

BUILDING BELONGING IN THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY: Finding Roles that Help Students Participate and Contribute



FAMILIES FOR
INCLUSIVE
EDUCATION



Inclusion is about more than physical presence at school. It is about belonging, being valued, and being able to fully participate in that school community.

All parents want their child's school years to be full and productive, for them to have opportunities to discover their gifts, to grow and to 'shine' in many small ways. Students with disability are vulnerable to only being seen for their challenges or negative stereotypes. Helping children have access to valued social roles is one way families and schools can guard against this vulnerability. Valued roles provide opportunity for connections, personal development, self-esteem (and much more!) both at school and across the whole of life.

This booklet has been designed for families and teachers of children with a disability from Kindergarten to High School. We have alternated language e.g. your child/your student as most tips are for both audiences.

You will find:

- basic information about the link between valued roles and school belonging,
- some family examples,
- written exercises to help you find ways to develop school roles which boost your child's/student's image, self-worth, and unlock increased opportunities for friendship and growth.

Experience tells us that if people are in valued roles, then they are more likely to be given access to the 'good life'.

(Valued Roles for All, Keys to a Good Life. 2014)

WHAT ARE SOCIALLY VALUED ROLES?

Socially valued roles are roles that are valued in our society. Roles come with socially expected patterns of behaviour, responsibilities, expectations and privileges and are easily recognisable and familiar to people. If we identify as a mother, or a teacher, people understand and “expect” things from us in these roles.

Positive roles are also typical to a person’s age, gender and culture, and enhance their value in society. Usually our positive roles are a good match to our skills and interest areas.

Most of us have many different roles. Valued roles help people to be accepted, experience a sense of belonging and provide opportunities for active participation, connection and contribution in our society.

During the school years, the roles which are valued are defined by the wider society and by that particular school community. What is highly valued in one school community may be slightly different to another school community. For example, one school community may highly value academic achievements; students who achieve academically will be frequently praised and acknowledged, while brilliant musicians or sportspeople may receive less accolades. At the same time, roles across all of those domains (sports captain, choir member, school dux) are recognized by our wider society as having value. And there are core values common to most Australian school communities: values like being generous and helpful, being reliable, showing commitment, being a good friend etc. Knowing what is valued in our society helps us to identify potential valued roles in school and to craft and strengthen valued roles for our family members with disability. A good test is that valued roles are usually performed with (other) valued people, in valued settings and while doing valued activities.

SOME FAMILIAR EXAMPLES OF POSITIVE, VALUED ROLES:

IN OUR FAMILIES

Daughter/Son
Niece/Nephew
Granddaughter/Grandson
Cousin

THROUGH OUR INTERESTS

Team player
Club member
Gardener
Artist

IN THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Reading partner
Library monitor
Football team member
Newsletter contributor

Knowing what is valued in our society helps us to identify potential valued roles in school and to craft and strengthen valued roles for our family members with disability.

WHY ARE VALUED ROLES IMPORTANT FOR STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY?

Students with a disability often experience reduced opportunities, social isolation and spend more of their day relying on others than their non-disabled peers. This dependence on others for support may not seem harmful while children are young, but when the natural opportunities given to other students for independence, new challenges and to be seen as a contributor are denied to the student with disability, many damaging, and life-limiting assumptions can be made.

Ensuring your student has access to roles and socially valued opportunities at school will allow them to connect with their peers around their interests, be seen as someone who contributes to the school community, and can challenge negative assumptions.



THINKING ABOUT ROLES

"Before learning about the positive outcomes for people with a disability when they are involved in valued roles, I used to look for 'special' opportunities for my daughter. I had never thought about how being in activities that were only for children with disabilities, or where children with disabilities were always the receivers of assistance from the 'leaders' who were invariably children without a disability, would impact how my girl would be valued as a person, and how eventually she would value herself.

I also didn't think about how it was so much more important to focus on typical options for my daughter with disability than it was for her siblings. It became obvious to me that so often opportunities would be presented to her that would never be offered to my other children; they were either just doing 'activities' with no real goal or improved status/recognition as a destination; or they were focused on 'fixing' her. I realised I would need to be more intentional in looking for valued ways of her being part of her school community, because they were far less likely to opportunistically present themselves for her than they were for my other children."

- Parent

BELIEFS, VALUES AND ASSUMPTIONS

Beliefs, values and assumptions shape how we understand and view people with disability. Negative beliefs and values get in the way of children with disability being included in the life of their school and community.

We all hold assumptions, and many of these are unconscious. Many common assumptions made about students with disability are unhelpful; when a high school student is seen as “childlike”, for example, they may not automatically be offered the same age appropriate opportunities as their peers. Immediately this narrows the scope of their school experience, and it removes the chance of making a valuable connection with their peers. When students with disability are separated out from their peers (segregated in the classroom or placed in a special education unit) their vulnerability to being perceived negatively is heightened. The impact of a negative role (or a number of negative roles) for a student with a disability can have more consequences. For example, a student with disability who is labelled the “class clown” is more likely to be more negatively impacted by assumptions made about this role.

