Chapter 4: Creating Optimum Learning Environments for the Child

# Case Study

Martha is 3 years of age and has just joined the local playgroup. She has been very excited about going to the playgroup and has spent much time with her mother and father reading books, learning her colours and days of the week and can count to 100. Her vocabulary is, for her age, quite extensive and her parents have given a great deal of time and effort to develop her listening skills and extend her vocabulary. For all intents and purposes she is a happy, well-adjusted and confident little girl. Her parents, however, have a number of concerns relating specifically to the culture they view within the playgroup. Martha’s parents were both made redundant from their workplace over a year ago and, following problems with being able to find the rent, they were evicted from their home where they had lived for over five years and where Martha had been born. Following their eviction they were rehoused by the local council in an area that has extremely high levels of socio-economic deprivation and crime. Most of the children in Martha’s playgroup are known to social services. The behaviours of the other children prove very challenging to the staff at the playgroup and they frequently complain that they receive little support from parents and all-too-often can find themselves at the brunt of aggression from a number of parents.

## Activity

Consider how adults working with Martha in the playgroup can create an environment that will stimulate her and support her in maintaining the very good level of progress she has already achieved from the input by her parents? How, for example, can they work to extend and develop her vocabulary? What activities might they introduce that would motivate Martha to learn and internalise new language concepts, new words and new ways of asking for support from adults?

How can adults working with Martha in the playgroup create opportunities for her to develop her language skills and abilities through collaboration with her peers, most of whom have quite limited learning experiences and delayed language development?