Defining Policy Practice in Social Work

"Advocacy is the cornerstone upon which social work is built. It is so important that it is framed in three sections of our Code of Ethics. Advocacy for individuals, communities and systems is not just a suggested activity for social workers. It's not a 'do it if you have some extra time' or a 'do it if the inequity and disparity are very great' activity. It is a requisite."

NASW Executive Director, ELIZABETH J. CLARK.[1]

INTRODUCTION

The power of policy practice has been demonstrated throughout the history of the social work profession (as discussed in more detail in Chapter 2), from Julia Lathrop's early efforts to establish the juvenile court system, to social workers' recent advocacy for universal health care. Through policy practice, social workers have made a difference in the lives of millions of Americans throughout history. This textbook examines the role of policy practice within social work and helps students apply their basic social work skills to policy practice arenas so that they can become successful advocates for just social welfare policies.

Policy practice is defined as using social work skills to propose and change policies in order to achieve the goal of social and economic justice (see Box 1.1). Policy practice is an integral element of social work as practiced in all settings—at the local, state, and national levels, as well as within micro, mezzo, and macro levels of intervention. Including policy practice in the daily life of social work practice is an effective and powerful avenue for enhancing the profession's goals and mission of social and economic justice.

ABOUT THE BOOK

There are few things that get our attention more than a moving story about social justice, and social workers throughout history have provided us with an endless number of examples of how to affect change on behalf of vulnerable populations. Storytelling provides some of the most powerful learning experiences for those learning new skills and material. For this reason, the text uses vignettes and case studies in chapters of the book itself but also refers to the companion Web site that includes the Simulated Case Studies (SCS) of policy practice efforts by social workers in collaboration with other human service professionals, political actors, and business people. Within the SCS, both the characters and the specific situations are fictional but are based on the lived experiences of social workers who have engaged in policy practice. Some of the case studies in the textbook are real and were written with the permission and review of the social workers involved. Other fictional case studies are based on the practice experience of real social workers. In addition to the SCS, this text is different from other policy textbooks in its use of a more collective and holistic perspective for analyzing policy options and determining social work's role in the policy process. Social work's ethical commitment to social and economic justice is seen as the driving force behind the mandate for the profession's involvement in policy practice. Incorporating the experience of the 2008 election, the text reviews current and new strategies for influencing public policy, including the use of new media and social networking Web sites. This book is designed to help enhance your policy practice skills in the hope that you, too, will influence the policy-making processes in your agencies, communities, states, and nation. In doing so, you can make a tremendous difference in the lives of individuals and families living and working in unjust conditions

BOX 1.1

A Definition of Policy Practice

Policy practice is defined as using social work skills to propose and change policies in order to achieve the goal of social and economic justice.

and living on the margins of society, just as Jane Addams and many other social workers have done in the past. Social workers reclaiming the responsibility and power of policy practice today are again making important contributions to client lives, organizations, communities, and the nation in achieving new levels of social and economic justice.

ABOUT THE CHAPTER

To introduce you to the idea of how policy practice often infuses social work practice, this chapter begins with several fictional vignettes within a range of settings that depict social workers engaging in policy practice. The scenarios demonstrate the variety of roles that social workers can play in improving social work practice by seeking changes in policies that limit practice options for populations that social workers often encounter. These vignettes set the stage for a more in-depth look at the many dimensions of policy practice and how they play out in the practice of social work in various settings across a variety of levels of intervention. The principles and values related to policy practice are discussed, and an overview of later chapters is provided that details specific aspects of policy practice. It is worthwhile to see policy practice in several contexts and how individual social workers can make a real difference. Such experiences are demonstrated in the vignettes that follow. Try to imagine yourself in these social work roles.

POLICY PRACTICE AT THE CORE OF SOCIAL WORK

Experiences of Three Social Workers

VIGNETTE #1.   Emily was shadowing the state agency workers responsible for licensing day care facilities in the state when they made their visit to New Prospect Mission Day Care in a small town—some distance from the state capital. As a church-affiliated day care center, New Prospect Mission was not required to be licensed by the state, but one of the parents had requested the visit. Emily was appalled by the conditions they found: formula and milk in a refrigerator that did not work, roaches in the cupboard, few toys and little play equipment, and too few staff supervising children. She was incensed that nothing could be done legally to better protect the health and safety of the children attending this day care center. Several weeks later, she learned about hearings being conducted at the State House, on a bill to require state licensing of all child care facilities in the state, including those operated by churches.

VIGNETTE #2.   Juan, a case manager at the local Area Agency on Aging, was working with a fiercely independent elderly gentleman, Mr. Anderson, who lived alone. All of his children lived out of state, though they were in close touch with him by phone. On a recent home visit, Mr. Anderson appeared to have lost some weight since their last appointment, and Juan became concerned that Mr. Anderson might not be eating properly. When Juan called the local Meals on Wheels program, he found out Mr. Anderson was not eligible for services because his road was outside their service area.

VIGNETTE #3.   Jennifer, a social worker for a local homeless shelter, was working with the Rodriguez family, who recently moved to the area. Both parents worked at minimum-wage jobs at the local poultry processing plant south of town. Even with their combined wages, they could not afford the expensive health insurance offered by the company or any independent policies. Their three children were in elementary school and doing well. The family also could not find

affordable housing in the community. Their older-model car was not reliable, so housing outside of town—which might have been less expensive—was not practical. The wait for Section 8 Housing (subsidized housing) was over two years and, at the time, the office was not even taking applications.

Many social workers begin their careers with a passion for helping individuals and families like the Anderson and Rodriguez families above. They have learned how to engage clients in the helping process, do comprehensive assessments, collaboratively develop intervention plans, and monitor their implementation. Even though part of the intervention may involve linking families and individuals with community resources to meet identified needs, many social workers focus on micro practice—helping specific people in need. When social workers monitor family progress, they are often able to see specific improvements in the family's situation as a result of their planned interventions.

At other times, progress is not so easily achieved. Analyzing family circumstances using systems theory, social workers can determine what factors are creating barriers to change. Sometimes the barriers are internal, such as low motivation or limited ability to cook nutritious meals, as in Mr. Anderson's situation described in vignette #2. Sometimes the barriers are external (e.g., community and societal barriers), such as Mr. Anderson living outside the service area of the Meals on Wheels program or laws that do not apply in certain situations. When social workers encounter difficulties in linking people to community resources or in making sure that the services are adequate to address the need, they are confronted with the need for policy practice, for making changes in the community and social systems within which clients live (the clients' environment) and work, so that individuals and families can achieve safe and stable lives. Sometimes the services needed are not available in a particular geographic location, as with the case of Mr. Anderson. If so, then services need to be expanded or created. Sometimes the economic structure of a community creates challenges for parents who are already working hard to care for their families, as with the Rodriguez family. To assist the Rodriguez family and others in similar circumstances, new opportunities need to be created through major policy changes, such as raising the minimum wage and building more affordable housing closer to the available jobs. These macro-practice changes will require great effort and take time before changes can take hold because the targets of change may include several environmental components (such as new laws, changes in agency policy, or additional resources). So although they represent a long-term solution, they may not offer much hope for immediate relief.

As a student, Emily learned that sometimes the law must be changed before conditions can improve. Emily testified at the hearing regarding her observations about several day care centers that were not meeting state licensing standards. During the hearing, a powerful state senator who was supported by many of the same churches that operated the day care centers in question, confronted Emily about her facts. He insisted that conditions were not as bad as she had reported, but Emily stood by her observations. That day, Emily did not yet realize that she would be setting the wheels in motion for a change in the state law. She also did not realize that her outspoken advocacy and policy practice that day would lead to a job offer to become the legislative aide for a state child welfare advocacy agency. She did not realize that she had begun to work in policy practice.

