A QUALITATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF

ADULTS IN THE NORTH GEORGIA AREA THAT WERE RETAINED IN GRADES K-12.

by

Betsy Green

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University

2015

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APPROVED BY:

Roger Stiles, Ed.D., Committee Chair

Gary Kimball, Ed.D., Committee Member

Libby Bicknell, Ed.D., Committee Member

Scott Watson, Ph.D., Associate Dean, Advanced Programs

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the impact retention has had on the lived experiences of adults in the North Georgia area that were retained in their K-12 education. The 10 participants were adults over the age of 18 that live in a rural North Georgia community and have experienced retention. The sampling was purposive and took place at public schools in Mountain Town, Georgia. The research questions for this study were:

- How is the experience of grade retention remembered by adults retained in their K-12 education?

- How has K-12 retention impacted self-efficacy, the belief in the ability to succeed, and quality of life of adults who were retained during their K-12 education?

    o How did retention impact their self-esteem?

    o How did retention impact their employment successes and socioeconomic status?

    o How did retention impact their home life and relationships?

Data collection took place using a survey, questionnaires, interviews, and a focus group discussion. Data analysis was conducted using Moustakas' Seven Steps (Moustakas, 1994) and included enumeration, selecting quotations to provide authentication, and coding that identified themes, significant statements, and shared experiences.

Keywords: retention, lived experiences, social promotion, self-esteem, achievement, employment, socioeconomic status, relationships

Dedication/Acknowledgments Page

This huge accomplishment in my life was made possible by the love and grace of

God my father and by the support of my husband, Richard, my children, Rich and Rebecca,

and my friends that encouraged me along the way and put up with my long hours of work to

achieve this goal. I want to thank my parents, Lee and Rebecca Forehand, for teaching me

the value of never giving up and always believing that I could achieve any goal I set for

myself. I want to thank my uncle, Buddy Baarcke, for editing this dissertation and helping

me develop a finished product. I want to thank Dr. Roger Stiles for being a very supportive

chair and pushing me to finish when daily life intervened and threatened to derail my

efforts. I also want to thank Dr. Gary Kimball, Dr. Libby Bicknell, and Dr. Russ Yocum for

making suggestions to improve my final product.

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List of Abbreviations

American Federation of Teachers (AFT)

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

College and Career Readiness Performance Indicators (CCRPI)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS)

Response to Intervention (RTI)

Stanford Achievement Test (SAT)

Socio-economic Status (SES)

Teacher Effectiveness Measure (TEM)

Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

This dissertation plan highlights the impact that retention as a stand-alone intervention has had on the educational outcomes, self-esteem, and quality of life in general of adults that have experienced this phenomenon. Teachers and administrators struggle with whether to retain students every year, despite the longitudinal research that shows that retention does more harm than good (Jimerson & Renshaw, 2012; Silberglitt, Jimerson, Burns, & Appleton, 2006). This study sought to shed light on how this controversial practice has shaped the lives of some of the adults that have experienced retention. Today, more than ever, schools and teachers are held accountable for student success and growth from one year to the next. For example, in the state of Georgia, College and Career Readiness Performance Indicators (CCRPI) are used to grade schools. The indicators are based on student success in the classroom and on standardized tests (Barge, 2014). Teachers in the state of Georgia are evaluated using an instrument called the Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES) and a growth model for each student that a teacher teaches is a critical part of the Teacher Effectiveness Measure (TEM) that is used to decide if a teacher is doing his or her job and will be used to make hiring and firing decisions (Barge, 2013). Motivating low performing students to put forth effort and care about their educational success is critical to all stakeholders. Therefore, this study seeks to enlighten teachers and administrators about the experiences of adults with retention and highlight the importance of utilizing research to validate current retention and promotion practices or to possibly adjust present practices to help more students experience educational success at their ability level.

Background

Retention, the act of holding a student back in a grade due to him or her not mastering the standards of the grade, has been practiced in the United States since the days of the one-room schoolhouse. Around 1930, educational practice began to change in favor of social promotion, moving a student up to the next grade when they have not mastered the standards, as psychologists became concerned about what retention was doing to the social emotional aspect of children (Steiner, 1986). In President Clinton's State of the Union Address in the late 1990s, he called for an end to social promotion and a rise in the standards and accountability of U.S. public schools. On the heels of that attempt to improve the United States' educational ranking in the world, President Bush in 2002 signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. This act required states to raise standards and hold school systems and students accountable for meeting those standards. Both of these attempts by the federal government to improve public education in the United States caused a steady increase in the retention of students over the past three decades (Leckrone & Griffith, 2006).

According to Jimerson and Renshaw, (2012) students that are retained in grades kindergarten through eighth grade are five to 10 times more likely to drop out of school than those not retained. Jimerson and Renshaw (2012) state, "Research reveals that neither retention nor social promotion alone is an effective strategy for improving students' academic, behavioral, and social and emotional success" (p. 13). One school of thought about the practice of retention is that keeping the student back for one year will allow them to mature and catch up. But, research shows that students that are struggling learners and candidates for retention suffer from many life circumstances that contribute to their poor educational state. According to Shaw (2011), most students that are candidates for retention also have attendance issues, family

support issues, and socioeconomic issues. Some qualitative research highlights the positives of retention in the eyes of those retained. Strong family units, especially a supportive mother, seem to be the outside influence that turns retention into a positive experience (Rand, 2013; Smith, 2013).

There are many qualitative studies available that include the views of elementary students, middle school students, high school students, teachers, and administrators about the feelings each group has about the practice of retention (Fournier, 2009; Rand, 2013; Roberts, 2008; Shaw, 2011; Smith, 2013). But, there are very few studies that delve into the meaning of retention from the point of view of adults who have lived through the experience. Studying the impact of retention on the lives of adults should add to the research that influences educational policy.

Situation to Self

Transcendental phenomenology involves setting aside personal experiences and feelings about the phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 1994). As an educator, it is essential for me to disclose my experiences with the phenomenon of retention and try to see this phenomenon with fresh eyes as I delve into the stories and experiences of the participants of this study. After teaching middle school for 10 years and being an assistant principal at the middle school and elementary school levels, I have had personal experience with retention of students. I have been involved with numerous retentions, either by being a committee member that helped make the decision, or as a teacher of retained students. I have seen retention work for one of the 10 middle school students that I taught and from this exposure, it seems that retention at the middle school level is an ineffective practice. I have only been at the elementary level for a year and I will be

very interested to follow the students retained this past year to see if retention was beneficial to them.

Problem Statement

The problem of this study is students that are retained as a stand-alone intervention do not make significant gains in learning and often face negative outcomes in life. Research shows that there is a large correlation between retention and dropping out of school (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007). It is estimated that about half of heads of households supported by welfare are high school dropouts (Schwartz, 1995). "Generally speaking, research has not supported retention and suggested negative effects" (Silberglitt, et al., 2006, p. 135). It is important to study retention because educators and parents need to make decisions for underperforming students that take into account the whole child and offer the most beneficial opportunities. Interventions need to be put in place early in a struggling learner's educational career that meet them where they are, not where the powers that be think that they should be (Powell, 2011). Studying the lived experiences of adults that were retained in their K-12 education will shed light on what the practice of retention does to a large span of a person's life, not just the years that the person is in school.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the impact that retention has had on the lived experiences of adults in the North Georgia area that were retained in their K-12 education. Studying the impact of retention on adults should add to the research that influences educational policy and local school retention decisions. Retention has been practiced in the United States for over a century, and the bulk of the research does not support this practice. The intent of retention is to allow students that are not on grade level with

the expected skills and standards to repeat the grade, catch up, mature, and successfully complete school. While this is a practice that has the best of intentions of the educators that are trying to help struggling students, the majority of the research points to negative outcomes for a large percentage of those retained in grade. Interventions need to occur for the struggling learners so that they can have success in school, graduate, and then pursue higher education or enter the work force ready to achieve financial independence and make positive contributions to society.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was to provide educators with an insight into how retention has played out in the lives of adults that experienced retention in their K-12 education. Educators do want what is best for all students and do not make retention decisions lightly. Educators view retention as "an opportunity to grow in maturity, build a stronger academic base and/or as a chance to improve academically" (Roberts, 2007, p. 87). They assign retention with the best of intentions in hope that this intervention will help students be successful in school and that this success will carry over into their lives beyond their school experience. The qualitative studies that research the impact of retention in grades K-12 on the lives of adults is sparse. This study will add to the growing body of research with this demographic.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were:

- How is the experience of grade retention remembered by adults retained in their K-12 education?

- How has K-12 retention impacted self-efficacy, the belief in the ability to succeed, and quality of life of adults who were retained during their K-12 education?

  o How did retention impact their self-esteem?

o   How did retention impact their employment successes and socioeconomic status?

o   How did retention impact their home life and relationships?

Research suggests that the practice of retention has far reaching negative effects on a person's life, from social isolation (Smith, 2013) to high correlation with dropping out of school (Jimerson &Renshaw, 2012) to self-esteem issues that sometimes lead to trouble with the law and unemployment (Swartz, 1995). Looking at the research in support of retention, or research that has found situations that promote a positive experience with retention, family support and value placed on education in the home seem to play a major role in contributing to a successful experience with retention (Ferguson, et al., 2001). When these factors are not present, the positive effects appear to diminish over time as new material is introduced and expectations are heightened (Jimerson, et al., 1997; Dong, 2010). This research sought to explore retention in the lives of the adults in this study using the research questions to determine if retention has served as a positive or negative influence in their lives.

Research Plan

This qualitative study has a transcendental phenomenological design, and data was collected using surveys, interviews, and a focus group. A transcendental phenomenological design was appropriate for this study because it sought to explore how adults construct meaning from the lived experiences related to being retained in their formal education. The goal of a phenomenological study is to explore how a certain phenomenon is experienced consciously and perceived by the people that experienced it (Wilson, 2002). The participants for this study were 10 adults over the age of 18 that experienced retention in their K-12 education. The participants represented younger adults, middle-aged adults, and older adults that had differing views about the impact that retention has had on their lives. The data analysis strategy that was employed

with this study was Moustakas' Seven Steps (Moustakas, 1994). This strategy included recording pertinent statements, removing repetitive statements, organizing reoccurring ideas, feelings, and thoughts into themes, using quotes to authenticate the shared meanings, and using the multiple perspectives offered by the participants to find the true meaning of the experience.

Delimitations

The participants of this study were adults over the age of 18 that are no longer in high school. Adults were chosen for this study because qualitative research is limited on the impact of retention over a long span of time. Limitations of this study include small sample size as the study included 10 participants, geographic location, small rural town in North Georgia, and elapsed time as adults recalled a life event many years in the past. Participant ages ranged from 33 to 81, so memory of events was different for the younger participants, as their memories were more recent than for the older participants.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Retention has been practiced in the United States for over a century now and has been a controversial issue since schools became organized around specific grades. This literature review includes a look at the theories that support or stand in opposition to retention, the history of retention in the U.S., retention statistics, contributing factors of retention, arguments in support and opposition to retention, and alternatives to retention. Educators have long debated the pros and cons of retention and theorists like Gessell (1933) and Piaget (1969) offer theories that support retention as a necessary tool that allows the student to mature and catch up. Piaget's theory of cognitive development (Cherry, n.d.) gives approximate ages for the different mental stages of intelligence that human beings reach, but he states that not all people arrive at these stages at the same ages. The stages build upon one another and people cannot be pushed into a stage that they are not ready to enter. Gessell is credited with the Maturation Theory (Gesell, 1933) that states that children mature by an internal clock directed by genes and that children cannot be rushed to mature ahead of this schedule. Theorists like Albert Bandura believe that children learn by watching others and are affected by their surroundings and experiences (Bandura, 2001; Rand 2013). Retaining a child damages self-esteem and children start performing to match that low self-esteem. Bandura believes that children need to be in environments where expectations are high and opportunities for catching up to peers are fostered.

Once schools became organized around grades and specific ages, retention was used as a means to correct academic weakness and serve as an intervention, and this continued until about 1930 when social scientists began to question the effectiveness of this practice when considering the social and emotional development of children (Rose, et. al., 1983). Social promotion became

popular and remained that way until Russia beat the U.S. in the space race by launching Sputnik in 1957. This event caused politicians to critically look at public education in the U.S. and standardized testing became popular as a means to set standards for promotion to the next grade. Jackson (1975) reviewed several research articles on retention between 1960 and 1975 and concluded that the studies were not valid and he warned educators that their retention decisions were not grounded in solid research. Thus, social promotion became widely used once again. The Clinton era in the 1990s and No Child Left Behind legislation at the beginning of the 21st century brought on more concern about the quality of public education, stricter standards, and a renewed determination not to promote students that had not mastered the set standards of each grade (Bowman, 2005; Hernandez-Tutop, 2012).

Retention statistics, for the most part, are bleak. The Condition of Education Report of 2010 reported that for the past 20 years, approximately 10% of K through 8th graders are retained each year, with boys, African American students, and students living in poverty comprising the majority of the retainees. In the U.S. alone, approximately 2.5 million students are retained each year at a cost of about 14 billion dollars annually (Jimerson, Ferguson, Whipple, Anderson, & Dalton, 2002).

There is research to support retention and research that opposes retention. The research that supports retention and shows positive outcomes for students points to the importance of the family unit's support of the student and the value placed on education by the family. The majority of research does not support the practice of retention and highlights the ineffectiveness of this practice (Jimerson, 2001). Retention carries with it many negative effects such as a high correlation between retention and the drop out rate, feelings of low self-esteem and isolation, and poor reading and math scores (Jimerson, 2001).

The overwhelming amount of research that shows negative effects of retention point to the need for interventions other than retention as this form of remediation has been ineffective over a long span of time (Jimerson, et al., 1997; Jimerson, 2001). There is no one intervention that will work with every child, but there are many research-based interventions that should be used to remediate students and help them be successful enough to move on through the grades with their peer group. Some of these successful interventions are after school programs, summer school, year-round school, smaller class sizes, multi-age grouping, looping, numerous classroom interventions, and the fairly new tracking system for regular education students known as Response To Intervention (RTI) (Jimerson et al., 2006; Shepard & Smith, 1990; Lekrone & Griffith, 2006; Klotz & Canter, 2007). RTI was first brought to the forefront in IDEA 2004 when this legislation called for more interventions in the regular education arena before students were referred for special education testing. RTI has gained ground in schools across the country as a tool to track academic progress and a way to avoid non-action until failure has occurred. (Klotz & Canter, 2007).

Theoretical Framework

Educators make decisions every year about whether to retain or promote students that have not demonstrated mastery of grade level standards. Retention and social promotion decisions are not made lightly as educators know the drawbacks to both practices. There are many theorists that have proposed theories about learning and development through the years that seek to explain how the brain develops and matures and that children mature at different rates, even though they are the same chronological age. Piaget's theory of constructivism is a theory that educators use to make decisions about what most children can learn at different ages. Piaget's theory of cognitive development is broken down into stages, and children's movement

through the stages directly relates to how they understand the world (Cherry, n.d.). The stages build upon each other and follow a sequence. The stages, in developmental order, are sensory motor intelligence (birth to age 2), preoperational intelligence (age 2 to age 7), concrete operational intelligence (age 7 to age 11), and formal operational intelligence (age 11 to adult) (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). As children age and mature, they move through the stages of intelligence. The age that children reach the stages varies from child to child and children cannot be forced into a new stage if their brains are not ready to function at that level. Piaget proposed that schema, assimilation, and accommodation are the concepts that are the building blocks of cognitive development. These three concepts are defined below.

> Schemas are categories of knowledge that help us to interpret and understand the world. In Piaget's view, a schema includes both a category of knowledge and the process of obtaining that knowledge. As experiences happen, this new information is used to modify, add to, or change previously existing schemas. Assimilation is defined as the process of taking in new information into our previously existing schemas. Accommodation involves changing or altering our existing schemas in light of new information. (Cherry, n.d.)

As children progress through the different grades in schools, the mental expectations increase to fit Piaget's cognitive development levels. All children do not arrive at the different stages of development at the expected age for several reasons that include but are not limited to genetics, experiences, socio-economic level, and family situation. The children that arrive at the stages later than expected or never arrive at higher stages are the ones that are considered for retention.

Arnold Gesell is a psychologist and pediatrician who was instrumental in the development of the field of child development. Gesell is credited with the Maturation Theory

and believes that maturation is an active psychological process and that there is a strong connection between maturation and learning (Gesell, 1933). His theory proposes that learning cannot take place without maturation and maturation cannot take place without learning being involved in the process (Gesell, 1933). Gesell believes that heredity and environment can only be separated in analytical thinking. In reality, the separation would lead to death of an organism (Gesell, 1933). Thus, maturity is a product of both heredity and environment.

> Gesell believed that genetically directed development determines when children are ready to learn, when they benefit from their surroundings, and what they experience in those surroundings. Rushing children to develop ahead of this internal schedule is pointless because all aspects of development are governed by the inner, gene-directed maturational process. (Miazga, 2000, p. 4)

This theory could be used to support retention and individualized learning. The Maturation Theory substantiates that retaining students that are not mature enough to move to the next level in school, gives the student the opportunity to catch up and be successful (Rand, 2013).

The Social Cognitive Theory is a theory that could be used to oppose retention. It was proposed by Albert Bandura and suggests that children learn by watching others and are affected by their surroundings. People are not just observers of their surroundings, but they are active agents of their experiences (Bandura, 2001). Most behaviors that people learn are learned from example. Observation, imitation, and modeling are three ways that people learn from one another. Observation leads to modeling which leads to ideas about how new behaviors should be carried out, which leads to future action (Bandura, 1986). The theory of self-efficacy is embedded in the social cognitive theory and this theory emphasizes the role of observational learning and social experience in the development of the personality (Bandura, 1989). Bandura

defined self-efficacy as one's beliefs in their ability to succeed in certain situations. External experiences and self-perception influence self-efficacy and self-efficacy in turn influences one's self-esteem (Bandura, 1989). Those who believe in their cognitive abilities tend to master difficult situations and those that don't believe that they possess these cognitive abilities usually avoid difficult tasks and don't put forth the effort to succeed (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Capara, & Pastorelli, 1996). Pajares (2002) discusses low self-efficacy and the self-fulfilling prophecy and how retention could encourage students to feel like failures and thus, start performing poorly. This could start a vicious cycle of not believing in one's self, performing poorly on tests and tasks, failing the class or grade, and repeating that cycle all over again (Roberts, 2008). Self-efficacy is nurtured by one's surroundings and experiences. This theory could be used to support social promotion in that students need to be promoted to foster high self-efficacy in order to perform well and eventually catch up to their peers. Also, being in an environment where their peers are learning at the expected level will positively influence them to start performing at the expected level in the classroom.

History of Retention in the United States

In 1852, Massachusetts passed the first mandatory school attendance law in America and by 1918, all American children were required to complete an elementary education. The one room schoolhouse marked the beginning of public education in America. Retention was not seen as a problematic practice at that time due to all grades being lumped together and progression to the next level of study being dependent upon mastery of skills at each level (Steiner, 1986). Around the mid eighteen hundreds, graded schools began to replace the one room schoolhouse in urban areas in the United States as the U.S. sought to follow in the footsteps of Great Britain, where graded schools were a commonality (Rose, Medway, Cantrell, & Marus, 1983). Graded

schools organized themselves around the age of the students and developed rigid criteria for each grade that had to be mastered for children to be promoted to the next grade level. Over the next seventy years, the graded school concept spread to rural areas as well (Holmes & Matthews, 1983). The mastery level for each grade was extremely rigorous, and as a result, about half of all students were retained at some point in their eight years of schooling (Steiner, 1986).

