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Qualitative Analysis of Adult Perceptions of Their K-12 Grade Retention

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QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF ADULT PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR K-12 GRADE
RETENTION

By
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Approval Page

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Abstract

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF ADULT PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR K-12 GRADE

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This study investigated the effects that a K-12 grade retention had on adults who were

retained as children. The research was motivated by three research questions: (1) How do

adults aged 18-65 who have experienced grade retention describe the effect that a K-12

retention had and possibly continues to have on their lives? (2) How do adults aged 18-65

feel about having been held back in school? (3) How do adults aged 18-65 perceive grade

retention overall? Previous studies neglected to examine the emotional implications that

retention can have on a child and the possible long-term effects that retention may have

on an adult years after the retention takes place. This qualitative study, using grounded

theory as the methodology, examined the memories of 14 participants between the ages

of 24-65 who lived in southeast North Carolina and northeast South Carolina during their

school-age years. Adults in this research were encouraged to share their stories over a

period of months with guided questions by the researcher. The findings showed that

there were still unanswered questions about the effects of retention on academic

achievement overall; however, the participants in this study considered retention to be

neither good or bad but to be used as a means for last resort by educators. Six of the 14

participants shared that they felt a myriad of emotions when they were children that they

could not fully explain. They went on to say that they have released all negative feelings

related to their retention and did not allow the retention label to hinder their adult lives.

Five of the participants admit the experience has left a negative feeling, and three

respondents admitted to having no comment or admit to having no immediate feelings concerning the childhood experience that they wished to share.

Keywords: grade retention, adult perceptions, poverty, social and mental well-being, grounded theory

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Chapter 1: Introduction

When a student fails to show academic proficiency at any given grade level, educators are faced with a few choices. Schools can provide tutoring; have summer school available; or, as a final option, hold the student back for a year. This last alternative, retention, often proves to be a problematic and combative issue for both schools and parents (Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011).

So, what is the answer for the question, "Does grade retention benefit children of any age?" Educational researchers, classroom educators, and governmental policy makers have attempted to answer that question for decades. The argument for grade retention is that students who have not met grade specific standard criteria will fall further behind as they are promoted through the grades (Reynolds & Fletcher-Janzen, 2007).

The RAND Corporation conducted a study in 2009 led by Xia and Kirby. The pair noted that students retained at a younger age are inclined to profit from an additional year in the same grade. Additionally, the RAND study revealed that kindergarten retention is different from being held back in later grades in two very distinct ways.

First, students who are retained in primary grades are identified because of emotional immaturity or have demonstrated difficulty in developing basic age-appropriate skills (Xia & Kirby, 2009). It is further noted that while later retention focuses wholly on academic performance (Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 1994; Alridge & Glodman, 2006; Jimerson & Kaufman, 2003; Jimerson, Woehr, & Kaufman, 2007; Krier, 2014; North Carolina Department of Public Instruction [NCDPI], 2013), a kindergarten retention happens before any real failure transpires. The RAND study noted

that an earlier retention exerts a less negative effect on retained students in the long term (Xia & Kirby, 2009).

Grade Retention

Grade retention is the practice of having a child repeat a grade; it is also known as flunking or being held back. The use of retention in schools has been debated for years (Alexander et al., 1994; Jimerson & Kaufman, 2003). Deciding whether or not retention has merit or a negative effect is still a debatable subject. Some educational theorists promote retention as an opportunity to overcome past struggles, academic or maturity (Light, 2006), while others contend that retention is a negative action – regardless of the issue – and has little benefit overall (Hauser, 1999; Quarterman, 2005).

The practice of grade retention in the United States dates back to 1860. Not much has changed in the way grade retention is facilitated in over 156 years. The practice is the same today as it was years ago: students who did not master grade-level material were required to repeat a grade (Owings & Magliaro, 1998).

In more recent events, the North Carolina legislature passed the Excellent Public Schools Act in 2012. This law forces retention based on the state requiring that all third graders must demonstrate proficiency in reading or the student will be required to attend a summer reading camp. This portion of the act, which has come to be called Read to Achieve, dictates that students unable to demonstrate proficiency on the reading end-of-grade (EOG) test or by other similarly normed assessments are required to attend a reading focused summer school. Further, children who are unable to demonstrate proficiency after a summer in the classroom must repeat third grade or enter a modified fourth-grade classroom with other nonproficient readers (Smith & Imig, 2015). Today,

schools and local educational agencies (LEAs) are being held accountable for the achievement of their students through publicized school report cards with schools receiving grades A-F as an indication of the growth a school and district make (NCDPI, 2013). High stakes testing such as North Carolina's has school systems around the United States struggling with the question of how to motivate students to achieve; how to address the needs of those who constantly struggle; and finally, when and if retention is appropriate (Nagaoka & Roderick, 2004).

Statement of the Problem

Grade retention continues to be used and, in some cases, proves to be a benefit for students who need more time (Alexander et al., 1994; Light, 2006; Vail, 2002); however, this researcher noticed very few studies that ask adults to reflect on their educational experiences as a once-retained student. This study also sought to examine the effects of retention and whether the adult attributes their grade retention to any residual effect later in life. Furthermore, this study will allow adults who were retained as children to reflect on the result the retention process had on them and to what effect.

In 2007, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) reported that an estimated 10% of American students were held back in the United States each year. The educators and researchers involved with the NCES research were implored to continue studying the effectiveness of retention on children in an effort to better understand the efficacy and long-term effects of being retained in a grade.

Peer-reviewed studies over the past 30 years have demonstrated that holding students back profits little or no long-term academic benefits and can actually be detrimental to students (Svokos, 2014). When improvements in achievement are linked

to retention, they are not usually sustained beyond a few years, and there is some evidence for negative effects on self-esteem and emotional well-being (Owings & Kaplan, 2001).

Theoretical Framework

For this qualitative study, an explicit theory had not evolved; therefore, this researcher decided to present the theory that was generated from data collection and analysis of participant contributions at the conclusion of this study using grounded theory as a guide. Grounded theory is an investigation method that allows one to examine a concept or phenomenon (retention) without an obvious theory at the onset. The theory is developed as the participants relate and respond to the concept of retention (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). Grounded theory methodology is used for developing theory that is grounded in collected and analyzed data that requires several stages and refinement of the information collected (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2013) such as this qualitative study.

Purpose

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explore the recollections of adults aged 18-65, who were retained in elementary, middle, or high school. The findings of this study identified possible long-term effects (positive or negative) that a retention experience could have on a school-age child.

Guiding Research Question

The focus of this research was to examine the views and experiences of adults who were retained at some point in their school career: kindergarten through high school. The guiding questions were based on Atkinson (1998). An individual's life story serves as an excellent means for understanding how people see their own experiences, their own

lives, and their interactions with others (Atkinson, 1998). The research questions for this study were

1. How do adults aged 18-65 who have experienced grade retention describe the effect that a K-12 retention had and possibly continues to have on their lives?

2. How do adults aged 18-65 feel about having been held back in school?

3. How do adults aged 18-65 perceive grade retention overall?

Definitions of the Terms

For the purposes of this study, the terms listed below are used as defined.

Ability grouping. The academic practice of separating students into different classrooms within a grade, based on their probable achievement or ability levels (Blystone, 2014).

Adults. People interviewed for this study at least 18 years of age.

At-risk students. Those students who are viewed as having a high risk of failing. Also, those of low socioeconomic background, a minority group, or having parents who are not involved in the child's school life (Owings & Kaplan, 2001).

Being held back/held back. Grade repeaters can be referred to as having been held back (Anderson, Whipple, & Jimerson, 2002).

Chronic absenteeism. Missing more than 10% of the total days for enrollment including both excused and unexcused absences. This definition could vary depending upon LEA; however, for this study, the characterization above will be used (Romero & Lee, 2007).

Dropout. A person who does not complete high school and does not have a diploma or certificate of completion (Goodlad, 1954; Orfield, 2006).

Elimination. A term from Edward L. Thorndike's (1908) study that described dropouts.

Flunked. Failure to reach the required standard in an examination, test, or course of study (Jackson, 1975).

GED. General Education Development or General Education Diploma. The GED is an internationally recognized test (NCDPI, 2013).

Grade retention. The process of having a student repeat a grade usually because of failure to accomplish a set goal or benchmark (Anderson et al., 2002).

LEA. Synonymous with a local school system or a local school district, indicating that a public board of education or other public authority maintains administrative control of the public schools in a city or county (NCDPI, 2013).

Peers. Persons who are equal to another in abilities, qualifications, age, background, and socioeconomic status (SES; Jimerson, Carlson, Rotert, Egeland, & Stroufe, 1997).

Social promotion. The practice of promoting students to the next grade level even when they have not learned the material they were taught or achieved expected learning standards (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

Special education. Instruction for students who have been diagnosed with a disability provided to those 3-21 years of age at no cost to the parents. Special education was mandated by IDEA (Boyd & Parish, 1996; Light, 2006).

Standardized test. Tests that produce scores based upon national norms showing grade-equivalent, percentile, or stanine scores. Examples of these are the North Carolina EOG tests (NCDPI, 2013).

Underperforming. Failing to do as well as expected (Reynolds 1992).

Assumptions

This researcher proceeded under the following assumptions:

1. The participants will answer the survey, interview, and focus group questions in an honest and candid manner.

2. The participants have all experienced the same or similar phenomenon of the study.

3. Participants have a sincere interest in participating in this research and do not have any other motives other than advancing focus of this researcher's topic.

Limitations

Limitations associated with this study were related to qualitative studies as a whole. Such studies deal with natural settings that are difficult to replicate (Wiersma, 2000). Knowing that replication is nearly impossible, this researcher took that knowledge into consideration as data collection proceeded. Furthermore, the researcher acknowledged the likelihood that a participant would be someone known to the researcher. The same ethical principles were upheld in any event; acquaintance or otherwise.

Other limitations included the amount of time that has passed and possibly clouded the recollections of facts; however, as the subject of retention was met with a significant emotional mindset, the possibility for not remembering the event or events was considered insignificant. With these possibilities, the researcher sought to uphold the same ethical principles for verification, validity, and ensuring participant rights for all involved, whether they were known to the researcher before the study or not.

Delimitations

This study was limited to the following participants: adults 18-65 years of age who were retained as a student during the kindergarten to 12th-grade years, were willing to be interviewed by the researcher in person and/or participate in a focus group and took part in a survey. The participants graduated (high school/obtained a GED) or were away from a K-12 classroom setting for at least 12 months prior to the initial interview dates. The participants currently live in North Carolina or northeastern South Carolina.

Scope

This study took place in North Carolina and northeastern South Carolina. The research was conducted within a 3-month period in late 2017 and early 2018. The researcher notes that the subjects for this study currently live in an area not in the southeastern part of North Carolina, but the subjects' K-12 educational background took place in the southeast region. The ages of the participants were 18-65 years. The participants for this study had a history of retention dating back to any grade span from kindergarten through eighth grade or high school setting. Participants have been away from a classroom setting (K-12) at least 12 months from the first day of the interview. This researcher targeted 12-15 participants for this study.

Significance

The purported benefits of retention are deceptive, as teachers do not usually follow student progress beyond a few years (Anderson et al., 2002). The practice of grade retention has been studied and investigated for years, but little research has discussed the effect that such an event has had on one's life extending into adulthood. Using recollections of the past, the researcher attempted to construct meaning from the

experiences told by adults who were retained in elementary, middle, or high school and how it affected their lives.

Implications for Social Change

The life story interview technique allows for an individual's unique voice and experience to be heard. There are very few studies that give examples of such a study. It is a highly personalized approach to the gathering of qualitative information about the human experience (grade retention). It demands many extemporaneous, individual judgments on the part of the interviewer while the interview is in progress (Atkinson, 1998). The evidence gained from this study can bring about awareness concerning grade retention and about those who are retained.

Personal information such as interviews and surveys provide a deeper understanding of how years later retention can still affect an adult who was once retained. The effects may appear as social and emotional issues (Saldana, 2009). Ultimately, this information can improve decision-making about retention for students in the future. Interviews and surveys can be limitations, and possible biases may emerge. The interviewer will take possible biases such as question order bias into close and careful consideration.

Question order bias is the result of how the researcher qualifies a question as the first one to ask (Israel & Taylor, 1990). The first question, answer, or response influence the answers to subsequent questions, creating the question order bias. Participants are primed by word phrases or ideas presented in the questions that might influence their thoughts, feelings, and ideas about upcoming questions. This type of bias is at times inevitable. To avoid such biases, the researcher will ask general questions before specific

questions to minimize bias (Sarniak, 2015).

Summary

The word retention was used in this study to define the state of a student remaining in the same grade. Additionally, retention was defined as the process of having a student repeat a grade usually because of failure to accomplish a set goal or benchmark (Anderson et al., 2002). Even after more than a century of practicing, studying, and researching retention, the use of it is still met with much criticism. The researcher looked at the past studies and attempted to construct meaning from the experiences told by adults who were retained in elementary, middle, or high school and discuss how it affected their lives. The practice of retention is likened to other stressful and traumatic events in a child's life.

