THE SECOND YEAR: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

OF THE INFLUENCES ON A STUDENT'S EXPERIENCE

WITH KINDERGARTEN, FIRST, AND SECOND GRADE RETENTION

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines primary grade retention as it is utilized in one suburban school district as an intervention for low achievement. Since as early as the late 1800s, educators have been struggling with the solution for students who do not demonstrate readiness for grade promotion. Grade retention is one of the practices that has been utilized in an effort to give students added time to prepare for the next grade level. This researcher collected and analyzed data on the experiences of a sample of six kindergarten, first, and second grade students who are repeating their respective grade level. The data for this qualitative study have been presented through classroom observations, parent and teacher interviews, and document review. The patterns that resulted from the data collection and analysis have provided insight into the factors that influence a student's experience with grade retention. This study explored the influential components of a primary grade retention program with recommendations for practical application in the field and future research in this area.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Purpose

This qualitative case study examines the academic, social, and emotional effects of

grade retention on a sample of 5-7 repeating kindergarten, first, and second grade students in

a suburban community. This case study collects and analyzes data on the experiences that

these children have had during their second year in each grade.

There are many reasons that a teacher might consider a student for retention such as

immaturity, underachievement, or frequent absence. For over a century, educators have

questioned whether or not retention is a successful strategy to ensure readiness for grade

promotion. Based on professional opinion and past practice, teachers are still widely

utilizing retention to help students, regardless of research that questions the effectiveness of

retention. Many teachers believe that by retaining a student they are giving that student time

to develop and grow to meet the level of maturity and achievement that their fellow peers

have already reached. This concept dates back to child growth and development research

that clearly states that everyone develops on an individual timeline. This continuum is

especially evident when looking at language acquisition with young children.

Since success in the primary level is directly related to high levels of achievement in

language arts, the stages of early childhood development play an important role in the

mastery of skills that allow children to proceed from one grade to the next. This study

evaluated, through a series of classroom observations, interviews, and document reviews, the

perspectives of teachers and parents on the developmental readiness of children, in relation to

their social, emotional, and academic success, as they experienced their second year of kindergarten, first, or second grade. This research is not meant to validate either perspective on retention. Knowing that retention is being utilized regularly in schools across this country, this research begins to explore the influential components of a retention program.

In Viadero's research on retention, as recent as 1999, she cites statistical data that "estimates that at least 15% of children nationwide repeat a grade between ages 6 and 17. In some districts, surveys have shown, up to half the students have been held back" (Viadero, 2000, p. 40). Students are retained because they are not achieving success at the current grade level, having not met the requirements necessary to be promoted to the next grade level. These students are often candidates for retention as a strategy to help improve low achievement by allowing them the opportunity to develop the skills they need to be successfully promoted. However, some research has shown that retention can have long-term negative effects on students such as a negative effect on self-esteem and a predictor of school dropout, as well as minimal academic benefits, especially for older children (Black, 2004; Byrd, 1994; Rothstein, 2000). Conversely, the idea of social promotion is of concern from the perspective of educators and researchers. Promoting students to the next grade, regardless of academic growth, can have academic ramifications because the student has not yet mastered the skills necessary to provide a foundation for more advanced concepts. Both ends of the spectrum, social promotion and retention, have their known weaknesses.

Purpose of Study

Grade retention seems to hold an intuitive appeal despite a lack of empirical research in support of the practice (District Administration, 2005; Silberglitt, 2006). Positive effects

of retention, however, have been found when it is utilized in the earlier grades. Retention is successful for some students and most professionals agree that it should not be eliminated altogether as an option, although there is still a lot of doubt as to how often and under what circumstances (District Administration, 2005; Grant, 1998; Pomplun, 1988). It is difficult to pinpoint the criteria that would need to be present to guarantee a successful experience, especially since there are so many variables involved with each individual case making generalization very difficult.

The purpose of this study is to observe and document the experiences that occur during the retention year. This study examines the retention experience through the perspectives of teachers and parents as participants in the retention program. This study will illuminate the academic, social, and emotional experiences that occur during the retention year for this sample of kindergarten, first, and second grade students to provide further insight into this practice.

Research Questions

This study explores the experience of retention on kindergarten, first, and second grade students as an intervention for low achievement and/or immaturity. The overarching question is as follows: What are the factors that influence the experience with retention as an intervention for low achievement? The perspectives of teachers and parents will be gathered as evidence of academic, social, and emotional progress, or lack thereof, during the retention year. This primary question will be answered by searching for answers to these secondary areas of inquiry.

- How does the teacher's approach to the student's educational program during the retention year meet the educational needs of the students and affect the retention experience?

- How do the teachers and parents perceive the retention experience?

- How does a student's academic, social, and emotional growth and development, or lack of demonstrated growth and development, as perceived by teachers and parents, contribute to or detract from the retention experience?

- How does the student's self-esteem/self-worth seem to be affected by interactions with peers in their retention year classroom?

- How do the attitudes of teachers and parents affect the retention experience?

Ultimately, the hope is that the answers to the above questions will help administrators, teachers, and parents better understand what occurs during the second year in the grade level and how these adults play an intricate role in this intervention strategy.

Definitions

Academic Achievement. A level of skill mastery that demonstrates growth and development over a period of time.

Developmental Readiness. Students who demonstrate cognitive growth or the ability to grow, preparing them to enter the next grade. (Grant, 1998)

Retention. A school practice that requires a student to remain at the current grade level for the following school year. (Silberglitt, 2006 citing Jackson, 1975)

Red-Shirting. The action of parents choosing to hold their child back from entering kindergarten immediately at the time of eligibility, usually based on a younger child whose birthday is near the district cut-off age for eligibility.

Remediation. Various strategies that are utilized during the retention year to aid the student in mastering skills necessary to proceed to the next grade.

Social Promotion. Students who are advanced to the next grade regardless of academic achievement or skill mastery, rather than being retained.

Delimitations and Limitations of This Study

This study will be limited for several reasons. The data were collected in only one elementary school in one suburban school district in central New Jersey. The interview responses received from teachers and parents may or may not be indicative of the experiences of participants of retention in other schools or districts. The results of this study are based on data collected from student retentions within this district only. In addition, only kindergarten, first, and second grade students are represented in this study, limiting any generalizations from application to students in other grade levels who have experienced retention.

This study can not necessarily be generalized to all kindergarten, first, and second grade students who are being identified for retention because of the many variables that exist within each individual student as a case. For example, home lives, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, individual rate of development, and learning styles all play a major role in

the impact of retention on a particular individual and differ greatly from student to student. In addition, the teacher's level of experience and teaching style are variables that students experience throughout their education that may impact retention. McGinn (1992) explains, "Because teacher behavior is complex, and can vary according to the situation, no one variable used to measure these factors stands out as predominant" (p. 6). This could possibly make the teacher the most difficult influence to explain regarding the success of retention.

Some aspects of this study could be found useful for educators who are involved in the retention process. For example, if the data illustrates that student, teacher, and parent attitude impact the success of retention, then this concept could be applied generally to all students who might experience this academic strategy. This research study may develop concepts that could be utilized in further research as a point of reference, to possibly develop future theories about retention.

Significance of the Study

There are no national statistics on retention that have been calculated up to this point in time. However, there are data that indicates that at least 13.3% of all K-12 students are retained at least once, and this figure could possibly be as large as 33% based on other evidence (District Administration, 2005 citing Haney et al.). In addition, most of these students are retained in grades K-3 and boys are twice as likely to be retained as girls. Knowing all of this, when surveyed, 70% of students, teachers, and parents from across the country feel that social promotion is worse than retention. (District Administration, 2005 citing Haney et al.) Even though there is support for retention, the practice has been an

indicator of high school dropout and only "approximately 20% to 35% of students who were retained learned more when they repeated a grade" (Bowman, 2005, p. 43).

There is a limited amount of qualitative research on retention at the primary grade level. Rothstein's research of fifth grade students who have been retained is similar to the type of research proposed in this study. She interviewed students, teachers, and parents to evaluate the experience of retention on upper elementary students. (Rothstein, 2000) Most retention, however, occurs prior to third grade, most frequently in first grade, and has seen the most success during these early years in a child's education. Pomplun (1988) states, "A review of retention promotion research revealed that studies that found academic benefits for retention were mainly in the primary grades" (p. 281).

My research attempts to fill this gap in the literature by providing insight into the retention program at the primary grades because even this level of academic success is small, as only about one third of the students experience academic success. Educators and researchers have found it difficult to pinpoint the factors that contribute to the results of the retention experience. Since the rate of retention has increased about 40% over the last 20 years (Rothstein, 2000), it is important that research continues to support or refute teacher's use of the intervention and identify the criteria that provide the best opportunities for learning for all students.

Theoretical Base

Two theoretical lenses have been used to analyze the data that is collected during this case study. Gareth Morgan's (2006) metaphor of the organization as a machine has been applied to analyze the current educational system and its relation to the use of retention as an

intervention for low achievement and/or immaturity in primary grade students. This analysis includes the use of literature related to the developmental readiness of children and maturational theory as it relates to the expectations of our society to achieve academic benchmarks at specific chronological ages based on our educational policies and graded system. The second lens that has provided perspective on this case study is Gross' (1998) Turbulence Theory.

Morgan's (2006) use of the machine metaphor to analyze organizations applies well to the organization of our national system of education. The metaphor of the machine can be described as an organization that operates in a routine and exact manner with clearly defined and extremely rigid input and output expectations. The machine's effectiveness is measured based on its level of efficiency. There are clearly defined roles or parts of the process that are expected to be managed by an overseeing body, the best people to perform the task are chosen, training is provided, and work output is monitored closely. Using Morgan's machine metaphor as described above, we can concretely apply it to the educational system and policies that revolve around the issue of retention. For example, consider that all children are expected by the system to enter school when their chronological age permits entry. Developmental readiness in regard to the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual growth of children is not taken into consideration when they register for kindergarten. The only criterion is that the child is five years old by a specific entry date. All of these children are grouped together in one classroom with one certified professional, who may possibly have another non-certificated adult in the classroom for support, and these children are expected to reach benchmarks to be labeled with grade level success. Of course, the certified professional has been evaluated through a performance assessment tool and has been deemed

competent by supervisors in the system as an assurance of credibility for the educational program. However, we must keep in mind that the organization as a machine does not individualize its approaches to educating these children. All the children are required to attend school for the same number of days each year and receive the same number of instructional hours each year, regardless of developmental needs. Although some children are expected to exceed the expected benchmarks, all children are expected to meet these benchmarks as a minimum requirement for success. The system assumes that all of the inputs, the children at the beginning of the school year, will result in efficient outputs, the children at the end of the school year.

Overall, the difficulty with creating an educational system that mirrors that of a mechanized system repeatedly returns to the variables that exist within human nature and our society, which can not be controlled in the same way that a machine controls its components. Gredler (1978) states, "Premature school entrance is a major factor in the lack of learning readiness" (p. 25). Many parents choose red-shirting as a form of retention by holding their, usually male, children back from beginning kindergarten at the time of eligibility. The thought process behind red-shirting is very similar to the idea behind grade retention, assuming that if children have more time to grow and develop they will be more likely to do well in school. Ventura (1993) explains that, "traditionally, in each grade level a continuum of skills is presented to be mastered at a gradual and regular rate throughout the school year" (p. 2). Therefore, students who are not developmentally ready to begin this skill mastery will most likely fall behind the regular rate of mastery that their peers exhibit (Grant, 1998). Ventura (1993) continues to explain that, "the learning rates for children in kindergarten through second grade vary widely, and growth is sporadic as opposed to gradual" (p. 2).

Developmental readiness can be further described through the understanding of maturational theory of child development. Maturational theory was developed through the work of Charles Darwin on evolution and his cousin, Francis Galton. As explained in Schickedanz (1993), Galton's discoveries of the connection between genetically similar people and their intellectual abilities prompted further studies relating to the genetic basis of behavior, the foundation of maturational theory. The following from Schickedanz (1993) clearly defines maturational theory:

> According to maturational theory, the individual may be influenced by heredity either at birth, when certain genetically fixed characteristics are present, or later on, when genetically determined traits appear according to an inherited timetable. Maturation is the process of biological change and development during which new behaviors steadily emerge one after another. Maturational theory suggests that, within a broad range of normal conditions, the appearance of a particular behavior depends on time, not on experience or environment (p. 47).

Maturational theory developed further during the twentieth century through the work of G. Stanley Hall, the first president of the American Psychological Association and founder of The Journal of Genetic Psychology (Schickedanz, 1993). According to Schickedanz (1993), one of Hall's students was Arnold Gesell whose theories provided further confirmation that skills are developed according to a child's individual inner timetable, again specifying that the learning or experience has little influence on this development. In his own words Gesell (1994) explains, "We see the broad sequences which are characteristic of the human species in general. Within these sequences are many variations of emphasis and patterning which lie at the basis of individuality." (p.16) In addition, Gesell presented the idea of readiness, sometimes also referred to as neurological ripening. As defined by

Schickedanz (1993), Gesell explained that "until the nervous system was mature enough for a

particular skill or behavior, the child was not considered ready for it" (p. 48). This theory

could explain why some children do not meet the norms for their age group on a fixed

timetable that has been developed by the metaphorical organization, which as described for

this purpose is the current educational system. Gesell addresses the contrast between

developmental norms and individual development in his research. As explained by Gesell

(1994):

> Although the child always remains true to himself, we must
> expect him to pass through varying phases…Although we
> shall never apply age norms arbitrarily, it gives us a sense
> of perspective to know that there are fundamental
> correspondences in the dynamic makeup of the child (p.
> 59)….[Norms] do not permit mathematically precise
> readings; but they do indicate approximate locations.
> When the profiles are read as a consecutive series, they
> give a time-flow-map of the way in which a child matures.
> It is not intended that a single profile should be used to
> determine whether a given child is bright or dull, good or
> bad. Individual deviations are almost as normal as they are
> numerous. The norms enable us to detect the deviations
> (p.70).

The theories of Darwin, Galton, Hall, and Gesell all support the concept of

developmental readiness. Retention may be the opportunity that some of the children, who

have not reached the developmental readiness necessary to proceed to the next grade, can

maximize as the extra time to grow enables the students to form a strong skill foundation.

Although it may not be the perfect solution for every child, it operates within the existing

system as it presents itself as a mechanized organization.

The other theoretical lens that has provided significant understanding on the process

and program of retention is Turbulence Theory. Turbulence Theory analyzes situations by

assessing the level of disturbance that has been caused by a change in the environment.

There are varying levels of turbulence from light to extreme, which categorize the situations

in their current state and assist in predicting the future impact that events or decisions can

have on the existing disturbance (Gross, 1998; Shapiro & Gross, 2008). Light turbulence is

characterized by "little or no disruption in the normal work environment" and "subtle signs

of stress" (Gross, 1998, p. 115). If moderate turbulence is present, the stakeholders are

usually more aware of the issue and the disruption is noticeable. With severe turbulence,

there is a "feeling of crisis" and "fear for the entire enterprise" (Gross, 1998, p. 115). The

most devastative level is that of extreme turbulence, characterized by a "loss of control" and

even the possibility of "structural damage" to the organization (Gross, 1998, p. 114).

Recognizing these varying levels of turbulence can help to understand the implications of the

situation or issue as well as the actions that might take place to resolve the issue. The use of

a turbulence gauge concretely applies each level of turbulence to the degree of disorder

caused by the situation. The turbulence gauge has been applied to retention experience in the

final chapter during data analysis and application. The following displays the format used

when designing a turbulence gauge.

Degree of Turbulence	**Turbulence as It Is Applied to the Situation**
Light	
Moderate	
Severe	
Extreme	

Table 1-1 – Turbulence Gauge

As one could imagine, retention causes turbulence for all of the stakeholders involved. Teachers have an immense responsibility evaluating student achievement, admitting that a student is not succeeding in their classroom, and then working with colleagues and parents to make the best decision for the student knowing the impact it may have on the student's future. In fact, although parents are the ultimate decision-makers regarding retention, teachers are the key factor in recommending the practice and assisting parents in making the decision (Tanner, 1997). Parents certainly struggle with the issue of retention as they worry about the stigma involved with repeating a grade and the traumatic effect it may have on their child. Finally, and most significantly, often the turbulence that the student feels is impacted heavily by the way that the adults handle the situation. The differing levels of turbulence based on the perspective and role of the stakeholder is described as positionality (Shapiro & Gross, 2008). In addition, the demographics of the individuals involved in this study will also relate to the positionality of the individuals (Shapiro & Gross, 2008). Positionality will be significant in this study as the level of turbulence each individual or group feels within the organization will help to clarify the retention experience.

Another aspect of Turbulence Theory is the cascading events or issues that can increase the level of turbulence that is experienced in any given situation. Each additional event or issue that occurs in the situation adds a layer of complexity to the issue (Shapiro & Gross, 2008). For example, when studying grade retention, a student who is retained and placed in a class with an inexperienced teacher and a handful of other students who demonstrate low achievement will experience a different level of turbulence than another student experiencing different environmental variables. The amount of variables impacting

the individual will be significant in this study as they will most likely impact the experience with retention.

The third aspect of turbulence theory that plays a role in the retention experience is called stability. The stability, or lack thereof, of the institution, the family structure, and community has an impact on the degree of turbulence felt within the retention experience. For example, an institution that is financially sound, provides resources to both parents, teachers, and students, and has a positive reputation in the community with little or no controversy provides a more stable setting for a dilemma, decreasing the degree of turbulence. Additionally, a family that provides support for the student would provide more success for a student than a family with absentee parents or financial hardship.

The lens of turbulence theory, including that of positionality, cascading, and stability, have helped to analyze the factors or components that influence the retention experience. These three components form a triangular relationship as they all impact each other and the degree of turbulence present during the retention experience. The humanistic aspect of the intervention, specifically related to the social and emotional aspects, are going to be quite significant and Turbulence Theory can help to bring clarity to the data during analysis.

Both of these chosen lenses are meant to highlight a different aspect of retention. The organization as a machine looked at the educational system and its ability to meet the needs of its consumers. Turbulence theory has helped to understand the social and emotional impact of retention as well as the differing perspectives of the stakeholders based on their role in the retention process and program. These theoretical lenses have been chosen to help analyze the data as this study searches for the factors that influence the retention experience.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Weitzman (1994) states, "National concern is growing about the increasing number of children failing school, and the apparent increase in the prevalence of early school failure" (p. 484). One of the interventions that has been used in an attempt to aid these struggling students is the use of grade retention. The literature on retention spans over 30 years of qualitative and quantitative analyses of the negative and positive results of retaining children in school due mostly to low achievement and immaturity. Even through this vast amount of literature and study of retention, there have been no final conclusions drawn by the education community as to whether or not retention is a solution to low academic achievement. Although there is disagreement in the educational community about the effects and results of retention, there is agreement on the fact that the rate of human development is an individual process. Wood (1994) confirms, "Age and cognitive growth do not necessarily go hand in hand" (p. 23-24). This is not just limited to cognitive development, since emotional, social, and physical development also varies between individuals and has an impact on the learning process. Yet, our current educational system is structured in a manner that assumes that age is the most significant determining factor of cognitive growth with an expectation that a child is able to learn a curriculum that is assigned based on his/her grade level, which is determined by age, not the rate of development.

