

Many Languages, Building Connections

Supporting Infants and
Toddlers Who Are
Dual Language
Learners



Karen N. Nemeth

Many Languages, Building Connections:

**Supporting Infants and Toddlers
Who Are Dual Language Learners**

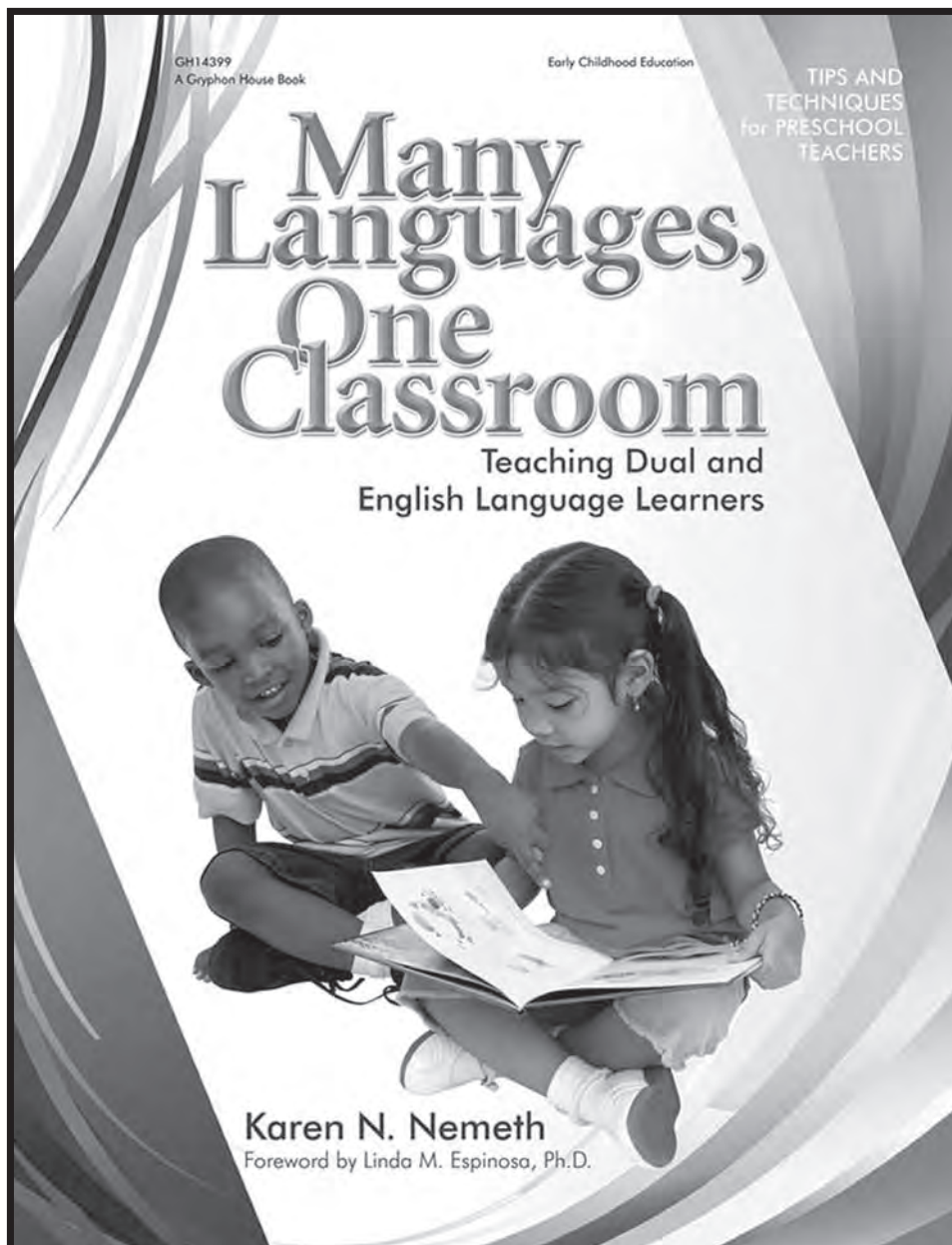
by Karen Nemeth

Acknowledgment

Gratitude and admiration to Linda Groves Gillespie for her helpful input on this project and for sharing her infant/toddler magic over the years, and to my editor, Laura Laxton, for a great collaboration!

Also by Karen Nemeth:

Many Languages, One Classroom: Teaching Dual and English Language Learners



STRATEGIES FOR
TEACHERS OF
INFANTS AND
TODDLERS

Many Languages, Building Connections

Supporting Infants and
Toddlers Who Are
Dual Language
Learners



Karen N. Nemeth



Gryphon House, Inc.
Lewisville, NC

© 2012 Karen Nemeth

Published by Gryphon House, Inc.

