Role Theory: One Model For Investigating
The Student-Teaching Process

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Many of the problems of administering a student-teaching programme require immediate solution, with or without the benefit of research findings, but I believe that student-teaching has been seriously neglected as an area for study and that there is a great need for conducting research on student-teaching in a systematic way. It seems appropriate in dealing with problems in student-teaching, especially in the light of some of the criticism of research in this field, to consider the heuristic qualities of theoretical formulations. An attempt will be made in this paper to analyse one model in role theory with the hope that the analysis will suggest researchable questions on the student-teaching process.

Role Theory

In recent years, research projects in some aspects of education, notably in educational administration, have been developed within the framework of role theory. Considerable attention has been given in the past to personality variables of student-teachers, but studies on the role aspect of student-teaching, if not entirely non-existent, are certainly rare. A number of researchers and theorists have indicated that such an approach would be profitable.[1]

While the concept of role has its roots in the writings of James[2] and Cooley[3], recent development in role theory owes most to the writings of Linton[4], Newcomb[5] and Parsons.[6] Role theory deals with interaction between persons who occupy positions in a social system. Emphasis is placed on the expectations which are held for the behaviour of the position-occupant by those with whom he interacts. Sarbin[7] pointed out that in contemporary role theory a second kind of interaction has been added — the interaction between the individual and his needs, on the one hand, and the expectations held for this individual (that is, his role), on the other.

The Getzels Model — Early Versions

One role theory model has been developed by Getzels and his colleagues.[8] Recent reviewers have emphasized the value of Getzels' contribution. Charters, in a critical appraisal of research on the social background of teaching, referred to the work of Getzels as "the most influential role theory in education."[9] In the 1964 issue of the *Review of Educational Research* devoted to educational administration, Lipham concluded that Getzels' model represents "the most useful theory in the field of educational administration."[10] And, in a statement on the social sciences and their contribution to the problems and practices of educational administration, Fosmire and Littman describe the model as being "elegant and complete."[11]

Getzels, following the lead of a number of social scientists (notably, Talcott Parsons), conceived of social systems as being made up of two components: individuals and institutions. In any social system, certainly in a school setting, there are two or more individuals who are alike in some ways and different in others. Each individual — teacher or principal or child — because of his unique personality, has particular needs or need-dispositions which, to a lesser or greater extent, must be satisfied. The individual, who may be the principal speaking to a member of his school board or the student-teacher standing in front of his first class of pupils, behaves in accordance with certain personal needs. When his actions result from exclusive concern with his needs, then they can be described as individual goal-behaviours. The diagram below illustrates the individual, or *idiographic,* dimension in behaviour.

Social System→Individuals→Personalities→$\begin{array}{c}\textit{Need}\\\textit{Dispositions}\end{array}$→$\begin{array}{c}\textit{Individual}\\\textit{Goal}\\\textit{Behavior}\end{array}$

A social system is something more than the sum of all the individuals who interact on a particular occasion. It has "certain imperative functions that come in time to be carried out in routinized patterns"[12] and when this happens, the social system has become institutionalized and can be said to have an institutional dimension as well as an individual dimension. Spindler claims that an organization or social system has "certain conditions of existence that must be maintained if the organization is to function and fulfill its obligations within the framework of the larger society."[13]

