

*RESEARCH CONNECTIONS
FACULTY TEACHING MODULES*

Module 6

*Research Connections and
School-Age Children*

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Instructors:

This module is intended to support the professional development of those who are interested in promoting positive outcomes for school-age children (ages 5 to 12) during their out-of-school time. The module is titled “school-age children” and refers to “school-age programs” in order to keep the primary focus on the child and his or her development and learning. As the module’s activities will illustrate for students, the developmental needs of children in this age group are met in many kinds of programs and settings: before/afterschool programs; weekend or summer programs, programs focused on academic skills, recreation, social competence, health, and other outcomes. At their best, such programs aim to provide all children with supervised, developmentally appropriate, growth-promoting experiences¹.

The module does not aim to address all aspects of this important field, and it is not intended as a stand-alone training/professional development course. Instead, it can supplement other professional development by drawing on the extensive resources of Child Care and Early Education *Research Connections* (www.researchconnections.org) to help students find out more about what research says on these issues, and how they may be better able to find and use that research in their work². Students might be already involved in directing or working in out-of-school programs for children in this age group, or they might be students preparing for careers in early care and education with a need for more knowledge about this sector of the field.

The module includes 12 activities/assignments that can be used in higher education courses—either those specifically focused on school-age programming (often part of a community college certificate program) or more general associate degree or baccalaureate courses that do or might include this content (for example, these could include courses in child development; professional issues; or curriculum). The activities may also be appropriate to use in non-

¹ Afterschool Investments (September, 2009). *Using the Child Care and Development Fund to support a system of quality improvement for school-age programs. Strategy Brief*. Washington, DC: Afterschool Investments. Online: http://nccic.acf.hhs.gov/afterschool/using_ccdf.pdf

² Note also that each of the other 5 Modules in this series has supplementary information specific to school-age children and programming for this age group.

credit professional development programs, with adult learners who are not currently “students.”

Below you will see a description of each activity. Each activity also has a worksheet that you may provide to students for recording the results of their searches and other work on the activity. Faculty users of these materials may come from a wide variety of backgrounds and orientations. If you regularly teach research or incorporate research into your classes, you may find the activity descriptions to be more detailed than is needed. As with all *Research Connections* Teaching Modules, you are encouraged to adapt, add to, or pick and choose among these suggestions. You are the expert on your students or other adult learners, and the activities and supporting materials are simply tools for your consideration. (Please note that if you want to change the text you must download and save the Word version, not the PDF).

Before you begin to use this module, we do suggest that you familiarize yourself with the *Research Connections* website and its search features, both by exploring www.researchconnections.org and by reviewing the document “Introduction for Faculty.” Although this document does not discuss “school-age” applications specifically, the general information is essential to your work on this topic as well as other topics that you may address in your teaching or professional development efforts.

Within the general topic of “School-Age Children,” this Module’s 12 activities are grouped into six subtopics:

1. School-Age Children: Who Are They and Where Are They?
2. The School-Age Field: An Overview
3. Out-of-School Programming for School-Age Children
4. Outcomes of School-Age Programming
5. Quality Improvement for School-Age Programs and Providers
6. Policies Affecting Programs for School-Age Children

Outcomes for Students:

Upon completion of this module, students will

1. Know about and be able to use the key features of the *Research Connections* web site;
2. Conduct initial searches and focus or modify their initial searches as needed;
3. Begin to identify specific ways in which research in general, and the *Research Connections* resources in particular, can help them as early childhood professionals with an interest in school-age/out-of-school programming;
4. Find and reflect on relevant research and other resources about specific subtopics within the field of school-age programming;
5. Assess their current level of competence and comfort in finding and using research through *Research Connections*; and
6. Be prepared to use their new competencies to find and apply research on additional aspects of school-age programming.

