

The Effect of Definitions of Policy on the Nature and Outcomes of Policy Analysis



Varying interpretations of the word *policy* greatly affect how and where particular policies are created and implemented and, ultimately, whether their results are as intended.

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By reading even a few references in the literature on policy analysis, one can safely conclude that the term *policy* is not defined in any uniform way; indeed, the term is rarely defined at all. Authors of policy papers, monographs, and books assume that their readers know what the term means. And, of course, these authors have their own implicit or tacit definitions in mind which shape what they have to say.

Yet these implied definitions vary considerably among authors and, most likely, among readers. This variation can lead to miscommunication and confusion, but there is another far more serious problem: the particular definition assumed by the policy analyst determines the kinds of policy questions that are asked, the kinds of policy-relevant data that are collected, the sources of data that are tapped, the methodology that is used, and, finally, the policy products that emerge. Unfortunately, if the reader and the analyst operate from different definitions, the reader will find the policy prod-

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This article is based on a paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association in New Orleans in April 1984.

Author's note: I am indebted to Dennis J. Palumbo, who currently heads the Morrison Institute for Public Policy at Arizona State University, for having provided me the opportunity during the summer of 1982 to develop the ideas expressed in this article. His encouragement and support are gratefully acknowledged.

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ucts irrelevant at best and pernicious at worst. Moreover, analyses that emerge from different definitions differ sufficiently among themselves so that the analyst can predetermine what a policy analysis will produce by the simple act of choosing the guiding definition. The political and ethical implications of this possibility are impressive.

I propose, first, to note the various definitions of *policy* that are implied in the literature and, second, by applying these definitions in three policy arenas, to note their differential effect.

The Three Exemplar Policy Arenas

I have chosen three widely different fields for these analyses:

1. *The community corrections program within the criminal justice field* (CJCC). The concept of community corrections is based on the assumption that retaining offenders in their home communities is more effective than sending them to prison. Felons who have committed less serious felony crimes (typically referred to as Class C felonies) are eligible for sentencing to programs such as drug rehabilitation, alcohol treatment, job

skills development, personal/psychological counseling, marital/family counseling, work release, victim restitution, halfway house, parole, probation, vocational training, community service, or employment/placement counseling. The assumption is that offenders who stay in close touch with their families are more likely to be rehabilitated. Moreover, court case loads and prison overloads may be substantially reduced; and punishments may more closely fit the nature of the crime. Possible negative effects include increased risk to the general public, more plea bargaining (since lesser offenders become eligible), and increases in the web of control, that is, the number of persons who remain under active supervision as compared to a prison or release situation.

2. *The program of education for all handicapped students under Public Law 94-142* (SPED—special education). P.L. 94-142, passed in 1975, requires that all students, regardless of handicap, receive a free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment consistent with the pupil's handicap. The least restrictive environment is usually interpreted to mean that the pupil shall, insofar as possible, be assigned to a regular classroom or *mainstreamed*. When students are suspected of having a handicapping condition, they are referred, tested, diagnosed, and assigned in an elaborate form of due process in which parents must be intimately involved. If a child is found to be handicapped, an individual educational program must be prepared that stipulates in detail the instruction the child is to receive, including placement, objectives, methods, timing, and so on. The individual educational program is reviewed at least once every three years. Possible negative effects are stigma for the child, excessive legalism, excessive paperwork for teachers and administrators, and instruction within the regular classroom by teachers ill-prepared to deal with handicapped youngsters.

3. *The process of accreditation of colleges and universities by regional accreditation associations such as the North Central Association, the Mid-South Association, and the like* (HEAC). Colleges and universities wishing to be accredited by a regional

association must apply for accreditation and undergo close scrutiny to ensure that they meet certain defined standards. Previously accredited institutions must undergo inspection at least every ten years; inspections may be scheduled more frequently if necessary or if the institution applies for a new level of program. Candidate institutions must prepare a lengthy self-study, which provides information relevant to the standards (such as faculty qualifications), and must submit to inspection by a site-visit team. A group of evaluator-consultants retained by the accrediting agency, a team is composed of experts competent to make judgments in the field in which accreditation is sought, typically the full gamut of colleges and professional schools. The team leader prepares a report based on the individual findings of team members. This report, which contains an accreditation recommendation, may be challenged by the institution if it is seen as inaccurate or ill-founded. A variety of grievance steps exist for the airing of such appeals. Possible negative effects of the accreditation process include external control over institutional policies, development of self-study reports that put the institution's best foot forward while covering up faults, and emphasis by the team on providing leverage to institutional administrators rather than on overall accreditation issues.