Like Emily, when social workers are faced with community (or macro) challenges, they recognize the need for policy practice—interventions in the larger systems in the client's social environment that will create the conditions conducive to growth, development, and empowerment. This recognition—of the need to effect change in larger systems to help individuals—dates back to the very beginnings of the profession, when people were understood within their environmental context, not as isolated individuals experiencing difficulties.

Person-in-Environment Perspective in Generalist Practice

When social workers use the person-in-environment perspective, they situate the person within a context. Although much of social work practice is focused on helping individual people make changes in their thinking and behavior so that they can reach their goals, this micro focus is not the whole of social work practice. Using the systems perspective, social workers recognize that people interact with an environment that may provide both opportunities and barriers to individual development and goal achievement. For most people, that environment is first encountered in interactions with families, particularly parents who first meet basic needs as children are growing and developing. But other systems, external to families, support families and enhance their abilities to carry out their nurturing, educating, and socializing functions.

Informal networks of friends and extended family members may provide both material and psychological/social support of friendship, child care, and play opportunities. For most people, this informal support network, together with families, is the first line of defense when individuals struggle to meet needs, both physical and psychological.[2] Many neighborhoods include both formal and informal networks of support for families and individuals, including neighborhood watch programs for crime prevention, garden clubs and plots, and social events that serve to meet a variety of needs. Putnam[3] highlights the importance of the needs-meeting aspects of this informal network in his discussion of the decline of civic engagement and informal group support activities that he observed. Others[4] have since repudiated Putnam's assertions, indicating that informal group support is just beginning to take different forms. Stengel and Blackman[5] assert:

> There hasn't been a disappearance of civic activism in America so much as a reinvention of it. It is not dissolving, but evolving. Yes, Little League participation has leveled off, but that's because everyone's kicking a ball not catching it. . . . Yes, fewer people are signing up for the Y, but they are joining health clubs for the StairMasters and the camaraderie. Yes, there are fewer ladies' garden clubs, but working women are meeting in evening book clubs to discuss high literature and low husbands. . . . And while people may not be going to political clubs anymore, they are discussing politics in the Internet equivalent of smoke-filled rooms.

More recent additions to the informal support systems of our technological age include online chat rooms, social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace, and other new forms of social interaction.

Cities and communities provide a wide variety of formal social, educational, and economic supports for families, including jobs for wage earners, schools for children, stores for shopping for goods and services, and civic activities and events for social, cultural, and political participation of community members. Beyond the interactions at the local community level are the corresponding state structures that support local community efforts, including statewide organizations for many different activities and functions, state government agencies that regulate services at the local level, and state political entities that make, adjudicate, and enforce the policies set by state government. National systems of nonprofit, for-profit, and public organizations may appear to be remote from the everyday lives of people at the local community level, but they may directly affect their lives when they respond to disasters—as the Red Cross did when Hurricane Katrina hit the Louisiana and Mississippi coasts. National organizations have an impact on local communities as when a U.S. automaker decides to move the parts manufacturing operation in Kokomo, Indiana, to a border town in Mexico.

And certainly, the federal government affects individual lives when it increases the Earned Income Tax Credit for low-income workers or proposes cuts in funding for vocational education programs when there is a need to reduce the federal deficit. At the international level, organizations operate to extend education and health care to underserved countries and communities. For example, former president Bill Clinton has established the William J. Clinton Foundation to fight AIDS and other health and environmental challenges internationally. Web media and blogs make international communication among people from different countries possible. According to its Web site, the mission of the William J. Clinton Foundation is to "strengthen the capacity of people in the United States and throughout the world to meet the challenges of global interdependence."(See www.clintonfoundation.org/index.htm for information about the Foundation and its efforts worldwide.) International grassroots community organizations serve as resources to help local communities in their economic development and sustainability efforts. Multinational corporations extend employment opportunities to India's college-educated population, resulting in a growth of their middle class, while promoting an outsourcing of middle-class jobs from the United States. In the economic downturn of 2008, the mortgage and banking crisis in the United States had an impact on markets around the world as Americans bought fewer products manufactured overseas. More and more global connections are extending in ever more complicated webs of interaction. Understanding these interconnections helps social workers appreciate the complexity of the policy process as well.

The Relationship of Policy Practice to Micro Practice

The person-in-environment perspective (see Figure 1.1) helps social workers conceptualize and make sense of how individuals are enveloped by layers of environmental systems that can both facilitate and hinder their development across time. Social workers can think of the individual person being in the center, with the family in the next circle surrounding the individual, then neighborhood and community institutions coming in succession before the layers or surrounding circles of state, national, and international organizations and forces. For example, in trying to assess Mr. Anderson's situation, described at the beginning of this chapter, from a person-in-environment perspective, Juan would see Mr. Anderson at the center of this series of concentric circles. Mr. Anderson does have an emotionally close family network, but they are at some distance and unable to provide a great deal of direct assistance. Looking beyond his family to his neighborhood, Juan would note Mr. Anderson's "fierce independence" as a potential challenge in assisting him to ask for help from the informal networks of neighbors and friends who might be willing to be of assistance. Examining the next layer of support in the community, Juan has already encountered difficulty in accessing one agency due to Mr. Anderson's location, but he could explore other community services that might be available. The policy challenge that Juan faces may take him to the state level in inquiring about how service areas are determined for different agencies and whether there is one mandated to serve Mr. Anderson's area. He may even decide to examine some of the state laws, programs, and funding mechanisms to see whether resources could be mobilized to serve Mr. Anderson and others who are outside designated service areas. These questions and inquiries may even take him to the federal level to examine authorizing legislation and mandates that the state may be required to address. In this way, Juan's person-in-environment perspective helps him look for ways to address Mr. Anderson's needs at all the different layers of potential resources that surround and may be available to Mr. Anderson. This perspective also allows Juan to identify gaps in
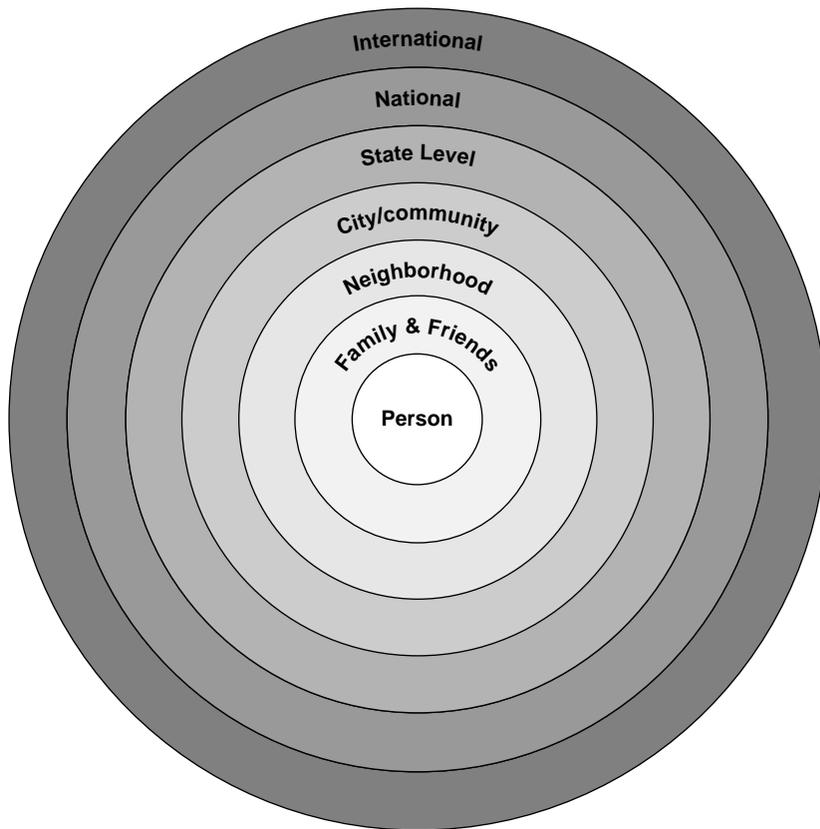
FIGURE 1.1   Person-in-environment perspective

those needs-meeting systems, some of which may need to be addressed by the policy practice activities discussed in this text.