ALIGNMENT WITH SELECTED NATIONAL STANDARDS AND COMPETENCIES

Note: Like the other Faculty Teaching Modules, the activities in Module 6 are not intended to address everything about this module's topic. However, the research and other resources that students find and apply through the Module's activities may increase their competence related to some of what is emphasized in the standards/elements/goals listed below. The school-age field does not currently have a national set of professional standards or competencies applicable to all professionals. Therefore, listed below are selected professional standards that are well-recognized; some are specifically applicable to school-age practitioners. For example, the Military School-age Assessment System is linked to a credential, and the C.S. Mott Foundation's competencies for afterschool educators include specific sets of skills needed by professionals in different roles.

Additionally, instructors are invited to modify any of the activities and worksheets to give more emphasis to other standards and goals.

MODULE SUBTOPICS	NAEYC STANDARDS WITH KEY ELEMENTS	CDA COMPETENCY GOALS	MILITARY SCHOOL-AGE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM AND COMPETENCY STANDARDS	MOTT CORE COMPETENCIES FOR AFTER SCHOOL EDUCATORS
1. School-Age Children: Who Are They and	1 a, b [children's characteristics and needs]	II and III [supporting competence]	Module 8: Self	"Ability to relate to and work well with diverse

Where Are They?	2 a [families' decision-making] 6 d [reflection]	across developmental areas]		children and youth”
2. The School-Age Field: An Overview	6 a [one sector of the EC field]	V and VI [foundations of program management; one sector of the EC field]	Module 12: Program Management [one sector of the EC field]	“Ability to effectively carry out program operations and policies to achieve program goals and meet needed requirements”
3. Out-of-School Programming for School-Age Children	4 a,b,c,d [methods] 5 a, b, c [content]	I, II, III, IV [multiple aspects of programming] V [management issues]	Module 3: Out-of-School Environments	“Ability to facilitate participants’ learning of new knowledge and skills”
4. Outcomes of School-Age Programming	1 b [influences on development] 6 c,d,e [collaboration, reflection, advocacy]	II, III [developmental outcomes] VI [professionalism]	Module 5: Cognitive; Module 12: Program Management	“Ability to facilitate participants’ learning of new knowledge and skills”
5. Quality Improvement for School-Age Programs and Providers	3 c [quality assessment instruments] 6 a,b,c [professional development]	V [quality management]	Module 13: Professionalism	“Commitment to one’s own learning, skill-building, and professionalism on the job”
6. Policies Affecting Programs for School-Age Children	6 a, b [professional knowledge, standards and other guidelines]	V, VI [financing and management; professionalism]	Module 12: Program Management	“Ability to effectively carry out program operations and policies to achieve program goals and meet needed requirements”

Module 6's Subtopics and Suggested Activities

Subtopic 6.1: School-Age Children: Who Are They and Where Are They?

In order to plan and implement effective programs, practitioners must begin with an understanding of the developmental characteristics and needs of school-age children. Students' coursework in Child Development may address some of this content and the two activities in this subtopic will help supplement this material. These activities will also introduce students to the key features of the Research Connections' site and search processes.

Activity 6.1.A. School-Age Children's Characteristics and Needs

We suggest that you begin this activity by helping students connect or reconnect with the world of school-age children, in an exercise that probes their own memories of their school-age years. The exercise can be conducted either face-to-face or on line. Then students will then search for one specific reference on the Research Connections site—the introductory chapter to a recent, excellent book:

Huston, A.C., & Ripke, M.N. (2006). Middle childhood: Contexts of development. In A.C. Huston & Ripke (Eds.), Developmental contexts in middle childhood: Bridges to adolescence and adulthood (pp. 1-22). New York: Cambridge University Press.

You will give them some information to guide their search—depending on their current skills in searching, this might be just one author, the title of the chapter or book, the year of publication, or a few key terms about the topic. Students can search independently or in teams; you just need to be sure that they do find the chapter!

Then, depending on your library system, students may download the chapter, find it in the library, or read copies that you provide to them. If you prefer, you may substitute another chapter or similar source that summarizes research on school-age children's developmental characteristics.

Please note that the Research Connections' collection does not emphasize basic child development research. Instead, it includes resources on early care and education (including settings for school-age children). Therefore, you will find some "development in middle childhood" resources but not an exhaustive collection.

