



National Center for Technology Innovation

Advancing Technology Innovations for All Students

Transcript of podcast with:

Ruth Ziolkowski, President of [Don Johnston, Inc.](#)

Chauncy Rucker (CR): Welcome. I'm Chauncy Rucker. I'm at the 2008 Technology Innovators Conference. It's hosted by the National Center for Technology Innovation and the theme this year is "Thriving in a Global Marketplace." I'm having a conversation with Ruth Ziolkowski. Ruth is the president of Don Johnston, Inc. and Ruth, I'd like you to talk about technology innovation, what the people are looking for in terms of technology innovation from your standpoint.

Ruth Ziolkowski (RZ): Thanks Chauncy. I would say that in terms of technology innovation, there's been a big shift. We've shifted away from new exciting types of technology to just some very practical types of ways to use the technology today.

There're a lot of different assistive technology tools but what teachers are really struggling with is implementation. How do I get teachers' time? How do we make sure they implement them? I struggle with I would love to, at a conferences like this, get more researchers around giving us more data and information about when and how we can implement these tools to get the best success. We have lots of case studies about that; a lot of small single subject design studies about that, but what we're really missing is some larger studies that can really tell us a lot about implementation even to the point where you know a teacher recommends something like a word prediction program, do we know if they used it three times a week, what kind of impact would that have versus one time a week? So there's just a lot around implementation and a lot of room for actually innovation in that area if we can figure out some of those ways.

Portability seems to be a big area right now. We've seen an influx of the low-cost laptops and I think that's going to have a big impact on the market and home use is really critical as teachers and students are realizing that a lot of the work they need to do doesn't happen always in the building itself so being able to have access at home.

This is a technology industry also very driven by policies and so within IDEA, there're two big areas that I think are driving assistive technology today. One is the accessible instructional materials area and again, if you think about innovation, in some ways it's not big and exciting, it's we're just back to access to textbooks. Unfortunately I would love to see that more exciting, but fundamentally it took policy to really get us to the place where we need to go on to that and some of that isn't really technology innovation either. We need changes in purchasing policies so that people get what they need right from the start.

Then, you know, I'm very interested and curious to have lots of conversation about some bigger K-12 initiatives. Response to intervention [RTI] being one of the biggest



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initiatives right now. The fundamental tenant of RTI is that it's much more proactive, let's not wait until students fail, and what worries me most is that assistive technology is still a, I call it, a wait to fail model. You know we, students try lots of different types of instruction and lots of different types of approaches and at the end if nothing else works, somebody finally says, "Hmm. I wonder if this stuff called assistive technology will help the students and just because the way the laws are set up that students really don't have the right to get AT until they become a special ed. student.

So I think there're some really great opportunities for us all to really think about and to have dialogue about Response to Intervention and how AT could look in an RTI world. So I think those are the places that we can look for some great innovations around.

CR: I was listening to Dave Edyburn the other day and he was talking about how everybody goes along until about the third grade and then there's this huge difference and he's kind of saying how long do you wait before you see this is failure and we need to have assistive technology of some sort.

RZ: I would say we see actually AT use coming in about the fourth or fifth grade and again because I think that K-3, their really trying to teach the students to read and I think with Response to Intervention, we're not going to give up on those kids at fourth and fifth grade. I think we're going to see some really nice, very intensive programs that we don't lose those students. I think the question for me is, even with all that intense intervention, do our students still need some extra supports and can they be in an inclusive classroom with some of those extra supports and that intensive intervention?

You know we've worked with Ted Hasselbring, who's the author of *Read 180*, and talked to him frequently about the students of *Read 180*, are they going to be successfully going back to that science curriculum? He's the first to tell you they still need support in that science curriculum. So they're still faced with a textbook written two grades above their reading level even if their reading level, you know. and that gap's decreasing, they're still faced with text that's way above their reading level so how do we support them with technology and tools? They can still remain in that classroom during grade level curriculum. Their thinking skills aren't disabled; it's certain kinds of reading and writing skills that are disabled.

CR: What about the future? One view is the economy is really in trouble. The other is some new hope with the new administration.

RZ: Well I think that you know this administration does seem to believe that education is a key to our future and I do believe that they can stay focused, which even throughout the election they you know, or the campaign, they stayed very focused and they kept talking about education so I do think that they will have something for education.



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I think it's going to be a hard time for education. You know, those mortgages, schools are funded by local and state taxes so and we're going to see some huge problems there, but it's also some great opportunities to really look at things differently so.

CR: Any question I should have asked that I didn't ask?

RZ: I think you did a great job.

CR: I think you did a fantastic job. Thank you.