

Child Care & Early Education RESEARCH CONNECTIONS

RESEARCH CONNECTIONS TEACHING MODULES

Module 2

Research Connections and Early Childhood Development

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Faculty:

This module is intended to be used after students have completed the introductory module “Welcome to *Child Care and Early Education Research Connections!*” It assumes that students have gained basic familiarity with the resources available through the *Research Connections* site and are ready to apply these in the content area of child development. If some time has passed since students completed the introductory module, it may be helpful to do a quick refresher. If you have Internet access in class, it will be easy to go to *Research Connections*’ home page, display various resources, and remind students how to do initial searches, how to browse, and how to filter using various criteria.

We assume that most faculty will use the activities and worksheets in this module within a course in Early Childhood Development or a similar course, although course titles and scope may vary. The early childhood field is expanding to include the early grades of elementary school, for example, to include children five through eight. Similarly, for those that would like to address school-age issues, you may want to include activities inclusive of children through age 12, or older. There is no recommended sequence or time frame for the suggested activities in this module, since your course is not organized in the same way as others’ may be. Further, if you are teaching some other course—for example, a course in family relationships, curriculum, teaching methods, or assessment—some of the child-development-focused activities in this module might also be used there. And as with all of the *Research Connections* Teaching Modules, we encourage you to adapt and improve these materials!

Outcomes for Students:

Upon completion of this module, students will

1. Expand their knowledge of resources specifically related to research on child development.
2. Extend their skill in conducting searches, browsing by Topical Classifications, and filtering results for child development-related information
3. Describe how they can use research on child development as future teachers of children and youth.
4. Self-assess their current level of competence and comfort in finding and using child development research through *Research Connections*

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

This module provides students with learning opportunities related to NAEYC Standard 1 (Promoting Child Development and Learning), and Standard 5 (Becoming a Professional), especially Key Elements 5c and 5d. For NCATE and NAEYC accreditation purposes, faculty might consider how key assessments in this and other modules could help document students' competence in relation to the standards.

With respect to school-age professional standards, this module aligns with the *Core Competencies for Afterschool Educators* indicators, in particular the indicators, "Commitment to one's own learning, skill building, and professionalism on the job," and "Ability to facilitate participants' learning of new knowledge and skills." Module 2 also aligns with two Military School-age Assessment System modules: Module 3: Out-of-School Environments, and Module 13: Professionalism.

Module 2's Contents and Suggested Activities

1. Using Research Connections as part of a child development case study

Most early childhood development courses include a major assignment/project in which students spend time observing one or more children, describing their observations, and commenting on the child's development from the perspective of developmental theory and research. In addition to drawing upon information in their textbook and other class material, such a project invites supplementary investigations using the resources of Research Connections. Examples follow:

Students individually or in teams might select one developmental domain-- physical, social, emotional, cognitive, language development--on which to do some additional research. If this seems too broad, they might choose a subtopic in "their" domain, using their textbook or other course material. Using their search skills, students might look for reports, fact sheets and briefs, or other resources. This might be a good place for them to concentrate on quite recent research (note that Research Connections allows one to filter searches by year). Then as part of their final case study report, there might be a section titled "New research on [for example] children's social development." Students would summarize what they have found and comment on its relevance in understanding the child on whom they've focused in the case study.

Many case study projects emphasize students' observation skills. To enhance this facet of the project, one might ask students to look on Research Connections' site for research that uses child observations. One way is to have students simply search for "observation" or "child observations" in the "description" field by first clicking on "More Search Options" from the home page (this is easy to do, but see

Research Connections' tips for searching and perhaps share some of these with students). Each student might find and download one full text example of a study that used direct observations of children. Students most likely will do this through clicking on their own college/university e-library connection, in the full text options box in the upper right corner of the View Resource Details pages).

As an in-class follow-up, one might discuss some of these child observation methods and explore how useful these might be for early childhood professionals. [See Student Worksheet 2.1, which focuses on the use of child observations. However, you could easily create other worksheets to link the Research Connections to some other aspect of your course's child development case study.]

2. Risk factors in child development

This is a topic that is usually addressed in child development courses, and on which much important research has been conducted, especially in recent years. Faculty might give students a list of risk factors (focusing on those that are emphasized within the course). Examples might be

- a. mothers' substance abuse*
- b. family violence*
- c. some specific disabilities*
- d. poverty*
- e. low birth weight*
- f. lead paint exposure*
- g. chronic school absenteeism*
- h. obesity and/or physical inactivity and poor nutrition*

It might be advisable for each student to have several such factors to explore, in case a specific search is not successful. And again, this kind of assignment may work best if groups of students are investigating the same set of factors.

