

A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY OF GRADE RETENTION AS PERCEIVED BY  
ADULTS WHO WERE RETAINED

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A Qualitative Inquiry of Grade Retention as perceived by Adults Who Were Retained

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## Abstract

Robin L. White. A QUALITATIVE INQUIRY OF GRADE RETENTION AS PERCEIVED BY ADULTS WHO WERE RETAINED (Under the direction of Dr. Deanna Keith) School of Education, September 2010. The purpose of this study was to explore the views and recollections of adults who were retained in elementary, middle, or high school. This qualitative, narrative inquiry study was an attempt to give a voice to individuals that have experienced the event, and to understand what effects the retention had on their lives, both past and present. The sample of five participants used in this study was obtained from a population of adults in the state of Georgia who attended a General Education Degree (GED) class at a local library, as well as those who attended a community college. The results of this study were mixed. Some participants reported an increase in self-esteem, maturity, and academic awareness. Temporary gains in academics were also noted in many cases. In addition, a few participants felt as if the retention was beneficial and necessary. Other subjects in this study indicated negative attitudes towards school, peer groups, and self-concept. Many of these issues have flowed into adulthood and have subsequently shaped the lives of the adults who were retained. These effects included the failure to complete deeds and affairs, as well as a sense of not having to do more than is asked. In addition, these adults have been given the sense that failure is an option, and they are now comfortable with that notion. The findings revealed that despite the temporary gains, the negative impact on the socio-emotional adjustments of the individual does not seem to support the concept of retention.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Grade retention, the practice of having a child repeat a grade, or the postponement of entry into kindergarten or first grade, has been practiced in American for over a hundred years, and has been steadily increasing over the past three decades (Leckrone & Griffith, 2006). The constant swing from this practice of holding a student back to the practice of passing them on to the next grade level so that they can be with their peers has been going on since the 1930s (Steiner, 1986). Today, more than ever schools are being held accountable for the achievement of their students with highly publicized standardized test results, school report cards, and sanctions for failing schools. Practically every major school system in the United States is struggling with the question of how to motivate students to achieve and how to address the needs of those who constantly struggle (Nagaoka & Roderick, 2004).

### **Background of the Study**

In his 1999 State of the Union Address, President Bill Clinton called for an end to social promotion, the practice of promoting students to the next grade regardless of their academic progress. During President Bush's 2000 campaign, he made education reform a major point in his platform and signed the bill for the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). The current law calls for every state to set standards in math and reading, and for every student to be proficient in those subjects by the year 2014. Students who are in grades three through eight are tested every year, and schools are evaluated on whether or not they made (adequate yearly progress) through highly publicized reports. Schools that do not meet the standards, are sanctioned and can

eventually be taken over or shut down. National initiatives such as Goals 2000 and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 have created the need for increased accountability in schools, producing a recipe for retention. Due to these initiatives, there has been an increased emphasis on “closing the achievement gap” between minority and non-minority students and improving the performance of all children. In an effort to ensure that all students meet basic competencies, several academic standards have emerged as indicators of whether or not students are proficient and should be promoted to the next grade (Jimerson, Pletcher, & Graydon, 2006). NCLB requires school systems be held accountable for graduation rates, as well as performance on academic assessments. This step in federal accountability has raised the bar in what is now a test-driven system (Orfield, 2006). These high-stakes tests ensure that students who do not meet the promotion standard will be held back or retained in the same grade. Since NCLB judges schools almost exclusively on test scores, schools that have students who do poorly on these tests will face the greatest pressure to focus on and teach to the tests. This means that schools that serve children who are poor, have limited English skills, require special education services, or are recent immigrants to this country, will likely have the most incentive to carry out the practices of pushing out students, narrowing teaching and the curriculum, thus limiting the school experience (Meier & Wood, 2004).

Retention decisions should be based on the individual child’s academic performance, but some critics say that not all students who repeat a grade are held back due to factors that are directly related to academic performance. They argue that children with specific social and demographic characteristics are more likely to be held back regardless of their cognitive abilities (Lorence & Dworkin, 2006). Gender, race/ethnicity,

socioeconomic background, and the age at school entry have all been associated with the risk of retention (Burkman, LoGerfo, Ready, & Lee, 2007).

According to the U. S. Department of Education National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), a survey done in 2007 estimated that 10 percent of students in kindergarten through eighth grade had ever been retained in a grade during their school career (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2007). The percentage of students who had ever been retained during their school career has remained between nine and 11 percent in all survey years between 1996 and 2007. In each survey year, a greater percentage of male students than female students had been retained. Among K-8 students in 2007, 12 percent of male students had ever been retained, compared to eight percent of female students. This statistic has remained consistent since 1996 (NCES, 2007).

The No Child Left Behind Act is rooted in closing the achievement gap between minority and non-minority children, but according to the National Center for Educational Statistics Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey of 2007 K-8 students, a greater percentage of black students than either white or Hispanic students had been retained in that year (NCES, 2007).

The survey showed that 11 percent of Hispanic students and 16 percent of black students were retained compared to only eight percent of white students. In addition, those statistics showed that the percentage of K-8 students who have ever been retained was greater among students from poor families than among students from near-poor or non-poor families and that 23 percent of students from poor families had ever been retained compared with 11 percent of other students.

Not only were students at a disadvantage if they were from an ethnic minority group and/or come from a lower socioeconomic background, but the education level achieved by a child's mother was also a strong predictor of retention. In 2007, 20 percent of students whose mothers had less than a high school diploma or its equivalent had ever been retained, compared with three percent each of students whose mothers' highest level of education was a bachelor's degree or graduate/professional school (NCES, 2007).

The achievement gap mentioned in NCLB between minority and non-minority is measured by test scores and based on yearly gains. This gap can also be documented by the number of high school dropouts in each group (Carpenter & Ramirez, 2007).

Graduation rates are an important indicator of school performance. In his first major address to congress, President Barack Obama envisioned a country where "dropping out is not an option" (March 2010). He has linked improving high school graduation rates to restoring the nation's economical and political standing in the world. President Barack Obama has committed \$3.5 billion to fund changes in persistently low-performing schools (Balfanz, Almeida, Steinberg, Santos, & Fox, 2009, p 4).

In a press release on March 1, 2010, the President outlined steps that his Administration will take to combat what he calls the "dropout crisis" and his plan to invest in strategies to ensure students graduate prepared for college and careers (White House Press Release, 2010). In the press release,

President Obama challenged states to identify high schools with graduation rates below 60% and discussed the Administration's investments to help them turn those schools around. The Obama Administration has committed \$3.5 billion to fund transformational changes in America's persistently low-performing schools.

Additionally, the President's FY 2011 budget includes \$900 million to support School Turnaround Grants. President Obama also emphasized the importance of investing in dropout prevention and recovery strategies to help make learning more engaging and relevant for students, and announced new efforts to invest \$100 million in a College Pathways program to promote a college readiness culture in high schools, through programs that allow students to earn a high school diploma and college credit at the same time. (White House Press Release, 2010)

President Obama said,

This is a problem we can't afford to accept or ignore. The stakes are too high-for our children, for our economy, for our country. It's time for all of us to come together – parents and students, principals and teachers, business leaders and elected officials – to end America's dropout crisis. (White House Press Release, 2010)

The link between economic outcomes and earning of high school dropout is well documented. High school dropouts earn less, and are much more likely to be unemployed during economic downturns. The earning gap between graduates and dropouts is almost \$10,000 annually. In addition, there is a growing challenge for individuals with only a high school diploma to find stable, well-paying jobs. The costs of dropping out are not just isolated to the individual, but are passed on to the communities in which they live, as well as the rest of society (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009). Dropouts from the class of 2008 will cost the state of Georgia an estimated \$15.5 billion in lost wages over their lifetimes (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009). Since the economic recession

began in December 2007, the national unemployment rate has gone from 5 percent to 9.4 percent in July 2009, and the nation has lost more than 6.5 million jobs, with more losses expected before the economy rebounds (Alliance for Education Excellence, 2009).

According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rates for high school dropouts in July 2009 was 15.4%, compared to 9.4% for high school graduates, 7.9% for individuals with some college credits or an associate's degree, and 4.7% for individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009, Table A-4). Each dropout, over his or her lifetime, costs the nation approximately \$260,000. Unless President Obama's plan is immediately implemented and effective, nearly 13 million students will drop out over the next decade costing the nation \$3 trillion (Rouse, 2005).

Graduation rates are important indicators of school performance for parents, policyholders, and other concerned community members. Holding schools, districts, and states responsible for aggressively increasing graduation rates while also improving student performance is necessary to discourage schools from "pushing out" students who might not score high enough on achievement tests. Both high-stakes testing and exit examinations for high school are factors cited as contributing to higher dropout rates (Viadero, 2005). If these tests are the basis of promotion or retention, then the practice needs to be examined more closely.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Many educators, lay citizens, and policymakers are convinced that by ending social promotion they can improve student learning (Hoag, 2001). However, the growing body of research seems to indicate the potential for negative effects consistently

outweighs positive outcomes and does not support the use of grade retention as an academic intervention (Burkman et al., 2007; Bonvin, Bless, & Schueback, 2008; Holmes & Matthews, 1983; Jimerson et al., 2006). With an estimated 10% of American students held back in the United States each year (NCES, 2007), researchers and educators alike must continue to study the practice of retention on these children in an effort to better understand the efficacy and long term effects of being retained in grade.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine and explore the views and recollections of adults aged 19-55, who were retained in elementary, middle, or high school. This study was needed due to the increased accountability schools are facing and the new requirements for students to pass standardized tests in order to be promoted to the next grade (Hong & Yu, 2008). President George W. Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act, which stated that assessments, aligned with state standards, must be used to measure the achievement of all children at each grade level (Picklo & Christenson, 2005). Now, states are required to use performance on standardized tests as a criterion for promotion and are required to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) on those state tests (Wu, West, & Hughes, 2008). Unfortunately, a year's or a semester's education is being reduced to a single test. The findings of this study can help identify some of the negative and positive outcomes of retention from those who have lived through the experience.

### **Justification of the Study**

The research regarding the experiences, perspectives, and effects of retention as perceived by adults who were retained as children is sparse. Most of the research to date

focuses on academic achievement, and socio-emotional and behavioral adjustment such as self-esteem, school engagement, peer competence, locus of control, maladaptive behaviors, and the connection to drop out rates (Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 1994; Jimerson, Carlson, Rotert, Egeland, & Sroufe, 1997; Jimerson, 1999; National Association School Psychologists, 2003, 2008). There are very few studies that examine the after effects as these children have grown into adulthood. This study explored the aftermath of retention and examined both potentially positive and negative outcomes as these students become adults.

### **Guiding Research Questions**

- 1) How is the experience of grade retention depicted and remembered by adults who experienced retention in elementary, middle, or high school?
- 2) Has the experience of grade retention had a positive or negative effect on the lives of adults who were retained?

### **Significance of the Study**

Research regarding the experiences of retention as recalled by adults appeared to be absent in the current available literature. Their viewpoints have the potential to guide subsequent research. The exploration of actual experiences along with the perceived benefits and detriments of retained students from an adult perspective could yield new information to add to the discussion of grade retention and could thus have an impact on practice and policy (Powell, 2005). For example, new explanations for increased drop-out rates were uncovered (giving more specific first hand explanations for dropping out). In addition, socio-emotional and behavior factors have surfaced. The findings of this study have implications that could be potentially important for current

teachers, administrators, policy makers and parents. A qualitative study such as this has opened the door to a wealth of information regarding the effects of retention.

### **Overview of Methodology**

This qualitative, narrative inquiry study was an attempt to give a voice to individuals that have experienced the event, and to understand what effects the retention had on their lives, both past and present. This study involved five adult participants who were retained in elementary, middle, or high school. The subjects were obtained from a local library holding General Education Diploma (GED) classes and a local community college. In addition, one participant was obtained through the snowball effect. The sites were purposefully selected due to the link between retention and high school dropout rates. As previous research has indicated, it was more likely that a participant be found at a GED site than randomly. Participants who were retained were also more likely to be found at a local community college than at a larger university. The participants were purposefully selected or sampled based on the fact that they exhibited certain criteria of interest to the study (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006) and based on the researcher's knowledge of the group to be sampled. The participant included four males and one female, with two of the participants being white. They were selected due to the fact that research shows that males are more likely to be retained than females and Hispanic and African Americans are more likely to be retained than whites (Jimerson, 1999; Jimerson, Anderson, and Whipple, 2002; Lorence & Dworkin, 2006; NASP, 2008).

The participants in the sample were interviewed by the researcher using a private, narrative inquiry interview (see Appendix B). Each interview was conducted in a conversational style interview with a list of pre-selected questions available as warranted

(see Appendix B). The interviews were to be recorded and then transcribed, but due to technical difficulties, all interviews were transcribed by hand on site. They were written in the form of narratives to allow the researcher to analyze the responses of each participant in the sample to determine common themes and categories. Each transcribed interview was dissected to identify and review common or reoccurring themes, phrases and keywords, and answers, as well as individual thoughts, feelings, and opinions in order to find a relationships, key themes, and emerging categories so that the researcher could make connections between and across categories. Themes of positive and negative effects and overall experience of being retained were looked at and focused on in order to attempt to answer the original guiding questions. Once the categories were connected, the researcher was able to summarize and see what was in the data (Ary et al., 2006). At the conclusion of the research, the results were analyzed by the researcher to identify common themes and categories that emerged by finding common links and connections among categories. Those findings are summarized and discussed in the following sections of this chapter.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The participants in the study were selected from a non-random population due to the nature and parameters of the study. Potential participants had to be identified as being over 19 years of age and been held back, or retained, in elementary, middle, or high school. Participants chosen for this study were either adults who had dropped out of school and were working on getting their General Education Diploma (GED), adults who were attending a local community college, or in one case a high school senior who was

over the age of 19. Purposeful sampling was used in this study to obtain rich data, and the results are specific to those who have been retained in their early life.

### **Definitions of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, key terms are defined as follows:

*Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)* - A term coined by the *No Child Left Behind* legislation that indicates whether a school system or school campus has sufficiently made academic achievement gains when compared to annual measurable objectives.

*Dropout* - This term refers to a person who does not complete a high school program and thus does not receive a diploma or certificate of completion.

*Grade Retention* - The practice of requiring a student who has been in a given grade level for a full school year to remain at that level for a subsequent school year.

*Member Check* - This is where the researcher asks participant to review and critique field notes for accuracy and meaning.

*Snowball Sampling or Effect* - This type of sampling occurs when the initially selected subjects suggest the names of others who would be appropriate for the sample.

*Social Promotion* - The practice of allowing students who have failed to meet performance standards to pass on to the next grade with their peers instead of completing or satisfying the requirements.

*Standardized Test* - Tests that produce scores based upon national norms (for example, grade-equivalent, percentile, or stanine scores). Examples of these are the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, the Stanford Achievement Tests, the Metropolitan Achievement Tests, the SRA Achievement Series, and the California Test of Basic Skills.

*Technology/Career-Preparatory (TP)* - A program of study requiring 22 Carnegie units, as oppose to 24 units in a traditional program, as specified by the Georgia State Board of Education. Completion of its program is signified by a Technology/Career-Preparatory Diploma that replaces a traditional high school graduation diploma.

### **Summary**

The practice of grade retention has been studied and researched for almost a century. Unfortunately, the results are not as clear as one would like and in many cases are mixed at best. Current research includes limited samples of interpretive research, almost none which focus on adults who were asked to look back on their retention experience and make meaning of the event over the course of their lifetime.

This interpretive study utilizes a narrative inquiry method to gather life story interviews about the retention experience of adults. By looking into the past, the researcher attempted to construct meaning from the experiences told by adults who were retained in elementary or middle school and how it affected their lives.

## **Chapter Two: Review of Literature**

This chapter provides an overview of the theoretical and historical background of both grade retention and social promotion. This review of literature elaborates on that background, as well as investigates the effects, both positive and negative, of both practices. The general standards and practices of schools are discussed as well as current policies dictated by the federal government.

Published research on retention is vast with hundreds of studies carried out during the last century (David, 2008). In this study, the empirical literature related to retention is reviewed, and previous studies from meta-analysis are presented beginning with one of the first researchers to compile the major studies from since the practice of retention began. In addition, meta-analysis from notable researchers Holmes and Matthews (1984) and Jimerson (2001) are reviewed to compare the outcomes of the research collected throughout the history of retention in the United States.

### **Theoretical Background**

As teachers rely on their knowledge of learning theories and child development to plan and assess instruction, they must consider the relevant research and best practices of learning theories. Two prominent theories come from Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky. Piaget's theory of constructivism described knowledge in terms of schemes, concepts and structures. Vygotsky's social development theory stated that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition (as cited in Schunk, 2000). Teachers must look to these and other theories to plan and assess instruction that meets the needs of individual learners in their classrooms.

Piaget was primarily interested in how knowledge was formed and constructed. Vygotsky was interested in the cultural and social influence on learning and development and how children actively internalize what they learn from others. Both men believed that higher order thinking was a culmination of earlier achievements. Piaget believed development preceded learning, while Vygotsky believed that learning preceded development. For Piaget, a student could not learn until he was developmentally ready whereas Vygotsky believed that learning pulled development to higher levels (as cited in Schunk, 2000). Vygotsky's constructivist approach emphasized social environment as a facility of developing and learning. With two renowned theories leading education, the pendulum has swung from social promotion, which favors Vygotsky's theory, back to retention, which follows Piaget's belief that the student is not ready to learn higher order thinking until he is ready.

### **Historical of Education in America**

Public schooling in America originated as a response to the influx of immigrants who came to the country with different religions and cultures. The primary focus and purpose of this schooling was to establish social order and Americanize large numbers of immigrant children into a common school setting (Coulson, 1999). The introduction of public education began in the 1600s in the New England colonies of Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Hampshire. In 1635, the first "free school" opened in Virginia, and by the middle of the eighteenth century, private schooling had become the norm (Johnson, Collins, Dupuis, & Johansen, 1985; Pulliam & Van Patten, 2006).

Public compulsory education as we know it today did not begin until the 1840s. Thomas Jefferson was the first American leader to suggest creating a public school

system that was funded by tax dollars. Unfortunately, his ideas were ignored and it took almost a century for the public system to take hold (Johnson et al., 1985; Pulliam & Van Patten, 2006). His ideas helped form the basis of the education systems that were developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By the 1840s, there were only a handful of public schools around the country, and they were located in communities that could afford them (Johnson et al., 1985). Reformers such as Horace Mann in Massachusetts and Henry Barnard in Connecticut wanted all children to gain from the benefits of public education and began calling for free, compulsory school for every child in the nation (Johnson et al., 1985; Pulliam & Van Patten, 2006). Mann started the publication of the *Common School Journal*, which took educational issues to the public. As part of the common-school reformers, he argued that common schooling, (mandatory state-funded schools), could create good citizens, unite society and prevent crime and poverty. Massachusetts passed the first compulsory school laws in 1852 requiring all children to attend elementary school. New York followed with a similar bill in 1853. By 1918, every state in the Union had a law requiring that all children be required to attend at least elementary school (Johnson et al., 1985). However, the Catholics opposed common schooling and created their own private schools. Their decision was supported in 1925 by the Supreme Court ruling in *Pierce v. Society of Sisters*. The ruling declared that the states could not compel children to attend public schools, and that children could attend private schools instead (Johnson et al., 1985). Even now, high school attendance is still not mandatory in many states for those who are 16 and older (Johnston et al., 1985).

The first public junior high school was established in Berkeley, California in 1909 (Ornstein, 1984). The progress for high schools was a little slower. The first public

funded secondary school in the United States was the Boston Latin School, which was founded in 1635. The attendance was limited due to the curriculum being specialized and difficult. The demand for skilled workers in the middle of the 18th century led Benjamin Franklin to start a new kind of secondary school. The American Academy was established in 1751 in Philadelphia (Coulson, 1999). Eventually, American high schools replaced the Latin grammar schools and the rise in attendance during the 20<sup>th</sup> century was impressive. From 1900 to 1996, the percentage of teenagers who graduated from high school increased from about 6 percent to about 85 percent. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most states enacted legislation that extended compulsory education laws to the age of 16 (Coulson, 1999).

As the 20<sup>th</sup> century progressed, jobs shifted from the fields to the factories to the offices, and the demand for a highly educated workforce began. This shift in employment led to a large increase in the number of high school graduates and people going to college. Just as high school graduation rates dramatically increased, so did the enrollment of college attendance. It jumped from about 2% of the 18-24 year olds to about 60% of the 18-24 year olds taking some sort of post high school course (Johnson et al., 1985). In addition to the shift in job requirements, financial support was extended to the universities which led to an increase in research and enrollment. Near the end of the century, more than 14 million students were enrolled in about 3,500 four-year and two-year colleges (Johnson et al., 1985).

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, schools in the South, and still many in the North were segregated. Free education was not for everyone until the movement to create equal schooling for all American children, no matter what their race. In 1896, the Supreme

Court ruling of Plessy v. Ferguson upheld the legality of segregation. It was not until 1954, public schools were forced to be open to people of all races when the Supreme Court overturned its ruling with the historic case of Brown v. Board of Education.

### **History of Retention and Promotion in America**

Throughout history, different schools have used different methods of measuring student success. In the one-room schoolhouse of more than a century ago, retention was meaningless as every grade was housed together, and students were promoted on the merit of the mastery of the academic standard for each grade level. As classroom sizes grew larger and graded schools began to replace the one-room schoolhouse in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, retention became common practice (Steiner, 1986). Grade retention became an educational practice for the remediation of students who failed to achieve (Holmes & Matthews, 1983). Around the 1930s, changing attitudes toward the role of schooling and the psychology of the individual student promoted a shift toward an approach called *social promotion*, in which children are passed to the next grade with their age peers, receiving remedial academic help when necessary (Steiner, 1986).

The trend reversed in the 1980s as concerns about academic standards rose and minimum competency testing took hold. Many cities implemented retention policies in which low scores on tests forced students to repeat a grade (FairTest, 2004). In 1982, New York City schools stopped social promotions, and within a few years the problems caused by the change in policy led the city to start social promotion once again (FairTest, 2004). In city after city, the policies failed and after few years, it was found that students who were held back did not do any better than comparably-scoring students who were not retained. (FairTest, 2004). In addition, those who were held back were up to twice as

likely to leave school before graduating. As a result, many retention programs were dropped in the early 1990s. By the late 1990s, the movement was once again changing. In 1999 Chicago's Mayor Richard M. Daley, along with numerous other mayors, ended social promotion in their school systems (FairTest, 2004).

In the last decade, the pendulum has swung from social promotion back to grade retention for those who are not perceived to be achieving on grade level. With a call to end social promotion in 1999 by President Bill Clinton and national initiatives to close the achievement gap, schools have taken a closer look at accountability including holding students responsible for passing state achievement tests (Jimerson, 1999; Leckrone & Griffith, 2006). Grade retention has been seen as a cure for academic failure and has been used as a "motivator" to implore students to perform on grade level (Hung & Yu, 2008; Jimerson, 1999). This leads to one question: Do the benefits of retention outweigh the risks? Research seems to indicate mixed results.

On one hand, retention has been shown to result in some short-term academic gains, especially in math (Jimerson et al, 2006). On the other hand, research has shown that retention may have negative outcomes such as low self-esteem, increased drop-out rates, increased negative behavior, and poor self-concept (Alexander et al, 1994; Jimerson et al, 2006; NASP, 2003). Researchers and school officials are constantly weighing the pros and cons of whether they should argue for retention or social promotion of students.

### **Impact of No Child Left Behind**

Since its inception, standardized test scores based on criteria from the No Child Left Behind Act have come to dominate the discourse about schools and their

effectiveness. Families make decisions on where to live based on scores from some of these tests, and neighborhoods and communities are rated on the quality of the schools around them (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). In addition, test scores are now used to evaluate programs and allocate educational resources at both the state and national level. Millions of dollars now hinge on the tested performance of students in educational programs. (Amrein & Berliner, 2002).

This federal law, signed January 8, 2002, was intended to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choices, so that no child is left behind (Public Law 107–110). The law was created to improve the academic achievement of the disadvantaged, prepare, train, and recruit highly qualified teachers and principals, ensure language instruction for limited English proficient and immigrant students, promote informed parental choice and innovative programs, and promote flexibility and accountability (United States Department of Education, 2009).

One of the main pillars of NCLB is the need to close the achievement gap and make sure all students, including those who are disadvantaged, achieve academic proficiency (United States Department of Education, 2009). This goal is to be achieved by creating stronger accountability for results. According to the U.S. Department of Education,

Under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), reauthorized as No Child Left Behind in 2002, each state has developed and implemented measurements for determining whether its schools and local educational agencies (LEAs) are making adequate yearly progress (AYP). AYP is an individual state's measure of progress toward the goal of 100 percent of students achieving to state

academic standards in at least reading/language arts and math. It sets the minimum level of proficiency that the state, its school districts, and schools must achieve each year on annual tests and related academic indicators. Parents whose children are attending Title I (low-income) schools that do not make AYP over a period of years are given options to transfer their child to another school or obtain free tutoring (supplemental educational services)[...] Annual state and school district report cards inform parents and communities about state and school progress. Schools that do not make progress must provide supplemental services, such as free tutoring or after-school assistance; take corrective actions; and, if still not making adequate yearly progress after five years, make dramatic changes to the way the school is run. (U.S. Department of Education, 2009)

With this accountability comes high stakes testing:

State assessments are required under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to provide an independent insight into each child's progress, as well as each school's. This information is essential for parents, schools, districts, and states in their efforts to ensure that no child—regardless of race, ethnic group, gender, or family income—is trapped in a consistently low-performing school.