Prior research exploring children's ratings of stressful life events showed that 548 first-, third-, and sixth-grade students in five different schools rated the stressfulness of 20 life events. Across grade levels, those events rated as most stressful by children were losing a parent, academic retention, going blind, getting caught in theft, wetting in class, a poor report card, having an operation, parental fighting, and being sent to the principal (Anderson et al., 2002).

It is the researcher's hope that educational professionals may use the results of this study coupled with the century's old research referring to retention to determine the best course when advocating for a student at risk of academic failure during their educational career (Owings & Kaplan, 2001).

The study was divided into five chapters. Chapter 1, Introduction, outlined the statement of the problem, theoretical framework, purpose, questions, terms used in the

study, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, scope, significance, and implications for

social change. Chapter 2, Review of Literature, is organized by outlining the historical

overview of grade retention, characteristics of retained children, and national implications

for retention. Subheadings included in this chapter are ethnicity, gender, poverty-SES,

parental influences, attendance, students with disabilities, and social promotion. Chapter

3, Methodology, includes a description of subjects and location, delimitations and

limitations, and data collection and analysis. A description of data collected and how the

data were analyzed are included in this chapter. Chapter 4, Analysis of Data, begins with

an introduction, followed by the problem and purpose revisited and application of the

research questions. An analysis of each research question is discussed, and associated

tables and data are included. Chapter 5, Summary, includes implications and

recommendations for further study and concludes with a brief summary of the overall

study.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Introduction

Historically, teachers recorded grade progress in a narrative report to determine student proficiency. Currently, rubrics or assigned grades are used to determine proficiency. The practice of grouping students by grade levels in elementary schools did not become a common practice until the 1860s. Students were grouped a variety of ways, including by age, achievement level, and grade level. Grouping in this manner is characterized by the remembrance of the one-room schoolhouse (Blystone, 2014). Once a student mastered a portion of assigned content, they were promoted to the next grade. By 1900, the curriculum content had become too difficult to simply assign a merit-based score (Maxwell, 1904). The New York City school system examined the issue. Maxwell's (1904) New York age-grade progress study became the standard conduit for educational systems to report promotion, retention, and dropout rates. Researchers began examining the value of retention in terms of student achievement.

Overview

Grade retention initially was intended to be the solution needed to improve student performance and schools reporting their scores by allowing underperforming students more time to develop adequate academic skills (Reynolds 1992); however, it did not take researchers long to discover that the negative implications surrounding retention outweighed any positive intent retention was designed to cover (Owings & Kaplan, 2001). It was at this point that the federal government began to collect data regarding retention and dropout rates. In 1908, the Government Printing Office published Edward L. Thorndike's study that portrayed an in-depth explanation of the term elimination.

Elimination was the word Thorndike used to refer to dropouts.

Thorndike's (1908) study revealed the connection between grade-level retention and student elimination (dropping out) from school. The study also showed that 82% of United States students entering school between 1900 and 1904 were eliminated before the ninth grade (Thorndike, 1908). During the 1930s, several noted researchers reported the negative effects of retention on achievement (Ayer, 1933; Kline, 1933; Otto & Melby 1935). In 1954, Dr. John I. Goodlad, a noted educational researcher and theorist, reviewed the research relating to retention from the year 1924 to 1948. Goodlad surmised that retention did not decrease the disparity in student achievement and had no positive effect on educational gain. Otto (1951) also suggested that repeating grades added no educational value for children, indicating that the academic gain of retained students was smaller than the gain of promoted counterparts. Halfway through the 20th century, there was a renewed interest in research between grade retention and school dropout rates. The relationship between the two became apparent when Berlman (1949) indicated that retained students tended to drop out of school more frequently than those not retained. Berlman's study also determined that many of those who had experienced grade-level retention and then dropped out were as smart as or smarter than those who eventually graduated. This article appeared in a period when the literature was starting to emphasize the need to keep students in school.

Grade retention was continually studied but received a huge increase in interest 2 decades later. In 1975, Jackson provided the first systematic, comprehensive overview of the research evidence on the effects of grade retention. This review included 30 studies published between 1911 and 1973. Jackson sought to examine whether low-achieving

students, or those with socio-emotional maladjustments, benefited from grade retention or promotion to the next grade. Jackson divided the studies into three groups based on their design type: naturalistic, pre-post, and experimental.

Bulla and Gooden (2003) conducted a study that surveyed 407 elementary school principals. The survey revealed that the factors most influencing principal decisions to retain students include lack of mastery of material, local and state accountability standards, and student maturity levels including their chronological age. Principals also believe children should be retained in the early years to avoid the possible harm a later retention may cause.

The North Carolina Education Research Data Center (NCERDC) conducted a study on retention and social promotion in 1999. The study concluded that grade retention is not a feasible choice to be used for children in early elementary grades (before second grade) and does more harm than good overall. The NCERDC noted that the students in the first grade performed worse academically and socially compared to other lower performing students who were not retained. The study continued to clarify that retention across grade levels showed more negative effects than not (Shepard & Smith, 1989).

A limited number of positive reviews showed retention to be a worthwhile practice; however, Holmes (1989) noted, "it appears that all of these (positive) studies were conducted in settings described as suburban and included few if any black subjects" (p. 16). When only well-matched studies were examined, a greater negative effect was found for retention than in the research literature as a whole (Holmes, 1989).

Retention among younger students does not affect the prospect of high school

completion but retaining low-achieving and nonproficient eighth-grade students in elementary school markedly increases the probability that these students will drop out of high school. Educational scholars agree that discussions about retention will eventually lead one to the conclusion of dropout and graduation rates being interconnected (Jacob & Lefgren, 2009).

Holmes and Matthews (1984) released a report focused on the nonpromotion statistical data relating to 1984. They asserted that retention is not helpful in all grades, including kindergarten. Studies failed to show positive effects beyond a few years, and the initial positive effects appear to diminish over time. Since few schools provide special interventions for retainees, the likelihood of positive outcomes following retention is further reduced. Students are retained in programs that were not beneficial to them in the first year. Being retained 1 year almost doubled a student's likelihood of dropping out, while failing twice almost guaranteed it. Retention is the second greatest predictor of school dropout. There is a consistently damaging association between retention and race, gender, SES, and school outcomes. Retention peaks the beginning of a level of education during first grade, entering middle school, and entering high school (Holmes & Matthew, 1984).

The debatable practice of grade retention (i.e., repeating a grade, flunking, or being held back) is neither a rare event nor one that happens at the same rate across localities (Warren & Saliba, 2012). There are unanswered questions about the effects of retention on academic achievement, developmental outcomes, and high school graduation rates (Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey, 1997; Jimerson & Kaufman, 2003; Lu, 2013).

Students are required to repeat a grade for a number of reasons including, but not

limited to, parent requests (e.g., low academics, social immaturity, or redshirting for sports), teacher recommendations based on missing a significant number of days of school, lack of academic mastery for that grade, frequent relocation, severe personal trauma, and/or having a late summer birthday (Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011).

High stakes testing mandates such as the NCDPI Read to Achieve initiative have made grade retention nondebatable, either a child passes or repeats. North Carolina Senator Phil Berger's Excellent Public Schools Act was designed to ensure that all students are reading at or above grade level by the end of the third grade. If by some chance a student fails to achieve that benchmark, the law requires that student to be held back from advancing to the fourth grade until proficiency is met (NCDPI, 2013).

Test-based promotion policies (also known as high stakes tests) are frequently executed with short-term remedial supports (e.g., after-school programs, summer camps, summer schools, and intervention programs targeted toward at-risk students). The idea of such policies is that the threat of retention will motivate students to meet grade standards (Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011).

Supporters argue that the threat of retention will provide incentives for students to work harder, for parents to monitor their child's progress, and for teachers to focus on the development of basic skills among low-achieving students, all of which should lead to increases in student achievement (Allensworth, 2005).

Notification guidelines for North Carolina Read to Achieve are outlined as the following: Parents and or guardians of third-grade students will be notified in writing in a timely manner that the students shall be retained unless they qualify for a good cause exemption. A good cause exemption is listed as an alternate pathway where a student can

show mastery such as a Limited English Proficient (LEP) student with less than 2 years of instruction in English as a Second Language (ESL) program; students with disabilities using an alternate assessment; students who demonstrate reading proficiency on an alternate assessment; reading portfolio proficiency; and previously retained students (NCDPI, 2013). Parents of kindergarten through third-grade students shall receive written notification when a student is demonstrating difficulty at their current grade level. Furthermore, students who are nonproficient shall receive written reports outlining their progress toward reading proficiency.

Elementary grade grouping did not become a common practice until the 1860s (Owings & Kaplan, 2001). Students were grouped by age, achievement grade levels, or mastery; prior to that, they were taught in a multi-aged class configuration. Grades were given as a narrative progress report that explained what the student knew. Once they reached a set level of understanding, they were promoted to the next level of learning.

Similarly, elementary grades practice of retention in the United States dates back to the same period, the 1860s (Bali, Anagnostopoulos, & Roberts, 2005). Those students who did not master that grade level's subject material were required to repeat that grade (Owings & Magliaro, 1998).

The goal of grade retention was to improve school performance by allowing an additional year to acquire skills that were lacking (Reynolds, 1992). By the 1930s, researchers were reporting negative effects of retention on achievement (Owings & Kaplan, 2001). According to Meador (2014), school retention is not the best remedy for every struggling student. Teachers, parents, and administrators choose to retain or hold back a student for a variety of reasons. Some of the reasons for retention are not tied

solely to academics (e.g., redshirting).

Academic redshirting for young children refers to the practice of postponing entrance into kindergarten in order to allow extra time for socio-emotional, intellectual, or physical growth. Redshirting is most often used when a child may be the youngest child in their kindergarten class and their birthday is close to district eligibility entrance dates (Katz, 2000).

Characteristics of Retained Children

Grade retention is the practice of holding a K-12 student who has not met the level of proficiency or performance standard back in a grade or course. Course repetition takes place with secondary school students who have failed a specific course. The actual objective is to make sure the student has met the proficient level before moving on (UCLA Center for Mental Health in Schools, 2015).

Demographics are often predictors of retention. Studies have shown that African-American children, poor children, and boys are more likely to be retained (Frey, 2005). Research has also shown that non-White students who have teachers of the same race are less likely to be retained (Bali et al., 2005). Byrd and Weitzman (1994) examined predictors of early grade retention. This study determined that several factors such as poverty, familial education, or the absence of one or more biological parents impacted early school failure. Byrd and Weitzman noted that school districts with substantial revenue and larger districts were more likely to retain students because costs may not be as evident. Larger districts have a smaller per-student expenditure; therefore, the cost of retention is less (Bali et al., 2005). Therefore, a child's race, SES, family, and where the child lives can affect whether or not a child is retained.

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 (Bonvin, Bless, & Schuepback, 2008). These children often have more in common than poor academics. According to many researchers, students of retention appear to be related in several ways: gender, ethnicity, SES, and parental or familial traits. They maintain that children with certain social and demographic characteristics are more likely to be held back regardless of their cognitive abilities (Jimerson, Anderson, & Whipple, 2002; Lorence & Dworkin, 2006; Meisels & Liaw, 1993). Race, ethnicity, family social status, and gender have been offered to influence grade progression, independent of student ability.

Table 1 gives a summary of retention studies related to student characteristics.

Table 1

Retention Studies

Category	Study	Sample	Findings
Ethnicity	Meisels & Liaw (1993)	16,623 K-8 students from Longitudinal Study NELS:88	29.9% of African-Americans, 25.2% of Hispanics, 17.2% of Whites were retained
	Alexander et al. (1994)	1990 US Census	Retention higher among minorities
	NCES (2009)	2007 Survey	More African-Americans than Whites or Hispanics are held back
Gender	Byrnes (1989)	71 retained elementary students	43% of girls and 19% of boys would not admit they had been retained
	NCES (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 Longitudinal Study NELS:88	33.9% of retained students were from the lowest income quartile compared to 11% from near poor and 5% from nonpoor
	NCES (2009)	2007 Survey	23% of students retained families from poor, 11% from near poor, and 5% from nonpoor
Parental	NCES (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 bachelor's degree

Ethnicity. Jimerson, Pletcher, and Graydon (2006) discovered specific ethnic characteristics connecting students who have been retained. The National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) of 1988 followed 24,599 eighth-grade students from 1,000

middle schools. This study was the most wide ranging 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, compared to 17.2% of their Caucasian peers. Further analysis showed that African-American students and Hispanic students are retained at twice the rate of Caucasian students. Alexander et al. (1997) also found that higher retention rates have been shown among ethnic minorities, especially among African-American and Hispanic students.

NCES (2009) indicated trends in enrollment across all levels of education. They reported that the percentage of K-8 students who had been retained differed by race/ ethnicity and by region. For example, in 2007, a larger percentage of Black students than either White or Hispanic students had been retained. No measurable dissimilarities were found between 1996 and 2007 in either the White-Black or the White-Hispanic gap in the proportion of students who had been retained. In 2007, the percentages of students in the Northeast and the South who had 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).

