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Staking Out the Successful Student

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Abstract

With the performance of students, teachers, and schools defining success under current standards-based accountability policies (e.g. Chicago Public Schools (Note 1); *No Child Left Behind Act*, (United States Department of Education, 2002)), school districts are implementing various forms of intervention programs as a means to improve student performance. By examining a pilot summer school program that is transitioning from a 'low-stakes' to a 'high-stakes' intervention program, this article examines the possibilities that exist for students to author themselves as learners, and it questions whether opportunities for students to identify themselves as successful learners are lost when an intervention program, such as summer school, becomes mandatory. The implications of this analysis highlight questions and concerns that policymakers and school personnel need to address when formulating high-stakes standards-based accountability policies and intervention programs.

Under the current standards-based accountability reforms (e.g. Chicago Public Schools promotion requirements; *No Child Left Behind Act*), a student's failure to perform at the expected grade level criterion results in a series of possible negative consequences, e.g. retention, or contributing to a school being identified as failing. Local school districts implement intervention

programs, such as summer school, to improve student performance and prevent further negative consequences for the child and the school from occurring.

Multiple studies examine the effectiveness of summer school in improving student performance—or what some term preventing summer loss (Cooper, Charlton, Valentine, & Muhlenbruck, 2000; Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2001). For example, Cooper et al. (2000), through a meta-analytic and narrative review of 93 evaluations of summer school, found that summer school programs focused that on lessening or removing learning deficiencies have a positive impact on the knowledge and skills of participants (p. 89). Remedial summer programs have larger positive effects when the program is run for a small number of schools or classes in a small community. Additionally, summer programs that provide small group or individual instruction produce the largest impact on student outcomes (Cooper et al. 2000, p. 92).

Other studies examine the use of summer school as an intervention to avoid retention (Note 2). For example, Roderick, Bryk, Jacob, Easton, and Allensworth (1999), Roderick, Nagaoka, Bacon, and Eaton (2000), Allensworth (2004), and Nagaoka and Roderick (2004) explore the promotion policies within the Chicago Public School System's standards-based accountability reforms. Students in grades 3, 6, and 8 who fail to meet test score requirements on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) may attend summer school and re-take the test at the end of the session to avoid retention. Roderick et al. (2000) and Nagaoka and Roderick (2004) found that student performance in grades 3, 6, and 8 on the ITBS (Note 3) increased since the inception of the city's high-stakes policies. However, Roderick et al. (2000) state that the improvement in 3rd grade test scores may be due to the retention of students in the earlier grades. For example, in 1999, Chicago public schools retained 6.6% of 1st graders, 4.1% of 2nd graders, and 1.5% of kindergarteners; all of these are significant increases from previous school years (Roderick et al., 2000). Retained students still struggle with the promotion policy after repeating their respective grade (Roderick et al., 2000; Nagaoka & Roderick, 2004) (Note 4). Roderick et al. (2000) conclude that these policies are keeping students on track through demonstrating increased test scores for students prior to (e.g., 63% of 6th graders passing) and after (e.g., 83% of 6th graders passing) the promotion policies took effect. Yet, these authors have found that retained students are doing no better than those socially promoted, and students retained two years in a row are progressing at a slower pace (Roderick et al., 2000; Nagaoka & Roderick, 2004) (Note 5).

Within the analysis of the effects of intervention programs little discussion exists as to what effects such programs have on student identity. How does being identified as a failing student by a set of state or district mandated criterion affect one's self-construction as a learner. Are opportunities for students to identify themselves as successful learners lost when an intervention program, such as summer school, becomes mandatory? Such questions typically do not take on a role of prominence within the standards-based accountability movement. The emphasis on students within accountability policies resides in the student's ability to perform, demonstrating whether or not that student exemplifies the skills necessary to succeed within the system.

By examining a pilot summer school program that was in the process of transitioning from a 'low-stakes' to a 'high-stakes' intervention program, I explore the possibilities that exist for students to author themselves as learners. Consequently, the implications of this analysis highlight questions and concerns that policymakers and school personnel must address when formulating high-stakes standards-based accountability policies and intervention programs.

The Context

This study took place in a mid-size city in the Midwestern United States in the summer of 2002. The District developed this summer intervention program in response to a state-based statute titled *No Social Promotion* for grades 4 and 8 (Note 6). Thisstatute called for local school districts to develop a set of promotional criteria based on student performance on the state's standardized tests at grades 4 and 8, a student's report card, and teacher recommendations. The District developed a policy that determines the promotion of a student to the fifth or ninth grade to be based on a set of District-developed hierarchical criteria (Note 7). The District's first criterion is for the student to attain a minimum grade in language arts, math, science, and social studies. Failure to do so requires the student to attain a proficiency score of basic in that subject area on a state-based standardized test (Note 8). Failure to achieve that score(s) provides the student with the option to be retained or to attend a summer program. Thus, the student must pass the summer program in order to be promoted. Student failure of the program results in grade retention. This policy went into effect during the 2002-2003 school year.

The District piloted this observed voluntary summer program in order to prepare itself for the policy's implementation. Only students from the District's Title 1 schools were eligible to attend the program. The primary reason for this requirement is that Title 1 funding covered part of the cost of the program. The criteria used to recommend students for the summer program was based on a student's performance in math and language arts. The criteria (Note 9) for identification of 4th grade students eligible to attend the mathematics program required a student to meet two of the three following criteria, and that there is an expectation that the student's attendance during summer school will be good.

Mathematics Criteria

1) The student's 3rd quarter 4th grade report card identifies the student as either emerging or progressing in number and operations.
2) The student's 3rd quarter 4th grade report card identifies the student as either emerging or progressing in algebraic reasoning.
3) The student is in the bottom 25% of his/her class in mathematics procedural and conceptual knowledge.

The criteria for identification of 4th grade students eligible to attend the language arts program required a student to meet two of the three following criteria and that there is an expectation that the student's attendance during summer school will be good.

Language Arts Criteria

1) The student's 3rd grade state based reading test score was a minimal or basic.
2) The student's current Basic Reading Inventory Level was grade 5 or less.
3) The student's 3rd quarter 4th grade report card identifies the student as either emerging or progressing in comprehends a variety of texts.
4) The student's 3rd quarter 4th grade report card identifies the student as either emerging or progressing in applies six traits of writing.

