The Hispanic population in the United States is very young. One in five zero to 5-year-olds are Hispanic. Hispanics also are the youngest ethnic group, and children under five represent about 11 percent of the total Hispanic population (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000).

IDRA recognized these projections 11 years ago when the first Annual IDRA La Semana del Niño Early Childhood Educators Institute was begun to celebrate the International Week of the Young Child. It is a professional development experience that enhances early childhood educators’ professional skills and gives them opportunities to network with colleagues and other experts and to learn from each other. Thousands of teachers, administrators and parents have been a part of this experience.

IDRA’s mission “to create schools that work for all children” is always the focus of the institute to ensure that all children receive quality and equitable education throughout Texas and the United States. The institute focuses on ensuring that children who speak a language other than English benefit from quality instructional programs that capitalize on students’ language and culture.

In fact, this institute is the only early childhood conference that focuses on English language learners.

**Pedagogy and Curriculum**

In 2000, White children had higher assessment scores in reading than Black children and Hispanic children. Access to high quality preschool is a key factor in achievement of young children. IDRA’s early childhood institute has addressed these issues from the start and will continue doing so until these gaps narrow.

A major instructional concern in early childhood literacy programs is the varied language backgrounds of the children who come to daycare centers, preschools, kindergartens, and first, second, and third grades (Mandel Morrow, 2001).

The IDRA conference dedicates a day to each of the following concentrations: curriculum and pedagogy, features of successful early childhood programs, and parent and community engagement.

*La Semana del Niño – continued on Page 2*
The IDRA institute focuses on ensuring that children who speak a language other than English benefit from quality instructional programs that capitalize on students’ language and culture.

Community and Parent Engagement

As parents’ education attainment increases, so does the early childhood enrollment rate of their children. However, in 2001, fewer Hispanics age 25 and older had completed high school than their Black and White counterparts – 57 percent of Hispanics, had completed high school, compared to 89 percent of Whites and 81 percent of other non-Hispanics (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002).

On the third and final day of the IDRA institute, educators receive information on the importance of parent and community engagement. Parents of young children and professionals...
Preschool children can learn to read in a way that is developmentally and culturally appropriate if they are presented with the necessary supports. The IDRA Newsletter has previously described “centers of excellence” and the eight components that must be addressed for students to reach reading readiness success at the preschool level (Scott, 2003).

There is a research base that supports centers of excellence (See Page 4). José Rodríguez, of IDRA, has noted that, “when students’ prior knowledge is activated and their curiosity is stimulated, they begin to make positive associations to reading” (2003).

How do we activate students’ prior knowledge and raise their curiosity? It is even more important than ever that preschool teachers build exciting, excellent classrooms that promote literacy. What do these classrooms look like?

**Engaging Environment**

Excellent classrooms are dynamic. They breathe life and excitement into preschool children about the joy of reading. At their center, students are acquiring basic skills and competencies in oral language development, phonological awareness, alphabet knowledge, and print awareness (Schickedanz, 1999).

When entering a center of excellence, one sees a vibrant, active, engaging, interactive learning space where children are being supported to achieve reading competency with a teacher who guides and facilitates the process.

The environment is rich with a spirit of acceptance and valuing of diversity and cultural difference. It also resonates with the richness of language and print. Teachers encourage communication and language exploration through discussions in children’s first language and in English as a basis for learning English. Provocative questions on materials, books, pictures, computer-based materials, and other forms of print are used as a basis for learning.

**Provocative Activities**

Through the activities they undertake, children are encouraged to talk to each other, speculate about the outcomes and inquiry, predict what might happen, and check their speculations against the actual outcomes of their reading.

In the library, they explore predictable and non-predictable books to increase their capacity to extract word meaning from the way words are displayed in relation to pictures in books. They examine book characteristics to determine meaning. They practice pronouncing and sounding out letters to create words. And when they do, they stretch their understanding because they learn that words mean something in the real world (Schickedanz, 1999).

Through play and through direct and explicit instruction from the teacher, children get help in learning word meaning as their teacher reads stories to them. Story reading in context provides a powerful tool for the teacher to observe learners sounding out letters and words, defining new and unfamiliar words, and examining what children already know and bring to the reading experience and what they are acquiring.

