



Research Reading Guide of the Month
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Locke, L.F. (2004).

Reading Research – When Not To Do It.

People rummage around in research reports for all kinds of reasons. Your motive may be the need for a specific fact (How do you calculate the Body Mass Index for a 14-year-old girl?), some general information about a narrow topic (What can research teach us about teacher enthusiasm?), a background explanation about a broad topic (How are school PE programs related to subsequent adult life style?), or just nothing more than the normal impulse of curiosity (I wonder if those pedometer gizmos actually work?).

In any of those instances, before you get the desired answer, you have to find the right research report, read it, and digest enough to figure out what it says. That can take a lot of time and effort, which surely is why few of us read a whole lot of research. There are, of course, ways to reduce all the expense and bother. Working smart includes such mundane things as locating a good library (with patient and helpful people at the information desk), knowing how to use search and retrieval systems, being aware of which journals are most likely to contain certain kinds of research, and, of course, having the skills required to use a computer to track down references and reports in the comfort of your own home.

Another aspect of working smart is developing some simple skills for reading reports without getting lost or wasting time on the wrong stuff. The “Research Reading Guides” in the last 14 issues of Unlock are related to that topic, as is the 2004 Sage Publications textbook Reading and Understanding Research (see the main page of this website). For this November issue of Unlock, however, I want to take a short detour into a different solution for the problem of using research to find things. It happens to be my own personal favorite. I think the following is a reasonable guide for most physical educators.

Whenever there is an appropriate alternative, don't read research reports in their original, published form.

Plain and simple, there just are better ways to find the sort of facts and ideas that research can produce. And, of course, the place to begin is where somebody already has done the hard work for you. Edited collections, anthologies, handbooks, textbooks, monographs, reviews, newsletters, and, yes, websites like this one, can provide short cuts to research-based information.

The people who prepare such short cuts to research can do the demanding work of search and retrieval, sorting and categorizing, translating and abstracting, identifying where to look for related resources, providing a quality assessment, and even offering suggestions about how findings might be put to use. You need only locate their outlets and then benefit from their labor. If all that is so (and it is), then you should ask, “Why would I ever bother to read the original reports?”

Well, sometimes there are good reasons to do so, but for most of us those causes are encountered later in the game. You can become motivated to seek out published reports *after* you discover that any one of three things is true: (1) you really need to know more detail than has been provided in

an abstract, annotation, or review article, (2) you really want to know how the study was done because that seems to be as important as what was found, or (3) your curiosity spot has begun to itch and demands a good scratch. But at the first, before you arrive at any of those conditions, go the quick and easy route. Use shortcuts to survey what is available, to figure out whether or not you are asking the right question, to test whether the topic retains your interest after you learn a little, or to see if what you find by going the easy way is all you ever wanted or needed to know.

Today, most libraries can provide a wide array search engines, databases, and retrieval capabilities. Because those will vary from one site to another I won't attempt to provide a listing here. The best route is to go and ask. An information retrieval specialist is the person to help you learn to navigate what is available in your home library. What I can do here is to suggest several shortcut strategies for locating research on particular topics in physical education, and several sources of translation and annotation that are not part of the usual library repertoire.

Finding Research on Journal Websites

If you have a topic in mind, one quick way to see what may be available is to go to journals that publish research on physical education and scan the tables of contents (for study titles) and abstracts (if a title looks promising). Rather than poring through bound volumes in the stacks, or straining your eyes with microfilm or microfiche readers, however, I suggest using your computer to visit the Websites maintained by the journals' publishers. The "Research Journal of the Month" section of Unlock will provide a good list of likely journal candidates, and in each review I have indicated the website addresses whenever they are open for free access. As examples, here are two that provide both search capacity for any topic and good quality (although usually brief) abstracts for each research report.

For the all of the research journals published by Human Kinetics (a prominent source of materials in physical education) you need only enter the site for any one of their journals, then navigate to the master journal list, and use the search engine to find what you want. For example, using the European Journal of Sport Science as an entry point, go to <http://www.humankinetics.com/ejss/> where you will arrive at the journal's main page. There, click on "search" at the left column, then set the search engine for "all fields" and "all journals" (the widest net for retrieval), enter the keyword "physical education" and click on "search."

You should get 151 records covering research reports (and a few reviews and general articles) from more than a dozen journals in the Human Kinetics stable. Scroll through the pages and stop at the entries for Journal of Teaching in Physical Education. Click on the first title that interests you, and both the full citation and a short abstract will appear. If the abstract whets your appetite, you can retrieve the journal from your local library or purchase the report from an online reprint service. If it does not, you have 150 other possibilities to consider.

For a different online system, try publisher Lawrence Erlbaum Associates at <http://www.erlbaum.com> where the home page provides a click option in the left column titled "Journals." When that page comes up, click on "journals alphabetical," and once there scroll down to Measurement in Physical Education and Exercise Science. There, click on the "Quick Search" option for "this journal," and enter the keyword "physical education." You should find a list of 70 reports, reviews and articles on that topic. By clicking on the "abstract" button for any one of the titles, you will have it instantly. Abstracts in Erlbaum journals tend to be longer and contain more detail than is typical on publishers' websites.

