

Editor's Note

Following publication of our review of Louisa Moats' report, *Whole language high jinks: How to tell when "scientifically-based reading instruction" isn't*, we received a note from the author containing three substantive objections. The reviewer, Richard Allington, was unavailable on Friday, February 16th, to write an immediate response, but he will do so at his earliest opportunity. As editor, I think it appropriate to present the objections immediately and to briefly present my own reaction. Dr. Allington has not read or signed off on this response. I want to thank Dr. Moats for setting forth her concerns.

Objection #1: "I have not written any program or assessment mentioned in the paper. The only program I have written for teacher professional development, LETRS, is not referenced in the paper. To date, I have not authored any reading program or part of a reading program and the Fordham paper in no way can be construed as an act of self-promotion."

Editor's Response: Although the review by Dr. Allington states only that LETRS is written by Dr. Moats and marketed by SoprisWest (he does not state that the report directly promotes LETRS), I do think that this should be clarified. That said, the original report does include repeated references to the need for professional development of just the sort LETRS provides (knowledge of linguistic aspects of phonology, grammar, etc). The key here, I think, is to help the reader clearly understand what the report does and does not say.

Objection #2: "In the body of the report, two programs that are published by Sopris West are mentioned, ReadWell and Responsive Reading Instruction. Responsive Reading Instruction is now published by Sopris, but it is mentioned in the context of at least four other research-validated interventions that are not published by Sopris." Dr. Moats also notes and defends the positive mention in a footnote of "Sound Partners," another Sopris program.

Editor's Response: The relevant passage of Dr. Allington's review states as follows:

Roughly half of the commercial products that Moats touts as effective (ReadWell, DIBELS, Sound Partners, Responsive Reading, Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling) are products or services that are sold by her employer, SoprisWest.

I believe this to be an accurate and non-misleading statement. I did just find the other two programs mentioned by Dr. Allington (DIBELS and Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling) in the Sopris catalogue for fall 2006. Consistent with the note from Dr. Moats, the primary mentions in the body of the report are to the two programs she notes (the other references are in footnotes). Again, however, I don't see a basis to correct the "roughly half" wording used by Dr. Allington.

Objection #3: "The decision to highlight the Montgomery, Alabama reading initiative was made by the Fordham editors. I personally cannot claim any credit for the stellar improvements in Montgomery and had nothing to do with the authorship, design,

marketing, or implementation of ReadWell at that site. The results, however, speak for themselves and deserve wide-spread recognition.”

Editor’s Response: Although we can make a note of this in a revised version of the review, I see nothing in the current review that is inaccurate or misleading. Dr. Allington could not have known that the decision to highlight this case study was not made by the author.

Overall, then, I agree with Dr. Moats that the review should be clarified so that the reader fully understands that the LETRS program was never directly mentioned or promoted in the original report. Additional changes and clarification may also be helpful, and I will discuss those with the author.

Dr. Moats ended her note to us with the following statement: “I continue to be astonished at your cynicism and propensity for spurious, ad hominem attacks on professionals whose work you dislike.” Since the note was addressed to both Dr. Allington and myself, I am not sure who or what is the target of her displeasure. However, I do want to assure Dr. Moats that our strong focus with the Think Tank Review Project is indeed on substance.

In that regard, I would like to encourage Dr. Moats to respond further to the substantive elements of Dr. Allington’s critique. The summary of his review reads as follows:

This review finds that Moats exaggerates the findings of the National Reading Panel (NRP), especially the effects of systematic phonics on reading achievement. She also ignores research completed since the NRP report was issued seven years ago. Perhaps most disturbingly, she touts primarily commercial curriculum products distributed by her employer — products that have far fewer published studies of effectiveness than the products and methods she disparages. These flaws pervade the report’s subsequent discussion of what “scientifically based reading instruction” should look like. In the end, the Fordham report works more effectively as promotional material for products and services offered by Moats and her employer, SoprisWest, than as a reliable guide to effective reading instruction.

While I appreciate the clarifications regarding the promotion of commercial products, and while I apologize to Dr. Moats for any impression left by the initial version of the review to the effect that her report directly promoted LETRS, I hope she will also engage with the other points which, after all, constituted the bulk of Dr. Allington’s review. We will gladly post such a response along with the report and review. I trust that we can work together to help enlighten readers about those issues.

Kevin Welner
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