Cultivating Culturally Responsive, Equity-centered, and Trauma-informed Attitudes among Educators

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CULTIVATING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE, EQUITY-CENTERED, AND TRAUMA-INFORMED ATTITUDES AMONG EDUCATORS

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment for the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the Doctoral Program in Public Affairs
in the College of Community Innovation and Education
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Summer Term
2022

Major Professor: Kim M. Anderson
ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored the influence of implementing a culturally responsive and equity-centered trauma-informed professional development series with educators. Seven middle school educators from various regions of the U.S. participated in a culturally responsive and equity-centered trauma-informed professional development series in the 2021-2022 academic year. Educators participating in the series received three live virtual two-hour trauma-informed modules highlighting racial trauma, race-related trauma triggers, and deficit versus asset-based perspectives of racially diverse students, along with case studies and critical discourse. Data collection included pre-and post-interviews (n = 14), participant journal reflections (n = 14), and intervention module case study reflection transcripts (n = 3). Three overarching themes were identified from thematic analysis relating to participants’ engagement in the professional development series. First, the series helped to enrich educators’ soil of knowledge and awareness (i.e., racial trauma knowledge and awareness, social awareness, and self-awareness). Second, the series helped educators grow roots of intentionality (i.e., deliberate and purposeful thoughts for interacting with students). Third, the professional development series cultivated the budding of social change agents (i.e., educators’ transformative potential and desire to engage in social action efforts). The study’s findings suggest that a culturally responsive, equity-centered trauma-informed professional development series has the potential to enrich educators' knowledge and awareness regarding racial trauma. Furthermore, the series has the potential to improve interpersonal interactions between teachers and students and increase student engagement. Lastly, the professional development series can help prepare educators to become confident and
assertive social change agents on a quest for racial equity in schools. Implications are provided for practice, research, and policy.

*Keywords:* Trauma-Informed Professional Development, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Racial School Climate, Social Justice Education
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many thanks due to an entire tribe of individuals in my life and that I have encountered during my doctoral journey. First, I would not have made it through the last four years without God and my support system. I was inspired by my sister, Ashlee, to begin my doctoral program and I am grateful that she allows me to ramble to her about my aspirations and ideas. I am also grateful to have my family (parents, sister(s), Godparents, and aunts/uncles) believe in my visions and fully support them.

To my cohort friends – I am forever thankful for our connection and bond! God really knew what He was doing by putting these genuine and sweet individuals in my life. I appreciate your ongoing support and prayers. To my dissertation committee – Dr. Anderson, Dr. Chapple, Dr. Wang, and Dr. Marsh – I am thankful for your guidance, knowledge, support, and encouragement. You all helped me grow into the confident scholar that I am today. I will continue to grow because of the seeds you planted.

To my best friends, Spelman Sisters, Productivity & Accountability Circle, good friends/associates, mentors/supervisors, research participants, and students – thank you for every listening ear, check-in, work group, work retreat, prayer, and encouraging word.
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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19</td>
<td>Corona Virus Disease 2019</td>
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<td>CRE</td>
<td>Culturally Responsive Education</td>
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<td>CREATE</td>
<td>The Culturally Responsive, Equity-centered, and Trauma-informed Education professional development series implemented by author as a component of the research study</td>
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Chapter one introduces the social justice issue being examined and provides an overview of the study addressing the presented problem. In this chapter, background information is provided on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and trauma. Additionally, this chapter includes background information highlighting how the awareness of ACEs and trauma has motivated a shift to trauma-informed education. Chapter one considers how trauma-informed education integrates trauma-informed professional development that reflects a single narrative of trauma and lacks a culturally responsive or equity-centered lens. The author discusses how trauma-informed professional development lacking a culturally responsive or equity-centered lens may perpetuate deficit perceptions of racially marginalized youth. Furthermore, the author asserts that deficit perceptions of racially marginalized youth contribute to harsh racial school climates that can consequentially lead to racial stress and racial trauma for students. The chapter thus introduces culturally responsive and equity-centered trauma-informed professional development to address the presenting problem and promote educational equity. The chapter concludes with the study’s guiding research questions.

Problem Statement

Trauma-informed professional development for educators delivered by helping professionals such as social workers and mental health providers has been increasing momentum as an interdisciplinary and collaborative way to address the harmful impacts of childhood adversity and trauma (Crosby, 2015; Crosby et al., 2018). Trauma-informed training for educators has been implemented to enhance educators’ awareness and understanding of general trauma and trauma’s impact on children (Christian-Brandt et al., 2020; McIntyre et al., 2019;
Whitaker et al., 2019). Such professional development opportunities have been perceived as a necessary mechanism for promoting a positive school climate, trauma-sensitive schools, and social justice education (Crosby et al., 2018; Gherardi et al., 2020; Hoover, 2019; Pawlo et al., 2019). While social justice education should encourage inclusive and equitable learning spaces in which all forms of social oppression are addressed (Carlisle et al., 2006), there is a need for trauma-informed educational practices that acknowledge aspects of oppression such as cultural differences and racism in schools (Altieri et al., 2021; Duane et al., 2021; Joseph et al., 2020). It is also essential that professional development for educators is developed using frameworks grounded in racial equity and cultural responsiveness that enhance educators’ racial awareness and responsiveness to trauma’s impact on racially marginalized students (Blitz et al., 2020; Gherardi et al., 2020). However, many trauma-informed professional development opportunities for educators do not embody such frameworks. For example, the content of much trauma-informed training for teachers emphasizes general trauma prevalence, trauma's neurological impacts, trauma-informed practices and interventions for students, and self-care for teachers (Christian-Brandt et al., 2020; McIntyre et al., 2019; Whitaker et al., 2019).

The general framing of trauma within professional development and training content reflects a single narrative of trauma rooted in Whiteness, omitting the association of race-related experiences as potential factors of youth's adversity and traumatic experiences (Alvarez et al., 2016; Mayor, 2018). Omitting the salience of race within the discussion of trauma invalidates students’ educational experiences of racism that may contribute to racially traumatic incidents and brings to question what experiences are justified as traumatic (Alvarez et al., 2016; Mayor, 2018). Trauma-informed professional development training that does not emphasize the intersectionality of race, race-equity, and trauma may lead educators to overlook the adverse
implications that racial trauma has on students’ mental, emotional, physical, and academic well-being (Alvarez et al., 2016; Anderson et al., 2019; Mayor, 2018; Saleem et al., 2020). Moreover, without framing the salience of race in youth’s traumatic educational experiences within trauma-informed professional development training for teachers, teachers may continue to adopt deficit-oriented perceptions of racially marginalized youth (Chafouleas et al., 2021; Gherardi et al., 2020). Teachers’ adoptions of deficit-oriented perceptions can create a hostile school racial climate that contributes to existing inequitable education outcomes for racially marginalized youth (Chafouleas et al., 2021; Gherardi et al., 2020; Mattison & Aber, 2007).

**Background**

The increased interest in trauma-informed professional development training for educators is largely due to increased awareness surrounding adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and their impacts on children’s well-being. According to Felitti et al. (1998), ACEs may include childhood abuse, exposure to substance abuse and mental illness in the home, and the incarceration of a household family and can have adverse health consequences on individuals within adulthood (Felitti et al., 1998). ACEs may lead to trauma or significant emotional and physical harm that impacts an individual or community (Bartlett & Sacks, 2019; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2014). ACEs and trauma may also severely impact children's development and academic learning experiences (Frieze, 2015).

While youth from all backgrounds may be exposed to ACEs and vulnerable to trauma, ACEs impact youth of color disproportionately (Bernard et al., 2021; Hampton-Anderson et al., 2021). For example, the 2016 National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH) captured youth's ACEs, including substance abuse, mental illness, and/or violence in the home; economic
hardship; parental separation/divorce; deceased parent/guardian, incarcerated parent/guardian; and violence in the neighborhood (Sacks & Murphey, 2018). The survey results indicated that Black and Hispanic youth are more vulnerable to ACEs than their White peers reflecting that "61 percent of Black non-Hispanic children and 51 percent of Hispanic children have experienced at least one ACE, compared with 40 percent of White non-Hispanic children" (Sacks & Murphey, 2018, p. 2). The 2016 survey also found that 17 percent of Black youth have experienced three or more ACEs compared to 11 percent for Hispanic youth and 10 percent for White youth (Child Trends, 2019). The 2016 survey statistics reflect racial disparities in ACEs for youth of color, making racially minoritized youth more vulnerable to trauma, especially Black youth.

Racial disparities in ACEs have led various scholars to criticize the original ACEs study conducted by Felitti et al. (1998), asserting that circumstances such as racism and racial discrimination should be considered ACE risk factors contributing to the existing disparities (Bernard et al., 2021; Cronholm et al., 2015; Wade et al., 2014). Additionally, Petrone and Stanton (2021) argue that relying solely on the ACEs study as the conceptualization of ACEs and trauma neglects institutions that may produce trauma, such as schools. Therefore, though schools are progressively becoming more trauma-informed, it is essential to acknowledge that school climate may be a source of trauma for students and may present as a barrier to educational equity (Jernigan & Daniel, 2011; Petrone & Stanton, 2021; Venet, 2021; Woods-Jaeger et al., 2021).

**Educational Equity, School Climate, and Racial Trauma**

According to Venet (2021), “educational equity is the process of ensuring that students can access high-quality education, that they are fully included in their school communities, that they are able to engage in meaningful and challenging academic work, and that they can do all of
this in an environment that values them as people” (p. 22). However, not all school climates exemplify Venet’s (2021) definition of educational equity. School climate considers dimensions such as interpersonal interactions and relationships that impact students cognitively, socially, and psychologically (Haynes et al., 1997; Thapa et al., 2013). The context of one’s school climate impacts students' school engagement or their level of involvement within the learning process (Axelson & Flick, 2011; Griffin et al., 2020; Fredricks et al., 2004). School engagement is characterized by three forms, including behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement (Axelson & Flick, 2011; Fredricks et al., 2004; Fredricks & McColskey, 2012; Griffin et al., 2020; Wang & Degol, 2014). Behavioral engagement describes students’ conduct as well as participation in academic, social, and extracurricular activities. Emotional engagement includes responses to teachers and peers, attitudes towards school, and feelings of belonging. Lastly, cognitive engagement addresses the level to which students demonstrate their willingness and effort to master difficult skills such as comprehension and problem solving (Fredricks et al., 2004; Fredricks & McColskey, 2012).

