

HOME VISITS FOR IMMIGRANT FAMILIES & YOUNG DUAL LANGUAGE LEARNERS

KAREN N. NEMETH, ED.M.



EDITED BY MARC R. BJORKMAN

- Preface •

Home Visits for Immigrant Families & Young Dual Language Learners

Language Castle LLC is pleased to provide you with this convenient compilation of popular resources from the [Language Castle](#) website. Our author, Karen Nemeth, is a nationally known expert on teaching young children who come from different home languages and cultures. She regularly posts articles about advocacy and policy issues related to working with young dual language learners. For more resources and strategies for working with linguistically and culturally diverse early childhood populations, you may also follow Karen on social media:



- * Twitter: [KarenNemethEdM](#)
- * Facebook: [Karen Nemeth at Language Castle LLC](#)
- * LinkedIn Group: [ELLs/DLLs in Early Childhood](#)

 **language castle**
Many Languages. One Classroom.

• Part 1 •

Meeting the Early Learning Needs of ALL Children – Not Just the Ones Who Show Up

If you are reading this, you must be interested in early childhood education. Now, here's the question at the core of this post: "Have you given any thought to the children who, for one reason or another, will not be able to attend a preschool program?" There's an awful lot of talk about early childhood education these days, much of it coming from President Obama and [Education Secretary Duncan](#). Politicians are talking about it, as are business leaders and [economists](#). Millions upon millions of Federal and state funding dollars are being spent for high quality early childhood programs such as Head Start, Early Head Start and universal preschool. Great minds are hard at work deciding exactly what the best possible preschool program should look like. But a preschool program is only effective for the children who show up.

What if the children who don't show up are the ones who need high quality early learning experiences the most? My primary

professional focus is on children who speak languages other than English. Their needs are more complex than non-immigrant English speakers, and K-12 schools are still struggling with the challenge of how to teach them. A lot is riding on their ability to be ready for school. That means a lot is riding on our expert ability to design high quality learning supports that truly fulfill the goal of preparing all children to be ready for school.

When I worked at the NJ Department of Education, I was struck by the fact that millions of dollars are spent on developing and improving high quality preschool programs. Still, in most funded districts, 10% or more of the children who needed preschool most were not attending. At that rate, how can we call it 'universal preK'? Who are the children that are not participating in free high quality preschool? On a national level, The Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) suggests an answer, "...children from immigrant families accounted for 24 percent of the preschool-age population. Although 1.9 million preschool-age children in immigrant families attended an early education program, another 1.3 million were not enrolled."

http://www.clasp.org/issues/topic?type=child_care_and_early_education&topic=0009).

Getting up early, getting dressed and ready, and transporting young children to a program every day is just not workable for many families. Does that mean we don't have to give their children a better shot at success? If their children enter school with little or no preparation, increased risk factors, and the added challenge of a language barrier, they might be more likely to need costly additional services as they progress through the grades. I guess it's hard for me to see the point in investing so many millions of dollars on only one type of out-of-home program while we remain unwilling to invest a small portion of that money to bring services to wherever the children might be. Really, we're either going to address the achievement gap or we're not. I don't think we can find a dignified way to say our goal is to 'sort of address the achievement gap.'

At Newamerica.net, Sara Mead posted some interesting findings in her October 1 blog, "A Closer Look at Stay-at-Home Moms". Based on a recent US Census report, "About 5.6 million American women — about one out of every four mothers with children under age 15 — were stay-at-home moms in 2007. Not surprisingly, stay-at-home moms were more likely to have younger children—and to be younger themselves — than non-stay-at home moms. They are also disproportionately Hispanic,

foreign-born, and have less education, compared to all mothers.” We have to realize that children who are missing out on high quality preschool programs are not children with advantages. In fact, they may have even more complications.

As my colleague, Marcela Summerville (PreKlanguages) said in a twitter exchange, she does volunteer work with Mexican immigrants – and many of them are afraid to send their children to free preschool because they don’t want to reveal their immigrant status. As I’ve been doing presentations about supporting young dual and English language learners across the country, I heard a number of other obstacles that keep families from enrolling in preschool. One of the most common concerns is that families who speak little or no English will not be able to access information about the programs in the first place. While I applaud the efforts of many programs to provide information in English and Spanish, and sometimes in other prominent languages, that still doesn’t help the few families who speak isolated or indigenous languages. The flip side of this issue is that a program that only advertises in a language you and your child do not speak does not seem like the most hospitable place. Furthermore, the idea of signing your “baby” up for school before the age of six is not common in some cultures. Still another factor is how frequently many families

move around, particularly when they are under economic stress. Understanding what is keeping some preschool age children home will go a long way toward improving attendance rate. Yet, there will always be children who are isolated or suffering or needy or perfectly ordinary who just do not get signed up for preschool.

