Grade repetition: Analysis of literature

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Abstract
Every elementary teacher must evaluate the progress of each individual in the classroom. The ultimate question becomes: Has this child gained the appropriate knowledge and mastered the designated skills to succeed in the next grade in school? In most cases the teacher determines with confidence that the individual has adequately mastered the expected competencies. Occasionally, though, the question is more difficult to answer and the teacher is confronted with the dilemma of determining what course of action will be in the best interest of a child who does not appear to have reached the expected level of achievement. Such a child must be considered for grade repetition.
GRADE REPETITION: ANALYSIS OF LITERATURE

A Research Paper
Submitted to
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Master of Arts in Education

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Introduction

Every elementary teacher must evaluate the progress of each individual in the classroom. The ultimate question becomes: Has this child gained the appropriate knowledge and mastered the designated skills to succeed in the next grade in school? In most cases the teacher determines with confidence that the individual has adequately mastered the expected competencies. Occasionally, though, the question is more difficult to answer and the teacher is confronted with the dilemma of determining what course of action will be in the best interest of a child who does not appear to have reached the expected level of achievement. Such a child must be considered for grade repetition.

Grade repetition has been referred to as retention, flunking, failing, nonpromotion, or a year to grow. Kerzner (1982) referred to the definition of a retained child "... as a child who is compelled to repeat an entire school year in the same grade giving the child an added chance for classroom success" (p. 5).

Grade repetition has had cycles of popularity. During the 19th and early 20th century, grade repetition was a common practice for slow learners. From the 1930's to the 1960's "social promotion" became more common and nonpromotion
was infrequently suggested. During the 1970's and 1980's educators have become more interested in criterion testing and mastery learning to provide guidance for making decisions (Rose, Medway, Cantrell, & Marus, 1983).

Public opinion has reflected a perception of relaxed academic standards. There has been insistence for educational accountability based on the decline in scholastic achievement. As a result, nonpromotion has again been considered as a viable alternative to social promotion. The following reports present examples of recent demands for stricter standards for pupils.

"Raise Expectations to Achieve Excellence" is a 1984 report from The National School Board Association that stated:

... students... who are promoted based on age and parental pressure rather than on evidence of learning will have a difficult time meeting stricter standards in high school. Effective policies on promotion and retention that are linked to achieving educational objectives will go a long way toward ensuring that students are prepared for the next educational level. (p. 1-2)

Another report reflects a similar view. The National Commission of Excellence in Education in 1983 declared
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that the placement and grouping of students, as well as promotion and graduation policies, should be guided by academic progress of students and their instructional needs, rather than by rigid adherence to age.

Finally, in 1983, The National Science Board called for the process of social promotion to be curtailed. It contended that standards for grade promotion and high school graduation should be established.

These reports illustrate that the public is expecting schools to reconsider policy and establish stricter standards for progress through the grades. Subject matter mastery must meet minimum levels before a student can progress so that high school graduation will become a valid indicator of competence.

Statement of the Problem

As educators are faced with demands for stricter standards for student achievement it is important to examine grade repetition. Does research justify grade repetition as an educational practice with potential for enhancing academic achievement? What impact will grade repetition have on the student's social and emotional development, and is there a way to predict reliably what the effect will be on future academic achievement?

A review of the literature and synthesis of research findings should provide guidance for teachers who must
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make decisions regarding borderline students. In addition, this paper will suggest ways to deal with the issue in order to avoid discouragement and enable a child to gain from repetition of a grade.

Procedures in Obtaining Literature

The ERIC Thesaurus of Descriptors suggests that the appropriate terms for a search is "grade repetition". In an ERIC Computer search in Resources in Education (RIE) and Current Index to Journals (CIJE) at the University of Northern Iowa Library the following terms were utilized: grade repetition, nonpromotion, student promotion, academic failure, social development, elementary education, primary education and intermediate grades. Ninety documents were obtained which had been published from 1975 through 1985. Twenty-nine documents were listed in The William S. Gray Collection in Reading under "Promotion Vs Non-Promotion (Retention)". Remaining documents were obtained from reference listings in research articles. These sources were examined and synthesized relative to the research questions.

