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RETENTION IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Submitted to the
Faculty of Urbana University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Masters of Education
Division of Graduate Study

by
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2006

Approved: 5/18/06

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Chapter I

Statement of the Problem

Many educators disagree on the effectiveness of grade retention. Much of the research available today indicates that retention does not benefit students. Grade level retention can hurt students academically as well as damage their self-confidence and self-esteem. Retention is the single strongest predictor that students will drop out of school. Even with these research findings, educators are still retaining students, especially in the primary grades. Teachers maintain that these children do not have the necessary skills or are not emotionally ready to move on to the next grade. The purpose of this study is to determine the relationship between a student's academic and social achievement and retention among kindergarten, and first graders retained at Northwestern Elementary School.

Significance of the Study

If used properly, data from on-going assessments can help improve a school's curriculum, hold schools and teachers accountable, as well as identify and address the needs of students. One of the practices educators need to examine is the retention of students. Research has shown that students who are retained struggle more academically and socially than their non-retained peers. These students are also more likely to drop out of school before graduating. (Black, 2004)

This research product provides data that allows educators to look at the effect retention has had upon their academic skills through the use of test scores and teacher surveys. It will also examine the impact retention has had on students' self-

confidence and maturity level as compared with non-retained students in the same grade.

Questions to be Investigated

In order to determine the academic and emotional success of students, who have been retained as they progress through school, several questions need to be investigated.

1. Is there an improvement in the academic performance of students who were retained?
2. How does being retained affect a student's self-confidence in school?
3. How does being retained affect a student's maturity?

Definition of Terms

1. **Academic success** – having average or above average grades and scoring in the average or above range on tests
2. **Grade retention** – requiring students to repeat a grade in order to teach skills not learned the previous year
3. **Self-esteem** – how students feel about themselves
4. **Students** – second, third, or fourth grade students at Northwestern Elementary School that were retained in kindergarten or first grade

Research Procedures and Methodology

The methodology for the research was in the format of a descriptive research study. This study looked at students who were retained in kindergarten and first grade. It focused on their academic and social achievements for the next two to three years. The intent was that the findings could be helpful in examining the social and academic effectiveness of retention at Northwestern Elementary School.

Records from the principal's office at Northwestern Elementary School were reviewed to identify second, third, and fourth grade students who were retained in kindergarten or first grade. After identifying these students, release forms were sent out to parents/guardians of those students to secure permission to use records for this study.

Assumptions

1. All students have the desire and capability to learn.
2. Teacher's grading techniques are similar.

Limitations

1. The family environment of each student can not be measured and may differ.
2. The teacher's instructional and classroom management techniques may differ.
3. The study does not take into consideration any preexisting factors when retention occurred nor does it look at reasons students were retained other than for lower academic performance.
4. The study can not determine the relationship between retention on academic and social achievements later in the student's school career.

Delimitations

1. This study does not account for parent involvement in retention.
2. Because of time limitations, only one elementary school in one school district was studied.

Chapter II

Related Research and Literature

The practice of retention in schools is one in which a student is required to repeat a grade level usually as a result of difficulties experienced in academic achievement, social development or a combination of both of these areas. During the course of this literature review, the intent is to examine research in the field that has looked at the effects of retention on students and reasons why students are retained. It also examines when it is best to retain students and finally looks at suggested strategies that can be used to improve teaching and learning as alternatives to retention.

In Lisa Kenneady's (2005) article, she explains the difference between social promotion and in-grade retention. Social promotion is the practice of passing students that have failed to master part or the entire grade level curriculum on to the next grade. In-grade retention requires students to repeat the same grade a second time in order to master what was not learned.

