

Integrating Race-Conscious Professional Development as a Trauma-Informed Practice: Insights from Black Educators

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examines the influence of a race-conscious, trauma-informed professional development (TIPD) fellowship among Black educators serving majority-Black students. While research on trauma-informed education is expanding, few studies have explored how race-conscious PD emphasizing racial trauma and awareness influences the knowledge and attitudes of educators who serve racially marginalized students. In Spring 2023, four Black educators at a southeastern public charter high school participated in a trauma-informed fellowship grounded in racial awareness, culturally responsive pedagogy, and equity-centered approaches. The program included critical discourse groups, trauma-sensitive strategies, and reflective journaling. Preliminary findings highlight the development of a trauma-informed affinity group, critical reflection on internalized savior complexes, and personal self-discovery. Educators processed racial stress collectively and documented professional growth. This model fosters trauma-informed educators and enhances racial consciousness. Implications highlight the need for expanding race-conscious TIPD to include allyship training for non-Black educators and creating "third spaces" for Black students that could promote racial equity and empower students to challenge systemic inequities.

Keywords: trauma-informed education, educator professional development, school racial climate, Black educators, racial equity

According to the 2022–2023 National Survey of Children’s Health, 11.8% of Black children under 18 reported the adverse childhood experience (ACE) of unfair treatment or judgment due to their racial or ethnic group, compared to 1.1% of White, non-Hispanic children (Child and Adolescent Health Measurement Initiative, n.d.). These disparities reflect how structural and sociocultural forces shape Black children’s daily experiences in ways that differ from their peers (Bernard et al., 2021). Schools are a key context in which these disparate experiences occur, as Black youth often face racial microaggressions, inequitable discipline, cultural invalidation, and academic inferiority (Hope et al., 2015; Saleem et al., 2020, 2021; Woods-Jaeger et al., 2022). Such experiences contribute to hostile school racial climates and can lead to racial trauma (Saleem et al., 2020). Henderson (2019) defines racial trauma as “an adverse interaction, either continuously or daily, with institutional, symbolic, and individual acts of racism” (p. 927). To foster healing-centered environments for Black youth, trauma-informed supports in schools must evolve to address the impact of negative school racial climates and racial trauma caused by racism (Woods-Jaeger et al., 2022).

One critical approach to addressing students’ racial trauma in schools is equipping teachers and school staff with the skills to recognize and respond to the trauma (Yough et al., 2024). Anderson et al. (2019) emphasize that professional development for educators must encourage self-reflection on racism and racial identity. Educators must also develop an awareness of racial stress and trauma to prevent the frequent mislabeling of students’ trauma responses as misbehavior. In response to these calls, the present study explores the implementation of a race-conscious, trauma-informed professional development model, guided by the following research question: How does participation in a race-conscious, trauma-informed professional learning experience influence educators of majority-Black students?

LITERATURE REVIEW

To frame our discussion, we review literature explicitly using the term “race-conscious,” as well as studies incorporating related concepts such as “anti-racist,” “culturally responsive,” and “equity-centered” frameworks in addressing racial trauma. Our review begins by examining literature on anti-racist professional development (PD) practices aimed at addressing racial trauma. We then explore research at the intersection of race-conscious and trauma-informed education frameworks. Next, we review studies applying race-conscious trauma-informed frameworks to educator PD practices, followed by a discussion of educators’ perceptions of race-conscious TIPD. In this review we use the term race-conscious trauma-informed professional development (TIPD) to describe educator learning opportunities that intentionally integrate the core principles of trauma-informed practice with a critical examination of racism, racial trauma, and inequities in school systems. With this definition in mind, we first examine literature on anti-racist professional development practices aimed at addressing racial trauma.

Anti-Racist Professional Development to Address Racial Trauma

While this review primarily focuses on trauma-informed practices, particularly TIPD designed to address racial trauma, it is also essential to acknowledge other forms of PD implemented for similar purposes. One such example is a Pacific Northwestern school district's "Racial Equity Systems Transformation Plan" (Lea et al., 2021, p. 2027). This equity plan integrated social and emotional learning practices and programs to improve school climate and reduce racial inequities that impact student success in a district where most students identify as students of color. As part of this initiative, the district implemented anti-racist PD to strengthen educators' knowledge and ability to address systemic inequities. This training focused on recognizing and mitigating "individual and institutional biases perpetuating inequities in instruction, achievement, and discipline," increasing "cultural sensitivity with historically marginalized and oppressed groups," and implementing "culturally responsive practices with students of color" (Lea et al., 2021, p. 2027).

