

Teachers' Perceptions of the Efficacy of the Open Court Program for English Proficient and English Language Learners

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Introduction

The civil-rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s was instrumental in the clamor for change in an educational system that failed to provide equal opportunities for learning. The dismantling of segregation policy was essentially to ensure that all students had equal access to education. However, this goal remains largely elusive because significant disparity in academic achievement among students of various racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds persists today.

Responding to the myriad of problems in education in California, the state government proposed and passed Senate Bill 2042 (1998) titled "Teacher Preparation Is Changing." The bill was enacted to overhaul teacher preparation programs in the state. The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) publicly announced that it was "concerned with the quality and effectiveness of the

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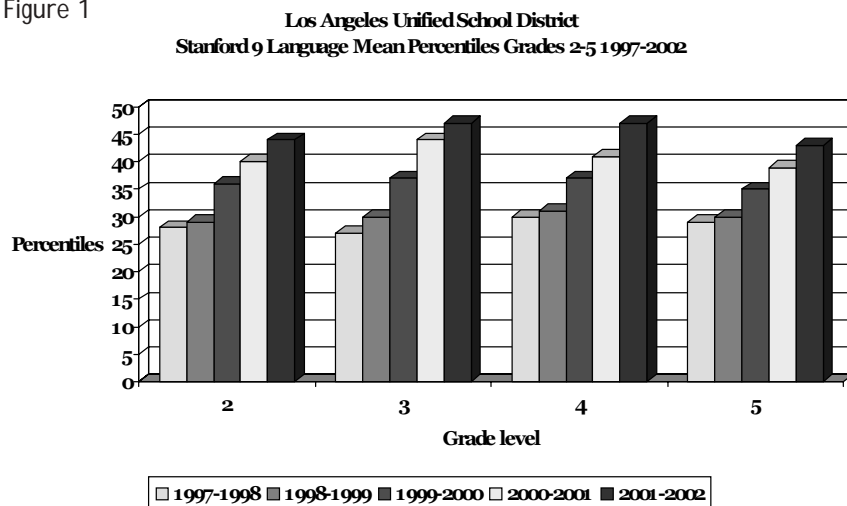
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preparation of teachers and other school practitioners” and that it was determined to “establish and implement strong, effective standards of quality for the preparation and assessment of credential candidates” by setting specific standards individual teachers were expected to meet before they could be licensed to teach (2004, p. 1). A committee was formed to study California schools. The committee in its report, *California's Lowest-Performing Schools: Who they are, the challenges they face, and how they are improving*, classified 109 elementary schools in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) among the lowest-performing schools in the state.

The report identified the challenges: According to the report, compared to secondary schools, elementary schools as a whole faced slightly greater challenges. In addition, more challenges were found among English learners (EdSource, 2003 p. 34). The Committee recommended reforms in elementary education in the form of “school-wide adoptions of a unified, well-integrated curriculum and instructional approach” (EdSource, 2003, p. 34). This school-wide focus meant that all teachers were to use the same books, receive the same training on how to use the curriculum effectively, share a common set of expectations for student performance, and use the same methods to assess student progress as well as help students who are experiencing difficulties in reading and language arts.

The adoption of the recommendation meant changes in kindergarten through third grade curricula that included adoption of a structured English program; i.e., Open Court. The adoption of LAUSD's recommendations also included mainstreaming ELL students into English classes, reducing class-size to 20 pupils per teacher, developing school intervention programs, and offering district-sponsored workshops and seminars. With the implementation of these “reforms,” LAUSD (2001) reported that students' achievement scores in Reading/Language Arts in

Figure 1



Stanford 9 examinations went up for five consecutive years in second grade through fifth (K and first grade pupils were not tested) (see Figure 1 below).

