

# Child Care & Early Education RESEARCH CONNECTIONS

## RESEARCH CONNECTIONS TEACHING MODULES

### Module 1

Welcome to Child Care and  
Early Education *Research Connections!*

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### **Faculty:**

This is an introductory module intended to be used as an orientation to the importance of research and evidence-based practices, and to the specific value of *Research Connections*. Depending on your program, it could be used at the beginning of any core course taken by all ECE students. Therefore, unlike the four “content-specific” modules, this module is not tied to a particular course. Some faculty who have piloted these materials recommend using at least some of Module 1’s activities at the beginning of every ECE course, as a refresher. As with all modules, feel free to select from the activities and related student worksheets, modifying as you wish (you must download the Word version in order to modify text). (Note: this module also addresses issues and adaptations relevant to professionals working with school-age children, ages five through twelve.)

### **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, browse, and filter results
3. Begin to identify specific ways in which research in general, and the *Research Connections* resources in particular, can help them as a future early childhood professional
4. Self-assess their current level of competence and comfort in finding and using research through *Research Connections*
5. Be prepared to use their new competencies to find and apply research in specific content areas and courses.

### **Professional Standards for Early Childhood and School-Age Professional Preparation:**

This module provides students with learning opportunities related to NAEYC Standard 5 (Becoming a Professional), especially Key Elements 5c and 5d. Additionally, the enhanced knowledge base gained by students can help them understand essential content across each of the other standards. For NCATE and NAEYC accreditation purposes, faculty might consider how key assessments in this module and in modules 2-5, could help document students’ competence in relation to some elements of the standards.

While the school-age field does not currently have a national set of professional standards or competencies applicable to all professionals, there some professional standards exist that are well-recognized; a few of which are

specifically applicable to school-age practitioners. For example, the Military School-age Assessment System, which is linked to a credential, and the C.S. Mott Foundation's *Core Competencies for Afterschool Educators* include specific sets of skills needed by professionals in different roles. Throughout these materials, where relevant, we will also include a discussion of how the module aligns with selected school-age standards.

This module aligns with the *Core Competencies for Afterschool Educators* indicators, in particular the indicator, "Commitment to one's own learning, skill building, and professionalism on the job." Module 1 also aligns with the Military School-age Assessment System Module 13: Professionalism.

## Module 1's Contents and Suggested Activities

### 1. What are evidence-based practices and why are they important for future early childhood and school-age professionals?

*Students need to see the Research Connections web site and its collection of resources within the broader context of what have been called "evidence-based practices." In early childhood, evidence-based practice has been defined as "a decision-making process that integrates the best available research evidence with family and professional wisdom and values" (Buyse & Wesley, 2006). Below is an outline of some key points about evidence-based practices. You are welcome to use or adapt the outline as a presentation, handout, or Power Point. The outline is followed by some key references and resources.*

#### *WHAT ARE EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES?*

*As summarized by Buyse and Wesley (2006), "evidence-based practices" ("practices" meaning what professionals do in their work) include 3 elements:*

- *Knowledge based on research*
- *Professional expertise*
- *The values of professionals (and, in early childhood, of families)*

*Together, these elements should influence all professional decisions.*

#### *IN WHAT OTHER FIELDS HAVE EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES BEEN DISCUSSED?*

- *The concept began in the field of medicine*
- *It has also been emphasized in other health-related fields, social work, etc.*

*In education-related fields, rigorous research, such as that based on randomized controlled trials that have been replicated in multiple settings, is often considered the most reliable basis on which to base practice.*

**WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR FUTURE EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS TO KNOW ABOUT AND USE EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES?**

- *Basing decisions on evidence means that it is more likely that outcomes for children and their families will be better.*
- *The use of evidence-based practices recognizes that the early childhood field has a research base*
- *The use of evidence-based practices recognizes that early childhood educators are professionals and that the field is indeed a profession.*

**WHAT ARE SOME IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER ABOUT EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES?**

- *“Evidence” is not static or fixed—new research often causes us to question old ideas*
- *There are standards for what is “evidence”—for example, research must be valid, credible, relevant*
- *No one of the 3 elements of evidence based practice will, by itself, lead to good decisions on behalf of children and families. All 3 must be integrated—and this is often difficult to do.*

*Key reference: Buysse, V., & Wesley, P. W. (Eds.) (2006). Evidence-based practice in the early childhood field. Washington, DC: ZERO TO THREE Press. An excellent concise discussion of their main points may be found on line at <http://www.recognitionandresponse.org/content/view/101/113/>*

*Additional references:*

*Terzian, M., Moore, K.A. Williams-Taylor, L., & Nguyen, H. (2009, July). Online Resources for Identifying Evidence-Based, Out-of-School Time Programs: A Users’ Guide. Washington, DC: Child Trends. See also the Youth Development Section of the Child Trends website for additional resources on evidence-based practice in out-of-school time programs. Available at [http://www.childtrends.org/\\_portalcat.cfm?LID=C6CEDAFE-34FF-4DFD-9CD745899CE5D128](http://www.childtrends.org/_portalcat.cfm?LID=C6CEDAFE-34FF-4DFD-9CD745899CE5D128)*