Just as individuals have particular *personalities,* so institutions contain *positions* such as superintendent, principal or teacher and, more particularly for this discussion, classroom teacher, assisting teaching or student-teacher. When we consider the expect-
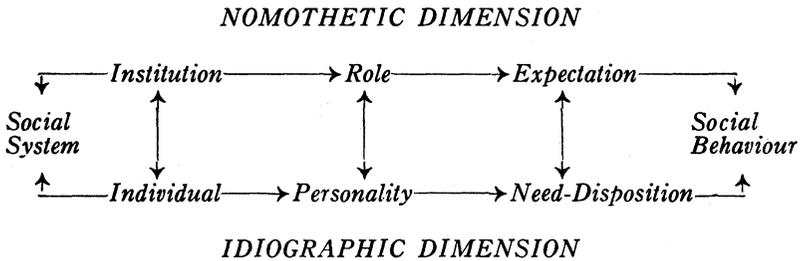
ations held for the behaviour of a particular position, say student-teacher, by his referent groups,[14] then we are dealing with the student-teacher's role. A hypothetical student-teacher may be motivated exclusively by personal needs and so is said to exhibit individual goal behaviour. On the other hand, a student-teacher who is concerned entirely with ascertaining the role expectations that are held by "significant others" and who then behaves in accordance with these expectations (or his perception of the expectations), can be said to be exhibiting institutional goal behaviour. The institutional, or *nomothetic,* dimension in behaviour can be illustrated as follows:

$$\textit{Social System} \rightarrow \textit{Institutions} \rightarrow \textit{Roles} \longrightarrow \textit{Expectations} \longrightarrow \begin{array}{l}\textit{Institutional}\\ \textit{Goal}\\ \textit{Behaviour}\end{array}$$

But human behaviour is not *either* individual goal oriented *or* institutional goal oriented — it is both of these. To some extent the student-teacher behaves according to the expectations of others, and to some extent from an attempt to satisfy the needs which grow out of his personality. Behaviour, then, is a function of both the individual's personality and the role he is occupying. Each goal demands a particular balance between nomothetic behaviour and idiographic behaviour. Student-teachers, as a group, may be governed more by nomothetic than by idiographic factors in their classroom behaviour but more by idiographic than by nomothetic factors in their behaviour in the faculty room. Or the reverse may be true. The implication is that the one individual, under certain conditions, is motivated primarily by concern for the expectations that are held for his behaviour and, under other conditions, is motivated primarily by personal considerations. Also, comparisons can be made between two student-teachers or between student-teachers in general, and assisting teachers in general. In this way it is possible to refer to one individual as being more nomothetic than another individual.

The institutional and individual dimensions are interrelated. One's personality is affected by the role one is occupying; one's role is affected by one's personality. Newcombe writes about "persistence of personality" and points out that, to be understood, this concept must be regarded as a problem "of maintaining a certain relationship with the social environment rather than as an intra-organismic problem."[15] Allport[16] also endorses the attempt to show the interdependence of personality and role. Linton takes an even stronger position and emphasizes that "personalities are dynamic continuums . . . [which] . . . develop, grow and change."[17]

In a similar way, Getzels has suggested that the expectations held for a particular occupant are affected by the personalities and needs of the members of the various referent groups. The interdependence of these two dimensions of behaviour is illustrated below.

NOMOTHETIC DIMENSION

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        ┌─────Institution────────→ Role────────→ Expectation──────────┐
        ↓              ↑                ↑                ↑             ↓
Social                 │                │                │          Social
System                 ↓                ↓                ↓          Behaviour
  ↑     ─────Individual────→ Personality────────→ Need-Disposition──┘
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IDIOGRAPHIC DIMENSION

The Getzels Model — Recent Developments

The terminology used by Getzels for the two basic dimensions of behaviour has changed during the past fifteen years: from affectivity and authority to personalistic and situational and, more recently, to idiographic and nomothetic. To these two terms, "idiographic" and "nomothetic," Getzels added a third, "transactional," to represent a third style of behaviour.

Whereas the idiographic style refers to the needs of individuals and to emphasis on personality as a factor determining behaviour, the nomothetic style refers to goals of the institution and to emphasis on role as a factor determining behaviour. An *idiographic* teacher, assisting teacher or student-teacher defines education as helping the person know what he wants to know and concerns himself essentially with the personal goals of the various individuals involved in the enterprise. The *nomothetic* teacher, on the other hand, defines education as the handing down of what is known to those who do not yet know and feels obliged to do things "by the book," as far as his superiors are concerned, and to "write the book" in his capacity as leader of pupils.[18]