As they read and reflect on this chapter or other similar resource, students will be using research-based information about what children are like during the years from 5 to 12, what their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are like, and what

kinds of experiences make a difference in their development. **[See Worksheet 6.1.A]** For related information, students or instructors might review some of the material in Module 2, such as Activities 2.2, “Risk Factors in Child Development,” 2.4, “Child Development Terminology,” and 2.6, “Play and Child Development.”

Students will then begin to apply the developmental information they have found in their search by completing a chart that connects “What School-Age Children Are Like” to “What Experiences School-Age Children Need.” You may want to have teams share these charts with one another, discussing what these connections mean for decisions about out-of-school programming. Those who are already involved in the school-age field may reflect on whether opportunities provided for children are the best possible match for their developmental characteristics and needs.

Activity 6.1.B: Where Are Children Spending Their Out-of-School Time?

As with the first activity in this subtopic, you might begin with a student reflection: As children, where did they spend their out-of-school time, before and after school, on weekends, and during vacation time? Where do the children in their community, or those in programs where they work, now spend time when not in school? Following the discussion/reflection, you can have the students practice their search skills by doing a “Treasure Hunt”—in this case, using hints to locate and download one specific resource that will provide very useful information from national surveys. For your information (don’t tell the students!), the resource is:

Lawrence, Sharmila. (October 2006). School-age child care arrangements. (Research-to-Policy Connections No. 4). New York: Child Care & Early Education Research Connections.

As described in the directions for students **[See Worksheet 6.1.B]**, they will search for this resource in different ways. You might give each of them a slip of paper with either the author’s name, or the publisher, or the title, or the month and year—and, of course, the general topic. You can make these hints more or less challenging depending on their prior experience doing searches. Each person will use search strategies to try to find the resource, figure out how to download it, and record how long the process took. Students can share experiences and tips with one another.

After finding and reviewing this resource, they will follow the worksheet’s directions to use the “Browse by Topic” feature to survey the resources on “selection of child care and early education arrangements.” They will be able to select and—if possible—download several resources that may shed light on the decisions families make about their children’s out-of-school time.

As a follow-up activity, either with a face-to-face group or on line, you might cycle back to the introductory discussion, asking students to reflect on whether the factors identified in these national surveys are similar to those in the communities where they live and work.

Finally, students might develop a presentation appropriate for leaders in their community about the risks associated with school-age children’s being unsupervised or “home alone.”

Subtopic 6.2: The “School-Age” Field: An Overview

Whether students have years of experience with school-age children or whether they are just finding out about this field, this subtopic will help them see the “big picture” of the range of environments, programming options, and career pathways for those interested in working with school-age children outside of traditional education settings. At the same time they will gain an early familiarity with the scope of the Research Connections resources and its search process. In the two activities for this subtopic, students will use key search terms about school-age issues and services, finding out the breadth of research and other resources available. They will also begin to learn how to filter their searches in various ways, to home in on specific information on topics of personal interest to them. As in most of the Module activities, students are encouraged to share the results of their explorations, either face-to-face or through the internet. For those who are new to this important field, the activities may help them begin to clarify their professional role.

Activity 6.2.A: A Bird’s-Eye View of the “School-Age” Field

For this activity, students will search the Research Connections site using terminology that is already familiar to many of them, as well as perhaps some new terminology, such as “Extended Learning.” [see Worksheet 6.1.A for directions for students] Feel free to add to or modify the list of terms for your own purposes. They will then learn how to “Browse” the collection, again looking for relevant resources. Be sure you have first used the “Browse” feature on your own; you may want to demonstrate this and other features, if you have internet available in your classroom/meeting space. This activity will also help students begin to discover the key sources of knowledge in this field, both individuals and key organizations that develop and disseminate evidence-based resources.

Activity 6.2.B: A Close-Up: Focusing and Filtering Your Search for More Information

For this activity, students will learn to use different kinds of filters and combinations of search terms the Research Connections site. Students will have the opportunity to

save their searches using RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feeds, so that they can revisit the results of their searches and easily find updates and new resources that have been added to Research Connections. Students are encouraged to filter their searches in accordance with their career paths and interests.

