

**Preservice Teacher Beliefs about Retention: How do They Know What They Don't Know?**

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*Abstract*

*This study attempts to measure the perceptions of preservice teachers concerning the use of grade retention. Findings suggested preservice teachers had an overall positive view of grade retention because they believed it prevented future failure, helped maintain standards, and assisted students who struggled with language arts. This was especially true for preservice teachers acquiring early childhood certification. Respondents perceived grade retention as necessary for students who are struggling academically, had low ability, and were immature. Preservice teachers viewed parental involvement as the most effective intervention in deterring the use of grade retention.*

The crux of reports such as *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) and legislation like the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002) and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA, 2009) point to a primary concern of the public. Namely, not all students are learning at high levels. Reacting to this pressure, policy makers expect the achievement gap to narrow despite the fact that all classrooms have substantial ranges in student abilities (Abbott et al., 2010; Martin, 2010). In response to the public's concerns over stalled progress, some states and school districts have adopted strict promotion policies, many of which result in grade retention for under-achieving students (Burkam, LoGerfo, Ready, & Lee, 2007; Xia & Glennie, 2005b).

Grade retention, also known as *flunking*, *grade repetition*, or *being held back* (Eide & Showalter, 2001; Xia & Kirby, 2009), has resurfaced due to pressure to stop social promotion, the practice of advancing low achieving students to the next grade despite not performing on grade level (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007; Lorence, Dworkin, Toenjes, & Hill, 2002; Penfield, 2010; Wu, West, & Hughes, 2010). In the 1960s, social promotion was used extensively (Jacob & Lefgren, 2002) but by the 1980s, public perception of social promotion was vastly different and educators viewed it as the primary reason why students were under-achieving (Penfield, 2010; Xia & Glennie, 2005c). Retention numbers increased throughout the 1990s (Allen, Chen, Willson, & Hughes, 2009) and by 2009, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2009) predicted that about 10% of students in kindergarten through eighth grade had been retained once. Additionally, some states (Florida and Texas) and districts (Chicago and New York) have taken

retention decisions out of teachers' hands by adopting strict promotion standards based on high-stakes tests (Penfield, 2010).

In the current educational context, ARRA (2009) set aside \$4.35 billion for states in the Race to the Top Fund established to reward significant improvement in student outcomes, closing achievement gaps, and improving high school graduation rates. Although the bill does not mandate the use of retention, it clearly defines *high-need students*, *common standards*, *increased learning time*, and *formative assessments*. The intersection of such variables has created the high stakes educational climate from which advocates of retention create their platform.

As researchers attempt to study retention, they have stressed the importance of teacher beliefs concerning at-risk students and retention (Cadigan, Entwisle, Alexander, & Pallas, 1988). Research has shown teachers, especially primary grade teachers, believe retention is a viable option for students who are struggling (Roberts, 2007; Tomchin & Impara, 1992; Witmer, Hoffman, & Nottis, 2004) because primary grade teachers, "have limited knowledge of the long-term student trajectories after retention" (Xia & Glennie, 2005c, p. 3). These beliefs are important to understand because the majority of retention recommendations are initiated by classroom teachers (Bonvin, Bless, & Schuepbach, 2008; Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011).

This study examines the perspectives of preservice teachers at two four year universities and their perceptions about grade retention using an on-line survey. Researchers propose that preservice education should work to develop the beliefs of preservice teachers about effective instruction (Chong, Wong, & Lang, n.d.). Because beliefs play a pivotal role in the decisions teachers make in the classroom, it is logical to understand how preservice teachers perceive retention (Pajares, 1992). Most practicing teachers form their belief systems based on previous experiences or by the influence of peers (Beswick et al., 2008; Haberman & Dill, 1993; Kagan, 1992; Witmer et al., 2004). Conversely, preservice teachers have limited previous experience or professional peers to form pre-determined attitudes. As a result, preservice teachers develop their dispositions about retention from memories of previous teachers, their own personal experiences, and formal education (Alkhrisha, 1994). Studying their beliefs before they enter the field is an important research endeavor.

