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A CASE STUDY EXAMINING TEACHERS' BELIEFS TOWARD IN-GRADE
RETENTION IN A K-2 SCHOOL

By

Charles Edward Smith

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of
Mississippi State University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Educational Administration
in the Department of Leadership and Foundations

Mississippi State, Mississippi

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2008

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RETENTION IN A K-2 SCHOOL

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The purpose of this mixed-methods case study was to examine teachers' beliefs toward in-grade retention in a K-2 school. This study focused on how teachers acquire beliefs regarding grade retention, and their knowledge of research regarding the effectiveness of retention. Witmer, Hoffman and Nottis (2004) contend that teacher beliefs toward grade retention may not be based on research, but on peer influence, past practice, or administrative policy.

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected to examine teacher beliefs in a K-2 school. Quantitative data were collected through the Teacher Opinion Survey (TOS) and Personal Experiences and Retention Practices (PERP). A total of ten K-2 teachers volunteered to complete the survey instruments. Additionally, six K-2 teachers and the school principal were interviewed to collect qualitative data. Data were analyzed to triangulate the findings.

This study concluded that teachers continue to retain students as a remedy for academic failure, contrary to what some researchers like Shepard and Smith (1989), who

decried that schools were continuing the practice of retention despite research findings that indicated little or no academic achievement is gained through retention. Findings further indicated that teachers disagreed that retention failed to improve achievement, failed to inspire students to buckle down and behave better, and failed to develop students' social adjustment and self-concept.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the loving memories of my parents, Joseph and Bernice Smith. Although they are deceased, their words of wisdom and encouragement are constantly with me. They have been my quiet inspiration throughout this journey.

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It is with the most sincere gratitude that I acknowledge the supportive professors who have been instrumental in guiding me through my mission to complete the doctoral program. This has been a journey that I could not have achieved without the encouragement and support of these brilliant professors.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

Graded education was developed to handle large numbers of students effectively (Shepard & Smith, 1989). Since the beginning of graded classrooms, there has been conflict between values “that promotion should be based on merit, and the need to treat all pupils the same for purposes of organizational efficiency” (p. 5). In the nineteenth century grade promotion by merit prevailed. During the late 1800s grade retention was introduced and became a common practice for grouping children who did not meet the standard requirements for promotion to the next grade level (Owings & Magliaro, 1998). Retaining students in the same grade became a widely used practice, affecting more than 70% of all children. Most students were unable to pass the required exams to be admitted into high school. Goodlad (1954) found that in-grade retention was not an effective remedy for poor academic performance.

During the early twentieth century, the pervasive educational practice of social-promotion was implemented. The purpose was to prevent the “negative consequences of so many misfitting overage students” (Shepard & Smith, 1989, p. 5) from remaining in classrooms with younger, smaller children. As the purpose of education changed to include all children, rather than the elite few, policies were developed for the purpose of keeping children in school rather than forcing them out. Social promotion was introduced

to prevent school dropouts. The publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 galvanized national attention upon the perils of social promotion. The publication condemned the concept of social promotion and cited the damage which occurs when students are promoted without achieving the mandated academic standards for promotion. Once again, retaining students as a remedy for academic failure became a strategy used by educators.

According to Shepard and Smith (1989), the practice of retention persists despite research findings that indicate little or no academic achievement is gained through retention. As stated by Black (2004), the result is quite the opposite. Research indicates, “for most children, retention fails to improve low achievement, fails to inspire students to buckle down and behave better, and fails to develop students’ social adjustment and self-concept” (p. 40).

Why do educators continue to retain children? Alexander, Entwisle, and Dauber (2003) state that teachers often view retention as a kindness to students who are too young, immature, or lagging behind academically. Retaining students may also be viewed as an effective solution to prevent future academic failure (Shepard & Smith, 1987).

Teacher beliefs regarding retention vary. In *NEA Today*, Black (2004) quoted a fifth grade teacher from Virginia, Gwendolyn Malone, who wrote, “retention offers students the chance to ‘refresh, relearn, and acquire new skills’ as well as to gain self-confidence and become good students” (p. 40). Malone further stated that she believes that the “threat of retention is an incentive for students to study so they’ll be promoted with their same-age classmates” (p. 40). Elementary teacher beliefs regarding the benefits

of retention are often validated by an initial academic boost the next year. However, the elementary teacher loses contact with that student too soon to realize the long-term negative effects that follow the retained student for the remaining years of school.

Statement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine teacher beliefs toward grade retention. This study also focused on how teachers acquire beliefs regarding grade retention, and their knowledge of research regarding the effectiveness of retention. Our current educational system uses a system that is failure-based rather than prevention and intervention (Thomas, 2002). Little emphasis is placed on “early and accurate identification of learning and behavior problems and aggressive intervention using research-based approaches” (p. 1). Retention increased over the past three decades possibly due to increased pressure on standardized achievement tests (Leckrone & Griffith, 2006). The primary reason that teachers retained students was to remediate academic difficulties. Witmer, Hoffman and Nottis (2004) contend that teacher beliefs toward grade retention might not be based on research, but based on peer influence, past practice, or administrative policy. This study examined what teachers in a K-2 school believed regarding grade retention and suggested alternatives for retention or social promotion.

Research Questions

The following research questions were developed to frame the focus of this research:

1. What is the nature of teachers' beliefs about grade retention?
2. What are the social, emotional, and psychological outcomes of retention?
3. What are the academic outcomes of retention?
4. What are the demographics of retention?
5. What are the incidences of retention?
6. What are the drop-out issues related to retention?
7. What are the roles of the school principal?
8. What are the suggested alternatives to retention?

Definitions of Terms

The following terms are unique to my study:

1. **Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)**: a term used to state student and school academic growth in the areas of reading, language, and mathematics on the MCT. *No Child Left Behind* mandates require a certain percentage of students to be proficient each year. The percentage is raised incrementally until 2014, when 100% of students must be proficient. The school must reach this target percentage both for the overall student population as well as eight sub-groups based on race, economic disadvantage and other factors (Mississippi Department of Education website, www.mde.k12.ms.us).

2. **Grade retention:** requiring a student who has been in a given grade level for a full school year to remain at that grade level for a subsequent school year.
3. **Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT):** the state test administered to children in grades 3-8. This test meets requirements established by *No Child Left Behind* to measure yearly academic progress in the areas of reading, language, and mathematics.
4. **Social promotion:** allowing students who do not meet grade-level performance standards and academic requirements to pass on to the next grade with their peers.

Significance of the Study

Research has not determined retention to be a sound pedagogical practice (Black, 2004). Therefore, it is important to understand the beliefs that teachers have universally embraced pertaining to grade retention and why they continue to practice it. This research has added to the body of knowledge available for educators and administrators to consider when making a decision that will impact the lives and future of children. It will assist professional educators in challenging their own beliefs and in making alternate choices that will improve the academic performance of students.

Limitations

The following limitations should be considered as this research is read.

1. The researcher may have caused the teachers to be anxious or nervous while they were being interviewed.
2. It is possible that the teachers who voluntarily participated in this study may have not provided answers that reflect their sincere in-grade retention beliefs.

Delimitations

The following delimitations should be considered as this research is read.

1. This study was conducted in a K-2 school and should not be generalized to other levels.
2. This research was conducted in one large urban school district in Mississippi.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Historical Perspective

During the 1860s, it became common practice to place elementary children in comparable age-related grade levels. Promotion to the next grade was dependent on the mastery of that grade level's subject material (Owings & Magliaro, 1998). Those students who did not master the required material were required to repeat that grade level. Therefore, retention was used as a method of "reducing skill variance in the classroom in an attempt to better meet the student needs" (Owings & Magliaro, 1998, p. 87).

Retention became a familiar practice in America's schools. It is estimated that in the early 1900s over 70% of children were over-age for their grade with early years retention rates as high as 52% (Ebel & Damrin, 1960). During the 1910s and 1920s a majority of those being retained were African American males and males of Italian descent (Hacsi, 2002). During the 1930s it was noticed that there was an increase in the number of students who were not mastering the material and thus were required to repeat the failing grade. As a result, the 1930s brought in a new era of social promotion (Hacsi; Owings & Magliaro, 1998). During this same era, it was also observed that there was an increase in the dropout rate. Because of these increases, researchers began to investigate

the negative impact retention had upon students' achievement (Owings & Magliaro). Research by Goodlad (1952) supported the 1930s research regarding the negative impact of retention on self-esteem, increased dropout rates, and the failure to improve achievement.

During the 1940s, selective social promotion came into practice in many public schools. After World War II and the beginning of the baby boom, the practice of retention was frowned upon and by the 1960s social promotion became the norm (Chandler, 1984). Retention research during this era indicated that any academic benefits for retention were revealed during the primary years of schooling (Chase, 1968; Reinherz & Griffin, 1970; & Scott & Ames, 1969).

The 1970s view of retention was studied by a review of research by Jackson (1975). In reviewing 44 sources of original research, books, and other related articles, Jackson deduced that the majority of research completed in the 1960s and early 1970s was not valid. He stated "there is no reliable body of evidence to indicate that grade retention is more beneficial than grade promotion for students with serious academic or adjustment difficulties" (p. 627). Jackson warned teachers by stating "those who retain students 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 promotion to the next grade" (p. 627).

The history of retention that was noted by researchers during the mid twentieth century began the relationship between retention and school dropout rates (Owings & Magliaro, 1998). As research began reporting that retention was a predictor of dropout

rates, others methods of assisting students to achieve mastery were developed. In the 1980s, the education community was criticized in the report *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Social promotion became popular once more following this report about the abysmal achievements of the educational system (Owings & Magliaro). Social promotion became the opposite of retention; students were “passed on” to the next grade level in spite of not obtaining mastery of the subjects. A combination of retention and social promotion continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Research continued to report the impact both of these trends had upon the students in America.

In the late 1990s in the State of the Union Address President Clinton called for an end to social promotion (Leckrone & Griffith, 2006). States rapidly began to develop policies to address this issue. “Legislation aimed at increasing standards and accountability was noted across the country” (p. 53). *The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001* was signed into law on January 8, 2002. This act reauthorized Public Law 107-110, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. NCLB requires states to set clear standards for core academics at each grade level and to measure student progress toward those standards.

Today, educational systems are dealing with President Bush’s *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB Act of 2001)* (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). This act has caused a dilemma for educators. The *NCLB Act of 2001* proposes that children are to achieve mastery by specified grade levels. The problem that educators are facing is that not all children master material at the same age and/or the same rate. If the educators are

interpreting the *NCLB Act of 2001* correctly, then a child who is not mastering skills should not progress to the next grade level (Campbell, 2004). It is possible that this could result in more children having to repeat a grade.

According to Jimerson, Pletcher, Graydon, Schnurr, Nickerson, and Kundert (2006) “more children have been left behind since NCLB was passed than before” (p. 86). Leckrone and Griffith (2006) contend that although the goal of improving education is apparent, “there is a downside to these required standards; ironically, many children are left behind through increased use of retention” (p. 53). During the last decade, the number of students retained in the United States has increased. Recent estimates are between 7 and 15% each year. This percentage is equal to roughly 3 million children. “It is reported that by high school, the cumulative risk of grade retention in metropolitan school systems often exceeds 50%”(p. 86). Witmer, Hoffman, and Nottis (2004) added that retention rates continue to rise as pressure to end social promotion increases, and end-of-year standards-based assessments become the new expectation for grade promotion.

According to Witmer et al. (2004), the decision to retain students is often made to remediate academic difficulties. However, retaining students is not an effective educational intervention strategy for long-term academic improvement. Jimerson et al. (2006) added that retention is not an effective method for remediating academic failure or behavioral difficulties. Retention has been “associated with negative effects, including greater academic failure, higher drop-out rates, and lower self-concept” (Witmer et al., p. 173). Why do educators continue to retain students? Jimerson (1999) stated that retention

looks as if it works, particularly if the teacher believes that it does. Considering the amount of evidence that has emerged indicating that retention has numerous harmful effects on students, academically and socially, emotionally, and psychologically, the percentage of retained students continues to increase.

Beliefs

Georgiou, Christou, Stavrinides, and Panaoura (2002) stated that beliefs are the “perceptions, attitudes, and expectations” (p. 583) that may determine teacher behavior and teacher interaction patterns with students. Teacher attitudes, or teacher attributions, toward a particular student will guide the teaching methods and strategies selected for instructing the student.

According to Witmer et al. (2004), “Beliefs are the best indicators of the decisions people will make throughout their lives. Beliefs are described interchangeably as attitudes, judgments, values, opinions, perceptions, ideology, and internal mental processes” (p. 174). Beliefs differ from knowledge. Knowledge will change as different knowledge is acquired. In contrast, beliefs remain static.

Teacher Beliefs About Retention

According to Witmer et al. (2004), teacher beliefs about retention may explain their practice of retention. There are limited studies that document how teachers develop belief systems during their career as educators. However, teachers rarely alter their beliefs based on research studies. Shepard and Smith (1989) added, “Teachers almost

universally endorse retention” (p. 147). They are more likely to change their beliefs based upon personal experiences or advice from colleagues.

Shepard and Smith (1989) explained that teachers have beliefs and theories pertaining to student developmental readiness that are internally consistent and may reflect theories in psychology. These beliefs and knowledge predict teachers’ retention practices. There are two types of knowledge described by Shepard and Smith. Practical knowledge is defined as knowledge that teachers have about curriculum, teaching, and diagnosis and correction of academic setbacks. Practical knowledge is superior to propositional knowledge. Propositional knowledge is defined as knowledge gained through professional literature. In the case of retention, the practical knowledge is incomplete and misleading. The teacher views a retained student as more competent in the material compared to the younger, less experienced classmates. However, the teacher lacks access to the information regarding what the child would have been like had he been promoted.

