

## **Shrink Rap Radio #14, November 19, 2005. High School Psychology and Podcasting**

**Dr. David Van Nuys, aka “Dr. Dave” interviews high school psychology teacher, Adam Ronscavage, MA.**

(transcribed from [www.ShrinkRapRadio.com](http://www.ShrinkRapRadio.com) by Dale Hoff)

**Introduction:** Welcome back everyone. This is Dr. Dave, also known as David Van Nuys, coming to you once again from the beautiful wine country of Sonoma County, California. Shrink Rap Radio is the psychology podcast addressed to the psychologist in you, whether you be student, professional or armchair psychologist. The format of our show is that I interview interesting personalities in and around the world of psychology. Today’s interview is with Adam Ronscavage, who interviewed me a couple of shows back on altered states of consciousness. Lots of psychology students hear discouraging messages that there is nothing they can do with a bachelor’s degree in psychology without going on for a master’s or a doctorate. Adam is living proof that that’s not true. He teaches Advanced Placement Psychology in a Denver, Colorado high school and he is as earnest and innovative a psychologist as I’ve ever met. Let’s get into the interview.

**Dr. Dave:** My guest today is Adam Ronscavage, who I first met when he responded with an email as a listener to the show and I found out that he has his own podcast on Advanced Placement Psychology, which refers to a class that he teaches in a Denver high school. So I thought, “Hey, he would make a great guest for the show.” And, this underscores the value of sending in those emails because, who knows, it might get you on the air here. So, Adam, welcome to the show.

**Ronscavage:** Thank you very much.

**Dr. Dave:** Okay. So before we get into discussing your podcast, the AP Psychology podcast, maybe you can tell us something about your own educational background.

**Ronscavage:** Sure. Let’s see. After high school, I went to the University of Colorado. That’s in Boulder.

**Dr. Dave:** Okay. A fine institution.

**Ronscavage:** Yeah. I was a Psych major there. I actually graduated on time. And after that, I stayed around an extra year to get my teaching credential and do some student teaching at Fairview High School in Boulder there. I wasn't teaching psychology at the time because there is no specific psychology teaching credential. It just falls under social studies so I was teaching history classes.

**Dr. Dave:** Uh huh.

**Ronscavage:** And then I landed a teaching job right away and I taught middle school for four years. And then right after that, I got my master's in educational technology.

**Dr. Dave:** Ah, okay.

**Ronscavage:** And that's kind of how the podcasting came in. And right after that, I started teaching psychology which was great because I was asking for it and asking and asking and, you know, generally there's one psychology teacher per building and so I begged and pleaded and I finally got it.

**Dr. Dave:** Well, I think many high schools probably don't even have a psychology class.

**Ronscavage:** You know, it's kind of hit and miss, I think. I know in Jefferson County, there seems to be. Now, not every school has AP Psychology.

**Dr. Dave:** Right and, you know, all of our listeners may not be familiar with the concept of AP, or Advanced Placement, courses. Maybe you could explain what those are and what their purpose is.

**Ronscavage:** Sure. AP stands for Advanced Placement. It's a way for students to earn college credit. So, if they pass the test, and tests are graded on a five point scale, some universities accept a three or better. Most universities will accept a four or better. So it kind of depends where you go. If you get a one or a two on the test, you won't make college credit. So, it's a way to get some credits for free, essentially. All they have to do is pay for the exam.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. That sounds great. And I know that I've had some students at the university who got in that way, who had taken AP Psychology somewhere. And I remember my kids took a—I don't know if it was AP Psychology or not—but

there was a teacher at the local high school who was really interested in psychology and I know he brought me in as a guest once or twice and I had a good time speaking to the students. Do you teach other classes as well now or just the psychology?

**Ronscavage:** I do. I teach AP and just regular semester-long psychology. And then I teach a computer science course.

**Dr. Dave:** Oh. Great fun.

**Ronscavage:** Yeah, it's kind of an introduction. In fact, I'm writing a grant right now so we can do some more podcasting with my computer science kids.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, I was going to say I'm sure they'll love that.

**Ronscavage:** Yeah. I think they're going to have a good time with it. We'll do things like daily announcements and interviewing other students at the school and kind of make a Lakewood High School, which is the school that I teach—make a Lakewood High School podcast.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. That's very interesting. I've been reading about that. I was reading about a school in the UK where—actually it was an elementary school—where they were putting together podcasts. So I think podcasts are going to be big in education and that we'll be hearing more and more about that sort of thing.