Gender. Another significant 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 (SREB, 2001), boys in the South are twice as likely to be retained as girls. Similar statistics have been collected from national studies like NELS (1988)

which reported that 24% of boys were retained in relation to 15.3% of girls repeating a grade (Meisels & Liaw, 1993); however, this research is not clear as to why boys are retained more than girls. Meisels and Liaw (1993) have theorized that there may be a conflict between expectations of school behavior in males and females. Additionally, there was a study out of the Southwest that examined the beliefs and attitudes of retained first-, third-, and sixth-grade boys and girls in an ethnically diverse community. This study found that these children believed that retention was a punishment and felt stigmatized by it (Byrnes, 1989). Byrnes (1989) also found that 43% of the girls and 9% of the boys in this study would not disclose to the researcher that they had been retained, even when directly questioned. Meisels and Liaw's evaluation of the NELS data also verified the sensitivity of girls to the negative connotation and effects of retention.

According to the NCES (2009) report, in each survey year, a larger proportion of male students than female students have been retained. Among K-8 students in 2007, 12% of male students had been retained, compared to 8% 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).

Poverty and low SES. Another possible factor in retention decisions is poverty. SREB (2001) estimated that children from poor households are two to three times more likely to be retained. According to national studies like NELS (1988), the 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).

The NCES (2009) report corroborated poverty as being a predictor of retention:

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% of students from poor families had been retained, compared with 11% of students from near-poor families and 5% of students from non-poor families. The percentage of students from poor families who had been retained was higher in 2007 (23%) than in 1996 (17%), while the percentage of students from non-poor families who had been retained was lower at 5% in 2007 than 7% in 1996. (p. 84)

Parental factors. In addition to gender, race, and socioeconomic factors, research shows that an even higher occurrence of retention is associated with students who are children of single-parent homes, those having been born to a teenage mother, those having parents with low measured IQs and educational backgrounds, and those having parents with a health or behavioral problem (Orfield, 2006). Jimerson et al. (1997) noted 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" (p. 21). This finding corresponds with what Miedel and Reynolds (1999) discovered during their investigation using parents of children who participated in their Chicago Longitudinal Study. These researchers interviewed 704 parents, asking questions about their involvement (frequency) in the preschool and kindergarten period of their child's life. The Chicago Longitudinal Study indicated that highly involved parents had children who had higher reading levels, lower rates of retention at age 14, and fewer years in a remedial or special education program while in school. The frequency of parent involvement was only slightly linked with reading achievement but

was associated with lower rates of grade retention. Miedel and Reynolds's findings

support the benefits of parent involvement in early childhood programs. Parents

becoming involved as soon as a child enters kindergarten and not waiting until there is an

academic or behavioral issue brought by the school was noted as a positive indicator for

early success (Machen, Wilson, & Notar, 2005).

NCES (2009), as mentioned above, also had similar findings. They stated that the

percentage of K-8 students who had been retained correlated to their mothers' education

level. Generally, in each survey year, the percentage of students who had 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% of students whose mothers had less than a high school diploma

or its equivalent had been retained, compared with 3% 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

Attendance patterns and absenteeism in the first month of school can predict poor

attendance throughout the school year. Half the students who miss 2-4 days in

September will miss nearly a month of school. An estimated 5 million to 7.5 million U.S.

students miss nearly a month of school each year (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

Absenteeism and its ill effects start early. One in 10 kindergarten and first-grade

students are chronically absent. Poor attendance can influence whether children read

proficiently by the end of third grade or are held back. By sixth grade, chronic

absence becomes a leading indicator that a student will drop out of high school

(Railsback, 2004).

Students missing 10% of the school, or about 18 days in most school districts, negatively affects a student's academic performance. Eighteen days of missed school equates to just 2 days a month and is known as chronic absenteeism. The academic impact of missing that much school is the same whether the absences are excused or unexcused. Suspensions also add to lost time in the classroom. Low-income students are four times more likely to be chronically absent than others, often for reasons beyond their control, such as unstable housing, unreliable transportation, and a lack of access to health care (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

When students improve their attendance rates, they improve their academic prospects and chances for graduating. Attendance improves when schools engage students and parents in positive ways and when schools provide mentors for chronically absent students. Most school districts and states are not looking at all the right data to improve school attendance (Railsback, 2004). Districts track how many students show up every day and how many are skipping school without an excuse. What schools fail to do is track whether the students are headed towards academic failure and whether they have chronic absenteeism (Railsback, 2004).

Students with disabilities. In addition to demographics, other factors appear to contribute to the retention of students. The evidence regarding the role of aptitude in the achievement of children is rife with differing opinions (Alexander et al., 1994). Many researchers report no substantial difference between retained children and low-functioning but promoted peers. (Roderick & Nagaoka, 2005; Wu, West, & Hughes, 2008). Moreover, developmental delays and learning disabilities are factors that increase

the likelihood of retention (Alexander et al., 1994). Additionally, students with

disabilities tend to be less confident, self-assured, engaging, socially competent, or

popular with peers and are also more likely to be retained (Jimerson et al., 1997).

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), now referred to as Every Student Succeeds

Act (ESSA) legislation and high stakes testing have contributed to the retention of

students as well (Hayes, 2004; Vinovskis, 2009). NCLB stipulated that states use

standardized assessments, also known as high stakes testing, in order to measure adequate

yearly progress (AYP) for schools, districts, and the states. The assessments allowed

state education agencies to develop target goals for students at particular grade levels.

After the targets were established, states were required to increase student achievement in

gradual increments in order for 100% of the students to become proficient on state

assessments by the 2013-2014 school year (NCDPI, 2013).

The former NCLB encouraged school districts to implement new grade retention

policies. The ESSA law focuses on low-performing schools, the children, and

communities which house these students who are overwhelmingly African-American and

Latino children. Never has the focus been specifically on students; prior to the new law,

the emphasis has been on schools and districts as a whole (Duncan, 2015; Obama, 2015).

President Barack Obama (2015) signed a retooled version of the law and explained,

> This bill makes long-overdue fixes to the last education law, replacing the one-
>
> size-fits-all approach to reform with a commitment to provide every student with
>
> a well-rounded education. With this bill, we reaffirm that fundamental American
>
> ideal that every child regardless of race, income, background, the zip code where
>
> they live deserves the chance to make out of their lives what they will. (para. 3)

Social promotion. Social promotion occurs when students who are struggling in school are moved on with their same-age peers. Those who support the social promotion policy argue that grade retention creates more harm than good and that the benefits keeping such students with their age group outweigh the costs. This is seen as the case when students are on the margins of success but are struggling to understand some basic material. Both policies have been widely criticized. A widespread problem is that they often are not sufficiently supported by a system of learning that is designed to prevent such failure and to assist students facing barriers to learning (Thompson & Cunningham, 2000).

Retention rates have gone up steadily over the past 25 years. NCES reported that in 2007, 5.7% (1.3 million) of all elementary school students were retained at their grade level (Planty et al., 2009). In years past, retention has been greatest in kindergarten and first grade. North Carolina's Read to Achieve initiative was designed to ensure that all students read at or above grade level by the end of the third grade. Once a child falls below a certain benchmark, the law requires that student to be held back from advancing to the fourth grade (NCDPI, 2013).

Current testing policies such as the North Carolina Read to Achieve initiative are increasing the numbers retained in third grade. Those retained tend to be minority males of low SES and have little to no low parental involvement during their years in school (Frey, 2005).

According to the North Carolina Partnership for Children, Inc. (NCPC, 2011), during the 2008-2009 school year, North Carolina spent more than $170 million retaining children in kindergarten through third grade. While the number of children retained in

Grades K-3 has been gradually decreasing in the state, it has leveled off at about 4%.

That number is still too high (NCPC, 2011) and costs the state millions of dollars. More

than 23,000 K-3 students were retained in North Carolina schools during the 2008-2009

school year. The cost of retaining those students was $170,164,288. In 1997, the

Chicago public schools took the lead in abolishing social promotion. Students who did

not master curriculum at certain checkpoints or "promotional gates" were required to

attend summer school to master the content or repeat their grade the following year. A

less often mentioned consequence of ending social promotion was the sharp rise in

summer school enrollment for students who failed to meet promotion standards. Summer

school functioned as the educational system's release valve for dealing with large

numbers of students who did not meet the new standards (Denton, 2001).

School districts in New York, Washington, Wisconsin, and Texas require students

to pay for each course they must take during summer school. The majority of students

who are required to attend and pass summer school as a condition for promotion are low-

income, minority students. The families who are least likely to afford summer school

become the financiers of said summer school (Entwisle & Alexander, 1992).

Exploring the problems associated with what to do for students who are not

mastering subjects or grade levels requires a review of both historical and recent research

studies on the broader topic of grade retention and social promotion.

Historically, researchers tend to conclude that neither retention nor social

promotion is beneficial for any parties involved (Krier, 2014). Conversely, there are

those who believe both practices have their place and, when used situationally, are

appropriate (Witmer, Hoffman, & Nottis, 2004).

Years of research show that retention and social promotion, if not supplemented by effective interventions, fail to deliver long-term benefits for those students in question. Neither repeating a grade nor simply being passed on to the next grade adequately scaffolds to improve academic and social skills of students at risk of academic failure. An all-or-nothing approach regarding retention and social promotion has seemed to be the norm. Quite a few researchers agree that educators should seek alternative intervention strategies that will heighten educational outcomes (Alexander et al., 1997; Holmes & Matthews, 1984; Jackson, 1975; Jimerson, 1999; Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007; National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], 2003, 2008).

Retention Across the Nation

Fifteen states and the District of Columbia have strict retention policies on third-grade reading (Lu, 2013). The policies require third graders to pass reading benchmarks before being promoted to fourth grade. Statistics for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, 2013) have shown that one of every three North Carolina fourth graders is reading below the basic level on the national assessment given each year. The research also shows children who leave third grade unable to read are on a path to academic failure and lifelong economic hardship. Traditionally, reading scores are infamously problematic to improve. Math scores on tests such as NAEP have shown substantial improvement since testing began in the early 1990s; however, reading scores have increased only by slim margins (Lu, 2013). Neuman (2008) noted a possible reason for math and reading disparity: Children learn math mostly at school, while they learn most of their language skills at home, much of it before they even enter school.

Retention policies are among the most controversial approaches to student success

in education (Alexander et al., 1994; Jimerson & Kaufman, 2003; Lu, 2013).

Researchers have contested the use of retention in schools for years. Deciding whether or not retention has merit or negativity is still a debatable subject. Retention is often promoted as an opportunity to overcome past struggles (Light, 2006), while others contend that retention is a negative action that has little benefit (Hauser, 1999; Quarterman, 2005).

Systematic evaluations and meta-analyses examining research between the years of 1911-1999 determined that the collective evidence does not support the use of grade retention as an intervention for academic achievement or socio-emotional adjustment problems (Holmes, 1989; Jimerson, 2001).

Intervention versus retention. During the 2012-2013 school year, Alexander and Cumberland counties in North Carolina were noted as having low kindergarten through second grade retention rates. When the district leadership in both counties was asked how their county could keep their retention rates low and their student achievement high, the two counties agreed that early and frequent intervention at the classroom level was the answer (Kindergarten Readiness Issues Group, Partners in Research Forum, 2003; NCDPI, 2013).

Furthermore, successful districts use the K-2 assessment and other instruction-based assessment tools to identify the students who need extra support. This intervention takes place within the first quarter of the school year. Their belief is that effective interventions mean no reason to retain (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Jimerson & Kaufman, 2003). Interventions occur in the context of the regular classroom setting. Successful districts create teams of regular education teachers, special education teachers, and other

specialists to develop interventions that work in the child's regular classroom. Team members use the child's Personalized Education Plans or P.E.P. to guide and coordinate their work (Jimerson & Kaufman, 2003).

A number of researchers suggest that if retention is to be used, it should be during the primary years. Before considering retention, specific interventions should be administered. In addition, better trained and more effective teachers in the classroom should be sought (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Hauser, 1999).

Hiring effective and highly trained classroom teachers is one of the most important decisions a school/district can make to ensure success for their students. According to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1996), next to the influence of a parent and home life, the teacher is the single most influential element in helping children succeed. Furthermore, studies have shown that teacher expertise has a direct correlation to high student achievement (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996).

Darling-Hammond (1998) noted, "Students who have highly effective teachers three years in a row score as much as 50 percentile points higher on achievement tests than those who have ineffective teachers for three years in a row" (p. 237). Darling-Hammond continued by saying that effective teachers "know the content they are teaching, engage students in learning, and challenge them to greater accomplishments" (p. 238).

Second, classroom teachers who exhibit high expectations in the classroom tend to have students who perform well (Hauser, 1999). The U.S. Department of Education's (2001) 1999 yearly report stated that schools must provide suitable opportunities for

students to meet expectations if students are to be held to high educational standards.

Next, ongoing and diagnostic assessments help schools develop intervention strategies that stop the cyclical effect of failure and increase learning. Student support services should be in place with intervention as a great emphasis (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Jimerson & Kaufman, 2003).

In addition to early intervention, schools need to give children different ways to achieve success. Offering an array of intensive intervention throughout the grade levels, schools will ensure that support is available to children who were not identified early, who recently moved into the system, or who need extended opportunities to succeed. "According to research, one of the most effective, standards-aligned intervention methods is to increase the instructional time for struggling students, especially intensive instruction delivered by a trained adult" (American Federation of Teachers, 1997, p. 5). Extending learning time for students can happen in several ways. Schools can use flexible and creative scheduling during school hours or extra time outside of the regular school day (Denton, 2001) such as before- or after-school programs, Saturday school, or summer school.