The rampant use of retention as a means to correct academic weakness and serve as an intervention continued until about 1930 when social scientists began to question the effectiveness of this practice when considering the social and emotional development of children (Rose, et. al., 1983). Also at this time, educators and legislators began talking about the most efficient structure for schools and merit promotion seriously hindered organizational efficiency (Hernandez-Tutop, 2012). Before this time, the educational system in the US was structured around the best and brightest and now educators started structuring schools around the abilities and needs of the greatest bulk of students. The best and the brightest were not forgotten as ability tracking became popular during this time period (Hernandez-Tutop, 2012). With this challenge to the practice of retention, social promotion gained popularity over the next 30-year period. Instead of retaining so many students that had fallen short of the academic goals of the grade, schools began to socially promote students. Students were moved on to the next grade, put into groups by ability and provided remedial instruction. This greatly reduced the number of students retained and encouraged educators to consider the whole child when making retention/promotion decisions. Factors such as age, physical size, mental maturity, home background, and attendance were all considered to make the best possible decision for the child (Hernandez-Tutop, 2012; Rose, et. al., 1983). After Sputnik in 1957, where Russia usurped the U.S. in the space race, the state of education in the U.S. became scrutinized by politicians, and in

the early 1960s, educators started noticing a decline in standardized test scores, attributing this to the reduced promotion standards of the public schools. At this time, a cry for stricter academic standards at each grade level and more rigorous promotion criteria started gaining ground in the educational and political arenas. Minimum competency testing programs became popular about this time as a means to set minimum standards of mastery for promotion purposes (Rose, et. al, 1983). In the 1970s, a research study conducted by Jackson (1975) began to challenge the notion that grade retention was a better alternative than social promotion. Jackson reviewed 44 original research sources from the 1960s and early 1970s and concluded that the studies were not valid. He stated that "there is no reliable body of evidence to indicate that grade retention is more beneficial than grade promotion for students with serious academic or adjustment difficulties" (Jackson, 1975, p. 627). Jackson warned teachers that if they retained students they were doing this without valid research to back up their decisions (Jackson, 1975). Social promotion gained ground again during this time as research was conducted that linked retention and the drop out rate (Roberts, 2007).

Once again, in the 1980s, the popularity of social promotion began to fade as standardized test scores started to drop, and the report entitled, *A Nation At Risk* brought the practice of retention to the forefront again as an answer to declining test scores and decreasing academic rigor (Bowman, 2005). In the 1990s, President Clinton called for stricter standards in public schools and an end to the practice of social promotion. Since the lowering of standards and the increase in social promotion, U.S. schools had fallen in their academic standing when compared to other countries. This decrease in world ranking started a political agenda that still seeks to raise the rigor of academic standards at each grade level in an attempt to gain ground in the educational forefront on the world scene. The Clinton administration's attempt to end social

promotion gave educators political permission to reinstate retention, and retention gained in popularity once again in the 1990s. But, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) reported in 1997 that many schools across the nation were still practicing social promotion, regardless of public policies and laws put in place to end the practice (Bowman, 2005).

After Clinton, President George W. Bush and his administration passed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in an attempt to close the achievement gap and assure the quality education of all students across the United States. NCLB set the goal of 100% of public school students across the US functioning at the meets or exceeds level on a minimum competency test chosen by the individual states by the year 2014. This was to be achieved through enhanced accountability of all educators through the measurement of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). This accountability was intended to promote the hiring of highly qualified teachers and principals, encourage English instruction for immigrant students where English is a second language, and promote parental choice when schools do not make the grade. This stringent act refueled interest in retention and retention gained ground as an intervention tool once again (Hernandez-Tutop, 2012).

The newest educational initiative, Common Core, provides even more rigor than NCLB. Student achievement under NCLB was measured using minimum competency tests and students were graduating still lacking in the problem solving skills necessary for college and career readiness. According to the Common Core State Standards Initiative,

> The standards are designed to build upon the most advanced current thinking about preparing all students for success in college, career, and life. This will result in moving even the best state standards to the next level. In fact, since this work began, there has been an explicit agreement that no state would lower its standards. The standards were

informed by the best in the country, the highest international standards, and evidence and

expertise about educational outcomes. We need college- and career-ready standards

because even in high performing states, students are graduating and passing all the

required tests but still need remediation in their postsecondary work.

(Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2014)

In a time of increased academic rigor across K-12 education, expanded emphasis on standardized

testing, and increased accountability for public schools in the US, the practice of retention versus

social promotion will continue to impact best practices and policy decisions (David, 2015).

Contributing Factors for Low Performing Students

Students that struggle in school do share some commonalities. The majority of students

that are retained are boys (Jimerson, et al., 1997; Meisels & Liaw, 1993), are members of a

minority group (Alexander, Entwisel, & Dauber, 1994; Lorence & Dworkin, 2006), and suffer

from poverty (Morris, 2001; Meisels & Liaw 1993). Many retained students have parents that

are not involved in their education and thus provide little support for their children's learning

(Jimerson, et al., 1997; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999), and have mothers that have less than or equal

to a high school diploma (Ferguson, et al., 2001; Cairns, Cairns, & Neckerman, 1989). Other

common characteristics of retained students are English is their second language, students are

younger than same grade peers, students make frequent school changes, high absenteeism,

attention span problems, low self-esteem in terms of academic competence, behavior problems in

a school setting, and poor peer relationships (Jimerson & Renshaw, 2012).

There are many research studies that show that boys are retained more often than girls.

In fact, according to Jimerson, et al., 1997, boys are twice as likely to be retained as girls. Boys

and girls generally produce similar scores on tests of cognitive ability, but boys have lower

classroom grades, have more discipline issues, are more likely to qualify for special education services, have a real detachment to school, and report lower enjoyment of school than girls (Jacob, 2002). These school difficulties are attributed to low non-cognitive skills of many boys. Examples of non-cognitive skills are attention spans, organizational skills, ability to work with others, and willingness to ask for and receive extra help (Duncan & Dunifon, 1998).

Research has shown that poverty is a contributing factor to retention. "Children raised in poverty rarely choose to behave differently, but they are faced daily with overwhelming challenges that affluent children never have to confront, and their brains have adapted to suboptimal conditions in ways that undermine good school performance" (Jensen, 2009, p. 14). Students living in poverty come from a culture where the parents are concerned about the basic needs of life, and education for many of them takes a back seat. In his book entitled, *Teaching with Poverty in Mind*, Jensen (2009) discusses four risk factors that negatively impact the education of children raised in poverty. These are emotional and social challenges, acute and chronic stressors, cognitive lags, and health and safety issues (Jensen, 2009). Emotional and social challenges for children of poverty many times start even before they are born. Teen mothers and poor prenatal care often lead to a weak attachment of the mother to the unborn child and then to the infant. This detachment leads to feelings of insecurity for the child that spills over into their school life. Acute and chronic stressors for children living in poverty are the stresses associated with exposure to abuse and violence and the stress of living in poor conditions that lingers over a long period of time. Life experiences influence cognitive development and many children that live in a low socioeconomic environment lack experiences necessary for brain development. Malnutrition, environmental hazards, and poor health care are examples of health and safety issues that plague many children of poverty. Health of children

and achievement go hand in hand. If the body is not healthy, then the brain is not receiving what it needs to function properly (Jensen, 2009).

Another problematic factor for low academic performance, higher drop out rates, and juvenile delinquency is school absenteeism (McCluskey, Bynum, & Patchin, 2004). Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10 percent of the school year or about 18 days per year. (Anonymous, 2012). Only six states keep records of chronic absenteeism and these six states report rates between six and 23 percent. Nationally, the average rate of absenteeism is reported at about 10 percent, but experts believe it is closer to 15 percent (Anonymous, 2012). Nationally, chronic absenteeism in kindergarten results in low academic performance in first grade. As the years go by, the achievement gap gets larger and the effects of poor attendance become more detrimental to graduating on time, if at all (Anonymous, 2012).

Changing schools frequently is another contributing factor to retention. Transient students are defined as students that move from school to school staying at each school for a period of time that does not coincide with the natural break in a year or graduation from a particular school (Parr, 2010). Parr (2010) conducted a study of transient students that had changed schools at least two times before the end of the third grade year. He compared them to students that had not changed schools and looked at academic success on standardized assessments of reading and math. The transient students scored significantly lower than the non-transient students, but the impact of transiency on student achievement was low for students at risk of academic failure compared to the other risk factors for low performing students, such as socioeconomic status, limited English proficiency, and having an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) (Parr, 2010). Student transients are not recognized under NCLB as an at-risk group,

but transient students are more likely to fall into the recognized at-risk subgroups than their non-transient counterparts (Parr, 2010).

Retention

"Grade retention refers to the practice of non-promotion of students to the next grade level upon completion of the school year" (Jimerson, Carlson, Rotert, Egeland & Sroufe, 1997, p. 3). Educators wrestle with retention versus social promotion every year as they struggle to find the best options for low-performing students. The following are some myths that many educators buy into when trying to justify retention decisions and the research that has been conducted in response to these myths.

- More time will help students catch up. Research: Struggling students rarely catch up to their similar promoted peers (Jimerson & Renshaw, 2012).

- Retention supports student achievement and acclimation. Research: Retention is linked to poor achievement in all academic areas, low self-esteem, and behavior issues (Jimerson & Renshaw, 2012).

- Retention is not a harmful practice. Research: Retention has been linked to emotional problems, drug and alcohol abuse, cigarette use, early sexual activity, and violent behaviors during adolescence (Jimerson & Renshaw, 2012).

- Retention assures academic success in subsequent years. Research: There is a high positive correlation between retention and dropping out of school (Jimerson & Renshaw, 2012).

- Retaining students in lower grades is fine, but retention in later grades produces negative outcomes. Research: Comparison of students who were retained in lower

grades to students who were retained in later grades fails to show benefits of early grade

retention (Jimerson & Renshaw, 2012).

Research studies indicate that students are generally retained in the previous grade for another

year for failure to meet academic standards set for the grade, immaturity, poor attendance, and

the notion that a repetition of the learning year will serve as a quality remediation tool to produce

successful students (Bowman, 2005). "But research does not support this belief and points out

many negative effects of grade retention as an intervention tool" (Silberglitt, et al, 2006, p. 135).

Retention statistics as reported in the Condition of Education Report of 2010 (NCES,

2010) are as follows. Over the past 20 years, the percentage of students that were retained

between kindergarten and eighth grade has remained at about 10 percent each year. Public

schools retain students more often than private schools, boys are retained more often than girls,

African American students are retained more often than students of other races, students from

high poverty homes where the mother does not possess a high school education have a greater

chance of being retained, and students from the southern region of the United States are retained

more often than students from other regions (NCES, 2009). More statistics gathered over the

past several years indicate that by the 9th grade, 30 to 50% of all students have been held back

sometime in their K-12 education, approximately 2.5 million students are retained in the U.S.

each year, and this extra year of schooling costs the U.S. taxpayer in excess of 14 billion dollars

annually (Jimerson, Ferguson, Whipple, Anderson, & Dalton, 2002). These statistics indicate

that U.S. schools are not a successful endeavor for a significant number of students (Corman,

2003). This highlights the need to find better interventions for students other than retention and

social promotion. Eisner (2003) wrote an article for Phi Delta Kappan that looks at 12

questionable assumptions of education in the United States. He writes that assumptions about

education are so deeply rooted in our culture that true, meaningful change is hard to make because the examination of these assumptions is rarely done and how schools function and run are taken for granted. One assumption that he names is "The aim of schooling is get all students to the same place at the same time" (Eisner, 2003, p. 1). He compares schooling to a train. All students get on board about five or six years of age and get off, if reasonably successful, at about 18 years of age. Our culture promotes common goals for the vast majority of students and to differentiate outcomes for different students condemns some students to lower positions in society. This assumption makes true differentiation impossible. He implies that it is impractical to expect everyone to fit into the same mold and find success with the same type of activities and interests. True differentiation would take into consideration the interests, life experiences, and abilities of each student. Another questionable assumption highlighted by Eisner is that age grading is the best school organization. He points out that age grading is convenient and easy to manage, but that it goes against what research reveals about child development. He uses the range of reading abilities within a single class as proof that age grading is not what's best for children. With each higher grade, there are larger reading ranges. For example, in second grade there is a about a two year age range in reading abilities, in third grade, there is about a three year range, and the range goes up with each successive year.

Arguments in Support of Retention

There have been several studies conducted over the past several years that yielded positive and mixed results when it comes to the effectiveness of grade retention (Lorence & Dworkin, 2006; Jimerson, et al., 1997; Dong, 2010; Greene & Winters, 2006; Alexander, et al., 1994). Lorence and Dworkin (2006) conducted a longitudinal research study in Texas and found a positive relationship between retention and reading achievement among the third graders that

were representative of the largest racial/ethnic groups in Texas (African Americans and Hispanics). These researchers concluded that there was no evidence that early grade retention was harmful to children with low academic performance (Lorence & Dworkin, 2006). Jimerson, et al. (1997) used the student participants in the Minnesota mother/child interaction project as the subjects for their research. These children were put into three groups, those that were retained in kindergarten, first, second, or third grade, those that were low performing but socially promoted, and a control group of students that did not fit into either of the two previous categories. The retained group did show improvements in math achievement for the retained year, but this gain dissipated as the students entered into higher grades and faced new material (Jimerson, et al., 1997). Dong (2010) conducted a study using data from the US Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Kindergarten Cohort 1998-1999. Fall and spring testing was done on these students in kindergarten, first, and third grade. The sample contained 8672, of which 8391 were promoted after kindergarten and 281 were retained in kindergarten. The results were positive for the retainees in the beginning, but the positive results diminished over time (Dong, 2010). Greene and Winters (2006) conducted a study to examine how beneficial Florida's test based promotion policy was to students two years after the retention. The results revealed that the retained students made significant gains in reading as compared to their socially promoted peers (Greene & Winters, 2006). Alexander, et al. (1994) conducted a study comprised of 800 students who began first grade in 1982. Looking at eight years worth of data on these students, they determined that the grade repeaters did better in the year of repetition and for several years after. These students also showed improved attitudes towards school and higher self-esteem (Alexander, et al., 1994).

Ferguson, et al. (2001) conducted a study that followed 106 students from kindergarten to the eleventh grade. Students were put into one of four groups that reflected their educational experience with grade retention. The four categories were: Students that had been retained in K, 1st, or 2nd grade; students that had been retained in K, 1st, or 2nd grade but put into a transition room; students that had been recommended for retention in K, 1st, or 2nd grade but were socially promoted; and students that were promoted on a regular schedule. One of the research questions was "Which variables are associated with "successful" and "highly successful" outcomes of retained students? "Successful" retained students were those whose GPAs in the 7th grade were 3.2 or higher and scored in the 53rd percentile on the 8th grade Stanford Achievement Test (SAT). "Highly successful" retained students were those whose GPAs in the 7th grade and scores on the 8th grade SAT were above the mean of the promoted students. The findings of this research study suggest that the main contributing factors to success after experiencing retention were higher educational level of the mothers, higher value on education by the family unit, higher socioeconomic status (SES), lower kindergarten social functioning deficits, younger age in kindergarten, and higher scores on early readiness measures upon entering kindergarten (Ferguson, et. al., 2001).

Looking at the research in support of retention or research that has found situations that promote a positive experience with retention, family support and value placed on education in the home seem to play a major role in contributing to a successful experience with retention. When these factors are not present, the positive effects appear to diminish over time as new material is introduced and expectations are heightened.

Arguments Opposed to Retention

Due to the increasing demands of standardized testing and the accountability push of the last two decades, retaining students has gotten more popular. In direct opposition to the great bulk of research that does not support retention as a successful strategy for struggling students, educational policy still promotes the practice of retention. Jimerson (2001) conducted a review of 20 research studies done between 1990 and 1999 and reported that these studies fail to demonstrate that retention provides greater benefits to students than social promotion. Below are some of the research studies and their findings.

- Grade retention increases the likelihood of dropping out of school by 20 to 50 percent (Jimerson, 1999).

- Seventy-eight percent of high school drop-outs were retained at least once in their K-12 education (Tuck, 1989).

- Students retained in elementary school are at a greater risk of dropping out of high school (Jimerson, Anderson, & Whipple, 2002).

- Grade retention has failed to show long-term gains on socio-emotional and achievement outcomes (Jimerson, et al., 1997).

- Grade retention has been highlighted as the most significant factor in dropping out of school (Rumberger, 1995).

- Promoted students fared better than retained students in comparisons of academic achievement in all areas, social adjustment, emotional adjustment, behavior, self-concept, attitude toward school, and attendance (Holmes & Matthews, 1984).

- Although retention might show short-term gains, retained students were more likely to fail in subsequent years than their socially promoted peers (Shepard & Smith, 1990).

This conclusion is right in line with previous research studies done between 1900 and 1990. While all of the studies conducted have limitations and some of the earlier studies have methodological concerns (Jimerson, et al., 1997; Holmes, 1989), the sheer bulk of the research that points to the same conclusion of the ineffectiveness of retention is powerful and cannot be overlooked (Jimerson, 2001). Jackson (1975) reviewed 30 studies published between 1911 and 1973 and found that although there were some benefits to retaining students, there were even greater benefits to promoting them. Still, other researchers have reported negative relationships between retention and successful student outcomes (Holmes, 1989; Holmes and Matthews, 1983; Hernandez-Tutop, 2012). Bowman (2005) also reviewed related research and found that retaining students does not improve their academic accomplishment and felt that the research does not support academic retention. Retention should be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and all options available should be considered (Bowman, 2005). A study done by Hong and Yu (2007) shows that even retention in kindergarten does not produce lasting results. Math and reading scores may improve for the retention year, but the results fade quickly in subsequent years (Hong &Yu, 2007).