The study by Lea et al. (2021) examined staff experiences at one of the district's middle schools, where findings revealed that educators who participated in the anti-racist PD developed a stronger commitment to centering antiracism in their teaching and disciplinary practices. As a result, they sought to create a more equitable school climate while reducing practices that contribute to racial trauma. Though such findings demonstrate progress in addressing racial trauma through race-conscious PD, there remains a need for frameworks that explicitly embed a racial trauma lens.

The Intersection of Race-Conscious and Trauma-Informed Frameworks

Race-neutral trauma frameworks risk perpetuating racism (e.g., anti-Blackness) and retraumatizing students who have experienced racialized adversity (McAdoo et al., 2023). In response, scholars emphasize the importance of integrating trauma-informed practices—including PD—that are explicitly race-conscious and anti-racist (Hatchimonji et al., 2022; Knox et al., 2023; Onipede et al., 2024; Palma et al., 2023). Adopting an anti-racist pedagogical lens is inherently race-conscious, as it acknowledges the realities of racism and its impacts on students. Educators committed to anti-racist pedagogy demonstrate a willingness to actively challenge racial injustice in education, aligning with Love's (2019) assertion that anti-racism requires "consciously committing to the struggle of fighting for racial justice" (p. 54). In support of racial justice in education, Herbert et al. (2024) argue that providing equitable learning environments for culturally diverse students (including those affected by racial trauma) requires an intersectional approach that integrates culturally responsive, anti-racist, and trauma-informed frameworks.

To operationalize this approach, Herbert et al. (2024) propose a framework for anti-racist education, highlighting six key practices educators must engage in: (a) examining bias, (b) building relationships, (c) implementing consistent structure and routine, (d) creating a sense of safety, (e) employing restorative behavior management, and (f) providing supportive feedback while acknowledging students' strengths. The authors further emphasize that school communities must offer professional learning opportunities that cultivate educators' critical consciousness, including awareness of the intersections among culturally responsive, antiracist, and

trauma-informed paradigms, and support the development of aligned action steps. Moreover, school leaders play a vital role in guiding and sustaining educators' integration of race-conscious trauma-informed practices through ongoing PD (Herbert et al., 2024). While this framework provides valuable insights into race-conscious trauma-informed school practices, there remains a gap in the literature examining the direct impact of such frameworks within TIPD.

Race-Conscious Trauma-Informed Professional Development

The authors of the current paper identified five peer-reviewed studies investigating the use of teacher PD on trauma that included a focus on race, racial trauma, and cultural responsiveness (Blitz et al., 2016; Douglass et al., 2021; Haynes et al., 2023; Knox et al., 2025; Smith et al., 2025). Two of the studies looked at PD within the context of implementing various components of a trauma-informed school approach (Douglass et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2025). Both studies included educators from multiple schools, all serving populations comprised predominately students of color. In one study (Douglass et al., 2021) no teacher demographic information was shared, and teachers in the other study predominately identified as White (75%) and Black or African American (19%) (Smith et al., 2025). Other studies which utilized anonymous data noted the lack of opportunity to examine trends between participant backgrounds and their experience throughout the training (Knox et al., 2025). The findings from Haynes et al., (2023) allowed for each participant's responses and change throughout the professional development to be understood in relation to their own identities.

Details regarding the delivery of PD sessions in these studies were not discussed, but racial justice and the relationship between trauma and racism were identified as key content covered. Smith et al. (2025) reported findings that PD content was generally well-received, with some participants reporting that its race-conscious content, along with the other implementation components of the overall trauma-informed model, helped their school prioritize and make progress with anti-racist practice. Douglass et al. (2021) similarly focused on the implementation of a multicomponent approach to trauma-sensitive education and offered little information about the details of the race-centered content or participant responses to it. Blitz et al. (2016) likewise share only that the PD content delivered to participants focused on race and cultural responsiveness in relation to trauma and toxic stress. While the studies themselves were voluntary, teacher participation in the PD activities they included was often mandatory or at the request of school leadership (Blitz et al., 2016; Douglass et al., 2021; Knox et al., 2025; Smith et al., 2025), with the Haynes et al. (2023) study appearing to be the only exception.

