

Knots in the Network of Information Sources About Education*

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Federal money supports many agencies intended to provide information to educators, but, because the services are not coordinated, few people use them.

"Unfortunately those who provide information and referral services have themselves become part of the maze to which they were supposed to offer guidance. This orderless growth has resulted in a specialized, fragmented system characterized by

- Duplication of and competition between services and functions;
 - Waste of resources;
 - Barriers obstructing access;
- and
- Inadequate services.

As a result, people can be shuffled from agency to agency, and many either will not receive the services needed, or will receive them only after great or exasperating difficulty."

—Comptroller General of the United States, 1978

A very large number of people—millions, in fact—work in the field of education. Some have been educators all their working lives. Others have come to the field only recently and will move on to other careers.

They come from all sorts of backgrounds.

They work in a wide variety of locations.

Because of those two facts, and for some other reasons, they

need different kinds of information to do their jobs well. Some educators find and use lots of information; others do not look very hard and do not get helpful information when and where they need it.

One point seems clear today: a lot of information has been collected for use by educators that is not being used very often or very well.

The federal government is a major source of money and ideas that have built and now support most of the existing education resources. The money comes from agencies that have now been incorporated in the new Department of Education, but many of the ideas come from other fields—agriculture, marketing, communications, and so on.

The money makes it possible for many people to set up equipment and information files that are

* Ideas for the writing of the pages that follow have been developed over the past 12 years while working on various contracts and grants provided to the Far West Laboratory by the U.S. Office of Education and the National Institute of Education, now incorporated in the new Department of Education. Neither of these agencies nor the Laboratory is responsible for the opinions expressed here. (An earlier version of this document, in somewhat different form, was prepared for a 1979 conference sponsored by the National Institute of Education.)

ready to give information to educators. These people work in many kinds of agencies—nonprofit regional education agencies, state departments of education, education service centers, specialized libraries, universities, business firms, and professional associations.

Very few people in the federal government or in the field of education know where all these information centers are located or whom they serve. In the next few pages you will find a brief summary of some of the more active resources, along with the titles of some handbooks that will allow you to find those that seem especially interesting.

Information Resources

Educational information sources can be grouped in a number of different ways. I will group them by their source of support. Many of these sources do more than provide educational information; some of them put more emphasis on training teachers or on helping schools adopt new programs or on meeting new educational or social goals set by the Congress or by state legislatures. Still, each of them can and does provide information of various types to individuals and institutions in the field of education.

Sources the Federal Government Supports

- *Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)*. At 16 places in the U.S., information about education is collected, examined, organized, and then communicated on request to any educator or researcher who asks for it. These 16 centers form a network that puts together large reference books to help educators find information. They also publish lists of materials on various topics to help educators learn what is new and different in that particular area of

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interest. In many libraries educators can look through this collection of documents at no cost, or materials can be ordered from the centers at modest cost.

- *National Diffusion Network (NDN)*. In each state a small staff gives school districts in that state information about any of some 200 or more unusual programs that have been shown to be effective in helping children learn and in training teachers to do their jobs better. These people have information about each of the effective programs located all around the country; they know what it will cost if a school district wishes to adopt one of these programs; and they know how interested districts can apply for funds to get a new program installed. Meetings are often arranged in different parts of the country where teachers and school administrators can meet with the people who developed the effective programs and can ask questions about materials, training, testing, costs, and so on.

- *Regional Offices of Education*. The Department of Health, Education and Welfare divided the nation into 10 geographical regions, with headquarters in such cities as Boston, Chicago, Dallas, and San Francisco. More than a dozen employees work in each of those regional offices. They provide information and other services to colleges, state education agencies, school districts, and anyone

else interested in education in that particular region. When the government issues new regulations for its education efforts, these offices are responsible for informing people in the region about them.

- *Research and Development Exchange (RDx)*. Seven nonprofit regional education agencies and a university research center operate this network of information resources. Each "exchange" helps educators in its region (made up of three or more states) get the materials and ideas they need to improve schools and the training of education personnel. They circulate information that the education agencies of the region ask for to meet state and local needs. A resource and referral service based at Ohio State University puts together and distributes a calendar showing all the education meetings scheduled in the months ahead. It also produces pocket-size lists of agencies and associations that can help educators with challenges such as school violence and vandalism, metric education, parent education, energy needs, women's equity, handicapped learners, child abuse, and so on. These lists are then distributed by the exchanges to various people in each of the states they serve.

