

The Iterative Process of Developing a School-Based Intervention to Take Actions Against Racism

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ABSTRACT

Racism threatens the mental and physical health of Black and Brown K-8 students and may lead to re-occurring harm without intervention. We developed 'Actions Against Racism' professional development trainings using a trauma-informed racial socialization lens to provide K-8 educators with proactive strategies to disrupt the negative psychosocial developmental outcomes associated with racism. This paper is a descriptive account of how we iteratively developed this intervention through four phases over the course of four years. The primary takeaway from this work is that developing and implementing interventions to disrupt racism and promote healing must take into account the implementation context, with consideration to balancing the urgency of supporting students amidst the necessity of taking time to build trust and authentic commitment to disrupting racism among staff.

Keywords: educator professional development, school-based intervention development, trauma-informed practices, school racial socialization

Black and Brown students experience direct and vicarious forms of racism daily, including experiences of both covert and overt discrimination (Benner et al., 2018; Skiba et al., 2011). Racism-related experiences at both the interpersonal and systems-levels within schools negatively impact Black students' psychosocial development



(Anderson et al., 2019; Bottiani et al., 2017). Thus, there is a need to specifically assess and address racism-related stress and trauma in primary and secondary school settings (Alvarez, 2020). To address this need, we partnered with a single K-8 charter school in the mid-Atlantic United States to develop Actions Against Racism, an intervention that draws from existing research on racism-related stress and trauma as well as the potential for racial socialization to buffer against these institutional and interpersonal harms. The intervention content brings together three evidence-based practices: social-emotional learning, trauma-informed practices, and racial socialization. In this paper, we describe the iterative process we used to develop this intervention in collaboration with school partners and future directions for this work.

RACISM-RELATED STRESS AND TRAUMA

According to Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) stress and coping model, stressors contribute to heightened arousal, which may lead to adaptive or maladaptive ways of coping, depending on the resources available. Over time, if insurmountable racism-related stressors exceed Black and Brown students' capacity to cope, along with limited environmental resources, a trauma response can develop (Carter, 2007). The resulting racial trauma is the accumulation of direct and vicarious experiences of racism that gravely impact the psychosocial well-being of Black and Brown students (Saleem et al., 2020). Racial trauma can resemble symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), including experiences of hypervigilance, flashbacks, nightmares, avoidance, or somatic complaints (Comas-Diaz et al., 2019).

The effects of racism-related stressors can cause psychological harm, including internalizing and externalizing responses such as isolation, alienation, and a lack of school belongingness (Henderson et al., 2019; Saleem et al., 2022), as well as delinquency, physical retaliation, or substance use (Henderson et al., 2019). In turn, the accumulation of racism-related stressors makes students susceptible to negative mental and physical health outcomes, including anxiety, depression, suicidality, substance use, and other risky behaviors (Njoroge et al., 2017). These effects are compounded by other intersections of social identities including gender (Cogburn et al., 2011), disability status (Lindsay et al., 2021), or LGBTQ+ affiliation (Salerno et al., 2023) to name a few.

Racial Socialization through a Trauma-Informed Lens

Racial socialization is one strengths-based phenomenon that serves as a protective factor and may buffer against the negative outcomes associated with racism-related stress. Although more commonly studied in the context of parental messages about race, racial identity, and the preparation for racism, school racial socialization is a recent focus of inquiry. The conceptualization of school racial socialization extends the literature on parental racial socialization by addressing practices and messages about racial ideologies within schools (Byrd, 2015). It is



common for K-12 educators to take a color-evasive, or colorblind, approach to racial socialization, meaning educators avoid discussions about race and racism (Hazelbaker & Mistry, 2021, Perry et al., 2025). However, such an approach does not eliminate the existence of racism-based encounters that occur, thus further perpetuating psychological and academic harm to students of color. Research suggests that taking a colorblind approach in schools can lead racially minoritized students to feel isolated and experience a lack of belonging, ultimately negatively impacting their academic outcomes (Byrd, 2015). Though often not the intention of educators using this strategy, colorblindness perpetuates systemic racism and racial hierarchy (Lloyd & Gaither, 2018). On the contrary, the promotion of cultural competence, a refusal of the colorblind approach, and a lack of stereotyping leads to increased feelings of belonging in middle and high schoolers (Byrd, 2015).

There is limited research assessing school racial socialization and positive psychological outcomes in school-age youth (Saleem & Byrd, 2021). However, McAddo and colleagues (2025) postulate that infusing teaching education programs with trauma-informed concepts related to racial discrimination and socialization practices is a promising starting point to addressing racism-based experiences in schools. This can be accomplished by incorporating more educational opportunities that critically reflect on the intersections of race, discrimination, and harm while promoting healing and self-reflection (McAddo et al., 2025). Educators who identify as white may need additional support in developing these skills, as many white educators rely on colorblind or color-evasive forms of racial socialization more often than leveraging racial socialization practices to disrupt racism (Hazelbaker & Mistry, 2021). Consistent with African-centered healing (Mickel, 2002), addressing and healing from racism-related stress and trauma is not an individual effort but communal and collective action. Providing school staff with trauma-informed, racially conscious professional development opportunities can assist educators in building their skills for talking about, recognizing, and disrupting racism, which can increase constructive interracial interactions and promote an inclusive school racial climate that empowers and amplifies staff, caregiver, and student voice.