Social Implications. Getting an education is more than going to class and studying for tests. Students learn to interact with their peers and adults and these interactions help build their social skills and self-esteem. Socialization is an important part of the developmental process, and school is the primary place that children develop socialization skills. Children are socialized by how they see themselves in relation to their peers and how they fit into a group of friends. Most students experience difficult times with socialization in school, even under the best of circumstances (Roberts, 2008). When a child is held back, they basically lose the friendships they had made in the previous years and have to start all over again with making friends and

fitting into a new group (Roberts, 2008). The old friends are still in the school, but the student is cut off from those friends as students in different grades are on a different schedule and rarely have the time to see each other. This change is a change in the child's culture and can negatively impact the child's development (Vgotsky, 1978). This creates feelings of isolation, loneliness, and poor self-worth. Just as damaging to a child's feelings of self-worth is how the non-retained students treat and feel about the retained students. Walters and Borgers (1995) reported that non-retained students were more critical of their retained classmates and less accepting of them, thus adding to the socialization problems that occur with retained students. Research shows that an unintended consequence of retention is poor emotional health of children (Leckrone & Griffith, 2006). Jimerson, et al. (1997) conducted a longitudinal study that was comprised of 190 children in a Minnesota mother/child interaction project. These children were put into three groups, those that were retained in kindergarten, first, second, or third grade, those that were low performing but socially promoted, and a control group of students that did not fit into either of the two previous categories. The results just on the socio-emotional factors resulted in the retained group having significantly lower emotional health by the sixth grade. When children are held back, their emotional and social adjustment is worse than children that are socially promoted (Jimerson, et al., 1997). Many times retained students end up being behavior problems because they do not believe in their abilities, do not feel that teachers and administrators believe in them, and end up trying to get attention any way that they can. In a longitudinal study conducted by Jimerson et al (1997), retained students displayed more negative classroom behaviors and were less engaged in the learning activities of the classroom than their low performing, promoted peers (Jimerson & Kaufman, 2003). Many studies point out that maladjustment to behavioral expectations is high for retained students (Cairns, Cairns, & Neckermanm 1989; Jimerson, et al.,

1997; Jimerson & Kaufman, 2003). Jimerson (2001) conducted a review of 20 studies about retention done between 1990 and 1999. Sixteen of the 20 studies concentrated on socio-emotional outcomes, and 77 effect sizes were computed. Of the 77 effect sizes, a mean of -0.22 was computed for the retained students, meaning that the retained students scored 0.22 standard deviation points below the comparison group of promoted students on social, emotional, behavioral, self-concept, and ratings of adjustment (Jimerson, 2001). It is the belief of many researchers that the biggest indicator of failing in elementary school is to fail a grade. Many times, the retention leads to feelings of low self-worth and poor attitudes about school and the work associated with school (Carlton & Winsler, 1999). Retained students' success in their school career is hampered by a poor self-concept and lack of motivation (Rose, et al., 1983).

Drop Out Rate. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) published a report in 2013 that provided drop out data from the 2009-10 school year for high schools in the United States. A dropout is defined as a student that

> …was enrolled in school at some time during the previous school year; was not enrolled at the beginning of the current school year; has not graduated from high school or completed a state- or district-approved education program; and does not meet any of the following exclusionary conditions: transfer to another public school district, private school, or state- or district -approved education program; temporary absence due to suspension or school-approved illness; or death (Stillwell & Sable, 2013, p. 2).

The average freshman graduation rate (AFGR) was 78.2% in 2009-10, which is an "estimate of the percent of high school students who graduate within four years of first starting the 9th grade" (Stillwell & Sable, 2013, p. 1). In the U.S. 514,238 public school students dropped out of grades 9-12 in the 2009-10 school year, which represents 3.4% of the high school population in the U.S.

Students in 9th grade had a drop out rate of 2.6% and students in 12th grade had a drop out rate of 5.1%. Drop out statistics by race are as follows: Asian/Pacific Islander – 1.9%, white – 2.3%, American Indian/Alaska Native – 6.7%, Black – 5.5%, Hispanic – 5%. The drop out rate among males was 3.8% and the drop out rate among females was 2.9% (Stillwell & Sable, 2013). Jimerson, Ferguson, Whipple, Anderson, & Dalton (2002) did a comprehensive review of research that studied the relationship between grade retention and drop out rate and found that retention was the overwhelming common denominator for students that dropped out of school. According to Jimerson, et al. (2002), the experience of grade retention has been shown to influence many factors related to dropping out of high school, namely student's self-esteem, socioemotional adjustment, peer relations, and school engagement. The research shows that students that are retained once in their K-8 education are 40 to 50% more likely to drop out of school than their promoted peers, and students that are retained more than once are 90% more likely to drop out (Mann, 1987). Penna and Tallerico (2005) reported:

Retention-in-grade is the single most powerful predictor of dropping out of school. It is even more powerful than parents' income or mother's educational level, two family-related factors long associated with student achievement and school completion. In fact, dropouts are five times more likely to have repeated a grade than are high school graduates. (p. 13)

More than 7,000 students drop out of school every day and without a high school diploma, these individuals will be more likely to be unemployed during their lifetime, on governmental assistance, and in and out of prison than their peers that graduated (Alliance for Excellence Education, 2009). High school drop outs will be more likely to be teen parents, less likely to raise children that will graduate from high school, more likely to commit crimes, and

more likely to depend on governmental health care (Wolfe and Hughes, 2002). Their earning potential will be seriously crippled as well. In 2011, the median earnings for those without a high school diploma were $22,900, $30,000 for those with a high school diploma, $37,000 for those with an associates degree, $45,000 for those with a bachelor's degree, and $59,200 for those with a master's degree (NCES, 2013).

Academic Implications. Although there is some research to support retention as an effective practice for academic performance, the bulk of the research shows that retention has a negative impact on academic achievement (Rand, 2013). Holmes (1989) produced a meta-analysis of 63 studies between 1925 and 1989 where students were tracked in the educational process and compared to promoted students. In summary, 54 of those studies reflected a negative impact of retention on academic achievement. The nine studies that reflected a positive impact of retention on academic achievement showed that the benefits appeared to diminish over time. Lloyd, Griffith, Lane, & Tankersley (2010) conducted a study where they used reading data from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) to research reading growth rates in 878 high school students that had been retained in their K-8 education in comparison to 878 high school peers that were not retained in their K-12 education. Their findings revealed that the retained students had significantly lower reading achievement in the eighth grade and had slower reading growth in middle and high school as compared to the non-retained group (Lloyd et al., 2010). McCoy and Reynolds (1999) conducted a study where one of the purposes was to analyze the long-term effects of retention on academic achievement. The subjects for the study were 1,164 low income, minority students from the Chicago Longitudinal Study. 28% of the sample was retained by the age of 14. The results revealed that there was a strong association between retention and poor reading and math scores by age 14. "These findings suggest that

intervention approaches other than grade retention are needed to better promote school achievement and adjustment" (McCoy & Reynolds, 1999, p. 273).

In spite of the overwhelming amount of research that shows that retention is an ineffective practice, there are proponents of retention that feel that early grade retention is effective and the justified exception (Silberglitt, et al., 2006). Silberglitt, et al (2006) conducted a research study with the intent of examining whether the timing of grade retention made a difference in academic achievement. The longitudinal study of 49 students tracked reading scores from first through eighth grade. The study revealed that students retained in grades K-2 had reading gains similar to students retained in grades 3-5. This study does not support the notion that early retention is an effective practice.

Jimerson (1999) conducted a longitudinal study that was comprised of 190 children in a Minnesota mother/child interaction project. These children were put into three groups: Those that were retained in kindergarten, first, second, or third grade; those that were low performing but socially promoted; and a control group of students that did not fit into either of the two previous categories. One of the research questions of this research study was "What is the association between grade retention and academic adjustment in high school" (Jimerson, 1999, p. 258)? The results suggest that the retained group of students experienced significantly lower academic achievement than the students in the low performing, but socially promoted group, and the control group. There did not appear to be any significant difference between the low achieving, socially promoted group and the control group.

Alternatives to Retention

Some educators view retention as a lesson in responsibility for unmotivated students and believe that another year in the same grade with the exact same curriculum will foster an

increase in achievement (Larsen & Akmal, 2007). However, longitudinal research does not

support grade retention as an intervention (Jimerson et al., 1997). Even the research that has

found some benefits to retention reports that the gains tend to be short-lived. The overwhelming

amount of research that has been conducted has found retention to be an ineffective practice in

many aspects of a person's life (achievement, socioemotional health, graduation rate, potential

earnings, financial independence, criminal activity) and cannot be overlooked. Alternatives to

retention and social promotion are available and need to be explored and perfected.

> Most educational professionals and researchers recognize that neither repeating a grade
>
> nor merely moving on to the next grade provides the necessary scaffolding to improve
>
> academic and social skills for the students at-risk of academic failure. Instead, it is
>
> necessary to implement and examine remedial strategies that can facilitate academic
>
> success (Jimerson, 2001, p. 433).

"As higher academic standards have emerged as a prominent national issue, it is

important for legislators, administrators, and teachers to look for pathways to academic success

for students who do not meet district or state standards of achievement" (Lekrone & Griffith,

2006, p. 57). Research provides support and evidence of effectiveness for many different

educational interventions. Preschool programs, before and after school programs, year-round

school, and summer school are some alternatives to retention and social promotion that have

proven effective (Jimerson et al., 2006; Shepard & Smith, 1990). Other interventions that have

proven track records are smaller class sizes, multiage grouping, and looping, which is a practice

where one teacher moves up to the next grade with a class of students. (Lekrone & Griffith,

2006).

In addition to systems and schools providing alternative programs to help meet the needs of struggling students, teachers need to practice research based interventions in the classroom with the needs of the individual child in mind (Jimerson et al., 2006). There is no one single intervention that works with every low-performing child, but there are many research-based interventions available for teachers to use (Jimerson, et al., 2006). Direct instruction, Curriculum Based Measurement, cooperative learning, and the use of mnemonic strategies are just a few of the interventions available to classroom teachers (Jimerson, et al., 2006). Differentiated instruction is a widely used term in current teacher evaluation measures and there are many sources that provide suggestions for classrooms teachers to reach all learners. Carol Ann Tomlinson is one educational specialist that believes that differentiation is not a set of strategies for teaching, but a philosophy with a set of core beliefs. Some of the core beliefs are as follows:

> Students who are the same age differ in their readiness to learn, their interests, their styles of learning, their experiences, and their life circumstances. The differences in students are significant enough to make a major impact on what students need to learn, the pace at which they need to learn it, and the support they need from teachers and others to learn it well. Students will learn best when supportive adults push them slightly beyond where they can work without assistance. Students are more effective learners when classrooms and schools create a sense of community in which students feel significant and respected.

> The central job of schools is to maximize the capacity of each student. (Tomlinson, 2003)

Teachers, when differentiated instruction is occurring, use several strategies for teaching and many interventions to reach all types of learners. Differentiated classrooms provide various options for taking in information, making sense of the new knowledge, and communicating what was learned (Tomlinson, 2003). Whole class instruction, small group instruction, and student-

centered group work are three strategies that are used in differentiated classrooms that allow students to find a method that works for them. Assessment in a differentiated classroom begins with a pretest to determine which students know more and which students know less about a topic and this data is used to drive the instruction (Tomlinson, 2003).

Jerry Aldridge (2010) reviewed several differentiated practices that are research based for the classroom teacher. Self-Regulated Strategies Development in Writing is one of those strategies. This strategy highlights the need to differentiate the content, process, and product so that students can individualize the method to best fit their needs (Aldridge, 2010). Another research-based strategy is matching the style of instruction to the style of reading (Carbo, 2009). Carbo (2009) identifies two types of readers, global and analytical. Global readers move from whole to part and analytical readers move from part to whole. Her article offers many strategies for differentiating reading instruction to match reading style. The Virtual History Museum (VHM) is a differentiated tool that helps teachers teach the regular education curriculum in social studies to students with disabilities (Bouck, Courtad, Heutsche, Okolo, & Eglert, 2009). This tool is a free web-based program that utilizes the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach. UDL is a flexible approach to curriculum design that gives all individuals an equal opportunity to learn and be productive (Bouck, et al., 2009).

Ollerton (2014) feels that differentiation in the classroom is inevitable because no two students are exactly alike. He feels that teachers need to capitalize upon this natural occurrence and offer more opportunities for students to express their different ideas and varying ways of arriving at answers to problems. One example that he gives is to partner up students and ask them to think together of all the different ways that they could find the answer to 23 + 19 or tell them that the answer is 42 and ask them what might be the question (Ollerton, 2014). Ollerton

also talks about the art of questioning strategies in a differentiated classroom. The teacher must know her students' abilities and include all students in the discussion by asking students questions that match their ability level (Ollerton, 2014). More advanced students would get harder questions such as to justify a previous answer and weaker students would get easier questions such as to offer another example. Questioning in the classroom needs to move away from the traditional raise your hand if you know the answer to randomized ways of calling on students to participate in the class (Ollerton, 2014).

Sherry Parrish (2010) wrote a book entitled "Number Talks" that details for teachers how to do the very thing that Ollerton is suggesting. Her method is all based on getting students to do mental math throughout their elementary years and highlighting all the different ways that students think about solving various math problems. Her method is based on moving students away from their desks and the use of paper and pencil, putting a math problem on the board, asking them to quietly think about the answer, then calling on different students to detail for the teacher how they arrived at their answer (Parrish, 2010). This method encourages students to do mental math, highlights the many different ways to arrive at an answer, and if done well, encourages risk-taking in a safe environment. All of these outcomes facilitate differentiation within the classroom.

Response to Intervention (RTI) is a support system for struggling students that is fairly new to public education as it has been around for only about eight or nine years. Its goal is to eliminate the wait to fail system that has been unsuccessful for struggling students for so long (Klotz & Canter, 2007). It is practiced now in all states and has a cause-effect relationship between interventions for low-performing students and their response to that intervention as progress is monitored and measured along a four-tiered system (Brown-Chidsey & Steege,

2010). Students that are struggling to master the standards and skills of their grade level are identified through standardized and classroom testing, given researched-based interventions targeted to their academic weaknesses, and monitored for progress. Those that are still struggling are given further interventions and progress monitored again. The students that are not showing gains continue through the four step program, with the fourth step being special education testing. This individualized plan of interventions travels with the student to successive grades so that teachers know the struggles at the beginning of the year and can use that knowledge to continue delivering research-based interventions as needed (Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2005). The essential components of an RTI program are standards-based classrooms offering high quality, research-based instruction, the use of a universal screener to determine which students are struggling and need extra support, a multi-tiered system where interventions become more intense and individualized to the students needs at increasing tiers, a collaborative approach by school personnel to offer exactly what the student needs, constant monitoring of student progress at each tier to determine if student is meeting the goals of the tier, parental involvement throughout the process, and documentation that special education timelines as outlined in IDEA 2004 are being followed (Klotz & Canter, 2007).

The RTI process has four tiers that are centered on standards-based instruction, universal screening, and progress monitoring (Response to Intervention, 2011). As a student moves through the tiers, the interventions get more intense and the number of students at each successive level becomes less (Response to Intervention, 2011). Everyone is on tier 1, which is research-based strategies delivered in a standards-based classroom. If a student struggles at tier 1, they are moved to tier 2. Tier 2 is needs-based learning where specific trouble spots are identified with the universal screener and research-based interventions are used in an effort to

close the gap that exists. If a student is successful at tier 2 then the student is monitored to make sure he or she continues improving. If the student is unsuccessful at tier 2, then the student is moved on to tier 3, which is the student support team level. At this level the instruction is even more individualized and the progress or lack thereof is monitored. If the student is successful at tier three, he or she is once again monitored to make sure the improvement continues. If he or she is not successful at tier three, then the student moves on to tier four, and special education testing occurs to see if a learning disability is involved. Successful RTI programs must contain the following: Strong school leadership, a collaborative environment, teachers and administrators being willing to offer a wide range of research-based interventions, teachers trained in administering universal screenings, and parents being kept up to date on the progress of their children (Klotz & Canter, 2007).

<div align="center">**Summary**</div>

Retention, the act of holding a student back in a grade due to him or her not mastering the standards of the grade, has been practiced in the United States since the days of the one room schoolhouse. Retention and social promotion have gone back and forth over the past century as the preferred methods for dealing with low performing students. Since the Clinton administration's opposition to social promotion in the early 1990s, and with the rigorous accountability measures of NCLB of the Bush administration, retention of students has increased. Still, educators wrestle with retention versus social promotion every year as they struggle to find the best options for low performing students. There have been some studies that report positive effects of retention, but the bulk of research that has been conducted over the last 75 years does not support the practice of retention, as it points out many negative effects this practice has on the students that are held back. The students that seem to turn retention into a

positive experience are the ones that have families, especially mothers, that value education and are involved in their educational process. But, the majority of students that are held back have less than desirable lifestyles and family situations. Most students that are struggling learners and candidates for retention suffer from poverty, broken homes, low educational level of the mother, and families that do not value education. Research suggests that the negative effects of retention live on throughout the life of the student and are commonly associated with social, emotional and behavioral problems, failure to complete high school, unemployment, and difficulty with the law. The correlation between retention and dropping out of school is very strong, with retained students being two to eleven times more likely to drop out than socially promoted students. "The association of grade retention and high school dropout is disconcerting and seems to be the most common deleterious outcome during adolescence" (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007, p. 334). According to Schwartz (1995), dropouts make up about half of the heads of households for families living on welfare and about half of the population of those in prison.

"Research reveals that neither grade retention or social promotion alone is an effective strategy for improving students' academic, behavioral, and social and emotional success" (Jimerson & Renshaw, 2012, p. 12).   Alternatives to retention and social promotion must be employed more to improve upon the negative statistics associated with retaining students. The goal is to educate students at their level so that they can earn a living for themselves and their families and be productive members of society, unlike the outcomes that are occurring for most retained students. Summer school, year-round school, multi-age grouping, smaller class sizes, before and after school tutoring, small group interventions, research-based differentiated strategies in the regular classroom, and RTI are some of the alternative practices to retention and

social promotion that have proven track records of success that need to be utilized to meet all of

the needs of the various students in public schools.

CHAPER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the impact that retention has had on the lived experiences of adults in the North Georgia area that were retained in their K-12 education. This chapter highlights the procedures, research design, and analysis for this study of retention as an intervention for low-performing students. Studying the impact of retention on adults should add to the research that influences educational policy and the practices of educators.

Design

This study followed a qualitative transcendental phenomenological design and data collection consisted of surveys, questionnaires, interviews, and a focus group. A qualitative approach was best suited to the research as it sought to study and gain a deep understanding of the practice of retention as experienced by people that have lived through it. Phenomenology is the study of the common meaning of lived experiences of several individuals(Creswell, 2013). Unless a person has personally lived through an experience like retention, it is hard to truly gain an understanding of this life event by observing it as an outsider. Phenomenology allowed me to gain an understanding of retention as if I were living vicariously through the participants. Data collected was used to create a snapshot of the experience of retention that was central to all participants of the study (Creswell, 2013). Data was collected that focuses on what each participant experienced and how it impacted their lives through the many years since the phenomenon occurred (Moustakas, 1994). Analysis of the data sought to uncover some shared meanings and themes. Transcendental phenomenology means that the experience was explored with fresh eyes as if seeing the phenomenon for the first time through the lived experiences of

the participants (Moustakas, 1994). This approach involved leaving behind the researcher's experiences with the phenomenon and really trying to look at the incident through the eyes of the ones that experienced retention first hand. Textural (what participants experienced) and structural (how they experienced it) descriptions were developed that allowed the researcher to truly get to the essence of the experience (Creswell, 2013). My experience with retention has strictly been from the standpoint of an educator trying to decide what avenue is best for low-performing students. The transcendental phenomenological design was appropriate for this study because it allowed me to take a fresh look at retention as if walking in the footsteps of the participants as they recalled their memories and feelings about this phenomenon. This design provided an insight into how retention made them feel about school, themselves, and their surroundings. It also helped the researcher and the reader to understand how retention directed the path of their lives.

Research Questions

The research questions for this study were:

- How is the experience of grade retention remembered by adults retained in their K-12 education?

- How has K-12 retention impacted self-efficacy, the belief in the ability to succeed, and quality of life of adults who were retained during their K-12 education?

  o How has retention impacted their self-esteem?

  o How has retention impacted their employment successes and socioeconomic status?

  o How has retention impacted their home life and relationships?