Retention is one of the only historically lasting responses to this flaw in our educational system; however, this reactive measure has its own negative side effects that are shown through data on academic achievement and dropout rates of students who have experienced retention. As documented in Grant (1998), "retention can and does help some children, but not all children" (p. 77). The difficulty with retention is utilizing this strategy appropriately based on the needs and characteristics of individual children. The common themes that were exposed through the literature on retention are the history of retention, factors that influence retention, developmental readiness, gender differences in retention and learning, and results of retention. The following is a closer look at each of these themes that serve to support my research as I search to examine the factors that influence a child's experience with retention.

History of Retention

To trace the history of retention, it is necessary to start with the history of graded education. The practice of placing students in grade levels based on their chronological age was initiated by John Sturum in Strassburg, Germany in 1537. John Philbrick brought this practice to the American school system in 1847 as his leadership determined the structure of the Quincy Grammar School of Boston in 1848. This structure was supported by other ancestors of education such as Horace Mann (Brown, 1963; Light, 2006). Owings and Magliaro (1999) documents, "It was not until about 1860 that it became common in U.S. elementary schools to group children in grade levels, with promotion dependent upon mastery of a quota of content" (p. 2). By 1870, American education was lockstepped to the grade system, creating a rigid system of student placement, curriculum organization, and

instructional design (Brown, 1963). In addition, about 30 years ago, the Gesell Institute of

Child Development came out with research that claimed that there is 50% chance that a child

is at least a grade ahead of the one that he should be in based on the knowledge that most of

the schools in our country determine if a child is ready for school entry using chronological

age and IQ, rather than consideration for their individual rate of development (Light, 2006).

　　Since then, the issue of grade retention has been an educational dilemma. As soon as

standards for promotion were developed, public education ran into the issue of what to do

with students who were not reaching levels of success within these age-appropriate

standards. Almost immediately, the solution to low achievement was solved with the use of

retention. Grant (1998) explains, "Retention is an educational intervention used to correct

wrong grade placement. Retaining the child 'in grade' for a second year provides the

additional learning and growing time that some children need in order to complete the grade

successfully" (p. 17). "The retention rate during the 1800's was as high as 70% as compared

to (Balitewicz, 1998, p. 5)" an estimated one tenth of that today. Sometime after the turn of

the century, educators started utilizing social promotion as a response to the large population

of students that were failing in school. Bowman (2005) and Lawton (1997) state, "During

the 1970s, the social promotion of struggling students was a common educational practice.

However, with the growing pressure to raise academic standards in the 1980s, social

promotion lost much of its appeal (p. 43 and p. 1)." Since the 1980s, the movement for

tougher academic standards across the nation, led the educational community to move away

from social promotion and increase the use of retention. In addition, leadership of the

National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) have

also been opposed to social promotion, favoring retention to support high academic standards

(Lawton, 1997). However, research that occurred during the '80s and '90s, "all but put to rest retention as a viable alternative to underperformance" (Parker, 2001, p. 12).

During these same decades, professionals in education realized the flaw in our education system that was not solved by social promotion and created an approach to teaching called developmental education. This "method matches the curriculum and methods of instruction to the child's current stage of development and needs" (Grant, 1998, p. 3). Developmental education prevents a child from being placed in the wrong grade level and offers additional learning time for students who need it. Unfortunately, developmental education is not the most cost efficient education because it requires staffing, transitional grade levels, and resources that go beyond the budget of a traditional program (Grant, 1998; Lawton, 1997). Basically, it supports research that explains that retention and promotion are the two extremes on a continuum, in which there are more creative options in the middle. However, as previously mentioned, the ability of an institution to provide the flexible arrangements necessary to meet the developmental needs of students to provide the time required for progress is quite difficult within our existing educational structure (Lawton, 1997).

As a result of diminished social promotion and the unpopular developmental education, the rate of grade retention has risen nearly 40% over the past 20 years. Many teachers believe that retention, especially in the early grades, is an effective remediation strategy for poor school performance and may reduce the later chance of school failure. (Leckrone, 2006; Rothstein, 2000; Witmer, 2004 citing NASP, 2003) In addition, the recent wave of high-stakes testing, due to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, has only perpetuated this growing concern and put more pressure on school districts to find solutions

to the issues surrounding retention. During the late 1990s, President Clinton advocated an

end to social promotion; therefore, promoting the use of retention. In January of 2002,

President Bush signed NCLB into law, requiring higher standards and accountability for

academic goals and student progress (Leckrone, 2006; Witmer, 2004). To compound this

issue, "there are twice as many standards as we have time for in K-12" (Parker, 2001, p. 12).

The benchmarks for achievement of these standards at each grade level that were determined

by this educational policy have put demands on a system that was flawed to begin with and

can not manage the stress of these high standards. In fact, many educators believe that the

NCLB Act does in fact leave children behind because the resources are not available to keep

all students at the level of achievement that the policy demands (Leckrone, 2006). The

policy also seems to dictate the need for retention policies since students that do not meet the

benchmarks are not supposed to be promoted to the next grade. This becomes another issue

for educators since not all children demonstrating low achievement are good candidates for

retention. However, schools fear the consequences of missing these benchmarks and not

making adequate yearly progress (AYP). The regulations of NCLB and the needs of students

seem to conflict on many levels and this presents situations where retention is used

inappropriately as an intervention (Light, 2006). For example, high school students in some

states must earn a minimum grade point average to get their diplomas or they must repeat

their senior year of high school and elementary school students who do not demonstrate the

ability to read on grade-level will experience retention. Basically, students have to reach a

minimum score in order to be promoted (Lawton, 1997). Educators question whether these

tests accurately reflect what a child should know before they proceed to the next grade level

and officials in each state do have the authority to override test scores with an evaluation of student work (Leckrone, 2006).

In more recent years, retention has been used by students who are in intense competition for admission into highly rated colleges. In order to bolster their transcripts, they will choose to repeat 9th grade with the intention to achieve better grades and even possibly take a more rigorous schedule of courses, while integrating extracurricular activities into their repertoire (Moore, 2005). Moore (2005) states, "Boys have done it much more than girls. Some students have taken an extra year just to improve in sports (p. 20)."   Many parents believe that it gives their son or daughter a chance to improve on skills that will benefit them in college, plus it is a gift of a year of less pressure because it is the second time through. Higher educators frown upon this type of retention because they feel it sends a negative message to the student's self-image; however, they often have a difficult time tracking these students since the first year of 9th grade can often be dropped from transcripts, especially if students transfer to a new school (Moore, 2005).

Kindergarten retention has increased in the last twenty years, and at one point was linked to an increase in school performance. Retention in kindergarten has often been viewed as an intervention to prepare students for first grade. However, as with most retention research in all grade levels, the results seem to be short-lived and ultimately ineffective (Mantzicopoulos, 1997 citing Niklason, 1987; Zepeda, 1993). An analysis of kindergarten retention published in the Fall 2005 issue of Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis found a trend in relation to school policy and demographics. Schools with retention policies that supported grade repetition were most likely suburban schools with demographics that included a small minority population and class sizes, higher reading

scores, and more home involvement. However, in actuality, the schools that retained more children were not schools that fit in the aforementioned demographic categories. Higher retention percentages were recorded from schools that had fewer classroom and special needs teachers, lower safety ratings, less parent involvement, focused more on classroom management and discipline than goal-oriented academic programs, and had inadequate facilities and resources. This information further explained why children in schools that often retained students demonstrated overall lower levels of achievement (Bracey, 2006). Interestingly enough, it was also found that this relationship impacted the effect of retention. Bracey (2006) explains, "The size of the impact decreased as the probability of being retained increased. That is, retention hurt least those who were most likely to be retained" (p. 413). This conclusion was reached in relation to the demographics of the various schools included in this study.

Compounding current issues in education brought about by changes in the American culture and the age of technology is the American tradition of resisting change. Brown (1963) describes, "In America we have the peculiar notion that a thing is good merely because we have been doing it a long time; but a school program several centuries old is woefully inappropriate" (p. 26). As becomes evident after comparing the analysis of the nongraded high school by Brown (1963) to the current educational issues in 2007, it is clear that this statement is valid. Brown (1963) demonstrates this by documenting that in the mid-twentieth century "the demand has steadily risen fore more attention to intellectual needs than is possible in age grouping". This statement is still true today, almost 50 years later, as we constantly are faced with a growing number of students who are not demonstrating achievement in their current grade placement and our instructional techniques are innovated

to meet the individual needs of students in classrooms who demographics are heterogeneous by ability and homogeneous by age. Unfortunately, until our society is able to develop an educational plan that is more diverse and able to meet the needs of all students, rather than a system that has been inherited from the sixteenth century and reinforced by legislation such as NCLB, interventions such as retention will still be necessary for study and consideration to support the learning environment for struggling students. Parker (2001) explains "Enlightened retention policies can lead to working smarter, providing more powerful classroom instruction and better intervention measures, and disallowing failure as an option. (p.12)"

Factors That Influence Retention

Several factors have been identified as predictors of the probability of a student becoming eligible for retention. Byrd and Weitzman (1994) documents, "Living below the poverty level, not living with both biological parents at age 6, black race, birth to a teenage mother or mother with low educational attainment, male gender, and younger age cohorts have increased rates of retention" (p. 483). Any one or combination of these factors put a child in an at-risk category for retention (Leckrone, 2006; Walters, 1995). Grant (1998) summarizes that the three primary predictors of retention are being developmentally young, chronologically younger, and factors related to their personal backgrounds. Retention provides the opportunity for additional time to learn what other children without these roadblocks already know or are expected to know. Considering that these factors describe a large percentage of our school population, it is difficult to prevent low achievement for all of these students. Some of these students fall behind even with all of the services that most

schools offer such as basic skills instruction or resource center support. Owings and

Magliaro (1999) states, "The goal of retention was to improve school performance by

allowing more time for students to develop adequate academic skills. More than two-thirds

of all retentions take place between kindergarten and third grade. (p.12)" Knowing that most

growth happens at the primary grade levels and that the allowance of time could be the key to

these at-risk children achieving success with the basic foundations to language arts and math,

it is essential that further research occur to identify how to institute the retention process with

the highest degree of success.

Educators have found that "retention is more likely to be successful if the children are

average or above in ability, so that they are fully capable of doing the required work" (Grant,

1998, p. 72). Unfortunately, it can sometimes be hard to determine the specific factors that

impact the child's low achievement. Many children have more than one influence that

contributes to their low achievement, which makes it difficult to determine who will meet

success with retention as an intervention and who will need further remediation to be

successful in school. In the primary grades, especially kindergarten and first grade, retention

is often used as one of the primary responses to low achievement since many educators

believe that it is more helpful than harmful for a student to have a second chance at mastery

of the primary grade curriculum. As Grant (1998) quotes Judy Keshner, a veteran

kindergarten teacher who wrote a booklet titled "Starting School":

> Each grade builds on the one that came before, and
> kindergarten sets the pattern and the tone…When children
> face a school environment that is too busy for their current
> stage of development, they start to see themselves as
> incapable of doing anything right. This is where the pattern
> of failure begins, and it may never go away. (p. 73)

Additionally, most educators agree that another advantage of retention is kindergarten and first grade is that the social groupings that occur later in elementary, middle, and high school have not yet occurred and are less significant to young children. Children at this young age are more likely to accept a new peer into their social environment without social repercussions for the retained student.

However, it is important to note that some factors that influence retention are present in the learning environment itself, rather than just within the child. Teacher expertise and school practices significantly affect student performance (Bowman, 2005). Therefore, administration consideration for student-teacher matching based on teacher qualifications as well as student learning styles can be especially significant prior to and during the retention year.

Light (2006) developed in the early 1980s a retention scale that is used across the country in many states and school districts to predict a student's success with retention as an intervention for low achievement. This scale has been updated several times since it was first created and is very thorough in its evaluation of a student's eligibility for retention. Light's Retention Scale (LRS) is an objective tool that considers 20 factors that should impact a student's eligibility for retention. Through the use of this evaluation tool, each student will receive a score from 0-90, indicating whether or not the student should be retained. A score from 0-8 indicates an excellent retention candidate, 9-29 a good retention candidate, 30-39 a fair retention candidate, 40-51 a marginal retention candidate, 52-69 a poor retention candidate, and 70-90 a student who should not be retained (Light, 2006). Prior to this detailed twenty factor scale, most schools used only four areas to consider grade placement: academic achievement, school attendance, previous grade retention, and history of learning

disability (Light, 2006). About three years after the LRS was published, Lieberman (1980) developed a similar model for determining grade retention that considered 21 factors for eligibility that were very similar to LRS, supporting Light's research.

The twenty factors used in the LRS are as follows: preschool attendance, current grade placement, student's age, physical size, gender, previous grade retention, student's knowledge of the English language, immature behavior, emotional disorders, history of conduct disorder and/or defiance, experiential background, siblings, parents' participation in school activities, student mobility, student attendance, present level of academic achievement, student's attitude about possible retention, motivation to complete school tasks, history of learning disabilities, and estimate of intelligence. It is essential to further explore each of these factors according to Light's (2006) analysis of their impact on retention to understand their significance.

Preschool attendance provides children with an exposure to the social demands and academic expectations of the school environment. These children tend to adapt more readily to kindergarten and their experience in preschool provides a foundation that eases them into school life. As Light (2006) explains, research on Head Start preschool programs supports the claim that preschool attendance can increase success with readiness for kindergarten and academic achievement in language arts and mathematics.

As indicated in the research of several authors (Cosden, 1993; Crosser, 1999; Grant, 1998; Light, 2006; Pomplun, 1988) retention has been found to have a greater rate of success in the primary grades than when children have passed third grade. There are less social repercussions to retention during these years and the additional time with the primary grade curriculum can give a student the foundation of skills necessary for future achievement. LRS

takes this into consideration by including current grade placement as a significant factor when considering candidacy for retention.

As cited repeatedly in this literature review, determining a child's grade placement based on chronological age is a flaw in our grading system. The student's age does not positively correlate with academic achievement since the rate of development differs between individuals. If a child enters kindergarten before he/she is old enough to start school, this individual could experience an academic disadvantage based on a lack of developmental readiness.

Physical size affects a student's social connections, especially at the primary grade levels. Young children consider size to be directly related to age; therefore, smaller children may experience peer discrimination as well as preconceived notions of ability by administrators and teachers. These adults and peers tend to view the smaller children as less capable and often have lower expectations of these children. Light (2006) also suggests that physical size is often related to immaturity and even learning disabilities that may account for low achievement in school.

Gender, another factor on the LRS, is significant because child development research has shown that there is an apparent difference between the physical and intellectual development between girls and boys. In fact, this information is an ongoing subject for researchers as recent technology has provided even more detailed information about the neurological differences between girls and boys (Gurian & Stevens, 2004). Statistics that have been compiled over decades support this data since boys are more often retained than girls. Historically, expectations for girls and boys have differed in society, most likely contributing to these statistical trends, since the difference between retention rates for girls

and boys has lessened in more recent years. Gender relevance in relation to retention is still a factor; however, it seems to lessen as our gender biases in society grow less distinct (Light, 2006).

Previous grade retention is an extremely significant factor in a child's education history because almost all previous and current research on retention as well as the opinions of educators support the disastrous effect of retaining a child more than once in his/her educational career. If a child has been retained previously and is being considered a candidate for retention again, then obviously the solution for low achievement is not the gift of time. Other factors must be contributing to low achievement that will not be solved by the repetition of curriculum and will most likely cause psychological trauma on an intrapersonal and interpersonal level.

As our population becomes more diverse with immigration from foreign countries, our population of students whose native language is one other than English grows. Students who are limited English proficient (LEP) are often students who struggle to achieve in subject areas that assume ease with the English language. However, this is not a simple factor to evaluate because multiple influences may impact acquisition of English. As Light (2006) explains, students who are unmotivated to learn English or have a disability which prevents acquisition of a new language will not be good candidates for retention. However, a student who has shown the development of English language skills, but needs more time to become English proficient may benefit from an extra year to gain these language skills as well as skills in the other subject areas that are linked to English proficiency.

Immature behavior is usually quite common among retention candidates. Behavior that is associated with younger children such as seeking out younger children on the

playground or having difficulty sustaining peer relationships, emotional outbursts, and a frequency for crying are all symptoms of immaturity. Most often students in this category who will benefit from retention are those that have shown physical and emotional growth, but are still behind the maturity level of their peers. Students who have not demonstrated growth during the current year of grade placement may be showing symptoms of disabilities that are related to immaturity. These students will most likely not benefit from grade repetition.

A child who demonstrates symptoms of an emotional disorder will almost never benefit from a year of retention. The repetition of the curriculum will not improve these emotional difficulties and the trauma of being held back could exacerbate the emotional disorder. Unfortunately, sometimes it is hard to identify these children and so they may be mislabeled as immature when in fact, they require other interventions rather than retention to increase their level of success in school. This same reasoning can be applied to children who have a history of conduct disorder and/or defiant behavior. These children who are often termed "delinquents" will not benefit from a year retention because the difficulties do not lie within the need for growth or exposure to a repeated curriculum. Retention will most likely be counterproductive with this type of student and exaggerate a student's anti-social behaviors. These students also need additional interventions or services such as counseling or psychiatric support.

Experiential background is an extremely significant factor that Light (2006) recognizes in his retention scale; however, it is also difficult to assess due to the variability in exposure and early enrichment. Even though this category would be seen by many as discriminatory, there is much statistical data that supports the claim that children from

impoverished families are more likely to be retained than those of a higher socio-economic background. The reason for this trend is that parents who have less education and provide less exposure to children during their years of early development tend to have children who have more difficult acclimating to the school environment and acquiring the necessary skills to move forward with their peers. Light (2006) sites studies that demonstrate the positive correlation between parents who themselves were high school dropouts to the rate at which their children experience grade retention.

The presence of siblings in a child's life can also impact the success of retention. The perception of retention and emotional interactions that occur between the siblings of a child who has been retained can have a negative impact on the success of retention. The closer that siblings are in age the more difficult the year of retention impacts their relationship and consequently the self-esteem of the retained student. This can be especially significant if the child is member of a multiple-birth such as twins, triplets, etc… Siblings are a permanent and unique relationship for humans that impacts their self-image more than any other human relationship since it is one of the most lasting bonds between individuals. It is important that the age difference between siblings and relationship between siblings is taken into consideration by parents and educators when considering retention.