Once the teachers identified those students who met the above mathematics and/or language arts criteria, the school principal sent a letter home inviting the student to attend the program. (See

Appendix 1 for a copy of the form letter.) The letter introduces the program to families as a voluntary opportunity for their child to improve her academic skills.

The District designed the summer program so that the students will take two course sections each day. Math and language arts were offered for the fourth grade summer school program. Site selection for this program took place at schools within the District that offered enrichment courses. Enrichment courses lasted for three weeks for any student in the District grades three through five. (Students who were not enrolled in the summer school program had to pay a fee and have their own transportation to take these enrichment courses.) The District divided enrichment school sites by location so that there were enrichment and summer school programs on the North side and on the South side. The program lasted for 29 days. In order to serve more students in the enrichment programs, the District conducted enrichment and summer programs at one school for three weeks on the North or South side and then moved to another school on the North or South side for the remaining three weeks. One of the reasons the summer school program located itself in the same buildings as the enrichment program was to offer students who only needed assistance in math, (which was the first class of the summer school program) to take the math class first and then an enrichment class during the second section of the day. If a student needed assistance in language arts only, she would take an enrichment class first and then the language arts class second. However, almost all the students' 4th grade teachers recommended that they enroll in both classes. In addition, different teachers taught the math classes and the language art classes. Finally, by using Title 1 monies to fund the summer school program, the District offered free transportation and a free breakfast to all participants.

Authoring One's Self as a Learner

Standards-based accountability reforms identify the students in regards to their level of performance in relation to a stated criterion or standard. Absent from this type of identification are the families', peers', or the students' own construction of themselves as a learners. When students enter an intervention program, how do these multiple constructions of themselves as learners affect their ability to identify themselves as students? For this article, Bakhtinian theory is used as a means to theorize the affects of the summer school program and the various stakeholders' images of that student on her self-construction. Bakhtinian theory provides a lens to tease apart the complex dialogues that exists within education and educational policy. Such a deconstruction provides an opportunity to identify the influence of these dialogic interactions on the student's self-authoring process.

According to Mikhail Bakhtin (1984; 1986), constructing one's self in the dialogic process is exemplified through the concept of authoring. Authoring, as understood through the dialogic relationship, is framed through the idea of the individual, the author, existing in constant relationship between other individuals and discourses (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 95). For Bakhtin, discourses are social phenomena that cover the entire range "from the sound image to the furthest reaches of abstract meaning (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 259). For example, the summer school student operates in dialogic relationships with her teachers, her classmates, the discourses of schooling, peer groups, pop culture, etc.

In view of Bakhtin's framing of the dialogic relationship, the summer school student addresses and answers herself, her teacher, and her classmates (Bakhtin, 1984; 1990; 1993). This fluid movement between multiple dialogic relationships creates a situation where the student's self-identification (Note 10) shifts depending on the individual she addresses or answers. For example, the student might ventriloquate (Bakhtin, 1981; Holquist, 1990; Wertsch, 1991) the school's

authoritative discourses by simply mimicking the words of her teacher or the curriculum. Additionally, the student might decide to take on the role the teacher verbally assigns her and wear it (Note 11) throughout the day in order to avoid drawing unwanted attention. The student might adopt this "clothing of language" as her own and decide that these "clothes" are what she will wear while she is in school, possibly at home, or even around her friends (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 291). These acts of ventiloquating and wearing another's words represent the interaction of many authors and many histories on the student's identity.

Furthermore, for Bakhtin, a student is in a constant state of construction in shaping who she is. A student's authoring of herself and the world around her is not the creation of a completed self-image. Rather, she is constantly changing her identity and the world around her through the various dialogic interactions that take place throughout the day and her life. Additionally, the people, objects, artifacts, etc that she interacts with on a daily basis have a history of their own that were shaped through their own dialogic relationships. Thus, the student's authorial process is in constant formation and reflects her various dialogic interactions with individuals and discourses (Bakhtin, 1986; 1993).

This article explores the generative constructs of these dialogic relationships and the density of discourses that influence the summer school student's self-authoring. Through this exploration, it is argued that the administrators', the teachers', the parents', and the students' framing of the summer program fostered multiple dialogic interactions that are not a part of the typical school year. These interactions allowed the students an opportunity to develop their selves in a supportive environment, which in turn lead to a positive self-image for many of these students.

Methods

This project developed out of a study that examined the effects of summer school on a student's identity as learner and a peer. Multiple forms of data collection were used throughout the project. Students were surveyed (Note 12) when entering (n=42) and exiting (n=30) the program (Note 13). In addition, parents were surveyed at the end of the program (n=11). Observations took place primarily in a Language Arts program (19 two-hour observations) at the South side location. Observations were conducted in the math program (8 two-hour observations) in order to identify patterns in my data and to contrast the students' experiences in different classroom settings. Field notes were generated after each visit in order to use in the analysis process. Additionally, two focal students were followed throughout the program, Steven, a bi-racial student diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder in kindergarten, and Teri, a Caucasian student who missed two months of school due to illnesses related to her tonsils, which were removed during the school year. Both students participated in the language arts program and the math program. Students were interviewed at the beginning and the end of the program. One of the two focal students' parents was interviewed. Pre- and post interviews were given to the students' two language arts teachers, Ms. Collins (a Caucasian female in early 30s who has taught elementary school for five years) and Ms. Hoff (a mid-twenties Caucasian female teacher who has one year of teaching experience as a substitute) who team taught the Language Arts class for all the students, and Ms. Klein (a Caucasian middle-aged woman who has taught for 15+ years.), a third of the students' math teacher, including the two focal students (Note 14).

Insights pertaining to the effects of this summer program on the authoring of the summer school student are drawn from the previously listed data sources. To provide additional support for these observations, direct quotes are included from the interviews and excerpts from program artifacts (such as the form letter from principals to parents) throughout the remainder of this article.