As Bowman's (2005) stated during the 1970's social promotion was a common practice. In the 1980's due to the growing pressure to raise academic standards, social promotion lost much of its appeal. In 1983 the attention was on retention, largely due to the A Nation at Risk report. This report helped to increase the desire for educational accountability. (Christenson and Picklo, 2005)

As a result of the federal No Child Left Behind Act, school districts are putting into place tougher standards which, in effect, hold schools more accountable

for the performance of their students. This act requires that curriculum must be aligned to the state standards and that assessments must be used to measure students' achievement at every grade level. With these new tougher standards and accountability in place, it is necessary for districts to identify effective remedial education programs to help their low achieving students. (Harvard Gazette Archives, 2004) Promotion and retention policies vary from state to state. "These policies include factors such as the number of times a student can be retained, the number of years behind grade level they can be, and cut off scores on district mandated tests." (Bowman, 2005 p.42)

In one study, a teacher retention belief questionnaire was sent to thirty-five kindergarten through fourth grade teachers from a rural school district in northeastern United States. Teachers from these grades believed retention is an acceptable practice. The most influential factor in making decisions regarding retention was the student's academic performance. Regardless of the grade the teacher taught, their knowledge about the effects and outcomes of retention was low. This was measured by factual questions asked in the questionnaires. (Witmer, Hoffman, Nottis, 2004) Teachers are more likely to alter their beliefs about retention, based on their personal experiences or advice from colleagues, than on research they have read.

Academic failure is the most common reason students are retained. In grades 1-5, students are usually retained due to having difficulty in reading. Students are retained in grades nine through twelve as a result of failing to earn enough course credits. (Christenson and Picklo, 2005, as cited in Smirk 2001) Many research studies have identified characteristics of students likely to be retained. These

characteristics include low grades, behavior problems, poor reading and math test scores, poor relationship with children their age and adjustment problems. Other characteristics include retained students are usually boys, come from homes with low parent educational level, low income, low parent perception of child's ability and a child frequently changing schools. (Christenson and Picklo, 2005 as cited in McCay, 2001)

If retention is beneficial, it is expected to be best if it takes place in kindergarten. (House, 1991) Children enter with widely varying maturity and backgrounds and it tends to be less traumatic than in older children. (House, 1991) Maturational psychologists believe some children are not ready to master the beginning curriculum at the time they become age ready. (Gay, 2002) Students are more likely to be held back in elementary school than in upper grades. A 1994 survey of students fifteen to seventeen years old found that thirteen percent had repeated at least one grade. (Riechmann, 1996)

"Most Americans believe that grade retention is an effective means for raising academic achievement." (Shepard, 1999) In one study that was conducted, questionnaires were sent to forty-one kindergarten through fourth grade teachers in the same rural school district in the northeastern part of the United States. Findings from the study indicated that 77 percent of the teachers believed retention was an effective practice for preventing failure in later grades. It also found that 94 percent of them disagreed with the statement "children should never be retained." (Witmer, Hoffman, Nottis, 2004)

Levy (2004) found the results of the study conducted by the Manhattan Institute favored retention. They found that students that were held back due to low third grade test scores, scored higher on their next test than students with low-test scores that moved on to fourth grade. These retained students scored four percentiles higher in reading, than the students that were allowed to move on. They scored ten percentiles higher in math.

As Lisa Bowman stated, arguments for retention include the following: immaturity, unsuccessful in reading and/or math abilities, and failure to meet criteria for promotion. Research indicates that while grade retention does not typically increase a student's performance, it is widely practiced throughout the country. (Bowman, 2005) Ohio's statewide retention rate is up 25 percent from 2.8 percent in 1993 to 3.5 percent in 1999. (Fuetsch, 2000) While most grade retentions do not necessarily result in any gains in the student's achievement, the results are sometimes more favorable when students are retained because of immaturity. (Johnson, 1984)

Many schools operate on the assumption that failing students motivates them to try harder, gives them another chance to "get it right," and raises their self esteem. (Black, 2004) This belief ignores several decades of research that show retention does not improve low achievement in reading, math, and other subjects. It also fails to motivate students to work harder in school and improve their social adjustment and self-concept. When asked if retaining a student was effective, 89 percent of teachers felt it was, while only nine percent expressed doubt. Many teachers feared ridicule from other teachers if they sent a student who was not prepared to the next grade. (House, 1991)