Parent involvement has long been valued by educators as a significant factor in student growth and success in school. Children are influenced by their parent's interest in education and participation in school activities. Parental attitudes have also been found to play a large role in a child's experience with retention (Light, 2006). Parents who display a positive attitude about retention and work with the school to develop a remediation plan for their child tend to see more favorable results with retention. If parents demonstrate a

negative attitude toward the school prior to or as a result of retention than it is less likely that retention will be beneficial for the child.

As many educators would agree, student mobility creates a difficult learning scenario for all students, but especially those with other factors that are influencing their rate of achievement are most impacted by the constant transition from one school to another. High mobility creates issues for children in emotional, social, and intellectual development. It is difficult for children to sustain social relationships and feel positive about themselves as they repeatedly try to acclimate to new environments and build new relationships. These experiences can often be exhausting and even difficult for students who do not have temperaments that support these types of experiences. In addition, the stresses of this lifestyle can affect motivation in school and students often have difficulty keeping up with academic requirements as they must adjust to the expectations and varying curricula between schools and states. Children who experience high mobility are usually not good candidates for retention because the repeated year tends to compound all of the other issues that are associated with student mobility.

School attendance is an obvious area to assess when considering a student for retention. At first glance, it would make sense to retain a student for excessive absence or tardiness to school. However, one must consider the reasons for excessive absence or tardiness because these factors may also impact the success of retention for this student. For example, if a student is frequently absent due to lack of parental supervision or support for education as a priority in the family then it would also make sense that this lack of parental involvement will also have an effect on the repeated year in the grade. A student who is unmotivated or has learning or emotional disabilities may often be absent or tardy, but would

most likely not benefit from retention. However, a student who was absent due to a long-term illness and needs the extra time to catch up on all of the missed instruction might be a good candidate for retention.

The present level of a student's academic achievement would be a significant factor in the determination of retention; however, it is important to note that it should not be depended on as finitely as has been the case in the past. LRS demonstrates how nineteen other factors with varying weight need to be part of the decision-making process when determining candidacy for retention. Students who are retained solely based on low academic achievement do not possess a clear probability of success. On the other hand, students who show signs of other factors that lead to strong candidacy for retention and are additionally about one year delayed than that of their peers in academic achievement would benefit from retention.

As previously discussed, parental attitudes toward the school environment and retention are significant in determining success with the intervention. It follows that student attitudes about the possibility of retention would also be significant to consider. Light (2006) states, "If a child enters the retention year with anger, feelings of failure, and low self-worth, the chance of his benefiting is minimal" (p. 52). However, if a student is counseled about the decision and receives school and parent support prior to grade retention then it is more likely that their attitude will not impact the results of the retention. Students need to view retention as an opportunity for growth and learning, rather than a punishment for failure.

Along with a student's attitude toward retention, their attitude toward school work in general will affect their success with retention. If a student is unmotivated and often refuses to participate in or complete school tasks, then a year of retention is unlikely to make a

difference for that child. However, if a teacher or counselor can get to the root of resistance to put effort into school work than it is possible to overcome this obstacle and assess whether or not retention would make sense when considering the other factors in LRS.

A child who suffers from learning disabilities that prevent achievement in the classroom without modifications or accommodations that will help them be successful will not have success with retention. Retention can often highlight these disabilities if they have not yet been diagnosed. For example, if a student is retained in kindergarten and continues to struggle with their acquisition of the alphabet, numbers, and other basic skills then it can become evident that a learning disability may be the root to the academic difficulties. Many special education students experience retention as an intervention for low achievement and are then classified with a disability. Ideally, if the child can be diagnosed before applying retention as an intervention then it will be a better situation for that child who can be promoted to the next grade with appropriate programming and supports to help the student with academic areas but provide them the opportunity to remain with their peers for nonacademic and social experiences.

Finally, the evaluation of a student's estimated intelligence through standardized intelligent quotient (IQ) test scores may also impact the retention decision. The best candidate for retention is a student with average intelligence. This is a student who has the ability to learn, but needs more time for any number of reasons as indicated in the previous LRS factors. A student with below average intelligence can not be expected to achieve academically at the same rate as his/her peers and a student with above average intelligence will most likely be able to learn new material quickly enough to make up for any lost time or delayed development. If an IQ score is not available, teachers should evaluate student

growth over the course of the year. If the child has grown immensely, but is not quite at the same level of achievement as the other students then it is likely that retention is not necessary and the student will continue to grow over time. If a child has shown little growth over the year, then it can be concluded the retention would be unsuccessful and that there must be other issues that prevent the child from learning. However, if a child has shown steady growth and it is assumed that the pattern of growth will continue if the gift of time is provided, then this is most likely a stronger candidate for retention.

Even though the 20 factors of LRS provide a much more detailed and thorough evaluation of a student, there are still gray areas that a child might score within, which still ultimately leaves the decision up to the school district, teachers, and parents to decide if retention is the right avenue for a student. Obviously, if a child scores as an excellent or even good retention candidate, it may make the decision pretty simple. Conversely, if the student scores as a poor retention candidate or a student who is not a candidate at all for retention than the decision could also be quite clear. However, the gray areas lie within students who score as fair or marginal retention candidates. Ultimately, LRS can not be the only factor used to decide whether or not a student is eligible for retention. Light (2006) supports this statement in bold print in his manual: "The LRS should never be used as the sole criteria in determining whether a child is retained, but should be used to complement the professional judgment of the educator, augmenting professional judgment with the latest research on grade retention" (p. 21). Light's perspective on the decision-making process for grade retention strongly supports the need for continued research on the topic to help educators and parents guide students in the most appropriate direction to meet individual learning needs.

Developmental Readiness

The literature uses developmental readiness and school readiness synonymously to refer to growth physiologically, socially, and/or emotionally that students need to experience to be prepared for their first years of school in either kindergarten or first grade. Bowman (2005) explains, "Teachers attributed school readiness based on (a) normal physiological readiness, (b) an effective preschool curriculum, (c) the treatment of diagnosed disorders, and/or (d) maturity" (p. 43). Developmental readiness can not be correlated with the age of a child. Proponents of developmental education believe that readiness should be the basis for progression through the educational system and all students should be protected from curriculum that is too advanced for their individual readiness (Smith, 1988). Some children are ready for reading at an earlier age than other children and some may not be ready to read until later than expected. Often this latter group of children are labeled learning disabled while the early developed children are labeled gifted (Wood, 1994). However, these labels are misleading, and often incorrect. As children's development aligns with their age over time, one may find that both the "disabled child" and "gifted child" are prematurely labeled and that in actuality they possess an average cognitive ability. Wood (1994) states that the best time to assess developmental readiness is at age 6 and can be accomplished through various diagnostic evaluations in literacy and mathematics. His literature explains the reasoning behind the popularity for retention at the first grade level.

Entry criteria differ in each state and school district in this country; however, children who enter the first grade should either be six years old by the start of the school year or soon thereafter. This traditional process of choosing an arbitrary date to mark school entry can be disastrous at both ends of the spectrum. Gordon (1999) explains, "In any kindergarten just

about anywhere in America, there is a range of three distinct ages" (p. 42). In each of these

kindergarten classes, there are 4 year old children who will turn 5 early in the school year,

there are children who will turn 6 within the first few months of the school year, and there

are the children who are solidly 5 years old, turning 6 during the latter half of the school year

(Gordon, 1999). The variety in chronological age leads to differences in the developmental

abilities of these young children (Smith, 1988). Students who are not developmentally ready

to begin school could struggle or even fail, while those students whose have shown early

development are prevented from starting school when they would most likely be successful

(Grant, 1998). Gordon (1999) states, "Early-childhood education in kindergarten through

grade 3 presents students with a variety of educational challenges, most of which are

developmental in nature. Social skills, mathematical concepts, and reading and writing are

critical to success in the early years in primary grades. Research has presented clear

evidence that many of these are developmental, just like walking and talking. (p. 42)" This is

a flaw in the structure of our schools, but regardless, research in human development and

child psychology have shown us that the period of time when we expect students to enter

school is also the period of time when development is extremely active and varies greatly for

individual children. Developmental benchmarks illustrate that the majority of six year old

children experience a dramatic rate of change in cognitive, social, emotional, and physical

development. Examples of this rapid development are apparent in children's physical

development as baby teeth begin falling out and new teeth emerge. Additionally, physical

growth increases as children can be seen in a constant hurry, more concerned with the

process and getting finished than the quality of the product. Social development takes off in

the first grade with an increase in peer interactions and various sound effects such as

humming and whistling. This social growth effects emotional growth as their awareness of others emerges causing six year old children to react to words, voice tone, and body language (Wood, 1994). Most significantly, six year olds experience a huge transition in intellectual growth when "concepts begin to be organized in a symbolic manner through understandable systems and approaches" (Wood, 1994, p. 60). For this reason, it is often the easiest age to determine when a child's development may be on a slightly delayed path that would suggest retention as an intervention for low achievement. As students become older and the rate of development slows, it is more difficult to assess the candidacy for retention.

Some children have difficulty due to learning disabilities and these children are not necessarily good candidates for retention because time to develop will not be the solution to their difficulties in school. These students have special needs that should be met through accommodations and modifications to their learning program. Children who display behaviors that suggest that their slow learning is temporary are the best candidates for retention. These children have an intense "need for prolonged periods of practice when preliminary learning takes place (Lieberman, 1980, p. 40)", which is why retention has seen the most success at the primary grade levels.

For other children, physical or emotional immaturity can be the developmental wall that blocks successful achievement in the early grades. Physical immaturity can be exhibited through hyperactivity (affecting listening skills and attention span), gross motor or fine motor difficulties (making early writing a difficult task), speech and language delays, and various perceptual difficulties. Psychosocial immaturity can make the school experience very difficult for some students as they have difficulty relating to their peers, developing a negative self-concept as a result (Lieberman, 1980).

Sometimes these developmental delays can be attributed to chronological age and other times they are just an indication of the child's individual rate of growth. For example, males who are toward the youngest of those in their class are often candidates for retention. These students not only have their young chronological age working against them, but biologically gender is a factor as males mature at a slower rate than females (Lieberman, 1980). Many of these students experience red-shirting, when their parents choose to hold them back from entering kindergarten, rather than waiting for possible retention at the school level.

It is important to note that even though retention may be a successful intervention for students with developmental delays, it will not be successful on its own. Retention combined with remediation has shown the greatest rate of success. Remediation refers to the strategies that are developed specifically for the student in need to assist any deficiencies that exist. It is an individualized program that occurs during the retention year rather than just simply repeating the same curriculum with no modifications or assistance (Balitewicz, 1998).

An alternative to retention that would align with the literature on the developmental stages of primary grade children can be described as developmental education. Grant (1998) states, "Developmental education is an approach to teaching that matches the curriculum and methods of instruction to a child's current stage of development and individual needs" (p. 3). Knowing that a child's chronological age does not correlate directly with the rate of development, developmental educators believe that many factors must be considered to assess school readiness for each individual child. Developmental educators consider school readiness to be the alignment between the student's development and their class or grade placement. Some of the aspects that are considered in assessing school readiness are related

to physical, social/emotional, and intellectual development. Physical development should demonstrate strong fine motor skills as well as accurate vision and hearing, or the identification of needs in any of these areas. The ability to separate from parents/guardians and cope with upset or conflicts that may occur on a daily basis in group settings, in other words a certain level of maturity, illustrate readiness in the social/emotional developmental area. Finally, intellectual development can be seen when a young child knows basic information about themselves and their family as well as some exposure to the alphabet, single-digit numbers, colors, and common household objects (Grant, 1998). This simple assessment is given to many children as a common screening procedure upon entry to kindergarten. It can often be a predictor of a student's achievement during the kindergarten year. It most definitely helps educators to be proactive in identifying the needs of the incoming kindergarten students. With this information, teachers can immediately individualize instruction and make plans for remediation.

Grant explains, "A developmental curriculum is designed to teach students in ways that match the students' current developmental needs and capabilities, and support continued social, emotional, physical, and intellectual growth. In this way, it enables children to achieve initial success in school. (p. 39)"

Gender Differences in Retention and Learning

Our school systems tend to ignore the innate learning differences in various student populations. The most obvious of these differences is between boys and girls when they enter their first year of school. Past and present literature (Brown, 1963; Crosser, 1999; Gurian & Stevens, 2004) demonstrate that girls tend to be more socially mature than boys,

which provides them an increased level of comfort in the group settings that occur in school. These researchers also agree that at the least this level of comfort may account for the ability of girls to learn to read faster than boys; however, more recent literature indicates that this may even be more biologically substantiated than was once thought (Gurian & Stevens, 2004).

Males are more likely to be retained than females at any age in their educational experience. However, especially at the primary grade levels, both parents and teachers feel that retaining male children is beneficial (Cosden, 1993). According to Crosser's (1999) interpretation of research, "boys with summer birthdates tended to be advantaged academically by postponing kindergarten entrance 1 year" (p. 12). Most parents and teachers would agree with Crosser because boys are more likely to be seen as immature or exhibiting behavior that is not developmentally appropriate for their age.

Boys are also more likely to be classified with a learning disability, with about two-thirds of the special education population consisting of boys. Boys represent the majority of the discipline referrals in schools. Most concerning is the large percentage of high school dropouts that are males, 80% percent, and that males make up less than 40% of college students (Gurian & Stevens, 2004, citing Gurian, 2001). All of these statistics illustrate the growing concern for males and achievement in our current educational system. Wood (2003) states, "Currently boys' underachievement continues to be a contentious issues, because of disparities in educational performance indicators from ages 5-18 years, as well as in social outcomes, and their wider impact on society" (p. 366).

New technology, in the form of MRI and PET scans, has given scientists the ability to see how learning occurs in the brains of both males and females. Through this technology

scientists have come to some conclusions about the differences in learning styles between males and females (Gurian & Stevens, 2004). Through the use of the knowledge of gender-specific brain development, instruction can be reformed to make it more gender appropriate. This gender appropriate curriculum and instructional methods will most likely have a stronger significance in the achievement of boys (Bearne & Warrington, 2003; Gurian & Stevens, 2004; Tyre, 2005). In fact, some educators feel that single-sex classes might be the optimal response to gender differences in learning (Warrington & Younger, 2001). Based on this information, acknowledgement of gender differences in learning may help reduce the number of boys who are retained or help to remediate those boys that have already been retained to increase the probability of success with retention.

Results of Retention

Leckrone states, "The efficacy of grade retention has been a subject of research for more than 100 years" (p. 53). Current results of retention are mostly negative (Leckrone, 2006), especially for older children, and the statistics on retention vary greatly from article to article or don't exist at all. In fact, there is no national figure for statistics on grade retention. Estimates have been between 20 and 50 percent of 9th graders have repeated a grade at some point in their educational career, most likely causing school dropout (Lawton, 1997; Parker, 2001). However, we do know that most retentions occur during your first few years of school in the primary grades (Lawton, 1997). Thompson and Cunningham (2000) explains, "Currently, virtually no statistics are kept on social promotion, in part because few districts explicitly embrace or admit to the practice" (p. 2).

Additionally, one must keep in mind, that retention research is difficult to draw firm conclusions from because ethical concerns prevent the random sampling of children to assign them to promotion or retention as a condition during schooling. Mantzicopoulos (1997) states, "When samples are matched on variables such as gender, age, and scores on cognitive or academic functioning, it is not known whether the groups are also similar on social and personality characteristics" (p. 116). However, there are researchers that have found data to represent both ends of the continuum regarding retention.

Repeatedly, research explains that retaining children might provide an initial rebound of achievement, but in the long run the gains tend to be insignificant in preventing school failure (Black, 2004; NEA Today, 1998; Parker, 2001). In fact, retention has been noticed to be a predictor of high school dropout (Black, 2004; NEA Today, 1998). Lawton (1997) references research statistics that 20 to 30 percent of students who were retained at least once were more likely to drop out of school. Academic achievement with primary grade retention has shown that students who were struggling with their math skills but nonetheless were promoted were doing better in math in their 5th grade year than those that had been retained (Schroeder, 1995). Schroeder (1995) continues to explain that although most often, the decision to retain a student is made due to poor performance in literacy, the detriment to math skills is often overlooked. Thompson and Cunningham (2000) explains, "Opponents have argued that retention discourages students whose motivation and confidence are already shaky" (p. 2). However, Thompson and Cunningham (2000) do point out that some retained students show academic improvement following retention and feel better about themselves and school.

Lawton (1997) discusses research findings of a study of inner-city Baltimore students conducted by researchers at Johns Hopkins University, in which students who were retained experienced improvement in their grades, test scores, and self-esteem. Additional research as cited in Mantzicopoulos (1997) referencing Meisels and Liaw (1993) suggests that early retention in the primary grades has shown positive results in academic performance and school behavior. Grant (1998) supports this claim by stating that retention works best as an early intervention or for older students who want more time to demonstrate success in a grade level. Older students who are emotionally capable of handling the stress of retention have found that the experience improved their self-image as well as their academic achievement (Grant, 1998; Mantzicopoulos, 1997 citing Mantzicopoulos & Morrison, 1992 and Shepard, 1989; NEA Today, 1998). This progress only occurs with remediation during the retention year. Pierson (1992) states, "Retention may be a component of an effective academic intervention for children with academic difficulties, in contrast to no intervention (i.e. social promotion)" (p. 307). However, retention does not usually eliminate academic difficulties, but might move students from failing to passing (Lawton, 1997). In addition, there is some evidence that demonstrates that the portrayal of retention from a child's parents, teachers, or peers can attribute to the negativity of the experience, making it less effective (Grant, 1998). Providing the proper supports and positive environment surrounding the presentation and implementation of retention could possibly change the results of the experience. "Working smarter and more strategically, providing more powerful classroom instruction as well as better prevention and intervention measures, and implementing a more enlightened version of retention (Parker, 2001, p. 12)" should be the goals of future research.

The results of retention conflict with America's perception of retention versus social promotion. As stated in District Administration (2005), neither retention or promotion in isolation have both been shown to be an ineffective solution to low achievement and poor school performance. "When asked if they favor stricter standards for social promotion, even if a lot more students will be held back, 72 percent of Americans say "yes". When asked which is worse for the child, simple promotion or retention, most say promotion is worse" (Public Agenda, 2003, p. 76 cited in District Administration, 2005). Teachers' opinions of retention versus social promotion echo that of the general population. (NEA Today, 2005; NEA Today, 1998; Public Agenda, 2003 cited in District Administration, 2005; Smith, 1988) Witmer (2004) states, "Years of research have shown that retention provides limited academic advantages to students, and yet the practice continues" (p.173). Knowing, that retention is still widely being used as an intervention in our schools nationwide, regardless of research results, supports the need for further study of the retention process.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

Assumptions and Rationale for a Qualitative Design

Retention is often argued against based on the social and emotional impact that it has on the students who experience this intervention to combat low achievement, with questionable academic benefits. The rationale for choosing a qualitative design for this case study is based on the need to understand the effect of retention on primary grade students from the perspectives of the participants in the retention process, focusing particularly on the social, emotional, and academic aspects that are represented in the program of retention. Qualitative design of this research provides the opportunity to collect data that are both detailed and descriptive, aiding in the determination of the complex factors that may influence retention. It has been difficult for researchers to pinpoint the factors that will guarantee a successful retention experience for a specific student because of the diverse variables that are involved in each case. Amongst these variables, the perceptions and emotions of the students, teachers, and parents all play a pivotal role in the success of the program.