Review of Research

Who Is Retained?

There are some general types of students that are more likely to be retained. As early as 1909, Ayers in
Laggards in Our School, reported that the rate of retention was significantly higher in the first grade than in all others. The rate was found to be higher for boys than girls. This information is consistent with subsequent reports (Caplan, 1973 and Abidin, Golladay, & Howerton, 1971).

Abidin et al. (1971) compared 85 sixth-grade children who were retained in first or second grade with a group of 43 promoted children who scored below the 25th percentile on the Metropolitan Readiness Test. The study revealed that certain nonacademic variables were significant factors in the decision to retain a child during the first two years of schooling. "In short, if you are black, male, from a low socio-economic family with mother working and father absent your chances of being retained in the first or second grade are greatly increased" (p. 414).

The data in this study also revealed that the determination for retention could not be explained in terms of ability or achievement. No differences between academic promise or achievement for the retained and for the promoted group were indicated in records of teacher judgments. The standardized test data showed the scores of the group that was retained to be significantly greater than that of the promoted group. There were also no differences found in teacher ratings, subject matter
grades, and conduct grades.

Reasons for retention recorded in the students' records did not help to clarify issues. Immaturity was cited in 28% of the cases, academic failure in 32%, in 24% there was no reason cited, and in 16% miscellaneous reasons were given (e.g., entered school late or missed too much school).

Caplan (1973) reported that many more boys than girls were identified as problem learners. She examined the influence of behavior and sexual norms on decisions to promote or retain students. Fifty promoted and retained primary students were matched by age, sex, race, and grades. There were forty boys and ten girls reflecting the ratio in which boys to girls were retained. Findings revealed that promoted girls received significantly higher behavior ratings than retained girls and that the mean behavior rating for the retained girls was lower than that for the boys. Comparison of the two groups of boys showed no evidence of behavioral differences. Caplan concluded that a girl's classroom conduct seems to be a critical consideration in the decision to promote or retain.

Reinherz and Griffin (1970) found that the retained subjects which they studied were mainly from lower socio-economic classes. Fifty out of fifty-seven
students were in the bottom two social classes, while only seven families were in the upper social classes. Children from homes where the fathers had a low educational level predominated. Forty-seven families had more than one of the family that had been retained.

Potorff (1978) compared 65 retained first-grade students with a random sample of 65 promoted peers. A retained student tended to have the following common characteristics: (a) belonged to a minority race, (b) came from a large family, (c) had a mother with low level of education, (d) came from a home of separated or divorced parents, (e) lacked reading skills, and (f) lacked mathematics skills.

**Research Design Types and Their Biases**

Jackson (1975) categorized the original studies conducted on grade repetition from 1911 through 1973 into three design types. While research intents were similar procedures varied and Jackson's study of these procedures indicates that the design type used in the study influenced the results. An understanding of these biases is essential in analyzing the results.

Design Type I compares the achievement and social adjustment of students retained under existing school policies and those promoted under normal policies.
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Student groups were as closely matched as possible by age, grade level, sex, grades, IQ, achievement test scores, and socio-economic status. The problem with such a research design is that it is biased towards benefits derived from grade promotion. Some students were retained while others were promoted under normal policies, indicating that the severity of the problems was probably greater for those who had been retained.

Design Type II compared achievement records of retained students before and after their retention. The bias in this type favors grade repetition since no comparison group is used and there is no control for improvement. Jackson considers this design to be the least valid of the three types since there is no investigation into whether that retained student would have shown increased scores just from normal growth and maturation.

Design Type III involves an experimental comparison of students experiencing difficulty in school and who were randomly promoted or retained. This design is the most unbiased, however, the three studies using this design type did not include representative samples of students and concentrated only on the short term effects of grade repetition. The three studies which used experimental designs (Klene & Branson, 1929; Farley, 1936;
and Cook, 1941) involved primary and intermediate students and examined achievement over a one-semester or six-month period. The data did not indicate significant differences between the two groups and, therefore, the conclusions could not support either course of action.

Because of the reluctance of schools to allow such investigations, researchers have had to use flawed research designs to conduct studies. This must be kept in mind when interpreting the findings.