Though Figure 1.1 appears as a static figure, what it represents is far from static. It is a dynamic reality of constant interaction and change as events unfold and take place in one layer resulting in changes or effects not only inward—toward the individual but also outward—toward broader systems. For example, when the federal law No Child Left Behind was passed, local school systems subsequently changed how they measured their annual progress toward their student achievement goals, focusing more on the use of standardized tests. Another unforeseen impact of this change has been an increase in the demand for mental health services for high school students during the week of state tests to assess their learning accomplishments.[6] The systems perspective further informs practitioners that these different levels of influence may assume different levels of prominence at different times. In recent years, for example, international events have become more influential on U.S. businesses and communities as multinational corporations make decisions about job location, outsourcing, and other restructuring changes and as concerns about possible terrorism have led to new restrictions in air travel procedures. Figure 1.1 will be revisited later to increase understanding of how policies at different levels interact with one another to create both the opportunities and the barriers that people experience firsthand in their communities.

DEFINING POLICY PRACTICE

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, policy practice is defined as using social work skills to propose and change policies in order to achieve the goal of social and economic justice. In doing policy practice, social workers apply generalist social work perspectives and skills to make changes in laws, rules, budgets, and policies and in the bodies that create those policies, whether they be local, state, or federal agencies or other decision-making bodies, in the pursuit of the social work mission of social and economic justice. The goal of policy practice in social work is to ensure social and economic justice in the social environment so that all people, regardless of their socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation, have opportunities to achieve success for themselves and their families, in a sense so that all those layers in the concentric circles of Figure 1.1 will work to assist them in meeting their needs. This policy practice goal and effort has been part of the social work profession since its very beginnings. Chapter 2 traces that development and discusses how policy practice has been manifested in social work practice historically.

Policy practice speaks to the core mission of social work. It is reflected in the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics: "To enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty."[7] It reflects the values that the profession holds: "Service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence."[8] Effective policy practice involves learning how to apply the core generalist practice skills (engagement, goal setting, planning, implementing, and monitoring progress) to larger social systems where the outcomes are not individual client change but larger system change in both laws and social conditions that will affect the lives of millions of families and individuals.

Multiple Definitions of Policy Practice and Advocacy

Social work policy scholars have only recently identified policy practice as an important aspect of social work generalist practice, though as noted above, it has clearly been part of the profession's ethical mandate for a long time. Jansson (2005) was one of the first social policy scholars to conceptualize policy practice as a distinct aspect of social work practice. He distinguishes between policy practice and policy advocacy in the following manner:

> I define *policy practice* as efforts to change policies in legislative, agency, and community settings, whether by establishing new policies, improving existing ones, or defeating the policy initiatives of other people. People who are *skilled* in policy practice increase the odds that *their* policy preferences will be advanced. I define *policy advocacy* as policy practice that aims to help powerless groups, such as women, children, poor people, people of color, gay men and lesbians, and people with disabilities, improve their resources and opportunities.[9]

Policy advocacy work for Jansson is the aspect of policy practice that represents traditional social work advocacy on behalf of others who seek to improve their social and economic circumstances. Advocacy is part of policy practice but is not the whole of policy practice.

Barusch also makes the distinction between policy practice and advocacy and, like Jansson, indicates that policy practice is inclusive of advocacy:

> Just as "individual practice" attempts to change individuals, "policy practice" focuses on changing policy. Although the two are closely entwined, policy practice does not

BOX 1.2

Stakeholders

Stakeholders are all those groups and individuals who have an interest in the outcomes of a policy practice initiative. For some initiatives, such as health care for those without insurance, it could be argued that many people in a community will have an interest and are, therefore, members of a stakeholding group. But some groups have particular vested interests in the development of any such new initiatives. Local physicians, nurses, social workers, and others working in health care will have particular perspectives and views that will be important to include. Others who work with people without insurance such as emergency-room personnel, staff at the shelter for people who are homeless, and even owners of small businesses unable to offer employees insurance may also have perspectives to share. Perhaps the most important stakeholding group is the target client population (in this example, people without insurance). This group is sometimes left out of assessment and planning processes that come from the top down. Certainly, social workers understand that the views of this stakeholding group would be essential to the successful implementation of any important policy change affecting their lives. While these stakeholders may favor changes in the current health care system, other stakeholders such as insurance companies may launch powerful opposition to any change efforts. The health care Simulated Case Study (SCS) demonstrates some of the dynamics in health care change efforts.

> *always* involve advocacy. It encompasses a range of activities that, while they sometimes overlap, can be loosely categorized in four groups: assessment and analysis, coalition building, advocacy, and empowerment.[10]

Barusch's delineation of four clusters of activities further demonstrates the different aspects of policy practice that require four different clusters of skills, some of which overlap with one another, and some of which do not. For example, assessment may involve reviewing existing data to discern trends and impacts, whereas conducting a new needs assessment to document local needs may require cooperation and coalition building among stakeholding groups.

Schneider and Lester use the term *advocacy* instead of policy practice, defining it as "the exclusive and mutual representation of a client(s) or a cause in a forum, attempting to systematically influence decision making in an unjust or unresponsive system(s)."[11] Their understanding of advocacy would fit within our definition of policy practice. The term *policy practice,* used throughout this book, refers to the full range of activities and roles that social workers engage in while attempting to change the larger systems in communities with the long-term goal of creating a more just social environment for all people. The perspective that is taken in this text is similar to that of both Jansson and Barusch in distinguishing advocacy as one aspect of policy practice. Advocacy has long been an important and essential activity within what is now called policy practice, but advocacy is only one activity within the broader field of policy practice, as noted in Table 1.1.

The term *policy practice* reflects an understanding of where this social work role fits with other roles within the profession. Policy is not just a topic social workers study and understand in order to help clients access programs and resources. The policy arena is also an arena for social work action, for social work practice, just as social workers practice with individuals, families, organizations, and communities. Social workers are advocates, to be sure, but that is not their only

TABLE 1.1 Policy Practice Activities

Policy Practice Activity	Definition	Examples
Policy analysis	Studying the policy to understand its goals, strategies, and potential impact	Analyzing provisions of No Child Left Behind and implications for student assessment procedures
Advocating for policy change	Interacting with policy makers in order to influence their policy decisions on particular proposals	Writing to members of Congress about changes needed in No Child Left Behind to make it more effective in meeting its goals
Building coalitions	Developing relationships with other groups to develop a coordinated advocacy message and strategy	Bringing educators, parents, and child advocate groups together to work on advocating for changes in No Child Left Behind legislation
Launching a campaign	Creating an overarching strategy and message to influence not only policy makers but the public about an issue	Developing a coherent message for radio ads, flyers, a web site, etc. to present arguments and rationale to support needed changes in No Child Left Behind

role in policy practice. Social workers are actively engaged in many aspects of policymaking and implementation, as discussed in Chapter 6.

