The NASP Social Justice Committee (SJC) is pleased to announce the 2022-2023 National Book Read, *Troublemakers: Lessons in Freedom from Young Children at School* by Carla Shalaby. The SJC encourages individuals and groups to engage with this text throughout the 2022-2023 school year. Committee members have developed a discussion guide designed to help readers think both broadly and specifically about how the issues discussed in the book connect to social justice for youth and families. If you would like to lead a group discussion around this book, the guidance documents are available both online and in printable PDF formats.

As you engage in the book read, please reference the NASP (2017) definition of social justice for additional context:

Social justice is both a process and a goal that requires action. School psychologists work to ensure the protection of the educational rights, opportunities, and well-being of all children, especially those whose voices have been muted, identities obscured, or needs ignored. Social justice requires promoting nondiscriminatory practices and the empowerment of families and communities. School psychologists enact social justice through culturally responsive professional practice and advocacy to create schools, communities, and systems that ensure equity and fairness for all children and youth.

Keeping in mind the centrality of social justice to school psychology practice, the SJC encourages school psychologists to organize groups (e.g., school-based colleagues, district colleagues, graduate education program faculty, and students) to read and discuss the book. We encourage interdisciplinary groups that include a range of school-based mental health providers and educators. Videos with tips for facilitating book reads will be available via the Social Justice page of the NASP website. This guidance document offers a structured way to engage in discussions about our recommended National Book Read. The questions are designed to prompt thought, critique, and action steps towards increasing the ability of individuals, schools, and communities to be a force for social justice.

**PLANNING YOUR BOOK READ**

To help coordinate your book read, we suggest using one of the following timelines:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th># of Meetings</th>
<th>Time Per Meeting</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Chapters to Discuss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 hrs</td>
<td>1. Reconceptualizing Troublemaking</td>
<td>1. Foreword-A Note to All Readers</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 hr</td>
<td>1. Forest School</td>
<td>1. Foreword – Lucas</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Crossroads School</td>
<td>2. Sean – A Note to All Readers</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>30-45 min</td>
<td>1. (In)Visibility &amp; Being Out-standing</td>
<td>1. Foreword – Zora</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Being Pigeonholed &amp; Willful</td>
<td>2. Lucas – Sean</td>
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Facilitators should be mindful of the safety and comfort of attendees when determining if in-person meetings are appropriate. Please see the Facilitating a Book Read video available on NASP’s Social Justice website for additional considerations for in-person environments. If you decide to meet virtually, Zoom and GoToMeeting are excellent options for synchronous virtual group discussions. If you would like an asynchronous approach, we recommend dialogue-oriented sites for engaging with your book read members, such as Flipgrid, Padlet, Discord, Microsoft Teams. Your schools/institutions may already have memberships and support to offer for these services.

When facilitating a book read, there will likely be varying opinions, experiences, and interpretations. Further, the subject matter can elicit strong emotional reactions that fuel disagreement among participants. To prepare, we encourage facilitators to watch our video, Tips for Fostering Dialogue Across Difference, to help navigate tense situations should they arise.

Finally, facilitators are encouraged to create learning objectives to help guide their group’s book discussions. We offer the following learning objectives as examples for Troublemakers.

The learning objectives of this book read are that attendees will:

1. Recognize the various perspectives, contexts, experiences, and systems that influence our interpretation of “trouble-making” behaviors;
2. Enhance their understanding of intersections between students, their teachers, their home, and the larger society;
3. Examine what constitutes freedom within education settings;
4. and apply the knowledge and awareness provided in the Troublemakers to the services and advocacy expected of school psychologists.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

Successful book reads are often participant driven, which allows for the group to determine the focus of the meeting. Facilitators can pose general questions, and it is recommended that they allow group members to freely move from topic to topic as naturally as possible. That said, some book groups will be more or less engaged with each other. At times, conversation may stall.

In an effort to keep the discussion moving, as well as action oriented, we offer the following guiding questions for facilitators to consider for each section of the book. It is not recommended that all questions to be used, but rather book read facilitators pick those that they feel are most salient to the interests and needs of the group. For each question, we have indicated the corresponding learning objective (LO) from our example above.

