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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe teachers' perceptions of changes in their ethnic-racial identity after completing professional development designed to support facilitation of a school-based ethnic-racial identity student curriculum – the *Identity Project*. We analyzed interview data from 11 U.S. high school educators (four Teachers of Color; seven White Teachers) who completed 32 training hours and post-program individual interviews to reflect on the impact of the program on their ethnic-racial identity. Based on reflexive thematic analysis, we found that the program influenced teachers' ethnic-racial identity by offering them time and opportunities for change through guided self-reflection. This included participating in all aspects of the *Identity Project* that is designed for students and learning from and sharing with colleagues. The program (a) served as a reminder reinforcing prior learning about one's ethnic-racial identity, (b) leveraged unique benefits of reflecting in community about issues of ethnicity, race, and identity, and (c) activated curiosity to learn more about one's ethnic-racial identity and its connections with supporting students. Nevertheless, there was teacher-specific variation in these findings that illustrated nuanced experiences. Our findings illuminate paths forward for fostering teachers' ongoing ethnic-racial identity development in the service of promoting students' learning and well-being.

Consistent with trends observed worldwide (Pew Research Center, 2019), the United States (U.S.) is becoming increasingly ethnoracially diverse (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). For example, in Fall 2021, youth of color comprised 55% of U.S. K-12 public school students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023b). In contrast, in 2020–2021, 80% of U.S. K-12 public school teachers were White (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023a). As one of the many examples of deeply entrenched ethnic-racial inequities in the U.S. education system, ethnic-racial mismatch between teachers and students can have profound implications for minoritized students' academic and socioemotional adjustment, with prior research showing links between this mismatch and quality of the student-teacher relationship, student academic achievement and engagement, and socioemotional

competencies (e.g., Gershenson et al., 2016; Rasheed et al., 2020). One important way for teachers to support learning and well-being among students from diverse ethnic-racial backgrounds is to engage in culturally sustaining pedagogy – teaching practices that enrich the strengths of students from minoritized groups and center these students' cultural histories, practices, and identities in schools in support of positive social transformation (Alim & Paris, 2017). Given that teachers' critical examination of their own social positions and identities is crucial to support such practices (Paris, 2012, 2021), professional development (PD) to support this mission must address the significant variability that exists among educators regarding the beliefs and attitudes they hold regarding their own ethnic-racial group memberships (i.e., ethnic-racial identity; ERI), the extent to which educators have explored and gained clarity about their ERI, and how this relates to their teaching and support for students (Garlough & Savitz, 2022; Mustafaa, 2023).

In the current qualitative study, we invited high school educators to share their experiences after engaging in PD designed to prepare them to facilitate the *Identity Project*, a school-based ERI-focused curricular intervention (Umaña-Taylor, Douglass, et al., 2018), with their students. Based on analyzing individual teacher interviews during which we asked them whether and how they perceived changes in their ERI in relation to lessons learned through PD, we focused analyses in the current study on describing teachers' perceptions of changes in their ERI. Specifically, what changes did teachers perceive in their ERI after participating in this ERI-focused PD? Furthermore, *how* and *why* did these ERI changes occur?

Teachers' ethnic-racial identity development and culturally sustaining pedagogy

ERI is a multidimensional construct that refers to an individual's beliefs and attitudes about aspects of their identity related to both cultural/ethnic heritage and societal racialization due to phenotypical characteristics, as well as the developmental processes through which these beliefs and attitudes progress over time (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). ERI developmental process components include exploration (i.e., learning about one's ERI) and resolution (i.e., gaining clarity and understanding about one's ERI), and ERI content components include affect (i.e., positive or negative feelings about one's ERI), centrality (i.e., level of ERI importance to one's self-concept), and public regard (e.g., beliefs about how others view one's ethnic-racial group; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Though the majority of ERI research has focused on the importance and benefits of ERI as a normative developmental competency during adolescence, developmental scholars have theorized that ERI development spans across the lifespan and is characterized by significant variability based on individual, group, and contextual differences (Williams et al., 2020). For example, certain events and experiences during adulthood can result in novel meaning-making about one's ERI, such as sociopolitical events (e.g., Black Lives Matter protests in Summer 2020) or changes in family or workplace settings that prompt exploration and reevaluation of the role of ERI in one's adult life (Williams et al., 2020). In particular, the workplace becomes an important proximal context that shapes ERI development through daily interactions and relationships with individuals from diverse backgrounds (Yip et al., 2019). Thus, as adolescent student learners are engaged in ERI development, teachers too are developing and making meaning about their ERI as they engage with students, colleagues, and parents on issues of ethnicity and race within their school environment.

U.S.-based education scholars have articulated important ways in which teachers' pedagogical approaches vary with respect to addressing issues of culture, ethnicity, and race in the classroom (Paris, 2021). Initially introduced as culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and thereafter culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000), more recent conceptualizations have expanded on these seminal foundations to highlight the need for culturally *sustaining* pedagogy that is not only relevant to cultural diversity in the classroom, but also furthers practices that center minoritized students' cultural identities, languages, and histories in support of positive social transformation (Alim & Paris, 2017; Paris, 2021). Though extant research on the development of teachers' ERI and how this relates to their professional practice is limited, related research informed by these pedagogical frameworks has revealed wide variation in teachers' beliefs about and awareness of ethnicity and race, for both teachers of color and White teachers (e.g., Garlough & Savitz, 2022; McKinney de Royston et al., 2021).

For teachers of color, research has shown that commitment to culturally responsive instruction was in part informed by personal experiences of racism and teachers' understandings of their cultural identities (McKinney de Royston et al., 2021). Despite significant strengths and expertise that many teachers of color may have for engaging in topics of ethnicity and race in the classroom, like their White counterparts, teachers of color may also hold internalized racial prejudice and take a color-evasive stance (i.e., not recognizing or discussing race and ethnicity) in the classroom (Kohli, 2014). Teachers may also over-identify with students, assuming a level of cultural and personal congruence that does not focus on students' identity developmental processes, flattening depictions of ethnic-racial group identities and enforcing stereotypes (Kohli, 2014). Other teachers may have experiential and personal knowledge on topics related to race and ethnicity but lack opportunities for professional training to sharpen skills for teaching and facilitating discussions about these topics (Nuñez et al., 2021).

For White teachers, a commitment to tenets of culturally sustaining pedagogy may develop through professional training (Garlough & Savitz, 2022), personal relationships with people and communities of color (Ullucci, 2011), and holding related values for social justice and equity (Tran, 2017). Research with White teachers shows a wide range of orientations to recognizing and addressing ethnicity and race in the classroom, including explicitly racist and antiracist attitudes (see Jupp et al., 2019, for review). White teachers may also demonstrate an "ambivalent" racial awareness, holding conflicting attitudes simultaneously (Deutschman, 2022). As with other academic topics, *all* teachers require opportunities to learn pedagogical content knowledge that enables them to skillfully instruct students in and support productive dialogue about topics related to ethnicity, race, power, and privilege. Can PD promote teachers' ERI development, and thereby their capacities for culturally sustaining pedagogy in the classroom? How do teachers experience this type of PD, and what are effective ingredients of training programs that meet these goals?

