
CHAPTER 2: ARTICULATING FOUR RATIONALES FOR PARTICIPATING IN POLICY ADVOCACY

This chapter discusses ethical, analytical, political, and electoral rationales for policy practice and policy advocacy, the importance of the ethical principle of “beneficence” to the work of professionals, and the ethical need to incorporate policy-related and policy-sensitive practice in social work practice. It makes an ethical case, using principles of social justice and fairness, that social work practice should also include policy practice that seeks to reform policies in agency, community, and legislative settings. Using examples of social policy research, it discusses how policy advocates should try to change policies so they conform to social science findings. It contends that social workers need to engage in policy advocacy to offset or counter special interests and politicians whose views run counter to social justice policies that help consumers and out-groups. It discusses why social workers should participate in electoral politics to help elect public officials with social justice perspectives.

CORE KNOWLEDGE

After studying this chapter, students should understand:

- a. The nature of ethical issues
- b. The importance of “beneficence” as an ethical principle to the work of professionals
- c. Why social workers need to engage in “policy-sensitive” practice and “policy-related practice” to advance the beneficence of their clients
- d. The ethical argument for policy practice and policy advocacy
- e. How the ethical principle of social justice suggests a need to engage in policy practice using the reasoning of philosophers like John Rawls
- f. How the ethical principle of fairness supports policy practice as advocacy for vulnerable populations
- g. Ethical reasons why governmental intervention in economic affairs is sometimes needed
- h. Differences in liberal and conservative perspectives
- i. Other ethical principles such as autonomy, freedom, preservation of life, honesty, confidentiality, due process, and societal or collective rights
- j. The nature of ethical dilemmas, such as situations where two (or more) ethical principles conflict and where ethical principles conflict with pragmatic realities
- k. Differences between deontologists, Utilitarians, and relativists
- l. How different ethical approaches can be fused with an eclectic approach
- m. How social science and policy research can yield findings that can improve social policies
- n. A political rationale for participation in policy advocacy by social workers
- o. Why “self-interested” policy advocacy is sometimes ethical
- p. Why social workers need to work to change the composition of government so that it contains more decision makers with social-justice perspectives

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Discuss the assertion: Social workers who focus on their clinical work “ought not be expected to do more,” since they are attending to their clients’ well-being (or beneficence).
2. Discuss the ethical rationale for the argument that direct-service work should include policy-sensitive and policy-related activities and dimensions. Enumerate specific sensitivities or actions that fall under each of these categories.
3. Discuss the assertion: Without policy advocacy, the social work profession becomes, in effect, an apologist for existing institutions rather than a force for social reform.
4. Discuss the merits of Rawls’ central argument that the “rational person” would likely choose to live in a society like Sweden rather than the United States when operating under the "veil of ignorance."
5. Review Policy Advocacy Challenge 2.2 “Empowering Clients or Citizens to Seek Social Justice.” Can social workers sometimes help their clients participate in the social-policy process?
6. How do deontologists and Utilitarians differ in their approach to ethical reasoning? Name one strength and one weakness of each approach.
7. A dilemma in ethical reasoning is that people often encounter two (or more) “partly-good options” so that choices are often not clear cut. Discuss this reality with respect to the merits of active euthanasia or any other controversial policy issue.
8. Discuss some ethical dangers or pitfalls we might experience if we base our ethical choices entirely on consequences, such as funding only those medical treatments and procedures that have zero side effects.
9. Compare and contrast the assumptions of radicals, liberals, and conservatives with regard to government involvement in the economic and social order.
10. With reference to Policy Advocacy Challenge 2.6 (“Ethical Reasoning by Firing-line Social Workers”), discuss some reasons why staff members do not divulge to outside authorities the wrongdoing of some of the hospitals’ discharge practices.
11. Discuss the assertion that social workers do not act ethically when they seek to advance their own, or their profession’s, self-interest.
12. Discuss the assertion that social workers are more likely than other people to emphasize social justice, fairness, and honesty when they participate in policy practice.