Definitions of Policy

Let us consider eight different definitions of policy:

1. Policy is an assertion of intents or goals.
2. Policy is the accumulated standing decisions of a governing body by which it regulates, controls, promotes, services, and otherwise influences matters within its sphere of authority.
3. Policy is a guide to discretionary action.
4. Policy is a strategy undertaken to solve or ameliorate a problem.
5. Policy is sanctioned behavior, formally through authoritative decisions, or informally through expectations and acceptance established over (sanctified by) time.
6. Policy is a norm of conduct characterized by consistency and regularity in some substantive action area.
7. Policy is the output of the policy-

Figure 1. Policy Types, Determiners, Appearances, and Proximity to Point of Action for Eight Definitions of Policy.

Policy Types	Policy Determiners	Definition of Policy	Proximity to Point of Action	Policy Looks Like
Policy-in-intention	CJCC: State legislature SPED: U.S. Congress HEAC: Commission on institutions of higher education of a regional accrediting association	1. Goals or intents	Distant	Ends
	CJCC: State criminal justice division and local supervisors SPED: State education agency and local supervisors HEAC: Regional association administrators	2. Standing decisions	Intermediate	Rules
		3. Guide to discretionary action	Intermediate	Guidelines
		4. Problem-solving strategy	Intermediate	Sets of tactics
Policy-in-action	CJCC: Street-level bureaucrats and local supervisors SPED: Street-level bureaucrats HEAC: Street-level bureaucrats and regional association administrators	5. Sanctioned behavior	Close	Expectations
		6. Norms of conduct	Close	Norms
	CJCC, SPED, HEAC: All of the above	7. Output of the policy-making system	NA	Effects
Policy-in-experience	CJCC, SPED, HEAC: Clients	8. Constructions based on experience	Inside	Encounters

making system: the cumulative effect of all the actions, decisions, and behaviors of the millions of people who work in bureaucracies. It occurs, takes place, and is made at every point in the policy cycle from agenda setting to policy impact.

8. Policy is the effect of the policy-making and policy-implementing system as it is experienced by the client.

These eight definitions are abbreviated in Figure 1, which makes several other points:

- Three *policy types* are implied by these eight definitions. Policy Definitions 1 through 4 treat policy as *policy-in-intention*, that is, as statements about policy. Definitions 5 through 7 treat policy as *policy-in-implementation*, that is, as behaviors or activities that are displayed in the process of implementing policy. Definition 8 treats policy as *policy-in-experience*, that which is actually experienced by the client.

- Different *policy determiners* are

also implied. Examples are given in Figure 1 for the three exemplar areas. Thus, for Definition 1—Goals or Intentions—the policy determiners are seen as high level agents—members of the several state legislatures that have enacted community corrections programs; the U.S. Congress in the case of Public Law 94-142; and the Commission of Institutions of Higher Education within the various accrediting agencies. For Definitions 2 through 4, policy determiners tend to comprise lower level subordinate agents—the state criminal justice division together with the supervisors of actual implementers (typically referred to as street-level bureaucrats¹) for CJCC; the state education agency with local supervisors for SPED; and regional association administrators in the case of HEAC. For Definitions 5 and 6, policy determiners are the operational implementers together with their immediate supervisors in all three areas. For Definition 7, all levels

are involved, while for Definition 8 it is the clients' constructions that count.

- Different definitions have policy formulated at different distances from the *point of action*. Thus, per Definition 1, policy is created far from the point of action; per Definitions 2 through 4, at an intermediate point; and per Definitions 5 and 6, close to the point of action. Since Definition 7 includes policy made at all levels, the concept of proximity is not relevant. Definition 8 places policy formulation *within* the point of action, since policy by this definition is the constructions that clients make out of their experiences.

- Finally, it is clear that these different definitions will produce policies of different complexions. In the case of Definition 1, policy looks like a set of *ends*. Definition 2 results in policy statements that look like *rules*, while Definition 3 results in *guidelines* with built-in discretion. Definition 4 results in a *set of tactics*. Definition 5 results in

expectations; 6 in *norms*; 7 in *effects*; and 8 in *encounters*. These differences in policy appearance are further elucidated below.

