Social Policy

From Theory to Policy Practice

Bruce S. Jansson

Second Edition

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Bruce S. Jansson
University of Southern California

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To Jane Addams, whose vision of a profession that prized social activism stimulated me to write about policy practice

A CLAIREMONT BOOK

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Preface

Near the turn of this century, Jane Addams and her colleagues envisioned a profession that would make social activism integral to its work. This bold vision challenged the members of the fledgling profession to expand their work beyond interpersonal transactions. Unlike professions like medicine, law, nursing, or psychology, social work has retained this vision, even through ensuing conservative periods and in the face of pressures to make counseling the exclusive focus of the profession.

This idealistic vision has endured; however, it has not been consistently reflected in the school curricula or in the professional work of social workers in ensuing decades. Although many factors have contributed to this situation, I believe that the vision of Addams is not outmoded; indeed, many features of contemporary society—persistent patterns of inequality, major social problems like AIDS and homelessness, and attacks (such as funding cutbacks) on prerogatives of the profession—make the vision as compelling as it was nearly a hundred years ago.

The settlement-house leaders provided a vision but did not provide a detailed methodology for implementing it. The social work profession needs a framework in order to provide strategies and skills for reforming policies. This framework must be simple enough for a wide variety of practitioners to understand, yet complex enough to avoid suggesting that social change can be reduced to a few steps. It must be relevant for a range of professionals, including direct-service staff. In addition, the framework must be readily applicable to agency, community, and legislative settings. Rather than being limited to a single skill or style, the framework should include analytic, political, interactional, and value-clarifying skills; these skills reflect the actual work of those who strive to change policies. Further, the framework should bely the widespread impression that policy practice can be understood only by specialists, but it should also lay the groundwork to allow some social workers to enter policy-specialized positions. Finally, to be true to Addams's vision, the framework must emphasize advocacy for the powerless and oppressed.

In the decades following the progressive era, the profession failed to develop this kind of framework; the reasons for this failure are discussed in Chapter One of this text. I hope readers will agree that the framework presented in this book, which is a sweeping revision of the first edition (entitled *Social Welfare Policy: From Theory to Practice* and published by Wadsworth in 1990), meets some of the criteria listed in the preceding paragraph. Unlike the first edition, which was organized around the four policy-practice skills, the chapters in this edition are focused on the six policy-practice tasks: setting agendas, defining problems, writing proposals, enacting policies, implementing policies, and assessing policies. I reorganized the book in this way to provide a more concrete, task-focused approach to policy practice.

I argue that policy practice is an interventive discipline that holds promise of advancing reforming activity in agency, community, and legislative settings. By using such terms as *policy practice, policy tasks, policy skills,* and *tactics,* I have tried to convert social policy into a ''doing'' discipline with analytic, political, interactional, and value-clarifying dimensions. By placing policy practice squarely within ecological or systems frameworks that guide social work practice, I have sought to make it integral to the professional role. Further, I suggest throughout the book that policy advocacy to help the powerless and oppressed should be an integral part of social workers' policy practice.

The book is organized into four parts. In Part One (Chapters One through Four), I provide a rationale for policy practice that rests on an analysis of the following: the politicization of human services, pressing social problems in contemporary society, the interests of the profession, ecological frameworks, and the moral obligations of social justice and fairness. I discuss the policy-practice framework and ground it (and discussions in succeeding chapters) in a case study of policy practice. To provide orienting perspectives, I examine ''the field of play'' in a new Chapter Four that discusses policy-making procedures, key players, and the context of policymaking in agency, community, and legislative settings.

The remaining chapters focus on the six tasks of the policy-practice framework: agenda building, problem defining, and proposal writing are discussed in Part Two (Chapters Five through Nine); enacting policy is discussed in Part Three (Chapters Ten through Twelve); and implementing and assessing policy are discussed in Part Four (Chapters Thirteen and Fourteen). I conclude with an epilogue that explores strategies for making policy practice an integral part of the social work profession.

The aim of this book is to provide a methodology for carrying out, within contemporary society, the social reform that the settlement-house pioneers envisioned. When I list the perspectives that I hope graduates in social work will possess as a result of their social-policy curriculum, ''willingness to assume leadership in improving agency, community, and legislative policies for disempowered groups'' holds a prominent position. I hope this text contributes to that goal.