- *Teachers' Centers Exchange*. Hundreds of teachers' centers are now operating in urban, suburban, and rural areas. A small group of professional communicators at a

regional education agency keeps them in touch with one another so that they can help each other grow and prosper. This network is made up mainly of the staff members of the centers; the staff members of the exchange act as a group who can be reached by telephone for ideas as to which centers have which kinds of talent to help other centers. The exchange also publishes books and bulletins to help new centers get started and do better work with local teachers.

- *Women's Educational Equity.* Various groups have different information responsibilities for women's educational equity. One major information center collects, examines, organizes, and provides information about all aspects of the subject. A coordination group, at a different site, has been responsible for keeping information moving among the various women's groups that received funds to develop materials or training in this field. Another group publishes and sells the best materials produced by various educators in the field. Still another group offers information and training on how to develop proposals that may lead to money to support local activities.

- *Curriculum Centers for Vocational Education.* At six regional locations educators can find or ask for information, teaching materials, training packages, and other help in vocational and technical education. Each state education agency has one person who links the schools and colleges in that state to the nearest curriculum center. Centers distribute such items as catalogues, brochures, and newsletters as well as curriculum materials.

- *Desegregation Assistance Centers.* Each region of the nation has three centers that can provide information and other help to school districts that are actually trying to desegregate their schools. One center offers help with race

desegregation; another takes care of national origin; and a third deals with sex equity. Each stores and circulates information to meet the special needs of educators in its own region.

- *Bilingual Education Centers.* Three centers collect, reproduce, and distribute information, curriculum, and training materials needed by educators in their regions who are working in bilingual education. These centers pull together the materials developed at 14 special centers for Spanish, Filipino, Portuguese, or Chinese bilingual needs. They also provide information on the work of 16 training resource centers that help school administrators, teachers, and teacher trainers use materials and tests in bilingual education.

- *Regional Resource Centers in Special Education.* Thirteen centers meet the information needs of educators who work with handicapped children. They do their work by demonstrating effective ways of creating individual education programs for each handicapped child. Each center plans with each state in its region what type of information and/or training will be needed in that state.

- *State Information Capability.* About 44 state education agencies have received awards that make it possible to build and operate a statewide education information program. The states develop plans, collect information, train their staffs, and provide information services to schools and colleges on request.

Sources Supported by State and Local Taxes

Each state education agency has on its payroll a staff of professionals who work with school districts. They carry information of various types from the state agency to local school district offices and, in some cases, to school

buildings in those districts. Some of them are subject specialists—persons with insights and experience in math or reading or science, for example. Others are legal experts or state fiscal officers. All can spread information among educators and can carry information from educators back to the state agency.

Spread around about half the states you can find more than 500 education service centers, located in different geographic regions of these states. They are often located in county or regional office buildings. Some can provide extensive amounts of information, whereas others offer less. In some cases they own equipment and maintain staffs to give information to the entire state or to several countries or even to users outside the state.

Large city school districts, where most of the nation's children go to school, have their own information resources. So do some of the wealthy suburban school districts. In addition, there are clusters of local school districts that work together—like the Council of Great City Schools or school study councils or networks of schools all across the nation that are using the same new program.

State departments of education have joined together to form the Council of Chief State School Officers. Regional service centers work cooperatively to share information within their respective states.

Also, a few states have broken up their agencies and put some staff members into regional state offices to bring their information services closer to the schools they intend to serve. In one state, for example, members of five service teams work directly with schools they are assigned to, giving them information they would otherwise have to get from the state agency located much farther away. Also, in each state agency you can find a number of state civil-service em-

ployees whose salaries are paid, fully or in part, by federal money to serve as information resources in specific fields—such as adult basic education, basic skills, migrant education, and so on.

Each state agency has a public information director. This person, with staff help, provides information to the news media, to school administrators, to teacher and community organizations, to the legislature, to the state board of education, and to many other individuals and groups.

