



## NCTI 2009 Innovators Conference

### *Policy Perspective*

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**Summary:** This session provided three different perspectives of policy: one from the inside of the government, one from an advocacy group, and one from enforcement through litigation.

### **Discussion**

#### **Linda Roberts**

- Policy and programs are not made up in the offices. They should be made in the field, and she advised Karen Cator to stay tuned to the field and get the knowledge and creativity that are needed.
- **New National Educational Technology Plan (NETP).** The original plan from her tenure at the Department was met with skepticism. People asked “how can a plan really make a difference?” A plan can make an enormous difference if it has the right goals. It is a blueprint for investment and for new programs. She used the plan with the U. S. Department of Education Secretary Riley in her tenure. A plan is only as good as the information and tools provided in it. Momentum is important. Plan will continue to evolve once it has started. Second thing is that we can’t predict everything about the future. Can be certain of what we want to accomplish educationally and what we want to make possible for all teachers and students. The current NETP Focus:
  - **Learning.** What is it about and what do we know about learning? How can we change what we do that links with what we know? How does technology help transition to improved opportunities for all learners?
  - **Assessments and continuous improvement.** Really interesting opportunity is what kind of assessment is needed.
  - **Teachers and teaching.** Focus is on enhancing what teachers do. U.S. Department of Education Secretary Duncan is very clear that teachers are essential and critical. It is important to improve the quality and resources for teachers. What does it take and what does it need? How can we help them?



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- **Productivity and infrastructure.** It is critical. Without infrastructure, nothing is possible without technology. Working side by side with the broadband plan at the FCC. Focus on state data systems.
- **Innovative Practice.** Gains will come from developing new ways of practice. It is about doing it differently. Once a teacher is online and pulling resources off of the web, the system can know what that teacher needs. Burden should be put onto the producers not the consumers to come up with ways of knowing what is needed. No reason why information and content can't come to users, including teachers and students, as it is needed.
- **Do the hard work.** It is often easier to do the transformative than the marginal.

### Larry Goldberg

- Call for fully accessible media and **an agenda for national accessibility.** Many federal appointees are in place who can help advance accessibility. We believe deeply in innovation and the latest and greatest things. There are also some important challenges to be addressed.
- **Cloud computing.** Cloud computing can have some problems in accessibility and not all cloud applications are accessible.
- **Crowd Sourcing.** Issues around crowd sourcing. Not everything can be crowd sourced, not every crowd is wise. There are some things that require human experts.
- **Web 2.0.** For some it is "Web 2.NO" since many of these applications are not accessible. For example, Google Wave was not initially accessible. They didn't even try to innovate on accessibility.
- **Public policy changes.** What we can do is look at some public policy changes. Get rid of the silos between educational technology and assistive technology. Focus on universal design for learning (UDL). An alternative to UDL is AMT or Accessible Mainstream Technology.
- **Kindle2, Close but not quite there.** Kindle 2 has a fantastic speech engine, but missed in navigation that is not accessible. Now there is a big controversy that was avoidable. Nook the Sony reader should have these same issues. Can we make mainstream technology accessible? Teachers Domain includes learner profiles, users can ask for content that is accessible, captioned, description, etc. and it is consistently served up to meet those standards.



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- **Apple & Microsoft.** Apple products are now committed to accessibility. The iPhone is accessible. Windows 7 includes an interesting approach. There is an Ease of Access center so that it is easy for everyone to operate the computers.
- **A Federal Problem.** Across entire Fed government there are issues with accessibility. Section 508 is an issue at the Department of Justice. There need to be assurances that US Department of Education grants will produce accessible media. Broadband and new media are needed. Every federal agency needs a policy stance from on high.

### Richard Bernstein

- The most important thing Richard wanted to express was a “thank you” for the work that this community does and the effort put forth and the passion and commitment. When a disabled child comes into the world, any family will tell you that the work that is done provides people with hope and optimism. “The work we do lets people know that there are possibilities.” He went on to emphasize:
  - **Change.** Change does not happen overnight. Change is painful and arduous.
  - **Technology.** When we focus on technology, we have come so far. We have made things better for so many people and things. Universities are moving away from traditional course packs and texts and an aggressive push from Amazon and others to use Kindle’s and other products like them. For blind students on college campuses, it is incredibly labor intensive to have texts put into accessible form.
  - **Kindle.** Kindle had the opportunity to provide blind students to immediately and expeditiously have materials made available, [but with a disabled navigation menu], the Kindle is not fully accessible. Universities are entering into contracts with Amazon and the advocacy community needs to raise its voice. Wayne State barred any business with Amazon unless and until material is fully accessible; University of Wisconsin and Syracuse adopted similar resolutions.
  - **Enforceable guidelines.** We need enforceable guidelines which are key to the future. Ultimately, in every case he has had the chance to work with, enforcement was required and federal partners joined in lawsuits (US ED, DOJ, VA). Technology will be the same as other areas of education. Disability movement has focused on the structural world and it is imperative that we focus on the virtual world as well.



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## **Discussion and Q&A**

**Comment from Gil Garcia, IES, U.S. Department of Ed:** The Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) review process. Familiar with the quality of the data represented in the phase I, 2, 3. It is a very competitive process. Generation of new knowledge is equally arduous as it needs to be carefully developed and analyzed. It is important not to treat this issue lightly. The Department of Education is aware of innovations. It is equally important that be clear about methods and outcome logic from proposers.

- **Linda Roberts:** Sometimes in the focus is on data. Sometimes we need to push the envelope on new knowledge and new innovation. How can we continue to support the best of the best and at the same time allow new knowledge and innovations and how to push the envelope on the innovation side?

**Question from Bruce Kennedy, Arizona Department of Education:** How do we get schools to do the right thing because it is the right thing to do? Schools avoid the discussion of assistive technology consideration as much as possible. Need to get information out to the street-level bureaucrats about the law and logistics.

- **Linda Roberts:** Ask what is not being done that could be done.