



IDRA Research for Quality Early Education

As we begin yet another year of working to assure equal educational opportunities for every child, it is the “Research” in our name that we are purposefully and with profound intent spotlighting in the *IDRA Newsletter*. And we are doing so by increasing visibility and awareness of IDRA’s research and the impact it has had for children. Each newsletter this year will feature our research contributions to particular topic. This month, the spotlight is on IDRA’s research for quality early education and its influence on the development of effective models and curricula for the youngest English learners.

In Spanish, *amanecer* means “the beginning of a new day.” In 1975, IDRA began a new day in public education by developing the AMANECER curriculum – one of the first bilingual early childhood curricula in the country. AMANECER was based on the then groundbreaking premise that children and families whose first language is not English must have access to quality education at the earliest levels of school. It also was based on research by IDRA and others that bilingual education is the best way to teach English while also teaching other subjects, making bilingual education in early childhood classrooms a key focus of IDRA’s work throughout the years.

IDRA’s U.S. Department of Education-funded Reading Early for Academic Development research a decade ago showed dramatic school readiness results among participating children and informed the development of a [“Classroom of Excellence” model](#) for early childhood classrooms of excellence. IDRA’s early childhood education research provides further grounding for the [Annual IDRA La Semana del Niño Early Childhood Educators Institute](#), the nation’s only gathering place for teachers and parents concerned with early childhood education of English learners. (Next institute April 24, 2014.)

IDRA research also informed [Semillitas de Aprendizaje™](#) – a unique bilingual (Spanish/English) supplemental curriculum that is helping teachers foster literacy, numeracy and social-emotional development, while valuing and capitalizing on children’s home language and culture (see stories: [Building Interest in STEM through Language Development and Storytelling and The Philosophy Behind Semillitas de Aprendizaje™](#)).

Samples from IDRA’s Early Childhood Education Research and Development Work

ACYF Preschool Bilingual Resource Center. IDRA successfully implemented an ACYF resource center for federal Region VI from 1978 to 1982 and for Regions IV, and VI from October 1981 to May 1983. IDRA’s leadership in early childhood education research, its recognized expertise in the field of bilingual and multicultural education, and its extensive experience in the development and implementation of technical assistance strategies, coalesced into a program to deliver training and technical assistance to Head Start early childhood programs initiating development and/or implementation of bilingual and multicultural instruction.

Adelante: A Support Services Program for LEP (EL) Preschool Children. IDRA’s project, Adelante: A Support Services Program for LEP (EL) Preschool Children, was funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s former Office for Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs (OBEMLA) – now the

Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA). In this early childhood development program, IDRA worked with teachers and paraprofessionals to shift their focus from childcare to early instruction in the classroom, and in so doing, changed their own perceptions of their students, parents, and themselves from limited to limitless.

Multi-Age Early Childhood Education for Limited-English-Proficient Students Research Study.

Through the U.S. Department of Education-funded Multi-Age Early Childhood Education for Limited-English-Proficient Students research study, IDRA led teachers to initiate research on the effects of multi-age grouping on LEP (or English language learner) students' learning and development and to develop a model for such programs based on their research. IDRA guided teachers as active practitioners/action researchers. Study findings showed that the multi-age approach promoted teacher and school cooperation, teacher experimentation and parent participation, as well as making students feel more at ease in the classroom. While there were a number of studies on multi-age classrooms in primary schools, IDRA's research study was one of the few in the country that focused on the multi-age classroom with LEP students.

AMANECER. IDRA's AMANECER in the late 1970s led the trend of viewing readiness as external to the child and tied to teacher beliefs. IDRA created an innovative, child-centered curriculum for early childhood bilingual education that incorporated the language of people, their culture, their values, and their contributions into their children's learning. A Multicultural Action Network for Early Childhood Education Resources (AMANECER) was a process approach to learning and development which personalized instruction for children based on their language preference, their understanding of ideas, and their level of skills development. The model was compatible with Child Development Associate philosophies and enabled teachers to acquire skills which facilitated the personalization and individualization of instruction.

Excellent Bilingual Early Childhood Programs – A Parent Guide, by Aurelio M. Montemayor, M.Ed. This report describes the characteristics of good preschools and discusses what parents can do, based on interviews and group work sessions where parents shared with each other their vision and dreams for their children. As with most parents IDRA has worked with, these parents reported they wanted their children to get a good education; to have many choices of professions; and to not lose their language, culture, values and faith of the family. All of these parents also wanted their children to be fully bilingual as adults. They were saddened to think that, without support, their children could lose their home language and culture in their journey to become successful and fulfilled adults. All families need the support of excellent early childhood programs. For families who speak a language other than English, it is critical that they have access to excellent bilingual, multicultural preschool programs. The guide provides a checklist for parents to use with early childhood program directors and teachers to ensure their children are receiving a quality bilingual early childhood education.

The Challenge for Site-Based Decision Making Councils – Making Quality Preschool Education Accessible to Language Minority Students, by Abelardo Villarreal (*IDRA Newsletter*, June 1993). This

article provides school-based decision-making councils in Texas public schools with information about creating successful preschool programs for English learners. It is intended to help the councils make decisions as to how they can: (1) ensure that English learners have access equal to that of non-EL children to a high quality preschool program, (2) create a vision of a high quality preschool program for ELs, and (3) determine the critical steps needed for making that vision a reality. Components necessary for an effective preschool program for EL students are listed, and criteria for program development and improvement are presented, addressing: (1) policy; (2) administrative structure; (3) program goals; (4) assessment procedures; (5) curriculum; (6) learning facilitation formats; (7) cultural component; (8) language development; (9) site arrangement; (10) instructional ratios; (11) staffing, staff qualifications, and credentials; (12) family involvement; (13) staff development and (14) program evaluation.