(United States Department of Education, 2009)

This program attaches consequences, either positive or negative, to the results of the standardized tests in order to make schools accountable for educating their students. Unfortunately, these consequences are passed down to the students in the form of “make or break” exams that determine whether or not they proceed to the next grade. The city of Chicago is a prime example of how high-stakes testing is impacting education.

Researcher Elaine Allensworth (2005) examined the effects of this new policy by looking at data from the Chicago Public School System from 1992 to 2002, after the inception of state initiated tests and NCLB. She reported that there were rises in both achievement and retention rates after the implementation of the high-stakes testing promotion policy. She stated that retention by the testing promotion policy was found to increase the likelihood of the retained students dropping out. Allensworth (2005) went on to say that “the post-policy retained students were more likely to drop out of school than similar students who were not retained” (p. 53).

A growing body of research shows that grade retention serves as an educationally low-quality placement for struggling students (Alexander et al., 1994.; Jimerson et al, 1997; Meisels & Liaw, 1993; Penfield, 2010). This practice has raised increasing concerns about whether the use of standardized tests in making decisions concerning grade retention conforms to current standards for appropriate and nondiscriminatory test use (Penfield, 2010). The practice of a one-size-fits-all assessment requirement and the accountability provisions attached could lead to higher retention rates in the country, once again sparking the conversation and controversy of whether or not it is better to retain, hold back, flunk a student or to socially promote them on to the next grade even though they might not have attained all of the skills deemed necessary for the next grade (Penfield, 2010).

### **Grade Retention**

The term *grade retention* has historically been defined as “the practice of requiring a student who has been in a given grade level for a full school year to remain at that level for a subsequent school year” (as cited in Picklo & Christenson, 2005, p.259).

Research suggests that students are retained for a variety of reasons including immaturity, failure to meet criteria for promotion, nonattendance, display of behavior problems, limited knowledge of English, and academic failure (Bowman, 2005; NCES, 2009). The underlying assumption in using grade retention as a student accountability mechanism is that the threat of retention will motivate students to achieve, and if students do not reach a certain achievement level, they should repeat the material. Advocates of grade retention argue that retention helps the student learn and sharpen skills such as organization, management, study skills, and literacy which are very important before entering middle school, high school, college and the workforce. Those who favor the practice believe schools must maintain high standards, and social promotion policies that fail to do this give students the message that little is expected of them. Others encourage people to think of retention as “additional learning time” or a “gift of another year” for misplaced students (Grant, 1997; Jimerson et al., 2002).

### **Social Promotion**

According to the U.S. Department of Education (1999),

Social promotion is generally understood to be the practice of allowing students who have failed to meet performance standards to pass on to the next grade with their peers instead of completing or satisfying the requirements. Promoting students in this way is called social promotion because it is often carried out in the presumed interest of a student’s social and psychological well-being, without regard to achievement. (p. 5)

Social promotion is often viewed as an alternative to grade retention and is sometimes thought to be less damaging in terms of educational and socio-emotional

outcomes (Picklo & Christenson, 2005). In addition, it is presumed to be more beneficial than grade retention because the child can remain with the same classmates and therefore is not perceived as a failure. Proponents of social promotion argue that grade retention only damages the child's self esteem, and the child can become alienated and psychologically withdrawn from school (Jimerson et al, 2002; Lorence & Dworkin, 2006). They also contend that making a low-performing student repeat a grade is detrimental to the long-term educational progress of the child and will eventually lead to dropping out of school (Jimerson et al., 2002). On the other hand, social promotion can either lead to frustration in the classroom or can send a message that little is expected of the student who is retained. These students are likely to graduate unprepared for work and for the future, if they graduate at all (U.S. Department of Education, 1999).

In 2000, Georgia established the requirement that third grade students must pass the reading assessment of the Criterion-Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) for promotion to the fourth grade in an effort to eliminate social promotion beginning in the 2003-2004 school-year. At the start of the 2004-2005 school-year, The Georgia Department of Education required all fifth grade students must pass the reading and mathematics assessment of the CRCT, and eighth grade students were required to pass the same portions of the CRCT in the 2005-2006 school-year (Georgia Department of Education, 2004). An objective of this policy was to have all students able to read at their particular grade level before being promoted into the next grade.

According to the Georgia Department of Education (2004),

Policies to end social promotion can benefit students in three specific ways:

- 1) motivating students and teachers in order to pass the assessment administered

in the spring, 2) raising students' skills to the level required to pass the test during the summer to avoid retention, and 3) improving the skills of students who are retained. (p. 9)

Georgia is not the only state establishing high stakes accountability in its school systems. Since 2001, when the federal government passed the No Child Left Behind Act, public schools were forced to focus their curriculum on reading and math skills in order to comply with the law stating that by 2005, every student in grades one through eight are required to take standardized reading and math tests every year (Georgia Department of Education, 2004; U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

Decades of research indicate that both retention and social promotion, if not accompanied by effective interventions, fail to provide long-term benefits for low-performing students. Neither repeating a grade nor merely moving to the next grade provides the necessary scaffolding to improve academic and social skills of students at risk of academic failure. Rather than taking an "either/or" or "all-or-nothing" approach regarding retention and social promotion, educators should seek alternative intervention strategies that will enhance educational outcomes (Alexander et al., 1993; Holmes & Matthews, 1983; Jackson, 1975; Jimerson, 1999; Jimerson & Ferguson, 2008; NASP, 2003 & 2009).

### **Characteristics of Retained Students**

In today's educational systems, grade retention is frequently applied as a measure dealing with poor academic achievements. Retainees are children who fail to meet the requirements of a specific grade (Bless, Bonvin, & Schuepback, 2005), but these children often have more than poor academics in common. According to many researchers, rates

of retention appear to be related to gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and parental characteristics. They argue that children with specific social and demographic characteristics are more likely to be held back regardless of their cognitive abilities (Jimerson et al, 2002; Lorence & Dworkin, 2006; Meisels & Liaw, 1993). Race, ethnicity, family social status, and gender have been hypothesized to influence grade progression, independent of student ability. Table 1 gives a summary of retention studies related to student characteristics.

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**Table 1**

*Retention Studies Related to Student Characteristics*

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Category	Study	Sample	Findings
Ethnicity	Meisels & Liaw, 1993	16, 623 K-8 students from NELS:88 Longitudinal Study	29.9% of African-Americans, 25.2 %of Hispanics, and 17.2% whites were retained
	Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 1994	1990 US Census	Retention higher among minorities
	Florida Association of School Psychologists, 2004	2003-2003 Census	Black 24%, Hispanic 19%, white 8%, Asian/Pacific 6% were retained
	Lorence & Dworkin 2006	Texas Public Schools	Hispanic & African-American low-performing students are more likely to be retained.
	National Center for Educational	2007 Survey	More African-American than white or Hispanics are held back.

	Statistics, 2009		
Gender	Byrnes, 1989	71 retained elementary students	43% of girls and 19% of boys would not admit they had been retained
	Meisels & Liaw, 1993	16,623 K-8 students from NELS:88 Longitudinal Study	Boys retained outnumbered girls 24% to 15.3%; found were emotionally vulnerable retention effects
	Jimerson, Carlson, Rotert, Egeland, & Sroufe, 1997	190 children from the Minnesota Mother-Child Project Longitudinal Study	ratio of retained males to retained females was significant
	Southern Regional Education Board, 2001	Students from 16 member states	Boys are twice as likely to be retained as girls
	National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009	2007 Survey	12% of males retained compared to 8% of females in 2007
Poverty (SES)	Meisels & Liaw, 1993	16,623 K-8 students from NELS:88 Longitudinal Study	33.9% of retained students were from the lowest income quartile compared to 11% from near poor and 5% from non-poor
	Gurewitz & Kramer, 1995	32 elementary schools in a Midwestern school district	Students attending middle SES schools were most likely to be retained.
	Morris, 2001	Miami-Dade (FL) School District	Correlation between SES, standardized tests results, and retention

	Southern Regional Education Board, 2001	Students from 16 member states	Students living in poverty are two to three more times more likely to be retained
	National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009	2007 Survey	23% of students retained families from poor, 11% from near poor, and 5% from non-poor
Parental Factors	Jimerson, Carlson, Rotert, Egeland, & Sroufe, 1997	190 children from the Minnesota Mother-Child Project Longitudinal Study	Mothers of retained students had lower IQ scores ( $p < .05$ )
	Miedel & Reynolds, 1988	704 low-income students Chicago Longitudinal Study	Number of pre-K and K activities their parents Participated in was related to lower retention rates through grade 8
	National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009	2007 Survey	20% of students whose mom had less than or equivalent to a high school diploma had been retained compared to 3% of students whose parents had a bachelors degree
Other Factors	Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 1994	1990 US Census Data	Role of intelligence in achievement: students with learning disabilities are more more likely to be retained
	Jimerson, Carlson, Rotert, Egeland, & Sroufe, 1997	190 children from the Minnesota Mother-Child Project Longitudinal Study	Retained students display more maladjusted behaviors in the classroom; retained students have a higher absenteeism rate: students who are retained are likely to be less mature than promoted

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**Ethnicity.**

Research has revealed that there are some specific ethnic characteristics pertaining to students who have been retained (Jimerson et al., 2006). The National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) of 1988 followed 24,599 eighth grade students from 1,000 schools. It was the most comprehensive federal study of its kind at the time. Researchers Meisels and Liaw (1993) used this data to analyze the characteristics of the students retained and found that the retention rate for all students was 19.3%, whereas the retention rate for African Americans was 29.9% and 25.2% for Hispanics in comparison to only 17.2% of their European American peers. In addition, an analysis of those who were retained in-grade (George, 1993) showed that African American students and Hispanic students are retained at twice the rate of white students. Alexander et al. (1994) also found that higher retention rates have been shown among ethnic minorities, especially among black and Hispanic students.

Statistics from the 2002-2003 academic year in Florida indicated that retained students included a disproportionate percentage of black (24%) and Hispanic (19%) students relative to white (8%) and Asian/Pacific (6%) students (Florida Association of School Psychologists, 2004). The United States Department of Education for Educational Statistics indicated that more Hispanics and black are held back than their white counterparts as well (2007).

Similarly, in 2009 the National Center for Educational Statistics report of *The Condition of Education* indicated trends in enrollment across all levels of education. They reported that

The percentage of K-8 students who had ever been retained differed by race/ethnicity and by region. For example, in 2007, a greater percentage of Black students than either White or Hispanic students had been retained. No measurable differences were found between 1996 and 2007 in either the White-Black or the White-Hispanic gap in the percentage of students who had ever been retained. In 2007, the percentages of students in the Northeast and the South who had ever been retained were larger than the percentage of students in the West.

Additionally, a larger percentage of students in the South than in the Midwest had been retained. The percentages within each racial/ethnic and region category of students who had been retained did not measurably differ in 2007 from those in 1996. (NCES, 2009)

This upholds earlier studies that indicate the connection between ethnicity and retention.

### **Gender.**

Another important factor in retention is gender, with males more likely to be retained than females (Jimerson et al., 1997). According to the Southern Regional Education Board (2001), boys in the South are twice as likely to be retained as girls. Comparable figures have been collected from national studies like the NELS of 1988 which reported that 24% of boys were retained in comparison to 15.3% of girls repeating a grade (Meisels & Liaw, 1993). Although research is not clear as to why boys are retained more than girls, Meisels and Liaw have reasoned that there may be a discord between expectations of school behavior and the typical development of male children.

Another study that examined the beliefs and attitudes of first, third, and sixth grade boys and girls in an ethnically diverse community in the Southwest who were

retained found that these children believed that retention was a punishment and felt stigmatized by it (Byrnes, 1989). Brynes found that 43% of the girls and 9% of the boys would not disclose to the researcher that they had been retained, even when directly questioned. Meisels and Liaw's (1993) evaluation of the NELS data also verified the vulnerability of girls to the negative emotional effects of retention.

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics report of *The Condition of Education* in 2009,

In each survey year, a greater percentage of male students than female students had ever been retained in a grade. Among K-8 students in 2007, some 12 percent of male students had been retained, compared with 8 percent of female students.

The percentages of male and female students who had been retained in 2007 were not measurably different from the percentages in 1996. (NCES, 2009)

This once again demonstrates the role of gender as a factor in retention.

#### **Socioeconomic Status.**

Another powerful predictor of retention is poverty. Some estimate that children from poor households are two to three times more likely to be retained (Southern Regional Education Board, 2001). According to national studies like the NELS:88, the socioeconomic status (SES) of the students corresponded significantly to retention with 33.9% of the students retained being in the lowest SES quartile compared to only 8.6% who came from the highest SES quartile (Meisels & Liaw, 1993). This relationship was also observed in a study from the council of Great City Schools where retention patterns from 33 districts in Miami-Dade County, Florida were evaluated (as cited in Frey, 2005).

Once again, the National Center for Educational Statistics report of *The Condition of Education* in 2009 substantiated poverty as being a predictor of retention.

They stated,

In each survey year, the percentage of K-8 students who had been retained was greater among students from poor families than among students from near-poor or non-poor families. In 2007, for example, 23 percent of students from poor families had been retained, compared with 11 percent of students from near-poor families and 5 percent of students from non-poor families. The percentage of students from poor families who had been retained was higher in 2007 (23 percent) than in 1996 (17 percent), while the percentage of students from non-poor families who had ever been retained was lower in 2007 (5 percent) than in 1996 (7 percent). (NCES, 2009)

In contrast, Gurewitz and Kramer (1995) did a five year analysis of retention rates in a Midwestern school district with high, middle, and low socio-economic status elementary schools. They reported that individual differences in student performance could not account for disparate retention rates. In addition, they found that the middle socio-economic status schools had the highest retention rate.

#### **Parental Factors.**

In addition to gender, race, and socioeconomic differentials, a higher incidence of retention appears to be associated with students who come from single-parent homes, those having been born to a teenage mother, those having parents with low measured IQs and educational backgrounds, as well as those having parents with a health or behavioral problem (Orfield, 2006). In the Minnesota Mother-Child Interaction Project study done

by Jimerson, Carlson, Rotert, England, and Sroufe in 1997, the mothers of retainees were found to be significantly lower ( $p < .05$ ) on measures of cognitive functioning than the mothers of the promoted group as measured by the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale. In addition to the cognitive functioning, the researchers reported that the “best predictor of children’s promotion or retention status was their parents’ level of involvement in their education and their attitude toward their child’s school” (Jimerson et al., 1997, p. 21).

This finding coincides with results found from Miedel and Reynolds’ (1998) investigation using parents of children who participated in the Chicago Longitudinal Study. Parents of 704 students were interviewed retrospectively about their involvement in the preschool and kindergarten period of their child’s life. The research indicated that,

Even after controlling for family background, the number of activities in which parents participated in preschool and kindergarten was associated significantly with higher reading achievement, with lower rates of grade retention at age 14 (eighth grade), and with fewer years in special education placement. The frequency of parent involvement was only marginally associated with reading achievement but was associated with lower rates of grade retention. A confirmatory analysis indicated that teacher ratings of parent involvement were significantly associated with higher reading achievement in eighth grade, lower grade retention rates, and lower rates of special education placement through eighth grade. Findings support the benefits of parent involvement in early childhood programs. (Miedel & Reynolds, 1998)

The National Center for Educational Statistics, as aforementioned, also had similar findings. They state,

The percentage of K-8 students who had ever been retained varied by their mothers' education level. Generally, in each survey year, the percentage of students who had ever been retained was greater among students whose mothers had completed lower levels of education, compared with students whose mothers had completed higher levels of education. In 2007, for example, 20 percent of students whose mothers had less than a high school diploma or its equivalent had ever been retained, compared with 3 percent each of students whose mothers' highest level of education was a bachelor's degree or graduate/professional school. (NCES, 2009)

#### **Other Factors That Contribute to Retention.**

In addition to demographics, other factors appear to contribute to the retention of students. According to Alexander et al. (1994),

The evidence regarding the role of intelligence in achievement of children is mixed, with many researchers reporting no significant differences between retained children and low-functioning but promoted peers; others report developmental delays and learning disabilities as features increasing the likelihood of retention. (Alexander et al., 1994, p. 152)

Other students who display more maladaptive behaviors and are less confident, self-assured, engaging, socially competent, and popular with peers are also more likely to be retained (Jimerson et al., 1997). Attendance is also a major factor, and students who miss school frequently often find their grades suffer (Jimerson et al., 1997).

A new factor that is contributing to the retention of students is NCLB. NCLB has prompted school districts to implement new grade retention policies to end social

promotion and to measure the achievement of students. These new promotion regulations are intended to make students work harder or else be retained in grade to improve their skills. This stand-alone requirement for grade promotion will have a major impact on the number of students retained each year. These new grade retention policies may have positive intentions but just might yield negative consequences (Hartke,1999). The implementation of high-stakes testing in promotional standards is relatively recent; not all educational systems have sufficient data to fully evaluate the impact of grade retention on academic performance. Most of the research assessing the impact of grade retention on academic achievement has pertained to teacher-initiated retention (Holmes & Matthews, 1983; Lorence and Dworkin, 2006).

Some studies report younger children are more likely to be retained because of immaturity and children from disadvantaged families or low socioeconomic status and with less education or less parental involvement also appear more likely to be retained (Jimerson et al., 1997). In addition, children who are retained are more likely to have mothers with lower IQ scores, poorer attitudes toward their child's education, and lower parental involvement in school (Jimerson et al., 1997).

### **Meta-Analysis of Retention Research**

Jackson (1975) provided one of the first comprehensive overviews of the research on the effects of grade retention. The review included 30 studies that were published between 1911 and 1973. He examined whether or not low-achieving students benefited from grade retention or promotion. He divided the studies into three groups based on their design type: Naturalistic, pre-post, and experimental (Jackson, 1975). Naturalistic studies compared students who were retained under normal school policies

with those who were retained, pre-post test studies compared the performance and adjustments of retained students before and after promotion, and experimental studies compared students with difficulties who were randomly assigned to either grade promotion or grade retention. Although the method of study designs was different, Jackson found similar results from them. He suggested that grade retention could be of some benefit for students, but felt that grade promotion provided greater benefits. He conclude 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” (p. 627).

In their 1983 meta-analysis, Holmes and Matthews examined 44 studies on the effects of non-promotion on elementary and junior high school students. They used the effect sizes from only those studies in which the promoted and non-promoted pupils had been matched, with a grand mean of .38 calculated. They insisted on using the highest degree of consistency in the measures to ensure credibility and validity to their findings. The effect on the academic achievement was measured in 31 out of the 44 studies and indicated that the promoted group, on the average, had achieved .44 standard deviation units higher than the retained group. This suggested that students who were promoted had a higher achievement gain than retained groups, and even indicated that non-promotion had a negative effect on the pupils.

Nine of the studies they analyzed measured the effect of retention on the self-concept of students who had been retained in either elementary or junior high school. After the data was collected, they concluded that the promoted students outscored the retained pupils by .19 standard deviation units (Holmes & Matthews, 1983, p.12). Their

analysis revealed statistically significant differences favoring the promoted students in each area of comparison (academic achievement, language arts, reading, mathematics, social studies, personal adjustment, social adjustment, behavior, and attitude toward school). They concluded that the cumulative research evidence showed the potential for negative effects consistently outweighs positive outcomes.

In another meta-analysis done in 2001 where 20 studies were analyzed, the results were found to be consistent with past reviews from the 1970s and 1980s (Jimerson, 2001). Jimerson conducted a systematic review of literature to identify studies of grade retention published between 1990 and 1999 that were presented in a professional publication, addressed the efficacy of grade retention, and included an identifiable comparisons group of promoted students. He created two categories for grouping analyses: academic achievement and socio-emotional adjustment. Most of the academic achievement studies were measured by results on a standardized norm referenced achievement test. Jimerson noted that “Indicators of socio-emotional adjustment were more diverse and included peer competence, self-esteem, locus of control, achievement expectations, school satisfaction, school engagement, behavior problems, and other composite variable incorporating students’ attitudes , behaviors, and social and emotional adjustment” (p. 6). In addition, most of the studies he analyzed included only students retained during kindergarten, first, second, and third grades. The meta-analysis was based on effect size, and the results were a measure of the difference between two groups expressed in quantitative units that are comparable across studies (Jimerson, 2001). He concluded that a negative effect size suggested that the intervention, retention, had a

negative or deleterious effect relative to the comparison groups of promoted groups in this analysis.

Jimerson analyzed studies that involved grade retention and the age at which it occurred. He looked at 14 studies that included students retained only in kindergarten through third grade, and six studies that included students retained in kindergarten through eighth grade. He found the comparisons between the outcomes associated with early or later retention were not significant, and in fact were similar during elementary school. In addition, his analyses of academic achievement outcomes favored promoted students. He looked at 174 analyses (from 20 studies) that explored academic achievement outcomes of retained students as compared to groups of comparable promoted students. He found that

91 revealed statistically significant differences. Of these statistically significant analyses, nine favored the retained students relative to the comparison group of promoted students, whereas 82 favored the comparison group of promoted students relative to the retained students. Of the 175 analyses, 84 yielded no statistically significant differences between the retained and comparison students. Thus, 47% of the analyses favored the matched comparison group of promoted students, 5% favored the retained students, and 48% indicated no significant differences between the two groups. (p. 429)

In addition to dissecting data on academic achievement, Jimerson looked at the socio-emotional and behavioral outcomes of retention. Sixteen out of the 20 studies in the meta-analyses addressed socio-emotional outcomes, with 148 analyses examined. He reported that eight of them favored the retained students relative to a comparison group of

students, while 13 favored the comparison group of promoted students, and 127 yielded no statistically significant difference between the retained and comparison groups.

Jimerson concluded that grade retention is ineffective as an intervention for academic achievement and socio-emotional adjustment. The majority of analyses yielded no significant differences between the retained students and matched comparison groups. In addition the average effect size indicated that the retained groups were .31 standard deviation units below the matched comparison groups. He concluded that the results were consistent with the converging evidence and conclusions of earlier research failed to demonstrate that grade retention provides a greater benefit to students with academic or adjustment difficulties than promotion to the next grade.

Another study published by Jimerson, Anderson, and Whipple (2002), examined grade retention as a predictor of students who dropped out of high school prior to graduation. The authors reviewed 17 papers and examined the possible link. Their investigation was guided by a transactional model that stipulated that “the contact between the individual and her or his environment becomes a mutual transaction through which each is altered by the other, which then impacts subsequent interaction in an ongoing and continuous fashion” (Jimerson et al., 2002, p. 443). Their study focused on the influences on high school dropout and the association between grade retention and dropout status. They concluded that all of the reviewed studies regarding grade retention as a potential predictor of dropping out yielded some result in the association between the two variables. They commented that even though the studies spanned different decades, locations, ethnicities, researchers, and designs, the results were consistent and indicated that grade retention is highly associated with later high school dropout. Jimerson et al.

stated that early grade retention is one of the most powerful predictors of later school withdrawal, or dropout status. In addition, the likelihood of dropping out is considerably greater for students who have been retained more than once.

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**Table 2**

*Meta-Analyses of Retention Research*

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Study	Sample	Analysis/Guiding Research	Findings
Jackson, 1975	30 Studies	Do low achieving students benefit from grade retention or promotion?	Grade retention could be beneficial to some students, but grade promotion provided greater benefits
Holmes & Matthews, 1983	44 studies	The effects of non-promotion on elementary and junior high school students	Cumulative research showed the potential for negative effects consistently outweighed the positive outcomes
Jimerson, from 70s & 80s	20 studies	The efficacy of grade retention	Grade retention is 2001 ineffective as an intervention for academic achievement and socio-emotional adjustment
Jimerson, Anderson, Whipple, 2002	17 studies	Grade retention as a predictor for dropping out of high school	All the studies reviewed yielded some results in the association between retention and dropping out of high school, retention was one of the most powerful predictors of dropping out

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All of the meta-analyses reviewed suggested that retention alone was not effective and in fact produced negative effects. There were some small gains in academic achievement, but they were not significant enough to warrant retention alone as an intervention for academic or socio-emotional deficiencies. A summary of the analyses are listed in Table 2.

### **Empirical Studies**

There are several empirical studies that point to the negative effects of retention. In 1997, Jimerson, Carlson, Rotert, Egeland, and Sroufe did a prospective, longitudinal study of the correlates and consequences of early grade retention. Their subjects were selected from the 190 children participating in the Minnesota Mother-Child Interaction Project. The retained group in the sample contained 32 children in either kindergarten, first, second, or third grades. The comparison group was a low-achieving promoted group that functioned similarly to the retained children in terms of academic achievement. The control group consisted of randomly selected subjects who were not already in one of the other aforementioned groups. Assessments were done when the subjects were in kindergarten, first, second, third, sixth grade, and at age 16. Each of these assessments included teacher interviews, child interviews and testing, and mother interviews.

