Teachers' perspectives on grade retention: is it effective?

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TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON GRADE RETENTION,
IS IT EFFECTIVE?

by
JOSEPH TERCH IV

A Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
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of
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Professor

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ABSTRACT

Joseph Terch IV
Teachers’ Perspectives on Grade Retention, is it Effective?
2002-2003
Dr. Xin
Master of Arts in Special Education

Grade retention has been a problem since the mid-19th century when the concept of individual grades replaced the one room schoolhouse. Extensive research was reported on grade retention, its effect, and impact on the referral of students with learning disabilities, parent and teacher perspectives. The research findings on retention are inconclusive and questionable. The purposes of this study are (a) to evaluate the teacher attitudes towards grade retention, and (b) to compare the differences of teacher attitudes at elementary, middle and high school levels. A survey was developed and approximately 150 were distributed to teachers. Of these 150, 120 were returned and analyzed. In all 66% of teachers (N=73) agreed that grade retention is a necessary educational practice, and 55% of teachers (N=64) agreed that they have or would recommend retention to the principal or to parents. Significant differences were found among the elementary, middle and high school teachers on their responses to 6 questions/statements. Overall, teachers in this survey support retention and believed that it should be implemented in the early grades. The teachers suggest that
the decision to retain should not be affected by student physical status, or standardized test scores; instead it should be influenced by the student’s ability to complete assignments. Overall, the teachers do not feel that grade retention harms a student’s self-concept instead it may help aid in student maturity.
Mini-Abstract

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Extensive research was reported on grade retention, its effect, and impact on the referral of students with learning disabilities, parent and teacher perspectives. The research findings on retention are inconclusive and questionable. The purposes of this study are (a) to evaluate the teacher attitudes towards grade retention (b) to compare the differences of teacher attitude at elementary, middle and high school levels. A survey was developed and approximately 150 were distributed to teachers. Significant differences were found among the elementary, middle and high school teachers on their responses to 6 questions/statements. Overall, teachers in this survey supported retention and believed that it should be implemented in the early grades.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Grade retention of students has been a problem since the mid-19th century when the concept of individual grades replaced the one room schoolhouse (Holmes, 1989). This caused about one-half of the students to be retained at least once before they reached the eighth grade. Grade retention as a practice in school has been implemented for many years, however, there is little research to support this practice in student academics (Holmes, 1989; Holmes & Mathews, 1984; Jackson 1975). Jimerson (2001) reviewed a total of 20 studies conducted between 1990 and 1999. These studies were separated into two groups, socioemotional adjustment and academic achievement, to analyze findings. Of these studies exploring the efficacy of grade retention, 4 found favorable conclusions while the other 16 found not favorable (Jimerson, 2001). It seems that grade retention may not help children catch up in academics (Shepard & Smith, 1990). As a result, it may show some short-term positive effects but in a long term the retained students are at a much greater risk of failure or dropping out of school (Shepard & Smith 1990).

The purpose of grade retention is to solve the problem of some students’ poor performance. The school makes those students repeat the grade to ensure that they will master the skills at the grade level. This assumption may indicate that the problem resides in the student, rather than the school or instructional practices. Therefore, the students must
repeat the same experience where they did not achieve success the first time, in order to master the material (Darling-Hammond, 1989). Students who are struggling are provided the chance to, “Refresh, relearn, and acquire new skills that help them to the next grade level” (Darling-Hammond, 1989, p.43). By doing this, the schools would save money, time, increase academic integrity, and also prevent dropouts (Darling-Hammond, 1989).

The debate over grade retention in schools has continued for many years (Bornfield, 1994). There are different ideas on retention. Some may support the practice and some may not. A major problem with retention is the surprising number of students with learning disabilities who are retained (McLeskey & Grizzle, 1992). It is found that 58% of students with learning disabilities were retained at least once before they were referred to special education programs in 1992; the number was increased to 72% in 1996’s study (Barnett, 1996). Data also shows that students were retained before being identified as learning disabled. For example, 76% of the cases were found in one state, such as North Dakota (Bornfield, 94). These statistics may indicate that teachers and administrators were using retention to try to control or solve students’ learning problems, to attempt to keep developmentally immature and slow learners from being classified as learning disabled, to defer the referral process in order to reduce the demand for diagnostic services and to limit the number of students enrolled in special education programs (Barnett 1996).

Much research has been conducted on the effectiveness of grade retention as an intervention for students with learning disabilities to succeed in school. The research indicated that grade retention had negative effects on student self-concept, social and emotional development, attitudes toward school, and academic achievement (e.g., Holmes 1989, Holmes & Mathews, 1984, Jackson, 1975, Nikalson, 1984; Smith & Shepard, 1987).
According to Byrnes and Yamamoto's survey (1986), students rated grade retention as the third most dreadful thing in their lives. Grade retention was also found to increase significantly the dropout rate of students (McLeskey et al., 1995). Students who are retained, never catch up to their peers, are lower achieving, and have a negative self-insight, which leads to an overall negative school experience and leads them to finally dropping out of school (Holmes, 1989, Smith & Shepard, 1989). Jimerson (2001) reported that being retained one time increases the probability that a student will drop out by 30%, whereas two retentions almost assures the student dropout, and as it raises the dropout rate an additional 20% to 50%. It seems that grade retention significantly increases the risk of students dropping out of school (Grissom & Shepard, 1989). Retained students are 2 to 11 times more likely to drop out of school and grade retention has been recognized as the "single most powerful predictor of dropping out" (Jimerson, 2001, p. 429). It seems that grade retention is not only found to fail to remediate academics but it is also associated with student poor self-esteem, negative attitudes towards school, and higher drop-out rates (Byrnes & Yamamoto, 1986; Grissom & Shepard, 1989).