Teacher Perceptions of Race-conscious Trauma-Informed Professional Development

Three studies (Blitz et al., 2016; Haynes et al., 2023; Knox et al., 2025) offered a closer examination of how teachers experience race-conscious, TIPD. Blitz et al. (2016) analyzed survey and interview data from a sample of sixty-one almost entirely White-identifying teachers and classroom assistants following a PD session on

trauma and cultural responsiveness for an elementary school serving over 50% students of color. Findings from qualitative analysis indicated educators were aware of some kinds of adverse experiences faced by their students at home, and many held negative views of parents' abilities to care for their children and support their education (Blitz et al., 2016). Educators in the study tended to not contextualize their perceived caregiver or student challenges within the social or economic inequities that many of the students' families faced, even though more than 90% qualified for free or reduced-price meals (Blitz et al., 2016). Rather, Blitz et al. (2016) found that interviewees largely endorsed color-evasive views of students, often evading or avoiding discussions of students' race, with some displaying defensiveness or shame in response to the workshop content.

Knox et al. (2025) reported similar findings in their study of teacher experiences of workshops integrating cultural responsiveness into trauma-responsive practices. Participants likewise identified predominately as White women, serving much more diverse student populations in three schools. Although some teachers indicated they appreciated certain aspects of the training, such as learning definitions of key terms and the impact of historical trauma, Knox et al. (2025) found that others expressed similar characteristics of color-evasiveness and signs of White fragility (such as shame and guilt when discussing race and racism) as those observed in the Blitz et al. (2016) study. In their discussions, Knox et al. (2025) identified the need for pre-work to introduce conversations on topics such as race and racism prior to starting culturally responsive trainings. Another commonality among the educator responses to race-centered, trauma-informed professional development was the desire for more practical strategies to use in classrooms (Blitz et al., 2016; Knox et al., 2025; Smith et al., 2025), in some cases, for the purpose of managing unwanted student behaviors and in others to improve relationships and support. The involved researchers reflected on the benefits of structuring their workshops in ways that might integrate more of these strategies, such as breakout rooms and reflection questions.

Finally, Haynes et al. (2023) found that culturally responsive, equity-centered trauma-informed professional development led to educator thinking and practice changes with the potential to improve racial climate in their classrooms. Content delivered over three professional development sessions included racial trauma and racial stress, race-related trauma triggers, and deficit perspectives of racially diverse students and healing-centered practices, all of which were accompanied by implementation and reflection activities. Teachers of racially/ethnically minoritized backgrounds ($n = 5$) felt the training content validated what they already knew about racial trauma, while White teachers ($n = 2$) expressed mixed results regarding increased understanding of racial trauma. All study participants professed more empathy toward their students and interest in being racial equity advocates in their schools, and those who were able to engage in implementing strategies from the professional development reported positive changes in their interactions with students (Haynes et al., 2023).

Current Study

Most studies on race-conscious TIPD have focused on educators working with majority students of color, primarily examining how PD initiatives influence

educators' knowledge and practices. The findings suggest that when educators and institutions are prepared and receptive, race-conscious TIPD can effectively enhance awareness, knowledge, and strategies for addressing racial trauma in schools. However, many of these studies provide limited details on the specific frameworks used for race-conscious TIPD and are predominantly conducted with majority-White educators. To address this gap, the current study expands the conversation on race-conscious TIPD by reintroducing the culturally responsive, equity-centered TIPD framework developed by Haynes (2022) and exploring its application through a university-community partnership with a sample of Black educators serving majority Black students.

METHOD

This study explores the influence of the Culturally Responsive, Equity-Centered, and Trauma-Informed Educator (CREATE) model, a race-conscious trauma-informed professional development (TIPD) program developed by Haynes (2022). As outlined in Haynes et al. (2023), the CREATE PD integrates key elements from multiple educational frameworks:

1. *Trauma-Informed Education* (Oehlberg, 2008; Thomas et al., 2019) to enhance educators' understanding of the prevalence and effects of trauma
2. *Culturally Responsive Education* (Gay, 2002; Hammond, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995) to support educators in developing critical consciousness about their own and their students' cultural backgrounds, as well as recognizing potential unconscious biases
3. *Equity-Centered Education* (Venet, 2021) to encourage educators to consider anti-racist strategies for addressing racial trauma within school environments and beyond.

