

Author's Response to [Martin A. Davis, Jr.](http://www.edexcellence.net/institute/global/page.cfm?id=407)
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The Fordham Institute's Mr. Davis argues that I (and my [review](#) of the [report](#) by Dr. Moats) do not have the facts on my side and that I have thus resorted to “pounding the table” by engaging in *ad hominem* attacks on Dr. Moats. This is untrue – on both counts.

Most importantly, my review of Moats' report focuses overwhelmingly on facts and factual problems with her analysis. To date, I have seen no substantive response. Instead, what I have seen are repeated attempts to divert attention away from those factual issues (“pounding the table,” if you will). Accordingly, allow me to once more ask Dr. Moats to respond to the specific concerns I raised about her report.

I also think it important to point out that my review did not engage in *ad hominem* attacks. As I noted in my review, about half of the products that Dr. Moats praises by name are distributed by her employer. And while she never names the two professional development products she authored or co-authored in her report, her recommendations for policy makers entail providing just the sort of training those products provide, products also distributed by her employer. I thought this important to point out, and I still do. Moreover, the editor and I both issued and published clarifying statements (here are the [editor's](#) and [mine](#)) in response to concerns raised by Dr. Moats – making it clear that the report did not in fact directly promote products she authored. This, to me, evidences an effort to focus on relevant facts. I hope Dr. Moats and her colleagues would do the same.

So I again turn to those facts. Are Mr. Davis and Dr. Moats unfamiliar with the actual findings of the NRP and the subsequent re-analyses of the studies they examined? Mr. Davis appears to be arguing that because Congress accepted the findings of the National Reading Panel (NRP), that somehow those findings are more convincing than their scientific weight would otherwise allow.

But no matter what Congress did as a result of the NRP report, the scientific facts are that the NRP found only a small positive effect for systematic phonics instruction, one that even if it were reliable is, as Hammill and Swanson noted, of no practical significance in terms of improving reading achievement. (See my review for a discussion of these studies.)

The report by Camilli and colleagues using hierarchical linear modeling for analyzing the NRP phonics studies, and they demonstrated that even the small effect disappears when the outcomes of the phonics studies are more appropriately analyzed.

Congressional acceptance of any supposed scientific finding doesn't make that finding any more reliable or valid. Pounding the table and shouting that the NRP has found a small and practically unimportant effect on reading achievement does not make that finding larger or more important in any scientific sense -- just in a political sense.

I encourage Mr. Davis to retrieve the more recent scientific analyses of the NRP report and the studies I cited, showing how often Dr. Moats ignored the scientific evidence in promoting products and approaches she obviously agrees with, regardless of the research available. I would encourage any reader who might be swayed by diversionary tactics and attacks to do the same. Focus on the facts, and the noise from table-pounding will fade off into the distance.

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