PO Box 10, Lewisville, NC 27023

800-638-0928; 877-638-7576 (fax)

Visit us on the web at www.gryphonhouse.com.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or technical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior written permission of the publisher. Printed at P.A. Hutchinson. Every effort has been made to locate copyright and permission information.

Cover photograph courtesy of © iStock photo LP 2011. All rights reserved. iStockphoto® and iStock® are trademarks of iStockphoto LP. www.iStockphoto.com.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Nemeth, Karen N.

Many languages, building connections : supporting infants and toddlers who are dual language learners / Karen N. Nemeth.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-87659-389-9 (pbk.)

1. English language--Study and teaching (Preschool)--United States--Foreign speakers.
2. Native language--Study and teaching (Preschool)--United States. 3. Second language acquisition--United States. 4. Education, Bilingual--United States. 5. Education, Preschool--United States. I. Title.

PE1128.A2N37355 2012

428.2'4--dc23

2011049903

BULK PURCHASE

Gryphon House books are available for special premiums and sales promotions as well as for fund-raising use. Special editions or book excerpts also can be created to specifications. For details, contact the Director of Marketing at Gryphon House.

DISCLAIMER

Gryphon House, Inc. cannot be held responsible for damage, mishap, or injury incurred during the use of or because of activities in this book. Appropriate and reasonable caution and adult supervision of children involved in activities and corresponding to the age and capability of each child involved is recommended at all times. Do not leave children unattended at any time. Observe safety and caution at all times.

Table of Contents

Setting the Stage

Chapter 1: Introduction	7
Chapter 2: Using This Book in Different Infant and Toddler Care Settings.....	13

Understanding How Language Develops

Chapter 3: What's New in the Language-Development Field?	17
Chapter 4: First- and Second-Language Development	23
Chapter 5: Supporting Development in Two or More Languages.....	31

Working with Diverse Families

Chapter 6: Welcoming Diverse Families and Encouraging Them to Enroll	41
Chapter 7: Engaging Families to Participate	45

Valuing Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

Chapter 8: Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Environments	51
Chapter 9: Cultural Awareness and Responsiveness	55
Chapter 10: Multicultural and Multilingual Books.....	59

Getting Ready to Support Diverse Children and Families

Chapter 11: The Village, the Community, the Diversity Team	67
Chapter 12: Training Bilingual Parents, Volunteers, and Staff	69
Chapter 13: Strategies to Help Caregivers Learn New Languages.....	73

Addressing Special Situations

Chapter 14: Supporting Families in Crisis	77
Chapter 15: Bilingual Infants and Toddlers with Special Needs.....	81
Chapter 16: Infants and Toddlers Adopted from Different Countries.....	87

Adapting Curriculum to Meet Standards and Expectations

Chapter 17: Stages, Standards, and Expectations	91
Chapter 18: Enhancing Infant/Toddler Curriculum for Multiple Languages.....	97
Chapter 19: Adapting Activities from Your Favorite Books.....	103
Final Words	106
Forms and Charts	107
References, Resources, and Organizations.....	123
Index.....	127

Introduction

Why do you need this book?