In my comments to Sara Mead's October 1 blog, I said

"We persist in using the term 'universal pre-K' to refer to services provided not to all, but only to most young children in the coverage area. We are educators and we should know the difference between 'most' and 'all' – especially when it comes to spending millions of taxpayer dollars to reduce achievement gaps in disadvantaged areas. I believe we got too caught up in advocating for high quality preschool programs when we should have been focusing on meeting the needs of preschool children. If you really stop to think about it, anyone can come up with a list of valid reasons why a five day, 8:00 – 3:00 schedule may be unworkable for some families. I've heard, "The program is too far and I don't have transportation," "I'm disabled and can't get my kids out on time every morning," "I'm worried about our immigration status," "I work odd hours and can't stick to that schedule with my kids," "I work two jobs as it is and the school keeps putting more requirements on me," or "I hated

school when I was young and I don't want to get involved there now." So, my question is this: should we devote our expertise and resources to a plan that considers children in these circumstances to be expendable? I hope the census report on stay-at-home moms will call attention to the fact that some important at-risk children are being overlooked. We can't expect high quality preschool to work its magic unless we are willing to adapt the program to fit the needs of every family who needs it. When states begin to shift their focus to giving every disadvantaged child an opportunity to prepare for school, we will see truly mixed delivery models that include school based programs partnering with Head Start, child care centers, family child care, kinship care and home visits for stay-at-home moms."

There are a number of wonderful models that are broadening the scope of early childhood education through flexible programs, family literacy initiatives and strengthening families approaches (I'll elaborate on solutions in my next post). This isn't new – it's just not big enough yet. More resources and attention than ever before are being devoted to the critical role of early childhood education in developing our 'human capital' and preparing our citizens of the future. Let's make it

our goal to provide high quality early learning experiences for ALL children... and this time, let's act like we mean it!

• Part 2 •

High Quality Preschool –Outside School Walls

The first installment of this series, “Meeting the Early Learning Needs of ALL Children – Not Just the Ones Who Show Up”, generated some important questions from readers, and I promised some answers. How can states and districts accomplish the goal of providing high quality preschool education to all, when some simply will not or can not participate in a full time, out of home program? Does high quality early childhood education have to be an all or nothing question? What happens when the children who don’t enroll in preschool programs are the ones who need support the most – such as children from struggling families or new immigrant families? Here are some possibilities to get the discussion started.

Public libraries: Marcela Summerville, of www.spanishworkshopforchildren.com, works with families who are reluctant to register their children for preschool. She suggests that public libraries could step up their efforts to

provide stronger programs for young learners to help them prepare for kindergarten. I would add that a true collaboration between the library and the school district would enable both resources to help each other, match curriculum and share professional development. Once families become comfortable with a library based program, they might be more willing to try the full time program at school.

Enhanced outreach: When I ask preschool programs what they're doing to attract families who speak other languages, they often tell me they translate some of their materials into Spanish – and maybe one other language. In the article, [New Resource Provides Data On Young Children Of Immigrants](#) , CLASP suggests that “states can increase action to ensure that immigrant families with young children are informed of and have access to high-quality early education”. The problem is some parents are not fully literate even in their home language. Judie Haynes, of www.everythingsl.net, says programs need to think of ways to connect with families that don't depend on print media. I've known programs that had great success by sending pairs of bilingual staff members – teachers or social workers – to knock on doors in the neighborhood. The Harlem Children's Zone is one example of this type of program.

Public-private partnerships: The broader the net, the greater the catch. Ideally, every organization that works with families in a given area should be prepared to connect young children with the best possible early learning experiences that will meet the needs of the family. Pre-K Now offers an impressive menu of possibilities here <http://www.pewstates.org/projects/home-visiting-campaign-328065> .

Home visiting programs: You know, when my budget gets tight, I don't stop buying food – I just try to get more for my money. Funny how that logic seems to be missing from budget discussions in many states right now. We know that investing in early childhood education is a sound long economic plan. If states can't afford the most ambitious plan, could they please consider that they can still reach thousands and thousands of high-needs youngsters through less expensive home visiting programs designed to help parents excel as their child's first teacher? The [Chicago Tribune](#) carried a nice story about one such program. Check your state listings for Children's Trust organizations and Early Head Start programs that provide home visiting services. Are they collaborating with publicly funded preschool in your area?

As I've said before, there are ways to address the issue of gaps in early childhood education services. We need to work

harder to assess those gaps – as Lisa Guernsey at [New America Foundation](#) suggests. Then we need to get serious about our united commitment to reach out to all children – especially the ones who need us most.

• Part 3 •

Home Visiting Can Bolster High Quality Preschool Efforts

I wrote about my concern that high quality preschool is failing to reach some of the neediest children who can't make it to a program every day. My main emphasis is always about how these issues and solutions will affect children from different language backgrounds. Then, I posted several resources and solutions to that problem. Now I have two more important ideas to share with you and I invite you to add to the discussion. The more resources we have to share, the more successful we can be in helping children from struggling families access the full benefit of services that will give them the best possible start in education and in life.