The data collected through this research has driven me to a theoretical understanding of the components of an educational program for retention with primary grade students. Qualitative design utilizes an inductive method of research, allowing me to gather the data and then generate conclusions based on the patterns in the data. Through direct contact with students, teachers, and parents, utilizing observations and interviews and building upon my personal past experiences, professional knowledge of retention, and understanding of child

growth and development as it pertains to the academic, social, and emotional development of elementary school students, I have developed an analysis of this phenomenon.

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher of this study will be to examine from an outside perspective the impact that retention has on six kindergarten, first, and second grade students. I observed and interviewed the participants of this study as not only a researcher but an educator and administrator who will encounter this phenomenon in the future. I am dedicated to identifying exemplary practices in the best interest of all students. I am qualified to conduct this research based on my training and experiences in elementary education. I have a professional knowledge of child growth and development as well as the kindergarten, first, and second grade curricula. This knowledge is the result of my undergraduate degree in elementary education with a minor in psychology and a graduate degree in educational administration, including my certification as a curriculum supervisor. I taught elementary school students for five years and then continued my career in education with positions as an assistant principal and curriculum supervisor in elementary education. Currently, I am the school principal of the elementary school where this research took place.

My position as the building principal of the school provides advantages to this research project. First of all, the teachers and students are comfortable with my presence in the classroom since it is my practice to visit classrooms regularly to informally observe students and the curriculum in action. Additionally, I have access to the site on a consistent basis to afford me many opportunities for observations and interviews over time, providing thorough data collection and it will not take me as long to orient myself to the field

experience as it might for an outside researcher. I also have unlimited access to student records and information on district policies and procedures that might impact the study.

I recognize the ethical issues and bias involved in this scenario and implemented safeguards to protect the study from these conflicts. The Intervention and Referral Services Team utilizes teacher recommendation, Light's Retention Scale, and parent approval to decide if a student should experience retention as an intervention for low achievement. This same group of individuals determines the teacher who receives this student during the retention year. In addition, I did not supervise these teachers during the length of time of this qualitative study. The Director of Curriculum and Instruction supervised and evaluated the teachers who participated in the study as well as supervised the curriculum and instructional practices of these teachers. All of the teachers involved in the study are tenured, veteran teachers who have had experience working with students of varying needs throughout their careers and are well-respected in the district. These safeguards have created an environment for my study that gave me the advantages of a participant observer without the disadvantages that may occur with the authority and power of my position in the institution.

Population and Sample

The sample of this qualitative case study is confined to one school district and one school to create some consistency in teacher training, community involvement, and instructional design. This suburban school district, located in central New Jersey, has seen ethnic diversity expand over the last ten years. The elementary school currently has a 50% minority demographic, mostly comprised of African-American and Asian/Pacific Islander students. Even more significant has been the use of one retention policy for the purpose of

this study to create a basis of reliability in identifying students for retention. The sample is limited to only kindergarten, first, and second grade retained students to expand our understanding of the retention experience based on cited research stating that if students are retained early in their educational career, giving them the opportunity to develop basic skills before moving ahead, then retention might be a successful strategy for initial low achievement. Pomplun's research in 1988 discussed that the "academic benefits of retention will decrease as grade level increases, self-concept and motivation of retainees will decrease in comparison with regular and borderline students as grade level increases, and teacher, student, and parent perceptions of retention as a beneficial alternative will decrease with increasing grade level" (p. 284).

To limit the study to one school district, one school, and three grade levels also reduces the size of the sample because very few students are retained from year to year in one school in each grade level. This suburban elementary school has an enrollment of approximately 500 students in grades K-4. The sample of students was obtained through the analysis of student records as well as teacher guidance, which documented those kindergarten, first, and second grade students that have been retained. The process for determining retention was consistent for all students in the sample through the use of Light's Retention Scale, teacher recommendation, the Intervention and Referral Services team recommendation, and parent agreement. The entire population of kindergarten, first, and second grade retained students was included in the sample, simply due to the limited number of retained students, with the exception of one set of twins whose parents chose not to consent to participation.

The students who participated in this study includes three kindergarten students, two first grade students, and one second grade student. The group consists of one female and five male students. Of the six children, three are white, non-hispanic and three are black. All six families have households with a middle-class income as is common in the community as a whole. Five of the students live in households with both parents, while one student lives in a single-parent household due to divorce. One of the five students is bi-lingual with parents from Ghana with a native language of Twi, while all of the other students speak English at home. One of the five students is an only child, while all of the other students have at least one sibling. Among these five students with siblings, birth order varies with two students having a younger sibling, two students having an older sibling, and one student having both older and younger siblings. All students participated in interventions prior to being retained. Each of these students will be further described and individualized in the results analysis of the data collected.

Data Collection

This qualitative case study analyzes the effects of retention on kindergarten, first, and second grade students in regard to their experience with the retention program. Through the use of student artifacts, student and teacher observations in the field, and teacher and parent interviews, I was able to triangulate the data. Student data have been collected through the use of student cumulative folders and student artifacts. The cumulative folders provided personal information such as birthdates, grades, ethnicity, teacher names, parent names, and an educational background for each student. Any classroom student artifacts provided ongoing student assessments, portfolios of student work, and possibly even communication

between the teacher and parents, demonstrating positive and negative experiences that the student might have had throughout the year. Documented parent and teacher communication was difficult to find since most communication is often verbal at the elementary school level, but this documentation could have provided uncensored insight into student growth or difficulties during the retention year or previous year.

The perspectives of teachers and parents were collected as data through interviews to determine academic, social, and/or emotional progress or regress that might have occurred during the retention year. Two groups of teachers were interviewed to examine their perceptions of the impact of retention. First, the retaining teacher of each student was interviewed to determine the factors that led to retention and provide a foundation for entry into the retention year. Then, the repeating teacher of each student was interviewed to analyze positive and negative effects of retention as it relates to the academic, social, and emotional growth of each student. Finally, interviews of the parents of the retained students were completed to gain their perspective of how they feel their child has responded to retention. Semi-structured open-ended interviews were planned and conducted to produce factors that might contribute to the retention experience for primary grade children. Schensul (1999) describes, "Semi-structured interviewing further confirms or disconfirms the validity of domains for the study and adds new domains as they arise" (p. 150). With this interviewing structure, there are no correct answers or selection of responses from a list of choices, but the questions will be preformulated with option for expansion by the researcher or the interviewee (Schensul, 1999). The interview questions were designed using my familiarity with the literature and exploration of the subject during prior doctoral coursework.

In addition, the teacher interview protocol was field-tested prior to use in this study. For these reasons, I have confidence in the validity of the interview protocol.

Moreover, I conducted exploratory, open-ended observations of the retained students an average of three times during this study to complete detailed and concrete field notes on a regular basis of their daily interactions in the classroom with the hope of producing patterns in the data over time that may not occur with sporadic observations. When observing students in class activities, I observed academic performance, evidence of current self worth/esteem, and social interactions with peers. I utilized an observation checklist that was developed from Nilsen's (2008) 4th Edition of Week by Week, a research based resource for educators with various tools for documenting children's development. The opportunity to observe these classrooms also provided data that was used to assess teacher effectiveness. Since the teacher is a significant variable in this study, observations of instructional strategies and teaching styles have been documented and analyzed. As a member of the school community, my awareness of the school culture and familiarity with the setting and norms of the community supports my use of participant observation as a data collection technique.

As defined by Schensul 1999, "participant observation refers to a process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the research setting" (p. 91). My position as the school principal provides me with the collegial relationships and an internal and intimate perception of the organization and its structural characteristics that give me a unique handle on the cultural experiences of the participants. Keeping in mind, there is a continuum on which participation exists in the field (Schensul, 1999). Although I was personally present during observations, thus initiating my participation, I acted in the environment as a non-participant with little to no interaction

between myself and the students and teachers I observed in the field. I interacted with the teachers during the interview sessions; however, I did not purposefully interact with the students during my observations.

Data Analysis

The data that have been collected during this qualitative study from the interviews of teachers and parents has been analyzed through the use of the constant comparative method and content analysis with a bottom up approach to data analysis. As explained by LeCompte (1999), the bottom up approach involves systematic item-level analysis. The steps to this process are as follows: 1) Observe the phenomena, 2) Differentiate the phenomena through a comparison and contrast with known conceptual frameworks, 3) Decide the observed phenomena that need further examination, 4) Organize the data into domains, factors, subfactors, and variables, 5) Identify which of these data categories are related to one another, and 6) Develop explanations for this relationships. (LeCompte, 1999). I utilized this process as I analyzed the fieldnotes from my classroom observations, teacher and parent interviews, and student artifacts. The constant comparative method came into play as I looked for similarities and differences between the items that arose from the data. A form of comparison is analytic induction, which emphasizes the need to seek out negative cases, helping to refine the categories of the items and thus their relationship to one another. (LeCompte, 1999) As the content of each interview was analyzed, responses to similar questions have been compared to find patterns that may exist amongst the six retention cases of kindergarten, first, and second grade students. Each interview was compared to previous interviews to allow patterns to be revealed in order to identify the factors that influenced the

retention experience. Similarly, the field notes from the classroom observations were analyzed with an item-analysis and constant comparative method to highlight patterns that may exist in this data as well. In addition, the content of student records were compared as the students participate in the same curriculum with similar lessons planned, creating a baseline for comparison for academic performance, while displaying the differing backgrounds and history of each student.

Methods of Verification

I have attempted to satisfy the quest for verification by collecting data from students, teachers, and parents, all of the individuals that are affected by retention, through the analysis of interviews, observations, and documents, utilizing triangulation as a method of verification. I observed the students at least three times during the study, interviewed the teachers, and interviewed the parents to provide an in-depth look at the six cases over their second year in kindergarten, first, and second grade. This long-term involvement has allowed for thorough data collection as several opportunities have been available to demonstrate student academic, social, and emotional growth and adaptation to retention. I observed in the classrooms from the perspective of a participant observer since I am employed in the school, but I did not participate in class activities as to prevent any intervention into the field of study. Since I visited the classrooms more than once for observations and visit the classrooms regularly as the building principal, students seemed to be comfortable with my presence and seemed to act naturally as they move throughout their daily activities. During data collection, I consulted with other educators, fellow doctoral students, and college professors, soliciting feedback from outside sources, to explore all

possible interpretations of the data as well as compare my data with the current literature on the effects of retention.

Ethical Issues

The ethical issues in this case study exist mostly due to my role as the researcher. I am the building principal of the location where the sample of students will be studied. Since the students have already been retained, I have not affected their educational progress, regarding social promotion or retention, in any way. I also had no influence over the decision to retain a student since it was decided upon based on criteria including Light's Retention Scale, teacher recommendation, and the Intervention and Referral Services team recommendation. Additionally, parents ultimately had the final say in the decision-making process by providing the permission to retain their child.

The ethical issues are related to any influence that I may have had over the interventions in the referral process, my interactions with the classroom teachers, and my interactions with the parents as an authority figure in the building as well as the researcher. I did not formally supervise the teachers who are participants in this study and all of the teachers are tenured staff members who are veterans in the building so that helped to alleviate my presence as an authority figure in the classroom. Additionally, I visited the classrooms regularly, creating an atmosphere where the students and teachers were used to my physical presence. They disregarded my company in the room and continue to operate as usual, providing me the opportunity to informally observe students and classroom routines. This common practice has reduced any impact I may have had on the activity in the classroom.

The procedures that have been already in existence in the school involving the retention process also protected the study against the ethical concern of my conducting the study as the building principal and researcher. The retention process is conducted by the Intervention and Referral Services team and the transition to the retention year teacher occurs through collaboration from the student's case manager from the team and the previous year's teacher. The building principal is not normally involved in the process of retention or the design of the individual retention program as an intervention for low achievement. Additionally, the Director of Curriculum and Instruction is responsible for developing the curriculum, programming, and instructional practices of the teachers, preventing my involvement in these areas from causing a conflict of interest.

Another possible ethical concern could have occurred during the parent interviews. I recognized the need to be sensitive to my interactions with parents as an authority figure in the school building. I found that parents were willing to be extremely honest with me and often provided more information than is even asked of them because they trust me as their building principal. I was careful to use this authority to include only information that pertains to my study in my data collection process and to ensure confidentiality to all who participated in the study. I recognized the possibility that parents may become upset as they reflect upon the experience or difficulties that their child may currently be/have been experiencing, but I took notice of this ethical concern as I conducted the interviews, utilizing sensitivity and empathy to alleviate any harmful effects of the study on the parents of the retained students.

Outcome of the Study and Its Relation to Theory and Literature

As a result of this study, I hope to provide insight into the developmental needs of primary grade children with low levels of achievement and maturity as they begin their retention experience in public education. My research has attempted to identify the factors that influence the retention experience for these students. Currently, retention is being utilized, but without consistent proof of success, and more often than necessary, negative effects. Study of child development clearly states that children need to be developmentally ready for the skills they are expected to learn in order for them to constructively process the information. In addition, the skills in language arts and math that primary grade students, specifically kindergarten, first, and second grade students, are exposed to provide the foundation for all future learning. This study is meant to contribute to the development of a more effective retention process and program for these young children, utilizing the expertise of teachers and the perceptions of parents who have experienced retention firsthand.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter includes all of the data that were collected as a result of teacher interviews, parent interviews, and student observations. These sources of information are directly linked to the research questions to provide insight into the retention experience of this group of students. (See Table 5-2) The teacher interviews provided data about teacher perception and attitudes of retention as well as the educational program they provide the students. Additionally, the teachers were able to share information about the student academic, social, and emotional status through their first year in the grade level as well as the retention year. The parent interviews yielded data in this area as well, but from a different perspective since they know their children more intimately and see their children's development over time. The student observations presented another perspective on the educational program offered in the classrooms where students experienced their retention year. The student observations also provided data about the student's academic performance and acclimation to the retention year classroom. Finally, student artifacts have been used to demonstrate student academic performance. All of these data collection methods have aided in identifying the factors that influence a student's experience with retention. Before taking a closer look at the data that were collected through the observations and interviews, the following section combines an analysis of document review and background information collected during parent interviews to give an in-depth look at the student population.

Student Population

Eight students were attending their retention year in either kindergarten, first, or second grade in this elementary school. Six of the eight students have been included in this study, with the parents of the two remaining students choosing not to participate. The following is a synopsis of the background of each child as well as the areas of concern that prompted the grade retention.

Student #1 is a black, male born in the month of October. He is six years old in his second year of kindergarten. He lives with both of his parents and English is spoken at home, although the native language of his parents is Twi. His parents moved to the United States from Ghana about ten years ago. He has one sibling who is two years younger than him. He received English as a Second Language instruction at an intermediate level as an intervention for low-achievement, but his high performance has enabled him to be exited from the program at the close of this school year. Through teacher recommendation, parental approval, performance-based assessments, and a score of 37 on the Light's Retention Scale (Light, 2006), he was retained in kindergarten. Items on the scale that contributed to his low score are:

- o Student Age - Birthday falls within the last half of the calendar year and is in the younger half of his kindergarten class
- o Student's Knowledge of the English Language - English language skills were below average, but have shown growth
- o Immature Behavior – Typically associates with children who are approximately one year younger than his age
- o Academic Achievement – Performance is approximately one year below grade level in all academic areas
- o Student's Attitude About Retention – Disinterested in whether or not he should be retained

These items along with the criteria that he was a kindergartener, male, never previously retained, and without a sibling in the grade level below him, qualified him as a Fair retention candidate (Light, 2006).

Student #2 is a white, non-Hispanic male born at the very end of June. He is six years old in his second year of kindergarten. He lives with both parents and English is spoken at home. He has an older sister who is twelve years old. He participated in the kindergarten intervention program, which provides an additional 45 minutes of instruction every day for one semester, approximately four months. He also received occupational therapy and speech therapy in school as intervention for developmental delays in fine-motor and language skills. Through teacher recommendation, parental approval, performance-based assessments, and a score of 21 on the Light's Retention Scale (Light, 2006), he was retained in kindergarten. Items on the scale that contributed to his low score are:

- o Student Age - Birthday falls within the last half of the calendar year and is in the younger half of his kindergarten class
- o Physical Size – Significantly smaller than others of the same age
- o Immature Behavior – Typically associates with children who are two or more years younger than his age and prefers adult company
- o History of Conduct Disorder and/or Defiance – Occasionally has difficulty following school rules and "pushes boundaries"
- o Student Attendance – Missed more than 35 days of school in nine months
- o Academic Achievement – Performance is approximately one year below grade level in all academic areas
- o Student's Attitude About Retention – Disinterested in whether or not he should be retained
- o Estimate of Intelligence – Intelligence is within the average range

These items along with the criteria that he was a kindergartener, male, never previously retained, without a sibling in the grade level below him, and his teacher did not see any evidence of a learning disability, qualified him as a Good retention candidate (Light, 2006).

Student #3 is a white, non-Hispanic female born in the month of March. She is six years old and in her second year of kindergarten. She lives with both parents and English is spoken at home. She has a younger brother who is three years old. She participated in the kindergarten intervention program, which provides an additional 45 minutes of instruction every day for one semester, approximately four months. She also received occupational therapy as an intervention for developmental delays in fine-motor skills. Through teacher recommendation, parental approval, performance-based assessments, and a score of 18 on the Light's Retention Scale (Light, 2006), she was retained in kindergarten. Items on the scale that contributed to her low score are:

- Preschool Attendance – Did not attend preschool
- Physical Size – Slightly smaller than others of the same age
- Academic Achievement – Performance is approximately one year below grade level in all academic areas
- Student's Attitude About Retention – Disinterested in whether or not he should be retained
- Motivation to Complete School Tasks – Typically spends at least 80% of class time working on school assignments even though some may be too difficult
- Estimate of Intelligence – Intelligence is within the average range

These items along with the criteria that she was a kindergartener, never previously retained, and without a sibling in the grade level below her, qualified her as a Good retention candidate (Light, 2006).

Student #4 is a white, non-Hispanic male born in late August. He is seven years old in his second year of first grade. He lives with his mother and grandmother, visiting his father on weekends, due to divorce. He has an older sister who is nine years old. He participated in the kindergarten intervention program, which provides an additional 45 minutes of instruction every day for one semester, approximately four months. He also received Reading Recovery instruction in first grade, which is an individualized, intensive

reading program with a teacher who has been extensively trained. Through teacher

recommendation, parental approval, performance-based assessments, and a score of 28 on the

Light's Retention Scale (Light, 2006), he was retained in first grade. Items on the scale that

contributed to his low score are:

- o Preschool Attendance – Did not attend preschool
- o Student's Age – Birthday falls within the last half of the calendar year and is in the younger half of his first grade class
- o Physical Size – Significantly smaller than others of the same age
- o Immature Behavior – Typically associates with children his age, but does not get along well with these peers
- o Academic Achievement – Performance is approximately one year below grade level in all academic areas
- o Student's Attitude About Retention – Disinterested in whether or not he should be retained

These items along with the criteria that he was a first grade student, male, never previously

retained, and without a sibling in the grade level below him, qualified him as a Good

retention candidate (Light, 2006).