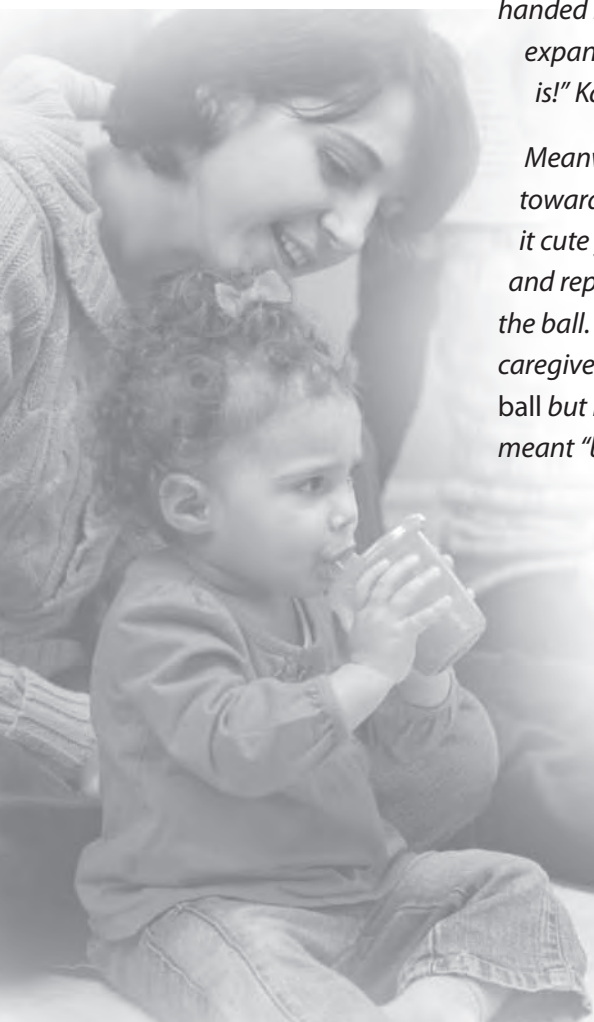
FOCUS QUESTIONS



- What do you expect to learn from this book?
- What challenges are you facing that you hope will be addressed in this book?

Thirteen-month-old Kayla said, “Bah!” and reached toward the basket. Her caregiver knew what she was asking for and handed Kayla the ball from the basket, repeating and expanding: “Ball! You said ball! You want the ball? Here it is!” Kayla bounced excitedly in her seat.

Meanwhile, 11-month-old José said, “Po!” and reached toward the basket. His caregiver responded with, “Po. Isn’t it cute you are trying to make little noises.” She smiled and repeated, “Po,” then turned to play with Kayla and the ball. José got quiet and turned away. Unfortunately, his caregiver did not realize he, too, was trying to say the word ball but in his home language. If she had known that pelota meant “ball,” she might have responded differently.



Caring for someone else's baby is an awesome and wonderful responsibility. Getting to know each tiny new person with his unique characteristics and personality, his likes and dislikes, and his family and culture is fascinating. Caregivers today are witnessing rapidly increasing diversity, which brings a critical question into focus: What is the best way to care for an infant or toddler who comes from a language background different from your own?

So much has been written about language education, ESL (English as a second language), and bilingual education for K–12 teachers, and we've seen a bloom of books written about teaching preschool children who are dual language learners. However, none of these resources gets to the heart of what infant and toddler caregivers want and need to know. The goal of this book is to help any adult caring for a baby or toddler to feel confident that he knows how language develops, how cultural differences can come into play, and how to assess an individual child's situation to provide appropriate supports.

The 2010 U.S. Census estimates that about 25 percent of children younger than the age of six are born to immigrant families, making this the fastest-growing segment of our population (Fortuny, Hernandez, and Chaudry, 2010). Infants and toddlers whose families speak many different languages are appearing in all kinds of early care and learning settings in growing numbers. These infants and toddlers may receive care at home, in someone else's home, or in a center. They may have large extended families or live with just one parent. They may live in wealthy homes full of expensive toys and furnishings or in homes with little to offer the growing mind of a young child. They may be seen by doctors, dentists, therapists, social workers, and nurses, or they may be in situations with few services. They may be thriving in secure homes or struggling in stressful environments. They may be growing up with two languages or more.

The more we learn about how important support for the home language and culture is to building a strong foundation for literacy, self-esteem, and relationships, the more we realize this support must extend to all children, even the very youngest. A rich cultural and linguistic heritage provides many advantages. Parents and caregivers need to share a common understanding and vision for raising young children whose home language is not English.

We know that language is a vital component of early experiences well before a child can say his first word. We cannot afford to wait until children get to elementary school to start addressing the development of their home languages and their learning of English. Yet, most professional-development programs for infant/toddler teachers do not introduce strategies for supporting linguistic and cultural differences for the youngest children. Nor do most programs for ESL and general-education teachers address the care of infants and toddlers from different language and cultural

backgrounds. In this book, both professors and professional-development providers will find ways to enhance their classes so they can better prepare caregivers for the diverse reality they will encounter in their work.

In addition, home visitors, family child-care monitors, program directors, trainers, nannies, consultants, therapists, early intervention specialists, pediatricians, social workers, and other early childhood professionals need knowledge and strategies to support the development of babies in bilingual environments with unique cultural traditions. All adults who have responsibilities for children younger than the age of three can help form nurturing communities to enhance the infants' and toddlers' experiences, including their experiences with culture and language.

Several terms are used to describe children who are growing up with two or more languages, and the programs that serve them. The term we use in this book is *dual language learners*, or DLLs, because it is currently the term of choice for key national organizations such as the Office of Head Start (which oversees Early Head Start programs for infants and toddlers); the Council for Exceptional Children, Division for Early Childhood; and Zero to Three, the national professional organization for infant/toddler caregivers and parents.