The Impact of Various Definitions

Figure 2 (in eight parts) summarizes the essential information about the

impact of each of the eight definitions in terms of five categories.

1. *Policy question*. What is the essential question that the policy analyst

Figure 2. Policy Question, Data Collected, Data Sources, Methodology, and Policy Products for Eight Definitions of Policy in Three Exemplar Areas: CJCC, SPED, and HEAC.

Definition 1. Policy is an assertion of intents or goals.

Item	CJCC	SPED	HEAC
Policy Question:	What are the overall intents or goals of the community corrections program?	What are the overall intents or goals of PL 94-142?	What are the overall intents or goals of accreditation in higher education?
Data Collected:	State and county level criminal justice statistics, such as crime rates, arrests, incarcerations, paroles, recidivism; plus: needs assessments, strengths assessments, resource assessments, opinions of experts	National, state, and local level special education statistics, such as variety and rate of handicapping conditions; plus:	National, state, and local college and university statistics, such as admission data, program selection data, employment data; plus:
Data Sources:	Stakeholding audiences: general public, victims, offenders, judges, parole officers; state and county records; relevant documents: such as white papers; court decisions; experts such as university professors of political science and forensics and leading practitioners.	Stakeholding audiences: handicapped students, parents, school boards, principals, teachers, special service providers; national, state, local education agency records; position papers; court decisions; experts such as professors of special education and leading practitioners.	Stakeholding audiences: faculty and administrators, boards of trustees, students, parents, employers; position papers; national, state, local college and university records; court decisions; experts such as university professors of higher education.
Methodology:	Statistical data analyses, interviews, observations, questionnaire studies, documentary analyses, hearings.		
Policy Products:	Listing of goals to be served; prioritized goals, such as reduction in costs of operating the criminal justice system, reduction in incarcerations, lowered recidivism, better fit of punishment to crime.	Listing of goals to be served; prioritized goals, such as free and public education for all, education in the least restrictive environment, reduction in stigma suffered by the handicapped, increased general acceptance of the handicapped.	Listing of goals to be served; prioritized goals such as assisting institutions to improve their program quality, inserting a quality floor in higher education, protecting the public against inferior institutions.

Definition 2. Policy is a governing body's standing decisions by which it regulates, controls, promotes, services, and otherwise influences matters within its sphere of authority.

Item	CJCC	SPED	HEAC
Policy Question:	What rules should govern the decisions in implementing the community corrections program?	What rules should govern the decisions regularly made in implementing PL 94-142?	What rules should govern the decisions regularly made in implementing higher education accreditation standards?
Data Collected:	Decision-making roles and functions such as state division of criminal justice, judges, probation officers, service providers. Types of decisions made by each. Timing of decisions. Impact of decisions such as public safety, recidivism, relief of prison overcrowding, plea bargaining.	Decision-making roles and functions such as state departments of education, superintendents, directors of special education, classroom teachers. Types of decisions made by each. Timing of decisions. Impact of decisions such as least restrictive environment, stigma, grade achievement.	Decision-making roles and functions such as review boards, evaluator consultants, review team chairpersons. Types of decisions made by each. Timing of decisions. Impact of decisions such as failure to accredit, loss of funds by institution, appeal, court suit.
Data Sources:	State and county community corrections administrators, state and county statistical records, operating personnel, clients, other operating community corrections programs.	State and local education agency administrators, state and local education agency records, operating personnel, clients (including parents), classroom experiences.	Examining team reports, self-study reports, consultant evaluators, clients.
Methodology:	Questionnaire studies, records analyses, site visits.	Questionnaire studies, records analyses, site visits, evaluation reports.	Analysis of self-study and team reports, interviews with consultant evaluators and clients, questionnaire studies.
Policy Products:	Identification of needed decisions; recommendations for rules such as Class C felons are eligible to be sentenced to community corrections programs, offenders who commit another felony shall be immediately resented to the state penitentiary.	Identification of needed decisions; recommendations for rules such as parents must be afforded due process before children are placed in any special education program, local education agencies must establish a child-find program.	Identification of needed decisions; recommendations for rules such as institutions must prepare an adequate self-study report, institutions have the right to veto a proposed evaluator-consultant.

would try to deal with, having defined policy in a particular way? Policy questions are given for each of the three exemplar areas. That is, given Definition 1, "Policy is an assertion of intents or goals," the CJCC analyst would ask, "What are the overall intents or goals

of the community corrections programs?" At the other extreme (Definition 8), the analyst would ask, "How would the clients describe the policy of the community corrections program as a result of their encounters with it?"