Both with the teacher’s help and independent of the teacher, they practice rhyming and pronouncing sounds that they can compare with others to improve their oral language abilities. They connect letters to form new sounds and blends of sounds as they are read to and, in doing so, learn to figure out the pronunciation of words for which they also work out meaning.
Critical Components of Centers of Excellence

Staffing
Center of excellence directors and at least one teacher possess a bachelor’s degree. This teacher serves as lead teacher. At least 80 percent of the teachers have an associate of arts degree (Shen and Poppink, 2003; Yelland, 2000).

Educational Equity
All classrooms in a center of excellence have the appropriate resources to support opportunities to learn regardless of the economic circumstance, English language learning level, disability, race, and gender (Scott, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2000, 2002; No Child Left Behind Act, 2002). Diverse cultures represented in the classroom are respected and addressed in the instruction.

Accountability
Education stakeholders, including parents, at centers of excellence hold themselves and each other responsible for the creation of classrooms of excellence that support the literacy development of children. Each stakeholder helps to build an appropriate educational environment and experience (Scott, 2002; No Child Left Behind Act, 2002; Scartoon and Doubt, 2003).

Teacher Expectations
Teachers in centers of excellence articulate high expectations for all young children and are expected to discuss high school and college completion at this very early age (Teale, 1978; Snow et al., 1998; Helm and Lang, 2003).
• The expectation is that children will be ready to read in kindergarten.
• The expectation is clearly and continually communicated to young children.
• The actions of teachers and other adults reflect the expectation.
• The reading success expectation is reflected in the curriculum and classroom activities.
• Children’s reading efforts and successes are celebrated by adult stakeholders.
• Children are supported to celebrate and joyfully hold high expectations for their own genuine effort and success.

Academic Achievement
Centers of excellence have measurable objectives consistent with state curriculum standards with special emphasis on the necessary prerequisite skills in literacy (i.e., phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and word comprehension) and other academic areas to be successful (National Reading Panel, 2000; CIRCLE, 2002; Wilson, 2003; Snow et al., 1996; Holiday and Parker, 1998; Pueples and Lowe, 1998; Irving, 2000).
• Kindergarten reading readiness and appropriate numeracy preparation are successfully demonstrated on classroom assessments and measurements.
• Student effort and high student outcomes reflect a belief in the possible appropriately transformed into the reality of demonstrated high performance.
• Children successfully achieve at the highest level of excellence in reading and numeracy readiness.

Social Maturity
Young children have been trained and received guidance in self discipline to manage their learning individually and in groups in a way that creates personal and shared academic success and prepares them to move to higher levels of achievement (Schickendanz, 1999; Helms and Lang, 2003; Wilson, 2003; Whitten and Rodriguez-Campos; Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines).
• Children learn to manage their own lives in school and beyond.
• Children learn to cooperate and work with others.
• Children learn to practice resilience and perseverance.
• Children learn academic goal setting and goal reaching.
• Children joyfully embrace learning and literacy as a key to their own success.

Classroom Management
Centers of excellence adhere to organizational systems and structures in the classroom and the human, mechanical, and technical supports for learning. All of the interactive dimensions of the classroom’s operation are aligned and integrated in a manner to support student achievement and excellence and the appropriate acquisition of skills and competencies for academic success (CIRCLE, 2002; Yelland, 2000; Dodge and Colker, 1998; Rand, 2000).
• Classroom curriculum and learning experiences are organized and structured for success.
• Human, mechanical, and technical supports for learning and literacy are aligned, articulated, and integrated to support reading readiness success.
• Curriculum is organized to engage the learner in oral language development, phonological, alphabet, and print awareness.
• The learning environment is print rich and provides meaningful, challenging, creative and joyful reading readiness opportunities in every learning/interest space.

Parent Participation
Parents work collaboratively with teachers and other staff in schools and/or in homes in support of schools to create and build opportunities for academic excellence and success for their children (Epstein, 1996; Dodge and Colker, 1998; Bower, 2000; Fischer and Murray, 1998; Helms and Katz, 2001).
• Parents reinforce learning at home.
• Parents actively engage in building their own English language competency and proficiency.
• Teachers and parents collaborate on building children’s reading readiness and school success.
• Parents are engaged to participate in classroom planning.
• Parents are presented with opportunities to participate in the learning experiences in classrooms.
• Parents, with teacher assistance, review student performance outcome data and plan for continued learning achievement and success.