Negative assumptions commonly result in the student with disability not being offered the same education or opportunities as their peers. Students can also live up or down to other’s perceptions, for example, a student who has behavioural challenges who is labelled a menace, can ‘play up’ to that label and continue ‘acting out’. Particularly when they are not offered more positive roles, they may really make that role (of menace) their own.

Positive roles act as a buffer to negative assumptions – they help fellow students see the student with disability as more like them, and raise their reputation in the eyes of peers.

Once in positive roles, there is usually the opportunity to keep building on so that the student is authentically in those roles to the fullest extent possible - to be seen as actively participating and belonging in activities, rather than just being merely a spectator. (Not all roles have this same scope or “bandwidth” but as well as increasing the number of positive roles a person can participate in, we can also increase the “depth” or “quality” of those roles).

Being authentically in a role doesn’t mean that the person has to be able to fulfil all parts of the role without any support. We can help the student to develop skills and we can also think creatively about how the student can participate in a role. A student who doesn’t speak can use their voice output system to be the school assembly chairperson or a student with intellectual disability can be successful with visual supports or prompts from peers to fulfil the role expectations.

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THE TALENT SHOW

Claire has been a member of her school community since Prep, but ensuring her active participation in community events and activities has required support and facilitation.

Claire is an emergent communicator who is learning to use a PODD communication system, via a paper-based book, and a high-tech eye gaze system.

Claire started her eye gaze journey in Year 1. After 6 months of having her system at school, I realised that due to it only being mounted on her desk at that time, no one outside Claire's class had had opportunity to see it or to know how it worked.

When the school talent show was advertised in the newsletter, I knew it provided a great opportunity for Claire to participate and to showcase Claire's way of communicating. She was just beginning with this communication method - however she had quite the unusual talent – she could play music with her eyes!

Claire auditioned for the talent show on her 7th birthday. I recall the teachers and peers who were there being very surprised at what she could do, and pretty impressed with the technology. It was really positive to see her do such a great job at the audition, and even better to then have the teachers and students serenade her with the happy birthday song.

On the day of the talent show, it was clear that the cool factor of the device was a great way to introduce the school to Claire's distinctive way to communicate. Using her AAC meant she could participate in the highly valued role of talent show participant. She was introduced, and put on a great show. I was really proud of her.

Claire's device is now mounted on her wheelchair, so is more visible across the school. It has been really important to Claire's journey in the community for us to attend all the school events, and to get her involved in all the action. Her journey with inclusive education is about so much more than her just being there. It's about her participating fully, and feeling a true sense of belonging.



ROLES ANALYSIS

NOW WE WILL EXPLORE HOW YOU CAN PUT THESE IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Let's have a look at some examples of ordinary roles within the school environment that can create either a negative or a positive image of a student with a disability. Add some more to the columns below from your own experience.

NEGATIVE ROLES	POSITIVE ROLES
Class clown	Friend
Visitor	Classmate
Menace	Social convener
Trouble maker	Leader
Buddy bench kid	Team member
"Special ed" or unit kid	
Mascot	

WHAT DO YOU NOTICE ABOUT THIS LIST?

TIP!

Alongside building valued roles, it helps to monitor any potential for negative roles so these can be addressed or attended to.

Bailey was held with a high degree of positive regard by his peers and the school community. He was viewed as 'one of the guys' by his friends. They had helped him understand the rules of handball, which was played almost every lunchtime. This helped to get a way in to other lunchtime activities like informal games of soccer throughout his school years. In grade 6 Bailey was asked to give a speech on behalf of his class at the end of year. It was breathtaking and something that past health professionals foretold we should never expect to happen (the young person who was unlikely to speak, have friends or successfully attend the local school with his sibling). We spent a lot of time cultivating the early friendships and he still holds some of those friends close now, although they went to different high schools.

POTENTIAL ROLES AT YOUR SCHOOL

THINK ABOUT ALL THE VALUED ROLES FOR STUDENTS AT YOUR SCHOOL

- Think about both the “big roles” as well as the “smaller roles” e.g. school captain vs student parade marshal, or concert soloist vs prep whiteboard cleaner.
- Think particularly of roles that are typical, ordinary and valued for your child or student’s age, gender, and culture in the school.
- Remember some will be open to ALL students but you can use them to play to you and your child’s strengths e.g. a really impressive valued book week character or being the most regular swim club attendee.
- At this stage, think of ALL the roles – even those you can’t see as a good match for your child’s interests or abilities.

BRAINSTORM AS MANY ROLES AS YOU CAN THINK OF:



As a parent, if you are not sure of all the valued roles in a class or school, you can:

- Pay close attention to the school newsletter
- Talk to other parents
- Ask teachers
- Talk to your kids, other students and listen carefully to their chat
- Observe school events ie. attend the assemblies, sports carnivals, spend time in your child’s class or attend open days.

As a teacher, if you are not sure of all the valued roles in a class or school, you can:

- Raise for discussion at a staff meeting or consult with colleagues. Colleagues who may have taught at other schools, may be helpful in suggesting opportunities.

