

## Seeing Culture through an Unbiased Lens: Principles of Ethnographic Research\*

*\*Adapted from work by James P. Bradley (1994) "Ethnography and Culture"*

- **Suspend your judgment.** Approach your research as a “detached observer.” We often judge others’ beliefs and actions based on our own values. Although it is impossible to put aside all your opinions and beliefs, practicing nonjudgmental observation is important. Being conscious of your beliefs about a school or a community—and setting them aside—will help you connect with and learn from others at your program site.
- **Look for “informants,”** people who can advise you about the inner workings of your site. Ethnographers learn about other cultures by finding people in the community who can help them understand cultural attitudes, rituals, and behavior patterns. In a school setting, your informants may be the principal, teachers, students, and/or parents. If your program is located in a library, recreation center, or other neighborhood site, find local leaders, residents, and others who can teach you about the community’s daily life and culture.
- **Practice active listening.** Make a conscious effort to be a good listener. Be open to the message a person is communicating by monitoring your biases and limiting your interruptions. Pay attention to your body language and facial expressions and to those of the person talking. Ask clarifying questions and paraphrase when necessary. Remember, being an attentive listener is key to being a student of another culture and to gaining another’s trust.
- **Pay attention to detail.** Keep in mind that everything you see is a source of information.
- **Ask questions.** Here are some starters: *What do I already know about this site’s culture? What else do I need to know? How can I find out?*