**Grade Repetition and Academic Achievement**

One of the earliest studies of grade repetition was conducted by Keyes (1911). He found, in a four-year study of 5,000 pupils, that 21% of nonpromoted pupils attained higher levels of achievement after repeating a grade, 39% showed no change, and 40% scored lower.

In a similar study, Buckingham (1926) found that of several thousand children a small percentage, (approximately one-third), did better after repeating a grade. McKinney (1928) also evaluated repeaters above first grade and found 35% performed better the second time, 53% did not improve, and 12% did less well.

Klene and Branson (1929) conducted one of the few Design Type III studies that compared children who were in grades two through six who were potential repeaters.
Of those children, the repeaters were randomly selected. Pupils, in two groups, were paired for sex, chronological age, and mental age. Findings indicated that as measured by achievement scores, potential repeaters profited more from promotion than nonpromotion. These researchers did not report, however, whether differences were statistically significant.

Farley, Frey, and Garland (1933) studied children with low IQ's who repeated several grades. These children were compared to children of similar ability, as measured by IQ, but who were not retained. Retained children were not achieving as well in their school work as nonretainees.

Arthur (1936) also compared promoted and nonpromoted first-graders on the basis of mental age. The nonpromoted group gained no more in reading over a two-year period than did the promoted students.

Saunders (1941) summarized early research on grade repetition and concluded that:

From the evidence cited, it may be concluded that nonpromotion of pupils in elementary schools in order to assure mastery of subject matter does not accomplish it's objectives. Children do not appear to learn more by repeating a grade, but experience
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less growth in subject matter achievement than they do when promoted. (p. 29)

Additional research supports Saunder's findings. Coffield and Blommers (1956) measured achievement of promoted and nonpromoted students in grades three to six at one- and two-year intervals. Achievement was assessed again when all the nonpromoted pupils reached seventh grade. They concluded that when performance is measured in a higher grade, children who had repeated a grade ultimately perform at about the same levels as those who had been promoted.

Dobbs and Neville (1967) studied thirty pairs of first- and second-graders who were matched on (a) race, (b) sex, (c) socio-economic level, (d) type of classroom assignment, (e) age, (f) mental ability, and (g) reading achievement. Each pair consisted of a once-retained first-grader and a never-retained second grader. The students were studied over a two-year period using reading and arithmetic scores on achievement tests.

The data showed that the gains of the promoted group were significantly greater than that of the nonpromoted group during both the first and second year of the study. Dobbs and Neville concluded that "...nonpromotion was not an aid to achievement" (p. 472).
Kamii and Weikart (1963) conducted a study to determine if the marks, achievement levels, and intelligence test scores of seventh graders who had been retained once in the elementary school were comparable to those who were regularly promoted. The results showed that the pupils who were retained once had several common characteristics. Their marks in academic subjects were below the average of the regularly-promoted seventh graders, usually D's and F's. Achievement levels in reading and arithmetic were also significantly lower than those of the regularly promoted pupils.

Abidin et al. (1971) conducted a study of sixth-grade students including an experimental group of 85 children who were retained either in the first or second grade, and a control group of 43 children who scored below the 24th percentile on a readiness test but were never retained. They found that:

... data collected in this study suggest there is no evidence of any net positive or negative short term effect of retention. ... However, the long term effect is not so benign. Those children who are retained display a continuing deterioration in both achievement and intelligence through the sixth grade. (p. 115)

Godfrey (1972) reported similar findings in a 1970
research project. He also found that years of retention could be an academic handicap to students by decreasing their performance. The study involved approximately 1,200 sixth- and seventh-grade students from 14 schools. In reading achievement, nonretainees were reading at a 6.8 grade level, and those students who repeated two or more grades were at a 4.5 level. In an analysis of mathematical achievement, nonretainees averaged in the 27th percentile, one-time repeaters in the 10th percentile, and those repeating more than one grade were in the 5th percentile.

