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Grade retention as perceived by kindergarten through third grade teachers

Brittany Leigh Pettay

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GRADE RETENTION AS PERCEIVED BY
KINDERGARTEN THROUGH THIRD GRADE TEACHERS

Proposal submitted to
Marshall University Graduate College

In partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of
Educational Specialist in
School Psychology

by

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ABSTRACT

Grade Retention as Perceived by Kindergarten through Third Grade Teachers

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This study examined the attitudes of kindergarten through third grade teachers regarding academic, emotional and social effects of grade retention, in addition to alternative interventions to retention. The teachers were asked to take part in a survey on grade retention as an intervention. After completing the initial survey, teachers were then asked to read an article entitled, “Grade Retention and Promotion” (Jimerson, Graydon, Pletcher, Schnurr, Kundert, & Nickerson, 2006) and then take a post-survey.

The results of this study reveal that the teachers’ attitudes about grade retention were significantly changed when they were presented with a research-based article entitled “Grade Retention and Promotion” (Jimerson et al., 2006) about the negative effects of grade retention, measured by a pre and post-survey, however there appears to be a disconnect between the teachers’ statistical results and their comments. These results indicate that although the quantitative results showed a change in attitude, the qualitative data from the teachers’ comments indicate that there was no actual change in attitude about retention and that the scientific evidence did not actually change their opinion.

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Chapter One: Review of Literature

Around the Spring of each year, teachers and principals struggle with decisions of whether or not to retain children who are having academic difficulty, or socially promote them and hope they will catch up to their peers. Educators who opt to retain students repeatedly do so despite the research that proves there are negative effects of retention (Viland, 2001). Grade retention is controversial and a frequently debated intervention in the field of education. When a student is retained, the student has to repeat that same grade that they are in for a year the following school year (Jimmerson, et al., 2006). The National Association School Psychologists released a position statement on student grade retention and social promotion in 2003 that states “despite a century of research that fails to support the efficacy of grade retention, the use of grade retention has increased over the past 25 years. It is estimated that as many as 15% of American students are held back each year and 30%-50% of students in the US are retained at least once before the 9th grade.”

According to the Educational Statistical Summary data from the West Virginia Department of Education public schools, in the 2008-2009 school year 2,159 kindergarten through 3rd grade students were retained, and of those students 1,025 were retained in kindergarten. According to the data another increase in retention rates in West Virginia occurred in the 9th grade when 1,430 students were retained in 2008-2009.

Attitudes Toward Grade Retention

An attitude is defined as “a mental position with regard to a fact or state or a feeling or emotion toward a fact or state” (Merriam-Webster, 2009). Attitudes have three related components: the first is affect which is the feelings about the issue, the second is cognitive which is the belief or assumptions which the attitude is based on, and the third is the behavior which is

how you act and respond (Galt, 2008). According to Kagan (1992) teachers seldom change their attitudes based on research they have read; however, they are more prone to change their attitude as a result of advice from other teachers or from their own personal experiences. Although Kagan's research is almost twenty years old, there still has been little research assessing why some teachers continue to disregard the research regarding grade retention.

Teachers play one of the most influential variables in a decision to retain a student; however, the ultimate decision is made by a team of people including the building principal, teacher, and parent(s). Throughout the second half of the school year, teachers keep parents informed of the student's progress. If the student is not making adequate progress, the teacher may mention the possibility of retention (Byrnes & Yamamoto, 2001). Failing a grade was rated the third most stressful event imagined in a student's life; losing a parent and going blind were rated one and two (Shepard & Smith, 1990), and yet several studies have shown that teachers think that retention is successful and can help a student progress in the classroom (Shepard & Smith, 1989; Stipek & Byler, 1997; Tomchin & Impara, 1992; Witmer, Hoffman, & Nottis, 2004). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics of all the students in 2007 who had ever been retained in their school career, 34 % were retained in kindergarten or 1st grade, 15% were retained in 2nd or 3rd grade, 9% were retained in 4th or 5th grade, and 7% were retained in 6th, 7th, or 8th grade. Out of all the children who had ever been retained since 2007, 47% of those students were retained kindergarten through 3rd grade. Tanner and Combs (1993) suggested teachers continue to view that retention as a good intervention, either because they are unaware of research about grade retention and other interventions or because they have seen the research and chose to disregard it because of their personal beliefs.