13. Discuss how social-science and medical research has encouraged a revolution in policies dealing with people with schizophrenia during the past 40 years.
14. Discuss the divergent policy recommendations that Richard Herrnstein and Claude Fischer would support as a result of their different findings in The Bell Curve and Inequality by Design.
15. Discuss why it is critical that social workers work to change the composition of government. Compare and contrast policies that emanated from a relatively conservative and a relatively liberal presidency or governorship to illustrate the importance of ballot-based advocacy.

POSSIBLE ASSIGNMENTS

1. Take an issue from the current news and ask students to examine it from radical, liberal, and conservative perspectives. What underlying assumptions and values would shape (1) perceptions of the issue, and (2) likely solutions?
2. Take an ethical issue in the social services, perhaps a medical issue like euthanasia or the question of whether to commit some homeless persons to institutions. Identify specific ethical principles, as well as pragmatic realities, that impinge on the issue. Develop at least two possible solutions to the ethical dilemma posed by the issue. Discuss the problems or difficulties you have in resolving this ethical dilemma.

ASSIGNMENTS RELATED TO POLICY ADVOCACY CHALLENGES

Use Policy Advocacy Challenges to generate take-home or in-class exercises. For example:

- Review Policy Advocacy Challenge 2.3 “Imagining a Better Society” and ask students to identify current, inadequate policies and then to determine how policy advocates might begin working on initiating change.
- Have students view the video clip in Policy Advocacy Challenge 2.5 “Linking to an Advocacy Group” and ask them to identify why it is difficult for individuals to influence major policies single-handedly. Ask them to identify a policy that affects a population with whom they are working and then to connect with a specific advocacy group that is focused on changing policies relevant to that population.
- Ask students to discuss when social workers might ethically engage in whistle blowing and when this is unethical (Policy Advocacy Challenge 2.6 “Ethical Reasoning by Firing-line Social Workers”)
- Develop and frame a specific policy issue using both conservative and liberal ideology (Policy Advocacy Challenge 2.7 “Using Different Ideologies to Frame Issues – and Taking a Position”)
- Have students review the causes of homelessness in Policy Advocacy Challenge 2.9 and then discuss the various ways that policy advocates can intervene to address these root causes.

INTERNET EXERCISES

- Have students compare, contrast, and assess the two websites in Policy Advocacy Challenge 2.4 with respect to ideology, accuracy of facts, and completeness of discussion of policy issues
- Have students locate a relatively conservative and a relatively liberal website with respect to a policy issue that interests them and conduct a similar comparison

IN-CLASS EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISES

1. SIMULATION OF CHILDREN IN POVERTY

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The following involves a somewhat elaborate setup; however, the outcome is well worth the time invested. This simulation of children in poverty was used in a morning Child Welfare policy course with 48 second-year graduate students at an Ivy League university. Students were told that they were not to bring any food or drink for themselves to the next class meeting. They made the assumption that breakfast would be served, as the comments to that effect could be heard around the room. Students received no other information about the events of the next class. Food was the medium selected to convey the existence of poverty.

On the day of the simulation, three of the classroom's four doors were locked so that students had to wait in the hallway. The fourth door had a sign that said "Do Not Enter." Immediately before class time, the professor emerged from the classroom with 3" x 5" index cards, one for each student. On each card was a number from 1 to 48, thus each student was given a unique number. The only instruction given was for the student to find his or her number at the table and sit in the designated location.

The classroom was set up with four long tables and one small table in the front corner of the classroom. The solitary table was used to connote the separation of the very privileged [wealthy] child from the rest of society. That table was set up with a linen tablecloth; fine china, crystal, and silverware; copies of the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal*. The food on that table consisted of fresh-squeezed orange juice, an assortment of luscious fresh fruits (e.g., strawberries, kiwi, melons, etc.), cereal, pastries, and coffee, which was substituted for milk.