Literature suggests that a school climate’s impact on students’ school engagement can consequentially affect student outcomes such as academic achievement, high school graduation rates, and discipline rates; especially for students exposed to trauma (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018; Rumsey & Milsom, 2019; Yang et al., 2018). Therefore, a harsh school climate for students of color can increase currently existing educational inequities such as academic achievement and discipline gaps (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). According to the U.S. Department of Education’s most recent data report from 2018 on education trends, 5.3 percent of public-school students nationwide received one or more out-of-school suspensions (de Brey et al., 2019). However, the percent for Black students was 13.7
percent, more than double the nation’s rate. The out-of-school suspension rate for White students was 3.4 percent and 4.5 percent for Hispanic students (de Brey et al., 2019). Additionally, in 2019, only 18 percent of Black fourth graders assessed on the U.S. Department of Education’s National Assessment of Educational Progress scored a proficient score in comparison to 44 percent of White students and 23 percent of Hispanic students (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2019). To fully address school climates that contribute to such educational inequities for racially marginalized students, it is vital to look beyond the general school climate and recognize school racial climate and its influence on racially traumatic experiences for students.

School racial climate is defined as a school’s values, norms, and practices relating to race and culture within the school’s environment (Byrd, 2017; Byrd & Chavous, 2011; Golden et al., 2018; Griffin et al., 2020; Hope et al., 2015). School racial climate encompasses four significant dimensions: (a) interpersonal interactions, (b) stereotypes manifested in race relations, (c) fair treatment and racial equity, and (d) institutional support (Golden et al., 2018; Griffin et al., 2020; Hope et al., 2015). Interpersonal interactions describe the quality of school interracial and intraracial interactions between students of color, their peers, and school personnel (i.e., teachers). Stereotypes manifested in race relations are the perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes held by individuals in the school community regarding racially diverse students. Fair treatment and racial equity include equitable or discriminatory treatment of racially marginalized students within schools. Institutional support is the extent to which a school environment supports and celebrates racial and cultural differences of students from racially marginalized backgrounds (Golden et al., 2018; Griffin et al., 2020; Hope et al., 2015). As with general school climate, a negative school racial climate can adversely impact student engagement and academic outcomes.
school racial climate may contribute to students’ racial stress and experiences of racial trauma (Gherardi et al., 2020; Keels et al., 2017; Morris et al., 2020).

Racial trauma also referred to as race-related trauma, “is an adverse interaction, either continuously or daily, with institutional, symbolic, and individual acts of racism” (Henderson et al., 2019, p. 927). Racism is present in various institutional settings and systems, including schools. Racism is often embedded in school-based interactions, practices, and policies that harm youth of color (Henderson et al., 2019; Masko, 2014). In education settings, institutional racism includes policies and practices that lead to inequities such as academic achievement and discipline gaps between students of color and their White peers (Henderson et al., 2019; Masko, 2014). Symbolic racism in education settings looks like resistance to multicultural education due to the belief that racism and discrimination are no longer relevant concerns and the acceptance of racial hierarchies (Henderson et al., 2019; Swank et al., 2001). Individual acts of racism in schools include racial microaggressions and invalidations from educators and peers (Henderson et al., 2019; Wormeli, 2016). Enduring various forms of racism in schools may cause youth to experience feelings of depression, anger, anxiety, low self-concept, helplessness, and racial stress or persistent worries about racialized experiences and racism (Hope et al., 2020; Jernigan & Daniel, 2011; Saleem et al., 2020). While all forms of racism in schools may present stressors for students, the current study primarily acknowledges individual acts of racism reflected in the school racial climate dimensions of interpersonal interactions and stereotypes manifested in race relations.
teachers’ deficit perceptions of racially marginalized students

Often, interpersonal interactions between teachers and racially marginalized students and the manifestation of stereotypes are reflections of teachers’ deficit thinking or perceptions of students (Pollack, 2012). Teachers of racially marginalized students engage in deficit thinking regarding students’ forms of engagement (Andrews & Gutwein, 2017; Pollack, 2012). Deficit thinking embraces the idea that students' behaviors and academic outcomes result from internal deficiencies or inadequacies (Valencia, 2010). Deficit thinking stems from racial and sociocultural biases (Ramsay-Jordan, 2020). Although biases may be unintentional, they demonstrate a lack of racial consciousness (Baker, 2019; Ramsay-Jordan, 2020). When teachers adopt a deficit lens to view the engagement of racially marginalized students, they are led to perceive students' engagement as a result of deviance, laziness, lack of motivation, low academic ability, cultural deficiencies, and poor parenting/low parent engagement (Andrews & Gutwein, 2017; Blitz et al., 2020; Golden et al., 2018; Henderson et al., 2019; Hope et al., 2015; Pollack, 2012). This adopted deficit lens is especially applied to racially marginalized students from economically under-resourced communities (Fergus, 2019). Deficit perceptions may lead teachers to characterize students with negative and harmful labels (Marsh & Noguera, 2018). Such perceptions of racially marginalized students can affect how teachers treat and respond to them in schools (Andrews & Gutwein, 2017; Pease, 2018; Pollack, 2012) and result in students’ experiences of racial microaggressions (Baker, 2019).

Racial microaggressions are defined as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (Sue et al., 2007, p. 271). Microaggressions have been associated with increases in perceived stress, symptoms of
depression, and internalizations of the inflicted microaggressions (Keels et al., 2017). Microaggressions from teachers, in particular, are often ingrained in biases and deficit thinking regarding students’ behaviors, motivation levels, and academic abilities (Baker, 2019; Ramsay-Jordan, 2020; Valencia, 2010); namely, deficit thinking surrounding racially marginalized students’ school engagement. When youth experience microaggressions in schools, they become susceptible to the burdens of internalizing racism and feeling stereotype threat (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012; Steketee et al., 2021). Stereotype threat describes one’s fear of being viewed or judged by a stereotype associated with their racial group (Steele, 2018). Teachers’ microaggressions in the classroom cause students of color to feel invisible and undervalued, thus presenting as a barrier to developing nurturing teacher-student relationships (Allen, 2010; Allen et al., 2013). Therefore, it is evident that persistent racial microaggressions in schools may create a harsh racial school climate that adversely impacts the social-emotional wellbeing and overall schooling experiences for students of color.

With the understanding that racial school climate dimensions such as interpersonal interactions between teachers and racially marginalized students and the manifestation of stereotypes in the form of microaggressions may contribute to racially traumatic experiences for racially marginalized students, schools must consider antiracist actions and practices to minimize racially traumatic experiences for students of color. Svetaz et al. (2020) describe antiracist actions as practices that "specifically seek to identify and deconstruct harmful personal, institutional, and internalized attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors to create essential opportunities for healthy living" (p. 323). Culturally responsive, equity-centered, and trauma-informed professional development may be a practical antiracist action forward to enhance educators' awareness and help them deconstruct harmful attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors centered around
students of color. By transforming educators’ deficit perceptions of students, educators can potentially play a role in lessening the chances of racially traumatic schooling experiences for students. Therefore, the current study assesses changes in teachers’ perceptions of racially marginalized students after participating in a culturally responsive and equity-centered trauma-informed professional development emphasizing racial trauma. The research questions that guide this study are as follows:

**RQ1.** How does a culturally responsive and equity-centered trauma-informed professional development influence educators’ trauma-informed attitudes, awareness, and practices?

**RQ2.** How does a culturally responsive and equity-centered trauma-informed professional development influence educators’ perceptions of interpersonal interactions and student engagement?

**RQ3.** How does a culturally responsive and equity-centered trauma-informed professional development influence educators’ professional and personal lives?
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter two shares the conceptualization of culturally responsive education (CRE) and trauma-informed education and the intersection of the concepts. The chapter also discusses recent research regarding the impacts of trauma-informed professional development for educators. Furthermore, chapter two highlights how culturally responsive and equity-centered trauma-informed professional development can transform teachers' perceptions of racially marginalized students and includes supporting theoretical frameworks.

Culturally Responsive Education

Culturally responsive education (CRE) consists of culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally sensitive classroom climates (Gay, 2002). Culturally relevant pedagogy describes a critical teaching approach in which all students are academically successful, learn in classrooms that enhance their cultural competence, and grow to become critically conscious citizens (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Culturally sensitive classroom climates are ones in which teachers maintain high expectations for all students, including students of color. In culturally sensitive classrooms, teachers establish respectful partnerships and community with students and affirm students’ cultural and racial identities and strengths (Gay, 2002, 2013). Hammond’s (2015) Ready for Rigor framework builds upon the previous characteristics of CRE and teaching. When educators interdependently practice areas embedded in the Ready for Rigor framework, “they create the social, emotional, and cognitive conditions that allow students to more actively engage and take ownership of their learning process” (Hammond, 2015, p. 18). The framework asserts that the first step in becoming a culturally responsive educator is to practice awareness, especially cultural awareness relating to educators’ selves and their students (Hammond, 2015).
Hammond argues that culturally responsive educators develop sociopolitical consciousness that demonstrates an understanding that society is racialized and results in some individuals receiving unearned privilege while marginalized individuals in society receive unearned disadvantages due to ascribed statuses such as "race, gender, class, or language" (Hammond, 2015, p. 18). Furthermore, an educator practicing critical awareness understands that school systems, including the educators within, can play a role in perpetuating or interrogating education inequities experienced by marginalized students. Therefore, a culturally responsive educator must reflect on their unconscious biases and perceptions of culturally diverse students to better understand how they impact their interactions with students (Hammond, 2015).

While previous scholars have conceptualized and advocated for the need for culturally relevant and responsive pedagogical approaches (Gay, 2002; Hammond, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995), Weinstein et al. (2004) argue the need for culturally responsive classroom management (CRCM). Weinstein et al. (2004) assert that classroom management is about “creating a caring, respectful environment that supports learning” (p. 29). Similar to Hammond’s (2015) Ready for Rigor framework that identifies teachers’ self- and sociopolitical awareness as integral to cultural responsiveness, Weinstein et al. (2004) consider teachers’ awareness of ethnocentrism, personal biases, and sociopolitical contexts to be critical components in CRCM. Another component of CRCM is increasing teachers’ knowledge and understanding of students’ diverse cultural backgrounds (Weinstein et al., 2004), a common theme in culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2002, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009). Additional components of CRCM include the use of equitable, culturally appropriate behavior strategies that reflect teachers’ commitment to fostering caring classroom environments (Weinstein et al., 2004).
Caldera et al. (2020) posit that classroom management, specifically in underserved schools primarily serving students of color, should also be trauma-informed and trauma-sensitive. The authors argue that moving towards culturally responsive classroom management that is also trauma-sensitive is important considering the lived experiences of many students of color in underserved schools (i.e., environmental, psychosocial, and racial stressors) and their impacts on students’ learning (Caldera et al., 2020). The assertions of Caldera et al. (2020) indicate the importance of teachers being provided professional development opportunities that promote culturally responsive and equity-centered trauma-informed education.