The definitions of policy practice, as articulated by other social work scholars, may vary somewhat from the one presented here, but all focus on changing larger systems through internal changes in community organizations' policies, state and federal legislative and rule changes, or through increasing funding levels for social programs. Further exploration of the complexities of policy practice in action requires an understanding of the matrix of opportunities for policy practice within the broad social environment in which both social workers and clients live.

CONCEPTUALIZING POLICY PRACTICE IN ACTION

Settings and Environmental Levels Within the Policy Practice Arena

Opportunities for policy practice occur within each of the concentric circles of the environment in Figure 1.1 that surround individuals and that help them meet their basic needs. Social workers attempt to influence policymaking in four different settings within the social environment. The executive branch of government (regardless of level from the White House and president, to the governors of the states, and mayors in local communities) is responsible for implementing and enforcing the policies and actions passed by the legislative branch of government whether that is the Congress, the state general assembly, or the city council through their respective democratic processes. Social workers can influence policymaking in all three branches of government (executive, legislative, and judicial), but the challenges are different in each, requiring different strategies to be successful. The judicial branch of government determines whether laws have been broken and whether those laws themselves are constitutional at the state or federal level. Attempts to influence the judicial branch of government may be targeted to the Supreme Court, state

supreme courts, or local family, civil, and criminal courts in both the federal and state systems. In judicial settings, laws and policies are both challenged and upheld as well as punishments meted out for those who violate the policies and laws as passed by the legislative branch. Strategies for influence in judicial settings differ from those in legislative settings. Sometimes social workers and their organizations are actively engaged in fighting repressive laws, such as contemporary efforts to defeat the bans on gay marriage in a number of states, and may be involved directly in filing constitutional challenges to existing laws; or social work organizations may file amicus curiae ("friend of the court") briefs (see Box 1.3) on a particular side in a court case. For example, NASW has filed amicus curiae briefs in the following court cases: *Roper v. Simmons* (U.S. Supreme Court, 2005) challenging the death penalty for 17-year-olds; in *T.B. v. L.R.M.* (Pennsylvania Supreme Court, 2001) granting lesbian visitation rights; in *Anderson (Saenz) v. Roe* (U.S. Supreme Court, 1999) challenging California's one-year waiting period for welfare benefits for new residents; and, in *Anspach v. City of Philadelphia* (U.S. District Court, 2005),[12] upholding access of youth to family planning services. In many of these cases, NASW joined other professional associations and community groups in the brief, thereby adding to its potential power to influence the court in making a decision.

In addition to the three branches of government, the fourth arena for policy practice is in grassroots and other community organizations that also are involved in delivering human services or advocating for client needs. Social workers may be taking the lead in identifying unmet needs and advocating for changes in these settings. (see Table 1.2).

Looking across the rows of Table 1.2, the settings for policy practice are identified for each level of policymaking. At the local level, for example, executive policymaking resides in various boards and commissions as well as in the mayor's office, legislative action is taken by the city

BOX 1.3

Amicus Curiae Brief

An amicus curiae brief is one that is filed as a "friend of the court" to support one side in a pending court decision. This legal brief provides arguments in favor of that position from the law and the evidence from practice and research.

BOX 1.4

Simulated Case Study

You will see how an advocacy effort might proceed when you visit the mythical state of Factoria in the Gay Marriage Simulated Case Study. This fictional story unfolds through simulated e-mails and Web pages and chronicles the efforts of a social worker, Julia Cohen, and her colleagues to defeat a repressive amendment to the state constitution. As you work your way through this simulated case study and the two others that come with this text, you will see many of the concepts and strategies discussed in the text come to life. Watch for these inserts to help you find relevant illustrations in the simulated case studies.

TABLE 1.2   Policy Making Organizations by Environmental Level

| Level of Policy Making | *Typical Policy Making Organizations by Setting* | | | |
	Executive	Legislative	Judicial	Community Activity and Advocacy
Local	Local housing authorities, city and county program offices such as probation office, voter registration, community and family services, local human rights commission, mayors, city managers	City and town councils, county councils, county commissioners, school boards	Circuit court, juvenile court, family court	Nonprofit agency boards, local grassroots organizations such as local gay-rights groups
State	State agencies such as those providing Food Stamps, TANF, Medicaid, emergency housing, etc., State Board of Health, Corrections, vocational rehabilitation, governors	State legislatures	State appeals court, state supreme court	Statewide nonprofit agencies such as Planned Parenthood, or Project Equality
Federal	Social Security Administration, Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Justice, the president of the U.S.	Congress	Supreme court, federal court system including appeals courts	National affiliate non-profit agencies such as Big Brother-Big Sister, or the Human Rights Campaign

council, judicial policies are carried out in the juvenile court, and community advocacy is conducted by a variety of grassroots organizations. In contrast, looking down the columns, the comparable policymaking settings are identified for each level. For example, legislative settings include city councils at the local level, state legislatures at the state level, and Congress at the federal level. Learning how to work in these various settings and levels is an important aspect of learning about policy practice.

Social workers engaged in policy practice frequently begin their work on a problem or issue at one level in one setting, but find that to achieve their goals, they must move from level to level and setting to setting. Going back to Juan's challenge with helping Mr. Anderson, Juan has many different opportunities to engage in policy practice to address the gap in services he has identified. At the informal level, he may discuss Mr. Anderson's situation (maintaining confidentiality) with colleagues and friends who work in other social service agencies, perhaps finding that Mr. Anderson is not the only older person not receiving the services he needs. As indicated earlier, at the community level Juan may identify other community organizations besides Meals on Wheels that might be in a position to extend or develop services if there is an identified need. He may work at the local level in letting the locally elected officials know about this need of one of their constituents. When he contacts staff at the state level, he is operating in executive branch of government. When he contacts the state legislator representing this district about a needed change in legislation that would help Mr. Anderson and others like him, he is working in the legislative branch of government. His contact at the federal level might start in the executive

branch with the Administration on Aging, but if some changes in federal legislation are required then he may be in touch with the U.S. representative and U.S. senators representing his area and state, the legislative branch. When he finds a need to change federal legislation, he may return to the community and grassroots level to organize a coalition to advocate for such a change. Juan's search for a way to meet Mr. Anderson's need may take him in many different directions through a variety of policy practice settings, depending on the information he finds and what he is able to accomplish.

Policy practice is inclusive of a number of different settings in social work practice at local, state, federal, and even the international levels. Though there may not be comparable bodies in each level (particularly at the international level), the settings for policy practice include citizens advocacy, grassroots-level community organizations, nonprofit agencies (citizen's groups that shape policy and provide valuable community services), and the three branches of government. These settings across the different levels from local through international are the points of origin for the policies that affect clients and that set the parameters for the services social workers may provide. When social workers understand where the policy originated and where it needs to be changed, then they can plan effective strategies to influence that person or deliberative body. If Juan determines that the gap in services can be resolved in the local community, then he will not need to involve state or federal officials. If, however, he discovers that there are multiple gaps in service delivery due to lack of state and federal funding, then he may need to work at those levels to advocate for increasing funding in this area to meet the needs of vulnerable people. Table 1.3 provides some examples of those policy decision-makers whom social workers may need to target and work with in changing policies to better meet needs identified in communities.