According to Bornfield (1994), parents of retained students with learning disabilities have lower aspirations than those of non-retained students. Unfortunately, many parents are not aware of alternative choices to assist their child instead of retention. These alternatives include: mixed-age classrooms, individualized instruction, tutoring, home assistance programs, smaller class sizes, alternative educational settings, school counseling, and postponed achievement tests. Parents who feel that their child is not capable of doing the work as well as their peers may convey this attitude to administrators who in-turn push for the child’s retention (Bornfield, 1994). Conversely parents who believe their children
are bright in spite of their academic performance may sway administrators to promote their children to the next grade instead of retention (Bornfield, 1994). Thus parents should be aware of the reasons behind the retention of their children and what other alternatives exist. They need to understand their important role in the retention process and decision-making for their child’s placement.

It was found that nearly 98% of teachers supported the practice of retention in grades of kindergarten through seven (Tomchin & Impara, 1992). For teachers, retention is an easy process to remediate student’s learning instead of instructional accommodations and remediation. Peterson (1989) suggested teachers gain research-based knowledge about children’s learning and development to enable them to view retention as an ineffective remedy. A teacher’s attitude toward retention may impact his/her decision regarding the student’s placement. Retention is an easy strategy, but is not effective to students who are at risk and those who need help. The negative consequences of retention are found to outweigh any positive effects (e.g., Holmes 1989, Holmes & Mathews, 1984, Jackson, 1975, Nikalson, 1984; Smith & Shepard, 1987). When students are retained their self-concept, social and emotional adjustment, and attitudes toward school are all affected in a negative way. Even in the cases of effective retentions, when the students use the year to catch-up and relearn any and all skills that they did not master, they catch-up to the wrong grade, leaving them at least one year behind their peers (Peterson 1989). Finally, all educators should realize that under no circumstances does retention serve as an appropriate intervention prior to the classification of a learning disabled student. Instead, the administrators and teachers should take a closer look at the learning environments,
curriculum and teachers’ instruction to determine the reason why students are not succeeding (Darling-Hammond, 1998).

Current educational practices need to be adjusted to prevent students in early grades from retention. Programs, such as Reading Recovery and Success for All, provide additional resources to at risk students early in the schooling to ensure promotion (Barnet 1996 Darling-Hammond, 1998). Assessment instruments also need to be adjusted. For example, teachers may need to move from the standardized test with multiple-choice answers, to performance-based assessment such as essay exams, oral presentations, problem-solving projects, research exercises, and using portfolios and teacher’s observations (Darling-Hammond, 1998). It was found that children who had been considered for retention, but were socially promoted to the same grade as their age appropriate peers showed gains in their achievement on standardized tests (Holmes, 1989).

Darling-Hammond (1998) contends that the negative effects of grade retention should not become the argument for social promotion. For example, no students should be moved on without the skills needed to be successful. In contrast, students may benefit from grade retention, though this group may be small (Medway & Rose, 1986; Rose, Medway, Cantrell & Marus, 1983; Sandoval & Hughes, 1981). The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP, 1998) also indicated that if students couldn’t catch up the grade level, retention is less likely to be harmful, especially for those students who are of normal or near normal intelligence, their achievement is near grade level, with good social and emotional adjustment.

Is retention an effective process for students who cannot catch-up to the grade level of their peers? This debate on grade retention continues because of the different ideas and
conflicting findings. It seems that a further investigation may be needed especially with respect to teachers’ attitudes toward retention. Although most teachers supported the practice of retention (Tomchin & Impara, 1992), it is not sure the positive and negative effects of grade retention on student learning. This present study will further examine teachers’ attitudes toward grade retention in different counties in the region of southern New Jersey.

Significance of the Study

Retention is a controversial issue discussed in the field of education for years. Research findings on retention are inconclusive and questionable. There is a considerable lack of research in the areas of teachers’ opinions on grade retention, especially a lack of specific data, though 98% of teachers support this practice (Tomchin & Impara, 1992). This present study will investigate the retention issue by examining teacher perspectives to determine if the practice of grade retention is effective from their view. A survey will be provided to both special and regular education teachers in different school districts located in the region of Southern New Jersey and Central Pennsylvania. Their attitudes toward grade retention will be examined.

Statement of the Purpose

The purposes of this study are (a) to evaluate the teacher attitudes on grade retention of teachers in Southern New Jersey and Central Pennsylvania, (b) to examine the percentage of teachers who recommend the retention of their students, (c) to compare the differences of teacher attitude at elementary, middle and high school levels and (d) to assess if there is any successful retention from the teachers’ point of view.
Research Questions

The following research questions are raised for the present study:

1. Do teachers rate grade retention or non-promotion as a necessary educational practice?

2. What percentage of teachers has recommended or would recommend grade retention of their students?

3. Are there any differences of teacher attitudes toward grade retention at elementary, middle school and high school levels?

