

# ERIC Counseling and Personnel Services Information Center

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This article describes the development and planned use of the Counseling and Personnel Services Information Center, which is part of the Educational Research Information Center (ERIC).

RECENT EFFORTS in information systems have led to the development of information-processing techniques that can facilitate the effective, efficient retrieval of information. The Educational Research Information Center (ERIC), recently established by the United States Office of Education, is a national educational information system that is utilizing many of these techniques. ERIC is a decentralized system that includes 13 information centers each specializing in a particular educational area. One of the 13 centers, the Counseling and Personnel Services Information Center at the University of Michigan, is being developed to meet the specific needs of counselors and personnel workers.

## DEVELOPMENT OF AN ONGOING COLLECTION

The initial phase in the development of

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the Counseling and Personnel Services Information Center has been to establish a number of procedures for the regular acquisition of materials. First, the scope of interest of the Center needed to be decided. To maximize the effectiveness of the Center's services to users, a broad scope was established for it was hypothesized that personnel workers in all settings and at all levels share a large core of common interests and concerns. Therefore, it seemed desirable to establish broad parameters that will permit the development of a collection of materials to meet the information needs of all personnel workers. As a consequence, the Center is actively seeking information about current research, programs and practices in various aspects of personnel work, and materials from other fields, e.g., the behavioral sciences, that can offer additional support to current practice.

To initiate the building of the Center's collection, a number of acquisition procedures were initiated. A major thrust in this area has been the establishment of a variety of liaison groups who can both help identify materials for input to the Center and communicate the nature of the Cen-

ter's services to potential users. Thus far, these liaison groups include state supervisors of guidance, directors of guidance, counselor educators, state supervisors of employment counseling, and representatives from American Personnel and Guidance Association branches. In the near future, these groups will be expanded to include representatives from other personnel areas, such as student personnel work, school social work, and school psychology.

A major effort has been made to describe the nature of the materials needed for inclusion in the Center's collection. The Center is actually gathering materials for two collections: (1) the national ERIC collection, where the stress is on disseminating substantive reports of research studies and innovative programs, and (2) the Center's collection, where the stress is on the development of a comprehensive collection of materials describing the variety of programs and practices that are pertinent to personnel work. The flexibility allowed by these two collections enables the Center to receive and process all materials within its scope of interest.

#### PROCESSING MATERIALS FOR RETRIEVAL

The processing of the Center's collection involves both abstracting and indexing. The goal of abstracting is to reduce the word content of the article while preserving the basic information content. The abstracts are 200-word summaries of the article that enable the user both to keep informed of basic information in his general field and to identify specific articles that are relevant to his special interests. The major advantage of abstracting is that it allows the user to survey a greater quantity of information while reducing the amount of time required to keep informed.

The basic process of indexing, which is a system for categorizing the information content of materials, involves assigning a list of terms that represent the concepts described in the article. An article describing the use of group counseling procedures in vocational counseling with twelfth grade, non-college-bound boys would be indexed under the terms: group counseling, vocational counseling, twelfth grader, non-college-bound students, and boys.

Once the collection has been indexed, it is possible to retrieve materials that are ap-

propriate to the special interests of users. Users may phrase either broad or narrow questions, and retrieve only that information from the total collection which is relevant to their question. A broad question would be one that requests all information on one rather general concept, e.g., "I am interested in information about group counseling." This type of question would be preferred only if the user seriously desires to survey this entire broad area. It is important for him to realize that a large number of materials in the collection will be retrieved in response to his demand. This means that much of his time will be required to search through these materials to locate those in which he is actually interested.

If the user is, in fact, counseling with potential high school dropouts and wants information about possible group procedures that might be effective with these special students, he should request information about group counseling procedures for use with potential high school dropouts. When this more specific information is added, the Center staff is able to search for *only* that information which concerns both group counseling and dropouts, and to exclude materials that deal only with group counseling or only with dropouts. Learning to phrase questions that accurately reflect the users' true information needs allows sorting to occur at the time of search rather than at the time that the user is reading the materials.

#### USES OF THE CENTER'S COLLECTION

The combined effect of the acquisition and processing procedures is the development of a large store of information which can become the basis for a number of user services. Because of the unique nature of the Center's scope, acquisition efforts, and processing procedures, a number of diverse services are available. Following is a description of some of these uses.

#### INDIVIDUALIZED CURRENT AWARENESS SEARCHES

Each professional personnel worker has a unique profile of special interests. To insure continued professional growth, it is important that he be able to keep informed about current information relevant to these

special interests. For example, a counselor may have received funds under NDEA Title V-A for the development of an elementary guidance program in a school where the majority of the students have been classified as culturally disadvantaged. This counselor has a definite need for continuous information about specific program ideas that are appropriate for this particular situation. Through the ERIC program he would have several ways of keeping informed about current ideas. First, he could subscribe to *Research in Education*, which is currently available through the United States Government Printing Office. This monthly publication contains abstracts and indexes for the monthly ERIC input. He would be able to look in the subject index for articles pertinent to elementary guidance and culturally disadvantaged children, and scan the abstract to determine those articles he would like to pursue further. This scanning would provide a current awareness of his special field. He would then be able to order microfiche or hard copies of the articles he wanted for his own personal collection from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service.

