Information Sheet on

Educational Research: finding sources of information

DECEMBER 1998

About this information sheet

This sheet aims to provide:

• an introduction to information sources for those less experienced in researching educational topics
• the help and guidance needed when embarking on educational research
• an indication of some further sources of information and contacts.

It is not an exhaustive list of information sources, but it highlights some key sources, and identifies organisations and networks that can offer further help and support. Inclusion does not imply endorsement by Becta, nor does exclusion imply the reverse.

Please note that if you are a student at a school, college or university your first point of call should be your own academic library. You should find both printed and electronic sources of information there together with expert staff.

This sheet can be accessed on the Internet:


Introduction

At one time or another everyone is involved in some sort of research, perhaps as a student writing a dissertation, or studying for further or higher qualifications, or perhaps more informally reflecting on the learning taking place within your own classroom or your school.

The data you gather for your research comes from primary sources such your own observations retrieved through survey, questionnaire or interview; from secondary sources such as journal articles that report others’ experiences and findings and through tertiary sources such as indexes and abstracts which point to where work has been or is being done.

What are the main sources of information available?

A range of information sources in a variety of formats now exist.

They include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of information</th>
<th>Methods of presentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Abstracts and Indexes</td>
<td>• On-line sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bibliographical guides</td>
<td>• CD-ROM resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Directories, Dictionaries and other Reference works</td>
<td>• The Internet and the WWW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Statistical data</td>
<td>• Microfiche or microfilm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Official publications</td>
<td>• Print</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Grey literature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As a researcher you will have to make judgements about how current you require your information to be and this can often be a primary consideration when choosing the format you use to retrieve it.
Printed Sources

Abstracts and Indexes
All subject areas have indexes and abstracts. Indexes are the starting point for retrieving information and because they do not have summaries of the articles and can therefore be produced speedily, tend to be more up-to-date than abstracts. Abstracts include article summaries. This makes it easier to determine whether particular items might be relevant to the topic you are studying. An ideal starting point is The British Education Index (BEI), which provides information about published educational literature. It is a subject/author index to more than 300 British educational periodicals, and lists all major articles. The British Education Thesaurus (BET), which contains keywords used for BEI, will also help to retrieve items on educational topics. Other abstracting and indexing services that may be available for reference in your library are British Humanities Index (BHI), Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA), Library Information Science Abstracts (LISA) and newspaper indexes such as Times Index. You are strongly advised to consult your librarian for further information and assistance.

Bibliographical Guides
Bibliographical and subject literature guides aim to indicate the different types of reference material available and describe the sources that can be helpful to those wishing to explore the literature for themselves. Finding out in education: a guide to sources of information, for example, indicates the different types of reference material available for the study of education. It describes the sources that could be helpful to those who wish to explore the literature for themselves.

Directories Dictionaries and Quick Reference
There are a range of directories and quick reference material, which you may need to use during your research. These may include dictionaries and encyclopaedias of education, which will help you, define terms, explain concepts or obtain background information. Directories can provide a range of information from statistical to contact information and tend to be published annually. The Education Yearbook, for example, is a comprehensive guide and indispensable handbook as is The Authorities Directory and Annual.

Statistical Information
The Government Statistical Service produce the Annual Abstract of Statistics, and the main producer of educational official statistics is the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) The most convenient general source for specifically educational statistics in the UK is the annual, Education Statistics for the United Kingdom. A good starting point for finding statistics in general is the Stationery Office publication, Guide to official statistics. The DfEE also carries out a survey of ICT in UK schools approximately every two years. This publication summarises the information available on the level of provision and use of information and communications technology in schools and its contribution across the curriculum. It covers primary, secondary and special schools.

Unofficial statistics, that is, statistics produced by non-governmental bodies, can be located using the guide published by Gower entitled, Sources of unofficial UK statistics.

For general figures relating to activities and relations in Europe, Eurostat, the Statistical Office of the European Communities, have produced a book, Europe in figures (4th edition, 1995).

Official Publications
Official publications are materials published by governmental bodies and include such material as white papers (policy documents) and green papers (discussion document). These can often be complex to find and you could well need the assistance of your librarian.

Grey Literature
Material which is semi-published or unpublished, for example, ephemera produced by a company for internal consumption. Because of the nature of these materials, they too can be very difficult to locate using the standard information tools. Contacting your librarian for information on locating this material is often advisable.

© Becta, 1998
What can I do if printed resources are not available?

If a printed item is not available within your library, it may be obtainable through the system of Inter-Library Loans (ILL) which is co-ordinated by the British Library Document Supply Centre (BLDSC). Library services are networked to give access to resources from a range of institutions, both local and national. These include academic, public, industrial and business libraries. When borrowing an item by the ILL system you should allow extra time for delivery. There may also be a small charge for this service.

You should also be aware that there are an ever increasing number of electronic sources of information available and some of these are mentioned below.

Electronic sources

**CD-ROMs**

An increasing amount of information is being made available on CD-ROM, ranging from bibliographic information relating to books and journals to the full-text of newspapers. For instance, the British Education Index (BEI) and Current Index to Journals in Education (CIJE) are now available in this format. Dictionaries (both English and foreign language), the full-text of encyclopaedias and newspapers, atlases and other standard works can be found on CD-ROM. Using the CD-ROM version of print material allows you more flexibility in structuring your search, you can normally print or download the results and it is much faster.