**Trauma-Informed Education**

Trauma-informed education is characterized by school systems that commit to using trauma-sensitive approaches and practices (Oehlberg, 2008). The commitment to trauma-informed education is reflected in schools’ integration of support staff such as social workers, psychologists, and other mental health providers to screen, assess, and intervene with students experiencing trauma symptoms; restorative disciplinary practices; implementation of mental health activities for students; and trauma-informed professional development for school personnel (Oehlberg, 2008; Thomas et al., 2019). In alignment with the literature’s characterization of trauma-informed education, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA, 2014) states that it is critical that serving systems such as schools prepare to help professionals realize and understand trauma’s prevalence and impact, recognize trauma-related symptoms among individuals within the serving system, and respond with knowledgeable approaches that prevent re-traumatizing individuals within the serving system. Though the adoption of trauma-informed approaches is growing within the education system
(Simon et al., 2020), such approaches must also be culturally responsive to the individuals in which the system serves (SAMHSA, 2014).

**Culturally Responsive and Equity-Centered Trauma-Informed Approaches**

Culturally responsive trauma-informed approaches in schools acknowledge the intersection of trauma and racism reflected in the individual and collective experiences of marginalized student populations. Such practices intend to challenge deficit perceptions associated with vulnerable groups, promote prosocial student behaviors based upon resilience-building, and encourage educational success among vulnerable student populations. A culturally responsive trauma-informed approach also illustrates “an appreciation for the context that contributes to how students behave in class and a desire to learn ways to engage parts of each student’s identity they deem most important” (Pickens, 2020, p. 46). Pickens (2020) upholds that an educator incorporating culturally responsive trauma-informed approaches creates psychologically safe school environments for students, honors student identities, and creates meaningful interactions with students; however, incorporating the approaches requires educators to become aware of their implicit biases that may be damaging to their interactions with students of color. In the book *Equity-Centered Trauma-Informed Education*, Venet (2021) states that critical pedagogical approaches such as culturally relevant and culturally responsive education are “trauma-informed and equity-centered by nature” (p. 163).

Equity-centered trauma-informed education ensures that educators in schools are informed about trauma and its overall impact within school communities and are equipped to respond to trauma without creating sources of it in schools (Venet, 2021). Equity-centered trauma-informed education is guided by six principles including (a) anti-racism and anti-
oppression, (b) asset-based, (c) systems-oriented, (d) human centered, (e) universal and proactive, and (f) social justice focused. An equity-centered trauma-informed educator applies their equity awareness to transform their classroom practices by prioritizing components such as predictability, flexibility, empowerment, and connection. This type of educator also utilizes their equity lens beyond the classroom by seeking ways to shift entire school systems (Venet, 2021). Collectively, culturally responsive trauma-informed education and equity-centered education have the potential to create healthy school racial climates for racially marginalized students. Though various scholars promote the development of culturally responsive and equity-centered trauma-informed approaches and educators (Blitz et al., 2020; Duane et al., 2021; Gherardi et al., 2020; Pickens et al., 2020; Venet, 2021), the impacts of facilitating culturally responsive and equity-centered trauma-informed professional development for teachers remain unknown.

**Trauma-Informed Professional Development for Teachers**

Several recent studies have been conducted to assess the impact of trauma-informed professional development on teachers. Researchers have specifically assessed how trauma-informed professional development has impacted teachers’ quality of life, including indicators such as compassion satisfaction, secondary traumatic stress, and burnout (Anderson et al., 2021; Christian-Brandt et al., 2020). Studies have also described the relationship between teachers’ trauma-informed professional development and teachers’ perceived quality of the teacher-student relationships (Whitaker et al., 2019) and teachers’ knowledge of trauma-informed approaches and skills (Brown et al., 2020; McIntyre et al., 2020). Recent research also discusses the impact of trauma-informed professional development on teachers and their attitudes (Goodwin-Glick, 2017; Kim et al., 2021; Law, 2019; Liang et al., 2020; Loomis & Felt, 2021; Parker et al., 2020;
Rodger et al., 2020). Together, these studies indicate the growing study of trauma-informed professional development and teacher attitudes. However, there is a gap in the research about trauma-informed professional development highlighting racial trauma and teachers’ attitudes. There is also a gap in research discussing the influence of trauma-informed professional development on teachers’ colorblind racial attitudes.

In a study conducted by Law (2019), the scholar studied the effectiveness of trauma-informed professional development for teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and practices. Law's research was guided by the Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP) framework commonly used in public health to evaluate a population's changes in behaviors following the implementation of an intervention. The study included 14 school personnel consisting of general education teachers, special education teachers, and administrators from a Midwestern public school district (Law, 2019). Law (2019) provided a one-time, two-hour training highlighting "the definition of trauma, prevalence, short-and long-term effects of trauma, and theory of trauma-informed schools" in addition to providing the personnel with practical classroom-based application skills (p. 43). Law developed and administered a questionnaire to measure changes in participants' knowledge, attitudes, and practices. The study's findings revealed that following the training, teachers demonstrated increased knowledge of trauma prevalence and impact, increased trauma-informed attitudes, self-efficacy in implementing trauma-informed practices, and enhanced intention to incorporate trauma-informed practices and interventions within the classroom. The identified increases significantly occurred after a two-hour professional development, denoting that training content may be most impactful (Law, 2019).

While Law (2019) developed the KAP questionnaire to study teachers’ trauma-informed attitudes, many studies have used the Attitudes Related to Trauma-Informed Care (ARTIC) Scale
to assess teachers’ attitudes following a trauma-informed professional development (Goodwin-Glick, 2017; Kim et al., 2021; Liang et al., 2020; Loomis & Felt, 2021; Parker et al., 2020). The ARTIC Scale was developed to measure helping professionals' understanding of trauma and their attitudes (i.e., more favorable or less favorable) regarding implementing trauma-informed care practices (Baker et al., 2016). In Loomis and Felt's (2021) work, the scholars assessed the relationship between trauma-informed training content and trauma-informed attitudes among 111 preschool educators from a Mountain West state in the U.S. The authors administered a Qualtrics survey to gauge the types of trauma-informed professional development teachers have received and what topical content areas were addressed in these professional developments. The study results exhibited that trauma-informed attitudes as measured by the ARTIC scale were higher for educators who received training content incorporating self-reflection and skills compared to teachers who received training consisting of knowledge-related content. Self-reflection includes training activities that enable educators to reflect on the impact of students' trauma on educators (i.e., vicarious trauma or secondary traumatic stress). Trauma-informed skills consist of trauma screening and tools for responding to students' behaviors possibly manifested due to trauma. The study's results are an indication that professional development content and the integration of critical reflection are essential features for shifting teachers' attitudes (Loomis & Felt, 2021).

In research conducted by Parker et al. (2020), the research team described a two-part study that evaluated the perceived impact of Compassionate Schools training for educators in the southeast region of the U.S. The Compassionate Schools framework consists of general knowledge highlighting ACEs, toxic stress, and their impact on children. The Compassionate Schools framework's goal is to educate school personnel on creating trauma-sensitive learning environments that help improve the learning experiences of students impacted by trauma (Parker...
et al., 2020). In part one of their study, Parker et al. (2020) used a single-group retrospective design incorporating a survey constructed by the research team to explore 133 educators' perceived changes in mindsets and behaviors following the participation in either a half-day or 3-day Compassionate Schools training. Part one of the study revealed that 86% of participants reported changes in mindset after participating in the training, and 76% reported changes in behaviors consistent with the Compassionate Schools paradigm (Parker et al., 2020). In part two of the study conducted by Parker et al. (2020), the researchers engaged in a pre-and post-survey design using the ARTIC Scale to assess the perceptions of 219 educators who participated in a 3-day Compassionate Schools training. The scholars found that participants in study two significantly improved their trauma-informed attitudes after participating in the trauma-informed training (Parker et al., 2020).

Progressing from a focus on teachers’ attitudes, Whitaker et al. (2019) studied the impact of an enhanced trauma awareness (ETA) course on preschool teachers' and teaching assistants' perceptions of teacher-student relationships. The study included a sample of 96 teachers from underserved schools in the School District of Philadelphia. The study's treatment group (n = 38) participated in six sessions of the ETA course, while the control group (n = 48) did not receive any sessions (Whitaker et al., 2019). Whitaker et al. (2019) discovered significant differences in the perceptions of teacher-student relationships for the treatment group compared to the control group. More specifically, the treatment group reported perceptions of improved teacher-student relationships.

A study co-conducted by the current dissertation author similarly revealed that trauma-informed professional development can shape teacher-student relationships (Anderson et al., 2021). Anderson et al. (2021) implemented a multipronged approach to a trauma-informed
professional development series for six K-5 educators with a university-community partner school in the southeast region of the U.S. Professional development components included training educators on trauma and its impact on student learning. Educators were also trained to implement a trauma-informed student intervention manual consisting of social-emotional wellness activities. The manual activities were adapted from the Support for Students Exposed to Trauma (SSET) curriculum, a curriculum developed by Jaycox et al. (2009) to help reduce stress symptoms often associated with students exposed to trauma. As educators engaged in the trauma-informed professional development series, they engaged in self-reflective journaling to document their experiences with their students and changes they saw within themselves and the classroom. The goal of the study was to better understand educators’ perspectives on how participating in the professional development series changed them (personally and professionally), their interactions with their students, and overall classroom climates. The study’s qualitative results reflected that as teachers’ awareness and insight into their students’ lives increased, their responses within teacher-student interactions became more empathetic and compassionate. Furthermore, this enhanced empathy and compassion also filtered into teachers’ personal lives with their relations with individuals around them such as family members. The study’s findings showed that trauma-informed professional development can strengthen educators’ professional and personal interactions (Anderson et al., 2021).

In another study co-conducted by the author, the research team implemented the multipronged professional development with four 6th-8th educators in the same university-community partner school in the southeast region of the U.S (Anderson et al., 2022). After equipping the middle school educators with the trauma-informed knowledge and resources to apply within their classrooms, the research team observed that the educators enhanced their
awareness and empathy regarding students’ lived experiences which led them to transform their teaching practices. The educators also began to think critically about ways they could address students’ emotional needs through their teaching which helped to transform the learning process for students by increasing their engagement in the classroom (Anderson et al., 2022).

