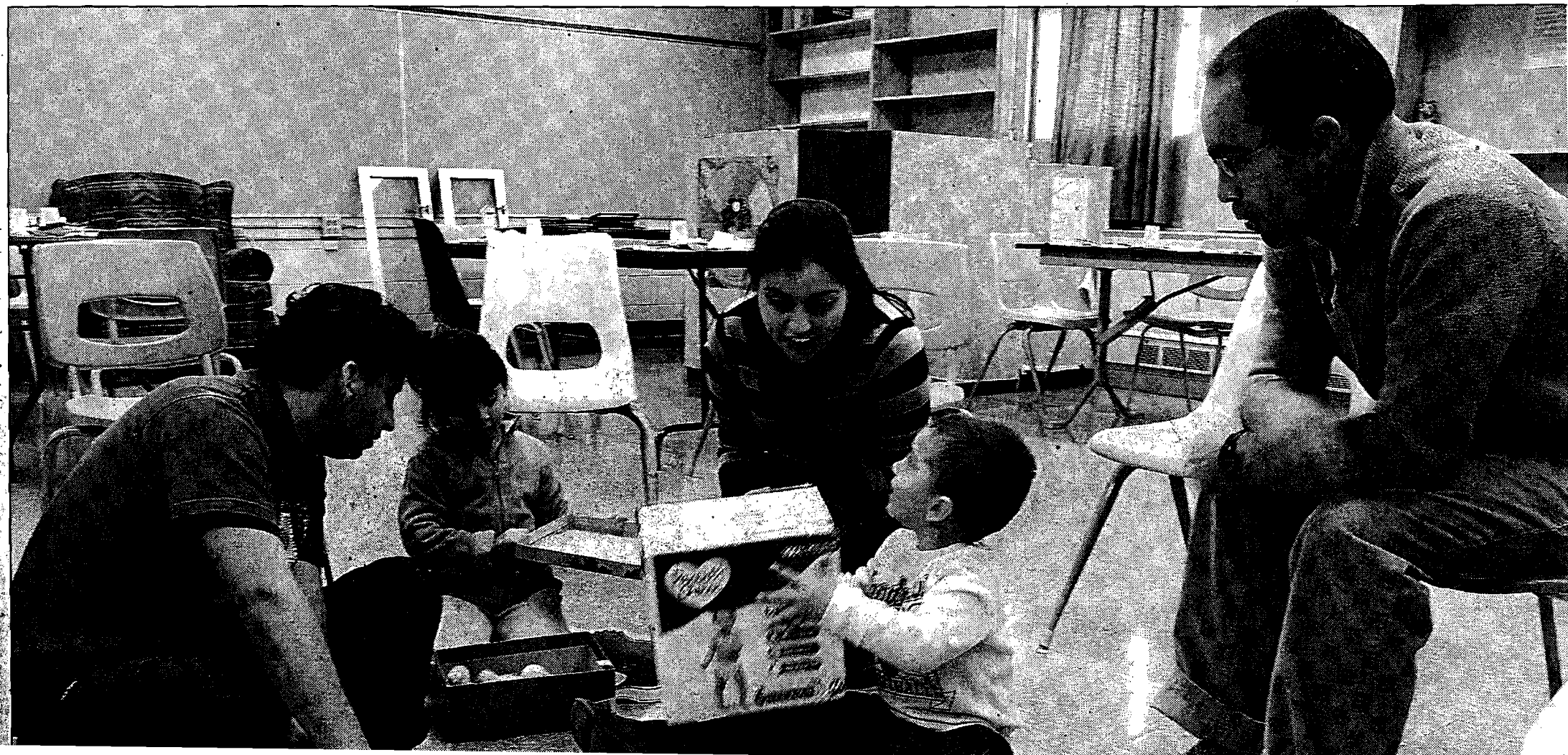


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■ **CULTURE:** Spanish classes for children take place Saturday afternoon



# Spanish language takes root in Sault

ELAINE DELLA-MATTIA  
The Sault Star

Anna Paula Cedeno always spoke Spanish to her parents at home.

It's the first language the four-year-old girl learned at home.

But recently, with the influence of an English-speaking daycare, Anna Paula's mother, Ivanova, has noticed a change in her daughter.

She's now speaking more English and is mixing her Spanish and English together in sentences.

Ivanova Cedeno, was born in Venezuela and her husband is from Colombia. They immigrated to Sault Ste. Marie in 2007 where her husband is employed at Tenaris.

The couple want to make sure Anna Paula, and their 18-month-old son retain their native tongue and culture and are happy to learn that the language was shared by other

Spanish speaking families in Sault Ste. Marie.

Recently, Saturday afternoon Spanish language classes began as a three-month pilot project.

The idea of starting Spanish language classes for children was the brain child of Ana Vargas, chair of the Algoma Latin Association.

Vargas, who doesn't have children of her own, studied linguistics and bilingualism and knows the importance of practicing a language in order to maintain it.

"It's very important that people keep their languages and there is not a lot of language development these days. I see that a lot of younger generations are understanding Spanish, but not speaking it," she said.

The problem is not unique to the Spanish language and Vargas said the understanding and speaking of a native tongue depends strongly on

**“It's very important that people keep their languages and there is not a lot of language development these days.”**

*Ana Vargas, chair of Algoma Latin Association*

the home situation and whether the language is spoken there.

Vargas conducted a survey to determine the level of interest and embarked upon a three-month pilot project to gauge participation and success.

Montse Segarra and Oscar Reyes teach the one hour afternoon classes to the young learners.

Segarra said their young charges all have different levels of Spanish and that encourages them to work together and learn from each other.

The sessions, she said, are active and include movement, singing, crafts and repetition

to teach the young children Spanish.

The pilot project has been established at the Holy Angels Learning Centre on Saturday's between 2-3 p.m.

It's geared toward students between the ages of three and five.

Vargas said that is the most critical age for youngsters to develop language skills and learn the basics of a second language through activity and play.

The 10 students participating in the pilot, all from Sault Ste. Marie, enjoy a variety of songs, vocabulary, crafts and culture that are later reinforced in the home. At least one of their parents is Spanish

speaking and can help the child learn Spanish at home.

A website blog also reinforces to parents what was taught during the lesson and how it can be practised at home.

Segarra said there are linguistic patterns the kids and their parents learn to help build vocabulary while singing simple songs like a Spanish version of *Hello Friends* where each child states their name, where they live and where they were born in Spanish.

The group believes there are more than 100 families in Sault Ste. Marie that speak Spanish, although true numbers won't be known until the Census results are released, Vargas said.

Cedeno said it is important to her and her husband that their children understand and speak Spanish and learn about their culture.

The gatherings also join the

Spanish community together, she said.

Alejandro Dindard, who immigrated from Argentina in 2007, agreed.

His three-year-old son Simon was born a year after the move to Sault Ste. Marie and without family here, the language classes give Simon a chance to learn about his culture.

Dindard said his family speaks Spanish at home but again, like the Cedeno's, his son is more exposed to English at his daycare.

"My son likes to sing and now he's starting to sing the songs he's learned here in Spanish," Dindard said. "And with no family here, this is part of our (extended) Spanish family."

Anyone interested in learning more about the Latin Association or the Spanish classes can call Vargas at 705-257-6904 or email her at latinassociation2009@gmail.com.