**On-line services**

On-line searches can provide bibliographic references on a chosen topic or, increasingly, the full text of an article. Several on-line educational databases are available. Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) and British Education Index (BEI) are two examples. On-line searching can be complex and as heavy costs are incurred, they tend to be searched by an information professional on your behalf. Increasingly, former on-line databases are also being published as CD-ROMs (e.g. ERIC, BEI). However CD-ROMs are up-dated less frequently than on-line. Many on-line services are up-dated daily whereas CD-ROMs vary according to the product but can range from monthly, quarterly or annually. By searching CD-ROM rather than on-line you will lose some of the currency of your search. Again, to search either on-line or CD-ROM products your librarian should be contacted for further details.

**The Internet and WWW**

The Internet offers an opportunity to navigate, select, evaluate and save information (text and pictures) for further consideration and use at your convenience. For instance, there is now a complete listing of public library Web pages and an electronic reference library called, “Ask the Librarian” Under FAQs (frequently asked questions) you can find some sample questions about looking for statistics, software and research evidence. Pointers to information sources are also included. Additionally on the Becta Web site you can follow links to other organisations involved in education and technology. Material from the Internet can also be topical and fresh, personal, provide more choice and variety and be richer and cheaper to obtain than from other sources. However, the other side to information on the Internet is that it can be inaccurate, incomplete, irregularly updated and difficult to locate. The Internet is not mediated so therefore you cannot rely on the standard of the information you find. As a general rule, look for information from reputable organisations to try and ensure the quality of the information. However again you should consult your librarian or IT support staff.

**Books**

*Action research: a handbook for practitioners*
by Ernest T. Stringer

*Curriculum action research: a handbook of methods and resources for reflective practitioners*
2nd ed. by James McKernan

© Becta, 1998
Doing research in education
edited by Geoffrey Walford

Doing your research project
by Judith Bell

Finding out in education: a guide to sources of information
by Peter B. Clarke

Guide to field research by Carol Bailey

How to write an assignment: improving your research and presentation skills
by Pauline Smith

How to research
by Loraine Blaxter and others

Professional development through action research
edited by Christine O’Hanlon

Research methods in education
by Louis Cohen and Lawrence Manion

Research paper: how to write it
by Ralph Berry

Student’s guide to doing research on the Internet
by Mary Campbell and David R. Campbell
Addison-Wesley, 1995 ISBN: 0201489163

Survey of information technology in schools,

Using the Internet, online services and CD-ROMs for writing research and term papers
edited by Charles Harmon

Internet

British Education Index
http://www.leeds.ac.uk/bei/
Guide to the contents of British educational periodical literature

Department for Education and Employment (DfEE)
http://www.dfee.gov.uk/dfeehome.htm

Education On-line
http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol
Electronic texts in education and training
ERIC Search
http://www.ericarchive.org/search.htm
Research in education and Current index to journals in education

ERIC Search Wizard
Help in building a search query using the ERIC Thesaurus

ICT in Education News
http://www.becta.org.uk/news/ictnews
A monthly alerting service providing abstracts of articles which have appeared in national newspapers and the educational press

Journals Published by Blackwell
http://www.blackwellpublishers.co.uk/asp/listofj.asp
Electronic versions of many titles are available on-line to subscribing institutions

National Information Services and Systems (NISS)
http://www.niss.ac.uk/
Information gateway

Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED)
http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/ofsted.htm

Public Libraries on the Web
http://dspace.dial.pipex.com/town/square/ac940/weblibs.html

Qualifications and Curriculum Council (QCA)
http://www.qca.gov.uk/index.htm

Times Educational Supplement (TES)
http://www.tes.co.uk

Teacher Training Agency (TTA)

Virtual Teacher Centre (VTC)
http://vtc.ngfl.gov.uk/vtc

Organisations

British Educational Research Association (BERA)
c/o SCRE
15 St John Street
EDINBURGH
EH8 8JR
Tel: 0131 557 2944 Fax: 0131 556 9454

Centre for Applied Research in Education (CARE)
University of East Anglia
School of Education,
NORWICH
NR4 7TJ
Tel: 01603 456161 Fax: 01603 451412
http://www.uea.ac.uk/menu/acad_depts/care/

Centre for Educational Development Appraisal and Research (CEDAR)
Department of Arts Education
University of Warwick
COVENTRY
CV4 7AL
Tel: 024 7652 4139 Fax: 024 7652 4472
http://www.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/CEDAR/

Classroom Action Research Network (CARN)
School of Education
University of East Anglia
NORWICH
NR4 7TJ
Tel: 01603 592635 Fax: 01603 259388
While every care has been taken in the compilation of this information to ensure that it is accurate at the time of publication, Becta cannot be held responsible for any loss, damage or inconvenience caused as a result of any error or inaccuracy within these pages. Although all references to external sources (including any sites linked to the Becta site) are checked both at the time of compilation and on a regular basis, Becta does not accept any responsibility for or otherwise endorse any information contained in these pages including any sources cited.