Professional Development

Currently, professional development trainings, specifically regarding race and equity, tend to be voluntary and disconnected, stand-alone sessions (Leonard & Woodland, 2022; Matschiner, 2023). This structure can be unsuccessful as it does not provide space for meaningful discussions, implementation, and growth in addressing and combating racism. In addition, efforts to confront racism and utilizing an anti-racist approach in schools are often met with resistance, fear, and discomfort (Matschiner, 2023). Particularly for white educators, there is resistance to seeing and understanding “whiteness”; fear in causing harm, not doing enough, and saying something wrong when practicing antiracism; and discomfort in having discussions. Thus, it is important that professional development training fosters safe, accountable, and brave environments to support educators in engaging in race conscious racial socialization (Stoffers et al., 2024). Unfortunately, little evidence exists in the literature for specific interventions that meet this need. A scoping review identified

27 studies that explored antiracist professional development but very few used quantitative analyses, demonstrating a need for effectiveness research (Barnes et al., in press). We developed the Actions Against Racism trainings to address the need for consistent, action-oriented, and engaging trainings to equip educators with the tools and confidence to combat racism. Ultimately, this program of research is intended to contribute to the nascent literature on the implementation and effectiveness of such interventions.

Sociopolitical Context

The development of Actions Against Racism began in 2020 during a time of significant racial tension. Black and Brown communities, already disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, also faced multiple highly publicized killings of members of their community by law enforcement. After the murder of George Floyd in May 2020, Kira Branch, PsyD, the senior author, formed the Nemours clinician working group to develop a brief intervention called “Action Against Racism” to provide Black and Brown communities with tools to manage racial stress and trauma. The clinician working group identified tools based on evidence-based practices, including racial socialization and trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy, to not only support Black and Brown communities, but also provide tools for all people to disrupt racism and dismantle oppressive systems (Branch et al., 2020).

In Spring 2021, a local charter school approached the Nemours Office of Community Engagement for help with transitioning their students to in-person schooling after the disruptions associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. The school was concerned about the impact of trauma and racial disparities on their Black and Brown students. The 475 students who attended this K-8 school were identified as 94% Black, 4% Latine, and 78% low income, while the staff identified as approximately 50% white and 44% Black. Recognizing that children spend a significant proportion of their time in school settings and acknowledging the systemic racism inherent in the education system, the intervention developers decided to collaborate with this specific school to develop a school-based adaptation of Action Against Racism, which became known as Actions Against Racism going forward.

POSITIONALITY OF AUTHORS

The authors of this paper include intervention developers, consultants, and research team members who were involved in this project. Many team members held multiple roles in that they developed parts of the intervention and supported research. When we refer to the “research team,” we are speaking of all co-authors on this paper, many of whom were leaders in this effort, and of additional supporting team members who helped with data collection and analysis for the larger project.

The first author identifies as a cisgender heterosexual Black/African American woman who deems it necessary to eliminate systematic barriers that impact the well-



being of culturally minority groups. Her direct school-based experiences as a former school psychologist, and emerging research interests in eradicating racism-based stress through system-level intervention informs her social justice worldview. She is a current member of the research team who became involved during the last phase of intervention development described here.

The second author identifies as a Black cisgender heterosexual woman of faith called to emancipate marginalized and oppressed Brown and Black children and families through culturally responsive evidence-based care. She is a licensed early career clinical health psychologist and mentor who has endured the generational ills of racism and sexism and acknowledges her pernicious assimilationist contributions to these and other egregious forms of oppression. This inspires her humbly evolving actions invested in equity and justice by living authentically, invoking educational advocacy, maintaining community proximity, developing early exposure pathways for non-traditional learners of psychology, and fostering dynamic futures. She was involved in the original conceptualization of this intervention and has supported and consulted on the research and intervention development.

The third author identifies as a Muslim, South-Asian woman and daughter of Bangladeshi immigrants. She is committed to fighting for a better future free from the shackles of white supremacy, capitalism, racism, colonialism, and all other oppressive systems. Her experiences as a trauma counseling student and clinical research coordinator engaged in community-engaged work have influenced her interest in liberation-, social justice-, and equity-focused research. She is a research team member and has primarily supported research efforts in the last two phases of intervention development who described here.

The fourth author identifies as a cisgender heterosexual Black African-Caribbean woman whose experiences growing up as an immigrant, child of a low socioeconomic household, and first generation college student have influenced her commitment to supporting the well-being and life outcomes of minoritized populations. Her experiences as a special education teacher and paraeducator have influenced her focus in social justice, equity, and inclusivity in schools. Her role has been primarily focused on research and evaluation during this intervention development process.

