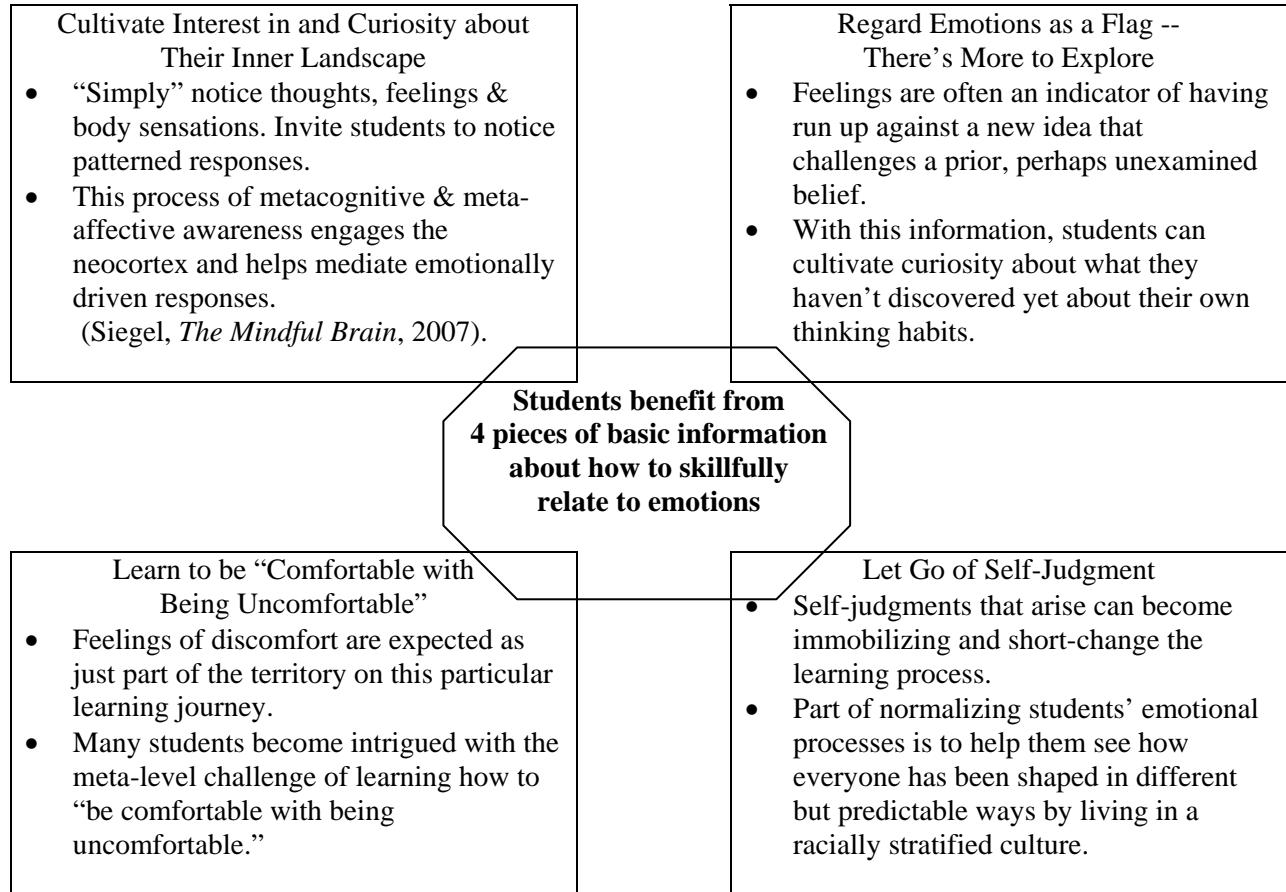


Helping White Students Move from Emotional Reactivity to Racial Understanding

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Ongoing integration of meta-cognitive and meta-affective reflections, along with emotional skill-building and support, benefits students' race-related learning.



→ The reflective process can be built into simple journal assignment 2 or 3 times during a semester, or woven into the course with just a comment, question, or example that encourages students to consider how they are learning.