Benefits from Grade Repetition

Research on grade repetition has also provided evidence of positive outcomes. Lobdell (1954) found that when specific and individualized criteria were carefully used to select children who were to repeat a grade, almost 70% made noticeable gains in achievement. These findings are questionable, though, due to the fact that there is no clear set of guidelines regularly used to select students for nonpromotion and there was no comparison group in this study. There is, therefore, no indication of how well they could have done had they been promoted. The next two research studies were also conducted under this Design II flaw.
Scott and Ames (1969) studied 27 students that were retained in elementary grades, mostly in primary grades. Retention was recommended solely on the basis of immaturity. The students had IQ scores of at least 90. They found that retention improved the academic performance and behavior of students. All exhibited significant improvement in class grades and teachers rated the adjustments of 90% of students as average, high, or very high. Parents reported significant improvement in their child's social, emotional, and academic adjustment.

Kerzner (1982) also studied the educational value of retaining low-achieving elementary school students in the same grade for an additional year. The subjects in this study were 56 students who had completed at least one grade level beyond the grade in which they had been retained. The students had each been tested during the year of retention and during the following year. Results showed that retention was academically beneficial to students in all grades. Those in the first and second grades showed a positive growth at the .01 level of significance and the third graders showed a positive growth at the .05 level of significance.

Owens and Ranick (1977) began an experimental
program in 1973 in which "No student would be promoted until they showed, on achievement tests, the mastery of the skills for their grades" (p. 531).

This achievement-oriented program produced the following results: (a) a declining number of retainees, (b) increasing achievement test scores in which students scoring in the bottom 20 to 30% nationwide on achievement tests had risen to the top 50 to 60%, (c) students displayed a more positive attitude about testing, (d) IQ scores increased, and (e) the dropout rate declined.

In a critique of Owen and Ranick's program, Koons (1977) pointed out four reasons why the program produced those results: (a) the Hawthorne Effect played a part in the "new" approach producing good results, (b) students achieved more out of fear of being retained, (c) the new importance of the tests motivated them to apply themselves more diligently to the testing situation, thus producing high scores without any real difference in achievement, and (d) teachers were prompted to consciously or unconsciously teach to the tests.

Grade Repetition and Social and Emotional Development

In assessing the effects of grade repetition on a student it is important to look not only at the academic consequences, but also at the emotional and social
consequences for that child. Sandin (1944) assessed the social and emotional adjustment of regularly promoted and nonpromoted students. Findings showed that children who had been retained did not consider their younger, regularly-promoted classmate appropriate companions. Differences in behavior, interests, likes, and dislikes of the two groups thwarted good social relations. According to Sandin, the general outlook of the retained pupil was not as positive as the promoted individual. This resulted in some of those retained students becoming worried about their school progress and becoming easily discouraged.

Caswell and Foshay (1957) also concluded that nonpromoted students suffer from depression and discouragement. Goodlad (1954) also found regularly promoted students to be significantly better in their personal and social adjustment.

On the other side of the issue, Chase (1968) indicated in her study of normal children retained for reasons of immaturity that 78% of 65 first, second, and third-grade children had no emotional upset after retention. Most parents (95%) were supportive of the retention decision and stated they observed positive changes in their children after they were retained. Similar results
were found by Scott and Ames (1969) in their study of immature students.

Finlayson (1977) investigated the notion that nonpromotion was associated with poor self-concept. He asked the question: "Does poor self-concept contribute to school failure or does school failure contribute to a poor self-concept?" (p. 205)

Finlayson set out to answer this question in a two-year study of retention and self-concept by collecting data on first graders at the outset of schooling and through their second year. He examined 75 regularly promoted students, nonpromoted students, and promoted borderline students with the same characteristics as the nonpromoted students. The prediction was made that the self-concepts of the promoted and borderline (also promoted) groups would remain stable over the two years, while the retained group would remain stable during the first year before being retained. It was expected that their self-concept would become significantly lower than those who had been promoted. The findings did not support the predictions. The self-concept of all three groups rose the first year and after nonpromotion. The scores of the nonpromoted group of pupils continued to increase significantly, while scores of the borderline and promoted
groups dropped slightly, though not significantly, during the second year of the study.