Foreword, Preface, and Introduction

1. As a school psychologist, how does it feel to see, words like “measurement,” “assessment,” and “quantification” framed as counter to freedom in schools? (LO4)
2. What personal work do you need to do in order to reframe “troublemakers” as teachers who are trying to highlight oppressive systems? (LO1)

3. Would you recommend this book to your peers in school psychology? Why or why not? (LO4)

4. What behaviors at your school are treated as “disordered” when they could in fact be valid responses to the context in which the student resides/learns/operates? (LO2)

**Part 1: Forest School**

1. How do the classrooms in your schools differ from Mrs. Beverly’s and Mrs. Norbert’s non-traditional classrooms? What is similar? What are the barriers to developing your school’s classrooms into more active, multimodal, accessible classes for all students? (LO1, LO4)

2. What about Mrs. Beverly’s and Mrs. Norbert’s classrooms align with the developmental stages of their students? What does not? (LO1, LO2)

3. Consider the schools in which you work: what expectations align with the student’s developmental level and what expectations do not/are instead focused on control and power? (LO4)

4. What about these classrooms and your classrooms align with practices of liberation and freedom? What aligns with ideas of hierarchical power and control? (LO3)

5. Where do you believe the teachers’ behavioral expectations stem from? (LO1)
   a. How about for you and the staff in your schools: Where are behavior expectations stemming from? (LO1, LO4)
   b. How can such expectations result in a focus on within-person deficits? (LO1, LO2)
   c. How is nuance in thinking and behaviors missed when we have rigid expectations of how students should think and act? (LO1, LO2)

**Zora: On Being Out-Standing**

1. Ms. Beverley often mentions that it is important for Zora to follow classroom and school "code of conduct". She continues to justify this by saying that they (the teachers) work to make students' behavior be "acceptable" to be "accepted".
   a. How do you think this language affects teachers' perspectives on students who do not follow their code of conduct? (LO1)
   b. What does this mean for how the student is perceived by the other students in the classroom? (LO2)

2. Zora's household is structured very differently from her school. Her home encourages curiosity, fun, flexibility, not "blending in", and to be extraordinary. What would it look like if Ms. Beverley's classroom reflected Zora's home values? (LO2)
3. How might Zora's behavior change if the school reflected similar values that her parents and home encourage? Would she still be publicly reprimanded as much? (LO2, LO3)

4. The school psychologist, teachers, and other staff met with Zora's parents to suggest medication for ADHD as a mechanism to improve her quality of life. Although parents were hesitant, they went with the suggestion of the school team. As a school psychologist, what were some other possible ways of supporting Zora and her parents' prior to suggesting medication? (LO4)

**Lucas: On Being Pigeonholed**

1. Corinne describes Lucas initially by saying “he was a good baby” until her other child interrupts and opens up a conversation that allows for a better, holistic understanding of her child.
   a. How can the words we use when speaking with a parent (i.e., in meetings, in parent interviews) impact the type of information we are able to gather? (LO4)
   b. What language and questions assist in allowing a parent to fully express their child holistically rather than limiting them to single word labels? (LO4)

2. There are assumptions made that Lucas should just “know” how to engage with others and think about things from others’ perspectives.
   a. How does such an assumption cause strife both in the short-term and long-term? (LO1, LO3)
   b. What are assumptions that you make around what people should just “know”? (LO4)

3. On p. 53, the author states “Lucas’s egocentrism can be mistaken for selfishness… but on the contrary, his extremely high level of sensitivity and overreaction allow him to demonstrate deep care and thoughtfulness” Consider the “troublemakers” in your schools and what assumptions are being made about them and why they act the way they do.
   a. How is this framing impacting how staff members interact with the child (i.e., “pigeonhole” them)? (LO1, LO2, LO3, LO4)
   b. How can labeling (i.e., pigeonholing) limit our understanding of a child? What can be missed in doing so (e.g., positive aspects that are overlooked about this child because of the focus on what they are doing “wrong”)? (LO3, LO4)
   c. What is another way of framing that “troublemaker’s” behavior? (LO1)

4. How had the policing of Lucas’s behavior and the rigid focus on him becoming part of/conforming to the culture resulted in the development of other non-desired behaviors so that he can cope with the expectations set on him?
   a. How are you seeing similar patterns playing out in your schools? (LO4)
   b. How can behavioral expectations and demands made of students in elementary school impact/stifle their ability to be creative, joyful and love learning? (LO1)

5. Imagine a world where Lucas’s behaviors aren’t just accepted but are celebrated rather than there being an enforcement of obedience and conformity.
   a. What’s the difference between accepting versus celebrating? (LO3)
b. How would this shape the classroom? (LO2)
c. How would school staff members mindsets need to change to do this? (LO2)
d. In what ways would this shift in framing be easy for you? Difficult? (LO4)
e. How would a celebration of difference change how we, as a society, view individuals with disabilities? (LO3, LO4)

