All You Have To Do Is Ask. The ERIC Information System Can Lead You Through the Maze of Education Research As Fast As You Can Think of Questions, and You Can Learn To Use It in an Afternoon.

Directed to the needs of teachers, this article explains the who, what, where, and why of the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) system for providing the results of research and current topics in education to practitioners. Included is basic information on Resources in Education (RIE) and Current Index to Journals in Education (CIJE), the ERIC indexing and abstracting publications; the Thesaurus of ERIC Descriptors; the ERIC collection of original documents reproduced on microfiche; and computer facilities for online searching. Estimates of annual costs to subscribers are included, as well as directions for submitting reports, speeches, and other papers to the ERIC system and a list of nine free publications describing the system; e.g., how to start an ERIC collection, bibliographies of publications about ERIC, directories of collections and services, and listings of information analysis products. (EAA)
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by

Henrietta Wexler

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Dolores Dought sank down into the faculty lounge, muttering “How am I ever going to do right by them?” she sighed.

“Do right by whom?” Dolores asked Marian, looking up from her cup of tea and a book.

“Those learning disabled children who are coming into my class next term.”

“Marian, you look as if you could use a break.”

“I think of questions, and you can learn to use it in a short time.”

Dolores thought a moment. “Okay, First I need to know how to identify a learning disability.”


“Then I’d like to know how to deal with learning disabled children in a regular classroom.”

“Good. Mainstreaming of learning disabled children.”

“I’m not sure I’d have to see what’s available.”

“Come with me to the Theaurus of Descriptors,” said Marian, leading the way.

“Not sure what that sounds like.”

“Sounds like a prehistoric monster!”

“Au contraire. Dolores. It’s a very up-to-date, alphabetic collection of key words and phrases,” said Marian as she pulled a volume down from the shelves under the ERIC Collection sign. Let’s see Learning disabilities. There see the subcategories under it. Some broader, like handicapped, some narrower, like dyslexia. What do you think?”

“Dyslexia? I expect a few children who’ve been diagnosed dyslexia.”

“Okay. I think those categories will give us a reasonable number of items from the computer. Oh, one more thing. How far back in time shall we go?”

“ERIC’s collection began in 1969, and it’s got over 400,000 items in the database. If we don’t limit the time frame, we’ll be swamped.”

“How about the past five years?”

Marian sat down at the computer terminal and tapped a few keys on the keyboard. In seconds, the screen filled up with lines of titles.

“Fantastic!” exclaimed Dolores.

“It tells me there are 39 documents dealing with the three topics we fed into the computer,” announced Marian. “Do you want abstracts of all 39?”

Sure. I think I can manage that if they’re only abstracts. Say, how does the computer do that?”

I mean, come up with all that information so quickly? If I’d used the card catalogs, it would have taken hours, maybe days, to find that many resources.

“It’s a crossing technique based on Boolean logic principles. If you’re familiar with Venn diagrams, you can picture the overlapping categories. But you don’t have to understand how the computer is programmed just say please.”

Marian laughed.

“Okay, please, how do I get to see the abstracts of those 39 items?”

“There are two ways. One, I can get a printout of the ERIC document number of the items so you can look them up in the ERIC volumes and read the abstracts here in the library. Or, two, I can order a printout of those abstracts by mail and you can take them home to look over.”

“Let’s order them by mail so I can take them home. After I decide which full articles I want, what happens?”

“Step this way to our microfiche collection.”
The basic tools of ERIC can cost as little as $140 a year, without computer facilities. And manual searches will lead to the same resources as a computer search.

"Micro-what? Some kind of sardines, ba ba?"

That's French for tiny memos, explained Marian as she pulled out of a drawer a 4" X 6" clear plastic rectangle with postage-stamp-size blocks imprinted on them. "Now follow me to the microfiche reader. You slip the microfiche into the slot, and presto!"

As she turned a knob the machine's screen was displayed: one after another, enlargements of the stamp-sized blocks so each could be read like a printed page. Now the test is up to you. You can read each page, take notes, and tell me which pages, or whole documents you might want on paper.

"How do I get paper copies?"

This machine will print out whatever pages you want so you can take them home, and mark them up to your heart's content.

"Great! How much will that cost?"

"Ten cents a page."

"Sold—a bargain. Can't wait to get the abstracts so I can look them over and choose the ones I want."

"And that's all there is to it, Dolores. Now how do you feel about ERIC?"