These centers of excellence by their very nature become training centers.

The Joy of Reading
– continued from Page 3

Teachers guide these emerging readers in constructing meaning through story maps of familiar and new stories where the structure of stories are plotted and organized by the teacher with the children’s help to determine characters, the setting, the problem or situations that must be handled, and the outcomes of the characters’ actions. Together, they examine cause and effect, respond to problem and solution questions, conduct comparisons, and describe situations to gain meaning and understanding.

The teacher reads books to them, and they can become involved by chiming in, filling in the blank words, and practicing rhythm, pacing, and pronunciation (Schickedanz, 1999). These activities develop and extend phonemic awareness. Practicing reading and writing the alphabet, seeing the alphabet form words as letters name and label objects, places, spaces, activities, and people in the environment help to strengthen alphabet knowledge and strengthen each child’s ability to read.

Print Rich Centers
The environment supports reading in many ways. Naturally, items are labeled and named. But the environment also is print rich, in a way that research reports is necessary to ensure literacy, oral language development, and improved reading ability (Snow, Burns, and Griffin, 1998; National Reading Panel, 2000; Goodman, 1986; Owocki, 2001; Armington, 1997; Schickedanz, 1999).

There are pictures and written materials available everywhere. The dramatic play areas have props where children can act out what they read and hear. They create their own stories with characters and plots and with problems and solutions they work out.

There are writing areas in the room where children can create their own stories or dictate stories to their teachers. There are read-aloud opportunities and “word walls” that foster real opportunities for phonological awareness, alphabet awareness, and oral language development.

There are materials available for children to publish their writing, including computers where children can actually practice their letters and spelling whole words. There are floor stories that children can engage in, with pocket and folder stories that they can manipulate.

Students are encouraged to create their own stories, letters, and other printed communications as they carry out activities that reflect the day-to-day experiences of life in the dramatic play center, literacy center, library, quiet area, desktop publishing area, large group and circle time area, manipulative area, block area, and other centers that periodically open and close based upon the lessons being implemented (Armington, 1997; Owocki, 2001; Snow and Tabors, 1996; Baker et al, 1995; Snow, Burns, and Griffin, 1998; National Reading Panel, 2000).

For students whose first language is other than English, the native language serves as the foundation for English language acquisition. Cognitive skills transfer from one language to another, and students who are literate in their first language will apply these skills and other academic proficiencies to the second language (National Reading Panel, 2000).

It is possible to create a world of reading excitement and joy in a center of reading excellence where children

Did You Know?

Children who attend high quality pre-kindergarten programs are less likely to be held back a grade, less likely to need special education and more likely to graduate high school. They also earn more as adults.

– National Institute for Early Education Research, 2003

Every dollar paid for providing very young children with high quality, full-day, year-round preschool generates a four dollar return to the children, their families and all taxpayers.

– National Institute for Early Education Research, 2002

Forty states funded preschool programs in the 2001-02 school year. Only two states enrolled more than half of their 4-year-olds, and 20 states enrolled less than 10 percent.

– National Institute for Early Education Research, 2003

A recent study of young Denver Public Schools students found that children who participated in a high-quality pre-kindergarten and kindergarten program consistently outperformed their peers several years later on the state assessment exam.

– Denver Post, 2004

For more facts and statistics, go to the “Field Trip” on IDRA’s web site.

www.idra.org

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– Denver Post, 2004

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www.idra.org
are learning to read excellently. Unlocking access to the curriculum in the upper grades begins with reading development at the preschool level.

**Resources**


National Reading Panel. *Report of the National Reading Panel – Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction* (Washington, D.C.: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000).


Bradley Scott, Ph.D., is a senior education associate in the IDRA Division of Professional Development. Comments and questions may be directed to him at comment@idra.org.
The Texas Supreme Court has sent the Texas school finance case back to trial to consider the suitability, adequacy and equity of the Texas school finance system. From its filing in 1984, the Texas case has generally been seen as an “equity” case. The trial set for July 2004 is generally seen as an “adequacy” case.