Legislation and Retention

President Clinton in the late 1990's announced an end to "social promotion" in his State of the Union address (Clinton, 1997, 1998, 1999). Social promotion is defined as "the practice of promoting a student from one grade level to the next on the basis of age rather than academic achievement" (Merriam-Webster, 2009). President George W. Bush in 2002 signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (P.L. 107-110) a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. NCLB required that individual states now have to set high and clear standards for students in each core academic area in each grade, and require them to measure the progress of students towards the standards (Leckrone & Griffith, 2006). The overall goal of improving the quality of education and making teachers more accountable is good; however, some student are left behind with the increased use of retention because of the fear of not making adequate yearly progress (AYP).

The call to end social promotion by legislation was not intended to increase the number of students being retained; however, some interpreted this call as needing to retain low achieving students (Jimerson, 2001). Social promotion like retention is not a preventive measure; it's an afterthought, and the problem of low achievement is already present. Placing students in the next higher level of education without having the skills or retaining the student another year does not address the basic problem. In an era where evidence-based practices and interventions are being promoted by legislation and reported to be used in schools, children are still being retained despite the evidence-based research that clearly shows that retention is not an effective intervention, and that there are other evidence-based interventions that are effective.

For the past century meta-analyses and systemic reviews have shown that the facts do not support the practice of grade retention as an intervention for student academics or

social/emotional difficulties (Jimerson, 2001). Evidence from retention research shows that some early academic improvements can occur during the initial part of the year the student is retained; however, evidence shows that achievement gains drop 2-3 years after retention (Jimerson, Woehr, Kaufman, & Anderson, 2004). Short-term progress from retention can be deceiving, as teachers do not see a student's progress after a few years, therefore not seeing the long-term effects retention has on students. One very important finding across many studies is that retaining a student at any grade is linked with later high school dropout (Anderson, Whipple, & Jimerson, 2002).

Effects of Retention

Jimerson, et al., (2004) indicate the following effects of retention:

- Temporary gains - During the year the student was retained, early academic improvements can occur although gains decline within 2-3 years of retention.
- Negative impact on achievement and adjustment - Grade retention is related to negative outcomes in many academic areas and social/emotional adjustment.
- Negative long-term effects - No known evidence supports a positive outcome of either long-term school adjustment or achievement. Students who experience grade retention are predictive of having health-compromising behaviors such as use of cigarettes, alcohol and drug abuse, low self-esteem, suicidal intentions, emotional distress, sexual activity at an early age, poor peer relations, and violent behaviors.
- Dropout - Retained students are much more prone to drop out of school. Recent systematic reviews revealed that being retained is one of the greatest predictors of high school dropouts; students who were retained were 5-11 times more likely to drop out.

- Consequences as an adult - Students who were retained are less likely to obtain a diploma by the age of 20, and are more likely to live on public assistance, be unemployed, or be in prison.
- Cost - Educators also need to be aware of the fact that when students are retained, it is another year in school that must be paid for by taxpayers. Xia and Glennie (2005) calculated the burden on taxpayers to be over eighteen billion dollars per year to pay for another year of instruction for students who have been retained.

Research-Based Alternatives Interventions

Grade retention is an often used intervention, even in spite of the research-based evidence indicating that it is not the best practice or an effective intervention. The National Association of School Psychologist (NASP, 2003) encourages a wide variety of evidence-based, well-researched, responsible, and effective strategies.

NASP recommends the following for educational professionals:

- Promote parent participation in their children's school.
- Implement culturally sensitive and age-appropriate instructional strategies.
- Highlight the significance of preschool programs and early developmental programs to help students learn social skills.
- Include regular assessments, such as formative evaluations and progress monitoring to make proper modifications.
- Have in place effective reading programs and mental health programs.
- Put in place student assistance teams to help identify and assess student behavior or learning problems. Teams can help design interventions and evaluate the effect.
- Use effective cognitive behavior and behavior management plans.

- Provide education programs for students with educational disabilities.
- Provide summer school programs, extended days, and extended year to students in need.
- Employ tutoring and mentoring programs.
- Have school-wide programs that promote academic and social skills for all children.
- Encourage community-base relationships to help with the needs of diverse at-risk students.