"You were right. Marian. Browsing through card catalogs may be fun, but I can't afford that luxury anymore. Gotta go now. How long will it take to get my abstracts?"

"A couple of days. I'll let you know as soon as the printout arrives."

That scenario, with minor variations, is played out every day in over 500 locations where computer search facilities provide access to the ERIC data base.

### What is ERIC?

ERIC, Education Resources Information Center, has been around for 16 years. Some educators know it as a service for scholars and researchers in education. It is that, but far more important, ERIC puts results of education research into the hands of classroom teachers, students, parents, or anyone with an interest in developments in education.

The nationwide system, supported by the National Institute of Education, consists of a central unit in Washington, D.C., and 16 clearinghouses, each focusing on a specific field of education. Each clearinghouse, with advice from a board of advisors, experts in their field, decides what goes into ERIC's data base. They find about half of the material submitted from a central processing facility and other sources suitable for entry into ERIC's retrieval system.

**Resources in Education (RIE)** is a monthly publication of abstracts of the nearly 1,000 documents that pass the ERIC clearinghouses' selection criteria. These include "fugitive" documents, which might never be seen by educators if not published in RIE. Research reports, curriculum guides and materials, project descriptions, conference papers. The documents themselves are available on microfiche or in print copies for a small charge.

**The Current Index to Journals in Education (CIJE)**, another monthly, contains abstracts of articles from over 700 education-related scholarly journals. Although these articles are generally not available on ERIC's microfiche collection because of copyright law, CIJE directs the reader to the source.

In addition to collecting the literature of education for announcement in RIE and CIJE, the ERIC clearinghouses analyze and synthesize the literature into research reviews, bibliographies, state-of-the-art and interpretive studies. These Information Analysis Products are put into the ERIC system and announced in RIE. Many of them are also made available to interested groups through professional associations.

There are about 700 locations in the United States where ERIC microfiche collections are maintained—in many college and university libraries, in most state departments of education, and in more than 60 locations abroad.

### What does ERIC cost?

A school library can subscribe to the basic tools of ERIC—the RIE and CIJE series—for as little as $140 a year. (The *Thesaurus of Descriptors* mentioned in the opening dialog, while useful, is not essential.) A microfiche collection costs about $2,000 a year to purchase. But this too can be done without, since most documents announced in RIE can be ordered by mail in either paper or microfiche. (About 17% are available only on microfiche.)

Computer facilities currently cost about $1,500 a year. The average charge for a computer search like the one described in the opening dialog runs about $2. A charge that many states or school districts will absorb for educators on the
The study were in their late 30s, usually and most often had a high-school or most often composed only of a nuclear. Most households both parents were ever held jobs around the middle of the while the mothers were often employed. Over half the respondents had more than one in ten households were intact, and often relatives.

A few ERIC fans.

Linda Goolsby, librarian at Rawlins Middle School in Rawlins, Wyoming, was one of those librarians-interns who became ERIC boosters. In Wyoming, Goolsby says, schools can be 100 miles apart and as much as ten to 20 years behind in education technology and theories. With access to ERIC's data base through the University of Wyoming at Laramie, she has become an experienced ERIC "negotiator" for educators in her school district. (A negotiator helps a searcher narrow the scope and time frame of a quest for information, just as Marian helped Dolores.)

Goolsby recalls one teacher who was trying to cope with an influx of Indo-chinese and Pakistani newcomers to the district. The materials she found through ERIC, on the culture and customs of the children's native countries, helped smooth and hasten the acculturation process for the children.

Goolsby would like to see a much wider use of ERIC. "I've really done some head-scratching about it," she says. "The microfilm equipment in Cheyenne isn't used as much as it would be if the equipment were available in each school district.

While the cost for fuller ERIC service is an obstacle in budget-cutting times, Goolsby continues to invite teachers in her district, through the district newsletter, to get acquainted with ERIC and keep up with the latest educational research.

When Jill Leiker, an English teacher in Rifle, Colorado, returned to work after a few years off, she needed to know what was new in her field, so she searched ERIC during the summer before school opened. "I got tons of information—from complete programs to little hints I could use in teaching world literature."

When she searched for new methods for teaching remedial reading in secondary school, she found that her own methods hadn't yet been improved on. But she did find new reading materials that combined low vocabulary with high interest for teenagers.

