

ACCESS FOR ALL

A New National Library for Tomorrow's Learners. The United States National Library of Education

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Abstract

Created in 1994, the National Library of Education is to become a principal center for the collection, preservation, and effective utilization of the research and other information related to education. The National Library manages its own collections and services, the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), the largest Education database in the world, and is instrumental in the Department of Education's World Wide Web presence. The National Library is sponsoring several initiatives in new technology including cross site indexing across multiple web sites, the Gateway to Education Materials (GEM) project which includes the creation of new metadata standards for education materials, and the Virtual Reference Desk which is research and development of internet based reference services.

The National Library of Education is the largest federally funded library in the world devoted solely to education and the federal government's principal center for one-stop information and referral on education. The National Library began in March, 1994 as a continuation of the Education Research Library. It is presently located at 555 New Jersey Ave, NW. Washington, DC. It began a century ago with the private collection of American schoolbooks from Henry Barnard, the first commissioner of the Office of education. It was nurtured by Commissioner John Eaton during his tenure of 1870-1886 and enriched by several private donors.

The earliest volumes in the library's special collections date to the fifteenth century. Other special collections include rare books published before 1800, mostly in education: historical books dating from 1800-1964; early American textbooks dating from 1775 to 1900; modern American textbooks from 1900-1959; and children's classics. More recently, other special collections were added to the library; material from the former National Institute of

Education, the former Office of Education, and DOE, including report studies, manuals, archives, speeches, and policy papers.

Soon after the library was formed, a recent reorganization of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement - the unit of the department in which the library is organizationally located, greatly expanded the library's available resources. The legislation had mandated that the education information branch, which operated a toll-free information and free-publications phone line, be merged with the new library. This brought additional staff with a wide range of educational subject expertise. At the same time, the department added Inet - a public access Internet site system and the Educational Resources Information Center. The ERIC includes 16 clearinghouses specializing in all aspects of education, adjunct clearinghouses, and support components.

Today the NLE houses more than 200,000 books and about 750 periodical subscriptions in addition to studies, reports, ERIC microfiche, a rare book collection, and CD-ROM databases.

Some collections are available through an online public library catalog, Maxcess. This online integrated library system provides access to the current collections via author, title, and subject searching. Soon the other modules of the system, including acquisitions, serials, and cataloging, and circulation will be available.

The National Library also maintains the U.S. Department of Education's Online Library. Individuals with access to the Internet can tap a rich collection of education-related information, including:

- Information about key Department of Education initiatives, such as GOALS 2000, Technology, and School-to-Work Programs.
- Full-text publications for teachers, parents, and researchers.
- Directories of effective programs, exemplary schools, information centers, and sources of assistance.
- Student financial aid information, and more.

For more information, visit the National Library's web site at

<http://www.ed.gov/NLE> or call 1-800-424-1616.

A selected group of 12 distinguished educational professionals served on the National Library of education's Advisory Task Force. The Task Force

consulted U.S. Department of Education staff, other organizations, and agencies, and members of the public about the role and functions of a national library of education. They studied National Library's legislation and previous reports and studies on National Library of Education and its predecessor organizations. They also examined documents and operation pertaining to the other national libraries and major education libraries. The Task Force envisioned the National Library as a hub of a national network of libraries, archives, and other information providers in the field of education. The Task Force developed a report which serves as more of a map for the future and a set of opportunities that awaited National Library's action and program development.

The National Library's mission statement and subsequently the program development centers around the four essential goals that the library seeks to fulfill:

- Awareness - informing current users of the resources available in and through the National Library of Education and cultivating new customers through an active program of marketing and outreach;
- Access- providing all customers with effective and efficient means to utilize the National Library's information resources in all formats, whether housed within the library's own collection or available through network partners;
- Assistance - enabling users to learn how to use electronic and print information tools, effective and responsive reference services, and state-of-the-art technology; and
- Accountability - continually improving library services through feedback from customers, network partners, and policymakers inside and outside government.