This analysis followed traditional qualitative inquiry (Wolcott, 1994; Strauss, 1996; Graue & Walsh, 1998). Field notes and interview transcripts were read and reread in order to identify relevant themes in the data, which were then coded using both external and internal codes (Graue & Walsh, 1998). External codes are codes that come out of my theoretical and conceptual perspectives about this research project (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. 163). Internal codes are codes that develop through my reading of the data (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. 163). For example, an external code was the teachers' constructions of the students. An internal code was the students' identifying themselves as successful learners. From these codes, the theme of providing the students with a chance to feel successful as learners was established. These themes derive themselves from the relevant data, and they were read against the text in search for contradictory evidence (Wolcott, 1994; Strauss, 1996; Graue & Walsh, 1998). From the memos developed in the analysis, narratives were written to describe the emerging themes (Graue & Walsh, 1998). Finally, these narratives were analyzed against Bakhtin's theoretical constructs of authoring and dialogic relationships in order to deconstruct the complexity of the dialogic processes that frame the student's ability to construct one's self as a learner.

Results

Opportunity

From the beginning, the intentions of this summer program were to provide the students with an opportunity to enhance their learning skills, e.g. the form letter from principals to parents. Because retaining students was not an issue, the majority of stakeholders (the administrators, teachers, parents, and students) did not express concern or anxiety as to what would happen over the course of the summer. For example, the three teachers interviewed for this study saw the summer program as an opportunity for the students to gain more confidence and to maintain, if not improve, their academic skills. Below, Ms. Klein's statement exemplifies this relaxed attitude that the three interviewed teachers had at the beginning of the summer school program. She saw this program as a time for students to build confidence and to foster more participation in the classroom discourse.

> What my image of summer school is is that it's a more relaxed atmosphere. The pace is a little slower. We're all feeling a little less pressured to accomplish something that… I don't feel like I have to… I don't have to finish this unit by this time and have an assessment because the report card is coming or something like that… And I think that's real freeing for a lot of these kids, especially from these kids who my assumption, and the ones I know… They weren't big participants in their school year math class, for example. So I think they can feel more comfortable and confident about participating than they would ordinarily. So I think it's a pretty good match. (Ms. Klein, initial interview)

Ms. Klein identifies this program as an opportunity for both the teacher and the student to build confidence and to enjoy participating in the school experience. She and the other interviewed teachers frame the students within a relaxed atmosphere rather than under the auspices of salvation (Popkewitz, 1998) or failure.

The recruiting letter for language arts teachers mirrors this idea of support for students. It states:

> [District's name] will pilot [program's name in bold face type] for rising 5th graders from schools eligible for Title 1 programming who need additional and intensive instruction in reading and math to meet anticipated criteria for promotion and to be successful at the next level. (February 15, 2002)

This document frames the students that the teachers would work with as needing support as they progress into the 5th grade. The primary goal was to assist the students in becoming proficient at the next grade level.

Additionally, all three teachers interviewed at this program felt less pressure to perform or to meet curricular deadlines. Rather than state that these students had to meet specific goals by a certain time, as demanded by a high-stakes intervention program, these teachers saw this intervention as a chance for these students to improve their academic and social skills at a pace that was not frustrating for the students. For instance, Ms. Hoff's comments reflect this concern in building the students' skills.

> Interviewer: What is the purpose behind this program?
>
> Ms. Hoff: I think to help these students… increase their reading ability. I'm sort of getting a sense that these are kids who would either not passing into the 5th grade or were really struggling in 5th grade if they didn't have this summer class. So they really need to… improve, I think, upon their skills they had coming into the reading, so they leave with perhaps more skills. Or just skills they might have had before but maybe they didn't have enough experience for kids so they become second nature. Just to give them a stronger base so that when they get into 5th grade, they're not struggling as much.

Opportunity and experience underlay Ms. Hoff's and the other teachers' construction of what the program provides these students. These teachers and the District artifacts define summer school as an opportunity rather than a necessity. The teachers' desires to at least maintain the students academic skills in a caring and low stress environment plays a critical role in shaping the dialogic relationships that exist between themselves, the students, and the program itself. The teachers oriented their expectations of their students in such a way that the students' needs drove the curriculum rather than meeting a specific performance standard, such as a cut score on a test.

Student uncertainty

Although the program's teachers had a vision as to what was to take place over the course of the summer, the students who entered summer school were unsure as to what they would experience. Below, Teri's comments reflect this apprehension.

Interviewer: Is this your first time in summer school?
Teri: Yeah.
I: Were you excited about coming?

T: Not really…
I: Why not?
T: Because I didn't think it was going to be fun…
I: What did you think was going to happen?
T: Like we'd have to work really hard.
I: Okay… What do you think you were going to learn this summer?
T: Like, stuff to help me read and do math.
I: What did your mom and dad tell you about summer school? (Note 15)
T: That it was going to be fun.

By initially defining the summer program as place where she would work "really hard," Teri assumed that summer school would mirror her previous experiences of schooling. Whether or not high-stakes are in play. Teri's expectations mirror what most students think when they are told that they have to attend summer school.

The program

The participants' statements and District documents authored the summer school student through the idea of improving a student's reading and math skills. This emphasis on improvement also appears in how these teachers define a successful summer program, which provides additional insight in how the authoritarian stakeholders in the program frame their expected responses from the students. For example, Ms. Collin's defines a successful program similarly to Ms. Hoff's objective to improve the students' reading skills. She states:

> If we end the summer with… close to the same amount of kids that started. I think that will be a huge success. Hmm… (PAUSE) If they can talk about and demonstrate some of the strategies that we've been working on. My big goal is for them to read cover to cover while constantly questioning what they read. If they're asking lots of questions when they read… If they each have a library card. (Ms. Collins, initial interview)

Ms. Collin's goals for her students were tangible within the time span of the program. Her intentions were to provide these students with the skills that successful readers possess—being an avid reader, using multiple strategies to make meaning or decode words, etc (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Ms. Collin's, her colleague's, and the program's goals created relationships with the students that deemphasize achieving a single goal or test score while encouraging these students to develop multiple academic and social skills. Helping students build academic skills rather than attempting to 'fix' the students academic or social behaviors frame the teacher's dialogic relationship with the student in a different light.

