

Section 4: Philosophy, Research & More



The Philosophy and Research Behind the Gee Whiz Curriculum

Program Philosophy

There is a wealth of research about how young children learn and how this impacts how teachers should teach. At Gee Whiz Education, our belief is that a balanced approach is best. Below you will find a short description of the main philosophies upon which the program is based along with what you may see in your own children that defines each researcher's discovery.

Jean Piaget

Piaget believed that young children learn through a series of developmental steps as they use their senses to gain knowledge about their environment.

During his research, Piaget discovered that children go through four stages of development: sensorimotor (birth-2), preoperational (2-7), concrete operational (7-11), and formal operational (11-16).

Piaget found that children use their senses and repetition to learn to differentiate between objects... how they are the same, how they are different, and how their actions on the object affect it. He concluded that all of this exploration helps children gain knowledge that they then apply when approaching new objects and situations.

What does this look like?

- *A toddler fills a bucket with water and dumps it out over and over again (sensorimotor).*
- *An infant squeezes a soft ball and then puts it in his/her mouth (sensorimotor).*
- *A preschooler discovers a box can be a hat or a tool for carrying blocks (preoperational).*



Lev Vygotsky

Vygotsky believed that the teacher has a crucial role in learning. His/Her role is to support children's learning until they become more confident. At this point, the teacher can reduce the level of support. This is often referred to as scaffolding.

Vygotsky also believed that language starts as a tool a child uses for external socialization but over time, becomes a type of "inner speech" he/she uses to work through complex tasks (e.g., talking to yourself in your head when doing a difficult task).

What does this look like?

- *Blowing bubbles for an infant to watch and talking about how they float into the sky.*
- *Inviting a toddler to try to blow the bubbles him/herself. How hard does he/she need to blow?*
- *Challenging a preschooler to find other tools that he/she could use to make bubble wands.*

Program Philosophy

Erik Erikson

Erikson believed that children go through a series of stages of psychosocial development. For young children, the three stages are:

- Basic Trust vs. Basic Mistrust (birth-1)
- Autonomy vs. Shame (1-3)
- Initiative vs. Guilt (3-6)

Erikson believed that as children go through these phases, they develop a sense of initiative and empowerment. The teacher's role is to create an environment where children feel safe to test their ideas and explore so they feel free and confident.

What does this look like?

- *An infant that might be new to your program learns to trust that you will come when he/she cries.*
- *A two-year-old wanting to learn to use the potty like the older children.*
- *A preschooler trying to learn how to zip his/her own coat.*

Sara Smilansky

According to Smilansky, there are four types of play, all of which are **very** important to the overall development of children:

- **Functional Play** - Repeated actions on movements with or without objects
- **Constructive Play** - Building or creating with objects
- **Dramatic Play** - Acting out roles in a make-believe situation
- **Games with Rules** - There are rules that must be followed and they are established before the game begins

These different types of play are very evident when watching children play. For instance, when given a cardboard box, most toddlers will just want to climb in and out. An older child, however, would be much more likely to turn that box into a boat or a car. Knowing that children engage in different types of play helps teachers plan experiences that are appropriate for them.

What does this look like?

- *An infant banging a rattle on his/her high chair tray.*
- *A toddler stacking large cardboard boxes.*
- *A preschooler pretending to be a veterinarian caring for plush animals.*
- *A group of school-age children playing, "Tag."*



Research Basis Behind GWE

At Gee Whiz Education, we want you to know that all of the activities, experiences, and components we develop for our products are based on the latest research on early childhood development and learning. Not only do we take into account new and emerging research findings, we also incorporate theoretical foundations as well. The following list includes the theories, published research and position statements that provide strong evidence for our approach to teaching and learning. In addition, the Gee Whiz curriculum addresses state and national ECE standards (e.g., Head Start Learning Outcomes Framework). Our curriculum has a comprehensive approach ... addressing 10 key developmental areas. Please see our website www.geewhizeducation.com for alignment charts that provide details on how the curriculum addresses the standards in your state and/or national standards such as the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework.

Theorists

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FAMILY CHILD CARE INCLUDING PROVIDER RELATIONSHIPS & INTERACTIONS

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Research Basis Behind GWE

QUALITY RATING SYSTEMS

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Position Statements

National Association of Family Child Care (NAFCC)™:

- NAFCC's Vision for Family Child Care (2007)

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)*:

- Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs (2009 version) – see citation below
- Early Childhood Mathematics: Promoting Good Beginnings (2002)
- Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation (2003)
- Learning to Read and Write (1998, with the International Reading Association)

All NAEYC® Position Statements can be found on their website at: <http://www.naeyc.org/positionstatements>

Bredekamp, S., & C. Copple, eds. 2009. *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs*. Third Edition. Washington, DC: NAEYC.



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NAEYC is a registered trademark of the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)

As an educator of young children, it is critical for you to know what developmentally appropriate practice is and how these guidelines can help you structure the learning environment and plan activities for your program. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)® developed a position statement to help early childhood educators follow developmentally appropriate practice. You can find this position statement document, along with a great deal of additional helpful information, on their website <http://www.naeyc.org/positionstatements>.

So, how can you ensure a developmentally appropriate approach in your program?



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