Teachers play a key role in grade retention and promotion. As an educator it is important to help identify children who are having problems in school early before children begin to feel like failures. Galford (2008) researched the relationship of principals and grade retention in a small geographical area in West Virginia and Ohio. The relationship examined how principals perceive grade retention in a pre and post-survey. Principals were asked to answer a survey on their opinions of grade retention as an intervention. After the initial survey, principals were asked to read an article titled “Grade Retention and Promotion” (Jimerson, et al., 2006) and then a post survey was given to the principals. Galford’s research showed that, overall, there was a significant change in attitude measured by the surveys when research-based information (the article) was presented to the principals.

The current study examined the perceptions of kindergarten through third grade teachers regarding student academics, emotional and social effects, in addition to alternative interventions to grade retention in a rural county in West Virginia. The research hypothesis is there will be a significant difference in pre and post-attitude scores concerning retention for teachers who read the article on grade retention. The null hypothesis is there will not be a significant difference in pre and post-attitude scores concerning retention for teachers who read the article on grade retention.

Chapter Two: Method

Participants

The Grade Retention/Social Promotion Survey (See Appendix A) was given to all kindergarten through third grade teachers in one rural county in West Virginia. A total of 106 were hand delivered to twelve elementary schools. A total of 31 pre/post-surveys were returned. Five other surveys were returned; however, may not include both pre and post-surveys. (See Design and Procedures).

Instrument

The Grade Retention/Social Promotion Survey (See Appendix A) was adapted from a survey by Weissenburg & Viland (Viland, 2003), which was based on literature reviews from educators' views of grade retention as an intervention. The survey was the same Galford (2008) used in her research of principals' attitudes toward grade retention. The survey consisted of thirteen true/false questions and one question on intervention preferences based on the research and the recommendations of Jimerson et al. (2006). Areas addressed by the questionnaire were effects of grade retention on students' academic achievement, satisfaction of county/school district's policy on grade retention, the effects of the dropping out of school, self-esteem, social development, attitude toward school, and preference for alternative interventions.

Design and Procedure

A packet containing participant's copy of consent and directions, an article entitled, "Grade Retention and Promotion" (Jimerson, et al., 2006) and two surveys (labeled pre and post) were given to each kindergarten through third grade teacher in the one rural county in West Virginia. The packets were hand delivered to twelve elementary school principals or placed in teacher's individual mail boxes. Participants were first asked to respond to the survey on their

opinions of grade retention as an intervention. Following the initial survey, teachers were asked to read the article, which is entitled, “Grade Retention and Promotion” (Jimerson, et al., 2006) and then asked to complete the post-survey. After completing both surveys teachers were asked to return the packet with both the pre and post-survey to the examiner through the county courier mail. A total of 31 pre and post-surveys were returned. Five other surveys were returned either missing the pre or post-survey. The surveys were kept confidential by numbering the surveys 1-106 on both the pre and post-surveys and to ensure the return of both surveys.

Chapter Three: Results

The survey data was analyzed using a paired sample t-test. The total mean of questions (1-12) in the pre and post-tests were calculated and compared, as well as the mean for each question in the pre and post-test (See Table 1). Frequencies and percentage were also looked at for comparison of pre and post-tests (See Table 2). Results from the teachers' surveys revealed that reading the article changed the teachers' attitudes toward grade retention. The researcher hypothesis was correct ($t(31) = -3.654, p < .05$) and for that reason the null hypothesis is rejected. The paired sample t-test was used to compare the pre and post-surveys for each question (1-12) in regards to the attitude change in teachers. Questions thirteen and fourteen were looked at separately, since they are not a change in attitude question. A total of seven of the twelve questions revealed a change in attitude. (See Table 1).

"Grade retention is a good intervention to consider for academic failure," was the first question asked of the teachers and a significant difference was found ($t(31) = -3.780, p < .05$). Fifty-four percent of the teachers were more likely to believe that retention is not a good intervention after reading the article. "Grade retention can be a successful intervention for low achieving students," was the second question and a significant difference was found ($t(31) = -3.780, p < .05$). The change indicates that after reading the article the teachers were more likely to believe that retention is not a successful intervention for low achieving students.