Participants

The participants for this study were 10 adults over the age of 18 that experienced the phenomenon of retention in their K-12 education. Criterion sampling, a type of purposive sampling, and snowball sampling were utilized in this study to find the participants. Creswell (2013) refers to criterion sampling as sampling where all participants have to meet the criteria of having experienced the phenomenon. Finding adults that were retained in their K-12 education was not a simple task, so snowball sampling was employed in the study as well. Snowball sampling utilizes participants that have been identified as experiencing the phenomenon to help find others that have also experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). For this study, once participants were identified through criterion sampling, participants were asked to refer other adults that they may know that have also experienced retention. The 10 participants of this study were white and between the ages of 33 and 81. Four of the participants were female and six were male. Four of the participants were retained in the state of Georgia and six participants were retained in various other states. Eight of the participants were retained in elementary school, one was retained in middle school, and one was retained in high school.

Site

In an effort to preserve anonymity, all personal and institutional names and locations are pseudonyms. The site for this study was all public schools in Mountain Town, a rural community in North Georgia. Mountain Town is located in a county that is about sixty miles north of Atlanta, Georgia, and has an approximate population of 25,000. Mountain Town is not racially diverse as approximately 92% of the population is white. These sites were used to survey adults and find 10 participants for my study.

Procedures

The first step taken in completing the research part of this study was to obtain

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. Once this was obtained, a purposive sampling was

administered to adults at the five public schools in the county. The researcher sent enough

surveys through interoffice mail for all employees of each of the five schools. Once the surveys

were completed, the four schools that participated had a central location for surveys to be turned

in and a designated person that packed them up and sent them back to the researcher through

interoffice mail. Using the answer to survey question number two, "Were you retained (held

back a year) in your K-12 education?" four school employees were chosen for the study. Six

employees of the school system that were not retained, but completed the survey, told me about

their husbands, one mother, and one friend that were retained in their K-12 education and asked

them if they would be willing to participate in the study. This type of sampling is known as

snowball sampling, which is a method where identified participants think about others they know

that have experienced retention. Next, a questionnaire was given to the chosen participants to fill

out that asked specific questions about their experience with retention. Then, recorded

interviews were conducted with each participant and a focus group of four of the participants

was formed to gather even more data. The researcher gave each participant a twenty-dollar Wal-

Mart gift card as a thank you gift for their participation and willingness to open up about their

experience with retention. After all data was collected, the data analysis strategy entitled

Moustakas' Seven Steps (Moustakas, 1994) was used to analyze data by finding shared

experiences, meanings, themes, and significant statements.

The Researcher's Role

My name is Betsy Green and I am an assistant principal at an elementary school in Mountain Town, Georgia. Before I had this job, I was a middle school assistant principal for one year and a math teacher for nine years. Before that, I stayed at home with my children for fifteen years. I come from an education background, as both of my parents were educators in public schools. I possess a Christian worldview and truly strive to help all the different students that I serve. I have been a part of several retention decisions at the schools where I have been employed and have taught five students that were retained at the middle school level. I was not satisfied with the long-term results of these retentions and I wanted more information relative to such decisions.

I have a working relationship with four of the participants. Three of the four participants taught at the middle school where I taught and was assistant principal for one year, and one participant is the counselor at the high school where both of my children attended. Three of the participants are husbands of teachers that teach at the elementary school where I am currently the assistant principal and one participant is the husband of a teacher at the middle school. One participant is the mother of a teacher at the elementary school where I work, and one participant is a friend of a teacher that works at my elementary school. I stressed to all the participants that participation in this study was voluntary and that no grudges would be held if they decided not to participate. I also stressed to them that I would not judge them or their circumstances, only collecting data that I hope will help educators make the best possible decisions for students that are not meeting success.

Data Collection

To achieve triangulation in this study, data was collected in three different ways, a data collection method that strengthens the credibility of the data and the study itself (Moustakas, 1994). Questionnaires, interviews, and a focus group meeting were used to gather data. A fourth data collection method, surveys, was used for the sole purpose of identifying the participants for the study. Before any of the data collection strategies were administered, a pilot group composed of colleagues that were not a part of the study, was assembled to examine the wording and question quality of the survey, questionnaire, interview questions, and focus group questions. I asked eight educators that work as my equals to read over the instruments and give feedback that would strengthen the data collected in this study. Five colleagues examined all data collection instruments and made minor suggestions to improve their quality. Surveys were given to approximately 350 different adults over the age of 18 as the tool for purposive, criterion sampling. Criterion sampling makes sense when the goal is to have all participants in the study meet a predetermined criterion (Patton, 2010). From those surveys, 4 participants were chosen and the other six participants were found using snowball sampling. Snowball sampling utilizes participants that have been identified as experiencing the phenomenon to help find others that have also experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). A questionnaire made up of closed, short answer questions was given to each person that asked more detailed questions about their experience with retention. This allowed me to acquire the less detailed information in a quick and easy way so interviews could be kept to a reasonable length. Next, individual interviews were conducted with the identified participants to understand the feelings and emotions that retention evoked for each participant. From the original 10 participants, a focus group of four were chosen for the purpose of sharing their stories and bringing to mind events and feelings that

might have been forgotten. I chose my four focus group members by willingness to participate and the group was comprised of participants ranging from 33 to 54 years of age.

Surveys

In qualitative research, surveys are often used as a criterion sampling method (Creswell, 2013). Surveys are questionnaires used to qualify survey takers as experiencers of the phenomenon or not, with closed-ended questions encouraging a short or one-word answer. The qualifying survey was given to approximately 350 adults over the age of 18 at all public schools in the county. This survey served as the purposive sampling tool to identify 10 participants for the study that were retained in their K-12 education. I created this survey with eight questions about retention in K-12 education and other demographic information that helped to narrow down the individuals surveyed to find the participants (see Appendix A). Maximum variation sampling at the site level is sampling that tries to find participants that might have different outcomes as a result of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Certified educators that were retained, and custodians, lunchroom workers, bus drivers who were retained will likely offer different outcomes to the phenomenon of retention. This is desirable for my research as I am trying to find participants that share common themes, but also find participants that have different experiences based on their life situations. The survey was given to all employees of the Mountain Town School System including teachers, office workers, bus drivers, custodians, lunchroom workers, and paraprofessionals. In early spring of 2015, all administrators of all the schools in the Mountain Town School District were given enough surveys for all of their staff at their school and were asked to give these out to all employees. Employees filled them out and returned them to the front office where the secretary collected them. Once most of them were returned, the secretary sent these to me through interoffice mail.

Questionnaires

Once surveys were analyzed and participants were selected, questionnaires were given to each of them to answer questions of a more closed nature (See Appendix B). A questionnaire is a list of closed-ended questions that offers no room for elaboration (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). This type of data collection enabled me to get more information from each of the participants and allowed me to shorten the interviews to a length that was manageable for both the interviewer and interviewee. The questionnaires were sent via email to all participants with an emphasized completion date. Participants were asked to send the answers by email back to me. Two participants were not email users, so I personally delivered the questionnaire to the participants and the participants completed the questionnaires and sent them back to me through people that worked at my school.

Personal Interviews

Personal interviews were conducted in a setting that was comfortable for the participants. Each participant was asked when and where he or she wanted to meet. All but three of the interviews were conducted at one of the public schools. Two interviews were conducted at Starbucks and one interview was conducted at the home of one of the participants. I scheduled the interviews a week in advance and called each participant to remind them on the day of the interview. Interviews were face-to-face conversations with the purpose of exploring issues or topics in detail (Pope & Mays, 1995). Semi-structured interviews are interviews where the researcher has prepared some guiding questions to add some organization to the interview, but has left room for improvising and going down paths that naturally come along with conversations (Myers & Newman, 2007). The interviews were semi-structured so that the questions guided the participants to help answer the research questions, but allowed them some

room to add their personal meanings to the interview questions that were open-ended (See Appendix C). Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) suggests semi-structured interviews for first-time researchers as true open-ended interviews have the tendency to get off track and an inexperienced researcher might possibly have a hard time getting the participants to focus and finish the interview. Interviews were recorded using an audio program called Garage Band, which is already installed on my computer. I used the voice memo application for i Phones as the back up recording device. I also took notes during the interviews.

Data Collected from Questionnaire and Interviews

Questions two through 11 on the questionnaire and questions one through nine of the interview helped me to answer research question number one which states: How is the experience of grade retention remembered by adults retained in their K-12 education? These questions were asked to get the adult participants to think back and remember why the retention occurred, how the process of retention worked for them, how they found out they would be retained, how other people treated them after the retention, and if the retention was beneficial to them now that they are older and are looking back at this experience. Questions six, seven, and eight of the questionnaire helped me to get a feel for the type of family in which the participant was raised and for the possible expectations of the parents. Questions five, six, and 10 of the interview helped me to answer research question 2a, which states: How has retention impacted their self-esteem? Question nine, 10, 12, and 13 of the questionnaire, and question 11 of the interview helped me to answer research question 2b, which states: How has retention impacted their employment successes and socioeconomic status? These questions asked the participants about their graduation status, employment history, and whether they feel that retention impacted their job successes and earning potential. Question 12 of the interview helped answer research

question 2c, which states: How did retention impact the home life and relationships of adults that were retained in their K-12 education? Question 13 of the interview addressed whether the participant's own children were or might be retained and how they felt or would feel about that. This question delved deeply into how they really feel about the practice of retention and whether they would want their own children to experience this phenomenon if they were not finding success in school.

Focus Group

Focus groups are defined as carefully planned discussions that seek to obtain the perceptions of a particular area of interest in a comfortable, nonthreatening environment (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Four participants were chosen for a focus group discussion (Appendix D) based on their willingness. Preferably, the group will be comprised of members from different age groups. The focus group was held at Mountain Town Middle School in one of the participant's classrooms. Three of the members of the focus group were teachers at the middle school and one was a youth pastor at a local church about two miles from the middle school. The goal of the focus group discussion was to bring together people that have experienced retention and to let their cooperative discussion jog their memories in a different way than one-on-one interviewing could achieve (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Creswell (2013) points out that focus group meetings need to be facilitated in such a way that all participants contribute and no one individual dominates the conversation. I led the focus group discussion while recording it so that I did not miss any important information. This helped with data analysis, specifically with coding and themes. Focus group meetings were recorded using an audio program called Garage Band, which is already installed on my computer. I used the voice memo application for i Phones as the back up recording device, and I also took notes during the focus group meeting.

Data Analysis

Moustakas' Seven Steps (Moustakas, 1994) were used to analyze the data generated by this study. Moustakas' Seven Steps include: Reviewing each statement for how accurately it describes the experience, recording all pertinent statements, removing all statements that are repetitive, organizing the constant meaning units into themes, combining the themes into explanations of the textures of the experience and supplementing the explanations with quotes from the text, using intuition and utilizing multiple perspectives to find the possible meanings in the content, and creating descriptions of the what and the how of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

> The "what" and "how" of the experience are the textural and structural descriptions. The researcher develops a textural description of the experiences of the persons (what participants experienced), a structural description of their experiences (how they experienced it in terms of the conditions, situations, or context), and a combination of the textural and structural descriptions to convey an overall essence of the experience. (Creswell, 2013, p. 80)

These steps were utilized to code the data from the different collection methods employed by this study. Coding is a process of identifying common themes and phrases. Coding and categorizing can be used interchangeably and "involves aggregating the text or visual data into small categories of information, seeking evidence for the code from different databases being used in a study, and then assigning a label to the code" (Creswell, 2013, p. 184). Creswell (2013) refers to coding as a winnowing process for data.

Trustworthiness

Creswell (2013) refers to trustworthiness of a study as validation. He goes on to define validation as strategies that researchers use to make sure their study is accurate. The four aspects of trustworthiness are confirmability, credibility, dependability, and transferability.

Confirmability.

Confirmability is the degree to which a research study is authentic to the experiences of the participants and not the bias of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). "Steps must be taken to help ensure as far as possible that the work's findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher" (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). Confirmability can be achieved through triangulation, use of direct quotes, researcher's admission of beliefs and experiences about the phenomenon being studied, and an audit trail (Shenton, 2004). Triangulation involves using at least three data collection methods to corroborate evidence to shed light on the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2013). In this study a questionnaire, individual interviews, and a focus group discussion were the data collection methods used to achieve triangulation. An audit trail is a "data-oriented approach, showing how the data eventually leading to the formation of recommendations was gathered and processed during the course of the study" (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). In this study, I provide a detailed description of each participant, an in-depth write up of each personal interview and the focus group discussion with many direct quotes.

Credibility

Credibility is the accuracy of findings in a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is the degree to which the researcher interpreted the phenomenon accurately (Shenton, 2004). Credibility can be achieved in a qualitative study through triangulation, member checking, and thick

descriptions. Member checking "involves taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account" (Creswell, 2013, p. 252). This allows the participants to check the findings and their interpretations for accuracy to help validate the study (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). "Thick description means that the researcher provides details when describing a case or when writing about a theme" (Creswell, 2013, p. 252). After each personal interview and the focus group discussion, I typed up the transcript and emailed it to each of the participants to check for accuracy and I encouraged them to change or add to the description as they felt it necessary. I also used detail and direct quotes to achieve thick descriptions in the transcripts.

Dependability

Dependability is expressing the findings of a study in a consistent manner where repetition is possible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). "In order to address the dependability issue more directly, the processes within the study should be reported in detail, thereby enabling a future researcher to repeat the work, if not necessarily to gain the same results" (Shenton, 2004, p. 71). Dependability can be achieved through describing in detail the research design and the data collection methods.

Transferability

Transferability is the degree to which the findings of a study can be applied to another study with a wider population, or different context or setting (Shenton, 2004; Trochim, 2006). Thick descriptions of the boundaries of the study need to be given to the reader, such as detailed description of the participants, description of the data collection sessions, and the time period during which the data was collected (Shenton, 2004). Thick descriptions "aim to give readers a sense of emotions, thoughts, and perceptions that research participant's experience" (Holloway,

1997, p. 154). In this study thick descriptions of the participants and what was said and expressed in the data collection sessions were utilized as well as a description of the limitations of the study.

Ethical Considerations

Obtaining IRB approval and getting informed consent were the first ethical considerations of this research study. The informed consent was a written description of the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of the study, the time commitment involved, the intended use of results, the right of participants to withdraw from the study at any time, and the confidentiality of all information gathered through data collection methods, (Creswell, 2013). Protecting the privacy of my participants was of utmost importance to me, as I felt obligated to that end as they gave me personal information that was of a sensitive nature. It was also important for me to keep all of my data confidential by securing the computer that I used and locking the filing cabinet where all of the non-computerized data was kept. Using pseudonyms for the participants was another important ethical consideration to ensure that anonymity of participants was preserved.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Overview

The first three chapters of this dissertation provide an introduction to the purpose of the research, a review of the literature, and the methodology used. Chapter four provides an in-depth inquiry of the findings obtained from the 10 participants of this study about the impact retention has had on their lives. Each participant completed a survey, questionnaire, and one-on-one interviews with me and was given a pseudonym to protect their identity. Four of the participants also participated in a focus group discussion. This chapter will include an overview of participants, a brief biography of each participant, a detailed account of each participant's retention story, and a summary of the findings. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand the impact that retention has had on the lived experiences of adults in the North Georgia area that were retained in their K-12 education. The research questions that guided this study were:

- How is the experience of grade retention remembered by adults retained in their K-12 education?

- How has K-12 retention impacted self-efficacy, the belief in the ability to succeed, and quality of life of adults who were retained during their K-12 education?

  o How did retention impact their self-esteem?

  o How did retention impact their employment successes and socioeconomic status?

  o How did retention impact their home life and relationships?

Participants

The sample of 10 participants used is this study was found by giving a brief survey (Appendix A) to most employees of the Mountain Town School District. There are three

elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school in the district with approximately

500 employees. One elementary school never responded to my inquiry to survey their

employees. The 350 employees surveyed included teachers, administrators, counselors,

custodians, paraprofessionals, and lunchroom workers. Out of this group, there were only four

school employees that filled out the survey indicating that they had been retained. Three of those

were teachers and one was a counselor. The snowball effect was employed, as teachers would

tell me that their relative or someone they know was retained. Four of the participants were

husbands of teachers, one was a mother of a teacher, and one was a retired teacher who was

friends with a current teacher.

Table 1

Overview of Participants

Pseudo-nym	Current Age	Young for Grade	SPED Services	Traumatic Experience as a Child	Mother Graduated From HS	Father Graduated From HS	Police Record	Highest Level of Ed
Alex	66	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Masters
Cathy	42	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Doctorate
Charlie	33	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Bachelors
Doug	46	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	Associates
Donna	54	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Bachelors
George	39	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	Bachelors
Jason	37	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	High School
Jack	64	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	GED
Jane	81	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	High School
Sally	59	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Masters

Four of the 10 participants were female and six were male. All participants were white and between the ages of 33 and 81. Four of the participants were retained in the state of Georgia and six participants were retained in various other states. Eight of the participants were retained in elementary school, one was retained in middle school, and one was retained in high school. Six of the 10 participants were young for their grade, three received special education services, and four suffered from a traumatic experience as a child. Seven of the 10 participants had a mother that graduated from high school, eight had a father that graduated from high school, two participants have a police record, and seven of the participants have a college degree. Only one of the 10 participants dropped out of high school.

Alex:

Description.

Alex is a 66-year-old white male who began school at the age of four. He was retained in the 7th grade at the age of 12, and he did not receive special education services. Alex was raised by both of his parents and has two siblings, neither of which was retained. His father holds a master's degree and his mother graduated from high school. Alex does not know the income level of his family when he was growing up, but they lived a comfortable life. Alex did graduate from high school and college and holds a master's degree in counseling. He does not have a police record, is currently employed as a counselor at Mountain Town High School and has a personal income level between $60,000 and $80,000.

Thoughts on why retained.

Alex feels that he was retained because he was young for his grade, small in stature, struggled in math, and spent long hours every night completing his homework. He stated:

"The way they explained it to me was they felt I was too young to go high school and I

had struggled a bit with math and made a C in math, and they said 'That's it. We are

holding you back. You'll be more mature and maybe you won't struggle so much' "

(Personal communication with participant, May 7, 2015).

When Alex was in school, 8th grade was the first year of high school, and his parents didn't feel

he was ready for the expectations of high school. When Alex was in the 4th or 6th grade, he

missed a lot of school due to having the measles, and he feels this could have contributed to the

gaps in his knowledge. "I don't feel that I was immature acting. In fact I know, or I'm pretty

sure, I was not, but I did struggle, particularly with the math. I was also small" (Personal

communication with participant, May 7, 2015). Alex does not feel that he suffered from any big

traumatic experience as a child, but he said that his dad was really hard on him and this made

Alex shut down. "Dad was very hard on me, very hard, to the point I know I shut down, and it

had to do with math. I couldn't get it and I remember being yelled at and I remember being

called dumb" (Personal communication with participant, May 7, 2015). This made Alex hate

math even more. Alex's dad graduated from law school and designed houses, so he was very

smart and good at math. He didn't understand why Alex struggled so. Alex was tested for the

gifted program his first year in 7th grade and qualified in science. But, he never entered a gifted

class due to a conflict with the sports schedule.

Memories of retention experience.