The reviewed literature demonstrates that teachers' professional development and training are viable mechanisms for transforming teachers’ attitudes and perceptions. However, how culturally responsive and equity-centered trauma-informed professional development impacts teachers’ perceptions of racially marginalized students' school engagement remains unknown. The current study fills this gap and is guided by Desimone’s (2011) conceptual framework for effective professional development and Mezirow’s (1994) transformational learning theory.

**Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks**

Professional development for teachers is a central element to education reform and the improvement of school quality in the U.S. Professional development may range from workshops, conferences, and courses to enhance teachers' knowledge, skills, and practices to improve student achievement (Desimone, 2011). According to Desimone (2011), core features of effective professional development include:

1. professional development activities centered on a particular subject and related to improving students’ learning
2. active learning in which teachers are provided feedback
3. coherence in which the professional development is consistent with reform efforts with the school, district, or state
4. Activities that last for a semester and consist of at least 20 hours of contact time with teachers

5. Collective groups of teachers representing similar grade levels or subject matters participating in professional development together to form a learning community

In addition to establishing core features of teachers' professional development, Desimone (2011) also developed a professional development conceptual framework that further describes the relationships between the identified core features. The model framework for an effective teacher professional development includes the following procedure:

1. Teachers experience professional development.
2. The professional development increases teachers' knowledge, skills, changes their attitudes and beliefs, or both.
3. Teachers use their new knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs to improve the content of their instruction, their approach to pedagogy, or both.
4. The instructional changes that the teachers introduce to the classroom boost their students' learning. (Desimone, 2011, p. 70)

Complementary to Desimone’s (2011) effective professional development conceptual framework is Transformative Learning Theory. Transformative learning theory, also known as transformation theory, was developed by Mezirow (1994, 1997) to explain the adult learning process. Transformative learning theory posits that adult learning is shaped by personal experiences and reference frames (Mezirow, 1994). Frames of reference describe personal perspectives or lenses in which experiences are understood. These reference points shape one's perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Mezirow, 1997). According to transformative learning, a learning experience is transformative when one's reference frames are challenged
through self-reflection and discourse in small groups that foster a community (Mezirow, 1994, 1997). Discourse consists of a dialogue process that helps adult learners to interpret their beliefs, habits, and points of view (Mezirow, 1997). Adults' transformative learning experiences may lead to personal transformation and consciousness-raising, resulting in behavioral changes, transformed practices, and social action (Mezirow, 1994, 1997). Grounded in Desimone's (2011) professional development conceptual framework and Mezirow's (1994, 1997) transformative learning theory, the current study implements a culturally responsive and equity-centered trauma-informed professional development that emphasizes racial trauma. Through professional development, the study aimed to enhance educators’ trauma-informed attitudes by increasing their awareness of racial trauma in schools, transform their potential deficit perceptions of racially marginalized students, and ultimately improve teacher-student interactions.

**Summary**

A review of the literature highlighted the evolution of critical pedagogical approaches such as culturally relevant and culturally responsive teaching. Additionally, the literature review provided the conceptualization of trauma-informed education and described examples of trauma-informed approaches within the school setting. More recent literature has indicated a merging of culturally responsive pedagogy and trauma-informed education and a call for trauma-informed education that is culturally responsive and equity-centered. The literature revealed that although trauma-informed professional development for educators is increasing, there is a need embed a culturally responsive and equity-centered framework when providing such professional learning opportunities.
However, there is a literature gap in understanding if educators’ knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors can be transformed when participating in such learning experiences. Therefore, the author’s research design, including intervention development, was informed by concepts such as culturally responsive pedagogy, trauma-informed education, culturally responsive and equity-centered trauma-informed education. The research methodology was also guided by conceptual/theoretical frameworks indicating professional development learning opportunities consisting of information dissemination, group discourse, and critical self-reflection can foster transformative learning, pedagogical changes, and social action among adult learners such as educators (Desimone, 2011; Mezirow, 1994, 1997).
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Chapter three describes the author’s research positionality, research design, intervention, sampling procedure, participants, data collection, and data analysis included in the study. This chapter also revisits the study’s guiding research questions and explains the rationale for the sampling procedure incorporated. As indicated in the literature review (Chapter 2), research does not yet discuss the impacts of facilitating culturally responsive, equity-centered, and trauma-informed professional development for educators, thus supporting the current study’s exploratory methodological approaches.

Positionality Statement

The author identifies as a middle class, heterosexual Black/African American woman. She is from a suburban community in Summerville, South Carolina where she attended public schools with majority White student populations. During her high school experiences, the author encountered instances of racial stress due to racial microaggressions from peers. However, it was through her post-high school (and post-undergraduate schooling) experiences working as an AmeriCorps member in schools and educational programs that she began to observe educators’ (i.e., teachers) racial microaggressions relating to racially marginalized students in underserved schools. The author became a social worker to support the social-emotional needs of racially marginalized students in education settings. She has provided two years of trauma-informed professional development to help educators of racially marginalized students in underserved schools grow equipped to also support their students social-emotional needs in the school setting. Her research is therefore informed by her work with students and educators in various
educational settings and her commitment to minimize racial stress and trauma for racially marginalized youth.

**Research Design**

This study aimed to explore changes in educators' trauma-informed attitudes, their perceptions of interpersonal interactions with racially marginalized students, and perceptions of racially marginalized students’ school engagement after implementing a culturally responsive, equity-centered, trauma-informed professional development series. The author used a qualitative research study design to best understand participants' attitudes and perceptions. A qualitative research study design uses qualitative data collection methods to explain how individuals interpret and make meaning of their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The qualitative research design sought to answer the following research questions:

**RQ1.** How does a culturally responsive and equity-centered trauma-informed professional development influence educators’ trauma-informed attitudes, awareness, and practices?

**RQ2.** How does a culturally responsive and equity-centered trauma-informed professional development influence educators’ perceptions of interpersonal interactions and student engagement?

**RQ3.** How does a culturally responsive and equity-centered trauma-informed professional development influence educators’ professional and personal lives?
**Intervention**

The Culturally Responsive, Equity-centered, and Trauma-informed Education professional development was entitled the *CREATE Professional Development (PD) Series*. Educators participating in the series received three live virtual two-hour trauma-informed modules via the Zoom ([https://zoom.us/](https://zoom.us/)) teleconference software as a part of an online cohort community for six (6) weeks (see Table 1 for the *CREATE PD Series* schedule).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 <em>CREATE PD Series Schedule</em></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each module consisted of the author disseminating research regarding racial trauma in schools and its impacts on racially marginalized students. The PD sessions included group dialogue among educators regarding their thoughts on the research shared and their perceptions of how the information related to their observations in their schools. In addition to providing research-based information, each module included a case study depicting how racial trauma may manifest in interpersonal interactions and potentially influence students' engagement. The author developed
the case studies based upon literature and her observations of teacher-student interactions within underserved schools (see Appendix A for module case studies and their guided reflection prompts). After reading a case study during a session, the author provided the educators with guided prompts to reflect on individually and through group discussion.

Module 1 of the PD series highlighted the concept and prevalence of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and the existing disparities in ACEs relating to racially marginalized youth. The module explained enduring ACEs can make youth more vulnerable to general trauma. Module 1 also included a differentiation between general trauma and racial trauma. Participants were introduced to the concept of racial stress. In Module 2, the author re-introduced participants to the racial stress concept and provided a conceptual map of how racial stress can lead to racial trauma for youth. The module further explained how racially traumatic experiences can impact youths' social-emotional well-being and what racial trauma triggers may look like in a school setting. Module 3 described deficit-based views of racially/ethnically diverse students (i.e., using labels like "at-risk"), why these views are harmful, and how educators may unconsciously perpetuate such beliefs. This module emphasized the importance of shifting to asset-based views of students and engaging in healing-centered practices that maximize students' strengths (see Table 2 below for the CREATE PD Series module topics).
Table 2 CREATE PD Series Module Topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1      | Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)  
         | Trauma  
         | Racial trauma  
         | Racial stress among youth  
         | Strategy of the Week for Educator  
         | Implementation with Students: Relaxation techniques |
| 2      | Impacts of racially traumatic experiences on youth  
         | Recognizing potential race-related trauma triggers  
         | Strategy of the Week for Educator  
         | Implementation with Students: Anxiety and anger coping activities |
| 3      | Deficit vs. asset-based perspectives of racially diverse students  
         | Healing-centered classroom practices  
         | Strategy of the Week for Educator  
         | Implementation with Students: Emotional regulation, cognitive appraisal (transforming thoughts), and goal setting |

After each module, the author trained the educators in trauma-informed strategies and activities. The strategies and activities shared with the educators included cognitive behavioral therapy techniques and activities derived from a trauma-informed student intervention curriculum co-developed by the researcher. The intervention curriculum techniques are adapted from the Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS) and Support for Students Exposed to Trauma (SSET). CBITS and SSET are school-based interventions found to have improved emotional and behavioral outcomes of diverse students who had been exposed to
trauma (Jaycox et al., 2012; Jaycox et al., 2009). The author encouraged the educators to implement the trauma-informed strategies and activities with their students after modules for one to two weeks using the scripted curriculum. In the authors’ prior facilitation of trauma-informed professional development in which educators implemented the trauma-informed strategies, it was found that educators had increased student engagement when implementing the intervention activities with a consistent student group, on a consistent day, and at a consistent time (Anderson et al., 2021). Therefore, although student activities were optional, the author asked the educators if they decided to implement the activities that they selected a consistent day, time, and class period that was most feasible for their schedules. Participants that were unable to attend the live virtual PD sessions were required to watch recordings of the sessions and submit their reflections to the varying prompted questions and case studies.

**Recruitment Strategy and Sample**

The author used purposive sampling to initially recruit up to 15 total 5th-8th teachers teaching a core subject and/or grade level in U.S. schools. Purposive sampling is often used when a researcher desires to study a small sample of a larger population to explore the nature of the research topic and question (Rubin & Babbie, 2014). The literature does not include a study exploring the influence of a culturally responsive and equity-centered trauma-informed professional development series on educators’ perceptions of racially minoritized students. Therefore, engaging a small sample of teachers in the larger U.S. educator population helped provide initial insight into the training's influence on educators.