The curriculum

The teachers, parents, and students interacted with the program's curriculum. In many ways, the teacher-implemented curriculum answered what the summer program's expectations were for the students and parents. Furthermore, the curriculum provided the students with an understanding as to what their teachers and the summer program would expect of them.

Although the curriculum played a large role with the interactions that took place in the school, the District did not design the summer program with a standardized curriculum or curricular method in mind (e.g. Direct Instruction (Engelmann & Osborn, 1999)). Additionally, the District did not provide the teachers with specific goals or targets to reach. The District subject area coordinators made curriculum suggestions and provided support to the teachers through meetings and providing subject specific materials. For example, the math teachers were part of a grant with the local university where they worked with a District math coordinator and university professors in developing instructional practices that fostered the understanding of math concepts rather than fact based knowledge--using instructional models such as cognitively guided instruction (Carpenter & Fennema, 1999). The summer school math teachers from both sites met weekly and discussed what content they thought vital to teach to their students. The literacy teachers met sporadically with a literacy resource person from the District and planned instruction at their respective sites rather than as a team. The literacy teachers were asked to use what the District administrators defined as a balanced literacy approach and to emphasize the use of non-fiction texts in their instruction.

The absence of clear curricular requirements is seen in the statements of Ms. Hoff.

Interviewer: What were you told were the goals for the summer program and the kids?

Ms. Hoff: I think in the summer, it's done a little differently than during the school year. It's definitely more laid back in the sense that we're not really given clear expectations of… "This is what you had to do in your classroom. This is what it should look like." We set it up to look like and to work with something we were comfortable with. The primary expectation that I got was the fact that these kids need to read. They need to have an opportunity to read during the day. They need to be able to strengthen their skills. (initial interview)

The script by which the teachers interacted with their students depended upon their professional judgment. This emphasis of their instruction was on providing the students with opportunity to use and maintain the skills they already possessed (Ms. Klein makes similar comments when discussing the math expectations). For example, in the languages arts program, reading instruction and book selection focused on the students' abilities as determined by a Basic Reading Inventory (Johns, 1997). Thus, how the various students were addressed by the curriculum depended upon the teacher's professional knowledge of math or literacy development and how that teacher approached using this knowledge with her students. This variation provided the students with the opportunity to answer the teacher-generated curriculum in a multitude of ways, and since the teachers themselves decided upon the curricular outcomes, this experience provided the students with a more individualized experience.

When discussing curriculum opportunities, Ms. Klein argues that no one curriculum would work for such a program.

Ms. Klein: I think more than anything we know that there is no curriculum that really does a good job for this kind of thing. No one curriculum. (Final interview)

Thus, the interactions that took place in the classroom between the student and the teacher not only varied due to the teacher's personality but also through the varied curricular experiences the children received. The authoring of the student was not only dependent upon the individuals involved with the program, but also with the classrooms instructional materials and practices. The absence of

specific curricular goals or a teacher-scripted curriculum provided an opportunity for the teachers to frame their interactions with students themselves rather than as the result of District or state policymakers' demands.

This program centered on providing individualized learning experiences that offered students the opportunity to maintain and even enhance their literacy and math skills. The summer school students interacted with these teachers' expectations, the curriculum, and their families various discourses, all of which generated various experiences and understandings as to what it means to be a student in this summer school program. Teachers and students addressed and answered each other in academic relationships that centered on their personal needs rather than an outside authority's wants or demands. The teacher's framing of the students was based on personal relationships and personal interests more so than on outside constructs of what it means to be a fifth grade student. However, the teachers did implement a curriculum that they thought was necessary for students to be successful in the fifth grade. The discussions in the next section outline whether the teachers thought this approach was successful in preparing these students for the next grade level.

The program effects

At the end of this summer school program, the majority of the program participants felt a sense of relief and accomplishment. In particular, students saw themselves as being ready for the next grade level, and the teachers stated that students were better prepared for the upcoming year. For example, Ms. Collins, a former fifth grade teacher, saw the students as prepared for the next grade level.

Interviewer: How do you think these guys are ready for 5th grade?
Ms. Collins: (PAUSE) Hmm… I think… (PAUSE) I think they'll be fine for 5th grade.
I: Can you think of any way they're not prepared for 5th grade?
Ms. C: No. I think they're really eager, all of them.
I: You're a 5th grade teacher so…
Ms. C: Right, right. I think they're really eager. I think they'll do well.

Ms. Hoff discussed the children's future in the context of the overall program and saw the students as being better prepared for next year.

Ms. Hoff: I think all the kids made improvements in different areas. They read more material, built some new strategies for reading and I think will be stronger going into next year than if they had not done this program. (Ms. Hoff, post interview)

Ms. Hoff believed the students are more prepared for the next grade, and all of the teachers believed that without the summer program the students would not be as prepared for the 5th grade.

The quantitative data that measured student achievement is suspect due to the large number of absences and a failure to have pre and post data for several students. The student's BRI scores exemplify this problem. For the students whom attended the program for 20 or more days (n=34), 22 students have pre and post test BRI scores. For 13 students there is not data because they attended the program for 19 or fewer days. Of the 22 students who did attend a majority of the program,

- 12 students increased their score by one grade level
- 9 students stayed at the same grade level

- 1 student dropped a grade level (see Table 1 for details)

Table1
Basic Reading Inventory Scores

Student	North or South Side	# of days in attendance	Pre-program BRI level	Post program BRI level
1	South	24	5*	6
2	South	23	-	3
3	South	27	5	6
4	South	23	-	-
5	South	22	5	6
Teri	South	28	4	5
7	South	27	4	4
8	South	28	2	2
9	South	27	3	4
Steven	South	27	5	5
11	South	27	3	3
12	South	17	3	4
13	South	25	4	5
14	North	29	6	6
15	North	27	5	6
16	North	9	-	-
17	North	6	-	-
18	North	14	-	-
19	North	18	-	6
20	North	2	-	-
21	North	18	6	6
22	North	21	3	4
23	North	26	3	4
24	North	13	-	-
25	North	23	5	5
26	North	12	-	-
27	North	28	-	4
28	North	28	4	3
29	North	29	6	6
30	North	20	-	-
31	North	21	-	6
32	North	15	-	-
33	North	28	4	4
34	North	8	-	-
35	North	4	-	-
36	North	27	-	4
37	North	27	-	6
38	North	29	4	5
39	North	21	-	3
40	North	22	-	-
41	North	10	-	-
42	North	28	3	4
43	North	27	4	4
44	North	29	-	5
45	North	23	-	4
46	North	23	3	4
47	North	23	4	-

*According to Johns (1997), these numbers represent the grade level at which the student is reading.

