ERIC in the Electronic Age

Tamara M. Westover, The Catholic University of America
Washington, DC

The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) is operated by the United States Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement. Since its inception in 1966, the ERIC database has become the most widely used database among educators in the world, and the format of its bibliographic citations has set a standard for on-line databases. ERIC is appreciated for its comprehensiveness and commitment to capturing documents that would otherwise remain fugitive documents such as conference proceedings, lesson plans, and other highly usable research for education practitioners.

ERIC has successfully served the community for 30 years. Now with the electronic age upon us, ERIC is expanding its services to meet its growing audience. When the database first became networked in 1966, few teachers had easy access to it. But now, with the aid of the Internet, our audience includes more teachers, teacher educators, students, parents, and education researchers than ever before. Based on a June 1995 ERIC Report, an estimated 36,766 users login to ERIC Internet sites each week. ERIC is becoming the nation's education information network connecting virtually all educational information providers and educational information users. The URL for the ERIC System home page is http://aspensys3. aspensys.com/eric/index.html.

As ERIC patrons become better acquainted with working on the Internet, ERIC is challenged to remain ahead of our technologically sophisticated users. To meet patron expectations, ERIC provides these electronic services on the Internet: E-mail services for all clearinghouses; the AskERIC Online Question and Answering Service; full text ERIC Digests on-line; excellent World Wide Web pages for ERIC System products and by ERIC Clearinghouses; and, starting this year, ERIC will provide full text delivery of documents over the Internet.

The heart of the ERIC System is still the ERIC database of Resources in Education (RIE) and Current Index to Journals in Education (CIJE). The database expands over a wide variety of resources for practitioners as well as researchers. Some of the resources you will find are: curriculum and teaching guides, full-text ERIC Digests (which are short syntheses of current topics in education), instructional materials, lesson plans, audio visual materials, computer programs, multilingual/bilingual materials, and more.

Getting to ERIC resources and accessing the system is changing profoundly with the personal access users gain from the Internet. If patrons cannot search the database on the Internet from home or the office, many academic and public libraries provide on-line and compact disc services in addition to carrying ERIC indices in print format. To search the database via the World Wide Web, go to http://www.cua.edu/www/eric_ae/ search.html. Also, the ERIC database is available on CD-ROM through National Information Services Co. (NISC) for the affordable cost of $25.00 (an annual subscription is only $125.00). You can order the disc on-line from the NISC home page at http://ericfac.pi ccard.csc.com/nisc.html.

The ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS) offers online ordering of ERIC Documents from their World Wide Web page. Patrons can order: the ERIC document collection (on microfiche) which covers all subject areas in education; Topical Bibliographies and Topical Microfiche Collections; the Quick Order service; and, the Quick Search service. The URL for EDRS is http://edrs.com.

ERIC is more than just a bibliographic database. We have diverse reference and referral services to meet the demands and expectations of our growing audience. ACCESS ERIC, the system's reference desk, provides general reference and referral information. Its staff also coordinates ERIC's marketing and outreach programs and develops publications and instructional materials. Call 1-800-LET-ERIC or send e-mail to acceric@inet.ed.gov if you have any questions concerning where to find, how to use, or how to obtain products and information about ERIC. The ERIC System home page, maintained by ACCESS ERIC, is located at http://aspensys3.aspensys.com/ eric/index.html.

The ERIC system is made up of sixteen clearinghouses across the country that collect, index, and abstract recent educational literature within their specialized subject areas. Each clearinghouse provides user services and participates in efforts to increase awareness of ERIC. With the growth of Internet resources, the expectations of our patrons reach beyond the ERIC database. Almost half of all user services are conducted through E-mail and entail performing searches of the ERIC Database and providing pointers and referrals to other education information providers on the Internet.

AskERIC began as a pilot project out of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Information and Technology at Syracuse University in 1993. Since its inception, this program has doubled in volume and now answers an average of 900 patron questions every week. .Staff from nine of the ERIC Clearinghouses participate actively in AskERIC question-answering. Each AskERIC question is forwarded to the clearinghouse with subject expertise and is answered within 48 hours by a reference specialist. A typical response includes a thorough search of the ERIC database, full-text digests, Infoguides, and pointers to Internet resources. You can send your educational queries to AskERIC@ericir.syr.edu.

The National Parents Information Network (NPIN) is the electronic question-answering services for parents. NPIN is heavily focused on early childhood education but provides excellent referral and reference information for all parental concerns. Send your queries to askeece@uiuc.edu.

The AskERIC Virtual Library is an electronic collection of education resources accessible via the World Wide Web, America On-line, CompuServe, and Gopher. From this collection, users can search a number of on-line ERIC databases: CIJE and RIE, Lesson Plans, and Full-Text Digests. Patrons can also find Infoguides, discussion groups and listservs for practicing educators and librarians, and pointers to other Internet resources in education. Check out ERIC's Javafied World Wide Web page. Go to http://www.ericir.syr.edu.

ERIC is proud to be the first place where educators look for answers to their questions. However, the description of our role as information providers carries greater responsibilities as the Internet keeps expanding. The challenge for ERIC is to maintain our high quality service as the patron base explodes due to the growth of electronic access and more patrons discovering ERIC services.