In a discussion of these findings, Finlayson explains that the self-concept of the promoted students may have become less positive as they progressed through the grades because as they interacted with their environment and they developed a more realistic self-image than they had earlier. Retained students may have improved their self-concept because they felt more competent within a familiar environment.

The question still exists as to what happens to these students when they approach new material. What happens to their self-concept when they are faced with unfamiliar challenges?

**Summaries of Research**

Reiter (1973) reported from literature reviewed before 1965 that neither a policy of automatic promotion or a rigid retention policy were in themselves a solution to inadequate academic achievement. Promotion, however, appears to have fewer disadvantages. Research completed since 1965 suggests that for maximal learning to occur teachers need to be sensitive to how students are treated, rather than with the retention/promotion policy. There is a call for "... (a) a humane treatment of each pupil as a person of value, and (b) creative provision of
appropriate learning tasks in which the individual can experience success" (p. 3).

Jackson (1975) after examining 44 original research studies, and categorizing them into the three design types, arrived at the following conclusions:

There is no reliable body of evidence to indicate that grade retention is more beneficial than grade promotion for students with serious academic or adjustment difficulties. . . Thus those educators who retain pupils in a grade do so without valid research evidence to indicate that such treatment will provide greater benefits to students with academic or adjustment difficulties than will promotion to the next grade. (p. 627)

Thompson (1980) examined the literature on grade retention and social promotion and concluded that all reviews of research comparing the two policies favor social promotion. "The best promotion policy, short of the ideal of the continuous progress curriculum, is one that calls for social promotion as the rule and permits an occasional retention when it appears to be in a child's best interest" (p. 24).

The most recent analysis of research was reported by Holmes and Matthews (1984). They used the meta-analysis
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technique. Meta-Analysis is based on the concept of effect size. Effect size in this study was defined as the difference between the mean of the retained group and the mean of the promoted group, divided by the standard deviation of the promoted group. This procedure results in a measure of the difference between the two groups expressed in quantitative units which are additive across studies.

Results of the analysis indicated that nonpromotion had a negative effect on pupils. Following retention, students scored an average of .27 standard deviation units below that of promoted students in measures of personal adjustment and behavior. On self-concept measures, promoted students out-scored the retained pupils at the .05 significance level. Regarding pupils perceptions of school, results showed that retained students attitudes were not as positive as those of promoted students.

Holmes and Matthews concluded, "Those who continue to retain pupils at grade level do so despite cumulative research evidence showing that the potential for negative effects consistently outweighs positive outcomes" (p. 232).

Predicting a Successful Retention

What Factors Will Promote a More Successful Retention?

There is evidence to provide support for both social
promotion and grade repetition. The bulk of research on grade repetition was reported in the 1930's and 1940's with an overwhelming majority of evidence favoring social promotion. This provided one of the main reasons Goodlad (1954) felt that graded schools should be replaced with nongraded at the primary levels. Because of the consistently negative findings of nonpromotion during this era many researchers considered the question closed and few studies were undertaken until after 1952.

While most research tends to support social promotion, those studies do indicate that some benefit from nonpromotion.

The type of research on grade repetition changed and investigators began to attempt to identify students for a successful repetition. Stringer (1960) described it as "... trying to find a safe course between the rock of routine retentions and the whirlwind of social promotions" (p. 370).

Is there a set of common characteristics among students that will help to predict what student will benefit from grade repetition? An examination of successful retention outcomes reveals student characteristics which might increase chances for a
successful repetition. Children with normal intelligence but who are immature for their grade seem to benefit most. In 1968 Chase studied the effectiveness of sixty-five first, second, and third-graders whose teachers considered them to have normal intelligence, but were immature for their grades. The most successful academic gains were achieved by those repeating first grade. Chase found them to be "... in a far better position to compete with their classmates than those who had been moved ahead to the second and third grades before being allowed to repeat" (p. 175). From teacher interviews it was determined that repeating had met the needs of 75% of the children and had produced no emotional upset whatever in 78%. Parents, 95% of whom said they were in favor of repeating, reported that the children liked school better, were more confident and successful in school, easier to live with at home, and were getting along well with friends.

