

Child Care & Early Education RESEARCH CONNECTIONS

RESEARCH CONNECTIONS TEACHING MODULES

Module 3

Research Connections and Early Childhood Curriculum and Teaching Strategies

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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 early childhood curriculum and teaching strategies. Of course, students working or planning to work in school-age programs also need to learn about relevant research around curriculum and teaching strategies and what this may mean for their work. If this is not a part of the existing ECE curriculum, it can be addressed by adapting aspects of this module. Where possible, we have indicated some options for adaptation. 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.

For this module, you may also want to give students more guidance about how to “Browse By Topic” under those Topical Classifications that are especially relevant for early childhood curriculum—under 6.2 (“Interventions/Curricula”), although students may need a reminder that not every resource will be specifically about curriculum. Another browsing option may be 11.1 (“Process Quality,” under “11. Child Care and Early Education Quality,” as this yields many resources about teaching practices.

We assume that most faculty will use the activities and worksheets in this module as part of a course in Early Childhood Curriculum or in a similar course that focuses on curriculum and teaching in programs for children, although course titles and content may vary. In the activities and assignments in this *Research Connections* Teaching Module, we have tried to weave in content related to inclusion; linguistic and cultural diversity; and assessment to improve instruction or plan appropriate activities for children. There is no recommended sequence or time frame for the suggested activities in this module, since no course is organized in exactly the same way as any other. You may need to pick and choose from the suggested activities to be sure they fit you’re your course’s goals and perhaps the situation in your own state. Further, if you are teaching some other course—for example, a course in child development, professional issues, or assessment—some of the curriculum and teaching-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 early childhood curriculum and teaching strategies.
2. Extend their skill in conducting searches, browsing by Topical Classifications, and filtering results for information related to curriculum and teaching in programs for young children.
3. Describe how they can use research on curriculum and teaching strategies as future teachers of young children.
4. Self-assess their current level of competence and comfort in finding and using research on curriculum and teaching strategies through *Research Connections*

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

This module provides students with learning opportunities related to NAEYC Standard 4 (Teaching 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 indicator "Ability to facilitate participants' learning of new knowledge and skills." Module 3 also aligns with several Military School-age Assessment System modules that touch on curriculum and teaching strategies: Modules 3-8: Out-of-School Environments, Physical, Cognitive, Communication, Creative and Self.

Module 3's Contents and Suggested Activities

1. Using Research Connections as part of a curriculum development project

Most early childhood curriculum courses include a major assignment/project in which students develop curriculum, often using a thematic or project approach. Such an assignment may easily be adapted to the needs of those working in school-age programs, although the specifics of the project or activity may differ.

Sometimes the assignment is on paper only, but often students implement part or all of their planned curriculum project during a field experience or student teaching. To help students consider the knowledge base underlying their planned project, faculty may wish to use the resources of Research Connections.

For example, a student who is planning a science project for her curriculum unit might seek information that could help explain the development of children's understanding of some of the concepts in this project. The student might also use Research Connections and similar resources to justify the science teaching strategies that she plans to use. Even a simple search using "science" as the search term yields literally thousands of resources sorted by relevance. Obviously, this search can and should be filtered or otherwise refined, but even without refining the search it is easy to see the accessibility and relevance of the information.

*With this kind of information in hand (from Research Connections and other sources), students would be able to complete a section of their curriculum project plan headed something like "Research Related to the Planned Project." [See **Student Worksheet 3.1**]*

2. Exploring research on different curriculum models

Students may use Research Connections to learn about recent research (or, in some cases lack of recent research) on a number of models or approaches to early childhood curriculum. For example, they might be given a list of such models/approaches; such as,

*Montessori
High/Scope
Tools of the Mind
Reggio Emilia
LA's BEST
Communities Organizing Resources to Advance Learning (CORAL)
Beacon Centers*