### *Literature Review*

The use of grade retention is one of the most antagonistic debates in education. Organizations such as the National Association of School Psychologists (2003) and the American Educational Research Association (2000) have drafted strong policy statements against grade retention to deter its use. Nevertheless, some educators and policy makers cite various reasons as support of its use, the dominant being early learning problems reflect immaturity and providing students another year to develop will increase their capacity to learn (Beswick et al., 2008; Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011; Chen, Chengfang, Zhang, Shi, & Rozelle, 2010; Xia & Kirby, 2009), a view more prevalent with early childhood educators. Haberman and Dill (1993) concisely summarized this view by stating this rationale, "assumes that knowledge can be broken down into bite-sized pieces and delivered with a specific age of child-consumer in mind" (p.353). Others view retention as a method to reduce the skill variance between students (Xia & Glennie, 2005c) which improves the teacher's ability to meet students' academic needs (Brophy, 2006; Hong &

Raudenbush, 2005). Finally, some speculate that the threat of retention causes students and parents to take academics seriously (Allensworth, 2004; Roderick & Nagaoka, 2005; Thompson & Cunningham, 2000). Regardless of which argument is used, a gap between research and practice exists in the beliefs of the public, teachers, and policy makers (Tanner & Galis, 1997; Xia & Glennie, 2005c).

Research concerning grade retention measures its impact on three areas, namely academic achievement, socio-emotional outcomes, and high school drop outs (McCombs, Kirby, & Mariano, 2009; Xia & Glennie, 2005a; Xia & Kirby, 2009). However, concerns raised by academics about the methodology of such studies has created the perception that results are merely speculation (Briggs, 2006; Chatterji, 2010; Hughes, Chen, Thommes, & Kwok, 2010; Wiley, 2006; Xia & Glennie, 2005a). Methodological concerns raised by researchers include lack of control groups to serve as a comparison to retained students, controlling for pre-existing variables, small sample sizes, various measures of academic/socio-emotional performance, and subjective teacher retention recommendations (Brophy, 2006; Greene & Winters, 2004, 2007, 2009; Lorence et al., 2002; Tanner & Galis, 1997; Wu et al., 2010; Xia & Glennie, 2005c).

For the remainder of this section, retention literature is briefly discussed and categorized in the following manner: (a) retention's negative effect on academic and socio-emotional outcomes as well as dropping out of school, (b) retention's positive impact on student outcomes, (c) the characteristics of retained students, (d) interventions administered to avert the use of retention, and (e) preservice teachers' beliefs about retention.

### *Academic Outcomes*

In reviewing retention literature concerning student outcomes, it is important to focus less on short-term studies and concentrate more on longitudinal analyses (Xia & Glennie, 2005a). As a whole, the results of most studies conducted to measure retention's impact on student achievement report negative findings (Xia & Glennie, 2005a; Xia & Kirby, 2009). Some studies report that retained students have short-term benefits over low-performing but promoted peers but gains quickly fade (Beswick et al., 2008; Wu, et al., 2010; Xia & Glennie, 2005a). For example, Alexander, Entwisle, and Dauber's (1995, 2003) comprehensive study of the Baltimore School District found that retention had short term positive academic outcomes for students; however, this positive achievement deteriorated by secondary school. In various recent studies, Hong and Raudenbush (2005) and Hong and Yu (2007) found no evidence that retention benefited kindergarten students and that retention had immediate negative consequences on reading and math performance the following year. Similarly, Griffith, Lloyd, Lane, and Tankersley (2010) found that retained students' reading achievement was worse than low performing but promoted peer group during the retention year. Furthermore, these reading deficiencies continued to persistent when the students reached the 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades. Martin (2010) concluded that early grade retention negatively impacted the homework completion of secondary students and also increased their absenteeism. Both in the United States and internationally, researchers have argued that grade retention resulted in large financial costs for school system, estimated at over 14 billion dollars annually, with little return in learning (Ehmke, Dreschel, & Carstensen, 2010; Greene & Winters, 2004; Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007; Rocher, 2008).

### *Socio-Emotional Outcomes*

Retention's negative impact on students' socio-emotional and behavioral outcomes is prevalent in the literature. Two meta-analyses (Holmes & Matthews, 1985; Jimerson, 2001) both concluded that retained students scored significantly lower on self-perception and attitude measures than promoted peers. Martin (2009) found that retention caused serious harm to students' self-esteem with negative consequences still present in high school. Anderson, Whipple, and Jimerson (2002) found that sixth graders viewed retention as the most significant life event they could experience. Finally, Jimerson and Ferguson (2007) found that retained students exhibited more behavior problems than promoted peers.