Sandoval and Hughes (1981) conducted an extensive two-year study to identify characteristics of pupils who profited from retention and identify the factors in retained groups that facilitated success after failure. Of a group of 146 first graders identified as potential repeaters, 84 repeated first grade and 62 were promoted.
Each child was individually tested by the researchers to determine academic achievement, perceptual motor ability, interpersonal relationships, intelligence, and cognitive and physical development. Parent and teacher interviews were also conducted.

Best predictors of successful retention were the child's initial status in three areas: (a) academic skills, (b) emotional development, including self-concept, and (c) social skills. Relatively unimportant determinants of successful outcomes were (a) a child's family background, (b) early life experiences, (c) physical size, (d) visual-motor development, and (e) teacher philosophy.

Stringer (1960) examined 50 cases of children retained in grades one through eight. Two were retained two times and some were seriously disturbed. Stringer found retention appeared to benefit subjects. On the average, students progressed better during the year of retention than the year of failure. Two factors were associated with favorable achievement during retention. First was an achievement lag between 1.0 and 1.9 grade levels and a rate of progress less than half of normal.

Another factor Stringer attributed to the gains were that of parental support. Those children in the
control group, whose parents would not work with the school were better off to repeat a grade to get the extra help at school. Those whose parents opposed the suggested retention and agreed to work with their child to improve achievement gains, did show gains.

Reinherz and Griffin (1970) conducted a study of 57 subjects to determine what factors were involved in a successful grade repetition. A majority of the students were boys who had at least normal intelligence who were repeating a grade for the first time. A majority made satisfactory achievement and progress during the retention. Thirty-six earned satisfactory achievement at grade level, while 21 made poor or fair achievement gains. Thirty-eight made much progress or improved over past levels and 19 made only little or some progress. The variable most frequently associated with satisfactory achievement was the grade level at which the student was retained. Over 80% of first graders made satisfactory achievement, while more than half of the second and third grade repeaters showed only fair or poor achievement.

Most students had shown learning difficulty from the beginning of their schooling. Parental attitudes toward retention tended to be more negative for second
and third graders than for first graders. Principals offered different reasons for retention of second and third graders, primarily academic deficiency, while the first grade students were held back for emotional and behavioral reasons, particularly immaturity.

The second indicator was emotional and social stability. Those showing good social and emotional adjustment and students having good peer relations usually made steady progress.

The most important finding was that children characterized as immature tended to achieve better during retention than children showing less signs of immaturity.

Measures Available for Determining a Successful Retention

There are no accurate criteria or measures available to simplify a decision for grade repetition. A mathematical scheme that designates one set of points suggesting retention and another set suggesting promotion would eliminate the controversy, but one does not exist. There have been attempts to help clarify factors involved in the decision, but these remain unclear.

Light (1977) felt strongly that all areas possibly affecting a child when retained should be considered before a decision is made. This prompted him to develop
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a retention scale. It consists of 19 categories of evaluation with responses in each category scaled from zero to five points. An item scored zero would mean it would be an asset when a child is retained. A score of five means the student will almost certainly not be helped by retention and stands a good chance of doing better by being advanced.

Categories include: school attendance, intelligence, present level of academic achievement, physical size, student's age, sex of student, siblings, previous retention, history of learning disability, student's attitude about possible retention, parent's school participation, motivation to complete tasks, history of delinquency, knowledge of English language, present grade placement, transiency, emotional problems, experiential background, and immature behavior. This scale is to be administered during teacher or parent-counselor conferences as a tool for clarifying the educational and psychological justification for retention.

Sandoval (1982) argues Light's Retention Scale is neither reliable or valid as a psychometric device. He compared Light's Retention Scale totals to a measure of a child's achievement gains, emotional state, and social status before and after retention. He found
that the Light total did not add to his ability to predict the outcome of having children repeat first grade.

Lieberman (1980) constructed a decision-making model that included child, family, and school factors that should be considered. These factors could be used to argue for or against a child's retention.

Child factors include: physical disabilities, physical size, academic potential, psychosocial maturity, neurological maturity, self-concept, ability to function independently, grade placement, chronological age, previous retentions, nature of the problem (behavior or learning rate as basis for retention), sex, chronic absenteeism, basic skill competencies, peer pressure, and child's attitude toward retention.