The fifth author identifies as a cisgender heterosexual Black/African-American woman. Her interest in social justice was sparked by the poetic writings of the Civil Rights Era. Her experiences with discrimination and 2nd generation desegregation in high school racism while attending a predominately white institution (PWI) of higher education further fueled her life-long commitment to challenge structural barriers and to promote well-being in marginalized communities. She has consulted on the intervention development and supported implementation and facilitation of the trainings throughout the project.

The sixth and corresponding author identifies as a cisgender heterosexual white woman committed to equitable school transformation. Her life experiences have made her attuned to the need for white educators, in particular, to take more responsibility and action to promote equity, belonging, safety, and inclusivity in schools. She has led the research efforts for the team and been involved in intervention development from the early stages of this project.

The senior author identifies as a cisgender heterosexual Black/African-American woman whose experiences of discrimination in school and medical settings have motivated her to disrupt systems of oppression and advocate for culturally-responsive and inclusive practices for individuals with marginalized identities. Her work as a pediatric psychologist has exposed her to school-based stressors experienced by youth and the impact it has on their health and well-being, rousing her to take action toward justice, equity, inclusion, and belonging in schools. She has led the intervention development efforts and has been involved in the research efforts from the outset of the project.

PHASES OF INTERVENTION DEVELOPMENT

Our work developing the Actions Against Racism educator trainings followed Kern and colleagues' (2011) phases of intervention development. Kern and colleagues (2011) created a five-phase process for intervention development in alignment with the Institute for Education Sciences' emphasis on iterative refinement (Table 1). Since the Kern et al. article was published, several school-based interventions have used this five-phase framework to guide the development process (e.g., DuPaul et al., 2018; Eiraldi et al., 2023). The iterative development process described by Kern and colleagues considers acceptability and feasibility as central goals, which was important to our research-practice partnership. The Kern and colleagues' process does not explicitly center considerations relevant to racial equity, however, so we infused elements of the race(ism) conscious adaptation of the Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (Allen et al., 2021) to further guide our development of implementation processes. Table 1 provides a summary of each phase, the key questions that guided us, the activities carried out, and the personnel involved.

Phase 1: Initial Intervention Development

Our research-practice partnership team initially included three clinical psychologists (DP, DH, KB), two school counselors, and one school psychologist/administrator. Our first task was to develop a preliminary plan for the school-based intervention, given the shared goals of the research-practice partnership team. To accomplish this goal, we needed to 1) develop a shared understanding of the needs of the school and 2) how an intervention could meet those needs in the school environment. The key questions that guided this phase were focused on understanding the core needs of the school, including how racial identities and lived experiences of educators and students impacted those needs (Table 1). We also needed to understand what specific competencies, including awareness, knowledge, and skills were needed to address the core needs of the school.



Activities

The Phase 1 activities are summarized in Table 1. The initial partnership team met every 2-4 weeks in the spring and summer of 2021 to develop a preliminary plan. School team members shared concerns about both staff and student wellness related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and racism-related stress and trauma. These meetings led to the shared understanding that educators in this school needed support with using trauma-informed approaches to racial socialization in their daily practice with both staff and students. The school team had launched school-wide book club for staff and conducted their own needs assessment, which included a survey to assess staff perceptions of the supports necessary to engage in constructive dialogues around race and racism in school. Questions were developed by the school team including Likert-type scale questions about preparedness to discuss topics related to race and racism as well as open-ended questions about the necessary supports educators felt they needed to be more equipped to discuss race-related topics in the school.

Outcomes

The needs assessment survey administered by the school team determined that almost half of staff respondents requested support discussing racial injustice with students. Additionally, staff highlighted the most challenging aspect of discussing race in school was “fear of judgment.” Building from the needs assessment, the work of the Nemours clinician workgroup described above, and a review of relevant literature, the partnership decided to leverage three evidence-based practices to build educator skills for combatting racism.

We chose racial socialization as the strategy to prepare students for coping with racism and discrimination and promote adaptive social, emotional, and academic functioning (Anderson et al., 2019). We included social and emotional learning (SEL) practices because these strategies build student and educator competencies that are essential for combatting racism, like assertive communication, empathy, and emotion regulation (Durlak et al., 2011; Gimbert et al., 2021). These competencies were thought to be foundational to regulating emotions so that educators could have constructive dialogues and build caring relationships. We also recognized the importance of a trauma-informed lens for students and staff impacted by racism-related stress and trauma, including elements of trauma-focused cognitive behavior therapy (TF-CBT), which offers specific strategies to support coping and healing (Metzger et al., 2021). We found no intervention in our literature review that integrated all three components.

