

# Students Educate Educators on Implicit Bias

November 14, 2018 by Arik Korman

By **Arik Korman**, League of Education Voters Communications Director

[Inspirational Workshops](#) has partnered with [King County Best Starts for Kids](#) to expand trauma-informed and restorative practices in schools, beginning with Garfield High School and Washington Middle School in Seattle to offer the [Trailblazers Program](#): youth of color blazing the trail for others.

The Trailblazers Program, created by Inspirational Workshops founder Theresa Hardy, is designed to empower underrepresented students to gain confidence that will support them with navigating institutionalized racism. Trailblazers introduces youth to social justice awareness and elevates student voice.

Last week, Trailblazers presented a professional development (PD) workshop on implicit bias for the entire educator staff at Washington Middle School, which was the first PD in the Seattle School District ever led by students. The session was led by Washington Middle School students Sona, an 8<sup>th</sup>-grader, and Kamilo (a.k.a. Bubbles), a 7<sup>th</sup>-grader. Sona and Kamilo told their personal stories and led discussions on what implicit bias is, which biases were in the room, why people have implicit bias, negative impacts of implicit bias, and solutions.

Kamilo shared his experience in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, when he had a teacher who has a bias against black students. This teacher sat him and his African-American classmates at the back of the classroom and treated them differently from their classmates, which made him feel alienated. When Sona was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, a teacher assumed she was on her phone when she put her head down on her desk because she had a headache. Sona felt that her teacher did not develop a relationship with her because of the teacher's bias.

Sona, Kamilo, and several of the 41 educators in the room revealed their personal biases. Kamilo explained how he has a bias against white male police officers, a sentiment that was shared by a Latino male educator and an Asian female educator. Sona described her bias against white male teachers due to her 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade teacher making her feel dumb – she told the teacher that she wanted to be in the Advanced Placement program because she felt like she was smart, and the teacher said it's not just about feeling smart, it is about being smart. The Asian female educator echoed that, clarifying that she experienced teachers making her feel dumb because English was not her first language. A white male educator shared that he has a bias against students who are late to class. Another white male educator said that he looks at black male students and assumes that they play basketball, especially when they are tall. And another white male educator shared that if he sees students of color playing in the hallway, he assumes that criminal activity is happening. The educator added that he once inaccurately believed Sona was stealing another student's phone, and in the future, he will instead “act dorky” to diffuse the situation.

Sona and Kamilo listed the negative impacts of implicit bias, which include teachers maintaining lower academic standards for students of color, students of color experiencing disproportionate suspension and expulsion (a friend of Kamilo's who was supposed to co-present the morning's implicit bias PD was unable to attend because he was suspended), students of color not being placed in highly capable programs, and students of color receiving lower grades than their white peers.

## Developing relationships with students is key

In order for educators to overcome implicit bias, Sona and Kamilo recommended that educators become aware of their own biases so that they can fix them. Educators can also study implicit bias and teach their colleagues. The students also suggested paying attention to teachers and leaders who try to close the achievement gap, watching for implicit bias in their school, and not buying into a single story about their students – there is always a multitude of factors that influence a student's behavior. Developing relationships with students is key, especially the students whom educators consider to have problematic behavior, and giving them platforms to tell their story.

In the Q&A forum after the presentation, a white male educator asked Sona and Kamilo how staff can get to know students who exhibit what they consider problem behavior. Sona and Kamilo answered, “Talk to them. Talk to their parents to find out what's up. Give them space, and they'll share when they're ready. Be genuine, and tell your students that you care.” When asked how school staff can talk to privileged white students about implicit bias, Sona and Kamilo suggested holding a school assembly and forming student advisory groups.

Throughout Sona and Kamilo's presentation, the 34 white educators and 7 educators of color at Washington Middle School remained highly engaged. They praised Sona and Kamilo's courage, participated in the partner sharing, offered their own biases to the large group, and asked thoughtful questions. The morning's implicit bias PD clearly demonstrated that students are wise beyond their years, and are an untapped resource to make our education system more welcoming for all.

## Resources:

Harvard University [Implicit Association Test](#) (IAT)

Film suggestion: [Freedom Writers](#)

Book suggestion: [The Blindspot: Hidden Biases of Good People](#) by Anthony Greenwald and Mahzarin Banaji

TED talk: [The Danger of a Single Story](#)

Love what we do? [Support our work](#)

Want to find out the latest in education news in Washington? [Subscribe to our newsletter](#)

Want to learn more about League of Education Voters? [Find out here](#)

## Share this:



[◀ Previous](#)

[Next ▶](#)

## Leave a Reply

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked \*

Comment

Name \*

Email \*

Website

☐ Notify me of follow-up comments by email.

☐ Notify me of new posts by email.



Join Our Mailing List

Donate

## LEV ARTICLE ARCHIVES

Select Month

## OUR COMMENT POLICY

Please review our [commenting policy](#) before joining the conversation.

## BLOG CATEGORIES

- Advocacy and Activism (71)  
› Activist of the Month (40)
- Charter Schools (14)
- Closing the Gaps (54)
- Early Learning (18)
- Funding (47)
- Graduation Requirements (5)
- Higher Education (15)
- Legislative session (32)
- LEV News (79)  
› Education Advocate (19)  
  
› Events (7)  
  
› Press Releases & Statements (13)
- School Discipline (14)
- Teachers (15)
- Uncategorized (2)  
› COVID-19 Resources (1)
- Weekly Roundup (25)

## TAGS

- 2017 Legislative Session
- 2018 legislative session
- 2019 Legislative Session
- 2019 Legislature
- 2020 Legislative Session
- 2020 Legislature
- Annual Breakfast
- basic education
- career connected learning
- charter schools
- college and career readiness
- college and career ready diploma
- CTE
- early childhood education
- early learning
- ECEAP
- education budget
- education funding
- education reform
- foster care
- funding
- graduation requirements
- higher education
- K-12
- levies and bonds
- McCleary
- Opportunity Gap
- OSPI
- podcast
- podcasts
- PTA
- public charter schools
- Social Emotional Learning
- South Shore School
- special education
- Spokane
- State Board of Education
- students
- student supports
- student voice
- Supreme Court
- teachers
- Transforming School Discipline
- University of Washington
- WA Charters