Black (2004) asserted, “It’s easy to see why teachers believe retention works. But it’s less easy to understand why schools allow teachers to hold so much power over this practice” (p. 40). Bowman (2005) described a study from the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). The study examined the

promotion policies of 85 of the largest school districts in the U.S. The AFT found that of the 78 districts that had written policies, there was little agreement regarding issues such as standards for promotion, who makes the decision to retain or promote, educational alternatives for students who are failing, and how

districts go about making their retention rates public information. Furthermore, a key problem is that there is no clearly defined academic standard against which to measure student progress. Teacher recommendations were used most frequently to determine retention for elementary school students. (p. 43)

Georgiou et al. (2002) stated that “teacher attitudes toward a particular student guided the teaching methods that would be selected each time and the strategies used for instructing the student” (p. 583). Teacher beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, and expectations determine teacher behavior and interaction with students, especially low-achieving ones. A study was conducted to “examine the existing relationship between teacher attributions of student failure and teacher self-reported, in-class behavior toward the affected student” (p. 585). The participants were 277 elementary school teachers who were divided into three groups according to years of experience. The teachers completed a questionnaire that examined teacher attributions of school failure. The results of the study indicated teachers responded to low-achievement with more pity and less anger when they attributed it to the child’s low cognitive abilities. In contrast, teachers tend to exclude the child and behave with anger toward him when the child’s own insufficient effort is determined as the major factor for failure.

Witmer et al. (2004) conducted a study to “assess teachers’ knowledge about retention and its source (personal experience or research findings)” (p. 174). The purpose of the pilot study was to develop a knowledge assessment to measure teachers’ propositional knowledge about retention. This research also defined propositional knowledge as knowledge of research findings. The results from the knowledge

assessment were added to a pre-existing instrument, the Teacher Retention Belief Questionnaire (TRBQ). The name of the newly developed questionnaire was changed to the Teacher Retention Beliefs and Knowledge Questionnaire (TRBKQ). Part one of the questionnaire measured teachers' beliefs about grade retention. Part two of the questionnaire assessed the differential importance of factors influencing teachers' decision-making processes when deciding whether to retain a student" (p. 175). Part three of the questionnaire assessed knowledge of retention and "asked respondents to indicate predictors of retention, alternatives to retention, and to identify their primary source of knowledge about retention" (p. 175). Finally, part four of the questionnaire collected demographic information about the teachers. The study "attempted to measure teachers' knowledge as well as beliefs about retention." The study also attempted to determine if there was a "relationship between their knowledge and practice of retention" (p. 180). The questionnaires were given to forty-one teachers who taught kindergarten through fourth grades. An important note to this study is that all respondents to this questionnaire were Anglo-American. Completed questionnaires were received from thirty-five teachers. The questionnaires received were grouped into two categories, teachers of grades kindergarten through second, and teachers of grades three and four. Part one of the questionnaire revealed, "Teachers believed that retention was an effective practice for preventing failure in later grades" (p. 182). Part two of the questionnaire revealed that student academic performance was the most influential factor in determining retention. Part three of the questionnaire revealed the most interesting information. Teachers indicated that their knowledge of retention came through personal experiences and

talking to their colleagues. When asked to express their “knowledge of the current research about retention, 23% reported that they had extremely limited knowledge, 56% explained that they had somewhat limited knowledge about retention, and 21% reported moderate, but not extensive knowledge about retention” (p.188). Part four of the questionnaire (demographic collection and teacher’s practice of retention) revealed that the greatest numbers of retained students, by the participants of this study, were at the kindergarten level.

Teachers intuitively believe that it is advantageous to retain students in early grades, kindergarten through second, rather than in later grades, third grade or later (Silberglitt, Jimerson, Burns, & Appleton, 2006). Teachers state that retaining students in early elementary grades will prevent future failure. Whereas, retaining students in high school will prevent students from receiving diplomas when they lack the basic skills necessary for post-high school success. Interestingly, teachers believe that “retention before second grade is viewed as an early intervention or a preventative measure” (p. 135). This belief led Silberglitt et al. (2006) to conduct a study to examine if “retention in early grades (kindergarten through second grade) is linked to better short- and long-term outcomes relative to retention in later grades (third through fifth)” (p. 136). The study utilized 49 participants who had been retained. The participants were assigned to one of two groups based on the grade of their retention. One group was retained in kindergarten, first, or second grade. The other group was retained in third, fourth, or fifth grade. The students were administered curriculum-based reading measures within their respective school districts every fall, winter, and spring during their first through eighth grade years.

“The analyses of longitudinal reading trajectories in this study revealed that early grade retention (kindergarten through second grade) did not yield advantages in reading trajectories from first to eighth grade, relative to student retained later (third through fifth grades)” (p. 138).

Shepard and Smith (1989) report on a qualitative study that was conducted by Smith. The study utilized clinical interviews with kindergarten teachers. The purpose of the study was to determine principle beliefs that could be inferred from recountings of practical knowledge rather than asking for personal educational philosophy. The teachers were asked questions that would elicit narrated stories. Results of the study assisted the researcher in categorizing the kindergarten teachers into four groups. The groups were labeled: nativists, remediationists, diagnostic-prescriptive teachers, and interactionists. (1) Nativists believe that children come to school for learning according to an evolutionary, physiological, unfolding of abilities. (2) Remediationists are teachers who are able to influence readiness and ability to learn. (3) Diagnostic-prescriptive teachers are able to detect inadequacies in learning that may be due to auditory memory and/or visual-motor integration. They diagnose and correct academic defects through extensive training. (4) Interactionists believe in a complex pattern of interactions between the readiness of the child and the environment provided by the teacher. When the merits of retention were analyzed for this study, teachers of all belief types determined retention as an effective solution to a perceived problem. The teachers expressed the belief that retention benefits students. The benefit would be demonstrated by giving the student time to *bloom* the second time around in kindergarten.

Teacher beliefs and classroom practices are meaningful contributions to our understanding of why teachers continue to retain students. Shepard and Smith (1989) determined that most kindergarten teachers believe that retention is appropriate under certain circumstances such as maturation and an inability to master basic skills. Neuharth-Pritchett (2001) conducted a study to examine the relations between kindergarten teachers' beliefs about retention and their classroom practice of retaining students. The study found that academic ability was the greatest contributor to teachers' retention decisions. However, the study also found inconsistency between the teachers' self-reported beliefs measures and their actual classroom practice of retention.

A study conducted by Tomchin and Impara (1992) focused on why teachers retain students. The study utilized 135 teachers in six different schools. The study utilized a "multimethod approach using both quantitative and qualitative methods to gain a better understanding of teachers' beliefs about retention in grades K-7" (p. 201). The teachers completed the Teacher Retention Beliefs Questionnaire (TRBQ) that was "designed to gather teachers' explicit beliefs about retention, specifically, when it is considered an appropriate action" (p. 201). Qualitative data was gathered in interviews with principals and teachers. The researchers also examined student records and written school policy. The results of the study determined that "teachers at all grade levels overwhelmingly accepted retention as a school practice" (p. 202). The majority of the teachers indicated that retention is necessary to maintain grade level standards, does not prevent wide ranges of achievement within a classroom, and does not permanently label students. Interestingly, some teachers provided this explanation during the interview:

Some teachers retained low-ability students, assuming they could benefit from the repetition of material, whereas others promoted low-ability students despite poor performance because teachers believed some students ‘could sit in the grade for 150 years and never do it.’ For certain teachers, ‘the child with ability who does not measure up’ will be retained, whereas others contended, ‘if the child has the ability, what’s the point of keeping him back?’ (p. 207)

Social, Emotional, and Psychological Outcomes

Retained students pay a hefty price academically, personally, socially, and psychologically (Bowman, 2005). Separating students from their peers has an effect on their self-esteem and how they view themselves. Retention can have a “long-lasting negative impact on youth” (p. 43). Peers tease students who have been retained and some students do not admit to grade retention.

Fear of grade retention is a stressful life event for students. Anderson, Jimerson, and Whipple (2005) replicated and expanded a study that was conducted by Yamamoto and Byrnes (1987). The results revealed that sixth-grade students indicated that only the loss of a parent or going blind was more stressful than grade retention. The findings from these studies demonstrate the need to consider the social, emotional, and psychological impact on children when exploring academic interventions.

Pianta and Stuhlman (2004) reported that the quality of a child’s relationship with their early school teachers is “increasingly recognized as a contributor to school adaptation” (p. 444). Kindergarten children who have negative relationships with their teachers demonstrate higher levels of behavior problems and lower levels of behavioral

competence. The competent behavior of secure kindergarten children has been determined to result in fewer problems in first grade classrooms. Children who have more conflict in their relationships with teachers are “less likely to engage in the classroom and are at increased risk for poor academic achievement” (p. 445).

Maturity or adjustment concerns leading to retention are often subjective. Several research studies have indicated that students with low grades during the first of the school year on items such as behavior and socialization are more likely to be retained (Alexander et al., 2003; Cadigan, Entwisle, Alexander, & Pallas, 1988; Dauber, Alexander, & Entwisle, 1993). Behavior and socialization marks are given by the classroom teacher and rely heavily on the teacher’s personal judgments. Teachers’ personal judgments are also involved in labeling a child as immature. On student cumulative folders of first-grade retainees, teachers listed immaturity as the reason for retention 28% of the time in one research study conducted by Abidin, Golladay, and Howerton (1971). The research related to adjustment concerns supports the notion that retention is not always an objective decision. Academic achievement is not the sole determiner of retention or promotion. Many subjective factors come into play.

According to Bowman (2005), the consequences of retention are not immediately visible. Jimerson and Kaufman (2003) examined over forty studies that resulted in poor socioemotional and behavioral adjustment of retained students. They stated, “On average the retained students displayed poorer social adjustment, more negative attitudes toward school, less frequent attendance, and more problem behaviors in comparison” (p. 625) with non-retained students. The study revealed that “the results of the

meta-analyses of over 300 analyses of socioemotional and behavioral adjustment from over 50 studies during the past 75 years fail to support the use of grade retention as an early intervention to enhance socioemotional and behavioral adjustment” (p. 625).

Rodney et al. (1999) reported that school-related variables contribute “more to delinquent behavior than the effect of either family or friends” (p. 186). They determined that “school failure was a stronger predictor of delinquency than socioeconomic status, race or ethnic background, and peer relations” (p. 186). It has been further determined that “academic failure is one of the largest and most consistently found predictors of later drug and alcohol use, delinquent behavior, teenage pregnancy, and dropping out of school” (p. 188).

Jimerson (2001) emphasized that there is “no published research evidence of beneficial effects of grade retention on social and personal adjustment in junior high or high school” (p. 51).

Academic Outcomes of Retention

For many years, research has been conducted to determine if retaining students provides academic benefits. Witmer et al. (2004) concluded “years of research have shown that retention provides limited academic advantages to students, and yet the practice continues” (p. 173). Grade retention is not an effective strategy to improve academic achievement. Small academic gains are sometimes noticed immediately after the retention. However, these gains are not sustained beyond a few years. Retention has been associated with a variety of negative effects, including academic failure.

Jimerson, Carlson, Rotert, Egeland, and Sroufe (1997) asserted, “The most frequent reason given by teachers recommending retention is low academic achievement” (p. 18). They conducted a longitudinal study of 190 students from whose mother had participated in the Minnesota Mother-Child Interaction Project. From this group of students, three groups were established for research. The first group of students was retained one time in grades kindergarten through third. The second group was a low-achieving (based on scores from a variety of tests) promoted group. The third group was a control group of randomly selected students who were not in either of the first two groups. The results of this study compared the control group and the low-achieving promoted group to the retained group. The groups did not differ significantly in intellectual functioning or on achievement or ability measures. The first and second grade retained students indicated a gain in math achievement, but no gains in reading and spelling achievement. Jimerson et al. declared, “Significant differences were found between the retained and low achieving promoted students in relation to social and personal adjustment variables” (p. 20). Teachers reported the retained students to be more unpopular and less socially competent than their peers. The retained group displayed significantly more maladaptive behaviors than their low-achieving promoted peers.

Viadero (2005) concluded that there is a “growing body of evidence that suggests, with some exceptions, that retaining students can have harmful effects on their schooling” (p. 9). Retaining struggling kindergarten students does more harm than good. Data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten cohort, or ECLS-K, was examined. The study “tracked 12,000 public and private school children from the time

they entered kindergarten in 1998 to the spring of 2000, when most were finishing first grade” (p. 9). From that group, 471 students repeated kindergarten. The researchers compared the retained kindergarten students to students with similar attributes who had been allowed to go to first grade. The repeating kindergartners, after two years of kindergarten, were about six months behind their promoted peers. The researchers determined that had the retained kindergartners been promoted, all but the very lowest-achieving group would have learned more.

Silberglitt et al. (2006) stated that students are often retained in early elementary grades to prevent future academic failure. Therefore, they conducted a study to determine if grade retention in early grades (K-2) may be linked to better academic outcomes than retention in later grades (3-5). The students were assessed three times each year in grades one through eight. Particular attention was given to measure academic growth rates for students retained in early grades (K-2) and compared to academic growth rates for students retained in later grades (3-5). The results of the study indicated that students who were retained in later grades had a negative bend in the growth curve, and the students retained in early grades had a stable growth curve. This means that students who are retained in later grades demonstrate a more rapid deceleration of academic growth compared to a consistent progress of growth for early-retained students. Silberglitt et al. emphasized, “Rather than perceive this as a benefit for early retentions, it is possible that these data are a result of a greater negative effects from later retentions” (p. 137).

Viadero (2005) proclaimed, “When it comes to kindergartners, schools do more harm than good by making struggling students repeat a grade” (p. 9). She reported on

data from the federal database known as the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten cohort, or ECLS-K. The database “tracked twelve thousand public and private school children from the time they entered kindergarten in 1998” to the time that most of them completed first grade in the spring of 2000 (p. 9). The researchers compiled a list of characteristics that would increase the likelihood of retention. The list included factors such as low test scores in reading and mathematics, male, minority, or younger than peers in the same grade level. The researchers compared the students who actually repeated kindergarten to the students having similar characteristics, but were allowed to go to first grade. The results of the study indicated that after two years in kindergarten, “the retained children were about half a year behind the same types of students who were promoted. Had the grade-repeaters been promoted instead, the researchers concluded, all but the very lowest-achieving among them would have learned more” (p. 9). This study adds to the evidence that suggests, “Retaining students can have harmful effects on their schooling” (p. 9).