Upon approval by the university institutional review board (IRB), the author submitted an application to conduct research in Sunrise County Public Schools (pseudonym) in the southeast
region of the U.S. Once the Sunrise County Public Schools research application was approved, the Sunrise County Public Schools Research and Evaluation administration directed the author to identify a list of 10 schools in which the school principals would be invited to participate in the research study. Of the 10 schools identified by the author, only one school principal expressed interest in having their school participate in the study. To maximize the sample pool, the author also submitted an application to conduct research in Sunset County Public Schools (pseudonym) in the southeast region of the U.S. However, a response was not received from the school district. Therefore, the author proceeded with establishing a relationship with the one school in Sunrise County. The author engaged in two meetings with the school administrators (i.e., principal and assistant principal) to discuss the study’s details and understand the school leadership’s vision for partnership. The administrators permitted the author to recruit participants by posting flyers in the staff lounge at the school and by the assistant principal sending multiple emails to staff requesting their participation. After two weeks of recruitment at the school, only one teacher expressed interest in participating in the study. The school’s assistant principal explained to the author that many other teachers voiced that they felt overwhelmed with their work responsibilities and did not have the capacity to add a professional development series to their workload.

After experiencing the recruitment challenges within Sunrise County Public Schools, the author expanded the eligibility criteria to include educators working directly with 5th-8th grade students in a classroom setting nationally. The educator participants were recruited by sharing a recruitment flyer (see Appendix B) on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Research indicates that racially marginalized students from economically underserved communities are associated with increased stress levels, adverse childhood
experiences, and trauma that can impact learning (Anderson et al., 2019; Blitz et al., 2020; Sacks & Murphey, 2018). Therefore, educator participants were eligible for the study if they worked in underserved schools with predominantly Black and Latinx student populations. To be included in the study, educators had to agree to their commitment to complete the duration of the PD series. The educators could not have participated in trauma-informed professional development offered by the researcher in previous academic years.

Participants

Participants \( (n = 7) \) consisted of a racially/ethnically diverse sample of educators from various regions in the U.S. Six participants identified as female, and one identified as male. Participants' ages ranged from 23 years to 61 years of age. Collectively, the educators worked in the education field for an average of 8.93 years \( (SD = 7.50) \). All the educators were middle school teachers except one participant, a behavior specialist working with elementary, middle, and high school students in her school district (see Table 3 below for a demographic breakdown of the participants).

Ethics

Data collection was initiated upon approval by the university institutional review board (IRB) (see Appendix C for IRB approval letter). Educators were asked to sign an informed consent form advising them of the study's purpose, voluntary rights, and protective confidentiality measures. Participants' information was de-identified using identifying numbers and pseudonyms created by the researcher during the data collection process. All documents consisting of participant information were stored in password-protected files on the researcher's
Documents were also kept in password-protected files on the researcher's backup hard drive. All participants were compensated with a $75 Amazon gift card upon completing the entire intervention and data collection process.

**Table 3 Demographic Breakdown of Research Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Region (in the U.S.)</th>
<th>Grade &amp; Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Christina</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>(Mountain) West</td>
<td>6th – 8th Science and Agricultural Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gina</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Latinx, White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Northeast</td>
<td>6th-8th Bilingual Language Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiffany</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>5th Social Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miranda</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Latinx, White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>West</td>
<td>7th Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>(Mountain) West</td>
<td>6th – 8th Special Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>7th Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angel</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Southeast</td>
<td>K-12th Behavior Specialist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Collection**

There were multiple sources of data collection, including pre-and-post individual interviews and ongoing reflection sources to enhance the study's rigor and answer the study's research questions.
Interviews

Participants’ perceptions of students were primarily assessed by their participation in individual semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2013) for approximately 60 minutes. The individual interviews \((n = 14)\) were conducted with each participant once before the initiation of the PD series and once after the completion of the entire PD series. Interview questions were centered around educators’ views about students’ behaviors and their interactions with their students (see Appendices D and E for pre-and-post interview protocols).

Intervention Module Case Study Reflection Transcripts

Each PD module consisted of a case study depicting a teacher-student interpersonal interaction that could cause a student racial stress or trauma in the school setting. The author asked the educators prompted reflection questions regarding what they perceived as inequities or racial stress in the case studies, and how they would approach the interaction differently. Although the author was the facilitator of information within each PD session, the educators provided insight into their perceptions regarding the delivered content and expertise in applying the knowledge to their observations and experiences as educators in underserved schools. Therefore, educators' dialogic responses and reflections regarding the case studies reviewed during the PD sessions served as data sources.

Journal Reflections

Critical self-reflection is a strategy that helps adult learners notate observational changes and challenge their traditional reference frames (Anderson et al., 2021; Loomis & Felt, 2021). Therefore, participants completed and submitted two journal reflections each \((n = 14)\) to
document their observations, experiences, and interactions with students while participating in the PD series (see Appendix F for journal reflection prompts).

**Data Collection Process**

The data sources were collected in three stages (see the data collection process in Figure 1 below).

![Data Collection Process Diagram]

**Figure 1 Data Collection Process**

**Data Analysis**

First, the author transcribed the transcripts from the pre-and post-interviews and intervention module case study reflections using the Temi (https://www.temi.com/) transcription service. Next, the transcripts and the participants’ journal reflections were uploaded and coded in the Dedoose (https://www.dedoose.com/) qualitative data analysis software program. Coding consists of exploring qualitative data to identify patterns to be grouped into labeled categories.
(Creswell, 2013). The coding process occurs in multiple cycles, primarily First and Second Cycles, to ensure the in-depth exploration of the text's patterns and meanings (Saldaña, 2015). First Cycle coding is the initial coding phase in which the texts are assigned codes, or words and phrases, that symbolize the segmented text's meaning. In the Second Cycle coding, the initial codes are revisited to determine more focused and collapsed codes that may help the researcher develop the study's overall themes (Saldaña, 2015).

The author read the data transcripts multiple times and engaged in an open coding process to best understand the data sources. During the first coding cycle, the author engaged in concept coding and descriptive coding. Concept coding is guided by conceptual and theoretical concepts from the literature (Saldaña, 2015). The author's identification of concept codes was guided by concepts and theoretical frameworks discussed in the literature review, including culturally responsive pedagogy, trauma-informed education, culturally responsive and equity-centered trauma-informed education, and transformative learning. Descriptive coding “assigns labels to data to summarize in a word or short phrase” ((Saldaña, 2015, p. 362).

The inductive approach of descriptive coding allowed the author to identify emergent codes that may not have been captured by the literature’s concepts and theoretical frameworks. The author generated 43 initial open codes. During the second coding cycle, the author applied axial coding (Saldaña, 2015) to understand the relationship between the codes and to merge the initial open codes into focused codes. The author analyzed the final codes to systematically identify themes most aligned with the study's research questions (i.e., trauma-informed awareness; perceptions of interpersonal interactions and student engagement; changes in professional and personal lives). An illustration of the author’s coding process is depicted below in Figure 2, with additional code trees figured in Appendix G.
Characteristic of trauma-informed education

Characteristic of culturally responsive trauma-informed education

Figure 2 Illustration of Coding Process
Research Methodology Rigor

The author utilized the “Big-Tent” criteria for qualitative research to ensure the rigor of this qualitative study (Tracy, 2010). The eight “Big-Tent” indicators include: “(a) worthy topic, (b) rich rigor, (c) sincerity, (d) credibility, (e) resonance, (f) significant contribution, (g) ethics, and (h) meaningful coherence” (Tracy, 2010, p. 837). A worthy topic is one that is timely and relevant (Tracy, 2010). The current study consists of a worthy topic considering educators are increasingly embedding trauma-informed education and researchers’ advocacy for culturally responsive and equity-centered trauma-informed education (Pickens, 2020; Venet, 2021). Rich rigor refers to the appropriate use of data collection and analysis processes and the guidance of appropriate theoretical constructs (Tracy, 2010). The author ensured that the data collection and analysis process of implementing a professional development with adult learners was guided by appropriate professional development and adult learning theoretical frameworks. To maintain sincerity, or transparency (Tracy, 2010), the author remained open and honest when communicating the study’s details and components with potential university-community partners and participants. The author also remained sincere and transparent with participants when approached with their questions and concerns throughout the intervention process.

Credibility (Tracy, 2010) was maintained in this study by providing in-depth descriptions of the methodology and research findings. Additionally, the author triangulated the various data sources to ensure consistency among participants’ statements and reflections. Resonance refers to the emotional influence the research has on readers (Tracy, 2010). While the author cannot yet confirm the study’s resonance, it is strongly possible that educators reading this research will resonate with the findings will the ability to transfer them to their professional and personal experiences. Due to the topic’s worthiness, it will provide a significant contribution to the
research literature. Adhering to proper ethical procedures, the study achieved its purpose and provided meaningful coherence (Tracy, 2010).
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The current study was conducted with the understanding that dimensions of racial school climate (i.e., interpersonal interactions and the manifestation of stereotypes) can cause racially traumatic experiences for racially marginalized students. The study's purpose was to develop and implement the Culturally Responsive, Equity-Centered, and Trauma-Informed Education (CREATE) Professional Development (PD) Series to enhance educators' awareness of racially traumatic schooling experiences for racially marginalized students. The author was interested in exploring if the PD series influenced educators' trauma-informed attitudes and awareness; perceptions of interpersonal interactions and student engagement; and overall professional and personal lives.

Seven educators participated in three professional development sessions (focus groups), journal reflections ($n = 14$), and pre-and post-interviews ($n = 14$) to provide insight into their trauma-informed attitudes and perceptions of interpersonal interactions and student engagement in their respective schools. Upon coding and analyzing the data sources, the author identified three overarching themes: (a) Enriching the soil of knowledge and awareness (i.e., racial trauma knowledge and awareness, social awareness, and self-awareness), (b) Growing roots of intentionality (i.e., deliberate and purposeful thoughts for interacting with students), and (c) Budding of social change agents (i.e., educators’ transformative potential and desire to engage in social action efforts). Figure 3 below illustrates a conceptual model of the study’s findings and the remainder of Chapter 4 details the identified themes.
Enriching the Soil of Knowledge & Awareness

Racial Trauma Knowledge and Awareness

All the study participants initiated the professional development (PD) series with a foundational understanding of general trauma and its impact on youth. However, knowledge and awareness of racial trauma varied among participants. Three participants from racially/ethnically minoritized backgrounds discussed that the PD content’s emphasis on racial stress and trauma confirmed what they already knew. For example, John, a Black male Special Education teacher working with majority Black students in the Mountain West region, shared the following
regarding his understanding of racial trauma, “I wouldn't say they [views and understanding of racial trauma] have changed; It [the PD] just confirmed the things that I have already suspected and known and experienced.” Gina, who identifies as a White Latinx female teaching majority Latinx students in the Northeast, shared a similar sentiment:

I think definitely the PD gave me a lot of academic sources and research that like backed a lot of things that me and the other participants know to be true. And then how you sort of like pushed us to think even beyond that.