Alex's parents told him that he was being retained after the final report card of the 7th

grade came out. Alex said, "I was shocked, disappointed, and bewildered. I played baseball with

kids that were moving on and this was embarrassing." On the first day of school of the retained

year, Alex suffered from more embarrassment as the teacher explained in front of the whole class

that Alex's parents did a wise thing when they retained Alex. He did start to grow physically

during his second 7th grade year and got recruited for an elite rec football team. Due to his athletic ability, the boys that were a year ahead and the boys that were in his new 7th grade class accepted him, but the girls in either grade never accepted him. Even though the boys accepted him in his new class, he still felt like an outsider. He did make a best friend that retained year, but the friend attended another school. They met due to sports and church.

Thoughts regarding retention, self-esteem, and quality of life.

Alex does not feel that the retention was beneficial to his education because he feels the social problems he suffered outweighed everything else. "I did feel like an outsider socially for the rest of my school years. Even when I started dating a girl from the older class, the couples in that class didn't invite us to go out with them" (Personal communication with participant, May 7, 2015). He feels like the better solution would have been to move him on with his original class because he was too old for the retention. Looking back, Alex feels that the retention did affect his self-esteem negatively for two or three years after the retention until he got an older girlfriend. Alex did graduate from high school and attended college in Tennessee. He played baseball in college on a scholarship and doesn't feel the retention affected him negatively in his life after high school. Alex graduated from college with a degree in English education on a Friday and began teaching the following Monday. Alex taught English and history for 20 years as well as coached football. He earned a counseling degree in the mid 1980s and started working as a school counselor in 1993.

Thoughts regarding retaining his own children.

Alex has two children of his own and neither one was retained. Alex said that he would have entertained the idea of retention for them if they had needed it in their early school careers, not in middle school.

Cathy:

Description.

Cathy is a 42-year-old white female who began school at the age of five. She was retained in kindergarten at the age of six and did receive speech services. Cathy was an only child, and her parents divorced when she was two. She lived with her mother, but did visit her father every other weekend. Both of her parents graduated from high school. Cathy thinks the income level of her family during her growing up years was in the range of $20,000 to $40,000. She doesn't remember being poor, but they also did not have a lot of extra. Cathy did graduate from high school and college and holds a doctorate degree in education. Cathy does not have a police record, is currently employed as a science teacher at Mountain Town Middle School, and has a personal income level over $100,000.

Thoughts on why retained.

"From what I've been told, my mother and the kindergarten teacher met and they decided that I loved school but I was not ready to move on to 1st grade. They were worried that if I went on to 1st grade, I would struggle and not enjoy school" (Personal communication, May 5, 2015).

Cathy says she experienced difficulty in kindergarten due to slow processing speed and low reading ability. She did receive speech services when she was in elementary school. Cathy's parents divorced when she was two years old, but she does not think that was traumatic to her because she never remembers her parents together, her parents never fought, and Cathy had a great relationship with both of her parents. She lived with her mom, but visited her dad every other weekend.

"I was pretty much a latchkey kid. My mom worked two jobs and she smoked and drank and I chose a different lifestyle as I got older. Nothing that set me back, just that my mom worked a lot. I don't remember her reading books to me and going over ABC flash cards, but she did read a lot and my love for reading is because she actually got me into book clubs when I was younger" (Personal communication with participant, May 5, 2015).

When I asked Cathy if she felt these situations had an impact on her retention she said,

"I really don't. I say that because I had a speech therapist. I also remember being in elementary school later on or it may have been middle school where they asked me to do summer school to get caught up on reading. I remember my spelling was always awful and now that I'm an educator, I look back and my dad can barely read, so I think there is some learning disabilities and one of my kids has maybe a little bit, but we have all overcome them so I think I might have actually had something just never diagnosed and I compensated and I think my daughter has done the same thing" (Personal communication with participant, May 5, 2015).

Memories of retention experience.

Cathy found out she was being retained by her mom. She remembers being excited because her best friend was a year younger than her and they would get to be in the same grade together. Her kindergarten teacher made her the class helper her second year of kindergarten and she never felt like she did kindergarten twice. Cathy does not remember the other kids acting differently towards her and she thinks this is probably because they were all so young and didn't realize that she was repeating kindergarten. The retention did cause her parents to help her more with reading and ABCs. Her mother signed her up for a book club and she got two books a

month as well as *Highlights* magazine and she remembers getting really excited about that. Cathy does feel that the retention in kindergarten was very beneficial to her education because it gave her an opportunity to mature and be one of the oldest in the class.

> "I think number one, I was older so when I went into high school and my younger peers were doing stupid stuff, I was like why are you doing that? I was 16 in the ninth grade and driving my friends around so it was really good for me" (Personal communication with participant, May 5, 2015).

Cathy does not feel there was a better solution than retention at the time because she was so young and the retention was seamless for her.

Thoughts regarding retention, self-esteem, and quality of life.

Cathy feels that the retention was good for her self-esteem all through her growing up years because she was older and more mature. When she was in middle school, she remembers not being chosen to take honor classes and that hurt her feelings, but in the 8th grade she was asked to take Algebra 1 with the gifted students and that was really good for her self-esteem. Cathy started working at the age of 14 and paid most of her own expenses. She did graduate from high school and college and presently holds a doctorate degree in education. She does tell her students about her retention and her struggles in school because she wants them to relate to her and realize that they can overcome obstacles and be successful.

Thoughts regarding retention of her own children.

Cathy does have two daughters of her own. She did think about retention for the younger one, but on the advice of her teachers, she did not hold her back and this ended up being the right decision because her daughter has caught up in reading and writing. Cathy does feel that if a

student is going to be held back, it should happen in kindergarten or first grade before friendships form and self-esteem is affected.

Charlie:

Description.

Charlie is a 33-year-old white male who began school at the age of five. He was retained in the 3rd grade at the age of eight and did receive special education services in reading. Charlie was raised by both of his parents and had two older siblings, neither of which was retained. Both of his parents graduated from high school and his mother received her bachelor's degree in education when Charlie was in the 3rd grade. Charlie reported that his family income was between $20,000 and $40,000 during his growing up years. Charlie did graduate from high school and college, but does have a police record "for doing something really stupid in high school." Charlie is currently employed as the youth pastor of a Methodist church in Mountain Town and has a personal income level between $40,000 and $60,000.

Thoughts on why retained.

Charlie was retained in the 3rd grade because he was young for his age and struggled with schoolwork. "I got behind and stayed behind. I was one of the youngest in the class with a June 30 birthday." He said that his end of year report card was the data used to decide to hold him back in 3rd grade and that his mother told him of the decision.

Memories of retention experience.

Charlie said that he was relieved because the friends he had made in the current grade were leaving him out and making him feel like they didn't really like him and that he was getting on their nerves. The new friends he made when he repeated 3rd grade fully accepted him. He said:

"Dusty and Clint became my buddies and this made me happy and content in my retained year. I had a young vibrant teacher my second year of 3rd grade and I loved that. There was a restroom attached to our classroom and the teacher said we could go to restroom when she was not teaching. This made me feel responsible and I thought the teacher was very cool" (Personal communication with participant, May 6, 2015).

The retention did not cause Charlie any problems at home and made him a happier person. Charlie was the baby of the family as his two older siblings are 7 and 9 years older than him. His siblings were not retained in school, but his brother did have to repeat a few classes in high school. Charlie feels that his brother could have benefited from retention early in his school career.

Thoughts regarding retention, self-esteem, and quality of life.

Charlie feels that the retention was beneficial to his education.

"Being able to be accepted by friends and successful with education and making good grades boosted my self-esteem and made me like school. I feel that the second year in 3rd grade allowed me to have another year to then thrive in school rather than struggle at the bottom of the pack" (Personal communication with participant, May 6, 2015).

He said that after his retention year, he stayed ahead of everything and school was not a problem for him. He recalls a time in the 4th grade where he was asked to do a speech about a topic of choice and he chose to do his about the plane his grandfather flew in World War II. He remembers enjoying the research and giving the speech and feels that school had become enjoyable for him. Charlie did graduate from high school and college. He received a baseball scholarship to college and this changed the course of his future plans. He had planned to go into

the military after high school, but ended up going to Lee University in Tennessee and graduated

with a degree in ministry. He was also a graduate assistant baseball coach at Lee University.

> "I tried to double major in ministry and history education and was within nine hours of
>
> doing this when I got offered a job in Marietta, Georgia, working part time as leader of
>
> FCA and part time as youth minister in a big Methodist church" (Personal
>
> communication with participant, May 6, 2015).

This is where he met his wife and nine months later they were engaged.

Thoughts regarding retention of his own children

Charlie has one daughter who is not school-aged yet, but he said if she struggled and

needed retaining that he would do it when she was very young. From his experience he feels that

friends are an important part of being happy in school.

> "The majority of what we talked about today with my retention was about friends and if
>
> friends are that important in 3rd grade, then that makes it that much more important in
>
> middle school. So, for that reason plus others, I would want to hold a child of mine back
>
> as early as possible" (Personal communication with participant, May 6, 2015).

Doug:

Description.

Doug is a 46-year-old white male who began school at the age of four. He was retained

in the 3rd grade at the age of eight and he did not receive special education services. Doug was

raised by both of his parents and has two siblings, neither of which was retained. His father

holds an associate's degree and his mother dropped out of high school at the age of 16. He

reported that his family income was between $20,000 and $40,000 during his growing up years.

Doug did graduate from high school and college and holds a degree in respiratory therapy. He

does not have a police record, is currently employed as a respiratory therapist by the local hospital in Mountain Town, and has a personal income level between $40,000 and $60,0000.

Thoughts on why retained.

The decision to retain Doug was made in a parent/teacher conference where Doug was present. Doug was retained because he lagged behind in reading. "Everything else was where it needed to be" (Personal communication with participant, May 11, 2015).

Memories of retention experience.

Doug was raised by both of his parents and did not experience any traumatic experiences as a child. Doug was not bothered by the decision to retain him because he was going to have the same teacher as he did the year before and he really liked this teacher. "I liked my teacher so that made it easier. On the first day of the retained year I remember feeling they weren't the same kids I was used to being with, but that's all I can recall" (Personal communication with participant, May 11, 2015). Doug does not remember experiencing embarrassment on the first day of the retained year because his school was a primary school and his former classmates moved on to another school. His new classmates didn't realize that he was retained, so the situation was an easy one. Doug does feel the retention was beneficial to his education because it gave him the opportunity to develop reading skills. Doug felt that the only better solution to being retained in the 3rd grade would have been to be retained earlier.

> "I do remember my mom having a conference with my kindergarten teacher and saying she didn't realize she could have kept me home for another year. I was four when I started kindergarten. But, the kindergarten teacher advised my mom to keep me where I was because I was excelling and doing well" (Personal communication with participant, May 11, 2015).

Doug did say that his mother was very involved in his education and that helped him to be successful.

Thoughts regarding retention, self-esteem, and quality of life.

Doug does not remember the retention having an impact on his self-esteem either negatively or positively. He said that he is still not a great reader because he doesn't read fast. Doug graduated from high school, went straight to college and got a degree in respiratory therapy. Doug worked in college and did his clinical rotations. When he graduated, he went to work for the same hospital where he did his rotations and worked there for five years. He and his family vacationed in Mountain Town, Georgia, and loved it so much they decided to move to Mountain Town. He has worked at the hospital in Mountain Town for 20 years now.

Thoughts regarding retaining his own children.

Doug and his wife have a son in the 8th grade. Doug said, "If my son had needed retaining I would definitely consider it after doing research as to why and after talking to my wife who is an educator" (Personal communication with participant, May 11, 2015).

Donna:

Description

Donna is a 54-year-old white female who began school at the age of 5. She was retained in the 2nd grade at the age of eight and did not receive special education services. Donna's parents got divorced so her mother and grandmother raised her. She has two siblings, but neither of them was retained. Donna's father holds a bachelor's degree and her mother graduated from high school. She reported that her family income level was below $20,000 during her growing up years. Donna graduated from high school and college and holds a middle school teaching degree. She does not have a police record, is currently employed as a science teacher at

Mountain Town Middle School, and has a personal income level of between $60,000 and $80,000.

Thoughts on why retained.

Donna's dad was in the military and they lived overseas her first time in the 2nd grade. "We just came back from Okinawa and I started 3rd grade in the states and I remember sitting in class looking at pictures thinking, 'I wish I knew what the words said so I could read the stories because all the other kids can' " (Personal communication with participant, May 12, 2015).

When she came to the states, she started school in 3rd grade, but her mother insisted that she repeat the 2nd grade. Donna does not remember if the 3rd grade teacher was involved in the decision to retain her, but she does remember that her mom told her when she was older that she had to fight with the principal to get her retained. Her mother also told her when she was older that she attributes the fact that Donna could not read in 3rd grade to her education in Okinawa because the teachers were not certified, but Donna does not feel this was the reason. She feels her immaturity was the reason.

Memories of retention experience.

Donna stated:

"A 2nd grade teacher introduced me to a child in her class and asked if I wanted to go to recess with them. She did this for 2 or 3 days, then said, 'Why don't you just come and play with us all the time.' The next thing I know, I was back in 2nd grade. It was perfect" (Personal communication with participant, May 12, 2015).

Donna's dad was in the military and was gone a lot during her younger years.

"My dad was away all the time. He was off fighting a war, but as a kid you did not pay attention to that. When he came home my parents fought. They finally got divorced and I didn't see my dad for years. As a kid you just adjust, but as an adult you think, 'Oh my God, what did you do that for' " (Personal communication with participant, May 12, 2015)?

Donna does feel that the fighting of her parents and the divorce did play into the need to retain her.

Thoughts regarding retention, self-esteem, and quality of life.

The retention was no big deal to Donna until she hit middle school. By middle school Donna had matured a great deal and grown very tall for her age. She said that she felt too old for 7th grade. Her self-esteem had been high up until this point, but in middle school she began to suffer from some self-esteem issues. Donna did graduate from high school and college. She graduated from college with a degree in education and taught 4 or 5 years before she stayed home with her children. After staying home for a while, she went to work for Valic and was able to work from her home. But, she grew tired of that job as it was boring and she missed teaching, so she started teaching again when her children were older. Donna does think the retention was beneficial to her education because she learned to read in the retained year and developed an interest in school that she had not had before. She thinks that without the retention, there is a good possibility that she would not have graduated from high school, and she does not feel there was a better solution for her learning needs. Donna attributes the success of the retention to her mother's involvement and support of her education.

Thoughts regarding retaining her own children.

Donna has three children of her own. She retained her middle son in the 4th grade, but the retention was not successful.

"He wound up quitting school and getting a GED. I retained him in the 4th grade and I should have listened to my instincts and retained him when he was in kindergarten. I thought since we were so supportive and he switched schools that it would work, but he was just too into what was going on with his peers" (Personal communication with participant, May 12, 2015).

George:

Description.

George is a 39-year-old white male who began school at the age of six. He was retained in the 9th grade at the age of 15 and did not receive special education services. George was raised by both of his parents and has two siblings, neither of which was retained. Both of his parents dropped out of high school at the age of 16, but both of his parents earned their GED. His mother went on to complete a nursing degree. George reported that his income level was between $80,000 and $100,000 during his growing up years. George did graduate from high school and college and holds a bachelor's degree in education. George does have a police record for foolish behavior in high school, is currently employed as a social studies teacher at Mountain Town Middle School, and has a personal income level between $40,000 and $60,000.

Thoughts on why retained.

George was retained in the ninth grade because he passed only three out of 12 possible credits that year. He was suspended for 12 to 16 days due to fighting and skipping school and missed a total of 39 days of school. He hung out with a group of 7 or 8 boys that lived across the

street from the school and were more motivated to go to the lake all day than go to school. Out

of that group of boys, George was the only one to graduate from high school. "I passed art,

math, and PE that year. It wasn't that I couldn't do it, I just chose not to" (Personal

communication with participant, May 7, 2015). George knew he would repeat his 9th grade year

due to his lack of effort and the number of credits he had at the end of the year. He said, "Mama

and I talked about it at the time, but Dad was in Germany" (Personal communication with

participant, May 7, 2015). Both of his parents were disappointed in him, but supportive of his

attitude to catch up and graduate on time.

Memories of retention experience.

George grew up in a military family and his dad was gone often.

"Daddy being away in the army affected a lot. Between the ages of 8 and 18, Daddy was

gone eight of those 10 years. I was the middle child. Mama worked nights, she was a

nurse and us three boys were home alone. My older brother was more apt to do what he

was supposed to do. My younger brother was handicapped so we took care of him. I was

more apt to do what I wanted to do" (Personal communication with participant, May 7,

2015).

Both of George's parents dropped out of school.

"Neither one of my parents graduated from high school. My mom quit at 16 and my dad

quit at 15 or 16. Mom got pregnant and dad went into the army. Mom had my older

brother at age 16 and had me at 20" (Personal communication with participant, May 7,

2015).

Both of his parents did go back and get their GEDs and his mom went back and got a nursing

degree.

Repeating 9th grade again did affect George's ability to play basketball and for that he was sorry.

> "I was asked to play on the basketball team. The basketball team was pretty good, but I was not eligible academically until the 2nd semester of my junior year. We won state that year. That summer, I had to go to summer school to play the 1st semester of my senior year" (Personal communication with participant, May 7, 2015).

George describes himself as a loner and the type to eat lunch all by himself and be perfectly content with that.

Thoughts regarding retention, self-esteem, and quality of life.

George does not feel that the retention affected his self-esteem in a negative way because he said he was comfortable with himself. He feels that the retention was beneficial to his education and to life.

> "The lessons that I learned outside of the standards were pretty valuable. Through this event, I developed the strength needed to go through hard times and grow from it. I don't know if I would be the same person today if I had not gone through that" (Personal communication with participant, May 7, 2015).

George worked from the time he was 14 years old doing everything from waiting tables, landscaping, digging ditches, bartending, being a bouncer, working at a funeral home to doing electrical work. The job of digging ditches was a lesson in itself. He said that he enjoys manual labor and enjoyed working with the people he worked with to dig ditches, but in the Savannah, Georgia, summer heat, he knew he could do something else. George feels that the retention affected his job successes and socioeconomic status in a positive way by teaching him how to overcome adversity, how to set goals, and chip away at the goals to achieve them.

Thoughts regarding retaining his own children.

George has two children of his own that are not of school age yet. He would retain them if they needed it, but he would prefer to retain them at a younger age rather than an older age due to the many social issues that arise in the later grades.

Jason:

Description.

Jason is a 37-year-old white male who began school at the age of five. He was retained in the 2nd grade at the age of 8 and did not receive special education services. Jason was raised by both of his parents and has one sibling who was also retained. His father and mother graduated from high school and both attended college, but neither of them graduated from college. Jason reported that his family income level was between $20,000 and $40,000 during his growing-up years. Jason graduated from high school and does not have a police record. Jason is currently employed by a gun shop and has a personal income level between $20,000 and $40,000.

Thoughts on why retained.

Jason was retained in the 2nd grade at the age of eight. "I was retained because I was a slow reader and generally off task because I really didn't want to go to school" (Personal communication with participant, June 2, 2015). His teacher and mother met and decided retention was the best option to help Jason strengthen his reading skills and to catch up in general. Jason said that when he was in the 1st grade, he had a brand new teacher who was just learning how to be a teacher and probably was not that strong in her techniques for teaching students how to read.