### *Retention and Dropouts*

Edley and Wald (2002) surmised that, "after 40 years, study after study on grade retention has reached the same conclusion; failing a student, particularly in the critical ninth grade year, is the single largest predictor of whether he or she drops out" (p. 1). This statement is supported by researchers who have found that a significantly higher percentage of retained students drop out, and one retention increases the chance a student will drop out to 20-50% (Jimerson, 1999; Jimerson, Ferguson, Whipple, Anderson, & Dalton, 2002; McGrath, 2006; Smith, 2004; Xia & Glennie, 2005a). If students drop out due to grade retention, the ramifications are felt into adulthood because retention also negatively impacts post-secondary enrollment and subsequent financial earnings (Eide & Showalter, 2001; Ou & Reynolds, 2010).

### *Positive Outcomes*

Retention's positive outcomes for students can be found in the literature and are often associated with studies that take place in states and school districts that have implemented strict promotion policies (Burkam et al., 2007). For example, studies disseminated over the past six years concerning Florida's retention policy have all found positive, short-term outcomes for students (Greene & Winters, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2009; Ladner & Burke, 2010). Additionally, research in Texas concerning students' reading scores showed that scores improved as a result of retention (Hughes et al., 2010; Lorence & Dworkin, 2006; Lorence et al., 2002). McCombs et al. (2009) found positive results concerning New York City's retention policy up to the seventh grade. Moreover, this study is significant because the authors reported both positive academic and socio-emotional result for students. Finally, Cannon and Lipscomb (2011) studied retention rates before third grade in the Los Angeles Unified School district and found that first and second grade students benefited academically from retention, although long term outcomes were uncertain.

### *Characteristics of Retained Students*

Researchers have come to consensus concerning the characteristics of retained students with the most prevalent being low performance on academic measures, usually language arts or mathematics (Alexander et al., 1995; Hong & Raudenbush, 2005; McCombs et al., 2009; Xia & Kirby, 2009). Additionally, demographic characteristics of retained students include: minority (usually African American or Hispanic), male, low socio-economic background, living with one

parent, young for grade, and being born to a teenage mother (Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011; Chen et al., 2010; Corman, 2003; Frey, 2005; Martin, 2009; Greene & Winters, 2009; Hong & Yu, 2007). The parents of retained students do not exhibit a sense of shared responsibility for their children's school success, probably because school was a challenge for them too (Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011; Corman, 2003; Jimerson, Carlson, Robert, Egeland, & Sroufe, 1997; Willson & Hughes, 2006).

### *Interventions as Opposed to Retention*

Because grade retention is an expensive intervention (Bowman, 2005; Eide & Goldhaber, 2005; Xia & Glennie, 2005a), its administration makes little sense in light of other research based interventions proven to assist struggling students (Hill & Weiss, 2005; Thompson & Cunningham, 2004). Moreover, because students have individual needs, it is important for educators to attempt various targeted interventions to determine which ones produce positive remediation (Jacob & Lefgren, 2007). Effective interventions include assistance in reading and math, tutoring and extending the school day, facilitating parental involvement, and lengthening the school year through Saturday or summer school (Benson & Martin, 2003; Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011; Clay, 2005; Davenport, Delgado, Meisels, & Moore, 1998; Jimerson & Kauffman, 2003; Meier & Sullivan, 2004; Musti-Rao & Cartledge, 2007; Vaughn & Linan-Thompson, 2004; Wynn, 2010).

### *Preservice Teacher Beliefs about Retention*

Due to a relationship between belief and action, certain teacher beliefs concerning educational issues are vitally important to understand (Johnson & Howell, 2009). Therefore, assessing the beliefs of teachers might give researchers insight into changing their dispositions (Freeman, Gum, & Blackbourn, 1999; Koehler, 1988). Beliefs can be defined as the innate theories and opinions teachers' possess about educational practice and are instrumental to understanding teachers' decision making processes (Cook, 2002; Pajares, 1992).

Beswick et al. (2008) surmised that when educators' beliefs are guided by misinformation, the academic futures of students are jeopardized. This is especially true because teacher beliefs concerning child development have been linked to views of grade retention (Gredler, 1992). Although all teachers have been found to exhibit positive views concerning retention (Johnson & Howell, 2009; Range, 2009; Tomchin & Impara, 1992; Witmer, et al., 2004), this attitude is much more prevalent in the primary grades (Biegler, 2000; Silbergitt, Jimerson, Burns, & Appleton, 2006; Xia & Glennie, 2005c).

