

Child Care & Early Education RESEARCH CONNECTIONS

RESEARCH CONNECTIONS TEACHING MODULES

Module 5

Research Connections and The Early Childhood Profession

Module 5

Research Connections

and

The Early Childhood Profession

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 “The Early Childhood Profession.” 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 Professionalism, Professional Issues in Early Childhood Education, Issues in ECE, Introduction to Early Childhood Education, or in a similar course that focuses on professional identity and professional 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 the system of early care and education; quality in ECE; standards and regulations; professional development; global issues in ECE; and similar topics. 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 on child development, curriculum, assessment, or families—some of the 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!

One other note on the activities in this module: there are a lot of them! (8—more than in any other module--each with a worksheet for students) As always, we encourage you to pick and choose depending on the focus of your course, your students’ interest, and time available.

Some notes on Research Connections resources on this topic: [Most of these may be used in other modules as well.]

State information. [*Research Connections* provides easy access to a great array of information organized state-by-state. This allows you to focus on your own state (if most students are in-state), to compare your own state with others on specific ECE topics, (for example, states’ requirements for and support of school-

age child care programs) or to have students from different states report on their own state's status. For example, the site links with many "50-State Databases on the Internet." These may be accessed from the "Policy Resources" tab on the home page or directly at:

<http://www.childcareresearch.org/childcare/datatools-02.jsp>.

Also at the state level, the National Center for Children in Poverty has brief, downloadable state early childhood profiles, focusing on policies related to low-income children and families.

http://nccp.org/projects/improvingtheodds_stateprofiles.html.

A few tips for state-level searches: One easy option for students is to just click on the state they're interested in (or several states at a time) in the "Browse By State" section--click on "Browse by State" link under the "Search the Collection" heading on the homepage. This brings up projects and reports for which data were actually collected in that state. Students can find additional resources by using the "More Search Options" feature and including the name of the state as one of the search terms (for example, if your students are in Indiana and are interested in its child care regulations, they could search using both "Indiana" and the exact phrase in quotation marks "child care regulations." Remember to search from All Fields. This gives all the resources in which both of those terms appear, sorted by relevance. For example, searching with both "Indiana" and the exact phrase "child care regulations" yields 79 resources, the first of which is a 2001 Indiana issue brief from the Indiana Youth Institute titled "State's Child Care Regulations Fall Short of National Standards"].

National resources. At the national level, clicking on "Policy Links" from the "Policy Resources" tab takes students to government sites for Head Start, Early Head Start, the Child Care Bureau, specific federally-funded programs such as Early Reading First, and others. The direct link is

<http://www.childcareresearch.org/childcare/policyinfo.jsp>

New research. Another valuable resource in any course that focuses on current early childhood issues is the "New Research" link, accessed from the center column of the home page, or directly at

<http://www.childcareresearch.org/childcare/new-research>.

This section of *Research Connections* gives one-paragraph summaries of a few very recent additions to the collection, with information about how to obtain full-text versions (most libraries give students this access in any case).

Key Topic Resource Lists on Topics Related to "The Early Childhood Profession," And School-Age Child care." "Key Topic Resource Lists" are bibliographies on critical issues in early childhood policy and practice, already prepared by *Research Connections*. These are easily accessed from the home page tab "Our Publications." Some may be quite relevant for your course, depending on its emphasis. For example, there is a recent list on "Quality Rating Systems" and another on "Child Care Licensing." If students click on "Updated Search Results" at the bottom of the brief description of the list, they will see all the resources

on the topic that have been added to the collection since the “Key Topic Resource List” was assembled. Students will be able to view the actual search terms used by *Research Connections* in conducting this search. (If necessary, direct them to <http://www.childcareresearch.org/childcare/keytopics/index.jsp>) Looking at these search terms can be very helpful to students who are still struggling with how to home in on the information they need. Also note that these lists can be re-sorted by relevance (the default is that they are sorted by date)—students will find this easy and interesting to do.

Research-to-Policy Briefs. From the same section of the site, one may access three “Research-to-Policy” briefs, on infant and toddler child care, school age child care, and family, friend, and neighbor care. Although you may also want students to gain more experience doing their own searches, all of these are credible, convenient resources.

Outcomes for Students

Upon completion of this module, students will

1. Expand their knowledge of resources specifically related to research on the early childhood profession. Students will benefit from a broad definition of the profession to include areas such as school-age care, afterschool, out-of-school time, and extended learning.
2. Extend their skill in conducting searches, browsing by Topical Classifications, and filtering results for information related to policy issues in ECE, state and national ECE initiatives, the ECE system and profession, and other critical issues in the ECE profession.
3. Describe how they can use research on various aspects of The Early Childhood Profession as future teachers of young children.
4. Self-assess their current level of competence and comfort in finding and using research on the early childhood profession 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 6 (Becoming a Professional), especially Key Elements 6a, 6b, 6d, and 6e. In this module and in other modules, Key Element 5c is addressed if you emphasize reflection and critical thinking in your assignments and assessments. 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 effectively carry out program operations and policies to achieve program goals and meet needed

requirements.” Module 5 also aligns with two Military School-age Assessment System modules: Module 12: Program Management, and Module 13: Professionalism.