Knowing the origin of a particular policy that is the target of a change effort is critical to designing an effective campaign. For example, if a local social worker discovered that the eligibility criteria for a local free health clinic set at 150 percent of the poverty level still restricted a large number of people in need of health care from using the clinic, one of the first steps in creating an effective campaign would be to identify the organization or body that set this policy. Did the local clinic staff or board set the policy? Have the local conditions and access to health care changed since the clinic eligibility standards were set? Is the clinic part of a network of clinics with state funding from enabling legislation passed last year and signed by the governor? Were the eligibility guidelines written into the law itself or were they promulgated as part of the state agency's rule-making process? Is the clinic receiving federal funds that mandate the eligibility criteria? Discovering exactly where and how the particular policy is made will help social workers as change agents to determine both the level and the setting where action must be focused to change this policy.

Interactivity of Environmental Levels and Settings

Environmental levels (local to international) and settings (the three branches of government plus nongovernmental community organizations) do not exist as separate, discrete entities but rather are interactive components of the entire matrix of policy practice. Sometimes, the ultimate goal may be to bring about change in one setting, but action must first be directed to another. Using the example of the clinic eligibility criteria above, if the social worker discovers that this policy is determined by the federal funding that is being provided, it will be futile to focus change efforts on the director and the board of the local clinic. Although it would be important to bring them into the change process as significant stakeholders (see Box 1.2 for discussion of "stakeholders."), the primary change efforts will need to be focused at the federal level, either

TABLE 1.3   Policy Examples by Setting and Environmental Level

	Typical Policies by Setting			
Level of Policy Making	**Executive**	**Legislative**	**Judicial**	**Community Activity and Advocacy**
Local	Local housing authority waitlist policies, local practices of the child protection office, local human rights commission hearing procedures	City and town ordinances banning discrimination based on sexual orientation, county commissioner budgets, school board policy on sex education	City court rulings in municipal drug cases	Local Habitat for Humanity application procedures, local Planned Parenthood clinic policies on service delivery, grassroots organizations' policies, local gay-rights group's stand on gay-rights ordinance
State	State policies on Food Stamp eligibility, TANF, Medicaid, emergency housing; State Board of Health mandates for county services; State Board of Education policies to implement the federal policy of No Child Left Behind	State laws on gay marriage, provision of education to children with disabilities, local taxing authority, etc. plus the state budget funding social services	State appeals court and state supreme court rulings on state and local laws that are challenged	Policies of statewide nonprofit agencies such as Planned Parenthood, or Project Equality that provide guidelines for local group affiliation
Federal	Social Security Administration and Department of Health and Human Services policies that set the broad guidelines for implementing federal programs such as SSI, Food Stamps, TANF, etc.	Federal laws designed to provide services or mandate access to services such as the Civil Rights Act of 1965, No Child Left Behind	Supreme Court and other federal court rulings such as *Brown v. Board of Education* and *Roe v. Wade*	Policies of national affiliates of non-profit agencies such as Big Brother-Big Sister or Planned Parenthood that set standards for affiliation

toward Congress (if the eligibility criteria are written into the enabling legislation itself) or toward the executive office charged with implementation (if the eligibility criteria are set by an administrative rule or regulation that has been promulgated). Taking another example, advocates sometimes challenge restrictive laws in the appropriate court system. A local ordinance denying equal protection in employment for gay and lesbian people that could not be overturned even after the next election of the city council might be challenged in the state court system. If upheld by the state supreme court, advocates might then seek to have sexual orientation added as a protected class in state law that would supersede the local ordinance. Currently, several states have passed

laws to increase access to health care, particularly by finding some way for providing health care to those who do not have health insurance. Some advocates predict that when enough states have passed laws to demonstrate both the political and economic viability of some version of a single-payer plan, such a plan will be passed by Congress, negating the need for separate state plans. So although the initial goal may be to achieve change at one level, sometimes efforts are more effectively targeted at a different level in the beginning of the change effort.

It may be useful to think about the levels and settings in Table 1.2 as interlocking pieces of a puzzle that must be creatively manipulated during an advocacy campaign to finally create a path toward change. The social worker and allies move through the different levels and settings in a planned but flexible change effort to achieve their policy practice goals. For example, a social worker could learn more about the Conyers bill (HR676) to establish a single-payer system of national health insurance at a national conference. Back in her local community, she could begin to organize social workers through her regional NASW group and then include other professionals and fellow residents concerned about health care. Now she is operating in the local level of the community setting. Later, she uses her NASW network to begin a statewide organizing effort to lobby in the state legislature for a single-payer initiative in the state. Now she is operating at the state level in the legislative arena. At the same time, a national effort is under way to get the Conyers bill moving in Congress again, so this social worker encourages her group to join her in a letter-writing and e-mail campaign; in doing so, she has moved to the national level of the legislative area.

As in the health care SCS, each change effort in each setting at each level will likely require different alignments at different points in time, in order to be successful. The policy practitioner who is armed with knowledge and skills to practice at a variety of different levels and settings will be positioned to be successful in achieving policy changes over time.

Foundations of Policy Practice in Generalist Practice

The philosophy and mission of social work are based on a principle of helping people, both in their individual situations and in their collective circumstances. With the person-in-environment perspective situating individuals in the context of their social environments so thoroughly, social workers' attention is directed at both helping individuals change and at helping them change their environmental circumstances as well. This linkage of the person in the environment is found in the origins of the profession with both the settlement house movement and the charity organization societies.

Social justice, one of the core values of social work, serves as the basis for policy practice. The NASW Code of Ethics is clear in its emphasis on "promoting the general welfare" beyond the help offered for individuals. The approach of moving from "case to cause" focuses beyond the individual client to recognize others in similar situations and identify broad community needs in an effort to build support for policy changes. If many people are experiencing similar difficulties, it becomes more difficult to sustain adherence to the belief in the sole solution of personal responsibility; however, this circumstance makes it easier to make the case for a need for more systemic change through the invention of positive social structures to provide and sustain support for a large number of individuals.

Taking this approach, the targets of the change process are not individuals, but that which impedes client development or oppresses clients. Policy practice seeks to remove environmental barriers and to increase opportunities available to individuals and families. Social workers engaging in policy practice are proactively shaping and evaluating new service paradigms and

programs to address emergent needs. They are thoughtfully proposing policy-informed service-delivery systems that will be sensitive to the diversity of clients needing services.

Though policy practice is identified by some[13] as a recent development in social work education, it is in fact central to the history of social work as a profession and has long been part of what community social workers do when they find unmet needs. It could be that scholars are just now identifying and naming policy practice as the profession recognizes the need to focus on skill development in this area in order to prepare social workers for the reality of increasingly complex practice in communities in twenty-first-century United States and as actors on the world stage.

FIVE POLICY PRACTICE PRINCIPLES.   In designing a course to integrate policy discussions and skills with social work practice, Rocha and Johnson articulate the importance of incorporating five policy practice principles[14] to ensure that students acquire the skills both to help clients and to change the policy environment within which they must be able to function. Those principles of policy practice are derived from Iatridis[15] and include

- Determining the effect of social policy, through analysis, assessment, and implementation;
- Linking direct services to social reform efforts through both systems theory and person-in-environment approaches;
- Understanding how organizational policies set the scope and limits of practice;
- Participating directly in the policymaking process at all levels through action steps;
- Increasing social and economic justice in resource distribution in the social environment.

These principles are central to the work of social workers as they help individual clients both directly and indirectly by making their environments more supportive with a variety of resources within social services and beyond in the broader community.

STRATEGIC USE OF POWER.   Social workers, as both professionals and citizens, and their clients have the power to affect policy at all the different stages of the policymaking process, to ensure that communities become more just and equitable in their ability to meet the needs of all the people who live within them. This power to affect policy is at the root of our democratic form of government and policymaking, but too few chose to exercise that power. Some have even suggested that the social work profession has abandoned the policy work that is at its root.[16] Box 1.5 describes the passage of welfare reform when powerful interests were successful in making lasting change in policy.