After an extensive literature search, only three manuscripts could be found that discussed preservice teacher attitudes about retention (Alkhrisha, 1994; Haberman & Dill, 1993; Johnson & Howell, 2009). Alkhrisha (1994) concluded that preservice teachers supported the use of retention for students not meeting standards, for those who were socially immature, and for those who were endanger of later school failure. Furthermore, preservice teachers who were majoring in early childhood education were more apt to support retention than students majoring in secondary education. Johnson and Howell (2009) found that, as a result of formal education, preservice teachers attitudes concerning the use of retention changed from supportive to less

supportive. However, “these attitudes remained more neutral than might have been anticipated, suggesting that attitude-change may require further development” (p. 40).

Preservice teacher education is focused on developing the belief system of preservice teachers to help create their attitudes about current issues in education (Kennedy & Kennedy, 1996). Consequently, because the presumption of most practicing educators is that retention increases learning readiness, such beliefs indirectly influence preservice teachers (Haberman & Dill, 1993). As a result, changing the beliefs of preservice teachers about retention requires considerable time and effort (Johnson & Howell, 2009).

### *Context of the Study*

Two four-year universities, one public and one private, were used in the data collection. The private university was located in the Midwest and provided approximately 100 areas of study. Total undergraduate enrollment for the fall of 2010 was 1,517 students. The public university was located in the Mountain West and offered approximately 190 areas of study. Total undergraduate enrollment for the fall of 2010 was 9,793 students. Both universities had a teacher preparation curriculum in which students could receive licensure to teach at the early childhood, elementary, or secondary levels.

### *Research Design and Methods*

This study was designed to illuminate how preservice teachers perceive grade retention. The research study followed a descriptive tradition and used an on-line survey to measure respondents' perceptions (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). Four research questions guided the inquiry:

1. What factors best explain preservice teachers' overall attitudes towards grade retention?
2. What interventions do preservice teachers believe are best at reducing grade retention rates?
3. What is the difference in how preservice teachers view overall grade retention based on their area of intended certification?
4. What is the difference in how preservice teachers view primary grade retention based on their area of intended certification?

The sample was a convenience sample (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012) in which specific classes were selected because they contained large numbers of preservice teachers who were acquiring certification in early childhood, elementary, and secondary education. Instructors at both universities were e-mailed in March 2011 asking them to allow their students to participate. After instructor permission was secured, an e-mail which contained a link to an online survey was forwarded by instructors to their students at both universities inviting them to participate in the study. Up to two reminder e-mails were sent each week for two weeks to instructors to again forward the survey to their students. Out of a possible 217 respondents, 95 responded to the survey, a response rate of 44%.

### *Study Participants*

Of those preservice teachers who responded to the survey, the majority were female (78.3%) while 21.7% were male. Average age was 21.68 with a range from 18 to 53 years old. Most respondents were working on elementary certification (46.7%) while 39.1% were seeking secondary certification and 14.1% were seeking early childhood certification.

### *Instrument*

The instrument used in the collection of data was a revised version of the Teacher Perceptions about Retention Survey (TPARS) developed by Tomchin (1989). The TPARS has been used in other retention studies (Haynes, 2007; Pouliot, 1999; Quarterman, 2004; Range, 2009; Tomchin & Impara, 1992; Witmer et al., 2004). In sum, section one of the survey included 14 Likert scaled statements (scale ranged from 1=strongly disagree to 4=strongly agree) which included: (a) two statements written to measure support or non-support of grade retention, one focusing on overall grade retention and the other grade retention in the primary grades and, (b) 12 statements concerning reasons why retention should be used. Cronbach's alpha was calculated for all 14 items and was found to be 0.71. Additionally, a Pearson correlation was computed between the *age* and responses to the statement, "Students should sometimes be retained." The correlation was  $r = -0.56$ , indicating that older respondents tended to disagree with retention and younger respondents agreed. This correlation provides some evidence that the survey had construct validity (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006). Content validity was also supported by the correspondence between literature on retention and items on the survey.

Section two prompted preservice teachers to select one factor they consider the most important when making a decision to retain a student. The third section required preservice teachers to rate the importance of interventions at keeping struggling students from being retained. These interventions were identified within the literature and included: (a) additional reading programs, (b) summer school, (c) parental involvement, (d) public school tutoring (e) private tutoring, (f) direct instruction strategies, (g) formative evaluations, (h) multiage classrooms, (i) smaller class sizes, (j) mental health support, (k) before and after school programs, (l) personal learning plans, (m) special education services, (n) cooperative learning, (o) group work, and (p) looping. Finally, the survey concluded with one open-ended question designed to allow respondents to describe situations in which retention might or might not be effective.

