

Collection Development on the Web? Yes, Try *EvaluTech*!

by Angela Leeper

Whether it is clowns or Congress, slugs or endangered species, pizza or sex education, educators now can find resources on these topics as well as numerous others through *EvaluTech*, a keyword-searchable database that features reviews of prekindergarten through grade 12 educational and professional print, nonprint, and technology resources. These reviews come directly from *InfoTech: The Advisory List*, a bi-monthly publication that is sent to all North Carolina public schools. A joint effort by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI), *EvaluTech* is located on the Web at <http://www.EvaluTech.sreb.org>.

The beginning sparks of *EvaluTech* occurred in fall 1996, when SREB began investigating ways to have software evaluated. With NCDPI's thirty-plus years' experience in evaluating educational resources, it was a logical choice when SREB chose to explore NCDPI's services. State representatives from SREB toured NCDPI's Evaluation Center in May 1997, and expressed a desire to have electronic access to all of NCDPI's reviews, not just software. Bill Thomas, Director of Instructional Technology for SREB, recognized that the value of NCDPI's educational reviews stems from "the process behind the evaluation, from the quality of criteria implemented to the thorough training that evaluators receive."

The staff at NCDPI also realized the value of a Web site with a searchable database. With the ever-gaining presence of the Internet, a Web site brings unprecedented exposure to NCDPI's evaluation services. More importantly, a searchable database alleviates the need to rely on the staff's collective memory, which, depending on who is in the office, the time of day, and the amount of caffeine recently consumed, can vary significantly. Media specialists, teachers, and even parents now can access *EvaluTech* and formulate their own searches to questions such as, "What are some recommended algebra software programs?," without having to call NCDPI each time.

The *EvaluTech* Web site was launched officially in February 1998. The site contains two years' worth of evaluations at all times as well as evaluation criteria, professional resources for selection and collection development, and frequently asked questions. The mainstay of

EvaluTech, however, is its searchable database. From the homepage, it can be accessed through the link, "Search Reviews of Instructional Materials." Search fields include: author's last name, title, publisher or producer, series, copyright date, grade, subject area, lexile level range, data format, keywords, and *InfoTech* issue date. These fields may be searched separately or combined (e.g., social studies as a subject area and print as a data format). To enter a search, click the "Submit" button at the top or bottom of the screen. A click on the "Reset" button clears all of the search fields to begin a new search.

When searching by author's last name, title, publisher or producer, or series, only a portion of the name or title is required. A search on "adler" in the author field, for example, produces resources by authors David Adler and A.E. Sadler. Note that the last name Sadler contains the letter combination "adler." Similarly, a search on "war" in the title field delivers titles such as *Young People from Bosnia Talk About War* and *Persian Gulf War Almanac* as well as Andy Warhol and Global Warming.

The copyright date, grade, subject area, data format, and *InfoTech* issue date fields all have drop-down boxes for easy access. Although most evaluations come from resources with recent copyright dates (the current and previous year), some resources such as second language materials do not meet these parameters. All copyright dates or a specific year may be searched. Grade level is broken down into three categories: PreK-5, 6-12, and Professional. Either an individual category or all grade levels can be searched. Likewise, all subjects or individual curriculum areas (e.g., science, workforce development, arts education) are searchable. A search by data format may be limited by the following formats: AV, Print, Software MAC, Software MAC/WIN, Software WIN, Web Site, or Other (e.g., kits). To obtain everything that will run on a MAC or PC, users should search on Software MAC/WIN.

Another way to search for reviews is by lexile level, which is a reading level. Most North Carolina educators are familiar with lexile levels, but for users not acquainted with them, a help screen from the search page briefly explains how lexile levels correlate to grade levels. A search on a lexile level range of 900 through 1000, for

example, would result in resources that are approximately at a sixth grade level. This manner of searching is especially useful when finding materials for students who read above or below their grade level (e.g., a first grader or eighth grader who reads at a third grade level). Since lexile levels do not necessarily reflect content or age-appropriateness, educators should read reviews carefully when matching lexile and grade levels. In addition to lexile level descriptions, the help screen gives strategies or clarifications for each search field such as explanations of subject areas (e.g., circle of childhood is described as early childhood).