4. What are the teachers' perspectives on grade retention?
DEFINITIONS

The following definitions are identified in the present study

Retention- Known as in-grade repetition or non-promotion means that students do not show the understanding of the basic skills or requirements to be promoted to the next grade.

Grade retention- Refers to any school practice that causes a student to repeat a particular grade or to begin kindergarten or first grade one or more years behind age level peers (McLeskey, Lancaster, & Grizzle, 1995)

Social Promotion- refers to promoting a student to a higher grade even when the student does not meet all the requirements for the promotion or the practice of moving students through the system without ensuring the students acquire the required skills (Darling-Hammond 1998).
Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Grade retention, failures, non-promotion, keeping back, or repeating a grade affects far too many students each year. This chapter reviews the most recent research available on grade retention, its impact on students, parents, and teachers, especially students with learning disabilities.

Grade Retention

In his meta-analysis of grade retention, Jimerson (2001) conducted a systematic search of literature to identify studies of grade retention published between 1990 and 1999. He conducted the research through use of online databases and abstracts as well as reference review in the studies. All of the studies had been published in a journal or book, addressing the efficacy of grade retention, including an identifiable comparison group of promoted students. His summary included 20 articles that explored the efficacy of grade retention between 1990-1999. Of those studies 16 (80%) did not report favorable conclusions regarding the efficacy of grade retention. The authors cited that trends in the students’ achievement or socioemotional adjustment were affected in subsequent years. 20 more studies were examined comparing retained students to a control group. Most of the authors, 16 (80%) concluded that grade retention was ineffective as an intervention for academic achievement and socioemotional adjustment. It is suggested that the research supports a new philosophy of education for the new millennium. The time should not be
spent researching social promotion and grade retention but developing a specific remedial 
intervention strategy designed to facilitate the educational achievement and socioemotional 
adjustment of our children (Jimerson, 2001).

According to Lieberman (2001), a decision-making model was suggested and 
developed to determine whether a student should be retained. This model included the 
factors of physical disabilities, physical size, academic potential, psychosocial maturity, 
neurological maturity, self-concept, ability to function independently and grade placement. 
The weight of each factor should be decided on an individual basis. That means that factors 
are weighed stronger or weaker depending on the individual child’s situation. The factor of 
physical disabilities includes children who suffer from cerebral palsy, deafness, blindness, 
arthritis, language development, or congenital heart disease. This factor could help 
determine whether or not to retain a child. Physical size could also affect the retention 
decision. For example, smaller sized children would be easy for teachers to refer to 
retention whereas, larger sized children may not, because some teachers think small sized 
children would be accepted easily by younger peers if they are referred to repeat a grade. 
Academic potential is defined in terms of learning rate. If students are chronically 
derunderachieving they are not necessarily right for grade retention, but if a child needs 
promised periods of practice he/she might be right for retention. Also, determination 
between temporary slow learning and permanent slow learning should be considered. 
Temporary learning problems might be solved by retention while permanent learning 
problems should be treated with special education. Students who have “baby behaviors” 
such as thumb sucking, inability to delay gratification or take turns may be classified for 
retention in the factor of psychosocial maturity, and conversely students who act like little
adults may be proponents for promotion. Neurological maturity is important as well as psychosocial maturity and in contrasting the chronological age of students to determine this initial placement. In addition, self-concept is a determining factor in the grade retention decision because self-concept is one of the major effects of grade retention. Students who have a negative self-concept before grade retention could either consider themselves as more of a failure or they could react positively because they are not in the bottom of the class. Students who repeat grades do not necessarily go to the top of the repeating class, usually they end up somewhere in the middle (Lieberman, 2001). Retained children might feel that they are a failure that may injure their self-concept. These factors are considered with the parents input. The child's ability to function independently effects the promotion because as the grades increase the amount of independent work increases. A willful lack of independent participation is not a reason to retain because that is a disciplinary problem; instead, those children need constant supervision because of physical, cognitive, or emotional factors. Lieberman (2001) believes that retention is only a valuable programmatic option for students from kindergarten through second grade. Third grade is a pivotal decision and anything above fourth grade is frowned upon. It seems that grade retention becomes a major problem in our schools.

Effects of Grade Retention

May & Kundert (1995) studied 3,238 Caucasian students who were in grades 1 through 12 in school district located in a middle class suburban New York. They used archival data in school files to collect data on gender, date of birth, current grade, retained/grade, and special education services received. Students who were identified as one or more years older for their current grade were selected for this study. Of the 279 students who had
delayed school entry 196 (70%) were boys leaving 83 (30%) girls. A total of 415 students were identified as being retained, a significant larger number of 261 boys (63%) over 154 girls (37%). Of the 279 held out students, 17 were later retained. This rate was less then the district rate, but the ratio of boys and girls was 14 (82%) to 3 (12%). Of the 14 boys, 6 were held out and later retained and placed in special education programs. None of the girls was involved (May & Kundert, 1995).