This article clarifies the differences and overlaps of these two legal theories. A later article will focus on the probable effect of application of the adequacy concept on the Texas system, whether that adequacy system is implemented by the courts or by the legislature.

Court cases challenging state school finance systems are usually, though not with complete accuracy, classified as either “equity” or “adequacy” challenges. Of course, these cases are always impacted by the severity of the educational conditions in the state, the constitutional language and history in the state, and the political approaches of the judges.

“Equity” Challenges to State School Finance Systems

The equity concept says that every school district should have the same resources to offer its students as every other district in the state. These cases are usually based on the equal protection clauses in state constitutions, though some courts have deduced an equity principle from the state education clauses. The Texas school finance cases relied on the Texas constitution’s education clause efficiency requirement, but noted the clear linkage between efficiency and equity.

Issues of equity can either focus at the school district level or the student level. The first asks whether districts have the same resources at any particular level of effort by local taxpayers. The second asks whether students in each district have access to the same level of funding, regardless of local effort.

The first major federal and state school finance cases, Serrano vs. Priest (1971) (Serrano I) and San Antonio I.S.D. vs. Rodríguez (1973) were equity cases, and a majority of the school cases before 1990 were equity cases.

One strength of the equity theory is the comparative ease of developing a judicially-enforceable standard of deciding whether the system is equitable and the comparative ease of explaining the situation to non-experts. There is also the possibility that the state can meet the standard without “carrot and...
On the other hand there may be a weakness of particular state-constitutional support for equity in state school finance systems. A system based on equity also must take measures to account for the very different costs of providing educational opportunity to different groups of students and districts.

“Adequacy” Challenges to State School Finance Systems

The adequacy concept says that state constitutions require an educational system of a certain definable level of quality – or at least opportunity to obtain an education of that quality – for every student. These cases are usually based on the education clauses of state constitutions, though some courts have imported an adequacy standard into an equity case.

Some adequacy cases challenge the adequacy of the entire state education system, while others challenge the adequacy of the school finance system in some subset of the state’s districts or low wealth districts.

The first major adequacy case was the New Jersey litigation, Robinson vs. Cahill, and most of the school finance litigation since 1990 has been based on the adequacy theory.

A court challenge based on adequacy makes it possible to challenge the entire system of education. There is also flexibility to consider all the special costs of education in a certain district or subset of districts.

However, the adequacy theory faces the difficulty of setting judicially enforceable state standards for adequacy. States face difficulty in meeting an adequacy standard, given shifting educational theories and research on what constitutes real needs in education.

A Comparison of the “Equity” and “Adequacy” Theories

Looking at models of systems that fit either, both or neither theory can highlight the differences between the equity and adequacy theories, and the natural overlap between the theories.

Equitable, inadequate systems – In one scenario, assume that $10,000 per student per year is adequate funding. If each school district only has $5,000 per student per year (regardless of tax effort), this would be a perfectly equitable system, but clearly an inadequate one.

If an equitable system is inadequately funded, all schools are equally vested in raising the level of support to an adequate level.

Adequate, inequitable systems – In another scenario, again assume that $10,000 per student is adequate funding. If some districts have $15,000 per student while others have only $10,000, the system would at first blush be considered adequate, but certainly not equitable.

This inequity would be exacerbated if the districts with greater per student funding had lower tax rates, or the districts with the least funding had long histories of inadequate funding. In effect, such a system would change the original definition of adequacy at $10,000 per student. The district with $15,000 per student would completely control the market for teachers (by offering up to twice as much for teacher salaries and benefits), and the district with $10,000 per student would find it almost impossible to attract and retain teachers.

Inadequate, inequitable systems – In a final scenario where $10,000 per student is considered adequate, if some districts have $8,000 per student and others have $5,000, the system would be both inequitable and inadequate. Unfortunately, this is the example most like existing school finance systems.