For racially/ethnically minoritized participants, the PD validated their lived experiences and previous observations and gave them a space to reflect critically on such experiences. The PD enhanced awareness and understanding of racial trauma also for participants. Miranda, a White Latinx participant teaching a majority Latinx student population in the West, shared that she was previously aware of racial trauma. However, her awareness and understanding of how racial trauma exists, particularly in classrooms and schools, has increased. An increase in racial trauma awareness also took place for Christina, a White (non-Hispanic) teacher of majority-Latinx students who voiced,

I think the biggest takeaway is I felt like I had at least some understanding of trauma-informed. But I think specifically talking about how race affects that, to have actual case studies and stuff, it just brought like a lot to the front of my mind. Like I don't know, I guess I never truly thought about how that is a form of trauma. Like kids get traumatized at school, too. Those are just some of the things that I was blind to because I hadn't experienced them.

While the PD series helped enhance Christina’s racial consciousness relating to trauma, this enhancement was not experienced by Jennifer, another White (non-Hispanic) identifying
When asked during the post-interview if her understanding and views of racial trauma have changed, Jennifer who teaches majority Black students responded,

I'm going to say that they've only changed because now, I see that the stressors are everywhere, no matter what the race is. The stressors are everywhere. And I think that the kids, whether they're White or Black...I think that they are all coming together. Because they find, I don't know if it's comfort, but they find friendship in each other.

Jennifer’s response reflects colorblindness and a lack of critical awareness or understanding that racially marginalized students experience racial stress, especially in schools. Furthermore, Jennifer’s response contradicts Miranda’s post-interview assertion that “it's so important that we acknowledge that there is racial trauma out in the community and in the schools and that we don't minimize it.”

**Social Awareness**

Though the PD series did not enhance all participants’ knowledge and awareness of racial trauma, it enhanced all participants’ social awareness. Social awareness is “the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others from diverse backgrounds and cultures” (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, n.d., para 2). A perceived benefit of the PD series is that it made participants socially aware that educators in various regions of the U.S. are navigating similar challenges of working with students vulnerable to traumatic experiences. John shared in his post-interview, “there was a relief to hear other teachers from different regions of the world that are experiencing, going through the same thing that I am... It’s good to hear the discourse between teachers.” Other participants (four) shared similar sentiments as John and felt
that the three PD sessions (focus groups) provided a sense of community to hear and learn from each other.

The series did not only enhance the educators’ social awareness among each other, but it also enhanced their social awareness of their students’ experiences. As a PD series component, the author encouraged participants to implement trauma-informed student intervention activities, which helped enhance understanding of students’ emotions and lives. For example, Jennifer, who implemented a few of the intervention activities with her students stated,

I knew these kids were under stress, but this sort of gave me an outlet to understand it more, to figure out some new strategies to help the kids, and to change my attitude towards the way I approached their learning.

Miranda, who is still teaching remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, also had the opportunity to virtually implement some of the intervention activities with her students. She shared the following about her implementation,

It's helped me focus on the little faces that I see in the screen and remember that they're little humans. I have an insight to the ways that they're living and the things that they're managing. I have a huge opportunity to build my understanding of what students are going through right now.

Like Miranda, Angel, a Black behavior specialist situated in a school within the southern region with a majority-Black student population, voiced that the PD series reminded her that “even though they [students] are little, they also deserve respect and care and compassion.”

**Self-Awareness**

As the educators grew more socially aware, they were inspired to continuously self-reflect on their personal traumas, attitudes, biases, and educational practices. Ultimately, their
social awareness fostered a sense of self-awareness. In his post-interview John shared that the journal reflections led him to think more deeply about his own traumatic experiences as a Black male educator stating, “I don't know if this was the intent, but the impact of this training for me is like I also see the trauma that I’ve experienced.” Miranda also acknowledged that the PD helped her to recognize her trauma triggers better and feel more “confident” in addressing them in her professional and personal life.

Three participants related their enriched self-awareness to their personal traumas. Additionally, all participants related their enhanced awareness to aspects such as thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors in their respective school settings. For instance, Christina expressed,

I think that training helps just even to just analyze my own stuff. Like looking into my own classroom, looking at my students, looking at situations. Like I feel like it gave me a lot more like, I don't know like, information to like start like looking at stuff.

Similarly, Gina viewed the PD series information as pedagogical tools that made her more aware of her emotional responses to student engagement among a particular student she commonly has challenges with. She stated,

I feel like the tools or just like the things that I’ve learned have just made me more self-conscious or like self-aware of those reactions and, like the fact that I need to make sure that I’m regulated before I can work with him or offer assistance or support to him. So, I think it's changed my mindset in that way; it's made me more aware of like how I am in the classroom and making sure that it's not clashing with students when they react a certain way to things.
**Growing Roots of Intentionality**

The PD series influenced educators to apply their enriched knowledge and awareness to the intentionality of their thoughts and educational practices. The participants believed that they had a new lens to view students and made an effort to embed this new lens in their interpersonal interactions. Angel shared that she believes she has always been a trauma-informed behavior specialist but is now “scanning” her language, words, and behaviors so that she can consistently ensure that they are trauma-informed. Likewise, John has grown to shift his views about his students and his interactions with them, expressing his belief that “kids are not bad, they're just surviving bad situations.” John continued,

> It’s just like this student, their goal in the morning is not to come in here and upset me or another teacher. There's a reason for this [behavior]. If I’ll get to that reason I don't know, but I will try to get to that reason. Because that's the only way that this kid is really going to be able to truly thrive in this learning environment.

Participants like John now choose to apply a trauma-informed lens to approach and support all students he encounters in the school environment.

Participants also described how they now practice intentionality to approach student academic engagement and student discipline. For example, Christina viewed herself as a contributing source to disengagement among students in her elective course. When comparing the engagement of her students before and after her participation in the PD series, Christina described,

> I wasn't really passionate about it [the course] and the kids weren't passionate about it. During the [winter] break I took some reflecting time, and I was like,
okay, how am I going to make it not like where we want to yell at each other?...

And so, like this semester, I was like I'm going to go in there and I'm going to really try to like connect with them and try to get to know them.

Christina explained that now that she builds genuine relationships with her students and taps into their strengths, the students are more actively engaged. She also perceived the class to be more enjoyable for her and her students.

The participants grew to see the transformations that could evolve in their classrooms when they were more deliberate in their responses to students’ cognitive and behavioral forms of engagement. During her post-interview, Gina referred to a new pedagogical approach she took to behavioral engagement (i.e., perceived disruptive behaviors). She recounted a recent experience where two students were disruptive by yelling in class while other students were working independently. Gina explained that she intentionally approached the students by choosing to have a conversation with them in the hall instead of screaming at them. Gina reflected that her approach to the situation was “a lot better” than how she handled similar incidents prior to the PD and attributed this intentionality to her enhanced awareness, “being aware that, like me, screaming at them in front of the whole class and then interrupting everyone's independent work wasn't going to do anything to better the issue. So that's like something that I’ve worked on.” Jennifer stated that she has also been working to move from her traditional approach to classroom management to one that is more flexible and less punitive. Jennifer voiced that before the PD series,

I would automatically write the referral because that to me felt like it needed something to happen. Now I take a step back and realize maybe I need to explain
the situation first before I take that disciplinary action. So yes, that is a little bit of a shift.

**Budding of Social Change Agents**

Participants growing intentionality also reflected their transformative potential and desire to engage in social action relating to trauma-informed education. Tiffany, a Black teacher of majority Black students, expressed transformative potential for dismantling “racial barriers” between her and her Latinx students. Tiffany shared that before the PD series, most of her Black students had an open line of communication with her, whereas her Latinx students were more “meek and mild”. However, now her Latinx students have also opened up to her more about situations they are dealing with in their personal lives. While Tiffany’s PD experience demonstrated the transformative potential of breaking communication barriers between teachers and students, Christina described the transformative potential for teachers to develop assertiveness when communicating with administrators regarding trauma-informed approaches.

During her pre-interview, when asked if she voiced her opinion to administrators regarding school policies, Christina explained that she did not feel comfortable doing so. However, during her post-interview, Christina described a recent staff meeting in which administrators presented a discipline plan for addressing student behaviors such as male students “pantsing each other” (pulling down each other’s pants). She stated that she looked up at her principal and suggested that students be referred to a counselor before enacting the discipline plan. Christina described that she has started speaking up more “because I feel like if you don't say anything then you're just like a bystander and like you have to take action. There's a responsibility to take action.”
Two participants aspired to take action but feel that they have not yet reached their desired level of action. For example, Miranda stated,

I want to be at that point where I see a practice, or I see something happening...
And I just want to get to that point where I can go from having the feeling 'ooh this isn't right', to naming what isn't right about it, to speaking on it faster.

Miranda believes that she will reach her aspired level of social action upon continuous professional development opportunities. Angel expressed similar desires as Miranda, and expressed, “I think I’m still working on like how to address those things [unhealthy teacher-student interactions] …Even if I see it, being able to say 'hey, you probably shouldn't have said that. Let's try something else with this student.’” Angel believed that her hesitancy to confront unhealthy interactions is largely due to perceived resistance to trauma-informed education, especially from educators from an “old school” background. However, she believes that as she grows “more confident” and practices “assertive communication,” she will be better prepared to engage in advocacy and social action to enhance the racial school climate.

Overall, the study participants attributed their enhanced knowledge and self-awareness to the case studies integrated into the module content. The educators' journal entries helped them process their contributing or mitigating roles in trauma-induced interpersonal interactions with students. Additionally, the educators who had an opportunity to implement the student intervention activities gained greater insight into their students' lives and experiences. One participant recommended that future PD sessions incorporate an opportunity for teachers to roleplay how to implement the activities instead of the researcher/facilitator solely modeling implementation. Two participants also recommended that future PD sessions amplify student
voices in which students share their firsthand experiences with racial stress in schools.

Additional suggestions for improving the PD series included extending the length of time (i.e., including more weeks in the series) and potentially hosting the series in person. Lastly, one participant expressed that due to the exhaustion of being an educator, she did not always feel as mindfully present as she would have preferred, thus recommending that the researcher alters the time or days in which the sessions are offered (i.e., providing it later in the evening instead of directly after work or on a non-workday).