A BROAD LIST OF POTENTIAL ROLES AND ACTIVITIES

CLASSROOM

- Friend/Peer
- Reading partner
- Class leader
- Tuckshop assistant / deliverer
- School banking deliverer
- Class roll assistant
- iPad collector
- Time keeper for small group rotation
- Birthday announcer
- Peer tutor
- Art supplies assistant
- Senior “Buddy” for younger student

AROUND THE SCHOOL

- Connector of peers
- Play equipment assistant at lunch
- Contributor to school newsletter/magazine
- Lunchtime compost collector
- Yearbook committee member
- Library monitor
- School assembly welcome/marshal
- Flag raiser
- Volunteer
- Fundraiser
- Fete student committee member
- Social convener
- Student council representative

SPORTS

- Team member (football, softball, tennis etc)
- School house team captain
- Swimming squad member
- Team hydration member (water bottles/oranges)
- Team sunsafe member (sunscreen/hats reminder)
- Assistant coach/conditioning assistant
- Score-keeper/recorder
- Cheerleader
- Umpire
- Linesperson

THE ARTS

- Performer
- Singer
- Dancer
- Band member
- Choir member
- Stage hand / stage-assistant
- Artist
- Art collective member
- Promoter
- Photographer / reporter for events
- Fashion designer / costume-sewer for stage shows

SPECIAL EVENTS ROLES

- School concert usher
- Sports day competitor
- Sports day announcer
- Cross country timekeeper
- Book week character
- Stage hand for special assemblies and parades
- Disco DJ
- Event decorator
- Trivia and Quiz events organizer
- Awards announcer
- MC for school gala

ACADEMIC AND CLUB MEMBERSHIPS

- Robotics/programming club member
- Games club member
- Lego club member
- Garden club member
- Drama club member
- Cultural or language club member
- Film club member
- Amnesty International member
- Australian and New Zealand Brain Bee Challenge team
- Global Cardboard Challenge participant
- International Mathematical Challenge participant
- MS Readathon Reader
- Premiers Reading Challenge participant
- Stem Video Game Challenge team member
- Schools Recycling Right Challenge team member

START WITH THE CHILD OR STUDENT

Take some time to jot down some of the things you know about your child or student in the boxes below:

**What is their essence?
What makes up who they are?**

**What makes them come alive or makes them light up?
What are they really interested in?**

**What is your child/student good at?
What are their strengths?
What gifts do they offer to others around them?**

**What creates distress, disconnection,
disengagement for them?**

**Is there an activity or interest area your
child/student might like to try out?
List a few ideas**

**Is there an opportunity or 'club' already at your
school that your child/student might like to join?**

"We have to start with the person, appreciating who they are, what their life has been like thus far, what they need to do now and into the future, and what strengths, gifts and capacities they have."

- Meg Sweeney

MOVING FROM ACTIVITIES TO ROLES

"If we start with filling time, all we'll get is activities. If we start with filling roles, then time will look after itself."

