

# **FOSTERING 1MALAYSIA CONCEPT IN MALAYSIAN PRESCHOOLS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Malaysia is a multi-racial, multi-religious and multi-cultural country. A genuinely pluralist society cannot be achieved without the social integration of ethnic communities within a common whole. In order to inculcate the sense of belonging, the spirit and values of togetherness regardless of race and religion, the education system which begins from the pre-school education lays the foundations for social integration in Malaysian society. The Malaysian Prime Minister launched the 1Malaysia concept as a guiding principle to build a united and progressive nation in 2008. This paper looks into ways to foster the 1Malaysia concept amongst preschoolers. It presents the current scenario of preschool education, discusses the issues and challenges faced in achieving the 1Malaysia concept and set forth the researchers' perceptions as teacher educators in fostering the 1Malaysia concept in Malaysian preschools.

**Keywords:** multiracial, pluralist, integration, fostering, perceptions, preschoolers.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Malaysia is a multi-racial country home to different ethnic groups such as Malay, Chinese, Indian and Indigenous People. Each ethnic group has its own religion, language and culture. Although the people of various races celebrate different festivals together, the celebrations sometimes seem to go on without embracing the values of total unity; there is separatism - where the different ethnic groups continue to live in the same society but with each group effectively operating within their own separate compartment. The sense of ethnic identity amongst many members of these ethnic groups is still very strong, and there is little indication that this will simply dissolve in the face of festive celebrations. Certain features of ethnic identity, most notably perhaps skin colour, which individuals cannot change even if they so wish, continue to distinguish them from other members of the society.

It is essential to acknowledge the reality of the multi-racial context in which we now live, to recognise the positive benefits and opportunities which are offered to all of us, and to seek to build together a society which both values the diversity within it, whilst united by the cohesive force of the common aims, attributes and values which we all share. Based on the above phenomenon, the Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Mohd. Najib Razak launched the 1 Malaysia concept on 16<sup>th</sup> September 2008. This concept would assert a great impact on the future

of the Malaysian society landscape particularly within the education system. Preschool is the starting point of a child's formal education. Since children at this age are beginning to figure out racial identity (Cross, 1991; Deman-Sparks 1993; Quintana 1994), it is without a doubt that the 1 Malaysia concept should begin at preschool level.

In this paper we look into ways to foster the 1Malaysia concept amongst preschoolers and also to discuss the stumbling blocks or challenges faced in achieving the concept. This article comprises six sections: (i) what is the 1 Malaysia concept? (ii) the current scenario of preschool education; (iii) cognitive development theory and the 1 Malaysia concept; (iv) issues and challenges and (v) perspectives of the researchers as teacher educators and a final conclusion.

### **What Is The 1 Malaysia Concept?**

The 1Malaysia concept is a guiding principle to build a united and progressive nation. It moulds into a form which retains the fundamental principles of the original but within broader pluralist conspectus diversity within unity. During the launching of the 1 Malaysia concept in 2008, the Prime Minister Datuk Seri Mohd. Najib Razak said this:

Under the concept of 1 Malaysia, being tolerant is just the beginning; the next paradigm is to move from tolerance to total acceptance. In other words, when we accept the differences in our society we accept diversity as something unique, something that provides us with a very colourful tapestry in our society, something that actually can give us strength and not otherwise.

The identity of our society represents an amalgam of all the various forces which have been and indeed are still at work within it and the many influences which have impinged upon it from outside. A genuinely pluralist society cannot be achieved without the social integration of ethnic communities within a common whole.

In order to inculcate the sense of belonging, as well as the spirit and values of togetherness regardless of race and religion, the education system plays a very important role. Hence, we strongly believe that the education system which begins from the preschool education should help to lay the foundations for social integration in Malaysian society.

### **The Current Scenario Of Preschool Education**

Preschool education in Malaysia is positioned as the preparatory stage for primary education. With the Education Act 1996, preschool education was made a part of the national education system (KPM, 2006). In this section we explain briefly the current scenario of preschool education in Malaysia.

There are three different categories of institutions that provide early child care and preschool education. The facilities of the preschools are managed centrally by different administrative organizations (Kamogawa, 2007). The first category is government related organizations. The preschools are administered by different ministries such as the Ministry of Education, the Department of National Unity, the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development, Community Development Division, the Ministry of Rural Development or Bahagian Kemajuan Masyarakat (KEMAS), the Department of Islamic Religion or Jabatan Agama Islam in each state. In the second category, the preschools are administered by non-governmental organizations such as the Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement or Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM) whereas in the last category the private sector operates child-care services and preschool education.