The driving force of *EvaluTech's* searchable database is its keyword field, comprised of over 1,000 keywords from LC terminology, curriculum terms (e.g., problem solving, cumulative tales, community helpers), and everyday language (e.g., slime, coming of age, first day of school). Either a word or phrase can be entered into the keyword field, and the Boolean operators AND or OR may be applied. If assistance is needed in choosing a keyword, a list of keywords

is available through a link on the help screen. Like the author and title fields, a keyword letter combination may find records that contain keywords with the same combination of letters. A search on the keyword "women," for example, also will find reviews with the keywords "women's issues," "women's rights," and "women's suffrage." The following words or topics also can be searched: names of people as keywords (by last name, first name) such as Edison, Thomas or Morrison, Toni; award-winning books such as Newberry Honor Books, BBYA (Best Books for Young Adults), or Coretta Scott King Awards; award-winning illustrators (by last name, first name) such as Ransome, James or McCully, Emily Arnold; words with multiple spellings, such as rainforests or rain forests; as well as the terms multicultural, early readers, and autobiographies (biography is a subject area).

Once a search has been submitted, a "Search Results" screen appears. This screen recaps the search criteria the user applied, the total number of reviews found, and a multi-celled box that lists the author, title, series (if applicable), publisher or producer, copyright date, lexile level (if applicable), format, and *InfoTech* issue date for each review. For nonprint materials such as software programs that do not have an author, "NONPRINT" is

identified in the author location. Encyclopedias, dictionaries, or other print resources that are compiled by multiple writers and editors use "PRINT" as the author. Clicking on a specific title takes the user directly to the evaluation of that resource.

Each review begins with a section in bold that contains bibliographic and purchasing information (See example). This bolded section also includes the grade levels and subject area for which the resource is best suited. The evaluation itself comes after this information.

InfoTech Review Incredible Comparisons

Ash, Russell. *Incredible Comparisons*. Illustrated by Dominic Zwemmer and Dorian Spencer Davies, art eds. 63 p. \$19.95. DK, 1996. (ISBN 0-7894-1009-5) [3-10, MATH]

This fascinating, and indeed, incredible book uses drawings, some fold-out, to help readers gain a realistic perspective of the size, speed, and capabilities of living and non-living matter. For example, students can visualize and understand the relativity of size from something as large as the universe to microscopic organisms, while scale drawings of well-known animals lined end to end show the true size of the Diplodocus. Readers of all ages will find it hard to close this well-organized and attractive oversized book of interesting facts, comparisons, and illustrations. Index. (An Eisenhower Review) [SCI] LL 1130

Keywords: comparisons, math skills

Subject Areas: Mathematics, Science

It may conclude with additional abbreviations of subject area tie-ins or the lexile level, abbreviated as "LL." As previously mentioned, users can find assistance with subject areas on the help screen. Towards the end of the review, users also may find the designation, "An Eisenhower Review," meaning that the review was completed by specially trained math and science teachers through NCDPI's Eisenhower Fellows for Resource Review program. The entire evaluation is followed

by a list of related keywords and subject areas. Media specialists and teachers, who then perform searches on these keywords and subject areas, will find similar titles to fill gaps in media center collections or to develop specialized units.

Although anyone can utilize *EvaluTech*, North Carolina media specialists hold a clear advantage over educators in other SREB states. They already have a history with *InfoTech*, the basis of *EvaluTech*, and understand the terminology in the evaluations, whether it is references to the Standard Course of Study or lexile levels. *EvaluTech* allows NCDPI to expand its services to North Carolina schools, and according to Frances Bradburn, Section Chief of NCDPI's Evaluation Services, "*EvaluTech* provides media specialists with more opportunities to match students and resources." Before teachers come asking for more resources to use during Black History month or Web sites featuring online projects, media specialists and public librarians will find it worthwhile to take time during the summer lull to explore *EvaluTech*, North Carolina's powerful new collection development tool.

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Credit Where Credit Is Due ...

Carol Truett, co-author of the article, and the editors of NORTH CAROLINA LIBRARIES wish to offer apologies to Dr. Cheryl Knight, Associate Professor at Appalachian State University, for inadvertently leaving her name off of the article "Technology Use in North Carolina Public Schools: The School Library Media Specialist Plays a Major Role" which appeared in the Spring 1997 issue of the journal. Dr. Knight not only co-authored the article, but she also spent many, many hours doing the original research and data analysis that preceded the writing of the results, for which she must be given equal credit.