Retaining students has created population problems at the high school level. Barton (2006) described the phenomenon as the “9th grade bulge” (p. 16). There are an increasing number of students in grade nine that are failing to be promoted to grade 10. Barton reported on a study that found that in 2001 there were 440,000 more students enrolled in grade 9 than in grade 8 the previous year. Seven states had at least 20% more students in grade 9 than had been in that grade the previous year. Leckrone and Griffith (2006) added, “some schools have found the high school freshman year to be a time of unusually high dropout rates” (p. 55). It was suggested that districts devise more flexible

routes to graduation, possibly ending strict retention policies for students who fail specific classes, allowing more time to complete needed credits or courses, or offering courses in the evening that accommodate working students.

Attendance and Work Habits

A student who is regularly absent from school or has poor work habits enter into a teacher's beliefs regarding retention. Teachers believe that students with poor work habits would be motivated a second time around, if they were retained (Tomchin & Impara, 1992). In the case of poor attendance, teachers saw retention as an opportunity for students to obtain skills that were missed during their absences.

Demographics of Retained Students

Jimerson et al. (2006) identified demographic characteristics of retained students. They stated that retained students often have lower achievement scores than other students in the classroom, particularly in the areas of reading and language arts. However, within these classrooms are equally low-achieving, but promoted students. There is no evidence that points to lower levels of intelligence as a factor distinguishing the retained and low-achieving students. According to Jimerson et al., "Children who are retained are more likely to have mothers with lower IQ scores, poorer attitudes toward their child's education, and lower parental involvement in school" (p. 87).

Jimerson et al. (2006) reported that, according to the Florida Association of School Psychologists (2004), gender and ethnic differences have been revealed in research. "For instance, statistics for the 2002-2003 academic year in Florida indicated

that the relative ratio of retained students by race included a disproportionate percentage of Black (24%) and Hispanic (19%) students relative to White (8%) and Asian/Pacific (6%) students (p. 87). Boys are twice as likely to repeat a grade as girls, and retention rates are higher for minority students (Black and Hispanic). Students who have been retained are more likely to have higher absenteeism than their non-retained peers. These demographics indicate that retained students are a heterogeneous group with an assortment of variables that influence low achievement.

Rodney et al. (1999) added that African American boys are retained more often than their Caucasian American counterparts. They also score lower on standardized tests and are three times more likely to be misplaced in special education or classes for slow learners. African American males are more likely to be suspended or expelled than any other group. The authors described a study conducted by Costenbader and Markson in 1994 that investigated 349 schools that represented 55% rural, 20% urban, and 24% suburban in 10 states. The findings from this study revealed that African American students were being suspended in large numbers that were disproportionate to their total enrollment.

Incidence of Retention

According to Jimerson et al. (2006), “Retention rates may vary by individual factors (e.g., social and economic indicators and ethnicity), school type (e.g., suburban, metropolitan), and geographic region” (p. 86). The rates escalate dramatically as sociodemographic risk factors are combined. By high school, the risk of retention in metropolitan school systems often exceeds 50%.

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), the number of high school students in 2004 who had ever been retained during their school career was smaller than the percentage in 1995. The decrease was an average of 8%. The percentage of students retained in kindergarten through grade 5 decreased from 11% in 1995 to 5% in 2004. However, the percentage of students retained in grades 6-12 was not measurably different between the two years. In addition, the percentage of students who had ever been retained varied by gender, race/ethnicity, and family income in 2004. “A greater percentage of males than females (13 vs. 6%) and of Blacks than Whites (16 vs. 8%) had ever been retained” (p. 2). Students from lower income families were in more likely to have been retained than students whose families were middle to high income.

Drop-Out Issue

The high school counselor has the daunting task of keeping students in school until graduation. The counselor is trained to recognize students who are at-risk for dropping out of high school. One variable considered is the number of grade retentions a student has had. Jimerson, Anderson, and Whipple (2002) cited work from Mann stating, “students who are retained in one grade are 40% to 50% more likely to drop out than promoted students and students who are retained in two grades are 90% more likely to drop out” (p. 452). DeBlois (2005) added that “a review of data showed that the single most reliable indicator of a student’s likelihood of dropping out was retention in grade, usually before high school” (p. 307).

Jimerson et al. (2002) reviewed 17 studies that examined the association between grade retention and drop-out status. In other words, grade retention was examined as a potential predictor for dropping out of high school. The results of the review revealed that all 17 studies concluded that grade retention was the strongest predictor of later drop-out status. Other predictors included excessive absences and frequent school changes. One of the 17 studies found “results indicating that early grade retention increased the risk of dropping out by 30% to 50%” (p. 443). The results of these studies are in contrast to information cited by Bowman (2005) from the U. S. Department of Education 1997 which states “although students who are retained in earlier grades are less likely to drop out than those retained later, students who are retained in middle and high school are more likely to drop out than their promoted peers” (p. 42).

By 9th grade, 30% to 50% of students have been retained at least once in their academic careers (Jimerson, Ferguson, Whipple, Anderson, & Dalton, 2002). Jimerson et al. (2002) conducted a longitudinal study that examined the connection to grade retention and dropping out of school. The study examined “Specific behavioral and academic variables of retained students in order to increase our understanding of what places children at-risk for later high school dropout” (p. 54). This study explored the characteristics associated with students who had been retained and dropped out and compared them to students who had been retained and continued on to graduate from high school. This twelve-year study explored academic and behavioral outcomes of students who were followed from kindergarten through grade eleven. The study revealed “the mothers of retained students who later dropped out had reported a lower value of

education for their children” (p. 56). In regards to aggression, students who dropped out displayed more aggression, lower self-esteem ratings, more counseling and special education referrals, and continued to display more aggression in later years. Achievement variables were not significantly different during elementary school between the two groups. However, during junior high and high school, the students who remained in school received higher grades than students who eventually dropped out.

Shepard and Smith (1989) reviewed previous studies regarding repeating grades and dropping out of school. Profiles were constructed of the typical school dropout by listing variable that distinguish graduates from dropouts. It was revealed that dropouts consistently come from “lower socioeconomic backgrounds, have little support for school from home, perform poorly on academic tasks, have poor self-esteem, a history of poor attendance and trouble with school, and so on” (p. 36). They also determined that dropouts have repeated one or more grades in school. Additionally, they revealed, “a student who fails either of the first two grades has only a twenty percent chance of graduating” (p. 36).

High school dropouts are less likely to enroll in post-secondary educational programs, receive lower employment status, paid less per hour, and receive lower employment competence ratings (Jimerson & Kaufman, 2003). Dropouts may face detrimental “outcomes including fewer employment opportunities, substance abuse, and arrests” (p. 624). Leckrone and Griffith (2006) added, “Grade retention is one of the largest and most consistent predictors of later drug and alcohol use, delinquent behavior, and teenage pregnancy” (p. 55).

According to data obtained from *The Education Pipeline in the United States* (2004), Mississippi has an extremely high dropout rate. The data indicated that in 2001, 57% of the students in Mississippi graduated. Georgia also had the same percentage, followed by Florida with 52% and South Carolina with 51%. The state with the highest graduation rate in 2001 was New Jersey with a graduation rate of 86%. Nationally, 505,000 students dropped out of school between October 2000 and October 2001. That number of students would fill 12,000 school buses (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004).

Role of the School Principal

The role of the school principal is not one that can be clearly defined. Hurley (2001) determined that the principal has the responsibilities of “organizing, budgeting, managing, and dealing with disruptions inside and outside the system” (p. 37). Additionally, the principal of today is the instructional leader of the school. The instructional leader takes on the tasks of coaching, teaching, and developing the teachers in the school. They must be knowledgeable of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to ensure a continuous improvement process that increases student performance. The instructional leaders must build learning communities within the school and engage stakeholders in creating a successful vision for the school.

Ruebling, Stow, Kayona and Clark (2004) suggested that a missing ingredient in student learning is the role of an effective educational leader. In order to ensure that students are meeting academic goals, teachers must be teaching district curriculum that is aligned with testing standards. The school leader must be involved in the monitoring the

implementation of curriculum. “Research increasingly affirms that the key to school improvement and student achievement is for school leaders to focus on the academic program, the use of assessment data, and professional development” (Ruebling et al., 2004, p. 244).

Principals in urban schools face unique challenges such as high levels of low socioeconomic neighborhoods that are violent and drug infested, families that are mobile, and students with low academic achievement. Danridge, Edwards, and Pleasants (2000) stated that the pressure that urban principals experience is all too real. They said that the principal is “ultimately held responsible for low student achievement and test scores, despite the acute lack of financial resources, personnel and other educational materials that plague inner-city schools” (p. 655). Vision for the school that fosters achievement and success for all students must be established and implemented. Urban principals encourage teachers to buy into their vision by creating an environment of collegiality that is inspirational and educational. A collaborative partnership that includes teachers, parents, students, and stakeholders will ensure a connection between the home and school, and create open communication with the community. The vision that is established for the school should include beliefs regarding student success.

Alternatives to Retention and Social Promotion

Educational research has proven that it is not advantageous to retain or socially promote students. Jimerson, Kaufman, Anderson, Whipple, Figueroa, and Rocco et al. (2002) contended, “because early educational experiences play a key role in subsequent achievement and development, it is critical that educational professionals implement

prevention and intervention strategies that have been empirically demonstrated as proven or promising” (p. 3). It is important for schools and teachers to implement strategies that will ensure students meet rigorous standards the first time. Jimerson et al. (2006), emphasized that when selecting and implementing interventions, it is important to consider the “developmental, cultural, linguistic, and gender differences among students” (p. 90). Thomas (Center for Development & Learning, n.d.) asserted that not all teachers are effective at identifying needs and applying instructional strategies that are appropriate for student needs. Thomas reported the findings from a study conducted by Sanders and Rivers in 1996 that examined the effects of teachers on student achievement and found a wide chasm between the impact on student achievement by effective teachers and ineffective teachers. The study found that equally performing second graders were separated by as many as 50 percentile points on standardized tests by fifth grade solely as a result of being taught by teachers whose effectiveness varied.

Public education is charged with educating all children regardless of their abilities. In their manuscript, Jimerson, Kaufman, et al. (2003) determined strategic interventions that can be simultaneous preventions of academic failure. The interventions discussed are “(1) preschool programs, (2) early reading programs, (3) directive instruction strategies, (4) mnemonic strategies, (5) behavior modification strategies, (6) cognitive behavior modification strategies, (7) summer school programs, (8) school-based mental health programs, (9) comprehensive school-wide programs, (10) parent involvement programs, and (11) formative evaluation” (p. 8).

Preschool

Preschool programs, such as Head Start, offer early literacy instruction and a “range of individualized services in the areas of health, nutrition, and parent involvement that are designed to foster healthy development” (p. 9) for at-risk students. Studies regarding the effectiveness of Head Start programs in the United States have not proven effective on a consistent basis. Regrettably, “positive effects of participation in Head Start programs taper off in the early elementary school years” (p. 9).

Preschool standards-based programs should be developed to increase school readiness and support transition services through the primary grades. Efforts made toward effective preschool programs should consider promoting social and cognitive competence of participating students.

Early Reading

Reading is an essential skill for the acquisition of knowledge. Early reading programs contribute to higher student success and assist students in the process of decoding. There is no early literacy program that is effective for all students. Therefore, teachers must be able to provide different types of teaching strategies and support for students who require additional assistance in acquiring early reading skills.

Direct Instruction

Direct instruction is a teaching strategy that is designed to “enhance a student’s academic engaged time, such as those that result in frequent student responses, fast-paced instruction, and teacher control of material” (p. 15). The Direct Instruction Model that

was developed by Englemann and Carnine in 1982 contained teaching strategies that included step-by-step scripted lessons for teaching, clear objectives for students such as questions that have one correct response and assessment that were progressive and criterion-referenced. Studies conducted on the Direct Instruction Model demonstrated increased reading achievement with the students who were studied.

Mnemonic Strategies

Jimerson, Kaufman, et al. (2002) defined mnemonics as “memory-enhancing strategies that have been found to improve student’s organization (clustering) and higher-order-thinking (knowledge application involving inference making) with learned information” (p. 16). Mnemonic teaching would include tying words together to emphasize their connection and providing a picture to reinforce the connections. For example, to connect the words fish and water, the sentence would be placed in the sentence “A fish swims in the water.” Then a picture of a fish swimming would be introduced to the students. Mnemonics assist with short-term recall and increase remembering information over time.

Behavior and Cognitive Behavior Modification Strategies

The purpose of teaching behavior and cognitive behavior modification strategies is to reduce negative conduct and increase positive classroom behaviors. A strict behavior modification strategy utilizes a token reinforcement system and peer or adult monitors. Alternate methods would teach a child to self-monitor their behavior and the use of positive feedback through publicly posted group or individual behavior charts.

Cognitive behavior modification addresses “the underlying conditions influencing external behaviors” (Jimerson, Kaufman, et al., 2002, p. 18). Cognitive behavior modification involves “combining behavioral approaches such as modeling, feedback, and reinforcement with cognitive approaches such as ‘cognitive think alouds’ to teach strategies such as anger control and self-coping” (p. 18). Jimerson, Kaufman, et al. discussed a meta-analysis that “revealed that cognitive behavior modification provided lasting effects in reducing hyperactivity-impulsivity and aggression” (p.18).

Summer School

Most summer school programs provide academic instruction during the summer months after the completion of a traditional nine-month academic school year. Jimerson, Kaufman, et al. (2002) reported a study that was conducted by Cooper, Charlton, Valentine, and Muhlenbruck in 2000. Several conclusions were drawn from this study.

First, summer school programs that providing remedial interventions enhance the development of knowledge and skills of participants. Second, summer programs that focus on strengthening achievement also show a positive educational effect.

Third, it appears that middle-class students benefit more from summer school programs than same-age students from lower SES backgrounds. (p. 19)

However, it was emphasized in this study that the effect was larger for higher SES students and all estimates of summer school indicate benefits for disadvantaged students. “Fourth, summer school programs have larger positive effects when they provide small group or individualized instruction” (p. 19).

