

Section 5: Meeting the Needs of ALL Children & Gee Whiz



**Supporting Cultural Responsiveness,
Linguistic Responsiveness and
Disabilities, Suspected Delays, and
Special Needs**

Cultural Responsiveness & GWE

What is cultural responsiveness? Sounds complicated but it really is not! Cultural responsiveness is basically respect and appreciation for the fact that we are all different, that families are different and cultures are different. This respect and understanding is then reflected in the activities you plan and the approach you take with each child in your group. So, what does that look like and how does the Gee Whiz curriculum help you make sure that your program is culturally responsive? Keep reading!

STEP 1: Watch our recorded webinar, "Exploring Diversity & Gee Whiz"

This webinar is an excellent first step to help you learn more about how you can assure that you are taking the steps you should to make sure that your program is culturally responsive. During this video, you will need to do some self-reflection to become more aware of your own personal biases. Then, you will learn how you can make sure your program is culturally aware and responsive. You can find this webinar in two different places.

Video Gallery on the Gee Whiz Website

<https://geewhizeducation.com/webinar-training/>

Gee Whiz Education Curriculum for FCC Channel on YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCkIYj0hTLIDxsdcB7Xftd9g/videos>



STEP 2: Gather information about families

It is critical for you to learn as much as you can about the families you serve. There are many ways to achieve this goal. This "info gathering" is not a "one time" event. Instead, you need to continue to gather information for as long as the child is enrolled in your program. There are many ways you can do this! Here are just a few:

- Ask questions when enrolling new families (see page 58) and ask yourself if you know the answers to these questions for children already in your program. If not, it is time to start asking questions!
- Schedule a monthly parent/guardian meeting to discuss all aspects of the child and his/her home life, perceptions about development, etc.
- Invite family members to visit, and participate in, experiences with their children
- Sharing weekly notes with parents/guardians about their children. Our "All About My Week" Reports (see p. 66) were designed with this in mind. If you are a current Gee Whiz subscriber, you also have special access to our "All About My Day" Infant Reports you are welcome to download and use.
- Utilize our "All about My Weekend" Reports to gain insight into how each child's weekend went. This information can definitely help on Monday! (see pgs. 51 & 52)



Cultural Responsiveness & GWE

STEP 3: Incorporate cultural responsiveness into the GWE curriculum

Now that you know what it means to be culturally aware, it is time to make sure you adapt and modify the Gee Whiz curriculum to reflect not only the cultures and beliefs of the families you serve but also each child's strengths, abilities, experiences and interests as they relate to his/her culture. So, how do you do that? Well, the Gee Whiz curriculum gives you guidance but you know your families the best and will need to take the information you gather in STEP 2 and integrate it into your daily plans. Here are a few ideas to help you get started.

EXAMPLE: One of the Gee Whiz units for 2021-2022 is titled, "All About Me." This unit is perfect for making sure that the activities you plan are culturally responsive. For instance, during experiences that relate to families, you would want to make sure you were aware of each child's unique family make-up. You would also want to expose children to the idea that all families are different and they are ALL special. You could also use technology to expose children to families from around the world. The Gee Whiz curriculum details how to do this in the activity plans.

IDEAS TO GET YOU STARTED

- Make sure the books in your book area reflect a wide variety of families and cultures
- Include clothing and play food in your dramatic play that represents different cultures, particularly those that represent the families in your group
- Invite family members to talk about special celebrations or events their family celebrates
- Have paint in different flesh tones available in your art center at all times
- When discussing professions, invite family members to share what they do with your group
- Keep in mind when celebrating holidays like Father's Day or Mother's Day that some children may not live with their fathers or mothers and adapt accordingly
- Serve foods for meals and snacks that represents the cultures of the families you serve
- Remember that not all children have had the same experiences prior to coming to your program. Keep this in mind as you plan experiences. It is important to know each child's level of background knowledge and then build upon it appropriately.
- Make sure that you reinforce frequently that there are MANY different types of families and ALL are wonderful!



Examples of Questions You May Want to Ask Families

Who lives with your child?

What language does your family speak at home?

What is mealtime like at home? Does everyone eat at the same time or at different times?

What family members that do not live with you play a very important role in your child's life?

Who gives your child a bath? Feeds your child? Takes him/her to doctor appointments?

Who is the person that disciplines your child?

