“What We’re Saying”: Teacher’s Perceptions of ‘Success For All’

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Research Question...

- What are teachers’ perceptions of the SFA reading program?
- What do they like?
- What don’t they like?
- What would they change?
- Why, and how?
Significance...

- ‘Success for All’ and scripted education

- Past research focuses on SFA’s effect on raising students’ reading ability, effectiveness judged by test scores, teacher input largely ignored

- Borman et al. (2005), studies conducted by SFA developers indicate overly impressive results

- Datnow & Castellano (2000)
  - Teacher buy-in
  - Altered and supplemented program, doesn’t say in what ways
Background on SFA program...

- Johns Hopkins University, 1986
- Robert Slavin, Nancy Madden
- Currently used in 46 states in over 1300 schools
- Daily 90-minute comprehensive reading sessions
- Grouped by ability
- Assessed every 8 weeks
- Goal: all students reading at grade level by 3rd grade
- One-on-one tutors
- Family Support Teams
- Reading Roots, Reading Wings (2nd-6th)
- $80,000 per year, per school
Thesis...

- ‘Success for All’ does not address the specific needs and conditions of the schools it targets because it was developed idealistically. SFA does not realistically confront the specific culture and challenges of the schools and communities it is meant to serve.
Dorr Elementary School...

- PK-6 grade, 530 students
- In 2004, 95% of students were eligible for free lunch and 74% did not speak English at home
- 98.9% Minority in 2004: 86.5% Hispanic, 11.6% Black, 1.1% White
- Title I school
Methods...

- Interviewed 6 teachers and the SFA coordinator
- Observed SFA classrooms ranging from level 1.2 to 6.1
- Questions centered on teacher’s experiences and perceptions of the program
Findings... ideal versus reality

“...I don’t really know what to do, this is the highest SFA level (6.1) and there are a couple students who have been in here for over a year and they have already read most of these stories...but then I get a few new ones after 8 weeks and we have to sort of start over. This isn’t meeting their needs or making them better readers... there is little challenge, they don’t have to try. I am not supposed to add any new stories because they won’t have the script like the others...something about controlling and monitoring what I am teaching. I am supposed to be getting some new materials, but who knows if that will happen.”

- Ms. Monroe, 6th grade

After 6 years of SFA only 40% of students at Dorr are reading at grade level.
“During training we were shown a video of what a classroom is supposed to look like and what a lesson looks like. We had to turn it off because everyone was laughing so hard. The presenter asked us for comments, all I said was, “Yeah, right”…. I don’t know where that classroom was, but I’m sure it wasn’t in Hartford.”

-Ms. White, special ed
Findings... culture

• “Some of these kids have been in the SFA system for six years now, and they still can’t work in teams?!? I just wonder if they ever looked at the culture of these kids before they developed and implemented this program.... I mean a lot of these kids used to take home every book, pencil, stuff their bags...and now you want them to let their guard down and work with a kid they don’t know, share answers, work together... they won’t even share pencils for God’s sake! When they answer questions wrong the other kids laugh and make fun of them.... You can’t bring in this white-bread system for 90-minutes everyday and expect them to accept it if once the time is up they are back to their reality.”

-Mrs. Alley, 2.2 level
Findings... assessment.

“They don’t use the computers ever and then they want them to take the test on them? How fair is that? No wonder the kids aren’t passing and advancing... SFA should be renamed Success-for-All-until-you-take-the-test.”

-Mrs. Graves, speech therapist
Conclusions...

- Question program’s applicability to the students and communities it is striving to serve

- Lacks realism, the model is not transferable to the classroom “as is”

- Teachers need to be involved in the development and implementation of such programs to help increase applicability and a general understanding of the context and conditions of the students, school, and community.