Supporting teachers' professional development as facilitators of the Identity Project

Despite the evidence that teachers' engagement in culturally sustaining practices is positively linked with student learning and well-being (Byrd, 2016), there is a lack of programs focused on supporting teachers in this mission. In a systematic review that identified 38 studies focused on the effects of PD for teaching on topics of race and racism in schools, only 7 studies (18%) found that teachers reported increased awareness of their racial identity and 7 studies (18%) found that teachers reported increased interest in and use of culturally responsive practices; further, the majority of these studies were conducted in elementary school settings (Fallon et al., 2023). In another systematic review of research that focused specifically on race-conscious teacher education among White teachers, the synthesis of findings showed that the impact of PD can support critical racial consciousness, show minimal impacts, or even inhibit teachers' interest in antiracist and race-conscious education (Hambacher & Ginn, 2021). Even among these few extant programs, empirical evidence has yet to reveal a clear avenue toward supporting teachers in culturally sustaining pedagogy and antiracist approaches to education. Given the important role that teachers' ERI plays in shaping their practices to create racially equitable classrooms, effective PD in this domain must address the significant variability that exists among educators regarding their ERI and how this relates to their teaching and support for students (Fallon et al., 2023; Hambacher & Ginn, 2021).

One opportunity for introducing ERI development and culturally sustaining pedagogy into the classroom is through the *Identity Project* – a discussion- and activity-based ERI intervention delivered once a week over eight weeks to adolescents of any ethnic-racial background, originally developed in the U.S. (Umaña-Taylor, Douglass, et al., 2018) and then translated and adapted for delivery in other countries (e.g., Juang et al., 2022). The intervention offers students scaffolded opportunities during the school day to explore their ERI and develop clarity about what it means to them. Consistent with the intervention theory of change, experimental evidence for the efficacy of the *Identity Project* when delivered by researchers

in the classroom has shown positive effects on students' ERI exploration, ERI resolution, and, in turn, positive associations with academic and psychosocial adjustment over time (Umaña-Taylor, Kornienko, et al., 2018). Thus, the *Identity Project* is one evidence-based example of incorporating principles from culturally sustaining pedagogy into the school context and supporting the developmental competency of ERI development to promote student learning and well-being.

To support teachers as the intended and ideal facilitators of the *Identity Project* with their students, teacher PD was developed based on extensive reviews of the research literature, conversations and collaborative efforts among scholars of adolescent ERI development and teacher education, and through partnering with educators to develop and refine the program (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2024). The primary goal of developing this PD was to support teachers' effectiveness as facilitators of the *Identity Project*, which is one way to intentionally introduce ERI exploration into the classroom and support students' ERI development. Teachers' engagement in this ERI-focused PD also offers unique opportunities to better understand teachers' own ERI development. For example, consistent with one of the key PD learning domains, there is a dedicated focus on teachers' self-reflection and exploration of their own ERI while they engage as participants in the *Identity Project* in preparation for teaching this curriculum with their students. Gaining teachers' insights into their experiences with this type of PD, including *how* and *why* their own ERI may change through such professional training opportunities, fills a critical gap in the extant research on preparing educators for addressing issues of race, ethnicity, and identity in their classrooms in support of student learning and well-being.

Current study

The PD was built in partnership with U.S. educators to prepare high school teachers as facilitators of the school-based *Identity Project* for adolescent learners (Umaña-Taylor, Douglass, et al., 2018). Consistent with a lifespan model of ERI development (Williams et al., 2020) and culturally sustaining pedagogical approaches in education (Alim & Paris, 2017), this PD emphasizes the importance of teachers' engagement in their own personal ERI development to support their students in this regard. In the present study, we sought to fill a gap in the extant literature regarding the processes through which teachers' ERI may develop in the context of PD to prepare them to implement an ERI-focused student curriculum. The primary purpose of this qualitative study was to answer the following questions: What changes did teachers perceive in their ERI after participating in this PD? Furthermore, *how* and *why* did these ERI changes occur?

Method

Research design overview

The research design included collecting data from participating teachers via individual interviews as part of a larger U.S.-based project (i.e., Umaña-Taylor et al., 2024) that leveraged community-based participatory research methods (e.g., Lucero et al., 2018) to bring researchers and educators together to develop and refine a program (i.e., *Equipping Educators for Equity through Ethnic-Racial Identity*; E[4]) to equip teachers with the skills, tools, and expertise with which to facilitate the *Identity Project* with their students. We analyzed these post-program qualitative interview data using a reflexive thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2022) and followed an approach to inquiry that developed iteratively through discussions among and contributions of a large and diverse research team, including elements of descriptive, postpositivist, and constructivist approaches. Description of study methods was informed by the Journal Article Reporting Standards for Qualitative Research (Levitt et al., 2018).

Researcher positionality

All coauthors contributed to the development of PD and to the analysis. Each author wrote the following brief description regarding some relevant aspects of their experience that shaped vantage point and engagement with the study. The first author is a White American man who, with the second author, facilitated PD sessions, interviewed participants, and led data analysis (first as a postdoctoral researcher and then as an assistant professor); he is a queer scholar with 10 years of psychology research experience. The second author is a Latina scholar who facilitated PD sessions and interviewed participants; she has over 20 years of experience studying adolescent ERI development and collaborating with high school administrators and educators. The third author is an African American researcher of racism and racial identity with over 30 years of experience in the field. The fourth author is a Black American researcher of race in education with 10 years of experience supporting school and district-level racial equity initiatives. The fifth author is a Mexican-origin Latina researcher whose research focuses on understanding the cultural resources that inform minoritized youths' academic outcomes in the context of ethnic-racial social stratification. The sixth author is an African American scholar who prepares Reading Specialists and Literacy Coaches to support teachers of historically minoritized youth in providing strengths-based literacy instruction; she served as a school leader for 19 years. The seventh author is a Korean woman who conducts identity research in the context of systemic inequalities in the U.S. and globally. The eighth author is a Multicultural Latina scholar with over 10 years of experience studying immigrant and ethnic-racial minoritized youth development. The ninth author is a White American woman with growing research expertise in ERI, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and qualitative methods. The tenth author is an African American teacher educator with 20 years of experience training teachers. The eleventh author is a Black researcher with 12 years of experience studying and/or working for racial equity in K-12 schools.

Researchers discussed their assumptions, expectations, and biases, some of which were similar and some of which differed among researchers. As a team, we approached this research with the following assumptions: (a) teachers are partners in this research process, professionals who care about the education and well-being of their students, and experts of their own experiences and identities; (b) it is possible for teachers to experience change or deepen their awareness of their own ERI through guided intervention; (c) individuals are embedded in a sociohistorical context of systemic racism that shapes engagement with, understanding of, and feelings about issues of ethnicity, race, and identity; (d) sharing and comparing our perspectives with other researchers is important to hold up a mirror to ourselves and research participants because of variability in experiences and understanding of racism based on our social positions. Researchers also differed in their assumptions, and these differences were considered strengths in this analysis. For example, researchers differed in training and expertise in paradigms that vary with respect to expected standards for reliability and validity (e.g., postpositivist research expecting quantifiable metrics; constructivist research expecting self-awareness and reflexivity). Researchers also differed in theoretical perspectives (e.g., developmental models of ethnic-racial identity, adult racial identity, and radical healing) and their proximity with research participants, ranging from those who were relatively more "insiders" (i.e., formed working relationships with participants in their roles as PD facilitators and interviewers) to those who were relatively more "outsiders" (i.e., never met participants).

Participants and procedures

Participants included teachers who were part of a broader research-practice partnership between our research team and their school in which history teachers were partnering with researchers to refine the E^4 PD. The school administration determined the subject area (i.e., history) that joined the partnership. Although participation was voluntary, all teachers who taught full-time in the history department agreed to participate. The site was a U.S. urban high school serving ethnoracially diverse students where no single ethnoracial group comprised more than 50% of the student population and

approximately 70% were students of color.[1] Participants were 11 history teachers (seven identified as White; three identified as Latinx; one identified as Asian American), ranging in teaching experience from 1 to 23 years. To protect participants' anonymity, additional demographic details are not reported; furthermore, direct quotations are identified with pseudonyms, but only general descriptors of majority/minoritized status (i.e., WP = White Person; POC = Person of Color) are used, and gender is not revealed. All participants provided informed consent.