→ Framing the learning process as a journey prepares students for the commonly experienced emotional responses and learning obstacles they may encounter. Naming common cognitive obstacles -- oversimplification and dualistic thinking -- and common emotional obstacles -- discomfort, and feelings of defensiveness, shock, guilt, anger and sadness -- supports student awareness and ability to not get stuck when these come up.

→ Having students share their reflective processes in class or online discussions, perhaps anonymously, gives students the opportunity to see that they're not alone in struggling with course material yet offers them new ideas and multiple perspectives. Knowing others share their struggles reassures and calms; multiple perspectives support empathy development.

★ Students who were able to continue progressing despite discomfort demonstrated the use of multiple meta-affective skills.

★ Several skills seemed to support continued movement toward deeper understanding, including:

- tolerating discomfort
- self-awareness of feelings
- articulating flawed self-assessments
- setting aside self-judgment
- seeing and naming what one didn't previously know
- contextualizing information within a larger perspective
- self-knowledge

★ In the following example, these skills are named in **bold**, and relevant text is highlighted in *italics*:

Through our class discussions *I realized that I wasn't as racially aware as I thought I was* [**honest self-awareness and articulation of flawed self-assessments**]. I reflected on my own childhood and upbringing and found that my socialization process growing up in a small-town kept me somewhat blind to the similarities that exist between different groups *I guess I was never fully aware of subtle [within group] differences* [**ability to see and name what one didn't previously know**] because *I often found myself thinking in general categories and assumptions* [**meta-cognitive awareness, or self-knowledge**]. In essence, I learned that I cannot generalize or see one group (ex: African-Americans) as one large equal group. At first *I felt somewhat guilty and uncomfortable* [**self-awareness of feelings**] with/about the generalizations and assumptions I had made and also for not having a stronger cultural awareness. In addition, since I thought I was more culturally aware than I actually was, I felt frustrated because what I thought I knew was wrong and I was eager to learn what is right. *Now I have moved beyond guilt because I realized this isn't a productive emotion* [**setting aside self-judgment so it won't derail the learning process**] and also because *my socialization and environment growing up was out of my control and there was nothing I could do to fix/change my past* [**ability to contextualize information and see it from a larger perspective**]. Because I am still becoming aware of the blinding power of my socialization, I am still eager to learn and to take a step towards understanding how to be more culturally competent I have come to the understanding that the first step towards racial-awareness is self-awareness and *I need to be comfortable with being uncomfortable* [**ability to tolerate discomfort in order to learn**] so I don't run from the discomfort, but rather embrace it and try to acknowledge and understand what triggers certain emotions/thoughts.

★ Students who expressed similar processes were able to continue forward in the learning journey, despite difficult emotions.

Factors that Contribute to White Students Learning About Race

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- ★ Are willing to pay attention to race-related
 - Thoughts
 - Feelings
 - Behaviors – all previously outside of conscious awareness
- ★ Continue to pay attention even when it gets uncomfortable.
- ★ Begin to develop awareness of their previously unconscious racialized worldview.
- ★ Stay with the process and begin to reflect upon and question themselves about their race-related responses, including thoughts, feelings, assumptions, and behaviors.
- ★ Develop the ability to tolerate ambiguity and not-knowing.
- ★ Begin to see themselves as having a white racial self or identity and to understand what it means to be part of the dominant or privileged racial group.
- ★ Begin to imagine, consider and understand the perspective of the Other.
- ★ Begin to apply new information to situations they encounter in their lives.
- ★ Begin to develop awareness of the normative standards of whiteness and how whiteness shapes their assumptions and worldview.
- ★ Begin consciously to use race as an interpretive lens for understanding themselves, others, relationships dynamics, media, and current events.

For a detailed write-up on this project: http://www.uwstout.edu/tlc/SOTL_participants0506.html

Results from two Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) projects suggests the following:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ The process of reflecting on thoughts, feelings and assumptions can help students stay with the learning process even in the face of uncomfortable feelings.➤ Learning simple emotional regulation skills can help students tolerate the discomfort of race-related learning, allowing them to develop skills to critically think about race, and deepen racial understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Framing the learning process as a journey with predictable cognitive and emotional obstacles supports destinations (outcomes) other than just maintaining comfort.➤ Opening to “not-knowing” can result in questioning and further reflection.➤ Empathizing with the challenge of experiencing difficult emotions helps minimize self-judgment that derails the learning process.