The social and academic effects of retention on students have been studied for decades. Studies show that repeating a grade does not improve a student's achievement. "Nine studies showed positive effects from retention but in fifty four studies, retention hurt rather than helped achievement." (Shepard, 1999)

Grade retention is one of the largest predictors of later drug and alcohol use, delinquent behavior, dropping out of school, and teenage pregnancy. Grade repeaters are more likely to be unemployed as adults, and live on public assistance or be in prison, compared to adults that did not repeat a grade in school. (Leckrome and Griffith, 2006) According to Heubert's article "In our society, not having a diploma is associated with lower pay, diminished opportunities for employment and further education, higher risk of criminal incarceration and greater likelihood of dysfunction in family life. (National Research Council [NRC], 1999)" (2003,p.26)

Students who are retained show poor attendance rates, have increased behavior problems, lower self-esteem, and view retention as a punishment. (Kenneady, 2004) Retention may also cost the school district and state more money. If a large number of students are retained this may result in an additional need for more teachers. Research conducted by IDRA (Intercultural Development Research Association) indicates that every twenty-five dropouts costs the state more than \$1.2 billion in lost income and support costs over the life of those individuals. (Kenneady, 2004) Some 64,000 children were retained in Ohio last year. The annual cost of educating a child today in Ohio averages \$6,000. The potential cost to taxpayers for an additional year of schooling is roughly \$380 million. (Fuetsch, 2000)

Although most adults favor retention, children fear retention. As stated in Jo Anne Natale's (1991) article, the general public may be in favor of retention because they feel it will help raise standards for graduation. "One 1980 study revealed that children, presented with a list of decidedly bad things, thought flunking a grade was only slightly less traumatic than a parent's death or going blind." (p.30) Even though academic gains can be made through retention, is it worth the emotional damage it may cause? Most students were also more likely to find out about being retained from their report card and parents, rather than their teacher.

Kenneady's article (Kenneady, 2005) also discusses some of the problems with retention. One problem is that these students are usually placed in the same or similar environment that they were in already. Students may be doing well in all subjects except one, but they are forced to retake the entire curriculum, the parts they mastered as well as the areas that gave them trouble. After students are retained they are usually given little or no additional help with their schooling.

Teachers and parents are the ones who work with the child and know best if the child should be retained. The decision to retain needs to be on an individual basis after all other options have been considered. Often the teachers' belief about retention effects their decision as to whether or not a child should repeat a grade. Before making a decision they need to look at the child's grades, their participation in school, and other things that show their academic performance. A simple test score should not be used to base a decision of retention. A low-test score could be because the child was ill, distracted, worried, had poor nutrition or was hungry. They also may have family problems, frequent absences and lack of a role model. Low-test

scores could also be the result of a disruptive learning environment or poor instruction.

Although students who are retained may academically improve and may also improve their self-confidence following retention, these improvements will last only a short amount of time. Children who are retained tend to fall behind a few years after retention. During the first year of retention, some achievement gains may occur but many research studies show these achievement gains decline within two to three years. (Ohanian, 2003 paragraph #five) To prevent retention, educators have suggested reducing class size, providing intervention for struggling students, and evaluating the curriculum. These suggestions are more expensive and taxpayers may not be willing to pay the price. Extra money is needed for services to help the at risk students. These services may include summer school, training for teachers to provide a variety of teaching strategies, re-teaching unmastered skills, before and after school tutoring, or extending the day. (Bowman, 2005) Another suggested alternative to retention is involvement in intensive reading programs such as Reading Recovery. Reading Recovery is an early intervention program for at risk first graders that are at risk of failing in reading. The goal of the program is to bring these students up to the average first grade student by intensive remediation during a twenty-week program. Students that are failing need help with reading more than any other single problem. (Shepard, 1999)

Retention has often been used by educators as a threat for students to perform better in school. The mandatory participation in intensive annual summer programs may be equally effective. The study by Christenson et al. (2004) found that the most

commonly used strategies for struggling students were the use of cooperative learning strategies and group work. Both of these strategies did not require any additional school personnel or resources. (Christenson and Picklo, 2005)