In a state as large and relatively unpopulated as Colorado, says Leiker, "ERIC brings the education world to your front door." She, too, feels the system is under-used. One reason may be that too many teachers find it intimidating. "It would help," she believes, "to have instruction in using the microfilm reader." Leiker would also like to see a small portable microfilm.
The process in either a manual or a computer search of the ERIC system can be illustrated by a Venn diagram. The searcher ends up with the articles, reports, etc., shown in the dark area where the three topics overlap.

James Jess, superintendent of the CAL (Coulter, Alexander, and Laumer) school district in Iowa, calls ERIC a “godsend.” He first used the system while working on his doctoral thesis at Drake University.

In 1977, when his small school district was caught between declining enrollments and insufficient funds, 12 parents and four educators—including Jess—met in an Iowa farmhouse to create a voice for the large silent majority. They called their fledgling group PURE—People United for Rural Education.

In a large metropolitan school district that has had computer search facilities since the early 70s, the clientele becomes quite sophisticated, says Nina Allen, assistant to curriculum librarian Karen Dowling of the Montgomery County Public Schools in Maryland. Educators in this Washington suburb now feel comfortable dipping into ERIC and other data bases, like Psychological Abstracts, as well.

In a school district that places a high priority on keeping its staff well informed of education developments, every school has a microfiche reader in its media center. With about 6,000 professional employees in the county’s public schools, some inexpensive that teachers could take it home and make paper copies of anything in the system.

Considering the dizzying rate of progress in electronic technology, Leiker’s dream does not seem all that impossible.

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I ERIC search facilities are within reach of every educator in the nation.

Dowling estimates that there are 2,000 searches a year, both manual and computerized, of ERIC and other data bases.

But Montgomery County wants to encourage even wider use of its search services. In a current experiment, a portable computer terminal is brought into a high school media center. During the week the terminal remains there, a media specialist works with teachers and students, getting information for them from ERIC and other data bases. Students’ queries are often directed to the New York Times computer service. This youngster it might be noted, takes to computer searches faster than do some adults.

Julie Lando is in charge of the professional library for the Alexandria City Public Schools on the Virginia side of the Potomac outside Washington, D.C. As assistant to Dale W Brown, curriculum specialist in libraries and media, she does manual ERIC searches for high officials in the school district, teachers do their own manual searches after a one-on-one session with Lando or after learning how in one of her workshops.

Though she has no computer facilities, Lando does have a microfiche collection. Faculty members can borrow one of her six portable microfiche readers, weighing only two or three pounds, and take at home for a few days to read documents at their leisure. (Some libraries are equipped to make duplicate microfiches for under 25¢ each so people can build up their own microfiche libraries.)

Even without computer facilities (although she feels some day the budget will have to find funds for a computer) Lando believes ERIC is a “fantastic” system for finding valuable information. “Most users,” she says, “find far more than they believe is available” on subjects as varied as adolescent suicide, time on task, masters of learning, effects of diet on hyperactive children, religion in the schools, therapeutic, physical education, early retirement, and peer influence on children’s learning.

If you have read this far, you now join thousands of educators who know what ERIC is and what it can do for them.

Somewhere within reach of every educator in America is a counterpart of Marian, eager to introduce ERIC to anyone who can be helped by the system. That includes possibly every educator in the country.

MORE ON ERIC

All of the following publications are available free, while supplies last, from ERIC Processing and Reference Facility, 4033 Rugby Ave., Suite 303, Bethesda, MD 20014; tel. 301/656-4723.

Bibliography of Publications About ERIC

Lists more than 300 items relating to the ERIC system.

Directory of ERIC Microfiche Collections

62 pp. Lists addresses, phone numbers, types of equipment, and services of 742 facilities by state and city. Includes locations outside U.S.

Directory of ERIC Search Services

61 pp. Lists organizations providing computer searches of ERIC’s database, arranged by state and city. Includes search methods and costs.

ERIC Information Analysis Products, 1975-77

162 pp.

The three publications above, annotated bibliographies of items and publications produced by the ERIC Clearinghouses, include abstracts of conference papers, research reports, and subject bibliographies, with information on availability. Indexed by subject, author, and institution.

How to Start an ERIC Collection

20 pp.

Describes all ERIC system tools, including directories, indexes, microfiche collections, costs, ordering information.

How to Use ERIC

19 pp. Briefly describes system, lists all ERIC Clearinghouses with functions, gives steps for manual and computer searches.

Pocket Guide to ERIC

Pocket-size brochure summarizes ERIC services and where to find specific information.