

INFORUM '98

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A NATIONAL LIBRARY

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Good morning! It is an honor for me to be here in Oak Ridge and to have an opportunity to address you. I would like to bring you greetings from the [Department of Education](#) and from all of the staff of the [National Library of Education](#). I especially want to thank Dr. Walter Warnick for his kind invitation to be here. I am looking forward to learning from this conference and to engage in some good conversation about your activities and your plans. I know that there has been some discussion about a National Library of Energy Science and Technology, so I hope that my comments will be of some value to you.

When Dr. Warnick asked me to speak and I learned that the topic was "What It Means To Be A National Library", I began to think about that question in both very broad and very specific terms and I also thought about what I could say that could have implications for the [Department of Energy](#). I also was a little curious as to why we, the National Library of Education, the newest and smallest of the National Libraries, should be here when the other National Libraries have larger staffs, bigger budgets, and perhaps more fully defined programs and services. Dr. Warnick didn't tell me the reason, but I have made up some of my own. There are a few reasons why the National Library of Education and the Department of Energy's [OSTI](#) may have some things in common. First, it is because we are the youngest National Library that we may be of interest. Our

history as a National Library is only four years old; everyone on staff has been there since its inception; all of us know what we have done; what went well, and what we wouldn't want to do again. Because we are the youngest National Library, we are still evolving and our structure is still fluid enough to let us easily implement new ideas or establish new programs. You just don't need to do much research to learn all about us. Another reason why we may be of interest is that, unlike many older libraries, we are beginning in the technological age. We do not have large physical collections of monographs and serials, and we do not intend to collect them. The issue in this age is not ownership, but access, and it is our goal to enhance that access through collaboration and facilitation. We do not have to devote major resources to maintaining large physical collections and their catalogs; we are devoting more resources to electronic initiatives and inter agency cooperation. And another reason why the National Library of Education may be worth examining is that because we are so young, we may be seen as a type of laboratory for experimenting with new ideas or new ways of doing business. Our staff is relatively small, so there is a good deal of synergy that occurs on a regular basis. We can attempt projects on a small scale; we can share with other offices and agencies easily, and we can discuss and evaluate our activities in a fairly straight forward manner. We are, in a very real sense, on the verge of creating a virtual national library. D. Kaye Gapen, a respected librarian, writes: "The virtual library has been defined as the concept of remote access to the contents and services of libraries and other information resources, combining an on-site collection of current and heavily used materials in both print and electronic form, with an electronic network which provides access to, and delivery from, external worldwide library and commercial information and knowledge sources. In essence the user is provided the effect of a library which is a synergy created by bringing together technologically the resources of many, many libraries and information services." Through our

programs and services, we are hoping that the National Library of Education will be able to achieve its goal of becoming that type of a virtual library.

HOW IT BEGAN

The National Library of Education began operation in 1994 after a lengthy reauthorization of the [Office of Educational Research and Improvement](#). However, I should give you a little background about events leading up to that moment. This history may have some implications for you as you think about your own attempts to create a National Library.

There had been a Government-owned Education library dating back to 1870 when the books of the first Commissioner of Education Henry Bernard formed the nucleus of the collection. Over the ensuing decades, as the federal agency changed from an Office to a Bureau and into several other reincarnations, the Education Library changed as well, getting larger collections, implementing new cataloging schemes, and publishing bibliographies and other research materials. Over the past few decades, the library, then known as the Education Research Library, served the research interests of the Department and few other people. Its budgets were very modest and it was seen as a small operation. There were other information activities occurring within the Department, however. The ERIC system began in 1966 and operated as a separate function from the Library. There was a publications and information service that also existed as well as a separate database searching office. There was also a separate office for the implementation of technology in OERI. Each of these offices knew of the others, but there was no coordinated approach to the information services being offered by the Department of

Education. This was the state of information services in the Department before the reauthorization of 1994.

Prior to the reauthorization, OERI commissioned the National Research Council to conduct a study of OERI and to make recommendations for its future. That study, published in 1992, was instrumental in creating the new organization for OERI. While it mentions research institutes, technical assistance offices, and dissemination efforts, the report makes no mention whatsoever of the Library or any recommendation for a National Library. It seems to me an indication of the low level of importance of the Library that it is not mentioned once in the study of OERI. While much of the material in the Research Council's report found its way into the reauthorization language, it was Congress, and particularly Major Owens, who created the bill for the National Library of Education. Suddenly, there was language creating a National Library of Education and the language was very specific as to what the Library should do and how it should do it. We have the Congress to thank for this fortunate circumstance and, in particular, we have to thank Mr. Major Owens who was primarily responsible for the language creating the Library. That language, to be found in the Access for All report, is sweeping in its charge to the National Library of Education to acquire education information, provide comprehensive reference service, and to establish networks and partnerships with other education information providers. The language is very direct and clearly indicates the role that Congress has envisioned for this new National Library.