If the idiographic and nomothetic styles are viewed as extremes, the *transactional* teacher "is able to steer a course between exclusive preoccupation with either of the extremes."[19] But the transactional style is more than a compromise: the transactional teacher knows when to maximize personality and when to maximize role considerations in shaping his behaviour, because he understands the limitations and the possibilities of the individual and

institutional dimensions. He is able to adapt, under certain condi-
tions, his idiographic personality needs to nomothetic role expect-
ations and, under other conditions, his nomothetic role expectations
to idiographic personality needs. Getzels and Thelen[20] refer to the
first adaptation as socialization of personality and to the second as
personalization of roles. Assuming that the transactional teacher
is the ideal, what factors affect the extent to which a student-
teacher is transactional in his behaviour, and which experiences
make him more transactional?

Getzels' construct has undergone a number of important
changes over the years, and perhaps the most important was the
addition of a cultural dimension. The need for consideration of the
impact of cultural values on the expectations which are held for
a position occupant is not frequently emphasized. Student-teachers
cannot be expected to integrate emergent values in a situation
where the possibility of change brings about fear and hostility.
In attempting to understand student-teacher behaviour, therefore,
attention must be given not only to the interaction of a student-
teacher's personal needs and the expectations for his behaviour
held by his referent groups, but also to the interaction of the role
expectations and personal needs with the cultural values — both
the broader cultural values shared in the community at large and
the narrower values of the teacher education community. These
major concepts, as presented diagramatically by Getzels,[21] are shown
below.
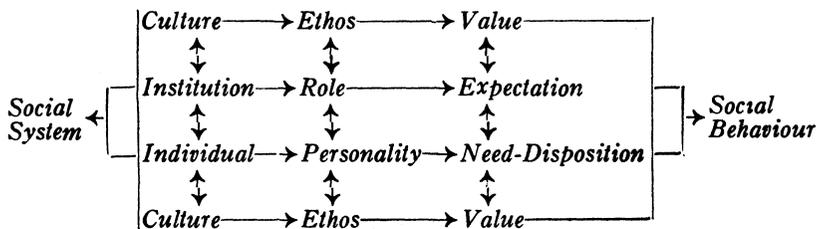
The Model and Student Teaching

While much of the work to date by Getzels and his colleagues
has been theoretical, several empirical studies have been made
within the framework of the model on the role of administrators
and teachers and one has been completed on student-teachers. In
one study,[22] I was concerned with the effect of the student-teaching

experience on the role expectations of student-teachers and with the extent of agreement between the expectations held by student-teachers and those held by assisting teachers. This exploratory study confirmed my belief that the Getzels Model could be applied with profit to problems in student teaching.

Role theory may well provide insights into questions such as: What importance do student teachers place on the perceptions which are held for them by principals, by cooperating teachers and by the pupils? Which personality factors affect the student-teacher's concept of his role? To what extent do the values prevalent in the larger culture determine the student-teacher's perceptions of the expectations which are held for him, and to what extent is his role determined by the values in the sub-culture of the particular school of education or school system? What is the relationship between value and role orientation and between each and actual behaviour on the part of the student-teacher? To date, questions like these remain unanswered because student-teaching is one of the most discussed, yet least studied, phases of teacher education programmes. Certainly, many types of investigations are necessary, but it is suggested here that role theory, in general, and the Getzels Model, in particular, would prove useful in studying relationships in the student-teaching process.