Preschools under the Ministry of Education enroll children who are four to six years old. This type of preschool does not charge tuition fees and include free lunch or mid-morning snack. The admission is based on parental income. Pupils who are unable to attend a preschool under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education would go to other preschools such as KEMAS, Perpaduan ABIM or other private kindergartens determined by their location or proximity and socioeconomic status.

Even though these preschools are not limited to any particular race, the enrolment is determined by the location, whereby the area of domicile will naturally segregate the ethnic population. In addition, it is also a fact that the sociocultural background manifest in these preschools is one based on a particular culture, which makes it difficult for people of other cultures to send their children to these childcare centers or preschools. Therefore the current trend in demography is mostly homogeneity, which has serious implications for national integration thus, the 1 Malaysia concept (Anna Christina Abdullah, 2009). Anna Christina Abdullah (2009) continued,

There might be concerns regarding the balanced representation of all cultures at all levels of responsibility or category of service. In other countries, there might also be issues with such cultural representation, for example if certain categories of early childhood services are dominated by a specific cultural group. Such a situation is evident in Malaysia where there tend to be a preponderance of the majority group in government or public early childhood services. Hence there is relatively invisibility of the other minority group in the role of early childhood teachers or caregivers in these centers (p 169).

Apart from that, from the academic and curriculum point, preschool or early childhood education came under the peruse of the Ministry of Education, and under the Education Act 1996 which enforced a standardized syllabus for all preschools in Malaysia. Currently, under the latest

preschool National Standard-based Preschool Curriculum (KSPK) 2010, the focus is 4M: reading, writing, early numeracy and reasoning. Culture is not one of the main focus in the curriculum even though there is a brief section under the Humanity Strand (7.1 – 7.7) which covers clothing, food, festivals and traditions. However, it is not enough to highlight the practical aspects of the culture mentioned in the syllabus, and all these will lead to mono-culturalism in a plural society like Malaysia.

### **Cognitive Development Theory and 1 Malaysia Concept**

How do children think about ethnicity and race at different stages? Piaget's (1966) Cognitive Development Theory is used as the framework in this section in order to understand the children's observation and experiences, and how to facilitate preschool children to foster the 1 Malaysia concept in them.

Piaget proposed four stages of children development according to age; sensory-motor (birth-2years), pre-operational (2-7years), concrete operational (7-11 years), formal operational (11 years and above). The preschool children belong to the pre-operational stage. During this stage, children's thought processes are developing, although in the adult sense they are still considered to be far from logical thought. Children at this stage are only able to consider things from their own point of view, imagine that everyone shares this view, and often assumes that everyone and everything is like them. It is also a stage where a person has the belief that everything that exists has some kind of consciousness.

At this stage of development, children begin to respect and insist on obedience of rules at all times, and they are not able to take anything such as motives into account. They also indicate most interest in physical characteristics of themselves and others. Their second interest is cultural characteristics that are observable like language and dress. Some practical examples for this stage are quoted from Derman-Sparks' (1989) research:

- S. A three-year-old Japanese American carpoled with a white mother. He said, Your nose is different because it goes up.
- A. A four-year-old white girl asked, Why I am white, mommy?  
(she had recently started going to an integrated preschool)
- J. A three-year-old white upon seeing an interracial couple, said:  
It's funny that the mommy and daddy are different. They should be the same.

In the Malaysian context, preschoolers tend to ask questions like:

B: Mommy, why do some of my friends in school use their hands to eat?

D: Teacher, teacher, he said the words Chinese teacher (Cikgu Cina) (in a monoculture Malay preschool, a Chinese teacher is someone who is new and different from whom they meet and see every day)

Research has shown that young children are excellent observers (Cross, 1991; Derman-Sparks, 1993; Quintana, 1994); however, their explanations make sense from their point of view but may not be accurate from an adult's perceptions. Children who belong to this age-group begin to figure out racial identity, they also learn to distinguish the meaning of colors applied to the objects and the social meaning of colors when applied to race. It is therefore difficult for them to understand that people who look and act differently are part of the same group.

Therefore, adults must be clear about the racial identity, the multicultural identity as well as the 1Malaysia concept, so that the children can cultivate a sense of their personal strength to participate in this 1Malaysia concept.

In order to lay the building blocks towards achieving the 1Malaysia concept, the foundations have to be laid during the preschool years. It is at this stage that the awareness of racial identity develops, it is at this stage that they learn respect. It is also at this stage that they learn to distinguish the meaning of colors applied to objects and the social meaning of colors when applied to race.