The National Library of Education serves the educational community through three areas: the Reference and Information Services, Collections and Technical Services, and Resource Sharing and Cooperation. Reference and Information Services - is a "one-shop that responds to telephone, mail, electronic, and other inquiries for education information:

- Provides service to all customers - government, public, and international
- Specializing in search and retrieval of electronic databases; document delivery by mail and fax; research counseling, bibliographic instruction; interlibrary loan services; legislative reference services; and selective searches.

- They answer the 1-800 toll free service, serve walk-in patrons, respond to mail, e-mail, and fax. In fact, typically this division receives between 400-500 phone calls month and 200 to 300 letters a day.
- They mail out education publications published by all components of the U.S. Department of Education upon request. The department's publications are prepared in different formats for better accessibility. There are bilingual versions, alternate formats for people with disabilities, and also online accessibility for most publications.

Collection Development and Technical Division directs the acquisition, preparation, and assessment of all collections in all formats. This division within NLE prepares several hundred thousand monographs, a thousand journal titles, many databases, legislative reference materials, textbooks, and rare materials. A partnership in the transfer and exchange of materials with the Library of Congress create an even more extensive database and development of alternative formats for these materials.

The U.S. Department of Education staff may check-out materials except rare books and archive collections from the Library. The loan period is 30 days and renewal is for 14 days.

The third division within the National Library is the Resource Sharing and Cooperation Division. This division develops and maintains a network of national education resources. Major activities include: OERI Toll-free Electronic Bulletin Board System, the award winning U.S. Department of Education's web site which contains more than 21,000 files and receives approximately 5 million hits per month. This web site offers cross site indexing across approximately 170 department of Education sponsored web sites and a state management of Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC).

ERIC

The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) system encompasses the world's largest and most frequently used education database as well as a network of 16 subject-specific clearinghouses, 11 adjunct clearinghouses, 1 affiliate clearinghouse, and 3 supporting service components. ERIC is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of educational Research and Improvement, and is administered by the National Library of education. ERIC has been an important component of the national education dissemination system for more than 30 years, ensuring that education information reaches those who need it, including teachers, administrators, parents, and students.

The ERIC database is the world's largest education database. Created in 1966 to capture and make available the "fugitive" education research, the database now includes nearly 1 million records. The ERIC database consists of two files: Resources in Education (RIE), which covers conference papers, research reports, program descriptions, book, curriculum guides, and other documents; and Current Index to Journals in Education (CIJE), which covers articles from approximately 980 education-related journals. Overall the ERIC database through 1997 contained 403,324 document records and 548,446 journal article records - a total of 951,770 bibliographic records. Each year, ERIC adds more than 30,000 records to the database. ERIC now has acquisition arrangements with more than 2,100 organizations that submit documents for the database.

The database is available in print, online, and on CD-ROM. There are now five online and six CD-ROM vendors who offer access to the entire ERIC database or portions of it. More than 1,000 institutions in 27 countries around the world provide access to the microfiche collection of full-text ERIC documents; electronic document delivery is also available for many of the more recent documents.

AskERIC

AskERIC is a personalized, Internet-based service that provides education information to teachers, librarians, counselors, administrators, parents, and others throughout the United States and the world. AskERIC began in 1992 as a project of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Information & Technology at Syracuse University, and, AskERIC answers approximately 1,400 questions per week and in September 1997, the staff responded to their 100,000th question. AskERIC draws from the resources of the entire ERIC system and many other sources. Anyone needing the latest information on special education, curriculum development, or other education-related topics can simply "AskERIC" by sending a request to askeric@askeric.org. Information specialists send personal e-mail responses to questions within two working days. Responses include a list of ERIC citations that deal with the topic, relevant full-text materials, and referrals to organizations and other Internet resources for additional information.

Anyone wishing to search for answers to education questions will discover an abundance of electronic resources at the AskERIC Virtual Library. These resources include lesson plans, AskERIC InfoGuides, ERIC Digests, education listserv archives, and much more. The ERIC database can also be searched online from the AskERIC Web site.

