
An Analytical Framework for Policy Practice: A Value Perspective
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Introduction

Today, the social work profession is challenged to reflect on its commitment to policy practice in the context of a conservative political ideology (Dubois & Krogsrud-Miley, 2005; Karger & Stoesz, 2006) that has and continues to dominate the national dialogue. This conservative political ideology shaped the devolution policies of the 1980s and the more recent fiscal and social welfare policies of both Republican and Democratic administrations. These policy trends contributed to an erosion of public funding for public and private social services (Gronbjerg & Salamon, 2002), eliminated cash entitlements for families with dependent children (Schneider, 2002), and opened up a debate on the viability and future of the Social Security Act of 1935. As a result of such trends, social work must consider policy practice as integral to social work in its assessment of the impact of these conservative policies on the most vulnerable of populations with whom the profession works.

Historically, the social work profession has been committed to the humanistic value of individual freedom and the democratic ideals of civic and social responsibility (Agnew, 2004). Individual freedom emphasizes the individualistic perspective of self-determination, choice, and personal responsibility; while, the democratic ideals of civic and social responsibility emphasize service and social justice (Agnew; Specht & Courtney, 1994). As the profession enters the 21st century, Ife (1997) states:

At the core of social work is a vision of humanity. This is expressed in various ways: the social work commitment to the worth of the individual; the continual reference to some idea of social justice; [and] the code of ethics that enshrines the values of humanism ... (p. 99).

According to Ife, it can no longer be assumed that society has a commitment to these historical values.

It is this belief in the dignity of each human being and pursuit of justice for marginalized populations that is proposed as the foundation of any policy practice framework. Humanism places value and dignity on the individual to grow and develop within a society organized to provide resources and opportunities. Social work is intended by its mission to work with the individual for personal change and to work with society for social and political change to provide these resources and opportunities.

Therefore, policy practice is driven by the humanistic values of freedom, the dignity and worth of the individual, and the responsibility of society to ensure equal access to economic, social, and political resources to fulfill basic human needs and sustain human development (NASW, 1999). Also, policy practice is shaped by a liberal ideology that acknowledges the role of government to protect the freedom of the individual and provide equal access to resources in order to ensure the individual pursuit of interests. This liberal political ideology incorporates the values of freedom, equality, and democracy (George & Wilding, 1993). Any policy practice framework must enable social workers to view social and political activism as a continuum of practice rooted in a humanistic/social justice perspective and a liberal ideology.

Statement of Purpose

It is the intent of this paper to examine the frameworks available to social workers for policy practice. Analyzing policy requires a social worker to integrate a variety of frameworks to produce one that is applicable to the policy/political arena. It also requires that a distinction be made between policy analysis to inform decision making and policy analysis for political action. Policy analysis to inform decisions requires a social worker to maintain an objective and value neutral perspective to generate policy recommendations. Policy analysis for political action also informs the decision makers, but requires the social work policy practitioner to analyze the policy in relation to social work values as well as to take action to implement the policy. Within this policy/political arena, a framework must address substantive, value, and environmental issues. No one framework can address all these issues, thus the necessity of integrating basic concepts of a number of frameworks. The frameworks to be examined for their contribution to this discussion include the analytical descriptive ((Dobelstein, 2003), value critical (Chambers & Wedel, 2005), value committed (Chambers & Wedel), and policy advocacy (Jansson, 2003).

Policy Practice Frameworks

Analytical Descriptive Framework

Dobelstein's (2003) behavioral model exemplifies an analytical descriptive approach to policy analysis. This model is firmly rooted within a social science research foundation. It is a logical model requiring the policy analyst to objectively define the social problem and evaluate all policy solutions to ensure that the preferred alternative can solve the problem. For the social work policy analyst, the behavioral framework with its emphasis on scientific data and research methods provides the knowledge required to understand the specifics of the policy as well as the ability to assess the efficiency and effects of the policy solution.

Dobelstein's model gives consideration to the social values that shape the normative definition of the social problem. However, it emphasizes the significance of value neutrality in policy development.

Value Critical Framework

The value critical framework, as discussed by Chambers and Wedel (2005), emphasizes the importance of value perspectives in policy analysis. This approach allows for and encourages value laden judgments as an integral part of policy analysis in contrast to the value neutrality of the behavioral model. According to Chambers and Wedel, the analyst expects that value conflicts will exist between those operating from different frames of reference as well as conflict within the policy analyst's own frame of reference. This framework acknowledges the significance of these differing value perspectives and allows the social worker to approach the policy process prepared to analyze policy using value based criteria.

