

CHAPTER 7

A Model of Social Work for a Sustainable World

The premise of this book is, simply, that if social work is to continue to be a viable, meaningful profession that addresses the problems of our age, it must consider a paradigm that will help secure a sustainable future for us all. In our exploration of literature on the interconnectedness of systems, we have seen that sustainability is not just a concept that applies to the natural environment. Our environment is the base upon which all other institutions are built; thus, our polity, our economy, and our social systems must reflect the principles of sustainability. They must value human life and the lives of all species; they must promote fairness and equality, as well as economic and social justice; they must support decision making that involves participation and partnership rather than domination; and they must protect our Mother Earth.

In chapter 1, I attempted to help us shift our thinking about how social workers view the world, from a narrow lens, and focus on the individual and his or her immediate context to a broader lens that allows us to connect individual failings with institutional shortcomings. This is certainly not a new connection. Recent efforts to expand and connect the macro and micro worlds in the study of human behavior and the social environment evidence the growth in our understanding of the interconnectedness of systems.

Other new knowledge suggests that our long-term viability on this planet may also depend on our understanding of two additional critical connections. If we are to create caring communities, locally and globally, we must do so knowing that we are one world, in science and in spirit. This does not mean one world government or one world religion. Rather, it means that from a multiplicity of

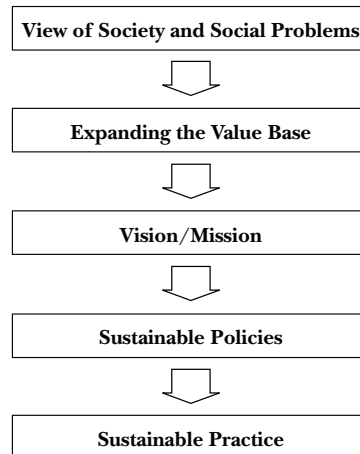
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cultures, belief systems, values, and traditions we can fashion communities and institutions that will both nurture diversity and meet common human needs. We can do this only through a disconnect from the old world order, wherein final arbitrations are made via violence, militarism, and warfare. This old mode of problem solving is ultimately obsolete and will not sustain us or the planet. We must transform our problem-solving strategies to a partnership approach and model of society focused on preserving and nurturing the planet and all its inhabitants.

Our model of practice, then, should inculcate this view of the world, these values, and a mission, policies, and practice approaches that reflect sustainability.

THE MODEL

How social workers see the world and its problems leads them to a professional mission and strategies of intervention. The model shown in figure 2 is one way of conceiving of a model of social work practice intended to lead us to a more sustainable future.

Figure 2 Conceptual Model of Social Work

OUR VIEW OF THE WORLD

Our new understanding of the world comes from viewing the behavior of individual and larger systems through a wide lens. This is how we can see the interplay within and between natural and social systems. Reality is interconnected, holistic, and epistemic, as it is defined by all the groups and interests that make up the social context of any human enterprise, large or small.

Furthermore, the behavior of any system is not totally rational. It acts upon and is influenced by natural forces, politics, economics, cultural values, and individual dreams. It is in a constant state of flux and is not linear in nature. New systems thinking suggests that systems never return to the exact same state as before change or intervention took place. Life on the river is socially constructed. How each person perceives the danger of falling over the waterfall depends on his or her place on the river, in a small vulnerable raft or in a large steamship, or on the safety of the land. Different people experience the journey, the current, differently. Thus arises the relevance of critical theory to this worldview.

THE VIEW OF SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS

In a new model of sustainable social work, society and social problems are seen from a postmodern perspective. The current view of social welfare and social work holds two perspectives on the nature of society and social institutions, which encompass most if not all of the social theories: order and conflict. The order perspective, sometimes referred to as the functional or systems perspective, views society as orderly and stable, with all institutions working together to maintain order and a consensus on the functions of those institutions. There is agreement on the rules, and all members of society contribute to the support of the institutions (Durkheim, 1972; Parsons, 1951; Weber, 1946). Neoconservative and liberal political perspectives are based on this view. Inequalities and problems necessitate incremental change in otherwise healthy institutions. The order perspective dominates social welfare in the United States (Mullaly, 1997).

In contrast, the conflict perspective views institutions and groups as in constant struggle with opposing interests and views

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about society and its functions. The power of dominant groups, not consensus, holds together the parts of the system. Inequalities are inherent in the power structure of the capitalist system, and radical change is needed. Competition is natural in such a system. Social democracy and Marxism both hold this perspective of society. These two political ideologies advocate wide participation by workers and citizens, which tends to flatten, if not eliminate the hierarchy, and emphasize shared power.

Social problems from an order perspective are seen as problems of individuals who are unable or unwilling to follow the rules. Through some individual deficit, trait, or inadequacy, those people do not conform to the expectations of society. A more liberal explanation of these deficits asserts that individuals sometimes have difficulty navigating complex modern societies and may need assistance. Changes in their immediate environment or advocacy for greater access to services can help alleviate the casualties of capitalism. Much of social work's early casework was based on an individual explanation of social problems. At present, most social workers trained in the systems perspective do not subscribe wholly to this view and acknowledge a liberal perspective of social disorganization (Mullaly, 1997). Thus, we may need to improve the institutions to deal with problems that individuals in a capitalist economy and dominator society face.

Social problems from the conflict perspective are structural in nature. They do not stem from a personal deficit but are inherent in a system of oppression, where those who have the capital, wealth, and power dominate those who do not. Therefore, basic institutions must change to protect and enhance human welfare.

A third perspective is the postmodern structural social work. At first glance, structural social work appears to be part of the conflict perspective of society and social problems (Mullaly, 1997). This approach, critical of the social structures of the society, has as its major thrust tackling the social injustice and marginalization of many groups in our society, through change from within and without institutions. Its ideology and values are socialist, embracing a radical social work heritage. What distinguishes it as a new paradigm is its postmodern view of society, which is congruent with the thinking we have been exploring.

Structural social work's approach stems from critical theory and challenges false dichotomies, asserting that there is more

than one way to conceptualize society and social problems. For example, it suggests that oppression is multifaceted; that is, not just racism or classism. Though the women's movement, the gay rights movement, and indigenous movements may have some commonalities, the groups that constitute these movements feel and experience oppression differently by different groups at different points in time (Mullaly, 1997). Thus dialogue about each group's construction of oppression, a process highly valued by feminist, multicultural, and other critical theory approaches, is an important part of structural social work practice that allows for various worldviews of the social world. Structural social work is congruent with sustainable thinking in its transformative goal and its location of social problems as structural. But some expansion is needed.