BOX 1.5

Welfare Reform Case Study

The passage of "welfare reform" during the Clinton presidency in 1996 may be a good example of when social work was not successful in using its power to halt a dramatic change in the federal entitlement programs for low-income families. Under pressure from advocates from multiple political persuasions who saw the existing Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program as flawed and broken, with many clients "trapped in the system" and

oppressed by its policies, many states had already moved to develop reforms of their own state welfare programs, seeking waivers from existing federal regulations in the process. Having vowed to "change welfare as we know it" during his presidential campaign, Clinton proposed moving the AFDC program from an entitlement program to one that was time-limited and that emphasized moving single mothers (the primary caretakers of the children who were the major recipients of AFDC funds) from welfare to work. The resulting legislation created Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, the TANF program. Based on their experiences working with welfare mothers, many practitioners in the states argued for enhancing the state educational and job training opportunities to enable women to move from welfare to employment with wages sufficient to help them support their families and raise them out of poverty. As passed, the educational and job training opportunities were minimal, and child care funding has been cut most recently to reduce costs. Modifications continue to be made to both federal and state level welfare reform efforts, sometimes based on what research shows as most effective in practice in the TANF program. Unfortunately, the bottom-line issue in many states continues to be a reduction in the welfare rolls rather than any appreciable positive change in the outcomes for families. While some follow-up studies report that many former clients are now "better off," there are still substantial numbers of families who are worse off under welfare reform, no matter how states may define success. In fact, in their study of the ten years of the TANF program, Parrott and Sherman assert that while progress was made in both reducing childhood poverty and increasing the number of single mothers in jobs up until 2000, childhood poverty had increased and employment had decreased since 2000. They go on to state that the number of single parents who are both unemployed and not receiving either family or government assistance has increased. TANF, they state, is helping fewer parents who qualify, falling from 80 percent in the early 1990s to 48 percent in 2002.

Startlingly, this drop in TANF participation among eligible families accounts for more than half of the decline in TANF caseloads since 1996. Stated another way, more than half—57 percent—of the caseload decline during the first decade of welfare reform reflects a decline in the extent to which TANF programs serve families that are poor enough to qualify, rather than a reduction in the number of families who are poor enough to qualify for aid.

What is the lesson here? What can be learned from welfare reform about efforts to influence policy? How involved were social workers in trying to influence the outcomes of welfare reform policy? The NASW, social work's professional association, was involved in trying to influence the policymaking process from the first debates on welfare reform and in its reauthorization, but it is challenging to access that legislative advocacy record to understand the process in some detail. The association was involved, but to what extent were they able to mobilize social workers in communities? What changes did they seek? What direct strategies did they use with their allies in Congress to win over the opposition? Welfare reform serves as a reminder of what happens when social workers are not able to achieve policy changes that fit with the social work value base. Learning from past failings, social workers will learn how to involve others in policy practice and stand up to the forces that would seek to implement policies harmful to the most vulnerable people social workers serve.

Source: Parrott, Sharon and Arloc Sherman. "TANF at 10: Program Results Are More Mixed Than Often Understood." Center for Budget and Policy Priorities. 2006. www.cbpp.org/8-17-06tanf.htm (accessed June 26, 2007).

THE SOCIAL WORK PERSPECTIVE ON POLICY PRACTICE

Social workers do not have to be in political office or hold positions of power in order to affect policy. Social workers and social work students have both the skills and perspectives (concepts, values, and beliefs) that are important in the policymaking process. These skills and perspectives are rooted in social work's history and experience of working directly with people to address the challenges and needs they face in their daily lives. Now is time to examine these skills and perspectives in more detail to understand the foundation upon which can be built an enhanced skill set for policy practice.

Application of Generalist Practice Skills to Policy Practice

As students learn in their practice classes, the generalist practice skills gained in class and in supervised interactions with people in need can be applied in a variety of settings. This application includes macro-practice settings where the goal is not individual change or access to resources but is rather policy change so that whole groups of people may have access to needed resources. These generalist practice skills that are applicable to policy practice work are discussed below.

- *Engagement skills*   enable social workers to develop trusting relationships with a wide variety of clients from many different backgrounds and experiences. These same skills, applied in policy practice, foster the development and nurturing of relationships with actors in policy settings including legislators, state agency policy analysts, lobbyists, and representatives of constituent groups. All these participants in the policy process have different personalities and different perspectives on policy goals and the policy process. Building relationships across these different constituencies requires the ability to be open, honest, and respectful to all, while making one's social work perspective clear. As a participant in the process, social workers must earn the trust of others so they are seen as presenting facts and information to others in an honest, straightforward manner, without manipulation or the deliberate withholding of information counter to their own perspectives. That trust is gained when a social worker, while working with a client, acknowledges a variety of perspectives, pointing out the advantages and disadvantages of each of the options available. Although the policy practitioner may suggest that a given direction will achieve the goals in a more fair and equitable or even more efficient manner, the policy decision most probably is not his or hers to make. When a trusting relationship with the policy maker has been developed, the social worker will be able to develop an argument for a particular position with more credibility and salience for the policy maker. Power in the policy process is gained through the relationships that are developed. The interactive skills that help social workers establish and maintain these relationships are elemental to policy practice. Long-time policy practitioners realize that "it is really all about relationship."
- *Assessment skills*   that social workers use to understand the person in his or her environment can be applied to macro settings to identify strengths upon which change can be launched as well as needs for resources and opportunities for intervention. Assessment skills are applied to understand problems, analyze proposed solutions for their appropriateness of fit, and develop an implementation plan that takes into account all circumstances for the people involved.
- *Communication skills*   are essential to establishing and maintaining relationships with individuals and families. Social workers learn to "start where the client is" with active listening to understand the world from the individual's perspective. So too, in policy practice,

they rely on their whole repertoire of communication skills. Social work policy practitioners must be able to communicate with a variety of groups, including those in the opposition and those who are sitting on the fence. There are times when confrontation is important, but equally important is knowing when that time is and how to use confrontation skills judiciously. Being able to testify before a committee and make a case eloquently for a proposed bill is indispensable in some policy practice roles. Policy practitioners also use writing skills to prepare white paper reports on issues, talking points for legislative alert networks, and policy briefs to distribute to policy makers.

- ***Problem solving and negotiating skills*** are important in direct practice with individuals and families in generating alternative options for new directions and new actions to take. Frequently, in family work, social workers are in the middle trying to help the "sides" develop solutions that will result in a win-win situation for everyone. Similarly, in policy work, when policy practitioners have identified needs and developed alternative policies to address those needs, they are seldom able to see the details of proposed policies adopted *in toto.* Frequently, they must settle for a watered-down version or a partial step forward that is politically more palatable or fiscally more practical at a given period of time. With continued pressure and persistence, long-term goals may be realized later, but policy practitioners must find ways to negotiate and find common ground in the short term.
- ***Networking and collaborating skills*** are important in linking clients to needed resources as well as working with other professionals with families experiencing multiple challenges. Wraparound services that include all the service providers in a team with families are proving to be effective in helping families challenged with being at-risk of abuse and neglect. Many schools use interdisciplinary teams to plan and implement services for students with disabilities. These same skills come into play in policy practice efforts to find allies who will join together in support of legislative initiatives. Endorsements from a variety of perspectives are most helpful in demonstrating broad-based support for bills under consideration in both Congress and the state houses across the country. Using the networks of connections with other constituent groups and coalitions, as demonstrated in later chapters, is often essential to passing legislation. Understanding how to develop and maintain relationships and connections with other groups and individuals with common concerns is a most useful policy practice skill. Being able to find potential allies among traditional opponents can be especially valuable (see Box 1.6).

