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PLANNING EFFECTIVE IMPLICIT BIAS TRAINING

Understanding the role bias plays in school security is critical. Lecture training won’t cut it though—for people to get a clear picture of their own bias and how it shapes their actions and attitudes, they need an immersive experience.

Fifty-three years ago, a schoolteacher in Iowa wanted to teach her third-grade students a lesson. Martin Luther King, Jr., had been assassinated the previous day, and she wanted the students to understand prejudice and racism.

The experiment Jane Elliott devised has been immortalized in news accounts, lectures, even documentaries. You know it as the Blue Eyes & Brown Eyes Exercise. She used eye color to segregate the children, giving advantages to the group with a certain color eye. The exercise was spectacularly successful—children with the preferred eye color quickly exercised their control to dominate the other children. Those with the eye color deemed inferior became timid and did worse on simple tests and exercises. She then flipped the script, to see if the previously dominated children would be more tolerant once they had power. The result: No, not even a little. The children—and many children and adults since then—certainly came to understand prejudice and racism in a new way.

Fast forward to today. In a discussion with two security experts on the dangers of implicit bias on school campuses, Jane Elliott’s exercise is right on the tip of the tongue when discussing proactive training of school administrative and security staff to mitigate the damage that implicit bias can cause.

“I think you go back and think of Jane Elliott—the blue-eyed, brown-eyed test—that immersive experiment and ones like it are the most impactful training.” So says Malcolm Reid, CPP, managing director of Brison LLC, a risk management consultancy firm. He is also on the ASIS Global Board of Directors and works on ASIS’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Taskforce. He continues: “They were immersed in the experiment, and it really helped them understand what it is like to be in a discriminatory situation. Reading theory will just be like water off a duck’s back and the training will not be beneficial. But if you give people an experience like that, the training can have a real, positive impact.”

Carlton Gerald, CPP the security and emergency operations coordinator at Alexandria City, Virginia, Public Schools, heartily agrees with Reid. Previously Gerald had managed the Emergency Planning and Guidance Unit for Washington, DC, Public Schools, and he is a threat assessment trainer for the U.S. Department of Education Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance Center. “As a trainer, I’ve gotten more out of people through scenarios than instruction alone,” Gerald says. “You want to put them in situations so they
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can develop a deeper understanding. You can show videos of situations, ideally ones that have some ambiguity about them. And then have participants talk through the situations as a group. That’s the way to help them understand their own true north, their own implicit bias. You have a much better chance of them altering their world view if they have that self-understanding as part of it.”

Gerald notes that the Center for School and Campus Safety, part of Virginia’s Department of Criminal Justice Services, has a comprehensive training curriculum called the School Resource Officer and School Administrator Basic Course, in which school security officers, school resource officers from the local police force, and school administrators all train on school safety and security issues at the same time. “This allows for all the parties to have a very clear understanding of each other’s roles and responsibilities,” he says.

They also say that to truly make an impact, diversity, equity, and inclusion training cannot be a one-and-done thing. The training must be woven into everyday interactions. The best training is one where the participants feel the freedom to respectfully call back to the training to discuss situations that arise. Both Gerald and Reid shared an experience in which in a professional setting someone assumed they had a function that they did not.

“That can be a teachable moment,” Reid says. “When you get an opportunity or a moment to educate someone, that can be a real shining light. It can help change someone’s perspective going forward.”

Making it an effective teachable moment, however, takes both tact and openness, and not every moment in which implicit bias is apparent will be the right opportunity. However, among groups who have had the same or similar training, using the training as a reference point to engage in real-life dialog—not just dialog based on a simulation—can be an incredibly powerful tool.

Scott Briscoe is content development director for ASIS International.
SCHOOL AND CAMPUS SECURITY

Our world is full of threats both external and internal, but there are steps you can take — some that you may not have considered — to mitigate the threat before it arrives at your front door.

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How do you allow authorized staff to move freely through your facility, but still allow egress during an emergency? Are you vulnerable to attacks by a disgruntled staff member, begrudged student, or stranger off the street?

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1. Perimeter emergency exit and access control
2. Lockdown systems

1) Perimeter emergency exit and access control
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2) Lockdown Systems
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