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In Retrospect: Is Youth Grade Retention Associated with Self-Esteem and Self-Efficacy in Early Adulthood?

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ABSTRACT

An abundance of research has shown that the practice of grade retention has many negative consequences for the lives of students who struggle academically. What is not readily apparent in the literature are the views of grade retention from adults who have experienced retention as youth. A total of 51 individuals (18 women, 33 men) enrolled in a post secondary institution participated in the study. The test group, those individuals who experienced grade retention, was comprised of 25 individuals, while the control group was comprised of 26 individuals. Participants were matched on age, gender, grade 12 grade point average (GPA), family structure, and family stressors. The retained group did not differ significantly from the control group on measures of self-esteem or self-efficacy. Additional analyses of the data resulted in significant correlations for the retained group, non-retained group, and the entire sample on self-esteem, subscales of the self-efficacy measure, and demographic questions. Implications and future directions are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Grade retention (also known as grade failure or being held back) is defined by Jimerson and Kaufman (2003, p.2) as “the

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practice of requiring a student who has been in a given grade level for a full school year to remain at that same grade level in the subsequent school year." Researchers have reported an estimated 5–15% of students fail every year in the United States (Anderson, Whipple & Jimerson, 2002; Hauser, 1999) which translates into an estimated 2.4 million students being retained each year (Dawson, 1998). Grade retention has received a great deal of attention by researchers due to the potential repercussions it may have on the individual. In addition to this, many researchers believe that society is impacted when students are retained. Such implications have been cited as difficulties in finding and maintaining employment, mental health problems, criminal activity and/or chemical abuse (Anderson *et al.*, 2002). A crucial piece of the puzzle that appears to be overlooked is the students' opinions regarding the learning environment. Students who struggle academically have valuable insight to share (Levine, 2001). Unfortunately, this may be overlooked and instead he/she may be retained without making necessary changes to their learning style, for example.

There are mixed findings regarding the appropriateness of grade retention. Within the available literature there exist negative and positive consequences (Dawson, 1998; Jimerson and Kaufman, 2003; Setencich, 1994). For some students grade retention appears to have a positive impact and can therefore be a useful practice. Early research with primary grade students found no negative personal or social adjustment effects on students (Chansky, 1964; Finlayson, 1975), while others have found grade retention to have a positive effect on academics (Chase, 1968; Kerzner, 1982; Leggette, 1982; McAfee, 1981; Reinherz and Griffin, 1970; Scott and Ames, 1969).

Anderson, Jimerson, and Whipple (2002) re-examined what elementary children would rank as stressful life events. Included in the children's rankings was grade retention, which the elementary children ranked as the single most stressful life event, higher than the loss of a parent. This is an alarming finding, however, hypothetical lists and situations do not necessarily give a realistic picture as to how an individual would react to a real situation. Although Anderson *et al.*'s study addresses children's attitudes regarding retention, focus needs to be placed on children who have actually experienced retention with an examination of their views of achievement and socio-emotional well-being.

To consider the impact that retention may have on young children throughout school and beyond would serve the existing research very well. In a 2003 position statement on student

grade retention and social promotion, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) indicated that grade retention has a negative impact on all areas of academic achievement as well as socio-emotional adjustment (2003). This was based on an analysis of the research completed over the last century. The most recent review on grade retention, by Jimerson and Kaufman (2003), further supports the NASP with solid evidence against the practice of grade retention. Jimerson and Kaufman addressed research around academic achievement and socio-emotional adjustment identifying negative outcomes for both areas such as, significantly weaker performance in language arts and reading, poorer social adjustment, more negative attitudes toward school, problems with attendance and increases in antisocial behaviour. Among other factors discussed in their article, Jimerson and Kaufman draw attention to one of the main concerns considered in the current study, looking beyond immediate success and considering the long-term effects of grade retention. Beyond the work of Jimerson and his colleagues, few studies have examined the long-term effects of grade retention. The available evidence concerning the long-term impact of grade retention indicates either no beneficial outcomes or a variety of negative consequences for students (Jimerson, 1999; Jimerson, Carlson, Rotert, Egeland and Stroufe, 1997; Jimerson and Kaufman, 2003; Raygor, 1972; Thomas, Armistead, Kempton, Lynch, Forhand, Nousiainen, Neighbors, Tannenbaum, 1992). What happens beyond the elementary years and adolescence? How do these individuals perceive themselves and their work as they face and manage a variety of life events? Since self-perception and academic competency are both extremely important and relevant to an individual's well being they will be addressed separately in the following sections: self-esteem and self-efficacy.