School-Based Mental Health

Since the majority of youths in need of services from school-based mental health providers, there is a growing trend to integrate mental health services into the school settings. Jimerson, Kaufman et al. (2002) discussed a study conducted by Armbruster and Lichtman in 1999 that compared the effectiveness of school-based mental health services to clinic-based services. Findings from this study revealed comparable levels of improvement. However, the authors stated that school-based services would have a greater potential of providing regular services to eligible students than clinic-based services.

Comprehensive School-Wide Programs

School-wide behavior programs have been successful in reducing discipline problems. Successful programs mentioned in the literature are “Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) and Project ACHIEVE” (Jimerson, Kaufman, et al., 2002, p. 21). Both programs are designed to focus on developing social and emotional competence through integrating affect, behavior, and cognitive understanding to decrease the risk for behavior problems. These programs require significant commitment by the school administration and faculty. Jimerson, Kaufman et al. commented, “considerable training, staff, and resources are necessary to successfully implement such comprehensive programs” (p. 22).

Parent Involvement

Jimerson, Kaufman, et al. (2002) define parent involvement as “a combination of parent’s attitude toward education and school, as well as a parent’s willingness to assist in creating a home atmosphere that is conducive to doing homework (e.g., weekly routine, structure)” (p. 23). A meta-analysis conducted by Fan and Chen in 2001 determined that parental involvement and parent expectations and desires for their child’s success have the strongest influence on increased academic achievement. Parental involvement is also associated with higher test scores, higher self-esteem, “improved social skills, better attendance and work habits, and fewer behavior difficulties” (Jimerson, Kaufman, et al., 2002, p. 23).

Formative Evaluation

Jimerson, Kaufman, et al. (2002) defined formative evaluation as “the process of designing, evaluating, and modifying instructional programs according to the results of regular assessment” (p. 24). A continuous progress monitoring approach is needed to evaluate the academic curriculum. Curriculum-based measurements “provide appropriate response to the public and legislative demand for accountability in student achievement and adherence to educational standards” (p. 24).

Witmer et al. (2004) concluded, “Educators need to address how to improve student’s academic skills and reduce failure” (p. 183). Teachers need to learn about and implement strategies that prevent retention. Leckrone and Griffith (2006) added that an “analysis of existing school policies and patterns of retention can lead to preventive change” (p. 55). School leaders can insert standards of identifying students early in the

school year who are most at-risk for failing. Diagnostic remediation could be determined and implemented to assist the at-risk students. The diagnostic remediation would be implemented to strengthen the at-risk students' academic weaknesses, behavioral or emotional problems, or a combination of factors that may result in their academic failure.

Chapter Summary

This chapter referenced the literature regarding teacher beliefs toward in-grade retention. Additional literature revealed the impact of grade retention on the student. (discuss the aspects). This study examined teacher beliefs toward in-grade retention in a K-2 school.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN

Case Study

The purpose of this mixed methods case study was to examine teacher beliefs toward in-grade retention. A qualitative methodology that utilized a phenomenological approach provided the participants the opportunity to describe their beliefs toward grade retention. This study included some quantification of the data. According to Glesne (2006), a “case study is not a methodological choice, but a choice of what is to be studied” (p. 13). Bogdan and Biklen (2003) added that a phenomenological study allows the researcher to attempt to “gain entry into the conceptual world of their subjects in order to understand how and what meaning they construct around events in their daily lives” (p. 23). The researcher chose to use the phenomenological case study approach in order to obtain rich, descriptive information from several teachers in one school through the use of in-depth, personal interviews and a survey. A Likert scaled survey was used to collect quantitative data related to teacher beliefs toward in-grade retention. Data obtained from the surveys were analyzed to identify beliefs in the practice of retention and identify demographic characteristics.

This research design allowed the researcher to triangulate data by using the survey instrument, analysis of the interview data, and the related literature. According to Merriam (1998), “triangulation strengthens reliability as well as internal validity”

(p. 207), especially in terms of using multiple methods of data collection and analysis. It was an appropriate method of research for this study in order to delve deep into the beliefs of the teachers regarding retention at a K-2 school in a large urban district located in Mississippi.

A characteristic of qualitative research is that the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 1998; Glesne, 2006). Since I collected and analyzed the data for this study, it is important to describe my background, which may have influenced the collection and interpretation of the data. I have been an educator for 19 years. First, I began my career as an elementary teacher in a Title I school in the rural Delta of Mississippi, teaching grades 6 through 8 for a period of two years. Next, I temporarily left the field of education and became a manager of a major retail electronics store for eight years. Then, I was a market manager of a major insurance company for four years. Finally, I returned to the field of education. First, I taught 3rd grade for five years in a School-wide Title I School. Next, I was an assistant principal for two years in a middle school. Then, I was a school principal at a middle school for six years. Currently, I am an assistant principal of a high school where I have worked for four years. Overall, I have a total of seven years of classroom experience as a teacher. I also have twelve years of experience as a school administrator.

Merriam (1998) reported, “. . . the researcher must be aware of any personal biases and how they may influence the investigation” (p. 21). As an administrator, I am constantly evaluating teachers. While conducting the interview phase of my data collection, I focused on the questions that were set forth for this proposed study rather than engaging in evaluative conversation with the teacher participants. I reminded myself

that my purpose was not to evaluate the teachers and their answers, but to listen objectively and ask clarifying questions. I took these steps to ensure that my research study was not biased.

I met personally with the district's Director of Accountability and Research and secured permission to conduct my pilot and research studies in the school district. I gave him a typed copy of my research perspective, and a letter requesting written permission to conduct my research. We discussed the schools within the district that would fit the criteria needed for this research. I selected two schools that met my research criteria. I selected Mountain View Elementary School (pseudonym) for my pilot study. I selected Valley Elementary School (pseudonym) for my research study. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) committee with Mississippi State University approved both this study and the survey instruments (Appendix A). Then, I met with the principals individually at their schools. I discussed my research, and gave each principal a letter requesting written permission to conduct my studies in their schools. Finally, I obtained written permission from the school district, participating school administrator, and each voluntary participant prior to collecting data.

Participants for the Pilot Study

The participants for the pilot study were the certified teaching staff at Mountain View Elementary (pseudonym), a K-2 school in the Johnson Public School District (pseudonym). Teachers volunteered for participation in the pilot study after hearing an explanation of the study (See Appendix B for the Recruitment Script) and signing the Informed Consent Form (Appendix C) at a scheduled staff meeting. A total of thirty

surveys, Teacher Opinion Survey and the Personal Experiences and Retention Practices (TOS/PERP) (Appendices D & E), were distributed to the certified teachers at the staff meeting. A total of 26 (87%) surveys were completed and returned. All of the volunteer participants were female.

Participants for the Research Study

The participants for the study were the certified teaching staff at Valley Elementary School (pseudonym), a K-2 school in the Johnson Public School District (pseudonym). Teachers volunteered for participation in the research study after hearing an explanation of the study (See Appendix F for the Recruitment Script) and signing the Informed Consent Form (Appendix G) at a scheduled staff meeting. The Informed Consent Form asked the teacher to volunteer to participate in the quantitative and qualitative parts of the study. I distributed sixteen surveys (Teacher Opinion Survey and the Personal Experiences and Retention Practices [TOS/PERP]) to the certified teachers attending the staff meeting. A total of ten (62.5%) surveys were completed and returned. Additionally, five of the participants volunteered to be interviewed. The interview volunteers consisted of two kindergarten teachers, two first grade teachers, and a second grade teacher. The school principal also agreed to be interviewed.

Each of the interview volunteers (five teachers and the school principal) provided uniqueness to this study. The demographics of the interview participants are described in Table 3.1. Pseudonyms were used to reference the names of the participants.

Table 3.1

Demographics of Interview Participants

Name	Age	Race	Gender	Grade	Number of Years Teaching	Highest Degree	Area of Certification Concentration
Ann	49	Black	Female	Kindergarten	19	Master's	Reading
Betty	61	White	Female	Kindergarten	28	Specialist	Early Childhood
Cathy	40	White	Female	First	1	Bachelor's	Math/English
Donna	26	White	Female	First	1	Bachelor's	Reading Language
Emma	30	Black	Female	Second	7	Bachelor's	Remedial Reading
Faye	43	Black	Female	Principal	21	Doctorate	Elem. Ed./Adm.

Prior to the interview, a complete explanation of the purpose and voluntary nature of this study was discussed with each participant. Issues of anonymity and confidentiality were addressed. The volunteers were informed that pseudonym names would be used in the final writing of the research. The interview was semi-structured, using an interview guide that provided specific questions, as well as probes that allowed me to explore the participant's responses. Interview participants were compensated with a \$20.00 gift card from Wal-Mart.

Instruments

A two-part survey form, The Teacher Opinion Survey and the Personal Experiences and Professional Practices Survey (TOS/PERP), was used for data collection. The surveys were developed and validated by Anita Ruth Ede in 2006 for her

research study. Written permission to use and modify the instruments was obtained prior to beginning the study (Appendix H).

The survey instrument was slightly modified. Therefore, a pilot study was conducted to establish validity and reliability of the TOS/PERP. The pilot study was conducted at a K-2 school in the same school district that the research study was scheduled to occur. The results of the pilot study were expected to be similar to the research study results.

The Personal Experiences and Retention Practices (PERP) of the teaching staff was used to provide quantifiable data related to professional status, prior retention practices, personal or family history of retention, and familiarity with current research in the field of education. The following items constituted the PERP section: current teaching grade level, number of years taught, number of students previously retained and their gender, participant's history or family member's history of retention, and participant's familiarity with current research on grade retention.

The Teacher Opinion Survey (TOS) is a quantitative instrument consisting of 11 four-choice (strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree, disagree) Likert-scaled belief statements. The purpose of the use of the TOS was to quantify what teachers believe about retention in relation to academic achievement, the social, emotional, and psychological effects of retention, immaturity, gender, opinions of their colleagues, dropping out of school, and alternatives to retention. A copy of the TOS/PERP is located in the appendix (Appendices D & E).

Participants who volunteered for the interview session were contacted. A location and time for the interview was scheduled. The interviews were conducted according to

the location and time chosen by the participants. The interview protocols that were used for teachers and the administrator for this study are also located in the appendix.

Appendix I is the protocol used for teachers, and Appendix J is the interview protocol that was used for the administrator.

Setting for the Pilot Study

The setting for the pilot study, Mountain View Elementary, is a K-2 school located in the Johnson Public School District of Mississippi. The school, located in the northern zone of an urban district, has distinct differences in the socioeconomics between the northern, central, and southern zones. The northern zone of the district consists primarily of minority students. The family economic status is marginally higher than the economic status of the families in the central and southern zones. However, the entire district qualifies for Title I status.

Enrollment data, number of students, and ethnicity for Mountain View Elementary School, are represented in Tables 3.2 and 3.3.

Table 3.2

Enrollment Data by Grade Level at Mountain View Elementary School

Grade Level	Total Number Enrolled
Kindergarten	162
1 st Grade	184
2 nd Grade	152
Total Enrollment	498

Table 3.3

Percentage of Enrollment by Ethnicity at Mountain View Elementary School

Ethnicity	Percent Enrolled
Asian	1%
Black	87%
Hispanic	1%
White	12%

Mountain View Elementary School has score data from the Mississippi Curriculum Test (MCT) for the second grade students from the 2006-2007 school year (see Table 3.4). The MCT was required for all Mississippi students in grades two through eight. However, beginning with the 2007-2008, the MCT-2 was required for all students in grades three through eight. The MCT meets the requirements mandated by the *No Child Left Behind Act* for statewide testing. According to the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE), the purpose of state assessments required under *No Child Left Behind* is to provide an independent insight into each child’s progress, as well as each school’s progress. The point of state assessments is to measure student learning. During the 2006-2007 school year, scores on the MCT were reported for performance in the areas of reading, language, and mathematics. The scores for Mountain View Elementary second grade students are displayed in Table 3.4 (MDE website, www.mde.k12.ms.us/ors/).

Table 3.4

MCT Data for 2006-2007 at Mountain View Elementary School

Subject	% Minimal	% Basic	% Proficient	% Advanced
Reading	4.9%	07.4%	61.3%	26.4%
Language	2.5%	11.7%	30.1%	55.8%
Math	0.6%	06.7%	43.6%	49.1%

According to the Mississippi Department of Education (website, www.mde.k12.ms.us/ors/) test scores are reported by performance levels in the state of Mississippi. A student who scores at the minimal level does not demonstrate mastery of the content area knowledge and skills required for success. These students require additional instruction and remediation in the basic skills that are necessary for success at the grade level tested. A student who scores at the basic level demonstrates partial mastery of the content knowledge.

Remediation may be necessary for these students. Students who scores at the level of proficient, demonstrates solid academic performance and mastery of the content knowledge and skills. Students who perform at this level are well prepared to begin working on more challenging work. Students who score at the level or advanced are clearly beyond grade level in the area tested.

Mountain View Elementary School’s performance classification was level five. The level five classification identifies Mountain View as a superior-performing school. The classification is based on the achievement and growth model mandated by *No Child Left Behind*. The school exceeded adequate yearly progress (AYP) for all academic areas tested (Mississippi Department of Education online www.mde.k12.ms.us/ors/).

Setting for the Research Study

The setting for the study was Valley Elementary School. Valley Elementary was a K-2 school located in Johnson Public School District in the state of Mississippi. This school was located in the southern zone of an urban district. The district had distinct differences in its socioeconomics between the northern, central, and southern zones. The southern zone of the district consisted of primarily minority students. The family economic status was lower than the central and northern zones. However, the entire district qualified for Title I status.

During the 2007-2008 school year, Valley Elementary had a student enrollment of 298 students. Student enrollment data, number of students and student ethnicity percentages are listed in Tables 3.5 and 3.6 (MDE website, www.mde.k12.ms.us/ors/).

Table 3.5

Enrollment Data by Grade Level at Valley Elementary School

Grade Level	Total Number Enrolled
Kindergarten	107
1 st Grade	95
2 nd Grade	94
Total Enrollment	298

Table 3.6

Percentage of Enrollment by Ethnicity at Valley Elementary School

Ethnicity	Percent Enrolled
Asian	0.0%
Black	98.4%
Hispanic	0.5%
White	1.1%

Valley Elementary School followed the same pattern as Mountain View Elementary School for MCT test data. Both schools have reports of data for the second grade students from the 2006-2007 school year. The MCT scores for Valley Elementary second grade students are displayed in Table 3.7 (MDE website www.mde.k12.ms.us/ors/).