Nevertheless, further analysis of achievement scores showed that the average scores of ELLs consistently lagged behind that of their English proficient counterparts during the five year period. Criticisms of the current situation include school policies and practices that have prevented teachers from integrating their professional competencies and resources in planning English language programs for students and methods that are not suitable for integrating and coordinating instructions for English proficient and ELL in the same classes (Genesee 1994). Similarly Ajayi (2005a) in a study of meaning-making activities in a second-grade, mixed elementary classroom in Los Angeles concluded that instructional practices did not teach English learners to construct vocabulary meanings to reflect their identities and subjectivities in terms of their interests, needs, priorities, and expectations. Furthermore, Toohey (2003) noted that the practices in English mixed schools “appear in effect to prevent the increasing empowerment and active participation of some of those defined as second language learners” (p. 95). Interestingly, achievement scores for the upper grades remained virtually unchanged during the same period.

Open Court is published by McGraw Hill and has been approved by the *No Child Left Behind Act* as an appropriate research-based reading program. Open Court Reading is advertised as “a research-based curriculum grounded in systematic, explicit instruction of phonemic awareness, phonics and word knowledge, comprehension skills and strategies, inquiry skills and strategies, and writing and language arts skills and strategies” (Open Court website, 2005). The Open Court program was adopted as part of the efforts to provide all elementary school students in California the English Language competence needed to succeed academically and socially.

The developers of Open Court often cite the research conducted by the National Institute of Child Health and Development (NICHD) in 1994 to support its effectiveness. The study touted Open Court as the most effective reading program for increasing economically disadvantaged children’s reading achievement. In 1996, the results were shared with the California State Assembly Education Committee. Interestingly, as Taylor (1998) pointed out, the announcement was made prior to the study being peer reviewed. Moustafa and Land (2001) outlined the important problems with the NICHD research and did research of their own to show that Open Court was actually less effective than other reading curricula for economically disadvantaged students.

Peck and Serrano (2002) examined the suitability of Open Court for ELL students and found that Open Court was faulted by teachers for “presupposing background knowledge that ELL students did not have” and that the “rapid instructional pace and lack of interaction caused ELL students to tune out.” Peck and Serrano (2002) also found that teachers felt the Open Court’s guide for adapting the curriculum for ESL was not useful.

Background

Teachers as Agent of Curriculum Implementation

The ultimate success of a language program depends, to a large extent, on teachers' familiarity with the program and its application to meeting instructional objectives. Richards (2003) argued that many steps can be taken to create a positive learning environment but ultimately it is the teachers' efforts, commitment, and resourcefulness that determine the success of a program. Richards contended that "good teachers can often compensate for deficiencies in the curriculum, the materials, or the resources they make use of in their teaching" (p. 209). Given that the teacher's theories, beliefs, educational knowledge, skills and practical classroom experience typically serve as the basis for judgments and decisions about a program's workability and relevance, the teacher's role is critical to the success of a language program. It seems plausible to assume that the teacher's perspectives and views are important to understanding the effectiveness of a curricular program. It is also possible that teachers' beliefs, values, and perceptions may contradict or even conflict with curriculum objectives set forth by the district. Hence, a language program that does not take into account teachers' expectations, interests, and perspectives runs the risk of setting "the stage for angst and doubt in teachers, leading to lower personal and professional efficacy... and most seriously, continued failure for students most at risk" (Kameeni, Carnine, & Dixon, 1995, p. 3).

Literature on Mixed Classrooms

Current literature on ESL seems to suggest that there are fundamental problems with the placement of English language learners in mixed class-rooms (combining ELL and English-only students for all instruction). For example, Chaudron (1988) documented the teachers' "apparent disparity in treatment" (p. 119) of ELL and English-only students. He also observed a "mismatch between teachers and students' cultural norms that resulted in a differential treatment of students during classroom interactions" (p. 119). Laosa (1979), in a similar study, concluded that teachers tend to be more negative towards, less interactive with, and more critical of ELL students in mixed classrooms. This is similar to the conclusion made by Mckeon (1994), who noted that teachers' interactions with ELLs tended to be more managerial than instructional. Lee (1999) also found that although support for bilingual education was high among parents whose children were enrolled in bilingual programs, the majority of the parents preferred that their children be placed in mainstream classes. Lee hypothesized that in addition to the stigmatism involved in bilingual education, there might have been issues related to student placement. Genesee (1994) claimed that English language teaching practices and policies alienate ELLs from the social aspects of their lives and promote annihilation of their home language and culture. The school thus becomes an agent of "socializ(ing) children to the values, beliefs and goals of the dominant society."

