Discussion

Students demonstrated increased academic competency after a semester within a race, racism, and social inequities-focused course. Each student improved in their use of academic vocabulary related to the course and increased the use of academic evidence to argue positions related to race and social inequity.

Several White students showed improvement in academic vocabulary and use of academic evidence, but did not appear to develop a deeper emotional self-awareness in regard to course topics.

For example, several White students continued to use phrases such as “it’s sad that today…” to introduce discussions of racial inequities. This phrase naturalizes racial inequity (Bonilla-Silva, 2006) as inevitable or unchangeable, which allows the author to lament the issue while avoiding responsibility for addressing it.

The majority of White students increased use of academic vocabulary and evidence while also personalizing the issues in ways that recognized their relevance to their own lives. These students understood that they were implicated in social inequities and took responsibility for that.

However, most students also expressed concern and frustration in developing concrete strategies for action. Many felt that the course was “enough to make them feel bad” but not enough to move forward productively.

For the students of color in class, two of the three demonstrated increased use of academic vocabulary and evidence as well as increased emotional self-awareness. Both men were grappling with internalized racism and named this process toward the end of the semester.

Conclusion

Student “awareness” and academic competencies improve over time with a one-course model. However, students indicate more sustained education over time is needed to support action and real transformation.

However, broader social and institutional shifts are moving toward less rather than more social justice opportunities. Neoliberal education policies at all levels, for instance, make it difficult to do what research tells us is best. Instead, the one-course model may leave students feeling guilty or hopeless if not given sufficient time to reflect and develop self-efficacy.