### *Data Analysis and Findings*

Quantitative data were coded and analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 18.0. Means and standard deviations were calculated for Likert-scaled items. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for forced choice items. Answers to the open-ended question were coded, re-coded, and categorized into themes (Hatch 2002).

One statement on the survey was written to ascertain preservice teachers' overall beliefs about retention. The statement, "students should sometimes be retained," yielded a mean of 3.13 (SD=0.55), which indicated respondents supported the use of grade retention. Additional analysis

on this statement showed 88 respondents either *agreed* (N=68) or *strongly agreed* (N=20) with the statement (scale ranged from 1=strongly disagree to 4=strongly agree).

A second statement, “retention should occur before second grade,” was written to measure whether prospective teachers’ beliefs mimicked the literature concerning the supportive attitudes of educators about primary grade retention. This statement garnered an overall mean of 2.45 (SD=0.68) (scale ranged from 1=strongly disagree to 4=strongly agree). Additional analysis on this statement showed that the sample was split concerning their view, meaning 50 respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed with statement while 45 respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement. Additional findings are organized according to each research question.

### *Research Question One*

Research question one asked what factors best explain preservice teachers’ overall attitudes towards grade retention? This question was answered within two sections of the survey and with two different analyses, namely linear regression and descriptive statistics.

Linear regression analysis was used to identify those items that best explained the variability in overall perceptions about retention. The overall retention item, “students should sometimes be retained,” was the dependent variable; it was regressed onto the 12 scale items (independent variables) that were included as possible reasons for retention. See Table 1 for a summary of the regression analysis. In addition, a plot of the residuals for the 12-item model against the predicted values indicated that the relationship was indeed linear. A stepwise selection procedure identified items that contributed most to the variability. Items that contributed little to the variability were deleted. Items to be included were chosen based on high correlations with the dependent variable, low correlations with other items, and high B-weights in relation to others. Four items were retained in the model and generated an  $R^2$  of .394.

The four items that were included in the model were items that explained preservice teacher attitudes toward retention. The first three items had positive B-weights, indicating a direct relationship with retention; for example, strong agreement about retention being effective also had strong agreement about retention preventing future failure (M=2.91, SD=0.59), helping to maintain high standards in the classroom (M=2.80, SD= 0.54) and assisting those students who struggle with language arts (M=2.34, SD=0.58). The fourth item had a negative B-weight; preservice teachers who agreed that retention is effective, disagreed that, for students who are on grade level with academic work, excessive absences should be a reason for retention (M=1.89, SD=0.66). According to the preservice teachers in this sample, these four items provide the best explanation of why students should be retained.

Additionally, preservice teachers were asked to choose one factor they considered most important when retaining students. Overwhelmingly, preservice teachers perceived two factors as the most important when retaining students in grade, namely academic performance (39.4%) and ability (37.2%). The remainder of the factors, effort being put forth (11.7%), emotional maturity (6.4%), age in relation to others (3.2%), and home environment (2.1%), were chosen less frequently. Additionally, preservice teachers were also asked one opened question in which they



could describe particular situations in which retention may or may not be beneficial. Respondents believed that students who were academically, socially, or emotionally immature as candidates for grade retention. For example, respondents perceived retention as beneficial in the primary grades because students might be emotionally immature which negatively affects their ability to learn and behave.

#### *Research Question Two*

Research question two, which asked preservice teachers to rate the effect of seventeen interventions aimed at keeping under-achieving students from being retained, was answered by section three of the survey. Table 2 displays these interventions, listed in order from highest to lowest mean.

Preservice teachers rated parental involvement ( $M=3.87$ ) as having the most effect in discouraging the use of grade retention. Additionally, respondents rated special education services ( $M=3.58$ ) and additional reading programs ( $M=3.50$ ) as interventions perceived to hold promise in reducing grade retention. Interventions viewed as having the least effect included group work, formative evaluations, peer tutoring, looping, and multiage classrooms.

#### *Research Question Three*

Research question four asked if there was a difference in how preservice teachers viewed overall grade retention based on their level of intended certification. This question was answered by comparing respondents' answers to the statement, "students should sometimes be retained." Table 3 displays the means and standard deviations for this statement based on intended level of certification.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference among certification levels for overall beliefs about retention. Results of this ANOVA are displayed in Table 4.