The third question, "An extra year can help a child develop and become more successful in school," was significantly different ($t(31) = -4.353, p < .05$), 48.4% of the teachers indicated that after reading the survey they were less likely to believe that an extra year of school can help a child develop and become more successful in school. "An extra year can help a child catch up," question four, showed a significant difference ($t(31) = -3.503, p < .05$). This change indicates

that after reading the article the teachers were less likely to believe that an extra year can help a child catch up. “The positive effects of grade retention can continue three or four years after a student is retained,” question five was significantly different ($t(31) = -3.780, p < .05$). This change indicates that after reading the article teachers are less likely to believe that positive effects of grade retention can continue three or four years after a student is retained. A significant difference was found in question seven “After a year of retention, a student can become more engaged in school,” ($t(31) = -3.503, p < .05$). This change indicates that after reading the article the teachers are less likely to believe that after a year of retention students become more engaged in school. Question eight showed a significant difference “Grade retention can have a positive effect on a student’s social development,” ($t(31) = -2.794, p < .05$). This change indicates that after reading the article the teachers were less likely to believe that retention can have a positive effect on a student’s social development. Analyzing question 14 revealed a significant change ($t(31) = -2.634, p < .05$), in teachers opinion of interventions preferable to grade retention. Indicating that after reading the article the teachers are more likely to favor other interventions suggested over grade retention.

The other five questions from the survey showed slight changes in attitudes however, the change was not significant. Question six, “Grade retention can improve a child’s self-esteem,” was not significantly different ($t(31) = -1.976, p < .05$). This indicates that the teachers showed no change in their opinion if retention can improve a child’s self-esteem. On the ninth question, “Retained students can become upset when they are removed from their familiar peer group,” was not significant ($t(31) = 1.360, p < .05$). Question ten “Grade retention can make a student more susceptible to dropping out of school,” did not show a significant difference ($t(31) = -.701, p < .05$). Question eleven, “Students can be motivated to work harder when they know there is a

possibility that they might be retained” showed no significant difference ($t(31) = -1.278, p < .05$). On question twelve, “Grade retention can apply a negative label to a child,” showed no significant difference ($t(31) = -.373$). Question thirteen, “I am satisfied with my county’s/school district policy on retention,” did not reveal a significant change in teachers satisfaction with their county/school district retention policy ($t(31) = -1.976, p < .05$). Of the teachers, 77.4% in the pre-survey stated “true” that they were happy with their county’s/school district’s retention policy, and 61.3% of teachers responded “true” that they were happy in the post-survey. Question fourteen looked at what interventions teachers prefer to grade retention. There was a significant change in question fourteen ($t(31) = -2.634, p < .05$), indicating that after reading the article teachers found more interventions preferable to grade retention. Qualitative results from the teachers’ comments revealed that teachers still felt after reading the article that grade retention is okay in some cases, and for some children (See Appendix B).

Chapter Four: Discussion

The West Virginia Department of Education public schools Educational Statistical Summary recorded that in 2008-2009 school year, 2,159 kindergarten through 3rd grade students were retained, and of those students 1,025 were retained in kindergarten. Previous research has shown that grade retention can be harmful to a child academically, emotionally, and socially. In an era where research-based practices are being prompted in schools, why is retention being used as an intervention despite the research-based evidence? This study examined the perceptions of kindergarten through third grade teachers on grade retention as an intervention.

Kagan (1992) found that teachers seldom change their attitudes based on research they have read; however, they are more prone to change their attitude as a result of advice from other teachers, or from their own personal experiences. Results from this research revealed that the teachers' attitudes about grade retention were significantly changed when they were presented with a research-based article entitled "Grade Retention and Promotion" (Jimerson et al., 2006) about the negative effects of grade retention, however there appears to be a disconnection between the teachers' statistical results and their comments. These results indicate that although the quantitative results showed a change in attitude, the qualitative data from the teachers' comments indicate that there was no actual change in attitude about retention and that the scientific evidence did not actually change their opinion. Clearly, the teachers did not let the facts from the research-based article actually change their opinion. Careful review of the percentages and frequencies (See Table 2) reveal that the teachers appear to be moving in the right direction, but comments suggest they do not take ownership of their responses. On question one, "Grade retention is a good intervention to consider for academic failure," 77.4% of teachers on the pre-survey marked that they believed that retention is a good intervention. On the post-

survey 54.8% of teachers felt that retention was not a good intervention (See Table 2). A total of ten teachers of the thirty-one changed their attitudes. The teachers had many comments about grade retention (See Appendix B). One comment that was seen across many surveys was that the idea to retain students should be on an individual basis, that “some” can benefit from being retained, and that the younger the student is the better the age to retain. This would indicate that although the answer was grade retention is not a good intervention in theory, the teachers’ belief system really did not change. That is probably why there were 1,025 kindergarten students retained in West Virginia in the 2008-2009 school year. Teachers see retaining children at a younger age more acceptable despite the research evidence.

