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ERIC/RCS Report: Introduction to the ERIC System

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ERIC/RCS REPORT
Introduction to the ERIC System

By Turee Olsen and William Rupley

The acronym ERIC/RCS stands for the Educational Resources Information Center/Reading and Communication Skills. ERIC is a national information system designed and supported by the National Institute of Education (NIE). The Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills (located at 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois) is responsible for collecting, analyzing, evaluating, and disseminating educational information related to research, instruction, and personnel preparation at all levels, and in all institutions concerned with instruction in reading, English, journalism, speech, and theater.

The Reading Module is responsible for educational information as it applies to all aspects of reading — cognitive, affective, and psychomotor — and to professional training, research, methodology, and organization of instruction. Particular attention is given to diagnosis of the individual's reading ability and the appropriate recommendations of materials dealing with the improvement of reading.

One needs, however, a working concept of the parts of the ERIC system in order to obtain desired information. The following descriptions and definitions of ERIC terms may help to lead the beginning user of the system to the information he needs.

THESAURUS OF ERIC DESCRIPTORS

The key to the entire system is the THESAURUS OF ERIC DESCRIPTORS. This volume, which is continuously being up-dated, is the source of all subject headings used for indexing and for retrieval of documents and journals in the ERIC collection. Each document entered into the system is assigned several *descriptors,* educational terms selected from the THESAURUS that indicate the essential contents of the document. Descriptors noted by an asterisk delineate the major concepts of the document, while the unmarked (minor) descriptors denote concepts that receive only passing attention or minor emphasis in the document.

(In cases where no descriptor term adequately describes some important feature of a document, an identifier term may be assigned in addition to the descriptors. Any word, name, or phrase may be an identifier; and, for the most part, identifiers are useful only to information specialists and not to the average user of the ERIC system.)

RESEARCH IN EDUCATION

Documents thus indexed using the descriptors and identifiers are printed in the monthly journal, RESEARCH IN EDUCATION (RIE), published by the National Institute of Education of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. About 1000 documents from all eighteen ERIC Clearinghouses are indexed and summarized, or abstracted in RIE each month. Each volume contains a main entry, subject, author, and institution or publisher catalog of documents.

The subject section is arranged by descriptor terms. Under each term are

found those documents which have been assigned a particular term as a major (starred) descriptor. Thus, a document which has been assigned five major descriptor terms will be found in five places in the subject index. In each place the title and a six-digit ED (for ERIC Document) accession number are listed. Semi-annual and annual compilations of RIE are also available.

CURRENT INDEX TO JOURNALS IN EDUCATION

Articles from nearly 600 educational journals are indexed in the same manner in another ERIC publication, CURRENT INDEX TO JOURNALS IN EDUCATION (CIJE). These articles are assigned a six-digit EJ (For Educational Journal) accession number and are annotated in most cases. Semi-annual and annual compilations of CIJE are available. Copies of the journal articles indexed in CIJE are not available from ERIC. They must be obtained from your library collection or from the publisher.

However, most documents abstracted in RIE are available from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS) in two forms: microfiche (MF), a four by six inch microfilm card containing up to 98 pages of text; or hard copy (HC), six by eight inch black and white photographically-reproduced pages in a paper binding. A few documents listed in RIE are not available from EDRS. In these cases, ordering information and current price are listed in the main entry abstract.

USING THE ERIC SYSTEM

Using the ERIC system to find information on a topic is most beneficial when a simple step-by-step procedure is followed. First, state your question as precisely as possible. Rather than asking "What can I learn about individualized reading?", ask "Is individualized reading an effective approach for teaching reading to my students?"

Then go to the THESAURUS and select the descriptor terms you will need to use in your search. Again narrow your choices as much as possible. Instead of using the broad term "Reading" use "Individualized Reading" or "Reading Instruction."

Using the terms you have selected, next read the titles listed under the subject headings in RIE and CIJE and choose those documents that sound pertinent for your purposes. By reading the abstracts of these documents in RIE and annotations of articles in CIJE, you can decide which documents and articles you wish to read in their entirety.

LOCATIONS OF ERIC COLLECTIONS

At least 500 complete ERIC microfiche collections and numerous partial collections exist nationwide. Each of the 80 Reading Resource Centers, also located nationwide, has a collection of microfiche dealing with reading and, in some cases, the other language arts. Most libraries and educational agencies have a list of complete ERIC collection locations. Or write to ERIC/RCS for the location of collections and the Reading Resource Center in your area.