Turning to the comments of students who did attend the program, one finds that those who participated in the summer program found the program to be worthwhile. For example, the two focal children felt that they gained skills in reading and math that would prepare them for the fifth grade.

Teri: Yeah. I know… I learned some new stuff about reading…
Interviewer: Like…
T: Like… to think about every paragraph. To stop and think after a paragraph.
I: What about math? What did you learn in math?
T: I learned some tricks for plus nines.

Teri gained academic skills that made her feel more confident in math and reading, and she felt that this knowledge would make her more successful as a student.

Additionally, for Steven, he saw his time in the program as being fun and productive rather than sitting at home watching TV, which he found to be boring.

Interviewer: So what was summer school like for you this year?
Steven: Fun.
I: Why was it fun?
S: It's boring at my house.
I: It's boring at your house so you'd rather be here?
S: Yes.
I: If you were at home, what would you be doing?
S: Watching TV.
I: And you'd rather be in school?
S: Yes.
I: So what do you think… So you like coming to school because it's fun… Why is it fun?
S: I like having work.

In regards to all the student participants, half of those who responded to the end of the program surveys (n=30; 20 North side (N), 10 South side (S)) rated the experience as either great or good (Note 16).

- 6 or 20% (5 N, 1 S) thought it was great
- 12 or 40% (10 N, 2 S) thought it was good
- 9 or 30% (4 N, 5 S) thought it was fair
- 1 or 3% (1 S) thought it was bad
- 2 or 6% (1 N, 1 S) thought is was horrible.

From the parent's perspective, the program was beneficial. For example, Teri's mother felt that Teri was prepared for reading but not sure about math.

Interviewer: Now that summer school is almost over, how do you think she's ready for 5th grade?

Teri's Mom: She seems to be, I mean, with the reading for sure. But like I said, with the math, I still don't know.

Teri's mother did not know where her daughter's math skills were because of the lack of contact between the school and the parents. She knew about Teri's literacy experience because she picked Teri up from school every day, which provided her with the opportunity to talk with Ms. Collins and Ms. Hoff on a regular basis.

What's interesting about this is that the parents understanding of their children's experiences in summer school came solely from their interactions with their children. Parents did not receive notes, report cards, or updates on their students' progress over the course of the summer. Yet, out of those 11 who sent back a survey, all 11 parents (100%) stated that if they had another child in 4th grade that was invited to participate in the program that they would let that child go. Additionally, a majority of the parents felt that their children gained skills and confidence in the academic subjects the program covered. For example, eight of the parents (73%) believed that their children became better readers. However, only 5 of the parents (45%) believed that their children became better at math. Thus, these families' judgments about the program were made solely through what their children told them, and whatever information was shared was evidently enough to convince them that the overall program was worthwhile.

This student support of the program is exemplified in Teri's comments.

Interviewer: Okay. If you were going to describe summer school to one of your friends, what would you say?
Teri: It was fun and… I learned a lot… I don't know.
I: Was it easy?
T: Sort of.
I: Sort of. It wasn't too hard?
T: No.
I: Was the school year harder for you than summer school or was it about the same?
T: About the same.

For Teri, the program was similar in difficulty to the regular school year experience, and she felt that she learned quite a bit in her experiences during the summer. Thus, rather than entering the fifth grade unsure about her skills or preparedness, Teri, as well as her mother, felt she would have a successful year.

Steven's comments echo this sentiment

Interviewer: Do you feel like you're ready for the 5th grade?
Steven: Yes.
C: How are you ready?
S: I don't know. Hmm… I'm good at math and stuff.
C: Do you think you're ready for 5th grade math?
S: Yes.

Rather than seeing themselves as students on the brink of failure, these students felt that they were ready for the next level of schooling. Although Steven and Teri felt prepared for the next level, this does not mean that all the students would submit themselves to this experience again. In fact, in the end of the program survey the children were asked if they were given the choice to go to summer

school again, what would they choose. Six or 20% (2 N, 4 S) would choose to go again, and twenty-two children or 73% (17 N, 5 S) would choose not to go again.

In examining how these various discourses speak to each other and across each other, one immediately recognizes that there is a consistent dialogue of overall success for those who participated in the program provided the students with the opportunity to develop a positive self-image as a student. However, the issue of attendance causes (see Note 13) one to question whether these positive self-constructions would exist if all students who were asked to attend participated in the program—an issue of internal validity. Their absence might be a statement of failure or simple a lack of interest in the program. For those students who did choose to participate and stay in the program, there was an underlying theme of success within their personal constructions of themselves as students.

Discussion

The construction of the summer school student is the interaction of multiple discourses, e.g. the teachers, families, etc. The student's authoring of herself as a student reflects this multiplicity of other's words. Thereby, examining the data above provides insight about the complexity that exists in attempting to identify the effects of a summer school program on the student's construction of one's self as a learner. However, the absence of those who chose not to participate speaks just as loudly as those who were present for the program. Additionally, according to Bakhtin, "Life by its very nature is dialogic," and this construction of existence points to the importance of how the participants' utterance spoke to each other and across various themes (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 293). Recognizing the influence of these interactions between the participants sheds light on the influence of such exchanges on the opportunities for student's to author themselves as learners.

From the beginning, the purpose of this program was quite different from a high-stakes standards-based accountability summer school program. Teacher recommendations and student/family participation determined student enrollment. Consequences were not a part of the equation, and a single test score or other criteria did not affect student entry. Prescribed curricula were not a part of the program. Promotion to the fifth grade was not an issue, and thus, the general framework in which these dialogic interactions took place illuminates the transition from a 'traditional' summer intervention program to a 'high-stakes' intervention program. The teachers and program administrators' utterances created an authorial discourse that centered on support rather than preventing failure. Students were not preoccupied with whether or not they would enter the fifth grade, which provided them with the opportunity to focus their summer experience on improving their own skills and learning.