The lens on society and social problems again must be widened to see the interconnectedness of all the elements of the social web of life in all the institutions of society, for they all contribute to both the health and the dysfunction of the systems. The thrust of structural social work to change the capitalist economy with the goal of greater social justice will not, alone, ensure a sustainable future. The shortcomings of capitalism must be understood and approached in connection with failings of other institutions such as the excesses of industrialization and consumerism, the lack of involvement of citizens in dialogue and decision making around needed changes, the need for environmental imperatives of resource conservation in global development, the need to achieve human rights, and population stabilization. Social problems are interconnected global problems of survival and must be conceptualized within this broad context.

A sustainable view of society challenges the dichotomy that society is either order based or conflict based. New systems thinking purports that institutions at all levels are in a constant state of flux, not order, and renew themselves through interactions that are consensual and conflictual. Lasting change will not be imposed from the outside or top down but will occur as a process of interaction of the elements at every level. Major movements such as the U.S. civil rights movement, the antiapartheid movement in South Africa, the revolution in Poland, and the demise of communism in Eastern Europe illustrate this social change that involves efforts at multiple levels. Many of these movements used local and global

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action, nonviolent strategies, dialogue and collaboration, and conflict tactics.

Because the new paradigm of systems thinking is holistic, social problems are the consequence of unsustainable elements in all institutions: the economy of unlimited growth and a global market system of profit over people, political systems that are closed to the direct involvement of citizens, and a societal view of family as consumers and receivers of service rather than active participants in the creation of and solution to social problems. This means that individuals and institutions contribute to social problems and are involved, interactively, in developing the solutions.

Finally, a sustainable view of society and social problems also requires taking a look at the interconnectedness of the material and spiritual aspects of social life and social institutions. In each of the previously mentioned social movements, the contributions of religious figures and moral leaders in opening up dialogue about the meaning of the human struggles was and is as important as any decision by a formal political leader. Consider the words of Václav Havel, a truly inspiring spiritual political leader, who believed in the power of the populace and led the Czech Republic's velvet revolution:

The only real hope of people today is probably a renewal of our certainty that we are rooted in the Earth and at the same time, the cosmos. This awareness endows us with the capacity for self-transcendence. Politicians at international forums may reiterate a thousand times that the basis of the new world order must be universal respect for human rights, but it will mean nothing as long as this imperative does not derive from the respect of the miracle of Being, the miracle of the universe, the miracle of nature, the miracle of our own existence. . . . The truly reliable path to coexistence must be rooted in self-transcendence. (1994, p. 613)

In summary, society and its problems are conceptualized holistically in a sustainable paradigm of social welfare and social work. Society is the result of interacting and self-renewing systems. The cause of and solutions for social problems are not found in individuals alone, nor in the structure of society alone; they involve both. We must assess what needs to be changed by examining the interconnected unsustainable, degrading, and dehumanizing processes as well as the devastating results on the environment and its species. In short, how we deal with problems cannot be separated from the results we attain.

But how do we know where we want to go? What values ground us as we think about what needs to be done?

EXPANDING THE VALUE BASE

The history and culture of the United States have shaped the values of the profession of social work, as practiced in the United States. Most of us would argue that, despite the recognition of multicultural worldviews of a vast heterogeneous population of immigrants, the American ethos has embraced, over centuries, core values of the Protestant work ethic, egalitarianism, individualism, patriarchy, Judeo-Christian values, democracy, and capitalism. These have influenced our beliefs that if people work hard in the application of their individual talents, opportunities are endless. They have also influenced our darker side. For when people differ from the American ideal of the Caucasian male, they receive differential treatment in the form of individual and institutional discrimination and oppression (Day, 2000). Thus, Native Americans, women, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, and other deviantly perceived groups have suffered social injustice in this country.

In the history of social welfare in the United States, social workers have played important roles in fighting this oppression, sometimes aligning themselves with the oppressed. For example, some were members of labor's rank-and-file movement in the 1930s and later advocated and organized for civil rights in the 1960s. However, the current thrust of social work is not on the structural problems of social injustice but on a narrow focus of work with individuals and families and their treatment. We mediate by helping them navigate the interface between themselves and social institutions (e.g., the workplace, the welfare office their child's school). Our current code of ethics supports this focus.

Although the 1999 version of the code expands our responsibilities to include the broader society, only four of the fifty-one standards pertain to social change at a broader level. The core values are service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence. It is in the translation of these values to the standards where the focus becomes narrowed to clients, colleagues, practice settings, and the profession (Congress, 1999; NASW, 1999). My experience with students over the past twenty years has been that, when

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asked how what they do relates to social justice, students have had a hard time conceptualizing this value, given the narrow focus of their work. Thus, the response is usually something like, "By offering them assistance and service it contributes to social justice." This may be because one of the aims of the code of ethics is to serve as a guideline for adjudicating those who demonstrate unethical conduct in the workplace and in private practice. But it appears that this purpose has become a driving force behind the narrow focus of the code on the relationship between client as individual and worker.

It is interesting to contrast the NASW's code of ethics with the statement of ethics and principles of the International Federation of Social Workers (2005). The range of models of social work is much greater in the member countries that belong to this federation. The mission and the standards embrace a much broader view of social work in the three categories of human rights and human dignity, social justice, and professional conduct. One could argue that the greater emphasis on human rights is due to the human rights violations in countries where torture or ill treatment of women is more prevalent than in the United States. However, all the statements on human rights and social justice certainly apply to this country. This country affords its citizens many individual rights and freedoms that other countries do not. However, the degree of inequality in income and wealth and social indicators demonstrating differential treatment of minorities and women in areas such as poverty, employment, education, and rate of incarceration do not indicate a country that is living up to its potential for social justice and human rights, given our status as the wealthiest country on earth.

Thus, though the stated values of social work in the United States may be humanitarianism, equality, social justice, the facilitation of self-determination through participation in government, and more equitable distribution of resources, the focus of social work has been to minimize oppressive elements of the system in which it finds itself rather than to change the system (Mullaly, 1997). The values are progressive, but the difficulty comes in trying to realize these ends within the existing institutional order of society.