Educators engaged in 32 hours of PD together as a team, dispersed into shorter interval workshop sessions (i.e., 2–7 hours) based on participant availability and feasibility, over the span of 6 weeks in 2021. PD content includes building upon teacher strengths in four primary learning domains that are integrated throughout the program: (a) ERI content knowledge and its significance for adolescents' adjustment; (b) practicing and workshopping facilitation strategies for supporting students in conversations about ethnicity, race, and identity; (c) understanding of systemic ethnic-racial inequities in U.S. education and how they shape youth ERI development and adjustment; and (d) teachers' own personal ERI development (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2024). Pedagogically, this PD addresses these learning domains through teachers participating in all aspects of the *Identity Project*, time for workshopping and discussing these sessions with experienced facilitators, additional sessions designed for adult learners to cover relevant topics in support of the learning domains (e.g., education on and exercises for examining implicit racial bias, perspective-taking exercises, addressing "hot moments" related to discussing ethnicity and race in the classroom), and time for individual and group reflection. Program facilitators were a Latina professor and a postdoctoral researcher who identifies as a White American man and queer person; both were present and played an active role for all sessions.

Program facilitators conducted one-on-one individual interviews with eleven teachers within 1 week after they completed the PD. Interviewers followed a semi-structured open-ended interview protocol with the primary purpose of inviting teachers to share their experiences and suggest potential changes in the content and format of the program as part of a collaborative and continuous improvement model. The protocol included a structure and sequence of planned questions asked by interviewers, as well as significant time for follow-up questions to further probe based on participants' responses, ask for elaboration, and engage in conversation. All interview data were included in this analysis, with a focus on responses to the series of questions most pertinent to the primary research question: "How do you think this training may have impacted *your own ethnic-racial identity development*? Can you please share your thoughts about this?" (see Table 1, for further details on the semi-structured interview protocol).

Interviewers asked follow-up probing questions based on participant responses and the context of each interview to facilitate elaboration and conversation with the participant, within the general orientation of participants serving as the experts of their own experiences and identities, which was emphasized throughout the training and the interview. The phrasing of potential follow-up questions was based on the theory of change for the *Identity Project* and the teacher training (i.e., increases in ERI exploration expected to lead to higher ERI resolution and thereby global identity cohesion, or more cohesive overall sense of self; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2024). Examples of potential follow-up questions that interviewers utilized to varying degrees on a case-by-case basis were: "Do you think your exploration increased?" "Do you think this training helped you gain some clarity?" "Do you think that, as a result of this training, you might do more exploring in the future?" "What else am I missing that could be relevant about the impact this training may have had on your ethnic-racial identity?" Interviewers also used standard interview techniques such as summarizing and probing (i.e., providing a synopsis of participant responses and asking for clarification and elaboration).

Interviews were conducted on Zoom and were approximately 60 minutes in length. Audio recordings were downloaded and transcribed verbatim by trained research assistants following standard procedures (e.g., Poland, 2001); this systematic process involved (a) using the reference tool of text generated by the recording application, (b) initial researcher transcription of the audio with this text as a reference following a structured transcription protocol, (c) independent double check of the same transcription with audio file by another researcher, (d) a third and final check of the transcription by

Table 1. Example questions from semi-structured interview procedures.

Section of Interview	Example Questions
Introduction	"What's one thing that you remember or really stands out to you about the training?"
Training Benefits and Feedback[a]	Examples from six standard questions:
	"As you know, our training goals for [this program] are to prepare educators to implement an ethnic-racial identity program with their students and to feel prepared to engage with their students in conversations on race, ethnicity, and identity. With this in mind, which of our sessions (or what parts of our training) did you feel were most essential to help educators meet these objectives?"
	"As you look over this list and think about the training, what (if anything) do you think we could have omitted or skipped?"
	"Now, for the flip side of that question, what was missing? What else would you have liked to have seen addressed in the training that would have met the [program] objectives?"
Impact on Ethnic-Racial Identity[b]	"How do you think this training may have impacted your own ethnic-racial identity development? Can you please share your thoughts about this?"
	Based on response and context of interview, follow-up probing questions used as needed to ask for elaboration and facilitate conversation:
	• "Do you think your exploration [of your ethnic-racial identity] increased?"
	• "Do you think this training helped you gain some clarity [about your ethnic-racial identity]?"
	• "Do you think that, as a result of this training, you might do more exploring in the future?"
	• "What else am I missing that could be relevant about the impact this training may have had on your ethnic-racial identity?"
Feasibility of Professional Development Model	"How can we make this training feasible, given the amount of time the training entails? Was the amount of time involved in this training appropriate to meet the goals?"
	"What factors made the scope of the training work for you?"

Note. All sections of the interview included time for follow-up questions to further probe based on participants' responses, ask for elaboration as needed, and engage in conversation with the overall purpose of better understanding teachers' perspectives for improving the training model for preparing educators to facilitate a student ethnic-racial identity curriculum. [a]Included a visual aid with timeline and sequence of all training session titles. [b]Section of the interview protocol that was most pertinent to the primary research question.

the first author and through consulting with interviewers, and (e) continued interrogation of transcription accuracy in the coding process and writing of the report. The Harvard University Institutional Review Board approved all procedures prior to data collection.

Data analysis

Coding procedures

The first three authors primarily led the analysis through independent reviews of the data and regular group meetings held on a weekly basis for several months. All coauthors contributed to the analysis by reviewing summaries and offering feedback on interpretations, conclusions, and presentation of results. Six general steps for thematic analysis (TA) informed the analytic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006), with an emphasis on *reflexive* TA that prioritizes the researchers' subjectivity as an analytic resource and the importance of reflexive engagement with theory, data, and interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2021). TA encompasses a family of methodologies that are systematic, diverse with respect to paradigmatic orientation, and designed to be flexible to meet research objectives (see Braun & Clarke, 2022, for suggested standards and variability within steps of TA). See Supplementary Materials for additional details regarding the coding steps followed in this study (Table S1).

First, the data familiarization phase involved the authors familiarizing themselves with the data by reading the interview transcripts. Second, the systematic data coding phase involved individually coding transcripts to identify excerpts that were relevant to the research objectives, generate initial codes within these excerpts, and meeting as a group to compare, discuss, and reflect on coding. Codes were organized into a visual heuristic tool used to support group discussion and develop the list of codes. This coding was iterative and included reviewing the data, discussing the meaning and interpretation of the list of codes, returning to the data to assess suitability of codes, and finalizing

codes as a group. See Figure 1 and Table S2 for all codes. The third phase involved generating initial themes from coded data, in which authors continued to independently review transcripts, examine the list of codes, and iteratively group these together into potential themes. During this phase, the visual heuristic was further developed through discussions and collaboration among the authors. The fourth phase involved further developing and reviewing themes through writing up preliminary descriptions alongside identified quotes and the visual heuristic to further define and clarify the themes and their representation of the data and codes. The fifth phase involved refining and naming themes, at which time the authors continued to meet to discuss and elaborate on the processes from prior phases. Finally, the sixth phase involved writing this report, a process that further clarified and interrogated themes in relation to extant theory, prior research, and support in the data.