A significant difference was found among the groups in regard to their overall beliefs about retention ( $p = .03$ ). Follow-up comparisons (using the Least Significant Difference method) revealed that preservice teachers planning to teach at the early childhood level were significantly more positive about retention than those planning to teach at the elementary level ( $p < .01$ ).

#### *Research Question Four*

Research question four, which asked if there was a difference in how preservice teachers viewed primary grade retention based on their intended certification, was written to ascertain whether the sample's beliefs mirrored the literature, namely, that educators perceived retention as being more effective if occurred before second grade. This question was answered by comparing respondents' answers to the statement, "retention should occur before second grade." Table 5 displays the means and standard deviations for this statement based on intended level of certification.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference among certification levels for beliefs about primary grade retention. Results of this ANOVA are displayed in Table 6.

A significant difference was found among the groups in regard to their beliefs about primary grade retention ( $p = .03$ ). Follow-up comparisons (using the Least Significant Difference method) revealed that preservice teachers seeking early childhood certification were significantly more positive about retention than those seeking secondary teaching certifications ( $p < .01$ ).

### *Discussion and Conclusions*

Preservice teachers were surveyed to ascertain their attitudes about grade retention. Findings suggest that these higher education institutions need to sharpen instruction to dissuade its favorable view. Consistent with other literature, there was a notable gap between a preponderance of research findings concerning retention's effectiveness (Hong & Raudenbush, 2005; Hong & Yu, 2007; Jimerson et al., 2002; Pouliot, 1999; Xia & Glennie, 2005a) and preservice teacher attitudes about it. Preservice teachers' views of grade retention as an effective intervention were stronger than practicing teacher views of retention (Range, 2009), and their overall positive views of retention are consistent with recent (Hananel, 2010; Moynihan, 2008; Wynn, 2010) and past findings (Alkhrisha, 1994; Byrnes & Yamamoto, 1986; Tomchin & Impara, 1992; Witmer et al., 2004). When asked how much they agree with the statement, 'students should sometimes be retained,' prospective teachers agreed, a finding consistent with Wynn (2010). Similar to other findings (Biegler, 2000), regression analysis indicated that preservice teachers were supportive of retention because they believed it prevented future failure, helped maintain standards, and assisted students who struggled with language arts.

Why does this attitude still exist despite the abundance of research that concludes its detrimental to students on many levels? Haberman and Dill (1993) suggested that it exists in preservice teachers for two reasons. First, prospective teachers view themselves as accountable to groups of students as opposed to individuals. Preservice teachers view group learning as the ultimate outcome within classrooms and lack the forethought to hold themselves accountable for individual student learning. Second, they view anything that might impede synchronous instruction as a nuisance. These impingements, "are individual children who resist or are unable to function in the group; those behind in basic skills and grade level achievement" (Haberman & Dill, 1993, p. 356). This attitude causes preservice teachers to view such students as a hindrance to the learning of others, and as a result, their solution is to retain them. This argument is reflected in one respondent's open ended answer who said, "Students who are not retained do one of two things: pull the rest of the class back toward their level, or never learn because the teacher focuses on the level of the rest of the class."

This study illuminated interesting findings within the sample of prospective early childhood education teachers (birth through kindergarten). First, prospective teachers who were acquiring early childhood certification agreed that grade retention as a whole was beneficial significantly more than preservice teachers who were seeking elementary certification, a finding atypical in some literature (Range; 2009; Tomchin and Impara, 1992). Secondly, early childhood preservice

teachers were significantly more positive about grade retention in the primary grades than secondary certification preservice teachers. The literature has illuminated the supportive views of elementary teachers concerning primary grade retention (Silberglitt et al., 2006; Tomchin & Impara, 1992; Witmer et al., 2004), but few studies distinguish early childhood teacher (birth through kindergarten) views from elementary teacher (first grade through fifth grade) views, a possible explanation to these findings.

Preservice teachers agreed that retention prevented future school failure, a view that Wynn (2010) and Pouliot (1999) described as a false belief underpinned by the concern of departing only basic skills to students as opposed to their holistic development. Tomchin and Impara (1992) argued that when teachers base their instruction on this stance, they believe that retention is necessary to build a foundation for basic skill development.