The existing values articulated in the code of ethics are not bad ones, but they do not reach beyond to a vision of change that is needed to sustain the welfare of species around the globe. Table 5

Table 5 Expansion of Social Work Values

Theme	Values
New systems thinking	View of world and new knowledge as <i>epistemic</i> ; diversity of “constructions” no “one” reality. <i>Interdisciplinary</i> (cross-interest-group) and <i>interconnected</i> (nonlinear) assessment of problems and solutions. Maximum <i>participation</i> of citizens in the web of decision making. Belief in systems’ penchant and abilities to <i>self-renew</i> vs. imposing solution from position of power. <i>Process</i> and <i>product</i> are equally valued. There is no way to peace; peace <i>is</i> the way.
Spirituality and science	Interconnectedness (same as above). <i>Science</i> is always <i>value</i> based. <i>Problem identification, solutions</i> made from spiritual/religious perspectives alongside other disciplines or worldviews.
Sustainability of environment	New sense of <i>identity</i> with the earth. Cohabitants with other species. Responsible as <i>steward</i> or caretaker of the earth. Institutions (e.g., economy, polity, family) must develop in harmony with the earth, respecting its limits.
Sustainability of economy	Shift from capitalist economy to more <i>sustainable collective model</i> with planetary and human welfare as goal (vs. profit). <i>Social justice</i> : greater equality in meeting human needs. Social capital valued. <i>Sustainable development</i> principles (respect for environment, participation, quality of life, social justice). <i>Technology</i> driven by <i>sustainable values and principles</i> .
Sustainable politics	<i>Nonviolence</i> toward people and environment, including structural violence of poverty and oppression (see social justice above). Development of citizen role of <i>governance</i> . <i>Value</i> -based politics of meaning. Principles of <i>transformational politics</i> (e.g., partnership, diversity).
Partnership vs. dominator model	Trust, sharing, open communication, win-win model of power, respect for nature, science of empathy.

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delineates values for us to consider for our code of ethics that are connected to each theme of sustainable thinking (value and quality of all life, fairness and equality, participation and partnership, respect for the ecological constraints of the environment, the interconnections among nature and social systems, the need for a holistic approach to connecting spirituality or religion and the material world, and a partnership model of society).

The values of this new paradigm do not counter existing social work values of equality, humanitarianism, and social justice. They are congruent with them. However, these values expand our value base in recognition of the limits to growth and move us beyond the unsustainable costs of a market-driven economy and technology, beyond a model of interest-group politics that stifles public participation, and beyond a dominator model of society that, through its separation of spirituality and science, relies on the power of dominance and violence as ultimate problem solvers. In short, these values provide us with an expanded view of our professional relationship with society. Now, with an expanded value base, how do our institutions need to change? And what is our expanded vision for global social welfare?

**DOES OUR CURRENT WELFARE SYSTEM
REFLECT OUR VISION OF SOCIAL WELFARE?**

Currently, many people view the United States as a welfare state, albeit it a reluctant one, in contrast to many European countries. We have no universal health care, increasing privatization of retirement and other social service programs, and decreasing commitment of the federal government to social welfare, as evidenced by the 1996 welfare reform legislation, the telltale Personal Responsibility Act. The good news is that we have managed to salvage Social Security. The bad news is that in almost every other category of social welfare programs, we have, as a country, suffered a loss of both federal and state funds in health care, housing, services to children and families, and mental health programs.

Our social welfare system today illustrates a residual approach, reflective of the American values of individualism and hard work. The assumption is that the market, or democracy, the church and other mutual aid organizations, and the family should be able to meet the needs of U.S. families in the twenty-first century. But as we have seen in this book, they cannot.

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The capitalist economy provides ownership and control of the means of production, distribution, and exchange to a minority of people. These resources are used to generate profit at the expense of the conservation of natural resources and the ill effects of production on laborers, consumers, and communities. Most people cannot own or control income-generating means of production, nor do they have a constitutional right to employment or adequate income. Capitalism's allowance of unemployment, income and opportunity gaps, alienating dominator hierarchical work environments, and the paucity of livable wages contributes to social welfare for the privileged few, lack of social welfare for the many, and social problems for all.

Political power, closely aligned with economic power in the United States, is curtailed for most; electoral politics, tied to the ability to access corporate wealth, make running for office almost impossible for those without money. Civic participation in community organizations is voluntary, nonmonetary, and not recognized as a critical part of the economy; people who can afford the time and money can donate their participation to civic life.

While it is a source of support for many families, the institution of religion, with faith-based organizations and groups that support spirituality, is fraught with controversy and marginalization in the broader society. With fundamentalists at one end and secularists at the other, many of those in between are fearful of the imposition of any belief system, and therefore prefer to limit talk of spirit, religion, values, and morality to the home. At the same time, people hunger for a sense of public and political morality in the affairs of the community, and on the global stage, conflict is pervasive. Fierce antagonisms such as those in the Middle East are driven, in part, by religious beliefs.

So, as a result, how is the institution of family faring these days, as a critical economic and social system for child rearing and emotional support?

A significant number of families feel the effects of institutional failings. Though the definition of *family* does not necessarily include children, most of us would agree that the functions of the modern family are to provide kinship and care, to socialize children to become productive citizens of our society, and to raise the future workers of tomorrow. Two social innovations linked to modernism have deeply affected the modern family: the rise in the material standard of living and the access to family planning services and technology. The good news is that, in the industrial world,

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affluence and birth control have made family size more a matter of choice than a biological or economic necessity (Garbarino, 1992). The bad news is that the third industrial revolution has brought with it stresses related to production and consumption that pose threats to the sustainability of the American family. At the global level, the economics of consumption and the oppression of women have influenced overpopulation of the planet, which, if unchanged, may threaten the carrying capacity of the planet.

What are some of the threats to the sustainability of the modern family? First, as we have already mentioned, is the threat to meaningful caring relationships as a result of the changes in time and space resulting from information technology. The time spent in front of a video-display terminal, whether a television or a computer monitor, is time away from face-to-face interaction with family members. In addition, though *community* may be an evolving term, it is questionable whether the virtual community is a substitute for the social sustenance that families and extended networks provide through face-to-face interactions.

Second, a question to ask ourselves here in the United States is, do we really experience a higher standard of living in terms of our quality of life, as a result of our GDP? Although our productivity is still leading the rest of the world, there are indicators that the family is not realizing the full benefit of this economic indicator. Job insecurity creates stress and poverty. Poverty is connected to child neglect and abuse, domestic violence, homelessness, and a host of other problems. When the economic system operates on market strategies for production and distribution, the result is overproduction of unnecessary goods with built-in obsolescence, which people with surplus (or perceived surplus) purchasing power are induced to buy through mindless advertising. It also creates underproduction and distribution of goods that people need (e.g., adequate affordable housing).

