A 1987 study of the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) proposed several key improvements to ERIC's acquisition, synthesis, and dissemination activities, including a recommendation that ERIC products and services should be more widely available to diverse audiences. Achieving significant improvements in ERIC hinges on three factors: receiving additional resources, applying new technologies, and adapting systemwide management policies. Future system improvement options—such as expanding database and journal coverage, developing the capability to store and retrieve full-text documents, creating expert search systems, enhancing electronic dissemination, developing new publication series, and marketing ERIC products and services in ways that better reach practicing educators—also are discussed.

For the past five years, ERIC has been under scrutiny. A two-year “ERIC Redesign Study” culminated in 1987 with the publication of the widely-discussed paper “ERIC In Its Third Decade” (Bencivenga, 1987). Later that same year, the House Subcommittee on Select Education sponsored the first oversight hearings of ERIC, on July 30, 1987. As a result of the ERIC Redesign Study, the Department of Education’s Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) identified three main emphases for improving ERIC:

- ERIC products and services should become more widely used and available;
ERIC should become better integrated into OERI's mission of gathering, analyzing, and reporting information on the status and condition of American education; and,

ERIC should serve a wider, more diverse audience, including policymakers, journalists, practitioners, and the general public.

The purpose of this article is to present an overview of the ERIC system today, to suggest initiatives to accomplish the goals of the ERIC Redesign Study and discuss other aspects of the system that could be improved, and to propose means to bring about such change.

A Profile of ERIC

ERIC, while familiar to thousands of users, is not always well understood, since it is a complex system involving the federal government, university-based and private contractors, commercial publishing and database services, and libraries and information service providers located throughout the world. There are several commonly asked questions about the ERIC system.

What is ERIC? ERIC is a nationwide information network designed to provide users with ready access to the education literature. Established in 1966 to make government-sponsored educational research available from a single source, ERIC now collects, analyzes, and distributes information from local, state, Federal, and international sources.

The ERIC system—managed by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Educational Research and Improvement—consists of 16 clearinghouses and several system support components, including the ERIC Processing and Reference Facility, ACCESS ERIC, the ERIC Document Reproduction Service, and both public and private publishers (e.g., Oryx Press) and information services. ERIC actively solicits papers, conference proceedings, literature reviews, and curriculum materials from researchers, practitioners, educational associations and institutions, and Federal, state, and local agencies.

These materials, along with articles from nearly 800 different journals, are indexed and abstracted for entry into the ERIC database. The ERIC database—the largest education database in the world—now contains over 700,000 records of documents and journal articles. Users can access the ERIC database online (i.e., via telephone line from their computer to an information service), on Compact Disk-Read Only Memory (CD-ROM), or through print and microfiche indexes.

Where is ERIC? About 3,000 locations around the world receive ERIC materials on a regular basis. ERIC collections and materials are found in every state in the United States and in more than 60 countries throughout the world. Of the 3,000 locations, about 900—780 domestic and 120 foreign institutions—maintain a substantial microfiche collection or perform computer searches of the ERIC database for clients.

What is contained in the ERIC database? A person searching the ERIC database