

ISCORE 2019

But What Does this Have to do with Engineering? Designing and Implementing Cultural Awareness Interventions for First-Year Students: A Panel Discussion

Clayton Johnson, Ashley Morton, Santos Núñez, Mackenzie Schwartz, Lindsay Frueh, and Ben McCarty

Designing interventions for first-year students around the idea of cultural awareness can be challenging. Students can have difficulty understanding how these topics are relevant to their collegiate career. Engineering students specifically come to college expecting to have a focused, STEM-oriented education, making these students generally more skeptical of activities focused on cultural awareness. This panel will include academic advisers in engineering who have designed, implemented, evaluated, and refined cultural awareness interventions. Although these activities were developed specifically for first-year engineering students, the activities themselves and lessons learned in the development, implementation, and refinement of these activities are applicable to anyone designing similar interventions for audiences new to this topic. We will discuss successes, pitfalls, lessons learned, and opportunities for growth in the future.

Included here are sample activities that were shared during the presentation.

Self-Reflection Questions: Cultural Appreciation

In groups of 3-4, please discuss the questions below. Remember, these questions are all about you and your personal experiences. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers.

What is your culture?

1. What is my culture? What are some customs, traditions, values, etc. that I experienced while growing up that are unique?

What is Culture? For the context of this exercise, we are defining culture as the customs, arts, social institutions, and achievements of a particular nation, people, or other social group.

2. What is my ethnic heritage and what does that mean to me?

What is Ethnicity? For the context of this exercise, we are defining ethnicity as the membership to a social or family group that shares a common and distinctive culture, religion, language, etc.

3. What is my race? How often do I think about race?

What is Race? For the context of this exercise, we are defining race as a socially constructed identification based on physical characteristics, ancestry, historical affiliation, or shared culture.

4. How does my upbringing influence how I view the world?

My life and my experiences

1. Share a time when you felt like someone made an assumption about you. How did it make you feel? How did you react to the situation?
2. What are some stereotypes/biases that you believe or have experienced?
3. How do stereotypes affect you?
4. Share a time when you realized your view of the world differed from the truth.
5. Share a time where you encountered a situation where you felt someone was being treated poorly. How did you react to the situation? Do you feel you should have reacted differently?
6. Share a time when you worked with someone different from yourself to accomplish a goal.

Cultural Appreciation: Facilitator Instructions

Divide students randomly into groups of 3-4. If possible, try to break-up students who typically work with each other, or talk to one another more than the other students. Preface the activity by talking about the wide variety of people at ISU—from different cultures, different races, different countries, different income levels, etc. Discuss how it is important to be able to work with people from all different kinds of backgrounds, and how these different backgrounds strengthen our knowledge and our work. If possible, please try to use a personal experience to emphasize this point—talk about an experience from an internship, class project, student club, etc. Students are not required to record their responses, but please ask students go through the question list and discuss their thoughts about the different questions.

Length of discussion: 20-30 minutes. Walk around the room and listen to different conversations during the activity to be sure students are staying on task.

At the end of the small-group discussion, bring the group back together and ask the following questions:

- 1. What did you learn about yourself?**
- 2. What did you learn about your classmates?**
- 3. Why is it important to be aware of, and talk about, our differences?**

The purpose of this activity is to help students recognize that, regardless of their background, they all have a culture. Even if two students look identical in terms of race, sex, class, etc., they are completely different and individual based on their backgrounds. Instead of letting these differences divide us, we can instead appreciate these differences and use them to our advantage. Different perspectives mean different ways of looking at the world, different ways of approaching problems, and more creative and innovative solutions.