Memories of retention experience.

Jason found out he was being retained in the summer after his first 2nd grade year.

"During the summer, my parents told me. Oh, I was sad and I was depressed. I thought

it was not fair that all of my friends got to go on and I was stuck back. I didn't know

anybody. My parents response was, 'Life's not fair.' I got over it pretty quick" (Personal

communication with participant, June 2, 2015).

Half of Jason's friends that got promoted did not treat him well and the other half did. "Half of

the friends I had would make fun of me. The other half acted normal and still played with me"

(Personal communication with participant, June 2, 2015). He said that his new classmates

probably didn't realize he was retained. He grew up in Santa Rosa, Florida. The area was really

large and if you moved a mile down the road, there was a good chance that you would go to

another school, so the kids probably just thought he moved in that year. The retention did not

cause Jason any problems at home. His mom was very involved in his education and made sure

he got his homework done right after school before he could play. "If I told her that I didn't

have homework, she would check my book bag to verify. I could never pull that one over on

her. My mom helped me memorize my multiplication tables and she read with me constantly"

(Personal communication with participant, June 2, 2015). Jason does feel that the retention was

beneficial to his education because the first time he was in 2nd grade, he was a poor reader and

only got through about a third of the first box of leveled readers. The other students were

finishing the second box by the end of the year. "This was frustrating to me. My parents worked

with me over the summer the year that I was retained and the second year that I was in the 2nd

grade, I was an all A student" (Personal communication with participant, June 2, 2015). The

only other option that would have been better in Jason's opinion would have been for his parents

to hold him back in 1st grade. This would have allowed him not to have to struggle so hard his first time in 2nd grade.

Thoughts regarding retention, self-esteem, and quality of life.

Jason's self-esteem suffered a little bit after the retention, but he quickly got over it once he started experiencing success in school. His self-esteem has been high ever since and he really has not thought about being retained again until his wife asked him if he would participate in my study. Jason did graduate from high school and went straight to work for 10 years for a manufacturer of plastic windshields for motorcycles. He joined the National Guard while working for this company and got deployed for a total of three years over a six-year enlistment period. After he completed his duty with the National Guard, Jason worked overseas for a security company for four years. He worked in Iraq and Indonesia. He then took three years off work when he returned to the states because he couldn't find a job close to home that he wanted. In the meantime his daughter was born. He now works in retail for a gun shop.

Thoughts regarding retaining his own children

Jason would allow his daughter to be retained early on if she needed to be. "My experience with retention was great and my younger brother was retained in kindergarten for maturity reasons and that was also a good experience. If she was struggling, I would retain her" (Personal communication with participant, June 2, 2015).

Jack:

Description.

Jack is a 64-year-old white male that began school at the age of 5. He was retained in the 2nd grade at the age of 7 and did receive special education services in reading. Jack was raised by both of his parents and has two siblings, neither of which was retained. Both of his parents

dropped out of school at the age of 16, and Jack reports that his family income level was below

$20,000 during his growing-up years. Jack dropped out of high school when he was 16 years

old, but did receive his GED when he was 46. Jack does not have a police record, is currently

disabled and not working, and has an income level below $20,000.

Thoughts on why retained.

Jack was retained in the 2nd grade due to not being on grade level in reading. He believes

the decision to retain him was made by his teacher and parents. "School held no interest for me.

I had a very dysfunctional family. There was alcoholism in my family and there were lots of

parties and fist fights at my house" (Personal communication with participant, May 9, 2015). A

cousin also sexually molested Jack as a child. "It was hard to concentrate on school" (Personal

communication with participant, May 9, 2015).

Memories of retention experience.

Jack was told his parents were retaining him and he was totally embarrassed about it.

Jack does not remember how he felt on the first day of the retained year, but said, "I was

embarrassed by the retention and the fact that I was big in size for my grade added to the

embarrassment" (Personal communication with participant, May 9, 2015). Jack does not feel

that the retention was beneficial to his education.

Thoughts regarding retention, self-esteem, and quality of life.

"The retention made me feel not smart enough, not good enough. It really messed with

my self-esteem" (Personal communication with participant, May 9, 2015). His father was a

workaholic, and his mother was in charge of his education. "If Mom had worked with me more,

I would have done better" (Personal communication with participant, May 9, 2015). Jack did

have a teacher in the 6th grade named Mr. Smith that was a great teacher and "he woke me up

inside for learning" (Personal communication with participant, May 9, 2015). All through his school years he felt like he was stupid, but his self-esteem improved as an adult when he went to work and experienced some successes. Jack dropped out of school at age 16 and was a union carpenter for many years. When Jack dropped out of school, he did work full time and started flying airplanes at the age of 16. Jack always wanted to be self-employed and bounced back and forth from being self-employed to working for someone else. When Jack was 46 years old, he wanted to get his real estate license, but he needed a high school diploma to do this. So, he went back to get his GED. "I felt proud, but the test was scored too easily. I couldn't understand what I wrote, so how could the graders" (Personal communication with participant, May 9, 2015). Jack ended his working life as a self-employed builder and retired after health issues became too much to work.

Thoughts regarding retaining his own children

Jack has one child who is now 44 years old, and she was not retained in school. She did have problems all throughout school, but Jack would intervene and try to help his daughter at home. "My daughter was labeled with a learning disability in school and the extra help class made her feel dumb" (Personal communication with participant, May 9, 2015). Jack has two grandchildren that are very smart and have had no trouble in school. Jack feels that retention is a serious issue and the people making the decisions need to look at the whole child, not just the academic issues.

Jane:

Description.

Jane is an 81-year-old white female who began school at the age of six. She was retained in the 4th grade at the age of nine and did not receive special education services. Jane was raised

by both of her parents and has two siblings, neither of which was retained. Both of her parents graduated from high school, but did not attend college. Jane reported that her family income level was below $20,000 during her growing up years. Jane did graduate from high school and does not have a police record. Jane is currently retired, but bakes cakes for local restaurants and grocery stores, and has a personal income level between $20,000 and $40,000.

Thoughts on why retained.

The first time Jane was in 4th grade, she missed a lot of days due to illness. She also felt that she was slow to catch on at that time and learning her multiplication tables was hard for her. Her mother and the teacher met to discuss the best educational plan for Jane and decided repeating 4th grade would be the best plan.

> "It was made between my teacher and my mother, most probably. I don't know if the dad was included back then or not. It took me a while to catch on. Back then, it was the multiplication tables in that grade" (Personal communication with participant, April 25, 2015).

Memories of retention experience.

Jane found out that she was being retained after her end of year report card came out by her mother telling her the plan. She remembers feeling disappointed because she didn't want all of her friends to move on the next grade and leave her.

> "Of course, I was disappointed. I didn't want all my friends to leave me. But, I made friends pretty easy and found some new ones and kept them all through my sophomore year. Then, we moved after Mother's death to live with an aunt for a while" (Personal communication with participant, April 25, 2015).

Jane describes herself at the time as a timid person with not much self-confidence. She remembers feeling scared on the first day of her retained 4th grade year. Her new classmates were very kind to her and probably did not know that she was retained. She still remained friends with some of her old classmates and remembers them being nice to her. Jane feels that the retention was a good decision and helped her to fill in gaps in her knowledge and gave her another year to learn her multiplication facts. "Well, it enabled me to go on to bigger and better things. I knew more and how to do what I had to do. I learned my multiplication tables" (Personal communication with participant, April 25, 2015).

Thoughts regarding retention, self-esteem, and quality of life.

Looking back, Jane thinks that retention was the best possible solution for her, and the retention helped her to gain confidence in herself and be successful in school for the rest of her school career. At the time of her retention, Jane's life was happy and normal. Her mother was very involved with Jane's education and made sure that Jane's retention was successful. When Jane was 16 years old her mother died after an extended illness, and she had to help her father keep their household in order. Jane did graduate from high school, but she did not go to college. She went straight to work as a bookkeeper at a bank. She worked there several years, got married, and had her first child. Her husband was a Methodist minister, and they ended up moving around. She held many jobs during this time period in her life including working in a doctor's office, working as a bookkeeper at a radio station, working at a children's shop, working as a teller in a bank, and working in a pest control office. When she moved to Mountain Town, Georgia, her children were grown and she started an in-home day care so that she could watch her grandchild as well as make money. She did this for many years until her grandchild got

older and then started baking and selling the baked goods to local restaurants and grocery stores. At 81, Jane is still doing the baking, but has scaled back some.

Thoughts regarding retaining her own children.

Jane has two daughters, four grandchildren, and two great grandchildren, and none of them were retained. Jane said that if one of her children had needed to be retained, she would have agreed to let this happen as she feels that retention was beneficial to her educational career and her working career.

Sally:

Description.

Sally is a 59-year-old white female who began school at the age of six. She was retained in the 2nd grade at the age of 7 and did not receive special education services. Sally was raised by both of her parents and had two siblings, neither of which was retained. Her father graduated from high school and graduated from an embalming college. Her mother graduated from high school and graduated from nursing school. Sally reported that the income level of her family was below $20,000 when she was growing up. Sally did graduate from high school and college and holds a master's degree in education. She does not have a police record, is currently retired from education, and has a personal income level between $20,000 and $40,000.

Thoughts on why retained

Sally's mom and teacher conferenced about Sally's poor grades and made the decision to retain her. Sally was raised in a military family that moved often. By the time she had competed the 2nd grade, she had attended four different schools. Sally was small in size and young for her grade as she had a July birthday. All of these reasons made retention seem like a good idea for Sally's educational success.

"This was relayed to me later. My mom had a conference with my teacher and what happens when you go from one school to another school is you miss out and so there were just gaps due to having so many teachers. So, it was like she needs another year to catch up on what she missed. I was tiny. I have a July birthdate. I mean, I had so many indicators that it was what I needed" (Personal communication with participant, May 20, 2015).

Memories of retention.

Sally learned of her retention on the bus ride home after the last day of school.

"I learned of my retention in the cruelest of ways. So we get on the bus and all the kids have their report cards out, and kids were like, 'Did you pass?' and I said, 'I don't know' and this one kid said, 'Let me see your report card and I'll tell you.' Then she said, 'What grade are you in?' I said, 'second' and she said, 'You failed' " (Personal communication with participant, May 20, 2015).

I went home and showed my mom my report card and she was so emphatic that I did not fail. She said, 'This is not failure, you just need to do it again' " (Personal communication with participant, May 20, 2015). Her mother made the retention a positive experience for Sally and this made Sally accept the decision in a positive way. When Sally was in the 1st grade, her dad left for 13 months on an assignment to Korea.

"Dad went to Korea at Christmas of the year I was in first grade and he didn't come back until 13 months later after Christmas of second grade. And back then you could not communicate other than letters and my mom was all alone in Tampa, Florida with four kids, two in diapers. She didn't have a support system" (Personal communication with participant, May 20, 2015).

When I asked Sally if this situation had an impact on her retention, she said, "It could have. We moved three times while Dad was gone. We moved from Florida to Maryland, then again in Maryland, then to Texas. When I repeated second grade, that was my fifth teacher since I had started school" (Personal communication with participant, May 20, 2015). Sally feels that this experience was somewhat traumatic for her, but she does not feel that the absence of her father was the only reason she did poorly in school. Sally was retained at her old school, but started the retained year at her new school in Texas, so classmates were not even aware that Sally had been retained. She experienced no anxiety from the retention and had a great teacher in her retained year. This made the retention easy for her and she ended up being very successful during her retained year. She enjoyed being one of the oldest in the class and being in the higher academic groups. Sally feels that the retention was beneficial to her education as the retention allowed her to mature and catch up.

Thoughts regarding retention, self-esteem, and quality of life.

Sally learned to focus and study during this retained year and she feels that her self-esteem received a boost due to her understanding of the schoolwork and success with the work. Sally had a successful school career and graduated from both high school and college. She held down many part time jobs as a college student including waitressing, bartending, and cashier. She graduated from college with an education degree and held teaching jobs from the time she graduated until she retired.

Thoughts regarding retaining her own children.

Sally has two children of her own and neither of them was retained. Looking back, she feels that her youngest daughter could have benefited from being retained as she had an August birthday and struggled with math because of her lack of maturity.

"I was really up in the air with my youngest daughter because she has an August birthday. I would ask her teachers if she was ready to move on and they would say, 'Yes.' She was smart, but immature. As the years have gone on, the maturity gap has closed, but looking back, she would have benefited from being retained early on" (Personal communication with participant, May 20, 2015).

Focus Group

Four participants in my study agreed to be a part of a focus group discussion about retention. The focus group included the three employees of Mountain Town Middle School and the local youth pastor at the Methodist church. Donna, Cathy, George, and Charlie all agreed to be members of the focus group and I used them for convenience's sake. I interviewed many people that did not want to participate in a focus group conversation, but these four participants were willing to share their experiences with retention. All of my focus group participants knew each other, but did not know that they were retained at some point in their K-12 education. It was humorous to watch their expressions as the group formed. Donna laughed and made the comment, "It is nice to be a part of such accomplished losers" (Personal communication with participant, May 27, 2015). The group reported different reasons for being retained. Donna was held back in the 2nd grade due to immaturity, Cathy was held back in kindergarten due to being a slow learner, George had to repeat the 9th grade due to adolescent attitude and laziness, and Charlie had to repeat the 3rd grade due to being young for grade and getting behind. When asked if they liked school before they were retained, Donna said that she did not like it because "They wouldn't let me get up and play. Sitting at a desk all day was boring" (Personal communication with participant, May 27, 2015). Cathy reported that she loved school from the very beginning and George said that he didn't mind school. Charlie said that he did not dislike school before the

retention but he became an outcast with his friends and this made school unpleasant for him.

When asked if they liked school after the retention, Donna said that she didn't like school until she became successful, which was in high school. Cathy said that she always loved school, and George said he liked school better after the retention because school became challenging and it was more exciting for him. Charlie said, "I liked school more after the retention because I had a new friend group that would accept me" (Personal communication with participant, May 27, 2015). When I asked them to express their feelings of how it felt when they found out they were being retained, Donna and Cathy both said the transition was so smooth that they don't remember being upset about it. Donna moved to a new school, so all classmates and teachers were different. Cathy said, "My best friend was a year younger than me and I was excited to be able to be in the same grade with her" (Personal communication with participant, May 27, 2015). George said he was old enough to see the retention coming, so it was not shocking news. Charlie said that he was not upset and was actually relieved due to being an outcast among his old peer group. I asked all of them if they felt their retention could have been avoided and George said, "Yes. If I had put more effort into my schoolwork and if Dad had been home" (Personal communication with participant, May 27, 2015). George's dad was gone 8 years between the time George was 8 to 18 years of age. Donna said that she thinks retention could have been avoided with more parental support of her education before the retention, and Cathy said, "Retention might have been avoided if my mother would have been more supportive of my education early on in my life by reading to me, but I now know that I was genetically prone to a learning disability" (Personal communication with participant, May 27, 2015). Charlie said that he was immature as he has a summer birthday and was one of the youngest in his class. So,

Charlie feels that the only way retention could have been avoided was for his parents to start him in school a year later than they did.

When I asked them what they learned from their retention that could benefit or has benefited their own children, Donna said that she would have been a better student if her mother had made her sit down after school and get her homework done. She did that with her own children and it did help them be more successful in school. Cathy said that she learned that she had to have a watchful eye and stay on top of her children's education from a very young age. Her youngest has speech issues and dyslexia, but she had them diagnosed early on and got her the help that she needed. Charlie said that his retention has taught him that he has to communicate with his children and stay in tune to what is going on in their lives. George said that the retention taught him the value of setting goals, believing in himself, and how to work smarter. He hopes to be able to convey these ideas to his own children.

The last question I asked the group was how the whole education system could be changed to benefit all learners. Three of these participants are teachers at the middle school level and one is a youth pastor who deals with young people ages 11 to 18. All participants have worked with adolescents for a minimum of 10 years and each one of them had ideas of how to make education more meaningful for all learners. All of them felt that social promotion was too prevalent and that students need to be retained in the very early grades. All felt that there should be different options for students other than taking the college-bound classes. George said, "We all have students sitting in our classes that truly need to learn how to balance a checkbook, and be trained for a trade. They need to be able to go and do" (Personal communication with participant, May 27, 2015). Donna said, "If my youngest son would have gone to Mountain Town High School instead of Metropolis High School, he would have graduated because they

have the vocational courses that would have interested him. He needed hands-on learning"

(Personal communication with participant, May 27, 2015). Charlie said,

> "My brother was a vocational kid. Pretty quick into high school, my parents figured out
>
> that traditional style education was not going to work for him and so he went head and
>
> shoulders deep into vocational classes and he scraped through to graduate because he still
>
> had to take English 12 twice, but once he was not going to college and out in the real
>
> world, he knew how to do things. He could build a house and he could weld. He had
>
> something to offer" (Personal communication with participant, May 27, 2015).

Other ideas proposed by the group were offering schools based on interests and learning styles.

Another idea that was discussed was that inclusion classes were too inclusive at times. Cathy

said:

> "Not all students need to be intermingled. Those that disrupt constantly because they
>
> have a behavior issue that they can't help need to be in a resource setting. At some point,
>
> you have to say, 'This is not the right environment because it's affecting the other 20
>
> something kids in the classroom.' At what point does the parent say, 'I don't want my
>
> child in that class' " (Personal communication with participant, May 27, 2015)?

 All of the participants agreed with Cathy and felt that the whole inclusion idea had gone too far.

All of them felt that inclusion works for students that know how to control their behavior, but

that the EBD (Emotional Behavior Disorder) students should be removed from regular classes

and put in an environment that is beneficial to their learning and would allow others to learn

better in the regular setting. One last idea that was offered up was giving teachers more planning

time. Donna felt that teachers need more planning time to reach all the diverse learners in their

classrooms. She said, "Teachers have more planning time overseas" (Personal communication with participant, May 27, 2015).

Results

This study delved into the experience of retention for 10 participants that were retained in their K-12 education at public schools in several states in the United States. All of the adult participants now live in Mountain Town, Georgia, a small town in the North Georgia mountains. The following is a collection of commonalities obtained from the thorough study of the questionnaires and transcripts of the interviews. Through the in-depth analysis of the questionnaires and transcripts, the researcher identified common themes and words that describe the essence of the experience through the eyes of the participants. The four themes were thoughts of why retained; memory of retention experience; thoughts regarding retention, self-esteem, and quality of life; and thoughts regarding retaining his/her own children.

Table 2

Codes and Themes

Codes	Frequency	Themes
Immature	6	
Young	7	
Small	3	
Struggled	11	
Trouble with reading	10	Thoughts on why
Dad gone too much	6	retained.
Military family	4	
Lack of effort	3	
Divorce	4	
Moved often	4	

Disappointed Embarrassed Mom involved in education Liked teacher during retained year	4 5 9 8	Memories of retention experience.
Beneficial Social issues Bad for self-esteem Good for self-esteem	10 4 6 5	Thoughts on retention, self-esteem, and quality of life.
Retain when young	14	Thoughts regarding retaining his/her own children.

Theme 1: Thoughts on Why Retained.

