

## What in the world is “Intercultural Awareness”?

The International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) states that *intercultural awareness* is concerned with “developing students’ attitudes, knowledge and skills as they learn about their own and others’ social, national and ethnic cultures. By encouraging students to consider multiple perspectives, intercultural awareness not only fosters understanding and respect, but may also lead to empathy.” Further, the IB mission statement calls for students across the world to understand that “other people, with their differences, can also be right.” Thus, learning about ourselves and others is clearly a vital aim of the IB Middle Years Programme.

What are we doing to make that happen at Moody Middle School? Well, as a school that seeks to prepare all of its students for what Thomas Friedman calls the “flat world,” we take this mission quite seriously. As we prepare your child for the jobs of the future, we infuse our classroom experiences with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills like collaboration and teamwork, critical thinking, creativity, and the use of technology.

The greatest opportunities we provide for your child to develop intercultural awareness take place during classroom experiences and during service towards others. More succinctly, intercultural awareness is borne from the pursuit of lifelong learning and lifelong serving.

In the classroom, students engage in the study of their own culture, as well as the culture of others. In language classes, health activities, debates of political issues, discussions of literature, experiments in science, real-world math applications, problem solving through the use of technology, and the creation of art, students learn about their culture and how it fits into the world around them. They learn that their choices affect others, and that human ingenuity leads to creations which have both positive and negative impacts.

Learning to speak another language gives students another method for developing intercultural awareness. Language provides access to another culture. We learn about other cultures by studying their core beliefs, as seen in their history, their traditions, and their leisure activities. We also learn about ourselves and others by travelling abroad. When we enter into an unfamiliar culture, we also learn about how we interact with something that is different from ourselves. We examine what we value within our own culture. Because travelling abroad can be cost prohibitive, you really don’t need to leave your own backyard to learn about other cultures. We can take part in simple activities such as shopping in a Latino,

Asian, or Indian market. We can explore world news outlets like [cnn.com](http://cnn.com), [bbc.co.uk](http://bbc.co.uk), or [france24.com](http://france24.com).

*Community and service* provides a second arena for developing intercultural awareness. While we are in the service of others, we are also gaining a deeper understanding of ourselves. By learning about a social issue, we become more aware of our own culture's response to that issue, whether it is homelessness, hunger, or health issues. In the classroom, teachers raise awareness about such issues and offer students opportunities to consider the nature of the problems, reflect on their attitudes towards them, formulate plans to assist each cause, and explore other potential responses through cultural and political lenses. Just this year, your children have advocated for issues involving other children in Colombia and Uganda all within the walls of their school. Later this spring, we will embark upon efforts to continue assisting Haitians as they seek to rebuild their country following last year's devastating earthquake.

What we know for sure is this: Without ever leaving 7800 Woodman Road, your children have been developing their sense of intercultural awareness. It is our hope that by learning about the cultures of others that they gain a deeper understanding about their own as well as how it is interwoven with the larger global environment. While it is difficult to know what the future will bring, our children will be well prepared as they play key roles in shaping a cleaner, safer, and more inclusive world!