

MOATS ASSOCIATES CONSULTING, INC  
411 MOTHERLODE LOOP - P.O. BOX 3941 - HAILEY, ID 83333

December 27, 2008

Mark Dynarski, Director  
IES What Works Clearinghouse  
PO Box 2393  
Princeton, New Jersey 08543-2391

Re: WWCH Posting on the AIR Professional Development Impact Study

Dear Dr. Dynarski:

I am the author of the LETRS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling) materials which have been named in a recent posting by the WWCH on the American Institute for Research's Professional Development Impact Study. I am writing to protest the content and nature of the research summary, and to request that it be rewritten to more truthfully reflect what was done by AIR and what was found in the study. What you have posted is inaccurate, misleading, and undeservedly harmful to the reputation of LETRS.

LETRS is a set of published materials to be used in teaching teachers to understand the structure of the English language, for the purposes of teaching reading and writing, and to become familiar with research-based frameworks for understanding reading development and reading instruction. LETRS is a tool for giving teachers foundational knowledge to support better practices. LETRS is designed to be one of five or six important leverage points in improving reading instruction, including in-class coaching and follow-up, which was provided in the AIR study by the Consortium on Reading Excellence (CORE) – not by LETRS trainers. In the AIR study, the LETRS-based professional development *did* have a moderate effect on teacher knowledge, accomplishing what it was designed to do. No effect was obtained from the coaching component provided by CORE. In addition, conditions present in the study schools, such as high teacher turn-over, lack of appropriate instructional materials for remediation of poor reading skills, selective targeting of one grade level without targeting K and 1<sup>st</sup>, and low incentives for implementation of better practices, were undoubtedly factors in the lack of student improvement.

Please note that we gave the AIR permission to base their training on the LETRS materials, but that we had no control over what was added by their design team, what was imposed in the way of an agenda and time frame, and what was deleted from the course of study that the LETRS materials support. The professional development program was that which was designed by AIR, using our materials but modifying them to suit the emphases that they considered important. To characterize the training accurately, you should call it the AIR Professional Development Program.

I, as the lead author of LETRS, have never proposed that foundational knowledge is all that is needed for teachers to be more successful in teaching reading. Therefore, to characterize the AIR's results in terms of a failure of LETRS to produce increments in second grade students' reading achievement is like saying that the anatomy course given to physical therapists did not result in improvements in the clients' physical condition. Was it expected to? Like anatomy in the physical sciences, foundational knowledge of language and reading are necessary, but not sufficient. There is not a straight path from foundational knowledge to improvement of second graders' reading in low performing schools; too many other factors must also be dealt with, as numerous other studies have shown. The way you have reported the AIR's results, however,

implies that there should be a direct effect, and that the LETRS materials have somehow failed to accomplish an expected result. This is false and misleading.

Please change this report to reflect more accurately what was actually done, by whom, and with what effect.

Sincerely yours,

(b)(6)

Louisa C. Moats, Ed.D.

Cc (b)(6)

# What Works Clearinghouse **WWC**

A central and trusted source of scientific evidence for what works in education.

February 18, 2009

Louisa Moats  
Moats Associates Consulting, Inc  
411 Mother Lode Loop  
P.O. Box 3941  
Hailey, ID 83333

Reference: 2008013

Dear Dr. Moats:

We received your December 27, 2008 letter regarding the What Works Clearinghouse's (WWC) Quick Review of the Garet et al. (2008) report "The Impact of Two Professional Development Interventions on Early Reading Instruction and Achievement." We have reviewed your concerns and concluded that it is appropriate to modify our description of this report. Rather than describe this study as a study of the Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) curriculum, we will revise the report to indicate that the study examined the impact of "a professional development program based on LETRS." Additionally, we will now refer to the quick review as "WWC Quick Review of the Report 'The Impact of Two Professional Development Interventions on Early Reading Instruction and Achievement'" rather than "WWC Quick Review: Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) Study." We plan to post a revised quick review reflecting these changes in the coming weeks.

Your letter also raised a concern that the quick review discussed only student outcomes. WWC staff currently are considering whether to expand quick reviews to include discussion of other outcomes such as ones related to teachers and teaching. If this policy moves ahead, we will re-examine the Garet et al. study from that perspective and possibly revise the posted quick review.

We hope this has addressed your concerns.

Sincerely,

(b)(6)

Mark Dynarski  
Director  
The What Works Clearinghouse