New York City – In lean-budgeted state and community colleges throughout the country, where faculty teach course-loads that are often twice or more what faculty at better-heeled schools teach – every resource is precious. So when a free resource dedicated exclusively to early childhood education and care comes along – especially one that comes with teaching modules ready to insert into college courses and is all online – instructors like Nancy Baptiste, EdD, who teaches at New Mexico State University, take notice.

“It is important at the undergraduate level to introduce students to research in early care and education and family support,” says Baptiste. “So I was grateful when I learned of Research Connections and its teaching modules at a conference – I knew that my students would benefit from the abundant and credible research offered on the site.”

Child Care and Early Education Research Connections provides researchers, policymakers, faculty and students with a substantial information management infrastructure that offers access to a comprehensive and continually updated collection of original research reports, policy briefs, fact sheets and data sets, explains Lee Kreader, PhD, who heads the project at the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) at Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health.

The project is a joint effort between NCCP and the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research at the University of Michigan, and is supported by the Office of Planning, Research and Education in the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

“Research Connections’ teaching modules [www.researchconnections.org/teaching_modules] provide college instructors with user-friendly, adaptable materials to incorporate into typical undergraduate courses,” says Kreader. “Since we created the modules, so many people have told me they wish they had a resource like this when they were in school.”

Each of the five modules includes between four and eight suggested assignments that help students learn how to find and apply relevant early childhood research on essential topics in their teacher preparation program.

Dr. Baptiste says that one thing she appreciates in particular about the teaching modules is that
the very first module introduces the students to the Research Connections site and encourages their exploration of the resources, while the following modules can be associated with specific courses, and can be edited and contextualized to the specific course that she is teaching.

“Given the many demands upon my time, I would not have been able to develop something as useful and accessible.” Feedback from Baptiste’s students has been positive: “One student told me that she wrote a paper for another class and used the Research Connections website to support her assignment. She knew that her high grade was related to her access to the website.”

Marilou Hyson, PhD, a consultant who helped the team at NCCP develop Research Connections’ teaching modules, says they were designed specifically for instructors like Dr. Baptiste, and her students. “Google has its place in people’s lives, but for students who are preparing to be professional educators – who need to make decisions about what they do as teachers on credible sources of evidence, such as what kids are like; what practices are shown to be effective; what kind of policies are being discussed in their state and in the country – Research Connections connects them to the content they need faster.”

Research Connections’ strength, when compared to other search engines in particular, is its dedicated focus on the content that’s most important to future early childhood professionals – and that it provides tools that allow the user to home in on “the best available information,” says Hyson. “Having these teaching modules gives faculty a way of letting students know how useful Research Connections can be in their professional life; and helps them to make good decisions about practice. This is especially important from a faculty perspective. At small, underfunded schools, faculty are so pressed for time. They’re typically overworked and under-funded.”

What some of the student users of the Research Connections teaching modules have said (comments sent to Dr. Baptiste, anonymously):

“I will most definitely be using it to find articles that will help me further my learning in other classes. I will also be using it to find research that will help me prove points that I am trying to get across.”

“I can use it for assignments in my classes and also explore it in my free time so I can read the various types of research that is going on in child care and early childhood education.”

“I will use this site whenever research in early childhood comes up. I have recently used this site to do research for another class. It paid off very well in my grade. I did not have to go back and forth looking for a reliable source because this information is updated.”

“Knowing that Research Connections exists was very helpful for me not only for this class but for my other classes as well. I have used it to research different topics that have helped me write papers in other classes.”

The National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) is the nation’s leading public policy center dedicated to promoting the economic security, health and well-being of America's low-income families and children. Part of Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health, NCCP uses research to inform policy and practice with the goal of ensuring positive outcomes for the next generation.