Summary

The CREATE Professional Development Series influenced the educator participants in various ways. Participants described how the PD series confirmed and enhanced their knowledge centered around racial stress and trauma. The educators also explained how the series enhanced their social and self-awareness. Applying their enriched knowledge and awareness, many participants evolved to grow intentional thoughts and shift their interpersonal interactions with their students. Finally, the PD series helped some participants transform communication barriers within their classrooms. The series also inspired others to want to become better advocates and social change agents within their school communities.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Chapter five discusses the research study’s aim and findings. The author relates the study’s findings to the guiding research questions and previous literature. First, the author addresses how the CREATE Professional Development (PD) Series influenced educators’ trauma-informed attitudes, awareness, and practices. Second, the author discusses how the series influenced educators’ perceptions of interpersonal interactions and student engagement among racially marginalized students. Third, the author provides an overview of how the series influenced the participating educators, professionally and personally. The author then discusses the study’s limitations (boundaries) and strengths. Finally, the chapter concludes with implications for practice, research, and policy.

Trauma-Informed Attitudes, Awareness, and Practices

The study’s first research question aimed to understand how a culturally responsive and equity-centered trauma-informed professional development influences educators’ trauma-informed attitudes, awareness, and practices. All participants initiated the PD series with a foundational awareness of general trauma. However, the PD series content and activities confirmed and enriched participants’ knowledge and awareness of racial trauma. The research-grounded concepts of racial stress, racial trauma, and their associated triggers provided participants greater understanding of how racial trauma differs from general trauma. Therefore, the PD series helped develop sociopolitical and racial consciousness relating to trauma for participants. Such development aligns with a core characteristic of a culturally responsive educator (Hammond, 2015).
PD activities such as case studies, group discourse, and the implementation of student intervention activities fostered self-awareness and social awareness growth among participants. This knowledge and awareness shift experienced by participants is consistent with prior research indicating that trauma-informed professional development helps increase knowledge, change mindsets, and enhance trauma-informed attitudes (Law, 2019; Parker et al., 2020). Furthermore, the significant effect that the journal reflection activities had on participants’ ability to process their enriched knowledge and awareness is parallel to other studies that identify critical reflection as a key component of trauma-informed professional development (Anderson et al., 2021; Loomis & Felt, 2021).

Like educators in the study conducted by Law (2019), the current study participants expressed their intention to incorporate trauma-informed practices and interventions due to their newfound knowledge and skills. Not all participants had the time and capacity to implement the student intervention activities embedded in the PD series. However, participants who implemented the intervention activities gained deeper insights, or social awareness, of their students’ emotions and lived experiences and began to have more empathetic and compassionate attitudes towards students. Such transformed attitudes reflect a related experience shared by participants in the study conducted by Anderson et al. (2021), in which teachers engaged in more trauma-informed and empathetic responses to students after tapping into their students’ emotional worlds.

Perceptions of Interpersonal Interactions and Student Engagement

As the participants enhanced their racial trauma knowledge and awareness and their trauma-informed attitudes, they applied their knowledge, awareness, and skills in the classroom
with students. The increased application led participants to perceive their interactions with
students differently, thus helping to address the study’s second research question regarding the
PD series’ influence on perceptions of interpersonal interactions and student engagement. Not
only did educators begin to use a trauma-informed lens for viewing students, but participants
also noted positive changes in interpersonal interactions and student engagement. Improvements
in interpersonal interactions and student engagement following a trauma-informed PD may be
expected as Whitaker et al. (2019) also found that educators also reported significant differences
in their perceptions of students and developments in teacher-student relationships.

Educators in the study began to respond to student engagement with practices that align
with culturally responsive and equity-centered trauma-informed education (Pickens, 2020;
Venet, 2021). For example, one participant, a behavior specialist, began scanning her language
and behaviors to challenge her deficit perceptions of students. At the same time, another
participant grew more intentional about cultivating genuine relationships with students that
honored their strengths. By cultivating meaningful relationships with her students, she observed
increased student engagement, a primary goal of culturally responsive pedagogy (Hammond,
2015). Other participants also illustrated equity-centered trauma-informed features such as
flexible restorative disciplinary approaches to disruptive behaviors and student engagement
(Thomas et al., 2019; Venet, 2021).

**Professional and Personal Influence**

The study’s third research question sought to understand how the PD series influenced
educators’ professional and personal lives. The PD series influenced participants professionally
regarding their knowledge, attitudes, and interpersonal interactions with students. Meanwhile,
the PD series also provided the participants with a professional virtual learning community to engage in critical discourse with and learn from, aligning with features of effective professional development and transformative learning experiences (Desimone, 2011; Mezirow, 1994, 1997). Furthermore, the PD series inspired participants’ transformative potential to engage in social action in their professional school settings, consistent with transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1994, 1997). More specifically, participants grew more assertive when communicating to administrators regarding trauma-informed approaches and advocating for students. Participants grew a strong desire to enhance their confidence to be more comfortable intervening in potentially traumatic educational incidents experienced by their students. On a personal level, the PD series helped participants become more cognizant of their personal experiences with general and racial trauma. The PD series case studies and journal reflections facilitated the recognition of personal trauma.

**Limitations and Strengths**

Although the current study suggested a transformative potential for its participants, a few study limitations or boundaries must be considered. First, the researcher experienced recruitment challenges, presumably due to teacher shortages and the burden of heightened educator responsibilities since the onset of the COVID 19 pandemic (Jones et al., 2021). Additionally, the researcher implemented the culturally responsive and equity-centered trauma-informed PD series during a controversial time when culturally responsive pedagogy was politically debated due to its presumed association with Critical Race Theory. Various political leaders have deemed frameworks and practices such as Critical Race Theory and culturally responsive pedagogy as divisive. Such leaders have recommended policies to ban diversity and equity-related training for
state and federal employees (Morgan, 2022). It is a possibility that the controversy surrounding topics of culturally responsiveness and race prevented individuals from participating in the series, leading to the following study limitation – sample size. While the study’s sample size prevents the generalizability of the research findings, triangulation of data helped enhance the reliability and validity of exploring the influence of the PD series.

A strength of the current study is that the intervention development was grounded in Desimone’s (2011) model for effective professional development. The PD series fulfilled most of the model’s criteria, including the integration of activities centered on a central topic (i.e., racial trauma); active learning (i.e., case studies, journal reflections, and trauma-sensitive strategies); consistency with reform efforts (i.e., trauma-informed education and social-emotional learning); and fostering a learning community. However, the series did not last for an entire semester or include a minimum of 20 contact hours with teachers. Therefore, future research should replicate the study and increase the length of time for the PD series.

**Implications for Practice**

A recommendation for practice guided by the study's findings is to support educators as they grow aware of their trauma and the trauma of others (i.e., students). School administrators must consider ways in which they are supporting educators in trauma stewardship or "daily practice through which individuals, organizations, and societies tend to the hardship, pain, or trauma experienced by humans, other living beings, or our planet itself" (Lipsky & Burk, 2009, p. 11). School leaders should move beyond general self-care and wellness to address educators' trauma and social-emotional well-being. Instead, leaders have to acknowledge institutional practices that may perpetuate trauma/racial trauma for their staff and students and work to
address such systemic practices. Therefore, just as teachers and school staff participate in trauma-informed professional development promoting anti-racism, school administrators should do the same. Facilitators of culturally responsive, equity-centered and trauma-informed professional development can also provide consulting services to help educators address instances in which they are triggered by the professional development content and interactions in the school. Facilitators can also provide educators a safe and brave space to process their professional development experiences through support groups.

Practice guided by the current study should also leverage the unique opportunity for interdisciplinary collaborations between social workers and educators. Social workers can provide professional learning opportunities to help enhance educators' awareness of racial trauma and their overall trauma-informed attitudes and practices. Educators can help social workers better understand their current challenges in schools and barriers/facilitators to incorporating culturally responsive, equity-centered trauma-informed education.

Future implementation of culturally responsive, equity-centered trauma-informed professional development must be sustained to help educators acknowledge racism and racial trauma as endemic health and social justice concerns (Anderson et al., 2021). Furthermore, future professional development should expand educators' social awareness by preparing them to recognize and intervene in potentially racially stressful encounters in teacher-student interactions and student-student interactions (Burleigh & Wilson, 2021). To best expand educators' social awareness, it is recommended that professional development content amplifies students' voices by having their shared experiences of racial stress and trauma in schools. This amplification can be accomplished by having students record digital stories of their experiences to be embedded in professional development case studies. Practitioners can also invite students as guest speakers.
during professional development sessions. Additionally, professional development sessions should allow educators to role-play intervening in racially stressful student encounters, advocating for/with students, and implementing trauma-informed student intervention activities to address students' social-emotional well-being. As professional development facilitators help educators understand what racial stress looks like in schools, facilitators should consider providing educators a ‘how-to’ guidebook for addressing such challenging encounters.

**Implications for Research**

Extended research relating to the current study should include embedding educators' scores from the Attitudes Related to Trauma-Informed Care (ARTIC) scale (Baker et al., 2016) and comparing the results to the qualitative findings in a mixed-methods approach. A mixed-methods approach to the qualitative findings and quantitative results can help provide a more comprehensive understanding of the educators' trauma-informed attitudes following a culturally responsive, equity-centered trauma-informed professional development, thus, further contributing to the literature surrounding educators' trauma-informed attitudes.

Future research incorporating a culturally responsive, equity-centered trauma-informed professional development in a virtual community should increase the sample size to have a more representative sample of U.S. middle school educators. Furthermore, scholars should seek to develop university-community partnerships within local communities to engage educators in professional development in person. While the development of university-community partnerships helps change the format of professional development delivery, it also provides an opportunity to further assess other outcomes related to racial school climate.
In developing sustained university-community partnerships, researchers can assess the relationship between implementing a schoolwide culturally responsive, equity-centered trauma-informed professional development and student and staff perceptions of teacher-student relationships. Researchers can also evaluate how the professional development and student intervention activities influence school disciplinary incidents and students' academic achievement. Disciplinary incidents and academic achievement should be recognized as critical outcomes due to the racial disparities experienced by racially marginalized students.

**Implications for Policy**

A significant area of contention in the U.S. political climate is policymakers' push to ban the Critical Race Theory framework and associated culturally responsive pedagogical tools (i.e., Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training). This climate reflects a critical time for helping professionals such as social workers and educators to stand firm as social change agents to advocate against any policies seeking to prohibit the advancement of racial equity in education. Additionally, to foster trauma-informed school racial climates, policymakers must provide adequate funding for comprehensive school resources such as support staff (i.e., social workers, mental health professionals, etc.) and systemic practices that support students and educators' social-emotional well-being. Furthermore, trauma-informed education must be prioritized as much as academics so that educators are not hesitant to integrate student activities into their routine pedagogical practices and are provided the support and capacity to do so.
Conclusion

The current research aimed to address the social justice issue of harmful school racial climates and educators' roles in perpetuating such environments. The researcher specifically sought to address educators' potentially contributing roles in racially stressful teacher-student interactions rooted in deficit perceptions of racially marginalized students and often manifested in microaggressions. To address the concern, the researcher recruited middle school educators to participate in a virtual, culturally responsive, equity-centered trauma-informed professional development series to enhance their knowledge of racial stress and trauma in schools.