The Intercultural Development Research Association (IDRA: McCollum, Cortez, Maroney, and Montes, 1999) as cited in Christenson and Picklo (2005), interviewed administrators from four Title One elementary schools in Texas that are known as very good schools. These schools had a large number of minority and low-income students. The administrators reported their schools made every effort to intervene and offer assistance before they retained a student. As a result they each had very low retention rates. Some of the intervention strategies that were used were tutoring from a teacher or peer, extended day programs, Saturday tutoring, summer school or extended year programs as well as parent involvement and cooperative learning classrooms. (Christenson and Picklo, 2005)

“Darling- Hammond (1998) suggested four strategies to improve teaching and learning as alternatives to retention. These strategies include:

1. improve teacher professional development to ensure that teachers have the knowledge and skills necessary to teach students with diverse needs;
2. make organizational changes within schools to support more intensive learning;
3. ensure that targeted supports and services are available for struggling students; and

4. conduct classroom assessments that better inform teaching. (Christenson and Picklo, 2005)

As suggested in Black's article, school psychologists should study the research and share their findings with school staff. School psychologists should also head teams consisting of counselors, teachers, and administrators who will make pass/fail decisions. Decisions made as a team may help avoid the problem of retaining students for the wrong reasons. Some teachers retain students in order to avoid being criticized from teachers in the next grade for promoting poorly prepared students. (Black, 2004)

In order to help make decisions on retaining students, some schools have turned to the Light's Retention Scale, developed by H. Wayne Light, Ph.D. Although this should not be used as the sole criteria, the scale can help guide professional educators and parents in making a decision to retain or promote a student. This scale takes about ten to fifteen minutes to administer. It looks at many factors that are often overlooked when making decisions to retain a student. These factors include the following: school attendance, intelligence, academic achievement, physical size, sex, siblings, previous grade retention, history of learning disabilities, age, student's attitude toward retention, parent's school participation, and motivation.

Although most research does not support retention as being a benefit to students, grade retention is still widely practiced in the United States. Retaining students can cost taxpayers millions of dollars. Students who have been retained have a higher high school drop out rate, which may result in higher support costs when they become adults. It has been suggested that instead of retaining students, extra

money should be put into providing them with interventions. Although interventions may cost more from the beginning, they may help these students earn their high school diplomas and as a result help reduce the cost it takes to support them later in their lives.

Chapter III

Procedures for the Study

Subjects

Northwestern Elementary is part of the Northwestern Local School District. The district is located in the northwestern section of Clark County and is a predominately white, middle-class community. Northwestern Elementary is the only elementary school in the district and houses pre-school through grade four. The district's middle school and high school are also located on the same campus. Due to time and size factors, only students attending Northwestern Elementary were included in the study. After meeting with the building principal and discussing the research project, 24 students were identified as potential subjects for this study.

Instrumentation

The instruments used in this study were Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT), Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test, student grades, and teacher surveys.

The Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test is a norm-referenced test designed to access skills essential to reading ability. The first grade test measures beginning reading achievement and the second grade test focuses on vocabulary and reading comprehension.

The Cognitive Abilities Test measures student's ability to reason and solve various types of problems. To assess student's cognitive development verbal, quantitative, and nonverbal exercises are used.

The students' grades in reading and mathematics were gathered to see if any gains have been made after being retained. Attendance records and conduct grades were also gathered to compare each year's grades to their attendance and classroom behavior.

The retaining teacher survey and the current teacher survey gathered information about the students' academic skills, maturity and social skills currently and the year the child was retained. The final survey was sent to all the academic area teachers at Northwestern Elementary. This survey asked the teachers their opinion of retention, whether they believed it was beneficial or not. It also asked the teachers to share any positive or negative experiences they have had with retention.

Procedures

Retention lists were obtained from the school office. These lists identified students who were retained in kindergarten and first grade and are currently in the second, third, or fourth grade. The list was reviewed and students who no longer attended Northwestern Elementary School were eliminated. Permission slips with self-addressed stamped envelopes, were then mailed to the remaining 24 parents/guardians that fit the criteria. (See appendix) After two weeks, reminder phone calls were made and new permission slips were sent to those parents that requested them. Twelve student records were released for this study.