Therefore, in order to foster the 1Malaysia concept at the preschool level, we need to relook into issues and challenges like a balanced curriculum, a teacher who can explain cultural diversity well, and parents whose model attitudes and behaviors are correctly observed by their children and, lastly but most pertinent, the role of a responsible mass media to channel correct perceptions of our pluralistic societies.

## **Issues and Challenges**

There are issues and challenges to the provisions advocated for fostering the 1Malaysia concept in preschool education. In this section, we discuss four provisions which include: curriculum orientation, preschool education staff, parents' values and perceptions, and roles and influences of mass media.

### **Curriculum Orientation**

Without proper curriculum support for the preschoolers, it is most difficult to infuse the 1Malaysia concept amongst preschoolers. In fact, the 1Malaysia concept should be infused throughout the

curriculum, by advocating multicultural education through proper pedagogy and curriculum resources.

### Multicultural Education

As mentioned in The United State's National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (1987), multicultural education can be defined as

...a perspective that recognizes (i) the social, political, and economic realities that individuals experience in culturally diverse and complex human encounters and (ii) the importance of culture, race, sex and gender, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, and exceptionalities in the education process. (p.57)

Educators who have been involved in promoting multicultural education in schools (Banks, Banks and McGee, 1993; Boise, 1993; Clark & Gorski, 2002; Cushner, McClelland & Stafford, 2000; Duhon-Boudreaux, 1998; Duhon, Mundy, Leder, LeBert & Ameny-Dixon, 2002; Gollnick & Chinn, 2002, Johnson & Johnson, 2002; Levy, 1997; Larson & Ovando, 2001; Quiseberry, McIntyre, Duhon, 2002; Shulman & Mesa-Bains, 1993; Silverman, Welty & Lyon, 1994) have identified some long-term benefits of multicultural education. Some of the long-term benefits are:

- i. it promotes cognitive and moral growth among people through having a variety of mental resources to complete the same tasks,
- ii. increases the creativity of problem-solving skills through having different perspectives to the same problems,
- iii. increases positive relationship through achieving the common goals, while at the same time respecting, appreciating and being committed to equality among the intellectuals,
- iv. decreases stereotyping and prejudice as diverse individuals have interactions and contacts among themselves, and
- v. fosters a broader and more sophisticated view of the world, and renews the vitality of society.

In Malaysia, Anna Christina Abdullah's (2009) research pointed out that the impact of the government's effort in implementing the national service, as well as the ethnic relation course in Malaysian universities is still questionable. She further proposed multicultural education to be made an important component in early childhood education. She agreed with the idea that cultural understanding is one of the seven foundation learning areas as proposed by the Queensland School Curriculum Council (QSCC). QSCC has considered the diversity and an inclusive curriculum are important for its learners, where developing the awareness and appreciation of one's own culture as well as the cultures of others has become the focus of QSCC.

Another of the examples given is the New South Wales' curriculum framework for Children's Services. This curriculum framework comprises four major obligations, and 'honoring diversity' is one of the four obligations. As propounded by Stonehouse (2002),

...honoring begins with respect which later moves to respect in action and practice (p.27).

Therefore in the daily planning of the early childhood or preschool education, it is crucial to foster and develop individual children's appreciation for the diversity that exists in the Malaysian society. However, there are some issues and challenges as listed below:

- i. Resources used in the classroom, for example, books, songs, posters do not represent the realistic and social practices of the children,
- ii. Opportunities are not provided for the children to use a variety of communication languages,
- iii. Programs are not provided to extend the children's knowledge of cultures other than their own,
- iv. Programs are stereotyped and value differences are not clearly identified, and
- v. Children are not taught how to advocate for justice and equity.

In order to achieve the objective of advocating multicultural education, the implementation stage, the pedagogy, as well as the resources for preschool education needs to be evaluated and reviewed.

#### The Pedagogy and Resources of Curriculum

Wiles and Brondi's studies (2002) found that curriculum reform for multicultural education needs the development and inquiry of new knowledge and understanding of the historical contributions of different ethnic groups to the current body of knowledge in the content areas as well as the academic areas.

The 1 Malaysia concept seeks to promote respect and appreciation for the various cultures by strengthening cultural consciousness and intercultural dependence. The recommendation of the new National Standard-based Preschool Curriculum 2010 (Kurikulum Standard Prasekolah Kebangsaan or KSPK 2010) is good; however, the implementation stage, the pedagogy and the resources still need to be evaluated and reviewed.