The study’s findings suggest that a culturally responsive, equity-centered trauma-informed professional development series grounded in Desimone's (2011) model for effective professional development and Mezirow's (1994, 1997) transformative learning theory has the potential to enrich educators' knowledge and awareness regarding racial trauma. Furthermore, the series has the potential to improve interpersonal interactions between teachers and students and increase student engagement. Lastly, the professional development series can help prepare educators to become confident and assertive social change agents on a quest for racial equity in schools. Therefore, the CREATE Professional Development series can be considered a foundational model or strategy for de-centering Whiteness in trauma-informed professional development and a strategy for enhancing school racial climates for racially marginalized students.
APPENDIX A:
MODULE CASE STUDIES AND GUIDED REFLECTION QUESTIONS
Module 1 Case Study: Anthony

Anthony was on the way to math class when he realized that he was almost late. Anthony began to jog to the class to avoid receiving a tardy from his teacher. On the way, the school resource officer (SRO) used a harsh tone as he scolded Anthony for running in the hall. As Anthony’s eyes wandered to the SRO’s taser, his mind began to drift to a memory of another time when he had been scolded by a police officer in the community using a similar harsh tone as the SRO. Anthony finally made it to math class, where his teacher was giving instructions for a quiz. As Anthony took the quiz, he felt anxious and could barely focus.

After school, Anthony’s teacher graded his quiz in which he earned a failing score. The teacher then stated to the teaching assistant, “This math class is clearly too difficult for students like Anthony”.

(Case study adapted from Equity-Centered Trauma-Informed Education by Alex Shervin Venet (2021))

Module 1 Case Study: Anthony
(Guided Reflection Questions)

• As a group, please reflect on the following questions:
  • What were some inequities and sources of racial stress presented in the case study?
  • Do you think Anthony responded in flight, fight, or freeze mode?
  • How do you think you would approach Anthony’s case as his teacher?
Module 2 Case Study: Jorge

**Context:** Interaction between Brown male student and White male teacher in an underserved school

Jorge was late to school after walking his younger sister to school. When Jorge entered the classroom, his teacher glanced at him and rolled his eyes. As Jorge sat in his seat, the teacher made the following comment: “You students show up late and just never seem to care about your education.”

Jorge loudly sighed before yelling, “I don’t even know why I come to school, especially this class!”

The teacher responded, “You know what Jorge? Go to the back of the class, turn around and face your future – I will tell you when you can have a seat!”

Upon hearing the teacher’s instructions, Jorge stormed out of the classroom.

(Case study adapted from “A Trauma-Informed and Culturally Responsive Approach in the Classroom” by Isaiah Polkene [2020] and facilitator’s field experiences)

Module 2 Case Study: Jorge (Guided Reflection Questions)

- Let’s reflect on the following questions:
  - What were some microaggressions reflected in this case?
  - Why do you think Jorge responded the way he did?
  - How could the teacher have addressed the situation differently?
  - If you ran into Jorge in the hall after he stormed out of the classroom, how would you intervene to de-escalate the situation?
Module 3 Case Study: Gabby

The students had just completed a highly engaging course activity that involved group interactions. The teacher used a signal to recenter the students’ attention, but a few students still whispered about the activity with excitement. Although a few students still chatted, the teacher turned and looked directly at Gabby yelling, “Stop talking! You are always the one still talking!” Gabby rolled her eyes and sighed loudly.

For the rest of the class period Gabby shut down and refused to complete her assignments. The teacher went to her and stated, “You will be receiving a zero for today, Gabby. This kind of behavior is why you’re at-risk for repeating this grade again next year.”

Discouraged, Gabby mumbled under her breath, “I can never do anything good or right in this class.”

(Case study adapted from facilitator’s field experiences)

Module 3 Case Study: Gabby (Guided Reflection Questions)

• What emotions do you think Gabby felt in this situation?
• How may this encounter cause Gabby stress?
• How would you have responded as the teacher in this case?
• Do you consider your students to be “at-risk”? Why or why not?
APPENDIX B:
RECRUITMENT FLYER
Volunteers Needed for Research Study on Trauma-Informed Professional Development for Teachers

- Are you interested in professional development on trauma-informed education?
- Are you also interested in learning more about the impacts of racial trauma for students of color?
- You may be eligible to participate in a professional development program that could enhance your trauma-informed awareness and teaching strategies with students affected by stress.

Eligibility Requirements:
- Teach in an underserved school in the U.S.
- Teach in grades 5-8

Participation Involves:
- Active engagement in a virtual trauma-informed professional development series on the following dates and times:
  - Session 1: November 17, 2021 (5:30 – 7:30 PM EST)
  - Session 2: December 1, 2021 (5:30 – 7:30 PM EST)
  - Session 3: December 15, 2021 (5:30 – 7:30 PM EST)
- Pre- and post-virtual interview (60-minutes each)
- Pre- and post-test survey (Approximately 15 minutes each)
  *Overall active participation time: 0.5 hours over the course of 3 weeks

*You will receive a $50 Visa gift card via email after you complete all 3 professional development training sessions

Potential Participant Benefits:
*Receive trauma-informed curriculum
  - Includes handouts, scripts, & activities for use in the classroom
*Improve your relationships with students and lessen student behavioral problems

If you have any questions about the study or would like to express interest, please email UCF doctoral student Jasmine Haynes at jasmine.haynes13@knights.ucf.edu.

This study has UCF IRB approval and is under the supervision of Dr. Kim Anderson, School of Social Work, at kim.anderson@ucf.edu.
APPENDIX C:
IRB APPROVAL LETTER
October 26, 2021

Dear Jasmine Haynes:

On 10/26/2021, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Review:</th>
<th>Modification / Update to expand eligibility, revised study timeline, added compensation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title:</td>
<td>A Culturally Responsive Trauma-Informed Training for Teachers in Central Florida Title I Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigator:</td>
<td>Jasmine Haynes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRB ID:</td>
<td>MOD00002316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding:</td>
<td>None</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grant ID:</td>
<td>None</td>
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<tr>
<td>IND, IDE, or HDE:</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents Reviewed:</td>
<td>Content for Social Media Postings, Explanation of Research (for parents), Informed Consent, IRB Protocol, Teacher Recruitment Flyer</td>
</tr>
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</table>

The IRB approved the modified protocol on 10/26/2021.

In conducting this protocol, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system. Guidance on submitting Modifications and a Continuing Review or Administrative Check-in are detailed in the manual. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request so that IRB records will be accurate.

If you have any questions, please contact the UCF IRB at 407-823-2901 or irb@ucf.edu. Please include your project title and IRB number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

Renea Carver
Designated Reviewer
APPENDIX D:
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (PRE-INTERVENTION)
Interview Protocol (Pre-Intervention)

1. What made you decide to choose a career in education?
2. What led you to teach in your current school?
3. What are your expectations for student engagement (academic and social-emotional engagement) in the classroom?
   a. How are these expectations communicated to students?
   b. How do you feel when students are not meeting your expectations for engagement?
4. Describe some disruptive behaviors that you observe within the classroom?
   a. What do you believe are some reasons behind these behaviors?
   b. How do you typically respond to a student displaying disruptive behaviors?
5. How do you think your students’ racial/ethnic backgrounds play a role in their behaviors and learning experiences?
6. How do you think your interactions with students impact their overall learning and schooling experiences?
   a. Do you think your racial/ethnic identity plays a role in your interactions with your students? Why or why not?
7. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me about your students, your interactions with your students, or your role as an educator?
APPENDIX E:
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (POST-INTERVENTION)
Interview Protocol (Post-Intervention)

1. In what ways has participating in the professional development impacted you professionally or personally?
2. In what ways do you believe your views of students have changed after participating in the professional development series?
3. How have your expectations for student engagement (academic and social-emotional engagement) in the classroom changed since completing the professional development series?
   a. How do you now communicate your expectations to students?
   b. How do you now feel when students are not meeting your expectations for engagement?
4. How have student behaviors in your classroom changed since implementing the activities from the professional development?
   a. Have disruptive behaviors changed? Please give some examples.
   b. Since participating in the professional development, what has been your response to students displaying disruptive behaviors?
   c. What do you believe are some reasons behind these behavioral changes (or lack thereof)?
5. After participating in the professional development, how do you think your interactions with students have changed?
   a. How do you think these changes have impacted your students’ learning experiences?
   b. Do you think your racial/ethnic identity plays a role in your interactions with students? Why or why not?
6. Based upon the information shared in the professional development series, how do you think your students’ racial/ethnic backgrounds play a role in their behaviors and learning experiences?
7. Have your views or understanding of racial stress and racial trauma changed since participating in the professional development series? If so, how?
8. What information or understanding of racial stress and racial trauma changed since participating in the professional development series? If so, how?
9. What recommendations would you provide for improving this professional development series?
10. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me about your experience in the series, your interactions with your students, or yourself personally?
APPENDIX F:
INDIVIDUAL JOURNAL REFLECTION PROMPTS
Individual Journal Reflection Prompts

Module 1 Reflection Prompt

Think back on your “focus/target” student for the series:

- Do you think any of the challenging/disruptive behaviors you described about this student reflect trauma responses such as flight, fight, or freeze?
- If so, does this change how you view this student and their behaviors?

Module 2 Reflection Prompt

Think about your interactions with your “focus/target” student for the series:

- Are there times you think your interactions with this student may have led them to feel worried, anxious, or angry?
- What happened during the interaction that may have contributed to the student feeling these emotions?
- Is there anything you would have done differently during this encounter? If yes, what?
- Are you noticing any changes in your interactions with this student as you participate in this PD series?
Characteristic of culturally responsive & equity-centered trauma-informed education

Growing roots of intentionality

- Application of trauma-informed pedagogical tools and practices (i.e., relationship building & flexibility)
- Asset-based perceptions of students
- Identifying and addressing emotional responses to student (dis)engagement
- Monitoring language, words, and behaviors
Characteristic of culturally responsive & equity-centered trauma-informed education

Budding of social change agents

- Advocating for students
- Desire to engage and advocate for trauma-informed approaches
- Critical consciousness (i.e., identifying systemic barriers/facilitators of trauma-informed approaches)
- Transformative potential for social action
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