Students who are retained in the fourth grade and higher are more vulnerable to negative shifts in self-concept (Lieberman, 2001). According to Lieberman (2001), any student retained after the fourth grade is usually the victim of an inappropriate disciplinary action or lack of special education services or both.

It is found that retention shows no clear benefits for students in the areas of academic gains, personal and social growth, or improvements in attitudes toward school. However retention has been associated with having negative effects in all of those areas and has increased the risk of dropping out of school (Sherwood, 1993).

Grade Retention and Students with Learning Disability

McLeskey and Grizzle (1992) found that 58% of students were retained before they were classified with a learning disability. Their study was conducted during the 1987-88 school year. Students who were referred and classified as having a learning disability were identified in this study. Students were selected using a stratified random sampling procedure. A total of 689 students classified as learning disabled have been administered the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children–Revised (WISC-R) Woodcock Johnson Test of Achievement (WJ) or the Wide Range Achievement Tests—Revised (WRAT-R). Of those students 399 (58%) had been retained before they were identified as learning
disabled. Forty-five percent of students were labeled in grades kindergarten through 2, whereas 34% in grades 3 through 5, and 22% in grade 6 through 12. Males outnumbered females by a ratio of three to one, respectively.

In another study, McLeskey, Lancaster and Grizzle (1995) found a significant connection between grade retention and students with learning disabilities. They revealed that a large proportion of students with learning disabilities are retained and the retention rate for these students is much higher than for students without classifications. In recent years, these learning disabled students have been included in the regular classrooms. Teachers need to understand that the characteristics of those students usually associated with grade retention are highly associated with learning disabilities such as underachievement, immaturity, and social/behavioral problems. Therefore, it is imperative that teachers of students with learning disabilities be aware of the policies concerning grade retention and the research-proven overall lack of effectiveness of the practice. The problem may be that if teachers are not aware of this situation the number of learning disabled students being retained will be increased. It appears that grade retention practices provide yet another reason for schools to examine their structure so that they may be redesigned to meet the needs of all students not just the students who meet arbitrary grade-level criteria. Until then the learning disabled student will continue to be blamed for the failure of the system and will continue to be subjected to an ineffective or harmful intervention—grade retention (McLeskey, Lancaster & Grizzle, 1995).

Teachers Perspectives on Grade Retention

Patterson (1996) conducted a survey to teachers and principals to find out their perspectives on grade retention. The principals were selected randomly and the principals
selected the teachers. A total of 384 principals and 384 teachers received the survey. Out of those, principals returned 169 and 140 by the teachers. The results revealed that 75 (44%) principals believed that retention hindered students’ performance while 67 (40%) believed that the benefits of retention are not greater than the negative results. Of the total of 140 returned surveys from the teachers, 81 (58%) of the teachers believed that retention helped students’ performance and 76 (54%) believed that the benefits of retention are greater than the negative results. The overall results of the survey were that principals believed that retention was not an effective practice for at risk children whereas teachers’ believe that it is effective.

In addition, Hagborg (1993) interviewed 37 teachers and 62 students about their perspectives on effectiveness of grade retention. Elementary, middle and high school teachers as well as their students completed the questionnaire. The teachers were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of their student’s retention. The results showed that across all groups academic benefits of retention were viewed as exceeding emotional benefits; while the students repeating the grade were considerably distressed at the time of grade retention. Most students stated that retention was a positive event, but both teachers and students were doubtful that there were benefits associated with retention. They both suggested other alternatives might work besides retention. It was found that longitudinally the students disagreed with the positive benefits of grade retention (Hagborg, 1993).

Faerber and Van Dusseldorp (1984) questioned 31 graduate students, in education majors, many of whom were teachers. The participants generally felt that both social maturity and academic improvement should be considered in promotion decisions, that grade retention can be ultimately beneficial to students and that promotion should not be
automatic. The questionnaire contained case studies to ask participants if they would prefer to retain or promote. Of those teachers, 61% of the males recommended promotion compared to only 44% of females. The elementary teachers favored retention 55% of the time whereas intermediate teachers only favored retention 48% of the time. The respondents agreed that a child's self-concept, attitudes, or academic growth are not affected by grade retention. They also suggested that parents should be involved in the grade retention process and they felt that retention in the earlier grades was less traumatic than the intermediate grades.

Pouliot's (1999) study examined 227 kindergarten and elementary school teachers in Quebec. The teachers believed that retention was an acceptable school practice and more than 66% of teachers supported it, which was reflected in their responses of 20 out of 24 questions. Teachers felt that grade retention, provided in the lower grades, does not harm the child's self-concept, but they were not sure about the effect on children in higher grades. However, teachers doubt that students can benefit from retention. In Pouliot's (1999) further interviews of 12 participating teachers. Of those, 6 believed that grade retention is important and 6 did not. The teachers who supported retention believe that schools should reach the goal of instruction instead of the global development of students. They believe that the programs should remain the same for all students instead of proposing adaptations. They also believe that students must first master basic skill before their advanced learning. Students should be homogeneously grouped based on their abilities using summative evaluations instead of formative evaluations. Teachers and educational researchers should co-exist to help reform the current educational practices
such as retention that have been rooted in school culture but have little educational research to support them (Pouliot, 1999).