Of all the higher-income nations, families in the United States experience the greatest gap in terms of unequal distribution of incomes. Of the national income, 30% is in the hands of the top 10% of the population; 1.8% goes to the poorest 10% of the population (Worldwatch Institute, 2003). Among the sixteen countries for which data is available, the United States has the largest percentage of the population living in poverty; one of every six Americans lives below the poverty line. Americans work longer hours than citizens in any other industrial country. Most American workers receive two weeks of vacation; the average European

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receives six weeks of paid vacation. France recently adopted a thirty-five-hour workweek and, since its inception, has created more than 285,000 jobs as a result of this policy (Honore, 2002, qtd. in Rifkin 2004a).

Our consumption patterns are a problem for the world and for individual families. For example, globally, the two groups most vulnerable are at opposite ends of the consumption spectrum; they are dying of poverty and of affluence. Physical health is compromised most in Europeans and Americans by cardiovascular disease and cancers that primarily affect those who consume too many unhealthy foods, tobacco, alcohol, and drugs and who lead sedentary lifestyles (World Health Organization, 2000). Massive debt and spending toward the paying down of this debt threatens investment in the future of our children.

Shopping for experiences and commodities has become the great national pastime in the United States; it fills up our leisure time, and we don't even get physical exercise in the process, for now we can do it from home. Consumption patterns in the United States, while they reflect a high standard of living, as it is traditionally defined, are becoming obsolete in a world with limits to growth. As long as the richest 20% of the world continues to account for 86% of total personal consumption expenditures, worldwide tensions increase and natural resources are overexploited (UNEP, 2002).

While more and more countries scramble to enter the on-ramp to the information technology highway, here in the United States our families are barreling down the highway in their Hummers equipped with televisions, sound systems, global positioning systems, and cell phones. All of these distract them, of course, from the highway and from any possible human discourse—discourse that involves questions like, where are we going and why? What a metaphor! How does this conspicuous, often dangerous, and wasteful consumption enhance the quality of life for our families? How does it contribute to sustaining and improving the lives of community members in the global village?

Such modernization has had no simple effect on the overpopulation of the globe. In most respects, it seems to have resulted in a population boom followed by a lowering of the birthrate. In developing countries, most childlessness is involuntary, due to disease, while in industrial countries most childlessness is voluntary. It appears that in developing countries, affluence increases the birthrate, while in developed countries it decreases it (Garbarino,

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1992). Overpopulation is the result of multiple factors; globally, it is related to poverty and the status of women and their access to family planning. Evidence indicates that the birthrate would decrease 25% to 50% worldwide if women who wish to limit their offspring were fully empowered to do so (Garbarino, 1992).

So, what can we do, as social workers, to help build systems that contribute to social welfare, not social problems? What is our vision?

SOCIAL WELFARE: A NEW VISION

Today we are faced with a challenge that calls for a shift in our thinking, so that humanity stops threatening its life-support system. We are called to assist the Earth to heal her wounds and in the process heal our own—indeed to embrace the whole creation in all its diversity, beauty and wonder. This will happen if we see the need to revive our sense of belonging to a larger family of life, with which we have shared our evolutionary process.

In the course of history, there comes a time when humanity is called to shift to a new level of consciousness, to reach a higher moral ground. . . . That time is now.

—Wangari Maathai, *first African woman to win a Nobel Prize, 2004*

The vision we have can move us from an old world order, an empire society based on principles of domination, material excess, violence and warfare, profit over people, and global social injustice, to one of an earth community (Korten, 2006), based on partnership and participation, material sufficiency within our limits to growth, nonviolent processes of decision making and shared power, and an imperative for the global welfare of all species.

The vision and mission is to develop sustainable global, national, and local communities and social service organizations that support and enhance life through the following institutions:

- Communities and social structures that permit all species to flourish in an earth-centered system to replace the current anthropocentric ethic
- An ecological social democratic economy that provides meaningful work and fair distribution of resources (e.g., food, housing, health care) to ensure social justice

- Political and civic institutions that involve shared power, with avenues for citizen participation and leadership
- The incorporation of values, spiritual inquiry, and religion in education and other public arenas
- Greater inclusion of families in decision making in economic, political, and spiritual life of the community, through the connection of their private life with the future of the global commons
- Social welfare services that are developed in partnership with political, economic, spiritual, and family institutions, to ensure a broad array of social provisions from basic needs (e.g., housing, health care) to personal social services.
- Social service organizations that strive for social justice, create opportunities for empowerment of clients and staff, and achieve self-renewal through new innovative processes and structures to achieve these goals

Social policies are some necessary steps to realize this vision. Social policy is used broadly here; it goes beyond those policies we associate with the traditional arenas of social welfare (e.g., education). These could be guidelines, laws, and both formal and informal policies that affect individuals and groups in every arena of life. In previous chapters we saw some suggestions for sustainable policies and social work roles. Summarized here are some major recommendations in six arenas that might lead us to a more sustainable future. Recommendations regarding the environment are folded into the other systems, as the environment as the base of all life must be considered in every systemic change.

KEY TRANSFORMATIONAL SHIFTS IN POLICY

The Economy

1. The adaptation of a sustainability-first agenda for economic development, within ecological constraints, as recommended by the UNEP.
2. The adaptation of full employment and the elevation of the development of social capital to be included in remuneration as work to ensure economic justice.

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3. The adoption of alternative measures of economic success or social indices (e.g., health, employment, education of citizenry) of progress to which governments are accountable.
4. Partnering of governments and community-based and/or non-governmental organizations in collaborative economic development strategies to implement economic, political, and social goals.
5. Support of small-scale economic development enterprises that favor participant owners versus monopoly-scale absentee owners, through community development corporations, cooperatives, land trusts, and other such mechanisms.
6. The global adoption of the 1995 proposals of the UN Summit on Social Development in Copenhagen, including curbing of the global casino of insider trading, fraud, and capital flight; a new Bretton Woods conference to reform the IMF and other international monetary institutions; and a UN-controlled world financial authority to oversee global financial institutions and hold them accountable (Henderson, 1999).
7. Proposals and steps to shift ownership and control of the few to the many, from a capitalist system to a social democratic system.