The CREATE PD model also includes coaching educators in the implementation of trauma-sensitive social-emotional activities with students, many of which are described in Anderson et al. (2022a), which focuses more directly on classroom-based strategies.

Study Context

The CREATE model was implemented as a trauma-informed fellowship program through a university-community partnership established in Spring 2023 between Haynes and a public charter high school in the southeastern United States. This charter school network is committed to fostering an inclusive school climate by integrating partnerships, programs, and practices that reduce systemic barriers to student success. Recognizing the alignment between the school's mission and the goals of the CREATE Fellowship, the principal at the time was eager to introduce the program. While the principal identified as a White woman, the high school serves a majority-Black student population, and the majority of its staff and administration

also identify as Black. Institutional Review Board approval for this study was provided by Haynes' institution.

Sampling

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to provide a comprehensive description and analysis of a defined case (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Haynes utilized a "two-tier" sampling approach, a common strategy in case study research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 99). The first tier involved selecting a case site. Given the understanding of the impact of racial trauma on Black youth in schools, including those that are racially homogeneous, the previously described charter school was deemed an appropriate case site based on its student demographics. The second tier of the two-tier sampling approach involved selecting participants within the case site. To do this, Haynes applied purposeful sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to identify school staff interested in participating in the CREATE Fellowship program.

Recruitment began in January 2023. Haynes developed a brief recruitment message, an informational video, and a short interest survey, which the school principal included in the staff's weekly newsletter for three consecutive weeks. Although eight individuals completed the interest survey, four ultimately committed to the fellowship program. The demographics of these four cohort participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Participant Profiles

Pseudonym	Race/Gender	Role	Grades Served
Rihanna	Black/Female	Learning Strategies Teacher	10 th
Lori	Black/Female	Biology 1 Teacher	9 th
Kisha	Black/Female	School Nurse	9 th –12 th
Cam	Black/Male	Biology and Chemistry Teacher	10 th

Data Collection

CREATE Fellowship Procedures

The CREATE Fellowship consisted of a series of five monthly meeting sessions. The first session was a virtual introduction facilitated by Haynes and allowed cohort participants to learn about the fellowship components and share their expectations. Recognizing the importance of context-tailored professional development (Knox et al., 2023), this session incorporated dialogue prompts such as:

- “How would you describe your students and your relationships with them?”
- “What is your greatest behavioral management concern as you reflect on your professional responsibilities and the learners you serve?”
- “How do you typically address these concerns within your classroom or across the school?”

These questions provided Haynes with insights into participants' unique challenges as educators, which informed adaptations to student-centered social-emotional activities to better address their student concerns.

Meeting sessions two through five were facilitated by Haynes and a Master of Social Work (MSW) research assistant trained in the CREATE model. Sessions two, three, and four were two-hour, in-person trauma-informed modules covering topics such as adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), general trauma, racial stress and trauma, asset-based perspectives of students, and healing-centered practices. The modules also incorporated case studies illustrating teacher-student interactions that may contribute to an unhealthy school racial climate, and thereby students' racial stress and trauma. A key component of these sessions was critical dialogue, where participants discussed how the presented concepts applied to their own experiences and observations within the school. At the end of each module, participants were coached on trauma-sensitive, student-centered social-emotional learning activities, which they were expected to implement with students before the next session. The fifth session was an exit focus group designed to better understand participants' perceptions of their fellowship experience. The comprehensive fellowship structure is outlined in Table 2 below. Table 3 illustrates how each component of the CREATE model is applied through the fellowship modules, offering concrete examples of how theory informs practice throughout the professional development series.