Similar to other inquires (Range, 2009; Tomchin & Impara, 1992; Witmer et al., 2004), preservice teachers perceived school academic performance and ability as the two most important factors to consider when retaining students. Wynn (2010) described this finding as important because retention literature clearly states that academic performance should not be the sole reason for administering grade retention. Additionally, similar to Alkhrisha (1994), preservice teachers' viewed students who are immature as candidates for grade retention because they believed retention provides students additional time to mature cognitively, physically, and emotionally. However, Bonvin et al. (2008) warned that when assessing grade retention factors with educators, no definite patterns exist and, "the implicit rules and regulations that lead to a decision to retain can vary considerably" (p. 3).

Little is known about what interventions educators recommend to deter grade retention (Hananel, 2010). In this study, preservice teachers rated parental involvement and additional reading programs as interventions that might restrain the use of grade retention, findings consistent with Range's (2009) survey of practicing teachers. However, little is known about how parental involvement truly impacts the effects of grade retention because most inquiries have little insight into how parents react and support retention decisions (Bonvin et al., 2008).

Similar to Range's findings (2009), preservice teachers rated multi-age classrooms as the least productive intervention to hinder the use of grade retention. However, both Brophy (2006) and Moynihan (2008) recommended multi-age classrooms as a possible intervention because these classrooms center on developmentally appropriate instruction in which students progress at their own pace.

#### *Limitations and Areas of Further Study*

The findings of the study are limited to two, small universities (one private and one public) in the United States with a response rate of 44%, distance from the desired 50% level. Additionally, the researchers had limited knowledge concerning the amount of instruction preservice teachers received on grade retention before the administration of the instrument. For further study, it would be important to interview preservice teachers, especially those seeking early childhood certification, concerning where their beliefs about grade retention began. The literature clearly highlights how complex prospective teachers' beliefs can be and how difficult they are to

change. If grade retention is not the answer for low-performing students, then further study concerning the views of teachers concerning interventions to discourage its use is important. In this and other studies, prospective and practicing teachers viewed parental involvement as the most effective intervention. Although a vague term which can be exhibited in many ways, parental involvement as an intervention for under-achieving students is a possible research endeavor. Finally, a qualitative analysis of typical textbooks used in preservice teacher education would be important, with significant attention paid to how much time is spent critically synthesizing the arguments for and against grade retention.

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Table 1  
*Regression analysis for overall retention regressed onto 12 items*

Item	B	t	p
Prevents future failure	0.30	3.39	<.001
Helps maintain standards	0.26	2.68	<.001
Aides low performance in language arts	0.27	3.29	<.001
Benefits students on grade level with excessive absences	-0.20	-2.75	<.001

Table 2  
*Descriptive Statistics for Effect of Interventions to Deter Grade Retention*

Intervention	Mean	SD
1. Parental involvement	3.87	0.34
2. Special education services	3.58	0.56
3. Additional reading programs	3.50	0.52
4. Private tutoring	3.47	0.64
5. Personal learning plans	3.45	0.64
6. Public school tutoring	3.41	0.60
7. Small class size	3.40	0.68
8. Before and after school programs	3.40	0.59
9. Mental health support	3.35	0.65
10. Cooperative learning	3.30	0.68
11. Direct instruction strategies	3.12	0.77
12. Summer school	3.02	0.71
13. Group work	2.91	0.87
14. Formative evaluations	2.88	0.64
15. Peer tutoring	2.87	0.76
16. Looping	2.75	0.82
17. Multiage classrooms	2.50	0.83

Note: Scale ranges from 1 (no effect) to 4 (strong effect)

Table 3  
*Means and Standard Deviations for “Students Should Sometimes be Retained” based on Level of Certification*

Certification Level	Mean	SD	N
Early Childhood	3.38	0.51	13
Elementary	2.98	0.51	43
Secondary	3.12	0.53	36

Note: Scale ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree)

Table 4  
*One-Way ANOVA for Overall Retention among Certification Levels*

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between groups	1.20	2	1.00	3.74	0.03
Within groups	23.69	89	.27		
Total	25.69	91			

Table 5  
*Means and Standard Deviations for “Retention Should occur before Second Grade” based on Level of Certification*

Certification Level	Mean	SD	N
Early Childhood	2.69	0.18	13
Elementary	2.60	0.58	43
Secondary	2.25	0.73	36

Note: Scale ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree)

Table 6  
*One-Way ANOVA for Primary Grade Retention among Certification Levels*

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between groups	3.16	2	1.58	3.72	0.03
Within groups	37.80	89	.43		
Total	40.96	91			