2. Data collected. What kinds of data would the policy analyst collect, given the policy question posed by a particular definition of policy? For example, given Definition 1—goals and intents—the analyst might well collect, for CJCC, state and county criminal

Definition 3. Policy is a guide to discretionary action.

Item	CJCC	SPED	HEAC
Policy Question:	What is the scope of discretionary action that can be tolerated in implementing the community corrections legislation?	What is the scope of discretionary action that can be tolerated in implementing PL 94-142?	What is the scope of discretionary action that can be tolerated in determining the accreditation status of a higher education institution?
Data Collected:	Action roles and functions such as those in Definition 2 above. Types of actions taken by each. Impact of actions such as those in Definition 2.	Action roles and functions such as those in Definition 2 above. Types of actions taken by each. Impact of actions, such as those in Definition 2.	Action roles and functions such as those in Definition 2 above. Types of actions, such as those in Definition 2.
Data Sources:	As in Definition 2.		
Methodology:	As in Definition 2.		
Policy Products:	Identification of key action roles; recommendations for expectations with respect to each, recommendations for discretionary limits, "meta-rules," such as a probation officer may recommend termination of sentence with the approval of the judge, a county criminal justice administrator may determine the county's degree of involvement in the program: full, partial, or none.	Identification of key action roles; recommendations for expectations with respect to each, recommendations for discretionary limits, "meta-rules," such as the school psychologist may recommend placement in the gifted program for students whose I.Q. falls between 115 and 125, parents may elect to keep an EMR child in a regular classroom even though school staff recommend otherwise.	Identification of key action roles; recommendations for expectations with respect to each, recommendations for discretionary limits, "meta-rules," such as evaluator consultants may recommend non-accreditation if they believe the institution will be unable to provide funds for a viable program in the future, institutions may appeal if it is believed that their situation has been misassessed.

Definition 4. Policy is a strategy undertaken to solve or ameliorate some problem.

Item	CJCC	SPED	HEAC
Policy Question:	What strategies can be followed to minimize the problems that arise in implementing community corrections programs?	What strategies can be followed to minimize the problems that arise in implementing PL 94-142?	What strategies can be followed to minimize the problems that arise in implementing higher education accreditation processes?
Data Collected:	Types and frequency of problems. Impact of each type of problem, such as prevents locating community corrections facilities in established neighborhoods, encourages offenders to accept as valid the classification imposed on them by the court.	Types and frequency of problems. Impact of each type of problem, such as assigns blacks disproportionately to the EMR category and whites to the LD category, overloads teachers with paperwork.	Types and frequency of problems. Impact of each type of problem, such as tends to misassess special purpose institutions such as bible colleges and chiropractic schools, biased toward re-accrediting formerly accredited institutions even in the face of program determinations to the contrary.
Data Sources:	Implementers, such as parole officers, judges; clients, other stakeholding audiences such as the general public, legislators; state and local records, such as recidivism, sentence completion, plea bargaining; actual experience.	Implementers, such as teachers, administrators, special services providers; clients; other stakeholding audiences such as parents, state department of education monitors; national, state, local records, such as increases in the number and type of handicapped served, amount of paper per served client.	Implementers, such as drafters of self-study reports, evaluator consultants; clients; other stakeholding audiences, such as students, employers; national, state, local records such as faculty credentials, enrollment data, placement data.
Methodology:	Statistical data analyses, interviews, observations, questionnaire studies, records analyses (including exception reports and monitoring reports), "hearings."		
Policy Products:	Identification of common, recurrent problems; sets of tactics for dealing with each, such as conducting community forums to overcome fear of corrections facilities in neighborhoods, counseling to overcome negative self-image.	Identification of common, recurrent problems; sets of tactics for dealing with each, such as monitoring black-white distribution of cases over the several special education categories, using computer facilities to provide as much routine paperwork as possible.	Identification of common, recurrent problems; sets of tactics for dealing with each, such as using special purpose faculty as evaluator consultants, emphasizing instructions to evaluator consultants to ignore previous accreditation in reaching judgments.

(Continued on page 68.)