The creation of the National Library of Education brought together many of the disparate information functions that had been occurring. The former Education Research Library, the ERIC

program, the INet program which is our internet activity, the education information and publications distribution program, the on-line search service, and the Department's legislative reference service all became part of the new National Library and it took some time for all of the organizational issues to be resolved. I should add that we were assisted in this early period by an organizational development consultant who worked with us to identify issues and to resolve problems. One of the more difficult problems in this transitional period was bringing together staff who had not worked together and who certainly had never worked in a "library". Some staff members were put off by the idea and some embraced it enthusiastically, but through a lot of discussion and time, I believe that we are now to the point where the staff feel that the Library is their organizational home and are pleased to be there. I would suggest to you that, if your National Library were to be created, that you spend some time on the development of an internal marketing approach so that you build a cohesive staff around the new organization as quickly as possible.

This period of reauthorization and creation of the National Library taught me several lessons. First, it was very clear that we had strong Congressional support for the idea of a National Library. Had it not been for that support, I don't know if the Library would exist today. Secondly, this type of reauthorization and consolidation of functions required a great deal more time and effort in dealing with internal administrative issues than I had thought. And, finally, I wish in retrospect that we had done more publicity and marketing of our new organization.

FIRST STEPS 1994-1996

Immediately after the passage of the legislation, the National Library of Education began to make plans for implementing the law. Organizational charts were created, position descriptions were written, and mission statements were developed. A great amount of time was spent in staff meetings, both large and small, in an attempt to discuss with staff what the National Library would be about and what roles all of these new staff could play. At the same time, we immediately began to think about what types of new services needed to be developed, what new clienteles were to be served, and what new technology initiatives needed to be undertaken. An important activity for us during this time was the establishment of the National Library of Education Advisory Task Force. Established by the new law and to last only six months, the Task Force was meant to advise us on future directions for the Library. The Task Force, composed of well known librarians and archivists, was convened by the Secretary of Education and met over the course of approximately twelve months. The result of that work is the report that you have called [Access for All: A New National Library for Tomorrow's Learners](#). This report was and is still significant for us because it establishes our Vision Statement that calls for the National Library to ensure access to all and to become a national network for education information. This report is somewhat different from other library reports that I have seen because it addresses not the usual matters of materials, services, and finances, but rather four guiding principles that are meant to infuse the new National Library with a sense of the future of library and information services. These four principles are Awareness, Access, Assistance, and Accountability. Under each of these four domains are goals to be achieved. But what is important is that the four goals are indicative of a new kind of library--one without walls that exists across a network of

education information partners and that is available and accountable to everyone. The four goals do not define a single institution, but a network of information services that are meant to assist in the equal access of information for all. We in the National Library have tried to remain true to these four goals as we have worked to implement new services, refine and improve existing services, and enhance our services to our clients wherever they may be.

WHERE WE ARE NOW 1996-1998

It has now been just under four years since the Library was created in 1994. Where there was once just a small Education Research Library, there is now a National Library of Education. Because of the consolidation of information services, our staff went from 7 people to approximately 50 on site with well over 200 contractors nationwide working on our behalf. The budget has increased from a few hundred thousand dollars to approximately \$15 million, again because of the consolidation. We are continuing to develop our organizational sophistication so that our various offices continue to coordinate well and so that our services truly develop into that invisible network of information providers called for in the legislation and in the Task Force Report. While we still operate a physical library with collections and staff, we are also shaping a new ERIC program for the future which will involve more technology and which we hope will continue to grow into a national reference service serving millions of people. We manage the content for the [Department of Education's World Wide Web site](#) and we are increasingly seen as the information content managers for the Department of Education. We are engaged in new projects such as the Gateway to Education Materials project which is attempting to create meta data for education materials on the web. We are investigating the notion of virtual reference desks

in which question and answering services are conducted digitally. We are working on electronic dissemination of government documents, the management and distribution of all Departmental publications, international activities regarding degree comparability and student mobility, a new national networking model involving many libraries, professional associations, and other interested parties, and school construction information. Each day the staff of the National Library seems to discover new opportunities for programs and services and it is our intention to continue to grow and to improve our services to as many people as possible. We strive to remain faithful to our goals of Awareness, Access, Assistance, and Accountability and we always try to remember that it is not the collection of materials that we possess nor the technology that assists us, but it is the service that we provide that is most important. Regardless of the technology, the hallmark of any good library is service and it is in that sense that we are continually attempting to improve what we do and to extend our services to as many people as possible.

SO WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A NATIONAL LIBRARY?

So, what does it mean to be national library in this age of declining resources and increasing technology? Aside from the work, the projects, and the demands for service, what it means fundamentally is to have a vision that is built upon some very simple notions that are rather timeless, but which will serve us well into the future. What are these ideas that underpin this new National Library? First is a strong belief in that what we are trying to do as a National Library is important and adds value to what information may already exist. As I had said earlier, the Department of Education had been offering several information services, but it is their consolidation into a National Library that increases their value and extends their reach. We in the

National Library of Education believe that our Library is an important development in the information services of the Department and that we add value because of the work that we do.