We then iteratively developed outlines for an initial series of professional development trainings in collaboration with the school team. This initial series of modules covered the following topics: 1) the impact of racism on mental health and education outcomes (e.g., knowledge of racism, racial socialization); 2) educator reflection on their own identities (e.g., social and emotional awareness of self and others); 3) an overview of racism-related stress and trauma (e.g., impact of stress and trauma on social, emotional, and academic functioning); and 4) the impact of microaggressions and strategies to disrupt microaggressions with staff or students (e.g., trauma-informed racial socialization).

Table 1: Actions Against Racism Educator Trainings: Intervention Development Timeline and Activities

Phase (Kern et al., 2011)	Key Questions (Adapted from Kern et al., 2011 and Allen et al., 2021)	Timeline	Activities	Who was Involved
Phase 1: Initial Intervention Development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the core needs of our population? 2. How do racial identities and lived experiences impact educator and student experiences related to the intervention? 3. What awareness, knowledge, and skills are needed to address the needs of our population? 	2020-2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptualization • Needs assessment • Literature review • Partnership meetings • Intervention outline 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School leadership • Counselors • Research team • All school staff
Phase 2: Preparation for Implementation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Who is best positioned to implement? 2. Is intervention viewed as acceptable and feasible by potential participants? 3. How do educators, caregivers, and students perceive the school culture and climate in relationship to racial equity? 4. Is there alignment of perspectives from students, caregivers, and educators regarding school racial climate? 	2021-2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot 2-day PD (8 hours) • Anonymous feedback • Qualitative data collection • Statewide taskforce • Refine conceptualization • Refine intervention • Refine implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School leadership • All school staff • Research team • Facilitators • Statewide taskforce • Student focus groups • Caregiver focus groups • State Department of Education



Phase 3: Implementation, Feedback, and Revision	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What constitutes core elements of the intervention? 2. Who considers the intervention to be effective, feasible, and acceptable? 3. How do individual, group, or school level identities affect perceptions of acceptability, feasibility, and impact? 	2022- 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot 8 monthly PDs (90 min. each) • Pre/post data collection • Anonymous Feedback • End-of-Year focus groups • Refine Intervention • Refine Implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School taskforce • School leadership • Research team • All school staff
Phase 4: Data- Based Refinement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What do the data tell us about educator responses to the trainings? 2. How do identities influence responses to trainings? 3. What implementation barriers and supports occur at individual, group, or school levels? 4. What supports are needed to implement trainings? 	2023- 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and share school report with school • Analyze qualitative and quantitative data • Share findings with practitioners and researchers • Identify areas for further refinement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School leaders • All school staff • Research team • Collaborators and new partners • Larger research and practitioner community • State Department of Education

Phase 2: Preparation for Implementation

The goal of the next phase was to prepare for school-wide implementation by further refining the content and implementation plan for the educator trainings. Our primary questions for this phase focused on understanding educator, caregiver, and student perspectives regarding school racial climate and assessing the acceptability and feasibility of educator trainings focused on trauma-informed racial socialization (Table 1). Incorporating this information would help to ensure that the educator trainings not only met the needs of the current partner school, but also offered potential generalizability to other school contexts.

Activities

Phase 2 activities are summarized in Table 1. We piloted the initial PD modules (8 hours over two PD days) before the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year. These PDs were facilitated by three members of the research and intervention development team [DP, DH, KB], with support from the school team. The school team collected anonymous evaluation and feedback data. In the spring, summer, and early fall of 2022, before beginning Phase 3 implementation, we gathered qualitative data from students, caregivers, and educators about school racial climate and discussions about race and racism in school. These data were intended to support refinement of the intervention materials and implementation plan. Preliminary analysis of the first student focus group ($n = 10$) and a statewide educator taskforce ($n = 14$) informed refinement of the intervention content for the following school year.

Outcomes

Anonymous open-ended feedback forms collected by the school team from the participants ($n = 57$, 88% return rate) after the 2021 pilot modules suggested high levels of satisfaction. Most respondents expressed appreciation for the opportunity to discuss strategies for addressing racism-related trauma, bias, and discrimination in their school. However, as the school year progressed, the school experienced several challenges in continuing to support courageous conversations among school staff. During one of the pilot trainings, a racial microaggression in a breakout group had exacerbated racialized tension among school staff, contributing to uncertainty and further need for support for the school staff. As a result, the school's leadership team recognized the need for continued professional development. The leadership became more involved in the research-practice partnership moving from Phase 2 to 3.

In focus groups conducted later in the school year, summer, and next fall, students and caregivers from the school described experiences that underscored the need for building educator skills for trauma-informed racial socialization. Students described experiences of racism and a punitive school culture (Sheikh et al., 2022).



Caregivers reported that topics related to racism were often “breezed over” (Parks et al., 2025). At the same time, students and caregivers demonstrated curiosity and interest in learning authentically about racism and in celebrating joy and resilience (Parks et al., 2025). We shared our preliminary analyses of these data with our school partners, who felt these data provided a clear rationale for continuing to iteratively refine the educator trainings.