The results showed significant differences in characteristics found between the retained and control group. The control and retained groups differed significantly on all demographic characteristics, including mean family income and mean maternal education. The retained group contained a significantly higher number of males (74%) than females than the low-achieving promoted group (56% of males). In addition, they found that there was no significant difference in achievement between the retained and

low-achieving promoted groups, but the retained students did display more maladjusted behavior in the classroom than the low-achieving promoted group. The retained group also missed a significantly greater percentage of school days. As in previous research, the mothers of retained children displayed lower levels of cognitive functioning than the mothers of the low-achieving promoted group.

Significant differences were also found in relation to social and personal adjustment variables. According to Jimerson et al. (1997),

Retained students were characterized as being significantly less confident, less self-assured, and less engaging than their academically similar peers. Retained students were also reported by teachers to be more unpopular and less socially competent than their peers. Classroom behaviors as assessed by the CBC-T revealed that the retained group displayed significantly more maladaptive behaviors than the low-achieving promoted group. (p. 20)

These findings suggest that perhaps retained children are perceived as poor students in part because of their behavior in the classroom. The researchers reported that a short-term effect emerged: first and second grade retained students displayed significant growth in math achievement but not in reading or spelling. On the other hand, these same students continued to be ranked the lowest on emotional health and peer acceptance and the highest on behavior problems. In addition, these gains in math disappeared by the sixth grade.

In 1999, Jimerson published a 21-year longitudinal study that included 29 students in a retained group, 50 students in a low-achieving promoted group, and 100 students in a control group. The participants were selected from the Minnesota Mother-

Child Interaction Project. During early childhood and elementary years, assessments included teacher interviews, child interviews and testing, and mother interviews and testing. In addition, information regarding education and employment was obtained in 11<sup>th</sup> grade and at 19 and 20 years of age. Jimerson found significant differences in characteristics between the retained and control group. The retained and low-achieving, promoted groups did not differ much in terms of achievement, as measured by an age-normed standard score for all academic areas. In contrast to the low-achieving, promoted group, the retained students displayed more problems behaviors in the classroom. They were ranked lower in terms of emotional health, peer acceptance/popularity, and missed a significantly greater percentage of school days. In addition, he found there was no significant difference between the retained and low-achieving promoted groups when comparing family demographic characteristics. However, the mothers of the retained children displayed lower levels of cognitive functioning on the Wechsler Intelligence Scale (WAIS) than mothers of the low-achieving, promoted group.

Academically, Jimerson found that,

The retained group of children displayed significantly lower academic adjustment than both the low-achieving but promote group ( $p < .01$ ) and the control group ( $p < .001$ ) however, no significant difference was found between the low-achieving but promoted group and the control group [...]. The chi-square analyses of the ratio of dropouts in each group suggest a significantly higher percentage in the retained group relative to both of the comparison group ( $p < .05$ ) and the control group ( $p < .001$ ). These results indicate that a greater percentage of the

retained students dropped out of high school, in contrast to the low-achieving but promoted students (69% and 46% respectively). (Jimerson et al., 1997, p. 260)

Employment outcomes were similar. The retained group of students displayed lower education/employment status than either the comparison or the control group. They were less likely to be employed full-time, in school full-time, or a combination of the two. In addition, the retained group made less money per hour and their work competence was rated lower than that of both comparison groups. Jimerson deducted that the retained group “appeared to be less successful than students with comparable low achievement who were promoted in early elementary school” (Jimerson et al., 1997, p. 262).

In conclusion, the results of the study showed that,

The retained student group was more likely to drop out prior to high school graduation, had lower levels of academic adjustment at the end of 11<sup>th</sup> grade, were less likely to receive a diploma or GED at age 20, received lower education/employment status rating, were paid less per hour, and received lower employment competence ratings at age 20 in comparison to a group of low-achieving but promoted peers identified in elementary school. (Jimerson et al., 1997, p. 263)

Rodney, Crafter, Rodney, and Mupier (1999) conducted a study to determine the variables contributing to grade retention among 243 African-American 13-17 year-old-boys in a Midwestern city. The participants were recruited through several youth-serving organizations and through the distribution of flyers. They interviewed each participant using the Children’s Structured Assessment for Genetics of Alcoholism. The researchers

theorized that there would be a significant positive relationship between alcohol abuse, suspensions, conduct disorder (violence), discipline at home, and grade retention.

Their results showed that 68% of the participants were under 15 and 32% were between 16 and 17 and out of those, about 14% had abused alcohol. Eighty-five percent of those who had abused alcohol reported having been suspended from school, and 33% of them reported being held back in school. The researchers used a multiple-regression analysis to investigate the relationship between alcohol abuse and grade retention. Of the 22 school-related variables that they investigated, they reported that three were positively associated with grade retention: the number of suspensions received, conduct disorder, and lack of discipline in the home.

Through their research, they found that academic failure was one of the largest and most consistent predictors of later drug and alcohol use, delinquent behavior, teenage pregnancy, and dropping out of school. After 243 participants were interviewed, the results did not support their hypotheses of a positive association between alcohol abuse and grade retention. The study did, however, positively associate lack of discipline in the home with grade retention.

Fine and Davis (2003) went beyond secondary school in their 2003 study that focused on whether or not retained high school graduates enroll in post-secondary school in the same numbers as do their promoted peers. They wanted to find out if those retained in earlier grades enrolled in post-secondary education in greater numbers than students who were retained in later grades. They used data from the National Education Longitudinal Survey (NELS), an extensive collection of data from across the nation on approximately 25,000 eighth-grade students, their parents, teachers, and schools from

1988 to 1994 that was compiled by the U.S. Department of Education. There were 5606 male and 6031 female student in the sample with 12.1% of the sample being Hispanic, 8.4% Asian, 9.5% African-American, 1.1% American Indian, and 68.9% white.

As stated by previous studies and reaffirmed in their data,

Of the 1992 high school graduates, 11.2% were retained at least once between kindergarten and eighth grade. Boys were nearly twice as likely to be retained as were girls, and graduates in the lowest quartile of SES were also twice as likely to be retained compared to high SES graduates. Lower achieving graduates were more likely to be retained than were high achieving graduates. (Fine & Davis, 2003, p.405)

According to Fine and Davis (2003), in addition to increasing the odds of dropping out of high school retention is also associated with a reduced change of enrolling in college. They report that retaining students at any time appears related to poorer post-secondary education enrollments odds, with retention in middle school having the lowest odds of enrollment ranging from one-third to one-quarter of their similarly low-achieving but promoted peers. They said,

The odds of enrolling in a 4-year college for persistent graduates retained at least once between kindergarten and eighth grades were half the odds of their promoted peers. Findings also indicate that the grade at which a student is retained affects the likelihood that he or she will enroll in post-secondary education. In particular, persistent graduates retained during the middle school years were much less likely to attend a 4-year college or other PSE institution than were promoted graduates.

The results of this study suggest that children retained in elementary or secondary school may experience negative effects that continue into young adulthood. Even the most persistent students are less likely to gain access to the economic and social advantages of baccalaureate education....These findings add to the growing research indicating that retained students, when compared to equally low-achieving but promoted peers, are more likely to experience less optimistic long-term outcomes. (Fine & Davis, 2003, p.409)

In 2004, Witmer, Hoffman, and Nottis released a study on elementary teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and practice relating to retention. They wanted to see if there was a correlation between teachers' knowledge and retention practices. The study was done in a rural school district in the northeastern part of the United States. Their data was compiled from 35 researcher-developed questionnaires that 27 female and 8 male teachers completed.

Witmer et al., concluded that teachers in K-4 believed that retention was an effective practice that could help certain students be more successful in the classroom, and teachers' beliefs about retention differed according to whether they taught younger or older elementary students. Both of these findings were consistent with other research findings. The researchers did not find a correlation between the teachers' knowledge and their practice of retention. However, what they did find was that the teachers did not have a deep knowledge of the research on retention and used their own personal beliefs in recommending a student for retention.

A longitudinal, empirical study done by Silberglitt, Jimerson, Burns, and Appleton (2006) looked at whether or not retention in early grades (kindergarten through

second grade) were linked to better short- and long-term outcomes than retention in later grades (third through fifth). The researchers used 49 students from five districts in rural and suburban Minnesota and divided them into two groups based on the grade of retention. One group with 27 students was retained early in grades K-2, and the second group of 22 students was retained later in grades 3-5. They analyzed the school district's curriculum-based reading assessment that was given in the fall, winter, and spring from 1996-1997 to 2003-2004, to students in grades one through eight. The researchers used a hierarchical linear modeling analytic procedure to examine relative reading growth trajectories among retained students in the district.

Silberglitt et al. noted that a trend in the growth curve suggested that students retained later had a more rapid deceleration of reading growth compared to the more consistent progress rate of the early-retained students. The researchers used the school district's curriculum-based reading assessment to compile the data. The researchers concluded that "the analyses of longitudinal reading trajectories in this study revealed that early grade retention did not yield advantages in reading trajectories from first to eighth grade, relative to students retained later, but a more linear progress rate was noted" (Silberglitt et al., 2006, p. 139).

Another study that noted negative effects of retention was done by Stearns, Moller, Blau, and Potochnick in 2007. It concentrated on the relationship between grade retention and dropping out of school. With this link between grade retention and dropping out well established, they wanted to test whether standard theories of dropout, including the participation-identification model and the social capital model explain the link. The participation-identification model focuses on the student in the context of his or her

relationships in the school, including academic engagement and social engagement. The social capital model looks at the relationship between students and teachers and those between students and their parents.

Like many others, they used data from the NELS:88, a nationally representative sample of eighth graders who were surveyed in 1988, 1990, 1992, 1994, and 2000. Their sample included black, white, and Latino students who participated in the 1988, 1990, and 1992 waves. Their analyses focused on early dropouts and late dropouts.

Their research showed that,

Retained students are more likely than are continuously promoted students to drop out both early and late than white and Latino retained students are more likely than are black retained students to drop out early. Retained students also come from poorer households than do continuously promoted students, with fewer hailing from household with two parents. It is not surprising that retained students tend to have lower achievement scores, to be pessimistic about their educational futures, and to have more disciplinary problems. In addition, white and Latino retained students have a lower self-concept than do their same-race continuously promoted counterparts, but there is no difference in self-concept between black retained and continuously promoted students. (Stearns, Moller, Blau, & Potochnick, 2007, p. 220)

They concluded that retention predicts both early and late dropouts for white black, and Latino students. They found that,

For white students and black students, achievement scores, educational pessimism, and disciplinary behavior significantly contribute to the gap between

retained and continuously promoted students. In addition the lack of engagement for white students appears to contribute to the gap in the probability of dropout. For black students, only academic background significantly explains the gap between retained and continuously promotes students. For Latino students, only demographic and contextual variables do so. (Stearns, Moller, Blau, & Potochnick, 2007, p. 230)

In addition, the researchers note that, “The predictors of dropping out late are more similar to the predictors of dropping out early than they are dissimilar” (Stearns, Moller, Blau, & Potochnick, 2007, p. 231).

Wu, West, and Hughes (2007) conducted a study that examined the short-term effects of grade retention on the growth rate of Woodcock-Johnson III broad math and reading scores. They investigated the growth of the scores over three years using linear growth curve modeling on an academically at-risk sample. They used a sample of 784 first graders who were identified as at risk for retention as shown by low literacy scores. They selected age at entrance to first grade and Limited English Proficient status as potential social-demographic moderators of the effect of retention. They closely matched 97 pairs of retained and promoted children based on tier propensity scores using optimal matching procedures. The initial sample was recruited from three school districts in Texas across two sequential cohorts in first-grade during the fall of 2001 and 2002. Participants were eligible to participate in the longitudinal study if they scored below the median score on the state approved district-administered measure of literacy, spoke either English or Spanish, were not receiving special education services, and had not previously been retained in first grade.

Annual measures of math and reading achievement were individually given at the schools for three years, with at least eight months in between the annual assessments. In addition, teacher and parent perception surveys were obtained and individual interviews were conducted the first year. Three-level linear growth curve models were estimated separately for the math and reading scores using SAS8.0 and PROC Mixed software (Wu, West, & Hughes, 2007). Their results showed that grade retention decreased the growth rate of mathematical skills, but had no significant effect on the reading skills of the first graders in the initial two years following the retention. They concluded that the results provided no evidence of overall beneficial short-term effects of grade retention (Wu et al., 2007).

In 2007, Jimerson and Ferguson published a longitudinal study examining the efficacy of grade retention through adolescence. In their study, they compared early grade retainees, students retained in a transition classroom, students recommended for transitional placement but promoted, and regularly promoted students, through eleventh grade. This twelve year study attempted to answer the following questions: 1) What is the association of grade retention and academic achievement during adolescence? 2) What is the association of grade retention and aggression during adolescence? 3) What is the association between grade retention and dropping out of high school?

Their subjects were from a large district in a western community. Students were classified into one of four categories reflecting their educational experience regarding first grade. Two groups emerged, those who were retained in kindergarten, first, or second grade either through a transitional placement or by traditional grade retention, and those who were recommended for transitional grade promotion, yet were promoted, and

students who were regularly promoted on schedule. They explored factors associated with the longitudinal academic and behavioral outcomes in association with the groups.

Of the 137 students identified in kindergarten through second grade, 72 were followed all the way through eleventh grade and were included in the study. The researchers measured the students' achievement using various standardized assessments, and they measured their behavior using multiple-teacher rating scales that rated students' aggression and personal-social functioning. In addition, they used district data regarding students' enrollment records to determine if students were currently enrolled or had dropped out.

According to Jimerson and Ferguson (2007),

Analyses of fourth-, fifth-, eighth-, ninth-, tenth-, and eleventh-grade achievement consistently demonstrated that the promoted students had higher achievement on average than both groups of retained students. Analyses of seventh-grade achievement also revealed that the students recommended for transitional room, but promoted, had higher achievement than the students retained in the transition rooms. All other analyses of achievement during eighth, ninth, tenth, and eleventh grades reflected no significant differences between these groups. Statistical analyses controlling for previous levels of aggression, revealed that the students recommended for the transition classroom, but promoted, displayed lower aggression in eighth grade, compared to both groups of retained students. In addition, the retained group of students displayed more aggression than the promoted group of students. Finally, analyses examining the percentage of students in each group who dropped out by the end of the eleventh grade indicated

that retained students were five to nine times as likely to dropout, relative to the promoted students. (Jimerson and Ferguson, 2007, p. 328)

Burkman, LoGerfo, Ready, and Lee (2007) investigated national patterns addressing children who repeat kindergarten and the subsequent cognitive effects of this event. The subjects were taken from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Kindergarten cohort (ECLS-K) data from the U. S. National Center for Educational Statistics. This is a nationally representative sample of about 21,000 children, their parents, teachers, and schools that was compiled in the Fall of 1998, the Spring of 1999, the Fall of 1999, the Spring of 2000, the Spring of 2002, and the Spring of 2004. The sample was composed of about 55% white, 15% black, 18% Hispanic, 6% Asian, and 5% Native American children, with nearly 20% of the children from families that were living below the poverty line. Their data was drawn from the first four ECLS-K data collection waves, in the Fall and Spring of the kindergarten year (Waves 1 and 2) and the Fall and Spring of the first-grade year (Waves 3 and 4).

They found that approximately 4% of the ECLS-K kindergarten cohort was repeating kindergarten and another 3.5% of the first-time kindergartners did not advance to the first grade at the end of the school year. They found these figures comparable to national estimates. They also found that boys were consistently repeating kindergarten at higher rates than girls. In addition, they conclude that students living in single-parent households and from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to repeat. These findings mirror earlier data mentioned.

In reference to academic findings, Burkman et al. (2007) found that kindergarten repeaters began their second year of kindergarten with a slight cognitive advantage in

literacy and comparable mathematic achievements relative to the first timers who were promoted after one year. Within two years, there was an increasing separation in achievement between the kindergarten repeaters and the first-time kindergarteners who were promoted, with the repeaters falling further behind.

According to Burkman et al .(2007), for most children in most schools, repeating kindergarten appeared to have a negative impact on nearly all literacy and mathematics development, and in some instances (e.g., in preprimary schools, or stand-alone kindergartens) the negative impact was substantial. They conclude,

Some children may not be adversely affected by repeating kindergarten, at least in terms of early cognitive development. For example, there appears to be no net effect, positive or negative, of repeating kindergarten on a black child's literacy development during the second year of kindergarten. Only Native American and mixed-race children show a consistent boost to their kindergarten achievement due to repeating kindergarten. Consequently, we conclude that repeating kindergarten rarely leads to cognitive benefits for literacy and mathematics achievement in kindergarten and first grade. (Burkman, LoGerfo, Ready, & Lee, 2007, p. 129)

Even abroad, the research regarding grade retention indicates negative effects. In 2008, Bonvin, Bless, and Schuepbach did a study to look at the determinants and effects of grade retention at the primary school level in Switzerland where they followed students from second to third grade. Their sample included two groups of retained students and two groups of promote students matched to retainees on age, gender, nationality, level of mastery of the language of instruction, IQ, and academic

achievement in math and language of induction. They followed 83 retained children (both German speaking and French speaking) and 83 low achieving but promoted peers in Switzerland.

Their results were mixed with positive outcomes in the case of same grade comparisons and negative effects based on same age comparisons. In the same age comparisons, retainees were found to have poorer academic performance in both math and language of instruction. In the same grade comparisons, retainees ranked significantly than the low-achieving but promoted students in math and in their language of instruction by the end of third grade (Bonvin et al., 2008). In addition, they found that retainees had a more positive attitude toward school at the beginning of the repeated year, but it diminished during the course of the said year. Retainees were also found to have a higher level of social acceptance and improved academic self-concept, but this too diminished during the course of the repeated year. The same grade comparisons showed no difference between the retained and low-achieving but promotes students, while retainees received less favorable values in terms of their social acceptance and academic self-concept than promoted low-achievers prior to grade retention as rated by their teachers (Bonvin, Bless, & Schupback, 2008).

The existing research overwhelmingly points to negative effects of retention. The research seems to indicate that initial academic improvements may occur during the year the student was retained, but many studies show that achievement gains decline within two to three years of retention (e.g., Jimerson et al., 2006). However, since 1994 at least three major studies have begun to suggest that grade retention might not always be negative (Viadero, 2000). In a recent empirical study done by Lorence and Dworkin

(2006), the long-term effects of grade retention in Texas were evaluated. Students who failed the Texas mandatory third grade reading test were followed through their sophomore year in high school. Using comparisons of reading scores between third grade students who repeated the grade and their socially promoted classmates revealed that the positive effect of retention persisted over time, regardless of race. Their findings revealed that requiring low-performing students to retake third grade was associated with increased reading performance. The authors stated that “making students repeat a grade, when supplemented with additional educational assistance, can benefit academically challenged children” (p. 999).

In contrast to other studies, they found that reading scores through six grades after retention revealed that socially promoted students lagged behind the reading ability of the retainees. In addition, the positive association between retention and reading performance was replicated across the three largest racial/ethnic groups in the state. They found no evidence that making academically challenged students repeat a grade harmed their academic progress. Their findings contradict the negative view that retention is not effective.

Another study that showed positive effects of retention was done in Baltimore in 1994, where Karl Alexander (as cited in Jimerson, 1999) and his colleagues tracked 800 students who began in first grade in 1982. Eight years later, they determined that grade repeaters did better both during the retention year and for several years afterwards. In addition, the retained students continued to show improvements in their levels of self-regard and in their attitudes toward school. Alexander, Entwisle, and Dauber have done several studies looking at the effects of retention in the primary school grades. In 2003,

they did a reassessment that looked at the consequences of grade retention prior to high school for retainees' school performance and socioeconomic adjustments as well as its long-term consequences for dropping out of high school. In this eight year longitudinal study, they matched two never-retained comparison groups: a group of all never-retained students and group of non-retainees with low 1<sup>st</sup> grade spring California Achievement Test (CAT) scores. In addition, they used multiple regressions to statistically adjust for differences in demographic factors, academic competence prior to retention, and other risk factors (Alexander et al., 2003). The subjects were a representative random sample from the Beginning School Study which monitored the academic progress and personal development of school children in Baltimore City Public Schools.

They reported, like many before them, that minority youth, children from lower SES backgrounds, and boys were held back more often. They also concluded that retained students fared poorly on all measures of early academic standing as compared to their never-retained counterparts. Alexander et al. found that students who were retained in second or third grade caught up with the promoted students in terms of achievement test scores during their repeated year, and at least part of these gains were sustained through grade seven, unlike some previous studies. Unfortunately, these students never reached the performance level of promoted ones, but the retainees were often close in comparison with low-achieving but promoted students. They reported that almost always, the retainees were closer to the promoted students in terms of academic performance than they had been before the retention, and they were ahead of their low-achieving but promote peers and equal to their regularly promote peers in terms of adjusted marks, as measured by report card marks. Although these results were promising, Alexander et al.

also reported that students in first grade did not improve their academic performance in the long run, and the retention seemed to have a negative socio-emotional effect on first grade retainees by the time they were eight years-old. The researchers found mixed results on various social-emotional adjustment measures for those students in second or third grade, but generally positive results were found for second and third grade retainees when statistical adjustments were made for pre-retention and demographic factors. However, they did confirm early studies and stated that grade retention was a distinctive risk factor for dropping out of high school, with students in upper grades and those retained multiple times more prone to leave school without a degree (Alexander et al., 2003).

A study done by Gleason, Kowk, and Hughes (2007) focused on the short-term effects of grade retention on peer relations and academic performance of at-risk first graders. In the study, the researchers theorized that this retention would have a positive effect. They used 350 at-risk first grade participants, 52.6% being male, from ethnically diverse backgrounds who attended three different school districts in the state of Texas. There were 74 African American, 132 Hispanic, 130 Caucasian, and 12 Asian or Pacific Islander students represented in the data. They administered individual tests of academic achievement, teacher-report and peer-report measure of academic competence, and peer-report measure of peer acceptance. Information was gathered on children in first grade and one year later, at which time 62 children were repeating first grade and 287 were in second grade (Gleason, Kwok, & Hughes, 2007).

The research indicated that when all children were in first grade, teachers perceived children who were subsequently retained as less engaged and as achieving less,

yet retained and promoted children did not differ on any of the initial peer-rated variables. In addition, retention had a significant positive effect on peer acceptance measure in the following year, and in fact they found that retention had significant positive effects on both teacher-perceived academic competence and peer perceived academic competence measured in that year. Gleason et al., acknowledged that their measure of academic competence was based on teacher and peer perceptions of students' academic performance in the classroom and could not reach any conclusions from the analyses regarding the effect of retention on children's actual academic achievement, but could conclude that among a sample of academically at-risk first graders, children who repeated first grade improved more in peer acceptance the repeated year than did children who were promoted to second grade (Gleason et al., 2007).

The state of Florida enacted a test-based promotion policy in 2001 in compliance with No Child Left Behind, and researchers Jay Greene and Marcus Winters have been studying the effects of the policy since 2004. In their first study regarding the academic affect on Florida's test-based promotion policy, the researchers compared the developmental scale score gains made by more than 80,000 low-achieving third graders in 2002-2003, one year after the implementation of the retention policy and compared them with a control group of low-achieving third graders in 2001-2002, the year before the implementation of the retention policy (Greene & Winters, 2006).

They found "consistently positive results for the use of such retention policies" (p. 9). They found that specifically, third graders subject to the retention policy made significantly greater gains in the achievement test scores in reading and math than students not subject to the retention policy. They also found statically significant

differences in achievement between the retained students and their low-achieving but promoted peers. The low-performing students who were retained made greater gains in both reading and math than did similar students who were promoted (Greene & Winters, 2004). The researchers found similar result in their 2006 study on the effects of grade retention on student achievement two years after the test-based retention policy. Once again, they found positive effects. They reported significant reading gains among retained third grade students relative to the control group of socially promoted students two years after the policy. In addition, they concluded that these academic benefits were found to grow substantially from the first to the second year after retention. They stated, “Students lacking in basic skills who are socially promoted appear to fall farther behind over time, whereas retained students appear to be able to catch up on the skills they are lacking” (Greene & Winters, 2006, p. i). In their 2007 study on the same subject, Greene and Winters once again found similar positive results. They found that, “Retained students slightly outperformed socially promoted students in reading in the first year after retention, and these gains increased substantially in the second year” (Greene & Winters, 2006, p. 319).

In 2009, Greene and Winters re-examined Florida’s test-based promotion policy and considered who was being retained and who was benefiting from the policy. They used data from the Florida Department of Educating that included information on demographics and test scores of all the students in Florida during the years 2000-2001 to 2003-2004. As in previously mentioned research, they also found that, “African-American and Hispanic students with scores under the retention threshold are significantly more likely to be retained under the policy than white students with

similarly low scores” (p. 4). In addition, they concluded that the retained students had significantly higher test score gains in reading compared to the students who were exempted from the policy and promoted. All three of their studies showed positive effects after being retained.