It is important to use appropriate pedagogy to expose children in homogeneous classes to different racial and cultural groups. One of the pedagogic strategies is to ensure that the environment contains materials representing different races and cultures. For example, while teaching about clothing (KSPK 2010: KM 7.1) books, dolls, pictures, posters, puzzles, learning

centers and other ICT materials should portray clothing of people of all races and cultures in very positive ways.

Focus curriculum materials about cultures on similarities among Malaysians rather than on differences. Focusing on exotic aspects of a culture only develops stereotypes but focusing on shared similarities builds understanding. This is because children can identify with shared experiences engaged in by people of other cultures, for example, all people need shelter, food, clothes and love (Whaley and Swadner, 1990).

Another pedagogic strategy is to integrate positive aspects of children's cultures into their everyday life, and to emphasize that culture is pervasive to all Malaysians. For instance, focusing on exotic aspects of a culture like telling or sharing about different types of clothes in the Malaysian's society (KSPK 2010: KM 7.1.1 *Bercerita tentang pakaian masyarakat Malaysia di persekitaran*) is a very touristic approach, as mentioned by Derman-Sparks (1993).

In addition, provide preschoolers with many choices of learning activities and many avenues for expressing what they know and are learning. Children will develop concepts about other races as they interact with their neighbourhoods. These experiences are the most valuable for helping them develop understanding and tolerance.

Hence, children would develop ways of perceiving, understanding and respecting cultural diversity among nations. In fact all Malaysians should develop the core human values since preschool that allow for the development of acceptance and appreciation for cultural diversity, and respect for human dignity among all cultural groups.

In short, rather than having the one way of thinking and the one way of life that one cultural group identifies with while being naive concerning the ways of life of the other cultural groups, preschoolers should be encouraged to interact among various groups of people, thus strengthening intercultural competencies as well as increased awareness of global dynamics.

### **Staff of Preschool Education**

Teachers play an important role in the process of students' learning. Directly or indirectly, preschool staffs have an impact on the children's developing attitudes towards cultural diversity.

According to Holmes (1995), children at the ages of 3 to 6 years old are at the level of integration of affective and perceptual understanding of ethnicity. Children's verbal descriptions of race and ethnicity are dominated by reference to external and physical manifestations.

In other words, children rely on phenotypic characteristics to describe racial groups. It is therefore important for children to receive the message that race is not a taboo topic. Their responses and comments about race should be responded to in an open manner. It is important to open lines of communication for children to process their racial cognition in order to stimulate development to more advanced conceptions of race and ethnicity. Staff without the necessary skills and knowledge has difficulty in facing such challenges.

In addition, most of the staff of preschool education might use inappropriate approaches such as the tourist approach (Derman-Sparks, 1993) as mentioned earlier when teaching culture about other races. Instead of studying and understanding the true culture and true picture of everyday life of the people of different ethnic groups, the tourist approach just tours and visits the culture, while emphasizing traditional costumes, foods and celebrations which do not bring much positive impact to the children.

Verma (2003) suggested that the elements of addressing the diversity of cultures in the content as well as in delivery should be included in the education courses for early childhood or preschool staff.

In the Malaysian context, not all of the preschool staff acquired any training or attended any courses in addressing issues on diversity of cultures. Perhaps it is just taken for granted that they are capable of addressing the issues on their own.

In order to prepare the staff to understand the real concept of 1 Malaysia, as well as to examine their existing values, perceptions and beliefs about the 1 Malaysia concept, and the impact on their practice towards the achievement of the 1 Malaysia concept, it is good practice to place the staff in the classrooms that are exposed to cultures that are different from theirs. A conscious effort must be made by the relevant parties in employing preschool staff from multi-cultural backgrounds so that preschoolers from young would be exposed to the many faces of Malaysia as a multiracial, multicultural and multi-lingua 1 nation. The preschool teacher should be able to provide challenges as well as to empower, support and prepare the children to live with and value our multiculturalism and diversity. The diversity of race, religion and culture tends to enrich various experiences for the children and institution as a whole.

In addition, all preschool staff need to undergo and receive appropriate training as suggested by Verman (2003) to fully appreciate the 1 Malaysia concept and to be able to address issues on cultural diversity among preschoolers.

## **Parents' Values and Beliefs**

Parents play a very important role in the development of their children's attitude towards others; they can either positively or negatively contribute to the development of 1 Malaysia concept in their children.