- Lynda Shevellar

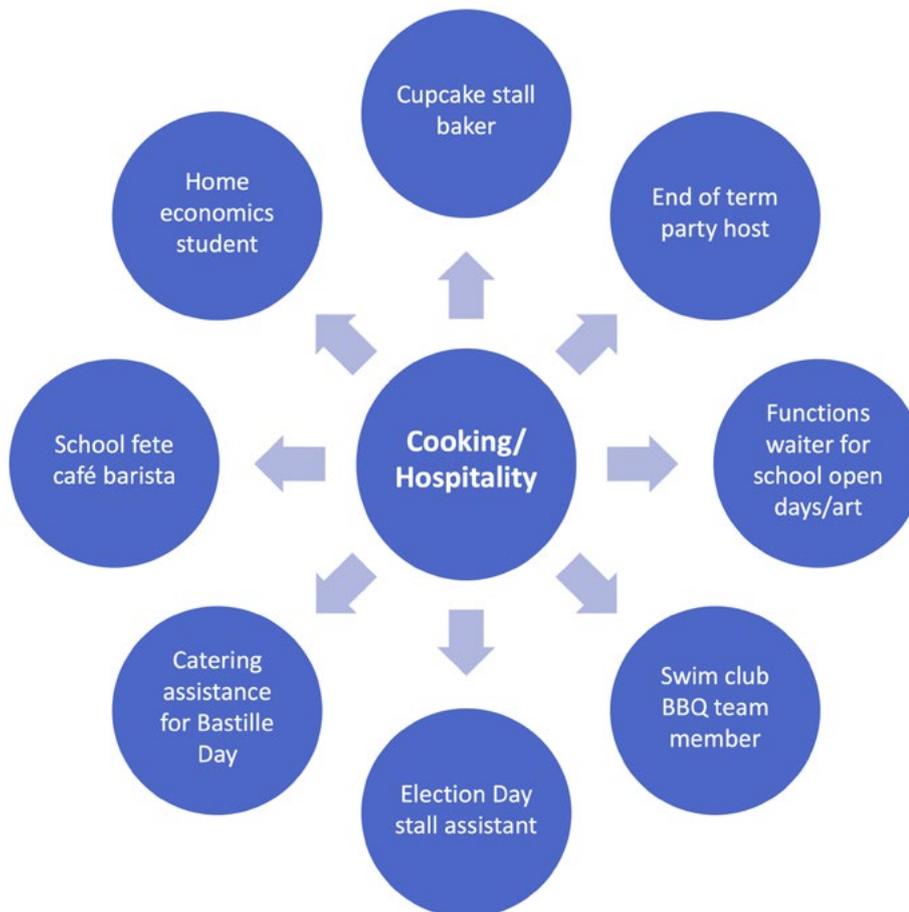
PART OF THE TEAM



Bobby's love for sport started at a young age. Taking up the opportunity of joining the year 4 soccer team resulted in him being part of school soccer for the whole of his schooling. At that age many of the players had little idea of the rules or how to play so he was just part of the group. His eagerness to be part of the team meant he was keen to attend training and turn up on Saturdays for the competition. Many of those boys from year 4 played with him throughout the years. His soccer mates became very skilled in guiding him on field and coaches came to understand that directions just needed to be broken down and simplified so Bobby could participate. Some years we would arrange for some pre-season training. The team loved to have a win but the mentality was more about having fun, relationships and being part of a team. Bobby was very much considered part of the team.

EXPLORATION OF ROLES

Brainstorming roles is one way of exploring the range of potential possibilities. Not all of the options will suit your child or your school, but it might help to come up with some ideas that you wouldn't normally consider. Below we have used the example of a student with an interest in food, cooking and hospitality and have expanded some possible positive roles associated with these activities.



Deciding which roles to pursue:

- If in doubt, choose the most socially valued (most “street cred” with peers/community)
- Choose something “potent” - lots of meaningful activities, opportunities for social connection or “growth” hang off that role
- Be cautious about roles which may reinforce disability stereotypes, e.g. actor in the role of a disfigured monster in a school concert, environment group member when the main activity is cleaning the rubbish bins
- Pay attention to whether the role is recognisable and genuine – usually it is best to choose a role which could be available to any student – people pick up on anything “made up” which seems too fake or weird
- Does the role take place with other valued members of the school community and in valued places? (again, toilet cleaner is not usually a valued role!)

The best roles will be performed regularly and frequently to maximise opportunities, but aim for a mix of those long-term roles and other roles (sports day participant) which become available from time to time.

THE CYCLING TEAM MEMBER



Sean had lots of valued roles during the school years. He was a swim club member, a school Auskick participant, a soccer player, a circus troupe member, a Tae Kwon Do student, a concert performer, a Mother's Day waiter and many more roles.

In high school, it felt harder for Sean to find valued roles. He always participated in lots of activities and was a photographer and art show exhibitor, a volleyball cheer squad member and timekeeper and a walkathon participant to name a few. But we recognised that we needed more effort to make sure he was known for more than the playground skirmishes or as the student who pushed the boundaries of phone use during class! Eventually we settled on two new roles: member of the cycling team and rugby water carrier/training coach assistant. The cycling team was a combined student, teacher and parent team and came together for weekend training and to participate in fundraising events. Sean couldn't ride long distances independently but participated with his Dad on the tandem bike. He had a uniform, attended training, and was immersed in the language, culture and rituals of the group – including the post training coffee chat about bikes, kilometres, and sore thighs.