Professional Associations

Professional educators belong to many types of associations. Teachers may be members of the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, or a local education group.

School administrators may belong to the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, the American Association of School Administrators, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, the Association of School Business Officials, or the state affiliates of any of these groups.

Policymakers may belong to the National School Boards Association, the National Association of State Boards of Education, the Education Commission of the States, and so on.

Private school personnel may belong to the National Catholic Education Association, the National Association of Independent Schools, the Council for American Private Education, and various denominational groupings.

Researchers may belong to the American Educational Research Association, the American Society for Information Science, the American Psychological Association, the American Sociological Association, and so on.

Those whose work is concerned mainly with improving the skills and performance of teachers may belong to the National Staff Development Council and/or the National Council of States for In-service Education, or may be part of the Teachers' Centers Exchange, or may share in the efforts of one of the Teacher Corps regional networks. They may also belong to the American Society for Training and Development.

Trainers of teachers who work in colleges and universities are likely to be involved in the programs of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, the American Council on Education, the National University Extension Association, and so on.

Others with special interests may share in the activities of the National Community Education Association, the National Congress of Parents and Teachers, the Public Education Association, the National School Volunteers Program, and other groups of this type.

Just about every one of these associations publishes a newsletter and a magazine or journal intended to spread educational information. Just about every one of them holds an annual meeting for its members, usually rotating the location from one section of the country to another to encourage wider participation and broader information sharing.

The list of professional association does not end there. The publishers of this country have an association. So do the college booksellers. So do the field representatives of the educational publishers in some of the larger states. They do a lot of sharing of information about education.

Librarians belong to national and regional and state associations—the American Library Association, the Special Libraries Association.

There are temporary associations of those promoting a particular type of education; for example, in the 1970s groups of professionals interested in experience-based career education joined forces to promote that new program. There are special-interest groupings—like the Committee for Full Funding of Education, the Council for Educational Development and Research, and the National Home Study Council.

Finally, there are the subject-oriented associations—the International Reading Association, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, the Speech Communication Association, and many more.

This list is not intended to be complete. For a fuller list, see *Private Organizations and Associations*¹ (1978) or *Directory of Education Associations* (1978).

Who Uses Information and How

Many information resources are in place, ready for use by educators. But their staff members wonder why so few of those who work in classrooms and those who manage school buildings use the information that is just waiting for them. Lots of it is free; much of the rest is offered at very low cost.

To improve student learning opportunities, teachers must have access to more and different information sources than those they presently rely on: text and reference books, personal notes and files, curriculum materials, and face-to-face communication with individuals in their own buildings. For the moment, they appear to make little use of the resources that are supposed to be serving them.

Do the Pieces Fit Together?

Think back to all those information resources described earlier.

¹ Prices and ordering information for all items are listed on page 431.

As you looked through the lists, did you wonder if each of the pieces of the information jigsaw puzzle could be fit together into a full-size picture?

You can turn to a new handbook called *The State of the States* (1979). In it you will get a little look at the way 38 states and territories would describe the information resources available to educators within their boundaries. You can also look at the new, revised edition of *Databases and Clearinghouses* (1979) and the publications mentioned earlier. You can also refer to the new sixth edition of the catalogue called *Educational Programs That Work* (1979). You can even look backward to a somewhat out-of-date resource called *Library Programs Worth Knowing About* (1977).

None of these will give you the whole picture.

No one in the federal government or in a state government has the whole picture conveniently at hand. The bits and pieces of these information resources are very hard to track down and very hard to keep up to date.

Take the picture you would find in one major education bureau. That bureau has about 20 different kinds of arrangements that can provide information and training for educators working in that special field. It has 16 centers for one group of clients—eight to serve multiple states. It has 13 resource centers and 16 service centers. It has a major center to index and distribute information about materials. It has set up a group to arrange for marketing of its products. It supports a service that gives information to parents, publishes a newsletter, and broadcasts mass-media messages. It maintains five parent information centers. It supports several groups that help with training and provide information about successful training practices. And lots more.