One possible reason for the findings in this study could be that the teachers were unaware of the negative research on grade retention and other intervention alternatives. After the teachers read the research-based article about the detrimental effects of retention their attitudes were changed. Another possible reason for the findings could be that some teachers had heard about retention being harmful to a child, but have not seen any research-based evidence that supported this argument. By reading the article they were then provided with the research-based evidence.

Limitations and Delimitations

One factor that may have influenced the research findings could be the research design, where teachers were given a packet that contained both the pre/post-surveys and the research-based article together. Handing out the packet containing both pre and post-surveys could have made the teachers feel pressure that they needed to have a change in attitude. However, the pre/post-surveys were handed out together to ensure the return of both surveys to use for comparison. Other limitations of this study include the fact that the researcher hand delivered the surveys to the building principal, instead of the individual teachers. Principals may not have

handed out the surveys to all of the teachers (k-3rd grade). The surveys were completed on the participant's own time. Teachers may not have wanted to take their own time to complete both surveys and read the article. With the researcher not present while the teachers completed the survey, the researcher has no definite way of knowing if the teachers really read the article. A total of 31 pre and post-surveys were returned. The researcher gave the participants a week to return the completed packet. Some teachers may have felt that a week was not long enough time to complete the survey, although the examiner did accept surveys that were received after the set date. Delimitations of this study include that the examiner used only one rural county in West Virginia, and although surveys were handed out to all twelve elementary schools, there is no way of knowing that all the schools returned surveys. For this reason the sample of participants may not fully represent the general population.

Implications for Future Study

It is recommended that the current study be replicated with the following changes in the design. Adding a comment section after each question, so teachers who may not have made comments on the current study could have an opportunity to express their opinions, and not provide both the pre and post-surveys to the teachers at the same time, which may have left the teachers feeling pressured to change their responses. Perhaps other methods of delivering these research methods to teachers might provide further information about teacher attitudinal change toward retention. Another area for research could examine how often teachers show a disconnect between their responses and comments.

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Table 1: T-Test Comparison of Teacher's Perceptions on Grade Retention

Pair	Pre Mean	Post Mean	T-Test	Sig. (2-tailed)
Total Pre-Total Post	16.7419	19.2258	-3.654	.001
Pre/Post Question 1	1.2258	1.5484	-3.780	.001
Pre/Post Question 2	1.2258	1.5484	-3.780	.001
Pre/Post Question 3	1.0968	1.4839	-4.353	.000
Pre/Post Question 4	1.1613	1.4516	-3.503	.001
Pre/Post Question 5	1.2581	1.5806	-3.780	.001
Pre/Post Question 6	1.4839	1.6452	-1.976	.057
Pre/Post Question 7	1.2258	1.5161	-3.503	.001
Pre/Post Question 8	1.3548	1.6129	-2.974	.009
Pre/Post Question 9	1.9677	1.8710	1.360	.184
Pre/Post Question 10	1.7097	1.7742	-.701	.489
Pre/Post Question 11	1.2258	1.3548	-1.278	.211
Pre/Post Question 12	1.7419	1.7742	-.373	.712
Pre/Post Question 13	1.2258	1.3871	-1.976	.057
Pre/Post Question 14	8.0968	9.1613	-2.634	.013

