

*“The published research literature is biased toward statistically significant results, and the content in PQDT represents the most current research in an area that is not biased toward statistical significance. When I review systematic reviews for journals, I insist that PQDT is searched for relevant research”*

– Terri Pigott, Professor of the School of Public Health at the College of Education, Georgia State University



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# Avoiding Bias by Starting at the Source

Research Case Study: *Outcome-Reporting Bias in Education Research*, Loyola University Chicago

Dr. Terri D. Pigott, Ph.D., is the former Dean of the School of Education at Loyola University Chicago and is currently a professor in the School of Public Health and the College of Education at Georgia State University. Terri's research focuses mostly on methods of research synthesis and metadata analysis. Because all research needs to be verified, Terri relies on resources like ProQuest Dissertations & Theses to help her further develop her research. Terri also recommends PQDT Global to her students as well.

### Terri Pigott

#### Georgia State University

Professor of the School of Public Health at the College of Education

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"All systematic reviews of research in the social sciences and in health need to include a search of the content in PQDT. The published research literature is biased toward statistically significant results, and the content in PQDT represents the most current research in an area that is not biased toward statistical significance. When I review systematic reviews for journals, I insist that PQDT is searched for relevant research," says Pigott.

Terri, along with fellow professors and researchers, Jeffrey C. Valentine, Joshua R. Polanin, Ryan T. Williams, and Dericka D. Canada, used the PQDT services to help verify research for their paper, *Outcome-Reporting Bias in Education Research*, where the study examines outcome-reporting bias in educational research by comparing the reports of educational interventions from dissertations to their final published versions. They searched the PQDT database between the years of 2001 and 2005 inclusive to draw conclusions. According to their paper, a large percentage of dissertations are available via electronic databases (e.g., ProQuest Digital Dissertations & Theses) to which many university libraries subscribe, and as such are easily retrievable.

Her paper concluded that if only published literature is used for research, it is likely that the effect of the studies will be overestimated. "We now encourage people to look for unpublished literature as well, and the best source of unpublished literature is in the ProQuest Dissertations and Theses library. If the unpublished work isn't taken into consideration you become subject to publication bias," says Pigott.

The paper also asks the important question of "What steps can we take to increase the quality of reporting of primary studies, and thus the completeness of syntheses using these studies?" Pigott, et. al suggest that all educational research would start with a highly operational, publicly available protocol that guides the research. While this is a lofty goal, Pigott and the rest of the researchers suggest that we start the development of professional norms that hold researchers responsible for fully documenting the research methods and analytic choices, including reporting all outcomes they measure and expand from there.

By using resources like PQDT Global, Pigott and other researchers have maximized the depth of their research.

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