

## Book Review

Rogowski, S. (2013). *Critical social work with children and families: Theory, context and practice*. Bristol, UK: Policy Press.

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Dr. Rogowski has been a practicing social worker for nearly 40 years and has published widely in the area of social work policy. He practices mainly with families and children and is particularly focused on youthful offenders. This book presents Dr. Rogowski's political argument for the use of critical social work strategies to lessen the influence and control of the managerial climate that he claims currently pervades social work in the United Kingdom (UK).

The first three chapters of the book focus on defining critical social work and juxtaposing it to what he labels the New Right and the resulting neoliberal policies, which guide the practice of social work in the UK today. Rogowski argues that once conservative leaders gained power, there was a gradual shift from focusing on the individual needs of families and children to a focus on accountability as measured by evidence-based practice. He posits that rather than trying to meet citizen's basic needs, social workers must now focus more on market-based assessments and rationing of goods and services.

Chapters four through eight discuss the kinds of problems that the social workers face when practicing with specific categories of children under current policies. He discusses social work practice for children who need protection, foster care, mental health, and disability services. He also discusses the needs of children and families who are refugees seeking asylum. In the final chapter, Rogowski argues

that social workers should work toward achieving social equity and justice through social reform and structural transformation. He claims that these goals could be achieved through the practice of critical social work.

Rogowski asserts that Critical Theory not only seeks to explain social issues, but also strives to change society toward its definition of freedom. It is founded in a Marxist/socialist paradigm where freedom equals freedom from want through redistribution. Thus, a large part of his presentation is based on the political ideology that socialism is preferable to capitalism as a means to freedom. As a result, readers who do not share his political ideology may bristle at some of the claims Rogowski makes, since he does not provide evidence to substantiate many of the negative social ills he attributes to capitalism. For example, he glosses over the conservative argument that to sustain a growing population a country must create jobs and wealth. Because he sees redistribution as the answer, he ignores the question of how to balance the real needs of the people against the real need of the state to solve a financial crisis.

While this book has many strengths, I think it would be much stronger if it were presented less as a political argument and more as a scholarly work. While, on one hand, he gives clear and fairly detailed insights as to the political ideology of critical social workers and to many of the serious challenges they face, he skims over more conservative ideas or attributes negative motives

to policies related to any cuts in social services. His presentation of the serious challenges social workers face as their work becomes less about individual clients and more about meeting various quotas is excellent. He provides multiple examples of real cases that illustrate how difficult it is for social workers to meet the needs of their clients under a managerial based system that focuses on numbers rather than client satisfaction. However, his argument would be made much stronger if he treated opposing ideas as worthy of analysis. Although he does acknowledge that service cutbacks were implemented to deal with a financial crisis, he seems to argue that the motives were less about solving a financial crisis and more

about control and greed. While this is an ongoing political debate in which the opposing sides are not likely to agree anytime soon, I believe Rogowski's claims would be strengthened by addressing the issue in a less politically charged manner.

Overall, I would recommend that anyone who has an interest in understanding critical social work read this book. However, as someone who teaches social theory, I would also be cautious about using it in a class without labeling it as political ideology. That said, I believe this book provides great insight into the very important issues facing social workers under the ever increasing austerity measures that many societies face today.