

## Multicultural Education

The fall and winter months are full of cultural holidays—Diwali, Ramadan, Hajj, Eid El-Fitr, Hanukkah, Christmas, Chinese New Year, to name just some. These celebrations sometimes lead to what is called a “tour and detour” approach to teaching multiculturalism—visiting certain cultural groups at the time of a high holiday. Tour and detour methods tend to trivialize, patronize, and stereotype cultures by emphasizing traditional costumes, foods, and dances while shortchanging the study of everyday life of different cultures. Celebrating the holidays of various cultural groups is fun, but research demonstrates that teaching multiculturalism that goes beyond the celebratory is necessary to develop understandings of other cultures and tolerance for differences.

Multicultural education is a commitment to educating all students who may be diverse by virtue of their culture, language, ethnicity or economic status. Research demonstrates that effective multicultural teachers and schools share the following characteristics:

- Sensitivity to the needs of all students
- Differences are not judged to be good or bad
- Seek accurate historical and cultural knowledge
- Modify teaching styles to meeting students’ learning styles
- Use a diversity of instructional strategies
- Have uniformly high expectations
- Seek positive relationships with parents
- Recognize and minimize racism, classism and sexism
- Affirm cultural differences

Effective multicultural education requires reconsideration of what is taught, but equally important are the relationships between teachers and students, students and students, and school and home. One model is called *whole schooling*, an approach that promotes principles of democracy, community, and inclusion of all students. More specifically, a *whole school* has systematic ways for students to participate in genuine decision-making, avoids ability grouping or tracking, uses differentiated instruction within particular learning activities, uses peer-to-peer teaching and support, and assists students in resolving conflict for themselves.

If you are interested in the many perspectives on teaching and learning multiculturalism, check the library for a four-volume series edited by E. Wayne Ross (also a McBride parent), *Race, Ethnicity and Education* and the Whole Schooling Consortium’s website <http://www.wholeschooling.net/>

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