

Agee, J. (2000). What is effective literature instruction? A study of experienced high school English teachers in differing grade- and ability- level classes. *Journal of Literacy Research*, 32, 303-348.

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Summary: The study examined how experienced high school English teachers defined, measured, and implemented effective literature instruction. Profiles of five teachers showed their use of differing models for literature instruction and for measuring their instruction's effectiveness. The models included:

- Student-centered models that privileged differences among students.
- Inflexible, teacher-centered models that limited teachers' ability to address students' individual needs effectively.

The models teachers employed affected their ability to gain feedback from students and adjust their literature curriculum.

Assumptions:

- Defining instructional effectiveness is a difficult task. Individual teachers have their own notions of what constitutes effectiveness in literature instruction.
- Change can only come when teachers are able to engage in a fundamental rethinking of the roles and relationships among teachers and students.

Results:

- The experienced classroom teachers who participated in this study exhibited differing views and models of what constitutes effective instruction.
  - Some teachers were more student-centered in their models of effective instruction, willing to entertain the responses, ideas, interpretations, and suggestions from students.
  - Other teachers were more teacher- and text-centered in their conceptions of effective instruction. They were less willing to entertain responses, ideas, interpretations, and suggestions from students.

Conclusions:

- The key question that emanates from this research may *not* be, "How do we help high school English teachers develop models for literature instruction that are most effective?", but "How do we help English teachers, who may have very different models for literature instruction, work to improve their effectiveness with all students?" In order to do this, teachers need opportunities and capacities to investigate their own and others' models of literature instruction.
- Situations need to be created to help both early-career and veteran English teachers learn how to interpret feedback from a range of students and use that feedback to make changes in their instruction.

Suggestions for Teachers:

- Be aware that you and your colleagues may have differing interpretations of what constitutes effective instruction.

- Be willing to enter into discussions about effective instruction, entertain differing ideas about what constitutes effective instruction, and be willing to make changes in your own teaching.

Suggestions for Literacy Leaders:

- Be aware that the literacy teachers you are working with may have differing interpretations of what constitutes effective instruction.
- Create conditions that require literacy teachers to examine their own and others' literacy teaching and discuss change. These may include:
  - Using videotapes to examine various models of teaching literature.
  - Addressing constraints encountered in schools that provide incentives for working with academically mature and able students versus younger and struggling students.