

Built to Last: Long-Term Maintenance of Success for All

Robert E. Slavin

Johns Hopkins University

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The story of educational innovation over the long run is a depressing one. Most innovations adopted on a large scale have never been adequately evaluated in the first place (see Slavin & Fashola, 1998; Herman, 1999), but even among the small number that have been successfully evaluated few have been able to maintain themselves in schools over an extended time period. Most often, innovations that have been enthusiastically adopted and even found to be effective in particular schools are later dropped, sometimes replaced by other innovations and sometimes reverting to the status quo ante.

The reasons for this boom-to-bust cycle in innovation are all too familiar (see Slavin, 1989, 1999). In any area of endeavor ruled by fashion rather than by evidence, such as art, music, design, and haute couture, novelty is prized, and no fad or trend can last for many years. Unfortunately, innovation in education far more closely resembles faddism in these areas than the generational progress based on evidence characteristic of such fields as medicine, applied physics, or engineering. In education, even where solid evidence exists it is usually doubted, ignored, or never publicized. Legitimate debates about evidence among researchers is often used by educators to reject even the evidence that is widely accepted by researchers and, more often, to reject the entire idea that evidence should guide educational decisions.

While faddism and problems of the quality and valuation of evidence are key factors in the waxing and waning of innovations in general, there are many other factors that undermine innovations at particular schools. Innovations are often brought in by or championed by a principal, a superintendent, or a small number of staff members, and the program may disappear when these people move on. Many innovations require extraordinary efforts on the part of staff and administrators and over time these people may simply burn out. Changes in superintendents, school boards, and other key district-level staff, and changes in district, state, or national policies may doom particular innovations. Innovations with long-term costs beyond usual per-pupil expenses may have to struggle for years to maintain funding and may disappear when funds dry up; in

fact, even programs that do not cost much may still disappear when funds are cut, as teachers and administrators may cut back on professional development or materials budgets or as they simply become demoralized. Such disasters as teacher strikes or work-to-rule actions, acrimonious board elections, or extreme accountability pressure (such as being put on a list of schools in trouble) may put an end to innovations.

With the many ways that innovations can be undone, it is perhaps more surprising when they do maintain over time than when they do not.

This article describes one innovation, Success for All, that incorporates a number of elements intended to increase maintenance over time and has, in fact, maintained in schools over many years. There are currently more than 1600 Success for All schools in 48 states, and since the program began in 1987, 87% of all schools that have ever implemented the program are still doing so today. A significant proportion of the schools that have dropped out have been forced out by superintendents opposed to comprehensive reform in general, or Success for All in particular. For example, a new superintendent in Memphis recently terminated all comprehensive reform models, despite requests by 23 Success for All principals to continue the program. Many Success for All schools have survived principal changes and funding cuts, changes in district leadership and policies, and many other changes that are often fatal to innovations. There is no guarantee that the program will continue to grow and thrive forever, of course, but the experience to date is at least instructive as to how one innovation attempts to anticipate and prevent threats to its maintenance and effectiveness over time.

Success For All

Success for All (Slavin & Madden, 2001) is a program designed to comprehensively restructure elementary schools serving many children placed at risk of school failure. It emphasizes prevention, early intervention, use of innovative reading, writing and language arts curriculum, and extensive professional development to help

schools start children with success and then build on that foundation throughout the elementary grades. Table 1 summarizes the main elements of the program.

Table 1: Major Elements of Success for All

Success for All is a schoolwide program for students in grades pre-K to five which organizes resources to attempt to ensure that virtually every student will reach the third grade on time with adequate basic skills and build on this basis throughout the elementary grades, that no student will be allowed to “fall between the cracks.” The main elements of the program are as follows:

Tutors. In grades 1-3, specially trained certified teachers and paraprofessionals work one-to-one with any students who are failing to keep up with their classmates in reading. Tutorial instruction is closely coordinated with regular classroom instruction. It takes place 20 minutes daily during times other than reading periods.