What type of discipline do you feel works best with your child?

What things must your child do in order to require discipline?

When your child is upset, what do you find works best to console him/her?

When does your child normally go to bed?

What times does your child normally wake up?

How much screen time (e.g., TV, computer, video games, tablet) do you think your child gets on an average day?

What celebrations are important to your family?

What foods does your family enjoy eating?

What special foods do you prepare for celebrations or family events?

What types of music does your family enjoy?

What are your hopes and dreams for your child?

What would you say are your child's biggest strengths?

What do you like best about your child?

What values are you trying to instill in your child?

What are you hoping your child will learn while they are in my program?

What skills do you think your child must have before he/she goes to kindergarten?

Would you say that boys and girls are treated the same or differently in your family? If differently, how so?

Is religion important to your family? If so, tell me more about how religion plays a part in your family's life.

Are there any secular celebrations (e.g., Halloween, Santa Claus, Easter Bunny, etc.) that you would prefer your child not participate in?

My weekend was: busy relaxed exciting tiring other: _____

Over the weekend, most of the time I was : happy irritated excited sad
 sleepy busy other: _____

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Todo sobre mi fin de semana



El nombre del niño: _____

Mi fin de semana fue: ocupado relajado emocionante fatigoso otro: _____

Durante el fin de semana, la mayor parte del tiempo estuve:

feliz irritado emocionado triste sueño ocupado otro: _____

Lo más emocionante que me pasó el fin de semana fue:

Durante el fin de semana, me gustaría que supieras que yo:

Todo sobre mi fin de semana



El nombre del niño: _____

Mi fin de semana fue: ocupado relajago emocionante fatigoso otro: _____

Durante el fin de semana, la mayor parte del tiempo estuve:

feliz irritado emocionado triste sueño ocupado otro: _____

Lo más emocionante que me pasó el fin de semana fue:

Durante el fin de semana, me gustaría que supieras que yo:

Linguistic Responsiveness & GWE

What is linguistic responsiveness? Well, we all know that in today's world, many families speak a language other than English in their homes. Linguistic responsiveness refers to the idea that you will want to embrace this fact and incorporate the children's home languages into the experiences you plan for them and the learning environment in your program. It also means that you will need to incorporate strategies to help children who may speak a different language at home learn English in an intentional way. These children are often referred to as Dual Language Learners (DLLs). Remember...these children are not only learning English but they are also learning to talk in their home language as well. This can be very challenging if you do not speak the home language. Here are some ideas on how you can address the needs of DLLs in your program

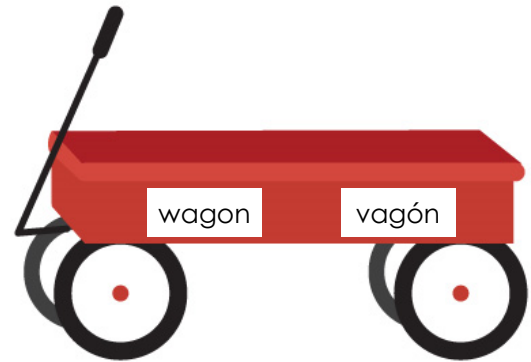
Reflect the languages spoken by the children in your program in your learning environment

HOW?

Label things in the environment in the language spoken by the children in your group (e.g., English/Spanish, English/Arabic)

Use photographs with words to help DLLs begin to connect objects with English words (e.g., labeling where toys belong on a shelf)

Include books in your book area in languages spoken by the children. Ask your local librarian for help finding some.



BUT... What if you do not speak the children's home languages?

It is not at all uncommon for providers to not speak the same language as all of the families they serve. Here are some tips to use if this is the case for you:

- Make Google Translate our friend! It can come in extremely handy when trying to communicate with families and children. If you press the 🔊 symbol after translating, Google will even read the translation out loud.
- Learn some basic words in the family's home language (e.g., hello, goodbye, thank you, etc.). Not only does this show respect for the family's home language, it helps you better understand how it feels to be learning a new language ... which is exactly what DLL children are doing!
- Invite family members to come in to teach the children how to sing common songs in their home language. Because the tune is familiar (e.g., Twinkle, Twinkle), learning new words is easier and it is also fun for all the children!
- Learn basic words for communicating with your DLL children such as eat, drink, potty, tissue, hungry, tired, upset, etc. Even knowing a few words will help you communicate better with DLL children. It will also give you the tools you need to then expose these children to the English word that matches their need.



