

CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH RACIAL LEARNING OCCURS

Nancy L. Brown

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As a white who works in a variety of organizations, I have found that learning about racism (my own, others', institutional) has increased my effectiveness in every work setting. Because this is so, I consciously seek ways to learn more, learn faster, and learn more deeply about racism. In the following, I summarize what I have discovered so far about my process (not content) of learning in this area. Borrow whatever is useful for your own learning situation.

CONDITIONS WHICH HELP / HINDER RACIAL LEARNING

Conditions Which Hinder or Inhibit Racial Learning

I learn less, I learn more slowly, or I learn more shallowly when:

1. I wait until others confront me.
2. My self-esteem is lower.
3. I fight racism primarily "for benefit of blacks."
4. I go in blind and naive.
- 5a. I require an immediate **yes-it-is** or **no-it-isn't** decision of myself.
- 5b. I require a simplistic, **either-it's** completely-racist or **it's-not-at-all** answer.
6. I limit myself to one kind of learning opportunity.
7. I anticipate getting it all together, being finished at some future point.
8. I discount the value of language to my racial learning.
9. I limit my experiences to higher risk work situations where I want/need to perform, to look "together" and not "raggedy."
10. I don't find/use white role models.
11. I seek support for my learning primarily from blacks who:
 - have a different struggle regarding racism from my struggle
 - are righting racism directly, and for whom support of whites and learning about racism is an added energy drain.
12. I swallow someone else's theory about how whites learn.

Conditions Which Help Racial Learning to Occur

I learn more, I learn faster, or I learn more deeply when:

1. I look inside first.
2. My self-esteem is higher.
3. I understand my self-interest in fighting racism. I fight racism primarily for my benefit.
4. I understand and anticipate potential negative consequences to me of fighting racism.
5. I allow the possibility that racism may be a part of the situation and allow myself time to consider that possibility.
6. I allow/require myself to have a balance of cognitive and experiential learning's about racism.
7. I accept the "onion theory," that I will continue to peel away layers of my own racism for the rest of my life.
- 8a. I use language as a tool to reveal myself to myself
- 8b. I use others' language as a tool to reveal myself to myself.
9. I periodically use labs or seminars as relatively low-risk-to-me learning opportunities.
10. I find/use white role models who:
 - display non-racist behavior
 - are in a learning posture about racism.
11. I seek support for my learning primarily from whites who are also learning and who will encourage and support my learning.
12. I articulate how I learn about racism based on my own experience.

I encourage other whites to increase their effectiveness at work by identifying and strengthening their learning processes in regard to racism. T Groups and other settings involving experience-based learning provide opportunities to look at these issues in a relatively low-risk way, with help from others, and to explore both **thoughts AND feelings**. When in these settings myself, I've found that keeping in mind three brief guidelines helps me:

1. **Initiate.** Don't wait for someone else to do it.
2. **Share feelings,** as well as thoughts.
3. **Hang in.** Persist.

Good luck with your learning!