However, to state that the program's emphasis on opportunity provided students with an environment in which they could develop their academic skills and gain confidence in their abilities underestimates the complexity of the dialogic interactions that exist within the authoring process. The data support the argument that the program was successful in providing students with the opportunity to develop in a positive manner. How positive this opportunity was depends on the students. For Teri and Steven, they felt that they were successful in the program, and they felt prepared for the next grade level. For those who chose not to participate in or left the program, their level of success was not as high those who chose to continue to participate in the program. Possibly, those students who decided not to participate felt that they were already prepared for the 5th grade. Nonetheless, the absence of high-stakes and program emphasis on support and skill building created a schooling environment that offered students the opportunity to develop

themselves as students in various dialogic relationships that supported their growth in terms of where they were as learners rather than in response to a particular cut score or other performance standard.

Implications

To begin, this program demonstrates that when the learning environment within schools centers on opportunity rather than the prevention of failure, all members of the community **still** work towards the same goals. Additionally, this summer program validates that spaces can exist for the struggling student to develop her skills in order to be more successful in schooling (Note 17). However, as this program demonstrates, such spaces typically exist outside the confines of the high-stakes accountability movement. Nonetheless, there are several lessons that can be learned from this 'low-stakes' summer program.

Authoritarian discourses, anticipated responses, and dialogic positioning affect students' perceptions of themselves as learners. Policymakers, schools, administrators, and teachers must consider how the policies and programs they create alter the complex dialogic relationships of schooling. Any type of stake shapes the opportunities for the student and her/his family, classmates, and teachers. Although this study represents a small sample of students who attended a particular summer school program, it demonstrates the power of and complexity in defining performance. Thus, high-stakes policies must expand their definition of success and recognize that for students, parents, and teachers school success is more than meeting a specific performance criterion. Steven's defining a good student as one who behaves well in class exemplifies this point. Additionally, Steven's example highlights how students are cognizant of their strengths and weaknesses in schooling. The prescriptive nature of high-stakes accountability policies create a situation where success is defined by a single or limited set of criteria. This restricted definition of success creates a dialogic relationship for the student that stifles the possibility for that student to author his/her learning experiences as being positive. The possibility to create opportunity for change is overridden by a "catch-up" mentality in order to ensure promotion.

The data above also highlight the importance for the various levels of public schooling to recognize their role in authoring the student. Whether stakes are high or low students and families internalize, as well as, react to the discourses that address them when they enter a school. High-stakes policies center around success and failure, but even a 'low-stake' environment creates a dialogic relationship that affects the student. How schools, administrators, and teachers interact with their student population plays a significant role in how students author themselves as learners, and stakeholders need to remember the importance of these interactions when implementing policies that directly affect students and their families.

Finally, within K-12 schooling, there will always be stakes that determine whether a student should attend summer school. The symbolic power (Ellwein, 1987; Ellwein & Glass, 1989) and the spectacle (Edelman, 1985; Edelman, 1988; Smith, Miller-Kahn, Heinecke, & Jarvis, 2004) that such policies create ensure their position in the landscape of education reform (e.g. the New York City Public Schools recent implementation of a 3rd grade promotion policy). Additionally, the recent shift in government towards a neo-liberal/managerial role in education which provides supplemental education services outside of the school (e.g. *No Child Left Behind Act*) causes one to question whether intervention programs such as the one I observed can exist in the current education reform landscape (Clarke & Newman, 1994; Apple, 2001) (Note 18).

Nevertheless, how states, districts, or individual schools set those stakes plays a key factor in framing the dialogic relationships that exists between the program and the student and her family. The more prescriptive and authoritarian the system, the less likely the student will be able to escape the notion of failure from her authoring of herself as a student. This idea of failure embedded in high-stakes policies creates a more difficult task for school personnel and families to assist students in constructing themselves as successful learners. Therefore, systems of accountability should base their decisions on several criteria rather than a single indicator (e.g., Heubert & Hauser, 1999; Baker, Linn, Herman, & Koretz, 2002; Linn 2003) (Note 19).

Although eliminating the construct of failure from schooling is nearly impossible, education policymakers must consider whether this is truly an issue of systemic failure (e.g. Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Bracey, 2002), and if so, they should consider placing this failure construct on multiple actors, including their own selves, administrators, teachers, and the curriculum rather than on the individual student. Such a positioning frames programs such as summer school in a very different light, creating an environment where the intervention becomes as a different type of instruction rather than a form of punishment.

Notes

1 See http://www.cps.edu/Promotion.html for an example of the district's promotion policies.
2 Researchers (including the researchers at the Consortium on Chicago School Research) have consistently found that retention offers no positive effects for the retained students. In fact, retention typically results in lower achievement and higher dropout rates for retained students in comparison to their peers (see Holmes & Matthews, 1984; Labaree, 1984; Shepard & Smith, 1986; Holmes, 1989; Meisels, 1992; Reynolds, 1992; Rumberger, 1995; Reynolds & Temple, 1997; McCoy & Reynolds, 1999; Zill, 1999; Alexander, Entwisle, & Kabbani 2000; Graue & DiPerna, 2000). For example, using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, Rumberger (1995) found that at the individual level retention is the single most powerful predictor of student drop out. Retained students were four times more likely to drop out, even after Rumberger controlled for student background and school measures.
3 According to the Chicago Public Schools' policy, a student's score on the ITBS determines whether s/he is promoted to the next grade level in grades 3, 6, and 8.
4 Less than 60 percent of retained third and sixth graders in 1998 and 1999 were able to raise their test scores to the promotional cutoff (Nagaoka & Roderick, 2004). For many students, this is the fourth time they have taken the grade-level test—2 times during the school year and 2 times during the summer (Roderick et al., 2000, p. 10).
5 Agencies, such as the U. S. Department of Education (1999), researchers such as Reynolds and Temple (1997), Darling-Hammond (1998), and McCoy and Reynolds (1999) and professional organizations such as Phi Delta Kappa (McCay, 2001) recognize the dilemmas states and school districts face with this issue of social promotion. These organizations and authors recommend that states and school districts consider such measures as strengthening learning opportunities in the classroom (e.g., tutors, well-trained teachers, reduced class size), providing intervention services at early age (e.g., comprehensive early childhood programs) extending the amount of learning time (e.g., after-school, summer school, and year-round schooling), and holding schools accountable for performance (e.g., rewards and sanctions) (Reynolds & Temple, 1997; Darling-Hammond, 1998; McCoy & Reynolds, 1999; U. S. Dept. of Education, 1999; McCay, 2001).