A Closer Look at Adequacy Cases

Texas is quite familiar with the development of equity cases. Adequacy cases bring up new issues. First is the trouble of coming up with the proper definition of an adequate system, consistent with the state constitutional history and interpretations, and with modern needs.

The adequacy case courts have also wrestled with the relationship between the court and the legislature. The general legal rule is that courts will determine the constitutionality of a statute or government system, but give the government body, in the first instance, the power to fulfill the constitutional standard by passing new or modified legislation.

When the governmental body does not respond appropriately, the case can become a political hot potato causing a severe strain between the branches of government, and public anger at both branches of government. Courts seek to avoid this quandary by treating the legislative body with deference, yet simultaneously protecting their own jurisdiction. State courts cannot force the state legislature to pass new taxes, so their power is indeed quite limited.

Adequacy cases go beyond the equity cases and look at the actual quality of the educational system and its real effects on students. Nevertheless, courts often rely on comparisons to other districts to hold that the offerings of the state are sufficient or insufficient.

The adequacy cases also must consider whether the state must offer the opportunity to each child to receive

Equity and Adequacy – continued from Page 7

Equity and Adequacy – continued on Page 9
Education Equity vs. Education Adequacy

**Equity**: Eq"ui*ty\, n. fairness

**Adequacy**: Ad"e*qua*cy\, n. the minimum amount to be sufficient

**Education Equity**

For many years in Texas, there were huge differences in the amount of money available to educate children in public schools. Before 1995, some of the wealthiest school systems spent $10,000 per student and had low school tax rates. Poorer school systems often had as little as $3,000 per pupil and had much higher taxes.

“Equity,” or an equitable system, means that all communities—whether rich or poor—are taxed at a similar rate and have equal access to similar amounts of revenue per student. **Equity is not the same as equality:** it does not mean that every school district gets the same amount of funding. Some schools need additional funding to serve students with disabilities, to provide bilingual education, and to provide free and reduced-price lunches. In a truly equitable system, every school district has enough funding to provide a quality education to all of its students.

**Why Fight for Equity?**

Just as we insist that Texas have a quality highway throughout the state so that all Texans can travel easily and safely from north to south, so we believe that schools should have the resources to serve all students, to build the skills and capacities they need to reach any destination. Much of the improvements in Texas schools in recent years is due to our equitable funding system.

**Education Adequacy**

**What is adequacy?**

Since the late 1980s, the issue of equity has taken a back seat to the topic of finance adequacy. Unlike the equity debate—which focuses on the disparity in funding between districts—the adequacy debate focuses on defining a minimum level of funding needed for every school to teach its students.

**Why does adequate set the bar too low?**

The problem with adequacy is that it provides for education that is “just enough” rather than excellent. We have to ask ourselves, if we had adequate education, wouldn’t we have adequate, not excellent, employees? Wouldn’t we have adequate, not engaged citizens? Wouldn’t we have adequate, not excellent, opportunities for our children to go to college?

All children deserve the best possible education, adequacy for some and excellence for others is, by its very nature, discriminatory.

**Source:** Texans For Fair Funding Web Site, 2004

Equity and Adequacy — continued from Page 8

*We need to be willing to look at the big picture of what it really means to properly—and not merely adequately—educate our children.*

— Donna Howard

Albert Kauffman is the senior legal policy and advocacy associate at the Civil Rights Project, Harvard University. Comments and questions may be directed to him via e-mail at comment@idra.org.
This year’s event will focus on building reading concepts and skills of young English language learners. Topics include: literacy, technology, social development, curriculum and policy.

- **Visit model early childhood centers.** These visits provide you with the opportunity to share ideas while seeing them in action. You will travel to high-performing, high-minority sites in the San Antonio area that are working effectively with diverse learners.
- **Interact with parents** to discuss ideas to form effective learning partnerships.
- **Learn in workshops** on successful bilingual programs, Spanish literacy, pedagogy and curriculum, policy and curriculum.

The action-packed schedule begins at 8:00 a.m. each morning and continues through 4:00 p.m. on Tuesday and Wednesday, and 2:30 p.m. on Thursday. The institute includes luncheon sessions on Tuesday and Thursday.

