
Methodological Aspects of Studying Roles and Role Conflicts of Vocational Teachers in Oklahoma: an Empirical Investigation¹

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This research project was an empirical investigation of the roles and role conflicts of selected vocational secondary school teachers in Oklahoma. The study was based upon and, hopefully, contributes to the development of role theory as a framework for analyzing social phenomena. Role theory has become a major theoretical area for social science research and the central terms of role theory may be found in numerous professional articles.

Theoretical Model—Few studies using statistical models have been made of role conflicts for public school teachers to date, especially studies which deal specifically with the vocational teacher. Similarly, empirical works concerned with the actual or ideal role of the vocational teacher in particular do not appear to exist. There have been, however, a number of studies made over the past 50 years which are relevant to the role of the teacher in general. The majority of these studies, based on cognitions for teachers as held by more than one position, have been descriptive in nature and have not attempted to operationally define and statistically analyze the extent of agreement or disagreement among cognitions held. Based on the framework by Biddle, et al. (1965), this study attempts to overcome the theoretical problems cited.

As an initial step of development, several key concepts were operationally defined in order to link the substantive results of the study with the previously mentioned theoretical framework. Thus, within the framework of this investigation, *role* is conceived as the set of cognitions maintained about a given vocational teacher by all interested persons. Cognitions entering into role may be of many varieties and include, in the present framework, both *expectations* (statements about what is perceived as existing, including activities but not characteristics) and *norms* (statements of approval or disapproval about what exists). Thus, the role of the vocational teacher may be considered to be a set of expectations and norms held for that teacher position by vocational teachers themselves and other

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counter-roles to be specified later. *Role Conflict*, in this study, is defined as the existence of disparate cognitions held by others for the behaviors of vocational teachers, as well as by the vocational teacher himself.

Instruments and methods—For initial clarification of the subject under study, contacts and interviews were conducted with State Board for Vocational Education personnel, campus personnel involved in training vocational teachers, public school personnel, and vocational teachers themselves. The four principal fields of vocational education included in the study were Vocational Agriculture, Trade and Industrial Education, Technical Education, and Distributive Education.

The staff then conducted a pre-pilot study involving the following procedures. Vocational teachers from schools in various parts of the state were contacted and interviewed in accordance with an open-ended questionnaire in order to discern subject areas that seemed crucial to the vocational teacher's position. Schools located in eleven different communities were contacted and interviews conducted with vocation teachers and administrators within each school. The staff also assembled several hundred questions pertaining to role behaviors, strains, and conflicts of vocational teachers, many of which had been used in previous studies and others stemming from the open-ended questionnaire. These questions (categorized into areas of behaviors, attitudes, characteristics, and general relationships) were narrowed into a series of instruments, ultimately used in the pilot study and the final sample, listed below:

1. General Information Form (G.I. Form)—to indicate pertinent facts about the individual categories of respondents.
2. Vocational Teachers' Activities Inventory (VTA-1)—to measure what vocational teachers *actually do*, according to the respondent.
3. Vocational Teachers' Activities Inventory (UTA-2) — to measure what vocational teachers *should do*, according to the respondent.
4. Counter-role Legitimacy Inventory (VTA-3)—to indicate, according to vocational teachers, which categories of persons have a right to hold expectations concerning designated activities and behaviors.
5. Vocational Teachers' Satisfaction Inventory (VTS)—to ascertain how satisfied vocational teachers are with salient aspects of their jobs.

The first two instruments were administered to the following groups: vocational teachers, nonvocational teachers, vocational students, nonvocational students, parents of vocational students, counselors, and administrators. These counter-role positions were chosen because they operate within our basic unit of analysis, the public secondary school system, and because of their high degree of accessibility. A comparison, item by item, of VTA-1 and VTA-2 presented the discrepancy between the actual and ideal role of vocational teachers, as perceived by relevant others. The VTA-3 and VTS instruments were administered to vocational teachers only.

