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PROVIDING AN IDEAL ENVIRONMENT FOR OUR CHILDREN: A PERSONAL VIEW.

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Recently I had the opportunity to visit Tarumbal Kindergarten/Preschool in Rockhampton. It is a kindergarten that enrolls young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. A few of the children that attend the centre are related and this makes it feel like a big family. I observed and interacted with the children once a week for four weeks. In that short time the children grew to like me and accept me into their group. I felt that I was treated as a part of their extended family.

This article considers how we as educators can provide an ideal environment for our children to work in and to learn. Every teacher should try to promote an ideal environment for their children to grow in. The children should hold no inhibitions about their abilities to learn. To provide this environment, we as teachers can set ourselves goals to work by.

A recent writer in *Childhood Education* suggests that there are four important goals that we should work by. These are:

1. Nurture each child's construction of a knowledgeable, confident self-concept and group identity.

To do this we can create a classroom environment that involves the cultures of all the children we teach. Have class discussions about different cultures and use the resources that are available to you. Bring in parents, grand-fathers/mothers etc. as guest speakers from different cultures. By doing this, you make your children proud of their culture and other children's cultures.

2. Promote each child's comfortable, empathic interaction with people from diverse backgrounds.

Each week, study one of the cultures in your group of children. Have the group work and focus on cooperation. Use an activity such as *My Special Mate* and group children with a partner from a different race. By doing this, the children can learn from each other about the cultures of other children.

3. Foster each child's critical thinking about bias.

Using group discussion the children can think about problems of bias (stereotyping, teasing, name calling and discrimination) and whether they are fair or unfair. The teacher can then call a whole class discussion and talk to the whole group about what their decision was. If the children think that bias is fair, then the teacher takes the steps of directing them to why it should not be

fair. We have to remember to find out what their reasons are for an answer they give. Do not treat their first answer as always wrong, they may have a perfectly good answer to back them up.

4. Cultivate each child's ability to stand up for her/himself and for others in the face of bias.

This can involve group discussion, class discussion or just individual thought on how we could overcome the problems of bias. We could use case studies made up by the teachers and present one to each group to solve. This could be a great learning experience for the children.

By setting these goals, we can provide a friendly environment for our children to grow in. By providing an environment such as this the children will be able to work at their optimal level, without worrying about the shame of failure.

We have to remember that every child is different and that we have to cater to the needs of each child, and not the children catering to the needs of the school system I would like to end with a poem written by my sister, Naomi Commandeur.

TO TEACH A CHILD.

My greatest love is to teach a child
Their thoughts are pure, clean and mild.

I know I'll need to take away
The stinging slurs, they'll hear someday.

For in this world where racism grows
Diminished esteem, and where depression
shows.

This child will need a place that's warm
Where knowledge thrives so he'll perform.

Away from ignorance and pride
Where he will never need to hide.

He will be a shining light
And I'll be there to keep it bright.

For to a child the world's brand new
It brings wisdom and love so true.

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