

Introduction

The **Educational Research and Dissemination Program (ER&D)** is a professional staff development program created by the American Federation of Teachers to give its members the latest in classroom-based educational research on effective teaching. This program provides access to the most current research. It enables teachers to help other teachers in unique and exciting ways; it assists teachers to examine their own teaching practices; and it makes positive changes where teachers, as professionals, deem appropriate. The basic formula for the program combines knowledge, research, common sense, and a belief in teacher experience and acquired expertise. **ER&D** is the cornerstone of professional growth and development because it provides teachers with an opportunity for renewal and expansion of their skills and competence as practicing members of the teaching profession.

The **Educational Research and Dissemination Program** of the American Federation of Teachers was introduced in Pittsburgh by the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers beginning with the second semester of the 1989-90 school year (following a semester for planning) and has continued both uninterrupted and expanding since that time.

What's ER&D all about?

ER&D is about keeping teachers aware of the most useful methods to operate a successful classroom. The components of the program are designed to help teachers manage instructional time more effectively, minimize discipline problems, maximize student attentiveness, improve student achievement, explore new classroom-tested techniques with colleagues, and, finally, engage in dialogue with leading education researchers about professional challenges and concerns.

What do ER&D participants do?

The participants meet in collegial sessions to explore key research findings and teaching concepts, to design exercises for the application of these principles in the classroom, to reflect on their own teaching, and to share their experiences with colleagues. A group of teachers and paraprofessionals from all levels, elementary, middle, and high school, and from all content areas train as Dissemination Coaches formerly known as Research Linkers (RLs).

The training of Dissemination Coaches is essential to the operation of the program. Dissemination Coaches have the responsibility to convey their knowledge and skills, particularly their strengthened research backgrounds, to their teaching colleagues at their respective schools---utilizing both informal settings and formal in-service time.

Participation in the training program is voluntary, and **the training is done all on the teachers' own time at the PFT Building**. The training process allows teachers from all grade levels and disciplines to interact with one another, deal with teaching questions and problems, exchange ideas, and share experiences.

How does ER&D bridge the gap between research and practice?

The purpose of the program is to bring educational research to the classroom teacher in an immediately applicable form. The program surveys research topics of real significance and timeliness. The basic research, which focuses on a common sense approach, is rewritten into "translations."

These "translations," which are reviewed by the original researcher for correct interpretation, can be used by the teacher to implement the findings efficiently into classroom routines. The Foundations of Effective Teaching "translations" are generic in nature, useful to teachers of grades Pre-K-12, and applicable across all subject areas. Topics include Classroom Management, Effective Group Management, Interactive Direct Instruction, Time on Task, Cooperative Small Group Learning, Student Motivation, Learning Styles, and Starting Out on the Right Track, a program designed for new teachers.

The AFT's **ER&D** program provides the teacher access to these "translations" through a well-designed training and professional development program that is flexible enough to work in a single classroom, a school building, or an entire school district.

The **ER&D** program has also expanded to examine research in subject matter such as mathematics and reading. The "Thinking Mathematics Program" was developed by the AFT in collaboration with the Learning Research and Development Center (LRDC) at the University of Pittsburgh. Beginning with the 1993-94 school year, it has been fully implemented as part of the PFT's **ER&D** program.

The Early Reading Intervention module provides research on how students learn to read and what the barriers are for students who have difficulties.

The Beginning Reading module focuses on strategies to help students develop the print-to-speech code, fluency, and comprehension.

The Reading Comprehension module focuses on research-based theory and exemplary practices.

The Managing Anti-Social Behavior module explores aspects of behavioral disorders and intervention practices.

The School, Family and Community: Supporting Student Learning module builds on many research findings, which clearly link parent and family involvement to student gains.

The Instructional Strategies That Work for All Disciplines course provides practical applications of instructional strategies that are outlined in the research base on effective instruction to support student learning.

The Thinking Middle School Math module provides usable knowledge about how elementary and middle school math is learned and how it can be taught more effectively.

The Managing Student Behavior for Support Staff module is designed for paraprofessionals who have contact with and/or are responsible for overseeing the behavior and safety of large numbers of students outside of the classroom setting.

