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ABSTRACT
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the development of a professional perspective. (Author)

Preservice Teachers' Responses to Institutional Constraints:

The Active Role of the Individual in Teacher Socialization

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meeting, Washington, DC, April, 1987.

# Abstract

This paper reports selected findings from a study undertaken to investigate the formation and development of preservice teachers' perspectives and the relative roles of institutional constraints and individual actions in that process. Preservice social studies teachers (N = 21) responses to the institutional contexts in which they practice taught were compiled through participant observation and interviews. Lacey's (1977) construct of "social strategy" was used to describe and categorize the nature of individual responses to the institutional socialization pressures. The findings support an interactive model of the teacher socialization process in which the individual plays an active role in the development of a professional perspective.

## Background

The socialization of teachers is a career-long process that begins even before formal training commences (Lortie, 1975). While professional socialization includes many complex dimensions, the most significant event en route to becoming a professional may be the individual's professional education. The program of the professional school has been called the "pivotal structure of the entire [socialization] process in that it moves the novice from lay culture to the status of practitioner" (Simpson, Back, Ingles, Kerckhoff, & McKinney 1979, p. 29).

Lacey (1977) notes that what is commonly thought of as "learning to teach" (acquiring particular skills and knowledge) constitutes only part of the teacher socialization process. The development of the interests, values, and attitudes of teachers is also important in understanding the process of becoming a teacher. Lortie (1975) demonstrated that while most teachers' values and attitudes toward their work were established while they were pupils, a significant change in those attitudes occurs during their preservice education. What changes is preservice teachers' relationship to the classroom situation, that is, their perspective. "Teacher socialization therefore includes the process of developing a teacher perspective in which situations are both seen and interpreted in a new way" (Lacey, 1977, p. 14).

There are two conceptions of how this new perspective emerges. The functionalist model of socialization is the traditional framework for describing the process of teacher socialization. This model stresses how society transforms the individual.

> It is conventional to think of beginning teachers as vulnerable and uninformed. They are expected to be unable to resist pressures to conform to institutional norms for teacher behavior. Willingly or unwillingly, beginning teachers are seen to be cajoled and molded into

shapes acceptable within their schools. (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1985, p. 1)

There is a significant amount of empirical research supporting this view of teacher socialization (e.g., Edgar & Warren, 1969; Friebus, 1977; Hoy, 1968; Wright & Tuska, 1968).

Evidence also exists, however, that illustrates the resistance of neophyte teachers to the social and institutional forces that seek to shape their perspective. This alternative view of teacher perspective development emphasizes the individual's ability to resist changes and sustain values, attitudes, and beliefs that are the result of anticipatory socialization. In this conception of teacher socialization, prior experiences and the individual's biography become the most important influences on teacher perspective development (e.g., Goodlad, 1982; Lortie, 1977; Mardle & Walker, 1980; Petty & Hogben, 1980).

It has been suggested that neither of these conceptions alone is adequate for understanding the processes through which beginning teachers are socialized. Zeichner and Tabachnick (1985) observed that on one hand beginning teachers are seen as prisoners of the past (either anticipatory socialization or preservice training), and on the other hand they are seen as prisoners of the present (institutional socialization forces). "Significantly, in neither case are beginning teachers viewed as making any substantial contributions to the quality or strength of their own induction into teaching" (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1985, pp. 3-4).

The study reported here sought to investigate how preservice teachers interact with the forces and agents of socialization that are attempting to transform them. Particularly, what role does the individual play in his or her own professional socialization and how do individuals respond to institutional constraints during their induction into teaching.

## Studying Teacher Socialization

One approach to the investigation of the processes of teacher socialization employs the construct of teacher perspective. In much of the teacher socialization literature, the exclusive focus has been on describing the central tendencies of expressed attitudes and ideologies of groups of beginning teachers. Given the view of many researchers (e.g., Ryan, 1970; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1985) that induction into teaching is highly context specific, these studies have failed to produce an adequate description of how specific beginning teachers are inducted into particular school contexts. The construct of perspective has been a useful vehicle for overcoming the deterministic character of this portion of the literature. Becker, Geer, Hughes, and Strauss (1961) first developed this construct in a study of medical student socialization. The term perspective refers to:

> A co-ordinated set of ideas and actions a person uses in dealing with some problematic situation, to refer to a person's ordinary way of thinking and feeling about acting in such a situation. These thoughts and actions are co-ordinated in the sense that they flow reasonably, from the actor's point of view, from the ideas contained in the perspective. (Becker et al., 1961, p. 34)

While studies relying in whole or in part on the investigations of teacher perspective have been conducted, the body of the work is relatively small (Adler, 1984; Goodman & Adler, 1985; Hammersly, 1977; Ross, 1986 Tabachnick, Popkewitz, & Zeichner, 1979-1980; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1985).