Six of the 10 participants were some of the youngest in their grade, and five of them said

that they felt they were retained because they were young for their grade. Alex said, "My

parents told me, 'You'll be more mature and maybe you won't struggle so much' " (Personal

communication with participant, May 7, 2015). Cathy said, "I was young and not ready to move

on to 1st grade" (Personal communication with participant, May 5, 2015). Charlie said, "I got

behind and stayed behind. I was one of the youngest in the class with a June 30 birthday"

(Personal communication with participant, May 6, 2015). Doug said, "My mom didn't realize

she could keep me home for another year when she sent me to kindergarten" (Personal

communication with participant, May 11, 2015). Sally said, "I was young for my grade and I

was a military child that moved a lot. So, there were huge gaps" (Personal communication with

participant, May 20, 2015). Jack was also young for his grade, but he felt that his volatile home life led to his retention. "School held no interest for me. It was hard to concentrate on school" (Personal communication with participant, May 9, 2015).

Six of the 10 participants struggled with reading, and two of the six participants, Jack and Charlie, received special education services in the area of reading. Donna said, "I remember thinking, 'I wish I knew what the words said so I could read the stories because all the other kids can' " (Personal communication with participant, May 12, 2015).
Jason said,

"I was a poor reader and only got through about a third of the first box of leveled readers the first year I was in 2ⁿᵈ grade. The other students were finishing the second box by the end of the year. This was frustrating to me" (Personal communication with participant, June 2, 2015). Doug said, "I lagged behind in reading" (Personal communication with participant, May 11, 2015).

Three of the participants were from military families and either moved a lot and/or had fathers that were gone often. Sally said,

"I was a military child that moved a lot. So, there were huge gaps. Dad went to Korea at Christmas of the year I was in first grade and he didn't come back until 13 months later after Christmas of second grade. And back then you could not communicate other than letters and my mom was all alone in Tampa, Florida with four kids, two in diapers. She didn't have a support system" (Personal communication with participant, May 20, 2015).

George said, "Daddy being away in the army affected me a lot. Between the ages of 8 and 18, Daddy was gone eight of those 10 years" (Personal communication with participant, May 7, 2015).

Donna said,

> "Mom felt I couldn't read in the 2nd grade because the teachers in Okinawa were not certified. My dad was away all the time. He was off fighting a war, but as a kid you did not pay attention to that" (Personal communication with participant, May 12, 2015).

Theme 2: Memories of Retention Experience.

Eight of the 10 participants said the decision to retain them was made by a combination of their parents and their teacher. Four of those eight participants specifically said that their mother and the teacher made the decision. Two participants said that their parents made the decision. Alex, who was retained in the 7th grade said, "I made a C in math and my parents said, 'That's it. We are holding you back' " (Personal communication with participant, May 7, 2015). Donna said that she moved back to the states from Okinawa, Japan, and could not read. "My mom told me when I was older that she had to fight with the principal to hold me back" (Personal communication with participant, May 12, 2015).

Six of the 10 participants said that they did not suffer from a traumatic experience as a child. Three of the four that suffered a traumatic experience said that their fathers were away in the military for a long time during their childhood. One of the three participants, Jack, had a volatile home situation. Alcoholism, parties, and fistfights after drunken parties were a frequent occurrence in his home.

When I asked them how they felt after they found out about the retention, four of the 10 participants remember feeling embarrassed, sad, and disappointed. Jason said, "Oh, I was sad and I was depressed. I thought it was not fair that all of my friends got to go on and I was stuck back" (Personal communication with participant, June 2, 2015). Jack said, "I was embarrassed by the retention and the fact that I was big in size for my grade added to the embarrassment"

((Personal communication with participant, May 9, 2015). Jane said, "Of course, I was disappointed. I didn't want all my friends to leave me" (Personal communication with participant, April 25, 2015). Four of the 10 participants said that the retention really did not bother them at the time. Sally said, "My mother was ok with it, so I was ok with it" (Personal communication with participant, May 20, 2015). Doug said, "I don't remember it really bothering me. I liked my teacher so that made it easier" (Personal communication with participant, May 11, 2015). Two of the 10 participants said that they were excited about being retained. Cathy said, "I wasn't upset, in fact I was excited, because my best friend was one year younger than me, so we got to be in the same grade together" (Personal communication with participant, May 5, 2015). Charlie said, "I was actually relieved because I was the outcast in my original friend group, and this made me not enjoy going to school" (Personal communication with participant, May 6, 2015).

When I asked the participants if the retention caused problems at home with parents or siblings, they all said, "No." George said that his parents were disappointed in him, but supportive of his desire to graduate on time. Five of the 10 participants said that the retention made their parents help with their education more at home. Cathy said, "I remember getting more help from my parents during the retained year. My mom signed me up for the book of the month club and I also started receiving *Highlights* magazine" (Personal communication with participant, May 5, 2015). Donna said, "My mom was very supportive of my education and this helped to make my retention so successful" (Personal communication with participant, May 12, 2015). Jason said, "My mother was very involved with my education. She helped me memorize my multiplication tables and read to me. She made me sit down and do my homework after school before I could play" (Personal communication with participant, June 2, 2015). Jane said,

"My mom stayed on top of my education, especially when I began to struggle" (Personal communication with participant, April 25, 2015).

Theme 3: Thoughts Regarding Retention, Self-esteem, and Quality of Life.

When I asked the participants if they felt that the retention had been beneficial to their education, eight of the 10 said yes and two gave an emphatic no. Cathy and Sally both said the retention caused them to behave more maturely through school. Doug, Donna, and Jason all said that the retention helped them to be better readers. Charlie said, "The retention helped me to be accepted by my peers and be more successful with school work" (Personal communication with participant, May 6, 2015). Jane said, "It enabled me to go on to bigger and better things. I knew more and how to do what I had to do. I learned my multiplication tables" (Personal communication with participant, April 25, 2015). George said, "The lessons I learned outside of the standards were pretty valuable and helped me be successful all through my life" (Personal communication with participant, May 7, 2015). Alex and Jack did not feel that the retention was beneficial to their education. Alex was retained in the 7th grade and he said, "The social problems of the retention decision outweighed everything else. I was too old to be retained. I should have moved on with my regular class and just gotten extra help for math" (Personal communication with participant, May 7, 2015). Jack was retained in the 2nd grade and said, "The retention made me feel not smart enough, not good enough. It really messed with my self-esteem" (Personal communication with participant, May 9, 2015).

When I asked the participants how they felt the retention impacted their self-esteem, five said the retention boosted their self-esteem, three said it lowered their self esteem, one participant does not remember, and one participant said he has always had high self-esteem,

before and after retention. Cathy said, "The retention built me up because my teacher made me the helper during my retained year and this made me feel really good" (Personal communication with participant, May 5, 2015). Charlie said, "It made me be able to be successful with friends, and with my education" (Personal communication with participant, May 6, 2015). Donna said, "The transition was so seamless that my self-esteem did not suffer. In fact, I started reading and that made me feel good" (Personal communication with participant, May 12, 2015). Donna said her self-esteem did not suffer until middle school. Jane said that her self-confidence was low even before the retention. She said, "My self-esteem was higher after the retention because I knew more and I could keep up" (Personal communication with participant, April 25, 2015). Sally said, "It elevated my self-esteem because I was very successful the second time in 2nd grade and I was in the higher groups" (Personal communication with participant, May 20, 2015). Alex, Jason, and Jack all felt that the retention lowered their self-esteem. Alex said, "My self-esteem suffered for the next two or three years, until I got an older girlfriend" (Personal communication with participant, May 7, 2015).

Jason said,

"The retention dropped my self-esteem for a while, but I got over it. My self-esteem was high as I got older and I hadn't thought about the retention again until my wife brought it up and asked me if I would be a part of your study" (Personal communication with participant, June 2, 2015).

Jack said, "I always felt like I was stupid. My self-esteem didn't improve until I became an adult and went to work and had some successes" (Personal communication with participant, May 9, 2015).

When I asked the participants if they felt retention had an impact on their job successes and socioeconomic status, eight of the 10 said that retention had affected their adult working lives in a positive way. One said the retention didn't have an effect on his working life as an adult negatively or positively, and one said that the whole retention experience had negative effects on his life. Eight of the 10 participants felt that the knowledge they gained from being held back and the maturity that followed, helped them to be successful adults and make a good living. Charlie said, "Retention helped to provide him with a better academic foundation which enabled him to be successful in college and get a good job" (Personal communication with participant, May 6, 2015). Doug said, "The retention made me a better reader and reading is the foundation of learning" (Personal communication with participant, May 11, 2015). Donna said, "Without the retention, I doubt I would have graduated from high school" (Personal communication with participant, May 12, 2015). George said, "Having the goal of graduating with my class helped me to learn to set goals and how to achieve the goals by chipping away at them" (Personal communication with participant, May 7, 2015). Jack felt that retention has not served him well in his adult life. He said, "If I would have graduated from high school, I would have been more successful" (Personal communication with participant, May 9, 2015). Jack did have some job successes as an adult, but the thoughts of retention still haunt him.

Theme 4: Thoughts on Retaining Your Own Children.

When I asked the participants if they had or would retain their children if the school suggested it or they saw that their children were struggling, nine out of the 10 participants said yes, but all nine said they would hold their children back very early in their school career before social issues became important. Jack was the only one that did not or would not hold

his child back. He said that his daughter struggled in school, but he worked harder with her at home. Jack also said, "Retention is a serious issue. Educators need to look at the whole child, not just the academic issues. I was suffering from some very serious home issues and retaining me in the middle of all of that did more harm than good" (Personal communication with participant, May 9, 2015).

Research Questions:

Two research questions guided the focus of this study. After conducting all the interviews and the focus group discussion, and analyzing all comments of the participants, both questions were answered through commonalities extracted from the participants' discussions of their retention experiences. The research questions were:

- How is the experience of grade retention remembered by adults retained in their K-12 education?

- How has K-12 retention impacted self-efficacy, the belief in the ability to succeed, and quality of life of adults who were retained during their K-12 education?

  - How did retention impact their self-esteem?

  - How did retention impact their employment successes and socioeconomic status?

  - How did retention impact their home life and relationships?

The first research question was: How is the experience of grade retention remembered by adults retained in their K-12 education? Six of the 10 participants remember being very young for their grade and not ready for the learning expectations of the grade. Six of the 10 participants remember struggling with reading and feeling frustrated when they realized that most of their

classmates were much better readers than they were. Three of the participants were from military families and remember moving often or having an absentee father for many years of their childhood. All of them felt that these situations contributed in some way to their need to be retained. Eight of the participants recall the decision to retain them being made by a combination of their teacher and their parents, with the mother playing the major role in educational decisions. Six of the participants did not experience a traumatic situation as a child, three of them equated their father being away in the military as traumatic, and one participant experienced trauma through extreme family dysfunction. Four of the participants remember feeling embarrassed, sad, and disappointed when they found out they were being retained. Four of the participants don't remember retention bothering them at the time, and two participants remember feeling excited about being retained. Eight of the participants were retained in elementary school and five of those eight were held back in grades 2 and below. Seven of these eight participants adjusted to the retention well and made new friends quickly. One participant recalls feeling dumb and not good enough and had a really hard time adjusting to the retention and the new friend group. Alex was retained in middle school and remembers the social issues affecting him in negative ways. George was retained in ninth grade and remembers that high school classes had students from many different grades in them, so most people did not even realize he failed the ninth grade.

The second research question was: How has K-12 retention impacted self-efficacy, the belief in the ability to succeed, and quality of life of adults who were retained during their K-12 education? How did retention impact their self-esteem? How did retention impact their employment successes and socioeconomic status? How did retention impact their home life and relationships? Eight of the 10 participants felt that retention had been beneficial to their

education and had a positive impact on their self-esteem. Seven of the participants felt that the retention enabled them to grow up and act more maturely throughout their school years. Three of the participants specifically mentioned that the retention gave them an opportunity to be a better reader and this impacted their education and self-esteem in a positive way. Two participants did not feel that retention was a positive experience for them and both felt that their self-esteem suffered. One participant felt that his self-esteem did not recover until he was an adult.

Eight of the 10 participants felt that their retention had a positive impact on their employment successes and socioeconomic status. All eight of these participants felt that the knowledge they gained from being held back and the maturity that followed helped them to be successful adults and make a good living. One participant did not feel that the retention had any effect on his employment successes and socioeconomic status and one participant felt that retention has not served him well in his adult life because the retention contributed to his low self-esteem and his dropping out of high school, which contributed to a limited number of job possibilities and jobs that did not pay well.

All 10 participants did not feel that their retention experience contributed to any added problems with their home life or relationships. Five of the 10 participants reported receiving more help with their schoolwork from their parents after the retention and this seemed to contribute to a better relationship with their parents. One participant already suffered from severe problems in the home, but he did not feel that the retention made those problems worse.

Summary

Ten adults whose ages ranged from 33 to 81 and whose life work and experiences are different offered their insight with retention to be examined as part of this research. This

research examined these 10 participants' memories about the retention experience and their feelings about it now, looking back at their lives from their adult perspective. Through the filling out of questionnaires, individual interviews, and a focus group discussion made up of four participants, the researcher has presented the lived meaning of retention for these 10 participants through direct quotes, thoughts and stories. The answers given on the questionnaire and the transcribed interviews were analyzed for commonality and four themes emerged: Thoughts on why retained; memories of retention experience; reflections regarding retention, self-esteem, and quality of life; and beliefs on retaining their own children. The findings of this research helped to answer the two research questions. How is the experience of grade retention remembered by adults retained in their K-12 education? The participants' memories were varied, but commonalities emerged that helped to make sense of the memories in light of similar experiences. How has K-12 retention impacted self-efficacy, the belief in the ability to succeed, and quality of life of adults who were retained in their K-12 education? How did retention impact their self-esteem, employment successes, socioeconomic status, and home life and relationships? The participants offered similar and varied insights into how retention affected their self worth, job successes, earning capabilities, and home life relationships. The compilation of this qualitative data seems to be inconsistent with prior research at first glance. But, when family situations are examined, this research does fall in line with prior research. The findings of this research provide useful information to parents, educators, and policy makers about the factors necessary for retention to have a positive effect on lives and lead to a successful school career. One of my participants said that educators need to look at the entire life of a child, not just the academic portion, before considering retention.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

In order to fully understand what participants experienced and how they experienced it, a transcendental phenomenological design was followed in this study. "Transcendental phenomenology is a scientific study of the appearance of things, of phenomena just as we see them and as they appear to us in consciousness" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 49). Transcendental means to put aside all preconceived notions and experiences with the phenomena and look at the experience with fresh eyes. Phenomenology is the study of the common meaning of lived experiences of several individuals (Creswell, 2013). The purpose of this research is to understand the impact that retention has had on the lived experiences of adults that live in the North Georgia area that were retained in their K-12 education. Chapter five includes a summary of findings of the research, a discussion of the findings and how the findings coincide with the literature review and the guiding theories, the significance of the findings to all stakeholders that are involved in retention decisions, a discussion of the limitations of this study, and a recommendation for future research.

Summary of Findings

This research sought to answer two research questions about the phenomena of retention. Below is a summary of the findings. Through in-depth analysis of the data, the researcher identified four themes that helped to summarize the experience through the eyes of the participants. The four themes are thoughts of why retained; memory of retention experience; thoughts regarding retention, self-esteem, and quality of life; and thoughts regarding retaining his/her own children. The four themes helped to answer the research questions. The first two

themes helped to answer the first research question and the last two themes helped to answer the second research question.

Research Question #1: How is the experience of grade retention remembered by adults retained in their K-12 education?

Six of the 10 participants in this study were some of the youngest students in their grade. They had birthdays that were very close to the cutoff date for entering either kindergarten or first grade. My older participants did not go to public kindergarten, so first grade was the entry point into their educational experience. All but one of these participants felt that their young age and immaturity were the reasons they were retained. One of these participants was young for his grade, but felt like his volatile home life caused his need to be retained.

Six of the 10 participants struggled with reading and two of these participants received special education services in reading. The memories of the reading struggles were still very vivid after all of the years that have passed and these participants used the word *frustrated* often.

Three of the 10 participants were from military families and either moved a lot and/or had fathers that were gone often. Absentee fathers, even when the reason for the absence is noble, left some deep scars for these participants and contributed to the struggles they experienced before the decision to retain them was made. Children from military families are known to move often and the changing of teachers and schools contributed to the gaps in knowledge experienced by two of these participants.

Eight of the 10 participants said that the decision to retain them was made by a combination of their teacher and parents. Four of those participants said it was specifically their mother that met with the teacher and made the decision to retain them. Two participants said

that their parents made the decision to retain them on their own because they saw their children struggling.

Six of the 10 participants did not suffer from a traumatic experience as child that would have contributed to the need to retain them. Three of the four that did suffer from a traumatic experience that was pivotal in their school struggles were from military families where the father was absent a good bit and the mother was left to raise the children on her own. One of these four participants experienced a dysfunctional home situation with excessive drinking, parties, and fistfights. He had a hard time concentrating on learning at school when his home life was in disarray.

Four of the 10 participants remember feeling embarrassed, sad, and disappointed when they found out they were being retained. Having to leave friend groups that they had become accustomed to and feelings of not being smart enough were at the heart of these sorrows. Two of the 10 participants said that the retention really did not bother them. Both of these participants were young and their mothers made the retention a positive experience. One of these participants reported that he had the same teacher the retained year and that he really liked her and wanted to be in her class again. Two of the 10 participants were excited about being retained. Both of these participants were young for their grade and talked about friendship issues that made the retention exciting. One participant had a best friend in the lower grade and this made the retention a positive experience. The other participant wanted to break free of the friend group that made him feel like an outsider and used the word relieved as his reaction to finding out he was being retained.

All 10 of the participants said that the retention did not cause problems at home with their parents or siblings. Five of the 10 participants said that the retention made their parents help

with their education more at home. Four of those participants said that their mothers were very

involved in their education from the beginning, but the help intensified after the retention until

they started being successful. One participant said that she does not remember her mom reading

to her or helping her learn her ABCs until after the retention. She said her mom paid more

attention to her own adult life than to her education until the teacher started the retention

conversation.

Research Question #2: How has K-12 retention impacted self-efficacy, the belief in the

ability to succeed, and quality of life of adults who were retained during their K-12 education?

How did retention impact their self-esteem, employment successes, socioeconomic status, and

home life and relationships?

Eight of the 10 participants said that retention was beneficial to their education. Two of

these participants said that they were older and more mature throughout their school career.

Three of the participants said that they became better readers, which affects all aspects of

learning. One said that he became accepted by his peers and was more successful with school-

work. One said that the retention helped her fill in the gaps that had developed due to

absenteeism from sickness, and one said that the lessons learned from trying to graduate on time

have served him well ever since. Two participants said that retention was not beneficial to their

education. One of these participants said that he was too old to be retained in the 7th grade

because social issues outweighed everything else. One of these participants said that the

retention was detrimental to his self-esteem as he was suffering from severe home life issues and

retention was the worst possible outcome for him at the time.

Five of the 10 participants said that retention boosted their self-esteem and all five said

the main reason had to do with feeling good about themselves when they became successful with

schoolwork. One participant said that being accepted by his new peer group also boosted his self-esteem. All of these participants mentioned the important role their teacher played during the retained year in making the experience good for their self-esteem. Three participants said that retention lowered their self-esteem. Two of the three participants said that their self-esteem suffered for a short while after the retention, but that they got over it and experienced high self-esteem after that. One participant said that his self-esteem was low until he became an adult. One participant said that he does not remember, so it must not have affected him. Another participant said that he has always had high self-esteem.