Definition 5. Policy is sanctioned behavior, formally through authoritative decisions, or informally through expectations and acceptance, established over (sanctified by) time.

Item	CJCC	SPED	HEAC
Policy Question:	What expectations should be set for implementers of community corrections programs, either as a <i>priori</i> prescriptions or as modified through experience?	What expectations should be set for implementers of PL 94-142, either as a <i>priori</i> prescriptions or as modified through experience?	What expectations should be set for implementers of higher education accreditation processes, either as a <i>priori</i> prescriptions or as modified through experience?
Data Collected:	Implementation roles and functions such as parole officers, judges, special service providers; "expert" opinion about expectations reasonable for each role, that is from counterpart implementers from other sites; constructions of role incumbents.	Implementation roles and functions such as regular and special education teachers, administrators, special service providers; "expert" opinion about expectations reasonable for each role, that is from counterpart roles at other sites; constructions of role incumbents.	Implementation roles and functions, such as evaluator consultants, review board members; "expert" opinion about expectations reasonable for each role, that is, from counterpart implementers who have carried out other accreditations; constructions of role incumbents.
Data Sources:	Role incumbents and counterparts; site observations; activity reports.	Role incumbents and counterparts; site observations; activity reports; evaluation reports.	Role incumbents and counterparts; site observations; activity reports; evaluation reports; team reports.
Methodology:	As in Definition 4.		
Policy Products:	Role definitions and corresponding expectations, such as parole officers shall be at all times responsible for knowing the whereabouts of their charges, service providers shall follow the program plans they have filed with the county community corrections administrator.	Role definitions and corresponding expectations, such as regular classroom teachers shall consult with a resource teacher when they are unsure about how to handle a case, administrators should be knowledgeable about every special education child assigned to their buildings.	Role definitions and corresponding expectations, such as evaluator consultants shall inform university officials of the accreditation status to be recommended but not discuss it, review boards shall not overturn the recommendation of the visitation team without input of additional evidence.

Definition 6. Policy is a norm of conduct, characterized by consistency and regularity, in some substantive action area.

Item	CJCC	SPED	HEAC
Policy Question:	What forms of conduct are consistently acceptable in agents who are implementing the community corrections program?	What forms of conduct are consistently acceptable in agents who are implementing PL 94-142?	What forms of conduct are consistently acceptable in agents who are implementing higher education accreditation processes?
Data Collected:	Implementation agents, such as judges, probation officers, special service providers; tried-and-true satisfying practices of local agents and counterpart agents elsewhere.	Implementation agents, such as regular and special education teachers, administrators, special service providers; tried-and-true satisfying practices of local agents and counterpart agents elsewhere.	Implementation agents, such as evaluator consultants, review board members; tried-and-true satisfying practices of local agents and counterpart agents elsewhere.
Data Sources:	As in Definition 5.		
Methodology:	As in Definition 4.		
Policy Products:	Descriptions of satisfying behavior and corresponding norms, such as parole officers should check the whereabouts of parolees sufficiently often to be comfortable about the possibility of absconding, judges should accept plea bargains as necessary to keep their case load manageable.	Descriptions of satisfying behavior and corresponding norms, such as teachers should keep paperwork up-to-date to satisfy any monitor, administrators should reassign borderline cases as needed to manage teacher loads or to take account of special circumstances of the child.	Descriptions of satisfying behavior and corresponding norms, such as evaluator consultants should check the data presented in the self-study at random as a means of validation, evaluator consultants should be less concerned with credibility than in providing leverage to the institution in solving difficult problems.

justice statistics such as crime rates, arrests, incarcerations, paroles, and recidivism. He or she might conduct needs assessments, strengths assessments, and resource assessments as well, and finally, might solicit the opinions of various experts about what the intents or goals should be. Parallel data would be collected for SPED and

HEAC. At the other extreme, in following Definition 8—client constructions—the analyst would be interested in collecting as many such constructions as possible.

3. *Data sources.* The data stipulated above cannot be found just anywhere; knowing what data are wanted makes it possible to stipulate where they

might be found. Sources may include (as they do for CJCC by Definition 1), groups of stakeholding persons, records, documents, position papers, court decisions, and groups of experts; others will be useful for other definitional situations. In the case of Definition 8, the sources will be almost exclusively clients since it is their con-

Definition 7. Policy is the output of the policymaking system: the cumulative effect of all the actions, decisions, and behaviors of the millions of people who work in bureaucracies. It occurs, takes place, and is made at every point in the policy cycle, from agenda setting to policy impact. As such, policy is an analytic category.