Module 5’s Contents and Suggested Activities

1. Using *Research Connections* to identify and understand current trends and critical issues in the early childhood field.

Courses such as “The Early Childhood Profession” or “The Early Childhood Field” often introduce students to a variety of current trends and critical issues that face the profession as a whole and that may face them personally in the future. Examples include the adoption of state quality rating and improvement systems (often known as QRIS); state preK programs; infant-toddler quality; inclusion of young children with disabilities; wages for early childhood educators; funding for child care programs, including school-age programs, and more.

*Course readings usually have information on these kinds of issues, but adding recent research will help students keep up to date. One approach is to discuss a number of such issues in class and then decide which would be most interesting and relevant for in-depth searching. Either the whole class could focus on one trend/issue, or teams of students might select different issues. For example, if some students are especially interested in school-age programs, they might form one team. (See **Student Worksheet 5.1**)*

Several search options are possible. First, you might simply have them search using an exact word or phrase that describes “their” issue. Students who have more advanced search skills might be asked to come up with one or two focused questions about their topic (for example, “How does our state’s Quality Rating and Improvement System compare with systems in other states?” or “Do children who attend state preK programs do better in kindergarten?” or “What school-age program options are currently available for children and youth?”) and then think about how to search for the information they need.

After students complete their searches and download some resources, they might organize poster displays (or, online, perhaps Power Point presentations) summarizing some of what they have learned about the issue. An important aspect of this assignment is to reflect on how these trends and issues may affect their future as early childhood professionals.

2. Using *Research Connections* to learn more about delivery systems and settings for early childhood services

Head Start, Early Head Start, child care, public school kindergarten and primary school, school-age programs, state preK programs, family child care, family/friend/neighbor care, and more—one of the features of the early childhood field is the multiplicity of settings and delivery systems for services for

children birth through eight and their families. Most texts and readings for this kind of course describe these settings; but again, Research Connections can supplement these descriptions with very current information as well as with research that focuses on different components of the ECE system.

Often instructors in courses on the early childhood profession include a panel discussion featuring visitors (or students) who work in various ECE settings. By conducting some searches in Research Connections, students will have a broader perspective and be prepared to ask panelists relevant questions.

One might begin by using other course materials to help everyone in the class gain basic familiarity with early childhood systems and services. Some students may work in one or more of these settings, and in that case they of course will be valued resources. Following this familiarization, one might use a “jigsaw” approach in which each group of students becomes expert on one part of the ECE system and is prepared to share that expertise with others (**See Student Worksheet 5.2**). A team of students might be interested in learning more about a setting in which they already work (such as Head Start or school-age programs), or it may be beneficial to have them broaden their horizons. In either case, these students would also serve as interviewers of class visitors/panelists (or, if a panel is not feasible, they might interview local practitioners as part of their project).

3. Using Research Connections to focus on observing and measuring quality in ECE

Issues of quality are at the forefront of concern in the early childhood field. Many courses include observations and reports about quality in early childhood programs. Recurring questions include what are the “ingredients” of quality, and how might one measure quality? Is quality the same in school-age settings as in preschool programs? A relatively easy way to expand students’ thinking about this is to guide them to a Research Connections search in which one simply searches for the term “Quality,” and filters the results by “Instruments” on the results page. Then individuals or groups of students may identify and obtain copies of a number of such instruments (some may be downloaded directly, while others are included in or summarized in journal articles referenced in the Research Connections search.

In any case, students may then look through and compare features of some of these “quality” instruments, using the chart in the worksheet as a starting point (**See Student Worksheet 5.3**). If possible, students might informally try to use one or more of the instruments in either their own workplace or a student teaching site. The results and their reflections could then form part of their professional portfolio. What have they learned about this aspect of quality? What might be the challenges both in achieving and assessing quality in this particular area?

4. Browsing the *Research Connections*' collection for recent initiatives to improve quality in early care and education.

Quality improvement is a priority for the early childhood field, and most states have major ECE quality improvement efforts underway, whether these are Quality Rating and Improvement systems (QRIS), compensation initiatives, or other efforts. The Topical Classifications system in Research Connections includes the subtopic of Quality Initiatives under "Child Care and Early Education Quality," giving students the opportunity to browse the breadth of such initiatives. Because the results of this browsing can also be filtered by state, you can have students look more closely at what is going on within their own state or other states about which they have interest (See Student Worksheet 5.4). Their reflections on quality initiatives, including implications for their own ECE work, may become part of their portfolio if you wish.