Additionally, providing after-school, Saturday classes, and summer school help tends to be effective. The keys to a successful intervention strategy are identifying children who need extra help early in the year and providing a number of ways for students to receive support. For example, early reading intervention programs can provide intensive support at the beginning of a child's school career (Hauser, 1999; Jimerson & Kaufman, 2003). Such programs are of particular importance since most children in the early grades are retained based on their reading achievement. There is

growing evidence that such programs can prevent problems from occurring in later grades (Hauser, 1999).

National Graduation Rates

According to the United States Department of Education (2015) and NCES (2007), the United States is graduating students from high school at a higher rate than in past years. The nation's graduation rate was at an all-time high of 82% during the 2013-2014 school year. That was the highest level since NCES adopted a new way of calculating graduation rates 5 years prior. Former Secretary of Education Arnie Duncan's (2015) reaction to the national improvement of graduation rates is quoted as,

America's students have achieved another record milestone by improving graduation rates for a fourth year. The hard work of teachers, administrators, students and their families has made these gains possible and as a result, many more students will have a better chance of going to college, getting a good job, owning their own home, and supporting a family. We can take pride as a nation in knowing that we're seeing promising gains, including for students of color. (p. 1)

Summary

Leading educational researchers have found elementary retention has an overall neutral or positive short-term effect on student achievement (Alexander et al., 1994; Jimerson & Kaufman, 2003).

Grade retention is generally regarded as a means to deal with poor academics; however, retained children have more in common than grade failure due to a specific grade requirement (Bonvin et al., 2008). More often than not, these children share

gender, ethnicity, SES, and parental or familial characteristics (Jimerson et al., 2002;

Lorence & Dworkin, 2006; Meisels & Liaw, 1993).

Chapter 3 focuses on the methodology, researcher's role in the investigation,

participant experiences, setting, data collection procedures, methods for verification, and

credibility of the investigations process.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of retention from those who were retained as a student and who are now adults. This qualitative research study used data gathering and analysis using grounded theory. This study sought to answer three fundamental questions:

1. How do adults aged 18-65 who have experienced grade retention describe the effect that a K-12 retention had and possibly continues to have on their lives?

2. How do adults aged 18-65 feel about having been held back in school?

3. How do adults aged 18-65 perceive grade retention overall?

Research Design

Qualitative research has advanced over recent decades to gain credibility for its ability to gain insight into the human condition and its many truths. Qualitative studies allow a researcher to work on a more personal in-depth manner. This process also allows the researcher to gather details that cannot be obtained through quantitative methods that may lead to fresh and new perspectives of those being studied. The main strength of qualitative research is its ability to study phenomena that are simply unavailable elsewhere (Silverman, 2011). Additionally, qualitative research is used when the experiences of individuals or groups are warranted. This study added to the limited research on this topic by seeking greater knowledge from adults who were retained as children by providing the in-depth personal viewpoint that qualitative research can achieve.

Much has been written about grade retention and the short-term effects while in

school (whether positive or negative). This study goes a step further: into those children's futures. The uniqueness of this study was that the research explored the impact that retention had on adults who were retained as a student/child in grades kindergarten through high school and whether or not that retention played a part in any successes or failures they may have encountered.

As stated earlier, grounded theory was utilized in this qualitative research. Grounded theory evolves as the meaning is established through the unique situations that unfold. Glaser and Strauss (2006) said that a researcher's job in grounded theory is not to give perfect descriptions, "but to develop a theory that accounts for much of the relevant behavior" (p. 30). Merriam (2002) supported the use of grounded theory methods in research when the emphasis is on discovery. By using grounded theory methods in this study, the researcher sought to discover any impact retention could have on students into adult life. The researcher also sought to discover if the grade retention label limited what they wanted to accomplish in their lives.

Grounded theory is an investigation method that allows one to examine a concept or phenomenon (retention) without an obvious theory at the onset. The theory is developed as the participants relate and respond to the concept (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Grounded theory methodology is used for developing theory that is grounded in collected and analyzed data that requires several stages and refinement of the information collected (Charmaz, 2006).

This researcher used focus groups, surveys, and interviews to gather data for this study. Atkinson (1998) believed that the vast majority of people really want to share their life accounts with others. Atkinson wrote that all that is needed is someone to listen and

show a sincere interest in their stories, and they welcome being interviewed. The topic of grade retention could cause those who may be reluctant to be interviewed feel somewhat intimidated, embarrassed, ashamed, or simply unsure about sharing that time in their life. This researcher hoped the potential subjects would see the benefits that could come from sharing their life stories if they felt any trepidation (Atkinson, 1998):

1. In sharing our stories, we gain a clearer perspective on personal experiences and feelings, which in turn brings greater meaning to our lives.

2. Through sharing our stories, we obtain greater self-knowledge, stronger self-image, and enhanced self-esteem.

3. In sharing our stories, we share cherished experiences and insights with others.

4. Sharing our stories can bring us joy, satisfaction, and inner peace.

5. Sharing our stories is a way of purging, or releasing, certain burdens and validating personal experience; this is, in fact, central to the recovery process.

6. Sharing our stories helps create community and may show us that we have more in common with others than we thought.

7. By sharing our stories, we can help other people see their lives more clearly or differently, and perhaps inspire them to change negative things in their lives.

8. When we share our stories, others will get to know and understand us better, in ways that they hadn't before.

9. In sharing our stories, we might gain a better sense of how we want our stories to end, or how we can give ourselves the "good" endings we want. By understanding our past and present, we derive a dearer perspective on our

goals for the future. (p. 127)

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher was concerned with meeting the qualitative research methods' underlying goal. The researcher was focused on maintaining an unbiased posture while participants shared their opinions, feelings, and experiences over a period of time. No attempts were made to manipulate any situation; as with social phenomena, the researcher allowed the events to occur naturally, allowing the time it required. The qualitative researcher allows a holistic perspective, rather than looking at a set of variables. The data were used to help develop concepts and theories that helped future educators and researchers understand the social world.

Jimerson et al. (2002) suggested that school personnel on all levels (teachers and administrators) have limited knowledge of student progress beyond their school and therefore do not know the long-term effects of retention on their former students. There have been no long-term studies supporting retention as an intervention, yet retaining students is considered an option when deciding grade placement.

Alexander et al. (1994) found that higher retention rates have been shown among ethnic minorities, especially among African-American and Hispanic students. In this qualitative study, purposive, also known as judgment or purposeful, sampling was used to select participants.

The researcher is a public school educator in an urban elementary school setting. The role of the researcher was to contact possible participants in person, by phone (call or text), or via email to request participation in the study. Participants were obtained through a network of people in the researcher's neighborhood, volunteer setting, and

work contacts, not to exclude church and civic affiliations in the southeastern and northeastern areas of North Carolina and South Carolina respectively.

The participants for this study had similar characteristics such as ethnicity, gender, and their SES when they were children. In some cases, the socioeconomic standing may or may not have changed. Participants must have been 18 years of age or older and no longer in high school. Ethnicity was not a factor; it was not used to exclude any race. However, as stated in the research of Meisels and Liaw (1993), the retention rate for students in their study was 19.3%, whereas the retention rate for African-Americans was 29.9% and 25.2% for Hispanics, compared to 17.2% of their Caucasian peers.

Furthermore, 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 et al., 2002; NASP, 2008). Given this information, the adult subjects for the study were based on gender, race, age, the experience of being retained in elementary or high school, and the willingness to be interviewed and discuss their experience.

Participants and Sample

The researcher recruited and secured participants for the study using the homogeneous sampling (purposive) to maintain the similarities in participant backgrounds. This method ensured that those members of the community who were used for this study were found quickly and provided the researcher with the best information without having to randomly search for adults who fit the needed category. Additionally, to maintain similar characteristics of participants, the stratified random sampling technique was used. This approach was helpful while making sure the subgroups

(ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic) were represented during the larger study.

When working with purposive sampling and qualitative research, the amount of effort spent on collecting exhaustive data from the participants often requires that the sample population be small. Upon identifying and garnering support from the pool of potential subjects through surveys, the researcher made contact with colleagues and friends who agreed to assist in locating participants for this project. The researcher also used community contacts to find participants as well as face-to-face exchanges during visits to community colleges, universities, malls, and churches. Finally, the researcher interviewed the volunteers who fit the specifications and determined "which cases will best illustrate and add knowledge on the issue of concern" (Worthen, Sanders, & Fitzpatrick, 2011, p. 411).

In addition to the above methods to secure the participants, the researcher designed fliers and business cards with information inviting voluntary participants. The information on the fliers stipulated that participants must be between 18 and 65, out of high school at least 12 months, retained at least once while in kindergarten through Grade 12, live in North Carolina or northeastern South Carolina, and willing to share their life story by interview, focus group, or survey, expecting no compensation. This information was made available when the researcher received permission to proceed with the research.

The fliers and business cards had tiny URL (Universal Resource Locator) and a QR (Quick Response) codes for participants to locate the Google survey (Appendix A) for interested participants. A tiny URL is a shortened version of the website or web address that is hosting the registration page. A QR code is a set of black and white boxes

that provide the same access as a tiny URL. The web addresses for such pages were too long to type them in, and the possibility of making errors could become a nuisance to those looking to participate. The researcher considered the frustration level of potential participants and decided to use the technology tools to gather information.

The researcher received help passing out fliers and cards from acquaintances. After the first 10 days, the researcher concluded that the number of interested participants fell short of the minimum goal of 12-15. Since the goal was not met, the Google survey was reactivated and continued to accept participants.

The URL and QR codes proved to be a "nuisance" for one of the participants, Andrew. The self-described "not tech savvy" Andrew relied on help from those who understood how to "handle that stuff"; thus, the researcher did not rely on the technology aids to secure participants. Other feedback from those who did not use the codes remarked that they did not have a URL or code reader, so getting the information would involve downloading the readers before starting the survey. The researcher stopped using the fliers and used email and texting to invite participants.

Setting

This study was set in North Carolina and the northeastern region of South Carolina. The researcher noted that the subjects for this study may currently live in an area not in North Carolina, but the subjects' K-12 educational backgrounds took place in the southeast region. Additionally, this study was limited to adults aged 18-65 years who were retained or held back as a student in either a kindergarten through eighth grade or high school setting. Participants for this study were away from a classroom setting (K-12) at least 12 months from the first day of the interview, were willing to be interviewed

by the researcher in person, participated in a focus group, and took part in a survey.

Ethical Considerations

Participants in the study were assured of confidentiality by remaining anonymous in the final data analysis and written assessment. Nondescript pseudonyms were used for all sample and larger study participants. To maintain further anonymity, participants were referred to by sex, race, age, and grade retained when speaking of the data. Participants were asked to sign a statement of consent (Appendix B), noting that they could withdraw from the study at any time. There was no compensation for participating in the study. Those who participated were assured that the collective involvement would be used to add to the existing body of knowledge relating to grade retention of school-age students.

Ethically speaking, the researcher/interviewer with human tendencies and predispositions must remember the line of demarcation between what the researcher hears and understands to be true based on personal understanding. With that being said, the direction of the interviews moved as the participant moved it or when established probing questions were used to facilitate more knowledge. Interviews can change directions on the spur of the moment by unexpected responses to questions or by the way a life is given its particular narrative structure (Atkinson, 1998).

Data Collection Procedures

The life story interview is a highly personalized approach to the gathering of qualitative information about the human experience. The initial interview questions (Appendix C) were based on the two primary or central research questions: What impact does being retained as students [between kindergarten and 12th grade] have on people into adulthood? What can adults, retained as students, tell us that can improve understanding

about any long-term impact on retention? The open-endedness of the initial questions allowed the participants a format to discuss in a conversational type tone their recollections of being retained and the impact that it had on them as children. This type of interview procedure required times of spontaneous, individual conclusions on the part of the interviewer while the interview was in progress. For example, during the narrative responses, the researcher/interviewer would change the questioning to clarify an answer given by the participant(s). An example of the type of probing questions are found in Appendix D (Krueger, 1998; Morgan, 1997).

Surveys. After the surveys were completed, the researcher converted the data into an Excel spreadsheet with all categories. The researcher highlighted areas such as ages of participants. From that, the researcher placed ages in spans such as 18-24, 25-36, 37-50, and 51+. The researcher did this to insure generational spans were represented. The researcher highlighted grades retained and assigned pseudonyms to the participants and began coding responses and comparing the responses to others to find similarities.

Interviews and focus groups. The last question on the survey asked if the participant wanted to take part in the interview or focus group session. Participants submitted their contact information, and the researcher contacted the participant to set up interviews and focus groups. Using Atkinson (1998) as the centerpiece of discussion and discovery during the interviews and focus groups (Appendix E) opened an understanding of the individual's life and the phenomenon of grade retention.

In this study, data were collected through personal interviews and analysis by the researcher. Each subject participated in a face-to-face interview. The interview questions were developed based on the research questions of the study using life story format

interviews. The private interview was conducted in a conversational style tone. With permission granted from each participant, interviews were recorded with a handheld digital recorder and the voice recorder application on the personal phone of the researcher as backup. The interviews were transcribed within 12 hours of the initial interview using a Voice to Text application via computer by downloading the recording to text prior to transcription. Once the interviews were transcribed, the researcher emailed participants to review, add, and amend any information. This process allowed the participants an opportunity to clarify any inaccuracies (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006).