To prepare for implementation in the following 2022-2023 school year, the research team partnered with individuals in the state Department of Education to host a series of four 90-minute educator taskforce meetings. Through this forum, we solicited feedback about the acceptability of the content and implementation plan from a broader group of educators within ($n = 7$) and outside ($n = 7$) of the pilot school. The rationale for this larger group was to ensure the Actions Against Racism model would have some generalizability beyond the pilot school and to ensure face validity of the trainings. Most statewide taskforce members were classroom teachers, social workers, counselors, paraprofessionals, and administrators. Some had a formal equity role (e.g., leader of equity work or member of equity team), but several members did not have a formal role. Feedback from this group supported content refinement such as adding a “My Why” activity to help educator participants identify their own reasons for taking actions against racism. This group echoed sentiments from the research-practice partnership that it was important to have both a white individual (representative of many educators) and an individual whose racial background is representative of the student population as co-facilitators of the educator trainings. This structure remains an important component of the Actions Against Racism implementation model: striving to represent lived experiences and identities of educators and students when choosing facilitators. In the end, the intervention consisted of seven monthly training sessions intended to be presented to all school staff over the course of one academic school year.

These activities also contributed to the development of a conceptual model for the broader Actions Against Racism as a school-wide multi-tiered intervention leveraging strengths of social and emotional learning, racial socialization, and trauma-informed practices. Each component of this multi-tiered effort was designed to build skills for five actions against racism in all members of the school community: talking, recognizing, disrupting, coping, and healing/repairing harm (Hatchimonji et al., 2022). From this conceptualization, we developed a scope and sequence specifically for educator trainings and obtained funding to support a pilot and feasibility study of educator trainings in the 2022-2023 school year in the same school.

Phase 3: Implementation, Feedback, Refinement

The goals for Phase 3 were to examine acceptability, feasibility, and impact of the Actions Against Racism educator trainings following the facilitation of the monthly staff meetings. We were guided by assessing feasibility, acceptability, and effectiveness, while also identifying what components seemed to be central to the intervention (Table 1).

Activities

We initially planned for seven modules but added an eighth module during the implementation year. The final implementation period included eight modules that were 75 to 90 minutes carried out from September 2022 to June 2023, facilitated primarily by two research team members (DH, KB). We included guest facilitators (KG) in two sessions to leverage specific expertise in African-centered healing and experiences of Latine communities. We also worked to gradually increase the contributions of the school team as facilitators over the year. We collected anonymous feedback at the end of each module to gauge acceptability in real-time and inform revisions to subsequent trainings. During the 2022-2023 implementation year, we held monthly meetings with a school-specific taskforce ($n = 7$) composed of counselors, classroom teachers, and paraprofessionals within the school to refine the intervention content and implementation plan. The research team also met with the school's administrative leadership team after each training to respond to participants' feedback and plan for the next training. To inform our understanding of the intervention's impact, we collected pre- and post-survey data measuring race-based traumatic stress, multicultural efficacy, multicultural attitudes, emotion regulation, and cultural intelligence.

Outcomes

Each training during this implementation phase was associated with an iterative feedback cycle that led to refinement of subsequent trainings. The taskforce and leadership team supported the research and intervention development team in interpreting the anonymous feedback data and making decisions about the content and implementation plan for the next training period. Table 2 provides the scope and sequence of the eight trainings as of September 2022 and June 2023, demonstrating the significant shifts made in response to the cycles of feedback and collaboration over the course of the year. The biggest shift was in sessions 2, 3, 4, and 5, the pacing of the content changed to allow more time to process and conceptualize racism and its impact on children and the education setting. In addition, these sessions were shifted to be more concretely relevant to classroom activities with students, in response to feedback from the school partners.

Each series of adjustments was based on the anonymous feedback surveys, suggestions from the educator taskforce, and input from the school administrators. For example, much of the anonymous feedback from the first training session indicated a challenging climate among school staff that prevented most staff members from sharing their own experiences with identity, shame, power, and privilege. Therefore, the second training session pivoted from the initial plan. Instead, we focused on community-building and discussing the distinctions between safe and brave spaces (e.g., Arao & Clemens, 2023). As the trainings continued, we noted



consistently encouraging, constructive, and positive responses from a segment of the school staff who attended. However, we observed that the remaining school staff inconsistently completed the feedback surveys and were likely representative of the less engaged participants during the trainings. The taskforce interpreted this discrepant pattern as indicating a large portion of the school's staff were not comfortable with the explicit content about racism. They suggested using smaller group discussions to address this challenge, and the leadership team agreed with this suggestion. The school leadership also suggested that another way to promote more engagement would be to provide more student-facing content and skill-building for the staff. Thus, sessions three, four, and five included additional student-facing content for educators, using smaller group formats (see Table 2). For example, small groups of four to five individuals worked together to define and explain racism in developmentally appropriate terms for their grade level(s).