**Ronscavage:** I think so.

**Dr. Dave:** So, what was it that—well, first let me ask you, how did you first hear about podcasting?

**Ronscavage:** You know, I was just thinking about that and I only remember it was about a year ago and I was—I don't know—I was on my computer somewhere and I saw the word come up—No, wait a minute. Maybe I saw it on television that Adam Curry was this big you know, and I remember him from the MTV days because I basically grew up on MTV as a kid.

**Dr. Dave:** Okay.

**Ronscavage:** And I thought, “Oh, wait a minute. Adam Curry, oh my God, he’s doing this thing.” So I looked it up and I went to the website and I downloaded the iPodder Lemon program and I was listening to the *Daily Source Code*.

**Dr. Dave:** Okay. And I can’t imagine that there is anybody listening who hasn’t heard of Adam Curry and the *Daily Source Code*, but just in case that happens to be so, Adam Curry is widely regarded as the Podfather, the person who kind of got this whole podcasting thing rolling. And he has a daily podcast called the *Daily Source Code* and I actually had a chance to meet him just a couple weeks ago.

**Ronscavage:** Oh really? That’s cool.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. So, you heard about podcasting and then you wanted to get into it.

**Ronscavage:** You know, I was—had some time off in the summer as I usually do and in the summers I’m a fly-fishing guide which kind of eats up a lot of my time but this summer I had a few days to myself and I thought, “You know, I’m always looking to do something new and, of course, to kind of be a pioneer of something. I want to be the first in my building to do this or first person in my district.” So I thought, “Why not? No one’s done a podcast yet. I’ll try it out.”

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. Hot idea.

**Ronscavage:** Yeah, so I just, you know, plugged in all my stuff because I use to do recording. I’m a guitar player and, you know, I made some like CDs at home and I thought, “Well, yeah. I already know how to do it and I have all the equipment. So why not give it a shot?”

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, great. So what’s the concept behind your show, AP Psychology?

**Ronscavage:** It’s kind of developing as we go along. I think, you know, originally I thought, “Well, what a neat way for kids to get some more little anecdotal information. I can go over some concepts that are difficult in class.” And I thought, “Well how cool would it be to drive to school with a CD burned or if you’re taking the bus put in your iPod and have a quick review before an exam?”

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, yeah. So tell us about the shows that you've done so far. I know I listened to a couple. I remember listening to one about developmental psychology where you actually went to a friend's house to be there with their baby.

**Ronscavage:** Yeah, I tried to interview a two-year-old. That didn't go over very well. You might have heard some squeals in the background. And, you know, I'm trying to get some real other people that are outside of the classroom because so much of education in high school is just everything is in the classroom, in the classroom. I'm trying to branch out. So I interviewed a two-year-old. God, hopefully at some point—I have a friend who used to be addicted to heroin—I want to interview him. And, I'm just kind of taking it as it goes. Other topics, you know, I did one real quick podcast, it was a ten-minute, where I just kind of went through the book and said, "Make sure you know this and make sure you know that." You know, I went over this concept and that concept. So I'm kind of trying new things every episode.

**Dr. Dave:** Right. Yeah. I think I actually heard part of that. It was good review for me.

**Ronscavage:** Oh, good. Well, I'm glad you learned something or rekindled a flame maybe.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. Yeah. So how many students do you have? Yeah. How many students do you have and then how many do you think are actually listening to the podcast?

**Ronscavage:** As far as AP students, I have around eighty.

**Dr. Dave:** Wow. That's a lot.

**Ronscavage:** Yeah. I have three sections and I built it up from about fifteen students when I first took over the course. So that was good.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. It sounds like it's a popular class.

**Ronscavage:** Yeah, it's getting there. And, this is kind of a sidebar, but I'm attracting a lot of non-AP students into AP Psychology.

**Dr. Dave:** Okay.

**Ronscavage:** And I think it's good because there are a lot of kids who go through high school and never challenge themselves and never raise that bar for their own education. So I don't have a lot of criteria for you to get into the class. I think if any kid wants to get in they should be able to challenge themselves so that's kind of why my numbers have gone up, too.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, yeah.

**Ronscavage:** Okay, now I forgot the question.

**Dr. Dave:** Me too. [laughter] Oh, I think that I had asked you how many students you have and how many are listening.

**Ronscavage:** Oh yeah, how many are listening. Geez, you know, I'm thinking about a dozen. I think about three to four in every class so that would be about twelve to fifteen or so.

**Dr. Dave:** Do they give you some feedback that motivates you to keep going?

**Ronscavage:** Yeah, they do. The latest episode on progressive relaxation—I had a student download it and burn it to a CD. He says he plays it every night before he goes to sleep and he says it works like a champ.

