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### **Open Court Reading Series What does the research say?**

*Open Court* is a very scripted reading program that many urban school districts have adopted. It is heavily based on phonics instruction and provides very little opportunity for teacher creativity. While SRA/McGraw-Hill, the publishers of *Open Court*, have published reports that its program has caused SAT 9 (a norm referenced test given in California) scores to improve, Margaret Moustafa and Robert Land found problems with these reports.

- Schools using *Open Court* are actually significantly more likely to be in the bottom quartile than comparable schools using non-scripted programs.
- The schools in the published reports by McGraw-Hill that did not use *Open Court* and scored lower than the schools that did had 71% of the children on the federal lunch program. The schools that scored higher and used *Open Court* only had 40-43% of students on the federal lunch program.
- The children receiving *Open Court* instruction had higher pre-test scores than the other children.
- The scores were not aggregated correctly. It was impossible to tell from the reported data how many years that the students had received *Open Court* instruction.
- The researchers equated "reading" with being able to pronounce a print word, regardless of whether they made sense of it.
- Children in the classrooms with non-scripted programs answered comprehension questions better than the students in *Open Court* classrooms.
- Increase in scores reported by McGraw - Hill do not follow students, but instead happened in the same grade level. Students actually had decreased scores moving from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup>, etc.
- Moustafa and Land found that *Open Court* actually limits what children are able to achieve in reading.

The benefits of *Open Court* seem to be exaggerated by the publisher. When looked at closely, non-scripted reading programs actually seem to raise student SAT 9 scores more than *Open Court* does.

## **OPEN COURT READING**

**What is Open Court?** Open Court is a language arts program designed by SRA/McGraw-Hill. The company claims that Open Court Reading is a research-based curriculum grounded in systematic, explicit instruction of phonemic awareness, phonics and work knowledge, comprehension skills and strategies, inquiry skills and strategies, and writing and language arts skills and strategies. It is a rigid, scripted program that leaves little time for any individualization or differentiation.

### **Why is Open Court being adopted in failing schools across the country?**

There are two components of Open Court that claim to work for "poverty level children". One is that this program is research-based and the other is that there is a strong dose of phonics and structured learning.

**What is Research-Based?** In order to claim that a program is research-based, the research must be from an experimental or quasi-experimental research base. Experimental research tries to exhibit a cause/effect relationship. With experimental and quasi-experimental design studies, the tester must disclude other causes. Therefore, there must be a control group, it should be randomly assigned (indicates no bias), and a large number of people need to be involved in the study. Open Court is a scripted program which eliminates control factors like the teacher variable. Thus, Open Court may claim that it is research-based, while other language arts programs cannot do experimental research studies because they cannot disclude the variable of teacher. The current administration has endorsed programs like Open Court because of the fact that it is research-based.

**Does Open Court Work with Disadvantaged Children?** Moustafa and Land, professors at California State University analyzed the SAT 9 data. They concluded that, if one followed students from grade to grade, the percent of children scoring at or above the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile remained virtually the same or declined. They also found that there was no evidence that Open Court fosters higher early reading achievement among economically disadvantaged children. They also found that there was no significant difference in the average SAT 9 reading scores between schools using Open Court and school using the non-scripted programs serving similarity disadvantaged children. Moustafa and Land also assert that there is no justification in sacrificing instruction in other curricular areas to implement Open Court because of the amount of time required to teach the program.

"The Reading Achievement of Economicaliy-Disadvantaged Children in Urban Schools Using Open Court," by Margaret Moustafa and Robert E. Land, 2002 *Yearbook of the Urban Learning, Teaching and Research Special Interest Group of the American Educational Research Association*, pp. 44-53.