Student #5 is a black, male born in the month of April. He is seven years old in his

second year of first grade. He lives with both of his parents. He has three older half-siblings

from his mother and father's previous marriages. He has a younger brother who is five years

old. He received Reading Recovery instruction in first grade. Through teacher

recommendation, parental approval, performance-based assessments, and a score of 28 on the

Light's Retention Scale (Light, 2006), he was retained in first grade. Items on the scale that

contributed to his low score are:

- o Student's Age – Birthday falls within the last half of the calendar year and is in the younger half of his first grade class
- o Immature Behavior – Typically associates with children that are approximately one year younger than his age
- o Academic Achievement – Performance is approximately one year below grade level in all academic areas
- o Student's Attitude About Retention – Requests retention but insists he get the same teacher next year

- o Motivation to Complete School Tasks – Typically spends at least 80% of class time working on school assignments even though some may be too difficult
- o Estimate of Intelligence – Intelligence is within the average range

These items along with the criteria that he was a first grade student, male, never previously retained, and without a sibling in the grade level below him, qualified him as a Good retention candidate (Light, 2006).

Student #6 is a black, male born in the month of July. He is eight years old in his second year of second grade. He lives with both of his parents. He does not have any siblings. He received Reading Recovery instruction in first grade. Through teacher recommendation, parental approval, performance-based assessments, and a score of 33 on the Light's Retention Scale (Light, 2006), he was retained in second grade. Items on the scale that contributed to his low score are:

- o Student's Age – Birthday falls within the last half of the calendar year and is in the younger half of his first grade class
- o Physical Size – Significantly smaller than others of the same age
- o Academic Achievement – Performance is approximately one year below grade level in all academic areas
- o Student's Attitude About Retention – Disinterested in whether or not he should be retained

These items along with the criteria that he was never previously retained, a male, without a sibling in the grade level below him, and his teacher saw no evidence of a learning disability or emotional disorder, qualified him as a Fair retention candidate (Light, 2006).

Teacher Population

Eight teachers participated in this study. All eight teachers are women, ranging in age from approximately 25 to 55 years old. One teacher is Hispanic and the other seven teachers are Caucasian. Among the eight teachers, their teaching experience ranges from kindergarten

to eighth grade, with the majority of their career focused at the elementary level, primarily in grades K-3. Seven out of the eight teachers are tenured, veteran teachers in the district with an average of 14 years of experience. Six out of the eight teachers have either begun or completed a graduate degree in education.

All eight teachers were interviewed regarding their experiences with retaining children and teaching children who had been retained. Eight students were currently experiencing retention, completing a second year in either kindergarten, first, or second grade. Five of these eight teachers taught these children during their first year in each grade level, with two of the teachers each teaching two of the eight students. One child's first year teacher is no longer employed in the district and was therefore, excluded from the study. Six teachers taught the eight children during the students' second year in each grade level. One of these six teachers taught three of the retained children in their second year of kindergarten. Two of these eight teachers are both the teacher who retained the students last year and have the responsibility of teaching them during this current year, the students' second year in the grade level. This occurred due to parent request and teacher recommendation for the student to remain with the same teacher for a second year. The chart below provides clarity in understanding the students' teacher assignments in their first and second year in the grade levels, since some of the teachers taught students in both years. The students have been assigned numbers 1-8, which correlate with the numbers aforementioned in the student population information, keeping in mind that student #7 and student #8 did not participate in the study with the exception of the teacher interviews. The teachers have been assigned a letter from A through H.

Student #1	First Year of Kindergarten	Teacher D
	Second Year of Kindergarten	Teacher H
Student #2	First Year of Kindergarten	Teacher D
	Second Year of Kindergarten	Teacher H
Student #3	First Year of Kindergarten	Teacher H
	Second Year of Kindergarten	Teacher H
Student #4	First Year of 1st Grade	Teacher C
	Second Year of 1st Grade	Teacher A
Student #5	First Year of 1st Grade	Teacher C
	Second Year of 1st Grade	Teacher C
Student #6	First Year of 2nd Grade	Teacher G
	Second Year of 2nd Grade	Teacher F
Student #7	First Year of 2nd Grade	Teacher (not available)
	Second Year of 2nd Grade	Teacher B
Student #8	First Year of 2nd Grade	Teacher F
	Second Year of 2nd Grade	Teacher E

Table 4-1 – Teacher-Student Assignments in First and Second Year in Grade Level

Teacher Interviews

Each teacher included in this study was asked to share responses for 14 questions that focused on her experiences with the process and decision to retain a child as well as the experience she perceived the child to have in the second year in the grade level. (See Appendix A) The following is a compilation of the eight teachers' responses to this interview protocol.

The first five interview questions established a foundation and background knowledge of each teacher on retention and the process of retaining a student. Each teacher was asked to describe what she feels a student needs to be successful in either kindergarten, first, or second grade, depending on which grade the teacher currently taught, to achieve grade promotion. The responses to this question fell into a pattern showing consistencies across all eight teachers with teachers varying slightly in focus in each grade level. Seven

out of the eight teachers explained the importance of a student reading on or close to grade

level benchmarks to achieve promotion. Teacher B explained:

> It is important that they're reading on level, that they're
> able to do second grade work, like what I expect from them
> towards the end of the year…able to do the work without
> being frustrated and reading on level is really key. As long
> as they're reading close to or on level, and of course above
> level, I would say they would be okay to move on.

Four of these seven teachers really stressed the importance of the student's ability to read

accurately and comprehend the text to have success. These four teachers explained that

reading filters into every subject area and a student is more likely to find success across the

board if his/her reading ability is on par with grade level expectations. Teacher C stated,

> The biggest thing I would say would be reading on level
> and comprehending on level because as they move up in
> the grades, it encompasses all areas. So even if they're able
> to do science and social studies in first grade, they're not
> always able then in second and third grade to get their skills
> because in first grade it's so oral. Their reading level is
> number one, along with other skills that go with reading
> like decoding, the ability to figure out unknown words, the
> ability to rhyme…those kind of things that are going to
> help them with their reading. Comprehension…just very
> basic comprehension, being able to tell me story
> elements…those are the big things.

Six of the eight teachers discussed the importance of meeting grade level benchmarks in both

reading and math, sharing that there is a basic foundation of the knowledge that is presented

in each grade level and a student's comfort level with these basic skills determines success in

the grade level. Four of the eight teachers listed maturity as another determining factor in

grade level success. These teachers described maturity as the ability of a student to work

independently as well as the student's interactions with peers. Teacher E described this as

the following,

> First, I guess I would look to see how much they can do independently, how much they rely on other people and myself to help them, whether they're mastering the basics of every concept we introduce and teach, whether it's something they can take further, or if they've just got the basics. Also maturity as far as how they interact with their peers socially, and deal with conflict.

However, all teachers seemed to agree that maturity was a secondary factor in determining grade promotion. The primary indicator of a student's success in kindergarten, first, and second grade was unanimously academic achievement.

The teachers were then asked how academic achievement was measured in each of their classrooms. The two kindergarten teachers described how they utilize teacher observation and individual quarterly assessments to measure achievement and growth. Of the six second and first grade teachers, five teachers explained the use of running records to assess reading accuracy and comprehension. Five of these six teachers also listed the use of formal assessments in all subjects such as unit tests. Three of these six teachers mentioned the use of teacher observation and anecdotal note-taking as a type of assessment to document student growth.

The teachers then described the interventions that they try when a student seems to be struggling with success by not meeting the grade level benchmarks on the aforementioned types of assessment. Seven of the eight teachers utilized small group or one-on-one instruction to remediate struggling students. Three of these eight teachers further explained that they use this small group or one-on-one time to hone in on specific skills that are weak and isolate one skill at a time. Teacher C explains the steps she takes:

> Well, the first thing I do is try to have the running record analyzed, not just by me, but then by our reading specialists, to figure out what I can do…where they are lacking, if they're not decoding, or if they're not making

> sense because they're not seeing the structure of the word. I go through those things and talk to them about how they can crosscheck their strategies. Then I work with them, a lot of times, one-on-one or in a small group of kids that have those same things and we work on only one of the skills at a time. We isolate them and we continually go over it and over it. I also call home and share the same exact strategy so when the parents are reading with their child at home, they're able to do that as well. So whatever skill I'm working on with them at that time, their parent at home is kind of modeling the same skill so there is reinforcement. Then if they master that, we go to the next skill.

All eight teachers stated that they would contact the parents for home support. Five of the teachers shared that after they have tried strategies on their own and contacted the parents, they would seek other resources and interventions that are available in the school. Amongst these interventions included basic skills tutoring, consulting with the reading specialist, and bringing the student to the intervention team in the building, which consists of a group of veteran teachers who might be able to provide additional suggestions.

All eight teachers stated that they have considered retention for a student at some point during their years in teaching. When asked what indications were present that caused them to consider retention, all eight teachers described academic struggles in the classroom and lack of academic achievement. Along with the academic issues, four of the teachers stated that the students also displayed signs of immaturity as compared to that of their peers. The teachers indicated different indicators of immaturity such as small physical size, difficulty interacting with peers, and developmental delays. Additionally, Teacher E explained that maturity at both ends of the spectrum is significant when considering retention. Students who are immature might be good retention candidates, but students who are more mature than their peers discourage this teacher from recommending retention.

Three of the teachers also indicated that a student's emotional state, related to poor academic achievement and immaturity, is also an indicator that retention may be helpful. These teachers further explained that emotional issues can be seen through frequent crying due to frustration, behavioral changes that indicate low self-esteem, or acting out in the classroom. Teacher A describes this more thoroughly in her response to this question.

> They were struggling academically in more than one area and also I've noticed with any kids that I've thought about retention for, you notice a difference in them. You notice that their self-confidence is falling, they may become quieter, and they may be acting out more. There are different things in their behaviors that you see than in September. This was not so and so's behavior…she used to come in really happy, she loved school. Lots of times that's a huge indicator because they know it, they know what's going on around them. They see what's going on with them, so I take that in. Also talking to parents and seeing if they might have a kid who is saying to mom and dad, "I don't want to go to school. I feel dumb. I can't read." Sometimes you can even listen to the kids say that, and then obviously partnered up with the fact that they're really struggling.

Teachers were asked what process they follow if they are considering retention for a student. All eight teachers explained that they would begin by discussing this with the parents early on in the year, either by suggesting the possibility for retention or just pointing out that the student was struggling academically. The teachers continued to explain that as the year progressed the parents would be contacted periodically to keep the communication open, and then toward the end of the year, retention would be suggested. Teacher H explained that it was important to her to keep the interactions extremely positive and that the parents felt confident about their decision to retain. She explained that if the parents are not positive about retention, then the student will be more likely to have a negative experience with retention. Three of the teachers shared that in their experiences most of the parents they

have contacted with regard to retention have agreed that it is in the best interest of their child. These three teachers have spent most of the careers in kindergarten and first grade, indicating that it is possible that parents are more likely to feel positive about retention in the earlier grades. In addition to communicating with parents when retention is considered, six of the eight teachers identified the school channels that most be utilized when considering retention. Three of the eight teachers mentioned the importance of documenting student work and parent communication to aid the retention process as well.

At this juncture in the interview, the questions focused on the retention experience. The teachers were asked to describe their personal philosophy on retention as educators who are confronted with the practice regularly. All eight teachers felt that retention has its place in the educational environment; however, they all felt that there are exceptions and it is not good for all children. Some examples of these exceptions were children who were learning English as a second language, children whose maturity level would be too advanced for positive peer relations in the retention year, children who may be struggling with a learning disability, and children who are older than the primary grade levels. With these exceptions in mind, for most students, the teachers felt that if there were academic gaps in skill mastery and the current grade level expectations were difficult for the child, then the following year would only be more difficult for the child if promotion occurred. In addition, the two kindergarten teachers both explained that with a half day kindergarten program, some students benefited from promotion to first grade. This exception usually hinged upon the home environment of the student. If the home environment was educationally supportive, then the teachers would recommend retention; however, if the student was not going to be intellectually stimulated during the hours not in school, then the teachers felt it was better to

promote them and consider retention again at the end of first grade so that the students benefited from a full day of school. Additionally, two teachers stated that they was more apt to recommend retention if the parents were positive and comfortable about the experience. They felt that the negativity that a parent could bring to the situation during the child's second year in the grade was so significant that it could impact the student's success in that year.

To try to obtain an idea of specificity within their personal philosophy on retention, the teachers were asked if they have had personal experiences with retention through family members. The group was split down the middle with this question with four teachers having a personal experience with retention and four who did not. Teacher C shared that two of her four children were recommended for retention when they were in first grade. She did not choose to retain her older child and regrets her decision now; however, she did choose to retain her younger child and believes it was the right decision. She further explained that this child struggled academically and socially in school, regardless of several interventions that the school utilized as well as the work she did with her at home. Currently the child is ten years old and doing well in school. Teacher H explained that she red-shirted her son, keeping him in preschool for an extra year because she felt he was not ready for kindergarten. He is now seventeen and she still believes it was the right decision for him. Teacher G had a niece who was retained in first grade. She explained that her niece was immature, struggling academically, and disliked school. She is now going into fourth grade and seems to be doing well. Teacher B said that her brother was retained in first grade. He is an adult now and her mother has shared that she still feels it was the best decision she could have made for him. Even though these four teachers all had positive experiences with

retention that touched their personal lives, it is important to note that all four of these teachers still feel that the decision to retain should be made for each child individually and it is not successful for all children.

After asking the teachers about their experiences with retaining children, the teachers were asked questions about their experiences working with children in their second year in a grade level. First, the teachers were asked how many times they had taught a child who had been retained. Five of the teachers estimated that they have had this experience approximately four times, Teacher E said less than three times, Teacher G said that she only taught a retained student in a long-term substitute position, and Teacher H said at least ten times she has taught a student in their second year in a grade level.

The teachers were asked to consider the children who experienced retention in their class with regard to their academic, emotional, and social experience during their second year in the grade level. All of the teachers felt that the students showed great academic improvement during the second year in the grade level. Some showed greater improvement than others, where sometimes the second year in the grade level highlighted a learning disability. All of the teachers who taught students who were later found to have a learning disability still felt certain that the second year in the grade level was a benefit to their educational experience. Teacher C described her experience with one student as follows:

> I've had one that was retained that I taught and was classified. That child actually still felt so great about himself because he wasn't playing catch up. He hit that flat line, he hit that wall in the middle of the year, and then was classified, but he still has a totally different attitude about school now. He came and went through four or five months of the school year really, really successful. So, he has an "I can" attitude so I think that is invaluable.

Unanimously, all of the teachers felt that the strongest area of growth was emotional growth. A pattern that repeatedly appeared in the data from the teacher interviews indicated that the self-esteem was observed to increase during the second year in the grade level. The teachers made statements such as "she felt smart, probably for the first time", "boosted her confidence", "he seems so happy", and "felt so great about himself…he never had to play catch up this year". The teachers also felt that socially the students seem to adapt well to the retention experience, mostly due to immaturity and poor peer relations in their first year in the grade. The teachers said that the students seemed to "socially, fit right in" and "find children who were a lot like themselves". Teacher E explained that since there are five classes in each grade level and the children get sorted into new classes each year, most students do not realize that they are in a class with a student who has done another year in school. Teacher G noted a similar observation and said that the only time she noticed any reference to the retention was during recess when the student knew a lot of children in the following grade and other children asked why he had so many older friends; however, she noted that it didn't seem to cause any future issues. One of the kindergarten teachers, Teacher D, shared that being retained in kindergarten is ideal for natural social relationships because all of the students come to school for the first time in kindergarten so they have no idea that the student was there the year before.

The teachers were asked to describe the educational program that they delivered to the retained student as compared to the rest of the students in the class. Six out of the eight teachers didn't feel that they taught the student any differently than the other students and didn't consciously modify the educational program. Four of the six clarified their response by saying that they do their best to make the transition for the retained student as easy as

possible, but not by altering the educational program, just through student-teacher interactions and sensitivity. Of the remaining two teachers, Teacher B said that she definitely felt that she watched the student more than the others in the class. Teacher C said that she definitely viewed a retained student differently in her class. She explained that it is important to make the work challenging and not to have the student just repeat everything from the year before. She also said that she tends to "let them do things that they never had the opportunity to do the year before" such as help other students with things around the classroom to help the student become a leader. She further explains that since the student struggled so hard the year before, it is unlikely that there was an opportunity to be a leader.

It is important to note that three of the teachers explained that they feel the current school curriculum meets the needs of these students especially well. Instruction in reading and math occurs in small leveled groups with learning centers around the classroom. This prevents a student from repeating material that has already been mastered and challenging their current academic level to maximize instruction and achieve growth. These teachers commented that the previous curriculum was mostly centered around whole group instruction, which prevented meeting the needs of these individual students.

To further address the social implications of retention, the teachers were asked to think about the retention students they have taught and describe peer interactions. The two kindergarten teachers felt that the children were able to easily make friends and that their peers treated them the same as the other children in the class. Both teachers felt that peer interactions improved in the second year in kindergarten because the children were so immature in the previous year. Teacher D explained, "I think socially they fit right in because they were so immature the first year that this time they were almost at the same level

as their peers." The two first grade teachers felt that the retention children they have taught made friends easily, transitioned smoothly, and were accepted by their peers. The second grade teachers all felt that the retention went unnoticed by peers and that the student found a new group of friends. Teacher B noted that she has noticed a little anxiety in her retention students at the very beginning of the school year and the children have shared with her that they are nervous about making new friends, but she said that this passed quickly and the children adjusted well. The second grade teachers also noted that maturity plays a major role in the ease of this transition and that most of the students that they taught were at a more appropriate maturity level the second year in the grade, making peer relations a bit easier. All eight teachers mentioned that each child is an individual and that many of the retention children that they have worked with have weak social skills. The teachers further explained that these weak social skills were present during the first year in the grade level and were not a result of the retention experience, but still have an impact on peer relations in the second year. However, even with that observation noted, the pattern that repeated throughout the eight teacher interviews was that the children found personal success with peer interactions in the retention year.