Methodological integrity

Tools to embed researcher reflexivity throughout the analytic process included the group orientation to engage in analysis through discussion and building consensus through conversation, as well as the lead author writing and reviewing memos throughout the analysis. These memos were used to engage the team in setting an agenda, returning to prior reflections and discussions for further clarification, summarizing conclusions, and directing subsequent analysis steps. Through the strengths of multiple perspectives on the analysis team, points of agreement and disagreement were tracked through memo writing and open discussion of analytic lenses and social positions through which each researcher interpreted the data and arrived at conclusions. For example, in team meetings, one researcher offered their interpretation of what they learned from reviewing the data through verbal expression, in writing, and/or with visual depiction. This supported a dynamic and collective process whereby another researcher offered a question or observation about this initial interpretation for reflection, followed by dialogue among the team to consider similar and different ways of approaching the analysis. Thus, "independent" analysis also became collective, directly shaped by this active and iterative explanation of potential themes on the part of each researcher while in community with each other to both independently and collectively develop themes. As a result, many opportunities for checks, balances, and critical reflection were embedded as core components into the analysis strategy, which we believe strengthens the trustworthiness of study results. As the analytic approach in this study was fundamentally grounded in reflexive TA that emphasizes researcher positionality and construction of meaning making through rigorous and critical qualitative inquiry (Braun & Clarke, 2021, 2022), positivist quantitative metrics of interrater reliability are not relevant to this analysis.

Results

In the context of PD designed to prepare teachers as facilitators of the *Identity Project*, the primary purpose of this analysis was to answer the following questions: What changes did teachers perceive in their ERI through participating in this PD? How and why did these ERI changes occur? We organized results from the analysis, including all codes, in Figure 1. Multiple interlocking PD learning domains provided the context for asking these questions about teachers' program-related changes, with a specific emphasis on the learning domain of personal ERI development for teachers. Overall, we found that the program offered time and opportunities for change in teachers' ERI through guided self-reflection, which included (a) engaging as adult participants in all aspects of the *Identity Project* that is designed for students, and (b) learning from and sharing with colleagues in this process. Teachers described how having time and opportunities for change through the program led to deepening understanding and experiencing ERI as a journey. Specifically, teachers described how the program (a) served as a reminder that reinforced prior learning about their ERI, (b) leveraged the unique benefits of engaging in reflection in community about issues of ethnicity, race, and identity, and (c) activated curiosity for teachers wanting to learn more about their ERI and its connections with supporting students. Below we elaborate on *how* and *why* teachers' ERI changed with example evidence from participant interviews. Additional participant quotes for each theme are included in Supplementary Materials (Table S2).

Professional Development Learning Domains
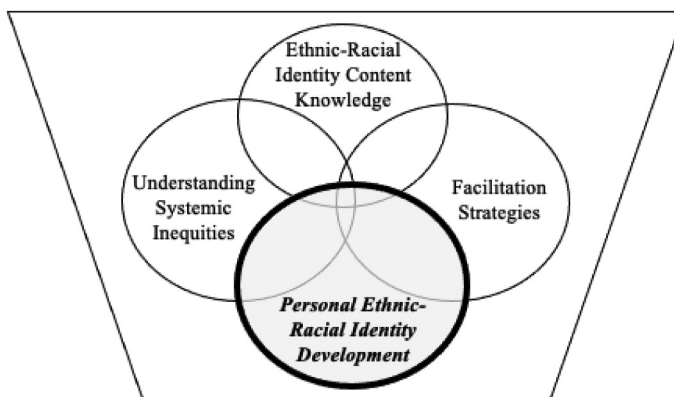
Time and Opportunities for Change
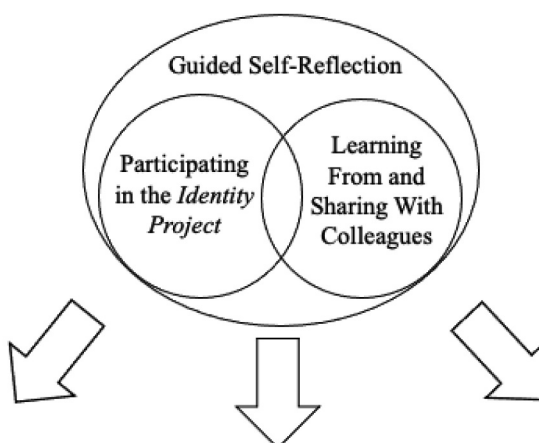
Deepening Understanding and Experiencing Ethnic-Racial Identity as a Journey

Serving as a Reminder	Reflection in Community	Activating Curiosity
• Reflecting on and revisiting the past (e.g., family history) • Remembering and reconsidering prior ethnic-racial-related experiences • Building and maintaining awareness of ethnicity-race	• Opportunities for deepening understanding through listening to and sharing with others • Finding enjoyment and pride in exploring and learning together • Witnessing and experiencing productive discomfort with colleagues	• Viewing ethnic-racial identity as an ongoing continuous process • Openness and desire to learn more • Seeing connections with ethnic-racial identity and looking forward to work with students

Figure 1. How does professional development designed to support educators as facilitators of an ethnic-racial identity curriculum with their students impact teachers' own ethnic-racial identity? *Note.* Codes from the data driven reflexive thematic analysis in this study were "Guided Self-Reflection" (with subcodes for "Participating in the *Identity Project*" and "Learning From and Sharing With Colleagues"), as well as all bullet points at the bottom of the figure. Other headings in the figure, starting with "Time and Opportunities for Change" and below, were themes derived from analysis of the coded data.

Time and opportunities for change

Teachers shared the importance of having the time and opportunities to reflect on their ERI. Their observations referenced aspects of PD that were designed for this purpose to provide both individualized and communal practices for building upon teachers' own experiences and strengths, while also recognizing the significant variability in teachers' expertise for considering the role of ERI in their lives and in their practice. Examples of guided self-reflection as a pedagogical tool in the program included independent journaling based on session-specific prompts and sharing reflections with partnersand with the group. This dedicated reflection time was offered in teachers' workplace amidst the backdrop of the unreasonable set of demands placed on educators' time and energy for the work they do in support of their students every day.

Regarding this guided self-reflection process that teachers described, what aspects of PD activities and experiences were teachers reflecting on, and how did these aspects of the program contribute to time and opportunities for change in teachers' ERI? We identified two central and interlocking components of guided self-reflection (i.e., subcodes of Guided Self-Reflection) that supported changes in teachers' ERI: (a) participating in the *Identity Project* and (b) learning from and sharing with colleagues in this process.

Guided self-reflection: Participating in the Identity Project

Actively participating in the *Identity Project* curriculum, designed for adolescents, offered one of the settings in which teachers had time and opportunities for ERI change. This included various session-specific activities that were designed to promote adolescent ERI exploration, such as creating a "family map" of the central influential figures (be they chosen family or family of origin) that contribute to one's ERI and a personal storyboard that connects the meaning of cultural markers with one's sense of identity – both of which offer opportunities to reflect on similarities and differences with one's peers as a vehicle for identity development. Teachers provided rich descriptions of their own engagement with and learning that came about from completing *Identity Project* activities, which all center personal ERI development in a group setting. Several examples from teachers illustrated ways in which engaging in these activities prompted further personal reflection and understanding. For example, when reflecting on Session 1 of the *Identity Project*, Frankie (POC) explained "[The definitions of] 'race versus ethnicity.' Um, I'm not sure I ever really thought much about that. It's one of those things, like, I use it all the time, but I never really think about what it means." In another example, when asked what they remembered the most about PD, Bailor (WP) connected the importance of participating in the *Identity Project* with their role as a teacher and facilitator:

> I think, just, like, having us go through the student role in everything. . . . I think that was really, like . . . one of the most enjoyable parts of the training. And also, like, where you kind of, like, see it all come together. . . . Um, and then, like, for your own personal reflection, like, "Oh yeah, this is how I would answer these things, right, about my family traditions and rites of passage." So I think, um, like, taking the time to actually do all that.