The primary goal in transcription of the interviews was to ensure the accuracy of meaning, to capture the meaning conveyed in the words used by the storyteller. Additionally, transcriptions that were member checked allowed the participants to review and critique for accuracy and meaning. Member checking (Creswell, 2013) is the process to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings through taking the final report back to participants to determine whether the participants feel that the transcripts presented are accurate. This procedure involved a follow-up interview with two contributors in the study. At this time, the participants clarified responses and were allowed an opportunity to comment on the findings.

The researcher found field notes to be helpful during clarification and member checking. The field notes were recorded after each interview to record observations and running thoughts (Ary et al., 2006). Notes taken during this time contained the pseudonyms or nondescript identifiers for each participant and did not contain any specific identifying information that could be linked back to the subjects.

The interview questionnaire was based on the two primary or central research

questions: What impact does being retained as students [between kindergarten and 12th grade] have on people into adulthood? What can adults, retained as students, tell us that can improve understanding about any long-term impact on retention?

Table 2

Timeline for Data Collection

Type of Data	Timeline
Surveys	April 2017-December 2017
Interviews and focus groups	April 2017-March 3
Audio recordings	April 2017-March 2018
Document analysis	April 2017-March 2018

Piloting Questions

The researcher proceeded by piloting the questions with a group of individuals who could alert the researcher of possible logistical issues before they arose (Polit, Beck, & Hungler, 2001). A pilot study is a part of the research strategy that follows a protocol to address problems before the main study, checks to make sure the instructions are understandable, evaluates the wording of the questions, and checks the reliability and validity of the results. The term pilot studies refer to micro-versions of the full-scale study, which is also referred to feasibility studies (Polit et al., 2001). This process pretested the research instruments in question: interview questionnaires, survey, and focus questions.

The survey and interview questions in this study were piloted by five independent subjects who were demographically relatable to the subjects needed for this study. The researcher made this pilot study accessible through an electronic survey, paper/pencil survey, small group discussion, and face-to-face interview. With the help of the piloting subjects, the researcher was able to clarify questions better with simple rewrites and

gather ideas as they related to question pacing when facilitating the actual study. For

example, all of the piloting participants agreed that there were too many questions that

repeated the same questions in a different way. The researcher eliminated three questions

the participants agreed were already asked in one form or another in the process of

questioning. Three of the participants commented that the survey and interview questions

could be the same questions if the survey participants and interviewees were not the same

people answering the questions. Participant 3 commented that the questions could

benefit both and cover more people and time. The researcher agreed and made a note of

the change.

Focus group questions. The interview questions were asked to gain more

understanding into each individual's current life: gender, ethnicity, age, current

occupation, any schooling after high school, marriage, and family status.

1. In what grade were you retained?

2. What do you recall about being retained?

3. Were you given reasons why you were being retained?

4. At the time, how did you feel about being retained?

5. What kind of instructional support did you receive during that time?

6. Do you feel that you received the teaching and support that you needed?
   Elaborate.

7. How do you feel now as an adult, about being retained?

8. Has being retained changed your life in any way?

9. Is there anything to be learned about the long-term impact of retention?

10. What do you think people such as educators, parents, and students should

know about being retained? Be as detailed and overt as you wish.

11. Does being retained as a child in the grades kindergarten through high school

determine achievement in adulthood?

If the participants needed prompting, the following questions were used as

probing questions (Krueger, 1998; Morgan, 1997)

1. Would you explain further?

2. Can you provide an example?

3. Please describe what you mean?

4. Can you clarify? I want to make sure that I understand.

5. One thing that I have heard several people mention is ____. I am curious as to

what the rest of the group thinks about that.

6. Are there any other thoughts that have occurred to you?

Interview questions.

1. Start by telling me about yourself today (age, job, family, hobbies, etc.).

2. Tell me what you remember about school. What did you do really well in

school? What did you have trouble with? How did you feel about yourself as

a student? How did you think others saw you in school? Friends? Teachers?

Parents/siblings?

3. Can you remember what it was like for you when you found out you were

going to be retained?

4. Why were you retained? Whose decision was it? Were you involved? Who

told you? When, how, and what were you told?

5. What grade were you in? What worries or concerns did you have? What did

you think about the teacher who retained you?

6. Tell me how your parents felt about you being retained? Did they discuss it with you? How did their opinions make you feel?

7. Did anyone ever ask you how you felt about being retained or what you thought about being retained?

8. When you found out that you were going to be retained, tell me how you think other people felt about you (parents, teachers, friends, siblings).

9. How did you feel about being retained?

10. Did anyone ever share how they felt? If so, who, and what did they say?

11. Did you feel differently about the way they saw you? Explain.

12. Did you think you feel differently about yourself than you did before you were retained? Explain. Examples. Actions.

13. Did you ever have anyone you could talk to and trusted enough to share about how you felt? What made you feel you could trust them?

14. Now that time has passed, tell me if you think being retained has been helpful in the way you feel about yourself.

15. Can you think of things that were positive, helpful, or encouraging during the retained year or afterwards?

16. What is your opinion about retention today?

Data Analysis Procedures

The researcher was the main instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2002). As interviews were completed, the researcher coded or linked responses. Coding means to assign a word or a phrase that summarizes a section of language-based or visual

data. It can capture whatever is noticeable, the essence of what is in the section, or it can be a suggestive trait (Saldana, 2009). The analysis of qualitative research involved aiming to uncover and understand the big picture by using the data to describe the phenomenon and what this means. Such qualitative analysis involves labeling and coding all of the data in order that comparisons can be recognized, recorded, and analyzed. Responses from even an unstructured qualitative interview can be entered into a computer in order for them to be coded, counted, and analyzed. The qualitative researcher, however, had no system for precoding; therefore, a method of identifying and labeling or coding data needs to be developed that is tailored to each situation, which is called content analysis (Saldana, 2009).

Content analysis can be used when qualitative data have been collected through interviews, focus groups, observation, and documentary analysis. Content analysis is a procedure for the categorization of verbal or behavioral data for purposes of classification, summarization, and tabulation (University of Surrey, 2016). The content can be analyzed on two levels. The first level is the basic level, also known as the manifest level. This level provides a descriptive account of the data (i.e., this is what was said, but no comments or theories as to why or how). The second level is the higher level or latent level of analysis. This level provides more of an interpretive analysis that is concerned with the response as well.

Content analysis also involves coding and classifying data, also referred to as categorizing and indexing. The aim of context analysis is to make sense of the data collected and to highlight the important messages, features, or findings (University of Surrey, 2016).

Methods for Verification

  To ensure credibility, 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 (Ary et al., 2006). The use of several sources of data, multiple observers, and/or multiple methods is referred to as triangulation (Ary et al., 2006). In data triangulation, the researcher reviews whether the data collected with one procedure or instrument confirms data collected using a different procedure or instrument. Data collection was taken with interviews, focus groups, and surveys (Saldana, 2009). During the interviews and focus groups, a digital recorder was used because of the quality of the recording and the ability to download interviews and the conversations as digital files on computers. Transcribing and analyzing data have the advantage of making adjustments to interview questions for future research. Knowing what went well and what did not work allows the researcher to improve interviewing techniques in the future (Saldana, 2009).

  Additionally, member checking (Creswell, 2013) was used as a process to regulate the correctness of the qualitative conclusions by allowing the subjects to conclude whether the transcript presented is the intent and accurately portrayed. This practice allows the contributors in the study a chance to comment on the findings. Taking it a step further beginning with coding, discovering early connections in the data adds further information that supports and helps in the continuing data collection process.

Summary

  This study sought to answer two fundamental questions surrounding grade retention. First, does being retained as a child in grades kindergarten through high school

determine achievement in adulthood? And, second, is there anything to be learned about

the long-term impact of retention? Chapter 4 deals with the conclusions and discussions

that were discovered during participant interviews, surveys, and focus group meetings.

Chapter 5 concludes with how this adds to the body of knowledge and if there are other

areas yet to be discovered.

Chapter 4: Analysis of Data

Introduction

 The first three chapters of this dissertation provided an introduction to the purpose of the research, a review of the literature, and the methodology used. Chapter 4 provides an in-depth inquiry of the findings obtained from the 14 participants of this study and the impact retention has had on their lives. Each participant completed a survey, and six of the participants agreed to one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions with the researcher. Each participant was given a pseudonym in order to protect their identity.

 Additionally, this chapter includes an overview of participants, a brief biography of each participant, a detailed account of each participant's retention story (Atkinson, 1998), and a summary of the findings.

 The guiding questions were based on Atkinson (1998). The participant's life story served as an excellent means for understanding how other people see their own experiences, their own lives, and their interactions with others. The life history approach aims to penetrate in a more profound way than any other approach by allowing the subjects to tell their stories and present their views (Atkinson, 1998).

 The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explore the recollections of adults aged 18-65, who were retained in elementary, middle, or high school. The findings of this study identified the positive and negative long-term effects that a retention experience has on a school-age child. What impact does being retained as students [between kindergarten and 12th grade] have on people into adulthood? What can adults, retained as students, tell us that can improve understanding about any long-term impact on retention? Similar themes emerged as the researcher analyzed the data

gathered from the surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Keeping the previously

mentioned questions in mind, the research questions for this study were

1. How do adults aged 18-65 who have experienced grade retention describe the

    effect that a K-12 retention had and possibly continues to have on their lives?

2. How do adults aged 18-65 feel about having been held back in school?

3. How do adults aged 18-65 perceive grade retention overall?

Overview of Participants

The participants were obtained from a population of adults in the state of North

Carolina and the northeastern region of South Carolina. Participants experienced grade

retention during their K-12 school experience. Additionally, of the adults who were

retained, eight were retained in their elementary years (K-4), three were retained during

the middle school years (5-8), two experienced retentions during the high school years (9-

12), and one was retained during both the second and sixth grades.

The process of recruitment for the study was based on the stratified random

sampling technique and snowball effect from friends and acquaintances of the population

sought after. Additionally, the researcher used purposeful sampling to focus on specific

subgroups (ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic) that would add to the study (see Table 3

for participants).

Table 3

Survey and Interview Participants

Participant	Age	Sex	Ethnicity	Grade Retained	Number of times	Feelings About Being Held Back
Andrew	65	M	African-American	2 & 6	2	Angry about it the second time
Deborah	49	F	African-American	2	1	Best thing to happen
Eve	45	F	African-American	1	1	Helped
James	54	M	African-American	12	1	Helped in some ways
Luke	56	M	African-American	7	1	Hindered; self-worth affected
Mark	26	M	African-American	12	1	Thought I was dumb
Mary	39	F	African-American	2	1	Good for me
Naomi	27	F	American Indian	3	1	Don't think about it, okay now
Paul	34	M	Caucasian	2	1	No issues
Peter	29	M	African-American	6	1	I still feel cheated, thought I was dumb
Rachel	45	F	African-American	1	1	It made me want to be successful
Ruth	48	F	African-American	7	1	No issues
Abigail	35	F	Caucasian	3	1	Almost forgot about it, fine
John	24	M	African-American	3	1	I considered myself dumb

The 14 individuals who participated in this survey study ranged in age from 18 to 65; and of that, a group of six agreed to be part of the focus group and personal interview portion if they were needed. Participants had an opportunity to complete the survey as a paper/pencil in person or online via email and Google survey format. Using this online format, the researcher was able to maximize the number of participants based on their comfort level of sharing their personal information. Each adult participant had been away from a classroom setting (K-12) for at least 12 months from the first day of the interview or focus group and before beginning the survey.

As the oldest, at 65, Andrew, a laborer/builder, had a few more challenges that were not expressed by the others. Andrew was orphaned and retained twice before age 12. He expressed that he "never felt loved" after his mother died and still misses his mother to this day. This African-American grandfather recalled believing that his teachers did not like him.

Deborah, an African-American licensed practical nurse, grew up in a household of "chaos" and violence. At 49, she still gets emotional when reliving her childhood experiences. Her childhood was spent moving "from place to place"; and she never felt that she had time to "make anything stick," academically speaking. Deborah understands why retention was the option chosen for her and says that she is not resentful but acknowledges that the experience was a hindrance regarding what she felt she could accomplish in her younger years. Deborah added that without her failures, she would not be able to appreciate her successes.

Forty-five-year-old teacher assistant and bus driver Eve was held back in the first grade. Eve was quick to say that kindergarteners and first graders are still learning and

only need to be held back in extreme cases. Growing up in her African-American household, there was an expectation of at least a high school graduation.

James, an African-American 54-year-old, was retained as a senior due to a technicality. Currently, he is a postal service worker and served in the armed services. James's experience with retention happened in the 12th grade when he was told "at the last minute" that he did not have enough credits to march with his graduating class. He was recommended to be held back, barred from the graduation ceremony with his class, and was told that he must attend summer school to make up his credits. "I felt bad. I had to change the date that I was going into the military because my graduation was pushed back. I graduated June 12th and went into the military later that summer."

Luke is a 56-year-old certified nursing assistant, professional bus driver, and chaplain in the county prison systems. His seventh-grade retention was the deciding factor for him dropping out of school. He began "running with the wrong crowd and things went downhill from there."