Self-Esteem

Rosenberg (1965) has provided one of the most widely known definitions of self-esteem: "the favourable or unfavourable attitude toward the self (p.15)." It is more precisely described as "an individual's sense of his or her value of worth, or the extent to which a person values, approves of, appreciates, prizes, or likes him or herself" (Blascovich and Tomaka, 1991, p. 115). Grade retention is one event that may have a negative impact on an individual's self esteem. In fact, self-esteem has been one aspect of grade retention that has received a considerable amount of

attention in research. Shepard and Smith (1990), after examining the results of more than 50 studies, concluded that children who experience grade retention were more likely to have lower self-esteem as compared to the control group. Similarly, Holmes and Matthews (1984) reported that grade retention had a negative impact on all areas of socio-emotional adjustment including self-esteem.

Furthermore, researchers examined whether the negative impact on self-esteem was short-lived or long-term. This is an important factor to consider since most students experience grade retention prior to grade three (Jimerson, 2003). At such a young age, students do not have the cognitive understanding needed to realize how the decision may affect them. According to research, however, the negative impact of grade retention on self-esteem is seen both in short-term as well as in the long-term (Anderson *et al.*, 2002; Jimerson, 2001; Jimerson *et al.*, 1997; Jimerson and Kaufman, 2003). Jimerson *et al.*'s (1997) examination of grade six students, who experienced earlier grade retention, were characterized by teachers as less confident, less self-assured, and less engaged than their academically similar peers. Thomas *et al.* (1992) concluded that four years after grade retention, a negative impact could be seen in terms of academic, emotional, as well as social functioning in students.

Beyond the elementary level there is limited research surrounding self-esteem. On the other hand, Jimerson *et al.*'s (1997) longitudinal work has demonstrated that six years after experiencing retention, the retained group was ranked by teachers and camp counsellors as having significantly lower levels of self-esteem. This difference was found when the retained group was compared to both the low-achieving promoted group and control group. A critical point in their analysis was that the differences found between the retained group and the low-achieving promoted group for emotional health could not be accounted for by initial differences in adjustment. In a follow-up analysis, Jimerson and colleagues found that at the age of sixteen, there were no significant gains in either group in terms of self-esteem (retained and low-achieving promoted).

Many researchers have reported that grade retention has long-term negative consequences on a student's self-esteem. What is unclear is whether students continue to have a diminished sense of self as adults. The focus of the current research is to determine if young adults who previously experienced grade retention continue to have a diminished self-esteem when compared to same age peers.

Academic Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy has been shown to be an important component in the development of the self (Pajares and Schunk, 2001). Perceived self-efficacy is conceptualized as “the beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (Bandura, 1997, page 36). When we consider academics, self-efficacy plays a fundamental role in a student’s experiences. If students perceive themselves as strong students academically, then they are considered to be highly self-efficacious. On the other hand, if students perceive themselves as poor students, self-efficacy is considered diminished.

According to the research on self-efficacy, it is possible that grade retention could diminish how a person perceives his/her academic ability (Holmes, 1989; Jimerson, 2001). There is very little research on self-perceptions of academic ability after experiencing grade retention. In terms of academics, most research has focused on how well students are performing, not how students perceive their own academic achievement (Hagborg, Masella, Pallading and Shepardson, 1991; Setencich, 1994; Thomas *et al.*, 1992). It is one thing to identify these students who are not performing as well as their classmates; it is another to find out what students think about their ability. Most researchers have found that after grade retention, students continue to do poorly academically in later grades (Jimerson *et al.*, 1997; Thomas *et al.*, 1992). What needs to be determined is whether they feel positively about personal achievement.