Subtopic 6.3: Out-of-School Programming for School-Age Children

In Subtopic 6.2, students began to have a sense of the breadth of this field. In this subtopic, the emphasis is on the kinds of program settings, curricula, and philosophical approaches that are possible, and also on research that could support specific kinds of programming decisions. Note that this subtopic addresses child outcomes to some extent, but the link between specific features of out-of-school programs and specific child outcomes will be addressed in greater depth in Subtopic 6.5.

Activity 6.3.A: Mapping the Landscape of Programming Options

For this activity, students will use two different search techniques – browsing by topic and keyword search – to identify resources on school-age program curricula and interventions. You may discuss with students which of these search techniques yields more useful results. Students will make note of several particularly relevant resources on school-age program curricula and interventions. You can then instruct students, either on their own or in groups, to reflect on what they have learned. You might ask them to identify common curricula and interventions used in school-age programs.

Following this exercise, you may choose to ask students to learn more about the curricula and program activities of an afterschool program in their community by interviewing a local program director. If students are currently working in school-age programs, they can discuss with their colleagues which type of curricula is most effective. Alternatively, you could have a panel of local program directors (or students working in afterschool programs) discuss varied program curricula in front of the class.

Finally, as an optional activity, you can organize a class debate to discuss which types of activities or curricula are most effective for school-age children. It may be helpful to ask half of the class to argue for a program focused on academics, while the other half of the class argues for the value of enrichment/recreation activities. While a quality school-age program may, in fact, incorporate both academics and recreation, this debate can help students to understand the merits of both program strategies.

Activity 6.3.B: Research Support for Your Own Programming Decisions

1. *A typical assignment for college or other early childhood professional development is to design a set of learning activities, or curriculum/programming features appropriate for children. In this module, of course these would need to be appropriate for a school-age program such as an afterschool program or a summer program. The purpose of this activity is to help students find resources that may provide research support or other credible resources related to their programming recommendations. For related information in other modules, students and instructors may review Module 3, Activity 3.1, "Using Research Connections as Part of a Curriculum Development Project," or Module 5, Activity 5.2, "Using Research Connections to learn more about delivery systems and settings for early childhood services."*

Either individuals or teams of students might do this activity, as part of a larger school-age programming/curriculum development project. Depending on students' background, you could give them a list of possible goal areas from which to choose: for example--

Programs/curricula to

- *Strengthen literacy skills;*
- *Enhance physical fitness;*
- *Build interest and competence in math and science;*
- *Improve children's study skills;*
- *Address the needs of English language students;*
- *Create an inclusive environment for children with disabilities; or*
- *Any other goal areas that you or they may find worth exploring.*

Note that these also link back to Subtopic 6.1, in which students searched for basic information about the developmental characteristics and needs of school-age children. Here they begin to look specifically for how structured programs may promote development in multiple areas and for diverse groups of children.

*The directions for students [see **Worksheet 6.3.B**] describe how to use the "More Search Options" feature to home in on relevant resources. Be sure your group of students knows how to find and download (or obtain hard copies from a library) full-text versions of some of the resources that they find. See Introduction for Faculty, and also direct students to the "Guide to Searching the Collection" from Research Connections' home page.*

As a follow-up, you could ask students to create a poster or Power Point presentation about their proposed programming recommendations (to be presented in person or on line). In the presentation they may summarize and

display some of the resources they found, which provide evidence about the value of the particular programming approach that they recommend.

Subtopic 6.4: Outcomes of School-Age Programming

Subtopic 6.3 focused on the content/programming emphasis of out-of-school services for school-age children. In this subtopic we shift to research on the results for children’s development when they participate in such services. The resources available through Research Connections include many such studies. The activities for this subtopic will help students find credible information and use it to build a case for such programs within their community.

Activity 6.4.A: Jigsaw—The Many Possible Benefits of Program Participation

For this activity, we suggest creating teams of students, at least 4 or 5 groups in all. Each team is asked to search the Research Connections collection for evidence of the benefits of out-of-school time program participation in one of a number of developmental or learning areas. If you chose to use Activity 6.3.B, students may want to continue with their already-chosen area. You are welcome to use the following list of possible areas to assign, or add/substitute others.