Part II: The Crossroads School

1. What messages does the Crossroads School send to their students about troublemaking, and how so? (LO1)

2. What does freedom look like in Emily’s classroom? For Emily herself? (LO3)

3. What if every school day could be less intense, as described towards the end of the school year?
   a. How would that change children’s and teacher’s experiences? (LO1, LO2)
   b. Our experiences as school psychologists? (LO4)

Sean: On Being Willful

1. How could Kate's parenting style be helpful for Sean? (Pg. 91) (LO2)
   a. How can it be harmful to Sean? (LO2, LO3)
   b. What are the areas of improvement? (LO2)

2. What might be learned from Sean’s willful defiance? How can schools uplift student voices and incorporate student choice within the everyday structure and curriculum? (LO1, LO3)

3. What strengths does Sean possess? How could Emily (Sean’s teacher) utilize Sean’s strengths to make him feel like a valued classmate? (LO1, LO2)

4. How can Emily (Sean’s teacher) create a space that is supportive and non-exclusionary? (LO2, LO3)

Marcus: On Being Good

1. What are some activities you as a school psychologist would create to allow Marcus meet his desire to be seen, heard, to help others, and to form genuine social bonds with others at school? (LO3, LO4)

2. The author re-interprets Marcus' behavior as stemming from a need to be heard authentically (i.e., on his own terms). What are some ways in which the teacher could have done this while also fulfilling her duty to the rest of the class? Give specific examples. (LO2)

3. Marcus' strong sense of community orientation clashed with the teacher and school's prioritization of autonomy and task-oriented mastery. Discuss this clash in terms of the
differences in cultural values. Also discuss the implications of this clash for decolonizing the traditional model of schooling? (LO2, LO3)

Conclusion

1. Shalaby discusses the need to not portray youth as “caricatures of troublemakers” (pg. 151) and treat the word “trouble-making as a verb rather than a noun” (pg 151). In what ways do school psychologists contribute to the perception of troublemakers, and how might we reframe our practice to follow Shalaby’s conceptualization of the word as a verb? (LO4)

2. How do school psychologists perpetrate schools’ tendency to engender, exclude, and erase trouble-making? How do we disrupt this process? (LO4)

3. How does the context of troublemaking connect to issues of exclusionary discipline and alternative education settings?

4. Consider the four summaries provided for each of the featured children in the book. Is one or more similar to a child you have worked with in the past? (LO4)

5. Using the story of one of the featured children, what are services that school psychologists could provide across each of the levels of advocacy demonstrated in Figure 1? (LO4)

Figure 1

*School psychology advocacy model from Malone et al. (2019)*

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Tier 3 & SPED  | Tier 2  | Tier 1  | Society
---|---|---|---
Student | Classrooms & Groups | Schools & Districts | Families & Communities | Public
Individual Intervention | Group Intervention | School-Wide Intervention (e.g., PBIS) | Family Trainings | Join National Workgroup
Advocating for Student Needs & Resources | Advocating for Student Group Needs & Resources | Advocating for Improved Policies and Systems-Level Procedures | Supporting Community Centers | Supporting Laws and Policies that Protect & Empower Youth
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A Letter to Teachers: On Teaching Love and Learning Freedom

1. Shalaby provides an argument against strategies such as correcting behavior in front of the class as a teaching moment and the use of peer monitoring of behavior. She further provides the “regular way” and the “toward a loving way” of classroom management. How might this reframe change the way school psychologists provide consultation for classroom management? (LO3, LO4)

2. Shalaby offers three questions to help move “us towards curiosity and away from evaluation.” How might school psychologists integrate these questions into practice? (LO3, LO4)

A Note to All Readers: On Mushrooms, Mold, and Mice

1. Consider the example of Detroit teachers engaging in “trouble making.”
   a. How do we determine what is socially acceptable troublemaking versus unacceptable troublemaking? (LO1)
   b. What are other ways in which educators may engage in trouble-making within the educational system? (LO2)

2. Shalaby’s message regarding freedom, within and outside of the classroom, is a powerful statement about how we frame educational systems and interactions. What is the role of school psychologists in promoting and engaging in freedom for children? Families? Educators? (LO3, LO4)

References


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