It is important to be clear how students feel about their own academic performance, particularly when they have experienced an event such as grade retention. Students’ views of their abilities have a significant impact on how well they perform and how they view their achievement (Pajares and Schunk, 2001; Zimmerman, Bandura and Martinez-Pons, 1992). Multon, Brown, and Lent (1991) conducted a meta-analysis on research conducted with elementary, high school, and college students and found that self-efficacy beliefs were positively related to academic achievement. The researchers found this to be most true for high school and college students. Multon *et al.*, also found reports of self-efficacy were higher when students responded to questions related to classroom-based indices such as grades (in comparison to standardized achievement tests).

Current Study

It has been argued that grade retention is a stressful experience that has a negative impact on the mental health of students. The purpose of the current research was to determine if grade retention has a long-term negative impact on an individual's self esteem and academic self-efficacy continuing into post-secondary educational experiences. It is important to keep in mind these students are the successes, graduating from high school and continuing their education at a university. The following two hypotheses were set for the current study: 1) retained individuals will have lower self-esteem when compared to individuals who were not retained; 2) retained individuals will possess lower academic self-efficacy compared to those individuals who did not experience grade retention.

METHOD

Participants

A total of 51 university students from Eastern Canada participated in the study. The test group was comprised of 25 individuals who experienced grade retention during their early educational experiences (between primary and grade 9). For comparison purposes, a control group was used, which was comprised of 26 individuals who had not experienced grade retention. Participants were matched for age, gender, grade 12 grade point average (GPA), family structure (i.e., marriage, separation, or divorce), and family stressors (i.e., death, illness, significant move, and job loss) based on information provided on the first demographic questionnaire. The age range of participants was 18 to 25 years, more males (33) than females (18) participated, most individuals reported intact families (parents married throughout their school experiences), and of the family stressors reported, death and/or illness of a family member was most often reported.

Measures

Demographics. Participants completed two demographics questionnaires developed specifically for this study. The first questionnaire included a series of questions that were used to match participants in both groups. The second set of questions were used to gain an

understanding of student's school experiences from elementary to high school, family structure, and home experiences, with additional questions specifically addressed to individuals who experienced grade retention (i.e., "What grade were you held back", and "How did it make you feel?")

Self-Esteem. To measure self-esteem the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI) was used. Coopersmith (1967) designed this inventory to measure an individual's evaluative attitudes toward the self in social, academic, family and personal areas. The CSEI is known for its high internal consistency reliability ($\alpha = .80$) (Evaluating the national outcomes, 2004). The psychometric properties are reported to be strong, based on several studies (e.g., Bhatti, Derezotes, Kim and Specht, 1989). The adult form contains 25 items that are answered either "like me" or "unlike me." Eight of the items form a lie scale to identify "false-positive" responses. These are responses in which the individual thinks he/she is answering a question in a way that reflects high self-esteem, but the answer actually reflects that the individual's genuine feelings are different (Pollack, 1999). Participants' responses were scored using a scoring key from the test publisher. Reliability for the current study was also analyzed ($\alpha = .67$).

Self-Efficacy. The Morgan-Jinks Student Efficacy Scale (MJSES) was used to measure self-efficacy. With permission, the MJSES (Morgan and Jinks, 1999) was modified from its original version (used with elementary aged children) to use with an adult sample. The MJSES is reported to have an overall reliability coefficient of .82. The sub-scale alphas were .78 for talent, .70 for context, and .66 for effort (Morgan and Jinks, 1999). It is a 30-item Likert-Scale with four intervals: "Really Agree," "Kind of Agree," "Kind of Disagree," and "Really Disagree." There are three subscales: Talent (13 items) "I am a good reading student" or, Context (13 items) "It does not matter if I do well in school", and Effort (4 items) "I work hard in school." The three subscale scores were used as the self-efficacy measure for this study. Reliability alphas for the current study were as follows: alpha of .72 for talent, .79 for context, and .68 for effort.

Procedure

Arrangements were made for participants to meet with the lead researcher to complete a consent form and questionnaires. Each

person completed a short demographics questionnaire in addition to the self esteem and self-efficacy measures. Upon completion of the forms, participants were asked to place all forms in an unmarked envelope.

RESULTS

The variables of the study were examined using analysis of variance (ANOVA) and multivariate (MANOVA) tests addressing the hypotheses of the study. Additional analysis of the data was completed to gather information on the test group, control group, as well as both groups combined to examine correlations for self-esteem, self-efficacy, and the demographic variables.