Mark's guidance counselor and school administrators blocked his path to graduate on two separate occasions; thus, recommending him for retention. That's when this 26-year-old African-American made the decision to drop out during his senior year. Mark was bitter for years but is now grateful that he can help others with his story. Mark was not clear as to why he was not a candidate in good standing for graduation. He did mention a number of times that he was in the foster care system for a few years and would run away when he felt challenged or situations were getting too "complicated." He commented that never thought he would have the ability to encourage others as a published author.

Mary is a 39-year-old African-American social worker today but remembers her second-grade experience of retention as "the best thing" that could have ever happened to her. She recalled that she was not a very strong reader and had vision problems which led to her having to wear glasses. That retention pushed her to excel from that point forward.

Twenty-seven-year-old educator Naomi was the only Native American who participated in this study. Her third-grade retention has given her a clearer perspective as it relates to retention. "I want to make sure that I use all resources available before retaining a child. I don't think I was given that chance as a kid."

Paul is one of two Caucasians who were part of this study. At 34, he is a self-employed laborer. Paul experienced retention in the second grade due to an extended sickness. He knew that he was behind his class but never thought he would "flunk" his grade; up until that point (sickness), he was a good student. "I was behind because I was sick, not because I couldn't do the work. Awful, just awful." He admits that he was embarrassed and thinks retention should be a last resort when all other remedial efforts fail.

Peter is a 29-year-old African-American self-employed car maintenance attendant and an instructional assistant working in the public schools with the exceptional children's program. He was held back in the sixth grade, eventually dropped out, and paid for his diploma through an online high school.

Rachel, 45, a self-employed African-American stylist, recalled having to move to another state in the fifth grade. She said that the work was harder, and she struggled that first year and remembers the feeling of humiliation when told she would repeat the fifth grade.

Ruth is 49 and African-American. She is a registered barber who was retained in the seventh grade. Ruth does not think that retention is productive because "the why of it cannot be explained to a child. For me, a part of me died and a light went out. Who wants to be overlooked and made to feel worthless and unworthy?"

Abigail, Caucasian, is a 35-year-old full-time teaching assistant and part-time sales associate. She was retained in the third grade and remembers feeling embarrassed to be left behind when her friends were promoted to the next grade. She commented that she sees the same sadness in her students' eyes that she had when she knew she might not pass her grade. Abigail admits that she feels a great deal of sympathy for them and tries to work as hard as she can for them in the classroom.

At age 24, John is the youngest participant. He is currently a student and is working towards a degree in education. He was retained as an eighth grader and said that he could not wait to be of age so he could quit school. He turned his life around when he realized that the opportunities for "young African-American males without an education were hard to come by."

Survey Results

The results of the surveys showed that most of the homes were led by single mothers; and if the fathers were around, the father was not involved in the day-to-day activities which included school functions (a few remarked that their grandparents were their primary caretakers). This qualitative inquiry provided opportunities for participants to examine their experiences as those experiences related to their kindergarten through 12th-grade retention. The participants shared their stories freely which produced a myriad of information that resulted in detail relating to their experiences as an adult who

experienced retention at some point in school. The researcher noted that the interviewees and focus group participants had a conversational tone throughout the sessions. The researcher attributes that to the nature of the questions and the rapport that was built as they shared sensitive and personal recollections.

The participants initially responded to a survey with guided questions. Participants were given the opportunity and space on the survey to elaborate as needed. The questions lent themselves to a more narrative-type response. The contributors were also asked to submit contact information to be a part of the interviews and or the focus group for a more in-depth response. Those who wanted to participate consented to give a more in-depth interview of their experiences. With the help of the participants, the researcher was able to answer research questions.

Participants responded to the questions when asked. The responses were retorts that were, as Deborah, one of the participants, put it, "nostalgic in nature." The responses were recorded via audio player as the participants shared their stories, and a transcription of the conversation was made available within 2 days. The comments ranged from responses such as feeling humiliated, embarrassed, and confused to not really knowing what was happening at the time.

If clarification was needed, a follow-up question was asked (*Could you explain what you meant by…*). The researcher asked the question and made notations during the clarified response; examples of the questions are in Appendix C.

Question 1: How do adults aged 18-65 who have experienced grade retention describe the effect that a K-12 retention had and possibly continues to have on their lives? This question was embedded in a series of questions that first appeared in the

survey questions that all participants answered. Interview and focus group participants were encouraged to revisit any question where clarification was warranted during the interview process. When asked to describe the effect their kindergarten through 12th-grade retention had and may continue to have on their lives, the responses were positive. The researcher noted that the participants spoke as though the questions caused a time to reminisce, also noting that many started the response by saying "back then I." The participant responses indicated that the remembered experiences had an impact at the time, with only three responding that at times still today feelings of shame come to mind.

Ten of the 14 adults in this survey were in sixth grade or below when their retention took place; and of those respondents, four agreed that they did not understand what was really going on because they were in the lower primary grades.

Eve, a participant in the study, recalled her experience:

I don't think that I allowed myself to dream big dreams after I was held back in 7th grade. I was so heartbroken at the time; my friends went on to the next grade without me. It took me a while before I let it the hurt go and started liking school again. Today, I am fine, and I guess if I didn't forgive the situation I could have been pretty messed up in adulthood.

Additional comments were, "I felt that it was a help in some ways. I worked really hard to make sure it did not happen again"; "My retention allowed me to be successful in my career"; and "Looking back in the long term I see the benefits now. Back then I was a kid who saw my friends leaving me behind."

Deborah, 49

I was retained in the second grade. I was fortunate enough to have the same

teacher again. Looking back now I believe that my teacher felt sorry for me and wanted to help me. My mother was distant and was not big on communication. I was sent to live with my grandparents and finally my aunt due to the chaos in my household. My teacher would say to me, 'okay little Deborah, you've got so much potential and let's be excited about learning.' I'll never forget that and even as a nurse and personal trainer, I must play a role a lot of times as somebody that's educating someone about their health, their well-being – she's [teacher] a marker for me to help someone. As for me, I think it was the best thing that happen to me because it made me fall in love with learning. Today I get excited when I find out someone is a teacher because of someone having that kind of gifting to reach into another person's mind and help them turn something on that they couldn't flip themselves, they couldn't get the switch going. So, my schooling, my education, with all the teachers from elementary even into high school, was always inviting for me to learn and I just made it more fun and interesting. It was not anything that I was made to be embarrassed about. I enjoyed school and I enjoyed it because I had great teachers. I didn't know enough at the time that I should be embarrassed. I was shielded from that stigma – what great teachers and caretakers (grandparents and aunt).

Mary, 39

Today I am fine. I have two college degrees because she [mom] did that [agreed to retain me]. I have a BSW in social work and a BS in biology, and when I read now, I appreciated it! As a social worker, I can identify students when they struggle, whether it's a learning disability or vision that went unnoticed; as in my

case. I am currently working with a child who is being served in the EC

[Exceptional Children's] program who has vision problems – not academic.

Amazing! I was retained in the 2nd grade. I vividly remember I was not reading

well, I did wonderfully in math. I also could not see, so things were blurry, and I

wouldn't admit that I couldn't see. I don't know if maybe it was because of the

lack of my age [being young] that I didn't know how to communicate "hey, I

can't see," or to explain what's going on – on those walls. So, my mother sat me

down one day and informed me that she and the teacher had talked, and they

made the decision to retain me, I did not know what that was. I can remember

that summer, I was very embarrassed. Everybody's going on ahead of me, and I

was kind of angry at my mom a little bit about that. But now I am so thankful that

my mother did that; she did the best thing for me. That next year, I began to excel

in school, not saying I was a straight A student, but compared to where I was, I

mean in my high school years I was in English honors,

Question 2: How do adults aged 18-65 feel about having been held back in

school? The participants had a lot to say concerning this question but did not differ too

much in the responses. The group of 14 were not overly against the practice while

sharing feelings. "I don't like that flunking is a part of my history," Abigail began,

> but it is, but it has not defined me. I know some people who are still upset about
>
> it – that's their right to define it however they wish. But for me, I prefer to think
>
> of it as the past.

Abigail and eight others responded similarly (Table 3), whereas five others still harbor

feelings of embarrassment, low self-esteem, and humiliation relating to a kindergarten

through 12th-grade retention.

Paul, 34

I imagine that it could have had a bigger impact on my life if I let it [embarrassment and humiliation] continue. I was embarrassed for most of my retained year. I didn't talk much, I guess I missed my friends [during the school day, especially at lunch and recess]. I did get to see them [friends] later in the neighborhood, but even so, I avoided talking about school as much as I could. I got over the embarrassment by the ending of that school year. Knowing that I was not the only one helped, I guess. Each thing [you know, attempting to try something new or unknown] I tried, there was something in the back of my mind that told me that I might fail; so, to say was I hesitant to try things? Yes. Was I thinking about that kid in grade school and how he felt back then? Yes, even now. Telling my story will help others, so I do not mind putting myself out there. Today I am fine, working every day and providing for my family. I could not imagine this back then.

Question 3: How do adults aged 18-65 perceive grade retention overall? The final question asked participants to consider retention overall. This open-ended question was asked to solicit current feelings surrounding retention and possibly insight into the use of the current practice. Mark commented, "I feel it is better to hold a student back than to intentionally pass him or her knowing that they haven't acquired the necessary skills." Paul shared, "It [retention] should be used only after everything else fails." Paul was not the only participant who shared this view. Others viewed the schools and teachers as the responsible parties to make sure teaching, remediation, and tutoring were

taking place to help students prior to being held back – if all else fails. Eve continued the conversation by saying, "I feel it's necessary in some cases. Some individuals need more time. Like if you are struggling in reading in 1st grade, 2nd grade will be a challenge in both reading & math (word problems)." Ruth shared the complete opposite with this response: "I don't think it productive because children feel that [humiliation]. It is no way to explain to a child why, there are no good reasons."

Andrew, 65

Do they still have it? Are they still using that in schools today [shaking his head]? Well, I don't think that it is effective. There are better ways, surely, there are better ways. I flunked two times, and it would have been three if I'd stayed in. I dropped out when I thought I could take care of myself – you know – like to get a job to take care of myself at around 14 years old. My mother died when I was very young, and my father died a short time after that. I lived with my older sister and her husband for a while until one day I came home from school and they were in the process of moving and did not tell me! My sister and brother-in-law made an arrangement for me to live with another relative, which I did not want to do. I was so angry. I was not successful in school – with grades or anything. I was not good at school and I did not think my teachers liked me. I was put in the back of the class, so my teacher could teach the kids who understood. Do they still do that? I hope not. Over the years, my teachers didn't help or answer questions I had; I was just left in the back of the room. I was so lost, I really did not know what to ask, to be honest. I was miserable and angry. I began to live my life that way [mad, angry and mean]. People began to call me mean, it stuck, and I was

fine with that. I did not have to worry about anyone hurting me again. I still

disagree with holding kids back. Before you do that, find out if there is a reason

or situation that is causing a child to fall behind.

Ruth, 48

I don't think retention is a productive practice; especially if they are doing it the

same way they did when I was a child. If a child must go back into the same

classroom setting – same work, same books, the same group of teachers – what

are we giving them that is different? In my case, I was never given a good why

[Why I flunked this grade, why am I doing this work – again]. *What can*

educators do then? Give the students prepared teachers, tutoring, and parental

involvement – on yes, we have a part to play as well. We have a job in all of this,

too.

Codes, Occurrences, Topics, and Themes

The research findings for the study are based on each of the three research

questions and follow-up questions that were used during the focus group. Specific

similar words surfaced in several of the participants responses. Those words were

identified as codes. Those codes were marked with a specific color to identify the

number of times that word or a synonymic version of that word or phrase was used and

heard by the researcher. The researcher created a tally mark system to keep up with the

occurrences each time those words or phrases were used.

For example, when the participant stated, "I remember feeling humiliated when I

failed my grade because my friends were leaving me behind," the researcher coded the

response "memory of retention," "feelings of being left behind," "peer group," and

"synonym for retained." This process of coding was repeated a second time. During this cycle of data analysis, the researcher noticed that due to the personal line of questioning, many of the responses were indicative of thoughts, memories, feelings, and what was noticed.

Topics began to emerge from the coded responses which were as follows: "Thoughts on why they felt they were retained," "Memories of how participants felt during and after retention," "Feelings about retention today," and "They noticed this during childhood." The following step led the researcher to clustered themes as noted on Table 4. The memories of retention were quoted as embarrassed (4), felt bad/sad, (2), humiliated (1), devastated (1), overlooked (2), worthless/unworthy (1), confused (1); and two respondents said they had no resentment towards the fact that they were retained. Four respondents suggested that retention was not productive (2), and the final two had no comment on the topic of their feelings of grade retention today.

