UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF TEACHERS’ CULTURE
ON STUDENT DISCIPLINE

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Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Education

Regent University
September 2011
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to advance educators’ understanding of the role of teachers’ culture on students’ discipline. A key issue in education is disproportionate disciplinary representation of Black male students for cultural behaviors. National and Commonwealth of Virginia discipline data indicate that Black male students are most frequently disciplined for subjectively determined communication-based behavior that is part of their culture. Teachers who are unaware of the way that their personal culture influences their disciplinary decisions are disciplining Black male students based on the culture of the teacher. As a result, the verbal and nonverbal communication patterns of Black male students are often misinterpreted by their teachers. The Cultural Awareness Inventory was administered to 205 teachers in a rural county in Virginia via SurveyMonkey® in order to determine whether differences exist in the way that elementary, middle, and high school teachers view diversity. Additionally, national, county, and Commonwealth of Virginia school discipline data were evaluated to provide increased understanding of the way that teachers’ attitudes and beliefs influence practice. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine whether a significant difference exists in teachers’ cultural awareness scores by grade level. The result of the test was significant. A difference was found in the way that elementary and high school teachers view diversity. School discipline data also indicated that high school teachers discipline Black male students disproportionately more for cultural behaviors than do elementary teachers. Based on the results of this research, adult education programs can be developed to address the diversity preparation needs of teachers.