More recent works in identity formation (Norton, 1995; Norton & Toohey, 2001; Toohey, 2003; and Ajayi, 2005) have shown serious fundamental problems in the conceptualization and practice of implementing language teaching programs in mixed classrooms. For example, in a critical examination of instructional practices in mixed classrooms, Toohey (2003) documented evidence of marginalization and concluded that the structure of the social world of classrooms “systematically excluded (ELLs) from just those conversations in which they might legitimately peripherally participate with child experts, English old-timers” (p. 93). Similarly, Norton (1995) in her ground-breaking work on socio-cultural identity and language learning concluded that classroom teaching practices neither conceive of integrating language learners with the social, cultural, and economic contexts of learning nor view language learning as an investment in learners’ own socio-cultural identities. She further contended that such practices have not investigated how “relations of power in the social world affect social interaction between second language learners and target language speakers” (p.12). The problems highlighted by these criticisms seem not to have been addressed in the framework for teaching English language in California.

A Summary of California Reading/Language Arts Framework

California’s Reading/Language Arts Framework provides a blueprint for defining the goals of English language learning, organizing language instruction, designing curriculum, specifying instruction, and identifying the role of teachers. The framework spells out in details what to teach, how to teach, and the expected outcomes. The framework also provides recommendations for classroom instructional activities and their time allocation. For instructional activities, the document recommends direct instruction of concepts and vocabulary of specific texts. For time allocation, the document recommends K-3 spend 2.5 hours per day in reading/language arts direct instruction and suggests educators ensure the allotted time “is given priority and is protected from interruption” (p.13).

Under the recommendations of the framework, educators must ensure that different types of assessments are used at different points (before, during, and after instruction) and also must provide to parents information related to what they are teaching, how much the students are learning, and what the students have mastered. With the belief that the instructional materials “can greatly influence the amount and rate of learning in classrooms” (p. 14), the framework recommends that:

Instructional materials incorporate specific strategies, teaching/instructional activities, procedures, examples, and opportunities for review and application consistent with current and confirm research.

Instructional materials prioritize and sequence essential skills and strategies in a logical, coherent manner and demonstrate the relationship between fundamental skills (e.g., decoding, vocabulary, and comprehension) (p. 14).

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For ELLs the blueprint identifies vocabulary as the most formidable challenge they encounter and consequently recommends that ELL students be helped through pre-teaching, vocabulary instruction, modeling pronunciation, scaffolding, student practice in discussions, writing assignments, and information about the origins and use of words. The blueprint states that instructions for ELLs must be presented “overwhelmingly in English” (p. 233). Specifically for kindergarten through second grade, the document asserts that students in elementary schools who are learning English “can participate fully in regular classroom language arts instruction” (p. 233). This claim is contrary to conventional academic discourse that inequitable social structures are reproduced in day-to-day social interactions in mixed classrooms (Norton, 1995). Toohey (2003) argued that such social practices create an atmosphere for the marginalization of language learners because of their construction as language deficit learners—those who do not have the symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991) to participate in classroom discursive practices.

On the role of teachers, the document has acknowledged the positive impact of effective teachers on student achievement. However, the document does not provide any specific role for the teacher in his or her involvement in language-program design and development. It only notes that teachers’ instructional practices will be most effective if they adhere to the guidelines; thus, the framework does not view teachers as “active agents in the development of their own practice, as decision-makers using their specialist knowledge to guide their actions in particular situations” (Calderhead, 1987 as cited in Richards, 2000, p. 65).