Eight of the 10 participants said that retention had a positive effect on their adult working lives. They all felt that the knowledge they gained from being held back and the maturity that followed helped them to be successful adults and make a good living. One said the retention didn't affect his working life as an adult negatively or positively, and one said that the whole retention experience had negative effects on his life. He dropped out of school at the age of 16, and this caused him to have lower paying jobs in his adult life.

All 10 participants said that their home life and familial relationships did not suffer due to the retention, and five participants said their parents got more involved in their education after their retention. Eight of the 10 participants said that they found a new friend group easily in the retained year, and two participants said that they never really fit into the new group after the retained year.

Nine out of the 10 participants said that they would or have retained their own children, but all of them said retention needs to occur early in a school career before social factors get in the way. One participant said that he did not and would not retain his own children as retention

had detrimental consequences for him and he would not want to put his children through that misery.

Discussion

Retention research that has been conducted over the past 30 years has identified the common demographics of retained students. The demographics of retained students as defined by the research are as follows: The majority of students that are retained are boys (Jimerson, et al., 1997; Meisels & Liaw, 1993), are members of a minority group (Alexander, Entwisel, & Dauber, 1994; Lorence & Dworkin, 2006), and suffer from poverty (Morris, 2001; Meisels & Liaw 1993). Many retained students have parents that are not involved in their education and thus provide little support for their children's learning (Jimerson, et al., 1997; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999), and have mothers that have less than or equal to a high school diploma (Ferguson, et al., 2001; Cairns, Cairns, & Neckerman, 1989). The demographics of the 10 participants of this research study are as follows: Six out of the 10 participants were male, all 10 participants were white, three of the 10 participants reported a family income that would qualify them as children of poverty, one of the 10 participants reported having parents that were not involved in his education, and four of the participants had mothers that had an education less than or equal to a high school diploma.

Other common characteristics of retained students are as follows: English is their second language, students are younger than same grade peers, students make frequent school changes, high absenteeism, attention span problems, low self-esteem in terms of academic competence, behavior problems in a school setting, and poor peer relationships (Jimerson & Renshaw, 2012). Other characteristics of the 10 participants of this study are: All 10 participants have English as their first language, six of the 10 participants were young for their grade, two of the 10

participants attended multiple schools with multiple teachers, and one participant reported high absenteeism due to illness. The demographics of the participants of this study do not align with all the demographics suggested by past research, but some of the demographics are the same.

There is research to support the practice of retention, and research that opposes retention. Most of the research available does not support retention as a stand-alone intervention for low performing students. The majority of research does not support the practice of retention and highlights the ineffectiveness of this practice (Jimerson, 2001). But, the research that has been done that showed positive effects of retention have commonalities. In Ferguson's longitudinal study, the results showed the main contributing factors to success after experiencing retention were higher educational level of the mothers, higher value on education by the family unit, higher socioeconomic status (SES), lower kindergarten social functioning deficits, younger age in kindergarten, and higher scores on early readiness measures upon entering kindergarten (Ferguson, et. al., 2001).

Eight out of 10 participants in my study had a positive experience with retention. This alone seems to stand in opposition to the bulk of the research on retention, but these eight participants did possess many of the main factors that have been suggested as needed for retention to be successful. All eight participants had families, especially mothers that valued education and were involved in their education after the retention. This seems to be the common thread that is interwoven through all of their retention success stories. Four of the eight participants that had a successful retention story were also young for their grade with birthdays close to the cutoff date for entering kindergarten or first grade. Seven of the eight participants had mothers that graduated from high school and four of those seven participants had mothers that had an education level above high school. Five of the eight participants with a successful

retention story had family incomes that provided a comfortable life style for their families and three reported having incomes that were meager. But, these three said that they had what they needed at the time and did not place importance on their financial situation.

Two of the 10 participants in my study reported having a negative experience with retention. Their experiences with retention and feelings about how retention affected their lives are right in line with the research about the negative effects of retention. Many times, the retention leads to feelings of low self-worth and poor attitudes about school and the work associated with school (Carlton & Winsler, 1999). One of the two participants that reported a negative experience with retention talked about not feeling good enough or smart enough after the retention and felt that these feelings of low self-efficacy were a direct result of the retention. The other participant that reported a negative experience with retention was in middle school when he was retained, and he felt that the negative social implications far outweighed any possible positive academic results. When children are held back, they basically lose the friendships they had made in the previous years and have to start all over again with making friends and fitting into a new group (Roberts, 2008). This change is a change in the child's culture and can have a negative impact on the child's development (Vgotsky, 1978).

Four of the 10 participants of this study reported a family income that would place them in the poverty range. Three of the four had a successful retention experience and feel that they always had what they needed. They also reported that they had involved, supportive parents, especially mothers. One of the four participants that reported a family income indicative of poverty also had a volatile home life where drinking, partying, and fistfights were common. He also reported that his mother was not involved in his education. All of these factors combined with poverty go right along with the research about children of poverty. "Children raised in

poverty rarely choose to behave differently, but they are faced daily with overwhelming challenges that affluent children never have to confront, and their brains have adapted to suboptimal conditions in ways that undermine good school performance" (Jensen, 2009, p. 14). In his book entitled, *Teaching with Poverty in Mind,* Jensen (2009) discusses four risk factors that have a negative impact on the education of children raised in poverty. These are emotional and social challenges, acute and chronic stressors, cognitive lags, and health and safety issues (Jensen, 2009).

The bulk of research does not support retaining students early in their educational career. Comparison of students who were retained in lower grades to students who were retained in later grades fails to show benefits of early grade retention (Jimerson & Renshaw, 2012). My study stands in opposition to this research as eight of the 10 participants in this study reported that retention was beneficial to their education and all eight of these participants were retained in elementary school. Also, all eight of these participants would consider retention for their own children early in their education because of the success they experienced. All of them said they would want to retain them in kindergarten or 1st grade because they felt the younger they were, the easier the transition would be.

Dong (2010) conducted a study using data from the US Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Kindergarten Cohort 1998-1999. Fall and spring testing was done on these students in kindergarten, first, and third grade. The sample contained 8672, of which 8391 were promoted after kindergarten and 281 were retained in kindergarten. The results were positive for the retainees in the beginning, but the positive results diminished over time (Dong, 2010). My study does not corroborate these findings because the eight participants of this study reported being more successful with school throughout their school career. Dong's research needs to be

extended to look into the home lives of these 281 retained kindergartners to see how many of them had parental support for their education, especially a supportive mother.

Implications

There are learning theories to support both sides of the retention debate. Piaget and Gessell are credited with learning theories that could be used to support retention. Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development is broken down into stages, and children's movement through the stages directly relates to how they understand the world (Cherry, n.d.). The age that children reach the stages varies from child to child, and children cannot be forced into a new stage if their brains are not ready to function at that level. Gesell is credited with the Maturation Theory and believes that maturation is an active psychological process and that there is a strong connection between maturation and learning (Gesell, 1933). The Maturation Theory substantiates that retaining students that are not mature enough to move to the next level in school gives the student the opportunity to catch up and be successful (Rand, 2013). Bandura proposed The Social Cognitive Theory, which is a theory that could be used to oppose retention. The theory of self-efficacy is embedded in the social cognitive theory and this theory emphasizes the role of observational learning and social experience in the development of the personality (Bandura, 1989). Bandura defined self-efficacy as one's beliefs in the ability to succeed in certain situations. External experiences and self-perception influence self-efficacy and self-efficacy in turn influences one's self-esteem (Bandura, 1989). This theory could be used to support social promotion in that students need to be promoted to foster high self-efficacy in order to perform well and eventually catch up to their peers. Also, being in an environment where their peers are learning at the expected level will positively influence them to start performing at the expected level in the classroom.

After conducting this research and studying the retention experiences and home lives of the 10 participants involved, I believe that a strong, secure family unit where the parents, especially the mother, support education is one of the common threads in retention success. The other common thread is the presence of a strong teacher during the retained year that helps students like school and feel good about themselves. These seem to far outweigh socioeconomic status, gender, and educational level of the mother. One of my participants, Jack, who reported detrimental effects of retention due to his horrible home life, summed up the best advice for educators about retention in the following quote. He said, "Retention is a serious issue. Educators need to look at the whole child, not just the academic issues. I was suffering from some very serious home issues and retaining me in the middle of all of that did more harm than good." Retention is not appropriate for all students, and educators need to know as much as they can about the children they are considering for retention. Retention should be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and all options available should be considered (Bowman, 2005). Educational administrators need to lead retention decisions and insist on a thorough investigation of all aspects of a child's life before making a recommendation to retain or socially promote a child. School counselors can be an integral part of a retention committee and help lead discussions about home life issues, self-esteem, and social/emotional aspects of a child's life. Teachers need to intentionally form a meaningful relationship with retained students beginning on day one of the retained year to discover the best avenues for building up the self-esteem of these students so that the retained year can be the beginning of a successful school career. Parents need to understand the important role they play in a successful retention experience and receive counseling themselves about the best ways to support their children at home with their studies and helping them to adapt to new friend groups.

The data on the success of public schools is grim. Statistics gathered over the past several years indicate that by the 9th grade, 30 to 50% of all students have been retained sometime in their K-12 education, approximately 2.5 million students are retained in the U.S. each year, and this extra year of schooling costs the U.S. taxpayer in excess of 14 billion dollars annually (Jimerson, Ferguson, Whipple, Anderson, & Dalton, 2002). The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) published a report in 2013 that provided drop-out data from the 2009-10 school year for high schools in the United States.   The average freshman graduation rate (AFGR) was 78.2% in 2009-10, which is an "estimate of the percent of high school students who graduate within four years of first starting the 9th grade" (Stillwell & Sable, 2013, p. 1). In the U.S. 514,238 public school students dropped out of grades 9-12 in the 2009-10 school year, which represents 3.4% of the high school population in the U.S. These statistics indicate that U.S. schools are not a successful endeavor for a significant number of students (Corman, 2003). Research suggests alternatives to traditional schools and practices. Preschool programs, before and after school programs, year-round school, and summer school are some alternatives to retention and social promotion that have proven effective (Jimerson et al., 2006; Shepard & Smith, 1990). Other interventions that have proven track records are smaller class sizes, multiage grouping, and looping, which is a practice where one teacher moves up to the next grade with a class of students (Lekrone & Griffith, 2006). Some of these ideas would require funding, but if all stakeholders are serious about making changes that are best for all students, then the pursuit has to be important enough to garner the necessary funding.

One of the questions in my focus group discussion was "How could the whole public education system be changed to benefit all learners?" Three of the four participants in the focus group discussion were teachers and the other participant was a youth pastor. All of them have

worked with adolescents for a minimum of 10 years. The following are ideas that they offered for making public schools more successful for all learners.

- All students are not college bound and should not be made to fit into that educational mold. Alternatives should be offered.

- Schools should be organized around interests of the students.

- Schools should be organized around learning styles of the students.

- The practice of inclusion has gone too far and is impeding the learning of the other students in the classroom. The three teacher participants felt inclusion was a great model for students that knew how to behave, but including the severe behavior problem students in the regular classroom was unfair to the other students in the class that had to try and learn in the midst of the chaos that extreme behaviors cause.

- Teachers need more planning time to plan lessons that reach all the diverse learners within a classroom.

Limitations

This study has many limitations that stem from the sample used for the research. The participants of this study are a small sample from one small town in North Georgia. All participants were found through surveying employees of one school system that is not ethnically diverse. All 10 participants were white, and nine of the 10 participants had a decent home life where the mother was supportive of their education. All participants were volunteers, and their stories were told with their own biases, and were recalling events that happened many years before, making their stories at the mercy of their memories.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are many studies that that have been conducted on the topic of retention. There are only a few that have adults that were retained in their K-12 education as the participants in the study. More research needs to be done with adult participants. Most of the participants of this study were retained in elementary school. More research needs to be done with adult participants that were retained in middle school. Research shows that retention is not usually successful for students that suffer from a chaotic home life. The majority of participants for my study had decent home life situations. More research should be done with adult participants that were retained, and had difficult home lives. The majority of participants was retained in elementary school and had a successful retention experience. The research shows that students retained in elementary school are at a greater risk of dropping out of high school (Jimerson, Anderson, & Whipple, 2002). My research does not support this conclusion, but the majority of participants in my study had supportive mothers and good home lives. More research needs to be conducted on effectiveness of retention in the primary grades and familial situations.

Other research topics in regard to retention could center on alternatives to the traditional schools and methods of education. For example, non-graded elementary schools and schools centered on learning styles or interests should be studied to see if these methods of educating low performing students are more successful than the traditional school environment.

Conclusion

A review of the literature on retention shows that the negative effects of retention far outweigh the positive effects. In light of this negative research, retention is still widely practiced in schools across the U.S. today, especially in elementary schools. The intent of my research was to study retention from the viewpoint of adults looking back at the experience of retention

and the impact it has made on their lives. The common thread that was interwoven through the stories of eight out of 10 participants that reported retention to have a positive impact on their education and adult work life was the presence of a mother that was supportive of their education and helped them at home with their schoolwork. Another common thread was the impact of the teacher during their retained year that went beyond their academic teaching skills. All participants that reported a successful retention experience liked their teacher during the retained year and this made them enjoy school and feel good about themselves. Jack, the participant in the study that felt retention had been detrimental to his education and adult working life, suffered from some severe home life issues that made it hard for him to concentrate on schoolwork. He describes himself as not feeling safe, witnessing drunken parties and fights, and not getting enough sleep. He said that in light of all he was going through in his personal life, retaining him and forcing him to go through even more changes and stress was the wrong decision for him. He doesn't remember having a teacher that inspired him until the 6th grade and that teacher stands alone in his memory. He stressed the need for educators to get to know the students being considered for retention and evaluate the whole child when making retention decisions. As an educator that is faced with retention decisions every year, I wanted to see if and when retention was beneficial. When students are retained, educators do have the best interest of the students in mind and conducting a study over a long span of the lives of the participants, helped the researcher understand that every child is different and that retention decisions must be on a case-by-case basis. If the factors that help make retention beneficial to education are absent, then other alternatives must be investigated.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Qualifying Survey

1) Name: _____

2) Were you retained (held back a year) in your K-12 education? ___Yes ___No

3) If you answered no to number 2, you do not have to fill out the rest of the survey.

If you answered yes to number 2, please fill out entire survey.

4) Phone Number: _____

5) Place of Work: _____

6) Gender: ___ Male ___Female

7) Age: ___18 to 30 ___30 to 40 ___40 to 50 ___50 to 60 ___ over 60

8) Race: ___Hispanic ___African American ___Asian ___American Indian

___White ___Other

Appendix B

Questionnaire For Participants

1) Name: _____

2) Age: _____

3) Birthdate: _____

4) Race:_____

5) What was your age when you began school?

6) In which grade(s) were you retained? _____

7) How old were you when you were retained?

8) Did you receive special education services? ___Yes ___No

9) What was the income level of your family when you were in school? ___Below $20,000
   ___ $20,000 to $40,000 ___$40,000 to $60,000 ___$60,000 to $80,000 ___$80,000 to
   $100,000 ___ over $100,000

10) What was the education level of your father? ___Until age 16 ___High school
   ___Bachelor's Degree ___Master's Degree ___Higher Degree

11) What was the education level of your mother? ___Until age 16 ___High school
   ___Bachelor's Degree ___Master's Degree ___Higher Degree

12) Who raised you?

13) If you had siblings raised in the home with you, what is their education level and

 Were they retained?

           Sibling #1_____Education Level   Retained ___Yes   ___No

           Sibling #2? _____Education Level   Retained ___Yes ___No

           Sibling #3? ? _____Education Level   Retained ___Yes ___No

14) Did you graduate from high school? ___Yes ___No

15) If you answered no to number 14, did you obtain a GED after dropping out of school?

 ___Yes ___No

16) Why do you think you were held back?

17) Do you have a police record? __Yes __No

18) What is your personal income level now? ___Below $20,000 ___ $20,000 to $40,000

 ___$40,000 to $60,000 ___$60,000 to $80,000 ___$80,000 to $100,000 ___ over

 $100,000

Appendix C

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1) How was the decision to retain you made? Who was involved with this decision?

2) Did you experience any traumatic situations as a child, such as the divorce of parents, etc? Do you feel that situation had an impact on your retention?

3) How did you find out that you were being retained?

4) How do you remember feeling about this decision?

5) How did you feel on the first day of school of the retained year?

6) How did your friends that got promoted act toward you? How did your new classmates act toward you?

7) Did the retention cause problems for you at home with parents or siblings? If so, in what way?

8) Do you feel that your retention was beneficial to your education? Why or why not?

9) Do you feel that a different solution would have been a better? Why?

10) How do you feel the retention impacted your self-esteem at the time? Throughout your school years? As an adult?

11) Tell me about your employment history as an adult. Do you feel that the retention impacted your job successes? Socioeconomic status? In what ways?

12) Do you feel that retention impacted your home life and relationships at the time of the retention? Throughout your school years? As an adult?

13) If you have school-aged children living in your home, were they retained? If so, how did that experience work out for them?

14) Is there anything you would like to tell me about your experience with retention that

I have failed to ask?

Appendix D

Focus Group Questions

1) Why were you retained? What factors contributed to you not being successful in school at the time of your retention?

2) Tell me if and why you liked school before you were retained. After?

3) I know I asked this question in the private interviews, but how did you feel when you found out you were being retained?

4) Do you feel that your retention could have been avoided? Explain

5) If you feel that retention was not beneficial to you, what other strategy or action would have been beneficial? Explain.

6) What have you learned from your retention that could benefit your own children?

7) How could the whole public education system be changed to benefit all learners?

Appendix E

Approval Letter From IRB

Dear Betsy,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases are attached to your approval email.

Your IRB-approved, stamped consent form is also attached. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
Professor, IRB Chair
Counseling

IRB   1 of 6

Appendix F

Informed Consent

CONSENT FORM

A QUALITATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF
ADULTS IN THE NORTH GEORGIA AREA THAT WERE RETAINED IN GRADES K-12.
Betsy Green
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of *the impact of grade retention on the lives of adults*. You were selected as a possible participant because *you indicated that you had been retained during your K-12 education*. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Betsy Green, a doctoral candidate in the *School of Education* at Liberty University is conducting this study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to understand the impact that retention has had on the lived experiences of adults in the North Georgia area that were retained in their K-12 education.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1) Complete a questionnaire about your experience with grade retention.
2) Participate in one 30-minute private interview with the researcher that will be audio recorded.
3) Possibly participate in one 30-minute focus group with three or four other participants to further discuss the experience of retention that will be audio recorded.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The study has minimal risks:

The risks of this study are no more than the participant would encounter in everyday life.

The benefit to participation is the opportunity to be a part of research that will seek to impact educational policy based on the impact that retention has had on the lives of adults that were retained in their K-12 education.

Compensation:

You will receive a $20 Wal-Mart gift card after the interviews and focus group discussion for your participation in this study. If you withdraw from the study early, no gift card will be given.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is *Betsy Green*. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact *her* at *706-974-7346*. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature: _____   Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____   Date: _____