While the revised modules seemed to meet the needs of many of the school staff, we observed that those who had initially been ready and willing to have courageous conversations about racism were now less engaged. Anonymous feedback suggested that shifting to more "palatable" conversations for some led others to feel that their own experiences were being dismissed. In the taskforce meetings and in anonymous feedback, we also learned that there was urgency to address microaggressions and discrimination amongst staff. Thus, the sixth training was designed to provide trauma-informed actionable skills for disrupting microaggressions. Session six included psychoeducation about trauma, stress, and emotion regulation, as well as role plays for disrupting microaggressions. This training was the highest rated in terms of acceptability and satisfaction; it was also the most emotional and most discussed in the end-of-year educator focus group and conversations with the school taskforce and school leaders. As a follow up to this session, the seventh session was designed to create a healing space building from the work of Resmaa Menakem (Menakem, 2017) using racial affinity groups. Menakem's work uses body-focused regulation strategies to cope with and heal from racialized stress and trauma. The eighth and last session was an opportunity for collective reflection, feedback, and action planning. Participants had opportunities to reflect on individual and school priorities moving forward and observe the reflections of their colleagues.

Phase 4: Data-Based Refinement

We used the data collected during Phase 3 to identify further opportunities to refine the intervention and implementation plan. During this phase, we analyzed qualitative and quantitative data to explore the barriers and supports to implementation of the Actions Against Racism trainings and further examine the effectiveness and acceptability of the trainings.

Activities

The pre- and post-survey data collected as part of Phase 3 allowed us to assess the impact of the trainings using quantitative measures. We tested for the impact of the Actions Against Racism trainings on educator multicultural efficacy,

multicultural attitudes, cultural intelligence, and emotion regulation using an uncontrolled pre/post design. We also held an end-of-year focus group with educator participants ($n = 6$) to assess the perceived impact and acceptability of the trainings (Hatchimonji et al., 2024). Finally, we re-examined open-ended responses to the anonymous feedback data from each training session and summarized the school taskforce meeting notes. We used these data to create a report to share with the school community and the school taskforce (Actions Against Racism, 2023). As we shared our findings with practitioners, education leaders, and researchers beyond the pilot school, we continued to identify opportunities to refine the intervention content and implementation process.

Outcomes

From the baseline survey data, we found that white educators reported lower levels of confidence than educators of color when controlling for positive multicultural attitudes (Stoffers et al., 2023). Thus, despite a desire to engage in constructive dialogue about racism, many educators, particularly those who identify as white, reported a lack of confidence or skills to do so. For the 30 educators with both pre- and post-surveys, we found a significant increase in multicultural efficacy and cognitive reappraisal (Stoffers et al., 2024). However, we found that only those with higher levels of cognitive reappraisal (an indicator of emotional intelligence) showed increases in multicultural efficacy (Stoffers et al., 2024). Taken together, these quantitative data reinforced the need to provide specific supports to white educators and suggested an important role for cognitive reappraisal as an emotion regulation strategy in the work of trauma-informed racial socialization.

To better understand acceptability, feasibility, and barriers and supports to implementation, we examined qualitative data using thematic and content analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2016; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The qualitative data we analyzed included: the end-of-year educator focus group ($n = 6$), open-ended responses to anonymous post-session surveys ($n = 207$), and school taskforce ($n = 7$) meeting notes. We are exploring these data in more detail to inform further refinement (Hatchimonji et al., in preparation).

Overall, results from these content and thematic analyses indicated multiple barriers to promoting trauma-informed racial socialization in schools. For example, at the school level, the school taskforce described low levels of trust among staff and concern that school leaders were not adequately prioritizing racial equity. Their assessment was that these dynamics contributed to lower levels of engagement for staff who were not already invested in combating racism. The end-of-year educator focus group provided valuable information from six participants in the trainings who were not members of the taskforce. In this focus group, educators reported satisfaction with the opportunities for emotional vulnerability, personal growth, and practical strategies for how to have a courageous conversation about racism. The



Table 2: Phase 3: Evolution of the Scope and Sequence of Actions Against Racism Educator Trainings

Session	August 2022 Outline	As Implemented (September 2022-June 2023)
1	<p>Talking: Introduction to Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Community Agreement ● Identity Reflection 	<p>Talking: Affirming Identities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Community Agreement ● Identity Reflection ● Impact of Racism: Stress, Trauma, and Education
2	<p>Talking: Impacts of Racism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identity Reflection Follow-Up ● Impact of Racism in Schools 	<p>Talking: Cultivating Brave Spaces</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop norms for brave spaces ● Identify new strategies to promote brave spaces
3	<p>Recognizing: Reading the Situation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recognizing Multiple Levels of Racism ● Interpersonal Implicit and Explicit Bias 	<p>Recognizing: Children’s Book</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identify racial socialization messages in books, media, and materials intended for K-8 (by grade band)
4	<p>Recognizing: Listening Session</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Share Experiences with Others 	<p>Recognizing: Racism in Classrooms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop 20-min. lesson on recognizing, disrupting racism (by grade band)
5	<p>Disrupting: Preparing Yourself and Students to Disrupt Racism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Strategies for Disrupting Interpersonal Racism ● Preparing for Racialized Situations 	<p>Disrupting: Racism in Structures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Critically evaluate different allegories that describe racism at different levels of society