Through Research Connections, they can find out what kind of research has been done recently on a particular curriculum approach. Small groups of students might work together on one such approach, perhaps in conjunction with another assignment (for example, perhaps students are able to observe teachers using different curricula). Then class discussion of the designated curricula may be enriched by sharing the students' findings: Are some approaches more researched than others? Are certain researchers identified with certain curricula? If one just looks at the last few years, have some curricula predominated in research reports? As seen in the worksheet, the assignment also has student dig

deeper by looking for the name of “their” curriculum within the Research Connections’ actual description of the study, not just anywhere in the report. For this and the next activity, students will need to be familiar with options for finding and downloading full-text resources—as emphasized in Module 2, Activity 3. **[See Student Worksheet 3.2]**

If, as part of the course, students write a paper about a particular curriculum approach, one section of the paper could be “What Does the Research Say?” Then Research Connections becomes an easy-to-use resource (though of course not the only one) to locate peer-reviewed and other research about that curriculum approach. This is also a place to remind students about the NAEYC and Research Connections information on what “quality research” is, and what some generally accepted criteria are for identifying good research.

3. Focusing on curricula used in state preK programs or in school districts

Some states have begun to specify the curricula that prekindergarten programs may use, and many public school districts have mandated adoption of certain curricula. Often these are content-specific curricula in literacy and, sometimes, mathematics. If that is the case in your state or local school district, students might search for research on such curricula. For students who will be working in school-age programs, it is important for them to be familiar with research on those curricula that are typically used in the schools from which the children may come. Students may need reminders about “generalizability” and similar issues: Does it seem that the children who participated in the research on (for example) a certain literacy curriculum were similar in income, ethnicity, urban/rural residence, etc. to those with whom the curriculum is being used in their state or district? You might also direct them back to the Research Connections’ information on “Assessing Research Quality,” available by clicking on “Understanding Research” from the home page.

*If possible, students could combine this Research Connections investigation with observations and interviews with classroom teachers who are implementing some of these curricula. This information may then become part of a written or oral report, or a group project summarizing the pros and cons of various curricula that the state or district has adopted. For students preparing for work in school-age settings, another option is to interview staff in afterschool programs about both their curriculum they use in the afterschool program and its alignment with the school curricula. **[See Student Worksheet 3.3]***

4. Challenges of Practice

Often, courses in curriculum and teaching will engage students in discussing what might be called the challenges or dilemmas of practice. If field experiences are

part of the course, these kinds of challenges inevitably arise in that context. Some of these might be:

- a. What are appropriate and effective ways of guiding children and addressing children’s challenging behavior?*
- b. Should mathematics be part of a program for children below kindergarten age? And if so, how should it be taught?*
- c. Should children who are extremely aggressive be excluded from their child care program?*
- d. Is direct instruction always a bad idea, or is there a time and place for directly teaching children certain skills?*
- e. If a teacher does not know a child’s home language, how can she work effectively with the child?*
- f. Should school-age programs be primarily focused on reinforcing academic skills taught during the school day or on social skills and recreation, or both?*
- g. What are strategies to link school-day learning and afterschool learning?*

These are only examples; the choice of specific issues and challenges will need to align with students’ concerns and with the specific emphases of the course. In any case, many of these could be investigated to see if there is relevant research.

This task creates a good opportunity for faculty to help students identify search terms (individual or combined words and phrases, and other ways of limiting or filtering their search) that will help them home in on the needed information. Having all students focus on the same question may be useful. Then in class, students can share their successes and difficulties in finding information, and they can make search suggestions to their classmates.

*This is also an opportunity for students to further discuss the concept of “evidence-based practice” [see Module 1, Activity 1] as including not only evidence from research but also the “wisdom of practice” and the values of professionals and families. In field experiences or at their workplace, students may be able to talk with other early childhood educators about the practice issue being investigated. Are the experiences of practitioners consistent with what the research suggests? If not, what may be the reasons for the differences? **[See Student Worksheet 3.4; note that you may wish to edit this worksheet to make it more detailed, depending on your goals and your students’ prior knowledge]***

5. 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; the same form may be used in each module]. 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.