As Bailor (WP) mentioned, some lessons in the *Identity Project* have learning objectives for students (and in this case, also teachers) to spend time exploring and learning more about their cultural heritage, including markers of culture such as family traditions, rituals, and rites of passage. The *Identity Project* also includes attention to defining the concepts of ethnic-racial stereotypes and discrimination through intentionally scaffolded activities that support students in naming and distancing themselves from societal stereotypes about the ethnic-racial groups with which they identify. For example, in one activity students are supported in stating how they identify with their ethnic-racial background (i.e., "I am . . . ") and pair this identification with ways that they are NOT defined by a stereotype that others may think about their group (i.e., " . . . but I am not . . . "). Completing this activity offered opportunities for teachers' reflection and to ask further questions about their own ERI as they anticipated leading this activity with their students, which would be difficult to prepare for without completing the student curriculum as learners themselves during the PD. For example, when asked about what they benefited from the most in this PD, Aubrey (WP) mentioned that this activity

to reflect on stereotypes really stood out to them and led to asking themselves, "Like, I really was just, like, WHAT stereotypes? And you know, that just, bringing something I already knew was true, to like, you know, a stark realization as I'm trying to think of stereotypes of White people." Aubrey (WP), along with other teachers, expressed that participating in these kinds of activities raised some questions about issues of whiteness and racial privilege that render stereotypes about White people (i.e., the dominant majority group with unearned advantages) less common and less harmful than stereotypes that exist about people of color. This is one important example showing that the process of reflecting on what they know and think about their own ERI was a benefit to teachers in preparation for facilitating the identity exploration process with their students, who are embedded in and affected by the same systems of racial power and privilege. As adult learners, participating in the *Identity Project* was one way in which this PD offered teachers time and opportunities for this guided self-reflection in support of their own ERI development.

Guided self-reflection: Learning from and sharing with colleagues

Another important setting in which teachers had time and opportunities for ERI change was the process of learning from and sharing with colleagues, which was integrated throughout their engagement in activities and self-reflection. Teachers shared that some of the most meaningful and impactful aspects of this PD were participating with their colleagues in a community, a process that supported changes in ERI through learning about themselves and about others. As Emory (WP) explained, completing the program in community supported deep growth in empathy and understanding someone else's experience:

> I think for me the community piece is big. . . . Like, the time spent together. And just, like, the depths that we went to. . . . Like, there is a level of, like, deep empathy that just comes with having more insight and understanding into someone's own personal journey. . . . Like, that alone just, like, makes us a closer department, makes us better teachers, makes us better able to support each other.

Emory (WP) went on to explain that the experience was distinct from completing PD with strangers, which they felt would not be as effective or rewarding for growth in personal ERI development. For example, opportunities to share independent reflections and questions with partners or small groups to hear similar and different perspectives prior to sharing with the larger group were a good fit for deepening connections among colleagues who already knew one another, thereby supporting accountability for engaging in this ERI-related work together. Skyler (POC) also explained that working with a colleague as a partner in PD activities, such as sharing the family map, encouraged both of them to reflect on their own ERI as they learned about someone else's perspective and shared their own.

Building in a community focus may be useful for many programs supporting PD for educators, in general. For example, Bailor (WP) described how the depth of conversations they had with colleagues prompted new understanding and future-oriented questions about their own ERI. This was specifically in reference to participating in and reflecting on an *Identity Project* activity that supports students in considering the concept of their identity as a journey and something that changes over time. Moreover, Bailor (WP) explained that practicing instructional moves for these types of student sessions in a group with colleagues offered useful examples for their own teaching practice and a reminder for how their ERI is part of their role as an educator:

> Also just, like, being able to voice and facilitate these conversations [about ethnic-racial identity]. And, like, practice with that a little bit more, I think has been, um, really good. Just to think about, like, how my own ethnic-racial identity, like, can be talked about and reflected on. And it's not something to be, like, ashamed about. But it's something I need to, like, recognize.

In summary, this PD offered teachers necessary time and opportunities for change through guided self-reflection, which included the key interlocking components of participating in the *Identity Project* and learning from and sharing with colleagues in this process. These mechanisms of change featured prominently throughout teachers' descriptions of how their ERI changed as a result of the program, specifically by deepening their understanding of their ERI and experiencing their ERI as a journey.

Deepening understanding and experiencing ethnic-racial identity as a journey

Our analysis to describe the influence of this PD on changes in teachers' ERI illustrated how offering time and opportunities for change (through the guided self-reflection mechanisms described above) contributed in several ways to teachers' deepening understanding of their ERI and experiencing their ERI as a journey in this training process. We grouped these contributions into three primary domains. The program (a) served as a reminder that reinforced and deepened teachers' prior learning about their ERI, (b) leveraged the unique benefits of engaging in reflection in community about issues of ethnicity, race, and identity, and (c) activated curiosity for teachers wanting to learn more about their ERI and connecting this exploration with supporting students.

Serving as a reminder

From the teachers' perspectives, the program on its own did not necessarily afford a significant amount of novel insights. This is consistent with the intentional design of the program to partner with educators as experts of their practice and own experiences, as well as to meet individuals where they are in the process of exploring their ERI. However, reminders from the program to reinforce and deepen prior learning offered teachers the opportunity to reflect on and revisit the past through examination of family history, remember and reconsider prior ethnic-racial-related experiences, and build and maintain awareness of ethnicity-race in their lives and in their teaching practice.

First, teachers described how reflecting on and revisiting the past was one way to explore and better understand their ERI, specifically through having conversations with family members that are encouraged for completing *Identity Project* activities. For example, Alex (POC) learned about their family history and the importance of reflecting on this connection to family history for their sense of identity:

> I guess [the program has] made me a little more curious about my own, like, my family's history. Like, you know, who my parents' parents were. And who their parents were. . . . I didn't know that my mom didn't know her grandmother's name. . . . I think that helped, like, sort of, was the most formative thing towards my own identity and the formation of my identity.

Sammie (WP) shared a similar process, recognizing how they previously viewed their ERI in one way, which they then reflected on and revisited through family conversations about their history and understanding of their ethnic-racial background. In addition, Charlie (WP) described the significance of reflecting on their family history as part of an ERI exploration process that leads to a more complete sense of self, "It makes me feel, I don't know, more, more whole . . . to explore my family's heritage. And where we come from. And what our history is. And what traditions are important for us." In summary, one of the ways this program helped teachers to deepen understanding of their ERI was through opportunities for reflecting on and revisiting their family history as it relates to ethnicity and race.

Second, teachers also described how the program served as a reminder of prior learning about their ERI by offering opportunities for remembering and reconsidering prior ethnic-racial-related experiences at earlier points in their own development. For example, Angel (POC) acknowledged that much of how they view their own ERI has remained the same since their teenage years, but aspects of the program still spurred a sense of exploration as an adult:

> I mean, I definitely think there was, like, some sort of, I guess, like, exploration. . . . You know, I think, for the most part, like, my answers are . . . the same that they would have been at, you know, 14, 15 [years old]. Um, and that, you know, nothing's going to change. Like, I am who I am. Um, but, yeah, I'm in the same place. But I definitely grappled with it, and, like, explored a little bit.

Angel (POC) went on to explain that they, "hadn't really thought about [their ERI] in that way before," and that the program, "was, like . . . a good reminder, and sort of more just, like, a reflection. . . . Yeah, I mean I definitely think there was, like, some sort of, I guess, like, exploration." Skyler (POC) also thought the program offered important space for reflecting on

and solidifying prior learning about their ERI, experiencing this process as a journey. In a similar vein, Aubrey (WP) identified *Identity Project* activities (e.g., identifying and distancing oneself from group stereotypes, creating and sharing a personal storyboard) that offered opportunities for reconsidering prior ethnic-racial-related experiences as a way to deepen understanding of their ERI, characterizing this process as one of change and complexity. Overall, as Bailor (WP) shared, just having "the time to reflect on your personal ethnic-racial identity journey" was a "necessary" and "useful" element of PD.

