

Students as Ethnographers

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Egan-Robertson and Willett (1998) define ethnography as having three goals:

- to describe in rich detail and interpret the cultural life of particular social groups,
- to contribute to our general knowledge about the kinds of life-worlds humans create and the nature of the cultural processes operating to create these worlds, and
- to help people imagine and create better worlds (p. 5).

They describe ethnography as having the following characteristics:

- it is holistic, contextual, and comparative;
- it is systematic but uses multiple, nonstandard, and recursive methods; and
- it elicits the group member view of reality (p. 5).

The practice of “students as ethnographers” emerges from the efforts of educators to draw on ethnographic and sociolinguistic methods as teaching tools with their kindergarten through twelfth-grade students. Teachers engage in transforming the traditional teacher-student relationship as well as school curricula through asking students to become generators of knowledge via community based ethnographic research projects. By emphasizing and legitimizing the knowledge that exists in families and communities, ethnographic projects encourage students to view this knowledge as resources for their academic learning. As they engage in reflections on themselves as learners in the contexts of school, family, community, and other aspects of their lives, students further develop and articulate their particular views of the world. In other words, students learn from their own situated perspectives rather than from perspectives imposed from elsewhere. Ultimately, through student-as-ethnographer projects, students are enabled to make connections and build bridges between home and school.

Reference

Egan-Robertson, A., & Bloome, D. (1998). *Students as researchers of culture and language in their own communities*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.