**Significant difference $p < .05$

Table 2: Frequencies and Percentages of Teacher’s Perceptions on Grade Retention

Survey	Pre-Survey	Post-Survey	Pre-Survey	Post-Survey
Question	Frequency	Frequency	Percentage	Percentage
Question 1	True-24	True-14	True- 77.4%	True- 45.2%
	False- 7	False-17	False- 22.6%	False- 54.8%
Question 2	True-24	True- 14	True- 77.4%	True- 45.2%
	False-7	False-17	False- 22.6%	False- 54.8%
Question 3	True-28	True-16	True- 90.3%	True- 51.6%
	False-3	False- 15	False- 9.7%	False- 48.4%
Question 4	True- 26	True-17	True- 83.9%	True- 54.8%
	False-5	False-14	False-16.1%	False-45.2%
Question 5	True-23	True-13	True- 74.2%	True-49.1%
	False-8	False-18	False-25.8%	False-58.1%
Question 6	True- 16	True- 11	True- 51.6%	True- 35.5%
	False- 15	False- 20	False- 48.4%	False- 64.5%
Question 7	True- 24	True- 15	True- 77.4%	True- 48.4%
	False- 7	False- 16	False- 22.6%	False- 51.6%
Question 8	True- 20	True- 12	True- 64.5%	True- 38.7%
	False- 11	False- 19	False- 35.5%	False- 61.3%
Question 9	True- 1	True- 4	True- 3.2%	True- 12.9%
	False- 30	False- 27	False- 96.8%	False- 87.1%
Question 10	True- 9	True- 7	True- 29%	True- 22.6%
	False- 22	False- 24	False- 71%	False- 77.4%

Table 2: Frequencies and Percentages of Teacher's Perceptions on Grade Retention (continue)

Survey	Pre-Survey	Post-Survey	Pre-Survey	Post-Survey
Question	Frequency	Frequency	Percentage	Percentage
Question 11	True- 24	True- 20	True- 77.4%	True- 64.5%
	False- 7	False- 11	False- 22.6%	False- 35.5%
Question 12	True- 8	True- 7	True- 25.8%	True- 22.6%
	False- 23	False- 24	False- 74.2%	False- 77.4%
Question 13	True- 24	True- 19	True- 77.4%	True- 61.3%
	False- 7	False- 12	False- 22.6%	False- 38.7%

Appendix A

Grade Retention/Social Promotion Survey

Please respond to all of the following items and indicate true or false to the following items.

In my opinion...

1. Grade retention is a good intervention to consider for academic failure.

True

False

2. Grade retention can be a successful intervention for low achieving students.

True

False

3. An extra year can help a child develop and become more successful in school.

True

False

4. An extra year can help a child catch up.

True

False

5. The positive effects of grade retention can continue three or four years after a student is retained.

True

False

6. Grade retention can improve a child's self-esteem.

True

False

7. After a year of retention, a student can become more engaged in school.

True

False

8. Grade Retention can have a positive effect on a student's social development.

True

False

9. Retained students can become upset when they are removed from their familiar peer group.

True

False

10. Grade retention can make a student more susceptible to dropping out of school.

True

False

11. Students can be motivated to work harder when they know there is a possibility that they might be retained.

True

False

12. Grade retention can apply a negative label to a child.

True

False

13. I am satisfied with my county's/school district's policy on retention.

True

False

Please answer to the best of your knowledge.

14. Do you think any of the following interventions are preferable to grade retention? If so, mark all answer(s) that are applicable.

Actively encourage parental involvement

Adopt age-appropriate and culturally sensitive instructional strategies

Establish multiage groupings in classrooms with teachers trained to work with students of mixed age and ability

Establish early intervention programs and preschool programs

Create the opportunity for students to have additional time to master material without becoming overage for grade by high-quality summer school, intersession programs, and before and after school programs

Create personal intervention plans for students

Reduce class size

Increase the use of one-on-one tutoring

Identify specific learning or behavior problems and design interventions to address those problems

Provide appropriate special education services

Establish full-service schools to provide a community-based vehicle to meet the needs of at-risk students

Appendix B

Comments from all surveys returned

1. Grade retention is a good intervention to consider for academic failure.Pre-Survey:

“Retention is good in a few cases.”

“It is an intervention to consider-not necessarily good/bad.”

“False, and yet sending them on is helping them either!”

“Only in extremes.”

Post-Survey:

“True, with modifications and interventions.”

“It is an intervention, not totally, bad, not totally good. Again, it depends at what grade/age is the student retained.”

“It depends on the individual child.”

2. Grade retention can be a successful intervention for low achieving students.Pre-Survey:

“In some cases.”

“Not usually.”

Post-Survey:

“True, plus specific IEP’s for student.”