Table 2: CREATE Fellowship Monthly Structure

Monthly Meeting Session	Fellowship Activity
1	Recruitment and introductory meeting with educators
2 (Module 1)	Critical dialogue discussion: Social and racial contexts of adversity and trauma Trained skill: Stress coping mechanisms for students
3 (Module 2)	Critical dialogue discussion: Navigating educators' identities and their intersection with their students'; understanding the influence of racial trauma on students and staff Trained skill: Student strategies for addressing stress, worry/anxiety, and fear
4 (Module 3)	Critical dialogue discussion: Unpacking deficit perceptions of students Trained skill: Student strategies for problem-solving
5	Exit focus group

Table 3: Alignment Between CREATE PD Model Components and Fellowship Modules

CREATE Model Framework Components	Key Tenet(s)	Examples of Aligned Fellowship Modules and Activities
Trauma-Informed Education	• Supports educators in recognizing and responding to students' trauma symptoms • Promotes trauma-sensitive, supportive learning environments	• Module 1 introduces trauma-related concepts, including ACEs and general trauma • Module 2 explores how trauma may manifest in student behavior and classroom interactions • All modules incorporate trauma-sensitive activities for educators to apply with students
Culturally Responsive-Education	• Fosters educators' critical consciousness of their own and students' cultural identities • Addresses the intersection of trauma and racism • Challenges deficit thinking and centers student strengths	• Module 2 addresses racial stress and racial trauma, and encourages reflection on educators' racial identities and their influence on student interactions • Module 3 focuses on shifting from deficit-based to asset-based perspectives using case studies and reflective journaling
Equity-Centered Education	• Promotes anti-racist, justice-oriented approaches • Emphasizes equitable and trauma-informed school practices • Aims to reduce harm and transform classroom and school climate	• Across all modules, educators receive coaching in trauma-sensitive student activities that can be applied individually or at the classroom level • PD content emphasizes educators' roles in fostering equity-driven, trauma-informed environments

Data Sources

Module Monthly Meeting Session Memo Notes. Haynes and the MSW research assistant who co-facilitated meeting sessions two through five independently

documented memo notes during each module to capture insightful points of the critical dialogue discussions.

Journal Reflections. Each participant completed and submitted four journal reflections, totaling 16 entries ($n = 16$). These journal entries served as a platform for participants to critically reflect on their experiences and observations following each of the first four meeting sessions. For instance, after the first module, participants responded to prompts such as:

- “How did the content from Module 1 impact the way you perceive your students and their behaviors?”
- “What changes (if any) do you notice in your interactions with your students after implementing Module 1 student activities?”

Exit Focus Group. As previously mentioned, the exit focus group provided participants with an opportunity to share their experiences in the fellowship program. The semi-structured questions were designed to explore the program’s impact on participants both professionally (e.g., teacher-student interactions, classroom practices) and personally. Additionally, the session allowed participants to offer recommendations for improving future iterations of the fellowship. The focus group was audio recorded.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process began with transcribing the exit focus group recording using *Temí* (<https://www.temi.com/>). Scott, an MSW research assistant on the research team (not the same assistant who co-facilitated the meeting sessions), then reviewed the transcript for accuracy. Following transcription, Haynes and Scott individually reviewed and manually coded the journal reflections and exit focus group transcript using structural coding (Saldaña, 2015). This process involved categorizing data into three overarching codes: professional influence, personal influence, and future recommendations. After completing their independent coding, Haynes and Scott debriefed to compare and determine any need to refine their initial categorizations. Next, they collaboratively engaged in pattern coding (Saldaña, 2015) to identify underlying themes and potential explanations for the professional and personal influences of the CREATE Fellowship program, particularly within the context of Black educators.

FINDINGS

Four educators engaged in a race-conscious TIPD program, completed ongoing critical journal reflections, and participated in a concluding exit focus group. Their involvement in these research components provided preliminary insights into how a race-conscious TIPD model, specifically the CREATE Fellowship, influenced Black educators working with majority-Black students. Through a systematic review of the data sources, the analysts identified three primary themes: (a) the formation of a trauma-informed critical affinity group for Black educators of the participants sharing

their racialized experiences, (b) critical reflection on internalized savior complexes, and (c) personal self-discovery. These themes are described in greater detail below.

The Formation of a Trauma-Informed Critical Affinity Group for Black Educators

Analysis of data memo notes and the exit focus group transcript revealed that participation in the fellowship fostered the development of a critical affinity group (Kulkarni et al., 2022). Through engaging in critical discourse during the module sessions, the fellows created a space to process their experiences with racial stress and trauma. Their shared racial identity as Black educators naturally facilitated this affinity group.