Analysis of pilot study results allowed refinement and clarification of the initial instruments. Confusing questions were clarified or eliminated. Content categories, derived by the staff, consisted of general areas of investigation pertinent to the study which could be used to classify questions into blocs for purposes of facilitating later analysis. Each question was placed into what the staff deemed the appropriate content category.

The final sample consisted of 84 schools, each visited by one or more members of the staff. On the basis of this sampling plan, a total of 1630 respondents were expected. At the completion of the field work, 92 percent of the expected responses were obtained.

Classification of questions made possible two types of statistical analyses: (1) general analyses by type of vocation program across all sampling strata and types of personal behaviors, and (2) examination of relationships between demographic and personal characteristics and role conflict; the former treated as

Independent variables and the latter treated as the dependent variable. Kruskal-Wallis one-way analysis of variance tests were made for differences between counter-role definitions of "actual" behaviors (VTA-1) for each of the four vocational teacher types, and the same analysis was repeated for "ideal" behaviors (VTA-2). For items where significant differences existed, according to the above test, Mann-Whitney *z* tests determined the location of disparities between individual counter-roles and between "actual" and "ideal" role definitions within each counter-role.

Implications—The conceptual model and methodology described above allows the researcher to determine the relationship between personal characteristics of vocational teachers, the role conflicts they experience, and the amount of satisfaction they receive from their position, i.e. as an actor within a defined social system. To illustrate the advantages of such a multiple approach, two of the items within the instruments are analyzed below.

Within the first two instruments, respondents were asked if vocational teachers do (VTA-1) and should (VTA-2) exercise some control over the type of students admitted into their vocational classes. All vocational teachers felt they have some but should have more control, while counselors and administrators felt the teacher had a substantial amount and were not in favor of increasing that control. Within VTA-3, vocational teachers indicated that only administrators had a legitimate voice in the matter of vocational teacher control over admission to vocational classes. Thus the counselors' opposing view created at most, "role strain" for the teacher. The legitimacy of the administrators, coupled with their divergent opinion on the subject, signifies a true area of role conflict for the vocational teacher. A similar question within the VTS Inventory elicited responses from vocational teachers indicating a relatively low degree of satisfaction (especially among T&I and Technical Education instructors) on the subject of admission to vocational classes. Thus, the methodological approach employed allows the researcher to distinguish, within a given system, disparate cognitions of various counter roles regarding a specified subject, determine via legitimacy if such disparities constitute "role conflict", and the relationship of such conflict to the satisfaction of occupants of the central role position under observation.

Another item within the instruments concerning the teaching of adult vocational classes indicated consensus between vocational teachers and administrators as to what the teacher should do (all respondents desired that such programs exist) which implies a lack of role strain or conflict. The VTS Inventory also indicated a relatively high degree of satisfaction among vocational teachers concerning adult classes (the average response was "Very Often Satisfied"), thus, this particular subject arouses a consensual and solidifying influence among members of the social system at hand.

The implications of the theoretical framework and methodological approach employed within this study are as follows:

- 1) it is possible to empirically isolate and evaluate role strain and role conflict or its potential within a given social system.
- 2) the question of legitimacy as perceived by the central role figure (heretofore largely unexplored in previous role studies) may be of paramount importance in determining the actual presence of role conflict.
- 3) the relationship between disparate cognitions (among individuals occupying a single role as well as between counter role positions), role strain, and role conflict, and job satisfaction does exist and can be scientifically examined.

The above implications point to the necessity of future role investigations using and improving the conceptual and methodological models indicated above. Hopefully, such investigations will cover numerous types of social systems and discover common factors interwoven into all systems. Also, the refinement of legitimacy instruments is desperately needed by all fields in the social sciences. And finally, such investigations may uncover the heretofore unknown relationship between

role conflict and job satisfaction. The project discussed here has attempted to lay the groundwork for such future investigations.

LITERATURE CITED

Biddle, Bruce J., J. Paschal Twyman and Earl F. Rankin Jr. 1965. The concept of role conflict. Okla. State Univ. Arts and Sci. Publ. Ser.
