement of work that builds valued roles; etc.

Ultimately, the intention is for the traveller to be able to construct a set of responses to the needs of a devalued person that are coherent with the individual having a better life and a positive future. It is also the intention, within an SRV framework, to shape the perceptions of others such that they will have positive expectations of the individual with the devalued status.

Key Ideas for the Journey: A Thinking Framework

A KEY VEHICLE for the journey will be to use a mental model that is different from the traditional ways of thinking. Those ways of thinking are founded on perceiving people largely through the narrow lens of their negatively valued characteristics. For example, if people are perceived largely as menaces, then the responses are largely about containment. If the perception is that adults are eternal children or in their second childhood, then responses are likely to include minding people and doing 'for' them.

An alternative thinking framework consists of a series of 'decision points,' like road markers or sign posts. Each decision point can be either consistent with SRV or 'detours' that lead the traveller away from an application of SRV. Decision points typically require consciously thinking through the issues. Sometimes issues need to be weighed carefully, depending on what is to be achieved. The application of SRV can be likened to conscious, cautiously confident steps towards a better life for and with an individual.

The kind of thinking needed to apply theory to practice starts with an appreciation of the identity of each individual and understanding the needs that must be met in order for them to have a typical life. Decision points are with regard to role goals, the use of typical ways and means, the role communicators, how best to enhance skills, and in what way someone is regarded (Wolfensberger, 1998, 82-102).

1. The Journey Begins

A SPIRIT of discovery is adopted.

(i) Who is the person?

The starting point is actually a fork in the road. The fork that is not consistent with SRV is this one: identifying which program with which (devalued) group and in which building the person should attend.

The fork that is consistent with SRV is one that leads to a deeper understanding of who the person is and an appreciation of the identity of the person beyond their deficits. This involves an appreciation of the person's key life-shaping experiences, the impact of the impairment on them, their past and current roles, the people in their lives, their strengths and talents, interests and passions.

(ii) Imagining a positive future

If the human identity of a person can be appreciated in all of its lights and shades, it becomes possible to imagine a more positive future.

The SRV notion of culturally valued analogue (CVA) is helpful here (Wolfensberger *&* Thomas, 2007, 30-31). To use the CVA, 'Think typical.' The CVA question of 'what would be a typical life for anyone else without an impairment of a similar age, gender and culture?' is asked. It can be seen that in asking a question like this, the focus is on what is considered to be ordinary, representative, respected and experienced by people with a valued status.

Questions in a similar vein refine the imagined better life. For example, 'what does a good home life look like?' for someone who has never had their own home or is at risk of losing theirs. For someone who is unemployed or attending day programs, the refined CVA question could be 'what does a meaningful week look like for someone who is of that age and unemployed?'

A focus on the identity of the person in the absence of the impairment or whatever it is that

leads them to be devalued is required. Magical thinking is not utilised. Rather, at this stage of the process, a form of short-term 'parking' of the impairment is adopted. Deficit thinking leads to lower expectations. Without a sidelining of the devaluing characteristic in our minds, the traditional habits of thinking can get in the way by limiting our perception of the person and our expectations of what might be possible.

(iii) Who is the person (part 2)

After a sense of a positive future is explored and described, the person's needs can be identified. These are the human and specific needs that should be met so that the person can move towards their positive future. This is not to say that needs like food, warmth, shelter and health aren't important; they are obviously necessary for people to continue to live. However, simply meeting the needs at the base of Maslow's hierarchy leads to people existing, not necessarily thriving. An SRV thinking framework requires attention to those more important or fundamental needs that, if met, would allow the person to thrive and also to have less important needs met.

This phase also involves identifying the vulnerabilities of the person. Appreciating heightened vulnerability allows an exploration of the sorts of things that might go wrong, such as poorer health or an increased chance of rejection.

The 'base camp' for the journey is an appreciation of two things: the person, their needs and vulnerabilities; and a sense of a positive future. Like a base camp, these are both the starting point and the return-to point. On any journey when travellers return to a base camp, they return not exactly as they left. They have been changed somewhat through their interactions with people, places and past-times. So too the SRV traveller, as they reflect on their new discoveries about the person and the sense of possibilities. So too for the devalued individual as they live life. Hopefully Albert Einstein's quote takes on intriguing relevance for the devalued person: 'There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.'

The next section continues with ideas in the thinking framework to help make an individual's life a miracle that is, at the same time, not miraculous. It is an ordinary life, good ordinary and not extraordinary, even though it might take extraordinary efforts.

2. The SRV Implementation Trek

Another quote is helpful to the journey at this point. George Bernard Shaw said 'Life isn't about finding yourself. Life is about creating yourself.' The four ideas of role goals, culturally valued analogue (CVA), role communicators, and enhancement of competency and image are essential SRV road markers which help people create themselves.

The thinking framework has been influenced by Wolfensberger's 'If this, then that' way of understanding SRV as well as by the ten themes of SRV (1995, 1998).