Students would then independently (or as teams) conduct their searches using a worksheet as a guide (See Student Worksheet 2.2). In class, or in follow-up written reports, they can share the resources that they found and discuss their relevance for working with children and their families.

3. Finding full-text material on Research Connections

Faculty who have classroom Internet access may begin by doing a brief demonstration, entering a basic, relevant key word or phrase (an example might be "attachment") and then showing students how to filter to find those for which full-text options are available. Full-text options include (a) directly through Research Connections, (b) through the original source, (c) whether they would need to link to their own college or university library in order to download and

read an entire article, or (d) whether they would need to try the Google Scholar option.

Then faculty may assign students specific terms/topics related to what is being addressed in the Child Development course. For this assignment, it may be best to give all students the same term/topic. Students are asked to search for full-text material related to this topic, download 1-2 such documents, and bring to class. All of the relevant documents can be compared and compiled. Students will also share with their classmates one important new idea or piece of information that they gained from the documents they downloaded. This should be something that would potentially be useful in their work as an early childhood practitioner. **[See Student Worksheet 2.3]**

4. Child Development Terminology: Using the Research Connections Glossary

This assignment has a format similar to the “Research Terminology” assignment in Module 1. For this assignment, faculty will have students draw out of a hat various child development-related terms from Research Connections’ “Child Care & Early Education Glossary.” Again, faculty are invited to adapt the list of terms depending on the focus of this course; their students’ prior knowledge, strengths and needs; and other resources available to students, such as their child development textbook. For a child development course, such terms from the Glossary might include:

- Attachment
- Developmental assessment
- Developmental milestone
- Early intervention
- Gross motor development
- Inclusion
- School readiness
- Social development

Teams of students (individuals or teams) will not simply copy the glossary definition but will describe its meaning in their own words. They will also add examples from their observations (if the course has observations) and will be prepared to describe why this aspect of child development is important for early childhood professionals to know about. **[See Student Worksheet 2.4]**

A related in-class activity would require 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. As in the “Welcome” module, students (using the “in the form of a question” Jeopardy rule) would try to identify which child development term is being defined.

5. Learning more about child development researchers

*To expand students' appreciation of the field of child development research, you might ask students to select a child development researcher (someone emphasized in class or in the textbook) and search for additional work by that person. Each student might learn about a different person, or pairs/teams of students might work together. It might also be useful for each individual or team to gather information about two different researchers, allowing them to compare and contrast content areas, amount and type of publications, and so on. [See **Student Worksheet 2.5**].*

In class, this may be a good opportunity to help students learn more about searching by author. The Research Connections site makes it easy to browse by authors. For example, one may click on "Browse by Author" to generate a list of all the resources in the Research Connections sorted by author. The results of searches or Topical Classifications browses may also be filtered by author. Several of these options could be demonstrated by the instructor or by students.

A follow-up class discussion could involve teams sharing some of what they found. Faculty can facilitate students' thinking about what child development researchers do and how they do it.

6. Play and Child Development

Because play is such a frequently-emphasized topic in early childhood teacher education, and because of the rich base of evidence about play, you might include the resources of Research Connections when discussing this topic. For school-age children, project-based and experiential learning are important strategies to engage children in active learning approaches.

One suggestion is to have students interview teachers, parents, or family members about play or project-based, experiential learning, depending on the age of the focal child or the interest of the student—what are their ideas, what do they think it does for young children, is it worth spending time on, etcetera. Then students might use Research Connections to get a sense of the scope of research on various facets of play in relation to child development. For example, they might conduct searches on:

- Play and creativity*
- Play and disabilities*
- Play and parents*
- Play and literacy*
- Play and cognitive development (or other domains)*
- Play and infants*
- Play and aggression*
- Project-based learning*
- Experiential learning*

Extended learning

Searches for these combinations are easily conducted by clicking on “More Search Options” from the home page. “Play” can always be the first term from All Fields and the other word or phrase the second from All Fields. Teams of students might focus on each of these combinations and share some of the results with their classmates. [See Student Worksheet 2.6]

7. Self-assessment

To wrap up this module, students will again complete a self-assessment of their current knowledge, attitudes, and comfort level with respect to finding and using research [See Student Worksheet 1.6; same form to be used in all modules, of course with any modifications you may care to make]. 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 students will be able to apply the skills they have gained as they’ve used Research Connections’ resources in this course when they take other courses during their early childhood education program.