Parents Perspectives on Grade Retention

Bornfield (1994) collected sample data in North Dakota using a questionnaire that was sent to all parents of students identified with a learning disability. The survey requested information regarding retention and educational aspirations of their child. Parents were asked to indicate the age and grade of retention and the age and grade of initial placement into special education services. Parents were then asked upon completion of high school whether they expected their child to get a job, attend a vocational/technical school, attend a junior college, or attend a four-year college or university. Of the responding parents, 49% reported that their child had experienced grade retention between kindergarten and eighth grade. Of those retained 76% were retained prior to placement into special education. The parental aspirations of retained students were less likely to aspire to a four-year university or college and more likely to expect a vocational/technical school or junior college. Only 4% of parents expected their children to get a job right after high school (Bornfield, 1994). Unfortunately there were not enough research articles to be found relating parents perspectives to grade retention. It seems that further research to examine parents’ attitudes is necessary.

Summary

Through the review of current research it is found that the negative effects of grade retention highly outweigh the positive or no-effects. It is also found that students with learning disabilities have been retained before they are classified. Parents, when given the choice, chose to retain their children before they were classified. Students who are retained
for any reason have a higher percentage of dropout rates than those without retention. Is grade retention a practice to assist students learning? What do teachers think about this practice? Research showed that teachers, in spite of its negative effects, supported the practice of grade retention. Future studies are necessary in the area of grade retention especially in the area of teacher and parent perspectives. The present study investigated the perspectives of teachers through a self-reported survey.
Chapter 3

METHOD

Samples

One hundred fifty copies of a self-reported survey were handed out to varying levels of teachers in elementary, middle and high schools in 4 different school districts. One hundred twenty, almost 80% were completed and returned. The 4 school districts that participated were in southern New Jersey and central Pennsylvania. The survey was distributed differently in each school. They were placed in each teacher's mailbox, there was a folder placed on the desk of the school main office near the sign-in sheet and they were delivered individually to each teacher in the school. A building representative in each school district was requested for collecting the completed surveys and returning them to the investigator. Table 1 presents the general information of the participating teachers.
Research Design

A random sample of teachers volunteered to participate in the study. Those teachers were asked to complete a 17 question survey developed by the presenter to determine the attitudes teachers have toward retention, whether or not teachers believe it is a necessary educational practice, and the percentage of teachers that recommend students be retained in grade to parents or the principal. Those questions used a Lickert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) for teachers to choose as their self-report. Their responses were analyzed to see if any differences occurred among the 3 groups of teachers, of elementary, middle and high schools.
Measurement

The survey for this research was developed using the Lickert scale of questioning ranging from Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) with 4 representing Strongly Agree (SA), 3 representing Agree (A), 2 representing Disagree (D), and 1 representing Strongly Disagree (SD). It was intended to evaluate elementary, middle, and high school teachers' attitudes toward retention. In order to develop this survey, articles on retention were reviewed and studies of teachers' attitudes were the focus. Two surveys on teacher attitudes toward retention were closely reviewed. This resource assisted in the construction of the survey used in this study. The survey consisted of questions indicating positive and negative attitudes toward grade retention. It was independently developed and distributed to all participants.

Procedures

The survey was delivered to 4 different school districts. Approximately 150 surveys were delivered based on the number of teachers in each building. There were 4 ways for the survey distribution. First, a school-building representative was in charge of the distribution and collection of the surveys. In this building representative placed the survey into each teacher's mailbox and waited for two weeks for completion, then returned to the investigator through an inter-office mail. Second, an individual distribution was used to pass the survey to teachers by the researcher. Third, a building representative left the survey in a folder in the teachers' room for the teachers to fill out during their lunchtime. Finally, a building representative placed the survey in a folder and left it by the sign-in/out sheet in the school's main office. Upon completion of the surveys, the building representatives forwarded the collected data to the researcher.
Data analysis

The mean and standard deviation of each answer of the survey was calculated. An ANOVA analysis was used to examine if there is a difference among the 3 groups of teachers, of elementary, middle and high school.
Chapter 4