Another study that examined the effects of retention was done by Hong and Yu in 2008. They looked at the effects of kindergarten retention on children’s social-emotional development in the early, middle, and late elementary years. The subjects were once again taken from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Kindergarten cohort (ECLS-K) data from the U. S. National Center for Educational Statistics, a nationally representative sample of about 21,000 children, their parents, teachers, and schools. According the researches, they analyzed a series of multivariate models and compared the retention effects across different respondents over different time points.

Their results showed that two years after retention, the retained kindergartens perceived a higher level of competence and interest in academic learning than they would have if they had been promoted to the first grade instead. They conclude that

Retention did not show detectable effects on children’s’ self-perceived competence and interest in peer relations two and four years after the treatment. Yet according to teachers’ observations at the end of the treatment year and children’s self-reports two years later, the retained students experienced a lower level of internalizing problem behaviors on average as a result of retention than they would have if promoted. In general, this study has shown no evidence suggesting that kindergarten retention does harm to children’s social-emotional development. Rather, it seems that retained the at-risk children in kindergarten

would likely raise their self-confidence and interest, especially in reading and in all subject, and might even decrease their internalizing problem behaviors. We note that the estimated effect sizes on all the outcomes measures were relatively small. Therefore, our results do not indicate that kindergarten retention will bring great benefits to the social-emotional development of all the children who would possibly be retained. (Hung & Yu, 2008, p. 417)

There are many existing studies regarding the effects of retention in kindergarten, often with mixed results. A recent study done by Yingying Dong in 2010 on the casual effects of repeating kindergarten on academic performance, illustrates this point. The research utilized the data from the U.S. Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten Cohort 1998-1990 (ECLS-K). The researcher focused on standardized reading and math scale scores for children who were either first-time kindergartners or kindergarten retainees in the 1998-1999 school year, and who were assessed in the spring and fall of kindergarten and the spring of their first and third grades.

Dong's main goal was to investigate whether the retained children actually did better than they would have done, had they been socially promoted. Findings from the study indicate that repeating kindergarten had positive effects on the retained children's later academic performance. The researcher felt that the retained children would do worse in terms of the first-and third-grade test scores, were they socially promoted. In addition, he found that while the positive effect on the retainees' math scores was still significant up to third grade, the effect the reading scores was not. In other words, the effects diminish over time, as found in the previous research mentioned. The research showed

that holding the low-achieving kindergartners back provided a temporary boost in their academic performance that appeared to wear off over time (Dong, 2010).

The research on retention has yielded mixed results, with each study contradicting the other. This review of literature on grade retention and its effects on a variety of short and long term student outcomes represents a diverse body of research available. Table 3 is a summary of the empirical studies reviewed, and should be of interest to policymakers, practitioners, and researchers involved in designing, implement, or studying interventions to improve outcomes for low-performing students (Xia and Kirby, 2009).

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**Table 3**

*Summary of Empirical Studies*

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Study	Sample	Findings
Alexander, 1994	800 students in Baltimore from first to eighth grade	Grade repeaters did better during the retention year and for several years after.
Jimerson, Rotert, Egeland, & Sroufe, 1997	190 children from the Minnesota Mother-Child Interaction Project Longitudinal Study	Retained students had more males, came from lower income families, and mothers' had lower educational attainment. They missed more days of school and displayed more maladjusted behaviors in the classroom.

Jimerson, 1999	21 year longitudinal study 179 students from the Minnesota Mother-Child Interaction Project	Retained students were more likely to drop out of high school, displayed more behavior problems and displayed lower academic adjustment scores.
Rodney, Crafter & Mupier, 1999	243 African American 13-17 year old boys in the Midwest	Positively associated lack of discipline in the home with grade retention.
Alexander, Entiwsle, & Dauber, 2003	Sample from the Beginning School Study from Baltimore City Public Schools	Students who were retained in second or third grade caught up with the promoted group on achievement tests.
Fine & Davis, 2003	25,000 K-8 students, parents teachers, and schools from NELS:88 Longitudinal study	Boys, low SES, & lower achievement were factors that made students more likely to be retained. Retainees are more likely to drop out of high school and less likely to enroll in a 4-year college.
Green & Winters, 2004	80,000 low-achieving third graders in Florida	Retained third graders made significantly greater gains in achievement test scores in reading and math compared to those not subject to the retention policy.
Witmer, Hoffman, & Nottis, 2004	35 K-4 teachers in the Northeast	Teachers believed that retention was an effective practice that could help certain students.

Greene & Winters, 2006	80,000 low-achieving third graders in Florida	Significant reading gains among retained third graders compared to socially promoted group of students two years after retention policy.
Lowrence & Dworkin, 2006	Third graders in Texas	There was a positive association between retention and reading performance.
Silberglitt, Jimerson, Burns, & Appelton, 2006	Longitudinal study with 49 students from five districts in Minnesota	Early grade retention did not yield advantages in reading from first to eighth grade.
Burkman, LoGerfo, Ready, & Lee, 2007	21,000 students, parents, and teachers from the NELS:88 Longitudinal Study	For most children repeating kindergarten appeared to have a negative impact on literacy and mathematics development.
Gleason, Kwok, & Hughes, 2007	350 at-risk first graders from three different school districts in Texas	Retention had a significant positive effect on peer acceptance the following year.
Greene & Winters, 2007	80,000 low-achieving first graders in Florida	Retained students outperformed socially promoted students in reading in the first year after retention.
Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007	Longitudinal study with 137 students in the west, 72 who were followed	Promoted students had higher achievement through eleventh grade on average; retained students more likely to drop out of high school

Stearns, Moller, Blau, & Potochnick, 2007	Eighth graders from the NELS: Longitudinal Study	Retained students are more likely to drop out of high school, come from poorer households, and have lower achievement scores.
Wu, West, & Hughes, 2007	787 first graders in Texas	Grade retention decreased the growth rate of mathematics, but had no significant effect on reading skills in the two years following the retention.
Bovin, Bless, & Schuepback, 2008	166 retained children in Switzerland	Mixed results: positive outcomes with the same grade comparisons such as retainees ranking higher in math and language, but negative effects for same age comparisons such as poorer academic performance in both math and language.
Hong & Yu, 2008	21,000 students, parents, teachers, and schools from the NESL:88 Longitudinal Study	Kindergarten retention will bring greater benefits to the social-emotional development of those who are retained.
Greene & Winters, 2009	Data from the Florida Department of Education	African-American and Hispanic students are more likely to be retained. Retained students had significantly higher test score gains than those who were socially promoted.
Dong, 2010	Kindergartners from the NESL:88 Longitudinal Study	Repeating kindergarten has positive effects on the retained children's later academic performance.

## **Current Practices and Policies**

President George W. Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act, which states that assessments, aligned with state standards, must be used to measure the achievement of all children at each grade level (Picklo & Christenson, 2005). Now, states are required to use performance on standardized tests as a criterion for promotion and are required to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) on those state tests. Unfortunately, a year's or a semester's education is being reduced to a single test. Research continues to show that using one standardized test as a basis for grade promotion decisions is an inappropriate remedy for low student achievement (Hartke, 1999; Goldberg, 2004).

Since NCLB was passed, more children have been “left behind” than ever before. The number of students retained annually in the United States has increased during the past decade with recent estimates between seven and 15% (over three million children) each year (Jimerson et al., 2006). Educational professionals, including school boards and administrators, are expected to consider research that supports effective interventions to promote the success of students. NCLB emphasizes scientifically based interventions, such as grade retention, to ensure that all students meet basic competencies. However, all the empirical evidence appears to denounce grade retention (Jimerson et al., 2006).

The research examining the efficacy of grade retention suggests that it is not likely to be effective in remediating academic failure and/or behavior difficulties. There seems to be a disparity between research, policy, and practice as educational policy and instructional strategies do not necessarily follow what has been empirically shown to be effective (Jimerson, 2001). Even though convergent evidence showing retention in grade is generally not effective, (Alexander et al, 2003; Holmes & Matthews 1983; Hung & Yu,

2008; Jimerson, 1999 and 2001) opposition to social promotion and support for retention in grade have resurfaced and have been endorsed as best-practices for non-mastery of grade level curriculum (Beebe-Frankenberger, Bocian, MacMillian, & Gresham, 2004).

Not only does retention cost the student, but it costs tax payers. In 1990, the annual cost to school districts of retaining 2.4 million students per year was nearly \$10 billion, and in 1998 the cost was estimated to be over \$14 billion annually (Dawson, 1998; Shepard & Smith, 1990). In 2005, the national per-pupil expenditure on public elementary and secondary education averaged \$8,701 a student (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). Each year a pupil is retained increases the cost of the retained child's education approximately by eight percent. For example, in Ohio the cost to taxpayers was approximately an extra \$4,700 in the 2000-2001 school -year (Gay, 2002). In addition, grade repeaters are more likely to be unemployed as adults, rely on public assistance, or be in prison compared with adults who did not repeat a grade (NASP, 2003).

### **Positive Effects**

The results of many past studies that examined the association between grade retention and academic achievement outcomes suggest mixed effects for retained students (e.g., Holmes & Mathews 1984; Jimerson, 1999). Researchers like Jim Grant (1997) argued that retention is not appropriate for all struggling students and that it works best for younger students in the class, emotionally immature children of average or high ability, and children who are small for their age. Proponents of grade retention advocate that retention in the early elementary grades is justified.

A longitudinal study in Texas found a positive association between retention and reading performance in third graders among the three largest racial/ethnic groups in the

state (Lorence & Dworkin, 2006). Lorence and Dworkin maintain that there is no evidence in the data that making academically challenged children repeat a grade harms their academic progress. They found that minorities who initially performed poorly in reading and were retained went on to perform better in reading than their African-American and Hispanic counterparts who were socially promoted (Lorence & Dworkin, 2006). Another positive effect was noted by Jimerson, Carlson, and Rotert (1997) who found that students who had been retained showed short-term gains in their math achievement. This research indicated that initial academic improvements may occur during the year the student is retained. However, many other studies show that achievement gains appear to decline within 2-3 years of retention (Hoag, 2001; Holmes & Matthews, 1983; Jimerson, 2001).

### **Negative Effects**

Grade retention remains a relatively frequently used and controversial intervention. While some research has identified a few positive effects, much of the body of research on retention has not found favorable achievement or adjustment outcomes for students who are retained. The findings from several studies collected over the last 50 years have suggested that grade retention either bestows no benefits on the retained student or has a negative impact on achievement, social and emotional adjustment, self confidence, and attachment to school (Holmes & Matthews, 1983; Hong & Raudenbush, 2005; Jimerson, et al, 1997; Pangani, Tremblay, Viatro, Boulerice, & McDuff, 2001). Research indicates that students who are retained are often found to be less confident, less self-assured, less engaged in academics, more unpopular, less socially competent, and have more maladaptive behaviors than their peers (Jimerson et al., 1997).

Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber (2003) also found students who were retained were found to have lower levels of academic adjustment, lower self-concept, and lower self-esteem (Alexander et al., 2003). Students who were retained often dislike school, and their behavior often worsens following retention. In addition, these students have lower achievement levels and/or more disciplinary problems than do students who are promoted continuously throughout school (Alexander et al., 2003; Jimerson 1999).

Another negative consequence of being held in grade is the possibility of rupturing social bonds with peers and consequently hurting students' ability to bond with teachers later in their educational career. Retention separates students from their same-aged peers and may end friendships (Stearns, Moller, Blau, & Potochnick, 2007). These students may have fewer friends and reach puberty earlier, which may become more obvious the older they get (Stearns et al., 2007).

Retained students are older than their peers, and they may be more susceptible to societal pressures that pull them out of school (Stearns & Glennie, 2006). This can lead to one of the most damaging effects, the idea that grade retention is considered to be among the strongest predictors of students dropping out of school (e.g., Jimerson, 1999; Jimerson 2007). A review by Jimerson, Anderson, and Whipple (2002) documented the consistent finding that students retained during elementary school are between two and 11 times more likely to drop out of high school than non-retained students. In addition, grade retention increases the risk of dropping out by 20% to 50%. This study found that these students had lower levels of academic adjustment, were less likely to receive a diploma by age 20, were less likely to be enrolled in a postsecondary education program,

and were paid less per hour. High school dropouts are far more likely than graduates to be unemployed, in prison, unmarried or divorced, and living in poverty (Orfield, 2006).

### **The Link Between Retention and High School Graduation**

In October 2007, the NCES estimated that approximately 3.3 million 16 through 24 year-olds were not enrolled in high school and had not earned a high school diploma or alternative credential. These status dropouts accounted for 8.7 percent of the 37 million non-intentionalized civilian 16-24 year-olds living in the United States (Cataldi & Laird, 2009). The dropout rate for males' ages 16-24 was 9.8% compared to females at 7.8%. In addition, black (8.4%) and Hispanic (21.4%) students were more likely to drop out than whites (5.3%) and Asians/Pacific Islanders (6.1%) (Cataldi & Laird, 2009). In fact, 3.5% of all students who were enrolled in private or public high schools in the United States in October 2006 left school before October 2007 without completing a high school program (Cataldi & Laird, 2009).

The NCES reported that youth who had dropped out of high school in each of the years observed were more likely to have ever been retained than youth who were enrolled in high school or youth who had completed high school. In 2004, 21% of youth who had dropped out of school had been retained, compared with 12% of those who were still enrolled and four percent of those who completed high school. Of those youth that had dropped out of school, a greater percentage had been retained in grades 6–12 (17 %) than in grades K–5 (10%) (Cataldi & Laird, 2009).

Every school day, more than seven thousand students become dropouts and will not graduate from high school with their peers as scheduled. Without a high school diploma, these individuals will be far more likely than those who graduate to spend their

lives periodically unemployed, on government assistance, or cycling in and out of the prison system (Alliance for Excellence Education, 2009). Increased graduation rates benefit everyone in society. Those who graduate will earn, on average, \$9,634 more a year in wages. The average annual income for a high school dropout in 2005 was \$17,299, compared to \$26,933 for a high school graduate (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2006). In addition, the nation will benefit from high school graduates' increased purchasing power, higher tax receipts, and higher levels of worker productivity (Editorial Projects in Education, 2009). High school graduates are less likely to be teen parents, more likely to raise healthier, better-educated children, less likely to commit crimes, and less likely to rely on government health care or use public services (Wolfe & Haveman, 2002).

According to the U.S. Department of Education, "The bipartisan No Child Left Behind law ensures that schools are held accountable for the academic progress of every child, regardless of race, ethnicity, income level, or zip code. Because of No Child Left Behind, closing the achievement gap is now a national priority" (NCLB Act of 2001). In a time where postsecondary education, let alone a high school diploma, is increasingly necessary to succeed in the global economy, there appears to still be a graduation crisis that disproportionately affects poor and minority students.

According to a report released by Jobs for the Future advocacy group and the Everyone Graduates Center at Johns Hopkins University, researchers found that one-third of Georgia high schools have low graduation rates (Balfanz, Almeida, Steinberg, Santos, & Fox, 2009). In fact, Georgia was one of five states with the worst graduation rates, along with Florida, Nevada, New Mexico and South Carolina. Overall, Georgia's rate

rose slightly from 75.3 percent to 77.8 percent from 2008 to 2009 (Balfanz et al., 2009). Unfortunately, the high schools with the lowest graduation rates served mostly poor, minority students. According to the report these students are more likely than white students to attend schools with low graduation rates. In Georgia in 2009, the graduation rate for African-Americans was 72.6% and the rate for Hispanics was 69%. While those rates do show slight improvement, they still trail behind the white students, who had an 82.1% graduation rate, and the state average of 77.8 % (Balfanz et al., 2009).

### **Alternatives to Retention and Social Promotion**

There has been a lack of evidence to support long-term achievement gains for students who are retained (Jimerson et al., 2002). In addition, longitudinal research has failed to demonstrate an overall positive effect for grade retention as an intervention (Jimerson et al., 1997; as cited in Bowman, 2005). Research suggests that when students do not meet predetermined academic standards, there are alternatives available. Schools need to move beyond grade retention as an intervention strategy and implement strategies that research has demonstrated to be effective in the classroom (Jimerson, 2001).

Research provides evidence that supports the effectiveness of several interventions. To better address academic problems, school systems can implement preschool programs, early reading programs, extended day programs, ninth-grade academies, year-round school, and summer school (Jimerson et al., 2006; Shepard & Smith, 1990). Expanded learning options such as block scheduling, flexible grouping, and cooperative learning are some of the strategies that can be used and are a central theme in the research for providing education to meet students' needs. Other programs that have resulted in significant academic gains with specific ages and populations of

students are smaller class sizes, multiage grouping, and looping (Leckrone & Griffith, 2006). Individual schools can implement after-school programs, multi-age classrooms, behavior modification plans, pull-out programs, and reading programs like Reading Recovery (Gredler, 1997; Jimerson et al., 2006).

Not only do individual schools and school systems need to provide preventative and alternative programs, teachers need to provide alternative strategies to help each student meet the standards (Jimerson et al., 2006). They can do this by attending professional development workshops, using effective instructional strategies and assessments, and by communicating with parents effectively through frequent contact (Picklo & Christenson, 2005). In addition, they can provide one-on-one instruction, teacher-led instruction, and supplemental tutoring in the classroom. Teachers also need to use systematic methods to monitor the progress of students in order to identify their strengths and weaknesses (McCollum, Cortez, Maroney, & Montes, 1999). The key is to prevent academic failure before it occurs.

According to Bonvin, Bless, and Schuepbach (2006),

All these comparisons are important and have to be considered as a whole because there does not seem to be an ideal single comparison that can give a suitable answer to the question. A measure such as grade retention has to be more effective than regular promotion to become an equivalent alternative, and even more so if the cost-effectiveness criteria are taken into account (the costs of an additional year of study must be balanced with the academic gains). The results at hand clearly show that this is not the case if the outcomes of all the comparisons and studies are considered together. As grade retention is primarily applied in

order to improve academic achievement, the positive short-term effects of grade retention on the social and emotional factors cannot alone justify this measure.

(Bonvin et al., 2006, p. 15)

## **Conclusion**

According to the National Association of School Psychologists (2008), Students who were retained or had delayed kindergarten entry are more likely to drop out of school compared to students who were never retained, even when controlling for achievement levels. The probability of dropping out increases with multiple retentions. Even for single retentions, the most consistent finding from decades of research is the high correlation between retention and dropping out. A recent systematic review of research exploring dropping out of high school indicates that grade retention is one of the most powerful predictors of high school dropouts. (National Association of School Psychologists, 2008)

This outcome has a devastating impact on these students later in life. According to the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), prospective, longitudinal research shows evidence that retained students have a greater probability of poorer educational and employment outcomes during late adolescence and early adulthood. They are less likely to enroll in a post-secondary education program and more likely to receive lower employment/educational status ratings, be paid less per hour, and receive poorer employment competence ratings by age 20. In addition, grade repeaters as adults are more likely to be unemployed, living on public assistance, or in prison than adults who did not repeat a grade (NASP, 2008).

President Barack Obama has linked improving high school graduation rates to restoring the nation's economic and political standing in the world (Balfaz et al, 2009). One way to support this goal is to limit grade retention and offer alternate strategies such as mentoring programs and tutors, smaller class sizes, individualized attention, better after-school programs, specific programming for at-risk drop-outs, and parent education (Womack & Shorthouse, 2009).

### **Chapter Three: Research Process and Methodology**

This chapter includes a description of the design used in this study, as well as the purpose of the study, research questions, research design, and research procedures. The purpose of this study was to explore the views and recollections of adults who were retained in elementary, middle, or high school. This study was an attempt to give a voice to individuals that have experienced the event, and to understand what effects the retention had on their lives, both past and present.

#### **Relationship to Research Genre**

There have been no long-term studies supporting retention as an intervention, yet retaining students has appeared to increase during the very time period that the research has revealed its negative effects on those who have been retained. If most of the research does not support retention and suggests negative effects, then why are students still being retained? Jimerson, Anderson, & Whipple (2002) suggest that teachers and administrators often have limited knowledge of student progress beyond their school and thus do not know the long-term effects of retention on their former students. Teachers may view retention as successfully improving academic performance that can ultimately result in a more homogenous grouping of students within a grade level (Jimerson et al., 2002). In addition, beliefs regarding the timing of retention also appear to validate its use. Many stakeholders believe that there is an advantage in retaining a child earlier rather than later to prevent future failure. It is often seen as an early intervention and as a preventative measure (Silberglitt et al., 2006). Parents and teachers who view students as “immature” usually believe retention at an early age is appropriate.

There appears to be a gap in the literature regarding the perspective of adults who have been retained as children. There are a few long term studies that present evidence to continue the practice. In 1999, Jimerson published a 21-year longitudinal study that included 29 students in a retained group, 50 students in a low-achieving, promoted group, and 100 students in a control group. The participants were selected from the Minnesota Mother-Child Interaction Project. During early childhood and elementary years, assessments included teacher interviews, child interviews and testing, and mother interviews and testing. During late adolescence, information regarding education and employment was obtained in 11<sup>th</sup> grade and at 19 and 20 years of age. The results of the study showed,

The retained student group was more likely to drop out prior to high school graduation, had lower levels of academic adjustment at the end of 11<sup>th</sup> grade, were less likely to receive a diploma or GED at age 20, received lower education/employment status rating, were paid less per hour, and received lower employment competence ratings at age 20 in comparison to a group of low-achieving but promoted peers identified in elementary school (p. 263).

Unfortunately studies like this do not appear to go beyond adolescence into the adult stage and do not include interviews of those whose lives were affected by the practice of retention later in life. Although this research was not a longitudinal study, it reflects the long-term effects of retention as perceived by those whom it has affected. A qualitative study in this area could help shed some light regarding the beliefs and misconceptions of educators and policy makers.

## **Selection of Participants**

In this qualitative study, purposive, or purposeful sampling was used to select participants who exhibited certain criteria of interest to this particular study (Ary et. al, 2006) and based on the researcher's knowledge of the group to be sampled high school. Research shows that males are more likely to be retained than females, and Hispanic and African Americans are more likely to be retained than whites (NASP, 2008; Lorence and Dworkin, 2006; Jimerson et al., 2002; Jimerson, 1999). Given this information, the adult subjects for the final study were selected based on gender, race, age, and the experience of being retained in elementary or high school. Criteria for the final participants included being retained at least one time in elementary, middle, or high school, the willingness to be interviewed and discuss their experience and the information listed previously.

In order to recruit and secure participants for the study, the researcher distributed information to a population of adults who were attending a General Education Degree (GED) completion program at a local library in a suburban area in Georgia. The researcher spoke with the class regarding the nature of the study and then passed out an initial questionnaire (see Appendix A).

The same process was followed at the community college, with the addition of the researcher having to submit some initial paperwork in order to be approved through the college's Institution Review Board (IRB). Once the surveys were collected and possible participants were identified and known to fit the criteria, they were contacted by phone for further questioning. After gathering the initial details about prior experiences as well details that fell within the parameters of the study five subjects were chosen. A face to

face interview was set up on site with each participant, with the exception of one participant who requested a telephone interview due to his schedule.

Three of the participants were working on completing their GED, one participant is working on an associate's degree from a local community college, and one participant was a senior in high school who was obtained through the snowball sampling. This occurred when the initially selected subject suggested the name of another who would be appropriate for the sample (Ary et al., 2006). Pseudonyms were used for all interviewees, and brief description of each of these participants follows:

Sam is an African-American male in his early fifties. He is married and has four children, all boys. Sam dropped out of school when he was in the ninth grade and has always wanted to go back to get his degree. With some pressure from his sons, he has gone back for the second time to finish his GED.

Nikki is an African-American female from Israel who is in her early thirties. She is the divorced mother of three children. Her eldest daughter was retained and she did not feel as if it did any good. She is now working on her GED in an effort to be a good role model for her children.

Rob is a Caucasian male in his mid-twenties. He is single and has returned to his local community college and is working on an associate's degree in dentistry. He was retained in the fifth grade and had completed high school.

Jay is a Caucasian male in his late forties. He is married and has two children and three grandchildren. After many years, he decided it was time to go back and get his GED which he is currently working on.

Jose is a nineteen year old Hispanic male. He is currently a senior in high school working on his getting his Technical/Career-Preparatory Diploma. He comes from a Spanish speaking household, and is the oldest of five children. Table 4 is a summary of the participants involved in this study.

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**Table 4**

*Information on Participants*

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Participant	Age	Race	Gender	Grade of Retention	Dropped Out
Sam	54	African American	Male	2 <sup>nd</sup> and 7 <sup>th</sup>	Yes
Nikki	30	African American	Female	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Yes
Rob	33	Caucasian	Male	5 <sup>th</sup>	Yes
Jose	19	Hispanic	Male	9 <sup>th</sup>	No
Jay	47	Caucasian	Male	4 <sup>th</sup>	Yes

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Note: Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant.

Participants for the final study were selected based on responses on the questionnaires. The criteria for final participants included being retained at least one grade in elementary, middle, or high school, the willingness to be interviewed about their experience, and being between the ages of 19 and 55. The final sample was chosen from a variety of backgrounds and included, but was not limited to, Hispanic, African-American, and white males since the literature indicates that these groups have a higher retention rate (NASP, 2008). This purposeful sampling process is used in qualitative studies to select participants exhibiting certain criteria of interest to the study (Ary et al,

2006). In this case, maximum variation sampling was used in hopes of revealing differences, but also identifying commonalities across the sample (Ary et al., 2006).