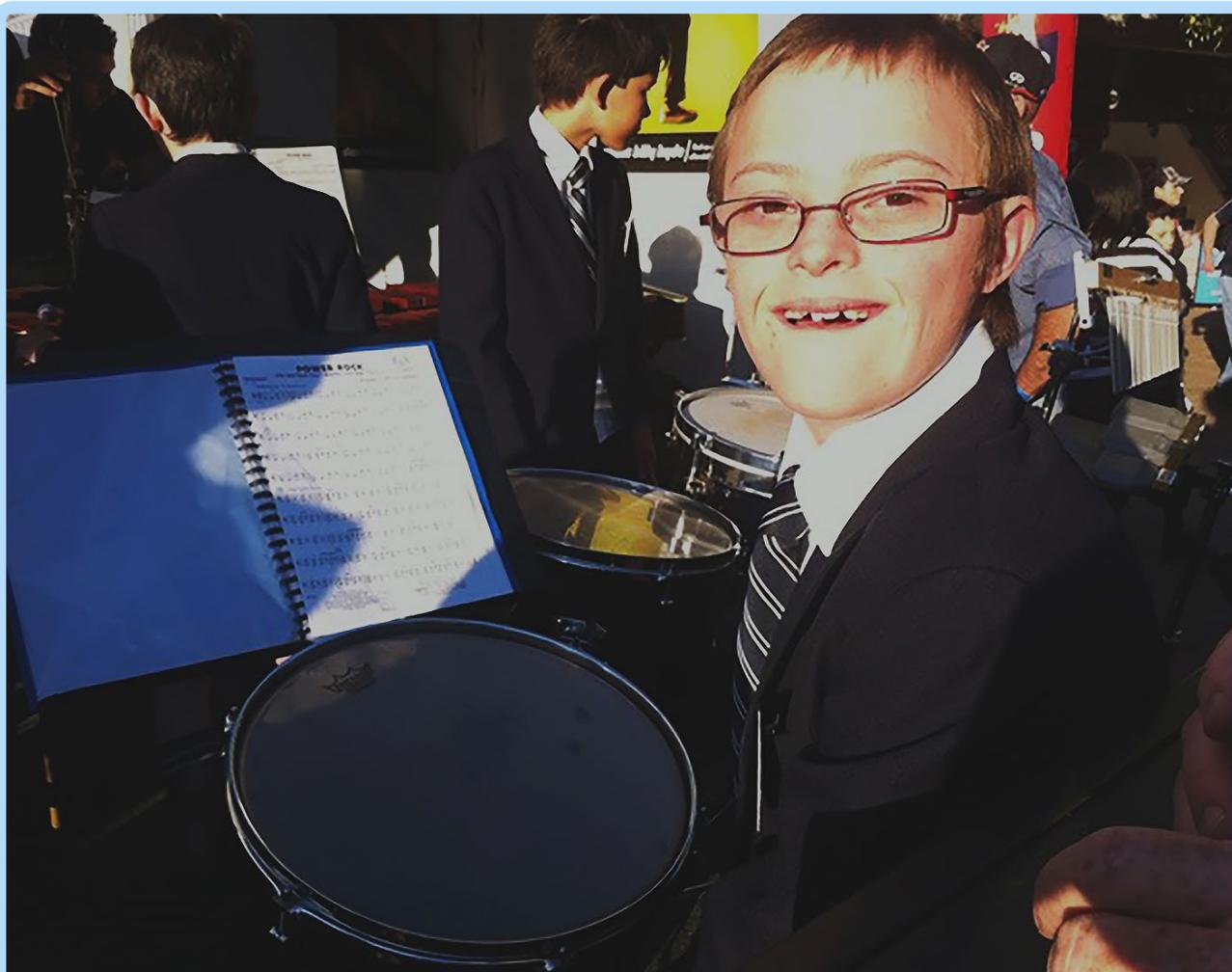
On their first fundraising effort, we assisted Sean to approach his and our networks to seek donations and he ended up as the top fundraiser for the school, a feat which greatly contributed to the school being at the top of the school fundraising leaderboard for the selected charity. He was invited to a function recognising top donors who had raised over \$1000. He revelled in the limelight, the congratulations and his appreciation certificate. This role contributed to his growth in many ways, not just cycling but also communication as a fundraiser, and he rose to the expectations of the role, and was surrounded by lots of positive role models both in the team and at the events he attended. He has continued to pursue this interest in cycling – participating in many other long distance rides and also developing his independence in cycling.



DRUMMING UP OPPORTUNITY

"Roles change activity into opportunity"

- Janet Klees



Bobby had piano lessons in his early primary years outside of school. In year 4 he moved to a larger school where music was a thriving component of the College's culture. He took up the opportunity of drum lessons and in time this led to joining the junior school band. This involved regularly attending junior band practice one morning a week - and consistent practice weekly. This was a big commitment for Bobby and the family. He loved being part of the band and particularly enjoyed dressing in the formal uniform proudly performing once a term at music night. He also had the opportunity to compete against other schools.

TRANSLATING INTERESTS INTO A ROLE

With practice, we can learn to take one interest and expand on all the potential possibilities related to that interest. Think about:

- All the possible roles
- Tasks available in that role (i.e. what do other students normally do in that role)
- Any opportunities to perform that role
- The places that the activity might take place

As an example, let's think about a child in grade 3 who loves to sing, hum tunes and enjoys listening to music.

INTERESTS

- Loves to sing
- Loves music
- Hums tunes
- Listens to music
- Enjoys rhythms and patterns
- Taps along to music

TASKS OF THE ROLE

- Singing with other peers
- Practising songs
- Performing in front of audiences
- Wearing choir uniform/costume
- Travel to eisteddfods
- Turning pages for the school pianist