Adler (1984) described the notion of teacher perspective as a construct that captures the ideas, behaviors, and context of particular teaching acts. Teacher perspectives differ from self-reported statements of ideology or attitudes because they are anchored in the world of actual situations and have reference to particular behaviors. Therefore, a teacher perspective is a theory of action that has developed as a result of

the individual's experiences and is applied in particular situations. Teacher perspectives take into account a broad range of factors, including the teacher's background, beliefs, and assumptions as well as the contexts of the classroom and the school, how these elements are interpreted, and how the interpretations influence the teacher's actions. This study is generally concerned with developing a clearer understanding of how teacher perspectives emerge. As in Lacey (1977) and Zeichner and Tabachnick (1985), a specific interest of this study was the degree to which preservice teachers felt free to exercise independent judgment in their work and the extent to which preservice teachers felt they had to conform to institutional pressures with respect to issues of pedagogy, curriculum content, and classroom management.

## Methods

Because the study explored the development of individual teacher perspectives, it was necessary to use a methodology that allowed for the incorporation of ideas, thoughts, and beliefs of the participants as the major focus of the study. Considering the study's purpose, the naturalistic research paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) provided the most appropriate framework for the study's design. Previous research regarding professional socialization and the development of perspectives has demonstrated that qualitative research methods and a naturalistic theoretical perspective allow unanticipated phenomena to be investigated as they emerge.

Teacher education students majoring in secondary social studies education at a large midwestern public university during the 1984-1985 academic year were the subjects of the study. Twenty-five prospective teachers representing each of four major phases of the teacher education

program at the university were randomly selected and volunteered to participate. Four of the volunteers participated in a pilot study and the remainder in the primary investigation. The sample included students from: (a) the freshman early field experience program, (b) the sophomore level introductory pedagogy and educational psychology course sequence, (c) senior level secondary social studies teaching methods, and (d) student teaching. Each phase of the teacher education program, with the exception of social studies methods courses, included a substantial field experiences component. One half of the professional education program for social studies majors was field experience related.[1] Table 1 illustrates the distribution of course requirements in the secondary social studies program.

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Insert Table 1 about here

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Data collection techniques included interviews and participant observations, however, interviews provided the main source of data.[2] The interviews focused on the development of the individual's teaching perspective over time, particularly during the university teacher education program. These interviews were similar to what Levinson (1978) calls biographical interviews and generally followed an interview protocol. Audio tapes of the interviews were transcribed for analysis. Respondents also participated in follow-up interviews, where the researcher shared specific patterns that emerged from the study as well as tentative conclusions. The respondents were given an opportunity to confirm, modify, or challenge the findings discussed in the follow-up interview.[3]

## Social Strategies of Preservice Teachers

A conceptual framework developed by Lacey (1977) and extended by Zeichner and Tabachnick (1985) was used to examine preservice teachers' responses to the institutional constraints encountered during preservice teacher education.

Becker (1964) asserted that the only possible outcome of occupational socialization is situational adjustment, that is, the individual becomes the kind of person the situation demands. Lacey (1977) challenged this view of socialization by providing the construct of social strategy as a heuristic device for understanding how teachers respond to the forces of socialization.

Lacey uses the construct of social strategy to describe a set of action-idea systems that account for both the constraining social forces in a particular situation and the individual's purpose within that situation. This allows for the accounting of different responses of individuals based upon the interaction of social structures and personal biography. It also allows the individual to be viewed as having the freedom to manipulate the situation while simultaneously being constrained by it.

There are three distinct social strategies that may employed by teachers in response to institutional constraints. The first two social strategies are closely related to Becker's idea of situational adjustment. Strategic compliance refers to situations in which, "the individual complies with the authority figure's definition of the situation and the constraints of the situation but retains private reservations about them" (Lacey, 1977, p. 72).

Internalized adjustment represents a deeper change in the individual. In this case, "the individual complies with the constraints and believes

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that the constraints of the situation are the best" (Lacey, 1977, p. 72).

Here, the individual not only behaviorally conforms but also makes a value

commitment.