A Schoolwide Curriculum. During reading periods, students are regrouped across age lines so that each reading class contains students all at one reading level. Use of tutors as reading teachers during reading time reduces the size of most reading classes to about 20. The reading program in grades K-1 emphasizes language and comprehension skills, phonics, sound blending, and use of shared stories that students read to one another in pairs. The shared stories combine teacher-read material with phonetically regular student material to teach decoding and comprehension in the context of meaningful, engaging stories. In grades 2-6, students use novels or basals but not workbooks. This program emphasizes cooperative learning activities built around partner reading, identification of characters, settings, problems, and problem solutions in narratives, story summarization, writing, and direct instruction in reading comprehension skills. At all levels, students are required to read books of their own choice for twenty minutes at home each evening. Classroom libraries of trade books are provided for this

purpose. Beginning in the second year of implementation, cooperative learning programs in writing/language arts are introduced in grades K-6.

Preschool and Kindergarten. The preschool and kindergarten programs in Success for All emphasize language development, readiness, and self-concept. Preschools and kindergartens use thematic units, a language development program, and a program called Story Telling and Retelling (STaR).

Eight-Week Assessments. Students in grades K-6 are assessed every eight weeks to determine whether they are making adequate progress in reading. This information is used to suggest alternate teaching strategies in the regular classroom, changes in reading group placement, provision of tutoring services, or other means of meeting students' needs.

Family Support Team. A family support team works in each school to help support parents in ensuring the success of their children, focusing on parent education, parent involvement, attendance, and student behavior. This team is composed of existing or additional staff such as parent liaisons, social workers, counselors, and vice principals.

Facilitator. A program facilitator works with teachers to help them implement the reading program, manages the eight-week assessments, assists the family support team, makes sure that all staff are communicating with each other, and helps the staff as a whole make certain that every child is making adequate progress.

Of particular importance to the readers of this journal is the approach Success for All takes to special education. As noted in Table I, the emphasis of the program is on prevention and early, intensive intervention to try to reduce the need for special education services for students who might otherwise end up assigned to categories such as learning

disabilities, reading disabilities, and mild mental retardation. This is done by emphasizing use of research-based strategies from preschool or kindergarten forward, extensive professional development to help teachers use effective strategies for instruction, classroom management, accommodation of individual differences, and so on, and careful monitoring of student progress and use of flexible grouping strategies to ensure that all children are appropriately challenged and supported.

Children who are struggling despite preventive efforts are given one-to-one tutoring in reading, family support services, behavioral interventions, health or social interventions, or whatever assistance is needed to help them get back on track without involving the special education system if at all possible. If children are found to need special education services beyond what the program provides, those services are closely coordinated with those provided to all children. For example, special education teachers in Success for All schools often teach a reading class and then tutor individual children most of the day, just like other reading tutors. Students with more serious disabilities are involved in full inclusion, to the extent this is feasible in an individual school. For more on special education within the Success for All program, see Slavin (1996) and Slavin & Madden (2001).

Research comparing Success for All to control schools in many parts of the U.S. has consistently shown that Success for All has substantial positive effects on student reading achievement throughout the elementary grades, as well as reducing special education placements and retentions and improving attendance (Slavin & Madden, 2001). Large scale, statewide evaluations in Texas and California have further documented the program's impact on reading performance (Hurley et al., 2001; Slavin, Madden, & Liang, 2002). Studies have found reductions in special education placements in Success for All schools (compared to controls), and higher performance of students with IEP's in Success for All than in control schools (see Slavin, 1996; Smith, Ross, & Casey, 1994).

Success for All was first piloted in one Baltimore elementary school in the 1987-88 school year. It has grown progressively since then and is currently adding

approximately 200 schools to the network each year (see Slavin & Madden, 1999). Begun at Johns Hopkins University, Success for All has, since 1998, been developed and disseminated by the non-profit Success for All Foundation (SFAF), which maintains close ties to Johns Hopkins.

