

Narrative

Topic: INEFFECTIVENESS of Retention

In 1860, it became common in U.S. elementary schools to group children in grade levels, with promotion dependent on mastery. For over 80 years, research has shown that grade-level retention provides no academic advantages to students. In contrast, research and literature proves retention harmful to students in terms of both achievement and personal adjustment. A synthesis of studies between 1924 and 1948 showed that retention had no positive effect on educational gain. Furthermore, it indicated that the academic gain of nonpromoted students was smaller than the that of their promoted counterparts. More specifically, studies of retention in kindergarten indicated that retained students have significantly lower scores on standardized achievement tests than do nonretained students, specifically on tests of reading fluency and comprehension. Although some research indicates that early retention may produce a short-lived increase in achievement, this gain vanishes in two or three years. 12 of 66 studies between 1990-1997 showed no positive effects on education gain. More alarmingly, the remaining 54 studies between showed negative achievement results for the retained students and proposed that retained children may continue to decline in reading achievement over time compared with nonretained students.

More recent statistical studies dig further into retention to find that it is the single most powerful predictor of dropping out of school. Dropouts are five times more likely to have repeated a grade than are high school graduates. Studies have reported that being retained one year almost doubled a student's likelihood of dropping out, while students who repeat two or more grades have a probability of dropping out of over 90%. In a study in Indiana, 58% of students identified with learning disabilities had been retained before identification. Retention is often used as an intervention before identification. Between retention and being labeled LD, the risk of dropping out of school is quite high. The consequences of dropping out of school are dire. They include diminished lifetime earnings, increased likelihood of criminal incarceration, restricted access to further education, greater chance of dysfunction in family life, and curtailed opportunities for employment.

U.S. students are not staking up to international comparisons, thus propelling education reforms. The excessively simplistic view of retention as a cure for educational difficulties ignores its negative impact on our students. U.S. students are being compared to those in Japan, Denmark, Sweden, UK, Norway, and Germany, all of which have 0% retention rates with the exception of Germany, which is still only 1.8%. These countries are getting results without retention. In fact, the only countries with higher retention rates than the United States are undeveloped countries, such as Rwanda, Congo, and Chad (24%-54%).

These studies have controlled for family, social background, and personal factors. Research is focused on a single significant correlate with academic failure and drop-out rates, grade retention, finding alarming evidence against it. While factors such as social background, SES, ect. are out of the domain of schools, retention is not. That is within

the school domains of policy and practice, and research should guide practice. As professionals, it is our ethical duty to first, do no harm. For more than 80 years, retention has been proven not only ineffective but that it harms an at-risk population. Undoubtedly, the practice of retention has not achieved its goal.

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