WHERE TO GET DIRECTORIES OF INFORMATION RESOURCES

(All prices subject to change)

Databases and Clearinghouses (1979)

\$9.75 from National Center Publications

National Center for Research in Vocational Education
1960 Kenny Road
Columbus, Ohio 43210

Directory of Education Associations (1978)

Stock No. 017-080-01882-9

\$3.75 from Superintendent of Documents
U.S. Government Printing Office
Washington, D.C. 20402

Dissemination Networks: Information Resources for Education

\$4.50 from Educational Resource Center

855 Broadway
Boulder, Colorado 80302

Educational Programs That Work (Sixth Edition)

\$5.50 from Order Department

Far West Laboratory for Educational Research
and Development
1855 Folsom Street
San Francisco, California 94103

Education Directory: State Education Agency Officials (1978-79)

Stock No. 017-080-02004-1

\$2.75 from Superintendent of Documents
U.S. Government Printing Office
Washington, D. C. 20402

The State of the States

\$3.50 from Order Department

Far West Laboratory for Educational Research
and Development
1855 Folsom Street
San Francisco, California 94103

If educators phone or visit the center or group nearest them, can they get information quickly and easily about all the other resources in that special field of education? Can they get directions on how to make use of other education information sources *outside* that special field?

For the time being, only certain groups of educators can get information from certain resource centers. Very few of the staff members employed in centers are able to provide information from the other sources outside their special area of responsibility. Educa-

tors who happen to decide to use one information source very rarely are encouraged to learn about *all* the resources that stand ready to meet their other needs and interests.

What Can Be Done Now?

Those who understand and work with modern communications equipment know that today it would be possible to put certain types of equipment into school libraries if the people who work in those schools knew how to use that equipment and were comfort-

able with it. Right now those who work in local school buildings may not even know this high-speed equipment is available or, if they do, they are awed by it. Even if a professional specialist were at their elbows, they might not know—for now—how to ask the right questions that would pull from the various information resources some ideas or materials they might use in classrooms the next morning. In any event, if change is to be brought about, experts who do not themselves work in those schools must recognize how the teachers and principals who do work there think and feel and behave.

Existing information resources are used by some educators. No doubt more educators can be made aware of these resources. More can become occasional or regular users. But new equipment alone will not bring about that expansion of services. What is needed, everywhere, is improved coordination of services.

Ultimately the nation's education information resources must

be organized more equitably and efficiently. Along with continued support for that cadre of communicators and linking agents who are genuinely eager to help, we need a major nationwide effort to consolidate and coordinate information services. Clearly, it is up to you to prod the education information community to get together and hammer out where it plans to go in the next few years to meet your needs and the needs of the students in your classroom. In the meantime, what can you do now?

Meanwhile . . .

First, identify the information resources and services that are intended to help you—those nearest you, those most responsive, those with the most capable personnel.

Then determine your own information—seeking priorities. (For example, you simply can't afford to subscribe to every publication or phone every information center that might offer useful information.) For which topics and at what

level of detail do you really need valid new information?

Finally, think through with care, in advance, the questions you will pose. The art of asking focused, precise questions is well worth cultivating.

In addition, keep in mind that learning opportunities are more likely to improve if you don't limit your information searches only to sources and ideas that confirm your long-held beliefs and preferences. *EL*



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Letters (continued from page 373)

Elsewhere in my article, I noted that small group instruction is effective in the early elementary grades. The work of Jane Stallings, among others, supports this. Small group instruction may be effective in the intermediate grades, as Mr. Rowan suggests, but as yet I have not seen *evidence* (as opposed to testimonials or armchair speculation) to this effect.

Some teachers in the Good and Grouws research got good results using small groups, but others did not, so that mean scores for this set of teachers as a whole were mediocre. Thus, this study pro-

vides no evidence favoring the use of small groups, as such, although it does show that small groups *can* be used effectively for fourth-grade math instruction by *some* teachers. In any case, as with most issues of educational methods, we need to move beyond relatively primitive "whole class *vs.* small groups *vs.* individualized" questions and begin to ask what particular kinds of small group instruction are effective with what kinds of students for bringing about what kinds of outcomes. *EL*

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Have Something to Say?

If so, write to us. Letters to the editor are usually edited for brevity and are printed only if space is available. Letters must be signed, although we will withhold an author's name if requested.

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