Benefits for:

- *Social competence (or have them search for outcomes related to prevention of antisocial or delinquent behavior)*
- *Mental health*
- *Literacy skills, reading ability*
- *Mathematics skills*
- *General academic achievement*
- *Physical health (perhaps including obesity prevention)*

Again, this activity gives you an opportunity to connect back to the developmental characteristics and needs of children in this age range and to help students think about the benefits of school-age programs in developmental perspective.

*The directions for students [see **Worksheet 6.4.A**] also introduce students to the value of peer-reviewed research (and how to find it), as well as the value of literature reviews as summaries or syntheses of many studies on a particular topic. (You’ll need to make sure students understand that they can filter their initial search results to find only literature reviews).*

Either in class or by other means, each team may be asked to share the results of their search, creating a group “jigsaw” of potential benefits for school-age children’s program participation in various domains of their development and

learning. You might have students create an actual jigsaw display such as a wall poster, or use some other means to document what they have found.

Activity 6.4.B: Presenting the Evidence to Others

In this activity, students are asked to build a persuasive, evidence-based presentation drawing on the results of their research on Activity 6.4.A. Using the teams that were formed in Activity 6.4.A, you may have students present to a hypothetical group of city leaders – mayor, city council members, etc. about the value of out-of-school time. Students will make their presentation with the intention of asking the city leaders to maintain their financial investment in transportation supports for out-of-school time programs, which are at risk of being cut. Faculty members have the option to create larger or smaller groups depending on class size and interest. The role play scenario could also be adjusted to a different context—rather than a city, perhaps a school district or other local or state decision-making body.

Subtopic 6.5: Quality Improvement for School-Age Programs and Providers

When looking at evidence of benefits for children in Subtopic 6.4, it should be clear that these benefits are unlikely to occur unless programs are of good quality. The field of early care and education, including the school-age/out-of-school field, is directing a great deal of attention to quality improvement strategies. The activities for this subtopic aim to help students identify current approaches to quality improvement, including professional development as a key tool.

Activity 6.5.A: Defining and Measuring Quality in Programs for School-Age Children

For this activity, you can begin by asking students – individually or in teams- to discuss their own perceptions about quality afterschool programs. For related information, students and instructors can refer to Module 5, Activities 5.3 and 5.4 “Using Research Connections to focus on observing and measuring quality in ECE” and “Using Research Connections to focus on the continuing training and professional development of early childhood educators.”

*As described in **Worksheet 6.5**, you can ask students to discuss:*

- *Why are high-quality afterschool programs important?*
- *What do you think are key components of high-quality afterschool programs?*

*Following the brainstorming exercise, students can follow the instructions in **Worksheet 6.5** to locate a Research Connections literature review titled “The Quality of School-Age Care in Afterschool Settings.” In large or small group discussion, or on line, students can compare what the research says about quality*

afterschool programs to what they had come up with in their brainstorming exercise.

The next portion of this activity will focus on identifying and using a quality assessment tool. Students will download one assessment tool (either national or local in scope) and read it. They can write down some of the major ways that the tool is used to assess quality and possibly discuss the variations in tools with the group. Students who have looked at assessment tools for prekindergarten, Head Start, or child care programs may be interested in comparing characteristics of those tools with ones developed to assess quality in programs for older children.

As an optional exercise, students can try out the assessment tool in their workplace or student teaching setting to better understand how it would be used. Students can then reflect - individually or in groups - on how assessment tools are used and challenges that programs face in achieving quality.

Activity 6.5.B: Professional Development for School-Age Program Staff

For this activity, you might begin by having students—individually or in teams—develop professional development-related questions to which they would like research-based answers.

You could give them a few examples, such as

“What kind of training and education do out-of-school staff members typically have?”

“What should staff and managers know and be able to do?” [core competencies]

“Are there new ideas about training being used right now?”