- 6 Coping: Caring for Yourself and Your Students
- Emotional Impact of Racism
 - Mindfulness & African-Centered Healing
 - Appraisals and Thoughts
 - Social Support
- 7 Healing and Repairing Harm: Continuing the Journey
- Advocacy Efforts to Combat Structural Racism
 - Create a Personal Growth Plan
- 8 No Session 8 in Initial Outline
- Identify strategies to disrupt racism at different levels
- Disrupting and Coping with Racism
- Body-focused emotion regulation strategies
 - Trauma-informed psychoeducation
 - Role-plays disrupting microaggressions
- Healing: Trauma-informed racial affinity spaces
- Role play centering relationship and repairing harm
 - Create safe, brave spaces in affinity groups to create healing space
- Healing: Review and Action Planning
- Review the school-wide journey
 - Reflect on individual journey
 - Individual and collective action planning
-



focus group participants expressed dissatisfaction with lower levels of engagement from some school staff, challenges translating the training skills into the school day, and a need for more healing-centered spaces (Hatchimonji et al., 2024).

The anonymous post-session surveys showed variability in individual responses to the trainings. Some individuals appreciated the small group discussions and chances to have open, honest, and engaging conversations. Other individuals expressed an interest in more role-plays, more resources, and a chance to go beyond introductory material. Taken together, these data suggested adequate acceptability as well as several areas for improvement. As we shared these results with educator partners, particularly in conversations with educators tasked with leading racial equity efforts, we began to focus on understanding and addressing implementation barriers as part of the continued intervention development process.

THE WAY FORWARD

There is a dire need to explicitly address racism-related stress and trauma in schools. Through a partnership with a single K-8 school, we developed action-oriented and trauma-informed trainings to build educator confidence and skills for combatting racism in a single school. This is both a strength and a limitation of the work. Because each school context is unique, particularly in regard to addressing racism-related stress and trauma, it may be difficult to generalize some of what we have learned in this specific setting. It is our hope that the iterative, collaborative approach we took with this work was productive in generating ideas that may be useful in other contexts. During the intervention development process, we encountered several challenges that are consistent with challenges described in the literature. Thus, we believe that our experiences and lessons learned may be beneficial to other teams developing similar school-based strategies to disrupt the harm from racism in schools. We describe our lessons learned below (see Table 3 for summary).

Table 3: Lessons Learned from Iterative Development of Actions Against Racism Educator Trainings

- Centering student and family experiences and voices should be a foundational step and strengthens rationale for trainings
 - Trauma-informed racial socialization trainings need to adapt to different learning needs
 - School leadership making a clear commitment to racial equity supports educator engagement
 - Connecting training objectives to standards and laws can strengthen the rationale for trainings
 - Understanding the implementation context is foundational to intervention development
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- Implementation science offers rigorous methods for identifying and addressing barriers to implementation
 - There is an undeniable tension between supporting students directly and building educator capacity to support students
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Challenges and Lessons Learned

One of the most persistent challenges we faced was meeting the needs of educators with a wide range of learning histories related to trauma-informed racial socialization. This challenge manifested primarily as inconsistent educator engagement in the trainings across the pilot school year 2022-2023. Whereas some educators were committed and engaged throughout the trainings, others were only engaged in specific activities (e.g., the children's books activities). Yet another group was only committed and engaged with the trainings when the content required more authenticity and vulnerability from participants (e.g., role play disrupting microaggressions). Others have noted that educators begin at different starting places when bridging antiracism and trauma-informed practices (Knox et al., 2023). These differences may be related to how racial identities and related learning histories interact with experiences of such trainings. Indeed, educators of color experience higher levels of burnout related to their own experiences with racism (Grooms et al., 2021) and white educators are more likely to use color-evasive racial socialization strategies that may cause harm (Hazelbaker & Mistry, 2021). Thus, for potentially different reasons, many educators are fearful of talking about race and racism, which may impact their engagement in such trainings (Reisman et al., 2020). Future directions for these trainings may be to develop differentiated pathways to optimize engagement and learning.

As part of the iterative development process, we frequently assessed levels of engagement using attendance, participation, and anonymous feedback. We worked with the school taskforce and school leaders to interpret engagement data. We found that one of the biggest impacts on increasing educator engagement was a clear commitment and prioritization of the trauma-informed racial socialization strategies from the school leadership. This is consistent with literature on the importance of school leadership in promoting racial equity-focused practices (Leithwood, 2021) and race-conscious inquiry to disrupt racism and produce affirming environments (Irby, 2022). An additional layer of support for leaders and equity champions is to explicitly link training objectives to current standards and laws (e.g., Bottiani et al., 2024). This process not only strengthens the rationale for such trainings but also protects the work from any potential for backlash. Going forward, our team prioritized linking learning objectives directly to state and district standards, values, strategic plans, and laws.

