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**Review of *Issues In Social Work: A Critical Analysis*. Roland G. Meinert, John T. Pardeck, and William P. Sullivan (Eds.). Reviewed by Joseph Wronka, Springfield College.**

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## Book Reviews

Roland G. Meinert, John T. Pardeck and William P. Sullivan (Eds.) *Issues in Social Work: A Critical Analysis*. Westport, CT: Auburn House, 1994. \$49.95 hardcover.

This book attempts to critically examine major issues in social work, a profession that many argue is currently struggling with its identity. Then, it proposes solutions. It succeeds extremely well on both levels, resulting in a uniquely scholarly work that is truly a state-of-the-art account of the profession.

Consisting of ten chapters, R. Meinert first discusses the book's rationale and method for determining the most salient issues in social work, humbly, yet correctly, admitting in the final analysis that some subjectivity may be involved. J. Billups then elaborates on "The social development model as an organizing framework for social work practice," elucidating how social work can concertedly deal with remedial, as well as, developmental or system-changing approaches to intervention. Traditionally, its emphasis has been on remediation. D. Bardill and J. Hurn in the following chapter discuss "Direct practice: Model framework for the past, present and future." Briefly, this model builds upon the person-in-situation paradigm, which remains a viable organizing framework for social work. The authors further delineate concepts from the family systems perspective, which can enhance this paradigm. These concepts are: differentiation, life situations, person-in-environment, and psychosocial ecology.

In chapter 4, J. Murphy in "A postmodern justification for holism in social work practice," argues that, although holism has been "de rigueur" for the profession, more work is necessary to theoretically justify holistic, thus contextually sensitive, interventions in practice. Postmodernism, which breaks with western intellectual traditions, particularly dualism, could successfully support such an approach. B. Thyer in "Assessing competence for social work practice: The role of standardized tests" meticulously documents legal regulations, professional associations, and credentialing programs to assess social work

competence, noting weaknesses, such as demonstrably poor evidence in regard to validity of standardized tests and suggesting steps for improvement like providing credible evidence that the social worker has helped at least one client.

In chapter 6, "Breaking away: The potential and promise of a strengths-based approach to social work practice," W. Sullivan and C. Rapp cogently assert the need for an approach that is different than a medically based model of helping or logical-positivist approach to inquiry which social work has generally adopted. A strengths based approach, for instance, would eschew expert/client models in favor of helping processes based on collaboration. H. Karger and D. Stoesz in "Toward a politically acceptable reformulation of the American welfare state" examine the development of the American welfare state, proposing five principles, which pertain to productivity, the family, social cohesion, community, and social choice, that are necessary for real welfare reform.

M. Dinerman in "Issues in social work education," discusses essentially master's level education, entertaining such timely topics as controversies over foundation courses, advanced concentrations, and the fit between graduate study and employment. She calls for more rigorous examination of the issues and planned experimentation, as the social work curriculum has been largely the same for 50 years. J. Pardeck in "An exploration of factors explaining the distinction and achievement levels of social work editorial boards" notes in essence that many social work editorial boards tend to lack the critical characteristics needed to appropriately evaluate manuscripts. These boards, as well as, the general status of social work programs at universities will only improve when the profession makes a greater commitment to scholarship and research.

Finally, J. Midgley in "Transnational strategies for social work: Toward effective reciprocal exchanges" examines why, despite social work's historical engagement in international activities and commitment to cultural diversity, it is generally characterized by pervasive parochialism. He calls in essence for the profession to more critically examine, for instance, how western methodologies may be inappropriate for some cultures

and how to promote dialogue and transfer practice innovations among countries.

Overall, the book is humanistic in tone. The writers are able to criticize in scholarly and meaningful ways that are not derogatory, but on the contrary, invite the reader to creatively explore avenues to improve the profession. They also do not merely criticize; they articulate alternatives, often a far more arduous exercise.

There appear no demonstrable weaknesses, though this author feels that social work's current emphases on clinical work appears mainly due to the availability of employment in this area, a point which generally, the authors do not seem to fully appreciate. Perhaps social work professional and other organizations ought to find ways to incorporate holistic, developmental, and other strategies to enhance social justice into job descriptions. Despite this apparent minor weakness, the book is an excellent contribution and must reading for those wishing to understand and improve upon critical issues in social work.

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Richard P. Barth, Mark Courtney, Jill Duerr Berrick and Vicky Albert, *From Child Abuse to Permanency Planning: Child Welfare Services Pathways and Placements*. Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 1994. \$41.95 hardcover; \$19.95 papercover.

Nora S. Gustavson and Elizabeth A. Segal, *Critical Issues in Child Welfare*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994. \$17.95 paperback.

The timing is perfect for the publication of these books, as child abuse reports and foster care placements continue to increase. Both books examine some of the critical issues facing child welfare agencies, and thus the social work profession, in the 1990s; but they represent very different perspectives on the issues.

*From Child Abuse to Permanency Planning* examines the "stall" of the permanency planning movement in recent years and asks