*At this point your students should be fairly skilled in using various search features of Research Connections. You may want to give them hints—some of which are in the worksheet [see **Worksheet 6.5.A**]*—about useful search terms to use for this activity, such as**

- Workforce development*
- Professional development*
- Staff development*
- Training*
- Competencies*
- Standards*

For this activity, students will need to be creative and strategic in combining various search terms in “AND”/“OR” combinations in the “More Search Options”

feature. Again, you may need to demonstrate or refresh their knowledge of these strategies.

As a follow-up activity, we suggest that students interview those currently working in programs for school-age children—either their co-workers or others—about their own needs and interests in professional development. Then all of this information can be used to clarify their own professional development goals. Depending on their current position, students might also use the information to design professional development for their own staff.

Subtopic 6.6: Policies Affecting Programs for School-Age Children

This subtopic will help students find information about national and state policies relevant to providing services for school-age children. Issues may include trends in licensing requirements; state ECE quality rating and improvement systems as they relate to school-age programs; and federal, state, and private sources of funding for such programs. For related information, students and instructors can refer to Module 5, Activity 5.5, “Using Research Connections to look at state-level standards and regulations for ECE.”

Depending on the students with whom you work, you may need to do quite a bit of modification and “tailoring” of these suggested activities. But whether a learner is an experienced program director or a beginning early childhood student with minimal knowledge about this field, each can benefit from diving into the policy-relevant resources available through Research Connections.

For this subtopic, one of the most helpful features of Research Connections is the ability to browse by state, and to filter search results by state. Students may be most interested in regulations and funding available within their own state, but they may also be interested in comparing their state with others.

Activity 6.6.A: State Policies and Regulations

*Depending on their background, students may have extensive knowledge or no knowledge of their own state’s policies, requirements, or licensing regulations for out-of-school services. This activity can easily be modified to reflect this diversity by changing the instructions for students [see **Worksheet 6.6.A**].*

In this activity, students will search first by their own state and then by another state of their choice, looking for comparisons in some aspect of public policies or requirements related to out-of-school programs. Licensing regulations may be one promising area to focus on, or in some states, students might find information on the state’s Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), looking specifically for how it may address school-age programs, staff

qualifications, etc. Especially for those who are not yet working in this field, the activity includes a suggestion that students interview a program director about her or his views on some of the relevant policies or regulations. Experienced staff may talk about these issues with colleagues or write a reflective journal entry in which they react to what they have learned about other states' policy initiatives in comparison to their own.

Activity 6.6.B: Finding the Green—Funding for Programs for School-Age Children

In this activity, students will interview an agency's Executive Director, child care business owner, administrator, or other relevant leader about the sources of funding they use to support their program. In setting up this exercise, instructors should be sure to emphasize the importance of students' investigating the specific sources of funding for the "school-age" part of the program. Many students may be able to set up interviews at their current places of employment or possibly with the caregiver they use for their own children. For those students that do not have immediate connections to prospective interviewees, instructors may consider assembling lists of child care providers who provide school-age care by zip code from the local Child Care Resource and Referral Agency. Following their interviews, students will report the results of their interviews at the next class meeting. It's recommended that instructors structure enough time for students to complete this exercise, allowing approximately 1-2 weeks for students to complete their field interviews.

As an optional follow-up exercise, instructors may ask students to perform a Research Connections search on "school-age funding" or "out-of-school time funding," or a similar term. Students should select 1-3 state-specific sources of information on funding sources in their state and reflect on the results of their research in light of the research available in Research Connections.

Self-assessment

*To wrap up this module, you may wish to ask students to complete a self-assessment of their current knowledge, attitudes, and comfort level with respect to finding and using research [See **Worksheet 6.7**]. You might also wish to use this as a sort of pre-/post- assessment, having students complete the form early in the module and then again at the conclusion. The form will prompt students to identify areas in which they will need more experience or additional resources. Instructors can facilitate a discussion of students' self-assessments, emphasizing that as continuous learners they will have many opportunities to use and expand their skills, using Research Connections as a support in finding and applying research. As always, we encourage you to adapt or add to this tool, depending on your own objectives for the module.*



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