Finally, another way in which the program served as a reminder for teachers to reinforce prior learning about their ERI was through opportunities for building and maintaining awareness of ethnicity-race. This process was notable among (though not exclusive to) White educators, specifically, as they reflected on their own positions and found new connections to what whiteness means for them in their roles with their colleagues and students. For example, Tyler (WP) reflected on one of the journal entries they wrote and identified that reflecting in this way and being aware of their ERI was not entirely new for them, but also served as an important reminder to center examination of how their ERI is informed by whiteness:

> I was looking at the journal entry that I wrote. . . . I think that it made me think about my identity in the context of other people in the room a little bit, right? . . . In my personal journey, you know, it made me really also realize that, like . . . a lot of my identity is just folded into, like, whiteness. And I don't think that that's something that I was unaware of. But it did make me think a little bit about, like, how salient that is. . . . I'm not sure this was something I didn't already know. . . . Maybe it made me remember this and put it to the front a little bit more.

Aubrey (WP) also shared how they recognized a greater awareness of their ERI through participating in the *Identity Project*, noticing that they were able to connect identity concepts at an abstract level to how they personally felt and experienced this part of their identity at a personal level.

As these teachers' reflections highlighted, this process of building and maintaining awareness of ethnicity-race occurred when *adults* completed activities from a curriculum designed for *adolescents*, illustrating the ongoing journey of ERI across stages of the lifespan. Given the pernicious nature of white supremacy and the toxic role this system of oppression plays in the sociohistorical context of ERI development for everyone, this PD was intentionally designed with extension sessions for adult learners that more directly define and offer opportunities to reflect on and discuss whiteness concepts (e.g., white supremacy, white fragility) so teachers are better equipped to navigate these conversations with their students in support of their ERI exploration. When asked what was most beneficial about the program, Sammie (WP) described the benefit of such sessions for their own ERI development journey and teaching practice:

> One of those very first sessions we had . . . on the "whiteness part." And thinking about my own identity, um, in terms of who I am as a teacher. . . . Anything that continues beyond that, that growth, and that path of understanding, what I bring to the classroom as a White educator, um, is valuable to me. It's super valuable to me. . . . For me that's already something that I have explored a little bit, but I don't think that that's something that, um, you can get enough of. So, um, the more the better you know. . . . So anything that continues my development and understanding my whiteness as an educator, I value. And find it'll benefit me in the long run.

The time and opportunities for guided self-reflection offered in the program, including specific attention to issues of whiteness and its influence on ERI development (for teachers and for students), created a context in which teachers could build awareness of ethnicity-race to deepen understanding of their ERI and how this relates to their role as educators.

Reflection in community

Guided self-reflection in PD, though deeply personal, did not occur in independent silos. Teachers described the importance of engaging in this PD with their colleagues as a community and multiple ways in which this community contributed to deepening understanding of their ERI. Specifically, teachers shared opportunities they had for deepening understanding through listening to and sharing

with others, finding enjoyment and pride in exploring and learning together, and witnessing and experiencing productive discomfort with colleagues.

First, one of the driving mechanisms underlying changes in teachers' ERI was the process of listening to and sharing with others in the program. For example, both Marion (WP) and Emory (WP) highlighted the importance of engaging in this program with the same people who they will be continuing to work with in the future. Speaking to the unique nature of participating in this reflective community with their colleagues, Marion (WP) did not think an alternative of completing this kind of PD with other teachers who they did not already know would have the same value for them. Teachers also mentioned the diversity of their team as an asset that afforded opportunities for perspective taking and deepening understanding through listening and sharing. For example, Aubrey (WP) referenced the diversity of their team as a factor that contributed to insights gained from the program through reflecting in community:

> Um, you know, we have a pretty diverse department. And so getting to hear different perspectives, and how [my colleagues] might view an activity differently or how it might affect students differently or how [my colleagues] were affected by what we were doing.

Second, reflecting in community included teachers finding enjoyment and pride in exploring and learning about their ERI together. As Charlie (WP) described their experiences sharing with colleagues, this sense of joy and fun was not mutually exclusive from deep and sensitive conversations during the program: "Kind of sharing some stories, family traditions, experiences, elements of my heritage with colleagues. Um, it was fun, and it can be fun. And, um, while at the same time, like, still wanting to have those deeper, more sensitive conversations." Emory (WP) similarly described enjoying opportunities to learn about their colleagues in this process and finding a personal sense of pride in their ERI through completing *Identity Project* activities that involve sharing with others (e.g., sharing a personal storyboard that showcases one's ERI). These descriptions of enjoyment and pride in this community reflection process are all the more notable given that discussing and working through issues of ethnicity and race can be endeavors that are sensitive, difficult, and often taboo in the workplace. This program with this community of teachers was not isolated from this reality. Thus, it is even more impactful to hear teachers share that they found enjoyment and pride as part of the experience that led to deepening understanding of their ERI through reflection in community with each other.

Finally, complementary to the enjoyment and pride described above, teachers also discussed ways in which witnessing and experiencing productive discomfort while reflecting personally and together with their colleagues contributed to deepening understanding and experiencing their ERI as a journey that changes over time. Though characterized by feeling (or beginning to empathize with others') anger, defensiveness, or ambiguity when it comes to discussing ethnic-racial-related issues as a group, teachers identified that the program contributed to changes in their ERI through engaging in this discomfort together. For example, Frankie (POC) shared that the program gave them more clarity and understanding about their ERI, going on to describe the feelings that come along with different stages and transitions of their journey:

> But I feel like the more clarity I get, the angrier I become. (laughs) . . . It really is good, but I'm at a stage now that I'm still very defensive. And I think the goal – I'm hoping that I transition into a time when I'm just, like, more accepting. . . . Like, I've worked with these people for a long time, but I didn't know a lot of what I learned about them, you know, with this project. . . . Kind of opened my mind a little bit.

Charlie (WP) also shared that they witnessed their colleagues' discomfort and experienced their own discomfort during some program activities, going on to describe how this process was productive for reflecting on their own ERI and planning for ways to support their students to engage with important and sensitive topics (e.g., the harm of ethnic-racial stereotypes) when completing the *Identity Project*. Furthermore, Emory (WP) summarized their endorsement of the utility of the program for deepening understanding of their ERI, acknowledging discomfort within a broader sense of safety established through community values that teachers created among and for themselves with guidance from the

program facilitators. Engaging in extensive PD with a focus on issues of ethnicity, race, and identity is no small or simple task for everyone involved. One important takeaway for *how* the program led to changes in teachers' ERI is the time and opportunities for engaging in reflection in community, which included sharing with and learning from their colleagues, finding a sense of enjoyment and pride in this collective process, and witnessing and experiencing productive discomfort while grounded in a general sense of safety.

Activating curiosity

Teachers also shared that this PD activated their curiosity for asking more questions and wanting to learn more about their ERI in the future. Teachers described how the program contributed to seeing their ERI through the lens of future orientation or "planting the seeds" for what may come to grow in the future. Specifically, teachers described coming to view their ERI as an ongoing continuous process, voiced an openness and desire to learn more, and saw connections between their ERI and looking forward to their work with students.