**Dr. Dave:** Wow. That's impressive.

**Ronscavage:** Yeah. So I was like, "Wow. It's only a ten-minute relaxation." You know, if I really had my way, it'd be like twenty minutes but the ten minutes seems to work for them and, so hey. Those are the kinds of little things—and I get some emails from students around—let's see, I got one from a student back east. I got one from a university of Istanbul.

**Dr. Dave:** Amazing.

**Ronscavage:** Yeah. Those people that are listening, you know, that aren't a part of my school also keeps me going.

**Dr. Dave:** Boy, I'll bet. That's really something to think that you're reaching out and, you know, influencing people that are abroad like that.

**Ronscavage:** Yeah. It's fascinating.

**Dr. Dave:** You told me another story, too, about a student who used your podcast as a preparation for an exam.

**Ronscavage:** Yeah. She's got a disease where she can't really go to school a whole lot because if she goes out it's just going to get worse and worse and worse. So she does a lot of stuff from home and I said, "Well, why don't you listen to my podcast?" And so she came in to make up a test and she says, "I listened to your podcast on the way over here," and she says, "I think I got about four or five questions right that I didn't have right before."

**Dr. Dave:** That's great. That's great. So, kind of, reviewing on the podcast really helped her to be ready for that exam.

**Ronscavage:** Yeah, I think so and I think, you know, five questions doesn't seem like a lot but that's ten percent of the test.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. Were there any challenges or stumbling blocks for you along the way of creating your podcast?

**Ronscavage:** Besides my computer that's extremely slow and old?

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah

[laughter]

**Ronscavage:** Let me think. I don't think there's anything too tough. You know, it took me a while to get it up and running so that the feed would update. You know?

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

**Ronscavage:** I use FeedBurner and it took me a while to get the hang of that and find out where my stuff was stored and kind of do that whole thing, but other than that, nothing too much. I think it's just processor speed. You know, I'm only limited to a couple tracks. Otherwise, my computer will crash so my podcasts are going to be pretty simple.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. Have you inspired any other teachers to get involved with podcasting?

**Ronscavage:** You know, our head of our tech department at Lakewood High School, he seems to be pretty into it, to have the kids do daily announcements and have those available as a podcast subscription. But as far as like classroom teachers, I'm kind of on the front edge of the technology wave and, you know, of course, there's a learning curve, which I don't mind, but I think other teachers—they're busy and they don't have time to sit down and do it. But in the future, I would love to teach a class on how to make a podcast for your classroom.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, yeah. Great. That would be terrific. Maybe you could teach a class for your district or something and get a lot of teachers coming.

**Ronscavage:** Exactly.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. Where do you see your podcast going in the future? What would you like to see happen with it?

**Ronscavage:** You know, I would like to see other teachers collaborating classroom to classroom, sharing ideas. Other students just sharing their experiences of what it's like to be a psych student so that I can relate that to my students and, think about it, you and I are talking right now. I'm in Denver. You're in California. Well, I would love to interview a psychology college student, maybe even one of my former students, on how my psychology class prepared them for college.

**Dr. Dave:** Oh, that's a great idea.

**Ronscavage:** Yeah. Then my students listen to it and it's just, you know, I think there're so many things that can happen if the technology is there and more and more people are having a broadband connection.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, definitely. How do you keep up your own learning in psychology?

**Ronscavage:** I do a lot of internet research, lots of journal reading. I belong to an AP, well it's not just AP psychology, but it's a psychology teacher discussion list and that just has topics that are fired from teachers, you know. I know every spring there's a discussion on negative reinforcement and examples of that. And there are, you know, lots of sources out there on the internet so I'd say that's my primary source. I also do some reading here and there but it's not really necessarily

psychology journals but I read books here and there. I just read a book called *We need to Talk about Kevin* about like a sociopathic little boy and an incredible book. So I kind of leave the books to the fiction side or maybe some non-fiction and then the rest of my research is probably internet and, of course, listening to your podcast.

**Dr. Dave:** Yes and I hope that will become an ever more valuable educational resource for you. Is there a professional association for AP psychology teachers?

**Ronscavage:** Let's see. There's AP Central and then there's—what's the other one I'm a member of? Why can't I remember it right now? But, yes there are. Oh, TOPSS. It's like Teachers for the Secondary Psychology teaching something, something—I can't remember really what it is. But they have lesson plans and forums for teachers to collaborate ideas. It's pretty cool.