Finally, the practice of strategic redefinition refers to instances of

overt deviance. These are situations where individuals without formal

power attempt to change the constraints of a particular situation by

widening the range of acceptable behaviors in that setting.[4]

Lacey's model of socialization makes the issue of the internalization

of social norms problematic.

> Within this model the actor has a choice with respect to his [sic]
> relationship to the social strategy he employs. He can internalize
> all the supporting arguments and values--internalized adjustment--or
> he can "get by" and remain only partially convinced by them--strategic
> compliance. Beyond this, he can attempt to wrestle with the
> constraints of the situation and in a sense hold the institution at
> bay--strategic redefinition. (Lacey, 1977, p. 96)

The findings of this research support Lacey's model of socialization, in

which individuals' purposes and actions as well as situational constraints

play a role in the development of a professional identity.

## Findings

Adaptation of preservice teachers to institutional norms or routines

cannot be taken for granted. Although all preservice teachers

participating in this study engaged in different social strategies during

their formal professional education, a dominant social strategy was

identified for each respondent. Table 2 illustrates the dominant social

strategies used by individuals in each of the four groups.

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Insert Table 2 about here

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Thirteen of the 21 preservice teachers employed strategic compliance as the dominant response to practice teaching and other preservice education activities. The behavioral conformity of the respondents was motivated either by the desire to please persons with evaluative power (i.e., the cooperating teacher or university supervisor) or by the belief that behavioral conformity was in the best interest of their pupils. In either case, the respondents harbored reservations about many of their actions as teachers and stated that they would not have taken them without the influence of situational constraints. The evaluative power of the cooperating teacher's position prompted the following reactions:

> You know that during student teaching it is important to make a good impression on your cooperating teacher. I mean, she has a lot of influence over whether you get a job or not. [My cooperating teacher] has been teaching for 10 years and I've never taught. I didn't want to be an egotist and walk in there thinking, "well she's totally wrong and I'm just going to change this whole school around because I know everything there is to know about teaching." I didn't do that. I wanted to give her system a chance. For three or four weeks I followed it and the further I went the more disenchanted I got with it. I was really getting bored. I liked teaching and I liked going into the classroom with the kids, but I was bored using the same format day after day—having them read out of the book and answer questions. Keeping discipline in the classroom with those kids and that type of format was almost impossible—especially for a student teacher coming in at the end of the year. (ST/3)[5]

> I felt that if this were a class of mine, I might have handled it differently. But, it is hard to come in when the teacher already has a certain schedule and change it....It was really hard to get the kids motivated. They always had to sit in their seats and keep quiet [because this was what the cooperating teacher wanted]. If it had been my class, it would have been structured completely different. I would have kept trying to motivate the kids. I would have tried different techniques, until I got through to them. I thought it was ridiculous to give up....The [cooperating] teacher told me to forget it, he said it [trying to motivate students] was a waste of time....I felt like I couldn't say anything to him, because it wasn't my classroom. I was just a college student and he was evaluating me. (FEEP/3)

> I tried to follow the routine of the teacher. My lesson plan was a bit different actually, but I tried to keep the continuity [with what the cooperating teacher had done before]. I tried to use good judgment and do something that the cooperating teacher would have

wanted....I tried to do what they wanted. I didn't want to rock any boats....I'm not one that never wants to rock the boat, but I think in that type of situation, you give in because you are taking someone else's class and it could be a real awkward situation, especially if you didn't give along with this person. (PI/3)

The above examples illustrate the power of the cooperating teacher to produce behavioral conformity on the part of the preservice teacher. In a few cases, the university supervisor was also able to elicit behavioral conformity because of his or her evaluative power. Yet, in all of these examples the respondents harbored reservations about their behavior and did not make the corresponding value commitment to their actions, thereby limiting the influence of the cooperating teacher. The ability of student teachers to resist the influence of a university supe      is illustrated in the following passage.

I developed a lesson plan that I knew would pass. I knew the lesson plan was going to be graded so I wrote out a very precise plan. It had to deal with every second because that was what this guy [the university supervisor] wanted. So I did that and then I got up in front of the class and just used it a point of reference. I kind of winged it as to how I going to handle the class. (SSM/4)

The influence of persons with evaluative power was not the only motivation for employing strategic compliance. Student teachers' concern for their pupils prompted several preservice teachers to strategically comply with certain situational constraints.