ROLES

Choir member
Music club member
Choir competitor

PLACES

- Music rooms
- School hall
- Concert halls

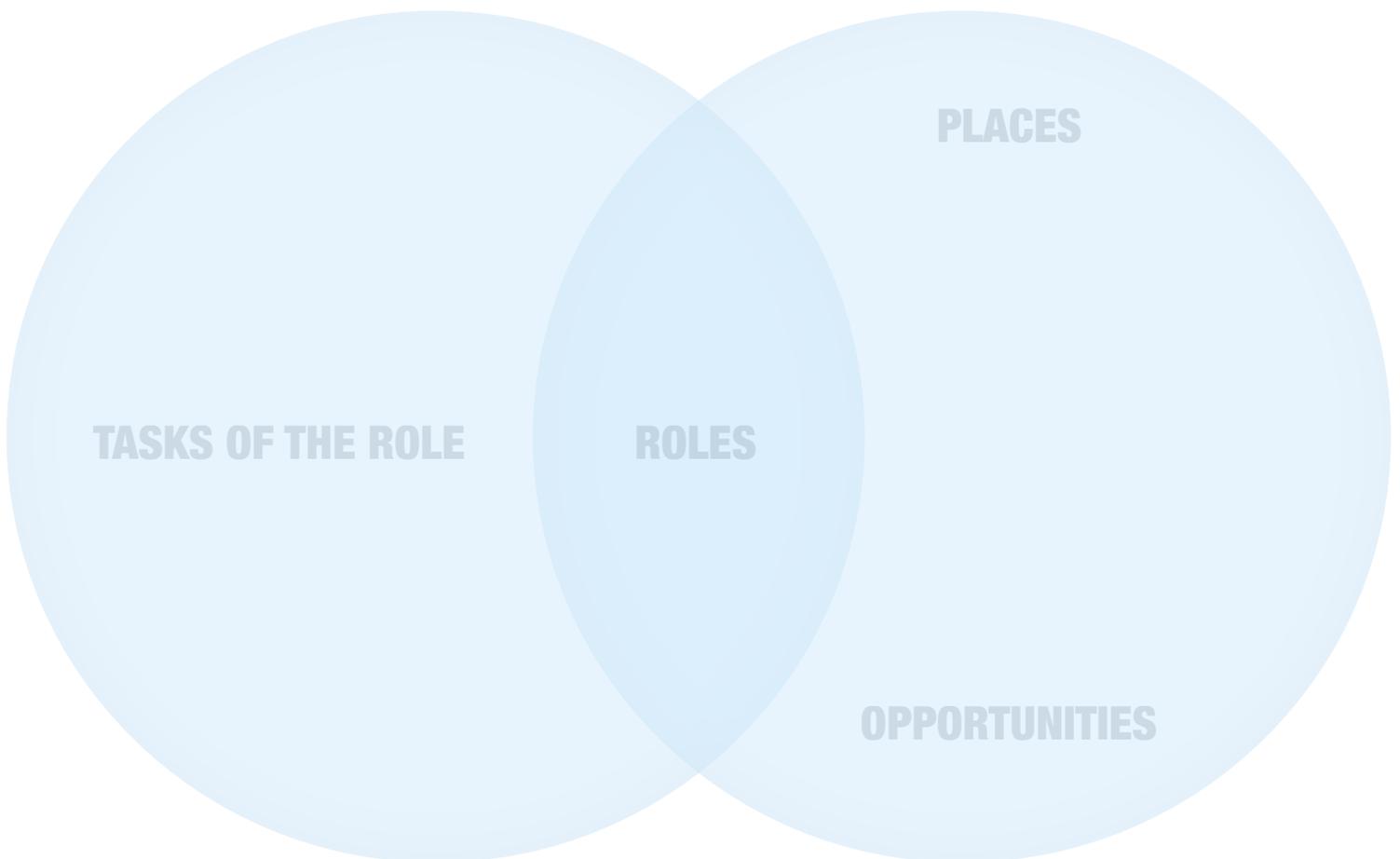
OPPORTUNITY

- School choir
- Music club
- School assembly
- Christmas concert
- School plays/productions
- School Eisteddfods
- School fete
- Choir competitions

ACTIVITY

Think about an activity that your child or student enjoys at home and start to explore the possible roles. List the tasks or activities related to that role (i.e. what do other students normally do in that role?) and where the activity might take place (you can include extra-curricular activities connected to the school community).

INTERESTS



MOVING FROM ACTIVITIES TO ROLE EXAMPLES

Primary School

Active, likes running, fast movements, enjoys being outside

e.g. From person who moves quickly and likes to run → Runner/Athlete

- Classroom runner – jobs to go to the office, other places around the school (on top of regular academic work)
- Lunchtime game organiser (setting up games for lunchtime play)
- Participant in school running and sporting events
- School track and field training team member
- Joins in and helps lead sport house school meetings

High School

Creative, draws, shows interest in art, makes things

e.g. From creative or making art → Artist

- Joining the local art club / arts collective
- Working on art in lunchtime with other students
- Showing artwork in art shows/art galas
- Donating artwork to fundraising events
- Designing school related logos / club emblems
- Working on related arts projects e.g backdrops for school plays and musicals
- Coaching younger students on an art project
- Runs a workshop on a particular skill for the whole school
- Being involved in organising arts events

THE SCHOOL FORMAL

Year 12 is a time of many milestones for students, the school formal and the planning of it is one that we all remember. Bobby, being a social person, loves organising an occasion and with the pre formal he saw it as an opportunity to use



some of his skills. He had the idea of a party bus to take guests from the pre to the formal. We assisted with sourcing an option of transport and he then made arrangements. Bobby arranged for 20 of the boys and their partners to go from the pre to the formal. This gave him the opportunity for lots of connections and a great role leading up to the big night. Lots of correspondence getting the boys to pay the money into his bank account, keeping track of who paid and organising music for the journey to the formal. Having the role of party bus organiser was a great way for him to be part of the big celebration.

ROLE COMMUNICATORS

“Using role communicators is not just about helping someone look the part; it is about helping someone be taken seriously in a role and having others treat the person as if they are in the role, so that the person can learn the role.”

- Sherwin, J and Sweeney, M (2012)



If you are thinking about roles for your child or student in an area unfamiliar to you – and you know they will need some coaching to do well in the role, you may want to research:

- The **settings** the role will be performed –
Is the role performed in a valued setting? What support or information will your student need to be confident in this environment?
- The **language** of the role –
is there special language that your student will need to be familiar with e.g. the positions on a netball court, the scoring terminology etc
- The **groupings** –
Aim as much as possible for the student to be linked with more valued members and in age appropriate groups
- The **activities** –
Can you practise activities or provide visual supports? Anticipate challenges and think of natural supports that might help with confidence and success. Also think about the range of activities available and which play to the student’s strengths.
- **Appearance** –
try to learn the “uniform” and ensure your student looks the part.

