

# Child Care & Early Education RESEARCH CONNECTIONS

## RESEARCH CONNECTIONS TEACHING MODULES

### Module 4

## *Research Connections* and Families of Young Children

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*Research Connections*  
and  
Families of Young Children

**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 “families of young children.” 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 materials in this module as part of a course such as Family and Community Relationships, Family Partnerships, Parent Communication and Involvement, or in a similar course that focuses on families of young children, parent involvement in early childhood education, and similar issues, 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 family characteristics; family diversity; and family involvement, noting that families may be involved in different ways in a before/afterschool program than they might be with other early care settings. 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 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—some of the family-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!

**Some notes on Research Connections resources on this topic:** Some of the very practical issues you cover in such a course (such as preferred ways to conduct parent conferences, or how to write newsletters, are unlikely to have relevant resources within *Research Connections*. As you will see, however, there is much research on family diversity, family involvement, and similar issues that are also important for students to understand. Because of the emphasis of the *Research Connections* collection, most of these resources emphasize family topics that are closely related to child care and early education, although some are more general.

**Browsing Family-Related Topics with Topical Classifications.** Although you may have guided your students toward the different purposes of “Searching” and “Browsing” [see Introduction for Faculty], this would be a good time to probe Research Connections’ Topical Classifications feature as a browsing strategy, perhaps demonstrating in class with a focus on topics and subtopics related to families, parenting, and family involvement. Remind students how to expand and contract the subtopic lists with the “+” and “-” signs, and how to apply filters to the results of their browses.

**Key Topic Resource Lists on Family-Related Topics.** There are also three *Research Connections* “Key Topic Resource Lists” already prepared, on topics related to families. One is on “Father Involvement,” one is on “Family Support,” and another is on “Parenting Education.” Each includes resources available through the *Research Connections* collection. Each is easily found from the home page. (Note: Some of the other “Key Topic Resource Lists” may fit with other courses that you teach. Also, be sure to regularly check the *Research Connections* home page, [www.researchconnections.org](http://www.researchconnections.org), as such lists are regularly added and updated.

### Outcomes for Students

Upon completion of this module, students will

1. Expand their knowledge of resources specifically related to research on families of young children.
2. Extend their skill in conducting searches, browsing by Topical Classifications, and filtering results for information related to family characteristics, and the influences of these characteristics on children’s development and learning.
3. Describe how they can use research on families, family diversity, and family involvement as future teachers of young children.
4. Self-assess their current level of competence and comfort in finding and using research on families of young children through *Research Connections*

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

This module provides students with learning opportunities primarily related to NAEYC Standard 2 (Building Family and Community Relationships), especially Key Elements 2a and 2c. In addition, the module’s content addresses NAEYC’s Standard 1, Key Element 1b, as students explore the influence of family characteristics on children’s development. 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 respectfully engage the important adults in the participants’ lives.” Module 4 also aligns with Military School-age Assessment System Module 11: Families.

## **Module 4’s Contents and Suggested Activities**

### **1. Using Research Connections as part of a family “case study”**

*Often students are required to develop a “case study” of a family with a young child. Sometimes this is part of a larger child development case study (see Module 2 for suggestions on using Research Connections for the child development component), or it might be an assignment in a separate “Family” course). Students might be interviewing family members about, for example, their attitudes about children’s learning; their discipline practices; the structure and composition of their extended family, the challenges of finding good care for their children before and after school, and so on. Students are frequently asked to summarize and discuss this information in a report.*

*Such an assignment is enriched when students also look at relevant research findings. A family relationships textbook probably has much useful information, but Research Connections may supplement this with additional, very current research. As suggested on the worksheet (**See Student Worksheet 4.1**), students might review a list of topics and choose a few that may apply to “their” family (such as “families and disabilities,”—if the family has a child with a disability-- or “grandparents”—if, for example, a grandmother is the provider of child care). Students would then identify some resources on that topic and include these in their family case study report.*

*With this kind of assignment, instructors do need to emphasize that research cannot neatly explain the characteristics of a specific family, but that research can offer a broader context that will expand one’s understanding of the family’s situation.*

### **2. Using Research Connections to broaden students’ understanding of family diversity**

*Race, culture and ethnicity, economic class, religion, geographic region—all of these are part of the broad concept of “family diversity.” The early childhood field recognizes that educators must not only know about but also respect and respond to the increasing diversity of families. Many students have limited opportunities to interact with families different than their own, and yet they must be prepared to work with ever-more diverse children and families in the future.*