The places at the remaining tables were somewhat integrated, and the place settings varied. Different socio-economic levels were seated beside one another, although two or three poor "children" were on occasion grouped together. The place settings represented the differences in economic level. For example, a middle-class child was provided a fabric placemat, whereas a lower middle-class child had a vinyl one. An upper lower-class child was given a paper placemat, and a poorer child had only a napkin with some food on it (e.g., a napkin was used only to keep the food from being placed directly on the table).

The differences in the food were intended to have an immediate visual effect, as well as to provoke thoughts and feelings. Those whose families had more financial resources ate cereal, juice, and a muffin. As the financial resources lessened, the quantity of the food decreased, as did the “quality” of what the food was served on. For example, the more affluent child had juice in a glass, the next group in plastic, and the next in part of a Styrofoam cup that had obviously been used before. Poor children did not drink juice, they drank water. Many of them ate a piece of a muffin, half of a small donut hole, or a small amount of cereal with water or dry, or perhaps ate nothing. Finally, there was one student who could not find his number anywhere. He represented the *homeless* child.

- a. It is best not to provide much prior instruction. Instead, ignore students’ questions. Students can be told that they are to take their seats and that class will resume at a specific time. It is recommended that the events be observed for 20-30 minutes. One suggestion is that the instructor may wish to provide some food for all of the students once the simulation has ended, but keep the food hidden from view. Process the experience. Ask students what they thought and felt, and then share your observations.
- b. Use Policy Advocacy Challenge 2.3 to divide the class into groups to develop a view of a more just American society—with each group presenting its “dream of a more just society” and what specific policy changes they would prioritize to actualize the dream.

2. UNDERSTANDING STRUCTURAL DISADVANTAGE:

TEACHING TOOLS

By Essie Seck, Ph.D.

Policy practice is often initiated on behalf of out-groups who lack access to social and economic resources because of structural impediments in society. The structural impediments—institutionalized racism or sexism, ethnocentrism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, or ageism—place groups at risk for experiencing selected forms of deprivation. According to Jansson, these include material resource deprivation, deprivation of opportunity, developmental deprivation; physical deprivation; interpersonal deprivation; and deprivation of personal rights. To effectively address these deprivations requires confronting structural disadvantage. These tools were designed to help students understand the basic nature of institutionalized forms of disadvantage.

In this teaching-learning segment, readings are assigned describing the nature of disadvantage for specific groups at risk such as African-American, Latinos, Asian-Pacific Islanders, Jews, women, homosexuals, the aged, and children. The instructor lectures on institutional racism and helps students generalize the basic concepts and constructs to other groups. Two handouts are useful: (1) A Framework to Understanding Individual and Institutional Racism, and (2) The Social Status of Blacks and Women: A Comparison. To apply this content, a variety of teaching methods have been used:

1. Students may view a video on sexism, completing the blank framework on institutional sexism during this process. They identify the beliefs, attitudes, practices, structure, and consequences revealed. A discussion follows. A video that has been

effectively used is “POV: Rated X” which consists of interviews with assorted men that provides a candid, disarming look at sexism and American male attitudes and prejudices about women. The same process can be utilized to further explore institutional racism, using the blank form on racism. A video on the Tuskegee Syphilis Study has been used for this purpose. The Tuskegee Syphilis Study was “a notorious medical experiment (where) government doctors promised Black men in Alabama free treatment for syphilis (but in fact) withheld treatment (even though the research) was authorized by the U.S. Public Health Service, paid for with taxpayers dollars, and conducted by government doctors.” (The experiment lasted from 1932 into the 1970s.)

2. An out-group can be selected and the class can identify the structural dimensions from assigned reading during a give-and-take discussion.
3. Students can break into groups and select an out-group. Based on the readings and other knowledge, they complete the framework on structural disadvantage for that group. A discussion follows. Efforts are made to understand the unique problems facing particular groups as well as the similarities in various forms of structural disadvantage.