Further reading

[The purpose of life is a life with purpose – creating meaningful futures through valued roles](#)

by Jane Sherwin and Meg Sweeney

CREATING CONNECTIONS



Billy started mainstream school in Prep. We wanted him to be with all the other kids in our community. He quickly made many friends and was well liked by everyone. However, as he is non verbal and has little communication skills, it was difficult for his peers to naturally sense what he did outside of school and what his interests were. As a family we, helped Billy be seen as just a regular kid doing all the things the other kids in the neighbourhood were doing. We made sure that he was at all of the community events like fetes, local Christmas carols and markets. Billy participates in all of the extra-curricular activities at school such as book week where he can really shine with some amazing wheelchair friendly costumes made by Grandma. It has become a tradition now to do the neighbourhood trick or treating around the streets with all of the local kids at Halloween. It is hard to go for a walk around the neighbourhood without a kid stopping to say hi to him. He has been able to create a connection to our local community without using any words.



TIP!

Appearance - Look the part

Expectations of roles are formed by the way the role is communicated to others. Personal appearance is one of these role communicators – and looking the part is extremely important. Think about the visual characteristics of a particular role – for example school soccer team member. You will notice that the uniform is essential, there are also soccer boots and team socks and players are looking good, organised and ready to play. All of these things contribute to the way in which this student will be welcomed and accepted by others in the team and on the side lines. If a student with a disability wears something different or looks out of place to their fellow team members it adds to the student being further set apart from their peers.

GROWING THE ROLE

Bailey is a 'buddy' to a year 7 peer, who used to attend his primary school. The two had never met at primary school, the year 7 student hadn't started school by that time. Bailey takes his role very seriously, making sure his buddy feels safe and happy at school. They are in the same homeroom and Bailey ensures that he helps his buddy to navigate classes and to spend time with him and his friends until he has established his own friendship group. Bailey remembers how he felt when he started year 7, so has worked hard to help his buddy feel welcome at high school. While the role of buddy is a familiar role, this buddy role was an intentional plan made by the year 7 student's parents, Bailey and our family. This role has built a genuine friendship between Bailey and the year 7 student. The school staff have closely watched the role Bailey has played and often remark on his confidence, kindness and willingness to be a leader in the school.



Finding positive socially valued roles is an ongoing task as interests and role opportunities do change over time. Once a positive role is established, there is opportunity to develop the role further. Setting expectations high from the beginning gives students the opportunity to learn and change. Sometimes a role might require a new skill to be developed, and that can be through new information and training, or just actively being in the role many times over. Giving a student the opportunity to connect with other peers and contribute something genuine means they are not only giving to others, but receiving something back for themselves too.

Janet Klees outlines some of the descriptors of how one can improve their participation within a role in order to deepen it further.

GOOD

- attendance /involvement is occasional
- in a setting that is valued by other students
- where students of same age 'hang out'
- in a familiar role of spectator or participant

BETTER

- regular attendance or involvement
- in a setting that is valued by other students
- where you see the same peers again and again
- in small enough numbers that those peers begin to recognise, acknowledge, and welcome you and where you are in a role that implies some kind of shared belonging

BEST

- frequent, regular and intense involvement
- where you see the same peers frequently and regularly, and;
- engage with those peers because of the active role that you play, and;
- there is ample time in some of the regular activities to socialise, and;
- where contribution is clear, distinct and recognised

GROWING THE ROLE

Activity

Take one of the potential roles from the previous activity to use to further tease out ways you could 'grow' / develop the role further. What opportunities might that interest or activity lead to that would allow the student to be present, have a presence, actively participate, connect or contribute?

Use this table to think about how that activity could further progress to contribution from them –

ROLE	BEING PRESENT	HAVING A PRESENCE	ACTIVELY PARTICIPATING	CONNECTING	CONTRIBUTING
<i>Example – Student at Lunchtime</i>	<i>Student sits in the library at lunchtime break</i>	<i>Student is known by name at the library and sometimes observes the Lego club in the library activities room</i>	<i>Student regularly engages in the weekly Lego club challenge</i>	<i>Student helps to set up the Lego boxes and hands out the weekly challenges to fellow Lego club peers.</i>	<i>Represents the school Lego club and announces the winners of the schoolwide Lego championship challenge on parade.</i>

TIP!
Observe

Observe highly connected students or those who are often seen as “contributors”... what are the things you see them doing: eg. Are they always the ones to set the meeting, buy the supplies, bring cake to the meetings??