Parents sometimes are either consciously or unconsciously contributing to their children's bias and prejudice towards people of other cultures. For instance, they might tell their children what to do in specific situations like don't play with XX because s/he is different from us.

Tatum (1997) noted that some parents, afraid of saying something wrong, normally react by silencing their preschool child instead of responding to their questions about race. Children who have been silenced often enough learn not to talk about race publicly. Their questions don't go away; they just go unasked (p.37).

Van Ausdale and Feagin's research (2001) showed that young children are developmentally incapable of understanding race and cannot engage in racist behavior. According to their experience, American children's active construction of racial and ethnic meanings and attitudes occurs early and are very similar to the meanings and attitudes held by adult Americans. This is because children are exposed to racial and ethnic ideas through their immersion in and observation of the large social world.

According to Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001), the immersion affects children of European-American heritage as well as children of color. Therefore all children in this society learn at early age that whiteness is privileged and darkness is not, thus affecting the way they view people of color as adults.

Van Ausdale and Feagin (2001) also pointed out that friendships between children affect how they view people different from themselves. Their choices of affiliation based on racial or ethnic origins as they grow up are influenced by what they have assimilated in their earliest years.

As mentioned before, parents' daily model attitudes and behavior, verbal and non-verbal, have a profound impact on their children's development. As racial identity is based upon a concept of group, the easiest way for children to learn and understand 'group' is through the concept of family since that is an entity they all experience.

In short, parents should be supportive of the 1 Malaysia concept by acknowledging their observations on racial and cultural identity, helping to sort out incorrect information and generalizations and give corrective feedback about unfair and untrue perceptions of people or expressions of prejudice.

## **Roles And Influence Of Mass Media**

Another challenge to preschool education is the continuity and consistency of influence that children receive from the mass media which includes the newspapers, magazines, radio, television, films and internet. Whether educators like it or not, preschool pupils are affected by what the various media transmit, they are educated through what they see, read, and hear through the media.

Media has an impact on children's feelings about race, gender, sexual orientation, family, society and the groups it represents, violence, death, and countless other factors. Children learn about good and evil, right and wrong, life and death, villainy and heroism. Many television programs and Hollywood films create unsettled feelings among ethnic groups when they portray groups of people with certain generalizations or stereotypes.

For example, *The Lion King* has sparked questions regarding moral dilemmas such as the issue of volition. Why do the wildebeests want to kill Mufassa? Why does Scar want to kill his own brother? *The Lion King* is also considered as racist due to the portrayal of villains and hyenas as possessing a nearly ebonic language. The language spoken by these characters is of negative value because these characters are basically saying that black is bad.

A survey was conducted by Motivational Educational Entertainment (MEE, 1998) involving 1,200 children of four races – African-American, Asian, Latino and White in the United States of America -- to explore the views of each race in equal depth. The result showed that children of all ages and races recognize the power of the media in their lives. It showed that children get messages about their race by seeing how and how often its members get portrayed in the media. The African-American children strongly feel that entertainment media represent their race more fairly than the news media (47% to 25%) while Asian children feel the opposite, 36% to 28% favoring the news media; and both White and Latino children are split between the two.

The above survey also showed that nearly half of African-American children believe Latinos are portrayed negatively (49%), followed by Latino (39%), Asian (35%) and White (34%) children. One of the boys in the focus group added,

If it is a Black person on a White show, sometimes they show people being scared of them. (p.5)

MEE survey (1998) showed that although children think that all races are shown doing both good and bad things on the news, they agree that the news media tends to portray African-American and Latino people more negatively than White and Asian people.

While in the Malaysian context, as young children are especially attracted to television programs, these should reflect the composition of Malaysia's population and not be dominated by a certain ethnic group only. The people of different cultures become invisible if they are not featured in these programs.

There are areas where parents and preschool staff could be involved in combating stereotypes and stereotyping by the media. For example, parents and preschool staff should know what their children or pupils know about multicultural learning and teach them on that basis. Preschool staff can incorporate current events portrayed in the media in the curriculum. They should also continue to develop their media literacy and try to better understand the multicultural dimensions of the media. In short, the media are not merely a window on reality, they also construct versions of life that need to be understood and questioned especially in a multiracial country like Malaysia.

### **The Perspectives Of Teacher Educators**

Learning becomes meaningless in our multi-cultural country if the nation does not understand the true meaning and significance of the values and beliefs underlying each ethnic group and culture. Education which is only centered on cultural artifacts such as celebrations, food, and clothing using the tourist approach as mentioned by Derman-Sparks (1993) must be minimized. Efforts have to be made to relook the preschool curriculum.

