



Playing to prevent racism ... Pauline Hooler from Muurrbay Aboriginal Language Cooperative sharing Gumbaynggir stories with children from Giigay Gamambi and Valla Preschools.

Photo: TREVOR VEALE 06060306B

# Nipping racism in the bud

By UTE SCHULENBERG

IT WAS only the second time they'd met, but Phillipa Maher said her kids charged to the gate to greet the Giigay Gamambi preschoolers when they arrived on Thursday.

"They were keen to say hello and see if they recognised anyone," the Valla Preschool director said.

The visit is part of a new project, Sharing Stories, which aims to nip racism in the bud.

At fortnightly sessions the children from the two preschools meet, play and listen to Gumbaynggir elders telling stories while artist Alex Blair

illustrates them.

"The art is definitely bringing them in and making them talk about the stories," Ms Maher said.

Giigay director Maureen McCarthy said it was vital for children to be exposed to racial differences early.

"Kids discriminate very early," Ms McCarthy said.

"It is so good for the kids to hear the stories. Not many of them know this is Gumbaynggir land and for the Aboriginal kids, they are hearing stories they might not hear at home."

Storyteller Gary Williams, from the Muurrbay Aboriginal Language Centre, said projects like this were tiny steps 'but

it's all leading somewhere'.

The project is the brainchild of Valla parent Liz Keen.

She noticed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children often had little contact with each other before primary school.

"I had also come across research showing a lot of kids form racist opinions before they even get to school," Ms Keen said.

"Hopefully this project can help to normalise the relationships."

After the four children's sessions are completed, there will be sessions for all Nambucca Shire preschool teachers to introduce them to Gumbaynggir language and culture.