

E ducation Responds to Cultural Diversity

Canada's multicultural, multiracial mix creates a major challenge for Canadian educators. The education system across the country must cope with over 60 languages and more than 70 cultural groups. They are not all in the same classroom, of course, but some schools do have 20 or more distinct ethnic groups. There was a time when this diversity was virtually ignored. But no more. Encouraged by Canada's national multicultural policy, many Canadian school boards have initiated multicultural education programs for their students.

While multicultural school programs vary across the land to reflect local needs, they have the same basic goals. Multiculturalism is not just for and about immigrant children. It concerns and relates to all Canadian children. The main thrust in most classrooms is cultural awareness, where games, discussions, research, movies and field trips are all used to help students understand and appreciate other cultures.



There are specific programs for students who are new to the country and need extra help in any subject. There are also classes in either English or French as a second language for those who are not yet fluent in one of Canada's official languages.

Many schools invite parents to participate in the program as advisors or instructors. Their contribution assists in providing facts, figures and artifacts to round out the program.

Heritage Language Programs

Because regular classrooms cannot always provide instruction in each child's mother tongue, heritage language programs, offered outside school hours, supplement multicultural education programs. The Canadian government provides support for many supplementary language schools across the country, and for more than 125 000 students in 8 000 classes studying 62 languages.

A major challenge for Canadian educators, Canada's multicultural mix consists of more than 70 ethnic groups.

In Canada's capital city, Ottawa, classes are usually held for two and one-half hours on Saturday mornings. Public funds are available to support a teacher, but all other services are commonly supplied by volunteers. There is no charge to the student and anyone may attend. Parents from two separate ethnic groups may decide to send their children to classes in both languages. Students who come from a different ethnic background may attend classes to learn a different language and culture.

Ontario, the province with the largest ethnic population, is proposing an extensive expansion to its heritage