### **Selection of Sites**

The four of the participants in the sample used in this study were obtained from a population of adults in the state of Georgia who attended a General Education Degree (GED) class at a local library, as well as those who attended a community college. The library was located in a small suburban city outside the Atlanta area. The library frequently offers classes to complete a Georgia high school diploma. The site is easily accessible to this small community and is located in the heart of the city. It is open the public everyday of the week and the classes are offered in the evening for working adults.

The second setting was a community college with an enrollment of nearly 4,000. It is located about an hour from Atlanta and has an ethnically diverse population. It offers certificate, diplomas, and associates degrees and has both online and satellite campuses available for potential students. These sites were chosen due to the link between retention and high school dropout rates. As previous research has indicated, it was more likely that a participant be found at a GED site than randomly. Participants who were retained were was also more likely to be found at a community or technical college than at a larger university. In addition, the last participant was obtained through the snowball effect, as he was secured through the recommendation of a friend who was surveyed at the library.

### **Data Collection Process**

Using the Life Story Interview (Atkinson, 1998) model as a framework, this study strived to understand the individual life, and the role it plays in the larger community. Through these stories and the process putting them together in story form, the researcher

was able to gain context and recognize meaning (Atkinson, 1988). In this study, data was collected through personal interviews and analysis. Each subject participated in a one time, face-to-face interview. The interview questions were developed based on the research question and theoretical framework of the study using life story interviews.

The private, narrative inquiry (see Appendix B) was conducted in a conversational style interview with a list of pre-selected questions available to be used as warranted. With permission, the interview was to be recorded and transcribed, but due to technical difficulties, all interviews were transcribed by hand verbatim on site. Once the interview was transcribed, the researcher sent a copy via email to the participants to review, add, and amend any information. The review of the researcher's interpretation of data allowed the participants to identify or clarify any inaccuracies (Ary, et al., 2006). This member check allows the participants to review and critique field notes for accuracy and meaning (Ary, et al., 2006). In addition, field notes were recorded after each interview to record observations and running thoughts. Notes taken during this time contained pseudonyms and thus did not contain any identifying information that could be linked back to the subjects.

Since the purpose of this qualitative, interpretive study was to explore the views and recollection of adults in regards to the effects of grade retention, a study that involved asking questions to those who experiences the event was vital (Powell, 2005). Interpretive studies use textual and descriptive data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) and are concerned with meaning. The goal of this research design was to collect first-hand, descriptive data from those who have experienced retention in elementary or middle school. Therefore, this interpretive study used a narrative inquiry utilizing personal

interviews in order to pursue the goal of both research questions. Data was collected for each of the following questions as follows:

Guiding question #1: How is the experience of grade retention depicted and remembered by adults who experienced retention in elementary, middle, or high school? To focus on this topic, each participant was asked a series of questions regarding their experience being retained (see Appendix B). These questions allowed the participant to reflect upon their retention and reveal their feelings regarding the experience both when the event happened and their feelings about the event as they now perceive it as an adult.

Guiding question #2: Has the experience of grade retention had a positive or negative effect on the lives of adults who were retained? To focus on this topic, each participant was asked to reflect on the impact that they thought the retention had on their life up to this point (see Appendix B). Participants were asked to share how the retention affected their relationships with their family, peers, and teachers. In addition, they were directly solicited about the long and short term effects that the retention had on their life.

### **Instrumentation**

Preliminary and interview questions, as well as grand tour question, which are those in which the interviewer asks to invite the interviewee to open up and discuss freely about his or her experiences, were developed based on Atkinson's (1998) *Life Story*. A six-question survey (see Appendix A) was given to those who agreed to be surveyed. If the would-be participants met the criteria, an oral interview was conducted with open-ended questions (see Appendix B) that had various probes to prompt discussion during the interviews. The questionnaire was based on the guiding research, 1988).

## **Data Analysis Procedures**

The data was derived from narrative accounts that were obtained through life story interviews, and was analyzed using a constant comparative method. This procedure relied on continual analysis by the researcher by means of comparing new data with previous collected data to note similarities and differences (Glasser & Strauss, 1967; as cited in Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Initially, each interview was to be recorded on a tape cassette for accuracy, but technical difficulties prevented that measure. Instead, the interviews were transcribed verbatim by hand and then into a typed format, and a summary of each individual was constructed using a narrative organization according to the interview questions. During this transcription, all identification data was removed and only pseudonyms were used. After the transcription was completed, the subject was given the opportunity to add, expand, and/or delete information that validates the truthfulness of the interview process.

In addition, the researcher kept field notes to supplement information from the transcription. These notes include a description of the setting, people, and their reaction to the questions as well as a reflective portion which included; the observer's personal feelings or impressions about the interview, comments on the research method, decisions and problems of the interview, records of ethical issues, and speculations about the data analysis (Ary et al., 2006). The researcher's reflections were also noted and distinguished from the descriptive information gathered during the interview. These field notes were to record recurring regularities or patterns in the investigation and supplement the oral interview (Ary et al., 2006).

After all of the interviews were transcribed, the researcher familiarized herself with the data by rereading notes and transcriptions, and analyzing the data using the constant comparative method. Each transcribed interview was dissected to identify and review common or reoccurring themes, phrases and keywords, and answers, as well as individual thoughts, feelings, and opinions. The narratives were highlighted to find common words, phrases, feelings, and sentences.

Analysis began with open coding in order to break down the segments into categories and subcategories. The information gathered was sorted into groups of similar and reoccurring themes in order to find relationships, key themes, and emerging categories. The interview questionnaire facilitated data analysis as each participant was asked to respond to the same question in the same order. Responses were color coded and the researcher began to identify common themes that occurred including the possible negative and/or positive effects of the retention. These coded responses were synthesized into themes.

After categories were disseminated, axial coding began so that the researcher could make connections between and across categories. This analysis involved synthesizing information and trying to explain relationships, theorizing about how and why the relationships appear as they do, and to connecting the new knowledge that is gathered with what was already known (Ary et al., 2006). The categories and major themes were then analyzed and connected.

Once that was achieved, selective coding was employed so that the researcher could systematically review the data for specific categories and narrow the focus of the study (Ary et al., 2006). Themes of positive and negative effects and overall experience

of being retained were looked at and focused on, possibly answering the original guiding questions.

Once the categories were connected, the researcher began to summarize and see what was in the data (Ary et al., 2006). Categories were examined and merged to identify patterns by finding common links and connections among categories. The researcher began to make statements about relationships and themes in the data and summarize that data by trying to find relationships among those categories. The researcher then began to make meaning of the categories and themes and connected them (Ary et al., 2006). These connections were displayed with graphs, charts, and concept maps to show the pattern observed.

By using the qualitative analysis strategy as the constant comparative method, the researcher was able to “combine inductive category coding with simultaneous comparison of all units of meaning obtained” (Glaser & Straus, 1967 as cited in Ary et al, 2006, p. 498). The researcher was able to compare each new topic to determine its distinctive characteristic, and then compared categories and grouped them with similar categories. Once the data was completely analyzed, the researcher then interpreted the information. This involved going beyond what was stated in the data to extract meaning and insights from the data.

### **Creditability, Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability**

The integrity of qualitative research depends on attending to the issue of credibility, or validity, which concerns the accuracy or truthfulness of the findings (Ary et al., 2006). This involves how well the researcher has established confidence in the findings based on the research design, participants, and context (Ary et al., 2006). The

researcher has an obligation to represent the realities of the research participants as accurately as possible and must provide assurances in the report that this obligation was met (Ary et al., 2006).

The use of multiple sources of data, multiple observers, and/or multiple methods is referred to as *triangulation*. In data triangulation, the researcher investigates whether the data collected with one procedure or instrument confirms data collected using a different procedure or instrument (Ary et al., 2006). To ensure credibility in this paper, the researcher used data triangulation to find support for the observations and conclusions by allowing the participants to read all transcripts to ensure accuracy and authenticity. The use of member check allowed the participants to review and critique field notes for accuracy and meaning, clear up miscommunications, identify inaccuracies, and help obtain additional useful data (Ary et al., 2006).

*Transferability* refers to the capacity to transfer results of the study to similar settings, and is the degree to which the findings of a qualitative study can be applied or generalized to other contexts or to other groups. The term external validity is used to refer to the generalization of the findings. Even though this is not a goal of qualitative research, it is the researcher's responsibility to provide sufficient, detailed descriptions of the context so that potential users can make the necessary comparisons and judgments about similarity and hence transferability (Ary et al., 2006). One strategy that was used was cross-case comparisons in which the researcher will investigate more than one case. If the findings were similar, this would increase the possibility of transferability of findings to other settings or contexts (Ary et al., 2006).

*Dependability* refers to the trustworthiness of the research. To enhance this reliability, the researcher needed to demonstrate that the methods used are reproducible and consistent and that the approach and procedures used were appropriate for the context and can be documented (Ary et al., 2006). A researcher can insure dependability by establishing an audit trail. This contains the raw data gathered and includes keeping detailed and organized records of research procedures, interview protocols, transcriptions, questionnaires and the conduction of data analysis (Ary et al., 2006).

*Confirmability* deals with the idea of neutrality or the extent to which the research is free of bias in the procedures and the interpretation of results (Ary et al., 2006). Since it is nearly impossible to achieve the levels of objectivity in a qualitative study, the focus will shift from the neutrality of the researcher to the confirmability of the data and interpretations (Ary et al., 2006). This study incorporated the audit trail and participant review of transcripts as two strategies for demonstrating confirmability.

### **Limitations of Study**

Several limitations emerged during the research process. Since the study focused on adults who have been retained in elementary, middle, or high school, significant time may have elapsed since the event occurred. Thus, the reliance on the memory of the participants was a limitation of the study. In addition, these memories have had the potential to be affected by years of other experiences and by what the participants have been told by others about their retention experience.

Another limitation of the study was self-reportage. There is a possibility that the participants only reported what they felt comfortable about and that they may not have revealed more sensitive feelings, effects, and experiences. Since this was a one-time

interview, the researcher did not have the opportunity to build a relationship with the participants and to gain their complete trust. The sample itself may be a limitation. The participants all have a connection to Georgia and that may skew the result. In addition, the size may become a limitation since there were only five participants interviewed.

### **Ethical Considerations and Issues**

Part of the study was done at a local library in the same county in which the researcher resides. It is possible that participants did not disclose full information due to the sensitive matter of the interview. All steps to ensure privacy and anonymity were taken to ensure the participants are not harmed in any way, including psychologically. All names were changed to guarantee anonymity. All measures were taken to assure that the participants know that the study was done to further the field of research in education and that their participation could help educators and policy makers make more informed decisions regarding the practice of retention.

### **Summary**

Chapter Three discussed the research methodology that the researcher employed in the qualitative, interpretive study. In addition, it provided a description of the data collection process, as well as the method of analysis. It included the instrumentation, the population, the sample size, and the limitations of the study. The next chapter provides the findings from the study.

## **Chapter Four: Results of the Study**

The first three chapters provided introduction to a problem, a literature review, and the research methodology used in this particular study. The problem presented in the first chapter is that many educators, lay citizens, and policymakers are convinced that by ending social promotion they can improve student learning (Hoag, 2001). However, the growing body of research seems to indicate the potential for negative effects consistently outweighs positive outcomes and does not support the use of grade retention as an academic intervention (Jimerson et al., 2006). There have been few studies that examine the long-term effects of retention, and even fewer that have examined the subjects in adulthood. The second chapter offered a review of the literature that was available regarding research that has been conducted over the last 50 years concerning the effects of retention. The third chapter gave a detailed description of the methodology used to obtain the participants, as well as the data collection process.

This chapter contains an examination of the findings obtained through five individual interviews of a narrative study regarding the subject of grade retention. Four of the interviews included adults who have been retained in elementary school, and one interview was with an adult who was retained in high school. The beginning of this chapter includes an overview of the participants, data gathering and recording, how the records were kept, and a brief biography of each individual. A detailed account of each interview and a summary of the findings is also included.

Research has found that for most students, grade retention had a negative effect on all areas of achievement, as well as social and emotional adjustments (Jimerson, 2001). Despite research that fail to support retentions effectiveness as an intervention, a

greater number of students are being left behind than ever before (Jimerson et al., 2005). Given the overwhelming evidence that the policy of retention is ineffective and possibly harmful, it is imperative that school administrators, teachers, and policy makers advocate for policies and interventions that are evidence based and effective (Jimerson et al., 2005).

### **Data Gathering and Recording**

The sample of five participants used in this study were obtained from a population of adults in the state of Georgia who attended a General Education Degree (GED) class at a local library, as well as those who attended a community college. These sites were chosen due to the link between retention and high school dropout rates. As previous research has indicated, it was more likely that a participant be found at a GED site than randomly. Participants who were retained were also more likely to be found at a community or technical college than at a larger university. In addition, there was a snowball effect from friends, or acquaintances, of the population being sampled. The participants were purposefully selected or sampled based on the fact that they exhibited certain criteria of interest to the study (Ary et al., 2006) and based on the researcher's knowledge of the group to be sampled. Research confirms that males are more likely to be retained than females, and Hispanic and African Americans are more likely to be retained than whites (NASP, 2008; Lorence and Dworkin, 2006; Jimerson et al., 2002; Jimerson, 1999).

Data for this study were collected through individual interviews using a private, narrative inquiry (see Appendix B). Four out of the five participants were interviewed face-to-face at their choice of location, and one participant was interviewed by telephone

due to his scheduling conflicts. Participants were asked to sign a consent form (see Appendix C) before the interview was conducted. The telephone interview was conducted with verbal consent and a copy of the consent form was mailed to the subject. All of the interviews were conducted in a conversational style with a list of pre-selected questions available to be used as warranted. The interviews took the form of a narrative at times, allowing participants to elaborate on questions. The researcher attempted to follow the questions as presented, but in some cases the participants answered other questions in their narrative response in previous questions. If the question was already answered, the researcher would repeat the question as to add any missing information and to confirm their original thought. Pseudonyms were given to each participant in order to protect their identities and were used throughout the transcriptions and in all subsequent chapters (see table 1).

### **Keeping Track of the Data**

The interviews were recorded by hand at the site, and then immediately transcribed once the conversation was complete. Once the interview was transcribed, the researcher sent a copy via email to the participants to review, add, and amend any information. The review of the researcher's interpretation of data allowed the participants to identify or clarify any inaccuracies (Ary, et al., 2006). The typed transcriptions were saved to an individual electronic file folder on the researcher's computer and were also printed out for dissemination. In addition, each participant's information was saved as a hard copy in an individual file. This information also included their original participation information sheet (see Appendix A), their hand written transcription of the interview,

their signed consent form (see Appendix C), and their return email indicating changes and approvals of the transcriptions.

### **Research Questions**

The focus of this research project was to examine the views and recollections of the effects of grade retention by adults who have lived through the experience. The guiding questions were based on Atkinson's (1998) *Life Stories*. The goal of the interviews was to hear the order and meaning of the experience of grade retention as it was lived (Atkinson, 1998). The study was guided by two research questions: 1) How is the experience of grade retention depicted and remembered by adults who experienced retention in elementary, middle, or high school? 2) Has the experience of grade retention had a positive or negative effect on the lives of adults who were retained?

### **Overview of Participants**

The individuals who participated in this study ranged from ages 19 to 54. Four males and one female were represented in the sample. All of the participants lived in the state of Georgia. Participants in this study were retained in schools from three different states and four were retained in their elementary years (K-5). Only one person repeated a grade in high school (9-12). When compared in size to their classmates, one stated he was smaller, one stated he was average, and three indicated that they were taller than their peers at the time of retention. Two of the five indicated that they relocated the year after their retention, while the other three remained in the same school.

Poverty, which was more prevalent in students that have been retained, was indicated by one student, as well as being a minority (NASP, 2008) which was represented by three students. In two of the cases, both a single parent home, and the lack

of parental involvement and support was present. This lack of parental support was seen in four out of the five participants.

One of the five participants acknowledged lack of participation and effort for their retention, while two cited language barriers, and the other two cited academic failures. Three out of the five participants dropped out of high school, but all three of those are currently working towards earning their General Education Diploma (GED).

Three of the participants, in their opinions, experienced some kind of stressful event prior to their retention. These include, divorce, death of a family member, and moving to a new city. They indicated that these situations had an impact on their learning.

### **Sam**

Sam is a 54 year old African American man who is currently working on getting his General Education Diploma (GED). He is married and has four sons. One of his boys lives in Massachusetts, a second son lives in Washington, D.C., and the other two live at home with Sam and his wife. One of his sons has already graduated from college, and one is currently enrolled at a state college in Georgia. His youngest son is still in middle school. Sam is the sixth of eight children, with two sisters and four brothers. Sam's mother passed away when he was 12, and his father passed away when he was 22. He was retained in both second and seventh grade.

### **Reasons for Retention**

Sam was retained twice in his school career for different reasons, and with different results and effects. The first time Sam was retained was when he was in second grade. He was living in Cincinnati, Ohio.

**Academics and school work habits.**

At the time of his first retention, Sam recalled that there were four or five other students in his second grade class who were held back that year. He stated that he just was not ready and did not know the material and that the retention was probably justified. He stated that he was alright in math, but had difficulty in reading and was just not at the same academic level as some of the others in his class.

In seventh grade, Sam was once again retained in grade. He admitted that he missed a lot of school that year and was not focused on his schoolwork. He felt as if there was a lot of favoritism at his school and did not think that his teachers liked him so he did not put any effort into his work.

**Social issues.**

Although Sam did not report any direct social issues, as he spoke a few concerns arose. Sam reported that his family was very poor and he did not have the nice clothes that everyone else did, nor did he not have access to a bath every night. He felt as if these factors made the teachers dislike him more than some of the other students in the class. Sam recounted that as he got older, he had some conflicts with teachers. He vividly remembered one math teacher who made fun of him when he raised his hand in math and did not know the answer to a problem. He said that back then he did not know he could see a counselor and with no support at home, his situation worsened and he started skipping school. In addition, Sam was quick to point out that he was as or more mature than his peers by the time he was retained the second time and this left him feeling as if he was not with his correct peer group.

**Parental factors.**

The first time Sam was retained was in second grade. He said there were four or five from that class that were also held back. Although he was poor, his family was still in tack. When Sam was in seventh grade, his mother passed away and the family was separated. At that time, he was sent to live with relatives in a different city away from his siblings. He said that he “lost track and focus” and that he “missed a lot of school” due to his situation. The family members that he was forced to live with only wanted the monthly check to keep him, and they did not care if he went to school, let alone succeeded there. He did not have the support and encouragement he needed from home. When asked if his father was still alive at that time, Sam seemed a little agitated and said that he had never said that his father had died. Instead, he indicated that his father was not around, thus he and his siblings had to live with other relatives, but was not forthcoming with where his father was or how or if he was involved in his life at that point. So, with his mother gone, and nobody to guide him, Sam was retained in school again.

**The Experience**

Living in Cincinnati, Ohio at the time of his first retention when he was in the second grade, Sam recalled,

It didn't bother me. There were four or five others from the same class who were set back so it really didn't matter. We were all in the same boat. The second time I was held back, I was in seventh grade. There were a lot of things going on in my family. My mom had just passed away and my family was separated. I lost track and focus. I missed a lot of school and this time there was poking fun. This

time it bothered me. My friends went on but I didn't (Sam, personal interview, January 14, 2010).

Sam expressed that he felt as if teachers looked down on him as if he were stupid as he got older. He remembered getting into conflicts with teachers and being made fun of by both peers and teachers. Eventually, he was sent to an alternative school which he said led him to ultimately dropping out of high school. He was in the ninth grade.

### **Retention decision.**

When asked how he found out he was going to have to repeat the second grade, he said that he did not remember being told he was going to be held back either time. He said it just happened, and he was not even sure if his parents supported it the first time. The second time he was retained, his mother was deceased and he guessed that other family members made the decision. He felt as if part of the problem with the second retention was the lack of home support and connection to the school. He declared that you were not important if your parents were not at PTA meetings and such and his guardians did not attend.

### **View of retention as an adult.**

Sam did not feel as if his view of retention changed over the years. He equated his experience of being retained to that of his experience of being in military.

When I went into the military, I didn't know how to get the information I needed.

So, I went in as a grunt when I could have done other things (Sam, personal interview, January 14, 2010).

Sam said he did not have the knowledge or skills to find out what other options were out there. This was just like his experience in school. He did not know what his options were

and felt like he never had the opportunities that some others may have had. He said that he honestly thinks his life would have turned out differently if he had not been retained. “I would have been further along, but I let it [the retention] affect me” (Sam, personal interview, January 14, 2010).

As an adult now, he reflected back when asked if he would retain one of his own children if necessary. He thoughtfully said,

Yes, I would agree because there would have been parental support. You get more information and procedures today. You get reports and have parent conferences. Parents are more aware of what is going on in the schools today. I get reports on my son every few weeks, and I can talk to the teachers whenever I need to (Sam, personal interview, January 14, 2010).

He indicated that if one of his children were in trouble academically, he would know about it and would be able to give his child the support he needed. He claims that if his child was still failing after all the support the family could give his child, that yes, he would agree to retain the child.

### **Feelings Related to the Retention Experience**

Sam’s feelings regarding the retentions have not really changed over the years. The first retention in second grade was not as traumatic or life altering as the second time he was held back in seventh grade. This was partially due to the young age at which it occurred and the amount of other children in the class that were held back at the same time. He commented that at that time he really did not care because there were so many others in his same situation. He said it truly did not bother him. That was not the case the second time he was retained.

The seventh grade retention was much more difficult. Although he was not surprised because he had been skipping school and lost focus at that time, it bothered him a lot. He was made fun of by his teachers and peers. He was devastated that his friends went on to the next grade and he had to stay behind. He felt as if he was stupid and a failure. Although he moved to Springfield, Massachusetts the following year, and was subsequently placed in 9<sup>th</sup> grade after he told the counselor at the new school that he was in 9<sup>th</sup> grade instead of 7<sup>th</sup> and a placement test indicated that he be placed there, his woes did not end. He had some conflicts with teacher and was put in an alternative school, which led to his dropping out of high school. He lost confidence and the will to continue his education.

## **Relationships**

### **Relationships with teachers.**

Out of all of the relationships during Sam's educational past, the one with his teachers was affected the most by his retention. He felt as if they looked at him differently and treated him with disrespect. After he was retained in seventh grade, Sam moved to a new state. When he went to enroll in his new school, he told the school counselor he was in ninth grade, even though he was really only supposed to be in seventh, and they gave him a placement test. He scored 74% on it and was placed in the ninth grade. While in Springfield, he got into boxing and admits he was pretty good. He became well known in the area and was quite often recognized as somewhat of a celebrity in the local newspaper. He recalled,

After I got into boxing, I had some conflicts with some of his teachers. The teachers would make fun of me. My math teacher would make fun of me when I

raised my hand and didn't understand something. I didn't know I could see a counselor back then and I didn't have any support at home (Sam, personal interview, January 14, 2010).

Besides the trouble with his math teacher, Sam had a physical education teacher that he felt did not like him either. He remembered getting suspended from school after getting into an altercation with this P.E. teacher. This landed him in an alternative school where he eventually dropped out in the ninth grade.

#### **Relationships with peers.**

Sam did not mention any issues with the relationships he had with his peers after the first retention in second grade. He did indicate that he was teased and made fun of by the students after his seventh grade retention. He then moved to a new city and since he was placed back in ninth grade, with his actual aged-peer group, there were no more abnormal issues with peers other than the ones normally experienced by someone that age.

#### **Relationships with family.**

The relationships with Sam's family had little to do with his retention and more to do with the structure of his family after his mother passed away. He could not recall any difference in how they treated him or if it was a problem at that time. Once again, the first experience was much different than the second due to his circumstances changing. Although he did not admit any changes in his relationship with his family after his seventh grade retention, he was quick to answer and appeared to elude the question by steering the conversation in a different direction when asked about those particular relationships.

## **Effects of Retention**

Sam was quick to say that being retained had a profound effect on his life. He felt as if his life would have turned out differently if it were not for being retained in seventh grade. He felt as if he would have been further along in his life and career. He said that he did the retention affect him and that it changed his life path.

### **Positive effects.**

#### ***Short-term.***

Sam did not indicate any short-term effects. He said that he really did not feel as if helped or made a made a difference in his academic life. He did not mention being back on track at any time in his schooling life, nor did he say that he felt like he was ahead of the class as other participants revealed.

#### ***Long-term.***

The only real positive effect that Sam expressed about the retention and subsequently dropping out of school was that it gave him the knowledge and experience to tell his kids and nephews about his mistakes. He feels as if he has the experience and background to counsel them and teach them how to not make the same mistakes he made.

### **Negative effects.**

#### ***Short-term.***

Sam stated that he felt as if he missed out on things like the prom and other high school activities. These effects are directly due to his dropping out of high school, which he believes is a result of being retained. In addition, he was forced to get a job and get into the workforce much earlier than that he would have if he had stayed in school.