First, as much as teachers described tangible benefits and lessons learned in the week after the program formally concluded, they also explained that this program left them with perhaps more questions about themselves than they had considered before. Rather than having more answers or certainty, the program contributed to developing views about their ERI as an ongoing continuous process. In other words, teachers' reflections showed how they experience their ERI as a journey rather than a destination. For example, when asked how the program impacted their ERI, Aubrey (WP) explained:

> I think, maybe it left me with more questions. . . . Um, like, not in a bad way. . . . It complicated things I would say. . . . I'm not, like, "Oh my goodness, who am I?" Just some more, like, "Oh, there's more there than I thought there was."

When asked what the most memorable takeaway was from the program, overall, Charlie (WP) described that, "this is a constant work in progress" and "that we're all at different points. And we'll all continue to move toward different points in this journey, too." Teachers describing their orientation to *process* and emphasis on the nature of an ongoing *journey* regarding their ERI stands in important contrast to their work in an educational system that values having answers and concrete metrics (e.g., test scores, grades) to show whether students, and by extension – their teachers, have achieved learning goals. Thus, offering time and opportunities for teachers to (re)discover the ongoing journey of their ERI and how this changes over time was no small effect of the program.

Second, teachers shared an openness and desire to learn more about their ERI. Angel (POC) shared the example of wanting to speak with and ask more questions of their parents to learn more about their family's cultural background, describing that the program, "Just also provided me, like, another opportunity to just, like, you know, ask my mom. And be, like . . . 'Who's this person's name?'" When asked if they think they will explore more in the future as a result of the program, Alex (POC) also shared that they will do this by, "Perhaps having more discussions with my parents . . . You know, just engaging them more. . . . Learning a bit more about my own history."

Finally, teachers described seeing direct connections between their personal ERI development process and looking forward to engaging in this ERI work with their students. Teachers not only described gaining personal insights and deeper understanding of their ethnic-racial backgrounds through this program, but also the plans they have for using this learning to support their students in ERI exploration with the *Identity Project* incorporated into their curriculum. For example, when asked what they benefited from the most, Frankie (POC) named at least four *Identity Project* sessions, connected them with their own experience completing the sessions with their colleagues, and predicted what this will look like in their classroom. After describing these connections, they summarized: "I thought, those are great opportunities for students to, if we were to do it in the classroom, like, to bond together. And, you know, just going around and finding [out] things about people that you thought you knew." Similarly, Alex (POC) shared the value and enjoyment they found

in engaging in their own ERI development process and their positive expectations for how this will serve their students:

> I'm a big proponent of students exploring their, you know, their own personal histories. And, um, it was kind of fun to do that on my own ... And I think just, like, in doing it, thinking about how that's going to impact students, and how they'll definitely enjoy that, I think.

Altogether, teachers described multiple ways in which PD activated their curiosity, looking ahead to where their own ERI journeys may lead and how this journey is related to their mission as educators.

Divergent perspectives

Throughout our analysis, we also identified a few instances in which participants offered directly contrasting perspectives to the primary pattern of results presented above. These divergent perspectives are an important aspect of these results, as they illustrate the variability across individuals in the ways that their ERI is influenced by this type of PD. These instances come from teachers who also shared exemplar descriptions contributing to the primary analysis presented above.

The most prominent example of one divergent perspective was when Marion (WP) was asked how they thought the program may have impacted their own ERI. In contrast to many of the teachers' descriptions summarized above, Marion responded that "it hasn't," and, "I don't see myself as having any more to say or do with my ethnic background and racial background." When asked to share about this further, Marion explained that they had already learned about their family history years ago and that, "there's nothing new for me to dig up." For them, the process of thinking about this history as it relates to race included facing difficult emotions, such as guilt about the attitudes and behaviors of their ancestors. Marion's responses to other questions showed that they were far from explicitly resistant to engaging in this program, and they did perceive benefiting in other ways as it relates to ERI in a more general sense, such as seeing value in this type of PD focused on ethnicity and race, sharing with and learning more about their colleagues, and incorporating the *Identity Project* into the curriculum for their students' benefit. Still, Marion's experience helps to show that not all educators perceived changes in their ERI through participating in the program. This feedback about their own experience is useful for validating the notion that all teachers enter into discussions about ethnicity, race, and identity at different points of their own ERI exploration. Though this PD was intentionally designed with this reality in mind, it is unlikely that one program can meet all educators where they are with respect to supporting ERI exploration for all. Also, it is unknown whether Marion's perspective on ERI changes shifted as more time passed after program completion.

Another example of a perspective that diverged from the primary results was Sammie (WP) explaining that they were sometimes nervous and did not always feel comfortable sharing with their colleagues, particularly in a large group. Unlike other examples in our analysis of teachers describing reflection in community, and specifically the benefits of learning and sharing with colleagues, it is unclear whether Sammie's perspective could be characterized as productive discomfort. For example, Sammie described their experience sharing out in the large group during a reflection activity: "I was, like, really nervous to talk." Sammie also explained that how they felt during this experience, in part, led to not expressing what they were thinking during later group discussions because they "don't feel comfortable around that group." Sammie shared many examples of how they deepened understanding of their own ERI and experienced their ERI as a journey through their participation in the program. However, their feelings about sharing in the larger group setting are important to highlight the complexity of group dynamics, especially when working with a team of educators who have a unique group dynamic through their existing relationships. In this sense, important design elements of the PD included offering teachers a variety of modalities to learn, reflect, and share. For example, in reference to the same instance described above, Sammie explained that they had "a great conversation with my table partner." Their experience helps to show that teachers' engagement in personal ERI

development in this type of PD is unique based on all the ways in which individuals uniquely reflect and learn.

Discussion

The U.S. education system rests on the tireless and undercompensated efforts of educators to support their students' learning and well-being. Educator PD is necessary to promote content knowledge and pedagogical expertise for teaching and facilitating dialogue about topics related to ethnicity, race, and identity. As a review of PD on issues of race and racism has shown, these programs are few in number and there is limited research evaluating their efficacy (Fallon et al., 2023). In this study, high school teachers completed PD as partners in the process of integrating the *Identity Project* intervention program (Umaña-Taylor, Douglass, et al., 2018) into their standard U.S. history high school curriculum. Our analysis of interviews with teachers after they participated in PD helped to describe impacts of this training program on teachers' ERI and illustrated multiple ways in which providing time and opportunities for change contributed to teachers' deepening understanding of and experiencing their ERI as a journey. Specifically, our analysis demonstrated that participating in the PD (including completion of the *Identity Project* student curriculum and additional extension sessions for workshopping these sessions) with a community of educator colleagues supported a process of guided self-reflection, which (a) served as a reminder that reinforced and deepened teachers' prior learning about their ERI, (b) leveraged the unique benefits of engaging in reflection in community about issues of ethnicity, race, and identity, and (c) activated curiosity for teachers wanting to learn more about their ERI and connecting this exploration with supporting students. It is notable that there was teacher-specific variation in these findings that illustrated nuanced PD experiences.

Findings from this study not only inform promising paths forward to preparing facilitators of the *Identity Project* designed for delivery through school curriculum, but also offer key theoretical contributions to the study of identity development more broadly. Consistent with notions from developmental theory (e.g., Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014), our analysis of teachers describing ERI changes through their participation in this PD demonstrated that exploring one's identity (e.g., learning about one's values, beliefs, and history) led to a deepening in understanding about the meaning of one's ERI as part of the self-concept. Rather than a discrete stage-like process with linear steps and qualitative differences observed from one identity change process to the next, teachers explained that the time and opportunities afforded by the program deepened understanding of their ERI in ways that were dynamic and illustrative of a nuanced non-linear journey. For example, teachers described that the PD allowed for unearthing reminders from their past about prior ethnic-racial-related experiences and learnings, consideration of their current views and contexts with attention to ethnicity-race, and looking forward to the future in their professional roles as educators committed to supporting ERI development in their students. This emerging empirical evidence supports notions from a lifespan model of ERI, in which ethnic-racial-related experiences at varying life stages (e.g., in work, professional and personal relationships) are theorized to shape dynamic shifts in exploration and resolution of one's ERI throughout adulthood (Williams et al., 2020).