BOX 1.6

A Slice of History

When a family cap was proposed for the federal TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) program as it was developed to replace the AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) program, NASW along with a number of other groups opposed the family cap that would not have allowed an increase in a grant if another child was born to a woman already on welfare. Most organizations opposed the family cap based on the restrictions it would impose on income available to raise a family. The Catholic Church and other Catholic organizations joined in this opposition because of a fear that the cap might lead to an increase in the number of women seeking abortions. So organizations with different stances and beliefs on the issue of abortion itself found themselves on the same side of another issue and were able to defeat this restriction in the federal legislation.

Relevance of Generalist Practice Perspectives

Social workers engaged in direct practice with individuals and families in communities not only have skills that are valuable in policy practice activities, but they also have perspectives derived from their education and developed from their engagement in change processes with families, neighborhoods, and communities. Understanding the process of change and learning to be patient with that process is vital for effective policy practice.

- *Commitment to and belief in the possibility of change.*   Social work students often become involved in volunteer work with agencies and then get interested in the profession because they want to "help people." When pressed, most will talk about ways in which they want to help others change their lives or the conditions that they live in so that they can realize their dreams. Such help implies the belief in the capacity and will of people to change and to make decisions to change the circumstances of their lives. The belief in the possibility of individual change can be extended to include the possibility for organizational, neighborhood, community, state, and national change, both in the structures of policy-making bodies and in the policies themselves. Indeed, American history is replete with examples of the power of a few to make great changes. Sometimes that change has been sparked by an individual's decision to change or to act differently, much like people like to think of Rosa Park's decision on one day to refuse to give up her seat on the bus, a decision that sparked the civil rights movement and resulted in the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1965. As in the work for civil rights for African Americans and many other groups, sometimes many individuals have to act in many communities, for a long period of time, to achieve policy changes. And even then, the work is never completely done.
- *Commitment for the long haul.*   In developing trust with individual clients, social workers frequently need to convince those with whom they are trying to partner and engage that the social workers will be there for "the long haul." Treating people with dignity and respect means that social workers will "be there" for them when the need arises. In policy practice, social workers are also in it for the long haul. They know that policy change requires persistence and perseverance. Just because a fight for legislation in one session of the legislature is lost does not mean that advocates will not be back to fight the same issue next session. Social workers will recommit their time and energy. Even when legislation is passed, it is seldom possible to completely relax. Vigilance is important. Monitoring the ongoing implementation of policy requires commitment. Funds may not be allocated. Policies may not be enforced. Rules may be written that undercut the original intent of legislation.
- *Passion for social justice and empowerment.*   Social work's core professional value and belief in the dignity and worth of the individual leads social workers logically into advocacy efforts as they partner with traditionally oppressed populations to realign power structures so that all are represented and have a stake in the well-being of society as a whole. This passion for social justice makes the social work profession, as an organization with its stands on issues, more "left-leaning" politically than some other helping professions. Once people are understood as part of a social environment, social workers are obligated to try to help individual people change and to also help change their environments. After analyzing the barriers that exist in the environments of many people who are poor and vulnerable, social workers realize the need for change in the policies that set parameters around what they can do and achieve. The greater faith the profession seems to place in federal-level interventions to address pervasive social problems may stem from the historical involvement of

social workers in the development of federal programs during the New Deal. This perspective makes many social workers fall left of center in the political spectrum.

- ***Systems perspective in understanding issues.***   In working with individuals, social workers use the systems perspective to understand how all the elements in the environment interact with one another to facilitate or hinder the individual's ability to develop to his or her potential. The ability to conceptualize the societal issues and challenges from a systems perspective illuminates everyone's stake in creating solutions. The systems perspective also helps social workers understand social problems as not isolated but in a constantly changing interactive environment of problems, solutions, and other factors. Systems thinking also helps identify other overlooked aspects of the environment that can be brought into policy practice efforts.
- ***Ability to find common ground in disputes and disagreements.***   Working with individuals and families, social workers are frequently called upon to help settle disputes, sometimes between parents, sometimes between parents and their children, and sometimes among a whole group of family members. Those mediating and negotiating skills can be most helpful in policy practice as well when policy practitioners try to build coalitions around an issue. It is unusual for everyone concerned about an issue to see it from exactly the same perspective. Building a coalition in support of a solution involves getting coalition members involved in the solution-building process from the beginning so that differences can be resolved early.

Fresh perspectives and recent life experiences of the current generation of students will help shape the policy frameworks of the future. As members of the newest generation to enter the workforce, the enthusiasm and engagement of current students and recent graduates will promote policy discussions and deliberations moving into future realms and possibilities that are yet to be dreamed about.

A Recommitment to Policy Practice

This chapter identified some key factors that have led social workers to recommit to policy practice:

- Policy practice was a central activity in the profession's historical roots both in micro and macro practice.
- Policy practice is a major feature of the Code of Ethics.
- Policy practice allows social workers to enact their core value of social justice.
- Policy practice enables social workers to partner in the creation of a social environment more supportive of human potential.

Success in policy practice can work to erode social workers' self-doubt and feelings of powerlessness. Publicity about social workers' macro-change efforts can counter the negative public image of social workers and demonstrate their public commitment to positive social change. It is exciting to consider this reconnection with powerful forces for social change in light of the social reforms achieved during the Progressive Era, the New Deal, and the civil rights movement. This revitalization of social workers' roles in social change may attract more activist students to consider entering the profession as well.[17]

PREPARING FOR POLICY PRACTICE ROLES

Some social workers say they are not involved in policy practice because it really is not part of social work. Reviewing the NASW Code of Ethics and some of the discussion in this chapter should help convince any doubters that policy practice is not just part of social work, but an important part of

BOX 1.7

To Learn More . . .

Social work faculty regularly require students to form task groups for policy practice projects as a part of their policy or other classes. The range of projects is broad but all are focused on efforts to enhance the principles of social justice so central to social work practice. As Rocha and Johnson detail,

"Projects at the organizational level include working with public housing tenants to change a local HMO's [Health Maintenance Organization's] health care policies, increasing handicapped accessibility in an organization, recommending changes to address disability content more adequately in the curriculum, and using local churches as a resource for pregnancy prevention programs. Projects that have targeted community and state-legislative levels include empowering parent groups to contact state legislators to amend day care legislation, changing transit system policies regarding the location of bus routes in poor neighborhoods, creating a task force to investigate new trends in hunger in a local metropolitan area, and recommending changes in the implementation of child welfare policy." (p. 439)

Other student groups have raised awareness about various issues including homelessness, date rape, and gang violence through informational campaigns. Developing these policy practice skills through social work education allows students to graduate with experience and a sense of self-efficacy that may make it more likely they will engage in policy practice when working as social workers in the community.

Source: Rocha, Cynthia J., and Alice K Johnson, "Teaching Family Policy through a Policy Practice Framework." *Journal of Social Work Education, 33*(3) (1997), 433–444. *Academic Search Premier,* EBSCO*host* (accessed March 10, 2007).

the profession's role in communities. Some social workers say they are not engaged in policy practice because they do not know how to affect policy, do not know enough, and do not have the skills. This book is designed to ensure that you will not belong to that group (see Box 1.7 for one example assignment). Upon completion of this text, you will have the necessary skills and knowledge to tackle tough policy issues and exercise your power in thoughtful and ethical approaches to change policies for a more just society. Some social workers say they do not have the time to engage in policy practice. This text will demonstrate the multiple roles available in policy practice, from the caseworker who writes to her state and federal representatives about the need for more affordable housing so that people will no longer be homeless, to the social worker who runs for political office. Social workers can engage in policy practice as part of their social work positions in agencies or in time off by going to community forums, city council meetings, and other venues to voice their opinions. We hope to inspire you about the possibility of change so that you will make the time to engage in policy practice, no matter what your own personal time commitment may be. We hope to inspire some of you enough that you will take the leap and actually try out your policy practice skills in your own communities.