Table 3.7

MCT Data for 2006-2007 at Valley Elementary School

Subject	% Minimal	% Basic	% Proficient	% Advanced
Reading	3.6%	10.7%	73.8%	11.9%
Language	2.5%	23.8%	42.9%	27.4%
Math	0.0%	11.9%	65.5%	22.6%

Mountain View Elementary School’s performance classification was level 4. The level 4 classification identifies Valley Elementary as a high performing school on the achievement and growth model mandated by *No Child Left Behind*. The school met

adequate yearly progress (AYP) for all academic areas tested (MDE website, www.mde.k12.ms.us/ors/).

According to the Johnson Public School District Elementary Division, Valley Elementary School retained a total of thirteen students in kindergarten through second grade during the 2006-2007 school year. In contrast, Valley Elementary School retained one student during the 2007-2008 school year. Table 3.8 displays the number of students at each grade level that were retained. There is not an explanation for the change in numbers.

Table 3.8
Number of Students Retained at Valley Elementary School

Grade Level	School Year 2006-2007	School Year 2007-2008
Kindergarten	3	0
First Grade	8	0
Second Grade	2	1

Johnson Public School District

Johnson Public School District is a large urban district in the state of Mississippi. The district is comprised of 38 elementary schools, ten middle schools, eight high schools, and three special schools (alternative school, career development center, and a performing arts school). Enrollment data for the 2007-2008 school year indicated that there were approximately 31,000 students in grades kindergarten through twelve. The

gender and ethnic enrollment of the district is listed in Table 3.9 (JPS District website www.jackson.k12.ms.us).

Table 3.9
Gender and Ethnic Enrollment of Johnson Public School District

Description	Percentage
African American	97.7%
Caucasian	1.65%
Hispanic	0.61%
Asian	0.18%
Native American	0.02%
Males	50.2%
Females	49.8%

Johnson Public School District Retention Policy

Johnson Public School District has a retention policy that was approved by their school board. Policy JBH/IGB mandates the following guidelines for teachers and administrators to follow when making decisions regarding promotion and retention of students in grades kindergarten through fifth. The researcher has listed the guidelines that pertain to kindergarten through second grade. The information is written verbatim from the district handbook (p. 19).

1. Kindergarten

It is the goal of the kindergarten program to provide all students with the school readiness skills they need to be successful in first grade. Students must master the essential kindergarten objectives to be promoted to the first grade.

2. Grade 1

Students must master the State Core Curriculum and the district objectives in reading, language arts, and mathematics with a grade average of 70 in each subject.

3. Grade 2

Students must master the State Core Curriculum and the district objectives in reading, language arts, and mathematics with a grade average of 70 in each subject.

Johnson Public School District offers a summer school extended year program “to strengthen the student academically and is not for the purpose of promotion. Overage students (two or more years behind in grade placement at the end of the current school year) are required to attend the summer BOOST program” (District Handbook, p. 21).

Data Collection

Qualitative research data collection consists of a variety of collection methods. Personal interviewing was one technique used (Merriam, 1998). Prior to conducting the research study, I completed and submitted an IRB application packet to the Mississippi State University Institutional Review Board. I secured consent forms from the school district, school principal and all participating teachers, granting me permission to conduct my research study. Upon approval from the IRB, I conducted personal interviews with teachers in a K-2 school. In addition, I distributed survey instruments to the entire staff to collect quantifiable data that helped to triangulate the findings of the research.

A date and time was established with the principal of the K-2 school for me to attend a scheduled staff meeting to discuss the proposed research with the certified staff. I gave each certified teacher a packet that contained a consent form and a survey instrument. First, the volunteering teachers were asked to complete the consent form and survey instrument. Next, they were asked to place the completed documents in a locked box that was located in the main office. Finally, the volunteering staff were informed of the specific date that I would return to collect the locked box. The participants were asked to indicate on the Teacher Consent Form their willingness to participate in an interview session with me.

The participants who volunteered for the interview were asked to include their contact information on the Teacher Consent Form. The Teacher Consent Form was separated from the TOS/PERP forms and placed in a separate envelope to protect survey anonymity. I contacted the volunteer interviewees to establish a time and location for interviews.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each teacher in order to gain an understanding of their beliefs toward grade retention. Merriam (1998) explains that the interview assisted the researcher in understanding the feelings, thoughts, and intentions that a person has toward a phenomenon. The purpose of the interview was to allow me “to enter into the other person’s perspective” (p. 72). During the interview, I asked the teachers questions regarding retention and how they acquired those beliefs. An interview guide containing specific questions was used to maintain focus of the topic. However, additional questions that arose during the interview were also asked. The interview sessions were held at a location that was selected by the teachers in order to assure that

they were comfortable with their surroundings. The interviews were audio-recorded with the teacher's permission, and field notes were jotted down to assist with accuracy during transcription.

Transcription of the interviews was completed as soon after the interview session as possible. Merriam (1998) stated, "Verbatim transcription of the interviews provides the best database for analysis" (p. 88). The typed interview transcripts were analyzed by organizing data into a tabular format for a more exhaustive analysis. The table consisted of domains that related to the research questions. The domains were broken down into multiple dimensions that allowed the researcher to condense the multiple pages of interview transcripts into workable tables that revealed broad themes and similarities or data that stood in stark contrast to another element of data.

All participants who volunteered for the study were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality in the final writings of the research. In this study, participants were assigned pseudonyms that were used to file their demographic information and interview responses. Pseudonyms were cross-referenced with the names of the participants and kept in a locked file cabinet. The consent forms for this study clearly informed the participants of the steps that would be taken to ensure confidentiality. The final writings of the study used pseudonyms for each participant.

All data collected were maintained in the home of the researcher and viewed only by the researcher for data analysis purposes. The data will be shredded upon completion and approval of the research and data analysis.

Data Analysis

Interview data were analyzed continually throughout this case study in a constant comparative method, constantly comparing data as it were obtained (Merriam, 1998). The researcher transcribed the recorded interviews. The interview transcripts were analyzed by organizing data into a tabular format for a more exhaustive analysis. The table consists of domains that related to the research questions. The domains were broken down into multiple dimensions that allowed the researcher to condense the multiple pages of interview transcripts into workable tables that revealed broad themes and similarities or data that stood in stark contrast to another element of data.

The data from the survey instruments were tabulated and analyzed by the researcher. Descriptive statistics were utilized to identify the characteristics of the participants including teaching experience and grade levels taught. The survey was a Likert scale and assumed an equal interval scale with applied numerical weights to each response as follows: (a) strongly disagree with 1 point; (b) disagree with 2 points; (c) agree with 3 points; and (d) strongly agree with 4 points. Then a statistical analysis was run on each question of the survey to determine teachers' beliefs.

Data from the interviews were compared to the data from the survey instrument. This established triangulation of the data. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) "in a triangulation design, the researcher simultaneously collects both quantitative and qualitative data, compares the results, and then uses those findings to see whether they validate each other" (p. 443).

Trustworthiness, Credibility, and Transferability

Merriam (1998) stated, “ensuring validity and reliability in qualitative research involves conducting the investigation in an ethical manner” (p. 198). According to Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2006) trustworthiness may be established by addressing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in the study and findings.

In this proposed research study, trustworthiness was established through means mentioned by Glesne (2006). The methods mentioned that were pertinent to my study included prolonged engagement and persistent observation, triangulation, peer review and debriefing, member checking, rich, thick description, and external audit. According to Merriam (1998) and Glesne (2006), the researcher is the primary instrument in qualitative research. I described my background to the participants to establish my credibility. I also conducted my research in a credible, reliable manner. I established a protocol of engagement with the participants that would ensure that all contacts were professional and representative of sound, ethical research. I was aware of my biases toward retention to ensure that I did not influence the data collection or analysis.

Transferability was used to determine the extent to which the research could be applied to other settings. I increased the transferability of this research by providing a thick, rich description of my data. Anyone reading my research would be able to transfer my study to another location by making a judgment concerning the rationale and nature of the transfer.

Reliability and Validity of the Instruments

Anita Ruth Ede developed the survey instrument used for this study, for her dissertation study in 2006. The instrument is a two-part survey form: The Teacher Opinion Survey (TOS) and the Personal Experiences and Retention Practices (PERP). Content validity, according to Gay et al. (2006) is the “degree to which a test measures an intended content area” (p. 134). The literature review was the basis for establishing the content material that the instrument will measure.

The survey instrument was piloted on April 1, 2005 by Anita Ruth Ede in a mid-size Title I elementary school. The instrument was placed in the mailbox of thirty teachers. A total of twelve surveys were returned to Ede. Analysis of the survey indicated that the teachers understood the belief statements and responded without concern or questions. “The Teacher Opinion Survey proved to be a workable instrument that required no clarification and elicited no comments as to its construction from respondents” (Ede, 2006, p. 56). Gay et al. (2006) defined reliability as the “degree to which a test consistently measures whatever it is measuring” (p. 139).

The survey instrument selected was ideal for this research study. The survey instrument contained survey questions related to teacher beliefs toward retention that correlated with the literature review. Prior to beginning the collection of data, the researcher obtained written permission from Anita Ruth Ede to use and modify the Teacher Opinion Survey and the Personal Experiences and Retention Practices. The instrument was slightly modified because the original survey asked a question regarding retention and English Language Learners (ELL). The researcher removed that question because the school site that was used for the collection of data did not have ELL students.

Therefore, when seeking permission to use the survey instrument, the researcher also asked for permission to modify the instrument to align it with the selected school site.

Ede did not report the reliability of the survey instrument that was developed for her study. Therefore, this researcher conducted a pilot study to establish reliability as soon as IRB approval was granted. To establish reliability of the survey instrument, the researcher conducted a pilot study that examined the responses of 26 educators. The pilot study used the TOS and PERP in a school with similar student characteristics as the school where the actual research was conducted. The results of the pilot study were entered into SPSS to obtain a reliability coefficient. Analysis of the pilot survey indicated that the teachers understood the belief statements and responded adequately without misunderstandings or questions about the content or the expectations. This version of the Teacher Opinion Survey was then established as a reliable, valid instrument that required no clarification and appeared to be consistently measuring what it was designed to measure. Cronbach alpha yielded a correlation coefficient of .66.

Statistics

The survey instrument that was used consisted of approximately eleven belief statements. The number of teachers to participate in the survey was 30. Therefore, the survey instrument was analyzed by tabulating the answers from each respondent. Data analysis was conducted to generate descriptive statistics using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 8.0. As stated by Gay et al. (2006) “The simplest way to present the results is to indicate the percentage of respondents who selected each alternative for each item” (p. 172).

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Chapter IV presents the findings derived from the analyses conducted on the responses of the teachers to the probing of the researcher. The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' beliefs toward grade retention in an attempt to focus on how teachers acquire beliefs regarding grade retention, and their knowledge of research regarding the effectiveness of retention. Historically, little emphasis has been placed on early and accurate identification of learning and behavior problems. Aggressive interventions using research-based approaches and retention have increased over the past three decades and attributed to increased pressure on standardized achievement tests. For that reason, I sought to determine the primary reason that teachers retain students. This study was designed to determine what teachers in a K-2 school believed about grade retention and to suggest alternatives for retention or social promotion.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the focus for this study:

1. What is the nature of teachers' beliefs about grade retention?
2. What are the social, emotional, and psychological outcomes of retention?
3. What are the academic outcomes of retention?

4. What are the demographics of retention?
5. What are the incidences of retention?
6. What are the drop-out issues?
7. What are the roles of the school principal?
8. What are the suggested alternatives to retention?

A qualitative methodology that utilized a phenomenological approach provided the participants the opportunity to describe their beliefs toward grade retention. The phenomenological study allowed the researcher to attempt to carefully examine the conceptual world of the teachers in order to understand how and what meaning they applied toward events in their daily lives and their professional judgment. The phenomenological case study approach was initiated in order to obtain rich, descriptive information from several teachers in one school through the use of in-depth, personal interviews, and a survey. This study also included some quantification of the data. A Likert scaled survey was used to collect quantitative data related to teacher beliefs toward in-grade retention. Data obtained from the surveys were analyzed to identify beliefs in the practice of retention and identify demographic characteristics.

This research design allowed me to triangulate the survey data, the interview data, and the related literature. The process of triangulation also aided in providing additional reliability as well as internal validity to the process, especially in terms of using multiple methods of data collection and analysis. This enabled me to closely evaluate the beliefs of the teachers regarding retention at a K-2 school in a large urban district located in Mississippi.

The educational software package, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 8.0, was employed to analyze the quantitative data. Descriptive statistics were used to describe and present the data. Frequency and percentage of responses for each category summarized data obtained from the survey. Qualitative data gathered from the focus group and key informant interviews, were analyzed through thematic categorization and coding. The findings of this study are presented and discussed in this chapter. Descriptive data, utilizing frequencies and means, represent the statistical methods used to analyze the quantitative and qualitative data. The results are shown in tables presented in this chapter.

Interviews

Interview data were analyzed from five elementary teachers who taught kindergarten, first, or second grade students. The school principal was also interviewed. All of the participants interviewed are female. The interviews were transcribed soon after the interview to ensure that the researcher would recall the body language and environmental factors related to each interview. The transcribed interviews resulted in 72 pages of data. The data were reduced into a tabular format to allow for a more exhaustive analysis. Based on the research questions, themes emerged during the interviews. The themes mentioned are based on the interviews from the teachers. An overview of the themes that emerged is indicated below in Table 4.1. A thick description of the themes was discussed using excerpts from the interviews.

Table 4.1

Overview of Research Questions and Related Themes and Categories

Research Questions	Emerging Themes
What is the nature of teachers' beliefs about grade retention?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefits low-performing students • Students are usually better prepared for the next grade after they have repeated a grade
What are the social, emotional, and psychological outcomes of retention?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership • Behavioral problems
What are the academic outcomes of retention?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepared to be academically successful for the next grade
What are the demographics of retention?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Males
What are the incidences of retention?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Black Males
What are the drop-out issues?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributing factor
What are the roles of the school principal?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist teachers • Instructional Leader
What are suggested alternatives to retention?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher Support Team • Transition classes

Research Questions

The data for research questions one through eight were analyzed through transcribed interviews and field notes to answer the questions.