When asked to assess the student's attitude during their second year in the grade level, all eight teachers felt that the students they worked with had a positive attitude about school. Teacher A believed that her interactions with one student proved his positive attitude. She said, "I think his attitude toward school is very good. He comes in…I mean, it is the cutest thing…in the morning, he gives me such a big hug. He comes in smiling, happy like he loves school." The teachers felt that their attitude about school remained or became positive because the student didn't struggle academically during the second year in the grade

level. Teacher G's experiences with one student brought her to the following conclusion. "I think he was happy because he was so successful. I think the year before, he was academically frustrated so I felt like he was happy [during his second year]." Teacher B said that one of the students she taught openly discussed his feelings about the retention year. "I know last year he really struggled and this year he's very confident, and has said to me, "I really like school this year." When I asked why, he said, "Because everything is a little bit easier this year." Two of these eight teachers had the unique opportunity of teaching children in both years in the grade level due to parent request. Both of these teachers felt that these children were beginning to develop low self-esteem and a dislike for school in their first year, and yet in the second year this attitude seem to change significantly for the better. Teacher A said that although she didn't teach one of her students in his first year in first grade, she took notice of him and knew that he began to experience discipline problems as the year progressed. She then taught him in his second year of first grade and noticed that these same behavior issues did not carry over. She feels that his negative behavior was a result of the academic frustration he felt in his first year of first grade. When the workload and expectations more appropriately met his needs in the second year in first grade, the behaviors didn't exist because he wasn't frustrated.

The teachers were asked if they had taken notice of the students they retained or the students they taught who had been retained as they proceeded through the following grade levels. Two of the eight teachers said that they weren't sure how the students performed in school in the following grades. Three of the teachers said that retention seemed to help the some of the students improve school achievement. Based on these teachers' observations, either retention worked well for the student, helping him to perform in the average range as

compared to peers or the student was found to have a learning disability. The students who continued to struggle were evaluated for a learning disability and classified as a special education student. Teacher D further clarified that even with students who became special education students still benefited from retention. She felt that retention still afforded the student the time needed to gain maturity. The remaining three teachers also felt that retention was successful for the students they had seen go through the experience; however, they all felt that ultimately those students were only able to maintain average performance in school. They felt that if these students had not been retained, then their self-confidence and attitude toward school would have been poor, but that these students would never perform above grade level and would always need academic support.

In closing, each teacher was asked if there was anything else she would like to share or highlight regarding retention. Four of the eight teachers responded. Two of the teachers spoke about the parent's role in the retention process. They both felt that a parent's resistance to retention because of the stigma they feel follows the experience or due to their own feelings of failure or embarrassment has a significant impact on the student. Teacher H specifically stated that if the parent is resistant to retention then she doesn't like to push the issue because it will affect the child's experience with retention. Both of these teachers felt that if parents could trust the educator's professional opinion and realize that things are different in school now than when the parent was young, it would benefit the student.

One of the four teachers, Teacher E, felt that retention "has its place" in education and if the student is not quite ready and is promoted anyhow, the results are usually not positive. In addition she stated, "I don't know that it has the stigma we all think it does. I really don't think it's as scarring and as detrimental as people perceive it to be." She further

articulated that children are involved in activities out of school that include kids of all ages.

She felt that most children know other children outside of their own grade, making it easier

to transition and keep peer relations positive if retention is needed.

Teacher A spoke eloquently about her feelings on retention as she responded to this

part of the interview. She explained her position on retention with the following:

> I just think it's such a tough call…it's one of those things…I've been teaching ten years and I still can't say one way or the other and probably another ten years, I probably still won't be able to. I think every child is their own case. Each situation is different and just really depends. It could depend on the child's connection to the teacher, different rapport they have, they way the classroom is structured, the way information is given to the child, [and] what type of learner they are. There are so many different characteristics that go into the situation. To me, it's never black or white with retention.

Parent Interviews

Each parent included in this study was asked to share responses to nine questions that

focused on his/her experiences with the process and decision to retain their own child as well

as the experience they perceive their child had during their first and second year in the grade

level. (See Appendix B) The following is a compilation of the six parents' responses to this

interview protocol.

The interview began by asking parents to describe their child's first year in the grade

level. All six parents recounted that homework during the first year in the grade level was

very difficult for each child. Four of the six parents stated that the child didn't seem to be

able to understand what the teacher was teaching in class. The parent of Student #4 shared

that reading was specifically a weakness for her son. All six parents mentioned the social

and/or emotional impact of the experience. Three parents shared that their child liked attending school, but there was some frustration for the child with the academic struggles and the child was aware that school was difficult. The parent of Student #3 stated that her child wasn't on the same level as the other students in the class. The parent of Student #2 explained that her son didn't seem to make real social connections since he didn't seem to have close friendships. The parent Student #6 said that from the beginning of the year, her son was behind academically as well as socially. She said that "he seemed a little bit withdrawn, more so in that particular year". She also shared that he was one of the smallest children and was much younger, chronologically, than the other children.

Next, the six parents were asked to explain how they first discovered that their child was having difficulty in school. Each parent answered this question differently. The parent of Student #1 said that she was worried before her son even started kindergarten. She knew he was the youngest in his class and could see that he was "having difficulty coping with what they were doing" in school. The parent of Student #2 shared that her son had developmental delays since he was toddler. She said that he didn't speak until he was three years old and received speech therapy before school began. Even though his verbal skills were average for children his age, once he started kindergarten, she was still concerned. Then his reaction to school worried her significantly. He would cling to her side and cry when it was time for school each day. The mother shared that the teacher would have to pull her son away from her each day; therefore, she often didn't send him to school and his immaturity meshed with his academic struggles were a warning sign to her. The parent of Student #3 explained that she knew her daughter was having trouble when she received the first progress report and then soon after, the teacher called home to set a up a meeting to

discuss her daughter's academic struggles. The parent of Student #4 stated that her first sign of academic difficulty in her son's first grade experience was that he would get very frustrated with homework. He would push it away and get frustrated. She also said that he had trouble retaining five reading words a week. The parent of Student #5 said that his son's rate of development seemed to be a concern in general, and specifically in the area of reading. The father noticed that it took him some time to retain concepts when they worked together at home. The parent of Student #6 has similar explanation to the parents of Student #4 and #5. She said that her son struggled with homework when they worked on it together at home and showed his disappointment and frustration by apologizing to mom and saying that he would do better next time. Overall, all six parents remembered knowing that their child was struggling in school and none of the parents answered the question by stating that they were surprised by the academic difficulties the children faced.

Four of the six parents said that the teacher suggested retention to them and the other two parents said that it was a mutually suggested option for their child. Those two parents explained that they both thought retention would be good for the child and couldn't really recall whether they went to the teacher first or the teacher came to them first with the idea. The parents were asked not only who suggested retention, but how they initially felt about retention. Four of the six parents said that retaining their child was an easy decision for them. The parent of Student #3 said, "when I went to the teacher, she said she thought she would be better keeping her back and I said keep her back". The parent of Student #4 explained that with the help of the teacher, she saw that her child was behind the other children in the grade. The parent said that she definitely did not want her child to go to the next grade without the skills necessary to succeed. The other two parents admitted that they

were definitely resistant to retaining their child. Both parents said that in the beginning, they

were against the idea and it took several parent and teacher meetings as well as advice from

their family and close friends before they decided to retain their child. The parent of Student

#5 explained, "You never really want to see your kid held back. Mainly because of the hard

work we put into him. We knew he was lagging behind and it was obvious after the meeting

that he needed to be retained." The parent of Student #6 was far more emotional in the

description of her feelings by explaining,

> I felt I could fix it…and I did not want to retain him. I
> thought it would make him feel more or less insecure
> socially…felt more like he failed because he already was
> aware of the situation…so I felt afraid for him.

These two parents expressed that it was a difficult decision to retain their child; however, the

other four parents shared that the decision was not difficult for them.

Each of the parents was asked how they explained to their child that they were going

to repeat the grade level, and how the child reacted to the idea of retention. All six parents

responded that they were honest with their child. The parent of Student #1 explained, "I told

him he was the youngest in the class and he needs more help so I was gonna keep him one

more year." She said that at first he seemed to be alright with the decision, but later asked

questions about why he wasn't with his friends. She further explained that she told him that

they wanted to make sure that he doesn't have any problems with his school work once he

gets to first grade. The parent of Student #2 said, "We pretty much told her that we feel it's

best for you if you stay back. You'll have the same teacher so you can be [Teacher H's]

helper." This parent said that her daughter asked questions about the retention. Her response

to her daughter was that "When you get older, you'll thank us for it. Mom and Dad made the

right decision at the time." The parent of Student #3 said that her son seemed to understand

the necessity in keeping him back, but he was concerned about having the same teacher again. When she assured him that he would have a new teacher, he seemed to relax. When she told him he needed a little more help before going on to the next grade, she quoted him as saying, "Oh no, I need a whole lot of help." Her interpretation of his response was that he knew that he wasn't ready to go on and she said that his cousin was going into kindergarten so he had a peer to transition with him. The parent of Student #4 explained to his son that he had "catching up" to do and that he was going to stay back in first grade. The father said that his son seemed to have very little reaction to retention and never really seemed to question the situation. The parent of Student #5 said that she simply told her son that he would repeat first grade and she quoted him as saying, "I know." She said that he knew he wasn't succeeding and she had prepared him for the possibility of staying back in first grade. The parent of Student #6 shared that she took the teacher's advice and try to have a positive attitude when speaking to her son about retention. She said that she told him, "he was younger than most of the kids and that [they] basically pushed him ahead in kindergarten a bit too early", further explaining that this was the reason he was behind in second grade. She said that he verbally indicated that he understood and that he felt okay about the situation, but she felt that it was more likely that he was just trying to please his parents. She felt that he was most likely a little sad about the situation.

Each of the six parents then described how they felt their child's second year in the grade level was with regard to academic performance and social stability. The parent of Student #1 said that she feels this year has been much better. She said that her son is able to do his homework by himself now and his verbal communication skills have improved greatly. She has noticed an increase in his abilities and retention of general knowledge and

recalls that his first year in kindergarten was so difficult compared to his second year. The parent of Student #2 feels that her son did much better this year as well. She shared that her son loved going to school as compared to the emotional hysterics that occurred when it was time to go each day during his first year in kindergarten. He is now eager to complete his homework each night, which she recalls was quite a struggle in the prior year. This parent also noted that he seems to have closer friendships now, since his second year in kindergarten. The parent of Student #3 said that she saw great improvements in her daughter through the second year in kindergarten. She said that her daughter was not frustrated by the work the second year and she was much more willing to come to school each day. In addition, this mother shared that her daughter has a close girlfriend this year and gets along with all the students in the class. The parent of Student #4 echoed the feedback from the previous parents stating that her son's second year in first grade has been better than his first year in first grade. The parent of Student #5 said that her son "went into the [second] year with a burst of energy because he was so far ahead of his class". This parent said that he believes his son still needs continued support during the summer and school year months, but he had a good second year. He also said that his son made a new friend from his class the second year, with whom he regularly socializes. In addition, he believes that his positive attitude with his son, through reassurance and reaffirmation has helped make his son's education successful. The parent of Student #6 said that during the second year in second grade her son "did a complete 360, really right off the bat". She said he seemed to easily make a lot of friends and he finally didn't feel like an outcast as the youngest and smallest boy in his class as in previous years. She concluded her feedback by saying that she saw a

"drastic change" in her son during the second year and "100%, all the way around, socially and academically, he did a lot better.

The parents were each asked if they noticed any difference in the educational program that their child experienced during the second year in the grade level. Four of the six parents said that they didn't notice any changes in the program, but that their child needed to experience it a second time to grasp all of the concepts. The other two parents recalled that some aspects of the program were the same and some seemed different based mostly on the difference in teaching styles between the teacher from the first year in the grade level and the teacher from the second year in the grade level. Neither parent was able to be specific about the differences they noticed, but they both indicated that they didn't think it had a major impact on their child, one way or another.

Each parent was asked to qualify their child's overall attitude toward school. All six parents said that their child seems to enjoy school. Three out of the six parents specifically noted that their child "loves school". These parents indicated that their child wakes up easily in the morning and is excited to go to school. The parent of Student #2 indicated that if the same question had been asked of her last year, she would have given a much different answer, demonstrating a positive difference in the student's attitude from the first year in the grade to the second year in the grade.

Concluding each interview, the parent was asked if there was anything else that they would like to share regarding their child's experience with retention. The parent of Student #2 said that the second year was a totally different year for the whole family due to her son's success. The parent of Student #1 said that she has more than one friend that was in a similar situation after their children's first year in kindergarten and they chose to send their children

ahead to first grade rather than retain them in kindergarten. She said that these children

struggled when they were in first grade, so she truly believes she made the best decision for

her son when she decided to retain him in kindergarten. The parent of Student #6

summarized her feelings about her son's experience with retention in second grade:

> I was just saying to my mom, 'you know, I'm glad that we did
> it for his sake'. I was really against it in the beginning because
> I thought of all the negative things but it really did help him all
> the way around socially and academically. I think in the long
> run he's gonna be a much better student and he'll succeed so
> much further than what he would have had we just pushed him
> along. So I really do thank the teacher that actually looked out
> and saw that there was a problem even when I didn't want to
> acknowledge it.

The parent of Student #5 shared a very different perspective on retention and his

personal experience with the education system in our country. He said:

> The only thing that I would say is that as far as the educational
> system goes, my hope and desire for the education system
> across the country and the world is that they judge a kid
> individually and not set a standard that every kid has to reach
> because every kid doesn't move at the same pace…everyone
> doesn't learn at the same pace.

Student Achievement Data

The following is a summary of the documented student performance comparison data

from each student's first year in the grade level to their second year in the grade level. The

kindergarten data that were available was on the three students who experienced retention in

kindergarten is more detailed and varies from the data available for the first and second grade

retention students. The kindergarten data were reported by the school through a standards-

based tool, as compared to the first and second grade data that was reported by the school

through subject area only. The difference between standards-based data and subject specific

data will be apparent in the student data tables provided below. In addition, the information

available for each student varies, regardless of grade level, due to each individual teacher's

reporting methods. The data collected for each student documents the level of achievement

that was recorded as of June 2007, the first year that the student was in the given grade level,

and June 2008, the second year the students was in the given grade level. The following

tables display the comparison data that was available for each student included in the study.

The kindergarten data is displayed with beginning, developing, or secure indicators for each

skill. "Beginning" refers to skills the student is beginning to understand, "developing" refers

to skills that the student understands and has started to apply, and "secure" refers to skills

that the student understands and applies independently. The first and second grade data is

displayed with outstanding, satisfactory, and needs improvement indicators for each skill.

"Outstanding" refers to subject areas in which the student has reached high expectations,

"satisfactory" refers to subject areas in which the student has met the minimum requirements

for successful achievement, and "needs improvement" refers to subject areas in which the

student has not met the minimum requirements as per grade level criteria. In addition, each

student's instructional guided reading level is documented with a notation as to whether the

student was on, above, or below grade level in reading with this documented level. The label

of on, above, or below grade level in reading has been predetermined using the district's

criteria as documented on the elementary school report card. Finally, student attendance is

documented with the total number of days present during each year. Underneath each table

is the teacher's summary statement for each year in the grade level as documented on the

student's Elementary Academic Record.

Student #1   **June 2007**   **June 2008**

	June 2007	June 2008
Guided Reading Level	not able to assess – below grade level	Level C – on grade level
Identifies Capital/Lowercase Letters	Developing	Secure
Written Capital/Lowercase Alphabet	Beginning	Secure
Letter-Sounds Association	Beginning	Secure
Sight Words	Beginning	Developing
Number Identification 0-20	Developing	Secure
Written Numbers 0-20	Developing	Secure
Recognition of Coins	Beginning	Developing
Recognition of Shapes (Circle, Square, Triangle, Rectangle)	Secure	Secure
Attendance – Number of Days Present	168	178

Teacher D Summary Statement June 2007 – "[Student #1] is too easily distracted. He can be very disruptive to his classmates and often does not complete his work correctly in allotted time. He can not retain concepts and needs lots of practice and repetition to assist him in both L.A. and Math."

Teacher H Summary Statement June 2008 – "[Student #1] has shown significant growth this year. With the added modifications and supports he has made a great deal of progress. He is eager to learn and strives to please."

Table 4-2 - Student #1 – Academic Record

Student #2   **June 2007**   **June 2008**

	June 2007	June 2008
Guided Reading Level	not able to assess – below grade level	Level E – above grade level
Identifies Capital/Lowercase Letters	Developing	Secure
Written Capital/Lowercase Alphabet	Developing	Secure
Letter-Sounds Association	Developing	Secure
Sight Words	Beginning	Developing
Number Identification 0-20	Developing	Secure
Written Numbers 0-20	Developing	Secure
Recognition of Coins	Developing	Secure
Recognition of Shapes (Circle, Square, Triangle, Rectangle)	Secure	Secure
Attendance – Number of Days Present	100	153

Teacher D Summary Statement June 2007 – "[Student #2] is very young both academically and socially. He needs to use class time wisely and is very inconsistent in his work. Attendance continues to be a great area of concern."

Teacher H Summary Statement June 2008 – "[Student #2] had a successful year in kindergarten. He is becoming more confident of his abilities and is learning to work independently."

Table 4-3 - Student #2 – Academic Record

Student #3   **June 2007**   **June 2008**

	June 2007	June 2008
Guided Reading Level	not able to assess – below grade level	Level D – above grade level
Identifies Capital/Lowercase Letters	Developing	Secure
Written Capital/Lowercase Alphabet	Beginning	Secure
Letter-Sounds Association	Beginning	Secure
Sight Words	Beginning	Developing
Number Identification 0-20	Developing	Secure
Written Numbers 0-20	Developing	Secure
Recognition of Coins	Beginning	Secure
Recognition of Shapes (Circle, Square, Triangle, Rectangle)	Developing	Secure
Attendance – Number of Days Present	175	175.5

Teacher H Summary Statement 2007 – "[Student #3] is a friendly, cooperative student. She has not yet reached the benchmarks in kindergarten. Reading and math are below grade level."

Teacher H Summary Statement 2008 – "[Student #3] is very friendly and eager to please. Her comfort level within the classroom has increased. With the added modification and support, academic progress has been made."

Table 4-4 - Student #3 – Academic Record

Student #4   **June 2007**   **June 2008**

	June 2007	June 2008
Guided Reading Level	Level E – below grade level	Level G – below grade level
Reading	N	S
Language Arts (Writing, Grammar, Spelling)	N	S
Math	S	O
Attendance – Number of Days Present	174	174

Teacher C Summary Statement 2007 – "[Student #4] has made many social gains this year. However, even with Reading Recovery, [Student #4] reads below grade level and will be retained."

Teacher A Summary Statement 2008 – "[Student #4] loves math, but continues to struggle in reading. He responds well to positive reinforcement and consequences, and needs structure to succeed."

Table 4-5 - Student #4 – Academic Record

Student #5   **June 2007**   **June 2008**

	June 2007	June 2008
Guided Reading Level	Level I – on grade level	Level N – above grade level
Reading	S	S
Language Arts (Writing, Grammar, Spelling)	S	S
Math	S	O
Attendance – Number of Days Present	176.5	178

Teacher C Summary Statement 2007 – "[Student #5] continues to struggle staying on task. Although with the help of Reading Recovery, he reads on grade level, he struggles with time management and will be retained."