The Polity

1. The expansion of national priorities on human rights to include those in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (e.g., a clean, healthy environment; universal access to food, housing, health care, and education; secure, nonviolent communities; meaningful work (full employment) and leisure opportunities).
2. The reformation of the electoral system to include such policies as public financing of elections; nonpartisan elections administration; open debate with equal airtime through public financing; an independent media; one person, one vote; and noninvolvement of corporate money (Korten, 2006).
3. Reformation of the powers of the UN toward legal authority over issues that affect the global commons (e.g., environmental threats, international trade, intra- or international conflicts).
4. Reformation of the UN's structure to equalize the power of large industrial countries and developing ones, and venues for both national and public participation in UN decision making.

Religion and Spirituality

1. National and regional summits on ethics and meaning, with opportunities for citizens to participate via the Internet and learn from one another about religious beliefs, moral positions, and their implications for public policy, public behavior, and environmental sustainability.
2. Expansion of national and international service as a substitute for the armed forces via Peace Corps, AmeriCorps, or other avenues. Make benefits available similar to veterans' benefits for those who have served other communities in peace.
3. Infusion of spirituality and religion as a natural part of any public decision-making body whose decisions affect the quality of the life of the community and the protection of the natural environment (e.g., via debate, public forums, community panels of religious representatives, university involvement, inclusion of survey data).

The Family

1. Harness the technological advances of the computer to reduce the workweek, and redistribute work so every family can spend some work time at home.
2. Build family support networks in every community to provide volunteer frameworks of assistance for families.
3. Reconnect the family and children to the natural environment through educational curricula, public and private service-learning initiatives, and family incentives (e.g., tax and educational credits for efforts in conservation, protection of natural resources).
4. Create councils of elders in each community and motivate social institutions to use the collective wisdom of these individuals.
5. Fight for flexible work hours and one year of paid family leave for parents-to-be with children in their first year of life.
6. Develop free and accessible family life education for all families, including conflict resolution and mediation services for estranged spouses.
7. Develop a partnership among public health, business, community members, and families, with compensation via a social wage so that the "village" can take care of children.

Social Welfare

1. Develop preventive programs for children and families, collaboratively, via public health, education, employment development, and public social services, to reduce significantly the residual functions of child protective services.
2. Put in place collaborative planning rather than market-based strategies by public and private institutions in housing, environmental protection, food, health education, and employment sectors, so that services can be equitably developed and distributed over time; citizen input is a mandated part of this planning.
3. Develop personal social services for chronically vulnerable populations (e.g., disabled people, elderly, severely mentally ill people); these could be regional centers with case management delivered by bachelors of social work and development of new models and programs by masters of social work.
4. Propose a global definition of social welfare that sets social standards of basic human needs, such as those in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, linked both with economic systems aimed at the protection and provision of these rights and with environmental preservation.

The Organization

1. Work collaboratively with other organizations to serve the individual, family, and community in a holistic model; advocate for funding streams and structures that support this approach through service integration.
2. Strive to be learning organizations that embrace continual self-renewal and the empowerment of clients and staff.
3. Commit to maximum client participation in every possible aspect of the organization's governance, service delivery, and evaluation.
4. Operationalize the principles of cultural transformation theory in the management and leadership of the organization (e.g., shared power, value-based science).
5. Develop indicators of organizational success that reflect the social mission (e.g., social justice, enhancing quality of life in the community, capacity building of communities and families); involve consumers and key constituents in this development.

6. Embrace environmental sustainability in the decisions made regarding facility, technology, processes and procedures of service delivery, alliances, or contracts with other organizations.

The thrust of the previous proposals is the embedding of social welfare as the goal of all society's institutions to sustain and enhance all life, to develop needed resources and equitable opportunities, and to make human needs the centerpiece of both public and private policy agendas. Thus, the new definition of social welfare becomes the state of collective well-being toward a sustainable future for all species of a community, nation, or planet, brought about through collaborative efforts of the polity, economy, family, spiritual or mutual aid organizations, and social service organizations, in harmony with the natural environment. Where does this place the practice of social work?

SOCIAL WORK: THE CURRENT PRACTICE PARADIGM

Let's look at what we call social work and then explore its relevance to sustainable social welfare. First of all, the mission of social work in the United States is twofold: to help meet the basic needs of all people and to promote social justice and social change (NASW, 1999). How do we do this? Do we have a paradigm or worldview of our practice? Malcolm Payne (2005) suggests that modern social work is a discourse between three perspectives.

Reflexive, or therapeutic, views are seen as therapeutic helping approaches (Dominelli, 2002). In this approach, social work promotes growth—self-enhancement of the individual, family, group, or community—through humanistic mutual influence between client and work. Through this interaction, clients gain an understanding of their world and are empowered to overcome or to rise above their suffering and situation. This approach expresses a social-democratic political perspective in its emphasis on self-determination and human potential for fulfillment and development. Some theories and models relevant to this approach are psychodynamism, humanism, existentialism, and crisis intervention. An example is a social worker helping an older single mother deal with the recent abandonment of the father and breadwinner to recognize her strengths and build on

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them through further mustering of her psychological and social supports.

Individualist-reformist views focus on meeting individual needs and improving services. These are seen as maintenance approaches (Dominelli, 2002), in that by helping individuals interface with society, they maintain the social order of society and social fabric of institutions. Politically, they stem from a liberal approach to society; basic social institutions function well but may need occasional tweaking or incremental change to better serve citizens. Theories and models relevant to this approach are systems, cognitive behavior, and task-centered practice. For example, a social worker helps interface between a senior center and an older isolated adult who is developmentally disabled to develop a fit between the older person's needs and what the center can provide.

The third view, socialist-collectivist approaches, sometimes called emancipatory (Dominelli, 2002) or transformational (Pease & Fook, 1999), assert, from a critical theory lens, that disadvantaged or oppressed people can gain empowerment only through social transformation. This view expresses socialist political philosophy and focuses on change in those institutions that impede social justice. Theories and models relevant to this approach are critical theory, feminist theory, and the empowerment model of practice. For example, a social worker helps educate and mobilize citizen groups in support of an upcoming state proposal to provide universal health care for all citizens through a public, private, and citizen partnership (Payne, 2005).