Table 4

Findings and Summary Table

Codes	Occurrence	Topics	Themes
I moved a lot as a child	1	Thoughts on why they felt they were retained	Academic (2) Parental (3) Medical (1)
I missed a lot of days of school	3		
Medical issues	2		
My mom/parents felt I was not ready for the next grade	3		
I made bad grades	3		
I was young for my age	1		
The teacher did not like me	1		
Embarrassed	2	Memories of how participants felt during and after retention	Negative (6) No issues (3)
Felt bad/Sad	2		
Humiliated	1		
Devastated	2		
Overlooked	2		
Worthless/Unworthy	1		
I was confused why I was held back; I still don't know why	2		
I have no resentment towards my retention; best thing for me	2		
Retention should be used only if all else has failed	5	Feelings about retention today	Negative (1) Positive (1) No Comment (1)
Retaining children is not productive	4		
I am successful today because of it	3		
I have no comment on the subject of how it's used today	2		
My parents worked a lot	2	Noticed this during childhood	Overcoming odds/homelife influences (4)
No one helped with my work	3		
Absent father	4		
Illiterate grandparents unable to read and write	1		

The researcher made notes of the visible candor the participates displayed as they shared their stories. The participants shared memories of their childhood during the focus group that allowed other participants to exhibit a level of obvious comfort such as laughter, high-fives, and affirmation throughout discussions. This observable level of comfort allowed others to share freely and support each other as they spoke. The researcher established rapport with the participants that led to more forthcoming answers. The researcher contacted the participants for clarification at times throughout this study. One of the participants, Deborah, mentioned that she moved a lot as a child. The researcher needed to contact her (researcher called the participant) for clarification as to the year the moving a lot took place: "Was your moving during the same year that you were retained?" "Yes, it was. I moved from my mother's home to my grandparents, and finally I moved in with my aunt."

The frequency of responses was as follows: Eleven of the 14 participants stated they were told they were not ready for the next grade or consistently had bad grades that kept them from going to the next grade. Examples of such responses were as follows: Mary said, "I was told that I wasn't ready by my mother. My mother also told me that she had a conversation with my teacher about my reading and vision; they both agreed that I was not ready for the third grade" (Interview, December 27, 2017). Peter said, "I was in special ed classes and my grades were always bad for as long as I can remember" (Interview, March 11, 2018). Andrew said, "I got behind and stayed behind, I just could not catch up" (Interview, April 12, 2018).

Two of the participants remarked that they moved a lot or that they missed a "significant number" of days. Deborah stated,

I grew up in an environment of domestic violence, so I was removed considerable amounts of times, staying with different people; family – my grandparents and then my aunt who was in the military. The hardest time for me was when I was seven, that was the year I was retained. It got better when I lived with my aunt; she helped provide needed structure and a schedule. (Interview, December 27, 2017)

Peter admitted that he was told that he had a learning disability; and after being told that, he struggled with academics for years in school.

I was held back in the 6th and dropped out in the 11th. Ever since elementary school they had me in a separate room during testing. When it was time for the end of grade testing, they would come and get me and take me out of the class. I was put in a smaller class. They read the test to me out loud, I always had extended time, and this started in elementary school and it stayed with me until I dropped out of school in the 11th grade. I didn't apply myself in school at all, why should I, they said I couldn't do it anyway. I really didn't know I was smart until I got into community college. I was actually doing all the work and it blew my mind that I can do this work. (Interview, March 18, 2018)

Andrew, 65 and the oldest participant in this study, was the only respondent who said that he felt his teacher did not like him.

I knew I was a handful but look at where I came from – my parents died when I was very young, and I was passed from place to place. Was I angry, yes; but I did not deserve to sit in the back of the classroom and be ignored by my teachers. (Interview, November 15, 2017)

Grade retention would not be used if the participants had their way. Ten of the 14 suggested using grade retention only if all else has failed. The researcher asked for clarification on that point. John, 24 years old and the youngest participant, said that teachers should find ways to help before it gets to the level of retention:

If all the strategies have failed, then yes – retain the child. But if there is a way to keep a child from going through what I went through, find another way – special classes, summer school, or afterschool tutoring. For years I considered myself dumb and not good enough. It took me failing third grade, dropping out in high school, cheating to get my diploma online and attending community college successfully to realize that I was not dumb, and I was worthy. (Focus group, February 10, 2018)

Deborah shared,

My sister told me that she had teachers who said 'you need to forget about basketball because you can't even pass this grade. So why would you even think about trying to play basketball?' That is awful, isn't it? An adult said that to a child who loved basketball – and my sister was good at it. For years she got the teachers like that who labeled her not smart and hovered it over her head. It's a shame, never giving her a chance. (Focus group, February 10, 2018)

Summary

The 14 participants provided insight concerning the adult recollections of their retention experiences. Each participant disclosed their stories and what impact they had on their lives after the retention. They described their unique experiences as well as their feelings toward the retention in the past and in the present. The interviews, survey, and

focus group provided data that assisted in answering the research questions of this study.

The data provided useful information for teachers, school leaders, and parents that can

aid them in making decisions regarding the practice of retention.

Chapter 5: Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to explore the recollections of adults aged 18-65, who were retained in elementary, middle, or high school. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the findings as they relate to the literature focusing on retention.

The uniqueness of this study was that the research explored the impact retention has on adults who were retained as children in grades kindergarten through high school and whether that retention played a part in any successes or failures they may have encountered in their adult lives.

Glaser and Strauss (2006) said that a researcher's job in grounded theory is not to give perfect descriptions, "but to develop a theory that accounts for much of the relevant behavior" (p. 30). By using grounded theory methods in this study, the researcher sought to discover the impact retention had on students into adult life. Additionally, the researcher relied on focus groups, surveys, and interviews to gather data for this study by listening to the participants as they told their stories (Atkinson, 1998). Following a format similar to that of Atkinson (1998), the researcher allowed the respondents to share their life accounts through stories, interviews, focus groups, and surveys. Atkinson wrote that all that is needed is someone to listen and show a sincere interest in their stories, and they welcome being interviewed; the researcher found this to be the case while dealing with the 14 participants.

This chapter contains discussion and future research opportunities to help answer the research questions.

1. How do adults aged 18-65 who have experienced grade retention describe the

effect that a K-12 retention had and possibly continues to have on their lives?

2. How do adults aged 18-65 feel about having been held back in school?

3. How do adults aged 18-65 perceive grade retention overall?

Chapter 4 was a unique look into the lived experiences of 14 participants' experiences with kindergarten through 12th-grade retention. The participants shared their stories through surveys, interviews, and focus groups.

Discussion of Findings

The research questions dealt with how the adult participants described the effect of retention on them as children and possibly now in adulthood. There are still unanswered questions about the effects of retention on academic achievement (Alexander et al., 1994) overall; however, the participants in this study considered retention to be neither good or bad but to be used as a well-documented conclusion. Six participants shared that they felt a myriad of emotions when they were children, which they released all negative feelings related to their retention and did not allow the retention label to hinder their adult lives; five of the participants admit the experience has left a negative feeling; and three of the respondents admit to having no comment or admit to having no immediate feelings concerning their childhood experience.

Of those participants, 10 received a high school diploma; three of the participants received a GED or diploma in a setting other than high school; and one did not receive a diploma at all.

Andrew, who was very emotional when he spoke, said that he never thought he could be successful or even go to college; he admits that he still struggles with self-esteem issues dating back to his early school experiences. Andrew enrolled in an adult

basic education class 7 years ago so he could transition to the adult high school classes at a church that worked in collaboration with the local community college. When the church site was closed, Andrew did not feel comfortable enough to reenroll elsewhere, so he decided to quit, stating that 1 day he will go back. When the researcher asked if he wanted his high school diploma, he became very emotional and said yes and that he was grateful to his grandchildren for teaching him in the meantime.

Abigail attended regular high school but completed night school to receive her diploma. Abigail did not elaborate on the reason why she had to switch to night school. The researcher did not insist on an explanation for this question, because the researcher sensed the change in her voice as she discussed having to attend night school. The researcher made comfort and trust a priority during all of the settings and did not want to jeopardize the study by making Abigail feel uncomfortable. The researcher also hoped that Abigail would revisit that if she felt comfortable enough at a later time.

Peter said he did not realize that he could be "good at school" until he enrolled in a local community college and became the go-to student for tough questions. Peter returned to receive a high school diploma online which he admitted to having his cousin take the assessment for him. Peter stated that he has a deep regret for cheating and has asked for forgiveness.

Thirteen respondents said they have attended some type of postdiploma training, whether it was at the college/university level, community college, military, or job related.

Peter, Ruth, and Andrew admitted that they still deal with the embarrassment, unworthiness, and devastation they felt as a child. Ruth said, "It became a challenge, an unspoken enemy that is fought, and you begin to fight everything just to belong or fit in,

only to be told that you are not good enough."

Much to the researcher's surprise, the overall responses about grade retention were not overtly negative and had touches of gratefulness, including "no comment" responses. All participants had a comment about their feelings today. Additionally, all of the participants gave conditions as to the usage of retention (e.g., maybe it could be done earlier K-1; if they have not acquired the necessary skills, some individuals need more time if they are struggling).

Students are required to repeat a grade for a number of reasons including, but not limited to, parent requests (e.g., low academics, social immaturity, or redshirting for sports); teacher recommendations based on missing a significant number of days of school; lack of academic mastery for that grade; frequent relocation; severe personal trauma; and/or having a late summer birthday (Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011). Research shows that not mastering subjects requires students to repeat a grade (Owings & Magliaro, 1998). Furthermore, some of the reasons for retention that surfaced in this study are not tied solely to academics (Meador, 2014).

The data from this study showed that the reasons the participants were held back were no different than what the research showed.

- Mary – failure to meet academic mastery, medical issue (vision)
- Peter – failure to meet academic mastery, missing days of school
- Abigail – failure to meet academic mastery
- Luke – missing a significant number of days
- Mark – failure to meet academic mastery
- Paul – severe personal trauma/extended illness, missing a significant number

of days

- John – failure to meet academic mastery

- Andrew – moved during the year, failure to meet academic mastery

- Rachel – moved during the year, failure to meet academic mastery

- Ruth – failure to meet academic mastery

- Deborah – failure to meet academic mastery, missing a significant number of days, frequent relocation, moved during the year, severe personal trauma/ violence in the home

- Eve – failure to meet academic mastery; young for her age, late birthday

- Naomi – failure to meet academic mastery

- James – credit hours missing during senior year

Peter, Eve, Naomi, and Abigail currently work in the school system. They all agreed that if retention is used, it should be viewed as the last resort; after all other strategies, remediation, and support have been used, then remediation should be used, "then and only then." Ruth added that she does not remember ever struggling with academics in school and does not know the reason why her mother agreed to her being retained. She has never seen any documentation for her situation. Ruth said that her mother relied on what the teacher told her and agreed for Ruth to be retained based solely on the word of that classroom teacher. "If retention is being used, there should be documentation to back up everything you have tried prior to settling on retention," continued Ruth.

School retention is not the best remedy for every struggling student (Meador, 2014). Retention may have been a motivator for Mary and Paul, but the rest of the

participants reported suffering mentally and would disagree with this: The threat of retention will provide incentives for students to work harder, for parents to monitor their child's progress, and for teachers to focus on the development of basic skills among low-achieving students, all of which should lead to increases in student achievement (Allensworth, 2005).

The researcher found a correlation between the following areas of the research and the study:

Location. The South had a larger percentage of children being retained (NCES, 2009). Boys in the South are twice as likely to be retained as girls (SREB, 2001). When asked, each participant considered their location to be in the South. The researcher agreed with the participants.

Gender and age. Males are more likely to be retained than females (Jimerson et al., 1997). The 1988 longitudinal study showed the retention rate for boys was 24% and 15.3% for girls (NELS, 1988). Additionally, the same study in 2007 noted that the retention rate dropped to 12% for boys and 8% girls (NCES, 2007). Six of the 14 participants experienced retention at the K-2 level. The RAND study noted that an earlier retention exerts a less negative effect on retained students in the long term (Xia & Kirby, 2009). All of the six agreed that the retention experience as remembered caused no ill feelings about the experience.

Race/ethnicity/socioeconomic backgrounds. African-Americans are retained two times the rate of Caucasian students (Alexander et al., 1994). Specific ethnic characteristics connect retained students (Jimerson et al., 2006); and African-American, poor children, and boys are more likely to be retained (Frey, 2005). Poverty and low

socioeconomic levels are two to three times more likely to be retained (SREB, 2001).

All 14 of the participants would consider their upbringing as poor or slightly below middle class. The breakdown of the participants for this study was six males and eight females; five African-American males and one Caucasian male, six African-American females, one Caucasian female, and one Native American female.

Students with disabilities. Students with disabilities tend to be less confident, self-assured, engaging, socially competent, or popular with peers and are also more likely to be retained (Jimerson et al., 1997).

Peter mentioned that he was told that he had a learning disability in elementary school. He considers that information not true since he has found he has an aptitude for writing and math since returning to school. He considers his elementary years as those of a slow learner, not to be categorized as a child with disabilities.

Absenteeism. Chronic absence becomes a leading indicator that a student will drop out of high school (Railsback, 2004).

As noted, of the three who dropped out of school, Peter was the only participant who sited missing a significant number of days of school as the reason for his academic deficiency. The other two noted failure to meet academic mastery as their documented claim of retention.

Parental factors. NCES (2009) conducted a study which stated 20% of students whose mothers had less than or equivalent to a high school diploma had been retained compared to 3% of students whose parents had a bachelor's degree.

In this study, the researcher found that seven mothers received their high school diploma, one received a GED, and six did not receive a diploma or a GED. Andrew

noted that when his mother was in school, graduation or finishing school was considered to be eighth grade. High school was only for those who could afford to continue school.