Teacher C Summary Statement 2008 – "[Student #5] has had a successful year in first grade. He continues to struggle with focusing issues, but has met all academic benchmarks for first grade."

Table 4-6 - Student #5 – Academic Record

Student #6   **June 2007**   **June 2008**

	June 2007	June 2008
Guided Reading Level	Level J – below grade level	Level M – on grade level
Reading	N	S
Language Arts (Writing, Grammar, Spelling)	N	S
Math	N	S
Attendance – Number of Days Present	170.5	175

Teacher G Summary Statement June 2007 – "[Student #6] needs a lot of support in the classroom. He needs constant repetition and practice in math and reading. He is easily distracted and needs to be redirected."

Teacher F Summary Statement June 2008 – "[Student #6] definitely benefited from another year in 2nd grade. He made steady progress in math and reading, but needs to work on writing."

Table 4-7 - Student #6 – Academic Record

Student Observations

Each student was observed a minimum of two times in the classroom environment

and once in the social environment during playground or recess time to collect data on

physical, emotional, cognitive, and social development during their second year in the grade

level. The following table, adapted from Nilsen's Week by Week (2008) Work Sample

Checklist, was utilized to provide a focus and consistency during observations. Each student

has been listed in the table by their identification number and the behavior is either noted as

demonstrated (D), not demonstrated (ND), or undetermined (UD). A behavior marked

demonstrated was seen consistently during the student observation. A behavior marked as

not demonstrated was seen in the opposite of its descriptor for the majority of the

observations. A behavior marked as undetermined was not available for evaluation during

the student observations.

<div align="center">Behavior   Student</div>

	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6
Physical Development:						
Controls body to stay within space	D	ND	D	ND	D	ND
Controls whole body movement during work	D	ND	D	ND	D	ND
Controls small muscles to hold tool	D	D	D	D	D	D
Controls tool to form desired product	D	D	D	D	D	D
Emotional Development:						
Expresses satisfaction in work, confident self-esteem	D	D	D	ND	D	D
Enjoys manipulation and creation	D	D	D	D	D	D
Controls emotions of frustration when work meets difficulties	UD	UD	UD	ND	D	UD
Displays risk-free attitude in work	D	D	D	ND	D	D
Separates from adult to work alone	D	D	D	D	D	D
Cognitive Development:						
Writes name on work	D	D	D	D	D	D
Places finished product in proper place	D	D	D	D	D	ND

Replaces materials to storage place	D	D	D	D	D	D
Uses materials independently	D	D	D	ND	D	D
Vocabulary reflects knowledge of subject	D	D	D	D	D	D
Focuses attention on project to produce a finished work	D	D	D	ND	D	D
Works shows a sense of identity and individuality	D	D	D	UD	D	D
Includes numerals and quantity in work	D	D	D	D	D	D
Shows one-to-one correspondence in work designs	D	D	D	D	D	D
Shows perceptual awareness of color, space, and form	D	D	D	D	D	D
Includes literacy in work	UD	UD	UD	ND	D	D
Recognizes the difference between drawing and writing	UD	UD	UD	D	D	D
Uses materials to symbolize ideas	D	D	D	ND	D	D
Work illustrates or connects with stories	UD	UD	UD	ND	D	D
Social Development:						
Participates in cooperative and collaborative work	ND	UD	D	D	UD	D
Desires and can work near other children	D	D	D	D	D	D
Shares materials and supplies	D	D	D	D	D	D
Works cooperatively on a joint project	ND	UD	D	UD	UD	UD
Demonstrates associative play during social interactions	D	D	D	D	D	D
Demonstrates constructive play during social interactions	ND	ND	D	ND	ND	D

Table 4-8 - Observation Checklist

Summary

The teacher and parent interviews, student observations, and student artifacts provided insight into the factors that influence a student's experience with retention. As seen through the data presentation in this chapter, significant patterns emerged. In the following chapter, these patterns have been applied to the overarching and secondary research questions.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The data collected through teacher interviews, parent interviews, student records, and student observations provided insight into the possible responses to the initial research questions. The following discussion will utilize the data in the previous chapter to respond to each of the research questions, while applying the theoretical base of Gareth Morgan's (2006) metaphor of the organization as a machine, developmental readiness/maturational theory, and Gross' (1998) Turbulence Theory to the resulting data patterns. Gareth Morgan's (2006) machine metaphor provides insight into our current educational system, which undoubtedly affects the educational program that is available in our schools; therefore, having a direct impact on a student's academic, social, and emotional growth and development as it relates to maturational theory. Gross' (1998) Turbulence Theory, with specific regard to positionality, helps to explain the perceptions and attitudes of the teachers and parents in relation to the retention experience. The use of a turbulence gauge as well as an in-depth look at the affect of positionality, cascading, and stability on the retention experience provided further analysis of the situation. Morgan's (2006) machine metaphor as it is applied to our educational system and Gross' (1998) Turbulence Theory have been utilized in this study to suggest several factors that may influence a student's experience with retention.

How does the teacher's approach to the student's educational program during the retention

year meet the educational needs of the students and affect the retention experience?

Through the teacher and parent interviews, observations, and student records,

evidence of the educational program that was presented to students during their retention

experience was consistent between the kindergarten, first, and second grade classrooms in

this study. The parents did not feel as though their child's program changed from year to

year during the retention experience. The teachers did not feel that they approached the

educational program for the retained students differently than for the other students in the

class. The student observations supported the teachers' statement in relation to the

educational program as the retained students were observed participating in the same

program as the other students in the class. Some of the teachers did mention that there was

an attempt, on their part, to be sensitive to the student's transition into the retention year and

some individual attention given to that student, but beyond that, the educational program was

the same for all students in the class. Three teachers did qualify this statement by explaining

that the programs that the school has offered the students provides differentiated instructional

techniques that customize the educational program to meet the needs of individual learners.

These teachers further described that small group instruction that is directed toward a

student's instructional level in literacy and math helps to individualize the educational

program to meet a student's needs. This type of differentiated instruction was documented

during observations as students were provided direct instruction in small groups during

literacy and math lessons. The students' academic records provided further evidence of

differentiated instruction with documentation of each student's instructional reading level

and standards-based indicators of growth in reading and literacy in kindergarten. Neither

teachers nor parents seem to feel that any aspect of the educational program directly impacted the first year or second year in the grade level for each of the students. According to interview question responses, the educational program did not cause retention and it did not seem to be the only explanation for academic growth during the second year in the grade level. Both parents and teachers attributed the experiences to factors other than the educational program.

The curriculum and instruction that is offered in this elementary school is a response to the rigidity of the organization of our educational system in the United States. Using Morgan's (2006) metaphor of the organization as the machine, one could describe the educational system provided to students in this country. Students enter a grade based on their chronological age and are expected to be promoted to the following grade every 12 months, regardless of developmental readiness or maturation. Due to this system, children are heterogeneously grouped together in classrooms when abilities and development are assessed at an individual level, even though their chronological age may be the same. This school district's response to the organization as a machine is to develop a program that allows for individuality within the lock-step grade placement protocols. The small group leveled instruction that is offered to all students in the school provides the opportunity to consider the human nature aspect of the component of the organization, allowing for instruction that is not mechanized, but efficiency that is more likely to meet student needs. By not assuming that all students will reach the same developmental benchmarks at the same chronological age, due to several factors that can be explained through maturational theory, the organization is able to meet the needs of students with a higher level of efficiency.

This theoretical lens applies to the retention experience because by understanding that all children develop on their own personal timeline of maturation, retention can be utilized as an additional response to the organization as a machine. The school's curriculum only allows for the flexibility of an individualized curriculum within a spectrum of just below the grade level to just above the grade level benchmarks. It is suggested through the use of retention that some students require even more time to develop, thus utilizing retention for a full year of additional growth, providing the ability to attain skills as cognitive development allows for mastery of these skills.

This study as well as a discussion of developmental readiness lends itself to the application of the gender research mentioned in the literature review. The inequality between gender and grade promotion is a significant factor when researching the influences of an experience with retention because most of the cases are male students. Five out of the six children included in this study are males. As Wood (2003) states, "Many factors contribute to gender differences in learning and achievement, and it is difficult to isolate gender from a wider network of influences, including ethnicity, sexuality, class and ability/disability" (p. 366). The explanation for this gender inequity may be explained by the knowledge of developmental readiness, which demonstrates that in general boys do not develop at the same rate as girls. For this reason, the data on retention shows that boys are more likely to be retained, needing the time to develop and mature in order to master skills that are at higher levels of cognitive ability. However, recent research by Gurian & Stevens (2004), has shown disconnect between teaching practice and the unique learning needs between male and female students. New MRI technology and PET scans have analyzed learning in male and female brains and found that it occurs quite differently. Gurian & Stevens (2004) have

recognized the significance of this discovery and stated, "Our schools fail to recognize and fulfill gender-specific needs" (p.21). This gender inequity requires further research as it could indicate that our school systems in their machine-like nature are not designed to meet the instructional needs of males as well as it seems to meet the needs of females.

How do the teachers and parents perceive the retention experience?

Consistently throughout the interview process, teachers felt that retention has a purpose for certain children. These teachers perceived grade level expectations as the necessary skill benchmarks for students to meet in order to be successful in the following year. In addition, continuing on to the next grade level without meeting current grade level expectations can be very frustrating for students, leading to self-esteem and behavior issues. This explains why teachers perceived the retention experience as an intervention for low-achieving students.

The teachers based their perceptions of the retention experience on the students that came through their classrooms. These eight teachers had taught children who had been retained an average of four times per teacher over all of their years as educators. All of these eight teachers felt that the students showed academic improvement during their second year in the grade level. The teachers explained that some students showed more growth than others, and sometimes the retention experience helped to diagnosis a learning disability in the student. This diagnosis was seen at some level as an achievement because it provided more information about the student's learning abilities and brought about opportunities for additional services and interventions.

Although the teachers felt academic growth occurred during this second year, the most significant pattern in their responses was in relation to social and emotional growth. The teachers unanimously agreed that the strongest area of growth in the second year in the grade level was in the area of self-confidence and peer interactions. This pattern appeared in the data several times from both parent and teacher interviews, and was confirmed through student observations.

All six of the parents felt that the retention experience was positive for their child. They all noted academic growth and a lessened frustration with homework as well as an overall improved attitude toward school. Several parents indicated closer social relationships between their child and other children in the classroom during the retention experience. Parents mentioned details such as improved social skills, greater retention of general knowledge, increased skill abilities, and maturity. At the close of the school year during the retention experience, all six parents were satisfied with their decision to retain their child and unanimously agreed that there were positive gains as a result of retention.

The teachers were able to provide some insight into the long-term perceptions of retention with previous students. Based on these teachers' observations, retention afforded the students the opportunity to maintain achievement at an average range within their grade level following retention, or the student was later found to have a learning disability. The teachers agreed that most of the time the latter did not occur and students were able to maintain average performance in school after retention. However, again the influence of retention on the child's emotional state seemed to resonate with the teachers. The teachers in this study felt that even if the student would never perform above grade level after the

retention experience, the confidence gained by the experience and an improved attitude toward school was invaluable.

Based on Gross' (1998) Turbulence Theory, positionality explains the varying perceptions of the teachers as compared to the parents with consideration for the retention experience. Although in this case study, the parents and teachers of the six students all perceived the retention experience to have produced positive outcomes, their expectations and items of analysis differ based on their perspectives and connections to the student. Teachers observe the students from a broader perspective as they compare students to each other and their previous experiences as educators. In some families, parents try to compare each child's development to the development of siblings or other close relatives, but the perspective is narrower since less examples for comparison are available. However, that is not to say that teachers are more qualified to determine eligibility for retention because parents have the ability to observe their children over time and have subconsciously gathered developmental data about their child from birth. In addition, parents are more likely to have a deeper understanding of their child's emotional needs and ability to transition and adapt during the retention year. The difference between these two perspectives can sometimes conflict during the retention process, causing a greater level of turbulence than was initial caused by the student's low achievement and the suggestion for retention.

In this case study, the level of turbulence in the situation remained moderate for the parent and student and light for the teacher. The teachers only experienced a light level of turbulence because the retention process and experience is an aspect of their profession and on a daily basis did not change their routines or responsibilities. The parents experienced a level of turbulence that ranged from light to moderate depending on their personal emotional

state. The students in this study experienced a moderate level of turbulence since the retention experience directly affects their growth and development. The levels of turbulence that each stakeholder experienced will be further analyzed in the discussions of teacher and parent attitude and student self-esteem during the retention experience. This occurred for two of the students and families in this study, raising the level of turbulence slightly; however, after some initial turbulence, the parents in both of these situations ultimately agreed with the teachers' analysis of the students.

How does a student's academic, social, and emotional growth and development, or lack of demonstrated growth and development, as perceived by teachers and parents, contribute to or detract from the retention experience?

All of teachers and parents reported that they saw growth in the children from their first year to second year in the grade level. Several patterns arose from the parents responses relating to student growth. The evidence of growth seen by the parents during the second year included an ease with homework, closer social relationships with peers, and a willingness to attend school and/or a positive attitude about school.

The teachers echoed this response with some evidence that was similar such as positive peer relationships and a positive attitude toward school. In addition, teachers felt that academic growth was made by all of these students. The documentation of this teacher perception was seen on the students' academic records. On each record, the teacher documented a summary statement at the end of each school year. The six summary statements of these students at the end of their second year in the grade level were drastically

more positive than the summary statements from the first year in the grade level. Five out of the six summary statements from the second year in the grade level demonstrated that the teachers felt that these five students benefited from the retention experience with academic and/or emotional growth. The sixth summary statement indicated that the student showed academic growth, but was still struggling in the area of literacy.

In addition, a comparison of each student's report cards from year one and year two in the grade level demonstrated academic growth for all six students. All six students increased their instructional reading level between the two years. The kindergarten students had a standards-based report card that documented mastery of skills in the second year of kindergarten that were only in the beginning or developing stages of application during the first year in kindergarten. For the first and second grade students, indicators of satisfactory and/or outstanding in the second year in the grade level replaced indicators of improvement needed from the first year in the grade level in all instructed subject areas.

The student observations were consistent with the student academic records with indicators of cognitive and emotional development that demonstrated developmentally-appropriate behaviors and performance in the classroom. The students were seen as functional members of the classroom who adjusted to the experience with enough success to complete classwork and participate in class lessons.

The demonstrated growth and development that was seen throughout this study supports theory related to developmental readiness. The theory suggests that students will be able to apply and retain skills when development has progressed to a cognitive level that is capable of this skill mastery. In other words, the expectation of a student to apply and retain skills that they are not cognitively prepared to master is going to result in low achievement.

If the students are given the time for development to occur at a rate that is personal for each individual, then higher achievement may be expected. With these six students, their personal rate of development did not align with the expectations for their chronological age; therefore, the additional year in the grade level was needed to allow for further cognitive development to support the attainment of grade level benchmarks.

How does the student's self-esteem/self-worth seem to be affected by interactions with peers in their retention year classroom?

This discussion must be prefaced by an explanation as to the interview protocol's approach to the concept of self-esteem/self worth. In order to ascertain each child's emotional development in relation to the school and home environment, the parents and teachers were both asked to share their opinion of the child's interactions with peers, social maturity, academic progress, and adaptation to the retention year. The questions were designed to provide feedback on the child's self-image and emotional development as it relates to the retention process. Responses that indicated students displayed positive peer interactions, the development of friendships, and active participation in class and assignments would indicate that the student possessed a higher level of self-esteem/self-worth as compared to a student who does not display one or more of these characteristics.

All six teachers felt that the students' self-esteem increased due to the retention experience. The teachers explained that confidence grew as a result of the students feeling less frustrated with schoolwork and more successful in their academics. Teachers also indicated that these students seemed immature as compared to their peers in their first year in

the grade level; therefore, the second year in the grade level afforded them an opportunity to build peer relationships as they met the level of maturity of their peers. The kindergarten teachers especially felt that the second year in the grade level was not a negative emotional experience because the other students in the grade level had never been in the school before and so they had no way of knowing that the student was retained. The retained students were accepted easily into the peer groups and the kindergarten teachers noticed that peer relationships improved for the retained students. The first and second grade teachers agreed that the retained students found personal success with peer relationships. In addition, all of the teachers felt that student attitudes about school remained or became positive, depending on the student's attitudes from the prior year. Furthermore, two of the eight teachers taught the same child for both years in the grade level and observed a transformation in these children from the beginning stages of low self-esteem from academic and social frustrations to a well-adapted and significantly more successful classroom participant. Moreover, the parents' interview responses aligned with the teachers' responses as the parents felt that their children enjoyed coming to school.

The student observations indicated that the students demonstrated one or more of the following behaviors: satisfaction in work completion, confidence in academic risk-taking, and the ability to work independently from the teacher in the classroom. In addition, several social characteristics were observed such as participation in cooperative lessons, the desire to work with peers in the classroom, the ability to share lesson materials, and at the least, associative play during unstructured time. These observed behaviors indicate that the students adapted well to the retention experience; and seem to have either not been affected

emotionally by the experience or they have overcome any emotional difficulty with the experience.

Overall, the interviews and observations relating to the emotional and social aspects of the retention experience have brought about surprising results. Either this group of students in an anomaly, the preparation and programming in this elementary school is different from others, or there is a misconception about the emotional and social effects of retention on primary grade students. The literature on retention repeatedly indicates concern with the emotional toll of retention on children, even at the young age of the students in this study; however, this study seems to conflict with the literature on retention.

Positionality, as described by Gross' (1998) Turbulence Theory, may be the explanation for the inconsistent findings between the research presented in the literature review compared to the results of the data collection in this case study, relating to the social and emotional aspect of retention. This study suggests that it is possible that retention experience can improve self-esteem rather than destroy it. Teachers and parents in this study explained that students experienced frustration and difficult peer relations due to low academic achievement and immaturity prior to the retention year. After experiencing retention, allowing for another year of maturity and the achievement that followed their personal growth and development during the year, the students' self-esteem improved. This data pattern is related to positionality because it is difficult for either the parent, teacher, or researcher to put themselves in the student's position. It would be difficult for an adult with developmentally advanced levels of cognitive ability and analytical reasoning to be able to revert back to their perceptions and cognitive ability when they were at the age of these

young children. In other words, the adults in the experience are utilizing their adult minds to

try to understand what the child is experiencing; however, this is a highly difficult challenge.

In addition, the variables that could possible impact the social and emotional state of a child

are quite diverse and large in number, so to make generalizations across the population for all

students is a difficult task. For this reason, the level of turbulence that each child experiences

with retention could vary from light to moderate to severe, depending on the conditions of

the experience. The following is a turbulence gauge as it applies to retention and the

estimated levels of turbulence that could results from the retention experience. The data in

this study demonstrated that all of the students and parents experienced a light level of

turbulence during the retention experience. As mentioned previously, there was a brief

period of time for two parents when the decision to retain their child was in the process of

being made and there level of turbulence may have been categorized as moderate; however,

this quickly dissipated when the perceptions of the parents and teachers aligned and the

decision was made to retain the children, resulting in a light level of turbulence through the

remainder of the retention experience.