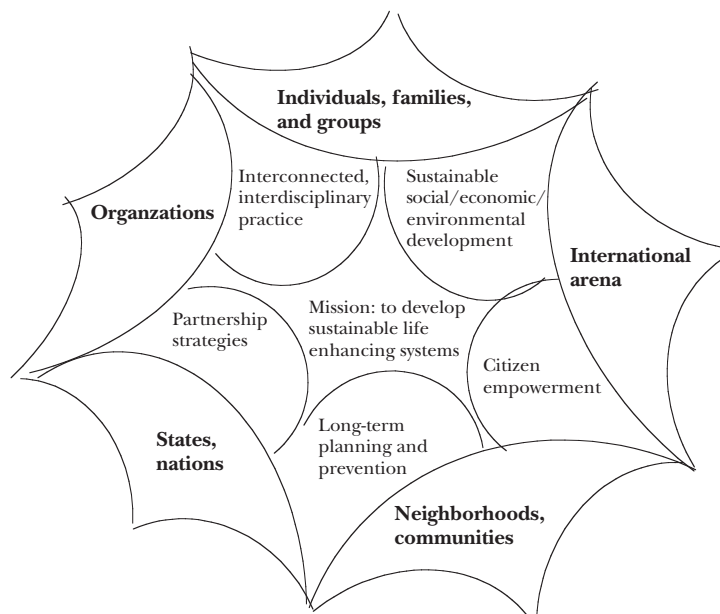
Payne argues that social work in the West uses all three of these, and social work in any one setting may use a mixture, depending on organizational and cultural expectations and societal expectations. However, the vast majority of our work uses the first two approaches, neither of which is very relevant to a new transformational vision of social welfare as global collective well-being. A broader approach that builds on Payne's (2005) socialist-collectivist approach is called for.

THE NEW PARADIGM: WHAT MIGHT OUR PRACTICE LOOK LIKE?

There are many new ways we might become involved in changing the landscape of our fellow travelers. I will explore five that I believe

are key in a new paradigm of sustainable practice: (1) prevention and long-term planning, (2) interdisciplinary social work, (3) sustainable social and economic development, (4) citizen and community empowerment, and (5) partnership education. After an exploration of these approaches, we will then look at their implications for social work education and research (Figure 3).

Figure 3 A Model for Social Work in a Sustainable World



Because we are concerned with the conservation of resources and long-term sustainability, attention to basic causes versus presenting problems or prevention must be the order of the day (Boyer, 1984). The problems we are living with that threaten our future did not happen overnight; nor will their solutions occur overnight. We know that a quick fix is ineffective and has negative long-term consequences; we must consider the whole system and the whole problem, with a focus on preventing social problems. This means helping bring about a mandate for planning at every level. One role of the social worker is to advocate for these mandates. We can also gather together those with expertise on

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different aspects of the problem, bring them to the table, and begin to hammer out some shorter-term changes in the provision of preventive health care, jobs, and housing.

We must make these changes across disciplines. This is not new to us. Interagency collaboration, wraparound services, and service integration seem to be the buzzwords of social service delivery in the new millennium. They are attempts to work more collaboratively and to increase stakeholder participation, which may also lead to more effective and efficient services. They have also been a rational response to shrinking federal and state commitment to funding social services. We may see these, historically, as ways of coping with neoconservative, post-September 11 times, similar to the climate of the 1950s (Fischer, 2002). But this can be viewed as part of a shift from unsuccessful isolated, fragmented, and unilateral efforts of the past based on a singular worldview of the problem to a more multifaceted view and multiconstituent problem solving. Indeed, Gray (1989) suggests that the impetus for collaboration today is that many of the problems communities face are metaproblems that one entity or approach cannot solve.

As the literature on collaboration grows, examples of government and community partnerships evidence this collaboration. For example, many of the initiatives shared in Schorr's *Common Purpose* (1997), such as Baltimore's Sandtown-Winchester partnership or the South Bronx community development corporations, exemplify the interdisciplinary collaborative approach to community problem solving. Others, such as the aforementioned Neighborhood Action Initiative, evidence the power of citizen involvement in cross-agency teams in neighborhood planning (Potapchuk, 2002).

Across all levels of practice, the acceptance of approximate descriptions of reality impels us to a position beyond a multidisciplinary one, wherein we note stakeholder or professional worldviews. It requires us to move toward interdisciplinary practice, wherein we acknowledge each stakeholder worldview as having value in the process of coming to a workable intervention. This is fairly easy to see in environments, for example, like hospitals, wherein multiple professionals have expertise in the aspects of patient care. Where we are more likely to become myopic is in arenas where we are the dominant profession (e.g., child welfare), where the problem domain, combined with strict legal mandates, often pushes our specialized knowledge and values into one corner of a ring, with law enforcement, public opinion, or any number of adversaries in the

other corner. These are some of the realities of day-to-day practice. The problem is, of course, that when professionals are busy fighting, there is only one winner and sometimes the client is lost in the melee.

Thus, an interdisciplinary approach is part of a sustainable agenda. It says that no one discipline or political party or authority has all the best answers. Rather, it values the different constructions of law enforcement officers, physicians, social workers, business people, churches, gang members, city planners, environmentalists, and concerned citizens in tackling the problems of, for example, gang violence in a community. Each of these groups has a stake, knowledge, and experience to bring to the table to attempt solutions. By inviting environmentalists to the table, for example, we may find other possible connections between youth and landscape beautification (e.g., community gardens, murals, art projects that use local talent). The danger in going it alone is that we may find ourselves opening the doors of our newly funded midnight basketball program only to find the court empty. For perhaps what youths in this particular community needed was not recreation but the preventive response—jobs—to compete with the drug economy on the street. But guess what! Youths weren't at the table when we defined our strengths and problems.

If the goal is to do more than catch people at the bottom of the waterfall, we need to move up to the top and, alongside our planning, begin to engage in some sustainable social and economic development. We can develop projects that preserve resources, consider the limits to growth, and operate on a scale at which people can be involved in their ownership and control.

For example, the Institute for Local Self Reliance in New York City developed a local planning and community capacity-building process to organize the Bronx Frontier Development Market. "After one year of operation it was producing 70 tons of finished compost a week. The compost was used to restore the soil for community gardens in the South Bronx" (Richardson, 1982). The Meadowcreek Project, working with Hendrix College in Conway, Arkansas, redirected its purchases toward local produce. "Within one year Hendrix increased its purchases of food within the state from 9% to 40%" (Daly & Cobb, 1989). Social workers could play a role in getting the right people to the table to develop some of these projects, ensuring community involvement in decision making.