Research Question One

The first question posed in this study was, “What is the nature of teachers’ beliefs about grade retention?”

When asked to describe their beliefs regarding grade retention, four of the teachers, stated that they agreed with retention, or that retention had value. To the

contrary, one interviewee stated that she was “not for it.” (The first grade teacher was in the eighth month of her first year of teaching.) She continued, “but I have three students who are currently failing and I don’t know what else to do. It’s kind of like what do you do with the kids if you don’t retain them. But it also causes problems further on if you are retaining them.” Betty, a kindergarten teacher, has been teaching for 28 years. She stated, “I think it is important to do it. I think it is important especially in kindergarten and first grade.”

It is important to note here that both kindergarten teachers, Ann and Betty, stated emphatically that children, who have not mastered kindergarten skills, should be retained in kindergarten. I concluded that they see kindergarten retention as an intervention that would prevent failure in first grade. Ann added, “If they repeat kindergarten then they will be successful in first grade.”

Donna, a first grade teacher, added, “it [retention] can be very valuable for the specific students who need another year in a specific grade due to lack of skills and maturity.” A child’s inability to master specific grade-level skills was mentioned by all of the teachers at different times during the interviews. The teachers said they conducted interventions with the students who were not mastering skills. However, they did not give common descriptions of the interventions that were used.

Emma, a second grade teacher, stated that retention is beneficial to students. She added, “if you’re repeating a child who is ability-wise able to do the work, and just refuses to do the work, then I feel that retention is useless. But if it’s someone who just

needs that additional help, maybe another year of lessons with interventions is beneficial.”

Faye, the school principal, concluded, “...retaining students is a negative as it relates to a child graduating. Retention has been shown not to be advantageous to the child in the long run.” In contrast, Faye personalized the interview by stating, “further down the road when I talk to parents about their child who was retained, in most cases they tell me that their child caught up. I think in most cases, if a child is retained in kindergarten or first grade, he does well the rest of the way out.”

Analysis of the interviews for this research question revealed that the teachers and the school principal agreed with retention for students who have not mastered grade-level academic skills. It is further determined that the teachers were not aware of research related to retention. The school principal conveyed that she has not read any of the research personally, but she is aware of it from discussions that she has had with colleagues. She explained that the latest that she had heard is, “retention has been shown not to be advantageous to the child in the long run. Based upon her responses, I concluded that she gauged her beliefs regarding retention by the few successes that she has witnessed in her school or heard parents discuss. Faye discussed a student she taught during her tenure as a second grade teacher. Tyrone (pseudonym) had been retained in second grade. He was placed in Faye’s class to repeat the second grade. She stated, “Tyrone made Honor Roll that year. I was able to call his name [during the award ceremony] and see that boy bounce across the stage!”

It is important to add here that Faye stated that she had not followed the academic progress of the students previously taught, nor the students within Valley Elementary School who had been retained to determine if they have been successful as students or have graduated from high school. She stated, “I don’t know how Tyrone is doing now.”

Research Question Two

The second research question posed in this study was, “What are the social, emotional, and psychological outcomes of retention?”

The interviewed teachers and the school principal agreed that there were negative social, emotional, and psychological outcomes related to retaining students. Cathy described the students in her classroom who have previous retentions as having “more of an attitude.” She added, “Overall, it’s just behavioral. I see behavior problems with the students who are retained. I think it’s because they are older, more grown than the other students in the classroom. They show out more.” Emma indicated that her experiences with social, emotional, and psychological outcomes appear to be aligned with the home environment. She clarified by explaining, “Some children just do not come to school enough to master objectives. If they are not at school the day that I introduce a new objective, then they are lost. I have to stop and try to reteach just that one student. For some reason, that makes a big difference in the way that student learns that skill.” She further stated that she believes the home environment always makes a difference in the student’s behavior in the classroom. Emma concluded, “Children who come from a home environment that does not value education seem to be more of a behavior problem.” She added, “a teacher can determine the value of education within the home through “parent

conferences, if the child attends school regularly and if the child arrives on time every day.”

Conversely, Ann claimed that she has noticed more “confidence” with her kindergarten students who have been retained. The interview with Ann revealed a strong belief that grade retention was a positive event for a student. When asked if she had knowledge of research regarding grade retention, she stated, “I am not familiar with it”.

Research Question Three

The third research question posed in this study was, “What are the academic outcomes of retention?”

The teachers and the principal stated that students who have been retained are academically successful the next year. Ann discussed a student who had been in her kindergarten class several years ago. The student was, “...developmentally delayed, and immature.” She added that she knew that she was giving the child more attention than would be given in first grade. Therefore, she talked with the parent about retaining the child in kindergarten to allow more time to “mature and master skills.” She concluded by stating, “The child did indeed do better that second year in kindergarten and succeeded as a first grader.”

The interview data for academic outcomes was limited during the analysis. Two of the teachers interviewed were first year teachers. Therefore, they did not have the experience of determining if retaining students affected academics. However, Cathy stated that she has 3 students in her classroom who are repeating first grade. She concluded that they are not ahead of the other students and their “academic skills” are

very weak. She stated, “I have to spend extra time every day working with them and a few other students who are weak.” She added, “I feel like I have to constantly stay right there with them to make sure that they are getting their work done. I feel like they have improved as far as ability goes, but they won’t do the work if I’m not right there. I have to give them incentives, put charts on their desks, or give them stickers. I don’t think they work up to their potential.”

Research Question Four

The fourth research question posed in this study was, “What are the demographics of retention?”

When asked about the demographics of the students they had retained, the teachers and the principal unanimously stated that the majority of the students they had retained were male. Since Johnson Public School District is 97.9% African American and Valley Elementary School is 98.4% African American, it was not surprising that each teacher who admitted to having retained students, said that the students they had retained were African American.

Ann informed me that she has retained very few girls during her teaching career. She expressed that “it seems like when a girl is retained, she will try harder the next year. Sometimes the boys give up and don’t do any better. It seems like you have a better chance with girls.” Donna stated that since this is her first year as a teacher, she has not retained any students. Interestingly, she acknowledged, “all of the students in my class that are failing right now are boys. I have never thought about that.”

Research Question Five

The fifth research question posed in this study was, “What are the incidences of retention?”

The teachers and the principal were not aware of the incidences of retention. When asked a probing question regarding the incidence of retention, Cathy stated, “I’m not sure what the national statistics are, but I feel sure that it is probably mostly Black males. I think that because you usually hear about the difficulties that Black males have with education.” The remaining teachers simply stated that they did not know.

Research Question Six

The sixth research question posed in this study was, “What are the drop-out issues?”

Many of the teachers who were interviewed and the school principal were not aware of the correlation between grade retention and dropping out of school. Faye, the school principal, expressed, “...retention has been shown not to be advantageous to the child in the long run. That’s the latest that I’ve heard as it relates to what happens to children who are retained.” She added, “In most cases, if a child is retained in kindergarten or first grade, he does well the rest of the way out.”

The teacher participants were not aware of research regarding grade retention. When asked about the drop-out issue, the teachers overwhelmingly stated that it was a high school problem. Emma emphatically stated, “Elementary teachers who teach the lower grades have to focus on teaching the foundation skills to each child. The high

schools should focus on making sure their students have the necessary classes to graduate!”

Research Question Seven

The seventh research question posed in this study was, “What are the roles of the school principal?”

The teachers offered support and praise for the school principal, Faye. They stated that she keeps a check on the academic progress of the students. Cathy added that one of the most difficult tasks of teaching is the overwhelming amount of paperwork. She stated, “having a principal like Faye makes it a little easier. She [Faye] explains what has to be completed and reminds us to do it. She also volunteers her time to help us when we feel like we can’t get it all done.”

The interview with Faye indicated that the role of the school principal has become stressful relating to assessment and accountability. She maintained that there are definitely more positives than negatives to the job. Faye added, “seeing the smiles on their faces in the mornings, receiving the hugs, having a child that’s angry and upset, and being able to talk to him, and have him realize what he could have or should have done better, is very rewarding on a daily basis.” Faye stated that the main role of the school principal is to be an instructional leader. She explained, “I do this by establishing a vision and mission that merge together. To carry this out, I have to make sure that the school is a place where children can come first and foremost to be safe, happy, and well educated. They need to be loved, and the grown people around them have to be passionate about children and their well-being.”

Research Question Eight

The eighth research question posed in this study was, “What are suggested alternatives to retention?”

The interviewed teachers offered many ideas as alternatives to retention. They discussed the academic interventions that they conduct in their classrooms. The teachers described their interventions as working one-on-one with the students or working with small groups of students who have similar academic needs. As stated by Ann, “this just encourages the child to do something they can be successful with.” Ann added that sometimes she uses a variety of websites designed to help young children with various academic skills. She declared, “but we don’t have many computers in the classroom.”

Donna stated that she seeks the assistance of the parents to help their children at home. She said,

the main problems that we have in here [first grade classroom] are with reading. So I type the weekly stories and send them home for the parents to read with the child. Then the parents sign to prove they have read the story with the child. That way I don’t have to send textbooks home. I read every morning with my lower performing students. Also, I have students from a local college assigned to come and read to the children.

Betty would like to see Johnson Public School District initiate a transition class. She stated that some kindergarten children master the skills for the first semester. However, during the second semester the children do not grasp the advanced skills of learning the letter sounds and preparing to learn to read. Therefore, rather than “have the

children repeat the whole year of kindergarten, there should be a class that would begin with the second semester of kindergarten, then move into first grade skills. Then, if the child excels, he may be ready to go on to second grade. That would depend on the student.”

The Three Tier Process was mentioned as another alternative by all of the participants. The Three Tier Process was developed and implemented by the Mississippi Department of Education for its public schools. The Three Tier Process requires schools to have Teacher Support Teams (TST) to analyze the academic or behavioral data of students who are failing or have been retained. When asked about improving academic performance of low-performing students, Emma proclaimed, “we have interventions, it’s called a tier process. I have a tier three student. I pull her aside and work with her for thirty minutes every day that I can. It is supposed to be everyday, but I can’t find thirty free minutes everyday. I read a story to her and ask her to retell the story in her own words.”

Emerging Themes

Several other themes emerged during the analysis of the interview data. These themes are consistent with the views of the majority of the teachers. Therefore, the researcher concluded that it was necessary to discuss these themes further.

Low Academic Performance

A student who has not mastered the required skills for the grade level was the major description of a low-performing student from the teachers who were interviewed.

Betty stated, “They can’t sit still and listen, they can’t concentrate long enough to finish a simple task, they are not familiar with books at all, and they have very low background experiences.” Betty maintained that when she begins to teach a new story, she starts out by asking for background experiences to, “tie the story to prior knowledge.” She declared, “Many of the children just haven’t had them [experiences].”

Emma described a low-performing student as, “One who struggles because they cannot read. And if they can call words, they don’t comprehend what they are reading.” She added that she has a difficult time teaching students to comprehend what they have read. She related the struggle to “low vocabulary”. She explained further, “By the time children get to second grade, they should have enough vocabulary words to be able to express themselves. Many of the children here don’t come from homes where they have been talked to or read to. They don’t have enough words in their vocabulary.”

The teachers expressed that they do not want to promote low-performing students to the next grade level. Each teacher stated that the low-performing student would have a higher chance of success if they repeated their current grade. Betty stated, “If I keep the low-performing students in kindergarten another year, there will be a better chance of them passing first grade. If I send them on to first grade, they will be unsuccessful all year and fail first grade.”

Immaturity

The concept of immaturity encompasses a wide variety of behaviors that teachers discussed during the interviews. Betty stated, “The children I have retained during my twenty-eight years of teaching has been based mostly on immaturity. In kindergarten,

most of them didn't know the letters, or didn't know the sounds. They were not ready to read yet."

Ann discussed a student who she wanted to retain because he was "too immature." She explained, "I had second thoughts because his parents told me that they would work on the letters and numbers, and he's going to grow up during the summer." Therefore, Ann agreed to promote the student to the next grade level. However, as soon as school resumed, she discovered that he was not able to master the simple skills of a beginning first grade student. Consequently, he failed first grade.

Summary of Interview Data

Low academic performance and immaturity were important considerations when the teachers in this study made a decision about grade retention. I found it interesting that the teachers did not mention district policy that has been established regarding promotion and retention of students. The teachers did not determine the socio-economic status of the students as a cause for student failure. When the data were analyzed, socio-economic status did not emerge in the teacher interviews. However, it is important to emphasize this stark conflict with previous research that has been conducted. The researcher concludes that the teachers have bought into the school principal's philosophy that "socioeconomics is important, but it is not a major factor in determining the overall academic success of students at Valley Elementary School."

Survey

This chapter further provides response rates and results of the data analysis.

Response rates were presented in numbers and percentages for the instrument used in this study and were broken down by category. Results are organized in accordance with the research questions used.

The teachers participating in this study taught students enrolled in kindergarten, 1st grade and 2nd grade (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2
Grade Level Taught

Grade Level	Number	Percent
Kindergarten	4	40.0
1 st Grade	5	50.0
2 nd Grade	1	10.0

Table 4.3 is an examination of the teachers' tenure at their current teaching position.

Table 4.3

Years at Current Level

Number of Years	Number of Teachers	Percent
1	3	30.0
4	2	20.0
5	1	10.0
6	2	20.0
15	1	10.0
26	1	10.0

The teachers were asked to provide information on the number of boys they retained in their grades (Table 4.4).

Table 4.4

Number of Boys Retained

Boys Retained	Number of Teachers	Percent
None	3	30.0
1	1	10.0
2	2	20.0
No Response	4	40.0

The teachers were asked to provide information on the number of girls they retained in their grades (Table 4.5).

Table 4.5

Number of Girls Retained

Girls Retained	Number of Teachers	Percent
None	3	30.0
1	3	30.0
No Response	4	40.0

The teachers were asked to provide information on whether any of their family members were retained in their grades (Table 4.6).