**Special Activity**

**Parent Leadership Institute, Thursday, April 22**

This one-day event will concentrate on the challenges in early childhood education and how to maximize parent leadership. Parents and educators will share ways to focus their leadership to enhance early childhood learning.

**Institute Sponsors**

The Intercultural Development Research Association is pleased to bring you this 11th Annual IDRA *La Semana del Niño* Early Childhood Educators Institute. Supporting IDRA projects include:

- IDRA South Central Collaborative for Equity (the equity assistance center that serves Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas).
- Texas IDRA PIRC (the parent information resource center).
- Project READ (IDRA’s project establishing preschool center classrooms of excellence that collectively form a center of excellence ensuring reading, cognitive, and emotional success for all preschool children).
- STAR Center (the comprehensive regional assistance center that serves Texas via a collaboration of IDRA, the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas at Austin, and RMC Research Corporation).

Each of these IDRA projects provides specialized training and technical assistance to schools. Information on how your campus can use these resources to improve instruction and assessment will be available at the institute, by calling IDRA at 210-444-1710, or by visiting IDRA’s web site: www.idra.org.

Contact IDRA (210-444-1710) or visit the IDRA web site (www.idra.org) for details and to register online.
11th Annual IDRA La Semana del Niño Early Childhood Educators Institute™

Registration Form

(Please use one form per person. Feel free to make copies of this form.)

Name __________________________________________________________

Campus ________________________________________________________

School or Organization ___________________________________________

Title/Position ___________________________________________________

Address _________________________________________________________

City _____________________________________________________________

State ____________________________________________________________

Zip ______________________________________________________________

Telephone (_____) ______________________________________________

Fax (_____) _____________________________________________________

E-mail ___________________________________________________________

$______ Total enclosed    Check or PO#_____________________________

Registration Fees

Early Bird Registration Fees – Before April 2

___ $175 institute registration, April 20-22, 2004*

___ $15 parent institute registration (if a parent and not an education professional), April 22, 2004

___ $60 parent institute registration (if an education professional), April 22, 2004

Registration Fees – After April 2

___ $195 institute registration, April 20-22, 2004*

___ $15 parent institute registration (if a parent and not an education professional), April 22, 2004

___ $70 parent institute registration (if an education professional), April 22, 2004

* Includes institute sessions, Tuesday and Thursday luncheons, two school visits [for first paid registrants], and materials.

Make checks payable to: Intercultural Development Research Association. Purchase order numbers may be used to reserve space. Full payment prior to the institute is expected.

Register Online with a purchase order number at www.idra.org

Mail with a check or purchase order to IDRA at 5835 Callaghan Road, #350, San Antonio, Texas 78228-1190, Attention: Carol Chávez

Fax with a purchase order to IDRA at 210-444-1714, Attention: Carol Chávez

Hotel Information

The institute will be held at the San Antonio Airport Hilton Hotel. The hotel is offering a special rate of $101 per night for a single or double room (plus state and local taxes), based on availability. The hotel reservation deadline for the reduced rate is April 9, 2004. Call 1-800-445-8667 to make reservations. Be sure to reference the Annual IDRA La Semana del Niño Early Childhood Educators Institute in order to qualify for the special rate.
working with young children watch with anticipation the developmental milestones indicating a child is picking up the skills expected at a certain age.

In the first year of life, the focus is typically on motor skills. In the second year attention shifts to language development (Shiver, 2001). It is interesting to see parents and teachers interacting and learning from each other.

A powerful feature of the IDRA La Semana del Niño Early Childhood Educators Institute is the parent conference component. This full-day event concentrates on the challenges in early childhood education and how to maximize parent leadership. Parents and educators share ways to focus their leadership to enhance early childhood learning.

This professional development experience enhances early childhood educators’ professional skills and gives the participants an opportunity to network with colleagues and other experts.

The 11th annual institute is being held in San Antonio on April 20-22, 2004 (see Pages 10 and 11 for details).

For 30 years, IDRA has been on the cutting-edge of current knowledge and research and was visionary when the first IDRA La Semana del Niño Early Childhood Educators Institute was held 11 years ago.

Resources


José Rodríguez is an education associate in the IDRA Division of Professional Development. Comments and questions may be directed to him via e-mail at comment@idra.org.