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There are two avenues to consider in this development. The first is to get ourselves involved in existing economic development arenas in our cities and counties. This means interjecting ourselves into discussions of, for example, how old military land will be used, whether wetlands should be converted, storage of toxic waste, or the development of a bike path. The second avenue is to create new alternative community-based projects to support people and their environments. Economic or social (caretaking) cooperatives, land trusts, community development corporations, community gardens, and farmers' markets are just a few of the many initiatives that social workers could involve themselves in. Examples of the development of social capital could involve building councils of elders (Garbarino, 1992) in communities to use the collective wisdom of older residents and to engage them in cross-generational activities or expanding family centers from social support to the creation of micro enterprises (e.g., home-based sewing).

Hand in hand with community development is citizen and community empowerment. If what is desired is a win-win solution within a shared-power paradigm, individuals must be equal partners with professionals in problem solving. The person-centered planning model in developmental disabilities (O'Brien & O'Brien, 1998), the recovery model in mental health (Jackson, 2001), and the family-to-family (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2007) or wrap-around initiatives in child welfare are examples of shared intervention strategies in social services.

A much larger shift needs to occur in the relationship of families to power in their communities. The job of the social worker should involve helping families gain access to the decision-making processes that occur in all the institutions that affect them. For example, we could develop consumer-advisory groups, citizen and youth commissions, school or neighborhood policy councils, or involve technology in the facilitation of citizen input into city council and planning meetings, countywide forums, or national elections. We could develop a local interfaith council, with the purpose of greater involvement of a community in its own development initiatives, or engage an existing one in sponsoring a communitywide forum on citizen involvement.

Every advisory group to government or the private sector, such as commissions, shareholder groups, and private boards of directors, should involve citizens in a meaningful way. This can range from formal membership to public forums, interorganizational

planning groups, and other creative decision-making webs. The more citizens connect what they perceive as private problems to social problems, many of them global in nature, the more they will see the interconnectedness between their own behaviors and consumer patterns and those of the larger global commons.

In this same vein, if the desired model of society is of partnership rather than domination, we must begin to educate ourselves and others about this approach and start to consciously use it. This should not be difficult, as the ideas are already congruent with social work values. For example, one of my former students had an “aha” moment using Eisler’s model. He realized that in his play therapy with the younger children at a clinic every game they played involved winners and losers. After one of our classes, he tried playing an ungame, cooperative play with a large nylon tent that all the kids could lift up and take turns crawling under and running through. He commented during the next class session that there were no losers, and he was able to recognize and reward each child’s effort rather than spend time doing damage control to cajole the team members of the losing team.

Approaching every situation from a partnership mind-set, be it a family, a neighborhood, the city council, or the UN, means that as social workers we acknowledge a value base of life enhancement versus destruction and violence, a respect for conserving nature, open communication acknowledging different worldviews of a problem, and a holistic approach to assessment and problem solving. Thus, conflict resolution within a client system, an agency situation, or on the world stage involves nonviolent win-win strategies. It is not a social service or mental health agenda that is pushed; it is a child and family agenda that is promoted. Rather than advocate for a pro-Israel or pro-Palestinian position, we take a position for peace.

In a sustainable model of practice, the approach must change institutions, not just individuals. We spend less time diagnosing problems of homelessness and more time working on universal housing. We spend less time delivering treatment programs for adolescent offenders. We turn our attention to advocacy to attain equitable funding for schools, to develop high school curricula that support conflict resolution, and to community service and job exploration for all students. We can choose to continue school-based counseling with disenfranchised students who have been tracked in the dead-end vocational path and see no real option but the armed services, or we can assist in the creation of meaningful

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work in an array of employment opportunities, work that can provide monetary or social wages for products or services that contribute to enhancing the lives of the community and the country. If our vision is to move toward sustainable systems, these alternative approaches move us to the top of the waterfall to begin to change the landscape and the futures of our families.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

Evolving toward partnership and a sustainable world has implications for both classroom curricula and field practice of social work programs. In social work curricula, we should first look to broaden of our view of person-in-environment to include a more holistic view of human behavior and the inclusion of the natural world. Second, we should place greater emphasis on a global perspective of social welfare. Third, we should use more knowledge and skill development in conflict resolution and conflict management. Fourth, we should consider additional coursework in interdisciplinary and interagency collaboration.

I am hopeful that a case has been made that new systems theories such as the web of life; the connections among mind, body, and spirit; the imperative of sustainability; and the evolution of models of shared power are important to our understanding of ourselves in the world. This next comment is for faculty, in response to the perennial whine, "But we already have so many theories of human behavior to cover, how can we possibly cover all of this stuff, too? And in other countries! You want us to look at new-systems theory, sustainability, and economics!" Well, isn't that sort of like saying, "We have one class that covers social welfare history and policy, and we've always taught it that way. The more history we get, the more impossible it is to cover it, so we'll just start with the New Deal?"

My response is that we must reexamine our frameworks. We have the information highway as a tool for students to explore these connections and theories. We have the expectation that, indeed, students are motivated and empowered to determine what they can learn. The role of faculty is to make available to them what is relevant and to help them help others make a difference in their lives and in the future social welfare of their communities and the planet. It behooves us to fashion curricula to do this.

Clearly, social workers are committed to nonviolence across systems. Although an attempt to use nonadversary approaches is desirable, whenever possible, it would be dishonest and irresponsible to teach collaboration as the only viable community practice strategy. Having said that, I suggest that if we are committed to putting our heads together to problem solve, then perhaps more attention should be paid in the curriculum, across all levels of practice, on the skills of conflict resolution and conflict management. There are materials to help us in this area as well (Barsky, 2000; Weinhold & Weinhold, 2000). Because Riane Eisler's work is so congruent with social work and has been developed for educational settings, it could be seriously considered in any or all of social work's policy and practice classes.

Coursework on interdisciplinary and interagency practice is relevant to today's social service arenas. Research on why we need to collaborate and what makes a good collaboration is growing (Winer & Ray, 2000). For example, the Annie E. Casey Foundation (1998), in its report on preparing human service workers for interprofessional practice, has begun to explore many of the issues involved in implementing effective social, educational, and health services across disciplines and social service systems. In response to the increased need for interagency partnerships, the social work department at California State University, San Bernardino, has recently revamped its curriculum with emphases, in the advanced year, on empowerment, leadership, and interdisciplinary and interagency collaboration. If many of today's problems are metaproblems and we are committed to a more holistic approach, we may need to somehow reach out to other practitioners in other disciplines and professions to get a more complete view of the elephant.