Family factors include: geographical moves, foreign language immigrants, attitude toward retention, age of sibling and sibling pressure, and involvement of family physician.

School factors include: system's attitude toward retention, principal's attitude toward retention, teacher's attitude toward retention, availability of special education services, availability of other
programmatic options, and availability of personnel.

These comprehensive lists illustrate the complex nature of the policy. The decision, however, has such a profound effect on children and their relationships to schools, parents, and peers that all areas should be carefully considered.

Summary

This review of the research indicates that the type of student retained can be defined as having certain characteristics. The rate of retention is higher for children in first grade than any other grade, and the rate is higher for boys than girls (Abidin et al. 1971 and Caplan, 1973). Also, girls who are retained tend to have lower behavior ratings than those who are promoted (Caplan, 1973). Teachers need to examine personal motive and perceptions to ensure they are not influenced by a desire to punish inappropriate behavior.

Many other nonacademic variables also characterize the retained child. Those retained tend to be from a low socio-economic class, more frequently a child of a minority race, and a child of a father who is absent from the home and a mother who works (Abidin et al. 1971; Reinherz & Griffin, 1970; and Pottorff, 1973). Decisions
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may be influenced by biases and predetermined expectations.

There is evidence supporting both nonpromotion and social promotion with a majority favoring social promotion. All major reviews of research indicate that there is not enough evidence available to adequately justify nonpromotion (Goodlad, 1954; Holmes & Matthews, 1985; Jackson, 1975; Reiter, 1973; and Saunders, 1944).

Research findings that support positive effects of grade repetition indicate that students found to be candidates for a successful retention are immature students with normal intelligence and good social adjustment. These repetitions are most successful in the primary grades, most commonly first grade. (Chase, 1968; Scott & Ames, 1969; Sandoval & Hughes, 1981; and Reinherz & Griffin, 1970).

Conclusions

Upon examining both sides of the issue, the evidence indicates that retention does not correct academic failure. Instead, it is frequently linked to continuing deterioration of student achievement and damage to the individual’s self-concept. Thus, any strict retention policies, especially those based on the student's scores of just one achievement test must be questioned. The
misuse of a testing instrument disregards what research has proven about errors in the measurement of human behavior and what research reveals about the many factors that should be considered in such an important issue.

Research also indicates that a strict retention policy is highly discriminatory toward boys, particularly those from a minority race whose families are of a low socio-economic status, whose father is absent and mother is working. There is mounting evidence, however, that demonstrates positive outcomes for grade repetition, especially for immature students early in their schooling.

Recommendations

Ideally, individualized instruction and nongraded programs should provide the most appropriate solution. However, realization of this ideal is extremely difficult due to the commitment involved in full implementation of such a program.

School districts must, thus, base their promotion policies on evidence provided by research. Studies of grade repetition over the past 75 years indicate support for a policy of social promotion over a strict retention policy. Retention should only be considered for children with developmental immaturity or a prolonged absence
from school, and should be suggested as early in the child's school career as possible.

When students are retained, special attention should be paid to the plan of instruction for that pupil. The individual should not be recycled through the instruction in which failure has already occurred, but should receive instruction geared to overcome deficiencies in needed skills.

This policy should not free the school of responsibility for designing and implementing programs that meet the needs of the immature child. Some schools have already adopted a pre-kindergarten or a pre-first grade program. The pre-kindergarten program has immature kindergarten-age children of normal intelligence in a group with a small pupil-teacher ratio. Children attend regular kindergarten the following year.

The pre-first grade is a transition grade between kindergarten and regular first grade where immature students are placed in a small pupil-teacher group and work on readiness skills for first grade. Both of these programs operate on the philosophy of allowing an extra year of growth without the "failure" stigma from repeating kindergarten or first grade.

The school district should also be responsible for
adapting curriculum and remedial programs for low-achieving pupils. Remedial programs, summer school sessions, and reading programs which continue formal reading instruction in junior high or middle school should be developed.
References


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