(i) Role goals

The identification of role goals is critical. The types of goals relate to whatever it is in the imagined future that is to be pursued. The role goals could be a combination of any of the following (Wolfensberger, 1998, 84-95):

a. strengthening existing roles, for example, to learn additional administration tasks for someone with a disability employed as a part-time administration worker

b. maintaining existing roles, for example, to maintain the role of homemaker for an older person with arthritic hands

c. finding new roles, for example, to become a school band member as well as a school student

d. reducing the negativity of any roles, for example, the role of prisoner is likely to be reduced in its negativity if someone learns employment skills

e. removing negative roles by, for example, to lose the roles of animal and menace for a person incarcerated in an animalistic environment and to move into a real home and the role of tenant

In short, if someone wants a better life,[1] then 'think roles.' While this sounds relatively straightforward, there are two further forks in the road:

a. Having role goals and finding activities are very different. For example, going to the football game is different from being in the role of avid fan. The former is a way of filling in time, even if the person is interested in football. The latter is about assisting the person to craft part of their identity. It therefore has implications for more than just attending matches. It also affects how the person dresses, who they spend time with during and between games, mementoes in their possession, what they might read, and so on.

b. If the intention is for the person to belong to a community of interest and to develop friendships, then it is essential that there is a distinction between roles that bring community presence, such as café goer, and roles that bring community participation, such as choir member and volunteer (Sherwin, 2011).

(ii) Culturally Valued Analogue (CVA)

The culturally valued analogue ('Think typical') is pertinent here as well. When considering how to meet needs, the traveller can consider how it is that people with a valued status get similar needs met. For example, questions like 'how does anyone else make a friend?', 'how does anyone else find a housemate?' and 'how does anyone else get to pursue an interest in football?' are illustrations of questions that are grounded in 'the typical.'

Following the road marker of the CVA makes it more likely that what happens around and with the individual is typical and valued. They are the ways and means of getting needs met that are familiar happenings through the journey of life for someone with a valued status.

(iii) Role communicators

A further set of decision points relates to how someone can be socialised into a particular role by the physical and social environment. This socialisation can be so strong as to result in the person's identity being moulded through their internalising of the messages about the role they are in.

Therefore conscious decision-making is required with regard to the following role communicators:

a. where the person will spend their time in the role

b. who the person will be alongside while they are in that role, and who will be in either similar roles (e.g., a group of students who learn from each other) or roles that are reciprocal, e.g., a teacher is in a reciprocal role to the student role

c. what they'll be doing while they are actually in the role

d. their appearance, e.g., it is difficult for a person to internalise a belief that they are in the role of exerciser without being in gym clothes

An understanding of role communicators as decision points leads to a guiding set of actions. The intention should be to systematically consider each of the role communicators and for the person to be in the most valued options that are feasible in each of these role communicator areas.

There are two benefits. Firstly, systematically thinking about each of the role communicators will help with socialization into the role (Sherwin & Sweeney, 2012).

Secondly, choosing as valued an option as possible is likely to help others see the person with positive regard. An essential benefit is that this unconsciously challenges any preconceived negative perceptions of the person. There is a continuum of value for each of the role communicators. For example, in terms of a role communicator about the physical setting, a detention centre is at the negatively valued end; people with a valued status would never say something like 'Oh, I can't wait to live in the detention centre.' Having a comfortable and secure home is at the positively valued end of the continuum.

If someone is already in a role, then shaping the role communicators to be at the more positive end of the continuum is also important. This is especially germane in situations where the individual is in a role that is culturally familiar but

is not at the positively valued end of the continuum. The following two scenarios illustrate how superficially someone can be in a role. In each case, the role is 'sort of' valued, but once scrutinised, is clearly not. Sometimes the role of a person working in a sheltered workshop is described as employee. It is true that there are many communicators of an employee role: for example, there is a factory-like work setting, repetitive tasks like one would find in a factory, and even uniforms befitting a factory worker. However, if all of the other people are there primarily because of a shared impairment, if the hours of work are more akin to school hours, and if those who are providing support are more like minders than supervisors, then the other role communicators diminish the value of the role of employee.

Another example would be to consider the role of tenant and homemaker in the home of an individual in the following scenario. The home looks like any others in the street, and the person has their own room, but the other five tenants entered as strangers who also have an impairment. The extent of the homemaking tasks are peeling carrots for dinner and carrying the dishes to the sink. The roles of host, billpayer, hobbyist and active neighbour are absent. The tenant has no authority over who enters the home or over the identity of the paid workers. Further, the paid actors might act like cooks, cleaners and minders. If workers act in these roles, then an understanding of role complementarity predicts that the individual will act like a guest or even prisoner in his or her own home.

These two examples demonstrate that roles exist on a continuum of value, and that if the goal is to support the person into a valued role, then ideally all of the role communicators would be at the more valued ends of the continua.

It could be possible to progress each of the role communicators towards the valued end. For example, it is possible to change the physical setting to be more socially valued. It could also be possible to have the right number of people in the group for the task at hand, for example, two to four people for cards, and eleven for hockey. Relatedly, having the right 'sort' of people in the group will be fruitful, so that there are good role models and so that the group organiser can provide timely assistance and manage the group well. This includes recomposing the group membership from being one of having a shared devalued characteristic to one of a shared age or a shared interest depending on what the role and tasks are.