Degree of Turbulence	**Turbulence as It Is Applied to Retention**
Light	o Student makes academic progress, performing on or above the grade level. o Student demonstrates positive social interactions. o Student displays a positive attitude toward school. o Parent provides home support and collaborates closely with the teacher.
Moderate	o Student makes some academic progress, performing on or just below grade level. o Student demonstrates some interactions with peers, but seems introverted as a

	result of the experience.
	o Student displays an attitude of indifference toward school.
	o Parent provides little or no home support, but fosters positive communication with the teacher.
Severe	o Student makes little academic progress, continuing to perform below grade level.
	o Student has little to no interaction with grade level peers.
	o Student displays an attitude with symptoms of depression and low self-esteem.
	o Parent provides little home support or collaboration with the teacher.
Extreme	o Student regresses due to the stress of the retention experience, gaining no progress and showing inconsistency with performance levels from the previous year.
	o Student has negative peer interactions, which often result in disciplinary infractions.
	o Student displays a negative attitude and is a behavior problem in the classroom.
	o Parent does not support the child or school and is combative/resentful in nature when communication occurs.

Table 5-1 – Turbulence Gauge on Retention

Additionally, the cascading nature of multiple variables as well as the stability of the institution itself can impact the retention experience in a negative or positive manner, depending on the variables themselves. Therefore, the variables that affected the social/emotional state of the children in this study, including but not limited to, the large student population, positive school environment, teacher sensitivity to the student, community interactions between retained student and other students, as well as home environment and parental support could have been the ingredients necessary to create a

positive experience for these children. For this reason, none of these students were observed to exhibit behaviors that would suggest a severe level of turbulence in their retention experience; however, some of the parent interviews indicated that some of children may have initially felt some stress with the transition into the retention year and so these children may have experienced a moderate level of turbulence. With these children, their parent's response to behaviors that exhibited a moderate level of turbulence helped to alleviate the distress, lowering the level of turbulence to light as the year of retention progressed.

How do the attitudes of teachers and parents affect retention experience?

The teachers' attitudes toward retention were clearly documented during the interviews as they described their professional philosophy regarding the intervention. All eight teachers felt that there is a purpose for retention and the decision to retain a child should be based on each individual child's attributes. The teachers listed some of the attributes that would determine that a child might benefit from retention such as a lack of academic achievement, immaturity as compared to their peers, small physical size, and developmental delays. Conversely, the teachers felt that a student may not be a good retention candidate if they are physically larger in size than their peers, learning English as a second language, displaying a maturity level that is too advanced for positive peer relationships, or struggling with a learning disability that has previously been diagnosed. All eight teachers clearly stated that although they believed in retention as an intervention strategy for children, it is not appropriate for all children and the decision must be made on a case by case basis.

Some of the teachers have experienced personal connections to retention. Four of the eight teachers were exposed to the retention experience through their own sibling, child, or sibling's children. All four of these teachers indicated that they observed a positive experience with retention through these personal connections, most likely also shaping their attitude and personal opinions of retention.

Two of the teachers shared that they were more likely to insist upon retaining a student if the parents displayed positive attitudes toward the intervention. Both teachers explained that negativity from a parent often transfers to the child and could make a significant impact on the retention experience. All of the parents interviewed in this study were asked to describe how they felt when retention was first considered for their child, to establish if positive attitudes existed from the beginning of the process.

Parents were asked to recall how the initial suggestion for retention came forward. Four of the six parents could recall that the teacher was the catalyst for retaining the child and the other two parents said that it was a mutually suggested step for their child. Parents were then asked to describe how they initially felt about retention when it was suggested or discussed during the child's first year in the grade level. Four of the six parents shared that they had no reservations about retaining their child. These parents indicated that it was a simple decision that was made based on their observations of their own child's academic progress, data collected by the classroom teacher, and the teacher's recommendation. Moreover, these parents explained that it did not make sense to them to push their child forward to the next grade if he/she had not yet mastered the skills in the current grade. The other two parents explained that initially they were resistant to the idea, but after consulting

with the school professionals and their own family members, the decision to retain seemed to make sense.

All six parents responded to an interview question that described the interactions between them and their child during the beginning stages of the retention experience. The pattern that emerged from this questioning demonstrated that all six parents felt it was important to be honest and positive with their child when explaining that the child was going to spend another year in the same grade level. The exact wording that the parents used when speaking to their child varied, but the parents seemed to explain that the child needed more help and a second year in the grade would provide the child with an opportunity to improve skills. One parent explained to her child that mom and dad put the child into school too soon and since he was younger than the rest of the students it would be better to have another year to grow. The pattern that emerged from this data is that overall, once the decision was made to retain the child, the parents approached the experience with a positive attitude.

Toward the end of the year, when the parents were asked to reflect back over the entire school year to assess the retention experience, all six parents were extremely positive about the experience. The parents all felt that they made the right decision for their child and observed positive growth in their child. One parent stated, "I really do thank the teacher that actually looked out and saw that there was a problem even when I didn't want to acknowledge it." Another parent specifically stated "he believes that his positive attitude with his son, through reassurance and reaffirmation, has helped him make his son's education successful".

In addition to the responses to both teacher and parent interview questions that indicated a positive attitude regarding the retention experience, the student observations

indicated that the teachers interacted with the students in a positive nature throughout the school day. The children's behaviors in the areas of emotional, cognitive, and social development were observed to be normal as compared to their peers and showing little, if any, evidence of retention at the close of their second year in the grade level. Of course, this does not suggest that simply having a positive attitude will provide a successful retention experience, but it could be one piece of the equation that must be present in order to have a higher probability of success with retention.

Positionality is definitely going to play a role in the level of turbulence felt by parents as compared to teachers during the retention experience, certainly affecting attitude. Teachers are more likely to experience light turbulence during the retention process and retention experience. Parents are more likely to experience turbulence that can range from light to moderate through the process and experience. The explanation for this difference is linked to the emotional investment of each party in the student's success. Teachers are trained and educated to work with all types of children. This background provides the coping-mechanism needed to remain emotionally-detached and more objective about situations such as retention as they perform their duties in the best interests of students. Many parents have more difficulty with this separation between their emotional investment to their child's success and the reality of student achievement. This was seen by the two parents who admitted to feelings of resistance when the topic of retention was first brought to their attention regarding their child. With these two cases, the parents' initial level of turbulence was moderate; however, as time passed and they dealt with the emotional aspect of realizing that their child was struggling academically, their level of turbulence decreased and decisions were made with more ease regarding their child's educational plan. Overall

though, the level of turbulence that the teacher and parent feel will be less than the student because the aspects of retention that will affect the student do not change the daily routines or experiences of the parent, most of the time. Some parents do feel an additional level of turbulence if social embarrassment becomes an issue when explaining to family members or peers that their child is going to repeat the grade level. However, none of the parents in this study gave any indication that they felt this stigma or embarrassment during this experience so it is difficult to assess the impact it may have on the retention experience or level of turbulence experienced. If it occurred with these parents, it certainly did not seem to impact their attitude toward the retention experience.

What are the factors that influence the experience with retention as an intervention for low achievement?

Based on the interview data, student academic achievement data, and student observation data collected in this study, several factors play a significant role in a child's experience with retention. First, and foremost, assessing the child's individual attributes to decide whether or not he/she is a good candidate for retention is probably the most significant factor in determining the probability of success with this intervention. In this study, Light's (2006) Retention Scale was a tool used to identify the student's individual attributes and rank these traits to obtain a numerical score that determined candidacy for retention. Four out of six of the children in this study were assessed, using Light's (2006) Retention Scale, as being "Good" candidates for retention, while the remaining two children were ranked as "Fair" candidates for retention. No child in this study was ranked as a "Poor"

candidate for retention, leading to a possible explanation for some of the observed success with the retention experience. In addition, teacher recommendation and parental response were taken into consideration when determining if retention might be a successful intervention for a child.

This elementary school's curriculum and instructional techniques also impacted the retention experience. By individualizing instruction and providing leveled materials for students to work with, every student is pressed to meet his/her maximum potential regardless of the grade level placement. This impacts a child who is working at either end of the spectrum during the course of the year. For example, if a child is above grade level at the start of the year because the child has already completed the grade once and ended the year at a higher functional level than those children first coming to the grade, then this child is able to work at his/her current instructional level in reading, writing, and math to prevent boredom or frustration. Conversely, a child who is below grade level at any point during the course of the year is also able to work at his/her current instructional level preventing frustration and encouraging self-confidence. The small group instruction that occurred on a daily basis in several subject areas in this elementary school allowed each student to learn on a level and at a speed that is most appropriate for his/her needs without the social stigma of being different than the other children in the class. In actuality, since the classes are designed to be heterogeneous, this type of programming supports the academic growth of all children in the class regardless of their strengths and weaknesses.

Another factor that may have impacted the experience with retention in this school is the size and design of the school population and class placement. With five classrooms in each grade level and approximately 500 children in the school, students accept new children

into their social world quite easily. The children are accustomed to being a member of a new class of students every year, since the children are reconfigured each year into five new classes. Since there are at least 100 students in each grade level, no student knows every other student in the grade level, allowing new children to be welcomed into the environment on an annual basis. In other schools, where the population is smaller and children stay together year after year, new students often have more difficulty entering the class and establishing strong peer relations. Additionally, in these smaller schools, the students are extremely familiar with their peers in each grade level and often even the grade level above or below their own. This prevents students from anonymity regarding retention and may cause labeling or a stigma that parents and educators sometimes fear for the children. This was definitely not seen through this study as children only knew other children in grade levels above or below their own based on extracurricular activities or sibling relations, and even this seemed to be sporadic.

Through the theoretical lens of Turbulence Theory, the positions of the stakeholders in this experience play an intricate role in the intervention. Positionality in the retention experience becomes significant because the role that the teacher and parents fulfill in the process differs greatly as well as each of their perspectives. The teacher most likely has a more objective lens to view the student and a less personal awareness of the student to provide a limited perspective on the child's abilities and development. The parent may be more emotionally connected to the child and not as objective, but less able to make comparisons between their child and other children of the same age, the parent is most likely more aware of their child's emotional state. These differing positions can sometimes conflict with each other; however, in this case study, the teacher and parent in the case of each child

were able to come together with both perspectives to support the student's needs. The influence of both of these parties impacts the retention experience as active involvement from both is necessary to take action that is in the best interest of the whole child.

Finally, it has been suggested that parental response to retention and attitude during the retention process can have a significant impact on the experience. In this study, only positive attitudes and positive parent-child interactions were documented, so it is difficult to ascertain exactly how a negative parental response or attitude might affect the retention experience. However, it is believed by the parents and teachers in this study that children model what they see and respond to their environment, so if the children are modeling and responding to their parent's positive take on the retention experience, then it is probable that this can only have a positive impact on the experience.

It is difficult to ascertain how parents and teachers would have perceived the retention experience if the students hadn't shown growth in one or more areas of the educational environment. Since all six parents and teachers saw academic improvements, it is likely that they felt more favorable about the retention experience. Further research is needed to determine the consistency and application of the patterns that revealed themselves in this study. Based on this study, the factors that strongly influenced the students' experience with retention were the use of Light's (2006) Retention Scale as well as parent and teacher input to determine retention candidacy, the design of the curriculum and instructional program, the collaboration of the teachers and parents with the best interest of the students in mind, and the attitudes of both the teachers and parents in relation to the retention experience. For the children in this study, all of these factors came together fluidly to enhance academic achievement and support development in all aspects of the educational environment.

Summary

Based on the data in this study, retention does not seem as detrimental to a student's well-being and overall academic, social, and emotional development during the early grade levels in elementary school. However, it is important to note the reasons why this seems to be true in this specific study. It is significant to note that the educational program offered by this school is aligned with the instructional techniques of differentiated instruction. The educational plan of this school has been designed to meet individual students' needs. The educational plan suggests that this school's philosophy of education does not align with the lock-step system that still exists in our national educational system, but works within the constraints of the national system to provide developmental education to its students. Knowing that students differ in their learning styles and rates of development, this school carefully considers each child's strengths and weaknesses, utilizing research-based methods, teacher recommendation, and parent recommendation before determining eligibility for retention.

This school's approach to education and student support services should be utilized as a model for schools with similar demographics as the school size, parental involvement, and institutional stability play a role in this school's success with student achievement. However, these general principles involving differentiated instruction and a thorough understanding of each individual child to suggest specific support services could be utilized by all elementary schools in a way that best fits their specific demographics.

In addition, it is important to remember that as much as education has stayed the same over the years, it has also changed. Therefore, educational techniques such as retention can

not be disregarded now, simply because they may not have shown success in the past based on previous assumptions that have been made through experiences and research. Retention is one of the educational experiences that is affected by several aspects of the educational system, including educational program. When the proverbial pendulum was resting in the opposite position and techniques such as whole language and whole group instruction were used in schools across the nation, retention may have not been successful as an intervention for low-achievement. Currently, educational trends lean toward differentiated small group instruction in all subject areas and grade levels at the elementary level, providing an environment where retention seems to be much more successful as demonstrated in this study.

In conclusion, the hope is that the data and their analysis as presented in this study will provide a new insight into an old intervention. The experiences of the educators and families involved in this study provided documentation of student success with retention in relation to academic achievement, and even more surprisingly, social and emotional growth. Even more interesting would be a longitudinal study of the children who participated in this study, or children who have been in a similar situation, to see if the positive trends continue with the long-term growth and development of these children as they continue their educational careers as well as to survey the students' personal opinions of retention as they become young adults.

As an educational leader, my recommendation for educators and administrators in elementary education is to foster a school culture in which the educational program exposed by this study can thrive. The educational program in this elementary school consists of many intricate aspects; however, there are several significant aspects of this particular educational

program that can be duplicated. An elementary school must be a nurturing environment that allows for children to develop at their own individual rate with an academic program that supports developmentally appropriate learning opportunities. This can occur with direct instruction that is designed for small groups to meet the needs of individual learners. There must be strong home-school communication to support this type of educational program. And finally, there must be respect for the professional opinions of the educators who work directly with the children. This respect allows teachers to advocate for their students, design a developmentally appropriate educational program for each individual student, and overall meet the needs of their students in all aspects of the educational environment. Developing and support a school culture with these characteristics will not only aide in the success of students who have been retained, but it will improve the achievement of all students.

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Linking Research Questions to Data Collection Methods

Research Question:	Interviews	Observations	Student Artifacts
How does the teacher's approach to the student's educational program during the retention year meet the educational needs of the students and affect the retention experience?	X	X	X
How do teachers and parents perceive the retention experience?	X		
How does a student's academic, social, and emotional growth and development, or lack of demonstrated growth and development, as perceived by teachers and parents, contribute to or detract from the retention experience?	X		X
How does the student self-esteem/self-worth seem to be affected by interactions with peers in their retention year classroom?	X	X	
How do the attitudes of parents and teachers affect the retention?	X	X	
What are the factors that influence the experience with retention as an intervention for low achievement?	X	X	X

(Table 5-2)

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
TEACHER

Thank you for meeting with me today to discuss your experiences as a primary grade teacher. This interview is a part of a research project that I am working on as a student at Temple University. I am studying to earn my doctorate in Education. This research project focuses on the retention/grade repetition for primary grades students. I am interested in learning about the experience with this program for students. Your experiences with this topic will help provide me insight on the topic. To ensure the confidentiality of this interview as well as provide your consent, you have signed a consent form.

1. To begin with, I would like to have you share information about yourself and your background in education. (During this part of the interview, I will collect data about his/her educational background, number of years teaching, and grades that have been taught.)
2. Through your experiences with primary grade students, what are your feelings about the attributes that a student must have to be successful in kindergarten, first, or second grade?
3. How do you assess students to understand if they are meeting success in your classroom?
4. What steps do you take if a student is not meeting success?
5. Have you ever considered retention for a student in your class? (If "no", proceed to Question #8)
6. If you could think back to specific examples of students who you considered for retention, what indicated to you that the child might benefit from retention?
7. How did you see the retention process as it took place, in relation to the school, administration, teaching staff, and parents?
8. What is your personal philosophy of retention and do you feel that your colleagues support this philosophy? Do you have any personal experience with retention, either yourself, your siblings, or your children?
9. Approximately, how many times have you had the experience of teaching a student who was retained in the grade?
10. What has your experience been with these students, in relation to their emotional, social, and academic status?
11. As the classroom teacher, how did you approach the educational program for the student who has been retained in your grade? (i.e. processes used to develop program, adaptations to program, instructional practices, presentation of curriculum, modification to routines or program, etc…)
12. How has the student performed in relation to your program adapatations?
13. What is the nature of the student's interaction and interrelationships with peers?
14. How would you describe the student's overall attitude toward school?
15. Have you taken notice of students you have retained and their experiences as they continued through the grades? How might you evaluate their experience with retention?
16. Is there anything else that you would like to share that I may not have asked during this interview?

This interview will be transcribed and I would be happy to send you a copy. If you get a chance to read it and feel that you would like to add to or change anything that we have discussed today, please let me know. Thank you once again. I really appreciate this opportunity and have enjoyed talking to you about this topic.

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
PARENT

Thank you for meeting with me today to discuss your experiences as a parent of an elementary school student who has been retained in his/her current grade. This interview is a part of a research project that I am working on as a student at Temple University. I am studying to earn my doctorate in Education. This research project focuses on the retention/grade repetition for primary grades students. I am interested in learning about the experience with this program for students. Your experiences with this topic will help provide me insight on the topic. To ensure the confidentiality of this interview as well as provide your consent, you have signed a consent form.

1. To begin with, I would like to have you share information about yourself and your background. (During this part of the interview, I will collect data about the family structure, educational background, and career choices.)
2. How would you describe your child's first year in kindergarten, first, or second grade? Teacher satisfaction? Peer relations? Academic progress? Maturity?
3. How did you first discover that your child was having difficulty in school?
4. How did you feel about the initial suggestion for retention?
5. Was this a difficult decision to make for your child and what factors influenced your decision to retain your child?
6. How did you go about sharing your decision with your child?
7. How would you describe your child's reaction to your decision to retain him/her?
8. How would you describe your child's experience during his/her 2nd year in the grade? Teacher satisfaction? Peer relations? Academic progress? Maturity?
9. Have you noticed any differences in the instruction or educational program that your child has experienced this year? If so, please describe these differences?
10. How would you describe you child's overall attitude toward school?
11. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with retention that I may not have asked you during this interview?

This interview will be transcribed and I would be happy to send you a copy. If you get a chance to read it and feel that you would like to add to or change anything that we have discussed today, please let me know. Thank you once again. I really appreciate this opportunity and have enjoyed talking to you about this topic.