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Knowing What Works for Arkansas

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Citation

The Office for Education Policy aims to serve as a resource to aid lawmakers and educators in education related decisions. The OEP recently became partners with the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC), a research unit of the U.S. Department of Education, which reviews K-12 curricula and interventions. The goal of this article is to highlight the resources offered through the WWC, and draw attention to some of the WWC services and products that may be useful to educators in Arkansas.

WHAT IS WHAT WORKS?

An initiative of the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences, the WWC:

- Produces user-friendly **practice guides** for educators that address instructional challenges with research-based recommendations for schools and classrooms;

- Assesses the rigor of research evidence on the **effectiveness of interventions** (programs, products, practices, and policies), giving educators the tools to make informed decisions;

- Develops and implements standards for reviewing and synthesizing education research; and

- Provides a public and easily accessible registry of education evaluation researchers to assist schools, school districts, and program developers with designing and carrying out rigorous evaluations.

In short, the WWC aims to act as a treasury of good information for educators and school leaders, perhaps similar to a "*Consumer Reports*" for educational strategies.

USEFUL RESOURCES

The WWC reviews research on various important issues in education such as instruction for English Language Learners, Beginning Reading, Middle School Math, and Dropout Prevention. On the WWC website, each of these topic areas has a link where you can search for relevant interventions. For the remainder of this paper, we will address three WWC tools that may be most beneficial to educators: Intervention and Topic Reports, Practice Guides, and the Doing What Works website.

Intervention and Topic Reports

Topic reports address a topic in general, summarizing the studies the WWC has reviewed. A specific list of interventions by topic is provided in the intervention report, which is presented in an easy to read format, providing information on the program description, related research, and the effectiveness of the intervention.

For example, a superintendent looking for a program for English Language Learners (ELL) in his/her district may review interventions that the WWC has provided in the report list. Here, the viewer can narrow the interventions to English language development, and the site provides details of seven programs and their effectiveness. If the viewer chose the intervention called *Peer Tutoring and Response Group* (which has the highest effectiveness), the website would describe that the intervention aims to improve language for ELL's through pairing or grouping students to work on a task. There were three studies reviewed that found Peer Tutoring and Response Groups to have positive effects on English language development.

Other programs that were found successful by the WWC for English language development are Fast ForWord Language, Instructional Conversations and Literature Logs, and Vocabulary Improvement Program for English Language Learners and Their Classmates (VIP).

Practice Guides

Practice guides are provided by the WWC to offer practical information for educators to help them address the everyday challenges faced in classrooms. These guides are somewhat lengthy, but provide valuable and realistic recommendations in a user-friendly manner.

For example, an administrator who is facing problems with dropouts in his/her district might be interested in a guide for Dropout Prevention that gives an overview of the topic and specific recommendations. Practice guides are also available for other topics, such as behavior problems, low-performing schools, and English language instruction.

In the practice guide for dropout prevention, one of the recommendations is to assign adult advocates to students at risk of dropping out. In that section, the level of evidence to support the recommendation is provided (in this case, moderate). Then it discusses how to carry out the recommendation (such as establishing regular times during school for students to meet with an adult), and potential roadblocks you may face (such as an unavailability of adults to work with students). This is only one of the six recommendations provided for dropout prevention. There are also other topics, like adolescent literacy, organizing instruction and study, and encouraging girls in math and science.

DOING WHAT WORKS (DWW)

The final resource, and perhaps the most practical and concrete, is the Doing What Works website, which is a partner site of the WWC that provides very specific examples of strategies for educators to use. It is an extension of the practice guides and includes online workshops, presentations, and publications for the curricula that the WWC finds effective.

For example, a preschool teacher who wants to improve the language and literacy of students may be interested in the section for early childhood education that addresses this goal, which includes videos that provide overviews to help the viewer understand essential concepts. There is also a section called "See How It Works" where an actual class is shown in order to view specific techniques.

For the topic of preschool language, the viewer can listen to a teacher talk about her daily classroom activities as she integrates phonological awareness, view a lesson plan, and watch videos demonstrating specific practices to better help teach letters and sounds. This is just a brief look at what the Doing What Works site offers. There are other topics (such as English language learners, math and science, psychology and learning, and school improvement) and interactive tools to help you become more aware and prepared to teach "what works."

CONCLUSIONS

Each year in Arkansas schools, educators choose and implement strategies intended to benefit students. In the midst of doing this work, most educators are likely too busy to also scan the research literature to see what might be working well, or working better, in other states across the country. This is where the WWC (and OEP) comes into play. The resources that the WWC offers provide educators the chance to compare programs, review the research, and see which interventions are most effective. At the OEP, we want to make sure educators know of these resources and are able to make use of them, to better serve Arkansas students.

WEBSITES

What Works Clearinghouse
http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/

Doing What Works
http://dww.ed.gov/