This study focused on only those students that were retained in kindergarten and first grade for several reasons. By limiting the study to students who were retained in kindergarten and first grade, and are currently in second, third, and fourth grade, allowed the researcher to look at the students, performance two to three years

after being retained. Also, since Northwestern Elementary School has students in preschool through fourth grades, this allowed the researcher to not have to consider changes in buildings within the district. Due to the time constraints placed on this project, looking at data from only three grades helped the data to be collected within the time frame provided.

The twelve students' records, 50 percent of the retained students at Northwestern, were reviewed and data was collected. The participating subjects were divided into three groups according to current grade level. For all participants, reading, math, and conduct grades and attendance records were collected. Also collected for all students were their Cognitive Achievement Tests scores that each child took in second grade.

Surveys were given to the teachers that retained the student in school and to the student's current teacher. These surveys gathered information on the student's reading and math abilities at the time they were retained and currently and also included information on the student's social skills, attention spans, working in groups and getting along with others. These surveys were compared to see if the students work habits, social skills and academic achievement had changed since the child was retained. Another survey was also given to all thirty-five teachers in the building. This survey asked the teachers their opinion as to whether or not retention is beneficial and any positive or negative experiences they may have had with retention.

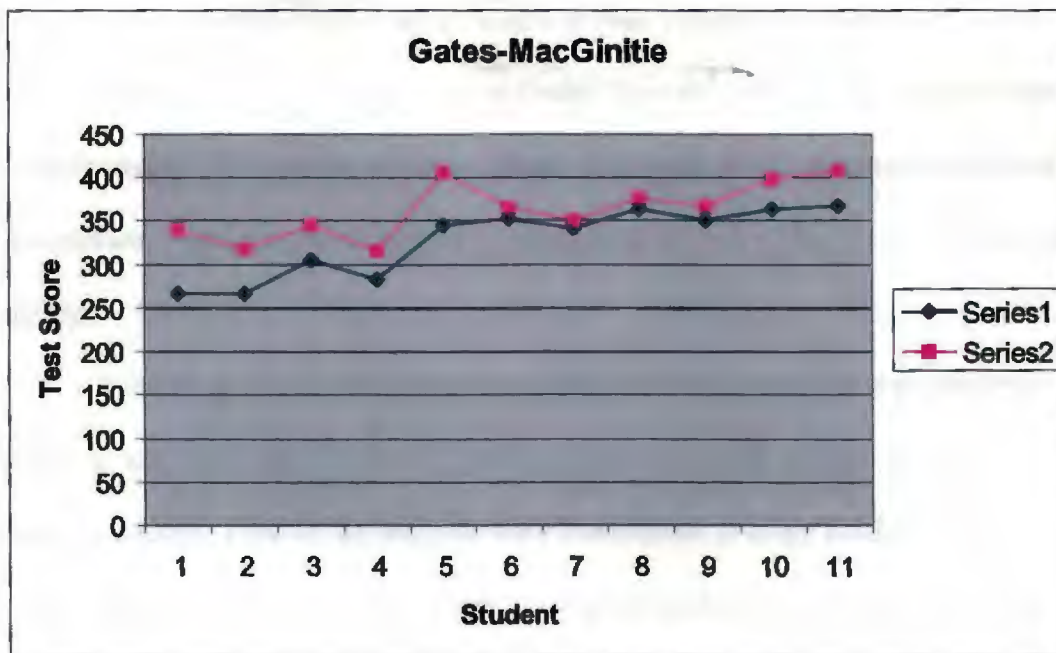
Chapter IV

Analysis of the Data

Test results from retained students' cumulative folders

Using the data collected from the retained students' cumulative folders, the researcher calculated a non-independent t-test comparing the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test scores from the year prior to being retained to the year they were retained. The researcher also calculated a Pearson r test to show the relationship between the students' CogAT IQ score and the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test score the year prior to being retained and the year they were retained in school.