Analyses of Variance

An ANOVA was utilized to determine if there were differences between retained and non-retained individuals for self-esteem, measured by the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI). Results were not significant, $F(1, 49) = 1.70$, $p = n.s.$ Means and standard deviations can be seen in Table 1.

A MANOVA was utilized to determine if differences were present between the retained group and the non-retained group for academic self-efficacy (talent, context and effort subscales)

TABLE 1

Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) for retained versus non-retained groups on measures for Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI total) and Morgan Jinks Self-Efficacy Inventory Subscales (MJ-talent, MJ-context, and MJ-effort)

Measure	Retained <i>N</i> = 25 <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Non-retained <i>N</i> = 26 <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)
CSEI-total	71.36 (20.45)	64.15 (19.05)
MJ-talent	3.17 (.37)	3.29 (.36)
MJ-context	2.54 (.31)	2.62 (.28)
MJ-effort	3.03 (.39)	3.16 (.62)

when measured by the Morgan-Jinks Self-Efficacy Inventory (MJSEI). Results were not significant, $F(3, 47) = 0.74$, $p = \text{n.s.}$

Additional Analyses

In response to a question about participants' retention experience, nine participants reported retention as being a positive experience (36%), nine reported it as a negative experience (36%), while seven indicated that grade retention was neither positive nor negative experience (28%). The retained participants were also asked to identify how they felt at the time of retention, based on eight possible feelings (e.g., joy, sadness, anger, fear, surprised, acceptance, expectant, and/or disgust). These were further aggregated into positive/negative feelings for frequency analysis. Seven participants in the retained group reported positive feelings related to retention (28%), 13 participants reported negative feelings (52%), three reported both positive and negative feelings related to retention (12%), and two participants did not report on their feelings regarding their retention experiences (8%).

Correlation analyses were completed for the test group to determine if retained participants' reports for self-esteem and self-efficacy were related to the demographic questions (see Table 2). A positive correlation was found between the self-esteem composite and participants' reports of father's academic support, $r(23) = .59$, $p < .01$ and a negative correlations was found for the self-efficacy talent subscale and participants' reports of mother's academic support, $r(23) = -.42$, $p < .05$. Further, a negative correlations was found between the self-efficacy context subscale scores and participants' reports of father's academic support, $r(23) = -.43$, $p < .05$. In addition, positive correlations were found between the self-efficacy effort subscale and predicted science mark, $r(23) = .41$, $p < .05$, predicted math mark, $r(23) = .41$, $p < .05$, predicted psychology mark, $r(23) = .47$, $p < .05$, and predicted English mark, $r(23) = .55$, $p < .01$. As participants in the retained group reported higher levels of self-efficacy, related to effort, they also anticipated to receive higher marks in all four subject areas (science, math, psychology, and English). Finally, a negative correlations was found for the self-efficacy effort subscale and father's level of education, $r(23) = -.44$, $p < .05$. As participants reported an increased sense of self-efficacy for talent items, fathers were reported to have less education.

TABLE 2

Correlation coefficients for the retained group between self-esteem scores (CSEI-total), self-efficacy scores (MJ-talent, MJ-context, and MJ-effort subscales), and demographic variables

Demographic Variable	CSEI Total	MJ-talent	MJ-context	MJ-effort
Age	-.06	-.22	.26	.31
Current GPA	.28	-.25	-.38	.28
Science Mark	-.24	-.28	.24	.41*
Math Mark	-.26	-.09	.36	.41*
Psychology Mark	-.09	-.24	.28	.46*
English Mark	.12	.06	.17	.55**
Mom's Education	-.10	.18	-.07	-.09
Dad's Education	.15	.04	-.16	-.44*
Mom Support	.06	-.41*	-.25	.22
Dad Support	.59**	-.05	-.43*	-.01

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

DISCUSSION

The aim of the current study was to determine if early experiences of grade retention (primary to grade nine) were associated with a diminished sense of self-esteem and/or academic self-efficacy in post-secondary students. By using a retrospective approach, it was found that grade retention does not appear to have a long-term negative impact on university student's sense of self-esteem or academic self-efficacy when compared to non-retained peers. These findings are inconsistent with the majority of findings reported in the current literature on grade retention (Evans, 2001; Hagborg et al., 1991, Jimerson, 2001; Jimerson et al., 1997).