Value Committed Framework

The value committed framework (Chambers & Wedel, 2005) goes beyond the acknowledgement of the role of values in policy practice and calls for social work activism on firmly held values such as social justice. This model implies the importance of political action to advance policy that rectifies social and structural problems through a distribution of resources and opportunities. Chambers and Wedel state:

There are moments when they [social workers] can be plausibly called by their professional commitments to all three [analytical descriptive, value critical, value committed] of these approaches. A calling to activism is recognizable in the roots of the social work profession-a calling to actively pursue particular strongly held positions based on fundamental professional values about how things ought to be as against a very different real world (p. 67).

The challenge then is to introduce a framework that acknowledges the significance of values and the responsibility of the social work policy practitioner to politically act to establish policy that alters conditions of social injustice.

Policy Advocacy Framework

Jansson (2003) advances a policy practice framework for political advocates. Jansson (2003) defines 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" (p. 13). Haynes and Mickelson (2006) advance political social work as a macro practice intervention that targets systems and structures of power for the purpose of changing policy on a local, state, or national level.

Jansson (1994) broadens the understanding of macro practice to include the significance of how political action and policy change may impact organizational and community change. The Jansson model details the tasks, skills, and competencies of policy practice, considers the context of policy development and the influence of values and ideologies, and views political action as an integral component of the model.

Discussion

Framework Linkages

All of the frameworks are consistent in their use of data to identify and describe the social problem as well as to inform policy choices. Each systematically incorporates a sequence in policy making that includes problem definition and the development of policy solutions, while acknowledging the context of values and ideologies that influence and shape the social problem and alternative policies. The frameworks also order an analysis of the efficiency and effects of the policy solution. They are consistent in determining justification for the distribution of scarce resources as well as the effects of the policy solution as to how the solution is a good and appropriate fit to solve the social problem.

Framework Distinctions

The frameworks differ in their understanding of the influence of values on policy choices, the role of the social work policy analyst in policy making, and the goal of policy practice. The behavioral framework roots its analytical process in social science data and research methods that prescribe a value neutral approach to policy choices. In contrast, the value critical, value committed, and policy advocacy frameworks acknowledge the role and significance of values and ideology in defining the problem and identifying the solutions while also utilizing the data. These frameworks integrate value criteria as a component of analysis unlike the behavioral model.

The frameworks also differ on the role of the social work analyst. According to the behavioral model, the policy analyst is to remain objective and value neutral in the process to make evident the best solution to the problem. The value critical and value committed frameworks both acknowledge the role of social work as not only analysts but policy actors who take action to change policy or impose a vision of how a society is to be through structural change. The policy advocacy framework incorporates and broadens the role beyond analyst and activist to a policy initiator (Jansson, 2003). According to this model, the policy practitioner/initiator is one who establishes a discourse with those stakeholders usually marginalized or outside of the policy making process and engages them in a process to shape and implement policy choices.

Finally, the frameworks differ as to the goal of policy practice. The behavioral model proposes that the goal of policy analysis is to address social problems through data analysis and to present the best solution. The value critical framework suggests that policy decisions are value laden and the goal of policy practice is not only to address social problems but to address political realities through analysis and change. The value committed framework adheres to the advancement of values that are considered the reality and truth, i.e., social justice. The goal of policy practice for the value committed framework is to impose such values on society through social and structural change. The policy advocacy framework proposes that the goal of policy practice is to initiate and shape policy solutions through a discourse inclusive of all stakeholders.

Conclusions

Jansson's (2003) policy advocacy framework provides a model for social work policy practice that integrates policy analysis for decision making and political action while advancing social work values. The model incorporates the concepts of the other frameworks through problem analysis, assessment of the impact of values and ideologies on problem definition and solutions as well as an analysis of the efficiency and effect of the policy choice. It distinguishes itself from the other frameworks in its proposal that policy practice incorporates practitioners as policy initiators, who act on social work values to propose policy developed in dialogue with other stakeholders and who politically advocate for the passage of the policy. According to the Jansson model, and in contrast to the other frameworks discussed in this paper, the model integrates political action for the enacting of policy as a legitimate task of the policy making process rather than an add on discussion regarding the importance of political action.

The Jansson's (2003) framework is a comprehensive approach that acknowledges policy analysis as a social science discipline, integrates values into the policy process, and places a unique emphasis on political action as a task of the policy making process. It bridges the gap between individual and policy/political practice, and incorporates concepts from the analytical descriptive, value critical, and value committed frameworks. It is applicable to legislative, organizational, and community policy and identifies the tasks, skills, and competencies to be practiced by social workers. Jansson's policy practice framework for political advocacy has great promise for social work in the 21st century.

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