RESULTS

Upon completion of the surveys, an ANOVA analysis and post hoc Student-Newman-Keuls were used to analyze the data. The significant information found in these tests is displayed in Table 3 through Table 8. The mean and standard deviation of the survey results are displayed in Table 2.
Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SURVEY QUESTIONS</th>
<th>Elementary (K-5)</th>
<th>Middle School (6-8)</th>
<th>High School (9-12)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Grade retention is necessary to maintain grade level standards</td>
<td>2.20 (SD 0.76)</td>
<td>2.83 (SD 0.81)</td>
<td>2.97 (SD 0.76)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Retaining a child will harm the self-concept of that child</td>
<td>2.58 (SD 0.66)</td>
<td>2.50 (SD 0.75)</td>
<td>2.29 (SD 0.52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Students who do not complete a high percentage of assigned work should be retained</td>
<td>2.29 (SD 0.63)</td>
<td>2.60 (SD 0.78)</td>
<td>2.70 (SD 0.64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Students are more motivated because they could possibly be retained</td>
<td>2.02 (SD 0.75)</td>
<td>2.55 (SD 0.68)</td>
<td>2.66 (SD 0.68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Retaining a student in the primary grades is less traumatic than retention in the intermediate grades</td>
<td>3.16 (SD 0.67)</td>
<td>2.87 (SD 0.73)</td>
<td>2.84 (SD 0.68)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Grade retention is a necessary educational practice in our schools</td>
<td>2.49 (SD 0.67)</td>
<td>2.76 (SD 0.80)</td>
<td>2.83 (SD 0.60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Students who are more than one year older than their peers should not be retained</td>
<td>2.75 (SD 0.61)</td>
<td>2.38 (SD 0.59)</td>
<td>2.09 (SD 0.59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Students should be retained if they do not score a passing grade on a standardized test</td>
<td>1.51 (SD 0.51)</td>
<td>1.76 (SD 0.71)</td>
<td>2.38 (SD 0.75)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I would retain a child if he/she spent more time in the principal's office or at home than in the classroom</td>
<td>2.09 (SD 0.73)</td>
<td>2.38 (SD 0.75)</td>
<td>2.66 (SD 0.65)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I would retain a child if he/she was smaller, younger, and one of the slowest workers in the class</td>
<td>2.14 (SD 0.67)</td>
<td>2.10 (SD 0.75)</td>
<td>2.47 (SD 0.80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I would recommend or have recommended grade retention to the principal and parents of a child</td>
<td>2.89 (SD 0.75)</td>
<td>2.54 (SD 0.72)</td>
<td>2.10 (SD 0.70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Retention helps a child improve academic ability by repeating the information</td>
<td>2.56 (SD 0.63)</td>
<td>2.53 (SD 0.69)</td>
<td>2.81 (SD 0.54)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Retention helps students to improve social skills and aids maturity</td>
<td>2.84 (SD 0.43)</td>
<td>2.62 (SD 0.63)</td>
<td>2.79 (SD 0.56)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A post hoc one-way ANOVA analysis using SNK of question 1, "Grade retention is necessary to maintain grade level standards", yielded significant differences in favor of middle and high school teachers \[F (2,111) = 13.016, P=.000 \ (P < .05)\]. Results are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>15.191</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.596</td>
<td>13.016</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Grade retention is necessary to maintain grade level standards</td>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>64.774</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>.584</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>79.965</td>
<td>113</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A post hoc one-way ANOVA analysis using SNK of question 3, "Students who do not complete a high percentage of assigned work should be retained", yielded significant differences in favor of high school teachers \[F (2,110) = 5.285, P=.006 \ (P < .05)\]. Results are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>4.747</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.373</td>
<td>5.285</td>
<td>0.006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Students who do not complete a high percentage of assigned work should be retained</td>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>49.395</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>.449</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>54.142</td>
<td>112</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A post hoc one-way ANOVA analysis using SNK of question 4, "Students are more motivated because they could possibly be retained", yielded significant differences in favor of middle and high school teachers \[F (2,112) = 9.598, P=.000 (P < .05)\]. Results are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>9.420</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4.710</td>
<td>9.598</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Students are more motivated because they could possibly be retained</td>
<td>54.962</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>.491</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>64.383</td>
<td>114</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A post hoc one-way ANOVA analysis using SNK of question 7, "Students who are more than one year older than their peers should not be retained", yielded significant differences in favor of elementary school teachers \[F (2,111) = 10.972, P=.000 (P < .05)\]. Results are displayed in Table 6.

Table 6.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>7.935</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.967</td>
<td>10.972</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Students who are more than one year older than their peers should not be retained</td>
<td>40.136</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>.362</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>48.070</td>
<td>113</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

25
A post hoc one-way ANOVA analysis using SNK of question 8, “Students should be retained if they do not score a passing grade on a standardized test”, yielded significant differences in favor of high school teachers \[ F (2,111) = 16.948, P=.000 \ (P < .05) \]. Results are displayed in Table 7.

Table 7.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>14.465</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.232</td>
<td>16.948</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Students should be retained if they do not score a passing grade on a standardized test</td>
<td>47.368</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>.427</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>61.833</td>
<td>113</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A post hoc one-way ANOVA analysis using SNK of question 11, “I would recommend or have recommended grade retention to the principal and parents of a child”, yielded significant differences in favor of elementary and middle school teachers \[ F (2,111) = 10.310, P=.000 \ (P < .05) \]. Results are displayed in Table 8.

Table 8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>10.697</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.348</td>
<td>10.310</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I would recommend or have recommended grade retention to the principal and parents of a child</td>
<td>57.584</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>.519</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>68.281</td>
<td>113</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9 shows the number of teachers who agree and disagree with the each individual statement along with the percentage that agree or disagree with the survey questions.