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Acknowledgments

I first wrote about policy practice in 1984, in *The Theory and Practice of Social Welfare Policy* (Wadsworth). My efforts in revising and refining policy practice in the ensuing years, as well as my work on this text, has been made easier by the work and encouragement of colleagues across the country.

For words of encouragement about the viability of policy practice as an intervention method, I would like to thank Professors Chauncy Alexander, Ron Dear, George Haskett, Jacqueline Mondros, John Flynn, Scott Wilson, Will Richan, Barbara Friesen, Jack Rothman, Michael Fabricant, Aileen Hart, Steve Burghardt, Paul Kurzman, Marie Hoff, Charles Guzetta, Harry Wasserman, Howard Parad, Len Schneiderman, Rick Reamer, Jay Cohen, Terry Mizrahi, Mimi Abramovitz, Marie Weil, and Harold Lewis. In various master-teacher workshops that I have led under the aegis of the Council on Social Work Education, participants have been enthusiastic about using policy practice to revitalize the teaching of policy; I have benefited from their many suggestions. Professor Ram Cnaan and his colleagues provided useful insights at a workshop I led at the School of Social Work of the University of Pennsylvania, where I gave the Kenneth L. M. Pray Lecture as I was working on this manuscript. Norm Wyers and his colleagues at the School of Social Work at Portland State University have been leaders in teaching policy practice. They persuaded me to reconsider the role of social workers' personal beliefs in shaping policies and in focusing more specifically on line practitioners. I also benefited greatly from discussions with Nancy Amidei when she was a Milner lecturer at the University of Southern California—and from her ringing endorsement of policy activism as part of social work. Drawing on the suggestion of the late Griff Humphreys that I move my discussion of ethics nearer the start of this edition, I have devoted the second chapter of this book to social justice and equity. Professor Sheila Kamerman persuaded me to use the term *social policy* rather than *social welfare policy* to conform to international usage.

This manuscript was vastly improved by the insights of those who read full-length versions, including John D. Morrison, Aurora University; Elizabeth Thompson Ortiz, California State University, Long Beach; and Mary K. Rodwell, Virginia Commonwealth University.

I would like to thank Professor Ramon Salcido for commenting on Chapters Ten, Eleven, and Twelve; Professor Wilbur Finch for commenting on Chapters Four and Thirteen; and Adjunct Professor Anneka Davidson for comments on Chapter Five. Other colleagues have encouraged my line of inquiry, including Professors June Brown, Elsie Seck, Madeleine Stoner, and Sam Taylor, as well as Adjunct Professor Kathryn Wright. Professor Wilbur Finch has long been a supportive colleague; he has given me far more suggestions and encouragement than he has received in return. As the Dean of my school, Rino Patti created a working environment that enabled me to complete this revision.

In acknowledging those who have offered their assistance, support, and suggestions, I would like to add that any errors of omission or commission in this book rest on my shoulders alone.

I would like to thank Claire Verduin at Brooks/Cole for encouraging me to develop this new edition. Laurel Jackson skillfully moved the book through production, and Eve Kushner made many excellent editing suggestions.

Finally, I want to thank Betty Ann for her forbearance and support during the years I have labored on policy practice.

—Bruce S. Jansson

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PART ONE
POLICY PRACTICE: THE FOURTH DIMENSION OF SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

Chapter One argues that policy practice is as important as the other three interventive disciplines: direct-service, community, and administrative practice.

We see how policy practice has emerged over the last three decades in response to other changes. Unlike periods in the United States when the welfare state was virtually nonexistent (before the New Deal) or relatively simple (from the 1930s through the 1950s), social workers encounter policy issues virtually everywhere in the 1990s. They need to be conversant with social policies *and* be able to seek changes in them, both to help clients and to advance the interests of the profession.

Chapter Two discusses moral imperatives to engage in policy practice. Using the moral principles of beneficence, social justice, and fairness, we argue that ethical professionals should supplement their one-on-one counseling by changing policy in agencies, communities, and legislatures.

Chapter Three provides a framework for policy practice with a political and economic context, six policy-practice tasks, and four policy-practice skills. We argue that the concept of power needs to receive more attention in social work theory and curriculum.

Chapter Four contains an overview of legislative, governmental, social-agency, and community arenas. Policy practitioners need to understand the institutions and settings where they engage in their work. We discuss legislative procedures, governmental institutions, the political economy of organizations, organizational structures, and community institutions.

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