CONCLUSION

This chapter introduced you to how policy practice has been and continues to be a principal focus for social work practice. The roots of policy practice were situated in the beginnings of the profession, primarily in the settlement house movement, which provides a sound foundation for

policy practice in the twenty-first century as well. The next chapter will provide a brief history of how social workers have engaged historically in policy practice to increase an understanding about the historical and economic context within which policy practice occurs, a context that must be understood in order to select strategies that are likely to be successful in moving toward the goal of a more just society.

End of Chapter Resources

MAIN POINTS

- Policy practice is defined as using social work skills to propose and change policies in order to achieve the goal of social and economic justice.
- Policy practice is an integral aspect of social work practice, rooted in both its history and ethical stance.
- Policy practice can involve social workers across three different environmental levels from local, state, and national levels of intervention.
- Policy practice intervention may be made in community or grassroots settings and in the three branches of government: executive, legislative, and judicial.
- Policy practice skills are based on the generalist social work skills of engagement, assessment, communication, problem solving and negotiation, and networking and collaboration.
- Policy practice also incorporates social work perspectives such as the belief in the possibility of change, long-term commitment, a passion for social justice and empowerment, systems perspective, and the ability to find common ground.

Discussion Questions and Exercises

1. Check with your state NASW chapter to find out how social workers and NASW have been involved in supporting or opposing key legislation at the state level. What have been the priorities of the state's NASW Public Policy Committee? What have been some major successes? Invite advocates to class to talk about strategies they have used to create successful change efforts.

2. Visit both your state and the national NASW (www.socialworkers.org) Web sites to learn about this year's public policy priorities. Discuss these positions in class to determine how they fit with the NASW Code of Ethics.

3. Examine NASW's positions on issues in *Social Work Speaks NASW Policy Statements, 2009–2012,* 8th ed. (Washington, DC: NASW Press, 2009) to read about the profession's approach to a variety of contemporary issues. These policy statements are revised through NASW's Delegate Assembly of elected NASW members. Debate some of the more controversial issues in class to determine if there might be viable alternative views on the policies based on different understandings of the NASW Code of Ethics. If possible, examine older versions of the policy statements to determine how these positions may have evolved over time. You may also notice new policy statements that have emerged with more recent issues such as HIV/AIDS that were not included in previous editions.

4. Policy professors frequently have assignments for students to track legislation and write to their legislators about issues of concern in their communities.[18] Some social work students are going beyond these assignments and putting their policy practice skills to work in substantial projects even before they graduate. You may even have a policy project assigned in the policy class you are taking now. You are not alone. Students, since 1997, have entered their policy practice projects in the Influencing State Policy (ISP) Contest. Winners in the past have included groups focused on reducing disproportionality in youth incarcerated in secure facilities in one state and restoring adult dental benefits for low-income families receiving state assistance in another.[19] You may want to consider entering the contest yourself. See the ISP Web site (www.statepolicy.org/) for the guidelines and rules and to review recent winners.

Internet Resources

Note: When using the Web for policy research and information, it is important to evaluate each Web site for the value it has for the specific research you are conducting. Some Web sites seek to inform, while others seek to persuade. Many university libraries have guides to help increase your understanding of how to evaluate Web sites. Here is just one example: www.libraries.iub.edu/index.php?pageId=1482.

1. See www.globalvoicesonline.org/ for an international blog that is a nonprofit global citizens' media project, sponsored by and launched from the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at the Harvard Law School.

2. See www.grassrootsonline.org/ for how the Web is being used in community-organizing efforts to promote global justice issues.

3. For more information about H.R. 676 The United States Health Insurance Act or "Expanded and Improved Medicaid for All" see Representative John Conyers's (MI-D) Web site: www.house.gov/conyers/news_hr676_2.htm. On the site is a summary of the bill, first introduced in 2003; who and what services would be covered; and links to other sites providing information about the 47 million people currently uninsured in the United States and other sites of interest.

4. Influencing State Policy is an organization of policy professors and social workers from hundreds of social work programs across the country who joined together in 1996 to help faculty teach about policy practice at the state level. The organization grew out of a need to refocus policy and advocacy work to state government in the light of devolution of much policymaking to the state level from the federal level. Influencing State Policy has adopted as its slogan, "Policy affects practice, practice affects policy." Faculty share resources and teaching strategies through the ISP Web site at www.statepolicy.org/. The Web site also includes resources helpful to students. ISP encourages students to make trips to their state houses for social work lobby days. In 2007, over 5500 students participated in these state house events. Each year, Influencing State Policy sponsors a contest (as noted above) for both undergraduate and graduate students to promote involvement in the policymaking process at the state level. Robert Schneider, a now-retired social work professor from Virginia Commonwealth University, was the original convener of ISP.

5. In addition, visit NASW's Legal Brief Bank at www.socialworkers.org/ldf/brief_bank/about.asp. If you are a member of NASW you may view this searchable database of briefs filed by NASW in a number of different policy areas.

6. There are many Web sites that are particularly helpful for policy practitioners. Several of the more important ones are listed here, but you can find many more at

http://socialwelfarespot.blogspot.com/ a resource for information related to social welfare issues, and

www.charityadvantage.com/iaswr/data.asp, page on the Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research that lists many of the federal data sources.

Organizations engaged in research, advocacy, and policy analysis for low-income families, poverty, and welfare-related issues:

Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, www.cbpp.org/

Center for Law and Social Policy, www.clasp.org/

Children's Defense Fund, www.childrensdefense.org/

Child Trends, www.childtrends.org/

Citizens for Tax Justice, www.ctj.org/

Coalition for Human Needs, www.chn.org/

Heritage Foundation, www.heritage.org/

Institute for Research on Poverty, www.irp.wisc.edu/

Mathematica Policy Research, www.mathematica-mpr.com/

Urban Institute, www.urban.org/

Additional Readings

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2. Jansson, B. *Becoming an Effective Policy Advocate: From Policy Practice to Social Justice.* 5th ed. Belmont, CA: Thomson Brooks/Cole, 2008.

3. Schneider, R., and L. Lester. *Social Work Advocacy: A New Framework for Action.* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning, 2001.

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Endnotes

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2. U. Bronfenbremmer, *The Ecology of Human Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1979).

3. Robert D. Putnam, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," *Current,* no. 373 (1995), 3. *Academic Search Premier,* EBSCO*host* (accessed June 12, 2007).

4. Everett Ladd, *The Ladd Report* (New York: Free Press 1999). Matthew Reed, "Apathy and Its Discontents: Social Capital and Social Awkwardness in American Life," *New Political Science* 23, no. 3 (2001). *Academic Search Premier,* EBSCO*host* (accessed June 5, 2007).

5. Richard Stengel and Ann Blackman, "Bowling Together," *Time,* July 22, 1996. *Academic Search Premier,* EBSCO*host* (accessed May 30, 2007).

6. Sean W. Mulvenon, Charles E. Stegman, and Gary Ritter, "Test Anxiety: A Multifaceted Study on the Perceptions of Teachers, Principals, Counselors, Students, and Parents," *International Journal of Testing* 5, no. 1, 37–61.

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