The results of the non-independent t-test comparing the Gates MacGinitie Reading Test scores prior to retention to the scores the year the student's were retained was 5.58. The result, 5.58 is larger than the error variance of 2.228, which showed that the Gates-MacGinitie Test score prior to retention and the score for the year they were retained do have a significant difference. The result showed there was a significant increase in the student's test scores the year they were retained. The students' reading abilities improved significantly after repeating a year in school.



After calculating a Pearson r Test between the student's CogAT IQ score and their Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test they took in the spring of the year prior to retention, the researcher found there is no relationship between these two scores. The Pearson r Test resulted in a score of .24. To show a relationship the result needed to be closer to .6021. The retained students' CogAT IQ score did not have any effect on how well they performed on the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test.

The researcher also calculated a Pearson r Test between the student's CogAT IQ score and the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test score the students took in the spring of the year they were retained. These results (.096) also showed there was no relationship between the students' CogAT IQ score and their Gates MacGinitie Reading Test scores from after they were retained. The child with the highest IQ may not have had the highest reading score and the child with the lowest IQ may not have had the lowest reading score.

Retaining Teacher and Current Teacher Surveys

Surveys on each student were collected from the retaining teacher and their current teacher. The results of these surveys were gathered by comparing whether the students improved, stayed the same, or went down in each of the areas asked on the surveys.

According to the retaining teachers and current teachers surveys the retained students' academic achievement in reading remained below average for seven of the twelve students. Four of the students went from below average academic achievement to average in reading and one student's reading achievement went down from average to below average after being retained.

In math, the retained students' academic achievement went up from below average to average or above average for seven of the students. Four of the students' math achievement remained the same, two students at below average and two with average performances. One student's math academic achievement fell from average to below average, after he/she was retained.

When looking at how the child plays and interacts socially with others, seven students remained the same after being retained. Three students get along better now with their peers and two students went from getting along with their peers to sometimes getting along with their peers.

When looking at how the children had participated in group work to how they participate now two to four years after being retained, ten of the students participate as well now as they did before they were retained. The other two students improved their participation skills after being retained. One of the students went from not

participating with a group to participating fifty percent of the time. The other student went up from participating fifty percent of the time to participating well with a group.

When asked on the survey if the student followed classroom procedures, five of the students follow classroom procedures better now that they had before being retained. Four of the students stayed the same and three students have a harder time following classroom procedures after being retained.

Six of the retained students stayed the same at remaining on task. Four students could remain on task better after being retained and two students have a harder time now with staying on task.

Teaching Staff Survey

Out of thirty-five surveys that were passed out asking the teaching staff at Northwestern Elementary if they believed retention is beneficial, twenty-nine teachers or 83 percent responded. Twenty of these teachers felt retention could be beneficial for students. Most of these teachers felt if the child started school at a young age and was immature it might benefit that child to repeat a grade. One of the teachers stated that she felt maturity catches up with time, but if they can't attend to a task for any length of time they miss the fundamental skills being taught. Most of these teachers also stated that retention was beneficial, but it should be done at an early age, most specifying the kindergarten and first grade level.

Three of the teachers felt that retention should not be used for any reason. They felt retention had a negative effect on students. They stated reasons such as it effects their self-esteem and also increases their chances for dropping out of school.

Six of the teachers felt retention can have both a positive and negative effect on students. Many of these teachers felt a decision on whether to retain a student needs to be made on a case to case basis. Factors such as IQ, age, size, basic skills, personality, maturity, and family circumstances needs to be taken into consideration when retaining a child. They also felt parental support and encouragement must be present for a positive experience. Many of these teachers also stated that retention should be done early in their school career.

The teachers made many positive comments about the benefits of retaining a student. One of these comments was that it might be beneficial if a child has had an extended illness or excessive absences. This gives the child the year to learn the material he/she had missed the year before. Another comment was that it could be beneficial for younger students if they need to catch up on social and academic behaviors of their peers. One of the teachers stated that having the opportunity to repeat a grade with the same teachers offers a sense of security, unless there are personal issues between the teacher and the student.