“It depends on the individual.”

3. An extra year can help a child develop and become more successful in school.Pre-Survey:

“In some cases.”

“If they are immature.”

“False, but only in K-1 sometimes this is needed, but only in very early years.”

Post-Survey:

“Some children.”

“True, if the child is very young.”

4. An extra year can help a child catch up.

Pre-Survey:

“In some cases.”

“Sometimes it does, but not usually.”

Post-Survey:

“Some children.”

“True, I have seen it happen many times.”

5. The positive effects of grade retention can continue three or four years after a student is retained.

No comments.

6. Grade retention can improve a child’s self-esteem.

Pre-Survey:

“It can have a negative effect on some children.”

“Not usually.”

“False, I’ve seen problems in a child’s self-esteem.”

Post-Survey:

“Some children.”

“Depends on child.”

“True, if it is handled well it can.”

7. After a year of retention, a student can become more engaged in school.

Pre-Survey:

“Sometimes.”

“Only if the child is immature.”

“Not usually.”

Post-Survey:

“Depends on child.”

“True, if the student is progressing.”

8. Grade Retention can have a positive effect on a student’s social development.

Pre-Survey:

“It can also have a negative effect, depending on when the child is retained: kg or 3rd grade?”

Post-Survey:

“True, if it is really a gift of time.”

9. Retained students can become upset when they are removed from their familiar peer group.

Pre-Survey:

“Not usually.”

10. Grade retention can make a student more susceptible to dropping out of school.

Pre-Survey:

“At what age was the student retained?”

“I am not familiar with the research on this matter.”

“Not in lower grades.”

Post-Survey:

“Not alone, I would argue. There are lots of other factors involved here.”

“True, but it doesn’t have to do so.”

11. Students can be motivated to work harder when they know there is a possibility that they might be retained.

Pre-Survey:

“Never experienced this!”

“False, however; sometimes parents will help them more.”

Post-Survey:

“True, with older students.”

“Not true for all kids.”

12. Grade retention can apply a negative label to a child.

Pre-Survey:

“If done correctly.”

Post- Survey:

“If allowed.”

13. I am satisfied with my county’s/school district’s policy on retention.

Pre Survey:

“On some points.”

“I guess.”

“Retaining students whom you know as a teacher are in need of special services and intervention is not in the best interest of the students. Blanket policy of retain student, then if there is still academic difficulty, refer is not effective in my opinion.”

“False, I’m sure we can have more interventions, but training for these? We can’t even get RTI right!”

14. Do you think any of the following interventions are preferable to grade retention? If so, mark all answer(s) that are applicable.

Pre-Survey:

“All of the above would be wonderful...But, in the real world...”

“I want required preschool/headstart screening as well as smaller classrooms and intervention time during each day for at risk children.”

Post-Survey:

“Sounds good...In the real world will all of the above occur...probably never!”

Additional Comments:Pre-Survey:

“These statements are very black/white; it really depends on when retention occurs. Sometimes a kindergarten child can acquire basic language/vocabulary skills in an extra year to bring them up to level. Hopefully a child would be retained in kindergarten or 1st grade, not third.”

“All generalized answers all answers depend on the individual.”

“Every time a kindergarten child is referred for testing, the county recommends retaining! I know when the child is immature and I also know when they have a learning disability. The testing used allows way too many children to miss out on special education services. It is political. Money decides their fate!”

“Many students are entered into kindergarten without being socially and academically ready. Some mature at different rates. This is the only area (and grade level) where I see that retention is successful.”

Post-Survey:

“I believe retention is effective with younger students who do not have the knowledge in place to go on to the next grade level. As students get older, retention can become more problematic.”

“Been doing this for 18 years, retention is a difficult decision to make and cannot be generalized. Each child retained accepts it differently.”

“All depends on the individual child. Sending a child on to ‘compete’ with on level kids is just as stressful to some. We should focus on child as individuals and quit using blanket policies.”

Below is a letter written to the examiner from a teacher in the county expressing personal views and experience with grade retention.

“I filled out the survey as you requested but it doesn’t say nearly what I think about retention. This note is to clarify and explain my position on this subject. I have taught first grade for over 40 years. During the early years there was no mandatory kindergarten so many children came straight from home to the first grade. Parents were very supportive and involved to the extent that when I needed them they were there, when children needed something they always found a way to get it and children never missed school (or nearly never).