Table 4.6

Past Experience with Family Member Retained

Family Members Retained	Number of Teachers	Percent
Yes	7	70.0
No	3	30.0

The teachers were asked to provide information on their familiarity with retention research (Table 4.7).

Table 4.7

Familiarity with Retention Research

Opinion	Number of Teachers	Percent
Yes	3	30.0
No	7	70.0

The teachers were asked to provide information on how they felt about retaining students in order to assist in raising the children's level of academic achievement (Table 4.8).

Table 4.8

Teachers' Perception about Retention as an Aid
to Raise Children's Level of Academic Achievement

Opinion	Number of Teachers	Percent
Strongly Agree	7	70.0
Agree	3	30.0

The teachers were asked to provide information on how they felt about retaining students in order to assist in preventing the children's future academic failure (Table 4.9).

Table 4.9

Teachers' Perception about Retention as an Aid to Prevent Future Academic Failure

Opinion	Number of Teachers	Percent
Strongly Agree	6	60.0
Agree	2	20.0
Disagree	2	20.0

The teachers were asked to provide information on whether they felt a low opinion about their ability would result from promoting children with low academic ability (Table 4.10).

Table 4.10

Teachers' Perception about Retention Whether a Low Opinion of Their Ability Would Result from Promoting Children with Low Academic Performance

Opinion	Number of Teachers	Percent
Strongly Agree	4	40.0
Agree	2	20.0
Disagree	3	30.0
No Response	1	10.0

The teachers were asked to provide information on whether they felt that grade retention injures children's self-esteem (Table 4.11).

Table 4.11

Teachers' Perception about Whether Grade Retention Injures Children's Self-Esteem

Opinion	Number of Teachers	Percent
Agree	4	40.0
Strongly Disagree	2	20.0
Disagree	4	40.0

The teachers were asked to provide information on whether they felt grade retention occurring in kindergarten and 1st grade was most effective (Table 4.12).

Table 4.12

Teachers' Perception about Whether Grade Retention Occurring in Kindergarten or 1st Grade is Most Effective

Opinion	Number of Teachers	Percent
Strongly Agree	5	50.0
Agree	4	40.0
Disagree	1	10.0

The teachers were asked to provide information on whether they felt grade retention was effective for boys (Table 4.13).

Table 4.13

Teachers' Perception about Whether Grade Retention is Effective for Boys

Opinion	Number of Teachers	Percent
Strongly Agree	2	20.0
Agree	5	50.0
Strongly Disagree	1	10.0
Disagree	2	20.0

The teachers were asked to provide information on whether they felt grade retention was effective for girls (Table 4.14).

Table 4.14

Teachers' Perception about Whether Grade Retention is Effective for Girls

Opinion	Number of Teachers	Percent
Strongly Agree	2	20.0
Agree	4	40.0
Strongly Disagree	1	10.0
Disagree	3	30.0

The teachers were asked to provide information on whether they felt that retained children exhibited more behavior problems than non-retained children (Table 4.15).

Table 4.15

Teachers' Perception about Whether Retained Children Exhibit More Behavior Problems than Non-Retained Children

Opinion	Number of Teachers	Percent
Strongly Agree	2	20.0
Agree	3	30.0
Strongly Disagree	1	10.0
Disagree	4	40.0

The teachers were asked to provide information on whether they felt that grade retention provides immature children an opportunity to catch up to peers (Table 4.16).

Table 4.16

Teachers' Perception about Whether Grade Retention Provides Immature Children an Opportunity to Catch Up to Peers

Opinion	Number of Teachers	Percent
Strongly Agree	2	20.0
Agree	6	60.0
Strongly Disagree	1	10.0
No Response	1	10.0

The teachers were asked to provide information on whether they felt that grade retention is the only alternative when students do not successfully master grade level material (Table 4.17).

Table 4.17

Teachers' Perception about Whether Grade Retention is Only Alternative
When Students Do Not Successfully Master Grade Level Material

Opinion	Number of Teachers	Percent
Strongly Agree	1	10.0
Agree	2	20.0
Disagree	7	70.0

The teachers were asked to provide information on whether they felt that students who made passing grades while functioning below grade level should be retained (Table 4.18).

Table 4.18

Teachers' Perception about Whether Students Who Make Passing Grades
While Functioning Below Grade Level Should Be Retained

Opinion	Number of Teachers	Percent
Strongly Agree	1	10.0
Agree	4	40.0
Strongly Disagree	1	10.0
Disagree	4	40.0

Qualitative Analysis

Five teachers and the principal were examined qualitatively to determine their views and their orientations regarding retention of students. They did not have a great deal of familiarity with current research on grade retention. However, the principal and

one teacher were aware that retained students are more likely to drop out of school and be unsuccessful. The principal stated that she has not taken the time to follow the students through their schooling to determine if they were successful or unsuccessful. The interview participants five out of the six stated that they had seen success with retained students. Conversely, they admitted that students in their classes who had been previously retained displayed inappropriate behaviors and reduced self-esteem. They further agreed that the retained students were not performing at higher academic levels.

The teachers were also asked to provide their beliefs' regarding implementation of grade retention policies in school districts. The following is a list of their perceptions, beliefs, and recommendations:

Teachers' Beliefs Regarding Grade Retention

1. Sometimes it is necessary and beneficial for younger students. It is a good thing for students who have a late birthday and are failing.
2. It is a good idea if it provides the child with a better opportunity to succeed and meet the state objectives and benchmarks.
3. If a child is lacking mastery and emotionally and behaviorally immature in grades kindergarten through 1st grade. This will help him/her catch up with the more mature peers.
4. If children understand the basics between kindergarten through 2nd grade, they will be successful in the higher grades.
5. The longer help is put off for the child, the farther behind academically the child becomes.

6. The child should be the focus of attention, not the parents or other siblings. The teacher should work with the child to the end, even though it may be apparent that the child is likely to be retained.
7. If a student is behind academically after intervention, he/she should be retained.
8. School districts should implement a TST process when considering retention. This requires a 3-tier procedure based on performance to be initiated before a child is retained.
9. In order to retain a child, parents must be notified by letter. The teacher must implement interventions for that child for 30 minutes a day to try to correct current problems.
10. If retention is deemed necessary, parents should be informed every step of the way. Documentation should be provided as evidence.
11. Social promotion should not be a consideration. There is less of a social stigma attached to retention in grades K-2.
12. It is beneficial for the students who are working hard, but unable to grasp the necessary skills.
13. It would be an injustice to promote a child who has not mastered the required objectives. The child will get further behind and feel like a failure because of the inability to meet the required objectives.
14. It would be devastating for the unmotivated child.

15. Retention is not good for some transitional children, children with ADHD, and dyslexic children.
16. Intervention and careful monitoring is a successful alternative to retention.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter is a presentation of the Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations that resulted from this study. This study sought to determine what the (volunteer participants) teachers and principal at Valley Elementary School believed regarding grade retention and alternatives for retention or social promotion. In order to provide guidance and support to school districts, it is important to understand the beliefs that elementary teachers have pertaining to grade retention and understand why they continue to practice it. The information derived from this research will add to the body of knowledge available for educators and administrators to consider when making a decision that will impact the life and future of children. It will enable professionals to examine their own beliefs when making choices designed to improve the academic performance of students.

Summary

The following research questions guided the focus of this study:

1. What is the nature of teachers' beliefs about grade retention?
2. What are the social, emotional, and psychological outcomes of retention?
3. What are the academic outcomes of retention?
4. What are the demographics of retention?

5. What are the incidences of retention?
6. What are the drop-out issues related to retention?
7. What are the roles of the school principal?
8. What are the suggested alternatives to retention?

Research question one examined the nature of teachers' beliefs about grade retention. Based on the responses from the questionnaire, almost three quarters of the teachers had personal experience with retention, and therefore were familiar with the emotional, psychological, and social impact of these practices on the children and their families. Approximately 70.0% indicated that they had family members who were retained at some point. All of the teachers were in agreement that retaining students had some benefits. They believed that retention had the potential to assist in raising the children's level of academic achievement.

About 80.0% of the teachers believed that retaining students could prevent the children's future academic failure. A small number of teachers, however, did not share the same sentiments. Approximately 20.0% disagreed that retaining students had the potential to assist in preventing the children's future academic failure. Statements like, "...I knew that the attention the child was getting in kindergarten was not going to be given in first grade, so I talked with the parent about giving this child another year in kindergarten. Then he would not fail first grade" solidify the belief at Valley Elementary School that retaining students could prevent future academic failure.

Only a small number of teachers kept abreast of the research relating to retention. Approximately 30.0% had some familiarity with retention research. The other 70.0% did

not have much knowledge about retention research. More than half of the teachers believed that their reputation would suffer if they promoted children who did not achieve the required academic skill level. About 60.0% agreed that a low opinion about their ability would result from promoting children with low academic ability. Almost one-third of the teachers did not have this same guilt about promoting children. Approximately 30.0% disagreed that a low opinion about their ability would result from promoting children with low academic ability. Half of the teachers support promoting students who performed below grade level, regardless of their grades. About 50.0% agreed that students who made passing grades while functioning below grade level should be retained.

Research question two asked, “What are the social, emotional, and psychological outcomes of retention?” More than half of the teachers did not believe that retention affected the children’s self-esteem. About 60.0% disagreed that that grade retention injures children’s self-esteem. However, a number of teachers shared the view that children’s self esteem would be affected by retention. Approximately 40.0% agreed that that grade retention injures children’s self-esteem. Half of the group of teachers who participated in this study believed that retained children exhibited more behavior problems than non-retained children. The other half differed in their opinion, not supporting the argument that retained children exhibited more behavior problems than non-retained children.

Research question three asked, “What are the academic outcomes of retention?” The majority of the teachers believed that if retention was to occur, it should occur in

kindergarten or the 1st grade. About 90.0% agreed that grade retention occurring in kindergarten and 1st grade was most effective. Only a small number of teachers opposed this view. Approximately 10.0% disagreed that grade retention occurring in kindergarten and 1st grade would be most effective. There did not appear to be a difference in the views of the teachers regarding the effectiveness of retention for boys and girls. About 70.0% agreed that grade retention was effective for boys. About 60.0% agreed that grade retention was effective for girls. About one-third of the teachers had reservations about the effectiveness of retention for both boys and girls. Between 30.0 % and 40.0% disagreed that grade retention was effective for boys or girls. A large number of teachers, however, believed that retention had benefits for immature children. About 80.0% agreed that grade retention provides immature children an opportunity to catch up to peers. Only a small number, about 10.0% disagreed that grade retention provides immature children an opportunity to catch up to peers

Research question four asked, “What are the demographics of retention?” The teachers participating in this study taught students enrolled in kindergarten, 1st grade, and 3rd grade. Most of the teachers taught 1st grade teacher or kindergarten; 10.0% of the group taught 3rd grade. Half of the teachers had five years or less in their current position. The other half had between 6-26 years of experience in their current position. It does not appear that there was a gender preference for retention from their responses on the survey. The teachers did not discriminate based on gender regarding the students they placed in retention. The teachers’ practices relating to retention based on gender seemed to be balanced with 30.0% indicated that they did not retain any boys in their grades, and

30.0% indicated that they did not retain any girls in their grades. About 30.0% indicated that they had retained a small number of boys and girls. About 30.0% indicated that they had retained one girl.

Research question five asked, “What are the incidences of retention?”

Approximately 30.0% of the teachers involved in this study indicated that they have recommended retention for students in their classes.

Research question six asked, “What are the dropout issues related to retention?”

The main issue related to retention is the willingness and the ability of the school to provide the child with a better opportunity to succeed and meet the state objectives and benchmarks.

Research question seven asked, “What are the roles of the school principal?”

If retention is deemed necessary, parents should be informed every step of the way.

Documentation should be provided as evidence, and the principal should be involved at an early stage in all negotiations with the parents and teachers. The principal should oversee the progress of such a critical decision that could have long-term effects on the children. Such decisions should not be taken lightly, and should involve input from several sources including the parents.

Research question eight asked, “What are the suggested alternatives to

retention?” About one-third of the teachers surveyed believed that there was no other choice available for handling under-achieving children. About 30.0% agreed that grade retention is the only alternative when students do not successfully master grade level material. More than two-thirds of them felt that there had to be other alternatives

available. About 70.0% disagreed that grade retention is the only alternative when students do not successfully master grade level material. Intervention and careful monitoring are successful alternatives to retention.

Conclusions

Educators have wrestled for years with the challenge of providing adequate academic opportunities for all students because of the high dropout rates and poor academic performance of their students. Over the years, retaining students in the same grade became a widely used practice in many school districts, affecting more than 70% of all children. This practice was implemented because it was felt that many students were unable to pass the required exams to be admitted into high school. However, Goodlad (1954) found that in-grade retention was not an effective remedy for poor academic performance. Social promotion was introduced to avoid addressing this issue. After President Clinton called for an end to social promotion (Leckrone & Griffith, 2006), many states developed policies to address this issue and began to set clear standards for core academics at each grade level and to measure student progress toward those standards.

This study examined the views of teachers in Mississippi regarding the practice of retention in their schools as they struggle to adequately educate their students and prevent future school dropouts. The majority of the teachers rejected the concept of social promotion that occurs when students are promoted without achieving the mandated academic standards for promotion. They prefer to retain students as a remedy for correcting academic failure, contrary to what some researchers, like Shepard and Smith

(1989), who decried the fact that schools are continuing the practice of retention despite research findings that indicate little or no academic achievement is gained through retention. Most of the teachers disagreed with the reports by Black (2004) that retention fails to improve low achievement, fails to inspire students to buckle down and behave better, and fails to develop students' social adjustment and self-concept.

Unlike Alexander, Entwisle, and Dauber (2003) who stated that teachers often view retention as a kindness to students who are too young, immature, or lagging behind academically, the teachers in this study believe that retaining students who are too young, immature, or lagging behind academically is a necessity, and they agree with Shepard & Smith (1987) that retaining students may also be an effective solution to prevent future academic failure.