Negative comments regarding retention were also stated on the teachers' surveys. One teacher felt the disadvantage to having the same teacher is the way the teacher presents the material is the same. The teacher of gifted children once had a student who was retained. He was retained for not doing his work because he already knew how to do it and did not feel it was necessary.

Parent interviews

When calling the parents to remind them about the permission slips, the researcher was able to talk with nine parents about their retained child. Out of the

nine parents the researcher was able to talk with, eight felt retention was beneficial for their child and one felt it had a negative impact. One parent said they knew their child would repeat kindergarten. He was a summer birthday and they decided it would be best for him to attend kindergarten for two years. Another parent stated that his son had missed a lot of school in kindergarten. Repeating first grade helped him make up what he had missed in kindergarten. The only parent that stated retention had a negative impact on their child said she was retained due to the inconsistency of teachers her first grade year. She had three different teachers in first grade due to her original teacher having medical problems. She also stated her child is lazy and Northwestern has very high expectations for their students.

Chapter V

Summary and Conclusions

Summary of Findings

Analysis of the data collected in this research study indicates that although 69 percent of the participating teachers at Northwestern Elementary School believe retention is beneficial if it is done in kindergarten or first grade, student test results and survey results did not support this belief. Although there was a significant improvement in students' Gates-MacGinitie Reading tests before and after being retained, the students also had Title One Reading providing them with extra reading practice. According to the retaining teacher's survey and the current teacher's surveys the only area that the students showed a significant improvement after being retained was in the area of math, with 58 percent of the students improving. According to these surveys both reading and social skills showed only minimal improvements, with 33 percent in reading and 29 percent in social skills.

Conclusions

This study was designed to find out if retaining students in kindergarten and first grade benefits students, both academically and socially, at Northwestern Elementary School. The study also looked at teachers' views both for and against retention.

Although many parents and teachers feel retention can be beneficial, the research does not support this belief. Comparing the scores of the Gates-MacGinitie Reading test the year before and after the student was retained showed significant improvements in the student's reading abilities after being retained. Now two to three

years later according to the survey results only 33 percent of the teachers felt their student's reading abilities had improved. The non-independent t-test result was 5.58. Because this is larger than the error variance of 2.228, it shows a significant difference between the two samples. The students' Gates-MacGinitie scores may have had a significant improvement as a result of the extra reading help they were receiving with Title 1 reading. After being retained, mathematics achievement improved for 58 percent of the students and social skills improved for 29 percent of the students involved in this study.

The Pearson r Test between the student's CogAT IQ score and their Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test scores before and after retention showed that there was no relationship between the student's IQ and how well they performed on the reading test. In order to show a relationship the Pearson r Test results needed to be around .6021. The Pearson r Tests results were .24 and .096. All of the students in this study had average to below average IQ's, which may be one of the reasons for having difficulty in school.

Implications

The social skills that were looked at in this study included how the students play and interact with others and how they participate in group work. It also looked at how well the students follow classroom procedures and how well they are able to remain on task. According to teacher's surveys, less than 50 percent of the students benefited in these four areas after being retained. According to the surveys, 58 percent of the retained students did improve in the area of math but only 33 percent improved in the area of reading. Are the risks of damaging a child's self-esteem and

increasing their chances of dropping out of school worth the minimal amount of improvement these students made in reading, math, and social skills after being retained?

Although 69 percent of the teachers at Northwestern Elementary School felt retention should be done in kindergarten or first grade, the students in this study were all held back in these grades and did not appear to have many benefits from retention. Teachers need to be educated better in the research that has been completed on retention. Students may benefit if the school district's policy on retention is made to discourage retention.

Recommendations and Future Research

One of the factors the researcher could not control was the amount of parent permission slips that were returned. The researcher was only able to obtain permission to review the cumulative files of twelve of the twenty-four students. Future researchers may want to repeat this study using a larger school system that has more students that fit the characteristics used in this study.

This research did not study the relationship between students that were retained and their birthdays. Thirty percent of the teachers at Northwestern Elementary believe retention may be beneficial if the child is young. A study conducted in this area may show the benefits, if any, of retaining younger students to help them catch up on academic and social skills.