Self-Esteem

Findings from the current study revealed that individuals who experience retention are similar to their peers in terms of self-

esteem. A trend (albeit, nonsignificant) that appears in the current study is that retained individuals' were actually reporting a higher sense of self-esteem than the non-retained individuals. Although the results for self-esteem contradict many studies on grade retention, there is evidence similar to results found in the current study. In a meta-analysis, Jimerson (2001) reported on sixteen studies that examined socio-emotional outcomes (i.e., social, emotional, behavioural, self-concept and adjustment). He found 8 of the 148 analyses were in favour of the retained group, while 127 of the analyses yielded no significant difference (between retained and comparison group). This indicates that many of the studies included in the meta-analysis (86%) found retained individuals were similar to their peers in terms of socio-emotional adjustment. In addition to supporting Jimerson's (2001) analysis, the current study also suggests that an individual's socio-emotional adjustment is still present into adulthood. In other words, retained individuals' self-esteem is comparable to their non-retained peers long after retention experiences.

Further analyses of the study variables revealed that retained individuals' sense of self-esteem was positively related to the academic support they felt from their fathers throughout school. Baumrind's (1971) theory of parenting may best explain this finding, particularly the authoritative parenting style. Authoritative parents encourage children to be independent, but still place limits and controls on their actions. Fathers could have played a more nurturing role, while maintaining limits and control, characterizing the authoritative parenting style (Baumrind, 1971). Father's support and interest may have contributed to building a stronger, more positive, and confident sense of self. This is consistent with research completed on parenting styles (Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts and Fraleigh, 1987; Steinberg, Elmen and Mounds, 1989; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch and Darling 1992). With a sample of 4,100 adolescents, Lamborn, Mounds, Steinberg, and Dornbusch (1991) found that adolescents who characterized their parents as authoritative reported stronger psycho-social competence as compared to those adolescents who identified their parents as espousing other parenting styles (authoritarian or neglectful).

Academic Self-Efficacy

Typically grade retention research is based on grades, not on individuals' perceptions of their abilities and performance in

school (Hagborg, Masella, Pallading and Shepardson, 1991; Setencich, 1994; Thomas et al., 1992). By examining grade retention and self-efficacy, the current study not only broadens the research on grade retention, but also supports that self-efficacious beliefs of individuals' who have experienced retention, is comparable to their non-retained peers when reported as young adults. This may be attributable to the fact the retained individuals in the current study are successful in their academic achievement.

Analyses of correlations between participants' self-efficacy and demographic questions resulted in several positive and negative significant relationships. According to individuals who experienced retention, effort related self-efficacy was positively correlated with each subject areas (English, math, psychology, and science). The post-secondary students involved in the study have demonstrated academic success by graduating from high school with average marks, and furthering their education at university. It seems logical that these individuals would anticipate higher end of term marks, as they reported a stronger sense of ability related to effort. Similarly the non-retained group reported a stronger sense of self-efficacy (talent). They anticipated higher English marks and an overall GPA.

Negative correlations were found between academic talent/context with mother and father's support, respectively. Overall, these two areas reflect individual's perception of themselves as students, views of university, as well as views of professors. So, as participants reported higher self-efficacy, they reported lower amounts of academic support from their mothers and fathers. While these findings may seem counter-intuitive, an explanation may be found through examination of parenting styles.

The research on parenting styles has repeatedly shown parental nurturance is related to children's perceived academic ability (Baumrind, 1971; Lamborn et al., 1991). Baumrind's (1989) more recent work on parenting style identified a variant of the authoritative parenting style. She described directive parenting, which is defined as firm, directive parenting with less support than what is typically described in the authoritative style. This variant of the authoritative parenting style may have been what participants were experiencing in their home. A stronger sense of self-efficacy (talent and context items) was paired with a reduced sense of academic support from mothers and fathers on talent and context subscales. This indicates that participants may have been self-efficacious and not requiring the support, which in turn resulted in little maternal/paternal support. It is also important to keep in mind that these correlations are bi-directional. Therefore,

individuals may have developed a stronger academic self-efficacy in their attempt to gain support from parents.