I felt locked in for several weeks. I guess the reason I felt that way was because I hated to change the approach of the class from one thing to another right off the bat. You know, make a straight cut to something different. The kids are going to be confused; they won't know what's going on....At Harding, I was locked into using the same techniques she [the cooperating teacher] was using as well as using the same materials she was. I really didn't get to experiment with different techniques because I had to keep pace with her other classes....I was bored. I thought it was kind of a waste of time....I didn't want to work with those kids that way because it was failing with them and I don't think I had enough experience using new techniques. (ST/4)

Each of these individuals reacted against the constraints of the school or university for different reasons. However, because of their low professional status and the nature of the constraints—such as performance evaluation—they generally acquiesced overtly to the demands of the situation while holding private reservations about their actions. The use of a social strategy such as strategic compliance illustrates how an individual can manipulate a situation while still being constrained by it. Despite the constraints of field experiences or university coursework, these preservice teachers were able to play an active role in the events that occurred.

Seven of the 21 respondents were found to have employed internalized adjustment as their primary response to situational constraints encountered during their teacher education program. While these respondents generally responded to constraints with internalized adjustment, evidence to support the type of passive response to socializing forces frequently suggested in the literature (i.e., Gibson, 1976) was weak. Only three preservice teachers employed internalized adjustment in the traditional sense of conforming their values and behaviors to the situational demands. Of these, two were in pre-student teaching field experiences. There was evidence that only one student teacher employed internalized adjustment in the usual sense. As in cases reported elsewhere (Tabachnick, Zeichner, Densmore & Egan, 1982), this response did not seem to be the result of passive acceptance of institutional constraints. In most of these cases, student teachers described situations free of many constraints, where cooperating teachers gave student teachers the freedom to exercise their own judgment and encouraged them to do so within the broad guidelines they established. As a result, many of the respondents employing internalized

adjustment were in situations compatible with their own teaching
perspective.

> She wanted me to be close to the unit on the American Revolution when
> I finished, but she did not tell me how I should teach particular
> concepts or units.  I had to tell her what I had planned and she would
> usually give me some suggestions....I liked the way she approached her
> classes.  She always used different methods and she would not just
> stick to lecturing. (ST/4)

> If you have a cooperating teacher that isn't cooperating he can hold
> you back and keep you from doing some innovative things.  But in my
> experiences I've known cooperating teachers that would let you do what
> you wanted or even encouraged you to be creative and innovative...I
> know some people that said they had a bad experience with their
> cooperating teachers.  I wasn't restrained at all.  I could have done
> just about anything as far as I know. (SSM/2)

> The cooperating teacher did influence me somewhat.  He felt a need to
> cover certain content.  He said, "this is what I've been doing.  While
> you're here this spring don't freak them out by doing something
> totally different."  I pretty much did what I wanted to do the way I
> had set out to do it. (ST/1)

One respondent was found to have employed strategic redefinition as

her dominant response to constraints encountered during student teaching.

She attempted to redefine the role of the teacher and the curriculum in the

classes she took over as a student teacher and was generally successful.

> I tried to avoid the way Joe did things--except for the things that
> the kids really liked and relied on.  I tried to make the change
> gradually and by the end I had changed just about everything with the
> classes.  Before I started student teaching I already had in mind what
> I was going to do.  I just figured Joe and I were real different and
> that we were going to end up being different. (ST/6)

During the course of her student teaching, she added new units (on the

history and cultures of South America and Islam) to the curriculum that her

cooperating teacher had always omitted.  She also transformed the structure

of the classroom from a teacher-centered, passive student environment to

one where students were actively engaged in learning through a variety of

pupil-selected activities including traditional research reports, inquiry

projects, art, and literature.

The teaching perspectives of respondents in this study were not found to be situationally specific. Many preservice teachers were able to maintain a perspective that was not supported by or that was in conflict with the dominant institutional pressures in schools and at the university. The stability of preservice teachers' perspectives was illustrated by their use of social strategies such as strategic compliance and strategic redefinition.

## Conclusion

This paper reports selected findings from a study undertaken to investigate the formation and development of preservice teachers' perspectives and the relative roles of institutional constraints and individual actions in that process. Preservice social studies teachers' responses to the institutional contexts in which they practice taught were compiled through participant observation and interviews. Lacey's (1977) construct of social strategy was used to describe and categorize the natur of individual responses to the institutional socialization pressures.