***Long-term.***

One of the long-term effects that Sam expressed was that he felt as if he “never had a good grasp of writing” (Sam, personal interview, January 14, 2010). He said it is still difficult to this day to put his thoughts down on paper. In addition, he felt as if the retention (the one in 7<sup>th</sup> grade) started him on the path of not finishing things that he starts such as the military and getting his General Education Diploma (GED). The most detrimental effect of the retention is the fact that Sam dropped out of high school in ninth grade. He has lived with this aftermath for forty years and still feels ashamed that he has not completed his GED. In fact, he said this was his second time taking the course because he dropped out the first time. He said it was another example of him not finishing what he started, just like high school.

**Nikki**

Nikki is a thirty year old, African American female who is currently working on getting her GED (General Education Diploma). She is the youngest of three, and was brought up in a single parent home. Like her, both her brother and sister were retained in elementary school. They were all born overseas in Israel and had to learn English as their second language. Nikki said that she felt as if she absorbed the English quickly and thus caught on more easily than most second language learners.

**Reasons for Retention**

Nikki’s retention occurred in the state of Georgia when she was in third grade. At that time, students were not held back for “test scores,” but rather on teacher

recommendation and evidence of a child lagging behind in academics. Nikki felt as if her being a speaker of a second language had some influence on the retention.

#### **Academics and school work habits.**

Although she was sure that she caught on and grasped the English language fairly quickly, when asked why she thought she was retained, she stated

I was in third grade. I have a hard time remembering back then. I think it was because of bad grades. I struggled in math and English, but I was good in science and social studies.

They made fun of me and asked me why I was still in third grade. I don't think it helped, I was still behind, I was always behind and not with my age group and I didn't have to fight to do better (Nikki, personal interview, January 10, 2010).

#### **Social issues.**

In school, Nikki was always taller than her peers. She admitted that she was below her peers in book smarts, but in common sense and street smarts she was more advanced. In addition, she said that she always felt as if she was more mature than her peers and that the situation got worse after she was retained. Even before the retention, Nikki felt as if she was not with her own peer group. This caused her a lot of frustration and isolation. She sadly stated that she felt as if she had been with people her own age, then she felt as if she would have risen up to the challenge and would have had someone to look up to. She expressed that she did not have any role models growing up, no one to guide her and push her to try harder.

**Parental factors.**

During the time of retention she remembered that the war in the Middle East was going on and that it was a big deal. She also explained,

My mom was a single parent and she didn't make us do homework. With my dad out of the picture, she took care of everything. I don't think it was because she didn't care, she just didn't have time to mess with it. I don't know if that contributed to my begin held back or not (Nikki, personal interview, January 10, 2010).

There were two siblings, an older brother and an older sister in the house while Nikki was growing up. Both siblings were also held back when they were in elementary school. Having older siblings made her more apt to hanging out with an older crowd, but still did not give Nikki a positive, academic role model to look up to and emulate.

**The Experience****Retention decision.**

When asked how she found out that she was going to be held back, she stated that she remembered her mom having a conference with the teacher and that she sat to the side. She could recall the teacher telling her mom that she had two U's on her report card.

When I started school the next year in the same grade, I was smarter than the others but as time progressed I got behind again. It was easy at first because I didn't have to really work. Then when the work did get hard, it was too late. I never really could catch up after that (Nikki, personal interview, January 10, 2010).

**View of retention as an adult.**

Nikki now has three children of her own and did choose to retain her oldest daughter when she was in the second grade. She said that she did not want to do it, but that her daughter's father and her husband at the time wanted it as well as the school her daughter attended. She did not feel as if the retention helped her daughter. She said that her daughter is now fifteen and is in the same boat that she was in. She said the only difference now is that she is the parent and homework is not an option, they must do it. She emphasized that even though she is now a single mother, she makes sure her children do their homework and helps them the best that she can. She wants to be a role model for them. She said that if she was faced with having to keep back another one of her children that she would not agree and would do what she could to fight it.

**Feelings Related to the Retention Experience**

Nikki said that the retention made her feel dumb and left her wondering where her friends were. She indicated that the retention did not help her at all. She explained,

If I was passed on then I would have had someone to look up to. It was terrible, especially because of the kids, they were very harsh. They would ask me why I was still in third grade. They would ask questions and you don't know. I didn't know what to say to them (Nikki, personal interview, January 10, 2010).

She articulated several times that she felt like everyone gave up on her so she gave up on herself. She sadly expressed that the experience was terrible, especially with how the other kids treated her the next year in third grade. She said she felt dumb and wondered where her friends were the whole next school-year.

## **Relationships**

### **Relationships with teachers.**

Nikki did not mention any adverse affects of retention on the relationships with her teachers. She did report that she felt as if the teachers just passed her on and that she “floated” her way through school. The experience did not seem to have a positive or negative effect on those relationships.

### **Relationships with peers.**

Although she did not mention her teachers, several times during the interview Nikki mentioned the effect that the retention had on her socially with her peers. She was already taller and more mature than her in-grade peers, so when she was held back an additional year, it only amplified the situation. Even though she did get along with everyone, she said she never felt like she was with her peers. She did not have anything in common with the girls in her class and felt they were very immature. Instead of becoming the model for other girls, she withdrew and did not participate in activities with her classmates. After school, she found herself hanging out with an older crowd, and says she still feels more comfortable interacting with people older than herself.

### **Relationships with family.**

Nikki did not mention any adverse affects to her relationship with her mother siblings. This may have been because all of them were retained at some point in elementary school and thus had similar experiences and afflictions.

## **Effects of Retention**

When asked if she thought her life would have turned out differently if she had not been retained, she strongly stated,

Yes. I would have stayed with people my own age instead of younger, less mature people, and I would have gotten to where they are at. I think I would have been more outgoing. I don't put myself out there. I wait until I am forced to do something. It caused me to give up because they gave up on me. I am comfortable giving up on myself (Nikki, personal interview, January 10, 2010).

**Positive effects.**

*Short-term.*

Nikki could not recall any positive effects of her retention with the exception of a short lived feeling of being ahead of the class when she returned to third grade at the beginning of the year. Feeling as if she already knew the information, she said she did not pay attention and ended up floating her way through the year. She said she was not motivated to do better and did not strive to do her best.

*Long-term.*

Nikki could not give any long-term positive effects from the retention.

**Negative effects.**

She did, however, feel as if there were negative effects to her being left behind.

She recounted,

I dropped out in the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> grade. I was with younger girls that were immature to me and did not have a lot in common with them. I just didn't care. If I had been with girls on my level or had the confidence in myself, I think I would have done better. Even now, I hang out with older people. (Nikki, personal interview, January 10, 2010)

***Short-term.***

The short-term effects experiences by Nikki were mostly those of the socio-emotional sort. She had feelings of not belonging to a group, feeling of not having a true peer group, and feelings of not being motivated to do any better. These emotions led her to drop out of high school and gave her the ability to give up on herself and her dreams.

***Long-term.***

Unfortunately, these short-term effects have bled into her adulthood. Today, Nikki feels too comfortable with giving up on herself. She sighed as she stated

It [the retention] caused me to give up on myself because they gave up on me. Since then, I have been comfortable with giving up on myself. I'm okay with giving up and not putting in extra effort. I don't want to put myself out there; I have to be forced to do it. The only reason I am taking these classes is for my kids. They don't know about my dropping out of school and I want them to be proud of me. (Nikki, personal interview, January 10, 2010).

**Rob**

Rob is a single, 23 year-old male who attends a local community college and is working on becoming a dental hygienist. He has an older half-sister, an older half-brother, and a younger brother who is a full blooded sibling. Both his mother and father had a child from previous marriages and then they had Rob and his younger brother. He dropped out of high school in the tenth grade and later went back to complete his GED.

**Reasons for Retention**

Rob could not really pinpoint one reason why he was held back. He knew that he did not have any type of learning disability and stated that he thought his retention had to

more to do with what was happening at home in his family than his actual ability or immaturity. He felt that his retention stemmed from his unstable home life at the time.

#### **Academics and school work habits.**

Rob stated that he had a difficult time getting his work done due to his older brother. He said he often did not do his homework or study for tests. He said that he can remember always being tired and not being able to focus in school that year. He recounted,

I didn't have a learning problem. It was more of other things going on that distracted me from doing homework. Things like my brother being out until three in the morning and banging on the door to let him in. I was emotionally exhausted and didn't take school seriously (Rob, personal interview, January 28, 2010).

#### **Social issues.**

During his first time in the fifth grade, Rob said that his friendships were strong and that he had a good group of friends. He felt as if he was at the same level of maturity as his peers, although he was a little bit smaller than they were. He said that although his mother thought he was a little less mature, he did not feel that way. He felt as if his mother was keeping him back because she did not want him to face the same problems that his brother had in high school. He said he felt like she was trying to keep him on track and that she did not want him to go astray like his older brother.

#### **Parental factors.**

Although Rob does not remember what was going on in the world around him the first time he was in fifth grade, he does recall a lot of issues at home. He stated,

There were a lot of things going on at that time. My grandfather was battling cancer, and he eventually died from it. My older brother was bad into drugs and that was when he really started to be a pain. He was 16 and really getting into stuff (Rob, personal interview, January 28, 2010).

His parents spent a lot of time dealing with his brother and grandfather, and thus Rob's failing school grades ended up taking a back seat to other more serious family problems.

### **The Experience**

Rob's retention occurred in Florida when he was in fifth grade. He recalls, At the time it was devastating, but it changed me for the better, not necessarily in school, but my friends. The bigger benefit was my group of friends and the social aspect. I had a better quality of friends. It is not something that I mention in discussions, nor do I deny it. I wouldn't say that the retention emotionally scarred me (Rob, personal interview, January 28, 2010).

As he looked back on the retention, he said that it was a positive experience that helped him grow but socially and academically. He admits that if he had not had a wonderful fifth grade teacher, Mrs. Smith, and had not met a great group of new peers, that the experience would have probably had a different effect on his life.

#### **Retention decision.**

Rob could not really pinpoint one reason why he was held back and reflected, I don't really know. I didn't do well the first time in fifth grade. My mom and teacher met and she came out and said, 'We decided to hold you back. We think it's better for you.' I think it was mom's decision. I think my mom wanted it (Rob, personal interview, January 28, 2010).

He thought his mother wanted him to repeat the grade because she knew he did not get all of the material and concepts that year due to his family situation. Looking back, he stated that it was the best thing she could have done for him.

### **View of retention as an adult.**

Rob does not have any children at this point in his life, but when asked how he felt about retention he responded,

Yes, I would retain my child, although I do not agree with today's standardized testing. I can remember that it was all the focus and they put pressure on you. As far as being held back, if they are not doing what they need to do then they should be retained. It is teaching the child that if you want to succeed you have to do the work and comprehend it to be successful....I can't think of anything that is equal to being retained, but it sticks out in my life. I can vividly remember it and it made an impact on me. Not necessarily negative or positive, but it definitely sticks out (Rob, personal interview, January 28, 2010).

### **Feelings Related to the Retention Experience**

In the beginning, he was upset at the prospect of repeating a grade. He called it devastating. As the new school year started and he made friends, he did not care anymore. Rob had a supportive teacher and a peer group that accepted him. As he reflects back, he has fond memories of that second time in fifth grade and says he although he did not know it back then, it was what was he needed.

## **Relationships**

### **Relationships with teachers.**

Rob was lucky in that the teacher he had after his retention was supportive and caring. He said that his class was one of those special ones that you do not see every day. Consequently, his relationship with her was a positive one. In fact, he and some of his classmates from that year still visit her and contact her periodically. Rob commented that he never felt that the retention made a difference in the way his teachers treated him in the classroom.

### **Relationships with peers.**

Rob's relationships with his peers were affected by his retention in a positive way. Although he does not remember any negative behaviors or instances with his peers the year before he was retained, he does feel that he was with a more suitable group of peers in the year after he was retained.

### **Relationships with family.**

The relationship with his family did not change much after his retention. Jay said he was mad at his mother at first, but by the end of the summer he had forgotten how mad he was. When school started again, those feelings came back and he was mad at her all over again. Even with these feelings of anger, Rob did not feel as if it really put a strain on their relationship. He recalled that his siblings did not say much about him having to repeat the same grade. The only time the subject came up was when the siblings were fighting, and then they would bring it up to make him mad.

## **Effects of Retention**

### **Positive effects.**

When asked what the best thing about being retained was, Rob replied, I think my self esteem went up and that was based on my friends and my maturity level. It matured me and made me realize how important school was. It helped my self-esteem and friendships. It made me who I am today (Rob, personal interview, January 28, 2010).

Looking back now, he says that he could not imagine not being held back because he would not have the group of friends that he has now. He said it gave him two groups of friends, some who he knows will last a lifetime. He expressed,

I think that the retention helped me. I don't think I would have done as well or made as good decisions and things like that. I guess maybe I wasn't mature enough to go to middle school and my mom's outlook at that time was to hold me back until I was mature. I had a bad brother and she didn't want me to make the same mistakes and decisions that he did (Rob, personal interview, January 28, 2010).

### ***Short-term.***

Rob said he felt academically successful when he started the new school-year in fifth grade. Having the full year in fifth grade also gave him time to mature and catch up with his peers. Rob said that he felt like it allowed him to regain the year that he lost.

### ***Long-term.***

The long-term effects for Rob were numerous. He mentioned more than once that his self-esteem rose and that he felt better about himself the second time around in fifth

grade and thereafter. In addition, it gave him a new peer group that he still maintains today. To him, that was the biggest benefit from the experience. He says they helped shape him and helped him become comfortable with who he is today.

**Negative effects.**

The negative effects that Rob experienced seemed to stem more from his short term feelings of embarrassment than anything else. At first, Rob was not able to give any negative effects. After more probing, he reluctantly gave more information regarding the negative side of his experience.

*Short-term.*

When asked what was the worst thing about being retained, Rob stated, Thinking I was not going to go to middle school with my friends and dealing with the humiliation. I was embarrassed when I had to repeat the fifth grade, but I made friends and nobody really cared about it. I don't really think there were any long-term effects from it. It didn't change anything for the negative, just the opposite (Rob, personal interview, January 28, 2010).

His outlook on his retention had mostly positive outcomes.

*Long-term.*

After answering all of the other questions, Rob recanted his earlier statement about not having any long-term effects. He stated that his dropping out of high school may have had something to do with the retention. School did not come easily to Rob. In addition, he has some personal internal issues that he was dealing with in his life. He was ready to be out of high school, and thus dropped out in eleventh grade. Looking back, he said that he would have essentially been done had he not been held back in fifth

grade. Within a year, he went back to get his GED and thus completed his education about the same time that he would have if he had stayed in school. Rob stated that “The retention was not necessarily negative or positive, but it definitely sticks out in my life” (Rob, personal interview, January 28, 2010).

### **Jose**

Jose is a 19 year-old, Hispanic male who is about to graduate from high school and works at his family’s restaurant. He is the oldest child and has three brothers and one sister. He was born in America, but has close family ties to Mexico. Spanish is spoken in the home, and his parents speak little English.

#### **Reasons for Retention**

When asked why he thought he was retained, Jose replied,

The work was difficult, especially science and social studies. It was hard in middle school, but when I got to high school, it got worse. I was on track to get a regular diploma, and so when I was held back I was told that if I would have to take Technology/Career Preparatory (TP) classes and repeat 9<sup>th</sup> grade and if I do this I can go up to 10<sup>th</sup> (Jose, personal interview, March 19, 2010).

#### **Academics and school work habits.**

Jose entered high school in ninth grade. Since his language was not deemed a major barrier to his learning, he did not attend any English as a Second Language Classes (ESOL) and did not have the extra support in that area. He did, however, receive some special education services for reading. Even with this additional support, he was not succeeding.

**Social issues.**

Jose did not report any social issues. He was very reluctant to speak about and gave very short answers in regards to this area of his life. He did reveal that he was taller, bigger, and more mature than his peers. He indicated that he had a small but stable group of friends before the retention and had a different group of friends the subsequent year. He maintains that he still is involved in both peer groups today.

**Parental factors.**

Once again, Jose was very brief in his answers concerning his parents and family. He did express that they did not speak much English and could not help him with his school work. He was reluctant to speak about this area, but did indicate that he was not always truthful with them concerning his schooling and did not care about school.

**The Experience**

Jose was retained in his first year of high school in the state of Georgia. In the district where he lives, sixth, seventh, and eighth grade are housed in what they call middle school, and then ninth through twelfths grade are housed at the high school. Jose said,

I was retained in ninth grade. At that time I was struggling with reading and began to not care. Going from middle school to high school was hard. I went to school because I had to (Jose, personal interview, March 19, 2010).

The work was becoming increasingly hard for Jose. He knew that he had his family restaurant business to fall back on if he did not finish school, and did not care if he finished. At that point, he decided that if he had to repeat, it would not be worth it because he would not be able to get a regular diploma. He then found out that he had the

option to take some vocational placement classes that would help him move up to the tenth grade faster. This was an option that appealed to Jose.

### **Retention decision.**

Jose said that his counselor was the one who told him he was going to be held back. He was worried that he would not graduate on time and would have to take many additional classes. He stated that his parents were very upset when they found out, but were alright with it when they found that he could be on the TP track and still graduate in a reasonable amount of time. That would mean that his diploma would not be a college preparatory one, but rather one that would set him up for a technological or vocational career. Jose accepted that because he did not have any intentions on going to a university or large college when he finished high school.

### **View of retention as an adult.**

Although Jose was not thrilled to learn that he had to repeat a grade, when asked if he would retain his own child one day he said,

Probably. If a student needs to be retained because they cannot do the work, then I agree. If you can't do it then you shouldn't move on. If my child could use another year in the same grade, then I would agree (Jose, personal interview, March 19, 2010).

Jose stated that he hopes he will not make any more mistakes and will be more successful now.

### **Feelings Related to the Retention Experience**

Jose expressed feelings of anguish and disappointment. He goes to school because he has to and because that is what his parents want, but it is difficult for him.

Repeating classes was not something that he looked forward to. Looking back on the retention, Jose said that he understands why it happened. He said that he just did not care about school and did not have much help at home. Both of his parents speak Spanish, and were not able to assist him with his studies.

## **Relationships**

### **Relationships with teachers.**

Jose did not think that the retention changed his relationships with his teachers. If anything, it made his relationship with his special education case worker stronger. He was able to go to her for advice and extra tutoring when he needed it. Since that time, she has left his school to work at another, but he still keeps in contact with her as she provides encouragement and support for him.

### **Relationships with peers.**

His relationship with his peers did not appear to change. Once again, he was reluctant to discuss any negative outcomes when it came to his peers. His answers were very short and he could not elaborate on any probing questions. At school, he was taller and bigger than his peers and felt like he was more mature than them. He hung out with a small group of friends but said he made other friends easily. He maintains that he now has two groups of friends, but seems to be drawn to the older ones a little more.

### **Relationships with family.**

He could not recall what was going on in the world at the time of his retention, and did not feel like there was anything abnormal going on his personal life either. He said things were normal and that he was just not trying to learn and did not care about

school. When asked about the dynamics of his family, he would only reply that everything was good.

### **Effects of Retention**

#### **Positive effects.**

##### *Short-term.*

Jose stated that he did not feel that the retention helped him immediately after he was held back. He did feel as it was helping him now. He said, “If anything, it made me straighten up” (Jose, personal interview, March 19, 2010). He said he still associates with his friends that had already graduated, but that being held back did give him the opportunity to make more friends.

##### *Long-term.*

As far as any long-term effects, those have yet to be seen. Jose is the youngest participant and has just graduated from high school. Time will tell if the retention had any long lasting effects on his life.

#### **Negative effects.**

Jose said that the worst part of being held back was that he was not going to be able to graduate with his friends. He did not believe that his life would have turned out any differently or had changed because of the retention. He stated,

I just kept going on. It put me a year behind, but that’s okay. I will make it up later. I was mad at myself when it happened. I wasn’t succeeding. I know I should have tried harder (Jose, personal interview, March 19, 2010).

***Short-term.***

Jose did not express any change in long or short-term effects. In addition, he did not think it changed his relationship with his parents or siblings. He reflected,

I am the oldest, so it didn't really make any difference. My sister and brothers didn't tease me or anything. Nobody really said anything about it. It was all still the same (Jose, personal interview, March 19, 2010).

**Jay**

Jay is a 47 year-old white male who is working on his GED. He is married and has two children, and two grandchildren. He owns and operates his own small business, but feels he could benefit from getting his GED and taking some college courses. He is the middle child of five, with one step-brother, two-step sisters, and one full blooded sister. He said that even though some of his siblings might have a different father, he has never felt like they were anything less than full blooded.

**Reasons for Retention**

Jay stated that he knows exactly why he was held back, he said he did not have the knowledge or the grades. In addition, he did not do the work and did not have any support at home. Jay struggled all the way through school. He said it got to the point that he just did not want to do it anymore.

**Academics and school work habits.**

School did not come easy for Jay. He always struggled and felt like he was not as smart as everyone else. This caused him to stop trying as hard and stop doing his work at home and at school. Spelling and English were the hardest subjects for him, and he still struggles with spelling and writing today.

**Social issues.**

During his first time in the fourth grade, Jay stated that he had a lot of friends and that he was popular. He said he felt as if he was at the same level of maturity as his peers, and that he was also the same size and age. Even though he felt confident with his peers, answering questions in the classroom was terrifying for him. He described,

I was petrified to answers questions in front of the class. I didn't like having my peers judge me. I was so nervous because I was afraid I would get it wrong. After a while, I would actually start giving the wrong answers, especially in spelling, in hopes that the teacher would not call on me. That didn't work (Jay, personal interview, March 25, 2010).

**Parental factors.**

Jay was quick to admit that his parents had a lot to do with his struggles in school. Even though Jay could not remember any specific things going on in the world around him at that time, he did express that there was a lot of turmoil going on at home. He stated,

During my retained year, my mom was going through a divorce. This was about the same time I went back to public school. My step-dad disappeared for three months. He dropped my mother off at the doctor's, because she was pregnant with my brother, and then he dropped me off at the house. He wrote a note and took off. I made it through the school year, but it was not easy, especially since they had new and more difficult material to learn in the public school (Jay, personal interview, March 25, 2010).

**The Experience**

Jay's retention occurred in Florida when he was in fourth grade. He recalls, I went from a public school in third grade to a private school in fourth. I am not really sure why I went there. It was very small and had only one classroom that went from first to sixth grade. The next summer, I went to enroll back in public school for fifth grade, and if I remember correctly, they gave me a test and I didn't do well on it. They told my mother that I needed to repeat fourth grade. I found this out in the office when I went to register for fifth grade. All my mother said about it was that it was fine and put me back in fourth grade (Jay, personal interview, March 25, 2010).

**Retention decision.**

Jay repeated the fifth grade while attending school in the Florida Public School System, and then moved to the state of Georgia for his sixth, seventh, and eighth grade years. The decision for him to be held back was due to the outcome of a single test at the public school. He said that his mother supported it and did not question the method of testing. His father was not around at that time, so there was no discussion on the matter.

**View of retention as an adult.**

Even though Jay did not think the retention helped him, he supports retention. He stated,

I think it needs to happen. Schools should take an interest in students and teachers need to be in contact with parents. If there is no support at home, then the school should do something to help those children. If one of my children was not doing

what he needed to, then yes, I would hold him back (Jay, personal interview, March 25, 2010).

Jay suggested that the tests that achievement tests that students must now take should not be the only indicator of success. He feels as if there should be more evidence of failure than just one single snapshot of a child's ability.

### **Feelings Related to the Retention Experience**

On more than one occasion, Jay indicated that the experience was devastating to him. He mentioned that the only thing that made it bearable was that he was at a different school. He declared,

The thought of it, the thought of being older than everyone in the class was the worst. After a while, it was okay, but every year at the beginning, just knowing that I was older bothered me. At the time, I was very upset and didn't want to go back to school ever again, I hated the public school for doing it to me. I understand now that I didn't learn anything at the private school, it was nothing more than a glorified daycare, but back then I was devastated. Add to that, I didn't have any support at home and teachers passing me on through school, I didn't have a chance (Jay, personal interview, March 25, 2010).

### **Relationships**

#### **Relationships with teachers.**

Jay mentioned that his sixth grade year was the best because he felt like a science teacher took an interest in him and made him want to succeed at school. He said he always felt lost and forgotten in school and could never seem to catch up. He felt as if the teachers just passed him on to the next grade. He stated,

By the time I got to eighth grade I was totally lost. Then, my family moved back to Florida and away from my friends. I felt too far behind to do anything and I just didn't care anymore. I went to school some in ninth grade and eventually dropped out (Jay, personal interview, March 25, 2010).

#### **Relationships with peers.**

Jay stated that his relationship with his peers did not change much due to the retention. He moved to a new school, which changed his peer group to begin with. He said he was always popular at school and had a lot of girl friends. He felt as if he was around the same size as his peer and just as mature as the ones who went to the grade above him.