The California Reading/Language Arts Framework constructs literacy education as reading and writing in traditional print texts rather than in broader terms, such as articulating the ways and means young learners express themselves and how the practice of literacy can be linked to their “social and personal identities and their quest for meaning, personal power, and pleasure” (Mahiri, 2001, p. 384). A theoretical framework for effective literacy practices in contemporary times must be able to frame literacy skills as a tool to access the core curricula in the classrooms. Utilization of emerging technological and multimodal representational forms, such as to critically analyze, deconstruct, and construct different texts and discourses to “generate visions of new worlds” (Luke, 2001, p. 672) would better today’s students. The California framework does not capture a broad perspective; hence the adoption of it does not benefit students as they participate in the educational, cultural and social contexts of their lives.

Open Court Program Adoption

The adoption of the Open Court program with a set of teaching materials by the LAUSD in the mid 1990s was meant to provide elementary schools with a uniform and structured curriculum. With the previous *Success for All* program, teachers had to choose from a variety of methods including look-and-say, phonetic, alphabetic, phonics, and others for teaching beginning reading (Samuels *et al*, 1992). The

design, instructional content, instructional methodology, and implementation of the Open Court program are significantly influenced by the theories and assumptions of the underlying phonic/fluency method.

Phonic instruction essentially teaches students how to understand the relationship between the letters (graphemes) and the individual sounds of a language (phonemes) and then use the relationship to read and write (National Institute for Literacy, 2001). The basic principle of fluency reading is that it “consists of optical, perceptual, syntactic, and semantic cycles, each melting into the next as readers try to get meaning as efficiently as possible using minimal time and energy” (Samuels *et al*, 1992, p. 126). Joyce, Weil, & Calhoun (1995) and Clark (1995) identified direct instruction as the most effective method for teaching phonic-based instructional program. They defined direct instruction as a teaching with an “academic focus, a high degree of teacher direction and control, high expectations for student’s progress, a system for managing time, and an atmosphere of relatively neutral effect” (p. 338). The instructional practices of direct instruction, which Open Court utilizes, consists of five stages: activating pupils’ background knowledge, lesson presentation, discussion, corrective feedback, and structure practice (Joyce et al, 1995, pp. 339-342).

Purpose

The purpose of the study is to examine teachers’ perceptions of the Open Court language program. More specifically, the study attempts to examine teacher perspectives and opinions on the effectiveness of the Open Court program to facilitate English language teaching for English proficient and ELL students in K–3rd grade. In addition, the study attempts to identify group differences between experienced and inexperienced teachers in their perceptions of the program. To further understand teachers’ views, the study also analyzed teachers’ recommendations for improving the program.

Method

Sample

Twenty-five elementary schools in LAUSD were randomly selected for the study. Working collaboratively with district and school literacy coaches, we requested four volunteer teachers (two experienced and two inexperienced) from each school to participate in the study. In all 100 surveys were distributed (four per school) with an initial return rate of 93%; the remaining seven questionnaires were subsequently obtained, these teachers having misplaced their original copies.

Subjects

For this study, the experienced group was defined as credentialed teachers who had been teaching for five or more years and the inexperienced group consisted of

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teachers who had taught for less than five years. The subjects' experience using the Open Court program ranged from one year to seven years. The number of Open Court training sessions that the subjects received prior to teaching ranged from none to five. The range for number of Open Court training sessions while teaching was none to 20; thus, most of the training for using Open Court occurred during teaching. The subjects of the study consisted of 81 female and 19 male teachers. Fifty percent of the subjects were experienced teachers and the rest were inexperienced teachers. Twenty-two teachers indicated that they were teaching first grade, 16 indicated that they were second-grade teachers, and 21 responded that they taught third grade. Nine teachers taught fourth grade, eight taught fifth and five taught kindergarten. The remaining 19 teachers indicated that they taught grade-level combinations. Twenty-two of the teachers responded that they had taught Open Court for zero to two years, 71 taught it between three and five years, and seven teachers indicated that they had taught Open Court between six and eight years.