Linguistic Responsiveness & GWE

Here are a few ways that the Gee Whiz curriculum can help you help DLL children learn English while also expanding their home language. These are just a few ideas to get you started.

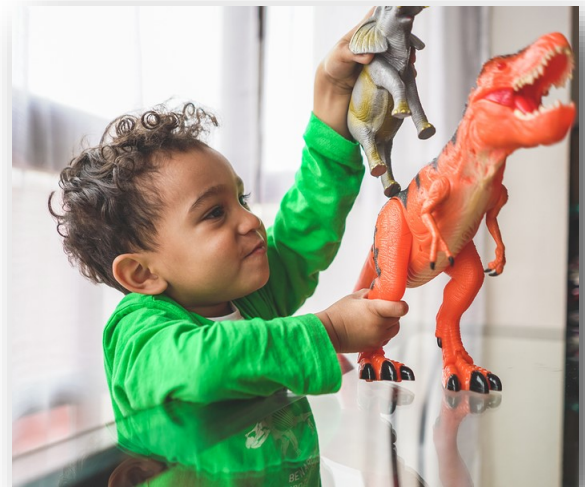


Model Language

The Gee Whiz curriculum includes tips for modeling language each day. This modeling not only helps English speakers but it also provides an opportunity for DLL children to learn the English language in a meaningful way. Tips are provided to help you incorporate robust language in your conversations with children each day. Make sure you speak slowly and clearly when working with DLLs. Additionally, limit the length of your sentences. Remember... these children are not only trying to learn English, many of them are also still learning their home language as well!

Ask Questions!

The Gee Whiz curriculum includes open-ended questions with each experience. The purpose of these questions is to help promote back and forth conversations between providers and children. Your DLLs can participate at a level that is appropriate for them while they learn a great deal by listening to your conversations with other children. Open-ended questions are extremely powerful because they cannot be answered with a simple "yes" or "no" and not only promote an on-going conversation but creative thinking skills as well.



Put Words to Their Actions

As you conduct experiences with DLLs., you will note that sometimes they may use actions instead of words to share ideas, wants and needs. Take this opportunity to expose them to English by describing their actions using words. This process is also VERY important for all children as they begin to use oral language to communicate. For instance, if you ask a DLL child, "Which color of paint do you want?" and he/she points to the blue paint, then you would want to say, "You pointed to the blue paint. That means that this is the color of paint you want to use." The more you talk to the DLL child, the more language they will absorb during all interactions. If you listen and watch, you will probably find that your older children automatically do this. Do not underestimate the power that children have to learn from one another!



Children with Disabilities/ Suspected Delays and GWE

When you are a child care provider, you are faced with the challenge of addressing the individual needs of the children in your group. This means that you will need to address the needs of children with disabilities, suspected delays or other special needs. In order to adapt and modify experiences for these children, you need to have a basic understanding of what it means for a child to have a disability, suspected delay or other special need. You can find extremely helpful fact sheets about different disabilities under the "Educational Resources/ Resources for Providers" tab on the Gee Whiz website or by following this link: <https://geewhizeducation.com/developmental-disabilities-info/>. Additionally, here is a website has wonderful detailed information about many different disabilities. Use it as a resource to help you learn more about the children in your care: <https://www.parentcenterhub.org/specific-disabilities/>

Inclusion benefits all children...not just those with disabilities. Research supports this idea as well as the concept that in order for inclusion to be successful, providers need to adapt and modify experiences to address the individual needs of children with disabilities, suspected delay or other special needs. This section will acquaint you with how you can adapt and modify experiences found in the Gee Whiz curriculum when working with children with disabilities, suspected delays or specials needs. We also encourage you to reach out to your Quality Specialist or CCRR contact for guidance when working with children with disabilities, suspected delays or special needs. They will know how to help you or where to direct you for further assistance

ADULT/CHILD INTERACTIONS

When working with children with disabilities, suspected delays or special needs, interactions are extremely important. Why are these interactions so important? Because they help enhance each child's social and emotional development. They are also key elements in language and cognitive development as well. So how do you promote and enhance these types of adult/child interactions? Here are a few ideas:

- Engage these children as you would all others in conversations. Just keep in mind, for instance, that they may use different means of sharing thoughts, ideas and needs (e.g., nonverbal) and it may take them longer to respond. Patience and good listening/observing skills are key!
- Maintain eye contact and keep interactions positive. It is crucial for children with disabilities, suspected delays or other special needs to have a strong, positive relationship with you. This will help them to feel secure and comfortable as they push themselves to try new things.
- Listen, watch, learn. Again, in many cases, when working with children with disabilities, suspected delays or other special needs, it is so important to listen and observe to gather information. This information then helps you to plan and adapt experiences.