The findings support an interactive or dialectical model of the teacher socialization process (Lacey, 1977; Zeichner, 1980). In this model beginning teachers are viewed as making substantial contributions to their own induction into the teaching profession, however, the influence of anticipatory socialization and the situational constraints of the workplace (including the university) are also considered important socializing forces. This model questions the traditional conception of beginning teachers as passive recipients of the culture of teaching and the internalization of social norms by neophyte teachers becomes problematic.

A possible explanation for the stability of preservice teachers' perspectives during their induction into the profession may be the

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conflicting nature of the demands and pressures encountered by beginning teachers.

> Despite arguments by Hoy (1968) and others that there is a homogeneous school culture into which neophytes are socialized, we found...that school cultures were often diverse, that various "subcultures" were easily identifiable in all but one school [that we studied], and that these subcultures at times attempted to influence the beginning teachers in contradictory ways....School cultures are apparently not always diverse and contradictory within any one setting, but when they are, the contradictions seem to provide room for beginning teachers to implement a "deviant" pedagogy, or at least to establish individual expressions of teaching. (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1985, p. 14)

In addition to the diverse subcultures within the school, the frequently cited schism between university teacher education and the schools also provides contradictory goals and demands for the neophyte teacher.

Another possible reason preservice teachers are able to successfully resist institutional pressures is the importance of the self-socialization processes that are simultaneously in operation during their exposure to external socialization forces. Preservice teachers play an active role in the construction of their own teacher perspectives, as evidenced by the frequent use of social strategies such as strategic compliance or strategic redefinition. While university teacher education programs and the schools determine the organization and nature of the preservice experiences, preservice teachers are able to exert some measure of control over socialization forces and take an active role in the construction of their professional identity. While employing social strategies is one example of the active role of the individual in the socialization process, there are other ways in which beginning teachers participate in self-socialization including: (a) role-playing, (b) selective role-modeling, and (c) self-legitimation.[6]

It is clear from the findings of this study and others that the socialization of teachers is a complex process that cannot be readily

captured by a single factor frame of reference (Lacey, 1973). As noted by

Zeichner and Tabachnick (1985), the challenge presented by the results of

research into the dialectical processes of teacher socialization is how to

create and maintain the conditions that will enhance individual expressions

of teaching perspectives.

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## Footnotes

[1] Professional education requirements for social studies majors included courses in social foundations, general pedagogy, subject area teaching methods, curriculum development, and an extensive pre-student teaching field experience. The pre-student teaching field experience, known as FEEP, provided experience in a school setting for 16 hours a week throughout a ten week quarter. Field experiences were supplemented by weekly university seminars with other teacher education students. The general pedagogy courses (two 6-quarter hour courses) included a minimum of 120 clock hours of field experience. Student teaching was completed over a 10 week quarter. For a more extensive description of the study's setting see Ross (1986).

[2] The interview protocol was developed based upon a pilot study (N = 4) and previous ethnographic investigations of the professional socialization processes (Becker et al., 1961; Lortie, 1975).

[3] See Ross (1986) for a more comprehensive discussion of the research methodology and its supporting rationale.

[4] Lacey (1977) uses the term strategic redefinition only for instances in which attempts to redefine the situation are successful. Zeichner and Tabachnick (1985) broaden the use of this concept to include both successful and unsuccessful attempts at redefinition. It is the broader use of this concept that is employed in this research.

[5] Codes following quotations from respondents identify individuals and their respondent group: Freshman early field experience program (FEEP), sophomore general pedagogy sequence (PI), senior level social studies teaching methods (SSM), and student teaching (ST).

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[6] Ross (1986) provides extensive illustrations and a discussion of how these self-socialization processes influence the development of teacher perspectives.

Table 1

Distribution of Course Requirements in Secondary Social Studies

Teacher Education Program

| Curricular Requirement | Percentage of Program |
|---|---|
| Liberal arts courses | 30% |
| Content courses in teaching field | 44% |
| Professional education courses | 26% |
| Field experiences (13%) | |
| Pedagogy (6%) | |
| Introduction to education & social foundations (7%) | |
| | 100% |

Table 2

Dominant Social Strategies of Preservice Teachers

|  | n | Social Strategy | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Respondent Group | | Internalized Adjustment | Strategic Compliance | Strategic Redefinition |
| Freshman Field Experience | 5 | 3 | 2 | 0 |
| Sophomore Pedagogy & Educational Psychology | 5 | 2 | 3 | 0 |
| Secondary Social Studies Methods* | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0 |
| Student Teaching | 6 | 2 | 3 | 1 |
| Totals | 21 | 7 | 13 | 1 |

*Only phase without a field experience component.