Program Characteristics Affecting Dissemination and Maintenance

There are several unique characteristics of Success for All that have an important bearing on the strategies we use in disseminating the program. First, while Success for All is always adapted to the needs and resources of each school using it, there are definite elements common to all. A fully functional Success for All school will always implement our kindergarten program and reading program in grades 1-5 or 1-6, will have at least one tutor for first graders, and will have a full-time facilitator and a family support team. Other elements, such as preschool and full-day kindergarten, are optional, and schools vary in the number of tutors, the staff time devoted to family support, and other features. Yet despite this variation, we believe that the integrity of the program must be maintained if schools are to produce the results we have found so consistently in our research. The whole school must make a free and informed choice to adopt Success for All; we require a vote by secret ballot of at least 80%. But when schools make this choice they are choosing a particular model of reading instruction, a particular use of Title I and special education resources, a particular within-school support structure, and so on. Unlike many alternative school-wide change models, Success for All is not reinvented from scratch for each school staff.

Success for All requires substantial change in many aspects of curriculum and instruction. It takes time for teachers to learn and perfect new forms of instruction, and for facilitators, tutors, family support team members, and principals to learn new roles.

Therefore, the program requires a great deal of professional development done over an extended period of time. While the initial training period is only three days for classroom teachers, many follow-up visits from Success for All Foundation trainers take place each year. Schools budget for 26 person-days of training in the first implementation year, 15 in the second, 12 in the third, and 8 in each subsequent year.

Success for All requires that schools invest in tutors, a facilitator, a substantial amount of materials and extensive professional development. Because of the focus of the program and its cost, the program is primarily used in high-poverty schools with substantial Title I resources. Increasing numbers of schools adopting Success for All are receiving funding from the federal Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD), but these funds still must be supplemented by Title I staff and funds. While the cost of the program does restrict its use, it also has an important benefit: it increases the likelihood that the school and district will take it seriously and work to see that their investment pays off.

The comprehensiveness, complexity, requirements for staff buy-in, and cost of Success for All have important consequences for dissemination and maintenance. First, they mean that the commitment to the program must be long-term, and the program developers must be prepared to be engaged with schools for many years. Second, they mean that the program is difficult to marginalize within the school, but becomes central to daily functioning. Even if the principal and the staff that initially voted for the program later move on, new staff brought into the school are typically asked to adopt and maintain the school's program, contributing to long-term maintenance.

Building Success for All to Last

There are several key aspects of Success for All that are likely to contribute to the longevity and quality maintenance of the program, as well as strategies specifically designed for this purpose. The quality of the program and its extensive research base are,

we hope, principal reasons why Success for All has maintained as well as it has, but there are many other facets that are certainly influential. These are as follows.

Facilitators

One of the most important elements of Success for All both for the quality of implementation and for longevity is the provision of a building facilitator. Usually an experienced teacher from the school's own staff, the facilitator's full-time job is to ensure the quality, effectiveness, and integration of all program elements. A good facilitator is able to help all teachers improve the quality of their teaching, but is also able to help deal with problems likely to occur over the long run. For example, the facilitator provides an induction program for teachers who are new to the school or new to teaching. The facilitator can and does cushion the staff from changes in principals or district staff or policies. In many ways, the program becomes identified with the facilitator, and as long as the staff has respect and affection for the facilitator the program is likely to survive even the greatest threats. When facilitators move on (they sometimes become assistant principals or principals), they are usually able to train a replacement who is also an experienced and respected teacher from the school's own staff, so continuity is maintained.

Materials and School Organization

Success for All provides teachers with extensive curriculum materials and changes in school organization and staffing as well as teacher's manuals and professional development. One side effect of this is that once a school has fully implemented the program, changing back to traditional materials takes effort, expense, and some degree of professional development. Programs that involve professional development but not specific materials are far easier to drop, and there is certainly no cost for doing so.

Implementing innovations without changing curriculum materials and other regularities of school and classroom context is like stretching a rubberband from a fixed point; it will stay stretched only as long as energy is applied. Changing materials and other school structures moves the fixed point.