Children with Disabilities/ Suspected Delays and GWE

CHILD/CHILD INTERACTIONS

Child/Child interactions are just as important as child/adult interactions for children with disabilities, suspected delays or other special needs. You have a key role in enhancing and strengthening these interactions. In order for children to interact with each other, they must have the opportunity to do so. This is where you come in...planning experiences and setting up the environment to encourage child/child interactions. Here are a few ideas of how you can accomplish this goal:

- Utilizing toys and equipment that naturally encourage interactions among children such as water and sand tables
- Group games where everyone can participate
- Music and movement experiences
- Bubbles and balls—always popular
- Helping children who may have trouble initiating social interactions to do so (e.g., asking another child to join in play)
- Keeping interactions as positive as possible!



EXAMINING THE ENVIRONMENT

Another important step to take is examining the learning environment. This includes both indoors and outside. It includes mealtime, routine time (e.g., handwashing), pick up and drop off. Take a minute to think about the children in your group and their individual needs. This is ALL of the children and not just those with disabilities, suspected delays or other special needs. Is your environment responsive to the needs of the children in your group? For instance, is your sink easily accessible to all children? Do you have different types and sizes of paintbrushes in your art center? Do the riding toys work for all of the children in your group or do they need to be adapted? It is very important to take a look around and answer these types of questions. You want the materials the children handle each day to be accessible to all, not just some. The ultimate goal is make sure the environment is engaging for ALL children!

Children with Disabilities/ Suspected Delays and GWE

CURRICULUM ADAPTATIONS

Children are ALL very different ... they have different interests, strengths, likes, dislikes, cultural backgrounds... and the list goes on! Adapting and modifying the curriculum to address the needs of children with disabilities, suspected developmental delays or other special needs is extremely important. But, these adaptations should not be limited to this group of children but instead should apply to all of them. **The Gee Whiz curriculum includes adaptation suggestions within the experiences to help you adjust for different developmental levels and skill sets.** We encourage you to read each experience and all adaptations. Then, think about EACH child in your group. Which version of the experience do you think might be the most developmentally appropriate for each child? You might also read the experience and find that you need to incorporate yet another option. This is exactly what you need to do!

Keeping all this in mind, there are many things you can do to adapt the Gee Whiz curriculum to meet not only the needs of any children in your group with disabilities, suspected developmental delays or other special needs, but all of the children as well.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUPPORT

- Make sure all areas are accessible to all children
- Change up materials - add, put away
- Choose materials that encourage children to play together ... even if that is side-by-side (e.g., parallel play) Examples include blocks, water/sand table, dramatic play items, etc.
- Think about what materials might require sharing (e.g., the most popular riding toy)
- Adapt the daily schedule to meet the children's needs (e.g., shorter or longer time for activities)
- Noise matters, too. Some children are very sensitive to loud sounds. If this is the case, keep the volume down when playing music. You can also use folded paper towels and blue painter's tape to cover the place where sound comes out on toys which play music or make sound to dampen volume.
- Does your program have an area where children can go to "decompress?" This might be a Cozy Corner or Book Nook. This type of area is very important for ALL children.

MATERIALS & EQUIPMENT

- Make sure all materials you have available to children match their needs (e.g., loop scissors for children with small motor challenges)
- Are toys and materials easily accessible to children? For instance, can a child in a wheelchair get what he/she needs without needing to ask for help?
- Do any of the materials need to be bigger or easier to handle? For instance, when working with Toddlers or preschoolers with fine motor challenges, you will want to have thick crayons and paintbrushes with thick handles that are easier to manipulate.
- Outside matters, too! Are the riding toys and climbing apparatuses appropriate and accessible for ALL of the children in your group?
- Do you need any special equipment? For instance, do you need a special feeding bowl and spoon for a child that may have motor delays? Do you need a table that is high enough for a wheelchair? Does your home need a ramp?