Implications for Practice

Currently, retention practices do not take into consideration student homelife, parental employment, poverty level of the household, or student trauma. Generally speaking, retention is based primarily on testing and attendance (NCDPI, 2013). In some cases, LEAs have final authority concerning what in addition to grades and attendance may influence a retention label.

This researcher's investigation focused on participant recollections that had more to do with personal, familial, and homelife issues that led to retention. This was not necessarily the intended focus; however, the outcome points to this phenomenon. Historically, retention is granted as a result of poor academics. This study shows that in addition to academic issues, there were other struggles the participants dealt with that proved to complicate their grade promotion.

Without having the opportunity to hear their retention stories (Atkinson, 1998), the discovery of their personal and familial struggles would have been missed. Participants were faced with struggles and issues that profoundly affected their ability to focus in the classroom: Deborah (violent and chaotic home life), Andrew (parents' death), Luke (absent father and working mother), and Abigail (overwhelming personal issues).

The problems that awaited them outside of the school building became what was significant in their K-12 lives; school was secondary.

School was my safe-haven. I loved being at school, I didn't necessarily

understand that my job was to concentrate and learn. That wasn't clear to me as a

6- or 7-year-old. There was so much chaos going on in my homelife that the

school work was not that important. (Interview, December 27, 2017)

An additional item taken into account is the participants in this study considered

their family household at the time of their retetention to be poor or slightly below middle

class. Children and families of poverty and low socioeconomic levels are more likely to

be retained (SREB, 2001). Deborah's experience can easily be the experience of a child

struggling in school today. Educators and policy makers may miss the possible root of

the poor grades and excessive absences because the focus is on academics and absences

(Allensworth, 2005). The teachers, student support staff, and administers may want to

consider looking at the whole child and assess the possible root causes of what may be

causing difficulty in school.

Failures in the classroom? It is likely that school officials and policy makers

could look at the complexity of the home life of families. When families struggle,

students struggle; children go through what the families go through. Educators and

policy makers should reach out to the parents and stakeholders then provide interventions

for those families in need. Educational leaders should strive to build authentic

relationships with all families, as this appears to be an intervention worth working

towards that affects student academics and home lives (Jensen, 2013). Simply put, the

cause of failure in classrooms may be starting at home. If school leaders want better test

scores and fewer retentions and dropouts, consider ways to help families where they are

physically, emotionally, and academically.

Limitations

Three limitations developed during the research process. The process for finding participants for this study was a limitation. The researcher sought to recruit and secure participants for the study by using the homogeneous sampling (purposive) and the stratified random sampling technique. This was in hopes that similarities in participant backgrounds would emerge and the members of the community who were needed for this study would be found quickly while providing the researcher with the best information without having to randomly search for adults who fit the needed category. This process took much longer than anticipated – months. The researcher made contact with colleagues, friends, and community members to assist with the task. The researcher also created an online survey using the Google format as the primary site. Within the first month, there were only two respondents. The researcher sent out an email to colleagues, friends, and community members asking for their assistance. The respondents began to pick up – peaking and holding for 2 months at 14 participants.

The second limitation was the frustration level of participants maneuvering the technology tools to place their information in this format. One of the participants stated that she preferred a hard copy to the online format and was quickly accommodated and sent a paper copy within a day.

A third and final limitation was the participants themselves. The researcher was concerned whether the respondents would remember their recollections with fidelity. The researcher was aware that there was a chance the participants would want to only share the good and tone it down, build up the drama, or not remember altogether due to the amount of time that has passed. There was also the possibility that due to the emotional

state of the questions, the participants would be affected by troubling memories. All participants were volunteers, and their stories were told with their own biases; however, the researcher believed that all respondents were truthful and forthcoming in their testimonials that were shared.

Recommendations for Further Research

The participants for this study discussed how the effects of retention affected their lives in a very candid, open way in hopes to add to the current body of knowledge. The participants hope that this research allows for the conversation to take place concerning adults who still may have trouble dealing with academic settings.

Supporters argue that the threat of retention will provide incentives for students to work harder, for parents to monitor their child's progress, and for teachers to focus on the development of basic skills among low-achieving students, all of which should lead to increases in student achievement (Allensworth, 2005). Retention is still being used as a strategy to improve student learning when there was no data or research that support that statement fully.

There have been no long-term studies supporting retention as an intervention, yet retaining students is considered an option when deciding grade placement (Jimerson et al., 2002). Consider further research in the following areas:

- Examine the retention policies for schools within the same grade span, building, district, and county.
- Examine the emotional effects of retention in children.
- Do children benefit from the threat of retention?
- Which incentives for students to work harder are the best for increasing

student achievement?

- In what ways is the ongoing documentation that is required from teachers who recommend retention used to support parents who are considering retention for their child?

- What is the best way schools can support parents with children at risk of being retained?

- What is the best way schools can support parents with children at risk of dropping out?

- Does retaining a student place them at risk for dropping out?

- What is the difference between immature students, a slow learner, and a student with a learning disability?

Reflection

The research regarding the lasting effects grade retention has on adults surprised the researcher. Three of the 14 admitted to harboring a sense of dislike of their retention dating back to their experience as a child.

A deep sense of personal and professional satisfaction combined with gratitude has left the researcher with a desire to know more about the topic of retention and ask more questions of adults who were retained as children and questions of school administrators and staff/stakeholders as well. This study has released a desire to examine the emotional side of retention in children and any effects that may create an unhealty pattern in their lifetime. The information obtained will be shared with school lawmakers in hopes to help reach the whole child. This study has also given a platform and voice to the adults who have felt marginalized as children.

It is the hope of the researcher that this study will provide insight for school administration, teachers, parents, and stakeholders as they consider what is best for the children in the school buildings where they serve.

Summary

This study has asked the question of 14 North and South Carolinians who were retained between kindergarten to twelfth grade and adds to the body of knowledge related to knowing some of the effects of retention. Not all respondents have negative things to say about the experience, but all respondents admitted that there was some emotional takeaway from the experience that was indeed impactful.

Deborah was a participant who was unabashedly loquacious throughout the researcher's interactions with her. She commented that the focus group felt like a support group, and she felt comfortable enough to talk about her expereince and connect with strangers who had similar experiences.

Jimerson et al. (2002) suggested that school personnel have limited knowledge of student progress beyond their school and therefore do not know the long-term effects of retention on their former students. This study does not have all the answers, but it can start the conversation with school personnel so the healing for children can begin.

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Appendix A

Google Survey Questions

Google Survey Questions
Digital link and QR Code
https://goo.gl/forms/3lW0USfkCYOEFqew2

1. Statement of Consent: I have read the above information. I am 18-65 years old and have been retained/held back at least once in grades K-12. I also affirm that I am not currently enrolled in a K-12 setting presently. Clicking yes is your consent to participate in the study.

2. What is your present age?

3. Sex: Are you male, female, prefer not to answer?

4. What is your occupation/job?

5. What is your race? Check all that apply.

6. Did you graduate from high school or receive a GED?

7. Did you further your education in anyway after high school? If so, please explain how (college, specialized training, etc.).

8. Were you retained/held back more than once?

9. What grade were you retained/held back?

10. What do you remember about being retained/held back?

11. How did you feel about being retained/held back? Please explain.

12. How do you feel about the practice of retention today? Please explain.

13. Tell me about your parents? Did your parents graduate from high school? Please explain below.

14. Do you view your grade retention as hindrance or a help? Did you feel that the label retained ever kept you from meeting any of the goals that you wanted to fulfill as an adult? Please explain your thinking.

15. If you would be interested in participating in a small focus group and/or an interview, please leave your contact information and the best time you can be reached below. Thanks!

Appendix B

Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Qualitative Analysis of Adult Perceptions of Their K-12 Grade Retention

Helena Sibyl King

Gardner-Webb University

Boiling Springs, NC 28017

You are invited to be in a research study of adults who experienced grade retention in elementary, middle school, or high school. 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: Helena Sibyl King, a doctoral student at Gardner-Webb University.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to examine and explore the views and recollections of adults who were retained or held back at least once during their K-12 years in school. This study is needed to examine the perception of grade K-12 retained adults.

Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, provide your name, phone number and/or email address so that you may be reached for further clarification of responses.

Additionally, you may be asked to participate in one or more of the following:

- Complete an online or paper/pencil survey
- Be part of a small focus group
- One-on-one/face to face interview (the interview should take between 30 and 45 minutes)

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 participant may terminate the interview.

The benefits of participation

Your contribution via surveys, interviews and focus groups adds to the deeper understanding of the effects of grade retention.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. No names will be used in reporting information; only non-descript labels such as sex, gender, age, and/or grade retained. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. The data will be stored at the researcher's home in a secured filing cabinet. After five years, the records will be shredded and disposed of. There is no anticipated use of the data in the future; recorded interviews 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 Gardner-Webb University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is: Helena Sibyl King. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact Ms. King at XXX-XXX-XXXX, or by email at XXXXXX.

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.

Name (print):_____ Date: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

You will be contacted within 48 hours of the above date with additional information. Which is your preferred way to be contacted (please print):

Phone number: _____

Email address: _____

Researcher initial as received: _____

Appendix C

Interview Questions for the Study of Retention

Interview Questions for the Study of Retention

Thank you for joining me here today. I'd like for you to share some of your thoughts and feelings about being retained. This conversation will be recorded so that I can listen to you now rather than writing everything down right now; and I want to make sure I understand everything that you tell me. I want you to feel free to tell me as much as you would like about the questions. I want to know your feelings about this event in your life because how you feel about this is very important to me.

1. Start by telling me about yourself today (age, job, family, hobbies, etc.).

2. Tell me what you remember about school. What did you do really well in school? What did you have trouble with? How did you feel about yourself as a student? How did you think others saw you in school? Friends? Teachers? Parents/siblings?

3. Can you remember what it was like for you when you found out you were going to be retained?

4. Why were you retained? Whose decision was it? Were you involved? Who told you? When, how and what were you told?

5. What grade were you in? What worries, or concerns did you have? What did you think about the teacher who retained you?

6. Tell me how your parents felt about you being retained? Did they discuss it with you? How did their opinions make you feel?

7. Did anyone ever ask you how you felt about being retained or what you thought about being retained?

8. When you found out that you were going to be retained, tell me how you think other people felt about you (parents, teachers, friends, siblings).

9. How did you feel about being retained?

10. Did anyone ever share who they felt? If so, who and what did they say?

11. Did you feel differently about the way they saw you? Explain.

12. Did you think you feel differently about yourself than you did before you were retained? Explain. Examples Actions

13. Did you ever have anyone you could talk to and trusted enough to share about how you felt? What made you feel you could trust them?

14. Now that time has passed, tell me if you think being retained has been helpful in the way you feel about yourself.

15. Can you think of things that were positive, helpful, or encouraging during the retained year or afterwards?

16. What is your opinion about retention today?

It was nice meeting you and thank you for your time.

Appendix D

Probing Questions

Probing questions for interview and focus group (Krueger, 1998; Morgan, 1997)

1. Would you explain further?

2. Can you provide an example?

3. Please describe what you mean?

4. Can you clarify? I want to make sure that I understand.

5. One thing that I have heard several people mention is _____. I am curious as to what the rest of the group thinks about that.

6. Are there any other thoughts that have occurred to you?

Appendix E

Focus Group Documents

Focus Group Documents

Focus Group Script

HSK: I would like to thank you for attending this focus group interview session today. My name is Helena Sibyl King and I will serve as the moderator for today. This focus group interview is an informal method of sharing your thoughts and ideas regarding Adult Perceptions of Their K-12 Grade Retention I realize your time is valuable, and I appreciate you taking time to assist me with my dissertation research. As you know I cannot compensate you for your time, but I have provided each of you with a tube of Burt's Bees lip balm to help with any chapped lips or dry mouths during our time together. Because you are here on your own time, I appreciate you making the effort to help in this endeavor. Additionally, I am humbled and honored to be the one to tell your story.

HSK: My role as moderator is to guide the discussion and ask questions. Please feel free to talk to each other. There are no wrong answers so please share your thoughts and ideas. Today's conversation will be videotaped and recorded. No names will be used in my research

HSK: I am going to ask some informal questions in order to get your insights about Adult Perceptions of Their K-12 Grade Retention.

HSK: Let's take a few minutes and introduce yourselves so that we can be on a first name basis.

Guidelines (Krueger, 1998; Morgan, 1997)

Some things that will help our discussion go more smoothly are:

1. Only one person should speak at a time.

2. Please avoid side conversations

3. Everyone needs to participants and no one should dominate the conversation

4. The focus group will last no longer than 2 hours, many of you have cell phones, please avoid using your cell phones during this time. If at all possible please turn off or silence your cell phones. If you need to keep your cell phone on, please put it on vibrate and leave the room if you need to take a call.

Guiding Questions for Focus Group or Interview Discussion

1. In what grade were you retained?

2. What do you recall about being retained?

3. Were you given reasons why you were being retained?

4. At the time, how did you feel about being retained?

5. What instructional support did you receive during that time? Elaborate.

6. How do you feel now as an adult, about being retained?

7. How has being retained changed your life?

8. What do you think people such as educators, parents, and students should know about being retained? Be as specific and explicit as you need to be.

Thank you for your time today!