In terms of Open Court training sessions attended prior to teaching the program, 51% noted that they did not attend any training, 23% indicated that they attended one training session, and 18% attended two training sessions. Similarly, in their response to the number of training sessions they attended during the course of the school year (when they responded to this instrument) 5 teachers indicated none, 11 teachers indicated one, while 32 teachers answered two times and 13 indicated six times. When asked about the frequency of collaboration with colleagues to consult on Open Court, 6% answered never, 57% indicated once per week, 23% replied once every two weeks, and 14% of the teachers indicated once a month. Table 1 below presents a summary of the teachers' biographical information.

Instrumentation

An attitudinal scale was designed to collect information from participating teachers. Section A consisted of 11 questions relating to the background information of participating teachers such as gender, professional training, years of teaching experience in elementary school(s), and years of teaching the Open Court program. Section B had a 22-item 5-point Likert-type attitudinal scale that asked teachers to

Table 1. Summary of Teachers' Background.

Gender		Teach. Exp.		Grade Level			Exp. with OP (yrs)			OCTPT	
female	male	Inexp	Exper	1 to 3	4 to 6	Combo	0 to 2	3 to 5	6 to 8	0 to 1	2plus
N = 81	N = 19	N = 0	N = 50	N = 59	N = 22	N = 19	N = 22	N = 71	N = 7	N = 74	N = 26
81%	19%	50%	50%	59%	22%	19%	22%	71%	7%	74%	26%

Key: OCTPT = Open Court Training Prior to Teaching
 Combo = Combination of Grade Levels
 Exp with OP = Experience with Teaching the Open Court Program
 Teach. Exp = Teaching Experience at Elementary School

respond to whether Open Court met the goals set in the *Reading/Language Arts Framework for California Public Schools* (RLAF, 1999). The content of the attitudinal scale was closely related to the provisions of the California framework. Teachers responded to the perceived effectiveness of the program for English proficient and ELL students. Issues that were incorporated into the instrument included whether the program promoted differentiated instruction, facilitated the use of a variety of instructional strategies and activities, promoted the use of appropriate materials, and suggested or provided learning activities that were related to learners' cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Other issues included time allocation, program administration and community participation. In section C, teachers responded to an open-ended question in which they were asked to list three aspects of the program that they considered most effective, three features they considered least effective, and three improvements they would like to be incorporated into the program. The teachers' responses to the open-ended questions were analyzed via grouping under broad categories. Using frequency counts the data were ranked from most frequent to least frequent.

Results

An initial t-test was performed to assess whether there was a significant difference in teacher's perceptions of Open Court effectiveness for ELL (English language learners) vs. EPS (English proficient) students. Results indicated that the mean for ELL=2.51 (SD=.44) was less than the mean for EPS=2.72 (SD=.35) and the t-test at .05 DF indicated that these differences were statistically significant (See Table 2).

Regression analyses were performed to compare each teacher variable with teachers' perceptions of Open Court effectiveness for English proficient and ELL students. Results indicated that the teachers' experience and frequency of Open Court training were slightly significant for their perceptions of the effectiveness of the program for EPS students. However, the result showed that both experience and frequency of training were not significant in the teachers' perceptions of the program for ELL students (See Tables 3 and 4).

Further t-tests indicated that teachers with less experience, ($t[50] = .044, p < .05$), viewed Open Court as more effective with English proficient students than teachers with more experience, ($t[50] = .052, p > .05$) (See Table 5).

Table 2. Difference in Teachers Perceptions of Open Court Effectiveness for ELL (English Language Learners) vs. EPS (English Proficient Students).

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
EPS	100	2.7268	.35307	.03531
ELL	100	2.5123	.44012	.04401

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Table 3. Teacher Variables and Teacher Perception of Open Court Effectiveness with English Proficient Students.