Item	CJCC	SPED	HEAC
Policy Question:	What are the collective effects of the behaviors of the several implementers of the community corrections program?	What are the collective effects of the behaviors of the several implementers of PL 94-142?	What are the collective effects of the behaviors of the several implementers of higher education accreditation processes?
Data Collected:	Relevant laws, court decisions, executive orders, administrative guidelines, regulations, memoranda, instructions, behavior of street-level bureaucrats; responses to the above by clients; opinions of experts.	Relevant laws, court decisions, state department of education directives, monitoring reports, guidelines, exemplars of common paperwork, behavior of the several implementer categories; responses to the above by clients and other stakeholding audiences such as parents; opinions of experts.	Relevant standards, guidelines, exemplar field reports and recommendations, minutes of review board sessions, appeals, behavior of administrators, evaluator consultants, and review board members; responses to the process by stakeholding audiences within the institutions; opinions of experts.
Data Sources:	Law libraries, state and local records, practices of agents at state and county sites and counterpart agents elsewhere, "experts" such as professors of political science and forensics and leading practitioners.	Law libraries, national, state, and local education agency records, practices of agents at state and local levels and counterpart agents elsewhere, "experts" such as professors of special education and leading practitioners.	Professional literature, accrediting association records, practices of agents within the association and at the candidate site, "experts" such as professors of higher education and leading practitioners such as university administrators.
Methodology:	Statistical data analyses, documentary analyses, interviews, observation, unobtrusive measures, investigative inquiry techniques.		
Policy Products:	Descriptions of collective effects, such as widening the net of social control to include offenders who might otherwise be released, increasing the range of acceptable plea bargaining.	Description of collective effects, such as determining who is "teachable," placing more emphasis on keeping auditable records than on overcoming student problems.	Description of collective effects, such as stigmatizing nonaccredited institutions, diminishing the range of creativity in programming that institutions will be willing to risk.

Definition 8. Policy is the impact of the policymaking and policy-implementing system as it is experienced by the client.

Item	CJCC	SPED	HEAC
Policy Question:	How would the clients describe the policy of the community corrections program as a result of their experiences with it?	How would the clients describe the policy emanating from PL 94-142 as a result of their experiences with it?	How would the clients describe the policy of the accreditation process as a result of their experiences with it?
Data Collected:	Client constructions		
Data Sources:	Clients		
Methodology:	Interviews, observation, unobtrusive measures, investigate inquiry techniques.		
Policy Products:	Client constructions, such as coercion, control, reluctance to provide entitlements such as employment opportunities, addiction therapy.	Client constructions, such as stigma, babysitting rather than help, reluctance to provide entitlements such as adequate diagnosis, therapy, prosthetic devices.	Client constructions, such as negativism, overquick judgment, inadequate understanding, reluctance to provide entitlements such as fair hearings study of special circumstances.

structions that define policy.

4. *Methodology.* Different data sources imply different methodologies in tapping them. Thus, personal constructions may require interviews and observations, records may require analysis, statistics may require numerical analysis, and so on. Hearings are a common form of input device to collect data from interest groups.

5. *Policy products.* This row of Figure 2 is by far the most interesting,

since it is here that one can best appreciate the vast differences that different policy definitions can produce. In CJCC, for example, a definition of policy as intents or goals results in a policy analysis yielding recommendations or prioritizations among goals such as reduction in costs of operating the prison system, lowering recidivism rates, providing a better fit of punishment to crime, and so on. This product is quite different from, say, Definition

2, which results in recommendations of rules (for instance, Class C felons shall be eligible for consideration for the community corrections program); Definition 3's guidelines (a probation officer may recommend termination of sentence with the approval of the judge); Definition 4's sets of tactics (conducting community forums to overcome fear of having corrections facilities placed in neighborhoods); Definition 5's expectations (judges

should accept plea bargains as necessary to keep their case load manageable); Definition 6's norms (judges should accept plea bargains as necessary to keep their case loads manageable); Definition 7's effects (widening the net of social control to include offenders who might otherwise be released); or Definition 8's client constructions (coercion and control).