Field placements should be developed in nontraditional field settings such as the planning, economic development, housing, and related departments of city hall, similar county departments, or with county supervisors, community development corporations, and industries such as utility companies, environmental oversight agencies, and businesses. Students, especially if placed with students from other disciplines, could form teams in program development, planning, or neighborhood revitalization, and could educate these arenas regarding a more holistic problem-solving approach. Service-learning classes across disciplines could be another route to more holistic problem solving.

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At a larger systems level, I recommend university reform. Before World War II, liberal arts colleges, with learning ordered toward more humanist ends, provided the major image of education. Disciplines did not dominate colleges. Specialized knowledge is important to advance our understanding of the world; however, academic disciplines tend to isolate some aspect for study in separation from the rest, treating it as if it were self-contained and related only to the external areas it was abstracted from. This works against a discipline's contribution to a broad human need of understanding the interconnectedness of phenomena (Daly & Cobb, 1989). Some of the following initiatives from the Annie E. Casey Foundation (1998) could assist in promoting a more relevant interdisciplinary university:

- A department or center for the study of social and global crises. This could encourage cross-disciplinary research on the urgent needs of the time. If combined with a requirement for service learning, this center could spearhead local and global problem-solving strategies.
- Interdisciplinary centers, similar to women's studies or peace studies, could be developed.
- Social work departments, by nature interdisciplinary, need not wait for top-down initiatives for cross-discipline initiatives (e.g., a master's-degree concentration could be developed in sustainable development involving economics, environmental studies, geography, and other relevant departments).
- Foundations and government could be engaged in the funding of projects that address the study of interprofessional education issues.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK RESEARCH

Social work is committed to the core values of promoting social justice and social change, through practice, education, and research (NASW, 1999). How do we see, understand, and study the world around us? Perhaps the most obvious implication of a sustainable approach to social work is the profession's acceptance of alternative paradigms in the conduct of social work research. New systems theory and a partnership approach acknowledge intuition, spirituality, and a science of empathy. We cannot separate our research from our value base.

It is therefore quite appropriate for social workers to consider using any of the four paradigms that Morris (2006) suggests in the pursuit of these aims. If research is framed in an ideological commitment to social justice and has social or political action as an agenda, then a systematically applied critical theory paradigm can bring enlightenment and action to a social issue. If the purpose of the research is to gather various stakeholder perceptions in the attempt to define the issues and the solutions, then a constructivist paradigm is useful. The assumption in this approach is that these constructions or worldviews vary from one time and place to another; stakeholders are allowed to influence one another's worldviews in this process, and the end result may be a commitment to a longer-term problem-solving effort.

Indeed, accepting approximate descriptions of reality or theological statements is part of the new systems paradigm and requires of us an openness to various ways of exploring the world as an always-changing, dynamic system. This does not mean we embrace sloppy research. Each of the four paradigms that Morris (2006) offers are applied in a systematic fashion. Rather, we can acknowledge that there are various ways of knowing, that reality can never be separated from context, and that we are challenged to examine these realities in a value-based, thoughtful, and methodical way.

This brings us to research that should be done to help further our understanding of our interconnectedness, the relationships and tensions between science and religion, and the myriad concepts we have explored in sustainability. This book has shared some examples of social workers who are engaged in efforts focused on new-paradigm thinking. Direct practitioners are using a holistic approach to healing; community practitioners are attempting to bridge the gap and bring peace between Hispanic and Asian gangs; local and international social workers are trying to influence community development strategies toward sustainable environmental and economic solutions. Such interdisciplinary initiatives should include a range of research designs, including value-based or critical theory and constructivism, as components of their studies.

Currently, it is not known to what extent social workers are aware of or embrace, for example, the theory of interconnectedness or the web of life, the mind-body-spirit connection, an ecological credo, or many of the other notions of sustainability we have explored in politics, economics, technology, or family life.

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In other words, I have asserted that scholars across many disciplines and cultural creatives are experiencing a shift in thinking about themselves and their place in the universe. But to what extent are social workers experiencing this shift in their own thinking? If some have, how has the shift affected their personal worldviews? The way they perceive science and religion? The way they see themselves and the natural world? The way they practice? Work by groups such as the Institute for Noetic Sciences and the Center for Integral Studies can assist researchers in formulating research questions relevant to social work and new-paradigm thinking.

ADDITIONAL THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

1. Using the narrow lens, define a problem such that the unit of analysis is the individual. Then, widen the lens, reframe the problem, and define it.
2. If social workers shift their work in mental health from individual treatment to the larger context of prevention and planning, what could they do to alleviate conditions that lead to mental illness?
3. What social, political, or economic theories are you learning about in your courses in human behavior and the social environment that widen the lens on social problems?
4. Consider a population or social problem that is of great interest to you. How might you use the strategies for practice outlined in this chapter to plan for or to develop effective responses that would promote a sustainable future?
5. In cooperative day care, family members give some of their time to work with children. What are some other social and community needs that cooperatives could meet? How might fiscal and social policy better support them? Tax incentives? Public assistance?
6. Theoretically, if social workers help develop more preventive programs (versus protective programs) for at-risk children, families, or elders, what might the employment of social workers be? Sites? Job titles?

MAIN POINTS

1. We have arrived at our current understanding via a narrow lens, with focus on the individual and emphasis on biological and psychological theories of individual behavior.
2. Sustainable social work uses a broader lens to identify the social, political, cultural, and environmental factors that influence social problems.
3. The themes of this book expand our values to include values-based science, a new identity with the environment, interconnectedness, a collective economic model, and principles of transformational politics.
4. The vision of social work in a sustainable world is to develop global, national, and local communities through institutions that are sustainable and support all life.
5. A new paradigm of sustainable social work involves the following five strategies: (1) prevention and long-term planning, (2) interdisciplinary social work, (3) sustainable social and economic development, (4) citizen and community empowerment, and (5) partnership education.
6. Implications of this paradigm for social work education involve broadening our view of person-in-environment, a global perspective of social welfare, greater emphasis on conflict resolution, interdisciplinary collaboration, and university reform.
7. Social work research needs to be values based and should incorporate critical theory and constructivist designs to research social problems and sustainable responses.

For Further Reading

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