And so it just makes me look at not just the kids here [in the school], but my home life as well. Like, I've always been like, let me make sure I'm not doing things to traumatize my children. ... And this information always been like, well, make sure I'm not doing anything, but also make sure other people aren't doing things to my kids or to other kids that are in my presence that could be traumatizing. – Rihanna

During the third session, which focused on personal experiences with racial stress and trauma, Kisha, the school nurse, became emotional recounting an incident involving a White male School Resource Officer (SRO). Kisha described that the officer, unaware that her son was part of a student group passing by, remarked that the students were likely “troublemakers” who enjoyed to “wake and bake,” a phrase referring to smoking marijuana. Other fellows affirmed her experience by sharing similar encounters, illustrating the fellowship’s role in providing a space for expression and support.

Critical Reflection on Internalized Savior Complexes

Participants reflected on their internalized savior complex, recognizing and beginning to challenge the belief that they were responsible for “saving” students. For example, in her third journal entry, Lori reflected on how the fellowship reshaped her perspective stating, “This fellowship makes me question the ‘why’ behind specific behaviors that I see, and it also forces me to realize that I cannot change the situations my students face, but I can help show them strategies and teach them how to navigate through.” Throughout the program, Lori continuously grappled with her evolving understanding of her role; not as a “savior” but as a trauma-informed educator who equips students with tools for resilience. Similarly, in the exit focus group, Cam emphasized the emotional toll of the savior complex and the importance of educator wellness by asserting, “People gotta understand they can't save everybody, because people get into teaching to try to save the world. And you come in here, if you want to try to save the world, you gonna burn yourself out.”

Personal Self-Discovery

Beyond professional growth, the fellowship facilitated profound personal self-discovery for participants. For example, in his final journal reflection, Cam wrote: “it has afforded me the opportunity to engage in profound self-discovery and uncover previously unknown facets of my own character.” In a separate journal reflection, Cam described using trauma-sensitive activity handouts with students focused on coping with anger. These handouts included prompts that encouraged students to identify triggers for their anger, recognize how they typically express it, and prepare for future situations by developing healthy coping strategies. Cam reflected that engaging with these activities not only supported his students but also increased his consciousness, recognizing that some of his own experiences with anger mirrored those of his students, whom he had previously criticized for their expressions of anger. This realization prompted a deeper level of self-awareness and empathy in his interactions with students.

Similarly, Rihanna and Kisha shared that the fellowship prompted them to reassess their relationships with students, family, or friends. They recognized the importance of applying trauma-informed principles beyond the classroom to improve personal relationships. Reflecting on her transformation, Lori expressed a strong desire to expand the fellowship’s reach within the school sharing,

So, just hopefully we can expand it because if I had this much growth and self-reflection and now I’m more self-aware, even on my worst day, I’m still pretty self-aware now, then I can only imagine what the school would look like if more people had access to it.

Overall, the CREATE Fellowship served as a transformative experience for Black educators, fostering a trauma-informed critical affinity group, encouraging deep reflection on internalized savior complexes, and facilitating journeys of personal self-discovery. These findings suggest that race-conscious TIPD programs can provide vital spaces for Black educators to reflect, grow, and support one another while navigating the complexities of working in majority-Black schools.

DISCUSSION

The application of race-conscious trauma-informed professional development (TIPD) is increasingly being explored in the literature (Blitz et al., 2016; Haynes et al., 2023; Douglass et al., 2021; Knox et al., 2025; Smith et al., 2025). Unlike prior studies, the current study specifically assessed how race-conscious TIPD influenced Black educators working with majority-Black students. Similar to the findings of a previous study by Haynes et al. (2023), that included a sample of majority educators of color, the current study underscored the importance of race-conscious TIPD opportunities providing educators opportunities to enhance their racial, cultural, and social consciousness individually and collectively.

However, the current study also revealed outcomes not explicitly reported in previous research. One notable finding was the unintentional development of a racial affinity group. This group provided a critical space for Black educators to process

shared racialized experiences, strengthen their racial identity, and cultivate solidarity. Prior research on race-conscious TIPD (Blitz et al., 2016; Knox et al., 2025; Smith et al., 2025) emphasizes that educators value practical trauma-informed strategies for classroom application. In the present study, these strategies supported participants' professional growth in the classroom, while the reflective discussions and affinity group facilitated their personal self-discovery. This aligns with literature highlighting the importance of relational and identity-affirming spaces for educators of color (Kulkarni et al., 2022).