A Test for Policy Products

The examples appearing in the Policy Products row of Figure 2 can reasonably be construed as policies. Some of the examples may sound more like policies to the reader than others, although this apparently greater validity is as much a function of what the reader normally takes to be policy as it is of any property intrinsic to the examples themselves. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to suggest a test; and the reader is invited to apply the following one. Using the sentence stub, "It is the policy of this entity to . . .," complete the sentence by adding the various examples of Figure 2. The term *entity* can, of course, be understood to mean a program, a unit, an agency, a legislature, or any other body or institution. To illustrate, let us take one example from Figure 2 for the special education (SPED) definition of policy:

Definition 1: *Intents or Goals.* It is the policy of this entity to provide a free, appropriate public education for all.

Definition 2: *Standing Decisions.* It is the policy of this entity to afford parents due process before placing any child in a special education program.

Definition 3: *Discretionary Guide to Action.* It is the policy of this entity to permit a school psychologist to recommend placement in a gifted program of any child whose I.Q. falls between 115 and 125.

Definition 4: *Problem-Solving Strategy.* It is the policy of this entity to use computer facilities to provide as much routine paperwork as possible.

Definition 5: *Sanctioned Behavior.* It is the policy of this entity to have regular classroom teachers consult with a resource teacher when unsure about how to handle a case. (This policy statement differs from numbers 2 and 4 above in that it is devised by

implementers close to the point of action; it is less a rule or strategy than a self-developed rule-of-thumb; the behavior is sanctioned by virtue of the successful experience of implementers.)

Definition 6: *Norms of Conduct.* It is the policy of this entity that administrators should reassign borderline cases as needed to manage teacher loads or to take account of the special circumstances of the child. (This policy statement differs from number 5 above in that norms are peer-developed accommodations to reality that have been worked out through mutual negotiation, even if only implicitly.)

Definition 7: *Output of the Policy-Making System.* It is the policy of this entity to place more emphasis on keeping auditable records than on overcoming student problems. (This analytic statement deduces policy from observations of behavior, analysis of records, and so forth. It may, as in this case, be an *unwritten* policy that is deduced but one that is operative in controlling the behavior of policymakers and implementers at all levels.)

Definition 8: *Client Constructions.* It is the policy of this entity to deny entitlements such as adequate diagnosis, therapy, or prosthetic devices. (This statement, like number 7 above, is a deduction, based not on analysis but on client experience. Clients having made such constructions will act as though these deductions were in fact the policy of the organization.)

Conclusions

Several conclusions may be drawn from the above analysis:

- It is nonsense to ask the question, "What is the *real* definition of policy?" No one of the definitions given above (or any others, for that matter) can stake a legitimate claim to priority. All definitions are *constructions*; none can claim tangible reality. Virtually any policy definition must be admitted so long as its proposer can make a rational case for his or her particular usage.

- Nevertheless, not all definitions are equal in their consequences for policy analysis. Each definition calls for its own data, sources, and methods, and produces unique outcomes. Explicitly or tacitly, each different defini-

tion has an enormous impact on the processes and products of policy analysis.

- The particular definition that an analyst elects to use should depend on the purpose of the analysis. From the perspective of the analyst some definitions will always be better than others. When Congress is seeking to set broad goals for the education of handicapped children, a definition of policy as goals or intents is clearly more meaningful than any other; indeed, certain others would not even be possible. And there can be no client constructions unless a program is already in place, for example.

- What constitutes a better definition is of course a matter of values. Thus, the selection of a particular definition is a value choice. Certain definitions of policy are likely to be more consonant with the analyst's values than others. The political implications of this choice should not be overlooked; that is, policy analysis may be used to advance certain values and to check others. The authoritarian policy board is not likely to be much interested in implementer norms or client constructions, for example. Policy analyses are *not* value free; the outcome depends heavily on the definition of policy that the analyst explicitly or implicitly follows.

- To be ethical, the policy analyst is obliged to point out the particular definition used in an analysis and to characterize its consequences for the variety of stakeholding audiences concerned with the analysis. The best way to do that is to show, as in Figure 2, what might happen if different definitions of policy were adopted. The best time to make this disclosure is *prior* to undertaking the analysis so that all stakeholding audiences may know what is involved and arrive at some consensus before the analyst proceeds. If consensus is not possible, the analyst may need to develop different analyses for different audiences; reconciliation and accommodation then become the audiences' problem. □

¹Michael Lipsky, *Street-Level Bureaucracy* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1980).

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