Table 9.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SURVEY QUESTIONS</th>
<th>Teachers who agree</th>
<th>Teachers who disagree</th>
<th>Total teachers who answered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Grade retention is necessary to maintain grade level standards</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>57.14%</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Retaining a child will harm the self-concept of that child</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>46.22%</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Students who do not complete a high percentage of assigned work should be retained</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>51.26%</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Students are more motivated because they could possibly be retained</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>47.11%</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Retaining a student in the primary grades is less traumatic than retention in the intermediate grades</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>79.49%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Grade retention is a necessary educational practice in our schools</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>66.36%</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Students who are more than one year older than their peers should not be retained</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>46.55%</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Students should be retained if they do not score a passing grade on a standardized test</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13.79%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I would retain a child if he/she spent more time in the principal's office or at home than in the classroom</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>42.74%</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I would retain a child if he/she was smaller, younger, and one of the slowest workers in the class</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>31.03%</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I would recommend or have recommended grade retention to the principal and parents of a child</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>55.17%</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Retention helps a child improve academic ability by repeating the information</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>63.16%</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Retention helps students to improve social skills and aids maturity</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>73.45%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This study was designed to examine teachers' perspective on grade retention. According to 120 respondents of the survey, which was developed by the researcher based on numerous research articles it is found that teachers do rate grade retention as a necessary practice, that more than half of the teachers have or would recommend retention and that significant differences are found between elementary, middle and high school teachers with respect to their perspectives.

The first research question is to examine attitudes toward grade retention or non-promotion as a necessary educational practice. The majority of respondents agreed with the statement either selecting strongly agree or agree. In all 73 (66%) of teachers agreed with the statement in contrast to 37 (34%) who disagreed. The results are similar to Patterson (1996) and Pouliot (1999). Teachers continue to believe that grade retention is a necessary educational practice despite overwhelming research that contradicts retention as a positive intervention.

The second question, “What percentage of teachers have recommended or would recommend grade retention of their students”, also yielded results favoring retention. The majority of teachers, 64 (55%), reported that they would or have recommended retention whereas, 52 (45%) said they would or have not. This information is less than the 98% of teachers responded in Tomchin and Impara’s (1992) study but more teachers still agree to support the practice rather than disagree.
The focus of the third question is to find out if there were any differences of teacher attitudes toward grade retention at elementary, middle, and high school levels. Significant differences between elementary, middle and high school teachers were found in 6 of the survey questions. These are as follows:

Question 5: “Grade retention is necessary to maintain grade level standards”

Question 7: “Students who do not complete a high percentage of assigned work should be retained”

Question 8: “Students are more motivated because they could possibly be retained”

Question 11: “Students who are more than one year older than their peers should not be retained”

Question 12: “Students should be retained if they do not score a passing grade on a standardized test”

Question 15: “I would recommend or have recommended grade retention to the principal and parents of a child”

It is found that middle and high school teachers had significantly different perspectives than elementary teachers with the statement regarding grade retention as necessary to maintain grade level standards. It seems that middle and high schools base their learning on standards more than the elementary schools because of content area emphasis. Teachers in the upper levels of education feel that to maintain academic standards in their classroom students need to attain the knowledge and pass the tests before they move on to the next grade level.

High school teachers also scored significantly higher or agreed more with the statement, “Students who do not complete a high percentage of assigned work should be
retained.” Perhaps the high schools rely on student projects and large assignments as their performance evaluation. If students do not complete the required assignments, teachers feel that they should not be promoted. High school teachers, more than the middle and elementary, rely on student performance on large amounts of individual work. They also believe that the responsibility of completing the work falls on the students and in order to maintain the accountability the teachers do not promote those without completing the work.

Middle and high school teachers differed significantly from elementary teachers with the statement, “Students are more motivated because they could possibly be retained.” The elementary school teachers disagreed with this statement. It seems elementary students are not mature or aware enough to make the connection between performance and promotion especially at the lower elementary level. The middle and high school teachers had mixed beliefs that students are motivated because of the possibility of retention. They believe the older the student the greater the understanding of the rules and consequences associated with grade retention.

High school teachers favored the statement; “Students should be retained if they do not score a passing grade on a standardized test.” These high school teachers know that students need to pass the HSPA test, in New Jersey, in order to graduate from high school.

On the other hand elementary school teachers differed significantly in favor of the statement, “Students who are more than one year older than their peers should not be retained”. It seems that the elementary teachers understand that the differences in physical appearance of students one year apart are quite significant and to have a range of two years would make it too difficult for the retained students to adjust socially.
Finally, middle and elementary school teachers responded significantly higher in favor of the statement, “I would recommend or have recommended retention to the principal and parents of a child.” The results of this question suggest that the elementary and middle school teachers believe that the earlier the child is retained the less harm it will do. Also, research has proven more grade retentions occur in the elementary school years or at least before high school.

The last research question was to examine teachers’ perspective on grade retention. More teachers agreed that retention is necessary to maintain grade level standards, that students who do not complete a high percentage of work should be retained, that grade retention is a necessary educational practice, that they would recommend or have recommended grade retention, that retention helps a child improve academic ability by repeating information and helps students to improve social skills and aids maturity. Almost 80% of teachers agree that retaining a student in the primary grades is less traumatic than in the intermediate grades. More teachers disagreed with the statements that the students are more motivated by retention, that students more than one year older should not be retained, that they would not retain students who were smaller, younger, slower workers or spent the majority of the time in the principals office. Around 86% of teachers disagreed that students should be retained if they do not score a passing grade on a standardized test. Overall the teachers in this survey agree with retention and believe it should be done in the early grades. Their decisions are not affected by student age or physical status. The students need to complete the work in order to be promoted and teachers do not feel that grade retention motivates a child to perform. They disagree with that scores on
standardized test should be the cut-off for retention and more that half of the respondents have or would recommend grade retention to the principal or child’s parent.

