

National Association of Special Education Teachers (NASET)

THE PRACTICAL TEACHER

This Month's Topic:

Special Education Research: Where to Start?

It's important to use well-grounded research to make decisions regarding children with disabilities. But where to start unraveling the mysteries of the research that's out there? Research isn't something you can take off a shelf and apply blindly to your circumstances. There are many factors to consider before deciding that a specific research approach matches your situation, your students or teachers, your socio-economic setting, your local needs. This issue of NASET's Practical Teacher will provide you with resources designed as a "Starter Kit" to research in general and the special education field in particular.

Research Basics

As we said above, it's important to know a bit (well, a lot!) about research, if you're going to read it and apply it to your local circumstances. So to lay the groundwork before plunging into unexpectedly deep water, you might want to start with these basics:

What is Scientifically Based Research? A Guide for Teachers.

From the National Institute for Literacy.

<http://www.readingrockets.org/article/31080/>

Scientific Research in Education.

From the National Academies Press, 2002. Available online at:

http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=10236

Understanding and Using Education Statistics: It's Easier (and More Important) Than You Think.

From the Educational Research Service, 2003.

<http://www.ers.org/CATALOG/description.phtml?II=WS-0496>

Applying Research

Okay, you've got the basics under your belt. Now you want to take the research you've read about and actually use it. How do you do that? Easier said than done, but here are some resources that are sure to help.

Using data to drive and inform school change.

The Center for Data-Driven Reform in Education (CDDRE) conducts research into how school districts can use data-driven reform to improve student achievement and shares this widely through its Raising the Bar program. <http://www.cddre.org/index.html>

Using research and reason in education: How teachers can use scientifically based research to make curricular and instructional decisions.

from the Partnership for Reading, May 2003.

<http://lincs.ed.gov/publications/html/stanovich/index.html>

Help for schools.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires that schools take certain steps towards improvement. The School Improvement Knowledge Base at the link below contains information and resources to help schools accomplish these tasks using a step-by-step, well-designed process. If you're in the driver's seat—or anywhere in the car!—you'll wanna come here.

<http://www.mc3edsupport.org/community/knowledgebases/Project-14.html>

A Policymaker's Primer on Education Research: How to Understand, Evaluate, and Use It.

A joint effort of Mid-Continent Research for Education (McREL) and the Education Commission of the States, 2004.

www.ecs.org/ecsmain.asp?page=/html/educationIssues/Research/primer/index.asp

Identifying and Implementing Educational Practices Supported by Rigorous Evidence: A User Friendly Guide.

from the U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, 2003.

<http://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/rigorousvid/index.html>

Where Do We Look First?

So...we know why it's important to care about research and who we're caring for. Now where do we find special education research? Disability-related research? What are the primary sources we can turn to, for these initiatives? Where's the research happening? And what's it focusing upon? (What it's finding is a whole separate section!)

Government-funded research into disabilities.

Did you know that the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) funds nearly 1,000 disability-related projects? Some prepare special educators or administrators, others conduct research, and still others offer technical assistance and information about educating children with disabilities. These projects are a very good place to look first for assistance. What projects are focusing on your areas of special education concern? Find out what's funded right now, at:

<http://publicddb.tadnet.org/>

NIDRR research can be helpful, too.

NARIC, the National Rehabilitation Information Center, offers an online searchable database of more than 300 projects funded by NIDRR (National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research), including their products. If you want to know about disability, rehabilitation, and promoting independence and employment for individuals with disabilities, NARIC is the place to visit. Search the database,

at: <http://www.naric.com/research/default.cfm>

What Works Clearinghouse.

You've probably heard of the WWC, which rigorously reviews educational research and connects educators with the best of that research. While most of the WWC's work focuses on general education research, there's good stuff to be found related to special education and students with disabilities. The link below will take you to the WWC's special needs section.

<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/topic.aspx?sid=19>

And don't forget the ERIC system when you're looking for research on an educational subject.

ERIC is an acronym for the Educational Resources Information Center. The ERIC database contains descriptions of over 1 million educational materials, including research-based findings published in journals and related to children with and without disabilities. Search the database for the research that interests you, at: www.eric.ed.gov

Try this database of interventions and policy evaluations.

Its acronym is C2-RIPE, which stands for Register of Interventions and Policy Evaluation. Developed by the Campbell Collaboration (get it? C2?), the database provides researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and the public with access to reviews and review-related documents in the following areas: Education, Crime and Justice, Social Welfare, and Methods. Go to: <http://www.campbellcollaboration.org>

Scientific research related to schools and education.

Visit the Child Development Center, which organizes and briefly describes current research related to schools and education according to the following groupings: development, psychology, learning, parenting, health/safety, and kids/media. Choose which one you'd like to view at: <http://childdevelopmentinfo.com>

Try These Websites!

There are many great research journals, associations, and organizations, all working to further the knowledge base of educational research we have. We've listed some primary participants below, in alphabetical order.

American Educational Research Association (AERA)

www.aera.net/

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD)

www.ascd.org/

Divisions of the Council for Exceptional Children

<http://www.cec.sped.org/Content/NavigationMenu/AboutCEC/Communities/Divisions/default.htm>

Educational Research Network

www.ernweb.com/

Educational Research Service

www.ers.org/

Institute for Academic Access

<http://www.academicaccess.org/>

Institute for Evidence-Based Decision-Making in Education

www.edieinstitute.net/

Journal of Educational Research

<http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/00220671.asp>

Practical Research, Assessment, and Evaluation

A peer-reviewed journal online at:

<http://pareonline.net>

Wisconsin Center for Education Research

www.wcer.wisc.edu/