The process of exploration featured prominently in teachers' interviews, likely due to the focus on this developmental process in the *Identity Project* and thereby the teacher PD. However, our analysis illustrated that teachers also perceived changes in multiple ERI components as part of the complex nature of deepening understanding of one's identity, including references to content dimensions (e.g., salience, private regard; Sellers et al., 1998) and aspects of identity meaning-making that have been theoretically defined but have received less empirical attention in quantitative survey research (e.g., deepening understanding through overcoming shame and working through productive discomfort with others in safe and supported settings; see Helms, 1990). Although this study was not equipped to answer questions about whether teachers of color and White teachers differ in their ERI change processes through participation in this PD, it will be informative for future research to consider this notion given prior work showing different ERI resolution developmental trajectories following the

Identity Project for U.S. youth of color and White youth (Sladek et al., 2021). Given the context of the PD setting in this study, which included teachers of color and White teachers participating together, it will also be important for future work to explore group dynamics and program outcomes in PD settings that vary with respect to teachers' ethnic-racial diversity.

Furthermore, findings from this study offer ways to support teachers in their own ERI development, including strategies to support their ongoing process of self-examination in an effort to further understand their identity, which is essential for educators to be able to effectively promote this developmental competency in their students. Future facilitator trainings for the *Identity Project* should strive to maintain key program elements identified here in support of ERI development for both educators and students. First, teachers should actively participate in the *Identity Project* sessions in advance of teaching this with their students because this afforded opportunities for adult ERI exploration by having time for reflection to think and write about personal discoveries and realizations. Perhaps most importantly, engaging in this process in community with colleagues allowed for sharing with and learning from others in discussions about ethnicity, race, and identity. Second, though time may be in short supply in many education settings, teachers in our study identified the importance of having time both during and in between training sessions over the arc of the full program to reflect and process their experiences. Finally, teachers shared that learning and sharing with their colleagues not only contributed to changes they noticed in their own ERI, but also to fostering stronger relationships and a healthier climate for ERI-related discussions among their teaching team. These are desirable outcomes that will be more difficult to achieve if teachers are not trained with a cohort that includes their colleagues. Though this study was focused on teacher PD for the *Identity Project*, specifically, there may be aspects of these results that also inform approaches for PD focused on teacher ERI development more broadly. For example, future research may consider examining potential benefits of incorporating time and opportunities for teachers' guided self-reflection in community with colleagues to promote their own ERI exploration, noting that the *Identity Project* offers one promising avenue to support this mission.

Limitations

This research describes a partnership with one school demonstrating motivation for and engagement with topics related to ethnicity and race, evidenced by support from the school district, administration, and teachers. The present study is not able to address important questions about educator training in contexts that vary regarding openness and enthusiasm for explicitly attending to issues of ethnicity and race, such as school settings that are less or more invested than our partner school. Though the findings offer important new insights with respect to this PD preparing educators for the *Identity Project*, as with most qualitative studies, the intent of this study was not to produce generalizable findings. Instead, the purpose was to expand our conceptual understanding of identity change by describing how teachers in the present study explained their experiences in PD. Findings will be used to inform future directions in research. The fact that there were not self-identified Black or Indigenous educators in this school team with which we partnered is a limitation of the study; therefore, we are unable to report on these important experiences and perspectives that are missing in this study. Also, though the interviewers brought significant strengths to data collection and analysis given their insider knowledge as program facilitators (e.g., rapport building, in-depth knowledge of program content, personal experiences with teachers during the program), this study is not able to report on data collected by researchers who were independent from the program facilitation team, which may offer additional insights into teacher PD experiences. Finally, though this study was rich in description and articulation of teachers' experiences, students' insights were not incorporated.

Future directions

The present qualitative study of teachers' reflections on their experiences following PD in preparation for teaching the *Identity Project* offers several directions for future research. First, though there are existing quantitative survey measures that are suitable to examine ERI in adulthood (for ERI reviews see Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014; Williams et al., 2020), the findings from this study suggest there are important opportunities for continued theory building and survey measure development to assess a more complete picture of ERI changes as a function of PD in the workplace. For example, in addition to information gained from established measures of ERI exploration, resolution, and content dimensions (e.g., centrality, private regard), the current findings suggest there may be ways in which teachers reach a deepening in understanding of their ERI that are not reflected in extant measures. Measures of such constructs may be key outcomes in future research with educators, including the process of reflecting on and reconsidering the context of ethnicity and race in one's past life stages, discussing ERI with a community of colleagues in a supportive and safe environment, and adopting a future orientation to continue learning about oneself and establishing commitment to supporting ERI as a developmental competency for students. Developing these measures should include further data gathering with teachers to continue interrogating the extent to which the current findings map on to variability in their experiences. By using available measures and developing novel measures informed by this study, future quantitative research should examine teachers' ERI and teaching practices before, during, and after participation in PD; this pre/posttest longitudinal design will ideally also include a control group to examine the extent to which observed changes are a function of the program.

Future research is also needed to examine points of convergence and divergence between teachers' and students' experiences. For instance, after teachers have completed PD in preparation for facilitating the *Identity Project*, and teaching on topics of ethnicity and race more broadly, how do ethnoracially diverse students experience this in the classroom? What factors inform the effectiveness of teachers as program facilitators in support of student ERI development?

Particularly in light of a recent wave of divisive sociopolitical rhetoric and enactment of policies that prevent educators in many U.S. settings from teaching on topics of race and racism (PEN America, 2022), there are significant barriers for future research in this area that must be addressed at a policy level in support of the scientific evidence that demonstrates benefits of centering students' ERI development (Umaña-Taylor, Douglass, et al., 2018, 2024). Even in the restricted range of school contexts in which teachers have the ability to be supportive of this work without fear of legal repercussions or employment consequences, as in the present study, it will be important for future research to assess feasibility of the time and resources needed for this PD with schools that vary regarding time available for PD. Indeed, in the process of developing and implementing this PD, most educators shared that the length of time was appropriate to meet the learning objectives of preparing educators to teach a curriculum that supports students' ERI development in the classroom, whereas a couple shared concerns about the length of time, including one teacher who thought the PD on its own did not offer enough time and one who thought the PD took too much time.

Conclusion

Teachers' strengths as influential socializers in the classroom are an important avenue to be fostered for redressing ethnic-racial inequities in education in support of student learning and well-being. Following their participation in PD designed to prepare educators as *Identity Project* facilitators, teachers in this study described ways in which having time and opportunities for change led to deepening understanding of and experiencing their ERI as a journey. Key elements of this process included engaging in guided self-reflection in community with colleagues, which served as a reminder to reinforce teachers' prior learning about their ERI and activated curiosity for wanting to learn more

about their ERI in the future. This qualitative analysis of individual interviews with teachers also highlighted variability in teachers' experiences in this ERI-focused PD. Fostering teachers' ERI development is a necessary component in their preparation for facilitating the *Identity Project* and may be one powerful path to create and maintain equitable learning environments for all students.

Note

1. To preserve anonymity, the specific percentage for each minoritized group is not reported.

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Data availability statement

Participants in this study did not give written consent for their interview data to be shared publicly; thus, supporting data are not available to be shared. Inquiries regarding the study data will be considered upon reasonable request.

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