#### **Relationships with family.**

The relationship that Jay had with his mother was strained, but he did not think that it was a direct result of the retention. He cited multiple marriages and moves as a point of discontent. He said that he never felt like he had a secure and stable environment. He was always wondering when his mother was going to get divorced again and when he was going to have to move to a new school and make new friends. With Jay being the middle child, he did not feel as if the retention had any impact on his relationship with his siblings. He was always just shuffled around in the middle and felt forgotten at times.

#### **Effects of Retention**

##### **Positive effects.**

When asked what the best thing about being retained was, Jay said he did not know because he never really recovered in school. He articulated that he truly believes

that he was never destined to go to college and that he did not think anything would have been different if he had not been retained.

***Short-term.***

Jay said that there were not many positive things about being retained in school. After reflecting for a moment, he admitted,

I did better in the beginning of my repeated fourth grade year because I had confidence that I could do it. Then it got hard again and I was back when I started. I was still afraid to answer questions. I don't think I ever caught back up after that (Jay, personal interview, March 25, 2010).

***Long-term.***

In terms of positive effects, Jay really had to think about how the retention impacted his life. He finally declared,

The only good thing that I can say has come out of it now, is that now I don't take shortcuts. What I mean by that is that when I learn something I want to learn all of it, now I am in control of my life and I want to learn all I can. For example, if I am trying to fix something mechanical, I learn all I can about it before I begin. I want to know the ins and outs of it (Jay, personal interview, March 25, 2010).

In addition, he admitted that it has helped him guide his children through school. He would not settle for their failure in school and did all he could to support them. It was very important to him that his children graduate high school and have some of the opportunities that he did not have.

**Negative effects.**

Looking back now, Jay reflected,

I don't think the retention worked. I didn't really learn anything in the private school. It feels as if that year was a waste of time. They wasted a year of my time. It is like the first year you are out of high school and you waste that first year trying to figure things out (Jay, personal interview, March 25, 2010).

***Short-term.***

The negative short term effects for Jay were numerous. He lost his self confidence and froze up whenever a teacher would call on him in school. His self-esteem plummeted and he felt as if he was dumb and could not catch up. He always felt awkward being the oldest in the class and often felt lost and forgotten in school. He was devastated and hated the public school after his retention.

***Long-term.***

One of the long term effects for Jay was that it was a catalyst for him dropping out of school in the ninth grade. He said that he had always felt behind in school, and when he got to high school it was no different. In a low tone, Jay said that he believes that he was not destined to go to college. He believes that things would not have turned out any differently for him if he had not been retained. He has put off getting his GED for over thirty years now because he does not have the self confidence to pass the tests. After all of this time, he still does not believe that he is smart enough to learn the material and to pass the required test to obtain his diploma. He is still afraid of failure.

**The Collective Case**

This study looked at five individuals who were retained, or held back, at some time in their academic career. The compilation is a collection of data from all of the individual cases. Through their experiences of the same event, retention, some common

themes and similarities were discovered. The collective case looks at those threads and tries to answer the guiding questions of the research.

### **Discussion of the Findings Related to the Research Questions**

#### **Question One: How is the experience of grade retention depicted and remembered by adults who experienced retention in elementary or middle school?**

The effects of grade retention as perceived by adults who were retained and the depiction of the experience were sparse. The participants in this study viewed the experience of being retained in multiple ways. All of the participants felt initial feelings of devastation, humiliation, or anger at the time of the retention. They recalled being embarrassed to begin the new school year in the same grade, being teased and asked why they were there, and the feeling of wasted time. Upon reflecting on their retention, one participant, Rob, felt that it was the best thing that could have happened to him, Sam and Nikki thought that it had a negative impact on their life, while Jay and Jose felt as if the retention did not make a difference at all in their lives or school experience. Retention has been linked to dropping out of high school (Jimerson, 1999; Anderson & Whipple, 2002; Jimerson 2007), and four out of the five had dropped out of high school, with the last participant is still in high school. Two of them dropped out in ninth grade, or dropped out in tenth grade, and one dropped out in eleventh grade.

In reference to interpersonal relationships, none of the participants recalled the retention causing any additional strain with their parents, siblings, peers, or friends. Only one participant mentioned being teased by a sibling, and that appeared to be when they were in the midst of a confrontation. Most of them agreed that it allowed them the

opportunity to meet new peers and make new friends. The theme of friends and peers appeared in all of the cases. The subjects cited losing their friends and not being with them as one of the worst things about being held back. They mentioned not graduating with their friends and always being older than everyone in their class as a negative side effect of the retention.

All of the participants had multiple reasons for being held back, but the theme of family support appeared in almost all of the participants. The fact that some type of family crisis occurred during the retention year was evident in almost all of the cases as well. The issue of home life appeared to be a factor in their retention. They cited problems such as not having any support at home, emotional exhaustion from home life, poverty, divorce, and a single family home as some of the reasons they felt as if they were left back in grade. Four out of the five participants said that despite the negative feelings and effects, they would hold their child back if the need arose. One of the participants mentioned that he felt that schools today communicate more effectively with parents and he felt as if he would have a better understanding of his children's educational needs than his parents did with him. The one participant who said she does not agree with retention has already held back one of her children due to the pressure of the school system and the child's father. She stated that she felt as if it has been a detriment to her daughter's education and self esteem, and refuses to hold back her youngest daughter, who school officials believed she would benefit from the event. Table 5 identifies the attitudes and perceptions of the participants regarding the effects that the retention has had on their lives.

**Question Two: Has the experience of grade retention had a positive or negative effect on the lives of adults who were retained?**

Participants in the study identified many common positive and negative effects as a result of their retention in elementary, middle, or high school. In the short-term aspect of retention, many subjects agreed that they began the new retained year off very well and ahead of their classmates, only to find that by mid-year they were falling behind again. They did disclose that they had a boost in self-esteem and maturity after the retention, and one subject even revealed that the retention made him straighten up. Almost all of the participants mentioned having a new group of friends as a positive effect. A few mentioned that their higher self-esteem continued on, as well as their new found friends. Another positive long-term effect was the desire to teach their own children about the mistakes the subjects made and to ensure that they, their children, do not follow in the same footsteps. Three of the participants stated that they felt better equipped to help their own children as a result of being held back. In addition, one participant felt as if the experience made him want to learn more as he got older. He now feels as if he must know everything about a subject that he is interested in so that he does not feel “dumb.” Table 6 identifies the common positive effects that impacted the participants’ lives along with the number of times they were mentioned by the subjects. Although there were some positive effects, there appeared to be more negative ones. Many of the short-term effects mentioned by participants dealt with their social-emotional well being. They offered the feelings of devastation and embarrassment, as well as being unmotivated in school and life. All of the subjects discussed their peer relations and the fear of being separated from their friends, as well as being the oldest one in the class. A

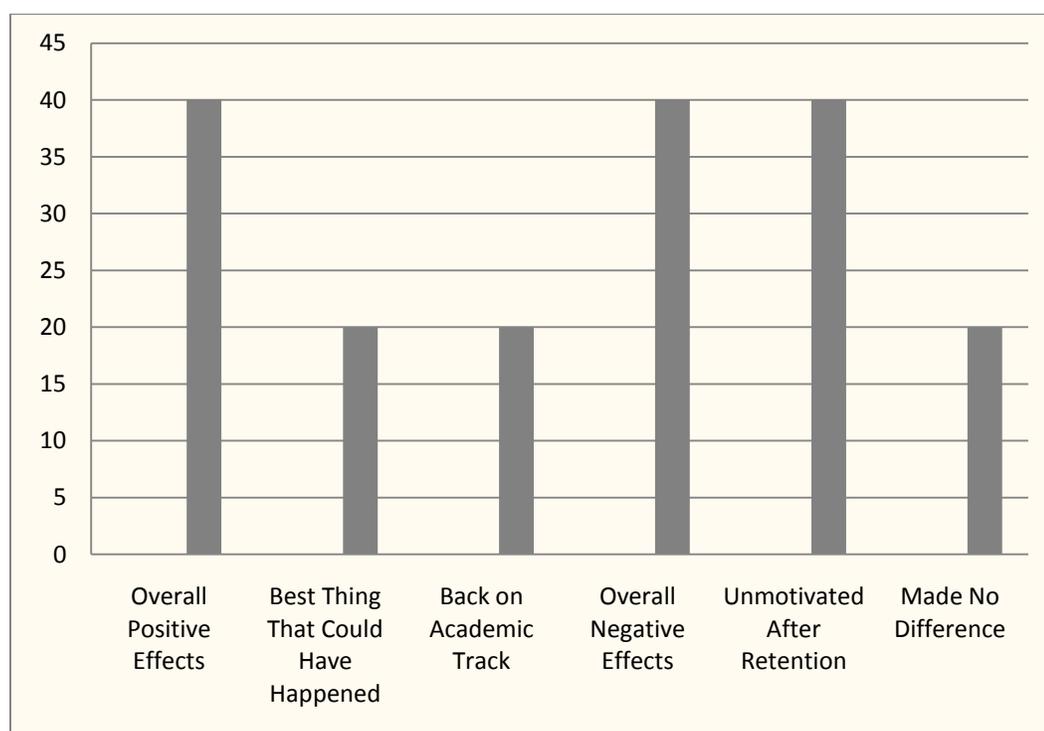
few subjects mentioned a loss of interest in school, while another stated that it caused her to give up. Several of them mentioned that they were still behind in their academics all through school, and never could really catch up.

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**Table 5**

*Attitude and Effect: Percentage of Participants Feelings and Attitudes Towards the Retention*

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**Table 6***Positive Effects and Their Frequencies*


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Effects	Number of Times Mentioned by Subjects
Acquired New Group of Friends	5
Academic improvement at the beginning of retention year	4
Increased Self-Esteem	2
Ability to help own children not make the same mistake	2
Increased Maturity and Awareness of School	2
Short-Term Academic Gains	2
Increased Desire to Learn Later in Life	1

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There were several negative long-term effects that were uncovered in the study. Although some mentioned higher self-esteem at first, it seemed to wean off in later years and reverse into low self-esteem. One of the participants revealed that the retention gave her a feeling of failure and thus gave her permission to fail at subsequent things. She said she felt as if she did not have to fight to do better and that she was still all right with just getting by and not venturing out and trying anything new and challenging. She expressed that she was comfortable giving up and that she felt that it all stemmed from the retention in third grade. On that same note, a different subject said that he felt that his retention led to his inability to finish things he started. He felt as if this was a long-term effect that still

lingered with him. One respondent also expressed the fact that the retention made them less outgoing and less likely to take a chance if there was a possibility of failure. One of the participants felt as if the retention made no real difference one way or the other. In all the cases, the subject assumed responsibility for his or her academic or socio-economic shortcomings and acknowledged the retention as an intervention to assist with these shortcomings. Table 7 identifies the common negative effects that impacted the participants' lives along with the number of times they were mentioned by the subject.

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**Table 7**

*Negative Effects and Their Frequencies*

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Effects	Number of Times Mentioned by Subjects
Dropped Out of High School	4
Awkwardness of Always Being Older Than Peers	3
Constantly Lagged Behind Academically After Retention	3
Decrease in Motivation/Loss of Interest in School	3
Feeling of Devastation and Humiliation at the Time of Retention	3
Separated from Friends/Peer Group	3
Comfortable with Giving Up and Not Following Through Now	2
Made Fun of By Peers	1
Decreased Self-Esteem	1

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## **Reasons for Retention**

In all of the cases, retention was enacted in order to assist the child in academic and/or social domains. This measure was recommended by the teacher or school and the parents supported the retention, which served as the only intervention for social or academic difficulties. Memories of specific academic struggles in reading, writing, and math were indicated by several participants. Maturity, lack of parental support, and conditions at home were indicators of social issues in most all cases.

### **Academics and school work habits.**

The majority of the time, academics is blamed for a student's failure or retention. This is especially true the older the child gets, and now with new measure to ensure no child is left behind, students must pass minimum competency tests to be promoted to the next grade. In all of the cases, academics were cited as the main reason for staying in grade.

Nikki stated that she was retained because she had bad grades and that she struggled in math and English. Although she was English as a second language student, she caught onto the language very quickly and did not feel that language was a barrier in her learning. The same issue of reading was recalled by Jose, who was also an English as a second language participant. This is in line with research that shows that Hispanic and African-American low-performing students are more likely to be held back in grade (Lorence & Dwrokin, 2006; NCEES, 2009).

Both Jay and Sam revealed that they had difficulty in English in school and still have a difficult time putting their thoughts to paper in their adulthood. They both felt as if they were consistently behind and could never catch up. In addition, they as well as Rob,

said that they did not do the work that was required to maintain or achieve the skills necessary for the grade they were in. Retention is often used as a way to stimulate those students who do not do their work or who are not intrinsically motivated (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2008). In all of these instances, the fear of retention did not implore them to do more work; instead it seemed to frustrate them and made them feel less capable of academic success.

### **Social issues.**

As in other research, the issue of social barriers and events caused participants discord in their personal life. This discord bled into their academic endeavors. In most cases, the social issue stemmed from the family, and in one instance immaturity was cited as a result. In many cases of retention, teachers, parents, and administrators believe that the gift of another year would benefit certain students (Jimerson, 1997; Jimerson, 2006). Students in kindergarten and first grade are usually the victims of this reasoning. In this study, only one participant said that immaturity was a factor in considering whether or not to retain him. Rob said that his academics were suffering, but thought that his immaturity at the time was the deciding factor in making the decision to keep him back in fifth grade.

### **Parental factors.**

In this study, the theme of social discontent and family factors prevented many of the participants from achieving to their full potential in school. In four out of the five cases, subjects mentioned that problems at home prevented them from succeeding in school.

***Single parent home.***

In three out of the four cases, single parent homes and poverty were mentioned as a possible connection to the subject's retention. Nikki's mother was a single mom who did not have enough time to help her three children with school and homework. Nikki said that her mother was never there and did not make her do her homework. They did not have a lot of money and putting food on the table and paying the bills were more important than school. Similarly, Sam reported that he did not have two parents at home to assist and monitor his academic progress. By the time he was in seventh grade, he was living with relatives who did not seem to care about his educational needs. Jay also mentioned that his father was absent during his retention year and his mother had to take care of all of the family needs.

***Poverty.***

According to the National Center for Educational Statics (2009), 23% of students who are retained come from poor families. In addition, students living in poverty are two to three times more likely to be retained than those who are not living in poverty (SRBE, 2001). These statistics are supported by the findings in this.

Both Nikki and Jay also mentioned lack of money as a contributing factor to their retention. Nikki's father was absent and her mother had to work two jobs to make ends meet. As a result, her mother was not at home to monitor the academic progress of her children. She said, "My mom did not make us do homework. I do not know if that contributed or not. It does make me stay on my girls now; they do not have a choice of whether or not to do it." (Nikki, personal interview, January 10, 2010). Jay also discussed the absence of his father for a few months they year prior to the retention. He said he did

not really know he was poor, he just knew that his mother had to work a lot and that money was tight.

*Lack of parental support.*

Poverty coupled with single parenthood led to the lack of parental support for many of the participants. In all cases, the subjects mentioned parent involvement when describing their experience of being retained. For Jose, it was not so much that his parents were not at home to assist him, but rather their lack of the English language that prevented them from assisting Jose. Since neither of his parents can speak English, they did not fully understand the ramifications of Jose not doing the work and not understanding it. Jose admitted that he slacked off a lot and did not do his work. He knew that his parents could not check up on it and he did not care about his education at that time.

For Jay, the story was different, but the outcome was the same. When he was in fourth grade, his father abandoned the family for over three months. He literally dropped his pregnant wife off at the doctors and was not heard from again for months. When he did return, they got a divorce and Jay was once again left without a parent. Subsequently, he failed that year in school.

The same type of family turmoil and lack of parental involvement was noted for Rob. He recalled that his grandfather, whom he was very close with, had died during the year before his retention. In addition, his older brother had delved into drugs and most of his parents' time was spent on dealing with him. He also remembers his brother being out until three in the morning and would beat on the door to let him in. He said this and other

things in the family distracted him from doing his homework. He said he was “mentally exhausted.”

### **The Experience**

Studies indicate that students with certain characteristics are held back more often than others. According to many researchers, rates of retention appear to be related to gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and parental characteristics. They argue that children with specific social and demographic characteristics are more likely to be held back regardless of their cognitive abilities (Lorence & Dworkin, 2006). Race, ethnicity, family social status, and gender have been hypothesized to influence grade progression, independent of student ability.

#### **Retention decisions.**

In this study, both socio-economic status and parental characteristics appeared to be factors in the retention of a child. In fact, one participant felt as if being poor led the teachers to dislike him and treat him differently. Yet, no individual in this study mentioned any setback due to their gender or their ethnicity. There were both male and female participants in this sample, as well as Hispanic, African-American, and Caucasian subjects. The participants' perceptions of why they were retained were mostly related to academic inadequacies.

Many participants acknowledged that they just did not try their best and that they did not complete the work. Several of them said that they missed a lot of school and thus were behind when they were there. They also expressed that they did not care about school and did not have anyone at home who was involved in their education. Four out of the five participants gave behind on academics as their main reason for being held back.

At first, Rob said he was not really sure why he was held back, he said, “My mom just met with the teacher and she came out and said we decided to hold you back. We think it’s better for you” (Rob, personal interview, January 28, 2010). After reflecting, he said that he thought that his mom just wanted to make sure he was not headed down the same road that his older brother had gone down and wanted to make sure he had a solid background before going to middle school. He also that it might have had to do with his mother feeling he was less mature than he should have been, although he thought he was on the same level as his peers.

#### **View of retention as adults.**

In almost all cases, the participants feel as if retention is necessary for some students. Four out of the five stated that they would hold back their child if they deemed it necessary. They felt as if there is more communication between the school and family and feel as if they would have more resources if their child was put in the same position as they were in school.

In addition, there were no participants who felt that their perception of their retention had changed much over time. The wounds were still there and the effects were still lingering.

#### **Feelings Related to the Retention Experience**

The feeling of devastation and embarrassment was a common thread seen throughout the collective case. The retained person often felt dumb and out of place. Many of them were pleased to know they had a new group of friends, but others soon found out that they were more mature and did not have as much in common. Another

feeling relate to retention was that of failure and the inability to complete tasks. This was seen in both men and women.

## **Relationships**

### **Relationships with teachers.**

The relationships that the participants had with their teachers were not an eminent factor. One participant felt as if his teacher picked on him and made him feel stupid. Three others had educators who helped them and made them want to learn. This area was not a strong thread.

### **Relationships with peers.**

In this particular study, the theme of peer relationships occurred several times. For almost every participant, the loss of friends and not being with their peer group was a major concern for the retainees. This appeared to be the main point of discontent in their life at the time of retention, yet most of them also agree that they discovered a new set of peers. Only one the female in the study had a difficult time transitioning to a new peer group. She felt as if she was never with the right group and felt she was too much older with the new students in her grade. She remembered always wanting to be with older students and needing someone to look up to. In addition, only two subjects mentioned that they were made of fun of by their peers and asked why they were back in the same grade.

### **Relationships with family.**

Peer relationships were mentioned by every participant; whereas changes in family relationships were not mentioned at all. One subject mentioned that his brother would tease him when they were arguing, but the subject never came up at any other

time. No participant felt as if the retention strained or changed their relationships with their parents, siblings, or any other family member.

### **Effects of Retention**

As in previously mentioned research, the overall effects of this study had some mixed results. There were both positive and negative results that spanned from peer relations to lack of motivation after the retention. In all cases, there was a lasting effect and impression on the participants.

#### **Positive effects.**

Research indicates that there are some short-term positive effects due to retention. Students who are retained have been shown to have higher math and language scores in the year after retention (Bonvin et al., 2008). In addition, it has been shown that kindergartners who are held back receive some social-emotional development benefits, as well as positive effects on their academic performance (Hong & Yu, 2008; Dong, 2010).

#### ***Short-term***

A few of these short-term positive effects were found in this study. Both Jay and Nikki said that they felt they were ahead at the beginning of the new school-year after retention. Unfortunately, they both said it was short lived and by mid-year they were behind again. Rob commented that he did not really think the retention helped academically, but it did help him socially. Jose was the only subject who felt as if the retention had a positive academic effect on his schooling.

Two of the participants reported that the retention increased their self-esteem the following year as in previous research indicated (Gleason et al., 2007; Hong & Yu, 2008). Unfortunately, those results were not the same for the other three participants.

They indicated that their self esteem plummeted after the retention and decreased their desire to go to school. All three of them reported skipping and withdrawing from school after the retention. As a result, they subsequently dropped out of high school.

***Long-term.***

This research did not indicate many consistent positive long-term effects from the retention. One of the only common threads found was that of obtaining a new group of friends. One participant reported that he had an increased desire to learn now that he is older.

**Negative effects.**

There has been a lot of research regarding the effects of retention on the socio-emotional outcomes. This study has allowed research to go beyond the normal school years and into the afterlife of those who were retained. Some studies have shown that retention had a significant positive effect on peer acceptance the following year and that benefits the social-emotional development on those who are retained (Gleason et al., 2007; Hong & Yu, 2008)

***Short-term.***

All of the subjects discussed their peer relations and the fear of being separated from their friends, as well as being the oldest one in the class. A few subjects mentioned a loss of interest in school, while another stated that it caused her to give up. Several of them mentioned that they were still behind in their academics all through school, and never could really catch up.

***Long-term.***

Several participants indicated that the retention was detrimental to their overall academic success in school. The retention gave Nikki the feeling of failure and allowed her to quit when things got too tough. It made her comfortable with giving up on both her academics as well as other things in her life. Many of the subjects cited loss of motivation as a negative effect in regards to their retention. They were not compelled to do any better and felt as if others were just passing them on. The most damaging effect of these retentions was the ultimate outcome of dropping out of school. Four of the participants dropped out of high school because they did not feel as if they belonged or as if they were academically equipped to complete the high school diploma track. This mirrors previous research that shows that retained students are more likely to drop out of high school (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007; Stearns et al., 2007).

**Themes in Findings**

Several key themes were evident in the data that was obtained. The most glaring piece was the stability of the family unit. In almost all cases, there was some type of turmoil in the home in the year before retention. The only anomaly was that of Jose. In his case, it could have been that his pride and culture would now allow him to open up as freely as some of the other participants. The researcher made note of his short, quick answer that nothing was going on in his family at the time of retention. This made the researcher believe that there could be more, but since the interviews were a onetime occurrence, the researcher did not have enough time to build rapport which could have led to a more forthcoming answer.

Another common theme was that of the non-completion of high school. Four out of the five participants dropped out of high school with correlates with previous research (Jimerson et al., 2002) that suggests those who are retained are more likely to drop out of school. Although no participant said that the retention was the direct cause of them dropping out of high school, factors stemming from the event point in that direction.

### **Summary of Interviews**

The five interviews provided a great deal of information concerning the adult perspective of the practice of retention. Throughout the course of the narrative inquiry, the participants discussed and disclosed several factors that they perceive as having a significant impact on their retention and their lives after the retention. They described their educational background and experiences to provide the researcher with the necessary information regarding their unique experiences. They discussed their lives before, during, and after the retention as well as their feelings toward the retention in the past and in the present. They expressed their reasons for being retained and how they found out they were being left back in the same grade level. They described their family situations and personal shortcomings that may have been factors in their retention. Finally, they provided information that expressed their views on both the negative and positive aspects of being retained and how it has affected their lives today.

The five interviews provided a moderate quantity of data that assisted in trying to answer the research questions of this study. The data provided useful information for teachers, school leaders, and other professionals that can aid them in making decisions regarding the retention of students in all grades.

## **Chapter Five: Findings**

Researchers have been debating the effects of retention on students for many years. Despite all their efforts, research continues to show mixed results with no clear cut answers (Bonvin et al., 2006; Jimerson et al., 2002; NASP, 2008). This study investigated the perceptions and subsequent effects of retention on those who actually lived through the experience. This chapter restates the research problem, reviews the methodology, summarizes and discusses the results, and provides suggestions for implementation and further research on the subject.

### **Restatement of the Problem**

In his 1999 State of the Union Address, President Bill Clinton called for an end to social promotion, the practice of promoting students to the next grade regardless of their academic progress. This, coupled with the addition of national initiatives such as Goals 2000 and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, has led to an increased emphasis on “closing the achievement gap” between minority and non-minority students and improving the performance of all children. In an effort to ensure that all students meet basic competencies, several academic standards have emerged as indicators of whether or not students are proficient and should be promoted to the next grade (Jimerson et al., 2006). NCLB requires school systems be held accountable for graduation rates, as well as performance on academic assessments. This step in federal accountability has raised the bar in what is now a test-driven system (Orfield, 2006). These high-stakes tests ensure that students who do not meet the promotion standard will be held back or retained in the same grade

Retention decisions should be based on the individual child's academic performance, but some critics say that not all students who repeat a grade are held back due to factors that are directly related to academic performance. They argue that children with specific social and demographic characteristics are more likely to be held back regardless of their cognitive abilities (Lorence & Dworkin, 2006). Gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic background, and the age at school entry have all been associated with the risk of retention (Burkman et al., 2007).