*As a general resource, you may want to point students toward the 2008 annotated bibliography from the National Center for Children in Poverty, available in full text through Research Connections, on promoting tolerance and respect for diversity in ECE, [http://www.nccp.org/publications/pdf/text\\_810.pdf](http://www.nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_810.pdf).*

*Both research and personal experiences are important sources of understanding in the area of family diversity. You might begin by having teams of students—perhaps 4 to a team—pick out of a jar a brief description of a family of a young child including a school-age child if this is of interest. (Example: “Jamiela lives with her mother in a farm community. She has grown up speaking both Spanish and English. When Jamiela was a baby her mother left Central America for the U.S.”). Then each team uses Research Connections to identify some resources related to aspects of “their” family’s diversity; for example, this team might search for relevant research using terms such as “Hispanic families,” “immigrants,” and “rural areas.” Team members might divide up this effort. **(See Student Worksheet 4.2)***

*At a later time, each team shares with others some of the results of these searches, focusing on how the information might help an early childhood educator to understand and support this particular family. If there are students who share some aspects of this diversity (for example, students who have lived in rural areas or are Hispanic), they may be invited to contribute to the discussion from a personal perspective. Or there may be families in the community who can come to the class as invited guests. Here the goal is to avoid stereotyping or over-generalizing, and to increase students’ appreciation of the complex factors that make each family unique.*

### **3. Grandparents and fathers: Research on family members other than mom.**

*For many years, mothers were the major focus of attention from family researchers. More and more, though, researchers are looking at the roles of other family members in caring for, nurturing, teaching, and influencing young children. Future early childhood professionals can benefit from this expanded view.*

*In its collection, Research Connections has numerous resources on two other categories of family members: fathers and grandparents. Depending on the emphasis of your class, you might choose one of these as a focus, or use both categories and divide the class so that half are finding research on fathers and the other half on grandparents. It might be helpful to begin this assignment with a reflective discussion of students’ memories about their fathers or their grandparents.*

*Following these reflections, students would spend time looking for relevant sources. Several approaches to sharing these sources could be considered.*

*First, students might create a display that combines photographs and written memories of their own fathers and/or grandparents with brief summaries of some studies found in their searches. A second approach would be for each student or team to summarize one of their sources for the rest of the class. (See Student Worksheet 4.3) Class members could then vote (and give award ribbons perhaps) in resource categories such as “Most Surprising”; “Most Practical”; “Most Interesting”; “Most Consistent With Our Experience.”*

#### **4. Families and their children’s learning**

*“Families are their children’s first teachers.” What does research say about that? Several specific topics lend themselves to exploration using the resources of Research Connections. For example, teams of students might search for research on parents’ beliefs about school readiness. Others could look at families’ influence on their children’s early language and literacy development. Others might search for research on families’ influence on children’s academic achievement, or their children’s motivation. For families of school-age children, pressures related to academic testing and performance may be even greater. Students that are focusing their studies on school-age children are encouraged to find relevant research on this topic. (See Student Worksheet 4.4)*

*As a whole group or in small groups, the class could use this and other background information to help them put together plans for a parent meeting that would suggest and demonstrate simple ways in which parents might help their children to be more engaged, successful young learners.*

#### **5. Finding research to support a proposed plan to increase family involvement**

*Many instructors require students to develop plans to promote family involvement in an early childhood program. Students are sometimes able to implement these plans if the assignment occurs during the student teaching semester; however, there is value in such an activity even if the plans are hypothetical. Fortunately, a great deal of recent research has been done on family involvement and related topics in settings serving both older and younger children. Students are encouraged to use their Research Connections search skills to identify the most relevant evidence to promote family involvement as it relates to specific types of settings.*

*As outlined in the accompanying worksheet (See Student Worksheet 4.5), students can be asked to summarize some of this family involvement research as part of an assignment to develop their plan. To do this, they will browse various parts of the Topical Classifications related to family involvement (starting with Topic 2 and its related subtopics, especially the resources under 2.3 (Involvement in Early Care and Education), which has sub-subtopics as well]. If you prefer,*

*another approach is to go for depth rather than breadth, working as a class to decide on one resource that appears especially valuable, reading this together, and discussing its implications. Finally, another assignment might be to put together an individual or class resource book on family involvement, using Research Connections sources as well as others that will add a very practical dimension. As always, feel free to modify the worksheets—or add others—to meet your needs and those of your students.*

## **6. 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.*