Over the years life has changed much. Children come to school with more experiences, more vocabulary, and more resources to help them. However, many of these children do not come from supportive environments. They do not come with materials and we are not allowed to ask them to bring even a pencil. I spend my own money to provide them with what I want them to have. This is a fact for most teachers at the school I work.

More and more children come with behavior problems related to a lack of parenting skills, more and more come with problems caused by drugs and alcohol before birth. More and more come with a lack of respect for both teachers and classmates. Very young children are now difficult to control due to such factors.

A good number of children have been in some type of preschool two years before kindergarten and still they come to the first grade unable to function at that level. I believe that a great deal of this stems from working parents who just put them in preschool or daycare so they can go to work. This isn’t right or wrong, but it does affect a child’s attitude about ‘school’ because all these previous years they were told they were going to school.

More and more children are coming from dysfunctional homes too. I have 16 students and only 7 of them live with both parents. Three of my children go to a different home every other day. These factors play a huge role in the life of a first grader. Homework is almost never done at home. Books are left in the car or at grandma's house and they don't know when they will get to go back there. These are troubling times for young children.

Now to get to my thoughts about retention, in the early days of my teaching career children were grouped by ability. Thank the Lord we don't do that now. When a teacher had the 'low group' some did not make adequate progress. I knew that feelings were a very important part of being a child. I did not want my students to think it was their fault or that they had failed first grade, but they just could not go on to second grade.

So my husband and I discussed it and prayed about it. We decided that I would tell all the students that next year I was going to need some special helpers. Those children who had not been in the first grade would not know how to find their way to the cafeteria or the playground. They wouldn't know how we did things in our room. There would be lots of them and only one of me. I told them that special helpers always had special jobs too. That was the year I began to retain children who really just needed a 'gift of time.' They were too young or struggled, but they were not low academically. I know that is hard to understand but a teacher knows by the end of the first grade if a child has a low IQ or other learning disabilities. Those are the only children who do not qualify for retention in my book.

This year I have 16 students. Out of the 16 I have 3 who will not be ready for second grade by the end of May. Two of them have birthdays in May and the other one is in August. They were all 5 years old the entire year in kindergarten. One little girl has severe speech problems that have interfered with her ability to decode or spell words. The other little girl still

sucks her thumb and her home is deplorable. The little boy was so out of control in kindergarten that he came to me whenever they needed to do fun things with the class.

All three of these children really need a ‘gift of time.’ I have already made the arrangements with the parents and have written permission to have them again next year. I have begun telling my story about needing special helpers for next year. This year’s special helper is already training ‘everybody’ to turn the computers off and on, to prepare things for centers and various other tasks that special helpers are in charge of. Everyone is trained because we never know who will be chosen.

The best part of this story is that it works. I never choose one child over another. Each day my class picks a name from the helper jar for 4 jobs in the classroom. Whoever was the leader yesterday picks the leader for today, etc. When the jar is empty we just put our names in again. It works great. Then when it is time to choose a special helper we all just put our names in the jar. Of course, when it is time to choose it just happens to be time to go home (important to the plan) and we’ll have to pick the helpers tomorrow.

When the children leave I take out all the slips of paper, unfold them and find the 3 that I need to keep. Then I fold up blank pieces of paper to fill the jar again. The next morning the leader picks a name. If he gets a blank I just say ‘Oh, I thought it would be fun to put some blank ones in the jar.’ They love it. Children actually cross their fingers and hope they will be chosen. This has worked well for me over 30 years.

Children do not get their feeling hurt. I never had a parent refuse this offer. I have never retained a child that was not successful the second year. I have never retained a child who would not benefit from a gift of time. I will continue to do this until I retire and I don’t know when that

will be. Everything can't be explained on a survey. I tried to answer your survey intelligently, but it just didn't have a way to say they teacher might just know what is best for her children.

I have read the research many times over the years and I still believe that first grade is the foundation upon which all future learning is laid. That foundation must be strong in all academic areas. It must also be what each particular child needs at that time in his or her life. I do not believe it can be found in a second grade room. I have considered 'looping' but have not had the opportunity to try it. Thank you for taking the time to read my thoughts on this subject."