Teacher beliefs regarding retention signify that it offers students the chance to become better students by relearning and acquiring new skills, as they grow emotionally and psychologically. Unlike other researchers' views, these teachers do not view or use the threat of retention as an incentive for students to study so they'll be promoted with their same-age classmates. They genuinely feel that there are some students who need additional assistance to maintain academic proficiency, and retention offers the opportunity to achieve this. This view is consistent with Witmer et al. (2004), who reported that the decision to retain students is often made to remediate academic difficulties, even though those researchers did not believe that retaining students is an effective educational intervention strategy for long-term academic improvement. Most of the teachers in this study, unlike Jimerson et al. (2006), believed that retention was an

effective method for reversing academic failure or behavioral difficulties. Even though there has been much evidence provided to indicate that retention has numerous harmful effects on students, academically and socially, emotionally, and psychologically, the percentage of retained students continues to increase (Jimerson, 1999). Elementary teachers in this study overwhelmingly endorsed retention as they believe that student developmental readiness is contingent upon the extra opportunities for academic advancement provided through retention. They feel that retention policies provide an avenue for them to correct academic deficiencies among young children.

Implications

The information derived from this research will add to the body of knowledge available for educators and administrators to consider when making a decision that will impact the lives and future of children. The information will enable professionals to examine their own beliefs when making choices designed to improve the academic performance of students.

Recommendations

Educators are challenged to find creative ways to reduce school dropout rates and promote academic performance among low performing students. Teachers should be encouraged to participate in workshops or conferences that focus on research relating to retention or alternative strategies for handling students who are failing academically. Teachers must continue to experiment with strategies that show promise to positively impact student achievement. It is recommended that a study be conducted to examine the

impact on student performance of retention policies and other alternative policies of student academic, social, emotional, and psychological performance. This would enable educators to determine which strategies would work best for correcting students' deficiencies that could hinder learning. It is also recommended that research be conducted to examine and compare the progress of failing students who were retained and those who were exposed to other intervention methods.

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APPENDIX A
IRB PERMISSION



February 8, 2008

Charles Smith
890 Old Rice Road
Madison, MS 39110

RE: IRB Study #08-025: A Case Study Examining Teacher Beliefs Toward in Grade Retention in A K-2 School

Dear Mr. Smith:

The above referenced project was reviewed and approved via administrative review on 2/8/2008 in accordance with 45 CFR 48.101(b)(2). Continuing review is not necessary for this project. However, any modification to the project must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. Any failure to adhere to the approved protocol could result in suspension or termination of your project. The IRB reserves the right, at anytime during the project period, to observe you and the additional researchers on this project.

Please refer to your IRB number (#08-025) when contacting our office regarding this application.

Thank you for your cooperation and good luck to you in conducting this research project. If you have questions or concerns, please contact irb@research.msstate.edu or 325-3294.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Katherine Crowley".

Katherine Crowley
Assistant IRB Compliance Administrator

cc: Dr. Jerry Mathews

Office for Regulatory Compliance

P.O. Box 5025 • 24 Morgan Street • MailStop 2505 • Mississippi State, MS 39762 • (662) 325-3294 • FAX (662) 325-8776

APPENDIX B
RECRUITMENT SCRIPT FOR PILOT STUDY

Script for Pilot Study at Mountain View Elementary School (pseudonym)

Good afternoon teachers:

My name is Charles Edward Smith. I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Program at Mississippi State University. My dissertation research study is titled, “*A Case Study Examining Teachers’ Beliefs Toward Grade Retention in a K-2 School*”. The purpose of my research study is to examine teachers’ belief toward grade retention in a K-2 school. The study will also focus on how teachers acquire their beliefs regarding grade retention and their knowledge of research regarding the effectiveness of retention.

I have obtained permission from the Johnson Public School District (pseudonym), and your principal, to pilot my research survey instrument here at Mountain View Elementary School. The research survey instrument is divided into two-parts: the Teacher Opinion Survey (TOS) and Personal Experiences and Retention Practices (PERP). The TOS consists of eleven belief statements. The PERP solicits your professional information in regards to your experiences and retention practices.

Your participation in this pilot study is voluntary. I will give you a packet containing a *Teacher Consent Form, Teacher Opinion Survey, and Personal Experiences and Retention Practices form*. Please take a few minutes to review each form. If you are willing to voluntarily participate in the pilot of my research survey instrument, please complete the *Teacher Consent Form, Teacher Opinion Survey Form, and the Personal Experiences and Retention Practices forms*.

You may withdraw from the pilot study at any time, or refuse to answer specific questions that you do not desire to answer. The information you provide will be confidential. The names of the school district, school, principal, or teachers will not be used in the research study. Students will not be used in the research study. Pseudonyms will be used to maintain the confidentiality of everyone involved. There are no anticipated risks involved with this research study.

Please insert the completed forms in the locked box that I have left in the front office. The box is labeled: *In Grade Retention Pilot Study forms*. I will return tomorrow, after school, to retrieve the locked box.

The survey forms will be destroyed after my research study is completed.

If you have any additional questions or comments, you may contact me by telephone or email. My contact information is located on the *Teacher Consent Form*. My dissertation director, Dr. Jerry Mathews, is also listed on the Teacher Consent Form as a contact person, if you need further information.

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR PILOT STUDY

Teacher Consent Form
Pilot Study

Dear Teacher,

Educators are constantly faced with the decision of whether to retain, or socially promote students who have not mastered the required standards. There are many reasons why teachers make their final decision to promote or retain students. The purpose of this research study is to learn more about teacher beliefs toward in grade retention in a K-2 school.

If you agree to participate in this pilot study, you will be asked to complete this Teacher Consent Form, the Teacher Opinion Survey (TOS), and Personal Experiences and Retention Practices (PERP) forms.

Participation in this pilot study is voluntary. You may withdraw from the pilot study at any time, or refuse to answer specific questions that you do not desire to answer. The information you provide will be confidential. The names of the school district, school, principal, or teachers will not be used in the research study. Students will not be used in the research study. Pseudonyms will be used to maintain the confidentiality of everyone involved. There are no anticipated risks involved with this research study.

If you should have any questions about this project, please feel free to contact me, Charles Smith, at 601 842-4883 or by email at chsmith@jackson.k12.ms.us. You may also contact my dissertation director, Dr. Jerry Mathews, at 662-325-7270, or by email at jmathews@colled.msstate.edu. For more information about human participation in research, please feel free to contact the Mississippi State University Regulatory Compliance Office at (662) 325-3294.

You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Teacher's Signature

Date

Investigator's Signature

Date

APPENDIX D
TEACHER OPINION SURVEY

Teacher Opinion Survey

Directions for completing survey instrument:

Please read each belief statement carefully. Indicate your answer by placing an “X” in one of the choice boxes for each question.

SA.....Strongly Agree
 A.....Agree
 SD.....Strongly Disagree
 D.....Disagree

	BELIEF STATEMENTS	SA	A	SD	D
1.	Grade retention provides children an opportunity to raise their current level of academic achievement.				
2.	Grade retention provides children an opportunity to prevent future academic failure.				
3.	If I were to send students with low academic performance to the next grade level, their teachers may form a low opinion of my teaching abilities.				
4.	Grade retention injures children’s self-esteem				
5.	Retention is most effective when it takes place in kindergarten or first grade.				
6.	Retention is an effective strategy for boys.				
7.	Retained students are more likely to exhibit behavior problems than non-retained classmates.				
8.	Retention provides immature children an opportunity to catch up to their peers.				
9.	Retention is my only alternative when students do not successfully master grade level material by the end of the school year.				
10.	Students who make passing grades, but are working below level, should be retained.				
11.	Retention is an effective strategy for girls.				

APPENDIX E
PERSONAL EXPERIENCES AND RETENTION PRACTICES

Personal Experiences and Retention Practices

1. What grade do you currently teach? _____

2. Number of years at the current grade level? _____

3. If you were teaching last school year, how many students in your class were retained (by gender)?

Boys _____ Girls _____

4. Were you, or a family member ever retained? _____
(If yes, please describe)

5. Are you familiar with current research on grade retention? _____
(If yes, please describe)

6. Describe your beliefs regarding in grade retention.

APPENDIX F
RECRUITMENT SCRIPT FOR RESEARCH STUDY

Script for Research Study at Valley Elementary School (pseudonym)

Good afternoon teachers:

My name is Charles Edward Smith. I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Program at Mississippi State University. My dissertation research study is titled, "A Case Study Examining Teachers' Beliefs Toward Grade Retention in a K-2 School". The purpose of my research study is to examine teachers' belief toward grade retention in a K-2 school. The study will also focus on how teachers acquire their beliefs regarding grade retention and their knowledge of research and their knowledge of research regarding the effectiveness of retention.

I have obtained permission from the Johnson Public School District (pseudonym), and your principal, to conduct my research study here at Valley Elementary School. The research study will consist of data collections through completion a two-part survey: the *Teacher Opinion Survey (TOS)*, *Personal Experiences and Retention Practices (PERP)*, and face-to-face interviews with consenting teachers and the principal. The TOS consists of eleven belief statements. The PERP solicits your professional information in regards to your experiences and retention practices. The interviews will be conducted to obtain more individualized in-depth, detailed teachers' beliefs regarding grade retention in a K-2 school.

Participation in this research study is voluntary. I will give each of you a packet containing a Teacher Consent Form, Teacher Opinion Survey, and Personal Experiences and Retention Practices form. Please take a few minutes to review each form. If you are willing to participate in my research study, please complete the *Teacher Consent Form*, *Teacher Opinion Survey Form*, and the *Personal Experiences and Retention Practices forms*. Additionally, if you are willing to voluntarily participate in a confidential face-to-face interview, please indicate your decision in the space provided at the bottom of the *Teacher Consent Form*. If you agree to the interview, you will be contacted at the time that you have indicated on the *Teacher Consent Form*. The interviews will be audio-taped.

You may withdraw from the research study at any time, or refuse to answer specific questions that you do not desire to answer. The information you provide will be confidential. The names of the school district, school, principal, or teachers will not be used in the research study. Students will not be used in the research study. Pseudonyms will be used to maintain the confidentiality of everyone involved. There are no anticipated risks involved with this research study.

Please insert the completed forms in the locked box that I have left in the front office. The box is labeled: *In Grade Retention Research Study forms*. I will return tomorrow, after school, to retrieve the locked box.

The survey forms and interview data will be shredded after my research study is completed.

If you have any additional questions or comments, you may contact me by telephone or email. My contact information is located on the *Teacher Consent Form*. My dissertation director, Dr. Jerry Mathews, is also listed on the *Teacher Consent Form* as a contact person, if you need further information.

Thank you in advance for agreeing to participate in my research study.

APPENDIX G
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Teacher Consent Form
Research Study

Dear Teacher,

Educators are constantly faced with the decision of whether to retain, or socially promote students who have not mastered the required standards. There are many reasons why teachers make their final decision to promote or retain students. The purpose of this research study is to learn more about teacher beliefs toward in grade retention in a K-2 school.

If you participate in this research study, you will be asked to complete this Teacher Consent Form, the Teacher Opinion Survey (TOS), and Personal Experiences and Retention Practices (PERP) forms. In addition to the survey, the researcher would like to interview several teachers. The interviews will be audio-taped. If you are willing to participate in an interview, please complete the bottom of this form accordingly.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw from the research study at any time, or refuse to answer specific questions that you do not want to answer. The information you provide will be confidential. The names of the school district, school, principal, or teachers will not be used in the research study. Students will not be used in the research study. Pseudonyms will be used to maintain the confidentiality of everyone involved. There are no anticipated risks involved with this research study.

If you should have any questions about this project, please feel free to contact me, Charles Smith, at 601 842-4883 or by email at ces1492@bellsouth.net. You may also contact my dissertation director, Dr. Jerry Mathews, at 662-325-7270, or by email at jmathews@colled.msstate.edu. For more information about human participation in research, please feel free to contact the Mississippi State University Regulatory Compliance Office at (662) 325-3294.

You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Teacher's Signature

Date

Investigator's Signature

Date

Please indicate below your willingness to participate in an interview with the investigator.

_____ Yes, I will participate in the interview.

_____ No, I do not wish to participate

Contact Phone Number: _____

Best time to call: _____

APPENDIX H
PERMISSION TO USE TOS/PERP

December 20, 2007

Dear Mr. Smith,

You have my permission to utilize and/or amend the Teacher Opinion Survey and Personal Experiences and Retention Practices for the purpose of doing your research. I would appreciate receiving a copy of the amended instruments and a summary of your findings when your study is complete.

Best wishes on a successfully study.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Anita Ede".

Anita Ede PhD
Northeastern State University
3100 East New Orleans
Broken Arrow, OK 74136

APPENDIX I
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR TEACHERS

TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Name: _____ **School:** _____ **Date:** _____

Ethnicity: _____ **Gender:** _____ **Age:** _____

Years in Teaching: _____ **Current grade level** _____ **Years in grade level:** _____

Degree: _____ **Concentration:** _____ **Certification:** _____

- 1. What are your thoughts about grade retention?**
- 2. Tell me about some of the children that you have retained.**
- 3. How did you make the decision to retain those students?**
- 4. What are the characteristics of a low-performing student?**
- 5. When you have a low-performing student, what do you do to assist him/her in improving academically?**
- 6. Do you have any students in your classroom who were retained?**
- 7. Have you noticed differences academically or behaviorally with the retained students, in comparison to students who were promoted? If so, explain.**
- 8. Are you familiar with grade retention research? (Discuss)**
- 9. What are your personal views concerning social promotion?**
- 10. Do you have any additional comments about grade retention and/or social promotion that you would like to express?**

APPENDIX J

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR ADMINISTRATOR

ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Name: _____	School: _____	Date: _____
Ethnicity: _____	Gender: _____	Age: _____
Years in Teaching: _____	Years in administration: _____	
Degree: _____	Concentration: _____	

1. (a) What is it like to be an elementary school administrator today?

(b) When you selected education as a career goal, did you intend to become an elementary school administrator?
2. How many students are in your school?
3. How many certified teachers are in your school?
4. How do you share your vision for this school with your teachers?
5. How do you assist your teachers in improving student achievement?
6. Describe your perceptions of the characteristics and traits of a low-performing student.
7. What are some of the challenges of being a K-2 principal in an urban district?
8. How do you encourage parent partnerships?
9. Are you familiar with current research on grade retention? (discuss)
10. What are your thoughts concerning grade retention?