Observations vs. Judgments: Exploring the Concept of Culture

Overview:
This lesson plan will study the concept of culture by further exploring the differences between a cultural generalization (an extension of the concept of observation) and a Cultural Stereotype (an extension of the concept of judgment). Students will learn to differentiate between observations and judgment and how they apply to culture. This culture will also help students see how they might be viewed by others through the lenses of these generalization and stereotypes.

Objectives:
Students will be able to:
- Recognize cultural observations
- Define the meaning of judgments
- Distinguish the differences between observations and judgments

Time: 25 minutes

Materials: Flipchart or Whiteboard, Markers, Pictures or Posters that presenting stereotypes

Common Core Standards:
CCSS ELA-LITERACY 9-10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.

AFS Educational Goals:

Cultural Realm:
- To understand the concepts of “culture” and intercultural adaptation.
- Cultural knowledge and awareness: To become more aware of their own culture and recognize its influence on their behavior
Activity:

- Post one of the “Generalizations and Stereotypes” pictures (or any poster or picture of your own) that will easily evoke judgment from the students.
- Ask the class to collectively brainstorm characteristics of the designated subgroup. For example, “How would you describe rock stars?”
- Write down everything you hear. The point is to create a list of what students automatically think about the designated group. Make sure they stick to characteristics about people (about “rock stars” not “rock music”). Shoot for a list of roughly 20-25 characteristics.
- Looking at the list, ask the students to put themselves “in the shoes” of the chosen subgroup being discussed. How do they feel about their brainstorming results? They will likely come to the conclusion that the subgroup would agree with some characteristics while objecting to others.
- Ask the class to explain the difference between observations (statements about others informed primarily by your empirical senses) and judgments (statements about others informed primarily by your interpretations). Point out that judgments are not necessarily negative as often perceived. We frequently make positive judgments about other groups.
- Return to the list you initially wrote on the board/flipchart and ask the group to identify any observations on the list. Typically, there will be a few obvious observations on the list, so it’s important to use these examples to identify what observations are. If there are none, ask the group to come up with any observations about the subgroup.
- NOTE: Most of the characteristics on the flipchart will be judgments, which is a result of our natural inclination to make judgments. We interpret through our own lenses what we see as an outsider to another group. We may have a positive or negative reaction to “otherness,” but humans tend to veer toward making judgments rather than observations. This points out that, when reacting with another culture, judgment is a very typical reaction, when interacting with another culture.
- Help students realize that it is important to understand the difference between observations and judgments and they need to focus only on observations, while avoiding judgments.