Schoolwide Buy-In

One key factor in the maintenance of Success for All is the fact that before we agree to work with a school, we require a vote, by secret ballot, of at least 80% of a school's professional staff. This ensures that teachers know that they had a free choice to select or not select the model, and that all or almost all of their colleagues supported the choice (individual teachers who remain adamantly opposed may transfer, but this happens rarely). There is some evidence that these votes may or may not be completely unfettered, as teachers sometimes report that they had few alternatives (Datnow & Castellano, in press), but the fact that a vote was taken still contributes to a sense that the school's professional staff made a professional decision to give the program their best effort. Because the whole staff chose it, the program belongs to the whole staff, not to the principal or to the small group of teachers that was initially enthusiastic. Among other things, this means that the program will often outlast any particular individual or set of individuals. Any new teachers who enter the school are informed that they are entering a Success for All school and are trained and socialized to the school's norms and behaviors. Cliques of "insiders" and "outsiders" are less likely to form since everyone was involved in the decision. The initial vote begins a process that we actively encourage of developing cohesion and a sense of mission among the school's staff.

Funding From Reliable Sources

Almost all Success for All schools fund their facilitators, tutors, and other continuing costs out of Title I and other funding sources that are both dedicated to improving the achievement of children in high-poverty schools and relatively reliable

(CSRD and other grants may be required for start-up, but not for long-term maintenance).

In fact, our experience has focused us on trying to ensure that schools can fund implementation of Success for All out of the funding sources likely to remain after any time-limited grant funds run out. We find that schools that have large amounts of grant funds are more likely to drop the program when those funds dry up than are schools that always had to rely on limited Title I and local funds. The close match between the focus of Success for All and that of Title I certainly has contributed to the maintenance of the program through the inevitable shifts in non-Title I funds that all schools experience.

National and Local Support Networks

Educational innovations that last are ones that involve educators in an active network of like-minded innovators. These networks hold national and local conferences, publish newsletters, and create an esprit de corps and a sense of belonging to a valued and caring organization. The network provides technical assistance and information, of course, but perhaps more importantly it provides emotional support to help innovators keep up their spirits and their efforts.

Success for All maintains a very active national network. We hold an annual three-day conference for experienced schools, which is very well attended by principals, facilitators, and some teachers. At this conference school staffs show off their latest developments and new ideas, attend workshops on common problems, and engage in other activities to hone their skills and understandings. We have a newsletter and other communications. The advice and technical assistance schools provide to each other is crucial, but the social support school leaders can provide each other may be even more crucial for long-term program maintenance.

Continuing Research and Development

A program must continue to grow, improve itself, and respond to (and incorporate, when appropriate) new developments in research and new popular ideas. A

problem in the longevity of innovations is that educators willing to implement one innovation are likely to be receptive to other innovations, too, leading to a flitting from one program to another. Programs need to constantly be learning from schools themselves and from other research, and then incorporating new ideas into new materials. This enables innovative educators to feel as though they are constantly growing and contributing to an endless development process. Continuing development is also necessary to respond to new standards, new assessments, and new objectives adopted by states and districts. In addition, continuing evaluations of program outcomes, if positive, contribute to a sense that a program is progressing and is justifying the efforts necessary to implement it. The Success for All Foundation has its own research unit that is constantly carrying out evaluations, reporting on evaluations done by others, and making recent evaluations available on our web site (www.successforall.net/resoure/researchpub.htm). The program itself is continually expanding and redeveloping existing programs and introducing new ones, so that schools that are receptive to innovations and research in general can find what they seek within the SFA network, rather than seeking other alternatives.

Conclusion

There is no guarantee that Success for All will continue to expand or maintain indefinitely. A decade from now, Success for All may be as much as a memory as programmed instruction, mastery learning, or Madeline Hunter. Yet we believe that as long as we can maintain the Success for All network, this program can continue indefinitely to affect the lives of hundreds of thousands of children. It is clear that educational programs do not maintain solely because they have a good research base and are popular and accessible. When they do maintain, it is because their developers and disseminators are constantly working on maintenance and quality and are building networks of technical and social support. To expect maintenance to occur on its own is naive, and this accounts for the bleached bones of once-promising innovations that litter

the educational landscape. Yet Success for All and other comprehensive, network-based innovations show the possibility that maintenance and quality can be achieved in school reform.

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