AskERIC Listserv Archive

ERIC fosters dialog and information exchange through the creation and administration of electronic discussion groups. More than 40 listservs are currently managed by ERIC Clearinghouses. A list of ERIC-sponsored listservs with links to subscription information is available on the ERIC systemwide Web site.

SPECIAL PROJECTS

ERIC Clearinghouses and support components bring creativity to the ERIC system through a number of special projects.

Education Resource Organizations Directory.

ACCESS ERIC assists the U.S. Department of Education by maintaining the database for the Education Resource Organizations Directory located on the Department's Web site. The Directory enables Internet users to search more than 2,100 national, regional, and state organizations, including information centers; comprehensive and technical assistance centers; and many other types of programs, services, and organizations.

Virtual Libraries.

Several ERIC Clearinghouse Web sites offer virtual libraries of full-text documents in their topic areas. For example, The ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Student Services has developed 11 Web-based virtual libraries on career development, cultural diversity, and many more educational topics.

ERIC Search Wizard and Expert Searches.

This state-of-art search engine developed by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation allows users to select terms from the Thesaurus of ERIC Descriptors to build effective, high quality searches. The Wizard features seamless online ordering, readily available information on journal and document sources.

Gateway to Educational Materials (GEM).

The National Library of education is spearheading a consortium effort - GEM which is a special project of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Information & Technology. The goal of GEM is to create an operational framework that will provide the key to "one-stop, any-stop" access to the thousands of lesson plans, curriculum units, and other educational materials on the Internet. To accomplish this, GEM created the K-12 meta-data standard for describing educational resources. GEM also provides software, training, and support so that GEM consortium members with Internet-based collections can easily use

GEM to describe their resources. These descriptions are assembled in the Gateway Catalog which went online in February 1998, and currently includes more than 2,000 records. The catalog contains links to the materials which creates easy access regardless of where the materials reside on the Internet.

Virtual Reference Desk (VRD).

The Virtual Reference Desk, is a new project creating the foundations for a national cooperative digital reference service. The project is sponsored by the National Library of Education and the ERIC Clearinghouse on Information and technology, with support from the Office of Science and Technology Policy. Resources of the Virtual Reference Desk:

AskA+ Locator.

The AskA+ Locator contains over 70 quality online expert services that answer the questions of the K-12 community. Digital reference services, also called "Ask-An-Expert" services, are Internet-based question and answer services that connect users with individuals who possess specialized subject or skill expertise. As opposed to static Web pages, digital reference services use the Internet to place people in contact with people who can answer specific questions and instruct users on developing certain skills.

Software Development and Certification.

The "Knowledge Base" is Internet software that allows students, teachers, experts, and others to search across AskA services archives for answers to previously-asked questions.

AskA Starter Kit.

This instructional resource guides organizations in the development of new AskA services in their areas of expertise by providing how-to-advice and methods based on experiences of exemplary services and in-depth empirical research.

Organization.

The Virtual Reference Desk seeks to identify and provide the resources necessary to link all K-12 community members to necessary expertise in order to satisfy information needs.

AskA Consortium and Standards Development.

The Virtual Reference Desk seeks to aid organizations of all types in the creation of a AskA services and offers resources and guidance to those interested in building and maintaining quality digital reference services.

USNEI

United States Network for Education Information was created in 1996 to meet the information needs of all who are involved in international educational mobility, including parents, students, educators, advisers, institution, and organizations. USNEI provides a central reference point for information on the United States and foreign education and also refer persons to the correct authority to help with the specific questions and assistance.

USNEI also serves as the official information service for the United States under the terms of international agreements involving the provisions of education information. USNEI is the National Education Information Center under the terms of the 1996 Convention of the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region.

While the management center for USNEI is housed at the National Library of Education, USNEI is actually both an internet presence and a distributed referral service spread across the United States and with contacts around the world in the United States embassies and consulates.