We believe that no other office in the Department can do what we do and we also believe that we have a destiny to fulfill, not only in the Department itself, but in the United States as well. If you are thinking of creating a National Library for Energy, Science, and Technology, I would ask you to consider how that would be different from what you do now? How would it add value to your current services and what new activities might you undertake? Also, how would it make you feel to be part of a new National Library and how might those feelings affect how you do your job or how you relate to others? I am speaking of intangibles now, but, for me, it is the intangibles of my job, the beliefs and the hopes, that sustain me to keep improving the National Library of Education. What are some other characteristics that may distinguish a National Library?

Obviously, one is leadership and how you position yourselves, both programmatically and organizationally, to exert that leadership. What does it mean for us to assume a leadership role in education information and what would it mean for you to assume the leadership role in energy information and services? Perhaps you already feel that you fulfill that role, but is there more that could be done in your discipline? Collaboration, one of the hallmarks of current management, is another important national activity for us and would be for you as well. There needs to be an information partnership that includes a variety of different types of people. We need Domain experts, those who are personally engaged in the creation and use of knowledge. We need Information technology experts who have the specialized expertise to build the library's information infrastructure. And we need Information experts, or librarians, who have the skills, training, and knowledge to organize the knowledge into systems and structures. For us, this has been a somewhat difficult and sensitive venture. We are the newest National Library; we don't

possess the largest collections of materials, the largest staff, or the greatest budget. We asked ourselves what we brought to the table that would cause other organizations and agencies to collaborate with us. When you possess neither a carrot nor a stick, what do you have to negotiate with? What we have attempted to do is to emphasize our role as a National Library that is interested in true collaboration and that our strength is in our facilitation of networks and partnerships and not necessarily our quantitative measures. I have been pleasantly surprised by how amenable so many groups are to our calls for meetings and collaborative activities. Whether it is the aura of federal government or the anticipation of federal dollars, I don't know, but I do know that our attempts to bring people together under the auspices of a new National Library have been very successful. One of the ideas that has guided me over the past few years is that the National Library of Education must become a "knowledge broker" rather than a document gatherer. Moving from traditional types of library services to becoming a knowledge broker among education information providers and users has been one of the ideas that has influenced me most directly. As the National Library of Education was created in this age of virtual libraries, then we must adopt a new role of knowledge broker rather than collection holder and we must ensure that this knowledge is made available equitably to everyone.

CONCLUSION

In concluding, I think that there are several ideas that I would leave with you as you begin to think about a new National Library. The OSTI Vision and Mission Statements declare your goal of developing a National Library of Energy Science and Technology. And your Mission Statement even describes some of its features. Your new library will be a digital library in the sense that it

may not be one single entity, that it would require technology to link the resources of many, that those linkages would be transparent to the end user, and that digital library collections are not limited to document surrogates; they extend to digital artifacts that cannot be represented or distributed in printed format. To create this new type of library takes diligence, patience, and perseverance. I have found the following principles to be of value to me as I work in my library.

First is to convince others, and especially your own Department, of the importance and value of this endeavor. How would this new office be different than the old one? What value would be added to your enterprise if you were to create a new library? How would your mission and objectives change? These are questions that your own administration might ask and it certainly would help to have answers to these questions when seeking Congressional support. As I mentioned earlier, it was only with Congressional support that the National Library of Education was created and I would suggest that the same may be true for you.

Another suggestion is to think about how to effect some fundamental changes in your existing organizations. How would your operations change? What new programs or services might be important? Most importantly, how would your staff react to such changes and how would they buy into this new concept?

A particular challenge for us was how to position ourselves in a leadership position nationally. I am not sure that we have succeeded completely in this, but we are continually making attempts. Part of that has been made simpler because we are part of a larger Federal agency that conveys a certain importance, but we have had to be creative in other ways through public relations and

publications, attendance at conferences and meetings, and as much personal networking as possible. I think that the Office of Scientific and Technical Information already has a high visibility, but as you think of new clientele and new demands on your services, you may want to think of how to position yourselves nationally.

Some other issues that may be important are being flexible enough to change quickly, being open to new partnership and collaborations, and letting staff take this new opportunity to fulfill themselves in some new ways. Because the National Library of Education is a relatively small organization, we are able to be flexible in our working relationships, our project management, and in our ability to respond to new issues. We are also flexible because much of what we do is actually contracted out and we can make changes as we need to fit changing circumstances.

Maybe it is because we are a small organization that we are looking for partners and collaborative activities, but we are always scanning the horizon looking for new opportunities and ways to enhance our visibility and our services. And, finally, I think that we give our staff every chance to work at tasks that they find fulfilling. Remember that when we were created a few years ago, many of our staff had never worked in a library environment before and so it has taken time for staff to adjust and to discover what it is that makes them feel fulfilled in their job assignments.

I want to wish all of you the best of luck in your future work and I want to extend an offer to each of you that we in the National Library of Education would be happy to cooperate with you in any way possible.

Thank you.