Here's an excellent model described by Tammy DiBartolo, Youth Services Manager at the Rapides Parish Library in Alexandria, LA. Tammy wrote: "I just wanted to let you know what we do here at Rapides Parish Library. We have a theme-bag delivery service to 63 Head Start and daycare centers in our area. We also became certified to do training for these teachers and

daycare providers so that they could receive clock hours toward their CEUs or CDAs.

In these training sessions we take our theme-bags and show participants how we would use a puppet, a flannel board story or a music CD. We hold the sessions on Saturday mornings about every six weeks. The response has been overwhelming. Now we are often asked to do parent training for Head Start and the Louisiana Parent Congress.

My staff and I belong to several community organizations that work with children. We often do programs for each other's groups. This has been an effective way to get the word out about our programs and offer other groups as resources for families with children who may need services.

In these hard times communities are going to have to pool resources and work together to prepare children for the future. If we don't put the money behind preschool education now...we will spend it later in remedial programs and social services."

Fran S. Simon (@FSSimon) recently shared information on Twitter about a seminar on [Measuring Home Visiting Program Performance](#). Hosted by The Pew Charitable Trusts, the seminar "will explore the new generation of home visiting research.

Some of our nation's costliest problems are rooted in early childhood. Evidence-based home visiting programs are proven to produce positive outcomes that deliver fiscal returns of up to \$5.70 per dollar invested. As these programs scale up, performance monitoring is critical to assure delivery of high quality services that result in meaningful outcomes and build the case for serving additional families."

Stay tuned!

• Part 4 •

Bringing Education to the Homes of Young Children

In 2010 I attended a leadership symposium presented by the Pew Center on the States. John Schlitt, director of the new Pew Home Visiting Campaign (now directed by Libby Doggett), hosted informative presentations and fielded important questions from participants. We learned about the sophisticated research techniques that will be used to assess which aspects of home visiting programs are most effective so that future funding can be directed toward the greatest impact. I was on twitter during the meeting to share live comments about what I was hearing.

Many wonderful experts, generous funders, and dedicated staff at the front lines are going to be engaged in this initiative – amazing! Then, we reached the end of the PowerPoints and speeches, and I realized I had not heard one word about meeting the needs of children and families who speak languages other than English. I don't think they are against serving these families – I just think they aren't used to

thinking about them. So, I'm here to push them in that direction. We heard an astounding array of statistics on January 7. Well, I think 25% is a pretty astounding number. The number of young children born into immigrant families in this country right now is about 25%.

Let me repeat: 25%. With so many resources and such earnest commitment, I hope Pew's Home Visiting Campaign will make families who speak languages other than English a priority. As, I've said in my earlier blogs, I believe that home visitors have the power to bring early learning support into the homes of children who are not enrolled in preschool – and that may contribute to our efforts to reduce the achievement gap. I know that's an assumption – but I can confidently state this: If home visiting programs are important for English speaking families in disadvantaged areas, they certainly can't be any less important for disadvantaged families who are also struggling with the language. According to the Pew Home Visiting Campaign Fact Sheet:

“Parenting is difficult for everyone and it can be particularly challenging for low-income parents. Our campaign is eager to partner with other investors, advocates and policy makers to ensure America's new and expectant families gain access to

quality home visiting programs during a child's most critical developmental period."

Read that paragraph again with a picture in mind of a low income family who speaks only Spanish. Now take that image a step further and imagine that scenario with a family who speaks a language that is not spoken by anyone else in the neighborhood or the school system. These are challenging scenarios. But the challenges will multiply if these families get no help as their children grow up.

More recently, Pew has produced some valuable information to address some of these concerns. Take a look at this presentation on [Engaging Latino Families in Home Visiting Programs](#).

If you have thoughts or comments, you can contact the Pew Center [via the information on the fact sheet](#). Certainly, feel free to leave comments here or write to me via my website.

I applaud Pew for taking on such an important endeavor, and I encourage them to take the lead in meeting the needs of the diverse population as it really exists in our country right now.

• Copyright and Acknowledgments •

© 2012 [Language Castle LLC](#)

ISBN 978-1-938362-00-2

Content:

Karen N. Nemeth, Language Castle LLC Co-founder

Editing & Production:

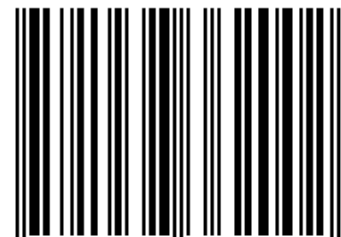
Marc R. Bjorkman, Language Castle LLC Co-founder

Contact us at: info@languagecastle.com

 **language castle**

Many Languages. *One Classroom.*

ISBN 978-1-938362-00-2



9 781938 362002 >