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.642	.067		39.703	.000
TeachExp	.137	.073	.194	1.875	.064
OCExp	.012	.078	.017	.149	.881
OCTrain	.132	.084	.172	1.567	.120
Collabor	-.051	.071	-.072	-.726	.470

TeachExp=Teacher Experience, OCExp=Open Court Experience, OCTrain=Amount of Open Court Training, Collabor=Frequency of Collaboration on Open Court

Table 4. Teacher Variables and Teacher Perception of Open Court Effectiveness with English Language Learners.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.496	.085		29.403	.000
TeachExp	.128	.093	.146	1.380	.171
OCExp	-.035	.100	-.039	-.345	.731
OCTrain	.104	.108	.109	.966	.337
Collabor	-.106	.090	-.119	-1.170	.245

TeachExp=Teacher Experience, OCExp=Open Court Experience, OCTrain=Amount of Open Court Training, Collabor=Frequency of Collaboration on Open Court

Table 5. Teacher Experience and Perception of Open Court Effectiveness with English Proficient Students.

	Teach Exp.	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
EPS	.00	50	2.6473	.31405	.04441
	1.00	50	2.8064	.37458	.05297

Regarding Open Court training, the same trend existed. Teachers with less training in Open Court actually viewed the program as more effective for English proficient students, ($t[50]=.041$, $p<.05$), than teacher's with more Open Court training, ($t[50]=.063$, $p>.05$) (See Table 6).

Tables 7 and 8 below provide a summary of the frequency counts (FC) of three aspects the teachers considered most effective, three features that were least effective and three recommendations for improving Open Court for English-only

Table 6. Amount of Open Court Training and Teacher Perception of Open Court Effectiveness with English Proficient Students.

	Octrain	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
EPS	.00	70	2.6779	.34727	.04151
	1.00	30	2.8409	.34550	.06308

and ELL students. The teachers' responses for both English-only and ELL students, based on rank (in order of frequency) were very similar.

As apparent in Tables 7 and 8, the teachers identified the phonics (including blending and spelling) as used in Open Court as the most effective component for English proficient and ELLs. This was followed by content (including themes and topics) for English proficient students and instructional activities for ELLs. The writing component was considered least effective, followed by scripted (or structured) nature of the program for both English-only and ELLs. The two topmost

Table 7. Aspects Teachers Considered Effective, Least Effective, and Their Recommendations for English Proficient Students.

Most Effective	FC	Least Effective	FC	Recommendations	FC
1. Phonics, blending spelling	94	1. Writing component	73	1. Better writing program	48
2. Contents, themes, topics	38	2. Scripted/structured	35	2. Flexibility & creativity	45
3. Vocabulary & grammar	35	3. Vocabulary & grammar	17	3. Content, themes, topics	33
4. Instructional activities	28	4. Time allocation	14	4. Vocabulary & grammar	27
5. Comprehension strategy	22	5. Content, theme, topic	13	5. Timing	10
6. Writing component	17	6. Inquiry journals	11	6. More activities	10
7. Structured/scripted	11				
8. Teaching strategy	11				
9. Integrating content areas	09				

Table 8. Aspects Teachers Considered Effective, Least Effective, and Their Recommendations for English Language Learners.

Most Effective	FC	Least Effective	FC	Recommendations	FC
1. Phonics, blending spelling	86	1. Writing component	92	1. Better writing program	78
2. Instructional activities	42	2. Scripted/structured	43	2. Flexibility & creativity	59
3. Content, themes, topics	37	3. Vocabulary, grammar	29	3. Content, themes, topics	56
4. Vocabulary & grammar	23	4. Time allocation	24	4. Vocabulary & grammar	19
5. Comprehension strategy	22	5. Content, theme, topic	13	5. Timing	17
6. Writing component	17	6. Inquiry journals	11	6. More activities	16
7. Structured/scripted	08				
8. Teaching strategy	08				
9. Integrating content areas	07				

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suggestions for improving the program were in the areas of the writing component and the need for flexibility and creativity.