There are some limitations in the study. First, this study used a self-reported survey only and all data collected was distributed in a scale of 4, strongly agree, 3 agree, 2 disagree, 1 strongly agree, with 4 representing a highest score and 1 representing a lowest score. This may limit the findings because there is not any scientific data available to support the teachers’ answers. Another limitation may be that the survey only provided 13 questions or statements, with no room for comments. Possibly more choices may need to be considered on the Lickert scale. The four choices of responses, strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree, may limit some alternatives for teachers. One possible solution to broaden the survey may be to consider a scale ranging from 1-10, with 1 indicating a strong disagreement and 10 for a strong agreement. In addition to expanding the range, the survey’s directions could have been more clearly stated to complete both sides of the survey. This change may avoid some missing responses that occurred in the study that were removed as missing cells from the statistical analysis. This removal caused the analysis to be based on 110 to 114 participants instead of the 120 respondents. Meanwhile, the size and range of teachers who responded to the survey were limited the study in a regional area. This survey might include other regional areas and different teachers such as special education teachers. A future study should be done to compare the perspectives of regular education teachers to special education teachers.

In conclusion, this present study presents useful information for school administrators. When a child is recommended for grade retention the negative implications of this practice need to be considered. Teachers’ positive attitudes toward
grade retention need to change to positive attitudes toward their students. Teachers should not recommend grade retention; instead they should address the individual needs of the struggling learners. The educational system should be adapted to assist children with learning difficulty when they are placed at the appropriate grade level. Repeating the same material and expecting they learn it the second time may not be a desired way of to help those children. A system of remedial instruction for at-risk students may need to be developed and implemented to replace the current ineffective educational practice of grade retention.
REFERENCES


Pouliot, L. (1999). A double method approach for a double need: To describe teachers' beliefs about grade retention, and to explain the persistence of these beliefs. *Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association*.


APPENDICES
Please circle the answer that best describes you for each item

1. Number of years teaching experience
   1-5   6-10   11-15   over 15

2. Level of education
   B.A./B.S. Some Graduate classes Master’s Degree Doctorate

3. Sex
   Male   Female

4. Grades you teach most often
   K-5   6-8   9-12

Please circle the choice that best represents you feelings

SA = Strongly Agree  A = Agree  D = Disagree  SD = Strongly Disagree

5. Grade Retention is necessary to maintain grade level standards
   SA   A   D   SD

6. Retaining a child will harm the self-concept of that child
   SA   A   D   SD

7. Students who do not complete a high percentage of assigned work should be retained
   SA   A   D   SD

8. Students are more motivated because they could possibly be retained
   SA   A   D   SD
Please circle the choice that best represents you feelings

SA = Strongly Agree   A = Agree   D = Disagree   SD = Strongly Disagree

9. Retaining a student in the primary grades is less traumatic than retention in the intermediate grades
SA  A  D  SD

10. Grade retention is a necessary educational practice in our schools
SA  A  D  SD

11. Students who are more than one year older than their peers should not be retained
SA  A  D  SD

12. Students should be retained if they do not score a passing grade on a standardized test
SA  A  D  SD

13. I would retain a child if he/she spent more time in the principal’s office or home than in the classroom
SA  A  D  SD

14. I would retain a child if he/she was smaller, younger, and one of the slowest workers in the class
SA  A  D  SD

15. I would recommend or have recommended grade retention to the principal and parents of a child
SA  A  D  SD

16. Retention helps a child improve academic ability by repeating the information
SA  A  D  SD

17. Retention help students to improve social skills and aids maturity
SA  A  D  SD
Informed Consent Form

To: All Participants

From: Joseph Terch IV

Date: 12/19/2002

I agree to participate in a study entitled “Grade Retention, Teacher’s Attitudes” which is being conducted by Mr. Joseph Terch IV, a graduate student in the Special Education program at Rowan University. The purpose of the study is to evaluate the attitudes of teachers toward the practice of grade retention. The data collected will be compiled into a thesis paper, a requirement for graduation from Rowan University.

I understand that I will be completing a survey that will be used to determine the teacher’s attitudes toward grade retention. My participation is voluntary and my name and school will not be released to any publication.

I understand that my responses are confidential and all data collected will remain confidential. I understand that the information I provide will be used to compare to other research to determine teacher’s attitudes toward grade retention.

I understand that there is no physical, or psychological risks involved in this study and that you are free to answer only that question you wish.

I understand that my participation does not imply employment with the State of New Jersey, Rowan University, the principal investigator, or any other project facilitator.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact Dr. Joy Xin at 856-256-4500

_________________________________________   _______________________________________
(Signature of Participant)                  (Date)

_________________________________________   _______________________________________
(Signature of Investigator)                 (Date)