Chapter 1
Cultural Bias and Its Implications for Discipline Disparity

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ABSTRACT

Minority students in both urban and suburban school settings within the United States are subject to harsher and more frequent disciplinary actions than their white counterparts. Implicit bias and lack of cultural awareness contribute to a large disparity in discipline referrals for Black males in particular. Through the application of Critical Race Theory and Racial Threat Theory, this chapter examines the historical influences that have created confirmation bias in the education environment as well as the prevalence of zero-tolerance policies that exist in schools with large minority populations. Data gathered from the 2017 Civil Rights Data collection reported to the US Department of Education were used to highlight the discipline trends of six US school districts.

INTRODUCTION

What do Krunk dancing, Hip-Hop culture, playing the dozens, comedy, slam poetry and athletic competition all have in common? Aside from them being outlets of creative expression, major business industries, and associations of youth culture, they are all forms of cultural expression that are rooted in competition and domination. If you are an educator working with minority youth ages 5 to 18 and you do not know what these things are you are operating from a cultural deficit that may harm

your relationship with students before you ever get started. This chapter identifies the ways in which discipline disparities can be attributed to cultural ignorance, prejudice, power struggles, and implicit bias.

In order to adequately and effectively address the biases that exist for many educators who find themselves working with an ever-changing demographic, it is necessary to identify the genesis of these biases and the ways in which they play out in the school environment. It is not enough to simply be able to recognize the bias, educators must be able to create solutions so that favorable outcomes for all students are achieved through an equitable lens.

The goal of this chapter is to offer insight into several commonly overlooked cultural subtleties that can lead to misinterpretations of student behavior and academic marginalization. Such consequences whose origins can be found in confirmation bias and Racial Threat Theory may ultimately end in damaged relationships between teachers and students.

Although there is no easy path to eliminating implicit bias,there are ways for educators to become more knowledgeable of what their biases are, where they may have begun, and how they impact students. The historical references in this chapter allow educators to examine their pedagogical practices when and where these biases interject into their learning community. By applying the strategies learned in this chapter educators will not only grow personally, they will gain insight into adapting best practices for students that will help eliminate cultural discipline disparities in classrooms throughout the United States.

As a dean of students, this author has first-hand experience in how cultural deficits can lead to misinterpretations of student actions, consequently creating missed opportunities, frequent referrals and punitive actions for minor offences. This author has seen positive gains in student behavior and efforts when students perceive the goal of redirection is not to send them home for every infraction. Prioritizing empathy over apathy should be the priority when interacting with student referrals. Seeking to understand students' actions allows for growth and reflection that results in an environment that fosters self-efficacy. Viewing discipline referrals through an equitable lens versus relying solely on zero-tolerance policies has led to reduced infractions and a boost in both student confidence and morale. As such, helping educators reflect on their practices and evolve to best serve students of all backgrounds is the priority that drives this research.

OVERVIEW

False narratives have plagued American society since its inception. This has recently been demonstrated in debates regarding use of Critical Race Theory (CRT)-originally

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