Discussion and Conclusion

Gee (2000), in his critique of the practice of early phonemic awareness and instruction for learning in elementary schools, observed that students failed to read in upper grades because the initial reading strategy did not prepare them to “actively recruit distinctive oral and written social languages for learning within socio-culturally recognizable and meaningful academic discourses (p. 413). Similarly, Richards and Rodgers (2001) criticized the phonic method for promoting “fluency at the expense of accuracy” (p.113). This study has found that there were divergent views on the effectiveness of Open Court among teachers using the program. For instance, many teachers frequently complained that the program was “too scripted” and “stifled creativity.” One teacher reflected on her frustration with the program in her Weekly Interactive Journal in these words:

We're supposed to follow the Open Court specifically (rigidly). There is so much 'pencil/paper' (learning activities) with all of the workbook assignment. There is no creativity in the learning and we're being told, generally, not to deviate from the Open Court specifications. I am having a difficult time adjusting to the Open Court methods after teaching without it prior to this. I really miss the creativity.

Interestingly, another teacher noted that Open Court provided security and confidence. She stated that:

Although there is a lot of controversy behind this series, as a new teacher, the program was great. It taught me how and what to do to teach Language Arts. The training taught you how to use the book to make the best out of your time. I don't know what I would have done without this scripted program. Now I feel a little more confident using other resources to teach Language Arts.

A positive correlation existed between teacher's experience and their perceptions of the effectiveness of Open Court. Less experienced teachers viewed Open Court more favorably. One explanation for this finding is that Open Court offers new teachers a rigid and prescribed program which requires less preparation. Interestingly, compared to the less-trained teachers (fewer than 5 trainings), teachers who received more than 5 trainings thought that Open Court was ineffective. This supports the finding above that the more experience the teacher has, whether it is overall teaching experience or experience using Open Court, the less likely he/she is to view Open Court to be effective for his/her students. In spite of its fairly large size, however, there was an important limitation in the sample: that is, the sample consisted of volunteer who may influence applicability and the sample did not provide cross sectional representation of populations across districts. Hence, bias among the subjects, particularly among the more-experienced teachers against the district, could have influenced the results.

Overall the teachers in this study believed that Open Court was more effective for English proficient students than for ELL students. The teachers' less positive views on the lack of creativity was apparent in the inherent weakness in the structural and conceptual framework of the program. There seemed to be a disconnect between teachers' expectations based on their own theory of language learning and real-life classroom practical experience and the instructional practices prescribed by Open Court designers. Freeman (2000) cited the disparity that exists between teachers as practitioners in the classroom and scholars as researchers of teaching and learning.

It is significant to note that the teachers did not believe that Open Court promoted the use of a variety of instructional strategies and methods for ELL students. The Open Court course-books were published over a decade ago and thus may not necessarily reflect recent developments in different fields that have influenced what teaching is and what teachers should know in order to teach effectively. Similarly, the subjects of this study responded less positively to the statement that the program was flexible enough to accommodate changes they considered significant in their unique teaching contexts.

The issue of teachers' decision-making process is at the heart of teaching. Teachers constantly interpret the classroom world they inhabit with their students. Classroom learning contexts require teachers to make judgment calls about the topics at hand and about learners' behavior, classroom management, and student learning in order to respond appropriately to students' learning needs, interests, and priorities. It appears that the scripted nature of Open Court essentially denies teachers this fundamental role of their profession. Freeman (2000) asserted that "teaching is knowing what to do under particular and unique circumstances" (p. 105). When the critical role of teachers is 'out sourced' to program designers, teachers run the risk of becoming reduced to mere technicians.

An important implication from this study involves the teacher's perceived role of themselves. Given that the majority of the teachers surveyed perceived Open Court to be generally ineffective, particularly for the English language learner, how teachers perceive themselves as agents of education remains compromised. Although Open Court was designed to standardize instruction and assessment, it appears that how teachers view themselves cannot be standardized.

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