As we solicited input from the broader school community during each phase of the development process, we found it difficult to address the often-discrepant



perspectives of classroom teachers, administrators, students, and caregivers. Over time, it became clear that the misalignment of perspectives across different segments of the school community was itself a barrier to enacting the strategies the trainings aimed to promote. We heard clear messages from students and caregivers that they desired more racially and culturally affirming experiences in the school. These messages are consistent with qualitative findings that adults and students perceive racial-equity focused strategies as promoting positive relationships and social-emotional development (Lea et al., 2022). Indeed, quantitative research demonstrates benefits of a culturally affirming approach (Kwon et al., 2022; Saleem et al., 2022). Yet, from the educator perspective, we found highly variable interest in meeting this need.

We interpret this discrepancy in student, caregiver, and educator priorities as related to the challenges many school communities have promoting authentic partnership across students, educators, families, and communities, particularly in the process of promoting culturally responsive teaching (Castillo, 2022). Yet, it is clear that the foundational work of trauma-informed racial socialization must be to open communication and courageous conversations across the school community. Building relationship-centered school communities through an equity-based family engagement model (e.g., Fores & Kyere, 2021) can strengthen the foundation of any school-based effort to promote racial equity. Centering the voices and experiences of students and their loved ones can help educators stay focused on their own “Why” for taking actions against racism when they hear the voices of their students asking for more affirming spaces. Therefore, we have chosen to prioritize the centering and amplifying of student and family voices as an essential ingredient in this work going forward.

Taken together, these challenges demonstrate the importance of understanding an implementation context as a precondition to developing an intervention. School-based racial equity-focused interventions, in particular, face unique implementation challenges that require specialized attention to address (Welton et al., 2018). Thus, it is essential for research-practice partnerships to prioritize understanding the full implementation context as part of the development process. Implementation science is a field that offers rigorous methods for assessing and understanding implementation barriers and developing strategies to address them (Lyon et al., 2019). Thus, future school-based intervention development research may benefit from research questions that are driven by implementation science.

PROMOTING RACE CONSCIOUS PRACTICES CHALLENGING SOCIOPOLITICAL CONTEXTS

Intentional investment in racial equity within schools will always be a necessity, given the threats related to racism are persistent and longstanding; however, the support for these efforts can vary widely depending on the local, regional, and national sociopolitical landscape. In our work, we support those K-12 school systems that are devoted to incorporating trauma-informed, race-conscious practices in their school communities regardless of the external context. Such committed schools can take the following steps to ensure continued commitment to this work.

In any context, but particularly in times when racial equity work is under threat, it is crucial for school communities to solicit the perspectives and needs from their families, and particularly from Black and Brown students and their families. The voices of students and families can help drive initiatives to support educator learning to meet their needs. In socio-political contexts with targeted barriers to this work, administrative buy-in is paramount to provide teachers the resources, space, and opportunity to engage in this important work. Often, the student and family voice can drive administrator buy-in and staff support, reminding educators of their “Why” for engaging in this work. Equity teams or champions may find creative ways to garner support by showcasing the voices of students most impacted by racism in their school communities. It is also important to acknowledge the diverse range of staff support, ideologies, and readiness to engage in this work. Therefore, a one-size-fits-all approach is likely to be inefficient, and any training should operate from a place of meeting people where they are and engaging staff members in ways that feel authentic and genuine. This might include operating in an open forum-type format to better understand and meet the needs of each specific school staff to inform the best starting points.

To ensure sustainability and accountability, it can be helpful to connect racially conscious educator trainings to broader state legislative actions and school- or district-wide plans. For example, trainings can be linked to legislation about educator preparation for diverse classrooms or legislation mandating specific topics (e.g., Black History; trauma-informed practices). Many schools and districts create strategic plans that may include a variety of indicators, including focusing on school climate, school discipline, or mental health. Connecting trainings to specific parts of the strategic plan can help ensure longevity and sustainability.

CONCLUSION

This research-practice partnership project sought to address gaps in addressing Black and Brown students' need for trauma-informed racial socialization in schools through action-oriented, school-based interventions. The iterative process of utilizing a community-based partnership to develop a school-based intervention through intentional planning, refinement, and ongoing assessment demonstrated the nuances of meeting school-specific needs. Collectively, we found contextual considerations that may be helpful for informing implementation in similar contexts. With that said, our team found it challenging to balance building educator confidence and skills for trauma-informed racial socialization while also supporting students of color's need for more direct and constructive racial conversations led by teachers. We have concluded that this tension is inherent to this work and requires careful balancing in partnership with school communities. Oftentimes in the literature, intervention development relies heavily on linear depictions of development, however the collaborative nature of this work is not linear but rather iterative and cyclical. Thus,



to appropriately and adequately address the needs of our partners, it is important to move beyond traditional linear methods to work in partnership with practitioners.

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