According to the U. S. Department of Education National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), a survey done in 2007 estimated that 10 percent of students in kindergarten through eighth grade had ever been retained in a grade during their school career (NCES, 2007). The percentage of students who had ever been retained during their school career has remained between nine and 11 percent in all survey years between 1996 and 2007. In each survey year, a greater percentage of male students than female students had been retained. Among K-8 students in 2007, 12 percent of male students had ever been retained, compared to eight percent of female students. This statistic has remained consistent since 1996 (NCES, 2007).

The No Child Left Behind Act is rooted in closing the achievement gap between minority and non-minority children, but according to the National Center for Educational Statistics Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey of 2007 K-8 students, a greater percentage of black students than either white or Hispanic students had been retained in that year (NCES, 2007). The survey showed that 11 percent of Hispanic students and 16 percent of black students were retained compared to only eight percent of white students. In addition, those statistics showed that the percentage of K-8 students

who have ever been retained was greater among students from poor families than among students from near-poor or non-poor families, and that 23 percent of students from poor families had ever been retained compared with 11 percent of other students.

Not only are students at a disadvantage if they are from an ethnic minority group and/or come from a lower socioeconomic background, but the education level achieved by a child's mother was also a strong predictor of retention. In 2007, 20 percent of students whose mothers had less than a high school diploma or its equivalent had ever been retained, compared with three percent each of students whose mothers' highest level of education was a bachelor's degree or graduate/professional school (NCES, 2007).

Many educators, lay citizens, and policymakers are convinced that by ending social promotion they can improve student learning (Hoag, 2001). However, the growing body of research seems to indicate the potential for negative effects consistently outweighs positive outcomes and does not support the use of grade retention as an academic intervention (Holmes & Matthews, 1983; Jimerson et al., 2006). With an estimated 10% of the students held back in the United States each year (NCES, 2007), researchers and educators alike must continue to study the practice of retention on these children in an effort to better understand the efficacy and long term effects of being retained in grade.

### **Overview of the Methodology**

This study involved five adult participants who were retained in elementary, middle, or high school. The subjects were obtained from a local library holding General Education Diploma (GED) classes and a local community college, as well a participant who was obtained through the snowball effect. The sites were purposefully selected due

to the link between retention and high school dropout rates. As previous research has indicated, it was more likely that a participant be found at a GED site than randomly (Jimerson, 1999; Stearns et al., 2007). Participants who were retained were also more likely to be found at a local community college than at a larger university. The participants were purposefully selected or sampled based on the fact that they exhibited certain criteria of interest to the study (Ary, et al, 2006) and based on the researcher's knowledge of the group to be sampled. Research shows that males are more likely to be retained than females, and Hispanic and African Americans are more likely to be retained than whites (NASP, 2008; Lorence and Dworkin, 2006; Jimerson et al., 2002; Jimerson, 1999).

The participants in the sample were interviewed by the researcher using a private, narrative inquiry interview (see Appendix B). Each interview was conducted in a conversational style interview with a list of pre-selected questions available as warranted. The interviews were to be recorded and then transcribed, but due to technical difficulties, all interviews were transcribed by hand on site. They were written in the form of narratives to allow the researcher to analyze the responses of each participant in the sample to determine common themes and categories. Each transcribed interview was dissected to identify and review common or reoccurring themes, phrases and keywords, and answers, as well as individual thoughts, feelings, and opinions in order to find a relationships, key themes, and emerging categories so that the researcher could make connections between and across categories. Themes of positive and negative effects and overall experience of being retained were looked at and focused on in order to attempt to answer the original guiding questions. Once the categories were connected, the researcher

was able to summarize and see what was in the data (Ary et al., 2006). At the conclusion of the research, the results were analyzed by the researcher to identify common themes and categories that emerged and by finding common links and connections among categories. Those findings are summarized and discussed in the following sections of this chapter.

### **Findings Related to the Research Questions**

#### **Question One: How is the experience of grade retention depicted and remembered by adults who experienced retention in elementary, middle, or high school?**

Overall findings for question one, as previously shown in Table 5, included 40% of participants reported positive effects from the retention, half of them reported that it was the best thing that could have happened, and the other half reported that it got them back on the an academic track. Forty percent of the participants reported overall negative effects with all of those reporting being unmotivated in school and life after the retention. The last 20% reported that the retention did not make a difference in their lives. All of the participants had negative feelings toward the retention when it occurred. The feelings ranged from devastated, to humiliated, to anger.

None of the participants reported having any negative effects or strains on their personal relationships at home, including those with their parents and siblings. In addition, most reported that they had forged new friendships and therefore had two groups of friends.

**Question Two: Has the experience of grade retention had a positive or negative effect on the lives of adults who were retained?**

*Positive Effects.*

*Short Term.*

As indicated in the Table 6, four out of the five participants indicated that they felt their academics improved at the beginning of the retained school year, even though it only lasted a short while. All participants mentioned that they acquired a new group of friends, and two participants reported that the retention increased their maturity and made them more aware of school and their education. Two participants reported that their self-esteem improved the year they were retained.

*Long Term*

Two of the five participants viewed their retention as a positive event. One of them described it as the best thing that could have happened while the other revealed that it made him straighten up and get back on the correct academic track. One participant acknowledged that the retention gave him a better sense of self and that his self-esteem improved after he was retained.

While the other three participants did not necessarily view their retention as a positive event in their life, they did share some positive outcomes associated with the retention. Two of the participants stated that the retention made it possible for them to relate to their own children and steer them in the right academic direction. They both felt as if they had the knowledge and experience to make sure that their children did not make the same mistakes that they made in school.

All of the participants mentioned a new group of friends and peers as being a positive outcome of the retention, with three of them stating that they are still friends with some of those peers today. In addition, one participant stated that he believed that because of his retention and experience in school, he had an increased desire to learn all he could about particular things that interest him. He explained that he sometimes goes to extremes to learn about a topic, almost wanting to be an expert on the subject so that he feels knowledgeable in the area.

*Negative Effects.*

*Short Term.*

Sixty percent of the participants viewed themselves as feeling awkward in respect to being older than their peers in their class after they were retained. This same percentage reported feelings of devastation and humiliation at the time of their retention. Sixty percent of those interviewed stated that they lost interest in school and their motivation decreased. In addition, they felt as if they were constantly lagging behind in their academics. They also expressed that they were worried about being separated from their friends and peers, and one participant recounted that she was made fun of by her peers during the year she was retained.

*Long Term.*

While all of the participants mentioned that a positive outcome of the retention was a new group of friends, it was also cited as the most common negative aspect of being held back. Every participant relayed the message that losing their friends and not being with their peers in the next grade was one of the worst things about the retention. Three of the participants also expressed the fact that they were still behind in school, even

after the retention and did not feel as if they ever truly caught up. They felt as if it did not help them socially or academically. In their opinions, this led to a decrease in motivation where school was concerned. One participant reported that she felt as if the system had given up on her and therefore she gave up on herself. She says she still feels that way today and is comfortable giving up easily. She also expressed that she is not comfortable with “putting herself out there” and she felt as if she would have been more outgoing and had better self-esteem if she had not been held back. Another participant reported that he felt like the retention led to his inability to carry out tasks in his life. In addition, four out of the five subjects dropped out of high school, correlating with much of the current research (Whipple, 2002; Stearns & Glennie, 2006; Jimerson, 2007; NASP, 2008).

### **Summary of the Findings**

As in previous studies (Jimerson, 2001 and 2006; Holmes, 1983; Silberglitt et al., 2006), participants in this study indicated varied results regarding the effectiveness of grade retention in their lives. Although some reported an increase in academic improvement for a short time, others indicated that the retention did not make a difference in their academic achievement and made them give up on themselves. The socio-emotional outcomes are also mixed. Some reported that their self-esteem decreased after being retained, while others reported an increase or no change at all. Participants in the study reported feelings of devastation and humiliation. Participants reported these negative feelings, as well as feelings of inadequacy and feeling dumb. All of the participants agreed that they gained a new group of friends, even though they were distraught at the prospect of losing their old friends and being put with a new peer group.

In all cases, the reasons for retention stated by participants in this study were based on academic issues. In the majority of the cases, the retention was an academic intervention intended on giving the child an additional year to catch up on academics. In three of the cases, this intervention was short lived and did not succeed in the child “catching up” on their academics.

Some participants appeared to still hold on to negative feelings and pain from their experience. Some participants said that the feelings came up at the beginning of every school year, but went away after they started meeting new peers and the year progressed. One described the experience as a wasted year of his life, while another said it still allows her to not have to fight to do better.

One trend noted by the researcher in the interviews included the lack of support at home. In all of the cases, participants cited no support at home as the reason for not succeeding in school and ultimately being held back. This lack of support ranged from single parenthood, death of a family member, poverty, inability to speak the language, and marital issues in the home. This trend appeared to have more impact on the lack of learning outside the home and seemed to be the underlying reason for the retention in many cases.

Unlike other studies, only one participant was held back due to immaturity, and none were held back due to frequent moves or for being smaller than their peers (NASP, 1998, 2008). In fact, most of the participants were just as big, if not bigger than their peers and they felt as if they were just as mature, if not more mature, than their classmates.

Most participants reported that they would retain their child if it was warranted. They expressed the fact that communication between home and school has improved and that they felt as if their child was not working up to their potential, they would indeed hold him or her back. One participant relayed that she has already held back one of her children, much to her opposition, and would not hold back another.

### **Discussion of Findings**

Grade retention has been researched and analyzed through many lenses in the twentieth century. Unfortunately, there is no conclusive evidence on the efficacy of the practice (Jimerson, 2001 and 2006; Holmes, 1983; Silbergitt et al., 2006). Despite this, retention was used in all of the cases as the only intervention. If students are still behind after being held back, stakeholders should look at alternatives that will help them succeed and stay on the same academic track as their peers (Jimerson, 1999; Silbergitt et al., 2006; Gleason et al., 2007). The results of this research show that there is no real benefit to holding back a child in the same grade. Not one of the participants mentioned that they were better learners or more successful academically due to their retention.

The growing body of research (Alexander et al., 1993; Holmes & Matthews, 1983; Jackson, 1975; Jimerson, 1999; Jimerson, 2006; Jimerson & Ferguson, 2008; NASP, 2003 & 2009), along with this study, seems to indicate the potential for negative effects outweigh the short-term positive outcomes and does not support the use of grade retention as the *only* intervention. Although initial academic improvements tend to occur during the year the student is retained, numerous studies (Jimerson, 2005, NASP, 2008) show the achievement gains decrease within two years of the retention, as does this study. Without specific interventions that address the needs of the low-achieving students, most

retained students do not catch up to their non-retained peers (Jimerson, 2001) as evident in this research.

The results from the study are mixed. Temporary gains and the increase in self-esteem were noted in some cases. On the other hand, some participants revealed a negative impact on their socio-emotional adjustments in school. These findings do not seem to support the concept of retention alone as an intervention (Jimerson, 1999; Silbergliitt et al., 2006). This research has found that grade retention has both a positive and a negative effect on both the social and emotional adjustments of those who are retained. It also has both a positive and a negative impact on self-confidence and attachment to school. Although many subjects in this study have indicated negative attitudes towards school, peer groups, and self-concept, some reported just the opposite. Unfortunately, many of these negative effects have followed them into adulthood and have subsequently shaped the lives of these adults who were retained. These effects included the failure to complete deeds and affairs, as well as sense of not having to do more than is asked. In addition, these adults have had it impressed upon them that it is alright to give up and be comfortable with it. These long term effects on adults are perceived to be a direct link to the failure and retention these adults experienced as children or young adults.

In addition to the negative impact retention has had on some of the subjects, there is the link between the retention and their dropping out of high school. Four of the five participants dropped out of high school, which backs up the current research which connects the two events (Jimerson, 2001; Jimerson, 2005; NASP, 2008) and states that students who are retained are much more likely to drop out of school. This statistic has

world-wide implications. Those who drop out of high school are less likely to enroll in a post-secondary education program and more likely to receive lower employment/educational status rating. They are also more likely to be paid less per hour and receive poorer employment competence ratings by age 20. In addition, as adults, individuals who have repeated a grade are more likely to be unemployed, living on public assistance, or in prisons than adults who did not repeat a grade (NASP, 2008; Jimerson 2005).

This issue of dropping out of high school has been high on the President's list since he came to office in 2009. In his first major address to Congress, President Barack Obama visualized a country where dropping out "is no longer an option" (Balfantz et al., 2009, p. 4). He linked improving high school graduation rates to restoring the nation's economic and political standing in the world (Balfantz et al., 2009). Since then, federal officials and educators have focused on transforming the 2,000 high schools that produce more than half of the U.S. dropouts (Balfantz et al., 2009). In addition, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) has been putting billions of dollars into low-performing schools to try to turn them around (Balfantz et al., 2009). With this important link of retention and the drop-out rates, one would think that more of the money would be spent at earlier stages where the money would have the potential to do the most good.

Even though there was some positive feedback regarding their retention experience, over half of the subjects in this study viewed their retention as a negative event, and expressed feelings of devastation at the time of the occurrence. In all of these cases, no intervention other than retention was employed by the teachers or the schools.

In addition, most participants indicated that they would not be the same if they had not experienced retention. They can only relate to their lives as they were retained. Would their experience of retention have been different if another intervention had been present? What would their lives have looked like if they were promoted instead?

One of the most unsettling findings in this study is the common acceptance of retention as a reasonable practice, without additional interventions. Most of the participants in this study reported some long-term effects regarding retention as it played a part in their lives. Talking to more adults in different walks of life might yield different results.

### **Implications for Practice**

Though this study is somewhat limited, the results of this study suggest that retention alone did not benefit the majority of the participants and in fact led to their dropping out of high school. This is supported by several studies regarding the connection between retention and leaving high school before it is completed (Whipple, 2002; Stearns & Glennie, 2006; Jimerson, 2007; NASP, 2008). Within the limited scope of this sample, it was evident that the majority of students retained without any additional resources or interventions added.

Despite all of the research that fails to support the efficacy of grade retention, the use of it has increased over the past 25 years (NASP, 2003 and 2008). The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP),

Promotes the use of interventions that are evidence-based and effective and discourages the use of practices that, through popular or widely accepted are either not beneficial or are harmful to the welfare and educational attainment of

American's children and youth. Given the frequent use of the ineffective practice of grade retention, the NASP urges schools and parents to seek alternatives to retention that more effectively address the specific instructional needs of academic underachievers (NASP, 2003 and 2008).

This position statement is in direct contradiction to the high-stakes testing environment that has recently been introduced since No Child Left Behind. Decisions about promotion are now made on the basis of a single test score. This practice and its connection to retention need to be highlighted and the researched evidence presented to all stakeholders.

Clearly, retention alone is not the answer. The introduction of interventions before the need for grade retention arises would greatly reduce the need to make the difficult decision to promote or retain a child (Jimerson, 2001; Jimerson, 2007). Another alternative is addressing the issue of retention in continuing education classes for teachers in the area of remediation and intervention. This should be addressed in both pre-service teacher programs and classrooms where teachers are already established. Plans for specific remediation and intervention should be considered before it is too late. Many school systems are now giving benchmark tests to identify deficiencies and promote interventions before the high stakes test is presented. In addition, many middle schools and high schools in Georgia have Graduation Coaches who meet with and council students who are at-risk for dropping out. Funding needs to continue in these areas to support students who struggle academically. Strategies such as these are only the beginning stages of a remediation and intervention plan.

Implementation and early identification procedures should be put in to place to promote cognitive and social competences. It is not in a child's best interest to hold him back if he is not going to be given any different treatment or course of action (Jimerson, 2006). Parents, school personnel, and policymakers need to consider the consequences of retaining a student in the same grade.

Family support is also needed for those who are at risk of failing. Parental resources and outreach programs should be available for those who are perceived to be at risk. Many Title 1 schools in Georgia now have Parent Centers and have begun to reach out to the community to support those in need. These programs need to be expanded to all schools and more effort needs to be made to reach those parents who are either not involved in their child's education, do not know how to help their child, or do not have the resources to help their child succeed. In addition, there should be frequent positive home-school communication in order to make parents feel welcome and secure. Teacher conferences and school activities should be scheduled to accommodate parents' schedules. Before and after school programs could be offered for additional tutoring, as well as English classes for those parents who need assistance in learning the language.

Both attention and resources need to be aimed toward alternative strategies that consider the child as a whole, and provides opportunities and support for each individual child in order for them to have both academic and socio-emotional success in school.

### **Limitations**

Several limitations emerged during the research process. First, the participants in the study were selected from a non-random population due to the nature and parameters of the study. Potential participants had to be identified as being over 19 years of age and

been held back, or retained, in elementary, middle, or high school. Participants chosen for this study were either adults who had dropped out of school and were working on getting their General Education Diploma (GED), or adults who were attending a local community college. Purposeful sampling was used in this study to obtain rich data, and the results are specific to those who have been retained in their early life.

Another limitation was the factor of time. Since the study focused on adults who have been retained in elementary, middle, or high school significant time may have elapsed since the event occurred. Thus, the reliance on the memory of the participants was a limitation of the study. In addition, these memories have had the potential to be affected by years of other experiences and by what the participants have been told by others about their retention experience.

A third limitation of the study was self-reportage. It is possible that the participants only reported what they felt comfortable about and that they may not have revealed more sensitive feelings, effects, and experiences. Since this was a one-time interview, the researcher did not have the opportunity to build a relationship with the participants and to gain their complete trust. The sample itself may be a limitation. The participants all have a connection to Georgia and that may skew the result.

A fourth limitation of the study involved the sample size. The size may become a limitation since there were only five participants interviewed. A larger sample, which included more diversity and age groups, could have yielded more data for further comparison. For example, a male and female in their twenties, thirties, and forties could have been interviewed to compare gender differences and experiences. The same could be done with socio-economic status and ethnicity.

## **Recommendations for Additional Research**

The current study brings to light some of the lingering effects of retention on adults whose lives were changed by the event. There are many studies that focus on students in elementary school and the lower grades, as well as newfound renewal in the effects that retention has on high school dropouts. The research regarding adults who have lived through the experience is still meager. The hope is that this research opens the conversation among scholars and policy makers alike so that how students respond to retention and the long term effects are better understood.

With its correlation to increased high school dropout rates, and no real assurance for positive benefits, perhaps retention can be replaced with intervention (Jimerson, 2006). Consideration for further research could include the examination of specific interventions and their value in the academic arenas. In addition, research that targets specific populations in regards to retention needs to continue to be conducted. This includes, but is not limited to, different minority populations and different socio-economic populations, as well as populations represented in prisons, rehabilitation centers, and homeless shelters and those who are on welfare or are unemployed. Other questions educators and policy makers should be asking are:

- Which students are best served by retention?
- Which students are best served by promotion?
- Are there students for whom retention should not be considered?
- Do children benefit from social promotion?
- Do children benefit from retention?

- What are the long-term effects of retention and social promotion on a child later in life and across their academic career?
- Does retaining a student place the student at risk for dropping out of school?
- What are the best early interventions to reduce the risk of retention?
- Is the student a candidate for special education services?

### **Conclusion**

When looking at the previous reviews of retention literature, the meta-analyses, and the research presented in this paper, a constant theme seems to emerge, grade retention is not an empirically supported intervention (Jimerson, 2006). Moreover, the research clearly demonstrates that students who are retained are more likely to drop out of high school, and is evident in this research. Neither in-grade retention nor social promotion seems to be the answer to the problems of academic or socio-emotional difficulty. The promotion of academically at risk children without remedial assistance is ineffective, and the retention of slow or inattentive learners who are forced to relive the same instructional program only produces small gains that are likely diminish within two years. It has been suggested that, “The real need is not so much to find a formula for effective remediation, as it is to find a formula for effective education” Alexander et al., 2003, p.15). Given the cumulative body of knowledge and considering the results of this research, one must ask himself, do the perceived short-term benefits really outweigh the possible negative consequences in the future?

With finance reductions and reform at both the state and federal level, providing additional interventions and remediation services could become a problem,

especially as they put more demands on the education system to close the achievement gap. Funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act needs to encompass all schools at all levels, not just the low-performing high schools. The key is to provide quality instruction and programs before a child reach the point of no return. Jimerson (2002) sums up the debate by saying,

When weighing the pros and cons of a decision to retain or promote a student, it is critical to emphasize to educators and parents that a century of research has failed to demonstrate the benefits of grade retention over promotion to the next grade for *any* group of students. Instead, we must focus on implementing evidence-based prevention and intervention strategies to promote social and cognitive competence and facilitate the academic success of all students. (p. 3)

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## Appendix A

## Adult Who Was Retained

Study: A Qualitative Inquiry of Grade Retention as perceived by Adults Who Were Retained

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for agreeing to complete this questionnaire regarding your grade retention experience. Grade retention in this study means having been held back in a grade and not promoted to the next grade with your peers. There have been many studies that have tried to show the effects of retention, but very few have looked at it from the perspective of those who have actually experienced it. Information from this study can then be studied further and findings could be potentially important for current teachers, administrators, policy makers and parents. A qualitative study such as this could open the door to a wealth of information regarding the effects of retention.

Your recollections of the experience are important to me. All written correspondence, questionnaires, and interviews responses will be destroyed at the end of my study. In addition, pseudonyms will be used to identify participants throughout the study, therefore ensuring your anonymity. Your honest and complete answers are appreciated.

Again, I thank you for your participation and look forward to talking to you. I will contact you after receiving this questionnaire in regards to your further participation in the study.

Robin L. White

Please answer the following questions. If you feel uncomfortable about any of the questions, please feel free to move to the next one.

1.) What is your present age?

2.) What grade did you repeat?

3.) What was your age at the time you were held back?

4.) In what state were you retained?

5.) Why do you think you were asked to repeat the grade?

6.) Will you be willing to be interviewed about your experience? If so, please give me a number where I can reach you to set up an interview. It will take approximately 30-45 minutes.

First Name only: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone # where you can be reached in the evening: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address where you can be reached: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

## Interview Protocol – Adults Who Were Retained

1. Tell me about your experience of being retained.  
Probes: What else do you recall? What else do you remember about that time?
2. Do you remember what was going on in the world at that time?  
Probes: Was there conflict in the world? Personally?
3. Do you remember what was going on in your family at that time?  
Probes: Siblings? Births? Deaths? Moves?
4. What things were happening with you at that time?  
Probes: Peer interaction? Were you smaller/larger than peers? Maturity level?  
Illnesses?
5. Why do you think you were retained?  
Probe: Incomplete work? Difficulty doing work? Less mature than others?  
Difficult subject areas?
6. How did you find out that you were going to repeat the grade?  
Probe: Who requested that you repeat the grade? Did your parents support it?
7. What was the best and/or worst thing about repeating a grade?
8. Do you think your life would have turned out differently if you were not retained?  
If so, how?
9. Do you think that grade retention (repeating a grade) affected you in any way? If so, how? (Now or back then)  
Probe: Did it affect your relationships with your parents, friends, siblings?
10. Do you feel like there were any short-term effects? (negative or positive)

11. What about long-term effects? (negative or positive)
12. How did you feel about retention when it happened? What about now?
13. Do you think your memory of it has changed over time?
14. From your adult perspective, how do you currently feel about retention?  
Probe: Would you retain your child? Do you agree with retention?
15. Is there any other life experience that you would equate with the retention?
16. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your retention experience?

## Appendix C

### CONSENT FORM

A Qualitative Inquiry of Grade Retention as perceived by Adults Who Were Retained

Doctoral Dissertation

Robin L. White

Liberty University

Department of Educational Leadership

You are invited to be in a research study of adults who were retained in elementary or middle school. You were selected as a possible participant because of your answers in the voluntary questionnaire that you filled out. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Robin L. White, a doctoral student at Liberty University.

#### **Background Information**

The purpose of this study is: to examine and explore the views and recollections of adults in regards to the effects of grade retention as perceived by these adults who were retained in elementary or middle school. This study is needed due to the increased accountability schools are facing and the new requirements for students to pass standardized tests in order to be promoted to the next grade.

#### **Procedures**

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things: You will be asked to participate in a one-on-one face to face interview or telephone interview. The interview should take between 30 and 45 minutes. You may be called upon again to clarify or answer any additional questions in the month following your interview.

## **Risks and Benefits of being in the Study**

The risks of this study are minimal, and are no more than you (the participant) would encounter in everyday life. The main risk is that of recollections of unpleasant memories or feelings. If at any time, you feel as if the memories of your past are too difficult to talk about, the researcher will terminate the interview.

The benefits to participation are: there are not perceived benefits to the participant.

## **Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. The data will be stored at the researcher's home in a secured filing cabinet. After three years, the records will be shredded and disposed of. There is no anticipated use of the data in the future. If interview tapes are used, they will be erased and destroyed after transcription.

## **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 the 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 researchers conducting this study are: Robin L. White and Dr. Deanna Keith. You ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact us at 770-207-6364, or at Liberty University at 434-582-2445, or by email at rwhite2@liberty.edu , and/or dlkeith@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 2400, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at fgarzon@liberty.edu.

*You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:**

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

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of parent or guardian: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*(If minors are involved)*

Signature of Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate whether or not you would like to receive a copy of the final dissertation at the conclusion of the study.

\_\_\_ Yes, I would like a copy.

\_\_\_ No, thank you.