Notes and References

1. See, for example, B. G. Biddle, J. P. Twyman and E. F. Rankin, Jr., "The Role of the Teacher and Occupational Choice," *School Review* (1962), 70, p. 204 and H. Miller, "Role Awareness as an Objective of Group Work in Teacher Education," *Journal of Teacher Education* (1955), 6, pp. 128-133.
2. W. James, *Psychology*, New York: Holt, 1892. James referred to four constitutents of personality: the material self, the social self, the spiritual self, and the pure ego. In reference to the social self he said, "A man's Social Self is the recognition which he gets from his mates. . . . a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind [and] . . . as there are distinct groups of persons about whose opinions he cares."
3. C. H. Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order*, New York: Scribner's Sons, 1902. While James dealt with the expectations that are held by significant others for the behaviour of an individual, Cooley emphasized the individual's perceptions of these expectations. He said that "in imagination we perceive in another's mind some thought of our appearance, manners, aims, deeds, character, friends, and so on, and are variously affected by it."
4. R. Linton *The Cultural Background of Personality*, New York: Appleton - Century - Crofts, 1945.
5. J. M. Newcomb, "Role Behavior in the Study of Individual Personality and of Groups," *Journal of Personality* (1958), 18, pp. 273-289.
6. T. Parsons, "Suggestions for a Sociological Approach and the Theory of Organization," *Administrative Science Quarterly* (1965), 1, pp. 63-85.

7. T. R. Sarbin, "Role Theory," in G. Lindsey (ed.), *Handbook of Social Psychology*. Volume I, Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley, 1954, 1954, pp. 223-258.

8. The development of Getzels' framework can be followed by reviewing writings by Getzels and others: J. W. Getzels, "A Psycho-Sociological Framework for the Study of Educational Administration," *Harvard Educational Review* (1952), 22, pp. 234-246; J. W. Getzels, "Administration as a Social Process," in G. W. Halpin (ed.), *Administrative Theory in Education*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958, pp. 150-165; J. W. Getzels, "Conflict and Role Behavior in the Educational Setting," in W. W. Charters, Jr. and N. L. Gage (eds.), *Readings in the Social Psychology of Education*, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1963, pp. 309-318; J. W. Getzels and E. G. Guba, "Role, Role Conflict, and Effectiveness: An Empirical Study," *American Sociological Review* (1954), 19, pp. 164-175; J. W. Getzels and E. G. Guba, "The Structure of Roles and Role Conflict in the Teaching Situation," *Journal of Educational Sociology* (1955), 29, pp. 30-40; J. W. Getzels and E. G. Guba, "Social Behavior and the Administrative Process," *School Review* (1957), 65, pp. 423-441; J. W. Getzels and H. A. Thelen, "The Classroom as a Unique Social System," in N. B. Henry (ed.), *The Dynamics of Instructional Groups*, Fifty-ninth Yearbook, Part II, National Society for the Study of Education, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960, pp. 53-82. This article relies heavily on these works and, except for direct quotations, reference will not be made to these specific sources.

9. W. W. Charters, Jr., "The Social Background of Teaching," in N. L. Gage (ed.), *Handbook of Research on Teaching*, Chicago: Rand, McNally, 1963, pp. 94-141.

10. J. M. Lipham, "Organizational Character of Education: Administrative Process," *op. cit.*, p. 425.
    pp. 435-454.

11. F. Fosmire and R. A. Littman, "The Social Psychology of the Superintendency," in D. E. Tope *et al.* (eds.), *The Social Sciences View School Administration*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1965.

12. J. W. Getzels and E. G. Guba, "Social Behavior and the Administrative Process," *op. cit.*, p. 425.

13. G. D. Spindler, "The Role of School Administrator," in G. D. Spindler (ed.), *Education and Culture*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963.

14. Groups of people which are important to the position occupant and to which he looks for assistance, approval, support, etc.

15. T. M. Newcomb, "Role Behavior in the Study of Individual Personality and of Groups," *op. cit.*, p. 283.

16. G. W. Allport, *Personality and Social Encounter*, Boston: Beacon, 1960.

17. R. Linton, *The Cultural Background of Personality*, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

18. J. W. Getzels and E. G. Guba, "Social Behavior and the Administrative Process," *op. cit.*, p. 436.

19. J. H. M. Andrews, "Recent Research in Leadership," *Canadian Education* (1958), 13, pp. 15-24.

20. J. W. Getzels and H. A. Thelen, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

21. J. W. Getzels, "Conflict and Role Behavior in the Educational Setting," *op. cit.*, p. 312.

22. M. Horowitz, "Role Relationships in Student Teaching Settings," Unpub. Ed. D. Dissertation, Stanford University, 1965.