The current findings also demonstrate the broader potential of race-conscious TIPD to support professional and personal development in tandem. Participants described heightened awareness of their students' experiences and recognized ways in which their own responses could reflect deficit racialized dynamics or personal biases. Participants reflected on the ways trauma-informed strategies could enhance student support while simultaneously revealing insights about their own experiences, behaviors, and relationships. This outcome underscores how TIPD can foster holistic growth, integrating educator self-awareness, professional development, and relational understanding, all in which are key components of effective race-conscious trauma-informed practice (Haynes et al., 2023; Knox et al., 2025).

A final distinct outcome of this study was participants' critical reflection on internalized savior complexes. While often discussed in relation to White educators (Sondel et al., 2022), the fellowship encouraged even educators sharing racial backgrounds with their students to recognize and shift away from savior-complex thinking. By engaging in reflective practices and race-conscious discussions, participants reported developing a trauma-informed, equity-centered perspective on their roles with students. This suggests that culturally responsive TIPD can support educators in balancing professional responsibility with personal well-being, ultimately fostering more sustainable and racially conscious practices.

Implications

This study's findings elevate several key implications for understanding school racial climate in majority-Black schools and the needs of educators engaging in race-conscious TIPD. Given the significant benefits of the critical affinity group formed during the fellowship, schools may benefit from establishing internal infrastructures that support professional learning communities where staff can engage in critical discussions about race, identity, trauma, and pedagogy. These spaces could also be incorporated into teacher preparation programs, providing Black teacher candidates with opportunities to critically engage with issues of race and trauma before entering the profession. Furthermore, fostering professional learning communities may encourage critical self-reflection, one of the study's major themes, which has been widely recognized as an essential tool for improving teaching pedagogy (Acquah & Commins, 2015; Anderson et al., 2022b). By embedding such reflective practices, future Black educators may develop skills that prioritize radical self-care (Waite & Iheduru-Anderson, 2022), reducing reliance on saviorism ideologies that often contribute to burnout and high turnover rates.

Although the CREATE model has primarily been assessed with educators of color, there is potential for adapting the model for predominantly White educators who teach predominantly Black students. Such adaptations could include a stronger focus on allyship training for non-Black educators, including pre-service teacher candidates, to help build school-wide commitments to racial equity. For example, White educators can be encouraged to critically explore what it means to be an ally to their colleagues of color and to Black students, while also deepening their understanding of how racial trauma affects students. This approach aligns with the equity-centered, trauma-informed teacher education residency model (Tillett et al., in press). While the CREATE model is designed for in-service educators, incorporating adaptations like these found in the equity-centered, trauma-informed teacher education residency model can equip all staff, regardless of race or ethnicity, with shared values and strategies to support racial justice. In turn, schools may foster more inclusive and affirming environments for both students and educators.

In addition to the implications for educators, future implementations of the CREATE model as a race-conscious TIPD framework should explore culturally responsive adaptations that create a “third space” (Gutiérrez, 2008) for students of color, particularly Black youth, where they can amplify their voices and develop critical consciousness regarding racial stress and trauma. Establishing such spaces, whether in collaboration with peers or educators, may empower students to challenge racially inequitable systems and advocate for a more socially just educational experience.

Limitations and Future Research

Kulkarni et al. (2022) emphasize that critical affinity groups for educators of color “provide support, reduce trauma, and support work toward collective intersectional justice” (p. 43). While this study identified the brief emergence of such a space among Black educators, future research should further explore the long-term impact of race-conscious TIPD models on Black educators’ experiences with trauma and their perceptions of social justice following participation in professional development programs.

One limitation of this study was the lack of racial diversity among participants, being all were Black. However, given that more than half of the school’s staff identify as Black, this outcome was not fully unexpected. Future research on the CREATE model should aim to include a more racially diverse sample to assess its applicability across different educator populations. Conversely, it may also be valuable for scholars to conduct an intentionally designed, race-specific trauma-informed professional development series for Black educators and compare the outcomes with those from the organically formed affinity group observed in this study.

Beyond participant diversity, future research should consider adopting a longitudinal approach to assess sustained changes in educators’ perspectives and practices over time. Additionally, incorporating student measures of school racial climate could provide further insight into how race-conscious TIPD models influence the broader school community.

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