If you limit your original search to "middle school physical education," you still will retrieve 18 potentially usable abstracts in that more narrow category for inquiry. If you go back and click on the "all journals" option (instead of "this journal"), however, you will learn something about the limitations for such search engines. Try it and see.

As you might guess, there are shorter ways to access all of this material, but the routings suggested above will give you more insight into how the journal websites are set up and how to move around within them. Not all research journals have websites, and, certainly, not all of them offer search capacity or archived abstracts. Nevertheless, when you are on the hunt, it makes sense to find out what may be available from such sources.

Using Handbooks and Edited Collections to Locate Research

Another shortcut for identifying studies that may meet your needs is to make use of handbooks, collections, and textbooks that are likely to be on the shelves of most large college or university libraries. While these do not usually provide extended descriptions of particular studies, they embed citations to reports of physical education research within reviews or discussions. If the study sounds interesting in the context where it is cited (or described), you can record the citation and later track it down. Alternatively, you can eschew reading any of the text material and just go directly to the book's index or reference list and start searching there.

Several such sources have been reviewed in the "Research Textbook of the Month" section of Unlock. For example, from the September, 2003 Unlock you can retrieve the review of Student Learning in Physical Education (2nd ed.) edited by Stephen Silverman and Catherine Ennis. To illustrate, in that collection the single chapter by Judith Rink ("Effective Instruction in Physical Education") contains citations to nearly 100 studies and articles. Not all are research reports, and not all deal with public school physical education, but in most instances you can identify reports that interest you from the context of the discussion where they are cited.

A very different kind of shortcut to research is represented in Kim Graber's chapter in the Handbook of Research on Teaching (4th ed.) reviewed in the November, 2003 issue of Unlock. Using her own model to sort and categorize the many different kinds of research on teaching physical education, she explains how no fewer than 461 studies have contributed to what we have learned over the last decade. Although published in 2001, and thereby not including reports published since 1999, the Graber review remains the most important resource we presently have for identifying research on teaching physical education. Sound and pertinent research does not have an expiration date.

A collection of research-based chapters not yet reviewed in Unlock (because a new edition is expected shortly) is the text Introduction to Kinesiology, edited by Shirl Hoffman and Janet Harris and published in 2000 by Human Kinetics. The chapter on "Pedagogy in Physical Activity," by Kim Graber and Thomas Templin offers a wide-ranging overview of instruction for various forms of physical activity, and indicates some of the investigations that provide a knowledge foundation for that professional field.

Finding Translations of Research Reports

Once you have located one or several studies that, on the basis of title and abstract, appear to be promising enough to warrant investing additional time, you have two choices. One course of action is to retrieve the original report as published. Before doing that, however, you should consider the advice given in this month's guideline.

An alternative course is to see if the report has been translated in one of the sources that provides annotations (longer than an abstract, an annotation ordinarily includes explanation, commentary, and, sometimes, critical analysis). These usually are written for non-specialist readers and constitute efficient ways to obtain a sound overview of how a study was performed and what was found. Here are several examples of such shortcuts to physical education research.

For many years, the Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance has included a Department called "Research Works." Each month a new study is annotated, often with some attention to possible applications. Although the translations are not all of equal quality, most have been both sound and completely accessible. It would be a simple task to create your own index to this useful series. With a page of notepaper and an hour in the library, you could list the topic keywords and publication dates for all of the studies that have been annotated in the past

decade. The reports would have been converted to plain language, reduced to manageable length, and be readily available in a widely distributed professional magazine.

The same sort of annotation service is available in the "Research Notes" section of the Chronicle of the National Association for Kinesiology and Physical Education in Higher Education published three times each year. In addition, the Research Digest, published quarterly by the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, has reviewed and annotated hundreds of studies since 1993. Editors at both of these sources have attempted to provide descriptions of research that are intended to be consumed by general readers in professional fields such as physical education.

UnlockResearch itself has now accumulated an archive of 15 annotated research reports; all selected for their currency and general interest to physical educators. These can be accessed from the Archive button on the main page. Every few months, the Archive index can be printed out and stuck in a drawer to provide an updated directory of what is available.

Annotations of another 30 studies, all specifically selected for their relevance to elementary school physical education, are available in the 2003 Human Kinetics textbook Putting Research to Work in Elementary School Physical Education: Conversations in the Gym (by NASPE President Dolly Lambdin, and Larry Locke). For an overview of that text, click on the "Books by Locke, et al." button on the main page of the present site.

I am sure there are other sources of research report translations in physical education that have escaped my notice (and I would appreciate a note if you locate one that you have found useful). Someday we may have an entire journal devoted to annotations of research in physical education. Until then, however, the sources we already have offer you the possibility of working smart by finding the facts or information you want for the smallest investment of time and effort. It is true that sometimes there is no substitute for the original, but until you know that to be the case, I urge you to take the shortcut to learning from research.

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