This study only had one student that was retained due to excessive absences in kindergarten. This child went from below average in math and reading to currently

performing above average in these areas. His social skills were high before being retained and as a result they have stayed the same. This shows retention could possibly be beneficial for students that have excessive absences, but because only one student in this study fit these characteristics, more research needs to be done in this area.

At Northwestern 69 percent of the teachers believed retention can be beneficial for students. At the same time only 58 percent of the students have improved in mathematics, 33 percent in reading, and 29 percent in social skills. Teachers at Northwestern Elementary School need to be informed of the outcome of this research. In order to make retention decisions they could get a group consisting of the school psychologist, counselor, principals, and teachers together to discuss each child being considered for retention to decide what is best for that child.

Appendices

Appendix A
Parent Permission Letters

January 24, 2006

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am a teacher at Northwestern Elementary and am conducting research project on the effectiveness of retention for my Master's Degree. I am requesting your permission to view your child's school record. Your child's name and identity will not be revealed. I guarantee complete confidentiality. My access to your child's file will end May of 2006. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at Northwestern Elementary (964-1351).

Sincerely,

Mrs. Kathleen Scaggs

Mrs. Kathleen Scaggs

Please return this signed and dated copy by February 1, 2006 in the enclosed envelope.

_____ Yes, I give Mrs. Kathleen Scaggs permission to view my child's school records under the conditions stated above.

_____ No, I do not give Mrs. Kathleen Scaggs permission to view my child's school records.

Signature _____ Date _____

Child's Name _____

Authorized by:
Cynthia D. Pierson
Ms. Cindy Pierson, Principal
Northwestern Elementary School

Please Keep For Your Records

January 24, 2006

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am a teacher at Northwestern Elementary and am conducting research project on the effectiveness of retention for my Master's Degree. I am requesting your permission to view your child's school record. Your child's name and identity will not be revealed. I guarantee complete confidentiality. My access to your child's file will end May of 2006. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at Northwestern Elementary (964-1351).

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Signature _____ Date _____

Child's Name _____

Authorized by:
Cynthia S. Pierson
Ms. Cindy Pierson, Principal
Northwestern Elementary School

Appendix B
Current Teacher Survey

Current Teacher Survey

1. How is the retained student's academic achievement in Reading as compared to the average student?

Below Average Average Above Average

2. How is the retained student's academic achievement in Math as compared to the average student?

Below Average Average Above Average

3. How does the student usually play and interact socially with others?

**Does not get Usually gets Gets along
along with others along well with well with
others others others**

4. How does the student usually participate in group work?

**Does not Participates Participates
participate about 50% of well with
in group work the time others in groups**

5. Does the student usually follow the classroom procedures?

**Can not follow Follows class Follows classroom
classroom procedures procedures about
procedures 50% of the time 100% of the time**

6. Does the student usually remain on task?

**Less than 50% Over 50% of On task most
of the time the time of the time**

Appendix C
Retaining Teacher Survey

Retaining Teacher Survey

1. How was the retained student's academic achievement in Reading as compared to the average student?

Below Average

Average

Above Average

2. How was the retained student's academic achievement in Math as compared to the average student?

Below Average

Average

Above Average

3. How did the student usually play and interact socially with others?

**Did not get
A long with others**

**Usually got
along well with
others**

**Got along
well with
others**

4. How did the student usually participate in group work?

**Did not
participate
in group work**

**Participated
about 50% of
the time**

**Participated
well with
others in groups**

5. How did the student usually follow the classroom procedures?

**Did not follow
classroom
procedures**

**Followed class
procedures
50% of the time**

**Followed classroom
procedures about
100% of the time**

6. How well did the student usually remain on task?

**Less than 50%
of the time**

**Over 50% of
the time**

**On task most
of the time**

Appendix D
Staff Survey on Retention

Staff Survey on Retention

Do you believe retention is beneficial to students? Why or why not?

Optional:

Have you ever had a positive or negative experience with retaining a student? (Please explain)

Please complete and return to me by March 14.

Thanks,

Kathy Scaggs

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