Self-Report Methodology

A distinct feature of the current study rests in the use of retrospective self-report methodology. Previously, many studies used parent/teacher reports to determine many variables regarding psychosocial well-being and achievement (Holmes, 1989; Jimerson, 2001). The current study takes the perspective of the individual who experienced grade retention, rather than using reports from professionals and parents. Perspective plays an important role when judging performance, particularly when socio-emotional variables are examined (Byrnes, in Shepard and Smith, 1990). Since previous research often relied on the viewpoint of parents/teachers, results are based on secondary perceptions of how well students adjusted before and after an event such as grade retention. The perspective of the individual who experienced the event may be very different, with the possibility of reporting a more positive experience (Plummer and Graziano, 1987; Rothstein, 2000). How a student perceives his/her own performance may be very different from how another person (teacher/parent) perceives the student's performance. For example, a student who performs below the class average may feel good about his/her personal performance, while the teacher perceives the student's performance as weak relative to his/her classmates. It is important to set goals for all children to help them achieve personal bests, which could be overlooked when educators compare students on achievement.

Additional Contributions of the Current Study

The current study adds novelty to the research on grade retention, and provides valuable insight into the population used for the research. First, the sample was comprised of young university students, which means students in the retained group have already accomplished a great feat by graduating from high school and furthering themselves with a post-secondary education. In the retained group of Jimerson's (1999) research 44% of the individuals had received a high school diploma. This was significantly lower than both the low-achieving group (72%) and the control group (percentage not available). Similarly, after

matching groups for age, gender, race-ethnicity, socio-economic status (SES), and achievement, Fine and Davis (2003) found approximately 59% of retained students had enrolled in a post-secondary education after high school, as compared to 81% of their promoted peers. Considering these statistics, participants in the current study must value themselves, as a person (self-esteem) and/or in their ability to do well as a student (self-efficacy), in order to persist and be the “successes” of retention.

The literature on grade retention is filled with arguments for and against the retention process (Alexander, Entwisle and Duaber, 1994; Jimerson, 2001). Even when time is considered, the short-term benefits are limited and the long-term consequences appear to have more negative outcomes (Holmes, 1989; Jimerson, 2001; Shepard and Smith, 1990). What can be determined from the research is that while some children may benefit others do not, particularly with academics. Although the current study did not find diminished self-esteem or self-efficacy associated with retention, it supports the need to clarify the many inconsistencies within the research. This, in itself, is an important addition to the existing literature.

Caveats, Future Research, and Conclusion

Self-reports provide a wealth of information from the perspective of the individual (Rothenstein, 2000) and are deemed a viable method to obtain data. The self-reports in the current study were retrospective in nature, which leaves room for error in the accuracy of recalling events that happened in years past. In this case, where participants recalled feelings and events from early school experiences, there is a formidable gap in time. In spite of this, retrospective reporting for purposes such as obtaining information on school experiences is a common research method that has produced significant contributions to retention practices (Hagborg et al., 1991; Plummer and Graziano, 1987; Setencich, 1994; Thomas et al., 1992).

Finally, variables not included in the current study, such as participant's self-motivation, may have directed the current findings. Again, this is a sample of ‘successful’ retained students because they persevered and continued their education at university. On the other hand, views of being retained as well as self perception could have changed from the actual time of retention to the present. Current perceptions may be more reflective of the successes they have experienced as adults (i.e.,

high school graduation, and/or acceptance into a post-secondary institution).

A significant contribution to the area of grade retention would be gained by conducting longitudinal research. In addition, valuable information could be gathered through further follow-up from previous longitudinal studies. This would provide a wealth of information regarding the viewpoints and experiences of adults who were retained in early school experiences, while accounting for the many variables and factors that are potentially overlooked with retrospective reports.

The current study provides a glimpse into very intricate, yet important, issues for children, adolescents, and adults. Findings point toward the lack of socio-emotional and academic repercussions of retaining children. It appears from our methodology that differences between those retained and those not retained are fewer than some researchers have reported. However, one needs to be cautious in assuming that this means that there are no negative consequences of retention or to infer causal links as the results of our findings. Further research needs to be completed to help untangle the obvious complexities of the topic.

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