**Dr. Dave:** Okay. Good. Yeah. I would think there would be resources like that. How about the APA, the American Psychological Association? Do you have any kind of membership or affiliation with them?

**Ronscavage:** You know, I do not and I should. I think I did at one point.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. I would really recommend it. I think they have memberships at various levels and I know I was at an APA convention a couple of years ago and I'm pretty sure I recall meeting some AP teachers there, some high school teachers of psychology. And, they were sharp and they were really, you know, high-energy, motivated. That's a good way to, you know—It's hard to sit down and read textbooks and, sometimes, academic material can be very, very dry but you go to a convention, it can be very energizing and enlightening and you can kind of pick and choose the topics that you're interested in and it's a way to kind of get up on the very latest stuff that's going on.

**Ronscavage:** Yeah, that's a great idea. I think I was a member at one point and I think I just let it lapse and haven't repaid my dues so that's a good reminder.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. The dues can be a little stiff. I struggle with that myself. Also, you might want to look into your state psychological association. I'm sure there is a Colorado State Psychological Association. I know in California, the state association tends to be mostly comprised of the people who are therapists rather

than the academics. Then there's the regional meetings too. For example, there's something called the Western Psychological Association. You are probably either in the Western or maybe the Rocky Mountain Psychological Association. And those regional meetings can be very stimulating and maybe not quite as stuffy as some of the national ones.

**Ronscavage:** Right. I'll have to look into that.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. Well, you know, I've been intrigued to meet you and to find out about the work that you're doing because, you know, I've been in touch with lots of college psychology majors and they worry about, you know, what are they going to do when they get out of school after they get their BA in psychology and, you know, they hear discouraging messages sometimes from their parents or others, you know, "Well you can't get a job unless you've got a master's in psychology or really you need a PhD in psychology." But it seems like you found a good career where you get to indulge your interest in psychology and to work with young people and benefit them. I wonder if you have any words of advice for, you know, people who might be—there might be some people who are early in their career that are listening to the show and they might be interested in pursuing a similar career.

**Ronscavage:** You know, I think teaching at the high school level is just phenomenal and I'm really lucky to have the kind of classes that I do and the type of students that I do because I've got great, great kids. You know, being a psychology major, graduating with it, I knew that I wanted to teach so I was kind of rare that I knew exactly what I wanted to do. But there's a woman that just lives down the street from me and she's a corporate psychologist. The Coor's brewery is located just west of Denver about fifteen, twenty minutes and she works for the Coor's Foundation doing industrial psychology. And, you know, I've got some of my friends who were psych majors, never really stuck with their psychology but they got other jobs elsewhere. One works for a pharmaceutical company. Just because someone graduates with a degree in psychology doesn't mean that, okay, I'm either going to become a psychologist or I have to go back to school for something else.

**Dr. Dave:** Right. I always try to get that point across to my students and let them know that, you know, most of the people in the working world are probably doing something different than they majored in when they were in college. I certainly met lots who were doing something that was totally different than what they had studied. I do a lot of market research consulting in the high-technology field and I met lots of people, you know, who work in these technology corporations who majored in history or psychology or English or philosophy or music, you know, but somehow then they end up in the corporate world and if you've learned how to learn and you're a fast learner than you can move into quite a wide range of work possibilities.

**Ronscavage:** Right. I think a psychology background gives you an advantage when you're working with people. I think that having a background in psychology has allowed me—because just about every job, you've got other people that you have to work with unless you're working in some laboratory all by yourself. And if you can understand social dynamics and what makes somebody tick at least a little bit then you have an advantage.

**Dr. Dave:** Right, Right. Do you have any further academic ambitions for yourself in terms of psychology?

**Ronscavage:** You know, I just applied to become a reader for the AP exam. The AP exam is in two parts. There is a multiple choice section and there is an essay section they need teachers to read so I just sent in my application so I'm crossing my fingers on that one.

**Dr. Dave:** Great.

**Ronscavage:** As far as going back to school—you know what? I've got my master's right now. In terms as teaching at a public school, I'm as far as you can get. [laughter] So until there are maybe some financial rewards, I think I'm pretty satisfied with my education. And I think, you know, I'm a self-motivated learner. I don't need a class to go learn new things, hence this podcasting stuff.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah.

**Ronscavage:** And, I just like to research and learn on my own so I don't need any formal training, at least for a while. I did look into a PhD but, financially, it just didn't really work out.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah. PhDs? We don't need no stinking PhDs. Right?

[laughter]

**Ronscavage:** Right, right. I'm glad there are people like you that have them but I think I'll just wait on mine a little while.