Other facts about ER&D in Pittsburgh

In all, more than **2750** Pittsburgh teachers have now had significant exposure and direct participation in some phase of the PFT's **ER&D** program and its utilization in teacher training. First of all, approximately **385** Pittsburgh teachers and paraprofessionals in 65 schools have successfully completed the full **ER&D** training program so far (as of the completion of the 2010-2011 school year).

Equally significant, the **ER&D** program has been partially extended by the PFT to an additional **2440** newly-hired teachers over the last twelve school years. This has been done in collaboration with the School District through a PFT-conducted orientation program for all new teachers at the start of each school year plus a New Teacher/Employee Induction Program with followup sessions for many of these teachers during the school year. Dissemination Coaches from the **ER&D** program facilitate various sessions for new teachers.

Teachers who successfully complete **ER&D** program classes receive either inservice credits from the state or increment credits for advanced study/salary schedule placement purposes from the Pittsburgh School District under the PFT-negotiated Teacher-Professional Collective Bargaining Agreement.

The **ER&D** program represents a direct Union/teacher/teacher leader contribution toward professional staff development for all teachers and toward induction of new teachers. It is one of the most effective and worthwhile services the Union can extend to its entire membership, particularly to new teachers. The **ER&D** program constitutes an especially effective introduction of the Union to its newest members.

Since the 1997-98 school year, in collaboration with the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, DCs/ITLs have provided training for new ITLs using the research in Classroom Management, Group Management, and Time On Task from the Foundations of Effective Teaching course. Beginning in the 2002-2003 school year, DCs/ITLs have facilitated all of the training for the Instructional Teacher Leader Program, including the observing and conferring component.

In August, 2003 the PFT expanded its **ER&D** program further by offering a Summer Session.

During the first and second semester of the 2010-2011 school year, the PFT's **ER&D** program offered four classes first semester and two classes second semester for professional development with approximately 75 teachers and paraprofessionals participants. Each semester the course offerings included Foundations of Effective Teaching, Thinking Mathematics I, Thinking Middle School Mathematics, Beginning Reading Instruction, Reading Comprehension Instruction, Early Reading Intervention Strategies, Managing Anti-Social Behavior, School, Family and Community: Supporting Student Learning, Instructional Strategies That Work for All Disciplines, and Student Behavior for Support Staff.

In the 2008-2009 school year, the PFT formed a collaboration with the Research Assessment and Account-ability Department to support school Instructional Cabinets in making data work for them.

PFT/Gannon University Collaborative

In the 2006-2007 school year, the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers and Gannon University partnered to offer teachers and educational professionals in the Pittsburgh School District a Masters of Education in Curriculum and Instruction. The program is offered in its entirety in the Greater Pittsburgh Area. Six credits earned from the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers Educational Research and Dis-semination Program will be used as electives. This program is only for members of the Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers.

The PFT sponsors the entire program and underwrites all costs, including an annual graduation session for Dissemination Coaches formerly called Research Linkers.

The PFT's **ER&D** program is conducted in cooperation with the American Federation of Teachers and the AFT's Educational Issues Department, as well as in cooperation with the Pittsburgh Public Schools, the Pittsburgh School System's administrative leadership, and the Pittsburgh School Board.

Continuing Development

As an important corollary to the PFT's **ER&D** program, the AFT has trained teachers as thinking mathematics strand coordinators, school, family and community: supporting student learning strand coordinators, early reading intervention strategies strand coordinators, beginning reading instruction strand coordinators, reading comprehension instruction strand coordinators, managing anti-social behavior strand coordinators, instructional strategies that work for all disciplines strand coordinators, thinking middle school math, and managing student behavior for support staff strand coordinators. Their responsibility is to disseminate the research in collegial class settings in the Pittsburgh **Educational Research and Dissemination Program.**

Not only has the AFT trained strand coordinators in these courses, but also, the following teachers have been and some still are Trainers at the National Level:

Patricia Colangelo
Jackie Dandridge
Marsha Ekunfeo
Honey Forman
Kathy Monti-Triewel
Barbara Panza
Kellie Skweres
Jaime Smith
Julie Stewart
Mary VanHorn
Wolfgang Weigner