In addition to using *Research in Education*, he could write to the Counseling and Personnel Services Information Center for suggestions about materials that can provide needed information. From this inquiry he would receive information about published and unpublished materials that suggest possible practices and procedures. Also he might be interested in some of the state-of-the-art papers and monographs that the Center will be developing periodically. These materials will provide a synthesis of broad areas, e.g., elementary guidance, and extensive bibliographies of currently available resources.

#### EXPANSION OF INTERDISCIPLINARY VIEWPOINT

A counselor who is interested in surveying, for example, current environmental information that can enrich vocational counseling practice, can, by requesting information from the Center on manpower utilization or occupational studies, receive information from a variety of subject fields that are related to these areas. This is possible because the materials in the ERIC collection are stored according to a concept or

subject area rather than by their viewpoint or the publication in which they appear. Thus the user's time is spent reading a wide selection of materials, all of which are appropriate to his information needs, rather than searching through various types of materials to locate those that are relevant. The result is that the user will be exposed to many viewpoints from many disciplines.

#### PROMOTION OF WIDE DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION

A major problem within a profession is the dissemination of information that can provide a base for the development of effective practice. Currently, the practicing counselor has a variety of dissemination formats available to him. He may, for example, subscribe to several professional journals, purchase monographs and books that are of particular interest to him, and attend professional meetings where special interest sessions are offered. However, it is impossible for him to develop a comprehensive, private collection of all resources that might contain information he needs. Also, he is faced with the problem that much information he could use is not available to him because such materials as state and local publications, speeches, and reports of funded research are typically not widely disseminated.

ERIC is working toward alleviating this problem. When the counselor uses either the Center's or the Central ERIC collection, he is actually drawing information from a greater variety of sources than he as an individual could survey or collect. The response to his question is limited only in that it is directly applicable to his special interest area. If he is interested in, for example, counseling underachievers, he will receive diverse materials, some of which may be state department publications, some from psychological journals, some from various personnel work journals, etc. This characteristic of the ERIC system can also be an advantage to those who write materials. Since a specific article appears in only one publication, it cannot be disseminated to all potential users. In fact, it is usually impossible for the writer of an article to anticipate who all the potential users might be. Through submission to ERIC, the article may be made available to a greater audience.

The Center sees wide dissemination of information as a basic goal. However, it realizes that meeting all of the diverse needs of a national user group from one central location is too massive a task. For this reason, the Center intends to encourage and aid local groups in the development of satellite information centers in local settings and designed to meet local user needs. It is conceivable that a personnel team within a local school system would want to develop an information center to serve the needs of personnel workers within that system. In this case, a Center staff member could meet with the local group to help them determine how they could use existing ERIC indexes and microfiche. If there were special information needs not met by the current ERIC materials, the staff member could suggest possible ways of acquiring and processing materials that would meet these special needs. Assistance could further be given by providing materials for training potential users of these centers and by offering suggestions about ways in which they could be utilized. These satellite centers could contribute to the local personnel program by providing information about individual staff interests, stimulating the development of in-service training materials and providing a stimulus for the development of personnel programs.

The Center anticipates that there will be high-demand interest areas. As professional concerns arise, many personnel workers will be seeking comprehensive information that can help them develop new approaches to meet new demands. For example, the Center may receive numerous inquiries about the utilization and training of support personnel. In response to this inquiry the Center may develop a publication that provides a synthesis and review of this area. This publication would include position papers, a review of existing information, and abstracts and bibliographic information on all materials related to support personnel that the Center has been able to identify. As the Center's collection grows and as user interests are more clearly identified, synthesis and integration of information will become an increasingly important Center function.

#### COMMUNICATION WITH USERS AND CONTRIBUTORS

As these services are initiated, the Center will communicate with potential users through newsletters. All personnel workers who are interested in current information about these services are encouraged to request that they be put on the mailing list. This request should be addressed to: ERIC Counseling and Personnel Services Information Center, University of Michigan, 309 South State Street, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104.

## Michigan Counselors Will Meet in November

▶ "Search for Identity" is the theme of the 21st annual state conference of the Michigan Counselors Association, to be held November 6-7 in Lansing. Besides regular sessions on diverse topics related to the central theme, the conference will feature exhibits, local tours, and college hospitality rooms. Counselors must pre-register by mail. Registration forms and additional information can be obtained from Marshall Simpson, Eastern High School, Lansing, Michigan 48912.