Adults can change preschool children's unexamined absorption of racism. The ideology that children are color-blind or the assumptions that if adults do not talk about race, children will grow up to be non-prejudiced adults is wrong. Teachers and parents must examine their complicity in racism, take seriously actions and words from young children that seem to be racist, expose them to the multiracial and multicultural or 1 Malaysia concept, and promote stories of social harmony.

Young children learn to discriminate differences and classify things and feelings. It is difficult to clearly separate the influence of ethnocentric attitudes heard or seen by young children in their contact with parents, relatives, neighbors, other children, books or movies owing to their lack of egocentric thinking. Inaccurate stereotypic images and information about racial or cultural groups are harmful to young children, as well as to the unity of Malaysians. Materials used for children like CDs, books, propaganda posters and pamphlets should have non-stereotypic images and well-represented with a diversity of cultures. The effort to eliminate racism and prejudice should be taken by making young children more aware of and accepting the cultural diversity in Malaysia.

As mentioned by Doyle and Aboud (1995),

Young children manifest a cognitive style that leads to generalizations based on specific instances. Preschool children are in the process of mapping their conceptions of race, ethnicity and culture onto their social and personal worlds (p.32).

### Pedagogy and Curriculum

Lessons limited to teaching children about a single aspect of another culture are inappropriate. Instead, helping children develop understanding and tolerance through active participation is the more valuable approach. In other words, strategies like field trips and “hand ons” would be better approaches rather than telling, sharing and explaining certain cultures.

The current curriculum for trainees in the teachers training institutes should emphasize on strategies for helping children learn about and respect racial, cultural and physical differences, and promote anti-discrimination. This is because children learn how to appreciate others from observing and participating in interactions with the teachers. In addition, expose the trainees to the fact that it is inappropriate to teach children about a single aspect of another culture. Instead, they should focus curriculum material concerning cultural similarities among all races in Malaysia rather than on differences.

Preschool staff and parents should help children develop positive attitudes about other races. Modeling acceptance and appreciation of all races is an important factor in fostering the 1 Malaysia concept in our preschools. Help children recognize there are differences among Malaysians, but these differences do not make them superior or inferior to others, as each individual has a unique personality.

Outside school, children learn through the media which has an impact on children’s feelings about race, gender, sexual orientation, family, society and the groups it represents. Mass media sometimes highlight intergroup misunderstandings through repeated presentation of derogatory stereotypes or overemphasize demeaning themes about select groups. We do not have complete control of when, where and what children learn through the varieties of media. Therefore, appropriate action such as deciding how to use “gatekeepers” on the media with regards to inappropriate sites for students should be taken, as well as evaluating and analyzing whether information on a site is authentic or is used for promoting polarization and fostering bigotry.

Preschool programs that pursue the 1 Malaysia concept will contribute substantially to the development of a truly united Malaysian nation. Therefore they should be accepted and implemented. When Malaysians move from the paradigm of being tolerant to one of total acceptance, there is a final apex which is to celebrate our diversity, realising the 1 Malaysian concept and being a truly united Malaysia.

## CONCLUSION

In dealing with racial and cultural understanding, mutual respect as well as social harmony, denial and avoidance posturing appears to be the worst technique. Children will naturally grow up to be non-racist adults only when they live in a non-racist society. The education system should provide children with anti-racist development. The fostering of accurate knowledge and appreciation of other racial groups and culture is important.

Having not yet fully formed clear concepts of themselves or others, preschoolers are still in the process of learning to determine what is authentic and what is not. When children do not have opportunities for feedback about their ideas through direct interaction with people different from themselves, caricatured images can form the basis of their thinking.

As mentioned earlier, research has shown that children are aware at a very early age, of physical and cultural differences among people. They learn the prevailing social attitudes toward these differences. Children are color-blind is analogous to the ostrich's head-in-the-sand strategy. Constructing a positive and knowledgeable cultural identity among Malaysian children is a major development task in our multiracial country.

All youngsters need to be provided with the necessary knowledge and the ability for reasoned and rational thought and judgement. Schools should be capable of leading the change by creating an overall unity of purpose which will encompass the 1 Malaysia concept.

Much of what we have recommended is focused on the need for attitude change. We sincerely hope that this contribution will lead to a greater understanding of the issues involved when considering the 1 Malaysia concept in preschool education appropriate for today's multi-racial society. For the sake of our beloved country and our future generations, the 1Malaysia concept should be incorporated as a kingpin component in early childhood education.

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