(iv) 'Acting the part and looking the part'

The person will be more fully in the role and treated well if they have the skills to be in the role and if others are helped to make up their mind positively about the person. Therefore, thinking needs to be done to identify the skills that will be necessary for the person to have, either before they enter the role or while they are in the role. SRV has much to offer in terms of the range of strategies (besides commonly used instructional strategies) that are fruitful in helping people build their competencies. Similarly, SRV has much to offer in terms of how to best convey positive imagery messages such that others around the person are likely to regard the person positively.

In summary, this paper suggests that helpful habits of thinking assist in the implementation of SRV concepts. A rhythm of thinking begins with an appreciation of the individual and a desirable future. The SRV decision points include role goals, the culturally valued analogues, competency development and image enhancement. Equally critical is the conscious use of role communicators as decision points in crafting any socially valued role.

Common Potholes, Detours & U-turns in the Journey

After participating in workshops, there are not un-common deviations in the SRV implementation trek. These can be imagined as potholes, detours and U-turns in the journey. Five such challenges are outlined below.

There is a crucial SRV signpost: if devalued people are in valued roles, then they are more likely to have a lifestyle that includes purpose, respect and relationships. If someone wants a better life, then being in valued roles will help. Travellers sometimes miss this significance of valued roles. Without the intentional crafting of valued roles, there is a reduced chance of a person having a full life with freely given relationships, or of changing how devalued people are typically perceived. Further, without community participation roles, there is likely to be a pattern where the person is present in community life, but not 'of' community. Missing the signpost leads to a detour that could be a worthy deviation, but not necessarily lead to an ordinary and valued lifestyle. An example of a worthy deviation could be an avoidance of grouping people and never using age-demeaning activities. There could also be positive attention paid to appearance and the use of culturally valued places and activities. The resulting bypass could look like the following example: individuals who live alone but don't know their neighbours, who look good when they go out but are largely on 'outings' which keep them occupied.

A big pothole is fallen into when there is a focus on imagery and a corresponding minimisation of the importance of the other themes. This can lead to an overemphasis on, say, the names of programs or the look of a building. These are pertinent but less vital matters than the extent to which a program actually meets the fundamental needs of the person, using effective strategies that lead the person to have a decent and meaningful life.

An overemphasis on the imagery theme can also lead to overlooking role communicators. The image channels are about perception; role communicators are about expectations and socialisation into a role. Therefore a related challenge exists when the signpost that says 'Shape the role communicators' is missed. It is easy, for example, to focus on the person being in an activity and how that looks, without considering the impact of the physical or social environment in shaping the person's experience of the role.

To continue the journey metaphor, alerts are also issued regarding road-washouts. It is a road washout when SRV is said to be implemented but with low consciousness of the vulnerabilities of the devalued person. This can lead to a lack of compensation for someone's heightened vulnerabilities, for example, a susceptibility to rejection by others.

Similarly, it is a road-washout when there is a lack of sophistication about how to increase competencies for valued roles. Even though competence is highly valued in our society, it is not uncommon for there to be gaps in the knowledge and skill base of many paid service workers in terms of knowing how to develop skills through such things as effective instructional design, the use of role modelling and adaptive equipment. As a consequence, opportunities to acquire knowledge and skills through consciously constructed learning experiences are missed.

Travellers' Aids for the Everyday Journey

It is likely that the journey into the everyday never ends. There are many more things to be mindful of that are beyond the scope of this article. It is also rare to find ideal circumstances for applying SRV (Shevellar, 2008) so the journey continues to be one of thoughtful monitoring of efforts and a gathering of insights.

It is also nearly impossible to apply SRV as a lone implementer. Anecdotally, those who are considered skillful at applying SRV report having had hundreds, possibly thousands of hours of conversations with others about SRV and its complexities and nuances. They also report having been exposed to people more experienced than them, sometimes as mentors, sometimes as sounding boards.

Exposure to stories and examples of where SRV has informed what has happened is strengthening of not just the will to use SRV or of the mind in understanding SRV. It is also a bolstering of the

heart, because applying SRV is an act of rebellion. It is a series of actions that stand against the forces of social devaluation and the dominant ways of responding to devaluation.

It is also important to 'know oneself' when working with SRV. This relates to the theme of consciousness where it is important to reflect on one's own set of assumptions and beliefs about devaluation and human potential, to name just two areas.

Ernest Hemingway said, 'It is good to have an end to journey toward; but it is the journey that matters, in the end.' The SRV workshops are an essential first step. Like going on any journey, one must also have a sense of where one is heading and a way to get there. An SRV thinking framework, self-knowing and relationships with like-minded people are essential traveller's aids when journeying into the everyday. ☙

1. Editor's *Note: To read more about the SRV concept that valued social roles are likely to open the door to greater access to the 'good things of life,' see Wolfensberger, Thomas & Caruso, 1996.*

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