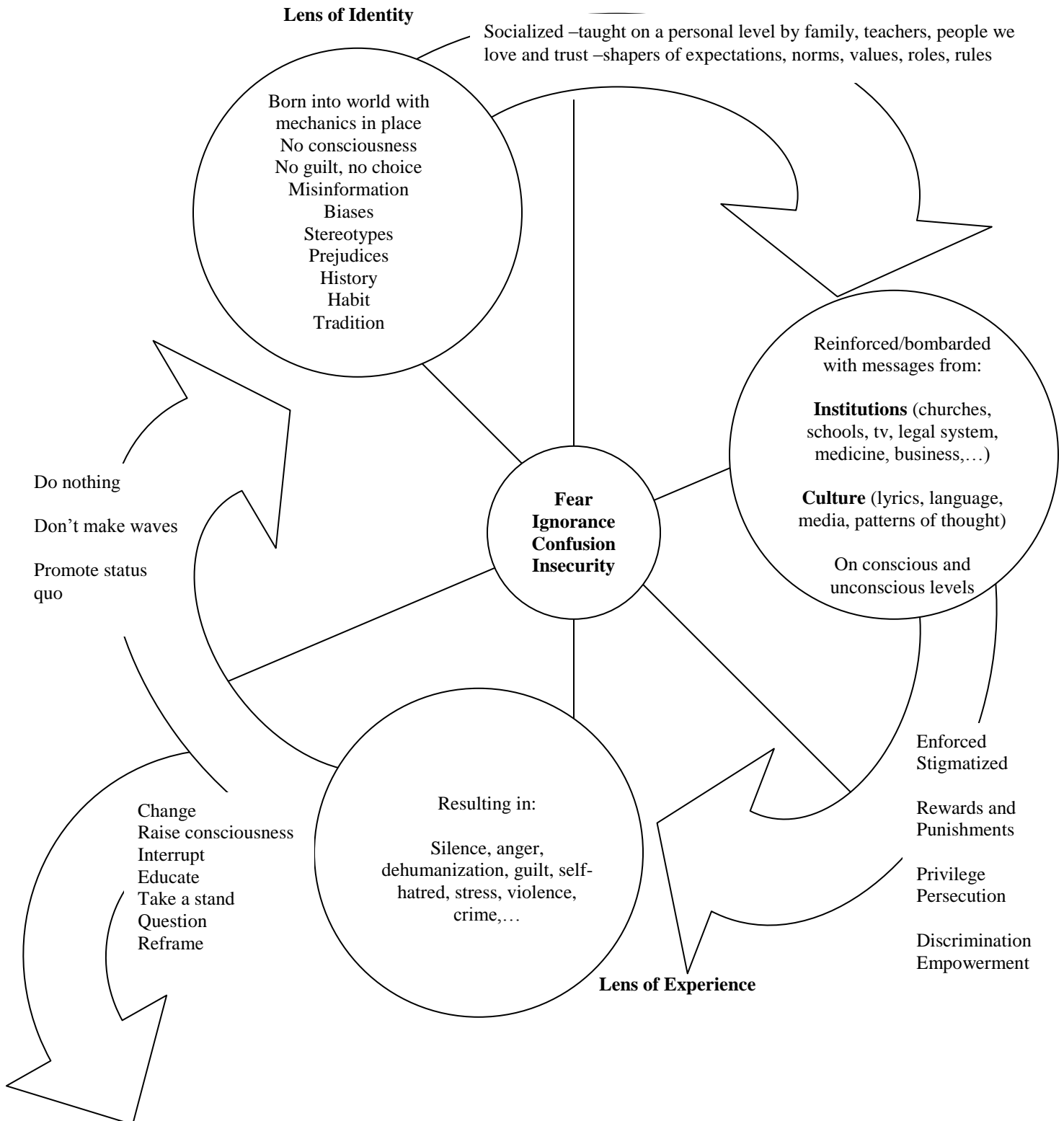
Understanding The Cycle of Socialization

The Cycle of Socialization helps us understand the way in which we are socialized to play certain roles, how we are affected by issues of oppression, and how we help maintain an oppressive system based upon power. The Cycle is comprised of 3 arrows, 3 circles, and a core center. Each of these components represents the following:

1. The beginning of the cycle, depicted by the 1st circle, represents the situation into which we were born. We have no control over this. We are also born without bias, assumptions, or questions. We are either “lucky” to be born into a privileged situation or “unlucky” to be born into an underprivileged situation.
2. The 1st arrow represents that fact that our socialization process begins immediately. We are given a pink blanket if we are a girl or a blue one if we are boy. The rules and norms are already in place and we subtly (and in many cases not so subtly) are made aware of the rewards of conforming and the consequences of rebelling.
3. The second circle represents the institutions that help shape our views and beliefs, and help instill within us prejudice or acceptance.
4. The second arrow represents the way in which the instilling of ideas, beliefs, and behaviors reinforce the cycle of oppression. Behaving differently is not as simply as most of us think. We are rewarded for good behavior – conforming to the norms and standards. By the same token, we are punished for bad behavior – questioning or rebelling against oppressive societal norms.
5. The third circle represents the devastating result upon all of us that this self-perpetuated cycle of oppression produces.
6. The final arrow represents a point at which we all arrive – the results of the cycle. We are forced to make a decision, even if that decision is to do nothing. Doing nothing is the easier choice, especially for those who benefit from the perpetuation of the cycle: we are all victims of the cycle and we are all hurt by it. Oppression hurts the oppressed and the oppressor.
7. And finally, it is the wheel that turns or enables any cycle. At the center or core of the cycle of socialization are fear, misunderstanding, insecurity, confusion, etc.

Source: Source: Adams, M., Bell, L. A., Griffin, P. (1997) Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice, New York: Routledge.

The Cycle of Socialization



Where I'm From

I am from _____
(a specific item from your childhood home)

from _____
(two products or objects from your past)

I am from _____
(a phrase describing your childhood home)

and _____
(more description of your childhood home)

I am from _____
(a plant, tree or natural item from your past)

whose _____
(personify that natural item)

I am from _____
(two objects from your past)

from _____ and _____
(a family name) (another family name)

I am from _____ and _____
(a family trait or tendency) (another family trait or tendency)

and from _____
(another family trait, habit or tendency)

from _____
(another family trait, habit or tendency)

I am from _____
(a religious phrase or memory)

I am from _____ and _____
(an ancestor) (another ancestor)

from _____
(two foods from your family history)

from _____
(a specific event in the life of an ancestor)

and from _____
(another detail from the life of an ancestor)

(a memory or object you had as a child)

I am from those moments _____

(conclude by finishing this thought or by repeating a line or idea from earlier in the poem)