Handouts for the Preceding Exercises

- A. To develop a handout titled “A Framework to Understanding Individual and Institutional Racism,” construct a two-by-five table with the following terms in each cell (see example on the following page).
- B. Groups can be given a blank table where the labels at the top and sides of the preceding 2 by 5 cell table are placed on the table, but where the group fills in the cells for specific out-groups. The blank table can be used to examine racism, sexism, or any other form of prejudice against an out-group.
- C. A table titled “The Social Status of Blacks and Women: A Comparison” is useful. (It can be found in Ian Robertson, Sociology, New York: Worth Publishers, 1981, p. 319.) The table shows similarities between blacks and women in terms of common stereotypes, forms of discrimination, similar problems, and supposed attributes.

A Framework to Understanding Individual and Institutional Racism

	Individual	Institutional
BELIEFS	Negative stereotypes of non-whites. The presumption of white supremacy and non-white inferiority based on supposed attributes of non-whites. Justification of status	The presumption of white supremacy based on race, culture, and religion
ATTITUDES	1. Fear 2. Prejudice 3. Hostility	Commitment to maintaining the relationship of white superiority over non-whites
PRACTICES	Avoidance Overcompensation Paternalism Treatment of individuals as representatives of group Negative verbalizations Hostile Actions	Neglect Discrimination Isolation Segregation Exclusion Exploitation Physical Attack Genocide
STRUCTURE	Custom Informal rule of Behavior Conscious and unconscious behavior patterns	Laws Formal rules and policies Informal policies and practices
CONSEQUENCES	Intrapsychic Interpersonal	Power and dominance Political, economic and social National and international

3. ETHICAL CONNECTIONS BETWEEN POLICY AND PRACTICE

By Jed Shafer, MSW

The history of all societies is the history of class struggles. - Karl Marx

In class video presentation: *Bramwell*

Bramwell (Carlton UK Television, 1995) is a fifty-minute video, originally shown in the United States as a series on Mobil Masterpiece Theater on public television. This episode (episode 5 in the series) takes place in Victorian London and begins when a pregnant laundry maid arrives at a thrift clinic run by a female physician. The maid is white and the father of the child is black. The female physician finds her Victorian outlook challenged by legal, moral, and professional issues which, in many ways, parallel conflicts reflected in today's social policy debates on health policy, race, adoption, public/private partnerships for social welfare delivery, and assistance to the poor.

As the class watches this very emotional drama unfold, they have an opportunity to see the impact of Elizabethan Poor Laws on social welfare delivery and it offers a nice segue into discussing the impact of that era on contemporary social welfare policy thinking.

I found students became very interested in discovering links between policy and practice after seeing this video. The video also humanizes the somewhat abstract ethical and moral dilemmas encountered in social work policy and practice.

4. CLARIFICATION OF VALUES

By Kathryn Wright, MSW

Purpose:

To reveal how prejudices and values influence decisions.

Procedure:

Form a group of 3-4 people.

Assume the following story to be true.

Read the following scenario and follow the directions.

Select a spokesperson and be ready to discuss with class.

Scenario:

The Nuclear War

The United States has been involved in a nuclear war. Ten people find themselves in a shelter capable of supporting only six people for the year of necessary confinement. There are no other shelters which survived the attack.

Your problem is to evict 4 people so that the remaining 6 may survive. After your group has come to a decision, place a plus sign (+) in front of the names of those individuals the group has decided may live in the shelter and a zero (0) in front of the names of those the group has decided to evict. Be prepared to state why you either chose to keep or evict them.

The ten people are:

- 1) Bookkeeper, 31 years old
- 2) Bookkeeper's wife, six months pregnant

- 3) Black militant, second year medical student
- 4) Famous historian, author, 42 years of age
- 5) Hollywood starlet, single, dancer
- 6) Biochemist
- 7) Rabbi, 54 years old
- 8) Olympic athlete, all sports
- 9) College student
- 10) Policeman with gun (they cannot be separated)