6 All references used to identify individuals or institutions are pseudonyms.
7 This study specifically centered on the fourth grade program, which was a half-day program that lasted for six weeks.
8 All students in grades 4, 8, and 10 in the state of Wisconsin are to take the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam (WKCE). There are four levels of performance on the WKCE: minimal, basic, proficient, and advanced.
9 These criteria were sent to the principals of the District's Title 1 elementary schools from the director of teaching and learning and the math and language arts coordinators.
10 Throughout my discussion of Bakhtinian theory and the student's self-construction in the dialogic process, I am not using Bakhtinian theory to untangle the psychological process of identify formulation. Rather, my emphasis is on the opportunities that are created in the dialogic process for the student to view one's self as a successful learner. Thus, if the opportunities for the student exist to identify her/his self as a successful learner, what happens? The psychological process of identity formulation is beyond the scope of my work, but there are theorists, such as Wertsch (1991), who link Bakhtinian theory to the psychological process (e.g. Wertsch connects Bakhtinian theory with Vygotsky's (e.g., 1978) work).
11 As Bakhtin (1984) notes, words can clothe the individual: ". . . the clothing of language, a new mode for wearing one's one body, one's embodiment" (p. 291).
12 All surveys, interviews, and student writing activities were voluntary, and therefore, not all student and their families participated. Additionally, only students who participated in the language arts program and their families were surveyed. See Appendix 2 for copies of the surveys.
13 The attrition of students throughout the program was a major issue for the school district. For example, only forty-seven of the original sixty-two students who signed up for the program attended summer school. Of the forty-seven students who did attend, only thirty-four students attended the program for twenty or more days.
14 All three teachers were licensed by the state of Wisconsin to teach at the elementary school level.
15 At the time that I asked this question, I knew that Teri lived in a home with a mother and father.
16 Due to the small response size, I am not making any claims for statistical significance with these responses, and because the program's retention rates were poor, I recognized that the survey data is biased. However, the data provides support to the comments and statements made by the individuals interviewed for this study.
17 My findings provide further qualitative support to the work of Cooper et al. (2000).
18 Additionally, are such intervention programs dependent upon the dire consequences these policies create in order to receive funding?
19 I want to thank Bernardo Hoes, Beth Graue, Denise Oen, Robin Fox, and Lucinda Heimer for their comments and suggestions to improve the various drafts of this article.

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Appendix 1

<Date>

Dear Parent:

There are still nine weeks left in the 2001-2002 school year and we are continuing to work very hard with your child to help him/her make the gains necessary for success in the 5th grade. However, if we are not able to help your child make these gains by the end of the school year, your child will have the opportunity to participate in an exciting learning opportunity this summer. We want you to know about this opportunity now so you can make summer plans for your child.

The District will have a six-week program for students at our school who completing the 4th grade need additional instruction in mathematics or reading to be more successful in 5th grade. The [program's name in bold typeface] will be June 17-July 26, 8:00 –12:15 p. m. In the [program's name] your child will work with a teacher on improving either mathematics or reading or both. If your child needs instruction in only one of those classes, s/he will also be able to take one of the [program's name] enrichment summer school classes.

The [program's name in bold face type] is provided at no charge. Transportation to and from the [program's name in bold face type] also will be provided at no cost to you. All you need to do is fill out the attached form to tell us that you are interested in your child participating in the [program's name in bold face type] and then, if we are able to enroll your child, make sure your child attends every day.

I hope that you will arrange your summer plans so that your child can enroll in the [program's name in bold face type] <u>if</u> he or she is eligible. I think the [program's name] offers a wonderful opportunity for your child to get the extra instruction he or she needs. Your child's teacher or another staff person from (name of school) will call you soon to talk with you about the [program's name in bold face type]. If you have any other questions, please call me.

Sincerely,

School Principal
Phone Number:

Appendix 2

Student pre-[program's name] Survey
Circle the word or number that best answers the question:

1. Are you a (circle one)? Boy Girl

2. How old are you? 7 8 9 10 11 12

3. At which school did you attend fourth grade?

4. Have you ever repeated a grade before? Yes No If yes, which one?_____

5. How many brothers and sisters do you have all together? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

6 Are any of your brothers or sisters in summer school? Yes No If yes, How many?_____

7. During the school year, where did you go after school? (circle the one you did most)
childcare came home after school program went to a friend's house stayed w/ a relative

8. During the school year, how many hours a day did you read (not including school)?
0 less than 1 1 2 3 4 5 6

9. During the school year, how many hours a day did you watch TV or play video games?
0 less than 1 1 2 3 4 5 6

10. How many hours a day did you spend doing homework in the 4th grade?
0 less than 1 1 2 3 4 5 6

11. Outside of school, whom do you usually play with (circle one)? Alone A friend A relative

12. What was your favorite part of 4th grade? (circle one)
Reading Math Social Studies Science Music Art P.E. Lunch Computers Recess

13. What is your least favorite part of 4th grade? (circle one)
Reading Math Social Studies Science Music Art P.E. Lunch Computers Recess