*Also, the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (NECTAC) has a useful site with definitions, links to various centers, and other information about the concept of evidence-based practices in early childhood, with special emphasis on children with disabilities.*

*<http://www.nectac.org/topics/evbased/evbased.asp>*

*Students may be asked to go to this site and explore the many applications of evidence-based practice.*

*In addition to this presentation, a related activity may be for students to reflect on and share their career goals (often in an introductory course*

you're discussing these goals with students anyway) and to begin to think about what it may mean for them to use evidence-based practices, whatever their future path may be. **[See Student Worksheet 1.1]**

## **2. What is the Research Connections Web site and how can it help future early childhood and school-age professionals?**

*This will be an exploratory hands-on assignment: On their own, students will go to the [www.researchconnections.org](http://www.researchconnections.org) site. Their focus will be on the home page and on looking at an overview of resources available. A worksheet will guide them through a few suggested tasks and can be brought to class for discussion. **[See Student Worksheet 1.2]***

**Tip:** *Faculty find that many students are initially challenged and frustrated by identifying appropriate "search terms," especially if they have not been in an ECE program long enough to be familiar with the jargon in our field. You will probably want to spend time now and in the future, looking at the terms they have used and helping them think about what may be more useful/productive search terms. Their own textbooks, as well as some of the Research Connections resources, may help. If you have internet access in the room where your class meets, it is easy to demonstrate the difference in results that they will get from different kinds of search terms.*

## **3. Searching for information on Research Connections**

*Following up on the previous "Exploring" assignment, faculty who have classroom Internet access are encouraged to do some searches with students, and then to follow up with another assignment in which students do searches either on their own, in pairs, or as part of a team, choosing from a list of possible terms, which will be provided by faculty. For example, depending on which course is used for this Welcome module, and on the interests of students, faculty might demonstrate searches on topics such as*

*Afterschool Programs (related terms include: out-of-school time, school-age, youth programs)  
 Child Abuse  
 Child Care Licensing  
 Family Child Care  
 Early Head Start  
 High/Scope [or other curriculum name]  
 Play  
 Playground Safety  
 School-age Programs  
 Standards*

*This is also a good time to introduce students to the “Browse” function, especially browsing by “Topical Classification” (see the Introduction to Faculty as well as Research Connections’ on-line information about how to use this helpful feature. You might compare for students the different benefits of browsing for a broad overview of a topic, versus searching for resources by specific search terms (words or phrases).*

*The worksheet for this activity [See Student Worksheet 1.3] asks students to conduct searches using terms you have provided, to narrow or modify that search, to use filters as needed, to conduct a search using a term in which they are interested, and to browse for resources on a topic of their interest. Depending on students’ prior familiarity with conducting searches, browsing, and filtering, you may want to modify the worksheet’s directions to make them more or less challenging.*

#### **4. Research Terminology: Hunt and Jeopardy Game**

*For this assignment, faculty will have students draw out of a hat various research-related terms about which they will learn more. Examples of such terms may be found in the “Research Glossary” available from the Research Connections home page, although as with other activities in the teaching modules, faculty are invited to adapt depending on their students’ strengths and needs. In any case, these should be terms that will help students understand the information they are finding, and that are relevant and potentially interesting to early childhood students. Such terms may include*

*Attrition  
Confidentiality  
Cross-sectional and longitudinal data  
Direct observation  
Literature review  
Quantitative research  
Qualitative research  
Randomization  
Reliability  
Representativeness  
Sample  
Social Desirability Bias  
Survey Research*

*Students (individuals or teams) will not simply copy the glossary definition but try to simplify or explain it in their own way, adding an example and perhaps a “why is this important?” [See Student Worksheet 1.4]*

*A “Jeopardy”-like in-class activity would require individual students or teams of students to share their definition or down-to-earth explanation with the rest of*

*the class, who will have the entire list of terms. Students (using the “in the form of a question” Jeopardy rule) try to identify which research term is being defined.*

**5. What’s the use of research anyway? Is it possible to know if research is any good?**

*Outside of class, students can review the NAEYC (<http://www.naeyc.org/resources/research/>) description of why research is important and what the features are of quality research; they can also look at the Research Connections description of how to evaluate research (click on “Understanding Research” and from there, “Assessing Research Quality.” The follow-up is to complete an assignment in which they respond to a hypothetical scenario (For example, a teacher with whom they work says “What difference does this stuff make? I don’t believe in research! When I go on line, all I see is that one person says one thing and another person says another. So forget about it! I don’t need to know anything about research for the work that I do!” In class, students can role play this dialogue, with the faculty member facilitating and guiding discussion—or students can post responses on line. Note that one scenario is provided on the worksheet, but of course you may substitute a more relevant one for your class. **[See Student Worksheet 1.5]***

**6. Self-assessment**

*To wrap up this “Welcome” module, students may complete a self-assessment of their current knowledge, attitudes, and comfort level with respect to finding and using research **[See Student Worksheet 1.6]**. The form will prompt students to identify areas in which they will need more experience or additional resources. Faculty can facilitate a discussion of students’ self-assessments, emphasizing that this module is only a first step and that as they move through the ECE program they will be using and expanding their skills with Research Connections activities in other courses.*