5. Using *Research Connections* to focus on the continuing training and professional development of early childhood educators

Higher education is only the beginning of early childhood educators' ongoing professional development. Often students in courses like "The Early Childhood Profession" create or add to a portfolio, part of which may include a description of their long-term professional goals. Research Connections may help students learn more about recent research on early childhood training, including mentoring, coaching, and other on-site supervision.

As described in the worksheet (See Student Worksheet 5.5), students can conduct searches using terms such as "mentoring," or "training" or "professional development." By filtering the search by "Fact Sheets and Briefs," they are likely to find the kind of practical resources that can be added to their portfolios. If a student is interested in one kind of early childhood service or setting (such as family child care or school age child care), the search can be modified to focus just on that setting (for example, using "More Search Options," one might specify two exact-phrase search terms-- "family child care" and "mentoring"—search from All Fields, and then filter by "Fact Sheets and Briefs" on the results page. This yields more than 70 fact sheets and briefs that address mentoring within family child care to some extent.

With this kind of information in hand, students can think about the kind of training they have experienced in the past (if they're now working in the field), as well as planning what training and support they wish for in their future professional development.

6. Using *Research Connections* to look at state-level standards and regulations for ECE

Future early childhood educators need to be aware not only of national standards but also of the standards and other regulations in the state where they work or will be working. Because it makes it easy to browse and search by state,

Research Connections can help you engage students in finding and reflecting on this information.

There are a number of directions you might take here. One approach is provided in the worksheet (**See Student Worksheet 5.6**), but you may want to adapt this. Students might focus just on state “Early Learning Standards” (also known as Early Learning Guidelines or for those interested in school-age populations, “Program Quality Standards or Guidelines. Using the “Browse By State” feature from the homepage, all students might use Research Connections to find information on the standards for their own state. Then individual students or teams of students might also search for the Early Learning Standards of a different state, perhaps one in which they may work in the future or one in which they have lived.

After gathering the information, students could share it by preparing charts or posters displaying a comparison of the two states’ standards on selected dimensions. Reviewing these together in class (or on line if a distance course) can highlight the similarities as well as the differences across states’ early learning standards. (Of course, the reports by Kagan, Scott-Little, and Frelow summarize much of this, but if students also do their own searching they will obtain very current information and will also refine their search skills).

If you do not wish to look at state Early Learning Standards, another option is to focus on some other kind of standards, such as state content standards for kindergarten-primary education (part of all states’ K-12 standards), or state child care regulations (either for centers or for family child care homes). The same methods could be used that were described when searching for and comparing different states’ Early Learning Standards.

7. Focusing on ethical issues in early childhood research

As emphasized in NAEYC’s position statement and its standards for early childhood professional preparation, well-prepared professionals need to be familiar with and reflect upon ethical issues. The NAEYC position statement is an essential starting point for discussion, but Research Connections may help you enhance your students’ competence. For example, you might ask students to look for resources by clicking on “More Search Options” and doing a search with the terms “ethics” OR “ethical” AND “research” from All Fields. After identifying resources about ethical issues in conducting research with young children, they might identify several peer-reviewed studies on topics that may raise ethical concerns, such as child abuse, aggression, or infants’ distress. With these in hand, you may help students consider how the researchers seem to have addressed ethical challenges in their work. [**See Student Worksheet 5.7**]

8. Using Research Connections to gain a global perspective on ECE

Any future early childhood professionals need to consider their field from a perspective broader than just the U.S. One easy way to expand this area is to

have students simply use Research Connections to search for information about ECE in other countries (**See Student Worksheet 5.8**). For example, they might use a word or exact phrase such as “kindergarten” (which in other countries often means something different than in the U.S.) or perhaps “child care” or “after school programs.” Then each student or team of students would do a search in which one search term was this one, and a second search term was the name of a country other than the U.S. (Remind them that they use “More Search Options” to search using more than one search term simultaneously). You might assign each student or team to a country, or you could leave them free to select a country because of personal or professional interest. Please note that at present the collection is almost entirely in the English language.

In either case, once they have gathered some information, students may summarize and share this as a group, in person or on line, using some version of the comparison chart on their worksheets. You might supplement this by encouraging them to go to other Internet sights to download photos of children and families in “their” country. If some students share the heritage of particular countries, they can provide personal insights as well. Discussion should avoid stereotypes, making an effort not only to identify similarities and differences but to go deeper—what might be the underlying reasons? Inevitably, this gets into national and international policy issues, and again Research Connections will lead you to useful resources.

9. 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.