

**Book Review**

## **Advocacy Practice for Social Justice (3rd ed.)**

**By: Richard Hoefer**

*Oxford University Press (2016)*

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Novelist and writer Marilynne Robinson (2016) recently examined higher education in an essay in *Harper's Magazine*. Robinson lamented that universities no longer teach the humanities. Through that choice, university humanities programs no longer create informed citizens who might contribute to a shared society. Robinson argues that citizens who were informed by the humanities viewed their social role as protectors of public assets. These citizens believed in the need to contribute to the common good. Robinson contends that universities and colleges are now producing taxpayers who increasingly view their role in society as taxpayer only, resentful of public burdens that oblige the payment of taxes. Graduates of universities are not learning about civic responsibility and what it teaches about values and social justice.

Richard Hoefer's book *Advocacy Practice for Social Justice* (3rd ed.) is a worthy response to Robinson. Specific to social workers, he argues that advocacy in the public interest is or should be part and parcel of general social work practice. Hoefer grounds his arguments in ethics and philosophy, arguing that as problem solvers, social workers should examine systemic solutions to the injustices that their clients face. Is it good practice to enable clients to learn how to adjust to their conditions of oppression? Hoefer argues no, that social workers can and should ally themselves with their clients to fight those oppressive forces. Social workers have civic duties to their immediate clients and to those who find themselves in situations that are similarly and structurally oppressive.

Hoefer offers parallels between generalist social work practices and advocacy. Problem-solving methods are similar. The skills needed are similar. Learning how to engage in advocacy is similar to learning any other method of social work. Hoefer further underscores how important advocacy is to social work practice by grounding

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the need for advocacy in social work in the accrediting standards from the Council on Social Work Education.

Hoefer offers social workers insights into how to understand their own values and skills, how to determine the philosophical foundation from which they practice social work. He then paves a path for social workers to understand how to use these values and skills to address systemic issues. Through discussions on distributive justice and problem solving, he helps his readers understand how to conceive of solutions to the systemic problems that clients face.

That is not to argue that this is a how-to approach to advocacy. It is distinctly not a manual. What Hoefer offers are strategies about how to think about the nuts and bolts of what to do. What messages can be effective (that also reflect personal values)? How can skills in planning for clients enable planning that accomplishes social justice goals? This book informs readers how to make choices about strategies to engage in advocacy. This book does not tell readers what choices to make.

Because Hoefer so nicely frames these questions, the book may be especially useful to novice advocates beyond those affiliated with social work. I have been engaged in advocacy and policy work with organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union and Amnesty International for over 20 years. As I read this book, I could see how useful it would have been to help guide thoughtful campaigning strategy. Likewise, this book would have better informed the ways I offered training on advocacy for the members of these organizations. Hoefer provides a logical scaffolding that would enable novice advocates to think through how to develop strategies to advocate for human rights and social justice. The book includes worksheets and exercises as tools to engage the reader. The book can easily be used in classes and trainings.

One critique of this book on advocacy is its failure to stress how big goals can be managed through campaigns, by breaking into smaller steps how to accomplish those broader outcomes that achieve social justice. In the advocacy map template provided in the book, the reader has an opportunity to identify “ultimate social justice-related outcomes for society.” In each example, Hoefer identifies an individual goal writ large. For example, if the long-term goal for a client is to have adequate amounts of food, the social justice outcomes would be a society in which everyone has an adequate amount of food. With social justice outcomes, Hoefer abandons the specificity that he accepts for developing goals for clients. Yet social justice-related outcomes can be more specific, particularly if they become operationalized in organized campaigns that parcel out the incremental progress needed to accomplish ambitious advances in social change.

Hoefer might have offered more tips on effective relationship building with legislators. Good advocates not only provide expert information to policy makers, but also learn to solicit positions from those same policy makers. This exchange of information helps build the foundation for a relationship that enables advocates to communicate effectively. It also builds a foundation to hold legislators accountable for their positions, particularly if they say one thing and do another.

Despite the critiques, the nuts and bolts of the book offer valuable resources and framing of how to engage in social justice advocacy. Social workers and social justice advocates can work together to expand a responsibility to civic duty as an ethical strategy that those concerned with the well-being of individuals can and should adopt.

The book is clearly directed at social workers' obligations to engage in advocacy. Robinson would be comforted to know that social workers envision their roles as responsible to the civic body and not only individual clients. Hoefer encourages advocacy so that all social workers think of themselves with duties to the common good as well as to the individual client.

## Reference

- Robinson, M. (2016, March). Save our public schools: In defense of America's best idea.. *Harper's Magazine*. Retrieved from <https://harpers.org/archive/2016/03/save-our-public-universities/>