GROWING RELATIONSHIPS



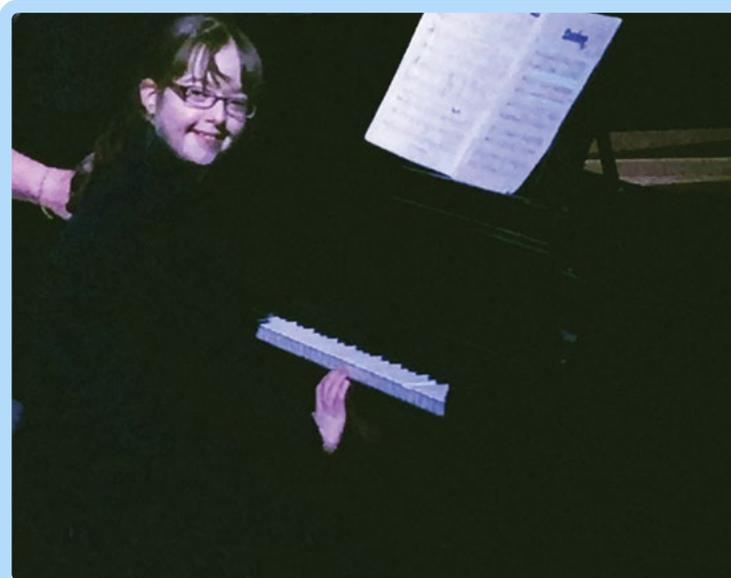
I wanted Millie to grow up to be known and valued by the kids around her; I wanted her to know what it felt like to belong, to feel missed when she wasn't there. I wanted her to not be a recipient all the time, but instead to see herself as a contributor. I wanted her to be seen truly as an individual by others, while also being seen as just one of the kids.

I learned to look out for whether she was just physically present, and if so, look for ways she could be a valued participant instead. Looking for key tasks in roles that Millie could be supported to do, and was authentically useful to the group, allowed her to immediately feel appreciation

from others, and to feel that internal confidence boost that we all get when we know we're making a difference. I started looking with her at what she loved, how we could find a role for that in school that already existed, and how we could build on the relationships and the skills that she developed in those to continue building upon her confidence and connection with her peers, and her value in her school community.

She is an introvert, which brought its own challenges for me (who is not), as I had to look for ways that she could connect with others in shared interests that played to her strengths. She was a Chapel Steward in year 6, which suited her natural talent for remembering all the actions for every Chapel song, and also placed her out of her comfort zone in front of the entire school every week, lighting and extinguishing candles and collecting chapel money. She rose to the role in brilliant style. She has always been keen to join any art/craft groups/clubs, and clubs centred around another interest and strength: cards and board games. In these situations, she has become known for bringing along interesting materials, or a new game to play.

Millie has developed some great relationships through these opportunities with peers who also enjoy 'quieter' interests. In High School she is now a member of the Signing Choir, which suits her perfectly (she learns actions fast, and she doesn't have to deal with someone singing into her ear of which she is not a fan). Millie has been a Piano Player for many years, doing lessons at school like other musicians, and her peers (most of whom do not play any instrument) are always very impressed to watch her play at concerts. This is again a big step out of her comfort zone but she has learnt like so many do, how to control nerves – a valuable skill. Millie has a love of and talent in art. She recently joined the Art Club at school, who have plans to work on the set for the upcoming school production. This will promote her from Art Club member to Set Designer; I can't wait to see Millie go to watch a production where she can see the results of her efforts with the rest of the set designing team.



TAKING IT FURTHER – INTENTIONAL STRENGTHENING

There is a lot to consider when thinking about the right roles for your child or student. Some roles will come more naturally than others, and some will require some additional thinking and planning. Here is a list of questions to think about as you help your student “grow into” some of their new roles.

Does your child understand the rules and language of the task or is additional coaching needed?

Do they look the part or can this be strengthened?

Do they have skills that need to be developed to keep growing in the role?

Are there friends or peer connections that help your student feel confident and successful?

Is your child connected to others or are there ways they can develop stronger relationships?

**Now the child is in the role, can they undertake more aspects of the role independently or take on new tasks?
E.g. if the child has been an usher at the last school musical, can they help design the booklet/paint sets/be part of the ensemble?**

**Does your student need more support to be engaged?
Are there any negative roles or patterns emerging?**

FURTHER RESOURCES

More information on Social Role Valorisation

Many of the ideas in this booklet are adapted and drawn from an important theoretical body of work called Social Role Valorisation. As the ideas here are only a fraction of that theory, we would recommend that you find out more by attending a training event or reading further. To find out more on Social Role Valorisation, please see the resources listed at the back of this booklet.

Articles for further reading

- Jane Sherwin and Meg Sweeney - [The purpose of life is a life with purpose](#)
- Jane Sherwin - [Acceptance and belonging: the helpfulness of being in valued roles.](#)
- Deb Rouget - [Connecting People and Building Social Relationships](#)
- Bianca Schultz and Ronda Held - [Valued Roles for All, The Keys to a Good Life – A Handbook](#)

Short videos

Darcy Elks - [Valued Social Roles: Pathways to Full, Meaningful, and Inclusive Lives](#)

Websites

- Wolf Wolfensberger and Social Valorization <https://socialrolevalorization.com/>
- Values in Action is a small not for profit organisation that runs regular training events in Brisbane. For more information please see <http://www.viaa.org.au/>
- Resourcing Inclusive Communities <https://www.ric.org.au/valued-roles/>
- The Good Life website - <https://thegoodlife.cru.org.au/the-good-life/#beingaccepted>

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Community Resource Unit (CRU) exists to create and promote positive change so that people with disabilities can belong to and participate in community life.

Our mission is to inspire, challenge and equip people to embrace ideas, to take action and to build a movement for change. For more information go to www.cru.org.au

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