In each chapter of the book, you will find focus questions to guide your reading, as well as reflection questions to help clarify your thoughts, feelings, and knowledge. These questions can be used by the individual reader to get the most out of the material, or they can serve as tools to support and document professional learning, staff discussions, and training events.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- What are goals that everyone might agree on for young children in their first three years?
- Are these goals affected by the children's culture or the adult's culture?

Interesting questions, indeed! If you ask people to answer quickly, you may hear very similar answers; however, when given time to explain their responses, people reveal subtle and significant variations. What do we want for infants and toddlers? For example, we want them to grow up in a safe and clean environment, but not too safe so they never face challenges (and it is this level of safety that causes disagreements). Some states regulate that it is absolutely unsafe for one adult to care for more than two infants, while other states find it acceptable to care for three or four without help. We also do not want the environment too clean, as recent studies say that exposing young children to very few germs in infancy may not be the best way to help them develop key immunities. But how clean is too clean? Is this a practical question or a cultural one? It is probably a bit of both.

We can agree that we all want children to grow up nurtured and loved, but how do we show that love? In the United States, many mothers practice "attachment parenting" and wear their babies in slings against their bodies all the time. Other mothers find that terribly restrictive and believe it is more loving to allow the child his independence so he can develop self-regulation and a separate identity. Practical or cultural?

We certainly want children to grow up with the ability to take care of themselves. American programs place strong emphasis on getting infants to feed themselves and dress themselves as early as possible, but other cultures view these self-help skills as less important than the bonding that takes place between caregiver and child. Are the people from those other cultures any less able to dress themselves as adults? Practical or cultural?

Our assumptions can really get in the way as we work toward providing culturally and linguistically responsive care for infants and toddlers. Taking the time to develop an awareness of your own culturally based assumptions will help you open up to the value of learning the variations in the goals people have for young children. There is no one right way to love a child. There are, however, several basic guiding principles that will be upheld throughout this book.

Basic Guiding Principles

1. Every baby needs the security and comfort provided by the bond with the people who love him most. The job of the caregiver is to enter into that bond, support it, and enhance it with her own special presence. The best way to do this is for the caregiver to share the language of love that the baby has started or grown up with.
2. Every parent has a unique way of bringing up her baby, based on a combination of personality, experiences, preferences, knowledge, and culture. And every caregiver brings a unique style, based on all these factors as well. It is not a competition of who is "right." The goal should be to understand each other and keep an open mind, blending all these elements into a rich, warm, responsive dance of love for the baby.
3. Every baby needs to hear some talk, stories, play, and singing in his home language every day. If that language is not English, then he will benefit from having those experiences in English every day as well. Caregivers and families need to work together to make sure infants and toddlers get rich, correct, engaging input in both languages.
4. Being bilingual is good for all children, not just the ones who happen to come from a non-English-speaking family! All caregivers should consider adopting this goal and making it a reality.
5. Language acquisition is more than just learning vocabulary. It is a complex and sophisticated developmental process in which the brain depends on strong, responsive, nurturing relationships to make sense of everything it learns about the world. The brain connects words to ideas. This process has to be supported by people during the critical first two years of a child's life.
6. Language is embedded in culture; the two are intertwined.
7. Language, identity, and self-esteem are also interlaced. For each of us, our language is part of who we are. For infants and toddlers, language is an inseparable part of who their parents are as well.



All infants and toddlers need experiences that nurture, support, and teach their home language and culture. Research has shown the importance of this foundation as a contributor to potential success in English. Even for babies, we should remember that full immersion in an English-only program that reduces their home language will not offer any learning or developmental advantages (August and Shanahan, 2006).

Of course, our concerns go beyond just worrying about how a child will succeed in school. We keep in mind this important insight from noted researcher Lilly Wong Fillmore (1991):

When parents are unable to talk to their children, they cannot easily convey to them their values, beliefs, understandings, or wisdom about how to cope with their experiences. They cannot teach them about the meaning of work, or about personal responsibility, or what it means to be a moral or ethical person in a world with too many choices and too few guideposts to follow. What is lost are the bits of advice, the consejos parents should be able to offer children in their everyday interactions with them. Talk is a crucial link between parents and children: It is how parents impart their cultures to their children and enable them to become the kind of men and women they want them to be. When parents lose the means for socializing and influencing their children, rifts develop and families lose the intimacy that comes from shared beliefs and understandings.

CHAPTER 1 PLANNING FORM

Identify Your Challenges

Challenges with staff	Challenges with families	Challenges finding/obtaining resources	Challenges about professional development

Planning Form 1007

Planning Chart

What are your greatest challenges and concerns about meeting the needs of diverse infants and toddlers and their families? Fill out the planning chart on page 107 to help identify your needs, then look for answers throughout the book.