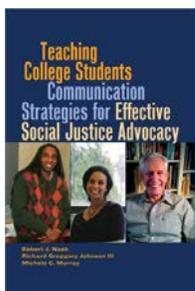


## Professional Book Review

Nash, R., Johnson, R., & Murray, M. (2012). *Teaching College Students Communication Strategies for Effective Social Justice Advocacy*. New York: Peter Lang. 186 pp., ISBN: 978-1-4331-1436-6 (pbk). \$35.95

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Education is an essential element in social justice leadership. Nelson Mandela (2003) stated, "Education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world." Multicultural education in particular has the potential to promote social justice in schools and society. College teachers have long been urged to view their classrooms as transformative entities by making themselves vulnerable to the students they seek to transform (hooks, 2003). The authors of this volume have an additional message: "Don't call out others; call to others" (p. xviv). Teach, don't preach social justice. Advocacy dialogue is more effective than preaching as it does not alienate and polarize those we are seeking to change. Advocacy dialogue is defined as dialogue "grounded in the principle of respect for the fundamental worth and dignity of each and every person" (p. xvi). Social justice advocates must be willing to learn from students. Educators do not have an exclusive connection with social justice. Teaching is accomplished through educator-student relationships built on trust, the essential foundation of transformative teaching and learning.

Transformation of one's students through multicultural education is a personal journey, beginning with educators themselves trying to understand their own cultural autobiography and reactions in relationship with others. How often has our advocacy been rejected as too "radical," "liberal," or "biased," when we might have been more successful beginning with the life experiences of our students and revealing our own subjectivities as one perspective, not the *only* perspective? The book breaks new ground in its application of scholarly personal narrative (SPN), an innovative approach within qualitative research, to a social justice perspective focused on communication strategies within higher education.

The volume explains and applies social justice *advocacy dialogue* through a collaborative project involving the interchange of ideas between noted multicultural educators. The authors demonstrate how scholarly personal narrative (SPN) is built on a foundation of collaboration and listening to the diverse perspectives of the authors. For example, Robert Nash is an "older white male" and veteran interdisciplinary college professor; Richard Johnson III, a "social justice expert" and African American faculty member; and Michele Murray, a female "top-level higher education student affairs administrator" who is also African American (pp. xv- xvii). These higher education scholar-practitioners engage in dialogue and share their own social justice teaching and lessons learned to provide a resource for others who want to become more effective

social justice advocates. The book models the approach of listening, storytelling and sharing. Chapter 9 includes firsthand reports from the field authored by an additional nine social justice advocates who provide leadership narratives on a range of perspectives related to sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, social class, religious, political, nationality, and other diversities.

Different styles of social justice advocacy dialogue are presented: (a) *Radvocacy*, or radically advocating and speaking up when injustices occur; (b) *Madvocacy*, or showing moral outrage and anger, but being aware of not silencing others; (c) *Gladvocacy*, or calling to others and listening closely to their perspective; (d) *Sadvocacy*, teaching through one's own pain and victimization, but being aware of not casting others as needing rescuing; and (e) *Fadvocacy*, or getting caught up in the latest injustice which might not be sustained long enough for change. The authors propose that the first three styles of social justice advocacy dialogue are more effective, with Gladvocacy the preferred style.

Activists, revolutionaries, and political change agents might force change through radical actions, but the authors center their leadership for transformation of society through education, an approach that offers potential for lasting systemic change. The authors quote Cornel West who defines justice as seeking equity or "what love looks like in public" (p. 121). Love in this sense of brotherly love for one's fellow humans seems to be what social justice advocacy teaching implies if it is to be effective and sustained. Love is not a word used frequently in education, but it is what is required in order for us to transform ourselves and to inspire and transform others.

Contributor Jacob Diaz begins his narrative entitled "Advocating for Social Justice Begins with Me" with a poem by Audre Lorde (p. 160):

and when we speak we are afraid  
our words will not be heard  
nor welcomed  
but when we are silent  
we are still afraid  
So it is better to speak  
remembering  
we were never meant to survive

Advocacy dialogue is thus demonstrated as powerful when combined with voice situated in a commitment to self-reflection and examining one's own self and in relation to others.

Prospective readers, college professors, administrators, staff, and students can learn from the scholarly personal narratives (SPN) of these social justice advocates and apply lessons learned from the field to their own multicultural education work and/or social justice leadership. Whether the practices of *radvocacy* (radical advocacy), *madvocacy* (moral outrage),

*gladvocacy* (listening and learning), *sadvocacy* (teaching through sad self-disclosures of injustice), or *fadvocacy* (following current trends in social justice issues) are to be applied to transform schools and society depends on the situation according to the authors. Social justice leaders must be sensitive to the contexts and the situations that best demand one or more approaches. Success will depend on the extent to which educators within their particular context and socio-historical milieu are willing to self-reflect, relate to others, and accept the principle that “not everyone is sensitive to issues of injustice” (p. 121). Regardless of the situation, a rigorous approach to solving problems of social injustice is to embrace the flaws in ourselves and others and to grow while learning in relationships.

One area of critique is the authors’ inattention to research on social justice leadership and the dynamics of power and influence inherent in leadership. See, for example, Theoharris’ (2007) research with leaders for social justice and the resistance they encountered. In seeking to transform individuals and organizations, the social justice advocacy recommended by the authors relies on the power of transformative leadership. Conservatives, radicals, and liberals in schools and higher education have a view of democracy, and they may engage in power and leadership to achieve their ends. It would have been helpful to expand the attention to how power is used in teaching and leading by individuals with different orientations and to how power is redefined with equity as the outcome for a better society. Concepts and theory from transformational and post-transformational leadership applied to teaching college students’ communication strategies for social justice advocacy remain for other researchers to examine.

The book is an essential reading for every social justice leader and educator. The objective of the book, to explore and illustrate how social justice advocates can communicate their message more effectively through advocacy dialogue, was met. As one who has polarized others through frustration with the slow pace of change, I found the book demonstrated the importance of connecting with diverse individuals in advancing the cause of social justice. Forcing change alienates others. Teaching college students requires, instead, the skill of listening and seeking interconnections between people if we are to realize learning and human potential.

## References

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