14. My 4th grade teacher was (circle all that apply)
Helpful Caring Smart Strict Fun Boring Hard to understand

15. I got along with my 4th grade teacher this year. (Circle one) Yes No

16. Rate your work in the 4th grade. It was . . . (circle one)
Horrible Poor Okay Pretty good The best

17. When I do my homework, I usually (circle one)

do a good job do a bad job get confused forget to do it need someone to help me

18. When I take a test, I usually (circle one)
do a good job do an okay job do a bad job get confused cheat on the test

---

19. I feel that I am ready to go to the 5th grade (circle one) Yes No Not sure

---

20. Who first told you that you had to go to summer school?(circle one) Parent Teacher

---

21. Is this your first time in summer school? Yes No

---

22. Do you want to be in summer school? (circle one) Yes No

---

23. I am going to summer school because . . . (circle all that apply)
I want to go My parents want me to go My teacher wants me to go
I want to take an enrichment course I don't know

---

24. I need help in these subjects (circle all that apply).
Reading Math Social Studies Science Art Music

---

25. In summer school, I think I will (circle all that apply)
Read Do Math Play games Have homework Take tests Do worksheets

---

26. In summer school, I do not want to (circle all that apply)
Read Do Math Play games Have homework Take tests Do worksheets

---

27. If I were not in summer school, I would be (circle one)
At home with my family At a camp At child care With a relative With a friend

Please write answers to these questions as best you can. (If you need more space, you can write on the back of the page.)

1. Why are you in summer school?

2. What do you hope to learn in summer school?

3. How would you rank yourself as a student? (circle one)
Horrible Poor Okay Pretty good The best
- Why?

Student post [program's name] Survey
Circle the word or number that best answers the question:

1. Are you a (circle one)? Boy Girl

2. How old are you? 7 8 9 10 11 12

3. At which school did you attend fourth grade?

4. Have you ever repeated a grade before? Yes No If yes, which one?_____

5. How many brothers and sisters do you have all together? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

6 Are any of your brothers or sisters in summer school? Yes No If yes, How many?_____

7. During the summer, where did you go after school? (circle the one you did most)
child care came home after school program went to a friend's house stayed w/ a relative

8. During summer school, how many hours a day did you read (not including school)?
0 less than 1 1 2 3 4 5 6

9. During the summer, how many hours a day did you watch TV or play video games?
0 less than 1 1 2 3 4 5 6

10. How many hours a day did you spend doing homework this summer?
0 less than 1 1 2 3 4 5 6

11.Outside of school, who did you usually play with (circle one)? Alone A friend A relative

12. Was this your first time in summer school? yes no

13. Overall, how would you rate your summer school experience? (circle one)
Great Good Fair Bad Horrible

14. What was your favorite part of summer school?
Reading Math Enrichment Class Recess

15. What was your least favorite part of summer school?
Reading Math Enrichment Class Recess

16. My parents helped with summer school when I needed it (circle one) Yes No

17. My summer school teacher was (circle all that apply)
Helpful Caring Smart Strict Fun Boring Hard to understand

18. I got along with my summer school teacher? (circle one) Yes No

19. Rate how you did your work in summer school. I did . . . (circle one)
A really bad job A bad job An okay job A good job A great job

20. My reading class this summer was . . . (circle one)
Too easy Easy Just right Hard Too hard

21. My math class this summer was . . . (circle one)
Too easy Easy Just right Hard Too hard

22. I feel that I still need help in these subjects (circle all that apply)
Reading Math Social Studies Science Art Music

23. If I had a choice to go to summer school again, I would choose (circle one): To go Not to go

24. In summer school, I felt that I did a . . . (circle one)
A great job A good job A fair job A bad job A really bad job

Please write answers to these questions as best you can. (If you need more space, you can write on the back of the page.)

1. What did you learn this summer?

2. How would you rank yourself as a student? (circle one)
Horrible Poor Okay Pretty good The best
- Why?

3. Make a list of all the things that you liked about the summer school and a list of all the things that you did not like about summer school?

Things I liked about the Academy Things I disliked about the Academy

Please answer the questions as best you can:

1. How are you related to the child in your household who attended summer school?

2. How old are you?

3. Which school did your child attend fourth grade at last year?

4. How many children are in your family?

5 Are any of them besides the fourth grader attending summer school? Yes No How many?

6. What did your child do after the summer school program each day? (circle one)
child care came home day camp go to a friend's house stay with a relative

7. Circle all the activities that you child participated in over the summer.
watching TV/playing video games team sports reading playing outside playing an instrument

8. How often and for how long did your child participate in each activity?
watching TV/playing video games _____ team sports_____

reading _____ playing an instrument_____ playing outside_____

9. How often did just you and your child do something together? (circle one)
Everyday Couple times per week Once per week Once per month Never

10. How often do you and your child read together? (circle one)
Everyday Couple times per week Once per week Once per month Never

11. Does your child usually play alone, with friends, or with family?

12. Was this your child's first time in summer school? If not, after what grade level did he or she attend it before?

13. What was your child's favorite part of summer school? (circle one)
Reading Math Enrichment Class Recess

14. What was your child's least favorite part of summer school? (circle one)
Reading Math Enrichment Class Recess

15. How often was your child's summer school teacher in touch with you? (circle one)
Everyday Few times per week Once per week One time Two times Never

16. How often did you go to your child's class(es) over the summer? (circle one)

Everyday Few times per week Once per week One time Two times Never

17. Do you believe that you child learned to become a better reader because he/she participated in the academy? yes no

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18. Do you believe that you child became better in math because he/she participated in the Academy? yes no

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19. Do you believe that your child is ready to enter fifth grade? yes no

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20. Rate your child's literacy teacher.
Horrible Poor Average Good Excellent

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21. Rate your child's math teacher.
Horrible Poor Average Good Excellent

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22. Do you believe that the Intermediate Academy was well organized? yes no

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23. If you had another child in the fourth grade and he/she were invited to participate in the summer reading academy, would you let him/her? yes no

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24. Overall, how would you rate your child's experience this summer? (circle one)
poor fair somewhat worthwhile very worthwhile

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25. How many weeks out of the 6 did your child attend the academy? (Circle one)
1 2 3 4 5 6

Please write answers to these questions as best you can. (Please feel free to write on the back of the sheet if necessary).

1. What did your child learn in summer school this year?

2. What grade would you give your child's summer school experience?
Circle one (A being best and F worst): A B C D F
Why?

3. How do you think summer school changed your child as a student?

4. If you could change anything about the [District's name] summer reading program, what would it be and why?

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