**Dr. Dave:** Okay. Well, it sounds like you're doing wonderful work without it so I wouldn't want to discourage you from what you're doing already. Well, I've kind of come to the end of the questions that I had thought of asking you. I wonder if there is anything that you'd like to say that I kind of haven't prompted.

**Ronscavage:** Well. I could talk about my website or my podcast. It is available on iTunes. It's called the *AP Psychology Podcast*. So you can do a search for that. And my email address is [ap.psych@gmail.com](mailto:ap.psych@gmail.com).

**Dr. Dave:** Okay, so all you psychology fans out there get in touch with Adam. And Adam, I want to thank you so much for granting this interview. It's been fun.

**Ronscavage:** My pleasure.

**Dr. Dave:** Okay. That's the interview with Adam. Be sure to check out his podcast. Actually, Adam is in the vanguard of educational technology. I recently did a presentation on the educational uses of podcasting and I discovered that much of the pioneering work has been taking place at the primary and secondary levels. I read about a number of such experiments in the UK in which students were being encouraged to create podcasts as group projects. For example, one class took a field trip to Paris. They created a podcast from the top of the Eiffel Tower. Meanwhile, everyone else back at their school who had not gone on the trip was able to have a sense of being there with them and, of course, their parents could listen as well and were thrilled to do so. Moving along, my pleas to here from you listeners out there have not fallen upon deaf ears. I got a wonderful email from a listener in Australia which I'd love to share with you.

**It says:** G'day Dave. I've been listening to your show now for about three weeks and love it. I've placed a link to your page on the Uni forum so that others can listen. I have only one subject to go until I have a BA in social science psychology at Charles Sturt University in Bathurst, Australia. My minor is in theater media and I'm now discovering the full power of psychodrama. I've been to a workshop for psycho theatrics.

**Dr. Dave:** And he tells who ran those. He mentions a Dr. Nina Krebs, who he says lives in the states, and I will try to track her down as a possible guest.

**He goes on to say:** Every time I talk to people and tell them about my minor of theater media, they pull faces of disbelief and quick as lightening respond, "What the hell does TM, that is theater media, got to do with psychology?" Then I have to go into a speech of the importance of theater media telling them that all of life is a drama and that drama is the key element for learning from the start of time. So, I would love it if you could interview a practitioner of psychodrama.

**Dr. Dave:** Well, it just so happens that I know some practitioners of psychodrama and I've also been involved in leading psychodrama workshops myself. Some years back, I co-led a workshop for the Esalen Institute on a trip into the High Sierras.

**He goes on to say:** I'm a thirty-three-year-old and was an auctioneer for fifteen years before I enrolled into psychology. As an auctioneer over the years I saw that families would fight and turn a happy family into a family that would not talk to each other when a death in the family occurs. There's a common saying in the auction game, "When there's a will, there's a family dispute." There are many other sad stories that I've witnessed so I thought, "How can I be of help to these people who do not see that love and the family is far more important than the items—things that we invest more emotions in than people." That's why I and, believe it or not, my mother enrolled into psychology and my brother is doing a BA in social work. Keep up the good work, Dave. I'm on MSN if you'd like to chat. I know nothing of Skype call. I will look it up.

**Dr. Dave:** And then he signs it "Frank S." And, he did look up Skype and, as a result, we were able to speak on a Skype call to one another and I found that Frank is a very fascinating person and somebody that I actually want to interview on the

show down the line. He also suggested that he'd be Shrink Rap Radio's correspondent down under and I think that that's a great idea and that may develop in the future. So, that's it for today. As usual, we'd love to hear from you. Send your emails or mp3 audio comments to [Shrink@ShrinkRapRadio.com](mailto:Shrink@ShrinkRapRadio.com). Our show notes are at [www.ShrinkRapRadio.com](http://www.ShrinkRapRadio.com). On Skype and Gizmo Project, our name is ShrinkPod. If you're enjoying our podcast, please rate us on the Yahoo directory at [podcasts.yahoo.com](http://podcasts.yahoo.com) and on the Odeo directory at [www.Odeo.com](http://www.Odeo.com). Speaking of pioneers as we were earlier when we were talking about educational pioneers, we have a piece of podsafe music right after our closing theme. It's titled *Cortez and Pizarro* and it's performed by the San Francisco group *Slim*. You'll find a link to their website in our show notes at [www.ShrinkRapRadio.com](http://www.ShrinkRapRadio.com). Until next time, this is Dr. Dave reminding you, it's all in your mind.